

**uk fuel protests:
looks as though we've got ourselves a convoy
(2000)**



photo of fuel protest in Nigeria, January 2012

Internationally and within the UK, fuel protests come and go, but the one time such protests seriously posed a threat - in many ways unintentionally - to the Economy and the State was in the autumn of 2000 (this is not to say they couldn't also pose a serious challenge in the future, though it seems very unlikely that such a challenge will come from the UK). This is a text co-written by me, Red Marriott and the Wise brothers:

LOOKS AS THOUGH WE'VE GOT OURSELVES A CONVOY

Well-Pitched Notes On The Autumn 2000 Fuel Protests Towards Recomposing & Orchestrating Working Class Harmonisation On A Major Scale



Featuring such favourites as:
Country & Western Capital
Rainin' In My Heart
Fuel For Thought
Sometimes It's Hard To Be A Woman

Music to our ears, it came out of the blue: a sudden eruption of direct action on the motorways and around the oil refineries in Scotland, Wales and England by truckers and small farmers in early September 2000. It came out of the blues as well: after the 1990s, *the worst years* these islands had experienced in centuries on the industrial strike/urban rioting front, finally something was happening. That "*something*" which people everywhere felt in their own perception of what was happening also tended to change the shifting character of this raw protest. A welcome drift was taking place. Its strength was that it took everyone by surprise. The State didn't have time to get its act together, the police let it happen whilst the oil companies hoped to take advantage of the actions.

Various Leftists have tried to make comparisons of the police attitude during the miners' strike and their *laissez-faire* attitude during the fuel blockades. They stupidly forgot that Thatcher had prepared the police for the miners strike several years beforehand, whereas the government this time round were caught completely off guard. In the absence of any clear commands from Straw and Blair, local cops, preferring an easy life, just let it happen. "Well, the cops in France don't intervene, so why should we", they thought, perhaps. (In fact, the French cops often *do* get heavy, on at least one occasion threatening blockaders with guns pointed at their heads, but British propaganda never mentions this)

Many of the poor supported this movement not because they really cared about the price of fuel (although they certainly cared about the knock-on effect of high fuel prices) but because it was an attack on the misery of normality: though the blockaders hadn't really intended it, the commodity economy virtually came to a standstill. Whilst many of the less ideologically befuddled poor supported this movement, it was left to the professional middle-class to denounce the blockaders (most of whom earned peanuts compared to these well-paid professional liars) as "greedy" and "voracious". Endlessly repeating this inversion of the facts, however, may well have the desired effect of undermining support for the next round of protest. During the miners' strike, occasionally miners would sneer at Scargill for "driving up to Orgreave in his chauffeur-driven car and getting himself arrested" - but they weren't very public about such criticisms. Probably there are a few protestors privately cursing the Land Rover/BMW/Merc-driving bosses who made up 20% of the blockaders, but unless they are public about such class antagonism people will get a clear impression of a harmony of interests and radical support will evaporate. As for those anarchists and ultra-leftists who denounced the whole thing because it was a "cross class alliance", strange that they fail to point this contradiction out when they get involved in Reclaim the Streets. Perhaps it's because they hope that RTS will provide them with fertile ground for recruits to anarchist ideology, whereas the fuel protests entailed looking at things afresh, not so simplistically. And wasn't the Poll Tax movement also a cross class alliance? Any anarchist who'd have used such an argument at that time as an excuse to

not get stuck in would have been dismissed as an arrogant twat. But now, after 10 years of relentless counter-revolution, so-called revolutionaries, like much of the rest of the population, are so entrenched in their petrified ideas that they are incapable of recognising the complexities of something new even if it jumped down their throats.

It didn't fit into existing categories and that disturbed all those who love socially descriptive paradigms from where one can hurl abuse: "*petit bourgeois entrepreneurs*", "*small business people*", "*anti-ecology numbskulls*" etc. Really though, it was more than abuse that was delivered by all the leftist/liberal news media; it was downright rubbishing. They were either right wing French Poujadists - the fascist inspired small shopkeepers and what have you - from the mid-50s or. like the Chilean truckers who helped topple Allende bringing in the military dictatorship of Pinochet. Essentially, they were thick, stupid, St Georges ' flag-waving, asylum-baiting, anti-union, greedy, planet-polluting animals no more notoriously illustrated than by *The Guardians* pet leftist, Steve Bell, the cartoonist who got his spurs satirising P.M. Major's Tory years. The traditionally right wing press did support the protestors- the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Telegraph.*, *The Times*, and *Sun* after having slammed the French actions of the previous week as typical gallic excesses well in need of another Waterloo-style trouncing, actions which were later the inspiration for what happened here.. There was a lot of typical opportunism here though because they got decidedly more nervous in their support of their "*this England*" interpretation of the rebellion once events threatened to get out of hand. And by November, all the official right-wingers (newspapers, the Tory Party, etc.) were completely down on the direct action. Scared by the potential power of inspiration that the blockaders could have sparked off, they all rushed in to emphasise that things could only be changed by the ballot box.

Behind the rubbishing though there was an old familiar theme in English society: people who work with their hands are among the lowest of the low only doing such jobs because they don't possess the intelligence to do any other. It's not an attitude so common in France. America or Germany. Here, it's still a marker of the incredible class prejudice and rigid division of labour which remains: even if you've managed to make enough dosh to purchase your own rig and climbed up the scale a bit to the status of "*small businessman*" you're still nothing but a "*counter jumper*". Big deal!

If one can say one thing about the last 10 years of effective social peace (with strikes in 1998 the lowest since records began, even lower than 1995, also the lowest, up till then, since records began) it is that there 's been a vast intensification of ignorance and indifference amongst the working class and the poor about how miserable and precarious are the lives of those outside of their immediate ever narrowing circle. At the height of the information revolution people have never been so uninformed: they can answer endless questions in pub quizzes but know nothing of their neighbours. Hence all the rubbishing propaganda about rich lorry drivers and farmers (sure, there are some, but then 20% of Jews in Weimar Germany were rich) falls on receptive ears, whereas during the Winter of Discontent, the stigmatisation of strikers as greedy' largely fell on deaf ears. At that time, workers recognised their individual self-interest as inseparable from their collective class interest, and those who condemned them in the name of society' were generally the most narrowly individualistic. Nowadays the victory of this upside down world makes many of the poor think that their self-interest is diametrically opposed to their self-organised class interest, resentful of those who try to overturn this topsy-turvy perception. A good example of this lack of interest, in all senses of the word, was the increasing ignorance, aided by 60 days of non-stop propaganda, about the lives of truckers and farmers. Truckers became reduced to *their* stereotype: indifferent killers of cyclists and pedestrians; farmers got reduced to *their* stereotype: greedy GMO-planting, BSE-nurturing money-mad Gypsy-killers. But as with *all* stereotypes, they are representative of only a minority, though every farmer and trucker gets tarred with the same brush.

However, let's stand back and look at a few hard - very hard - facts. The enormous defeat of the working class here and crucially 'the destruction of the miners in 84/'85 among the bitter and often violent disputes of the 80's, including urban insurrections, was to have a huge international ramification. Monetarism in its Thatcherite version became *the* model for capitalist development worldwide. The success in defeating working class resistance and the roll-back of the Welfare State and all other partial gains of the working class that went with this defeat was exported to East Europe (remember how Thatcher was feted and cheered in Poland, despite the fact that it was the so-called communist - Jaruzelski who had supplied Britain with extra coal during the miners strike?). Despite the naïve yet joyful hopes of the destroyers of the Berlin Wall, rapacious de-statification of the Russian and East European economies by a rip-off, free market gangsterism rushed over the ruined border. In this country, it meant the State with it's now gung-ho economic neo-liberalism was viciously out to punish everybody (famously described by the butcher Thatcher as *"the enemy within"*) who'd dared question it. Appropriate terms were used (*"dinosaur"* etc.) to describe those who didn't embrace this new shift in capital. Except that dinosaurs may prove to have more longevity if there isn't a social revolution, now that capital, for the sake of profit. is quite prepared to set fire to and drown the planet both at the same time.

With the asset stripping destruction of a lot of factory-based production, aided and abetted by financial concerns in a triumphalist City of London, side by side with the tendency towards hollowed-out companies in building, engineering and what have you and who no longer had many permanent workers on their pay roll, many laid-off workers were FORCED (more or less) to become self-employed; to acquire the services of an accountant, to buy their own fixed capital (trucks, small workshop and what have you). Well, it was either that or welfare and the prospect of constant harassment and punishment disguised as ridiculous pseudo-job training or slightly more lenient forms of workfare than experienced in America. It was basically *Hobsons Choice*. This mini-mass of intentionally pseudo-individualised people became a veritable army of *"reluctant entrepreneurs"* as we began to call them. It marked the petit-bourgeoisification of the proletariat. Or so it seemed.....

It equally marked the proletarianisation of the petit bourgeoisie. A lot of those who were forced into this position weren't that enamoured of it from the word go and actually quite fearful of the step. They had reason to be. They often had to work a lot harder, were *"on call"* with a mobile ringing day and night, worried into sleeplessness over insurance liabilities and costs if anything happened which previously their employers would have assumed responsibility for. Weekends spent on learning and doing maintenance to your machinery because you didn't want to spend the cash on getting it serviced by a company or by another worker like yourself etc. Then, no sick pay, no holiday pay and no perks like staying at a hotel when engaged in *"out"* work - expenses which you once could have fiddled. Though you'd get more money (and often, over short periods, a lot more) if things went well, at other times you were up shit creek without a paddle and with debts mounting up. on the brink of a nervous breakdown. At best, the lack of any real life you might have once hoped for has become sublimated - for example, in endless package holidays and the aestheticisation of domesticity. Everywhere people are imploding into obsessions with gardening, cooking, interior decorating, computers, a kind of valorisation of an introverted narrow life and not much compensation for the overwhelming sense of absence.

We have an engineering friend who was employed by an American multinational. The company with one hand gave him the sack and with the other offered him bits n' bobs of their own, long term, contract work. It suited them particularly as regards reduced insurance liability if anything happened subsequently (e.g. machinery breaking down after servicing etc.). For them, it probably meant a little more for shareholder dividends in terms of a hike in the profit margins. Our good and decent friend had always gone on about *"the workers"* in a somewhat hilarious demagogic way - bashing his fist on pub tables when a bit drunk etc., so, as a joke, we'd wind him up, saying, *"...businessman now, eh?"*. He'd go ape-shit, bashing his fist down even harder

on the table retorting, *"I'm still a fucking worker!"*

Another instance, and probably more to the point: in the 1980s we once worked on a building site in London where a fair proportion of the guys were hill farmers from Wales. They were good at their trades, having learnt them mostly out of necessity in everyday maintenance of their small holdings. Things like carpentry, roofing and bricklaying. Inevitably, we got talking as you do during moments, lunch and tea breaks, etc.. A fair amount of the conversation was about their farms, the long hours, starting before daybreak and finishing well after dark - often working during the night - for very little hard cash. In the end they said they liked the outdoor life and the hills but if they didn't periodically work on the buildings in London over winter, they just wouldn't survive. Their wives and sons looked after their spreads while they were away. They chatted away openly and pleasantly and weren't at all uptight. Well, apart from the foreman but then that's a foreman for you. The subcontractor was also a hill farmer but somewhat better off than the others and though he was making money out of all of us, there was a point of overlapping friendliness between him and the others from the hills. In fact you got the impression the subby was a wily guy who was creaming it and he'd go bright red with pleasure-cum-guilt if he'd particularly done a nice fleecing job on you ~ rather like he did, but more mechanically, shearing his sheep back home. He even told all of us that if we got the job finished on time we'd all get long free visits to a prostitute. Somehow, like the rest of his fancy incentives, we'd all gawp at it as it never materialised! We'd have been too embarrassed anyway. A few years later and suddenly we saw some of these hill farmers on TV. The sub-contractor, chameleon-like, had turned rebel-leader for the moment and had organised a protest against a visiting Tory Minister of Agriculture and had been accused of splattering him with eggs.

In the blockades there was something of all of this in the mix of people involved but with the addition that some were rich reasonably-sized business people, though the really big trucker firms like the Eddie Stobarts', it seemed, didn't get involved. It was a liquorice allsorts, a rag tag army, a Pandora's box of expectation defying accurate description. True, some had been strike-breaking truckers as the TUC said itself hiding behind its own, far worse, brutal strike-breaking history and intent. Equally, some had been involved in *"The Winter of Discontent"* and some, with the closure of the pits, were ex-miners, heirs of that great aborted insurrection. And it's probably because it was such a mix with an undefined, though clearly palpable, *"worker"* element that truckers on the outside were able to make friendly and instant contact with tanker drivers on the inside of the depot - many of whom also weren't employed directly by the oil companies either! Much ideologically was made at the time (in the TV and press) that the drivers *"trapped"* inside the refineries were union and those on the outside were non-union trying to create a calculated separation which just couldn't hold water. Thus T&G representatives were shown hard at work persuading drivers to get the oil supplies moving to the garage forecourts spurred on by T&G boss Bill Morris at the annual TUC conference venomously condemning the protestors mouthing on about *"anarchy cannot rule"* etc.

For a brief moment something else started to unfold. Possibly, some T&G aide or subscriptions officer tapped Bill Morris on the shoulder and said something like: *"Hey man, cool it, some of these truckers in the blockades are union members. Remember, they use our legal services because the New Labour government abolished legal aid for salaried people plus other basic shit. I mean hell, you wanted to modernise the TU movement and now we've got no choice but to go a long way with that. ~ and incidentally, we don't want to lose any more members just when membership is on an upturn because where'd our secure salaries be if we fucked our members out. I mean, hell, we're not fat cats but shit it would be nice to be one"*. Sure, they would not have talked *"American"* like this but this is the American executive style they would like to imitate having nothing in common with the workaday world of the American worker. Suddenly their bad mouthing, along with more enlightened members of the Labour Government, became more subdued e.g. Minister of Transport, ex-Trot, Gus (*"Lord"*) MacDonald and some of these protestors acquired first names, to give them a more accessible image.

Though this was the first international strike across Europe, it was also a revolt by a threatened farming community against globalisation in agriculture. Farming now has moved on from simple agri-business to vast ranching administered by agronomists, seed and fertilizer specialists with close links to powerful bio-tech multinationals like Monsanto and owned by huge financial bodies mainly ensconced in the City of London and Wall Street. Make no mistake about it these ranches are well in the wings in these islands. These vast ranches world wide will inevitably compete with each other and one thing is for certain, it's the final curtain-call for the folkloric frontier farmer of Hollywood mythology. For many ecos, though, peasants in India burning GM conditioned rape seed are OK but small farmers from the south west of England using the issue of fuel on which to hang their many grievances are merely reactionary little Englanders or some other charming description.

Despite the "Little Englander" caricature, this movement was clearly international, with international significance. Inspired firstly by the success of the French fishermen and then the French lorry drivers, it then went on to inspire lorry drivers and others in Poland, Hungary, Israel, Peru and Australia, not to mention several West European countries. It was also international in other respects. For instance, the situation of the tanker drivers inside the Stanlow oil refinery should be seen within a global perspective. In comparison to the truck drivers strike of 20 years ago during the Winter of Discontent, it was relatively local. Yet the contradiction became apparent at Stanlow when it was "*discovered*" that the company responsible in the last resort for getting the oil out was based...in Milan! The system of sub-contracting was such that it seems it came as a surprise to most drivers. It also made a mockery of the laws against sympathy strikes in the sense of workers belonging to a company taking sympathy action in solidarity with workers belonging to a related company. The pattern of ownership has become so bewilderingly opaque that what counted for more than belonging to a particular trade or branch of industry, financial concern etc was the sheer sense of frustration, lack of accountability and alienation and torrent of incomprehension and meaninglessness that threatened finally to overwhelm and transcend the sectional, confused and contradictory nature of the original dispute to really drive it to inspirational heights.

Perhaps the most inspiring aspect of the blockade (on the streets though, people actually referred to it as a "*strike*") were the growing permanent roadside meetings and encampments which developed around the refineries. Although assembly is perhaps too strong a term, they nevertheless daily grew in number in many parts of the country as people joined them from all walks of life. People who were simply fed up to their back teeth and wanted to see something happen.

This was especially true of Stanlow, south of Liverpool in Cheshire, and Grangemouth on the west coast of Scotland. It was at first a trickle of people which got bigger daily and could possibly have become a flood if the blockade hadn't been called off so quickly. Families turned up (the kids enjoyed larking about), taxi drivers, builders, women kiosk caterers, unemployed people, the odd toff and business person as well as those welcome but nutty eccentrics you always get on such occasions. Most importantly - once at the roadside assemblies - no matter what - anybody who was there, regardless of status, job or gender - was given the right to vote on immediate practical proposals like should tankers be let out for essential deliveries to such and such a place, should we contact so and so, should we ask for blankets, should we stay, should we ignore police directives etc? A magician at Stanlow, between odd bouts of entertaining the assembly with his tricks, was also occasionally putting up three to five hands when voting.

In many ways this was the most remarkable aspect of the strike-cum-blockade. This type of ultra-egalitarian, direct democracy hadn't taken place in these islands for a long, long time and probably before trade unionism existed in what can loosely be called "*an industrial dispute*". Perhaps the last time was in the late 18th century? Who the hell knows? And does it

matter? Although, during *"The Winter of Discontent"* there were lorry driver blockades, if you weren't a transport union member you wouldn't have been allowed to vote in the ad hoc roadside meetings. Thus, the city of Hull in East Yorkshire in the winter of '79 - '80 was effectively blockaded by striking lorry drivers who decided themselves what provisions/services etc could or couldn't enter the city. It was terrific. It was memorable. But would these truckers have allowed anybody to turn up and have a say in their decision-making if they didn't have a T&G union card? Even though this was rank n' file unionism at its best, potentially pointing to the transcendence of the union form, would these drivers, in the inspirational cold of that snow-bound winter and which now seems so long ago, have made such an imaginative though necessary leap?

It was precisely this ultra-open, assembly form that looked as though it was beginning to get out of hand and very quickly. *And there's the rub.* There was nonetheless a contradiction between the hauliers/farmers and the meeting itself: finally hauliers and farmers, because they had rightly acquired such prestige through an authority based on audacity, were able to call off the protest and without a great deal of fuss. Their authority was beginning to hamper the flow of that drift they had themselves set in motion. Basically, they'd got scared of their own power and recoiled before their strength. Possibly they saw how small in number they were - 2 to 3 thousand actual truckers and farmers at most - yet their success had begun to throw up in days a situation of dual power which was hovering dimly on the horizon. Who wouldn't be scared by such responsibility? They would have had to go beyond their *de facto* vanguard position and connect *directly* with other workers in order to inspire some practical activity from the vast majority of people who, up till then, were merely *passively* supporting them. They perhaps could feel these meetings/assemblies, particularly the big ones, were beginning to take on a rhythm of their own: the hot heads (from where ~ who knows and who cares?) were beginning to let fly with their tongues. One of the official organisers said on the telly that they'd called off the blockades because they were scared that people were getting angrier. Probably they wanted to achieve a role as negotiators by showing the authorities that they had the power to turn the people in the forecourts on and off like a tap. They capitulated and how! At one stroke they exposed their own naivety and lack of experience using all the old, time-honoured, foolish arguments about moral high grounds, good will via a placebo "*breathing space*" of 60 days etc. They snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. Even the most wooden of trade union strike proceedings wouldn't have left it like that. No agreement, no piece of paper with some signature, no nothing! It's the one thing you can't do when faced with a blood-thirsty UK state especially when it concerns outright protest and direct action from below. The Dracula State here with its fangs still dripping with the life blood of miners, printers, seafarers, dockers, urban rioters and anybody else who simply wanted to be really different and authentic, simply isn't going to recognise goodwill. All it recognises and suppers on is *WEAKNESS*. Interregnums merely give it time to go for the kill. Many an old lag from the old battles shook their head in disbelief. Hadn't some of the protesters said during the blockade that they now realised something of what the miners had been through in '84/'85 and from such unlikely quarters as Essex truckers? Sure enough, apart from a few soothing, mealy-mouthed words, the only the State is actively doing is making certain, with the assistance of the Confederation of British Industry, Police Chiefs, the Media and the TUC, is that no such event must ever take place again, even if it means destroying the livelihood of every rebel trucker and small farmer. And if there's a repeat of the blockades they'll do that through the way they know: fines, expropriations and debts rather than jail and martyrdom. That's the modern way: the way of money. The 60 day truce gave the authorities plenty of time to get themselves into gear, both in terms of law and order and in terms of crapaganda. Whilst in September the ruling world were divided - basically between the left and right wings of capital - after 60 days they were much more united. Why? Because they know that any concession to direct democracy undermines bourgeois democracy, any concession to one section of the poor would incite opposition in all sections. A Thatcherite journalist in *The Times* put the predicament of the ruling class most clearly: "*This crisis could be a truly historic event. This could be the moment when Britain forgets all the hard lessons it learnt under Margaret Thatcher about economic realism, market incentives and social rigour and drifts back into the delusion and self-indulgence of the 1960s and 1970s. This could*

be the moment when the British public decides...that they can casually ignore the laws of economics...that the self-discipline created by the economic insecurity of the 1980s can finally be thrown away like an unfashionable frock...After the Second world war the western world enjoyed more than two decades of full employment before the lessons of the 1930s were forgotten in the breakdown of social discipline that began in 1968. Is Britain about to forget the lessons of the 1980s before full employment has even been restored?"(14/9/00). At the time one felt that the small farmers and small hauliers recoiled before the enormity of what had been unleashed - a hunch that was subsequently confirmed by Channel 4 TV. At the last moment it foundered through fear of its own potential and the promise to return within 60 days proved to be an empty threat, which government spies on the ground would surely have been aware of. So Eddie Grundy retired to Ambridge to nurse his hunting gun which more than likely be used to blow his brains out than shoot rabbit. And Ernie, driver of "*the fastest milk cart in the west*" country, decided to call it a day in more ways than one.

The November protests were pretty much a damp squib, hardly surprising in retrospect. The best one can say about the suggestion of a Jarrow-type slow parade of cars up and down the country is that it undermined a little the crass stereotyping of the blockaders as "petite-bourgeois Tories". Such a traditional Old Labour-type image of "fine decent upstanding people" somehow clashed with the Tory definition of "fine decent upstanding people". However, the original Jarrow March was an expression of appalling weakness - 10 years after the defeat of the General Strike in 1926 as much at the combined hands of the TUC and the Tory Party as the November parade was (in 1926 the TUC initially supported the strike in order to rein it in and undermine it; today, with a Labour Government, the Tories have swapped roles with the TUC). The would-be workers of Jarrow marched partly because they ate better and had a more cheerful time on the march than stuck in an 80% unemployed town with the modern equivalent of £27 a week. Despite much support, the Prime Minister at the time - Stanley Baldwin - dismissed them out of hand and refused to meet them, surprise, surprise. In 1981 the TUC tried to imitate this with the Peoples March for Jobs. This time, of course, there was much media coverage: cameras were waiting to record the moment the march passed through the village of Lavendon in Bucks, sight of the most well-known photo of the Jarrow march. In '81 no-one complained of the sacreligious nature of the show or of the fact that the kids of '81 unemployed weren't running about barefoot, though today Old Labourites are all jumping up and down with their mock outrage. In '81 four weeks after the TUC's boring march of those willing to be *hierarchically* organised, the self-organised unemployed (and many employed also) resorted to rioting in the streets, with over 30 cities erupting against the cops and the Economy. During those 10 days that shook the State, Thatcher herself admitted to hardly sleeping a wink as she tossed (but refused to turn) around ideas on the maintenance of Britain's brutal class society. From 1936 to 1981 to 2000, history repeats itself, first time as tragedy, second time as a B-movie stunt, third time history virtually got arrested before it even got onto the motorway. The protestors, threatened with the loss of their livelihood and unable and unwilling to extend their protest didn't even try to reclaim the streets on foot, but were forced to walk along the pavement by the cops. Though it's certainly not that lorries and cars are necessarily signs of wealth or lack of poverty, as shallow well-off leftists would have us believe, they are commodities whose effect is to isolate and separate us. CB radios and mobiles apart, in November the drivers never got to really *meet* new people in this fizzled out parade. This possibility - the chance of breaking out of habitual contact networks, of taking over the alien territory of this society and making it *ours*, is the possibility thrown up of *all* social movements. But subverting the normal commodity use of lorries and cars means, at some point, getting out of your lorries and cars. Unfortunately the various leaders of the protests had their way, and boring self-defeating, and ultimately irrational, "reasonableness" took hold, despite the "nothing to lose!" rhetoric ~ people clapped the demagogic phoney sympathizers, leaders held negotiations with politicians and talked to the TV cameras - anything for the 15 minutes of fame this society dangles carrot-like, all the better to beat you with the stick of financial ruin.

One of those politely clapped was Mark Francis of the Peoples Fuel Lobby, a mini-celebrity

who'd already appeared on Newsnight and Kilroy. On November 10th *The Guardian* quoted him as saying, "Everybody has jumped up and down and have said this fuel price has put us out of business - that's bullshit. The deep-rooted problem is over-population (in the British haulage industry). There are too many wagons on the road". Such a blatant desire to collaborate in the restructuring of the haulage industry should have, at the very least, got him booed, but perhaps few truckers read *The Guardian*, hardly surprising considering how their pernicious portrayal of the protesters as fascists seems to have colonised the brains of people who should know better.

Gordon Brown has already started on this road to restructuration in his November budget, by upping the start-up licence for those entering the haulage industry from £6000 to £20,000. When one then considers that involvement in any go-slow or blockade could result in having your licence withdrawn it doesn't take much to guess how truckers' minds may be concentrated.

Country and Western capital

Sometime after the calling off of the September blockade, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, "Capability" Brown^[**] went on TV to stress that British agriculture was undergoing a "restructuring". He avoided using the term crisis to play down the dramatic events taking place down on the farm. The gradual withdrawal of subsidy in terms of food price support has meant that the reform of CAP (Common Market agricultural Policy) has caused many small farmers to place their worsening plight alongside the resistance of miners and steelworkers in the early 1980s. Unfortunately, this seismic shift in consciousness in parts of the countryside is hobbled by arcane political stereotypes which persists in viewing the major divisions in society as summed up and represented by the opposition between Labour and Tory party. A North Wales beef and sheep farmer, Brian Perry expressed it in the following way: "We weren't there for the miners or the steelworkers. The farmers were Conservative and the miners were Labour. We know how they felt". *The Guardian*, Oct 21st 200. However, neither the Labour party nor the trades Unions were there for the miners during their mighty year-long strike, just as in a similar manner, the NFU (National farmers Union), the Road Hauliers Association and the Tory party weren't there for this practically spontaneous movement. (Demonstrating farmers later complained in the pages of *Farming Today* that this was not a harvest festival of resistance because unlike the French protest they had not gathered in the corn prior to taking to the streets). they were effectively disowned by all and sundry official bodies - which actually could have given them a head start, but the greatest weakness then became a lack of resolve and their own creation of new media-pampered leaders.

There is much talk of an agricultural crisis but the pity was the protesting farmers did not ever really clarify the situation when they could have easily done so. It seemed they wished to hang onto a comforting corporatism, far more applicable to 30 years ago, of tractors, farmyards, cow biers, pig pens, geese and the inevitable sheep dog. The reality is vastly different and set to change even more rapidly - and hinted in Brown's favoured term "restructuring", which was also applied to the steel industry in the late 70s and 80s and especially to the mining industry. Behind it in The fields (more like prairies) lies merger after merger (the taking over of one farm after another) by City institutions which lease the land to contract farming companies which employ professional agronomists to run these new corporate outfits. The City institutions are then the shareholder and contract farming companies the decision makers who decide what to plant or rear. All round there is a huge increase in contract working.

This restructuring aims at the creation of unimaginable vast farms, which will eventually come to dominate world agriculture and which will be run by the City of London, Wall St and other major stock exchanges. At this point in time globalised farming is also the stock exchange-isation of agriculture.

Canny country talk is no longer the witless comedy of "How much a good yoke of bullocks at Stamford Fair" as in Shakespeare's *Henry IVth* but about the rising middle classes of India and China etc and growth in the per capita consumption requiring an increase in grain and meat production. That this agriculture of immense dimensions is closely linked to the petrochemical industry and bio-engineering companies should surprise no one. Sadly, it is the small farmers that are doing all the dirty work for the GM food trials. As food subsidies diminish they are increasingly tempted by a bung from Monsanto etc to compensate for the sharp reduction in the giro cheques from Brussels. but these are just short term bribes to pacify small farmers to what they face in the slightly longer term. They will be surplus to (capitalist) requirements: as a government spokesman said on a radio debate on 3rd January 2001, "The vast majority of them will be out of business.

On account of the unpopularity of the CAP (e.g. the Geldof/Thatcher pseudo-confrontation over the refusal to liberate the food mountains for famine victims in East Africa) the spin applied to the reform of the CAP suggests the withdrawal of ALL subsidies. Nothing could have been further from the truth. In fact, price support has been replaced by area payments. One doesn't have to be a mathematical genius to realise that a "farm" going on for the size of a small county will get more than those glorified meadows and a bit more such as dot the Pennines, Mendips and the Welsh mountains. In 1994 (please note, not 1999/2000) it is thought a dozen farmers (i.e. management boards) banked cheques worth £1 billion while it was rumoured four received more than £5 million each. In the bad old days of CAP at least the food surplus and waste were there for all to see and bemoan. This is far more sinister and occult and more akin to the unseen millions beamed around the world everyday through cyberspace.

The blockade was a lost opportunity for the farmers themselves to clear up the confusion clinging to the term crisis and to lay bare the actual class relations in the countryside. Had they done so, perhaps along the lines indicated above, their impact would have been greater. To the sheer elemental force of the movement which is so typical of this country (e.g. the miners' strike, the Winter of Discontent, the class riots of 1981, the Poll Tax revolt) there would have been indeed a critique making force yet more irresistible through the clarity of analysis. That they did not do so (and the hill farmers of Wales and elsewhere must know better than anyone else how dire the direction of modern farming is) suggests the movement harboured a great weakness destined from the start to hand back power to the enemy. Wishing to call a halt to the rapid changes taking place in agriculture and in their traditional allegiances (and meanwhile establishing common ground with the hordes of redundant steel workers, miners and what have you) the farmers ("remnant farmers" rather than "tenant farmers") should pause to remember what Saint Juste said, who was himself riding the wave of a peasants uprising: *"Those who make half a revolution dig naught but their own grave"*.

Rainin' in my Heart

As the autumn floods drowned parts of the country, one of the more nauseating aspects of the sad November protest was the sight of banner waving eco-purists lining the route of the motorway, wagging their fingers as only the Politically Correct English Middle Class can. Their moralism meant that they could feel good about point blank refusing to talk to people, scurrying off to the protection of their familiar clique whenever someone tried to discuss things with them. No wonder they arrogantly and ignorantly assumed that those who supported or took part in the fuel protests hadn't realised the contradiction of the environmental message. In fact the only message of Friends of the Earth and of Greenpeace was "Here is the Truth - bow down before it!". Though it cheered us up that Greenpeace got acquitted for digging up the GMOs last autumn, in the end it was all a bit of free advertising for **them**, rather than the action, which had already been done by loads of other groups of people. The priestly messenger role teaches only

subtle variants of "We'll do it for you" or "We're the One True Path - join us!". Particularly as Monbiot, Melchett, Porritt and Secrett (that well-known Law firm) were quick to emphasise "There is Good Direct Action and Bad Direct Action. We are Good, RTS's May Day and the fuel protests are Bad". The corny condemnations of violence and intimidation as undemocratic means that they're hoping one day to be very vicious democratic Ministers of the Environment, when they can be *really* intimidating and violent, all in the name of "Saving the planet".

State "ecologists" (who pretend that capitalism, the market and the State, could be environmentally-friendly) always condemn independent movements because they undermine their would-be authority and they want to show how useful they are for certain sections of capital. The contradiction of State "ecologists" was best expressed by the Green Party in France. They're well-known for condemning Jospin for conceding victory to the fishermen there in their struggle for less tax on their fuel, stating the standard eco-ideological line about the genuinely devastating effect on the environment, yet for months they'd been supporting Nuclear Power, despite having condemned it before they joined the government. What a surprise! Does it really need repeating - the critique of the sick joke of democracy, the critique of our right' to decide between Tweedledum or Tweedlegreen for a minute every 4 or 5 years, our predictable cynicism about the fact that, when elected, they just go on doing what's good for their class, regardless of their meager promises? The French Greens support pollution by the powerful (the nuclear power lobby), but not by the poor. For this reason, a 2000 strong demo against a nuclear reactor in the North of France physically prevented rank and file Green Party activists from joining the demo. If you join the State you cannot be ecological.

People who *need* to use vehicles, despite recognising their miserable effects (and not just on the ozone layer), in order to survive will hardly reduce their use because of higher indirect taxes on fuel. This is a lie indirectly admitted by Blair & co. when they say that if they reduce fuel tax there'll be less money for the NHS and pensioners (this, after having ruled out increased income and corporation taxes for the rich). But if less of the so-called "Green" tax means more petrol will be bought, then logic states that revenue should be constant. And if increased tax means less car users then how can that help the NHS? But as always with arguments which accept the contradictions of this society, logic has fuck-all to do with it. In this case, high indirect taxes are just another way of making the poor pay for the insane crisis capitalism has thrown the world into, the ideology being that we are *all* responsible for this disaster. And the option of lower indirect tax is presented as a threat to poor pensioners. As always, the hidden logic behind this lack of logic is the need for the ruling class to divide the poor against each other. No wonder Two-Jags Prescott (whose petrol consumption is paid for by that strange beast, the taxpayer) advocates the "Green" tax. Many of the hauliers' spokesmen have advocated higher tax for the top tax band, which kind of undermines the caricaturisation of them as Tories and certainly puts them to the Left of the government.

Rachel, a woman truck driver involved in the blockades, put the tax question more clearly: "[D]cl we have to pay high levels of vat on diesel and petrol in order to have decent social services?....I am now 60 years old. I drive a 41 ton truck over 4000 kilometres a week, to Spain and Portugal and back as an employed driver, for which I get between £300 & £350 a week clear paid into my bank account. The fact that I face a future with an inadequate pension and am terrified of becoming ill in case I have to rely on our NHS has nothing, repeat nothing....to

do with not paying enough tax. If you concede the ground on which you argue to Capitalists there there is indeed no hope of achieving a socialist society. The enemy is Capitalism, not low taxation. It's significant that Blair only showed concern for pensioners after the fuel blockades had started: in 98 a handful of pensioners successfully blockaded the Humber Bridge for a few hours. Blair's attempts to divide pensioners off from blockaders is aimed at ensuring pensioners fail to recognise themselves in the actions of the fuel protesters.

Scientists have admitted that globally a 60% reduction in CO2 emissions is the minimum needed over the next 10 years, whilst the various governments are humming and haahing over a 5% reduction. Predictably, the government complained, in November, about the loss to the economy of a billion quid, whilst global warming cost well over that in two weeks of flooding last autumn alone. It's clear that whilst the need for a quick turnover of profit continues, the smooth running of which is the function of the State, the State's self-proclaimed long-term project of clearing up the environment is just an abstract pretension subverted by the irrational reality of a competitive market economy. At best', whilst the economy exists, an ecological State would need to be world-wide and so totalitarian as to make previous forms of dictatorship seem like a light slap on the wrist in comparison. Whilst the need for profit exists, any infringement of a *hierarchically* organised ecological policy would need unprecedented forms of surveillance and policing (particularly in those parts of the world where people are forced, through poverty, to destroy parts of the land, over-fish, etc., just in order to stay alive). The only real choice is to abolish the profit motive and the need for money. How? - by the masses of individuals seizing and transforming the whole of social space and goods in order to make the world based on human beings not commodities. Though this project seemed like a far greater possibility in the 60s up until the mid-80s, the irony is that the greater the urgency of such a project, the more unrealistic it seems.

The fuel blockades' limits were partly defined by their attachments to old methods: negotiations, leadership, public opinion, etc.- symptoms of a lack of confidence brought upon by 10 years of hardly contested counter-revolution. But they also gave us a glimpse of possibilities - the subversion of the economy had its freshness and egalitarianism, and expressed the spontaneity of new forms and attitudes that need to re-emerge from an informed reflection on the reasons for the eclipse of the old movements.

This text was produced care of:

B.M.Combustion, London, WC1N 3XX

APPENDIX 1

We produced the following leaflet for the November 14th demo:

FUEL FOR THOUGHT

Pouring petrol on troubled waters

One of the best results of the fuel blockades was the fact that one began to talk to virtual strangers about what was going on ~ an experience not known since Poll Tax. And you began to talk about everything that mattered poverty, the environment, the futureless society we live in, the sense of defeat over the years, the miners strike, the Winter of Discontent, sex (well, not the latter but next time maybe). Suddenly a breath of fresh air: at long last, the rulers' smug smirks wiped off their smarmy faces; after a decade of virtually unopposed intensified State/market misery, a decade that seemed like a century, something that gave us some sense

of life and hope. And it was a breath of fresh air quite literally: the streets of Manchester eerily empty apart from buses. London like a permanent Sunday. If this was an anti-eco protest, as some would have it, it wasn't turning out like that

This is a pedestrian leaflet in that we're part of that large body of people who broadly supported the protest and always, it seems, waiting at bus stops! We know very little about farmers and truckers apart from occasional pub conversations. Obviously the protagonists are understandably wary of this "*outsider*invasion, suspicious of hidden agendas. Maybe you see us as outside agitators but really we're agitated outsiders, like 99% of those who gave their support. In a life divided between insiders and outsiders, everything now really is INSIDE OUT!

At the same time as thoroughly enjoying the protest from a distance we felt there were contradictory aspects to it. It seems about 20% of those on the blockades were "*rich*" bosses and that wasn't confronted. We fully realise that the rest were technically small-business people and self-employed forced by changing economic circumstances to often become "*reluctant entrepreneurs*", usually debt-driven, worried sick about bank overdrafts etc. and many of them not exploiting others' labour. It's complex and dismissing the struggle as "*petit bourgeois*" etc. is just simplistic, dogmatic, intellectual purism, far more arrogantly and safely conservative than the blockaders.

Certainly we loved the short-lived forums that gathered spontaneously around the oil refineries. We liked the general lack of placards and we liked the voting procedures that unfolded at Grangemouth and Stanlow etc. No matter who or what you were, if you'd taken the trouble to turn up at the roadside you could vote. But was this an open forum or merely a smart bit of public relations for the TV merely ratifying things that didn't really need ratifying? It seemed that more and more people flocked to these forums, daily getting ever bigger. We don't know if this was one of the reasons why the protest was suddenly called-off as those people who'd unfortunately allowed themselves to become leaders got panicked by what they'd set in motion, quickly arranging a behind-the-scenes settlement with police and others? Things were certainly poised for a greater take-off and practical involvement of a lot of others in their workplaces. It was obvious that individual contact through mobiles etc. would have had to be made to hospital staff to ensure fuel supplies did go to the hospitals and not to forecourts on the motorways and that district nurses and health visitors could have a full tank in their cars. The prospect of a rudimentary dual power was dimly shaping up and it would have been far better... **GULP!** ...to take such a giant step than capitulate before your own might. Moreover, it would have challenged the media/government spin that truckers and small farmers were destroying the health service.

Instead defeat was snatched from the jaws of victory. The protestors backed off declaring a 60 day moratorium without securing one simple guarantee about anything. Dead duck arguments the moral high ground public opinion - etc. were deployed. The State doesn't give a toss about such phrases and "*public opinion*" is a media/ad man's invention which didn't exist 100 years ago. Public opinion was behind 300,000 miners and their supporters who marched in London in 1992 over pit closures. Even Tories like Churchill were on their side. It made fuck all difference. Then there was a so-called moratorium but it was merely a ruse as the closure programme carried on dictatorially anyway.

We realise that the price of fuel was a pretext for many small farmers and truckers, having been pushed to the outside margins on the brink of collapse. Small farmers are now being eliminated as ranches the size of small counties owned by City of London financiers, administered by agronomists in league with giant bio-tech companies, are now well on the drawing board. Basically, together with often smaller hauliers, they're fighting against

obsolescence ("*Capability*" Brown's "restructuring") and are the latest trade in the firing line after steel workers, miners and printers. These more traditionally recognised sections of the working class" did help each other somewhat and the farmers didn't etc. Well all that's true but it's of no help now (and in the **light** of changing social conditions we need to redefine what is "*the working class*"). Ferocious laws were put in place to stop the working class cutting up untidy but remember it was the unions who first of all stopped this getting together before the State enshrined this in law. So the nasty attack launched against the protestors in September 2000 by the T&GWU who'd already helped fuck over the Liverpool dockers over 3 years ago, shouldn't have surprised anybody. It was merely the most blatant in a long line of such attacks. Mind you, some of these newly emerged leaders seem to be acting like TU bureaucrats already.

If this wasn't bad enough the liberal press in particular went in for an horrendous rubbishing on other fronts, epitomised most clearly by Steve Bell, *The Guardian's* pet cartoonist. They made out the protestors as fat, ugly, right wing, flag-waving, fascist sympathising thickos, who couldn't care less about the NHS, pensioners or the environment. The latter has been used especially effectively. For some of the press and TV it's mainly the protestors who are responsible for the horrors of global warming. And, *lo and behold*, it's like as though God and Noah went to their immediate assistance: **THE RAIN AND BIG FLOOD FOLLOWED**. *Yea, the State is divine!* What a spectacular *PROPAGANDA* coup. True, there is a vast and frightening ecological catastrophe unfolding but this is the outcome of a capitalist mode of production entering a suicide phase prepared to destroy every living thing. Hypocritically attacking the protestors lets the major accomplices of the State and the huge transnationals off the hook. All those summits like Kyoto, supposedly convened to cut greenhouse gases, are meaningless, ineffectual, politically correct, theatrical exercises as they, the biggest culprits, remorselessly pursue global devastation for a quick buck.

But isn't it the old, old story in a new guise? Isn't it always those at the bottom of the pile who get the blame for all the shit and far deeper in it? Of course people at the sharp end are going to be uptight about the price of fuel when they don't have much dosh to play with but that doesn't mean you're not worried about the on-going ecological nightmare. It's just that you feel so impotent to do anything about anything until finally there's something that causes you to snap inside. You 've got to start somewhere but always **remember** the State will deploy *any* argument, no matter how low, because they don't want to see any social movement.

Remember that eco arguments were deployed after the event in the 90s pit closures. Having defeated the miners in their year long strike in 1984/5, the UK State went to destroy them completely as a warning to others: Don't ever dare challenge established authority ever again! Only later was it suggested that the industry was a big polluter. Even the leftist *New Statesman* endorsed this bullshit without underlining the real reason for the pit closures.

Stereotyping the fuel protestors as anti-eco is great stuff coming from a State deploying fast cars, government chartered jets and what have you. Then there's "*Two Jags*" Prescott. All these services for immediate consumption and all on freebies. (The hypocrisy is inevitable for those in hierarchical positions: "*Do as I say not as I do*".). Moreover, where is this governments green tax going to? Public transport hasn't improved. There's been no fare reductions nor increased services. In fact with ongoing privatisation for the benefit of shareholders and fat cats, things have got worse for all us alley cats.

The problem with all social movements is to break out of the particular and make connections. In the mid-90s, *Reclaim the Street* and the Liverpool Dockers came together and engaged in direct action against the dock bosses. How about a street party of fuel protestors

and commuters who suffer the daily stress of expensive and miserable transport? How about blockading a main line station and holding an open forum there? How about (enter your own dream action in the space provided: Our wildest dreams are their greatest nightmares and their delirious dreams are our greatest nightmares).

We 'd like to say more and we
will **later. That 's all for now**
folks! ~

Adge Cutler and the Wurzels (Just 4 people. November 12th. 2000).

(If interested contact: BM *Combustion*. London, WC IN 3XX. who has kindly let us use his box number).

APPENDIX 2

Sometimes it's hard to be a Woman

This was received from Neil Gordon: practicalhistory@hotmail.com, 20/9.2000

This came to me via another discussion about the petrol prices movement in the UK I've been having. Gill and Dave referred to by Rachael had denounced the movement as 'petit bourgeois'.

Dear Comrades

Re: Fuel Blockades

As an international freight driver I find it hard to keep my cool on this one, we truck drivers at last, all be it in a distorted way, start to stick together, tanker drivers refuse to cross blockades, Bill Morris and the TUC leaders indulge in a disgraceful sell out (which more than matches Bill Morris' sell out of the Liverpool Dockers) and my own "Comrades" side with Bill Morris!

Just to state where I am coming from: I am a member of at least one usually excluded group, ie. A woman truck driver in a very male world, one that is not only occupied by men but one in which racist, homophobic, sexist, xenophobic comments and attitudes are a constant threat.

Part of the ideological baggage that stems from the attitudes of many of the blokes I work with is that they are totally cynical about collective »action, the sell out of the lorry drivers strike in 1979 by union bureaucrats has taught them a bitter lesson, one that has led to a sense of defeat

and reactionary ideas. In spite of all this, in spite of the fact that the blockades were organised by small owner drivers and other "nasty" »elements, we did actually stand together and fight our corner for a brief period of a week at least. I think socialists like me deserve more support than we apparently received from David and Gill.

David says that the blockades are about moving in a direction of "less tax, less welfare" " no, that is not a marxist position, is David saying that we have to pay high levels of vat on diesel and petrol in order to have decent social services? If he is then my personal experience is at odds with his opinion. I am now 60 years old, I drive a 4 ltonne truck over **4,000 kilometres** a week, to Spain and Portugal and back as an employed driver for which I get between 300 and 350 a week clear paid into my bank account. The fact that I face a future with an inadequate pension and am terrified of becoming ill in case I have to rely on our NHS has nothing, repeat nothing David to do with not paying enough tax. If you concede the ground on which you argue to Capitalists then there is indeed no hope of achieving a socialist society. The enemy is Capitalism, not low taxation.

I am proud to call myself a trucker and prouder still of being a woman trucker (even if it does get changed to "**lady** driver" yuk), fighting my corner in a very male world. It does actually take a lot out of me too, for example, pull into a truck stop in Spain in the middle of the night to fill up with diesel and get a meal and get looked at like I come from another planet. When I talk and discuss with the blokes I have to be very careful about how I put forward my socialist ideas. Language like Gill and David, use would increase my sense of vulnerability and I do not want to be associated with you or the language you use.

The reasons I support the blockade are because lower fuel prices are a means of protecting my job. I'm now employed but three years ago, before I went bankrupt, I was an owner driver (I think that there probably are historical examples of owner drivers, like journeymen who owned their own tools or their own small businesses, who can legitimately be described as working class, (at least as much as a University Lecturer can). When I was going down the pan, knowing I was failing to compete, knowing I was losing, I tried to keep afloat by "running on cherry" (using untaxed diesel). I bought it off a bloke who charged me 18p a litre, he obviously paid less than this in order to make a profit out of customers like me. I didn't like what I was doing and, after » I got caught and fined the £1,500 I had to pay , was one of the reasons I went bankrupt. I was paying £1,374 a month for the only new vehicle I will ever own, the tax on it (vehicle excise duty) was about £3,750 a year (I cant remember the exact figure but it's now about £5,500 for a two axle unit pulling a tri-axle trailer). If I bought legitimate diesel the diesel costs were in excess of £3000 a month (insurance, and R & M use up another £500 pcm). I

used to get £1,700 for a Barcelona (and back), work it out for »yourself .Whether employed or owner drivers we are not all Eddie Stobarts. In shcrt you have to drive night and day, literally, in order to make a living.

I will never ever forget that day, about six in the morning in Ramsgate Docks, when I was busted, this Customs Officer, in a bizarre ceremony, putting her hand on my beautiful 420Eurostar and saying "in the name of the Queen I seize this vehicle . There were tears of rage and humiliation streaming down my cheeks, later on, after I mortgaged my earnings to pay them, I said to her "look, what can I do now? I have 850 litres of cherry in my tanks, I will really get wrong with the Green Party if I dump it in Ramsgate Docks!". "I couldn't care less what you do with it" she said, " You're just shipping out aren't you? Run on cherry the other side of the channel all the time for all I care, just don't have any in your tanks when you come back". On the ferry I tipped vodka down me and talked with another trucker who told me about a number of prison sentences he had served, he instinctively felt solidarity with me "know what you want to do? Keep running on cherry till you have your £1,500 back from the bastards, then when you have done that start making more money out of them!" Maybe that just makes the two of us "lumpen scum" who "turn up on the picket lines?", I do though know that the hatred we both felt towards those who had done what they had done to us was a valid emotion which was a starting point for action.

I am proud to be a trucker but I am also ashamed when I think of drivers driving through the picket lines, when, possibly these same drivers change »their attitudes and respect blockades would it not be better to support them and try to express solidarity? I am told one of the tanker drivers said in a tv interview that he had **driven** through miners picket lines and he now realised he was wrong, what would David and Gill tell him? That he was wrong to drive through the miners picket lines but that he should have driven through the "petit-bourgeois" picket lines? What are they going to say to the rest of us? That because these blockades were led by petit-bourgeois elements then we should all go home and read at least one volume of "Das Capital" before demonstrating again?

Because of the cut throat nature of Capitalism the job I do for a living could be described as a rat race, except that this would be unfair to rats because rats don't behave in such an anti-social way as Capitalists, the point however is to change it, not criticise us when for the first time in years, when we start to come together and when Bill Morris sells us out and advises drivers who are starting to respect blockades to drive past them then you could at least be a little more constructive than to hurl insults at us like "lumpen scum" and "petit bourgeois narrow interests". By the way Tony Blair is no Allende. If you think he is we have nothing in common and there's

no further point in discussion.

Conditions are so bad in our industry that there are blokes (and women) driving night and day, 24 hours a day, it's not all that unusual for blokes to run back from Southern Spain without sleep, a friend does Lancashire-Brindisi and back with only the sleep he can snatch whilst waiting for the ferry or being loaded or unloaded, this is quite common, as are interrupter switches so you can turn off the tackograph. Also hidden diesel tanks built where customs officers don't find them, so you can run on cherry without getting caught, like I was, (by the way, the government made it legal to run on cherry last week, during the crisis) . There is a minority of drivers who use amphetamines and a lot who use alcohol, but we are not all macho "lumpen scum", I have met with so many acts of mutual aid and help from blokes who I will possibly never see again, the point is to turn this into trades union solidarity and to do this we need insults and negative opinions like we need a hole in the head.

I have to get up in the early hours of the morning and there is a whole lot more I want to say but I will leave it, I could add that I don't want to be personal but this wouldn't be true. That Volvo420 I drive is all there is between me and having to "live" on an OAP, it's my life, these issues are that important to me and I will fight with the blokes (and women) I work with, you can see some of our opinions if you go into: »http://ladytruckersclub.tripod.com/LTC_Bulletin/page1.htm. And look round the site.

In socialism and in Solidarity with my Sisters and Brothers ,

Rachael Webb.

Samotnaf Note (written 2001):

Although I essentially agree with Rachael Webb in the above letter, I should point out that she is a member of the "Socialist" Party, formerly known as "Militant", and much of her other propaganda is pretty crap. In particular, she claims somewhere in her texts that Militant were responsible for the anti-poll tax movement and the downfall of Thatcher, a horrendous vanguardist image of Militant which ignores the facts: most of the anti-poll tax movement was self-organised and Militant leaders denounced the rioters in the West End at the end of March 1990, even offering to hand over any information about rioters to the cops, a disgusting policy which caused a lot of Militant members to attack the leadership, and some even to quit the 'party'. Undoubtedly the acute isolation of those trying to find a way out of this mess of a world

plays a significant part in why in many ways decent individuals join stupid organisations but it's certainly no solution to isolation and it's no excuse for coming out with absolute bullshit designed to boost the Socialist Party's image in the eyes of potential recruits.

Footnotes

* Some anarchists - the *Anarchist Federation*, producers of that hot-bed of subversion, *Organise!*, wrote to that equal hot bed of subversion, *The Observer*, giving a little boost to this line of nonsense, crudely distancing themselves from the ugly truckers, thereby upholding the fine history of anarchism (not). Obviously these anarchists would object to the paid-up bureaucratic role of Bill Morris and the TUC, but in both viewing the protests as reactionary there wasn't much difference between them. Despite a supposed critique of anti-fascism, they end up with aspects of the same facile anti-fascist ideology as *The Guardian*. When will these starvelings arise from their slumbers?

**

The original "Capability" Brown was an 18th century landscape designer whose great contribution to the countryside was to reinforce enclosures by kicking the peasants off the land and chopping down woods to create lifeless but neatly-hedged vistas, complete with fake sheep that never moved, bleated or shat, a still-life aestheticisation of dehumanised unnatural nature, aiming to soothe the frayed sensibilities of the aristocrats he landscaped for on the eve of the Industrial Revolution. Over 200 years later, our modern "Capability" Brown (no, not Alan Titchmarsh) wants to create a similar graveyard for his multi-national superiors, a graveyard strewn with the bodies of poor farmers with self-inflicted bullet holes through their heads.



