

BLACK FLAG

2015/16

issue 237

£3

SQUATS AND RESISTANCE

On political occupation in a time of crisis

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

*Scotland and anarchism | polling | patriarchy and men's rights
Radical Routes | lessons from animal rights | new Luddism
Trade Union Bill | Breathing Utopia | the fall of Victor Serge | Reviews*

Editorial

Welcome to the new issue of Black Flag. We are still appearing annually but want to become more frequent, and we need your help for that — in writing, editing, distributing and selling. We are also thinking about changing format from A4 magazine to A5 journal from the next issue. Watch this space!

Two unexpected events occurred since our last issue. First, the Tories squeezed to a Parliamentary majority based on 24% of votes. Talk about rewarding failure!

The Labour right, echoing right-wing media, proclaimed this was because Ed Miliband was too “left-wing” and the “centre” needed to be reclaimed. That this “centre” is moving rightwards with the Tories is lost on them — but, then, the second unexpected event showed where their loyalties lie.

We are, of course, referring to Jeremy Corbyn becoming Labour leader.

Absurd attacks began immediately. That reaction is expected, but why the hysteria? Perhaps because after 30 years of neoliberalism the ruling class are still worried. Neoliberalism has not lived up to its spin — hardly surprising given that was always rhetoric to hide an agenda of empowering the few.

The reaction shows that at least one class in society, the ruling class, is aware that socialism is not dead. Labour’s Chuka Umunna suggested that “screaming ‘you’re wrong’ at the public is not a good strategy for a party that lost an election.”

Why, then, bother with an opposition? He seems unaware that politics involves winning people to your ideas — that sometimes means explaining why they are wrong.

Our role is two-fold. First, aid extra-parliamentary struggle and organisation. Second, argue our politics and convince people that real power lies outside Parliament.

While Corbyn may win office, he will not be in power — the State bureaucracy and big business is — and he will need to be pressured from below by a movement rooted in communities and workplaces using direct action and solidarity.

More, we need to challenge his vision of socialism. We must stress that socialism means workers’ control, that it is libertarian or nothing.



On a limb: The support of the social safety net is dying off for our red and black parasite killer, but the Black Flag ladybird soldiers on.

Picture: Anya Brennan

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Correction: Due to a last minute mix-up, two articles were misattributed in issue 236. The Afem article was written by an individual in the Anarchist Federation (AF) and was not the official AF one. The AF article was, in fact, the one on UKIP which was marked as anonymous. We are sorry for any confusion this may have caused.

Ethos

Black Flag is for a social system based on mutual aid and voluntary co-operation – against state control and all forms of government and economic repression. To establish a share in the general prosperity for all – the breaking down of racial, religious, national and sex barriers – and to fight for the life of one world.

The Black Flag has been a worldwide symbol for anarchism since the 1880s. It is at base a representative of the negation of all oppressive structures.

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Escalating the housing fight

Reportage: False binaries of 'deserving' and 'political' squatting aim to divide resistance in London

Recently, a wave of housing occupations has swept London. Beginning last winter with the Focus E15 Mothers who occupied the disused Carpenters estate in Stratford, occupation has been increasingly used as a strategy against the housing crisis.

However, squatting as both a personal action against homelessness and as a base for political actions is much older. The significance of squatting as a radical force in London, however, has been overlooked, evidenced by the fact that many of the high profile housing occupation campaigns such as Focus E15 do not identify as squatters or use the language of squatting.

During the 1980s, the German Autonomes acknowledged the importance of reclaiming spaces for autonomous living away from rigidly controlled society as a base to organise and plan their actions. Likewise, across Europe squats have been recognised as a place to live, for free, outside of many of the constraints put upon us.

The London squatting movement needs to be reclaimed as a key radical social movement, redefining ownership of space and politicising housing.

The occupation of the Aylesbury Estate in Southwark earlier this year was an important intervention into the current phase of housing occupations because it proudly asserting its status as being made up of housing activists and squatters, and increased the militancy of the attack against privatisation of space and commercialisation of life.

Beginning in the late '60s as a response to the housing crisis, London's squatting movement quickly diversified beyond the initial aim of rehousing families as many different people took to squatting for a variety of reasons.

This led to the tactical development by the media and internalised by some squatters of a false dichotomy and hierarchy between deprivation and political squatters. The media has provided sympathy and support for those who cannot afford to be housed by other means, above those who see squatting

Sieged: The Aylesbury Estate in London
Photo: Tom Bastin/CC



as a political act or base for political actions. This dichotomy dismisses the huge crossover between these poles, undermines the solidarity within the movement, and refuses to acknowledge the radical act of occupation itself.

"Some want to continue living 'normal lives,' others to live 'alternative' lives, others to use squatting as a base for political action. Any squatting organisation needs to recognise this diversity or it will fall into the trap of saying there are good squatters and bad squatters. We must reject any attempts to create an internal class structure within the squatting movement ... Everyone has a right to a home."

Advisory Service for Squatters Statement, 1974

All squatting is political, because it challenges ownership of property and forces confrontation with the state.

The Aylesbury Estate in Southwark was occupied at the end of January following the March for Homes, in protest against the demolition of the huge estate in order to use the land to build unaffordable luxury flats.

The occupation of the Aylesbury was a significant intervention into discourses around the housing crisis and how to fight back, in many ways upping the game from individual eviction resistances to a battle for an entire estate. At the Aylesbury occupation, some squatted for housing need, some identified as housing activists, most seemed to fall somewhere between the two.

But an awareness and effort existed to keep all these motivations working together rather than creating unnecessary divisions for the media or the council to exploit. The discourse of "good/bad" squatters only serves to delegitimise elements of a movement that one does not personally consider to be a "good enough reason."

barricade, to resist, and to go to war against the powers that seek to make them homeless, whether or not they recognise the political nature of this resistance. The State is also prepared to go to war against squatters. A clear and recent example of State aggression came earlier this year at the Aylesbury. First, Southwark Council tried to deter the squatters by gutting the properties, then, when that didn't deter them, they attempted to impose a lockdown and prevent access, when that failed, they imposed an aggressive twenty-four hour security patrol complete with guard dogs and built a £140,000 security fence surrounding the area, until finally the occupiers rallied supporters and pulled down the fences, ending the occupation. The council was clearly prepared to use extreme measures to evict the squatters, to win the battle they had inadvertently thrown them into.

"It seems to me that the most revolutionary thing in the world is to demonstrate to the disenfranchised, alienated and therefore apathetic majority of people that they can act and win, and that they can run their own lives without rulers, politicians and their ilk."

**Ron Bailey
The Squatters, 1973**

Simply living in a squat and facing daily repression by the state and landlords radicalises many people. Experiences of solidarity and collective action make many people realise their own capacity for self-determination and control over their own lives. Part of the collective action that squatting entails is realising that "the authorities" are not there to protect squatters, and are in fact what the squatters are resisting. Self-determination was often realised through experiences of mutual aid and collective action, a necessary feature of squat survival. Squatters turn up to each other's evictions, help build each other's barricades, and promise each other aid when needed. One example of solidarity was the many supporters that turned up after Aylesbury's Twitter call-out during the aggressive eviction in which people engaged in clashes with the police. Solidarity means self-determination, which often leads to a reconceptualisation of one's place in society, rights and autonomy.

At the Aylesbury, the people that stayed after the eviction and kept the occupation going knew each other through no basis other than affinity and a collective desire to continue this project and to fight for decent housing. However, by the end of it, these were people whose experiences of sustained attack by the State through attempted evictions, physical violence, and expansive legal procedures had been unwillingly formed into an army.

They were ready for the attack, and had learned that barricading and physical resistance are necessary against a hostile and aggressive council. Connections of friendship grow between individuals who struggle together against a common enemy, what the french call *amilitant(e)s*.

This has led to persecution and repression of individuals or groups who do not fit the image of a "legitimate squatter." Thus it is necessary to reassert the political nature of squatting and the legitimacy of every aspect of a diverse and radical movement.

"You don't need a degree in politics to know that property is the cornerstone of this society, property is power, and the need to own is what keeps us in line."

**Hackney Community
Defense Association
Squats 'n' Cops, 1992**

Conflict is central to politics. There is a conflict between those within the system and who view it as just, and those without, who don't. In the context of squatting, there clearly exists an us/them division, and one that is explicitly between individuals and the state, or the agents of the state in the form of bailiffs or police.

Squatting is radical because it poses a direct challenge to assumed rights of property and land. This challenge is radical because of the centrality of property ownership historically to State and class control.

In most European countries squatting is considered a violation of private property rights. By contesting property and land ownership squatting challenges the legitimacy of traditional forms of domination and the basis of capitalist structures. Property asserts individual rights over collective need, best exemplified in the enclosures of common lands in the 15th to 19th centuries. Squatting is essentially the expropriation of private property for collective benefit. By challenging property a squatter is challenging hegemonic forms of domination and historic state control.

Squatting necessitates the setting of one's self against the state. Squatters acknowledge the potential need to



“My commitment to the street’s struggle, and my love for the people I lived with, grew each time a house was wrecked and each time we worked out ways to try to prevent it. The external threats and our resistance certainly brought us together.”

**Wates & Wolmer
Squatting: The Real Story, 1980**

Solidarity also extends to the broader housing movement. Squatters consistently emphasise the importance of unity with tenants and residents, and the strength of a united neighbourhood. At the

occupants had access to the Twitter and website to update with essays or articles or comments as they wished.

Due to the dual needs for solidarity and support, and the housing of many people, squats are usually occupied by large collectives of individuals, pooling resources and living communally. This is a radical difference from the way in which society desires households to function. The nuclear family as a unit is by necessity often broken down through squatting. The State saw this disregard of the fundamental family unit as a threat to its established order.

for paying rents, squatting helps to prefigure an anti-capitalist world without work. The very fact of not paying rent is a significant development in the lives of many squatters, that has a hugely politicising effect as people realise that freedom from rent means freedom from work which effectively leads to a far greater degree of personal and collective freedom.

By moving into empty, neglected buildings, we fight to carve out a space for ourselves in this merciless money-dominated city. We aren’t here to fight on anyone’s behalf, but to fight in solidarity with the residents of Aylesbury.

“We are the generation which has nothing to defend: no council housing and no homes we own, no sense of belonging to any place, just endless badly paid, insecure, dead-end work. So we squat, constantly moved, our belongings taken, constantly hassled by police and bailiffs. But, as we do, we find others and together achieve some freedom from the State and landlords and some power to take control over our lives.”

fightfortheaylesbury

To sum up, the false binary between deprivation and political squatters was harmful to the early movement, and still affects the language of the squatting community today.

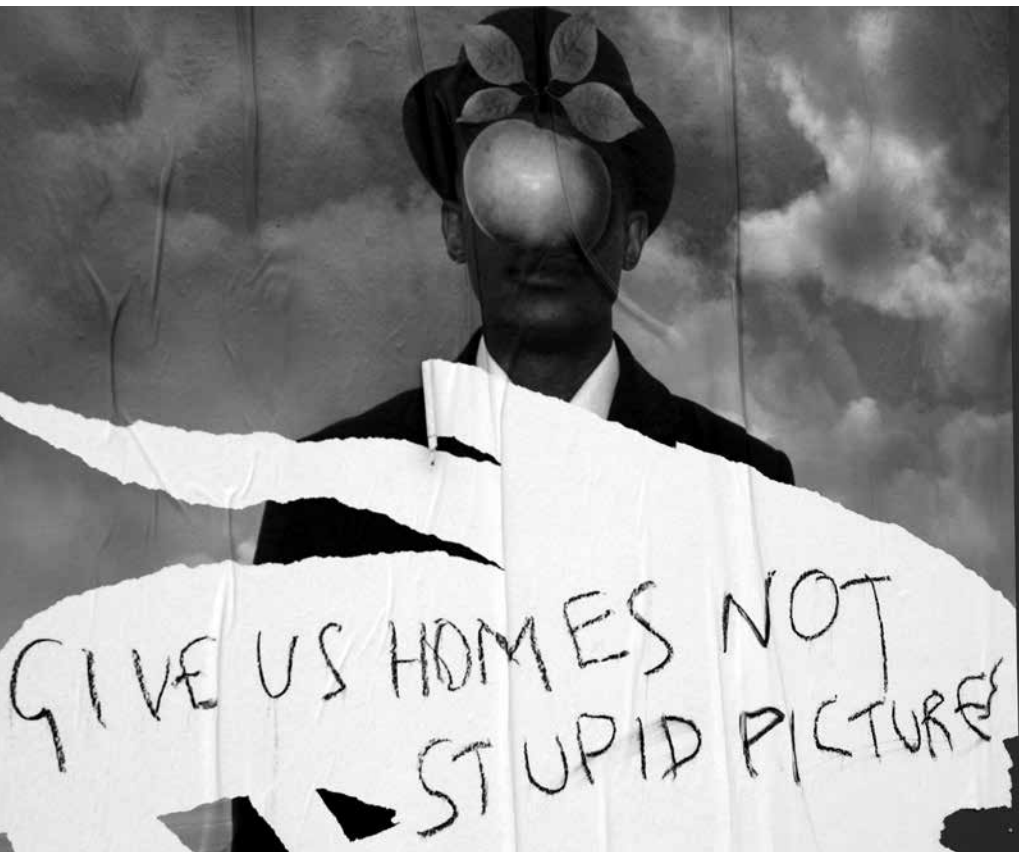
The discourse of “good squatter/bad squatter” is still as pervasive as ever, despite attempts to fight back against this unhelpful division. The radical nature of squatting needs to be reasserted and the active antagonism so often present between squatters and councils or officials needs to be celebrated and engaged with so that the radical potential of squatting, as suggested by the militancy of the Aylesbury occupation, can be unlocked.

Squatting represents a conflict with the State over private property rights — this in itself is enough of a reason to take it seriously. But then squatting can also be politically transformative, radicalising people through experiences of solidarity and self-determined action and through alternative lifestyles and communal living.

To call the act of squatting “political” legitimises those who choose to engage in it for ideological reasons, as squatting should be encouraged regardless of social or economic background as a domain of resistance to hegemonic control over our homes, our lives and our consciousness.

“No fence can contain us. No fence can keep us out. We are squatters who are not bound by the borders of the Aylesbury estate. We are residents who still have leases and tenancies. We are everyone who needs a place to stay. We are bound by nothing but this need. See you soon at Aylesbury. See you soon at Sweets Way. See you at the Guinness Trust. See you at UAL, LSE, Kings and Goldsmiths. See you soon in all the squats. See you at every protest and minor act of resistance. See you soon everywhere.”

fightfortheaylesbury



Aylesbury anger: A resident responds to posters put on the fences *Photo: astonishme/CC*

Aylesbury, the squatters leafleted around the neighbourhood and also held two information and fun days, with crepes, bouncy castles and information boards in order to connect with the tenants. Working with tenants and residents on campaigns against property developers and rent hikes builds trust and is able in many cases to resist the efforts of the State to polarise squatters and tenants. In so doing, squatters can escalate the social clash.

Likewise, an acknowledgement of the way in which the media and the State work together, and the experience of incorrect and harmful representations in the media has led to many squatters becoming cynical of the media.

At the Aylesbury there was a “no media inside the occupation” policy and no spokespeople were nominated as the occupiers did not want to create false leaders or representatives. Instead all

Historically, a cohesive “family” following the State’s definition is more likely to be rehoused by the council if a squat is evicted. Indeed, when the London Squatters Campaign first was established, it was families that were able to set a precedent of licenced squats for the rest of the squatters to follow. It is also worth noting that the only recent housing occupation which gained media sympathy was Focus E15.

They emphasised the presence of mothers in the campaign and in the estate, inadvertently reasserting the need/choice binary through the primacy of single mothers rather than the support network of people underpinning the campaign. By squatting one engages in support structures and affinity groups that transcend the traditional bounds of the “family” and create broader structures with strong ties.

Beyond destabilising the nuclear family, by diminishing the reliance on wage slavery

Further reading

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**By
Scorsby**



Analysis: How have Scotland's referendum and SNP's rise changed things?

While “anti-constitutionalism” is a core feature of anarchism, anarchists are aware that as well as being against the state, aiming to negate and transcend its relations, activists are also *in* the state. The only way to overcome something is to first recognise it as a constriction. The State is not like a shaving-rash or a pub bore — If you ignore it, it doesn't go away.

Whilst responding to the State and its forms of government is not the centre of all anarchist activity, some activism rightly remains largely “autonomous” from statist-frames. Nonetheless, governmental actions and responses to them influence anarchist tactics and forms of organisation, as recent events in Scotland have shown.¹

General Election 2015

The May 2015 general election results highlight a widening gulf between the political cultures of Scotland and England, which despite multi-level governance remains overwhelmingly where such British political decisions are made.

In England, the parties that garnered the most votes (Conservatives) and the third-most votes (UKIP) collectively gained well over 50% of the popular vote. In Scotland they were the third and fifth most popular and together accounted for less than one in six of those who voted.

Instead, the Scottish majority overwhelmingly supported parties that portrayed themselves as “left of centre” or “social neoliberals,” using the institutions and language of social democracy to even out some of the contradictions of capitalism in order to assist the development of the free market economy.² This apparent division currently helps sustain both the leading parties of these respective parts of the union — each claiming the other is a threat which only unity can defeat. The results have a number of significant features for non-constitutional political radicals.

First the Labour Party, which was overwhelmingly the most dominant political force for the last 50 years north of the border, is collapsing. From 2010, Scottish Labour lost 40% of its voters as well as all but one of its 41 parliamentary seats.³

The Labour Party has never faced such a serious decline in its electoral support in Scotland and one would have to go back nearly 100 years to find a lower level of support for what was the main political player.⁴

Such a collapse is not a one-off phenomenon, but the product of declining relevance, institutional corruption⁵ and inertia (exacerbated by processes of devolution).



Dealing with their polls

Popular: : Nicola Sturgeon speaks at a One Scotland meeting. *Picture: Scottish government*

The Labour Party has also lost two consecutive Scottish parliamentary elections, and is almost certain to lose a third in 2016. Its stranglehold on its former council fiefdoms is declining. In the past social democratic and structural reformism (taking over the state to promote social transformation) often involved supporting Labour. This option has disappeared.

The SNP, by contrast, has successfully reframed its “nationalism” in terms of multi-culturalism, protection of the welfare state and critiques of London-centric power, rather than through explicit anti-

Englishness. It gained support by portraying itself, or being portrayed by others, as an anti-austerity, social democratic party.

Once dismissed in leftist circles as “tartan Tories,” the SNP has successfully adopted the language and identities of social democracy. Its MPs are now more explicitly social democrats/social neoliberals,⁶ even expressing admiration for Labour's socialist icons like Nye Bevin⁷ and Tony Benn⁸ when



few of leading Labour politicians, bar the isolated Jeremy Corbyn, would do so.

The SNP's appeal to Scotland's working class is typical populism. It promotes welfare provision in places either where it has few responsibilities or where it can be seen as the main provider to encourage identification with the devolved and evolving State⁹ — whilst simultaneously cosying up to the ruling class with plans for cuts in corporate tax rates. It opposes renewing Trident whilst simultaneously promoting continuing membership of Nato.

It appeals to new constitutionalism, but supports maintaining the Windsors as unelected heads of state. It talks of a green economy, but its post-independence plans are based on supporting North Sea oil industries. It opposes others meddling in Scottish affairs, but aims to set up a sovereign wealth fund which will cast recipients in the role of colonised subjects.

Referendum 2014

While the official and unofficial independence movements lost the referendum, the SNP has been the overwhelming winner in the limited arena of constitutional politics.

Labour, which was part of the "Better Together" campaign against Scottish Independence, has seen its decline in Scotland accelerate.

There are underlying structural reasons for Labour's deterioration. The waning social and political influence of trade

decisions are made at supra-national scales, joined with the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats for the campaign. Labour politicians appeared alongside, apparently supporting, coalition government MPs.

The cross-party campaign necessarily had to downplay the impact of coalition policies, so as to boast of the advantages of continued Union, making Labour politicians seem complicit with, rather than in opposition to, the UK government. This included arguing that unemployment and disability benefits and green energy subsidies were best secured by being part of a larger, more financially stable union of nations.

These policies have subsequently been threatened, reduced or ended as a result of the UK Conservative government, adding to the bitterness towards Scottish Labour, and leading them to be dismissed as "Red Tories" by pro-independence groupings.

This use of the terminology to describe Scottish Labour in particular and the UK Labour Party in general is significant.¹¹ The non-Labour left, who usually advocate voting Labour without illusions to keep out the Conservatives, have abandoned such attempts, hitching themselves either to the SNP or to new electoral alliances based principally on a pro-Independence agenda.

Given that Scottish independence was not the main policy issue even amongst those voting SNP in the Scottish Parliament¹² and that six months before the referendum campaign YouGov reported that over 60% (who expressed a preference) were in favour of continued union,¹³ few, even in the SNP,

participating in the referendum as it simply offered a choice between one type of state and another: "As committed internationalists, anarchists oppose nationalism in any form."¹⁴

They saw little positive for libertarian socialists from either side of the independence debate. "Simply put, there is no reason to believe that in an independent Scotland libertarian socialist organising would be in real terms any easier or that because of its existence we would see an upsurge in class struggle."¹⁵

The second position was found amongst some of the anarchists within the Radical independence Campaign (RIC) who campaigned alongside and with Greens and radical social democrats for a statist, capitalist country.¹⁶ It saw possibilities for greater libertarian transformation by working with and alongside the diverse selection of radical social democrats and Leninists in RIC.

A third position was exemplified by Class War's Martin Wright, who considered support for the pro-Yes campaign, irrespective of their social democratic, paternalist goals as desirable, because of the immediate radical possibilities that would open up north and south of the border as Unionist institutions were damaged: "Politically a Yes vote will screw their system ... [putting] everything up for grabs ... [and creating] momentum for change."¹⁷

The final position, "Yes, but ..." used the campaign to engage with voters and activists in order to pose critical questions not just about the Union, but the supposed alternative. They pointed out gaps in the left, independence positions — the limitations of small states in a global capitalist economy and continued membership of international military and financial organisations.¹⁸

Some activists drifted between these different positions, with some becoming increasingly critical, with at least one notable former anarchist and syndicalist explicitly endorsing the SNP.

In the aftermath of the Yes campaign, as predicted by anarchist commentators,¹⁹ the main leftist sections of RIC dived into structural reformism and unintentionally revealed its shortcomings. The radical left, emboldened by its role in the referendum and anticipating second vote support from the radicalised SNP electorate (in Scottish parliamentary elections 2016) and the collapse of Labour, immediately saw opportunities for its favourite strategy: A new party of the left. This would somehow, perhaps by magic incantation or burning of a sacrifice in a wicker man, avoid all the past problems of social democracy.

Not much marks the proposed Party as new. In the main it's a recombination of socialist grouplets, such as the former-SWP International Socialist Group (ISG) and the Scottish Socialist Party. Thus the group announced itself as "the Scottish Syriza."²⁰

This appeal to Syriza illustrates the very problems of constitutional radicalism for radical social democrats — electoral success would mean capital flight and refusal to invest, leaving the socialist government and the wider country without access to vital resources or capitulation to the punitive institutions of international capitalism, whether the IMF, European Union or World Trade Organisation.



Referendum: : The SNP has profited despite the No result.

Picture: William Starkey/CC

unions and industries in which Labour's "fairer capitalism" had a clear constituency; contemporaneous with reliance on business sponsorship; declining and ageing membership;¹⁰ and a party structure which provides little autonomy. It appears increasingly out of touch with a self-identifying "Scottish" constituency whose antagonism is growing to political decisions that seem to favour other geographical locations — framed, for example, as The City. These failings all crystallised in the referendum campaign.

Labour, in a move that was suicidal, but understandable when core strategic

initially gave the Yes campaign any chance.

The fact that Tories, Lib Dems and Labour were all forced to promise further devolution a week before the referendum demonstrates a significant shift in of public opinion. A shift which the Scottish left claim was due to intensive campaigning by the "radical" wing of the pro-independence campaign.

Anarchism and the referendum

Here the debate within anarchist circles about the referendum seems important. There were four main positions.

First were those which rejected

Anarchism and non-constitutional activity

The concentration in this review on responses to constitutionalism should not give the misleading impression that this is anarchism's main interest.

Indeed, when anarchists engage in constitutional activity, whether supporting a side in a referendum or standing as a guerrilla candidate in the elections (such as Class War's democratic engagements), they do so to promote direct action. The main impact of the elections is to hasten the slashing of the social wage (or "welfare reforms") and thus provoke greater oppositional tactics. Thus anarchists in Scotland are continuing with a range of activities, many of them unspectacular, but worthwhile, life-enhancing and radical.

The most active groups are, unsurprisingly, in the two main cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh. Edinburgh has the long-running Autonomous Centre, whilst Glasgow's autonomous spaces tend to be more transitory.

Glasgow's anarchist scene is large enough to have a number of separate groups including Glasgow Anarchist Federation and Glasgow Anarchist Collective. Libertarians are active in Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty and Glasgow Against aAusterity (previously Glasgow Against ATOS) provides advice and takes direct action in support of benefit claimants, people facing eviction and campaigns against workfare, providing solidarity and support for resistance well outside the Central Belt.²¹ Small formalised groups of anarchists can be found in towns and cities like Dumfries, Dundee and Inverness. For instance, members of the Dumfries group were part of a well-mannered mob that ran the Conservative Secretary of State for Scotland out of town.²²

The two main national anarchist organisations have groups in Scotland. The Anarchist Federation currently have more active groups and members than SolFed, though some are members of both. SolFed and AF members are also often involved with the IWW which retains a presence, of fluctuating importance, in the main conurbations. IWW members and others have been involved in the Scottish Education Workers Network, which



Presence: Anarchists were heavily involved against Atos

Picture: Glasgow Against ATOS

campaigns on a range of fronts within the education industries.

Culturally, AK Press still operates out of Leith, and radical independent bookfairs pop up at various points across central Scotland and support radical gigs and meetings. Internally, groups continue to reflect on their practices, concerning disability, access, inclusivity and challenging chauvinism within their own organisations as well as challenging more overt forms of racism and prejudice through anti-fascist mobilisations.

International solidarity has seen symbolic support work for Greek, Kurdish and Spanish comrades. Cross border campaigns exist with most British groups on welfare, environmental and labour rights. Green groups, especially in the borders have been supporting Cumbrian activists frustrate frackers.

Concluding remarks

Like the Workers Solidarity Movement, the anarchist-communist organisation in Ireland, which has a long history of engagement in referendums, in Scotland the anarchist engagement in—and against—the referendum provides opportunities for reflection on

anarchist tactics and opportunities.

Those who engaged in the referendum, especially under "Yes, but ..." found that there were openings for critical dialogue, that conversations soon went beyond the limits of constitutionalism.

Clearly not all referendums offer such an opportunity — the 2011 referendum on changing to an Alternative Vote electoral system would be an example of one too inane to engage with.

But a second Scottish Independence referendum is likely within a decade and a vote on continued membership of the European Union will be held before the end of the current Westminster parliament.

Constitutional engagement, whether through an organised boycott or engaging with a particular side or outcome, can open dialogues that can go beyond what constitutional parties expected and lead to more critical, prefigurative and radical activities, especially if they feed into relevant forms of direct action such as bank occupations, migrant support and labour activism.

By Benjamin Franks



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FROZEN OUT?

All systems of dominance generate myths to justify injustice and excuse the inexcusable. This is true of capitalism, of white supremacy, of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Patriarchy is no different. The myths of patriarchy are about the nature of males and females. In this mythology:

- Males are strong, females are delicate
- Males are brave, females are timid
- Males are rational, females emotional
- Males are capable of being smart, females are not
- Males are assertive or aggressive, females are passive
- Males are providers, females are nurturers
- Males always want sex, females are chaste or whores (sexually manipulative)

From patriarchy's early origins, these myths have been used as bullshit justifications for male dominance and female subordination. Why can't women take part in public life? They don't have the character for it. Why can't women get an education? It would be wasted on their irrational minds. Why are women confined at home taking care of kids? It's what they're best suited for and what brings them most fulfilment. Why must women serve men? Because men deserve it and women enjoy it. Why should men be in charge? Because men are superior.

And the same patriarchal myths can also be wielded to legitimatise harms and injustices to males.

If men are strong and brave and aggressive, they are the perfect warriors. If they're less nurturing than women, then it's men who should risk their lives. Women can't, or who would take care of the kids?

This is why men are overwhelmingly the ones who fight wars. Very few countries allow women in military combat and even fewer conscript women during a military draft.¹

It's why men are more likely to work dangerous jobs. Worldwide, two-thirds of deaths from work-related causes are male. Men are 93% of those who die from on the job accidents in the US,² and 96% in the UK³

These factors are partly why men have lower life expectancy in almost every country in the world, five years less on average.⁴

This issue of "male disposability" is a major concern of Men's Rights Activists (MRAs). It's a very legitimate concern, but unfortunately, MRA websites, forums, and organisations are also cesspools of putrid misogyny and whackadoo theories blaming the gendered hardships of males on feminism and an imaginary matriarchy.

And it's really too bad. It's too bad for women and girls and it's also too bad for men and boys, because those claiming to advocate for them are fighting the wrong enemy.

It's patriarchy that created the myths about

males and females. Patriarchy needs these myths. Male dominance can only be justified if men are naturally suited to dominate. But if men are destined to dominate — if they're that strong and invulnerable — how can men as victims be taken seriously? They're supposed to be too tough to hurt.

This relates to another concern of MRAs, that there is a disregard for male victims of abuse, violence, and sexual assault.

MRAs claim that men and women are equal victims of intimate partner violence. On the surface it appears true. Many surveys based on nationally representative probability samples in "Western" countries reach this conclusion.

But these studies have serious flaws. They rarely measure the severity of violence, rarely include sexual assault, rarely include violence by ex-partners, and rarely count murders.⁵

The Canadian General Social Survey corrected these flaws,⁶ finding that women and men in heterosexual relationships experienced violence at roughly equal rates but that women were:

- Three times more likely to be severely injured.

- Seven times more likely to be sexually assaulted.
- Nearly five-and-a-half times more likely to say they feared for their lives.
- Three times more likely to be killed (also, women kill in self-defence more than men).

So it's not true that men and women are equally victimised. What's true is that there's generally less concern for male victims.

This is something you can witness for yourself. A video made by YouTube channel OckTV, "Extreme Domestic Abuse In Public! (Social Experiment)" shows two actors, one man and one woman, in public pretending to have a dispute. When the man is hitting the woman, people rush to the rescue. But when she's hitting him, only one man has the courage to intervene — by slapping the victim in the head. Others stand around gawking, smirking, and laughing.

MRAs blame feminism for this, but they should be blaming patriarchy and its myths that men can and should endure violence while are women so feeble that their violence



IT'S PATRIARCHY

In focus: How men's rights activism picks the wrong targets to attack

is meaningless. Feminism deserves credit for trying to abolish these myths, recognising that they're used to keep women in subordinate roles and controlled by men.

The ABC program *What Would You Do?* did this experiment with a couple on a park bench.⁷ In many hours of filming, only one person (a woman) intervened when the man was abused. When the man abused the woman, 19 people stepped in to protect her. Fourteen were women and only five were men.

But here's the thing: 192 people witnessed the abuse (92 men and 100 women).⁸ out of 10 people did nothing. There's less concern for male victims, but a shortage of concern for female victims, too.

There are rarely services for abused men. Because women more often face worse abuse, it makes sense to have more women's services. But the gap in services is not proportionate.⁸ Abused men often have nowhere to seek help.

Sexual assault and abuse of males is also trivialised. Prison rape is treated as a joke and if the perpetrator is a woman, many refuse to see it as sexual assault. They call it "every man's fantasy."

These despicable attitudes come from another patriarchal myth that any post-pubescent male always wants sex. For biological reasons, it's probably true that men are on average hornier than women. But this doesn't mean they're always horny. And it sure as hell doesn't mean that when they're horny they necessarily want sex.

As usual, the patriarchal myth that harms males harms females, too, in this case by enabling rape of women and girls. The view is that guys have voracious sex-drives that must be fed. "There was a rape? Ah, how sad, but boys will be boys." This also leads to victim-blaming, and it's been used to force oppressively strict dress codes on females.

MRAs are concerned with false accusations of sexual assault, but their online forums show that this concern has a sexist double standard. It's all "Where's the proof?" until a male accuses a female — then it's "look how awful women are."

Another big MRA concern is divorced

fathers getting custody of children less than mothers. In the UK, single-dad households are only 13.5% of single-parent households. In Canada they're about 20% and in the U.S. 23%.⁹

This court bias does seem to exist, but what can we expect after thousands of years of women being reduced to breeders and domestic servants? This has been used to imprison women in the home, pay lower wages etc, and take us less seriously beyond domestic roles.¹⁰

While men struggle to get recognised as caregivers, it wasn't long ago they were using this exact idea to oppose women's rights. When women were fighting for the



The same patriarchal myths can also be wielded to legitimatise harms and injustices to males

vote, opponents put out propaganda images of fathers taking care of kids and doing housework. The images had captions like "Votes for Women" to make it clear what would cause this gender apocalypse.¹¹

Even so, research shows courts grant sole custody to mothers less than in the past, with shared custody becoming more common.¹² In the US, single-dad households increased at twice the rate of single-mum households since 1960.¹³

Divorced dads are also getting more time with their kids than they used to, and to a great extent this is thanks to feminism combating patriarchal gender roles. Yet many MRAs blame feminism for anti-father bias in courts — using laws drafted mainly by men.

Patriarchy and capital

Gendered wounds caused by patriarchy are also caused or exacerbated by capitalism and by class society in general. Like war.

Men and boys are most likely to fight them, women and girls are most likely to suffer rapes by soldiers and partner abuse by traumatised veterans.

We can't end war unless we end capitalism and the State. As long as we have a system where nations and people compete for power, resources, and wealth then what else can we expect but war?

It's mostly males who fight wars, but it's also mostly the working class and peasants, their lives and limbs and mental health sacrificed to make the rich richer.

Although patriarchy is a system of male dominance that creates a gendered power imbalance, it has also always been used to maintain rich and ruling class men at the expense of all other human beings.

Men are more likely to do dangerous work, but which men are those? Not capitalist men. Capitalists sit back safely and rake in profits from all genders.

Safety in the workplace is sacrificed at the altar of profit. Capitalists tend to spend only as much on workers' safety as they're forced to.

MRAs point out that there is little to no funding of services male victims. But women's and girl's services are also underfunded. Inadequate services is just the norm in capitalism. Again, it's a class issue.

Capitalism helps preserve the view that childcare is "women's work." Since its origins, capitalism relied on women's unpaid domestic work while men were exploited in wage-labour. Many women did wage-work, too, but were paid less based on the view that men are family providers.

Though the wage gap has narrowed, women are still paid less, so a heterosexual couple might make the practical decision for the man to get a job and the woman to do housework and childcare.

The men's rights movement is rightly upset and alarmed about the ways our society maims men and boys. What they don't realise is that the thorns that maim them are attached to the throne of patriarchy.

By Harmony Montes



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Get home

At the end of a long, curved, potholed track leading out of a small Derbyshire town squats a large old building, recently extended and partially rebuilt. It overlooks wide fields amidst an area listed on an anonymous government server as “of Outstanding Natural Beauty.”

Wild Peak cottage is surrounded by rolling green hills and bounded on one side by a river, at which only five people are allowed to congregate at a time.

Adjacent to the building and its garden is a field left to grow, with a rope swing in one corner, which in August provided tent space and entertainment for small children who were visiting with their parents and friends for the summer 2015 gathering of co-operative housing project Radical Routes.

Wild Peak is a regular host of this “coop of co-ops,” which was set up in 1988 to enable a self-help approach by radicals to Britain’s growing housing troubles and has since helped hundreds of people to find a home while promoting community and green activism.

Stuart Field is one of the organisation’s longest-serving volunteers and originator of its financial system. He said: “The project started through a man called Roger Hallam, who was the impetus behind the first five members joining. He and others bought a seven-bedroom terrace in Birmingham for about £30,000, then he wrote about it and a lot of groups were interested in the procedure.”

Factfile: The New Education Project

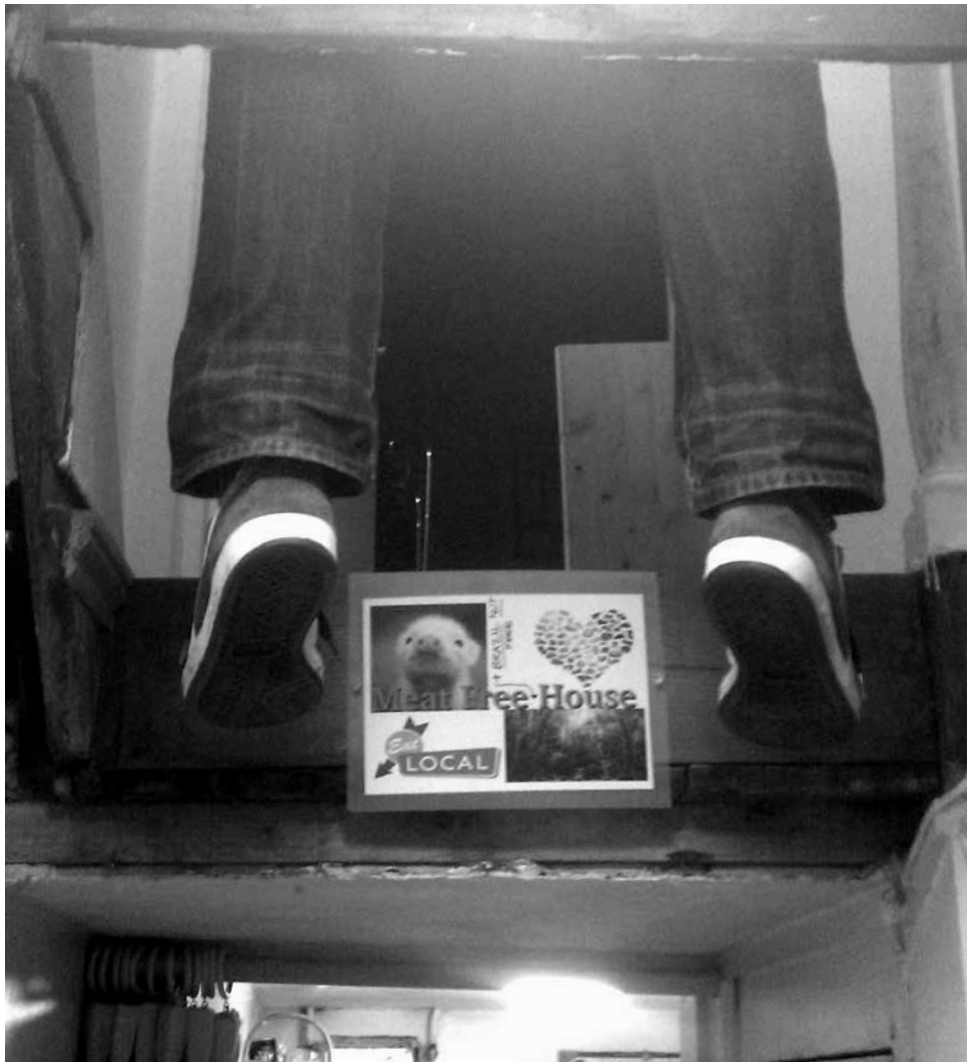
The Birmingham house, dubbed The New Education Project, was sited at 24 South Road, Hockley, a few miles north-west of the city centre on a nondescript row of Victorian terraces, and ran from 1986-2000, when some residents relocated to the Upper Swansea Valley. It remains an associate member of the wider network today.

Takeup was enthusiastic following a writeup and PR drive from the co-op explaining how even housing benefits alone could potentially make buying a house viable, and once Radical Routes itself was formed the number of participants grew quickly. By 1993 Hallam was able to tell a reporter for the Independent that decisions were being made by a total of 20 members.

Numbers have tended to fluctuate since, largely depending on the state of the housing market, but at present Radical Routes has over 30 groups, including both homes and small, worker-run businesses.

It is run on a federalised basis and its constitutional norms would be familiar to most anarchists. While members don’t need to hold libertarian perspectives, the project itself is run on horizontal lines.

There are multiple gatherings every year, hosted by one of the member co-ops, at which news is exchanged, policies thrashed out on a consensus basis by mandated reps and “core members” recruited for important ongoing working groups.



Fix-em-ups: Volunteers take a break from stair repairs at Routes member co-op Random Camel

New members are required to go through extensive training and heavily encouraged to become involved in the various working groups, helping to navigate the complex process of keeping Radical Routes and its affiliates afloat.

As with many organisations of its type, Radical Routes aims to provide a platform for radical activity, and indeed has an oft-debated requirement for members to undertake 15 hours of action a week in aid of radical causes.

Where it differs from other radical co-op projects is in its size, its ethos of constant grassroots training and the way in which it engages with the financial system.

Finances were the biggest problem as the network grew, Field explains: “Initially there were a lot of groups interested in the procedure, but there was money missing from the equation — activist groups couldn’t raise that sort of cash.

“Our solution was to raise funds from loanstock. Around that time I got work for Triodos, which I did initially for a basic wage and then through a co-op which joined Radical Routes. The skills I learned there

allowed us to set up Rootstock.

“No-one in the movement had much in the way of jobs, assets etc, so in theory we should have been lemons. Instead we’ve got the best reputation in the sector, with mutual aid underpinning our success as it

Factfile: Rootstock

Rootstock is the social investment society which funds Radical Routes co-op projects. Money is paid out to applicants once Routes has checked off their sums. This allows co-ops to subsequently reach for loans from Triodos and other financial bodies which otherwise might not touch them. The 100% success rate of Rootstock is almost unique in the business, and is underpinned by a robust system of collective self-help as older co-ops help newer ones to survive.

via the Routes

Reportage: After nearly 30 years, radical housing is still going strong

means we practically support each other in not defaulting.

“With the member co-ops effectively being their own landlords, Radical Routes has used the system in such a way that we got higher returns than general almost by accident.

“We effectively took David Graeber’s debt route to become viable, long before he outlined it, and rather than take loans directly from Triodos we set up a fund which would then provide initial loans, helping banks to believe in them.”

The system worked, allowing Radical Routes to secure cash and back activist groups that were growing up around the time of road protests, animal rights activism and the Poll Tax riots. In its first peak period in 1995/6 a £100,000 injection of cash and a relatively easy housing market allowed participants to give out eight loans in just one gathering.

But rapid growth came with other potential problems. The complexity and responsibility attached was rising quickly, but the number of people with the required skills wasn’t, risking a situation all too common to volunteer-led co-ops worldwide where a coterie of de facto leaders emerges despite best intentions.

The solution Radical Routes came up with was simple — train everyone.

“Across Europe there are several similar projects, but they haven’t got the internal learning methods we use, and they’ve suffered for it,” Stuart believes.

“A good example of the difference is our

Dutch sister group, now Solidaire, which essentially split into two, with the inward-looking housing project shutting down and the outward-looking ‘bread fund,’ a mutual aid network for when people are suddenly short on work, growing to a membership of 6,500.

“In Germany, groups like Wiben, Verbent and Project A work through an advisory group people can go to. As a result, very few people know the full story because it’s not a requirement to do the training to be a member. They’ve fallen into the trap of letting people become experts.

“You can read the book but the best people to teach you are those who have already done it, so we have a solidarity system where people shadow each other — effectively this was mentoring before it became a buzzword.”

Sitting in on a recent working group dedicated to looking at improving the other working groups (such as training, finance, outreach and organising gatherings), the co-op of co-ops seems in a constant state of flux with a high turnover of people leaving and being recruited. But with a relatively stable current membership base, this has meant a decent strength in depth.

Current issues under discussion relate to providing a more centralised information point for documentation, and a need for more people to shadow roles.

There is a strong focus on cultural gaps within co-ops, particularly with people not understanding the methodology used in activist organisation, and work is being done

on improving the entry points to consensus working and facilitation techniques.

Concerns have been mooted too over getting new people into roles, with some working groups being quite low on active people, and on keeping information in the shifting networks. But there doesn’t seem to be the common anarchist problem that if the wrong person gets run over by a bus a crisis will likely ensue.

Of more concern to some is that turnover of members means that relatively small numbers of the current organisation have been around since the early days — yet interventions from them are often key because someone needs to remember why certain older decisions were made, or rules implemented.

Radical Routes has suffered from the loss of co-ops throughout its history. Because of its focus on radical action and behaviour from member groups, it is time intensive and some fear that the requirements for keeping up can sometimes push people out.

And economically, Radical Routes is tied to the state of housing in Britain, Stuart says.

“Under Blair, we saw membership peak in 1998/9, but as the economy boomed things slowed down. The price to loan ratio didn’t work any more, so buying slowed.

“Over this period we saw the amounts in our bank account rise, as people paid back, but the membership fell both because we weren’t getting in new people and because people swapped out their loans to other providers who weren’t so time-intensive in their requirements.

“Then in 2007 we had the financial crash. Prices fell, interest rates fell, and interest in alternative methods of living rose, so buying through Radical Routes rose.

“Since then of course the ‘drip-feed’ recovery has happened. House prices are up again and uptake falls. What has been pleasing though is that co-ops are staying more at the moment. In the 1993-2007 period we found that there was quite high turnover, which made stability more difficult.”

How long the current period of relative calm will last is anyone’s guess. But in the meantime, Radical Routes has been able to continue enabling its members to work on social change while keeping a roof over their heads.

As they proudly note, a recent social audit picking out members’ actions and initiatives ran to 72 pages — the work people have put in is far more than the economic numbers alone.

And this year, despite the severity of the crisis, a co-op in Brighton, Out Of Town, had their loan request accepted. With a bit of luck they will become the collective’s newest bricks and mortar addition.



We must articulate

Comment: Despite the hype, people aren't sold on Westminster. So what do we offer beyond sound and fury?

Back in the early 1980s I had a friend who believed the revolution was just around the corner. One night in a pub in Bradford he told me that he had some rifles buried in his back garden (I never saw them but had no reason to believe that they did not exist). When in 1983 Thatcher, on a 77% turnout, won 44% of the vote and a second term, he was the only person I knew who was pleased.

Another five years of Thatcher, he reasoned, would tip the balance. In fact for a while I thought he might be right — riots burst out across English inner cities in 1983 and the miner's strike raged into 1984. Looking back though, over three decades later, what 1983 actually signified was the acceleration of a long retreat for the working classes, which actually began in the 1970s, if not before.

The revolution did not happen but privatisation, harsher and harsher anti union laws, cuts in welfare, globalization, the selling off of social housing, growing inequality, fuel poverty and much more did.

No longer can the claim be made that the State is there to protect the poor against the powerful as was once the case — the reverse in fact is true. In his recent book *Postcapitalism*, Paul Mason writes that the project to destroy the market through the levers of the state (to be fair never the plan of us anarchists) has “collapsed.” Kropotkin was pointing the futility of trying

pulled the overall average up. In England only around 65% of people voted. In 1950 the figure was 84%. To put this in context, while 11.3 million people voted for the Conservatives in May, 15.7 million did not bother to vote at all.

Why the low turnout? International research suggests that higher levels of social inequality result in lower turnout amongst poorer people. Why vote for the system that is screwing you and your family over? Another factor that explains levels of voter turnout is confidence in the political system, institutions, and the degree of perceived accountability of politicians. Only one in four of the British public trusts their MP to honestly represent them in Parliament. Incredibly though, nearly nine out of ten MPs believe they are trusted.

The decision not to vote for many is a rational and political choice, as Colin Ward wrote back in 1987 in *The Case Against Voting* — “the non-voters are among the largest of the political groups.” Nearly 20 years on non-voters are not “among” the largest, they are the largest political group.

Ward went on to make the case against voting. Anarchists, he wrote, “for well over a century, have been the most consistent advocates of conscientiously staying away from the poll. Since anarchism implies an aspiration for a decentralised non-governmental society, it makes no sense from an anarchist point of view to elect representatives to form a central government.

“If you want no government, what is the point of listening to the promises of a better government? As Thoreau put it: ‘Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence.’ A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then; but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight.”

Kropotkin noted the futility of seeking to change capitalism through voting when he wrote: “The state organisation, having been the force to which the minorities resorted for establishing and organising their power over the masses, cannot be the force which will serve to destroy these privileges.”

For most anarchists participation in elections is futile, the system flawed. Falling turnout (now at a pretty steady third of the population) is a sign that an increasing number of people share our view, if not our anarchism. It is also well worth noting that enthusiasm amongst those who do vote is also in long term decline, including amongst young voters.



What is needed is an articulation of a clear credible alternative. The anarchist alternative to liberal democracy is direct, participatory democracy. “I always say the principle of direct action is the defiant insistence on acting as if one is already free” (David Graeber).

As Kropotkin wrote in *Representative Government*, political, social and economic advances are achieved through struggle not elections. Liberties are hard fought and when delivered through the action of the State, never guaranteed. Watch, for example, what happens to the NHS over the next five years.

Never mind the ballots

One clear outcome of the general election then is evidence that a growing number of British people — voters and non-voters alike — are disillusioned with liberal democracy. Is it any wonder, given how inane, dull and trivial elections actually are?

In the summer edition of *Tank* magazine, its editor wrote in a rare moment of media honesty: “The recent UK election was



Henry David Thoreau

Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence

to reform the state in the 1880s.

This year we had an election in Britain. Just like the 1983 election that so pleased my friend, this one also produced a Tory majority albeit a slim one — the first in two decades.

Turnout

May's turnout was trumpeted as being the highest for 18 years. It was though, just 66% — ten-percentage points lower than the '80s. Turnout in Scotland (at 77%),

better alternatives



further proof that words whether spoken or written, continue to terrify the powerful, who prefer to grin inanely for photographs. I wonder how many of us didn't read the Conservative manifesto but instead trusted the conclusion that Ed Milliband has a weird stare."

Actually I did read the Tory manifesto as research for this article. Look as hard as I could there was nothing in it anywhere saying: "Re-elect us and we will screw you if you are young, poor or disabled or dare to have more than two children." Funny that.

In fact thinking back didn't Cameron say they wouldn't change child benefit?

He lied. Of course he did. We expect nothing else. Deciding not to vote for "Red" Ed because he looks odd when he eats a bacon sandwich is probably as good a way as any to decide where to place your vote, when on all the major policy areas — health, education, defence, the economy, housing and welfare — there is so little to distinguish between any Parliamentary group.

Notice that the one thing the main party politicians did not do during the campaign was get anywhere near real people. "Public"

events were stage-managed, invite only affairs. We are now spectators, kept outside and behind the barriers just in case we might raise some difficult questions. The trouble is, if they bothered to notice, none of us are looking because it's all so fucking boring and pointless.

What do the actual results tell us? As everyone knows there is next to no relationship between the proportion of votes won and the share of seats occupied in the Palace of Westminster. The Tories got 37% of the vote but a stonking 51% of the seats.

Do voting patterns tell us anything about the political mood of the British public? This is a bit crude, but if you add up the votes for all the main parties, you find that those on the right (Tories plus UKIP) got about the same as those on the left — there are just a lot more parties on the left.

The Greens saw their vote rise from 265,000 in 2010, to over 1,156,000 in May and it is in fact the growth of smaller parties that is the big story of the 2015 election. The combined share of the vote that the Tories and Labour secured hardly changed. Given

this, it makes you wonder why Labour are so desperate to be loved by Tory voters.

The rise of the SNP on a left-learning platform has been well documented and discussed. A few points can be made.

SNP politicians come from a much broader range of backgrounds than the other three parties. They did actually go out and meet and talk to people. They presented a progressive (for parties advocating representative democracy) programme and were honest about it. I remember listening to Alex Salmond talking about their aspiration to rid Scotland of nuclear weapons.

I almost cheered to hear a politician say something straight — "nuclear weapons are pointless as a deterrent, they cost money that could be better spent elsewhere and we will get rid of them."

Just to be clear though, this is rhetoric; Ward's "promise of a better government." The SNP's running of the NHS in Scotland shows that given power they can be as crap as the rest of them.

At the heart of classical left revolutionary politics is the notion of class-consciousness and class struggle.

In his 1978 Marx Memorial lecture Eric Hobsbawm sought to measure class-consciousness. He used a number of indicators: Trade union membership, votes for the Labour Party and involvement in other left groups.

Hobsbawm called his lecture "The Forward March of Labour Halted?" because he was worried that changes in the composition of the working classes, amongst other things, would result in the rolling back of the gains made of the previous century.

Where do we stand now? Compared to 1979, Labour's vote is down by 2.5 million (and of course the electorate is much bigger). In 1978 Hobsbawm lamented that 35% of the workforce were not trade-union members, now only 25% are.

These measures though, particularly voting patterns, seem too crude to capture what people really think. There are plenty of examples of self-organisation and mutual aid going on, and one thing seems really clear: People do not have faith in capitalism and its cheerleaders.

The 2008 crash wiped 13% off global production and 20% off global trade. In the West the depression that followed has lasted longer than 1929-33. The answer to this, the answer adopted by all the major parties is the same — "austerity." No alternative is effectively articulated. People are not happy. Stormy waters lie ahead: £12 billion welfare cuts, £20 billion spending cuts, Europe, the international economy ...

Whether it brings the revolution any closer, like my friend thought it would back in the '80s I don't know. What I do know is that we need one.

By Richard Griffin



Lessons from a front line: Animal rights

For all its many controversies, Britain's animal rights movement created one of the most militant and effective direct action campaigns of recent times, prompting in turn one of the most comprehensive State crackdowns of recent times.

From its earliest origins in the 1960s-70s, the broad animal rights movement managed to build itself even as its most militant members conducted a campaign of harassment, obstruction and inventive direct action against rural hunts, major companies involved in vivisection, the fur industry and many other areas.

Mr J was on the frontline of that struggle, and in the article below, he talks about how he got involved, what happened as the movement got itself into a position to take down major companies, and how a corporate-government compact eventually conspired to eliminate it.

How did you get involved?

The first thing I did was hunt sabbing in Scotland in 1992, which carried over to Wales when I moved there. I got involved in wider politics then, as the group was involved in a lot of different things. We got a lot of abuse at the time so gained confidence to deal with many situations.

In the late '90s there were the Consort Beagles and Hillgrove Cat Farm campaigns, where a lot of local groups came together.

It was an exciting time and there was real strength in numbers. There was an atmosphere that people were up for it. We won those campaigns and thought "we can beat the police here, we do have power and momentum, we're ahead of the game."

We weren't afraid to be bolshy, we were having running battles with police, pushing them out of the way.

There were moments when the police might try to blockade the road, we would go round the side and fight them in the woodlands.

We had these big days of action with hundreds of people and that also meant we were meeting new people all the time, lining up stuff.

Maintaining cells

Covert work was there from the start, animal rights was always quite radical with ALF and the hunt sabs, it was all part of the milieu and just accepted as part of what we could do.

Sabbing was really good for finding people, when you're out against the hunt either you walk the walk or you don't.

People used to say "I'll save it for the big actions." No. Show us now. If you can't do it here, you won't do it later.

The problem was really learning to be effective, which we mostly did through sab training. There were a few anonymously



Confrontations: Hounds greet sabs at a hunt *Photo: facebook.com/HuntSaboteursAssociation*

authored articles which went round too, but mostly it was what we taught ourselves.

We also built up good connections going around the country and just doing animal rights campaigning — it fed into green direct action, anti-fascism etc.

The State takes an interest

People have said the honeymoon period was really 1983-85. After that, the police began to build what would become the Animal Rights National Index (ARNI) of names.

We had the State — people like Bob Lambert — starting to take a real interest. The corporates were obviously also trying to get intelligence but we don't know how much direct collusion there was going on between them at this point.

Then there was the Sheffield conspiracy trial — what we learned later was that the ARNI went national around then, having previously been the work of regional forces.

By 1998 we'd won a lot of battles and big pharma was in uproar after the SPEAK victory at Garrington in Cambridge.

Blair's war on AR

It wasn't until 2004 that Tony Blair met with their bigwigs, heralding the true start of the national response to animal rights.

What was to become the Domestic Extremism Unit started at that time.

At this point corporations were under a huge amount of pressure, and they responded with a huge legal attack. The lead law firm, Lawson and Cruttenden, lodged court cases trying to impose massive exclusion zones.

A government green paper said "we need a co-ordinated response," people like top cop officer Anton Setchell got involved and that when we really started to feel the hit.

People had been sent down before, but it became multiple forms of harassment. We'd do a local stall about animal rights and local cops would show up trying to shut us down. They'd stand in front of the stall, intimidating people away. They'd follow activists around, stalk them at demos, anything to isolate us.

At government level they changed laws to facilitate crackdowns. Harassment legislation was extended to companies after we challenged the idea in court. In SOCA (section 146-7) they specifically included anti-animal rights rules by banning home demos.

That was specifically to stop us from getting shareholders' addresses and targeting the communities where they lived, which was extremely effective.

All the cops who used these laws have moved on now, so they've fallen out of use,

but these laws are still on the books, and will be resurrected next time the State needs them.

Police undercovers

We knew they were there, along with corporate spies. It was accepted there would be some, we just couldn't say who.

Because of our long history of direct action though by the time it became critical we had a strong security culture in place. It didn't stop people getting arrested, but it did reduce the wider damage, and people made fewer mistakes.

It's harder for them to target activists if they don't know who they are, and the cell group structure helped people stay free — some through decades of activity.

Lessons learned

It's worth acknowledging how we evolved over time — we missed a few tricks which weakened us.

There was a problem with how the rest of the left perceived us, as a "single issue group" and when we did get attacked there was isolation going on.

But equally, while we were good at reaching out on a local level with campaigns we missed reaching out to a national level. But then again we were running a how-powered campaign against big firms, and that was a full-time job in itself, you have to balance priorities.

On the plus side, we found we were able to leverage a lot of people to do small jobs. We didn't go after you for for A to B marches, we wanted your number so we could call you up. The police struggled with that distributed model of organising.

The next flashpoint: Anti-fracking campaigning

This has the potential to be the next major direct action movement, the next Newbury with people coming together and forming small, decentralised, effective opposition groups. At the moment the grassroots are still in charge, but the threat is that Friends of the Earth get in and "take charge." They'll disown "bad" actions and kill the movement.

Top tips

- Get off Facebook
- Talking to people is fundamental, particularly through stalls etc
- Build in a security culture from the beginning
- But don't be paranoid that the State is out to get you — if you start thinking everyone is an undercover they're paralysed you, and they've won
- Covert working means not going to demos. Leave that to the public facing groups.
- Neither condemn nor condone: The State wants to play off "acceptable" activity against direct action.
- The agenda should be shaped by the grassroots.

Spirit of revolt: A Glasgow archive

Activists tend to be the best hoarders of campaign material, but the worst preservers of that material. They get involved, and the leaflets, papers, badges, stickers, letters, newspaper cuttings and pamphlets, etc. all end up in boxes, ploy bags and in drawers, then years later they have a clean-out, and it all gets binned. So a whole slice of our history, our culture, is lost forever. It's as if it never happened. If this continues, we become a people without a history, without a culture.

What is also lost is experience, methods, and lessons learnt, through hard fought struggles, ideas and knowledge, useful for future generations to continue our struggle.

Thankfully, there are those who have held onto their material, and it is to those that we went a calling. I have always held the belief that this material from people's involvement in campaigns, national, international, and community, is the real history of the ordinary people. A history free from the party political system, free from Establishment figures, such as leaders of industry, politicians, and military leaders, it is grassroots beliefs and hopes for a better world.



We hope to branch into oral testimony, from those involved in the day to day struggles of the ordinary people

With this in mind I started a web page that I called Strugglepedia, a collection of people and events from the Glasgow/Clydeside area, that helped to further the struggle of ordinary people. Later, around 2011/12, together with a few individuals of like mind, we gropingly put together the idea of an archive of all activist material that we could get our hands on, again focusing on the Glasgow/Clydeside area, though not exclusively. After much discussion in a café in Glasgow, we finally agreed on the name, "Spirit of Revolt," an archive of dissent.

As a bunch of volunteers, we soon had material coming in from various sources. We then managed to negotiate a room in the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, to work from, and store our material and equipment.

Though housed in the Mitchell Library, the archive belongs to those who donated it and/or the Spirit of Revolt. To meet the international standards of the Mitchell,

who have been extremely supportive, we are obliged to hire an archivist to do the actual cataloguing, everything else is done by a group of keen and willing volunteers. So funding is always a struggle. Strange how you need "things," and they all cost money, scanners, computers, ink cartridges, web-hosting, etc.

The idea behind the cataloguing is not just to store and make the material accessible at the library, though that is indeed very important, but to attempt to get as much of the material digitalised and onto our website (spiritofrevolt.info) to make it easily accessible to a much wider general public.

We hope to create a living resource that continually grows and can be a learning tool for present day, and future groups and individuals, interested in furthering the cause of the ordinary people, outside the party political system.

We do not gather any party political material as they no doubt have ample paid resource to archive their own material. We have no financial connections with any political party or trade union, nor do we wish any.

At present we have 30 collections catalogued, others waiting to be dealt with, and still more due to be brought into the Spirit of Revolt room. Scanning is a major part in the enterprise, and requires the patient dedication of a small group of volunteers to turn up regularly, and sit and work their way through the material. A slow and painstaking process. Then there is the slow process of uploading it to the website in as readable a format as possible.

We also hope to branch into oral testimony, from those involved in the day to day struggles of the ordinary people. It is also considered important, by the group, to try to reach out to the general public, and to that end we have put on exhibitions and displays and are planning more. The group has also been represented at a few conferences.

We have lots of ideas to try and expand the Spirit of Revolt with special collections, and resources for education etc., but it is always a slow process as most of the volunteers are involved in other activities. Perhaps if you visit our site and can see how best to advance the use of its resources, you can drop us a wee note.

If you see something in our catalogue which hasn't been digitalised, and you would like to read it, drop us an email (info@spiritofrevolt.info) giving us the details, and we will dig it out, digitalise it and get on the website as soon as possible for you to enjoy.



Ludd

In the early 21st century, as the 200-year-old bubble of industrial capitalism begins to burst, the politics of technology looms larger every year. Despite the obvious failure of the existing technological and social paradigm, mainstream debate, as well as that in most radical movements, is still stuck in received dogmas of technological neutrality and “progress through technology.”

The fundamental insight of green politics is that the relationship between humans and nature, which is articulated through technology, is one of oppression in capitalist modernity, so some ‘deeper’ elements of the green movement criticise industrialism, but this tends to veer into an anti-technology primitivism. Meanwhile, the orthodox Marxist/socialist left, because it is still tied to techno-progressivism and industrialism, insists that it is only capitalism, not industrialism that is the problem, and that once the workers control the factories, all will be well.

Luddism is the middle way between anti-technology primitivism and liberal/left techno-progressivism. The Luddites vowed to destroy only those machines they judged “hurtful to commonality,” evoking solidarity and the commons (which includes nature).

The point of Luddism is to start from a position of scepticism about the promises of progress through technologies developed under the overall technocratic capitalist regime, rather than the technocratic ideology that technology is inherently benign and politically neutral. An attitude of general scepticism does not preclude acknowledgement of specific benefits in some cases — of course such technologies have improved the lives of some human beings. Luddism is an anti-technocracy, not an anti-technology, movement.

The problem is not just capitalism

With its general anti-technocratic tendencies and openness to Luddism, it was with some hopefulness that, as a Luddite, I read the section of the Anarchist FAQ on capitalism and technology (section D10). It deserves some examination, both for its strengths and because its weaknesses point us in the direction of a genuinely Luddite politics.

FAQ is clear on the way that technology designed by the powerful (ie. nearly all technologies in our society) will be selected and designed to reinforce their power. It provides one of the clearest accounts I have read of how this works with industrial production technology, to deskill and replace workers, thereby

reinforcing the power of management over workers. Technology, it argues, can only benefit all when it is controlled by workers.

The FAQ generally follows a social-determinist approach however: “A non-oppressive, non-exploitative, ecological society will develop non-oppressive, non-exploitative, ecological technology, just as capitalism has developed technology which facilitates exploitation, oppression and environmental destruction.”

Despite its disavowal of the idea that technology is neutral, this approach is in fact premised on exactly that assumption: only if it is inherently neutral and innocent can it be so easily transformed. The authors’ method seems very similar to Marxism: technology is basically empowering and liberatory, the problem is capitalism.

They approvingly cite Murray Bookchin’s belief that, “technology is necessarily liberatory or consistently beneficial to man’s development” and repeatedly return to reassurances that technology is not inherently bad and oppressive.

The real spectre that the FAQ tries to banish is that modernity is a system of ordering of nature and society (through the institutions of state, bureaucracy, etc) which subordinates human freedom to its systems and rules, and that the origin of this system is the machine principle.

This is what Bookchin means when he refers to people being enslaved by technology and technological modes of thought. The point is not that technology is inherently bad, but that technology has its own authoritarian ideology and generally shapes our society. This technocracy mostly works hand in glove with capitalism, but it is reductionist to think that it is “just part of capitalism.” It is another power system that starts from a different problem and has a life of its own.

Technocracy

The essence of technocracy is described succinctly by the maxim of its founding father, the 17th century philosopher of the Scientific Revolution, Francis Bacon: Knowledge is Power. It is a system of power over nature and people through technology and technical discourse.

Of course, this translates into more power and influence for scientists and engineers. In his utopia, New Atlantis,

Bacon proposed a formal political technocracy, in which society is ruled by a scientific institute, an idea revived in the Technocracy Movement of the first half of the 20th century, whose slogan, “Science Discovers, Technology Executes, Man Conforms” hung over the entrance to the 1933 World Fair in Chicago.

With the Scientific Revolution there developed a new set of ideas about nature and human beings’ place in it and their relation to it. Whereas previously nature had been seen as living integrated whole, with the Scientific Revolution and the work of the French philosopher, Rene Descartes, nature was reconceptualised as a giant machine.

The organic metaphor of nature was condemned as a pagan mystification. Instead nature was seen as merely a set of resources to be exploited through technology. Of course all human societies have necessarily manipulated nature; but until the 17th century in Europe this was always moderated by cultural and/or religious restraints.

The new worldview legitimated the authority of “Man,” seen as separate from nature (referred to explicitly by the proponents of the Scientific Revolution as an unruly whore in need of disciplining, says Caroly Merchant in her 1980 work *The Death of Nature*) to dominate and manipulate it without limit, through technology.

It is this idea, just as much as the capitalist drive to extract profit from it that has led to the ecological crisis of the 21st century. Because technocracy is a general system of domination, these authoritarian approaches to nature later rebounded on “Man,” in the shape of the industrial factory system, and systems of scientific social control, such as eugenics and the pharmaceutical mental health industry.

Where is the line to be drawn on our attitude to technology?

The key concepts of technocracy are technical, not economic or political: Materialism/mechanistic understanding of nature, efficiency, uniformity, rationalisation, automatic control, etc.

The content of these ideas is not simply capitalist ideology transposed into science. In fact, what happens more often is that the evolution of technology and associated technocratic systems largely shapes the development of capitalism (there is no space here to deal with such complexities).

In technocratic societies everything is supposed to work like a machine, from the largest-scale elements of state, market economy, industrial and bureaucratic systems down to the human body.

Technocracy can be summed up in the motto of one of its industrial apostles, Frederick Taylor, who developed the system of Scientific Management: "In the past the man was first. In the future, the system will be first." The regimentation of nature is writ large in industrial agriculture, for example, with its straight lines and uniform landscapes and its treatment of animals as mere production units.

A current example of the authoritarian control of nature is synthetic biology, an extreme form of genetic engineering whose proponents aim to thoroughly rewrite life from scratch, with "standard modules" for greater efficiency.

At the other extreme of scale, climate engineers seek to manipulate the entire planetary system, eg. by changing the pH balance of the oceans, to fix climate change caused by the existing industrial paradigm.

Meanwhile their digital colleagues develop new tools of technological social control, such as "surgical precision," drones, killer robots and global surveillance systems.

But technocracy is not just repression and control. It gives meaning and purpose to modern life through its ideology of techno-progressivism, in which the ongoing perfection of control of nature is defined as both progress and freedom — freedom from the constraints imposed by nature, such as scarcity and the need to work, from suffering and even death.

And it is true that technological advances do bring genuine progress and even freedom for some, but we need to fight the underlying ideology

of control of nature. We also need to be aware of how, by structuring the world in ways that intensify capitalism and technocracy, and then giving us the tools to "do more" within that structure, they fool us into believing that things we never knew we needed are genuine benefits, and thereby create dependency upon the technology and upon the market.

Conclusion

The basic anarchist rebellion against the technocratic machine society is correct. Its origins in the machine ideology of the Scientific Revolution have been well studied. This may be uncomfortable for those who wish to rescue the reputation of technology from its "abuse" by capitalists.

The problem with technology is worse than that: The truth is that the western philosophy of technology fits hand-in-glove with capitalist concepts. The Luddites were fighting against the machine society of industrial capitalism, not just to save their jobs.

Does that mean that our only choice is to reject technology and lapse into primitivism? Of course not.

Firstly, there are still forms of technology that do not dominate people and nature. What is critical in devising such technologies is first to ask people what they actually need, rather than the technocratic system of scientists and engineers deciding what the problem is, how to solve it, and imposing their solutions upon us.

People need to think collectively

and very carefully about the social forms and relationship to nature that a particular technology implies and supports. Perhaps an anarchist society will produce some goods industrially, though the general imposition of the industrial system on nature and society will have to go.

Most importantly, the difference between Luddism and primitivism is this: In rejecting technocracy rather than technology, Luddites recognise that the problems caused by technologies are due to the way that the new ideology of technocracy became a dominant force in western societies, unmoderated by cultural and social restraints.

Efficiency and standardisation have their uses, so long as they do not dominate all other values, and are not institutionalised by the forces of capitalism.

In my view, anarchism needs to understand and fight against the socio-technical totality of technocratic capitalism, against both technological domination and industrialism as well as capitalist exploitation, and there are many elements of the anarchist movement that understand this. The best model for such a movement was (and is) Luddism.

■ For more see www.luddites200.org.uk, or the *Breaking the Frame* working group, www.breakingtheframe.org.uk.



In focus: The Trade Union Bill will hit the right to take protected industrial action. But much more is also set to be imposed...

STRIKE ENDS

The unions have reacted with fury — but will they really do anything about the Trade Union Bill restricting strike action?

After years of threatening to do so, the Tories are finally set to bring in even tighter restrictions. They are introducing the requirement for 50% of balloted members to take part for a vote to be legal, and in “essential public services” no strike can take place unless 40% of those eligible for the ballot support action, regardless of turnout.

The UK already has “the most restrictive trade union laws anywhere in the western world,” as Tony Blair once boasted, and the new measures are set to make things worse.

The official line is that this is simply about making sure strikes are democratic, and that a handful of rabble-rousers can’t use the whole workforce as pawns to hold the poor bosses to ransom.

This rhetoric quickly falls apart on even a cursory inspection. If it’s about democracy, why not allow workplace balloting to guarantee high turnouts? If it’s about legitimacy, why not apply the same standards to parliamentary elections, removing most of the Tory Cabinet at a stroke? But of course it isn’t about those things. The fact that restrictions on scab labour are to be lifted only underlines that the point here is explicitly to restrict strikes as far as they can get away with short of making them illegal altogether.

In addition, it’s worth noting that these laws aren’t a response to overly belligerent trade unions. They’re the act of a ruling class on the offensive. They can enact the new legislation without worry for the same reason they can roll back all the concessions of social democracy — because the movement that won them is in retreat.

No Answer from the Union Tops

Most people opposed to these new laws will know instinctively how to challenge them. Sure, there’ll be a naive soul here who really thinks a petition can sort it out, and a blind fool there who believes that Labour will repeal them in five years’ time. But in general, people who want to defeat these new laws will realise that the way to do that is by defying them.

But it would be a mistake to look for that defiance to come from the union leaderships.

Such an idea is typified by the Socialist Party of England and Wales: “At the FBU conference, just days after the election, TUC general secretary Frances O’Grady announced that there will be a special

meeting of the TUC executive in the aftermath of the Queen’s Speech.

“But if Cameron (elected on 24% of the electorate!) announces the threatened new laws to bring in 50% turnout thresholds in industrial action ballots and worse for the public sector, this has to be widened out to an emergency TUC general council.”

“It should be a ‘council of war’ to seriously prepare the whole union movement for a 24-hour general strike, as a warning to the Tories. More importantly, it would raise the sights and lift the spirits of millions of workers and all those lined up to be on the receiving end of the Tories’ eye-watering £12 billion welfare cuts. The left executives should work out a strategy to put pressure on the TUC. But if the TUC refuses to organise, then the left-led unions should get together to call action.”

To their credit, SPEW concede the likelihood of the TUC refusing to organise such defiance. This is amply demonstrated by both the TUC sell-out of the 1926 general strike, and its retreat in the face of Thatcher’s anti-strike laws. But it is more than just reticence or cowardice. Even were the TUC not merely an umbrella organisation with no power in itself, calling a tokenistic one day general strike simply isn’t in its material interests.

I refer to the existing and future legislation as “anti-strike” rather than “anti-union” because it actually serves business trade unionism. In restricting the ability of workers to strike, the law also reinforces the union’s representative function — mediating between workers and capital and providing individual case work support rather than organising collective disputes.



UNIONS



Restricted: Public sector strikers in Norwich Photo: Roger Blackwell/CC

lose and nothing to gain by defying the law and risking the sequestration of their funds.

So even if the TUC general council talks the talk of a “war council,” it will always be a pantomime.

Lobbying the TUC to “get off its knees” in ignorance of how it works and where its material interests lie is a dead end. As is looking to the Labour Party, which was responsible for a document called In Place of Strife and would have had us today referring to the “Wilson anti-strike laws” had they not been defeated.

Instead, we need to look to ourselves. The answer lies with our class rather than with those who proclaim themselves to be our leaders or representatives.

So let’s not sloganise about a general strike, especially not a one-day shadow puppet version of it. Let’s not “call on” the TUC or the Labour Party for a single thing since they can offer us nothing.

Let’s take matters into our own hands so that we can start to advance instead of retreating.

Taking on the #TradeUnionBill

The Tories have, for several years, been making noises about restricting strikes. But now that the Trade Union Bill has been published it goes even further than we thought.

It’s worth noting that this bill is not purely a product of today’s government, it is the culmination of a project begun by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. She succeeded where both Edward Heath and Harold Wilson before her had failed, first by taking on the most powerful unions, and then by legally constraining strike action.

Thatcher’s laws are currently embodied in the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.

TULRCA and its associated codes of practice actually offered sweeteners to official unions, setting out statutory rights in regards to representation, consultation, and facility and training time for union representatives. These reflected studies showing that union recognition can and does save employers money, avert industrial action and benefit the economy. Many businesses are aware of this and it is one of the reasons unions were legalised in the first place.

But the Act also stipulates that strikes cannot be called in mass meetings or be sprung upon them. Secret postal ballots are required, a week’s notice has to be given, and there are various other legal and bureaucratic hoops to jump through in order to call workers out on strike.

The effect of all this isn’t so much to hinder trade unionism but to hinder a

specific brand of trade unionism. Much like with the original legalising of unions, the aim was to do away with the workforce as a collective causing disruption, instead empowering individual officers to speak on the workforce’s behalf, and importantly, to reach accommodations on their behalf.

Thatcher’s laws accelerated this moderating, service-provider model of trade unionism. Individual problems were channelled into clearly-defined grievance and discipline procedures instead of evolving into group disputes. Negotiations mutated so that the process of entering into a dispute with an employer was riddled with bureaucracy and largely detached from the workplace. Providing insurance, consumer savings and other such products became as much a part of trade unions as collective bargaining.

On the whole, trade unions accepted this shift, despite occasional sabre-rattling about “anti-union laws.” Even with several unions forming an “awkward squad” still willing to take strike action fairly often, it has led to historically low levels of strikes, and unions more often seen by bosses as social partners than an opposing side.

However this has created a paradox. With unions having contained and defused their members’ anger for so long, they have effectively de-powered the movement to such an extent that the state and bosses no longer feel as strong a need to accommodate it. Embracing social partnership has in effect reduced the necessity for social partnership.

The Changes to Come

The Trade Union Bill, then, is not a retaliatory strike against a belligerent trade union movement but an attempt to finish the unions off when little effective resistance is anticipated.

Perhaps that is the reason for the extent of the changes. Ballot thresholds have long been the main talking point when the Tories have threatened these changes, but they are by no means the last word on the matter. The bill contains much more for organised workers to worry about. The main changes are:

- A strike ballot must have at least a 50% turnout in order to provide a lawful mandate for industrial action;
- In “important public services,” on top of a 50% turnout the action must have been voted for by 40% of those eligible to vote — in some cases requiring an 80% Yes result;
- The union must give 14 rather than seven days’ notice to the boss;
- The industrial action mandate will expire four months after the ballot date;
- Any picket line must have an appointed supervisor, who must give their details to the police, be present or available to attend throughout the picket, be visibly identifiable and carry a letter of union authorisation to show on request to anyone who asks;
- All unions with a political fund must not only ballot members on the fund’s existence every five years, as the law already requires, but also ask each member whether they wish to pay into the fund every five years;



■ Unions must include an audit of protests and pickets in their annual returns to the Certification Officer — the officer may impose levies and penalties if these requirements are not complied with;

■ All public sector employers must publish the amount of facility time union are getting and estimate how much this costs — the government will be able to impose restrictions on these amounts.

The bill also imposes extra technical requirements on unions in how a ballot is run and how the result is notified.

Beyond the provisions of the bill, the government is also running three consultations over additional changes.

The consultation document on tackling intimidation sets out their intent to make breaches of the code of practice on picketing criminal rather than civil offences. They lay out plans to further restrict not only pickets but also other related protests.

“Hiring agency staff during strike action” is aimed at giving employers much greater leeway to draft in scab workforces.

“Ballot thresholds in important public services” offers a much more in-depth look at what the bill means by “important public services” and who would potentially be affected by the 40% threshold.



All of these changes have a clear goal of making strike action far more difficult to engage in lawfully, and restricting how much lay reps can do in order to increase reliance on full time officials. At once, then, this further reduces disruption to business while shifting the power within the union from those whose primary material interest is in winning improved conditions to those whose primary material interest is in preserving their position by maintaining a seat at the negotiating table.

The Official Trade Union Response

As soon as the measures were announced in the Queen’s Speech, and again when the full bill was revealed, union leaders responded with fury. There were a lot of tough words about how this was an attack on the working class (or, “working people,” as more moderate union leaders prefer to put it in terminology that is uncomfortably close to that used by the Tories), democracy and hard won rights.

Regulation, law and Wobblies

The IWW has no policy about the State and its laws. It has no particular plan to cope should an employer go to court to seek to have industrial action declared unlawful. If it did it might be best to keep any plans secret, but there are no secret plans and anyway the IWW is so open and transparent that any such plans would not remain so.

We know that the powers of the courts as used in the past have sequestered union assets, such as in NGA, the Messenger dispute, SOGAT and Wapping.

Sequestration means having the union’s assets taken away so they can’t be used. The most inconvenient and compelling aspect of sequestration is freezing the union’s money in the bank. Since most unions have many office staff and officials who would not get paid, this leads to the union purging the contempt of court by ceasing the unlawful action, or repudiating those members participating in it.

It is this threat and act of sequestration that makes the trade union laws effective.

How would they impact on the IWW? Well in my view very little. The laws are not framed to deal with small unions. The IWW has money in the bank, but not a huge amount. Since it’s possible to anticipate sequestration, money can be moved into cash and held by the members.

The IWW does have some members paid to undertake administrative work, but these are not employees, they are active members. So the union would continue to function. If officers were threatened by the court, they could resign. The IWW has run very well in the recent past without a secretary and as you may imagine, officers of the union do not issue orders or instructions. So the absence of officers or “leaders” would not cause much trouble.

The IWW has had to come to terms with the State and it “registered” when it found that it could not otherwise represent members in disputes or procedures with employers.

The law obliges employers to allow union representatives to represent members. But the definition of a union in the law is that it is registered with the Certification Officer for Unions and Trade Associations. So some acknowledgement of the role of the State is necessary if a union is to be of practical use to its members.

The IWW, some years later, went on to apply for a “certificate of independence” from the Certification Officer. This in particular allows the union to use a State-provided procedure to force recognition of the union from a recalcitrant employer.

All of this is true. The working class won the rights we have today through mass movements which had as their most powerful weapon the ability to disrupt, slow down or entirely stop production. We have health and safety laws, statutory employment rights and more on the back

It’s doubtful if this will ever be useful, as a union without the power to force an employer to recognise it in practical matters is unlikely to be able to take advantage of being “recognised” under a State procedure. For instance, the employer is made by the state to ‘recognise’ the union, the union puts in a pay claim, the employer says no. The recognition isn’t much help, the union still needs to create its own power in the workplace if it is to make employers pay or otherwise significantly change the boss-worker relationship.

Sometimes following legal requirements can be worthwhile. The law provides that, without a ballot for industrial action, a strike can be declared unlawful. The IWW is not necessarily too concerned about this, except for the fact that employees on strike without a ballot can be sacked immediately.

If every striker is a politically aware hardcore activist this might be acceptable. However since we aim to organise everyone this is unlikely. A ballot undertaken within the law means a strike is lawful and the striking members can not be sacked until 12 weeks has passed. If a strike can’t be won by then it probably should not have been called. Strikes are only worthwhile when there is a reasonable probability of winning, or the employer has committed a grave offence against the workers.

The State’s laws and regulation of unions are a fact of life, the IWW has chosen to get stuck in and seek to organise everyone and almost anyone, rather than be a selective club for political activists. This involves some compromise and an understanding of the realities of the world while we struggle to change it.

We do not anticipate that the State will mend its ways, nor will we call for it to create union friendly laws. We aim and struggle for the “abolition of the wage system” (see the IWW preamble to its constitution). We expect the abolition of the wage system will be achieved at about the same time as the abolition of the State.

We do not expect any mitigation of the state’s regulation of unions. The direct struggle at the point of production is more dignified and significant than asking for a “level playing field” or “fairer ways of making us behave ourselves.”

By Frank Syrratt, former IWW national secretary (Personal capacity)



of such action. Which is why attempts at anti-strike laws and repression are as old as strikes themselves.

But ultimately all the fine words of the trade union leaders are just that — words. They’re not about to lead a crusade to prevent these laws by defying them, as other

Big noise: But Unite chief Len McCluskey has little to gain from wildcat action
 Photo: Steve Eason/CC



repressive legislation has been defeated in the past. Their behaviour when Thatcher's laws came in is enough to tell you that.

There is talk about it. More than one union head has come out as saying that if the right to strike lawfully is restricted, it will only lead to an increase in unlawful, wildcat strikes. But such speeches aren't a threat to take such action; they're an appeal to the state to see reason, and realise that while the existing legal and collective bargaining machinery keeps the workforce in line, so that the unions can offer industrial peace, the blunt instrument of more laws only risks making it harder to control angry or militant workers.

Much has been made of Unite changing its rules to remove a requirement to follow the law. But all it does is remove a caveat from a single clause of its constitution, which many more moderate and even scab unions don't have anyway. It doesn't change the fact that backing unlawful action would only get Unite's leadership arrested and its funds

sequestered, and for all Len McCluskey's rhetoric about civil disobedience he simply isn't about to do that.

That's not to say that there's nothing worthwhile in the official union response. For example, the civil service union PCS is currently undertaking a strategic review of all of its functions and structures. Nobody should expect genuinely radical change, but they are starting from a recognition that they have yet to get a turnout in any national ballot that would satisfy the new laws (more localised ballots on different campaigns have beaten the new thresholds) and that with both that fact and the union busting attacks the government has already subjected them to they need to be much better organised and to improve in the weaker areas rather than just leaning on the areas where they are strong.

This is an entirely sensible proposition, given that the union in the strongest position at present is the RMT who regularly bust through even the hurdles set

to be imposed by the trade union bill. There are other unions who could certainly look at similar measures to improve their own position in such national ballots.

Building from the Ground Up

However, the official response from the head of the union movement still leaves us adapting to rather than challenging the new restrictions.

In terms of challenging them, the best response of course would be waves of wildcat strike action in order to defeat the law by making it unworkable. We're a long way from such action, of course, so we need to get organised. This means building a culture in workplaces where "the union" isn't an external body or an insurance policy, but something that everybody is part of, and where workers have confidence in their own collective power to win improvements — not only on the say so of a union official but of their own volition and initiative.

For how we do that, some good starting points include the libcom.org workplace organising guide, the recent organising strategy adopted by PCS Bootle Taxes Branch, and real-world practical examples such as the Sparks BESNA dispute, the IWGB 3 Cosas Campaign, the Ritzy living wage dispute, the Pop Up Union, Brighton Solidarity Federation's Hospitality Workers initiative, and others.

But, of course, while we get on with what is often slow, patient and hard work, the Trade Union Bill is set to become law in the very near future and needs to be resisted now.

One good starting point for this is the branch-based Right to Strike campaign, which though starting off relatively small has some good ideas about fighting back. Crucially, while a lot of these ideas involve publicity and winning the argument against the law, the campaign also recognises that it won't be overturned on an appeal to reason but on a show of strength from the working class.

To that end, I would argue that all strikes need to be spread into the community and supplemented by direct action on the streets in order to crank up the disruption caused. So, for example, when a Tube Strike shuts down the London Underground, road blockades should grind the roads to a halt. Or if supermarket workers go on strike, economic blockades should stop deliveries and consumers getting in.

If strikes are blocked by the courts, and particularly if the dispute is based in a public-facing employer, occupations and economic blockades should seek to cause the disruption that the courts sought to prevent. If an agency is drafting in a scab army to break the strike, they should be targeted the same way.

These are just a few ideas, and many more will no doubt present themselves in specific struggles. But the point should be that, even where we lack a rank-and-file movement willing to take wildcat action, we can still engage the wider working class in order to cause disruption and help make the legislation as unworkable as possible.

By
 Phil



Respect comes

Answering the question “In an anarchist society, who would do the dangerous and dirty jobs?” former miner and union activist Dave Douglass explains that far from being work that no-one would do, what he and his comrades built down the pits was a form of direct collective responsibility that went well beyond what our atomised society will allow. His answer comes from direct experience of the respect and drive found in those dark tunnels.

We used to get asked that question a lot, especially when there were more dirty and dangerous jobs around. As an anarchist coal miner I thought I was in a prime place to answer the question, “we will.”

Not just me but particularly lads of my generation, enthused by the growth in radical and revolutionary political consciousness in the '60s and '70s dreamed of the transformation of society to more egalitarian forms. Workers' councils and committees, industrial commonwealths, soviets.

What the question posers did not understand was that as miners we were not trying to escape our trade underground, but the exploitation of our labour by capitalism. Not avoid our labour but stop its waste.

Many of us aspired to being miners, felt honoured to be miners, felt valued in our communities and among our peers. Whilst some might have felt the whip of unemployment force them to labour underground, many us chose it. Indeed given my time over I would choose it again.

We also had a strong tradition which lasted almost the entire lifetime of our industry that education, talent or training wasn't seen as an escape mechanism out of the pits and coal communities but a means of helping the

collective. Almost every miner I knew who graduated from Ruskin, Oxford over decades went back down the pit the next day. Others went on union scholarships to university.

Men with degrees toiled on their knees in the dark thickened with coal dust. But this was also true of footballers and runners and cricketers. Even when they became professionals they lived in the same village, taught the kids on the row, drank in the miner's welfare.

Miss Pye's school of dance trained a dozen or so professional groups, her dancers starred in key TV and theatre shows. Her dad was a miner, her studio could have been in London or at least Leeds, but it was in the little pit village of Dunscroft where her family worked in the mines. Our contributions to society were to each other, the value of our worth wasn't in title or position or wealth but respect and self-respect and collective class values.

That's not to say the pit wasn't fearfully dangerous, even lethal at times, wasn't back breaking toil, because often it was. Or that it was all back-slapping camaraderie and good humour — you landed with the odd bunch of psychos — and bastards from time to time too. At times you encountered the dog-eat-dog rough twats who would pull you down to get themselves up, but they were an exception.

The form of our labour, in co-operating teams, drove always in the direction of collective action. Your eyes were my eyes, my eyes were our eyes, literally a danger which befell me or you would fall on everyone else too. “Dog-eat-dog” in a coal mines soon ends up with everyone being eaten.

Boring a long hole in a faulted crumbling rock face, with both your hands on the pounding machine and eyes on the rock in front of you, your mate comes to stand with his hand rested on your back, while his eyes patrol the rock above you, his eyes in the back of your head, the slightest movement of rock and his hand ensures you react and jump back in an instant without checking his judgement. One

of a million examples of collective security.

In the early days of mining, before unions, there was a spiral of ever-decreasing wages. Whoever was the poorest would fling his cap on the gaffers table and offer to work for a lower rate than the bloke before him.

We learned that lesson early. Back at the beginning of the 1700s we would form local unions, agree a bottom line under which nobody would sign on, and through thick and thin not individually surrender but seek a collective decision and collective rate.

It was a tradition we hung on to for almost 400 years, gaining large swathes of job control which we seized and held from “the management prerogative” (their right to manage).

Who signed on at the pit? We usually ran that, or greatly influenced it and ensured they were miner's sons and grandsons — this wasn't just nepotism it was ensuring loyalty to the class traditions of the union and the community.

Overtime, we allocated that. In coalfields where the union wasn't strong, overtime was used as a bribe, blue-eyed gaffer's men got the cream and the reds got nowt. Most places we controlled the lists and kept it on a rota, if they didn't supply us with numbers of how many they wanted for a weekend by Thursday, we didn't give them anybody, and nobody would turn up without the union's say so.

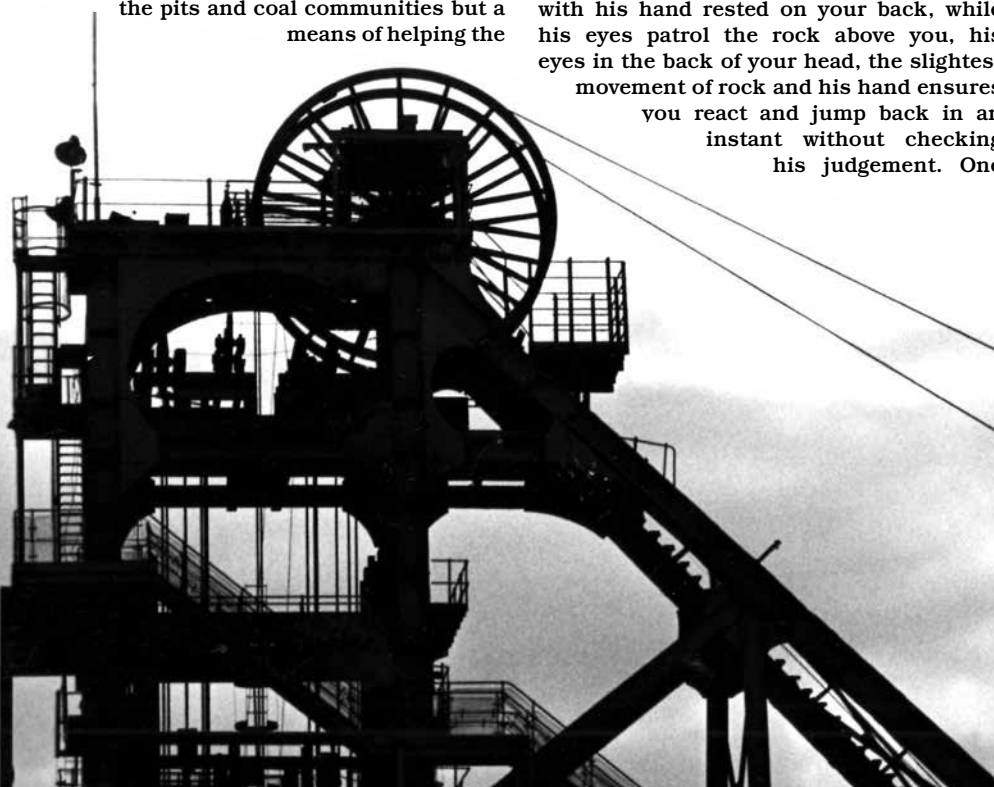
The union of course, to us was and is the rank and file. The man at the pick point, the mass crowd who crammed meetings every time there was an important decision, the union was never the bloke in the office at Barnsley or Durham or London. Teams, as many strikes and rag-ups happened over worker's control as wages. Far more.

The teams were assembled and disassembled at every new coal face. Spare men became regular men, regular men spare men, it meant the militants couldn't be kept out in the cold, it meant the safety conscious worker who stopped the job wouldn't be pushed out, it meant the gaffers men couldn't be rewarded with the best jobs. It drove them mad.

We fought for a day wage, so that a hewer in Scotland or Wales or Durham or anywhere got paid the same, on the principle of each according to his ability. Even before this while contract work still prevailed in the northern coalfield, where the union was strong, a master note, a collective pay note produced the total tonnage filled, the total number of men, and was divided equally according to shifts worked.

An injured man, an old man, an inexperienced man would be “carried” by the rest of the team at least for a time, the wage shared on the basis of each according to his ability. So long as everyone was doing their best, we all didn't have to achieve the same.

It was these unifying principles which Callaghan's 1970s Social Contract sought to destroy by introducing the divisive bonus scheme. It was, as it was planned to do, to split away the more individually-minded



out of the pits

self-interested coalfields from those with more collective traditions. It was what caused Nottingham and Leicestershire miners to break the great collective strike action of 1984/5.

But the point is not everyone at all times wants to be the boss, or be in charge, or be the leader. Famously of course pirate ships often demonstrated this principle. Unlike Royal Navy vessels which carried armed marines to enforce the rule of the captain, it was the crew who were armed, and the crew outnumbered the captain.

New crew members who were known to be able to read could read charts, and crew members who could numerate could read a sextant, and they were then made captain. Of course it was all the responsibility with few of the perks and if anything went wrong, off you went. So rather than have a cushy job (while it lasted) as captain, men would lie, and say they couldn't read or count in order to do the far more physical dangerous and arduous tasks of a matelot.

I certainly believe that in an anarchist society, everyone should contribute according to their abilities either by brain or brawn or artistic skill into the collective wealth of the community.

I'm old fashioned enough to believe that if you don't pay in, in whatever form you can pay in, you shouldn't take out, but when you do take out, you take out according to your needs. So a large family should get more, a smaller family will need less, an injured person might not be able to contribute as much as a strong young person, but that strong young person should still contribute to the maximum of their ability.

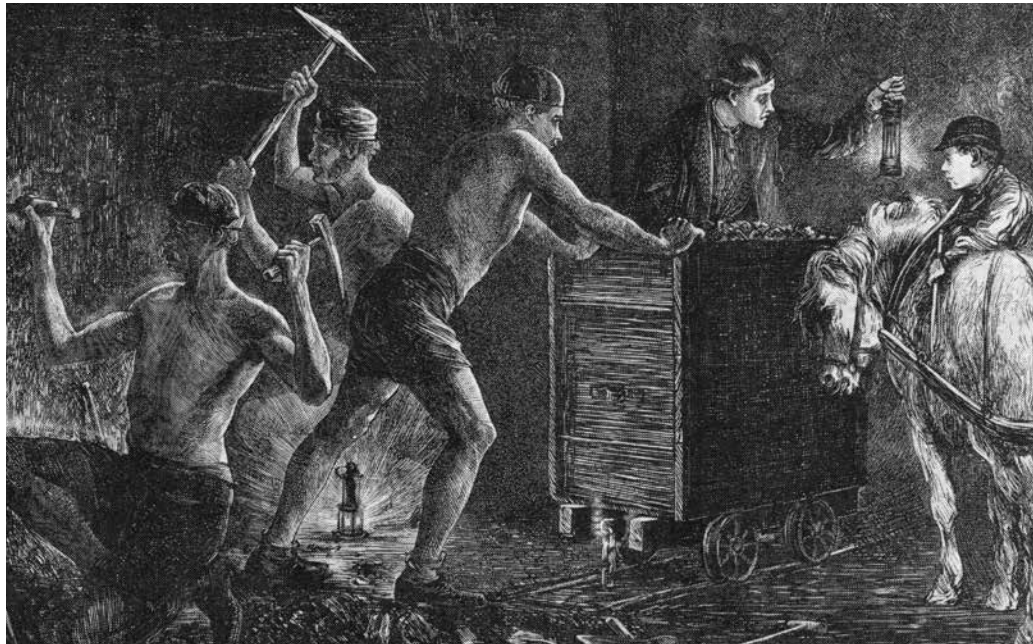
Far from being pie-in-the-sky utopian values, such principles are the very bedrock of working class experience and clear values on which to assess the real meanings of words like "worth" and "value" and "wealth" and "aspirations."

Whether there will be a need for such people as coal miners in an anarchist society, is perhaps another debate.

Personally I think as long as we need steel and things made from steel we will need coal to make it. Clean coal technologies, can be small scale as well as large scale, small drift mines without surface infrastructure are easily better options than open cast mines.

Clean coal is always a better choice than nuclear in my book, but the energy options and the energy debate is still to be had (as will the coal) when that anarchist society emerges, if coal is needed then, there will be no shortage of people to mine it. Indeed like the massive long queues of people trying to climb Everest for their own personal fulfilment and pride, we may have long lists of volunteers willing to spend some of their social contribution working in a coal mine.

Breathing Utopia: How will mining happen, after the social revolution?



Long history: Mining through the ages and, bottom right, Dave Douglass as a young miner



At root, anarchism is

In focus: In order to understand its present, we must know its past

This year, 2015, marks the 175th anniversary of the publication of Proudhon's seminal *What is Property?*. While opponents had hurled the label "anarchist" at those more radical than themselves during both the English and French revolutions, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865) was the first to embrace it.

Anarchism, like any significant theory, has evolved as society has evolved and a great many since Proudhon have proclaimed themselves — or been proclaimed by their enemies — an anarchist. What, then, does anarchism mean in the 2010s?

The first notion to dismiss is just because someone calls themselves an anarchist it makes them so. Just because the rulers of a state proclaims it a "Socialist Democratic Republic" does not make it so. Just because a self-contradictory charlatan like Murray Rothbard (1926-1995) proclaims his system of private hierarchies "anarcho" capitalism does not make it libertarian.

Equally, just because someone does not use that label does not make them non-anarchists. Some Marxists have come to conclusions that echo Mikhail Bakunin's criticisms against Karl Marx in the First International (1864-1876). Does it really matter if they do not call themselves anarchists if their politics are identical?

We must reject trying to define anarchism in terms of the ideas of those who appropriate the word. That is the way to an "anarchism" which becomes meaningless and even self-contradictory.

What is the alternative? We need to understand where anarchism came from, the foundations upon which anarchism today is built. Starting in 1840 and reconstructing what anarchy meant to those who were creating the first anarchist theories and movements.

This does not mean that there were no anarchistic movements or thinkers before 1840. Far from it — for as long as there were rulers and ruled, owners and dispossessed, there were those who were against both and in favour of liberty, equality and solidarity. In that sense Kropotkin was right to state "that from all times there have been anarchists and Statists."

However, we can only recognise these thinkers and movements as anarchist because of how the idea of anarchism



developed after it was first used in a positive sense.

Political philosopher William Godwin (1756-1836) can be considered as an "anarchistic" thinker because he came to the same conclusions specifically on the state and property as Proudhon did.

He is not an "anarchist" thinker as such because he had no direct influence in the development of anarchism as a named theory. He was rediscovered by anarchist historians in the 1890s and introduced to a movement which had become well-established without being aware he even

existed. That he had come to many of the same conclusions as anarchists means a certain kinship, but he can't be considered an ancestor of the movement.

So those like author George Woodcock who seek to provide a chronological account of anarchist thinkers before discussing the movement produce a two-fold disservice. First, by producing a flawed chronology starting with people who simply did not help define anarchism and second, by downplaying the movement key thinkers were part and parcel of. Anarchism cannot be understood as a set of unchanging ideals

not a liberal subject

isolated from the society they were shaped by and which, in turn, wishes to shape.

Early anarchism, then, needs to be placed within the society its pioneers experienced and wished to change. It cannot be understood, then, outside of the European labour and socialist movements of the 1830s and subsequent decades nor can it be understood outside of what provoked its adherents to proclaim “Je suis anarchiste.”

Once this context is understood then we can define what anarchism is and who can be considered anarchist.

There are a limited numbers of writers from this period however and all thinkers exist in a social context. So anarchist thinker Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) was unfortunately exaggerating for example when he wrote: “In the European labour movement Bakunin became of soul of the left wing of the International Working-Men’s Association, and he was the founder of modern anarchism, or anti-state socialism, of which he laid down the foundations upon wide considerations of the philosophy of history.”

Bakunin would never have gained his influence, nor would his ideas have been the same without being immersed within the labour movement. If he became influential it was because his ideas reflected — while influencing — the debates and ideas already occurring within the International’s left-wing.

The notion of there being a “founder” of anarchism is very much at odds with both libertarian principles and our movement’s history. This does not mean that specific individuals did not play a key role — Proudhon helped shape the ideas he championed (and named them) just as Bakunin did — but they are part of a wider movement which cannot be ignored.

Proudhon himself was not the isolated, paradoxical thinker so many writers suggest. He was deeply involved in the popular movements of his time, influenced by them and their critique of capitalism while seeking to influence workers already questioning the status quo, away from the Jacobin socialism of Louis Blanc (1811-1882) and the fantastical visions of utopian socialists towards a federal, decentralised socialism rooted in workers’ associations.

Bakunin, like many others, took Proudhon’s core ideas of anti-state socialism and applied them in the militant labour movement. This involved rejecting Proudhon’s opposition to strikes and unions and replacing his reformism with social revolution — strikes, revolts, general strikes, occupations, expropriation and popular insurrection. He also replaced Proudhon’s patriarchy with a consistent anarchist position — if liberty and equality was required in work and the community then why was the family excluded?

Anarchism is libertarian socialism, a decentralised, federal system based on worker and community control. Private property is replaced by possession, property rights by use rights. This means

the means of production are socially owned and anyone who joins a workplace or community automatically takes part in its management — no more bosses, no more governors. It is based on the ideas of association which was raised by those workers who first experienced wage-labour — selling labour and liberty to a capitalist who gets to keep the product you make.

It was these ideas which inspired Proudhon, who named his most famous work *What is Property?* rather than *What is Government?* for a reason. An “anarchism” which is not socialist is not anarchism in any meaningful way.

This historical approach also suggests that the common attempt to define anarchism as a fusion of liberalism and socialism is mistaken. Kropotkin suggested anarchism was “an outgrowth of two great movements of thought in the economic fields and the political fields” of the time, namely socialism and liberalism. This was later taken up and transformed by Rudolf Rocker (1873-1958) in his book *Anarcho-Syndicalism* into a “confluence” and “synthesis” of the two. It has remained an influential idea ever since.

Kropotkin, however, also added that this was simply what they had “in common” with the two tendencies and defined anarchism in the very first sentence as “the no-government system of socialism.”

labour was his property and, like any property, can be sold and if it is sold then he had no claim on his product, just his wages. The State forms when property owners join together into a civil society to better secure their rights and property, creating a political power above themselves which decrees the law and acts as a neutral umpire in disputes. This would create a state like a joint-stock company in which property owners are of civil society and make decisions while those without property are merely *in* civil society. As long as the latter do not leave the state, they give their tacit consent to be ordered around.

Thus there is no paradox in neoliberalism centralising state power, constraining organised labour and increasing what is termed the democratic deficit. It also explains why the modern descendants of classical liberalism can happily embrace fascism (like Ludwig von Mises in the 1920s and Friedrich von Hayek with Pinochet) while others produce learned discourses on how voluntary slavery is the essence of “libertarianism.”

Classical liberalism is not a theory of freedom, of finding social associations that protect and nourish individuality, but rather attempts to justify hierarchies by giving them a veneer of consent. It sees freedom as isolation, not a product of social interaction as anarchists do. It feigns to



Big ideas: Left, Pierre Joseph Proudhon and above, Rudolf Rocker

Given that the audience he was writing for was undoubtedly familiar with socialism as an ideology aiming for state ownership and control, his comparison with liberalism was unfortunate.

This is because classical liberalism is not particularly liberal (in the modern popular sense of the word). Its major theorists, such as John Locke (1602-1704), were seeking to justify the social position of the bourgeoisie and its privileges and so were primarily interested in property and not liberty.

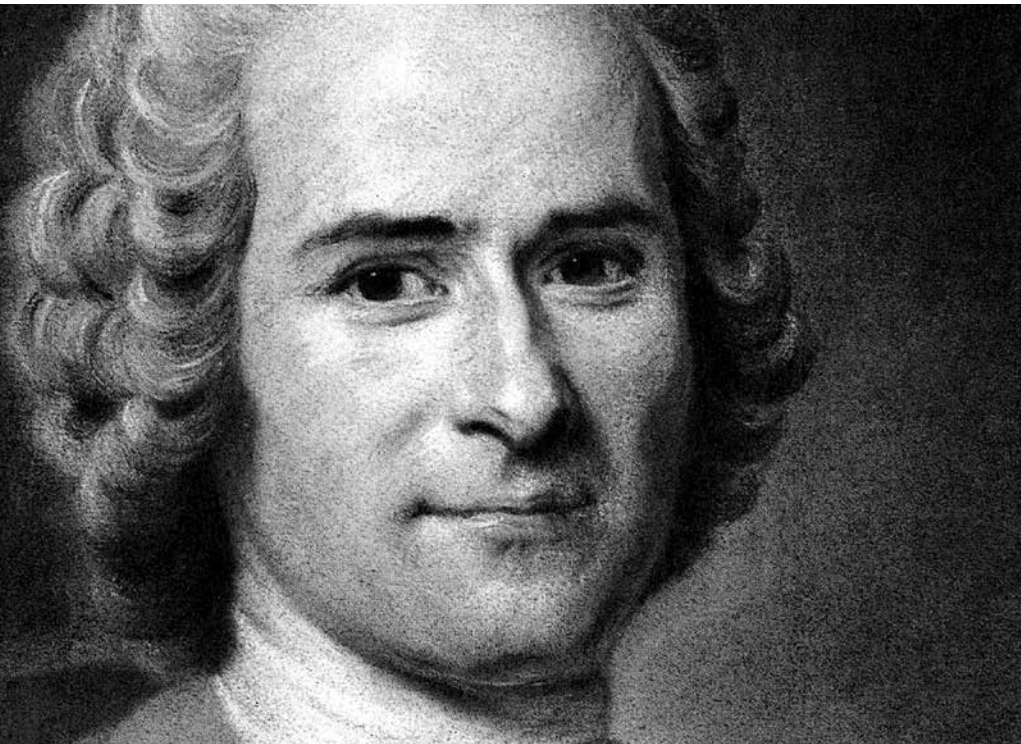
For Locke the logic was simple. A worker’s

believe that freedom and equality are not interrelated and interdependent. If it aims to reduce state intervention, then it does so for the property owner. The very obvious hierarchies associated with wealth are not an issue for it, it as we should know our place (and hence the need for a State or private police force if we do not).



Classical liberalism simply does not understand Proudhon's argument that property "violates equality by the rights of exclusion and increase, and freedom by despotism," that it has "perfect identity with robbery" and the worker "has sold and surrendered his liberty" to the proprietor. Anarchy was "the absence of a master while the landlord "imposes his will as law."

The main non-labour influences on anarchism in its formative years were the French Revolution and the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). It is Rousseau and his influence on the French left that Proudhon was most engaged with and the classical liberals appear only very indirectly in his polemics with bourgeois economists.



Formative ideas: Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Bakunin, likewise, critiqued Rousseau and his social contract theory. Both were seeking to explain why the French Revolution had not achieved its goal of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity."

Rousseau recognised that while man "was born free" he "is everywhere in chains" and sought to "find a form of association which defends and protects, with the whole power of the community, the person and goods of each associate; and by which each one, uniting himself to all, obeys only himself and remains as free as before." Proudhon quotes this passage from Rousseau's *The Social Contract* approvingly and attacks Rousseau because his solution to the real problem he raises is, at best, inadequate or, at worst, contradicts it.

Proudhon argued that Rousseau's answer did not ensure that everyone remains as free as before. This was for many reasons, not least Rousseau's arguments that the "general will" was indivisible which led to a pronounced support for centralisation in the French left. This resulted in the empowerment of the few — the government and state bureaucracy — at the expense of the many — the people.

For Proudhon, "the government is not within a society, but outside of it" and "the

citizen has nothing left but the power of choosing his rulers by a plurality vote." The state was "the external constitution of the social power" by which the people delegate "its power and sovereignty" and so "does not govern itself."

Anarchists "deny government and the State, because we affirm that which the founders of States have never believed in, the personality and autonomy of the masses." Ultimately, "the only way to organise democratic government is to abolish government."

This meant decentralisation was essential: "Unless democracy is a fraud, and the sovereignty of the People a joke, it must be admitted that each citizen in the sphere of his industry, each municipal,

those who possess, against those who do not possess; and the only part played by the citizen is to pay the police."

The social contract for Rousseau, no less than Locke, inevitably becomes the class State because it takes property as its base. Property itself had to be abolished by democratic principles being applied within the company by association.

So in stark contrast liberal traditions, Proudhon attacks the state because it defends property, because it is an instrument of (minority) class rule. His anti-statism has a socialist base.

The similarities between State and property were clear to Proudhon: "Capital, whose mirror-image in the political sphere is government [...] The economic notion of capital, the political notion of government or authority, the theological notion of the Church, these three notions are identical and completely interchangeable: an attack upon one is an attack upon the others [...] What capital does to labour and the State to freedom, the Church in turn does to understanding. [...] In order to oppress the people effectively, they must be clapped in irons in their bodies, their will and their reason."

Proudhon argued that to achieve their goal of liberty, equality and fraternity, socialists had to embrace federalism and decentralisation. Rousseau's goal of a centralised and unitary republic empowered a few at the top at the expense of the people. This would only become worse if you replaced property with state ownership — it replaces bosses with one big boss, the state bureaucracy, and so universalises wage-labour. Sadly, many socialists then and since did think turning workers into employees of the state was socialism — with the unsurprising result of discrediting socialism for many.

So what is anarchism? Simply libertarian socialism, anti-state socialism. It is a socialist — egalitarian — critique of both capitalism and state. It recognises that liberty is a social relationship between people and so advocates federalist association for freedom and equality are interdependent as freedom cannot meaningfully exist if inequality of wealth results in the many selling their labour and liberty to the few.

Anarchism's goal is to replace the State with a decentralised, federalist, communal one and to replace the theft and despotism of capitalism with free workers co-operating together as equals.

These were Proudhon's conclusions when he studied the France of his time, its inequities and injustices and those movements that were stirring amongst those experiencing it.

These ideas were what inspired the French mutualists to help found the International Working-Men's Association in 1864. It was these ideas which Bakunin embraced and championed after he joined it and, as a consequence, grow in influence and helped shape them in the direction of revolutionary anarchism rooted in the labour movement. It was these ideas which subsequent anarchists have built upon.



HISTORY

Paris rebels 1871



First International: Part Two of our historic summary

The first part of this article appears in Black Flag issue 236. It covers the founding of the First International in 1864 from its roots in French mutualist tradition and British trade unionism to the emergence of syndicalist currents in 1870 and the rise of Mikhail Bakunin.

In Paris, as winter ushered in a militant mood in 1871, an attempt was made to establish a revolutionary commune for the city.

Radical Internationalists did not take an explicitly anarchist position, calling instead for the creation of a “workers’ and peasants’ Republic.”

But this “republic” was to be none other than a “federation of socialist communes,” with “the land to go to the peasant who cultivates it, the mine to go to the miner who exploits it, the factory to go to the worker who makes it prosper,” a position very close to that of Bakunin and his associates.

After the proclamation of the Paris

Commune on March 18th, 1871, the Parisian Internationalists played a prominent role. On March 23rd they issued a wall poster declaring the “principle of authority” as “incapable of re-establishing order in the streets or of getting factory work



going again.” For them, “this incapacity constitutes [authority’s] negation.” They were confident that the people of Paris would “remember that the principle that governs groups and associations is the same as that which should govern society,” namely the principle of free federation.

The Commune’s program, mostly written by Pierre Denis, a Proudhonist member of the International, called for the “permanent intervention of citizens in communal affairs” and elections with “permanent right of control and revocation” as well as the “total autonomy of the Commune extended to every township in France,” with the “Commune’s autonomy to be restricted only by the right to an equal autonomy for all the other communes.”

The Communards assured the people of France that the “political unity which Paris strives for is the voluntary union of all local initiative, the free and spontaneous cooperation of all individual



Nationalist zealot: Giuseppe Mazzini

energies towards a common goal: the well-being, freedom and security of all.” The Commune was to mark “the end of the old governmental and clerical world; of militarism, bureaucracy, exploitation, speculation, monopolies and privilege that have kept the proletariat in servitude and led the nation to disaster.”

For the federalist Internationalists, this did not mean state ownership of the economy, but collective or social ownership of the means of production, with the associated workers themselves running their own enterprises. As the Typographical Workers put it, the workers would “abolish monopolies and employers through adoption of a system of workers’ co-operative associations. There will be no more exploiters and no more exploited.”

The social revolution was pushed forward by female Internationalists and radicals, such as Nathalie Lemel and Louise Michel. They belonged to the Association of Women for the Defence of Paris and Aid to the Wounded, which issued a declaration demanding “No more bosses. Work and security for all — The People to govern themselves — We want the Commune; we want to live in freedom or to die fighting for it!” They argued that the Commune should “consider all legitimate grievances of any section of the population without discrimination of sex, such discrimination having been made and enforced as a means of maintaining the privileges of the ruling classes.”

Nevertheless, the Internationalists were a minority within the Commune, and not all of them supported the socialist federalism espoused in varying degrees by Eugène Varlin, Jean Louis Pindy and the more militant Proudhonists. The federalist and anti-authoritarian Internationalists felt that the Commune represented “above all a social revolution,” not merely a change of rulers. They agreed with the Proudhonist journalist, Auguste Vermorel, that “there must not be a simple substitution of workers in the places occupied previously by bourgeois ... The entire governmental structure must be overthrown.”¹

The Commune was savagely repressed by French state forces, with the connivance of the Prussians, leading to wholesale massacres that claimed the lives of some 30,000 Parisians, including leading Internationalists like Varlin, and the imprisonment and deportation of many others, such as Nathalie Lemel and Louise Michel. A handful of Internationalists, including Pindy, went into hiding and eventually escaped to Switzerland.

For Bakunin, what made the Commune important was “not really the weak experiments which it had the power and time to make,” but “the ideas it has set in motion, the living light it has cast on the true nature and goal of revolution, the hopes it has raised, and the powerful stir it has produced among the popular masses everywhere, and especially in Italy, where the popular awakening dates from that insurrection, whose main feature was the revolt of the Commune and the workers’ associations against the State.”

Bakunin’s defence of the Commune against the attacks of the veteran Italian revolutionary patriot, Giuseppe Mazzini, played an important role in the “popular awakening” in Italy, and the rapid spread of the International there, from which the Italian anarchist movement sprang.

The defeat of the Paris Commune led Marx and Engels to draw much different conclusions. For them, what the defeat demonstrated was the necessity for working class political parties whose purpose would be the “conquest of political power.”

They rammed through the adoption of their position at the September 1871 London conference of the International, and took further steps to force out of the International any groups with anarchist leanings, which by this time included almost all of the Italians and Spaniards, the Jura Federation, many of the Belgians and a significant proportion of the surviving French members of the International.



Auguste
Vermorel

There must not be a simple substitution of workers in the places occupied previously by bourgeois

In response, the Jura Federation organised a congress in Sonvillier, Switzerland, in November 1871. Prominent Communards and other French refugees also attended. They issued a circular to the other members of the International denouncing the General Council’s actions, taking the position that the International, “as the embryo of the human society of the future, is required in the here and now to faithfully mirror our principles of freedom and federation and shun any principle leaning towards authority and dictatorship,” which was much the same position as had been endorsed by a majority of the delegates to the 1869 Basel Congress.

The Belgian, Italian and Spanish Internationalists supported the Jura Federation’s position, with the Italian and Spanish Internationalists adopting explicitly anarchist positions. Even before the London conference, the Spanish Internationalists had declared themselves in favour of “collective property, anarchy and economic federation,” by which they meant “the free universal federation of free agricultural and industrial workers’ associations.”

The Italian Internationalists rejected participation in existing political systems and in August 1872 called on the federalist and anti-authoritarian sections of the International to boycott the upcoming Hague Congress and to hold a congress of their own. Marx and Engels manipulated the composition of the Hague Congress to ensure a majority that would affirm the London conference resolution on political action, expel Bakunin and his associate, James Guillaume of the Jura Federation, from the International, and transfer the general council to New York to prevent the anti-authoritarians from challenging their control.

Barely a week after the Hague Congress in September 1872, the anti-authoritarians held their own congress in St Imier where they reconstituted the International along federalist lines. The St Imier Congress was attended by delegates from Spain, France, Italy, Switzerland and Russia.

For them, “the aspirations of the proletariat [could] have no purpose other than the establishment of an absolutely free economic organisation and federation, founded upon the labour and equality of all and absolutely independent of all political government.”

Consequently, turning the London conference’s resolution on its head, they declared that “the destruction of all political power is the first duty of the proletariat.”

They regarded “the strike as a precious weapon in the struggle” for the liberation

of the workers, preparing them “for the great and final revolutionary contest which, destroying all privilege and all class difference, will bestow upon the worker a right to the enjoyment of the gross product of his labours.”

Here we have the subsequent program of anarcho-syndicalism: the organisation of workers into trade unions and similar bodies, based on class struggle, through which the workers will become conscious of their class power, ultimately resulting in the destruction of capitalism and the state, to be replaced by the free federation of the workers based on the organisations they created themselves during their struggle for liberation.

The resolutions from the St Imier Congress were ratified by the Italian, Spanish, Jura, Belgian and, ironically, the American federations of the International, with most of the French sections also approving them.

The St Imier Congress marks the true emergence of a European anarchist movement, with the Italian, Spanish and Jura Federations of the International following anarchist programs. While there were anarchist elements within the Belgian Federation, by 1874, under the influence of De Paepe, the Belgians had come out in favour of a “public administrative state” that the anarchist federations in the anti-authoritarian International opposed. The French Internationalists contained a prominent anarchist contingent, but it was not until 1881 that a distinctively anarchist movement arose there.

In his memoirs, Kropotkin wrote that if the Europe of the late 1870s “did not experience an incomparably more bitter reaction than it did” after the Franco-Prussian War and the fall of the Paris Commune, “Europe owes it ... to the fact that the insurrectionary spirit of the International maintained itself fully intact in Spain, in Italy, in Belgium, in the Jura, and even in France itself.”

One can say, with equal justification, that anarchism itself as a revolutionary movement owes its existence to that same revolutionary spirit of the International from which it was born in the working class struggles in Europe during the 1860s and early 1870s.

It was from those struggles, and the struggles within the International itself regarding how best to conduct them, that a self-proclaimed anarchist movement emerged.

■ *Robert Graham is the editor of Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas, a three-volume anthology of anarchist writings from ancient China to the present day. His history of the emergence of European anarchist movements from out of the First International, We Do Not Fear Anarchy—We Invoke It, has recently been published by AK Press.*



By Robert
Graham



Historic anarchist town: St Imier and, above, a recent anarchist bookfair held in the town
Photos: Kurt Zwahlen & Jan Zuppinger/CC

References

1. Proudhon's 1848 "Election Manifesto of Le Peuple" expounded an identical vision of a social structure based on mandated and recallable

delegates ("imperative mandate") and an economy run by a "universal association" of workers' co-operations (Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph

Proudhon Anthology [Edinburgh/Oakland/Baltimore: AK Press, 2011], Iain McKay (ed.) 371-381) while his advocacy of federalism is well known.

Revolution – and the fall of Victor Serge

Radical Reprint: While still calling himself anarchist, Serge tried to convince comrades to follow Lenin's path, to the disgust of Italian activist Luigi Fabbri

In the latest edition of *Vie Ouvriere* to have arrived from Paris, we find a long letter from a Russian comrade, Victor Serge, known in France — where he lived before 1915 — under the pseudonym of Kibaltchitch. He writes from Moscow about the Russian Revolution, living as he is in the middle of it all.

In truth, he has no news to deliver.

His letter is, more than anything else, a polemic against the newspaper *Le Libertaire* which he takes to task for keeping faith with our beliefs, according to which, if we may quote Bakunin's phrase, the authoritarian communists' notion that a revolution can be decreed and organised "either by a dictatorship or by a constituent assembly, is quite mistaken." Kibaltchitch thinks otherwise. He has changed his mind and is a supporter of the so-called proletarian revolution.



But as is the policy of every renegade who is, or appears to be, sincere, he deludes himself that he has evolved and reproaches the anarchists who have stayed faithful to their own principles with being traditionalists, of being stick-in-the-muds, whereas anarchism — so he says — is not traditionalist and not static but dynamic. Precisely! But he fails to appreciate that

under the pretext of breaking free from a so-called anarchist tradition, he fails into the orbit of the old statist, authoritarian tradition of the bourgeois socialists, if not directly into the absolutist and militaristic tradition of the ancien regimes.

He is the very archetype of the anarchist who has moulded anarchy like a beautiful dream of his imagination, because, deep down, he has little faith in it: and as soon as events crop up, in the face of which he is called upon to abide by his own ideas, even should it cause friction, conflict and sacrifices, he promptly scampers off in the opposite direction.

And to any who might be surprised by this, he replies: "One has to march in step with life, and face reality. One has to remain on the terrain of facts."

This is precisely the same language employed in 1914 by anarchy's other renegades in their embrace of war-mongering policy, renegades who forgot their own principles and whose assertions were so brilliantly exposed as false by our [Errico] Malatesta.

Kibaltchitch is a State anarchist (the contradiction between those two words is indicative of his wrongheaded stance) just as Grave and Malato were in 1914: just as the Vanderveldes, Guesdes and Bissolatis were State socialists, except that they were less at odds with their own teachings. just as the interventionists of 1914-1915 used to call us traditionalists and worshippers of words, and argued, as Kibaltchitch does, that one had to revise one's own ideas in the light of the reality of the facts, etc., But just as they were unable to offer anything in place of anarchist ideas other than the empty, deceitful verbiage suitable for bourgeois democrats, so Kibaltchitch too can offer no more details as to how and in what particulars anarchist ideas stand in need of amendment and he simply retreats behind the "phenomenon occurring" in Russia in order to mouth the authoritarian marxist formula about the State being an instrument of revolution.

He, like some other anarchists we know, has failed to understand that the most important part of the anarchist programme

consists, not of some far-off dream, which we would also like to have come true, of a society without masters and no government, but, above all else, of the libertarian notion of revolution, of revolution against the State and not with the State, the notion that freedom is also a means as well as an end, a more appropriate weapon against the old world than the State authority preferred by Kibaltchitch and less of a two-edged sword, a weapon less treacherous than that authority.

Therein lies the whole essence of the anarchist teaching: Not sprung all at one stroke ... but deduced from the experience of previous revolutions, from contact with which and in the heat of which, after 1794, 1848 and 1871, people like Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, Arnould, Pisacane and Lefrancais, etc. ... have drawn the appropriate lessons which the First International largely adopted as its own and which are known today by the generic description of anarchism.

If one denies this revolutionary function of anarchism, one is an anarchist no more. If the whole of anarchism consisted of a distant vision of a society without government, or of the individual's assertion of self, or of the intellectual and spiritual conundrum of abstract individual perception of lived reality, there would be neither need nor room for an anarchist political or social movement. Were anarchism only an personal ethic for self-improvement, adaptable in material existence to the most widely divergent actions, to movements that would fly in the face of that existence, we might be called "anarchists" whilst belonging to other parties, and the description "anarchist" might be applied to all who, even though intellectually and spiritually liberated, are and remain our enemies in terms of practicalities.

But that is not how we understand it, nor do those who have detected in anarchism, not some means of retreating into an ivory tower, but a revolutionary proletarian movement, an active involvement in the emancipation of the workers, with equality and freedom alike as its criteria and its object!

Kibaltchitch, who does not accept that object, automatically places himself outside the anarchist family. In order to stay within it, when he reaches conclusions of his own, he implicitly admits that he is neither an anarchist nor an anarchist-communist. He confines himself to the assertion — I am a communist.

That comes within an ace of flying false colours, for it is far from certain that, as he contends, communism is of itself anti-State and libertarian in its immediate aims, as soon as they can look upon the State not as some impediment and deviation, but as a weapon against the old world. He deceives himself and deceives us when he seeks to reconcile dictatorial communism with anarchy, since Lenin himself cautioned (in *The Reconstructive Task of the Soviets*) that “anarchism and anarchist syndicalism are irreconcilable with proletarian dictatorship, with socialism, with communism.” Socialism and communism in the sense in which Lenin understands them, which is to say, Bolshevism.

Whilst we wait to hear from Kibaltchitch just what this non-traditional anarchism is, we note that his own is more properly described as a non-anarchism. Indeed, he speaks in the most pessimistic manner possible about the Russian anarchist movement which so flourished in 1905, 1906 and 1917-18. “After having done the revolution immeasurable service and afforded it a legion of heroes — he says this Russian anarchist movement has been rent by utter ideological, moral and practical confusion.”

That would be depressing news indeed, if we did not know already that all who quit one party for another discover that everything is going from bad to worse in the one they have just left. All renegades see things through the same spectacles! Our reply is that a movement that has been strong enough to do the revolution immeasurable service and provided a legion of heroes cannot be destroyed so easily.

It may perhaps have happened in Russia as it has in other revolutions that the burning idealism and revolutionary vigour of the combatants may have paved the way for the ruling party, which later disposed of them, or rather, rid itself of those who proved incapable of accommodating themselves to becoming functionaries of the new government and who were unwilling to forswear expression of their own dissenting ideas.

Kibaltchitch might supply us with news of Emma Goldman and let us know if it is true that this courageous woman, who arrived in Russia brimful of faith in and enthusiasm for the revolution, is presently walled up in the prisons in Moscow. Let Kibaltchitch try to get hold of Russian language anarchist papers, and if he can find none, let him tell us why and let us know if it is true that the anarchist press is not allowed under the dictatorship. That would account for the “destruction” of the Russian anarchist movement better than subtle distinctions between traditional and non-traditional anarchisms.

If these be baseless rumours and calumnies, let him deny it — himself or someone else — for it is right that light should be shed on events in Russia, even from the revolutionary point of view, from the point of view of liberty, now that the threat from the Western states has been neutralised and the Moscow government

senses victory. For example: is there any truth in reports of compulsory labour in Russian factories, military discipline, extended hours, restricted wages, bans on strikes, etc? It is not important that we should know about steps taken against the bourgeois, reactionaries, nobles, monks, etc. and we might even endorse those, but the important thing is that we find out what effective freedom is enjoyed by proletarians, revolutionaries, our anarchist comrades: freedom of the press, freedom of association, freedom of thought, freedom of enterprise, etc?

And it is on those counts precisely that we are kept most in the dark.

In his article, Kibaltchitch talks only of the least important matters: intellectual work on Communist Party history, open air festivals and theatres, etc. Even the Roman tyrants offered the people “bread and

international bourgeoisie.

We know all that, but we are convinced that for some of its afflictions, especially its internal afflictions, the Russian revolution is indebted to its dictatorial character, to its government and those who govern. “This is no time to call it to account for its sins,” says Kibaltchitch. Perhaps. But nor should a veil be drawn over mistakes or others be encouraged to repeat them.

What, in essence, would Kibaltchitch like? That even the French anarchists abjure their principles so as to join the communist faction of the Socialist Party, “in order to reduce the dangers of State socialism and combat the influence of power.” Very well, charge! We know from all too great experience that all who have defected from anarchism to authoritarian socialism have ended in the worst reformist-legalitarian and authoritarian hyperbole. The best



Dispute: Luigi Fabbri (left) and Victor Serge

circuses” and it is very true that in Russia there are spectacles aplenty and the news that food supply in Moscow and Petrograd is better than before is a comfort to us too.

But Kibaltchitch does not talk to us about what most interests anarchists, precisely because they are anarchists — that is, freedom. And should the reports reaching us from various quarters, and which we have spelled out above, are correct, that would confirm our profound belief that communism without anarchy, communism in its statist form, is the negation of freedom. When Kibaltchitch says that “communism itself in its governmental form guarantees the individual greater well-being, more happiness and more freedom than any other current form of social organisation” he is saying something that, to say the least, still awaits practical substantiation.

As he himself admits, in Russia today, there is none of that. We are well aware that a large part of the reasons why the revolution cannot bring the Russian people greater well-being, comfort and freedom can be put down to the infamous blockade by the capitalist countries, to the war waged against the Soviet Republic by the Entente powers, and to the countless, unspeakable acts of infamy perpetrated against it by the

means of bringing an effective anarchist influence to bear is to stay an anarchist in one’s ends as well as in one’s means.

But Kibaltchitch says that dictatorship is a means, a weapon, just as much as a revolver. “All violence is dictatorial!” Thus does our Russian ex-comrade indulge in a rather fraudulent play on words.

By insulting it, he confuses the violence of the rebel with the violence of the gendarme: the violence of a risen people against that of the oppressor government, the violence of the breaker of shackles, breaking free and freeing others with the violence of the State, not that of the revolution: and although it may claim and hold itself to be revolutionary, dictatorship holds the revolution in check and drives it off course.

Rejecting, resisting and lining up with the opposition to that certainly does not amount to “withdrawing from the fray,” as Kibaltchitch argues, but instead amounts to prosecuting a different action which is simultaneously more revolutionary and more libertarian.



REVIEWS

It's not all about BRANDING

Manifesto: A famous TV motormouth got political this year, but what were the real implications of it?

Revolution

£7.99

ISBN: 978-009959-4-93-2

by Russell Brand

Pub. Arrow

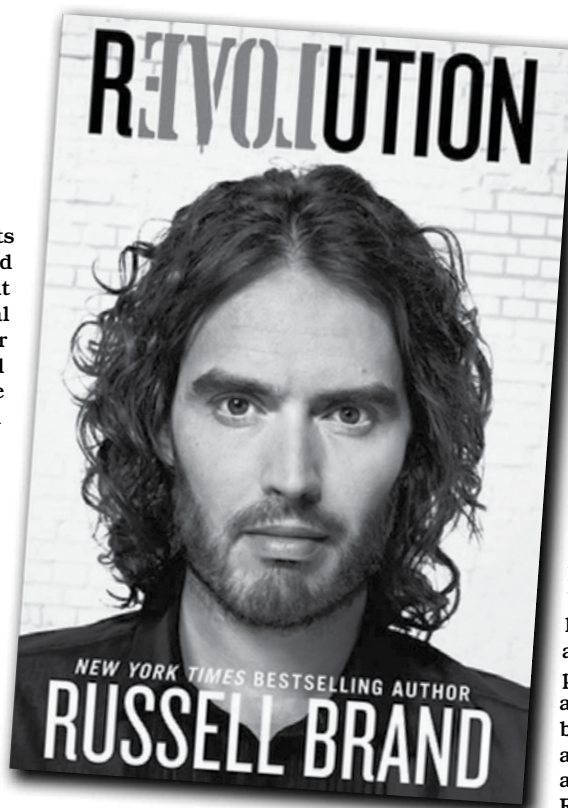
384 pp

One of the more bizarre developments of the last year has been Russell Brand or, more correctly, the response that he has provoked across the political spectrum. Watching commentator after commentator froth at the mouth and seeing Cameron proclaim in the middle of an election campaign that a comedian was a “joke” was, to say the least, strange. It reached a (to use a word Brand would surely approve of) climax when it was proclaimed by the right that Ed Miliband was “getting into bed” with Brand — by having an interview with him. Seriously? Did Cameron get into bed with Paxman then?

What is going on here? The over-the-top demonisation suggests one thing — that Brand has touched a nerve. Why? Perhaps we need to revise some history. Brand's book *Revolution* starts as you would expect with his Paxman interview and his unashamed admission that he had never voted, that he felt none of the parties represented his views, that the system was corrupt and needed to be changed by the people from below. This provoked a response which was interesting, not least that some expected that Brand should discuss his alternative in some detail.

This was somewhat unfair. Why should anyone — not least a comedian — be expected to provide a detailed blueprint to replace a system which is obviously not working (at least for the many)? Not least because if you are arguing that a key issue with the current system is that people are disempowered and have no say then it hardly makes sense to announce a ready made social system which said people are expected to simply implement!

We can also be sure that if he had produced



one then he would have been denounced as an authoritarian elitist seeking to impose his preferences on the masses.

This is what produced *Revolution*, as Brand himself states at its start, which leaves the task of reviewing it. Now this is where it gets tricky. I could review it as a contribution to political theory with my best anarchist activist hat on. That would be incredibly po-faced and, fundamentally, missing the point. So I will review it for what it is, a work of autobiography that aims to get various ideas — most of which are libertarian in essence — across to those who know Brand via his stand-up and forays into TV and films (i.e., me) or read *Booky-Wooky* and its sequel (not me).

This is important, for the book is

fundamentally an autobiography — *Booky-Wooky 3: This Time It's Politics* — and so “Brand, Russell” is the longest entry in the index. This should come as no surprise to those who have seen him in stand-up — he does an amusing line of self-centred but somewhat self-depreciating humour which is reflected in this book. While many people label him as narcissistic, I don't see this as being an issue. Being partial to a bit of Egoism (communist-egoism, naturally), I'm not going to berate someone for being focused on themselves — after all, what is revolution and socialism about unless it is about creating a world you are happy in and wish to live in? The self-sacrificing dour-faced moralism of much of the left has never been that appealing — as can be seen from its steady decline.

The first thing to stress is that Brand has found God (spiritualism may be a better word). This makes some of the book hard going, for me at least. Then there are the enthusiastic assertions about the power of transcendental meditation, which again I found unconvincing. Much of the book describes his new found spiritualism and his belief in the interconnectedness of all life. This is reflected in the title, with *Revolution's* evol reversed into love in a nice shade of red. I think most anarchists will not be too interested in this aspect of the book but, then, we are not the audience it is aimed at.

So what of his analysis and alternative? I think it is fair to say that most people will not be expecting Russell Brand to produce a work of deep political thought. He does not disappoint in that respect — it is not so much “Chomsky with nob gags” as “summarising Chomsky with a few nob gags thrown in.” Given this, it comes as no surprise that the book varies widely in tone and subject, covering aspects of autobiography to illustrate his own political awakening and ideas while summarising other people's work — notably, anarchists like Noam Chomsky and David Graeber. His commentary on Orwell's account of anarchist Barcelona is amusing and

Photo: D B Young/CC



to the point, as are his comments that the Ten Commandments don't mention homosexuality. His throwaway comment on 9/11 conspiracy theories distract from his serious points — like workers' control, decentralisation, federalism, etc. These are basic anarchist ideas and they are reaching a bigger audience, which can only be good.

The book's basic message is that if he can change then we can change both ourselves and the world. This is a refreshing message and it is good that he is using his fame to push ideas we take for granted out of the libertarian movement into wider society.

He is stressing the need for direct action as well community activism, and that is a good thing. He is urging the replacement of capitalism with co-operatives, the end of wage-labour by associated labour, creating a decentralised system which empowers people to manage their own lives, communities, workplaces and, ultimately, world.

So the book reflects a journey (sorry, this feels like a cliché but it will have to do), one which is obviously not finished yet. Is *Revolution* confused? Yes. Are Brand's politics completely correct and coherent? No. But potentially they are — and they are more correct than many on the left. Overall his message is quite reformist and hardly utopian — if we ignore the spiritualism aspects and his claims for it — replacing corporations with co-operatives, decentralising power, etc.

So why the backlash? Partly because he is exposing the "Elephant in the Room" with his comments on not voting. You do not say things like that in polite society. He touched a nerve and as he cannot be refuted he must be demonised.

From an anarchist point of view, he has raised the notion that not voting is not apathy but can be conscious political act which shows disdain for a corrupt system as well as saying that this is not the only system possible.

So if he gets even a few of his readers interested in the people he summarises — Chomsky, Graeber, Orwell — or gets them reading about anarchist ideas or active in direct action community and workplace groups then all for the best. And I'm sure he would be the first to agree.

As I mentioned Brand's interview with Ed Miliband, it would be remiss to mention developments after the book's publication. He famously backed the Greens in Brighton and urged a Labour vote in England and Wales to keep the Tories out (from the context, the implication was to vote SNP in Scotland). Much was made of this, with some proclaiming Brand a hypocrite. Personally, I was not surprised for he actually did not proclaim a principled opposition to voting but rather that the current parties did not deserve his vote. This implied that if a party came around which he considered as decent then he would vote.

This can easily result in advocating tactical voting, something which — as the LibDems discovered to their cost — is widespread.

While some anarchists do make not voting into a point of principle, this just fetishises something which is a tactic. Anarchists are against voting because you cannot achieve socialism by those means. In this, we have won the argument. No self-proclaimed Marxist, bar the Socialist Party of Great Britain of course, agrees with Marx that the working class can liberate itself by means of "political action." Rather, it is a case of using elections for propaganda reasons or for getting Labour into power so people can see their limitations. Either way, it is used simply to build the party rather than for the reasons Marx supported it for.

So the anarchist critique, that political action produces reformism, has been proven correct to such a degree that even Marxists usually echo it.

This is not to deny that decent, principled people can get elected and stay that way. People like Mhairi Black, Caroline Lucas and Tony Benn are, however, the exception. That they are so rare is shown by the very fact people remember their names.



You can count them on one hand. Nor is it to deny that some parties are worse than others — the Tories in power always make Labour more appealing — and that tactical voting can work in the sense of getting the lesser evil in office.

However, we must always remember that it is still an evil — so it does not matter if you vote or not, the government gets in and we need to organise in our workplaces and communities to tame it until such time as we can smash it. This would have been true even if Ed Miliband got the keys of Number Ten and it is still true for those of us who have Nicola Sturgeon's anti-Austerity rhetoric not being matched with her government's actions.

Brand suggested that a Labour government would be more likely to be swayed by political protest from below and that was the main reason why he urged people to vote. Yet he seems to have forgotten that it was a Labour government which ignored the mass march against war in 2003. Indeed, Blair's rejection of this mass protest was a major factor in current cynicism about politics and, of course, it emboldened subsequent governments to "make hard decisions" and ignore public opinion and protest. Brand should have challenged Miliband more on that.

going to make it even harder to strike. Similarly, Miliband, as usual with Labour politicians and their apologists, pointed to the NHS and other feats of the distant past while failing to mention that Labour as much as the Tories undermined those achievements.

Yes, Labour nationalised many industries back in 1945 but they did not put them under workers' control and Labour under Miliband could not even suggest letting the privatised train franchises expire!

Why does this happen? At one point in his book Brand rightly notes that those who fund a political party will get what they paid for in terms of friendly decisions and legislation.

This is obviously the case with Brand's example — companies and corporations — but he does not mention that Labour is funded by the trade unions and — regardless of the Daily Mail's hysterics — it is clear that the "union bosses" (i.e., union officials who, unlike actual bosses, are democratically elected) do not get to pick the tune or the dance. This points to an obvious issue with Brand's position — if, as he suggests, a party did appeal to him and the general public and it were voted into office why expect it to reflect its supporters interests any more than Labour does?

an anti-parliamentarian movement based on direct action.

So Brand has identified and exposed a truism which most commentators and politicians do not want to admit: the system is corrupt, people have little influence, parties do not represent people but those who fund them (unless it is Labour and their trade union "masters", of course!). However, he still has some illusions that the system could be reformed into a real democracy if we elect the right people although he does recognise the need for pressure from below to keep them in check. The next step will be to recognise that while pressure from below is needed for reforms and to tame the state, the state itself — like capitalism — cannot be reformed away and that a consistent anti-parliamentary socialism from below is needed.

Will Brand make that step? Hard to tell but one thing is true, he won't be encouraged to take it if he is attacked simply for his past and because he has not reached the position we would like him to.

For anarchists Brand's book will not be that enlightening. While some chuckles will be produced, he is not saying anything we don't already know while wrapping it around a core of mysticism and religion. For non-anarchists, his book does raise the idea of ending capitalism with co-operatives, direct action, decentralisation, building the new world today and the need and possibility of real change. That a relatively well-known figure is raising these ideas means more people will become aware of them and that can only be a good thing.

Of course, this may all be a passing phase. Little Steven of the E Street Band got political and produced a series of increasingly radical albums in between 1984 and 1989 ("Voice of America", "Freedom - No Compromise" and "Revolution") before stopping and doing some acting along with continuing to back Bruce Springsteen. Still, his songs are still there and may inspire others to find out more.

Will the same happen to Brand? Who knows but it would be crazy to force him to abandon a promising path due to personal dislikes or failure on his part to have reached the correct conclusions as quickly as we would like. Some seem to forget that no one is born an anarchist and none become one overnight.

Finally, the more serious (i.e., po-faced) Marxists dismissed his book while the opportunists (like the SWP) were uncritical about it (probably because they want donations from and/or publicity via him at some later stage).

He deserves neither (saying that, in the unlikely situation Brand actually reads this, Black Flag could do with a cheque for £1,000 to eliminate our historic debt to our printers). Brand is raising important issues and is clearly learning as he does so. We can expect missteps and mixed messages. This is to be encouraged and so while the average anarchist will not gain much from Revolution it may get an audience which we do not usually reach interested in social change. If it does, then Brand should be congratulated.



Milibrand: Many were disappointed by a last-minute turn to Labour Photo: Andrew Skudder

Miliband also argued that we need protest and "politics" (i.e., voting) to change things and placed the focus on politics (unsurprisingly).

Yet the example of the equal pay act he pointed to shows that this is not the case. It took direct action to get that law passed and inequality still remains — worse, the strike that forced the matter into the public consciousness would be deemed illegal today and would never have happened. Is Labour proposing to change that? No, at best they were — unlike the Tories — not

The reason why this happens is because the State is not an instrument of popular power. It has evolved to secure minority rule, to exclude the many. Its centralised and hierarchical structure is there for a reason — to disempower the many so that the few can enjoy their wealth and the power that comes with it.

Governments are in office, not in power, as they are subject to the pressures of business and the permanent state bureaucracy. This can only be countered by pressure from below which means building



Short stories: Tales from the workforce are affecting

Lines of Work: Stories of Jobs and Resistance

\$21.95 (£14.31) from akpress.org
ISBN: 978-192687-8-13-3
Edited by Scott Nikolas Nappalos
Pub. AK Press
242 pp

Lines of Work is a fascinating, at times bleak and emotive volume of stories about work and its effect on our lives. How fitting then, that my review copy was waiting for me after my usual 20-minute trip home from work had stretched to four hours, thanks to the flooding in Wellington of May 14th 2015.

Work (with a little help from the weather) had kept me away from my loved ones even more than it already does on a day-to-day basis. That period after clocking out was clearly not my own time, but that of capital.

The 32 stories in Lines Of Work explore similar examples of contemporary working life. It brings together texts originally published on *Recomposition*, an online publication run by a collective of worker radicals based in the US and Canada. Written between 2009 and 2011, we hear from a range of people in various jobs, including non-profit organisations (which are no different from the rest).

The writers are not professionals, and rightly so — the purpose of Lines of Work stems from a desire to link and explore the everyday experiences of people who work as an organising tool.

As we know, “the personal is political,” and Lines of Work is an example of a radical praxis that supports the power of discourse without drifting into a Foucauldian abyss.

“In the eyes of dominant culture and the opinions of political culture” writes editor Scott Nappalos in the introduction, “stories play second fiddle.

“In political life, literature is at best an emotional tool for theory, something to motivate people around a cause or worse, simply pure entertainment.” Yet “looking at stories in that way is out of step with working life. The lives of working-class people are filled with stories people share every day about their struggles, perspectives, and aspirations” (p1).

With this in mind, Lines of Work asks us to take a serious look at the way stories can help us build a better society. “There is something powerful in the process of someone who participates in struggle finding a voice to their experiences ... reframing the role of stories requires us seeing this process as both part of being an active participant in social struggles, and as a way to participate” (p2).

In doing so a transformation can occur, opening “up space for deeper work” (p2). Stories about work should be seen “not only for their beauty, tragedy, and

motivating power in our lives, but also as a reflection of workers grappling with their world and creating new currents of counter-power autonomous from the dominance of capital and the State” (p7).

Stories of work, therefore, are a “part of workers’ activity to understand and change their lot under capitalism ... through storytelling, [the stories] draw out the lessons of workplace woes, offering new paths and perspectives for social change and a new world” (blurb).

As another reviewer has pointed out, “a good amount of these jobs—finance,

accounts of trying to correct problems at work, and collective lessons that came out of those struggles” (p7).

What struck me about this section was the arbitrariness that so many workers have to deal with in their day-to-day work, from not being allowed to celebrate birthdays to managerial changes to a roster.

These are not tales of general strikes or historic moments, but stories of little struggles: of the mundane yet important tasks that can either foster resistance or keep a workforce down. Some victories are shared, but so are many losses and regrets at what happened, or what could have been done differently.

“Time” was my favourite section and the largest in the book. It covers “the world of work, in all that it demands and takes from us” (p7).

What this means is spelled out in rare, intimate detail, and in a way that instantly resonates (well, for me at least). Travel to and from work, repetitive on-the-job tasks, shitty customers, shitty bosses, sexism and difficult workplace conversations, racism, identity, class, job control, poor health, despair—are explored across workplaces totally different yet unsurprisingly the same.

I light-heartedly explained this to a friend as “the commonalities of crappiness.” But in all seriousness, what is great about this book is how the stories connect the common elements of working life, and place our own experiences of work into an international context.

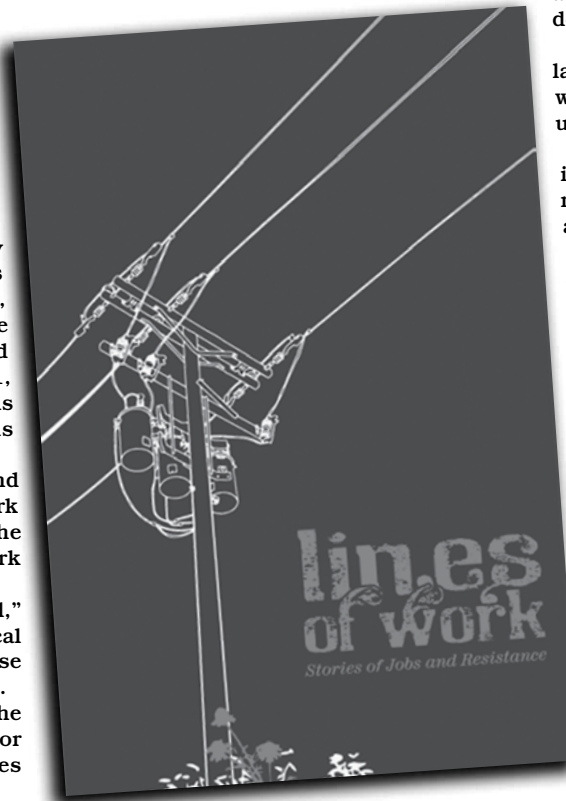
The section titled “Sleep and Dreams” shares examples of how capital invades what is supposedly our “own” time: our sleep. Who hasn’t dreamed about work? Had a nightmare of turning up to work a job they quit years ago?

“Awaking from a work dream only to find one’s work day only beginning is perhaps one of the banal horrors shared most widely by the entire worldwide proletariat.” These stories of dreams and (lack of) sleep are sad yet fascinating in their own right.

But the underlining idea of un-free time and the reproduction of capital (in the form of what we do in between clocking out and signing in) is a strong critique of work as a separate activity of life—of alienation.

It is the perfect way to end an engaging and highly readable expose of contemporary working life, and how unnatural the wage relation truly is.

■ *The Recomposition Collective can be found online at recomposition.info*



food service, clerical work, manufacturing bullets for imperialist wars—are not the seeds of a future society but a blight on the present one.

There is no straight line from these jobs to a libertarian communist society, nor are most of them (except for the bullet factory, really), strategic ‘choke points’ of capital, as the present theories of circulation dictates that we seek out.

A revolutionary struggle would be waged to eliminate these jobs, not to make them cooperative”. Yet this is not necessarily the point of the book. While it may lack the “what next” element some readers crave, Lines of Work is a welcome addition to the subjective aspect of working-class experience that is often missing from theoretical accounts of struggle.

In Lines of Work, the stories are organised into three sections: resistance, time, and sleep. The theme of “resistance” “gives

By Jared
Davidson



Anti-austerity action in Perth, Scotland



Case study: Tony Cox

At the Perth meeting Mike Vallance called for solidarity with Tony Cox who appeared at court in Forfar, again, in October.

Andy said this was essential, not just for Tony's sake, but because increasing austerity, and us fighting back against it is bound to mean that there will be more arrests.

Tony, an activist from Scottish Unemployed Workers Network, is being backed by the IWW, Edinburgh Anarchist Federation and Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty over his arrest following a dispute at Arbroath jobcentre in January.

Tony was accompanying a vulnerable woman claimant, who suffers from severe dyslexia and literacy problems. She been signed up to the Universal Job Match, the computerised job search system, and was being forced to complete five job searches per day,

which had led to several panic attacks.

Jobcentre bosses called police rather than deal with Tony acting as an advocate, and his case was heard on October 13th 2015, following a two-day series of protests in favour of the right to advocacy. Charges of "threatening behaviour against him were dropped, but the case was again strung out with a November 18th case being set to hear charges of "resisting arrest."

A recent "Anti Austerity Action" conference in Perth was very successful and very positive. Around 60 people attended from various different groups, from all over Scotland.

The full sessions were jointly chaired by Katie of Perth Against Welfare Sanctions (PAWS) and Andy of Dundee Against Welfare Sanctions (DAWS).

The conference started off with a welcome from the organisers, then introductory talks from participating groups (limited to three minutes per speaker, no long speeches allowed). Then there was discussion on the way forward, based around co-operation, co-ordination, and solidarity.

After that, we split up into three "workshops" on different aspects of the struggle. These workshops were:

1. Direct action against workfare and co-ordination of this on a Scotland-wide basis (introduced by Mike Vallance from Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty, ECAP, and Sarah Glynn from the Scottish Unemployed Workers Network, SUWN).
2. Sharing tactics, and experiences for organising and sustaining new groups, introduced by Mike Taylor (DAWS).
3. Linking up industrial and community struggles, introduced by myself (from Radical Independence Campaign, RIC, Angus group), and Andy (DAWS).

In the third workshop I started off by talking about the life of early IWW activist Joe Hill, which saw him sometimes working, sometimes, unemployed, sometimes helping others, and sometimes being the recipient of "charity."

That is reality — any of us in the working class can be sometimes working, and sometimes unemployed. The lie of a division between "hard working people" and "scroungers" is ruling class propaganda.

While it is of course essential to fight back against welfare sanctions etc, industrial struggle is vital.

We are the working class, we are the class from whom the workers are drawn, and it is that fact which gives us the power to challenge, and ultimately to defeat, capitalism and the ruling class.

Andy spoke about the experience of struggles in Dundee — linking the hospital porters' strike with DAWS and with the campaign against Menzieshill school closure. He said it was vital the Porters' Support Group was independent of the trade union organisation.

He said the message from full-time union officials to workers on strike is "keep away from them outside agitators," but when workers see that you are genuine and not just seeking to build support for some party or candidate, they are prepared to ignore that advice.

Andy mentioned pickets of SNP offices in Dundee (Shona Robeson is Scottish Health Minister) and also my proposed "patients protest" inside Ninewells Hospital, which was due to go ahead when a better offer came through, which was accepted.

The strike was a success, and there is little doubt that the solidarity being shown by the Porters' Support Group contributed significantly to that success.

There were also contributions to the discussion by Jean from Castlemilk Against Austerity, by Katie about the fight against the bedroom tax and then the formation of PAWS. Dominic spoke about the need for action by those workers whose jobs involve implementing government austerity policies.

After the split into three different workshops we all got together again for report backs in the final session.

Mike Taylor of DAWS said they have no "magic formula", and people do have to be flexible according to local circumstances, but they do have considerable experience to share, as well as always being open to learning new things.

Folk who are enforcing government policy don't tell people their legal rights, we need to make folk aware that they do have rights. Mike also pointed out that the "austerity" policies being implemented both by Westminster and Holyrood will mean things are going to get worse for a great many people. The coming winter will be hard and we have to be ready with both solidarity and the message of fighting back.

Sarah of SUWN and Mike of ECAP both spoke about experiences of taking direct action against companies, agencies and charities which use workfare's forced labour.

In general discussion, a motion of support for the Justice for Sheku Bayo campaign was unanimously carried.

That concludes this report, but it is just the beginning of wider co-ordination of anti-austerity campaigning. As a result of that conference we now have a considerable network of folk prepared to show solidarity with each other.

By Dave
Coull





Mass dissent: October 10th, 2015 saw huge crowds rally in Berlin against transnational trade deal TTIP, an anti-worker mashup between the US and EU aiming to drag down rights on both sides of the Atlantic
Photos: Rettet den Regenwald & Leif Hinrichsen/CC

In colour: Trip up TTIP





Antarctica: Today's newborns may well live to see the total collapse of the Southern ice shelves, according to research published in Nature Geoscience.

Photo: rammteiner18