£4.00

Stormy Petrel

Class Struggle, Solidarity and Mutual Aid

Name change

"We are the birds of the coming storm" - August Spies, anarchist militant and Haymarket martyr, executed by the US government in 1887.

This second issue of the theoretical and historical magazine of the Anarchist Communist Group has now been re-named Stormy Petrel. Its original name, Virus, was in commemoration of the magazine of the same name, originally edited by the late Colin Parker, which became the voice of the Anarchist Communist Federation in the 1980s.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have decided to rename the magazine Stormy Petrel, after the Stormy Petrel bird, which was seen as a herald of coming storms. The Russian poet Maxim Gorki wrote The Song of the Stormy Petrel in 1901 and it is a coded call for revolution, coded because of Tsarist tyranny. It proved very popular in Russia and was translated into many languages. Gorki himself became known as the Stormy Petrel of the Revolution.

The poem was popular in anarchist circles and Burevestnik (Stormy Petrel) was a paper published by Russian anarchist communists in exile in Paris and then Geneva between 1906 and 1910. Burevestnik was later the title of the daily paper brought out by the Petrograd Federation of Anarchist Groups in 1917-1918. The German-American anarchist communist Claus Timmermann edited Der Sturmvogel (Stormy Petrel) between 1897 and 1899.The name has also been applied to anarchist militants like the Russian sailor Anatoli Zhelezniakov, the Spanish militant Buenaventura Durruti and the Scottish anarchist Ethel MacDonald.

Song of the Stormy Petrel

High above the silvery ocean winds are gathering the storm-clouds, and between the clouds and ocean proudly wheels the Stormy Petrel, like a streak of sable lightning.

Now his wing the wave caresses, now he rises like an arrow, cleaving clouds and crying fiercely, while the clouds detect a rapture in the bird's courageous crying.

In that crying sounds a craving for the tempest! Sounds the flaming of his passion, of his anger, of his confidence in triumph.

The gulls are moaning in their terror--moaning, darting o'er the waters, and would gladly hide their horror in the inky depths of ocean.

And the grebes are also moaning. Not for them the nameless rapture of the struggle. They are frightened by the crashing of the thunder.

And the foolish penguins cower in the crevices of rocks, while alone the Stormy Petrel proudly wheels above the ocean, o'er the silver-frothing waters.

Ever lower, ever blacker, sink the storm clouds to the sea, and the singing waves are mounting in their yearning toward the thunder.

Strikes the thunder. Now the waters fiercely battle with the winds. And the winds in fury seize them in unbreakable embrace, hurtling down the emerald masses to be shattered on the cliffs.

Like a streak of sable lightning wheels and cries the Stormy Petrel, piercing storm-clouds like an arrow, cutting swiftly through the waters.

He is coursing like a Demon, the black Demon of the tempest, ever laughing, ever sobbing--he is laughing at the storm-clouds, he is sobbing with his rapture.

In the crashing of the thunder the wise Demon hears a murmur of exhaustion. And he knows the storm will die and the sun will be triumphant; the sun will always be triumphant!

The waters roar. The thunder crashes. Livid lightning flares in storm clouds high above the seething ocean, and the flaming darts are captured and extinguished by the waters, while the serpentine reflections writhe, expiring, in the deep.

It's the storm! The storm is breaking!

Still the valiant Stormy Petrel proudly wheels amid the lightning, o'er the roaring, raging ocean, and his cry resounds exultant, like a prophecy of triumph--

Let it break in all its fury!

Editorial
The Deadly Disease: Capitalism

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and aggravated the various tensions within late capitalism. In Brazil, Britain and the USA, where Bolsonaro, Johnson and Trump were elected on right wing populist platforms, the new governments have proved woefully incompetent in dealing with the pandemic, resulting in increasing numbers of deaths. In Britain, the Johnson regime was wedded to the idea of herd immunity. Faced with a widespread backlash against this, it was forced to make a U-turn, although Johnson and his advisers like Dominic Cummings remain covertly committed to the disastrous herd immunity policy.

This, and the prioritisation of profit over health, are behind the drive to re-open schools and colleges, pubs, and the entertainment and sports industries. Many workers are being asked to work in unsafe environments. Many more will be asked to do so as they return to work over the coming period.

A No Safety, No Work campaign has been launched. This is a campaign to be led by workers trying to keep themselves and others safe at work in the time of Covid 19. We know that the working class cannot rely on employers or the government to keep us safe. It is supported by a number of revolutionary groups, including the ACG, the Haringey Solidarity Group, the Birmingham Revolutionary Anarchist Group, Organise! In Northern Ireland, and Angry Workers of the World.

Tens of thousands of people have died in this pandemic, and even more are killed in the work place every year. None of these deaths were inevitable but were the results of the greed of the bosses and the rulers of our society. As more and more people are returning to work, the government has not passed a single law guaranteeing workers safety but has issued guidance to employers. This is not enough to keep us safe.

The boss class is already preparing to launch austerity measures after the pandemic crisis is over, in order to snatch back profit and to make us, the mass of the population, the working class, pay for something they have signally failed to control, and which has killed many of us, whether they be health workers, bus drivers or the elderly in care homes.

George Osborne, the former Tory Chancellor of the Exchequer, and now editor of the London Evening Standard, set alarm bells ringing when he wrote in an article that after the lockdown, more austerity measures were needed. We should be reminded that he was one of the architects of previous austerity measures which decimated the NHS and caused our health and social services to groan under the pressures of the pandemic.

Michael Gove has also hinted that massive rescue packages to businesses, as well as money paid out to furloughed workers, will have to be paid for "in due course". For his part, Rishi Sunak, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, has said that the money "will need to be paid back at some point" and of "chipping in together to right the ship". Osborne was echoed by the German Minister for Economy, Peter Altmaier, in Germany who said "Once the crisis is over - and we hope this will be the case in several months - we will return to austerity policy and, as soon as possible, to the balanced budget policy." Indeed, many major companies are already inflicting austerity measures on their own workforces. The travel company Expedia, for example, asked its workers to voluntarily reduce their working weeks, whilst the pub chain Wetherspoons suggested that its workers take other jobs during the lockdown.

The austerity measures over the last few decades, pushed by governments wed to market values, has, in the UK, caused an increase of 165% in rough sleeping, whilst life expectancy has stalled, and the number of those living below the poverty line has soared. Meanwhile average real wages only went back to their 2008 peak at the end of 2019. All of this has now been exacerbated by the pandemic, with a prediction of an extra 5 million unemployed by the end of the year.

Italy is now in a state of virtual bankruptcy, and other southern European states are not far off this, indicating further austerity measures there, another "iron cage of austerity" as former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis styled it. Greece and Italy's spending on health is well below the EU average, thanks to the austerity measures imposed on them. We should remember that these austerity measures, both here and in the rest of the world, are actually costing many thousands of lives. Here the availability of hospital beds, went to a new record low in 2019. The same goes for France, where a much-admired health system, is in a diabolical state, thanks to the cuts it has sustained over the years, not least under current President Macron. In America, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, who now

portrays himself as a sane answer to Trump, was responsible for cutting $400 million from hospitals in his State and for empowering his budget director to make further cuts in the future.

We can now see more clearly that policy makers are basing their neo-liberal policies on a profound disinterest in human lives. The governments that imposed these measures are guilty of mass murder, as is the European Union, and the International Monetary Fund. There is little sign that they will break with these disastrous and murderous policies. But the pandemic has revealed that what is most important is our health and the need for a caring society based on mutual aid and solidarity. Their plans for more years of austerity must be countered and new oppositional movements must be created to resist them.

The number of pointless, "bullshit" jobs, is another reason for the lack of preparednesss for the pandemic. The COVID-19 virus has shown that many jobs are far from essential, yet at the same time has shown that the really important jobs for society such as in health and care, cleaning, transport, and postal services, are understaffed and underpaid. These pointless jobs have been created because in this society, in order to obtain basic goods, you need an income, and in order to have an income, you need a job. Capitalism is guided by the principle of exchange value.

Bizarrely the pandemic has resulted in governments wed to neo-liberalism and the free market, adopting emergency measures which include the nationalisation of various services, in other circumstances seen as anathema to the same free marketeers. Thus in Spain, private hospitals have been nationalised, in Britain the government has taken control over sections of the transport system, and in France there have been statements from the Macron regime about its possible plans to nationalise large businesses. On top of this, various governments, including the UK, have been prepared to pay out furlough payments to large numbers of workers for not working! This goes against the general principle of capitalism that one has to work to earn an income, apart from a reserve pool of unemployed.

The pandemic has actually cast doubt on the need to throw everything open to the free market, including public services, which are increasingly run as businesses with a strata of highly paid and bullying managers determined to marketise the health service and the postal services. In addition, the British government was forced, albeit on a temporary basis, to house the large numbers of homeless living on the streets in many towns and cities, resulting in the question that if it was possible to do this during a pandemic, why was it not possible in more "normal" times?

Meanwhile, humanity is still facing the ever-increasing environmental crisis from which COVID-19 itself sprang. This environmental crisis is signally being ignored by most governments around the world, including the Johnson regime. It cannot be left to them, as they will fail to deliver, tied as they are to the profit motive and the need for capitalism to produce, (and in some instances to climate denial like the Bolsonaro and Trump regimes). Only increasing movements wedded to mass direct action can bring about effective change, but this means a linking to action on all the social problems created by capitalism. That means an all-encompassing social revolution.

Building Resilient Communities: The Challenges of Organising Locally

This article is based on a talk given by the ACG for the Anti-university Week in June 2019.

The only way we can build a revolutionary movement that involves the mass of the working class is to be embedded in day-to-day struggles in the workplace and in the locality. Though there are links to be made with the workplace, here we focus on the locality, often referred to as community.

People live in a particular place, often far from work. In cities work and home are often separated by many miles and long commutes. This means that some may not spend a lot of time at home, and often need to rest and recover from the working week when they finally arrive there, and therefore are not keen on getting involved in political activity where they live. Nevertheless, there are many critical issues that relate to where people live including housing, health and services, and the environment (green spaces, pollution). Political decision-making is also based around a geographical place with local councils making many decisions that affect people's lives. We therefore need to be present in campaigns and struggles where we live.

In a future society the locality will become much more important. In an anarchist communist society the wide separation between work and home will be greatly reduced and the main unit of organisation will be the commune, which will include production, distribution and consumption, services and general decision-making. As a step on the road to the revolutionary transformation of society, we need to begin to put in place some structures and forms of organisation that prefigure the commune- in other words, building up self-organised communities.

Why we need communities

People may live in a locality but it is not a community. Communities are places where there are connections between people, where people have shared interests and concerns. Divisions will exist because people are not identical but there needs to be something holding them together so that they can work together towards a common goal. Without communities, we cannot organise. Communities do not have to be based on a locality; they can be communities of interest, e.g. football supporters, hill walkers, environmentalists or anarchist communists. There are also now many online communities. Still, the physical, face-to-face communities are crucial for social change to happen.

The term 'community' is a common feature of political discourse: consultation with the local community, community leaders, what the local community think/want. Policy makers and politicians talk of 'community- led regeneration'. In Scotland, community is a central plank of land reform with the 'community right to buy' and 'community ownership'. However, the word 'community' is often misused, referring to something that doesn't actually exist. A community, as defined above, must be based on connections between people, and some sense of a shared identity and interest. In reality, many so-called communities today, are nothing but a bunch of people who live in the same geographical space- locality but not community. There are a number of reasons why people do not make the necessary connections to form a robust community.

As previously mentioned there is a separation of work from where people live. In a city like London, people will chose where to live based on cost of housing so will often be far from where they work. Even in the smallest villages where you would have expected there to be more sense of community, many residents may commute into a city and therefore not have much to do with where they live apart from their family. In general, people move around a lot so that family and friendship groups are separated. People may grow up in a particular area of London or Glasgow but housing costs will force them to

move elsewhere. Insecurity of tenure also means that people have to move about- often from one borough to another. People also have to leave their home area to find work. In rural areas, young people will move to cities, causing the decline of the smaller towns and villages. In some cases councils have deliberately moved people away from their social networks. Because of high housing costs, London boroughs have exported their housing problem- sending, for example, single mothers as far away as Hastings. This continual movement makes it difficult for people to put down roots and form connections, as well as losing the connections they once had.

The design of cities and the car culture makes it harder for communities to form. High Streets and local markets are under threat from shopping malls and hypermarkets. Shopping has always been a social activity where people would run in to friends, have a chat and go for a cup of tea. It is hard to see the same sort of connections being made at the shopping malls. Instead of walking to the local market people will drive out of town to the big chain store developments, meeting no one they know at any point. This isolation is exacerbated by the lack of communal social spaces where people can mix. Many community centres and youth clubs have been closed.

Road closed to allow families to meet up and give children the space to play.

Localities are also incredibly divided and without common struggles and interests this is a major obstacle to building up real communities. There are divisions based on income, ethnic group, religion, local and incomer, lifestyle and political views. It is these sub-communities that often make up the locality and it is difficult to bring them together. Different groups will have their own meeting places, e.g. mosque or church, political social space, or recreational club. This is why when people talk about consulting the community or community-led regeneration it is difficult to know who they are actually talking

about; people may have very different views and consultation processes will not include many of the weaker voices. And even within the sub-communities there are divisions. There are many mosques and churches that may have widely different views on a range of issues so that talking about the Muslim community or communities of faith is misleading. Even in smaller places there will be more vocal people who may be better off or have more time on their hands and will therefore be able to make themselves heard better than others.

Creating communities

Divisions also exist in the workplace with clear hierarchies and many jobs segregated on gender or racial lines. But at least everyone is in the same physical space and there are some structured connections to each other, common interests and a common enemy. In a locality, building these connections and overcoming divisions is much harder to do. Nevertheless, it is imperative that we do so.

Some divisions will not be overcome and we would not want to. The division between the ruling class and the working class is a fundamental inequality that cannot be overcome by appeals to unity in the community. For example, large landowners often use this argument- that they are part of the community – in order to maintain their paternalistic dominance. The rich will always have very different interests to that of the working class.

We need to build the unity amongst the working class. This will involve identifying what people have in common, such as problems with housing, even if people might be in different tenures. It helps when there is a common enemy, for example if the council is going to close a nursery, market or a community space. People can unite against cuts in general even though they may have different needs in terms of council services. It is not healthy to ignore differences. Any effective and inclusive strategy needs to recognise that people have a variety of concerns and that their interests may diverge sometimes. But this has to be done in such a way that unites rather than divides, stressing the concepts of mutual aid and solidarity. Environments can be created where people feel comfortable airing their own concerns and where conflicts can be managed in a friendly and respectful way.

Many people have worked hard to build up communities in their localities and they have used a number of initiatives. It is vital that there are physical spaces where people can meet together. It is all very well communicating online

but in the end to create real connections between people they have to meet face-to-face, forging social bonds and respect. It is possible to unite people around campaigns that aim to create that social space. Fights for more green and open space, community gardens, local markets, community kitchens and for more car-free zones will both bring people together as well as creating common community spaces.

Certain issues unite people more than others. General campaigns around land issues- gaining access and control of land for a community need, whether that be for housing, food, social or recreation reasons, could resonate with everyone. The difficulty is integrating people's particular interest with the more general issue. For example, gaining control of a piece of land that might have been sold to a private developer and then working together to satisfy a number of needs on the site, such as social housing, food, community space and green areas, would be a way of uniting people around a common aim. This is the idea behind the St Anne's Community Trust in north London *(http://www.start haringey.co.uk/).* They were able to have access to the land of an ex-mental hospital that the council was going to sell off to developers. They are now in the process of working out the plans for this. Of course there are divisions and frictions, but the fact that they are working together is very positive step. The same is happening on the site of Holloway Prison, though in the earlier stages *(https://plan4holloway.org/).*

Another group that managed to bring people together is the Friends of Queen's Market. The market in east London is incredibly diverse both in terms of stall and shop owners and those who shop there. They may have prejudices against other groups in the market and shoppers may be divided along religious or ethnic lines, but they all have something in common which is to preserve the market and save it from the hands of the developers. The group has managed to unite so many different people that would normally not work together - with a woman in a burkha sitting next to a traditional east London cockney stallholder *(http://www.friendsof queens market.org.uk/index2.html).*

Another interesting group is the Clapton Ultras. They have now disbanded because Clapton Community Club was formed and the supporters are now part of the co-operative *(https:// www.claptoncfc.co.uk/).* They brought a general anti-bigotry message into the local football scene in Newham in East London. They were supporters of the Clapton Football team, known more for the enthusiasm of their supporters than for the success of the team.

"Autumn 2012 – a small group of East London football nomads, priced out of League football, decided to set down roots at our closest ground. A few cold months, standing with the long-serving, yet diminished, Clapton support at the Old Spotted Dog, we fell for the Tons as we learnt about its social history and local significance. We decided to get involved and lend our support to help the revival of one of East London's last remaining amateur club. We were inspired by active supporter involvement, characteristic to both non-league football and the ultras movement and were encouraged by our players, coaches, ultras groups, football fans from other clubs, and local community groups. This is what matters to us, and that football is accessible to as many people as possible, an ideal which is responsive and ongoing" *(http://www.clapton ultras.org/).*
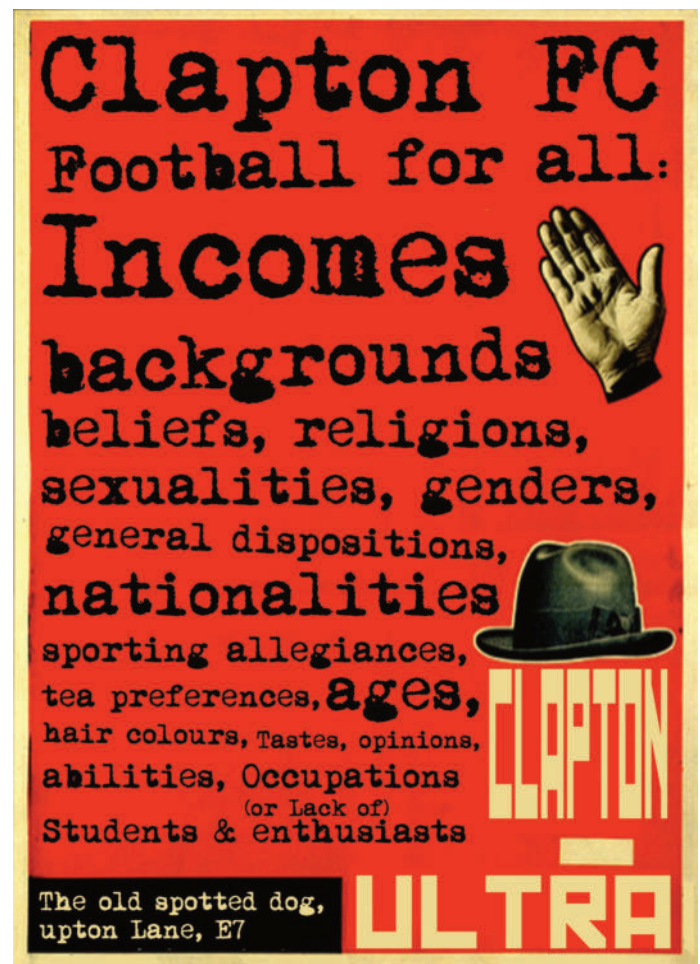
Putting on events and activities that bring people together is an important part of any strategy. Friends of Queen's Market does regular stalls and special events for various holidays. The Granville Community Centre in northwest London has loads of activities and events *(https:/ /thegranville.org/whats-on/).* They are able to do this because they have worked hard to get the physical space, which shows how important it is for people to get hold of land/property.

A presence on social media is of course important but even more important in some respects is having a local newssheet that can be given out to a range of people who may not normally be looking at your social media. One example is the Alternative Estuary *(https://alternativeestuary.home.blog/)* which exists as a blog and also as a local community paper (when not in lockdown!). One of the main features of such a media presence is that it can make links between different issues- promoting a variety of campaigns and struggle, making people aware of all that is going on.

Another important principle is that one needs to deal with prejudice and bigotry which will certainly come to the fore at some point if a large section of the community is brought together. It is not a question of denouncing in righteous voices any out of order comment but of dealing with it quietly but firmly. It is hoped that by working together many of these attitudes will begin to disappear. Of course if someone is disruptive and very offensive then it will be necessary to remove that person from the campaign/group. But we cannot expect people to have fully developed anarchist communist views so we need to learn how to effectively deal with such attitudes.

Grenfell: A Case Study

The Grenfell fire and its aftermath illustrates many of the issues discussed so far. The fire was such an extreme event that it brought people together, both within the tower itself and in the surrounding locality. Prior to the fire there was a Grenfell Action Group but this by no means represented even a fraction of the residents, who came from such diverse backgrounds that they did not mix very much despite the best efforts of GAG to unite them around health and safety issues in the tower. The surrounding area was also diverse with different sub-communities based on religion, politics or other. The fire

changed that to a large extent as people came together in an outpouring of grief, mutual aid and solidarity that extended to other parts of London. Divisions were put aside as people struggled with the day-to-day issues of surviving. Though this legacy remains to an extent, divisions soon appeared once the immediate crisis was past. Soon 'community leaders' came forward to speak on behalf of some part of the community and different support groups formed. The survivors of the fire soon felt swamped by all the different groups that they formed their own group *(https://www.grenfellunited.org.uk/)*. There were divisions based on tactics and strategy with Grenfell United seen to be less militant than Justice4 Grenfell *(https://justice4grenfell.org/about/)*.

The problem is the lack of a united community before the fire. Without those connections and structures in place it was difficult to keep up a truly united community when there were so many divisions: political, cultural, and economic. Nevertheless, Grenfell and its surrounding locality certainly will have a much more united feel than other areas of London. The memory of the event and the on-going struggle for justice keep people together.

Conclusion

Despite the frequent use of the term 'community', it is clear that these do not exist automatically simply as a result of people living in the same locality. They need to be created out of everyday struggles. Building resilient communities is a long-term process that requires hard work, commitment and consistency from those who believe, as we do in the ACG, that organising in communities, along with the workplace, are the essential components of building a revolutionary working class movement.

Community Activism in South Essex

Talk given by Dave, a long-term community activist, for the Anti-university June 2019.

Preamble

I'd like to thank the ACG for inviting me to share my experiences of community activism. Hopefully, the following will play a small part in improving our understanding of what 'community' actually means and also, help in resolving the issues all of us face when working in our neighbourhoods.

The IWCA Years

Some of the most valuable lessons I learnt about community organising came from my time with the Independent Working Class (IWCA). As well as helping out branches in Blackbird Leys (Oxford) and Islington, I also stood in 2007 and 2008 as a candidate in the Stanford East & Corringham Town ward. This ward is in an area of predominantly post WW2 overspill housing plonked out on the edgelands of the Thames Estuary in Essex.

As soon as I started slogging round the streets canvassing, I started to learn some interesting lessons. The most important one being that by and large, most people are pretty much apolitical and only think about politics if there's an election coming round. Pinning people down on the political spectrum did actually prove difficult as people would be pretty progressive on some issues and quite reactionary on others.

The lesson learned was that in any form of community organising, we have to start with where people are and accept that it's going to be an ongoing process to get them moving towards where we'd like them to be.

Vange Hill/Tenure/Community Churn

Along with our comrades from Basildon & Southend Housing Action (BASHA), we spent a couple of years working alongside the Vange Hill Community Group (VHCG). As with our days in the IWCA, when it comes to working with community groups, you have to start from where you are and gradually turn them round to your way of thinking.

Vange Hill is a housing estate on the southern fringes of Basildon that has more than it's fair share of problems. What remains of the social housing on the estate has been passed onto a number of housing associations who don't seem to have fully grasped the concept of accountability.

A fair sized chunk of the social housing that was lost to 'Right to Buy' has ended up in the hands of private landlords as 'Buy to Let' properties. Too many of these landlords are getting away with doing the bare minimum necessary in terms of maintaining their properties.

On the Vange Hill Estate, there are a lot of 'Homes of Multiple Occupation' (HMOs).

These HMOs are let to a wide range of tenants ranging from groups of migrant workers through to people with mental health / addiction issues desperate for any kind of roof over their heads. We found one horror story while undertaking a community clean up when we met a young woman housed by the local authority in a house with four other men!

The problem on an estate with a large number of HMOs with a continuous churn of tenants is that it's hard to build a sense of community.

Going back to our IWCA days, when I helped out on an election campaign in Islington in 2005, because they only have elections every four years, one of the activists said to me that on some estates where homes had been purchased with the specific purpose of being let, it would mean a churn of 30% in the tenants, making it harder to build a permanent base of support.

As well as the churn from the number of HMOs, there's also the issue of properties being brought up by London based housing associations, Local Space Stratford being one of them, to house people being socially cleansed from the capital.
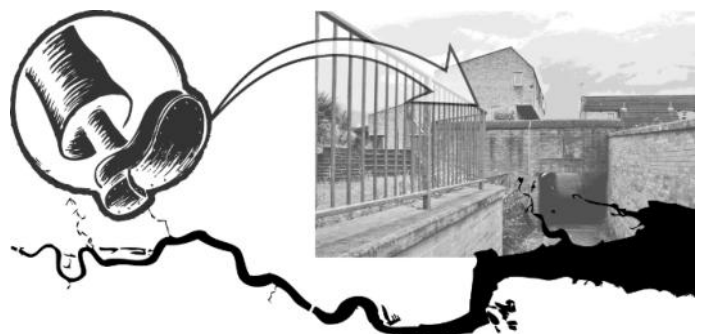
We've spent more time than we care to remember explaining to the locals on the Vange Hill estate why this is happening, putting it in the broader context of the housing crisis in London and the social cleansing that results as a consequence.

Apart from a few hardcore bigots who because of their own far right leanings refuse to listen, generally, we've made some headway in getting our analysis across.

So, one of the major issues is the perception that community spirit in Vange Hill is under threat because of the number of HMOs and the churn in the population this causes.

Most of the long standing residents accept that there's always going to be a degree of churn in the neighbourhood as people come and go.

What they resent is that fact that they have absolutely no say, let alone control, over the future of their neighbourhood.

The problem is that there are elements of the far right lurking in the shadows who are only too happy to start exploiting this resentment for their own ends.

Luckily for us, at the moment, the far right don't have any significant presence in Basildon which gives us some leeway.

Hardie Park

I'd like to conclude on a more positive note with a few words about a community project I'm involved with where I live in Stanford-le-Hope. This is the transformation of Hardie Park, formerly a neglected park that was once a no go area for a lot

of people and has now been transformed into a much loved and used, resident run local park. It started with a few residents undertaking litter picks, clean ups and the like.

It grew from there to a more formal project which admittedly works within the system to secure funding that somehow isn't available from the local authority.

The thing about the park is that apart from a couple of paid staff, it's run by volunteers. All of the volunteers agree that their experiences working at the park has made them feel more confident and empowered. I'm one of the volunteers in the gardening group – we're pretty much left to get on with it.

The interesting thing about the group is that there's no hierarchy – projects are jointly discussed and when consensus is reached, they're implemented. As for the way the group operate on their regular gardening day of Friday, there's no boss telling any of us what to do – apart from a brief discussion over a coffee beforehand, everyone knows what has to be done, picks a task best suited to their physical ability and gets on with it.

Whisper it – they're anarchists but they don't know it!

That level of engagement has made a significant difference to the sense of community in Stanford-le-Hope.

The project certainly doesn't tick all of the boxes an anarchist purist would want to see but as pragmatists, we see more than enough positive aspects to it to give it our active support.

Conclusion

I've dealt with a range of situations, some that are quite difficult and others that offer some kind of hope. Taking the above into account, my feeling is that a sense of community comes from involvement and the knowledge that makes a positive difference. Which is why we do our level best to support and when we can, facilitate, grassroots projects that will bring people together, empower them and start to make a real difference.

Mutual Aid during the Pandemic: Charity or Solidarity?

COOPERATION BIRMINGHAM — SOLIDARITY IN SEPARATION

What is mutual aid?

MUTUAL AID IS THE VERY SIMPLE IDEA THAT ONLY IN COOPERATION (AND NOT IN COMPETITION, LIKE WE HAVE BEEN TOLD) WE THRIVE.

IT IS THE IDEA THAT WE HELP EACH OTHER AND WE DON'T LEAVE ANYONE BEHIND.

BUT ABOVE ALL THAT, IT IS THE IDEA THAT TOGETHER WE ARE POWERFUL.

Mutual aid is a principle made famous by the anarchist theorist Peter Kropotkin, after the zoologist Karl Kessler. Darwin's influential theory of evolution had 'the survival of the fittest' as a key concept. This was misinterpreted by apologists for capitalism as a rationale for ruthless competition and gave birth to what became termed Social Darwinism – poverty and wealth reflected people's skills and the natural order rather than human-made power relations, that is, the ownership and control of resources by bosses and landlords. In fact, Darwin had argued that co-operation is more important than competition for the progressive evolution of humans and other species. Kropotkin, a trained geologist, brought evidence to bear which showed that co-operation was prevalent amongst the most successful species, including our own and that survival and prosperity was greatly dependent upon it.

Anarchist communists have long drawn attention to people organising and supporting their fellows in the aftermath of both 'natural' disasters and those created directly by people such as the Grenfell Fire and the current Covid 19 pandemic. This distinction itself is often false, as many 'natural' disasters are caused by humans, for example, the many fires and floods caused by climate change. There is often a vacuum in the immediate aftermath of disasters where the State disappears. Because it exists to protect the power and wealth of the capitalist class, not to ensure the health and well-being of all its citizens, it will only intervene if capitalism itself is at risk. Working class self-organisation often emerges to make sure that communities receive food, medical aid, shelter etc. This mutual aid has sometimes been described as 'disaster communism'.

Mutual Aid in the current pandemic

The Covid 19 pandemic has seen many groups and networks organising to make sure that the elderly, the socially isolated and vulnerable receive food and medication and that health and care workers have masks and nutritious food. Many of them have adopted the 'mutual aid' tag.

This 'spontaneous' response raises some important questions, the answers to which may not at this stage be definitively answered. If mutual aid groups are going to be part of a medium and long-term strategy for class power, rather than charities in all but name, we need to discuss the following:

- **To what extent is this mutual aid, as anarchist communists would define it? Or, are they acting more as charities rather than as groups with solidarity at their centre?**
- **Can some of this organisation be extended or developed as solidarity groups when we are back to a (new) post Covid-19 'normal'?**

Maybe it was inevitable that many mutual aid groups became 'service' rather than solidarity groups given their immediate tasks of supporting the vulnerable and the diversity of composition. Just as casework is a poor way of building workplace organisation, a support service is not likely to build a community of resistance.

But, as the Revolutionary Anarchist Group say in this edition of Virus "'Mutual Aid' took on a universalist humanitarian character, drawing participants from across the class and political divide." The few initiatives which started from a class perspective, tended to be swamped by those whose approach was to keep the groups apolitical or whose understanding of Kropotkin's concept was superficial.

The small organisations of the libertarian left, including our own, were unable to organise a nation-wide response because we are generally too miniscule and insufficiently embedded/ organised in our communities. However, locally, activists engaged with and, in some cases, initiated mutual aid groups, on an ad-hoc basis.

But the experience of groups on the ground during the pandemic has been varied. Below are some accounts of different experiences of mutual aid groups which we have found interesting.

Experiences

South Essex

An activist says 'with regards to us and our comrades in Basildon the [Mutual Aid] model is simply one of neighbours in the road or block looking out for each other and doing what they can....No FB [food bank] groups involved – just physically distanced face to face conversations or phone calls....where there's an existing community project such as the resident run park in Stanford-le-Hope, the volunteer groups there have seamlessly slipped into looking out for each other and delivering mutual aid. The structures to do this were pretty much in place as part and parcel of being a volunteer group. There's one interesting project in Southend – crops NOT shops – who have been out and about guerrilla gardening *(https://thehecklersewca.wordpress. com/2020/05/30/crops-not-shops-reshaping-communities-lockdown-special/).* They saw what happened with shortages at the start of the crisis and set about helping residents/community groups set up their own vegetable and fruit growing plots...there's no one size fits all model for mutual aid at the community level. It's a case of locals knowing what each other needs and either adapting what's already there or creating something specific to the circumstances. Given what could well be coming over the coming months and years, reviving the local mutual aid/ solidarity groups is definitely the way forward'.

Cambridgeshire

A Cambridgeshire mutual aid network was set up near the beginning of the crisis by a local member of the Industrial Workers of the World, but it quickly became so big in terms of volunteers that it had to split off into more local groups, which run mostly autonomously with a bit of central admin to help with resources and passing on requests. I was made aware of my local group by a leaflet that they had printed and passed through the door, providing a phone number, email address, and WhatsApp group I could contact them on.

They have been taking on quite a few regular responsibilities—delivering food parcels provided by a local church, offering dog walking volunteers for the self-isolating—along with the more off-the-cuff requests for prescriptions, shopping and specific items. What's been nice to see is that many of the posts have also been the other way around: people offering spare food or items of furniture free of charge.

Recently, the city council approached the group with a list of people they had identified as "medium risk"—not high risk, but people who get help from the council in some way (e.g. they have help taking their bins out, or something). When going around this list of addresses, it seemed to be houses that they just hadn't had any response from in a while—some of the addresses didn't even exist!

I have a lot of hope that the group will be able to carry on after this crisis. It has fostered a really strong sense of community (I only moved to the area last December, but I've spoken to some of the other locals on my delivery rounds and they all seem to agree that they've met people through this that they didn't know before) that I think will persist. Most notably I think that it is doing a lot of jobs for people that the council are unable/ unwilling to provide, and I think any organisation that shows that the people can do a better and more efficient job than the state is quite useful for promoting revolutionary attitudes.

The buying co-op I find even more exciting! I can imagine many ways it could grow into more of a multi-faceted commune arrangement—for example, some of the members could offer labour (manual or otherwise) in some way to local farmers in exchange for lower group prices, and others could offer to help physically deliver the food, etc.

One very effective way of promoting revolutionary attitudes is to lead by example—to set up communistic networks, and show that they are far more efficient and useful than the

state, and far fairer and kinder than capitalism—and I think that if we manage to put forward ideas of direct democracy, decentralisation, and communal labour and resources, in these groups and our communities, by being leading voices in them, then we could really stoke some revolutionary fire.

In dialogue 9 of *At The Café,* when explaining how we would persuade people that anarchist communism is a better system to live under than the current one, Malatesta writes:

> "…*we will create communism and anarchism among ourselves… when we are in sufficient numbers to do it—convinced that if others will see that we are doing well for ourselves, they will follow suit.*"

Scrub Hub (SH) an autonomous Mutual Aid response to Covid-19

(from an interview between Jim Donaghey and Katya Lachowicz at AnarchistStudies.Blog)

'Scrubs are pyjama-like clothing that health workers wear and change to prevent cross contamination. On Covid wards they need to be changed about ten times a day and therefore there was a huge increase in demand. The UK was unprepared, and it soon became apparent that there was a huge shortage. Often workers had to provide their own.

The Scrub Hub (SH) initiative started in Hackney Wick, East London in mid-March, and rapidly blossomed into 127 groups across England, Scotland and Wales, each operating independently under the umbrella of the SH network.

The Newham group were producing 900 scrubs ordered by 160 health workers for themselves and colleagues. At the peak there were 200 volunteers involved; numbers dwindled as people return to work, but demand for scrubs persists.

Producing scrubs was seen as a way of undertaking political action at a time when so much was put on hold due to lockdown. Much organisation was involved: sourcing material, press and social media, outreach to health workers and volunteers, structuring safe and sane working conditions, developing data systems for order collection, tracking progress and stock levels, distributing materials.

SH was set up with different principles to another network- For the Love of Scrubs (FTLOS) which had been created by a nurse. The FTLOS made scrubs for the NHS and were apparently unconcerned whether their unpaid production could affect waged workers demanding better conditions. In contrast, Scrub Hub was set up as a grass roots workers co-op, that wouldn't make scrubs for NHS Trusts but took orders directly from health workers, delivering directly to their homes. Even when scrubs became available on the market, the price had risen due to price gouging, meaning many health workers couldn't afford them.

SH consciously set out to be non-hierarchical, starting with a WhatsApp group, followed by a team of skilled sewers as a separate group. It was a struggle to ensure the network kept to these principles. "We are fighting against a certain neo-liberal culture of the organisation of work which deliberately alienates workers from mutuality, which places emphasis on hierarchy, 'expertise' etc. And even within the development of our own hub we had these difficulties to contend with, especially with regard to the ownership of work." Many of the collective's volunteers were professional seamstresses or tailors with no previous experience of collective work but soon adapted to this way of working, sharing tips on how to do things and supporting each other.

"Of course, the reasons for people's participation vary and a lot of people have expressed that it has helped deal with the psychological impact of the crisis. But this is because we ourselves have constructed conditions of dignity, human interaction and care in purposeful practices of work".

The other contribution to the development of practice on mutual aid was the way links were

made between producers and consumers. Though unpaid, the scrubs producers were providing the products directly to those who needed it rather than relying on capitalist enterprise. Nevertheless, being unpaid is a problem and does rely on good will and volunteers. But SH is keen to argue that they are not a charity but mutual aid. Charity is different from Mutual Aid because the latter is based on horizontal structures of solidarity and an emphasis on community building. Still, they had to get the money for materials- a challenge for all mutual aid groups that aren't just distributing things made by companies.

The future?

"In the short term our WhatsApp groups have created something really worth keeping and a lot of the participants are looking to create "legacy projects", for example some are sewing a huge quilt with fabric squares donated by volunteers wishing to participate. It's different to what perhaps we would consider as a potential prospect within the framework of mutual aid, but it definitely has an affective value to the people participating in it and this is an important factor. People used the Whatsapp groups in a variety of ways – helping each other sew, fix machines, and people have even started bumping into each other in the streets – these are all very important aspects of community building, and we're not entirely sure how to place ourselves in the future. For now, a few of us are willing to stay on and do this for as long as it's needed. But I can imagine progressing into an expanded form of mutual aid because it is our joint work that has allowed us to form the connections we now share. In this respect, it's really worth reflecting on the

experience...especially in...creating mutual aid groups with people who are not used to working collectively and would very surely steer away from anarchist politics....I think that in some cases there is a lack of desire among politically active people to be involved in these kinds of scenes. And it's very important for us not to isolate ourselves. Especially here in the UK where in terms of organising we haven't really gone very far."

Conclusion?

It is difficult to answer the questions we set out to answer. We are not fully aware of every Mutual Aid group nor can we predict what will happen as the pandemic continues through the winter. Nevertheless, there are certain points we can draw out from these examples (See article from the Revolutionary Anarchist Group for further points).

• **To what extent is this mutual aid, as anarchist communists would define it? Or, are they acting more as charities rather than as groups with solidarity at their centre?**

Without doubt, Mutual Aid, as understood by anarchist communists, has been a factor in the emergence and activities of many of the myriad of mutual aid and community assistance groups that have emerged not just in the UK but internationally. Sometimes, this has been, beyond the name, with specific reference to Mutual Aid in opposition to the state. For most part, and perhaps inevitably, the Mutual Aid did not take an openly anti-state and class-based perspective, which reflects the weakness of the revolutionary movement and of working class combativity and organisation. If nothing else, the rapid and widespread emergence of these groups does undermine the narrative that, even after a generation of atomising 'the devil take the hindmost' ideology, people do look out for each other.

However, the actual focus of the groups was essentially charity work. Even with those who set out to engage in solidarity work, such as the examples mentioned above, the fact remains that the tasks undertaken were ones that charities also did- though usually the mutual aid groups were not paid for their efforts. Shopping at Tesco's and engaging in unpaid production of Scrubs is not really challenging the system. That doesn't mean that these tasks is not worthwhile, but there is little to clearly differentiate it from charity work.

Nevertheless, many of the people involved in the groups saw it as solidarity work and aimed for that to be at the centre of the work. To an extent,

maybe it is this intention that is important. People involved have learned a lot, creating structures and ways of working that could be used again. It is very difficult to create organisations of equals in these situations. Those requiring help were not in a position to do anything but gratefully accept the goodwill coming their way; they could not get involved themselves, which is a requirement of something being solidarity. The health workers who benefitted from the scrubs were also not able to become part of the organisations as they themselves were overwhelmed by their own jobs.

The question then becomes: ***Can some of this organisation be extended or developed as solidarity groups when we are back to a (new) post Covid-19 'normal'?***

The problem is that now that full lockdown has gone, most of the groups have fallen apart as there is no immediate apparent need. The current increase in cases and deaths has not seen the re-emergence of the groups in any significant way. The groups that have continued are ones that either existed in some form before the pandemic, such as various food co-operatives and community kitchens *(https://granvillecommunitykitchen.wordpress.com/)*. The Cambridge example is one where the group has realised it needed a new focus and hopefully will be successful in its efforts. In most instances, though, it seems that once the need seemed less urgent, and other issues came to the fore, such as Black Lives Matters, activists abandoned the Mutual Aid groups and moved to other activities. This is one of the main difficulty in building solidarity groups- they require long-term commitment.

What evidence has there been of these contributing to an anti-capitalist and anti-state movement, which is building the power and confidence of the working class in the workplace and community? What are our ideas on how these groups could form part of a revolutionary strategy post-lockdown? What practical steps could be taken? How could they fit in with other campaigns and groups?

The activities of the mutual aid groups certainly empowered people to an extent. The examples above show this. The question is whether this can be built on once the tasks that were the main focus of the groups are no longer needed. Well, the wheel remains in spin, although many mutual aid groups have been winding down since the summer and look unlikely to come back together in a seemingly less urgent situation. Lessons will hopefully have been learned regarding the dangers of co-option by the local state and of becoming (or remaining) a more 'politicised' charity. Revolutionaries within these groups will need to draw out these lessons and offer local leadership. However, if the structures are no longer there, then the lessons cannot be put into practice. This is why the groups who have reorganised themselves around food may be more successful; they have retained there structure and have a new focus that can keep them together.

There are other options. If those who have constituted the core of these groups began to orientate towards the fight against unsafe return, this would be a move forward and an orientation towards workers' struggle in the Covid crisis. They would be in a position to make links between the community and the workplace. Mutual aid groups could become local struggle or solidarity groups and start work around a host of issues, such as resisting evictions. Or they could become local discussion groups for revolutionary theory and practice and eventually co-ordinate federally and work with existing organisations of the libertarian socialist movement. The main thing is that structures based on anarchist communist mutual aid need to be created and maintained through long-term commitment. Is the libertarian left prepared to do this?

WE DON'T BELIEVE IN AUTHORITY

WE BELIEVE IN EACH OTHER

Covid Mutual Aid: A Revolutionary Critique
The Revolutionary Potential of Covid-19 Mutual Aid
Can Mutual Aid groups be Revolutionary?

Covid-19 Mutual Aid appeared in the months before the UK lockdown, when activists began to prepare for civil shutdown modelled in China, Italy and elsewhere as Coronavirus swept across the globe. As work and travel restrictions came in to effect, the movement began to spread, spawning thousands of spontaneously organised groups delivering food, medicine and companionship to those left socially or financially cut-off by the crisis.

The rapid change in conditions provided fertile soil in which the movement could thrive. The effects of the crisis were widely felt across divisions of age, race and class, creating a sense of common cause which allowed community organising to flourish. Food shortages brought on by panic-buying led to a shared experience of material deprivation affecting even the otherwise well-off. Home working and enforced work stoppages ensured that large sections of the population who would otherwise be occupied with wage-labour were detained at home, often with little to do and no distraction from the crisis unfolding around them.

This backdrop provided the movement with a large number of motivated volunteer activists with few competing commitments, while in turn marking the movement with a number of problematic features.

'Mutual Aid' took on a universalist humanitarian character, drawing participants from across the class and political divide. The discussion around aid provision was largely depoliticised in order to maintain unity among heterogeneous groups. The apparent universality of need obscured underlying inequalities which would determine who bore the long term brunt of the crisis, alienating the movement from a clear class perspective.

Taking the form of food and financial donations, many mutual aid projects lack the reciprocity necessary to constitute 'mutual aid' as such. Rooted in the altruistic and mixed class character of the movement, most organisation focuses on

'providing for those in need' at a 'difficult time', rather than uniting workers in collective self-defence. This can be obscured in the language of solidarity or the abstraction of the class at large helping itself, but the concrete reality is often that of a fixed group of passive receivers aided by a separate group of altruistic donor/organisers.

None of this detracts from the achievements of a movement which has provided food, community and other support to thousands of working class people across the UK and beyond. But does this movement hold any potential in the struggle for workers' self-emancipation? And if so, what changes must it undergo to realise that power?

An apolitical movement based on class collaboration with no clear class or revolutionary outlook is of little or no use to the class struggle.

Some groups have responded to this issue by distributing political material along with aid parcels, or hosting online discussions and live-streams on the political aspects of mutual aid. Others began to build connections beyond the mutual aid movement by providing food, water, face masks and other support at Black Lives Matter demonstrations.

For activists within less political groups, breaking the silence of depoliticisation might mean tactfully but persistently highlighting the class nature of the crisis, whilst awaiting opportunities when other members are open to discussing political issues more directly. Those in avowedly apolitical groups may seek out allies within other projects to try to influence the local movement through cooperation.

Groups with a radical or class conscious outlook could begin to forge connections between mutual aid and more explicit class struggle. Tenant and trade unions are battling Corona evictions, redundancies and attacks on working conditions. Linking claimants to these struggles and taking action alongside these organisations could help bridge the gap between the passivity and

empowerment of aid recipients. Groups could also use their resources to offer material support to striking workers, or organise a solidarity network to take on the fights of exploited workers approaching them for aid.

The pursuit of reciprocal models of aid and self-organisation by aid recipients are also essential for the future of the movement. Food cooperatives are one alternative being discussed, having the advantage of including recipients in organisation. However, these coops remain dependent on donations from suppliers of free food, essentially making beneficiaries administrators of a grass-roots charity.

Aid must originate within and be organised by the working class if it is to gain confidence in its own power. Whether mutual aid is capable of making this transition may be the key question determining the potential of the movement going forward. This also applies to maintaining independence from local politicians and local government who have acted to pacify and co-opt the movement from its early beginnings.

As it stands the mutual aid movement is not a revolutionary movement, or a clear asset to the class struggle. However, if class-conscious activists can cooperate to move it beyond it classless and charitable character, an evolved mutual aid could form part of the wider ecology of the working class movement.

To join other activists to discuss the future of mutual aid, contact the Mutual Aid Federation at: *www.facebook.com/mutualaiduk*

No Safety No Work! New campaign launched.

NOT SAFE? NOT WORKING.

Workers' Self Defence against the abuses of our employers and the government.

www.anarchistcommunism.org

Many workers are being asked to work in unsafe environments. Many more will be asked to do so as they return to work over the coming days and weeks.

We have launched a **No Safety, No Work** campaign. This is a campaign to be led by workers trying to keep themselves and others safe at work in the time of Covid 19. We know that the working class cannot rely on employers or the government to keep us safe.

Tens of thousands of people have died in this pandemic, and additionally many die in the work place every year. None of these deaths were inevitable but were the results of the greed of the bosses and the rulers of our society. As more and more people are returning to work, the government has not passed a single law guaranteeing workers safety but has issued guidance to employers. This is not enough to keep us safe.

We also fight for measures that make it possible for people to make choices about going to work: safe transport, furlough, ban on evictions.

If you have a problem at work or want to get involve contact **safereturn@riseup.net**. Have a look at the website for news of fightbacks and resources such as advice, leaflets and stickers.
https://nosafetynowork.wordpress.com/

ACORN – no mighty oak!

ACORN (Association of Community Organisations for Reform Now) is a "community union" set up in Britain in 2014. Its initial and founding branch was in Bristol, but it has now established branches in other cities, including Cambridge, Exeter, Brighton, Hastings, Sheffield, Newcastle, Norwich and Manchester. It describes itself as "a mass membership organisation and network of low-income people organising for a fairer deal for our communities". ACORN "identifies rising housing costs, stagnant wages and spending cuts as key issues, and aims to tackle them through mass member-led community direct action".

In Norwich it has supported a family in Dereham who were forced to leave a 12month tenancy early because of rising damp and mould that was affecting their health. In Sheffield it recently organised a noise demonstration of renters and leaseholders at Park Hill Flats demanding that the owner freeze service charges during the pandemic. It also won back £800 in deposits for three renters from a landlord and campaigned against the privatisation of local bus services, and demanded that they be placed back under the control of the local council.

In Manchester they won £250 compensation from a landlord. They appear to be growing and claim 500 members in Manchester alone. In Bristol they successfully lobbied the local council not to withdraw tax exemptions from 16,000 of its poorest residents and have campaigned to bring buses back under council ownership. In Brighton it has won quite a few cases for individual tenants.

We are convinced that many of the rank and file members of ACORN are genuine activists concerned about the housing situation. Yet, we have profound misgivings about the whole ACORN project, including its structure and its connection to the Labour Party, which we spell out here.

As we said, ACORN emerged in Britain in 2014. According to the ACORN International website in an article from 2016: "It began in Bristol when co-organiser Nick Ballard and a colleague worked on Locality, a government-backed community-organisers programme. Any funding the pair raised to start a community organisation, would be match-funded by the government. When they secured the cash in 2013 the Bristol Acorn was planted. "We thought we would do something to tackle economic issues rather than relatively more superficial things," Ballard explains".

Ballard went on to say that: "I have to admit I didn't know much about the US organisation, but when we spoke to their founder it sounded like their model worked and that it would beneficial to operate under that name."

In fact, Ballard was to state in an interview in the Morning Star that: "Some us had been involved in a renegade, rule-breaking, anarchist-inspired pilot scheme called Liberty & Solidarity which had taken such a ruthless approach to 'keeping only what works' that it had eventually ditched anarchism for a kind of 'pure syndicalism' before rationalising the organisation itself out of existence too....Some see a bit of the anarchist spirit lingering, while others have called us closer to Bolshevism. In reality our members would reject both (and other) labels and demand, rightly in my view, that we focus on the work of winning as much for the working class as we can at any given point....We've avoided the trap of adopting a 'purer than thou' approach that some might have taken and as we were memorably criticised for early on: we are willing to 'enter the

corridors of power' and interact with whoever we find there in order to advance the interests of our members, our communities and our organisation. We understand that we won't win anything without power and without getting our hands dirty we'll never achieve that. Ultimately, the major difference between us and other organisations is that we know what it takes to win and we're prepared to do it".

In point of fact Ballard was interviewed on this occasion by another ex-member of Liberty and Solidarity, who now works as a Morning Star journalist.

As Notes from Below noted: "ACORN is the child of the Lib-Dem/Conservative coalition government. However strange that may sound, it is accurate. The funding used to launch the project came, in part, from David Cameron's 'big society' initiative. Three organisers, who'd cut their teeth in the syndicalist union the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), used that money to cover their expenses, quit their jobs and begin setting up the union in late 2013".

In actual fact, these three IWW members (at least two of whom had been members of Liberty and Solidarity) had approached the union at both a branch level and nationally to ask for funding to set up the Acorn project. They used the lure of Acorn recruits in Bristol being automatically jointly recruited to the IWW. The London General Members branch rejected giving branch funds to Acorn, though thousands of pounds was given from other branches and at a national level. The promise of a large increase in IWW membership was one that failed to materialise and these three subsequently were to leave the IWW. Indeed, as Acorn organisers they began to employ staff, which went against IWW statutes.

In Leeds one IWW activist cancelled a branch meeting because he didn't recognise a single one of those present and most of the core IWW members had sent in their apologies. At the following branch meeting it is alleged that the core members outnumbered the unknown newcomers and the motion to fund ACORN did not pass, as Leeds IWW members had as many misgivings as London members. However, Leeds, London and also Glasgow branches remained a minority within the IWW as the vote was lost nationally because of the alleged strategy of filling the one meeting where this was voted on with ACORN members was successful in more branches than it wasn't.

One member of Leeds IWW recalls: "the first time I heard of ACORN was when I met someone at a party in Leeds and started trying to recruit her to the IWW and she said she'd actually just joined and I said oh are you having trouble at your workplace and she said no not at all, that she'd just been on a community organising course from a group called ACORN and that was meant to lead to a job with them eventually. She said that she didn't expect she'd have any problems with them as employers. But that at the end of the course they told all the people on the course

that they should join the IWW, which was a lot of people from all over the UK. I was sort of pleasantly surprised but also really confused to be honest (thinking why is her potential employer trying to get all their potential employees to join the IWW, very very weird). Then a few months later when this proposal to give them a load of money appeared, and she turned up to her first IWW meeting, it all fell into place".

The reticence of some IWW members in funding Acorn is explained by the history of the parent group of Acorn in the United States.

ACORN in the States was set up by Wade Rathke, who came from a family of wealthy orange growers in California. He was active in the leftist Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in the 1960s and worked for it as a draft resistance organiser. In 1969 he became a paid organiser for the National Welfare Rights Organisation (NWRO) which practised a strategy of building a "poor people's alliance". The NWRO had been set up by African-American George Wiley, who sent Rathke into the South to organise NWRO branches. Black militants objected to this appointment of a white organiser. As a result, and probably sensing that he might soon be out of a job, Rathke set up the Arkansas Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) which the following year changed its name to the Association of Community Organisations for Reform Now. For the next 38 years Rathke served as its chief organiser and created more than 300 ACORN affiliates.

Rathke counted Bill Clinton as a friend, and he and other ACORN organisers organised mass campaigns of voter registration to assist the Democrats. He also has links with the Democratic Socialists of America (see here: *https://www.anarchistcommunism.org/ 2020/04/14/not-with-a-bang-but-a-whimper-bernie-sanders-campaign-ends/*)

In 1999 and 2000, Dale Rathke, Wade's brother, embezzled $948,000 from ACORN and its affiliates. For eight years, ACORN executives, including Wade Rathke, kept this a secret from the membership, and allowed the Rathke family to pay back the sum at the rate of $30,000 a year! Despite the embezzlement, Rathke kept his brother on the payroll as his assistant for eight years. All of this came to a head on July 28th, 2008 when ACORN voted that Rathke "be terminated from all employment with ACORN and its affiliated organizations or corporations," and "removed from all boards and any leadership roles with ACORN or its affiliated organizations or corporations." It went on to acknowledge the embezzlement.

Despite being expelled from ACORN Rathke continued his work with various ACORN affiliates and changed the name of its international consultancy, ACORN International, to Community Organisations International and served as its head. It soon reverted to its old name and Rathke continues to serve as its "chief organizer". In 2011 he became owner of the Fair Grinds Coffeehouse in New

Orleans, and became station manager of the Arkansas community radio KABF in 2013.

If the embezzlement scandal and links to the Democrats were disturbing, what really worried London IWW members was some of the following.

ACORN filed a lawsuit in California seeking to exempt itself from the state's minimum wage of $4.25 per hour in 1995. ACORN alleged in its complaint that "its workers, if paid the minimum wage, will be less empathetic with ACORN's low and moderate income constituency and will therefore be less effective advocates."

In 2001 the Washington IWW reported that: "Since the workers at the ACORN office in Washington were forced to resign their jobs amid hardship and harassment on the part of the employer, Wade Rathke, "chief organizer" of ACORN National, and the new manager at the local office, Kent Smith, continue to perform damage control for their illegal anti-union tactics and their mistreatment of workers. While the union was able to negotiate a severance package for the workers that were able to return to their jobs, ACORN cannot buy their way out of the fact that what they did was wrong, and Wade Rathke shows no remorse for what he has done in the organization, and will likely continue to do to their workers without a union. We have to put in all into perspective: workers were asking for a 40 hour week, regular lunches, a policy on sexual harassment, a safety policy, and to get paid on time and in full. It is a sad commentary on ACORN that their workers had to turn to organizing a union to get ACORN to comply with their own stated principles, not to mention what is law in most states. Mr. Rathke and Mr. Smith, along with their small but powerful clique of anti-union power brokers, have shown that they do not have the interests of the ACORN membership in mind. They will continue to ask low income and working class families to give their hard earned money to an organization that represents the antithesis of what their membership has expressed; the right to be treated fairly on the job. It is why the membership in Washington supported the boycott call by the organizers; it is why the new manager, Mr. Smith, refused to allow the organizers to talk to the membership once they did return to their jobs after much struggle. ACORN operates under the pretense of democracy; however, even their own bylaws have provisions for what the hidden hierarchy can do if the membership strays from the unofficial party line, that being of top down control and only very limited membership democracy, if it actually exists in reality". *https://archive.iww.org/history/campaigns/ acorn/speakout/43/*

In the same year in Seattle workers had organised with the IWW and went on strike on February 26th, 2001, demanding a 40 hour week and recognition of the union. The employer locked the workers out shortly thereafter. During the strike, lasting over two months, two workers, Alexa Gilbert and Lara Davis went on to take other jobs as a result of the lockout, in order to pay the mounting bills and living expenses, and were unable to return to their jobs at ACORN. The three remaining workers decided to quit in protest, after seeing that ACORN was willing to appeal every ruling in favour of the union, which would effectively postpone a representation election for up to a year. The National Labor Relations Board eventually forced ACORN to pay $20,000 in back pay. John Pershak, an IWWer in Seattle was to remark: "The community must never forget what ACORN has done. How can ACORN management lock workers out for two months, forcing them to quit because of hardship, pay out over $20,000 in a settlement, fly two attorneys to Seattle to further delay the representation election at the Labor Board, and expect people to believe that all is well?" He adds, "This underscores further the doublespeak that causes their workers to unionize or resign in disgust, and it shows that Wade Rathke and his clique have learned nothing about workers' rights." ACORN employed scabs during the course of the action as strike breakers.

In 2002 the IWW in Pennsylvania reported that: "Recent actions by management in Philadelphia are quite illustrative of the horrendous workplace conditions imposed on employees. Organizers in Philadelphia work more than 54 hours each week. They are frequently asked to come in several hours early for events, and do not leave the office until after 9 p.m., receiving no additional compensation for this. Workers are usually not given anything in writing concerning their wages, and when they are given specifics by management, their paychecks often do not reflect these announced policies. New organizers are sent out to the most dangerous parts of Philadelphia, late at night, when they do not know the area and are unfamiliar with public transportation routes. To top it all off, new organizers are not compensated for their public transportation travel expenses while on the job. Many report that they would not have taken the job had they known all of the details about how ACORN treats its employees. One former ACORN employee, with whom I have been in contact, reported that her paychecks were several dollars short every two weeks, and she remarked to me that if this is happening all across the country, ACORN must be saving quite a hefty sum each month.

Even more alarming is that workers have not been provided the health coverage ACORN had promised. Workers are supposed to be given COUNCIL health benefits after three months of service (most do not last that long). After a bit of research by one former employee, it seems as though many ACORN employees are currently without coverage, even though they have put in their qualifying time. In one case, management even assured a worker that she had insurance, when, in fact, she did not.

Workers at ACORN in Philadelphia are also subjected to patronizing comments and verbal abuse by their supervisors, who try to squeeze every ounce of surplus labor value out of them. Even when the

most fiscally productive organizers politely suggest to management that there are better ways to run the organization, they are quickly silenced and told that they are out of line. It seems that workers who do not "tow the party line" can never please management. One worker in Philadelphia was told that while she was the most productive organizer in terms of the quotas or "goals" that are imposed upon staff, she did not do anything "big". The meaning of this was left to be deciphered by the puzzled worker, who also had more involvement by her members than any other person in the office".

In 2003 it was reported that in Dallas ACORN bullied and laid off three workers who tried to organise at work with the IWW. " The National Labor Relations Board of the United States of America ruled that ACORN violated labor law by intimidating and unfairly laying off three employees who were trying to improve their working conditions and supported the IWW union organizing effort".

When questioned about the above by members of the IWW in Britain, the ACORN organisers denied any direct connection with Rathke. However, this was apparently contradicted by photos on the internet of Rathke, over in the UK on a visit, having dinner with these self-same organisers. They had said that, in the words of one IWW member: "they understood that we don't trust ACORN because of him firing ACORN employees for organising, using the IWW, and that these were completely separate organisations, and that of course they'd never have anything to do with Wade Rathke the union buster."

Later in 2020 with Bristol ACORN announcing that it was running a film show about Rathke. "ACORN Bristol are proud to be screening a film about the founder of ACORN and the rollercoaster history of the organisation...His entrepreneurial vision helped build ACORN but internal conflict and external pressures would lead to its tragic downfall....Wade will be joining us on the night to discuss the film, ACORN, community organising and more. This is our chance as members of ACORN Bristol to quiz Wade on how to make our union as powerful as can be!"

Indeed on Rathke's Chief Organizer blog, he adopts a proprietorial attitude to ACORN UK, for example: "Although we had been renting the upper floor in the Communication Workers' Union of Bristol since last December, it was my first time there", and "Every day is a challenge for a young organization, but in Bristol we're seeing how quickly we can begin to reach our potential and it's exciting to imagine the unlimited potential for our members there in the future." The Bristol film show proved to be part of a UK tour including Manchester and Leeds where Rathke held question and answer sessions at the end of the film shows.

ACORN in the USA turned out to be an organisation where professional organisers, who served in permanent positions within it, forced those who it employed, many from very poor backgrounds, just out of prison, from halfway houses etc, to work immensely long working weeks and no lunch breaks, below the minimum wage. ACORN USA acted as a strike breaking organisation, and it covered up major embezzlement. Rathke has served as its Chief Organizer for decades. We should be totally opposed to the concept of professional organisers as a concept that creates a hierarchy of officers and footsoldiers.

If ACORN UK does not have the same history of strikebreaking and bad treatment of its employees, it is still wedded to the idea of professional organisers and Rathke, to all intents and purposes, appears to be very much in the driving seat. Another concern with ACORN in the USA was its links with the Democrats. Is the same thing being repeated here? One key ACORN organiser in Bristol has now moved on to being organiser for the Labour Party in south west England, and as Notes from Below remarks, Brighton ACORN "began to develop very close links to the local Corbyn-supporting wing of the Labour party... For some members ACORN was understood as part of a strategy to develop 'Corbynism from Below'. The branch began regularly sending speakers to Labour party ward and branch meetings, and counted among its supporters a number of councillors and Momentum local committee members. The Kings Rd. rent strike was openly supported by the newly-elected East Brighton MP Lloyd Russell-Moyle."

Also disturbing is the presence in Bristol ACORN of the landlord and Green Party councillor Stephen Clarke, who evicted a tenant from "one of his numerous local buy-to-let investments after the tenant told him that his rent increase of 28 per cent was unaffordable!" (from the Bristolian newspaper/website). *https://thebristolian.net/tag/acorn/*

As we stated earlier, ACORN in the UK does not have the same history of strikebreaking and bad treatment of its employees, but given the organisation's structure of employers and employees, we predict that this is an inevitable outcome in the long term. A class analysis shows that the relationship of boss-worker is certain to lead to exploitation and abuse. Such a structure is unavoidably incompatible with advocating for the working class.

It is vital that organisation develops around housing struggles. The London Renters Union is an example of a model of organisation that involves the mass of the membership rather than relying on a command structure where there is a professionalised elite and an employer-employee relationship. They say: "We are controlled by every one of our members. Every single member has a say and we take decisions collectively and democratically. Every member is encouraged to bring new ideas and suggestions." It is such a model that needs to be developed outside of London and that coordinates federally on a territorial basis.

Anarchist Communists, anti-fascism and Anti-Fascism

'In a time of verbal inflation, "fascism" is just a buzz word used by leftists to demonstrate their radicalism. But its use indicates both a confusion and a theoretical concession to the State and to Capital. The essence of antifascism consists of struggling against fascism while supporting democracy; in other words, of struggling not for the destruction of capitalism, but to force capitalism to renounce its totalitarian form. Socialism being identified with total democracy, and capitalism with the growth of fascism, the opposition proletariat/Capital, communism/wage labour, proletariat/State, is shunted aside in favour of the opposition "Democracy"/ "Fascism", presented as the quintessence of the revolutionary perspective. Antifascism succeeds only in mixing two phenomena: "Fascism" properly so-called, and the evolution of Capital and the State towards totalitarianism. In confusing these two phenomena, in substituting the part for the whole, the cause of Fascism and totalitarianism is mystified, and one ends up reinforcing what one seeks to combat.'

Gilles Dauve, When Insurrections Die.

Fascism, fascism everywhere. Tommy Robinson, Steve Bannon, UKIP, Trumpism, For Britain, the Football Lads Alliance and Generation Identity and Morrissey!

Certainly, a populist, Islamophobic and ultra-conservative movement is emerging in the UK. Of the 'real' fascists – with the strange exception of Britain First (And even they should not be overestimated), whose frantic activism allows them to appear a national phenomenon, the likes of the BNP, NF and the smaller 'traditional' fascist groups are going nowhere, slowly. The would-be race terrorists of National Action have been repressed by the state. Although they will doubtless re-emerge in another form, their tech savvy Hitler worshipping will only appeal to those on the fringes.

In the USA the extreme right has become emboldened by the Presidency of Trump and they have had a target in the Black Lives Matter movement and the 'cultural Marxism' of the Democratic party.

In Europe, the right wing forces have found electoral success in Hungary where the Fidesz party holds power and its largest rival is the formerly fascist Jobbik party. So how should libertarian communists respond?

The Marxist writer, Gilles Dauve, once said that the worst product of fascism is anti-fascism (or

Anti-Fascism, the official ideologised version). Whilst on the surface that sounds both vulgar and patently wrong: obviously murder on an industrial scale is definitely a worse product, what they were trying to say is that the Anti-Fascist ideological response to fascism is the worst product in that it disarms/misleads/confuses the working class. And it does so by defending liberal democratic capitalism against the potential for a highly authoritarian – fascist – dictatorship as if they were not two sides of one coin.

In the inter-war years of the 20th Century, with the period of the rise of fascism and national socialism, something like Dauve's perspective was held by a minority of revolutionaries who rejected the Anti-Fascist position of both the Stalinists and the Trotskyists and left socialists of various stripes: that is, the Popular Front and the United Front. The former being a front of all 'progressive' and 'democratic' forces, including those of the liberal, democratic and potentially even conservative parties. The latter, on the other hand, brings together the forces of the left – essentially the social democrats, socialists, communists and anarchists. Most of the revolutionary left of the 1920s recognised, more or less, that the emerging fascist movements were wholly movements to stabilise or 'save' capitalism. But how these movements were to be opposed was far from agreed.

In Italy, fascism came to power soon after the defeat of the working class mobilisations, that

culminated in the factory occupations of the 'Two Red Years' (1919-1920). Italy seemed on the brink of worker's revolution, following those in Russia, Hungary and Germany.

The anarchist communist Luigi Fabbri, in his Fascism: Preventative Counter-revolution (1922) described this insurgent period as one which failed to achieve a revolution overthrowing capitalism, but one which had managed to terrify the capitalist class. "[T]he intoxication lasted too long, at nearly two years: and the other side, the ones who daily faced the threat of being ousted from their thrones and stripped of all privilege, began to wake up to the situation, to their own strength and the enemy's weaknesses." The rapid development of the Fascist party in Italy was predicated upon the frightening of both the traditional ruling class and also of various social groups opposed to the proletarian revolution but hitherto excluded from power. The latter formed the backbone of Italian Fascism. The Blackshirt movement, after a brief period of radical verbiage, quickly became a force for order – specifically a force that would violently crush working class organisation and would unify the state.

In the early 1920s, active opposition to Mussolini's Blackshirts took the form of the Arditi di Popolo (The people's daring ones), a united front organisation that included socialists, radical liberals, syndicalists and anarchists. Physical opposition also came from the squads of the Communist Party, who, under the leadership of Bordiga, withdrew from the Arditi (as did many of the socialists, albeit for different reasons), a decision based upon their rejection of any political co-operation with reformists, which for them included the anarchists. On the economic plane they were, however, willing to co-operate and did so in a disastrous general strike against the unconstitutional or "illegal" fascists in 1922.

Actively supported by the armed forces and the police, the fascists took power as the state accepted that despite the revolutionary rhetoric of the Blackshirts and the violence they unleashed, they were able to unify Italy and did not constitute a threat to capitalism.

In the Germany of the 20s and early 30s, the ideology of Anti-Fascism was greatly directed by the Communist Party (KPD), the most powerful Communist party outside the USSR, from where, after the mid-1920s, it was politically directed.

The KPD up until 1931 had done two things: physically confront the Nazis and other ultra-nationalists using their paramilitary group the Roter Frontkämpferbund (Red Front Fighters Alliance), whilst simultaneously attacking the massive Social Democratic Party (SDP). From 1928, the KPD described the SDP as 'social fascist' and considered the left outside the KPD a greater enemy than the Nazis. The SDP itself had been a part of a pro-democratic militia, the Reichsbanner, since 1924. This involved liberals and political Catholics, but it was less anti-fascist than against any threat to the Weimar Republic, from left or right. The famous three arrow symbol, now universally used by Anti-Fascists, comes from this political perspective: the arrows being directed against monarchism, Nazism and Bolshevism. In 1931 the SDP formed the Iron Front and in the same year, Trotsky, believing the electoral potential of the Nazis had expired, argued that a fascist coup d'etat was inevitable and that a United Front between the Communists and Social Democrats could save the day. The same year, the KPD started to call for unity with the SPD rank and file, on KPD terms, and simultaneously withdrew from violent confrontation with the Nazis, even adopting nationalist slogans and engaging in joint activity with the Nazis in the 1931 Landtag Referendum in Prussia and a brief co-operation in the 1932 transport workers strikes in Berlin.

Alliance of Red Front-Fighters, Germany, September 1928.

A position that emerged very quickly after the Nazis took power in 1933 was that if only the left had united then Hitler could have been defeated. Throughout the interwar years 'fascist' parties were emerging everywhere in Europe and beyond. They took various forms, some modelled on Italian fascism, some on the National Socialist model, some clerical, some secularist, some anti-semitic, some ultra-traditionalist, some modernist, some oriented towards electoralism and some more committed to extra-parliamentary methods etc. In response, anti-fascist organisations emerged and the ideology of Anti-Fascism, in the sense of a defence of democratic values and/or the liberal democratic system, emerged in response.

Partly this was a product of the foreign policy interests of the Soviet Union (which was slavishly followed by the vast majority of Communist parties and their fellow travellers). But it was also a product of two other factors. One was the idea that socialism was the extension of democracy or rather the thorough *democratisation* of capitalism. This was true of a large part of the parliamentarian social democratic and labour parties. It made sense, therefore, that they would seek to defend existing liberal democracy.

Finally, there was the fact that with the end of the revolutionary wave that had begun with the 1917 Russian Revolution and ended with the final 1923 defeat of the German Revolution, working class confidence had understandably declined. Belief that the world proletarian revolution was an immediate possibility had receded and much of the left saw, with the rise of fascism, a phenomenon that had to be defeated before the workers movement could put revolution back on the agenda.

The idea that a United Front was needed to halt the fascist wave became the 'common sense' of the left, which remains the case today. A minority of revolutionary groups did not accept this analysis. Notable amongst libertarian groups, the Federation of the Russian Anarchist Communist Groups of the U.S. and Canada, many of whom had experienced the Russian revolution's degeneration, issued a statement Our Position in 1934.

"We are for a war against Fascism. Such a war means, first of all, a war against any dictatorship which is the foundation of all Fascism. Therefore, we are for the Social Revolution which will liberate the proletariat and all humanity from the yoke of capitalism and the chains of the state. This social revolution is not only a war against Fascism, but a war for the

establishment of anarchist communism. A United Front is absolutely necessary, but it can be and will be created only by the militant working class itself through direct action against the state capitalist system. It must be created not only without the political parties of State Socialism and Communism, but directed against them as well, because their full triumph in Russia has led to the establishment of "Red Fascism."

We are for a United Front of revolutionary workers of the whole world. For us, this United Front means the union of class, revolutionary, and economic organisations of the proletariat, which practice the direct method of struggle and which combat any attempt of political parties to dominate them. We consider, therefore, that it is our sacred duty to create such a United Front and to be in the front ranks of the proletarian army to call upon the workers to join us in the fight first, against the state, capitalism, dictatorship and terror in all countries,- second, for the establishment of libertarian communism."

The Federation of Russian Anarchist Communists of the US and Canada saw fascism as part of a global move towards State Capitalism, in an attempt by capitalism to overcome its crisis. This analysis was shared by anti-Bolshevik communists in Germany and elsewhere.

Spain 1936

However, the dangers of Anti-Fascist ideology was nowhere better displayed than in the Spanish Civil War. And here, the anarchists made their own contribution.

General Franco was an ultra-nationalist and conservative traditionalist who used the trappings of fascism and co-opted the actual fascist party (the Falange) to defeat the democratic government of the Spanish Republic in the civil war of 1936-39. Anti-Fascism now had a sort of test case. The Italian fascists and the German Nazis had come to power with the agreement of their national bourgeoises and a mixture of intimidation and electoral success. Franco was taking it through military might. It was presented as a classic struggle between democracy and dictatorship. But in the middle of it all, there was a revolution being led by forces that were in opposition to both fascist dictatorship and liberal democracy.

Durruti famously said that "No government in the world fights fascism to the death. When the bourgeoisie sees power slipping from its grasp, it

Anarcho-syndicalist militia members, Spain 1936.

has recourse to fascism to maintain itself" and he understood the military defeat of Franco as a part of a larger movement of revolutionary transformation.

The rank and file anarchists used the opportunity of the attempted coup to initiate a revolutionary transformation that challenged both the fascists and the democratic republic. Collectivisations of industry and the take-over of land saw an attempt to create self-management in the midst civil war, although without directly challenging the capitalist state, now calling itself a 'workers republic', itself.

However, the anarchists of the National Confederation of Labour (CNT) and the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) were also dragged into not only a popular front but an actual bourgeois government. Generally, the mobilising slogans were anti-fascist rather than revolutionary and in the name of anti-fascist unity the gains of the Spanish revolution were reversed. This didn't happen without a fight of course, but the State and its Popular Army had the advantage. Whilst the Stalinists and socialists insisted that there could be no aim but to defend the republic, critical voices in the anarchist movement, such as the Friends of Durruti group and the Italians around Guerra di Classe (Class War), insisted that fascism could only be defeated by revolution – whilst the leadership of the anarchists insisted on anti-fascist unity, even when their Anti-Fascist allies were undermining every facet of workers' power.

Because the Spanish revolution was isolated and came about whilst much of the working class globally was in a state of abject political defeat, the odds were stacked against it spreading. Likewise, because it didn't suit the interests of democratic geo-politics at that time, the anti-fascist cause did not attract the support of democratic governments in Europe. Regardless of how liberal, democratic and non-revolutionary Anti-Fascist Spain presented itself, it was abandoned by global democracy. In 1939, as the civil war came to an end, the Friends of Durruti looked back at the victory of Franco and the defeat of the worker's revolution and concluded that 'Democracy defeated the Spanish people, not fascism' (The Friends of Durruti Accuse, 1939).

An Anti-Fascist war or Inter-imperialist war? Both!

From the Allied side, the Second World War was fought as an Anti-Fascist/anti-totalitarian war. It was a war explicitly for the defence of democracy. Whilst the anti-fascism wasn't taken very seriously by the Allied governments, who happily utilised 'fascists' to police post-war Europe, it was considered as such by almost the entirety of the traditional left. Internationalist opposition to World War 2 was dismissed by large parts of the left as either pacifist, ultra-left or even crypto-fascist. Social democrats, Stalinists, Trotskyists and indeed many anarchists supported the war. Tragically, many Spanish anarchist exiles joined the Allied

Dresden, February 1945. Corpses in the street after allied bombing.

military in the vain hope that following the liberation of France, Spain would be next. Anarchists tend to celebrate the fact that Spanish anarchists were amongst those who liberated Paris. But they did so fighting for a capitalist army that had no intention of extending their Anti-Fascist war to Franco's dictatorship. The Stalinists of the worldwide Communist parties supported the war effort and opposed industrial action by workers in the Allied nations. The Trotskyists, for the most part, essentially understood the war as an inter-imperialist conflict (a very small number opposed the war) but supported the Allies on the basis of their continued defence of the 'deformed workers state' of the USSR. Anarchists and council/left communists in the UK, notably, those around the Anti Parliamentary Communist Federation and the War Commentary group in Glasgow and London respectively, opposed the conflict as an inter-imperialist war. Tiny and marginalised, these groups could do little more than expose the hypocrisy of the democratic powers and give what support they could to workers in struggle.

Unlearned lessons

Some of today's 'militant' Anti-Fascists, such as Antifascist News *antifascistnews.net/https:// antifascistnews.net/2017/02/13/antifa-worldwide-a-brief-history-of-international-antifascism/* reflect not just the United Front idea but something more like its Popular cousin when they write about the Spanish civil war and fail to even criticise the Stalinists, presumably in the name of Anti-Fascist 'unity'.

'Unlike in Germany and Italy, the French and English left was able to prevent voluntary capitulation to fascism— perhaps in part as a result of the rejection of the defeatist line that

"bourgeois socialists" and "radical liberals" and even moderate conservatives should be considered as bad as, if not worse than, fascism'

Alexander Reid Ross Antifa Worldwide: A Brief History of International Antifascism

The above argument is essentially that, the fascist menace in the inter-war UK (and France) was defeated because the left united and weren't calling each other fascists. This is incredibly simplistic and actually inaccurate.

The left in the UK was no more united than that in Germany. The Communist Party followed the Moscow line fairly closely and there was little love lost between the Labour Party and the Communists or the 'centrist' Independent Labour Party. What was different, however, was that the British capitalist class did not, at least in any significant number, feel the need for a fascist organisation to attack organised labour, never mind a fascist government to manage capitalism. The fascists under Sir Oswald Moseley remained a marginal force in most of the UK despite being near-homogenous on the extreme right (outside Scotland and Northern Ireland who had their own forms of clerical fascism). Certainly their defeat in the 1936 Battle of Cable Street marked a turning point for the Blackshirts in London but the British ruling class, with some small exceptions, did not feel threatened enough either by the vicissitudes of the world market or the threat of revolution to turn to the maverick former socialist Moseley as their saviour.

Unlike in the UK, France's extreme right had, by the 1930s, a long history and a mass following, but was infamously divided between Monarchists and ultra-Catholics, secular fascists and militarist conservatives. After a 1934 March on Paris by the forces of the right descended into a confused riot, much of the extra-parliamentarian extreme right faced repression by the state, not to recover until the Nazi takeover of France in 1940. The democratic state, in the form of the Popular Front which was composed of the Socialist Party and the liberal Radical Party supported by the Communists, neutered the 'fascist' threat.

British fascism since WW2 has had its ups and downs. But mostly downs. Moseley's post war Union Movement went nowhere. Bashed nearly everywhere they went, by both the ex-services 43 Group and by almost everybody else, the Union Movement stank of fascism and the dark years. Out and out Hitler worshippers like the National Socialist Movement and their offshoots fared even worse in the 1960s. The great white hope of

Union Movement drummer takes a beating, Manchester, July 1962.

post-war British fascism, the National Front, did have some relative electoral success in the 1970s (as in not losing their deposits everywhere) and, albeit briefly, looked like becoming the new 'third party' in a small number of areas. But their anti-immigrant rhetoric was easily and successfully co-opted by the Conservatives and, after Thatcher came to power in 1979, they imploded. The BNP played this role in the 1990s and with more success, in some by-elections actually becoming the 'third party'. But after peaking in 2009 with two MEPs, they too imploded as part of their reactionary constituency shifted allegiance to the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). UKIP, which had started as a vaguely left of centre group rapidly moved to the right and today is righter than ever before, flirting with the Tommy Robinson roadshow and picking up edgy UK alt-righters and, post-Brexit Party, embracing irrelevance.

Fascism can obviously change – it isn't as if there is an 'ideal' fascism that requires contenders for the title to tick every box before being considered fascist – and today's fascism is not going to echo every characteristic of classic fascism (shirt politics, the centralised state intervening in the national economy, plus strident militarism), however, patently organisations like UKIP, the Football Lads Alliance (FLA) and For Britain are not fascist in any meaningful sense. UKIP are the voice of insular British conservatism and casual xenophobia, the FLA are an Islamophobic protest group who have no interest in taking power and For Britain, like UKIP, are another *explicitly* free market conservative party with a traditionalist (backwards looking) agenda. What they have in common is that they are all outside the present ruling circles. They can, therefore, sell themselves as anti-establishment and anti-elitist. This is in fact a characteristic of historical fascism. But they do not want to replace democracy. And, presently, the bourgeoisie do not feel the need of their services, at least as a stabilising factor for national capital.

But even when there are large and aggressive fascist movements and parties, what should we be doing about it?

Which brings us back to the beginning of this piece. Fascism everywhere in the UK, the USA, everywhere. And, therefore, Anti-Fascism also. So, what should the response of anarchist communists be?

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The relative growth of the right: populist, islamophobic, racist, street based and electorally oriented, fascist and conservative/traditionalist, is real. Much of the anti-fascist 'movement' in the UK lumps them all together as 'Nazis'. There have been calls for the relaunching of the Anti-Nazi League, notably by John McDonnell MP. The original ANL was seen as successful (in what? Stopping a Nazi takeover in 1978?), was mothballed in the early 80s and relaunched in the mid-90s as a SWP front to compete with various other anti-fascist groups. The SWP already has Unite against Fascism and Stand Up to Racism, both of which are, naturally, ineffective in halting the 'rise of the right'. In reality, neither of them is that bothered about stopping fascism, but they are interested in building their party.

The autonomous (of party control) anti-fascist scene, of which the Anti Fascist Network (AFN) in the UK is representative, is committed to physically opposing fascists. To that extent it follows the tradition of Anti-Fascist Action of the 1980s and 90s but is mostly composed of anarchist leaning people. They state: 'The Anti-Fascist Network is not about telling people what to do, what type of anti-fascist activity they should undertake or what political analysis they should adopt. We simply want to cooperate to defeat fascism. ' So, although their approach to anti-fascism is more physically confrontational, any politics beyond opposition to fascism is to be left at the door in the name of Anti-Fascist unity.

This despite the likelihood that most of the activists in AFN would claim to hold some variety of anti-capitalist perspective. If anything, 21st Century Anti-Fascism seems to have learned few of the lessons of the 20th. Now, Anti-Fascism is being used by anarchists (and others) as a reason to support Catalonian and Kurdish nationalism against "fascist" Spain and "fascist" ISIS/Turkey. Uncritical support for the YPG is de rigour as many anarchists withdraw from a class politics into a morass of liberal leftist perspectives, often using Anti-Fascist rhetoric and imagery.

And revolutionaries, such as Durruti, are now being labelled Anti-Fascists. Of course, they fought against fascism, but they were fighting for libertarian communism and an end to capitalism, not in its defence.

Anti-fascist activity as self-defence

So, what about anti-fascist activity as simple self-defence? As a form of prophylactic hygiene? Should we sit and do nothing when the far-right mobilises to intimidate meetings and events,

Clashes in Lewisham 1977. Photograph: John Hodder, The Observer.

menaces our activities, dominate the streets and create a climate of fear amongst minorities and marginalised people?

Obviously not. And in order to defend ourselves, it helps to be in large number, thus bringing the pressure to enter into alliances with other groups. Groups who may, implicitly or explicitly, promote the narrative that 'democracy' must be defended. It is required therefore to be explicit and open about what we think fascism is, why we fight it but, most importantly, what we are fighting for. We are against fascism and therefore, by definition, we are anti-fascists, but we are for workers' power, we are for libertarian communism. As the libertarian communist Daniel Guerin said at the end of the Second World War: "Anti-fascism cannot triumph as long as it drags along as the tail to the kite of bourgeois democracy. Beware of 'anti' formulas. They are always inadequate because they are purely negative" (Fascism and Big Business 1945 edition).

It is important to understand the appeal of Anti-Fascism: fascism is hateful in that it promotes national chauvinism, and almost invariably racism, reinforcing all of the things we as libertarian communists are opposed to: misogyny, homophobia, deference to authority. It is capitalism in the raw, writ large and nasty. What's not to loathe? To make things worse, fascists present themselves as opponents of the status quo, often as against the political elites and 'anti-capitalist'. And, everywhere, they recruit working class people as their foot soldiers, weakening class solidarity and working for the continuation of our own exploitation and oppression.

But libertarian communists know that fascism and democracy are two methods of managing capitalism. They are not in real opposition. The history of 20th Century democracy has shown us that it can shed its velvet glove with great speed when it has to, and just as quickly return to a democratic form when that is required. So, to destroy fascism, once and for all, requires a struggle against democratic capitalism. And that truth should always be foregrounded and repeated constantly in every mobilisation and every act of self-defence against fascists.

The struggle against fascism begins and ends with the struggle against capitalism whether in its democratic or fascist form!

Anti-Fascist Action in action, Battle of Waterloo, London 12th September 1992.

WOMEN: WORKING AND ORGANISING

I have been told so many times that to organise around the rights of working women is seeking to "divide the working class" or "indulging in identity politics". However, this is not the case. The working class is already divided and can only be truly united on the basis of equality. And, organising women does not need to be identity politics, which could be defined as a preoccupation with the oppression of one particular social group/identity, assumed to have certain essentialist characteristics, without reference to the wider system and without the overall goal of finding common ground. The workplace is made up of a number of different social groups and the bosses will not be defeated if the workers aren't united. However, they will not be united if some groups are worse off than others or actually oppressed by their fellow workers. Organising women, who face particular problems in the workplace and in the wider society, is therefore necessary for women but also necessary for the working class as a whole.

Discussion of workplace organising must take special account of the position of women. Patriarchy is not a separate and competing analysis of oppression: *it is a structural and essential function of capitalism*. This has been brought into sharp relief by the Covid 19 pandemic, where low-paid (previously labelled low-skilled) women workers have now been lauded as key workers and essential to society. Capitalism depends upon a flexible reserve army of vulnerable, cheap labour, largely made up of women, black and migrant workers.

Women's work is still segregated - still largely offering low-paid, poorly organised, insecure employment: retail, care work, hospitality, factory assembly-line, food production, retail and other service work. This is particularly the case for black and migrant women, so it is also an issue of race and class. Many of the jobs that are open to us, are deliberately and structurally designed to pay significantly less than we need to survive and to support ourselves and our families. This allows employers to have their wage-bills subsidised by the state, whilst forcing workers to claim benefits and get necessary supplies from food banks. Despite the fact that the notion of the family wage is no longer used, women are still paid substantially less than enough to support themselves and their children - often less even than the minimum wage. We are the reserve army of labour no less now than in the 19th and 20th centuries, allowing employers to exploit vulnerable workers with so-called flexible contracts and conditions to maximise profit and control. The only surprising thing about this is that it still persists after decades and decades of unions 'fighting' it and governments and employers paying lip-service to an equality agenda.

In this article I am going to look at some of the structural causes of women's oppression at work and the difficulties of countering them (including the ineffectiveness, misogyny and racism of trade unions). I will also look at some of the methods and successes of women organising. It is something of a personal account - drawing largely on my own experiences - but hopefully, sufficiently general to be of use.

Casualisation of work

The old model of permanent and secure jobs, albeit poorly paid and mostly part-time, either in the public or the private sector has largely disappeared. This has often left women with insecure, casualised and unorganised work as their only option. Many unions consider these workers to be unorganisable because of the insecure nature of employment (cleaners, shop workers, hospitality workers, care staff, sex workers, childcare in all of its many forms, call centres and so on) and see these workers as peripheral or marginal despite being the bedrock upon which our societies function. Hourly pay rates are minimum wage or below and the hours are, in any case, irregular and insecure. While the minimum wage did improve low paid service work for a while when it was first introduced, the combined effects of privatisation, austerity, casualisation and cuts have completely wiped out any benefit. The Equal Pay/Equal Value legislation has produced few improvements for low paid women workers, often as a result of unions' unwillingness to pursue such cases (more of that later). Privatisation has had a devastating effect on women's wages and jobs in the public sector, particularly in the care industry.

Gender pay gap and gender data gap

The gender pay gap has had some publicity recently, but mostly in the context of TV presenters, film stars, professional women and the glass ceiling. Whilst there is no doubt that discrimination is a reality in these circles, I want to address the everyday and almost universal pay gap for large numbers of working class women. In the 1980s I took part, as a shop steward, in the negotiations around the local government manual worker pay re-evaluation scheme. This was meant to revalue the work of the many women (and men) to redress the balance of male and female pay discrepancy - in fact I think the logic of the scheme was to protect the employers from vulnerability to Equal Value discrimination cases. The result was that one group of women workers, the home helps, was awarded a significant pay rise. In Islington, where I then worked, the home helps had previously taken action and occupied part of the town hall for several weeks because they were angry about pay-rates and lack of protection for the workers. As a result of this action the Islington home helps became for a short while the highest paid home helps in the country.

The increase for home helps was subsequently cancelled out by the privatisation of the care industry. The other women's jobs within this scheme were downgraded or remained at the

bottom of the scale. School cooks and kitchen assistants were downgraded, care home staff remained near the bottom and cleaners remained firmly on the lowest grade. The argument at the time being around lack of skill and responsibility. One of the national negotiators said that you couldn't consider that women on these grades had any real skill, because the work of cooking, cleaning and caring was only an extension of that what they all did at home anyway and required no special skill or knowledge; anybody could do it! Although, I had gone from being a classroom assistant in a special school to a gardener (considered a 'man's' job) where my pay increased quite a lot, regardless of whether or not one job was more skillful than the other. All this within the context of the already low pay for all grades of local government manual workers.

Privatisation, austerity, zero-hours contracts and casualisation have all contributed to an ever-growing number of insecure workers and unregulated and unorganised jobs. This is not to say that men do not also have low-paid, insecure jobs, but that there is a growing proportion of work that is reserved for women and, in particular, black and migrant women. Covid 19 has led to something of a public rethink about what work is considered essential and valuable and therefore the value of the largely female workforce that delivers it. So far that appreciation remains a matter of words and sentiment, without any recompense in the form of pay, job security, protection or status. Despite all the hand-clapping and politicians drooling over our heroic frontline workers, it is business as usual for employers in the care industry. On the 6th May, it was reported that 97 care home staff in Leicestershire would have their weekly pay cut by a third, plus payments for weekend and night shifts scrapped, sick-pay down to the government minimum, annual leave cut by 2 weeks - because the pandemic had "substantially increased operating costs". There is no doubt that the care industry is big business, with large profits being made for shareholders - often syphoned off-shore. So much for our heroic front-line workers. On the 15th May, the government announced that they would need to freeze public sector pay because of the cost of fighting Covid - yet again, the low paid, vulnerable (mostly women) workers will have to pay, not only with their health and their lives, but also with continuing wretched wages and starvation pay-rates.

The gender data gap refers to the fact that our world is designed around the notion of a typical person (a man). Data is gathered on disease, health needs, design of equipment and tools, absorption of chemicals and poisons, design of cars, seat belts and so on, without considering that women's bodies are physiologically different - we are not just smaller versions of the male body, our physical make-up is actually different. This can have effects that range from inconvenient to downright lethal. The current discussion over PPE in the NHS has finally brought out the fact

Ford Dagenham machinists' strike 1968.

that the PPE is designed "for a six foot three rugby player" (the words of a NHS nurse in a recent account). The worker used as reference for health and safety standards, is a 70kg Caucasian man, aged 25-30. My experience with PPE and machinery, as a local authority gardener, was an ongoing and bitter struggle to get these adapted to fit me and not cause me additional danger. I ended up with what turned out to be a permanent back injury, caused in part by attempting to handle large mowing machines and pulling the rip-cords to start them, designed to fit the male body. Women are generally not only smaller and shaped differently, we have different immune systems, different hormones, thinner skin, and a higher percentage of body fat (which can absorb toxins). In addition, many women workers also have an additional shift to perform when they get home, to look after family and household. Any chemical exposure absorbed at work can combine with exposure to cleaning fluids etc. at home forming a chronic, long term cocktail of exposure.

If we just look at lifting hazards - very common in many women's jobs - leading to very high injury levels. *Hazards* magazine reports (March 2017) that cleaners and carers lift more in a shift than construction workers or miners. However many have little or no training in, or assistance with, lifting and, as a result, disabling back injuries are commonplace (and often go unrecorded).

Since the passing of the Health and Safety at work Act in 1974 records show that fatalities in the workplace have fallen by 85%. However workplace accident/injury figures have largely not been disaggregated into male and female incidents. Occupational research has been into 'male' industries (e.g. construction). Policy has been to try and alter the behaviour of women, rather than eliminate the problem For example, nurses are subject to more acts of violence than police officers or prison guards, however the design of hospital buildings (think of long, deserted hospital corridors), nurses' name tags, requirement for lone working, do not take this into account. Home carers and other lone workers are expected to take care when going into people's homes. Risk assessments for home care tend to center on the needs of the patient, rather than possible dangers to the carer (in the form of cleaning fluids, chemicals, danger of attack from other family members). The carers are expected to take care and report incidents - although that may be too late. This is without touching on the dangers of racing around from one patient to another with inadequate time allotted to complete tasks and no allowance made for travel between homes.

Value – Worth

- Unison has published figures stating that two-thirds of low paid workers are women - many doing multiple jobs (Unison 2014)

- The Fawcett Society says that one in eight British women are on zero hours contracts In London this rises to one in three (July 2014)

- 61% of those earning below the living wage are women (Fawcett Society: July 2014)

- Over a lifetime, women earn between 31% - 75% less than men (UN Women 2015-16)

- Women make up 75% of part-time workers (Fawcett Society: 2016)

- Plus payments: overtime, bonus payments are rarely offered to women workers

- 32% (2.7 million) employed women don't meet the criteria to qualify for self-enrolment pensions (against 14% of employed men) (Fawcett Society: 2016)

I could go on. However, the clear conclusion to be drawn from the undervaluing and invisibility of women workers is that it is the employers that benefit from the increasing vulnerability of the female workforce by having access to a flexible and compliant body of workers. The effect of realising from a young age that our lives are not valued, our work is considered unskilled, unimportant and peripheral, cannot help but reflect upon our own self-esteem and confidence. How many times have I heard women members say, "Oh, I'm only a cleaner"? (carer, home carer, shop worker etc). This must go some way to explaining why most women have not risen up and fought this ongoing discrimination. Add to this the likelihood that partners, fathers, brothers compound the feeling of lack of worth by echoing similar sentiments. The lack of economic value weighs down upon our lives and emphasises lack of status and importance. And in any case when they're often struggling with two or three part-time jobs and all their domestic responsibilities, who has the time?

Violence, harassment, bullying

A United Nations report states that 50% of women have suffered sexual harassment at work in European countries. (This figure is an estimate because no reliable data exists). The TUC's published figures show that 69% of women in manufacturing have been sexually harassed and 67% in hospitality and leisure. Nurses report a large number of instances of sexual harassment. The TUC also found that women on irregular or precarious contracts are more likely to be subject to sexual harassment. The TUC's data comes from surveys done through constituent unions over many years. However the statistics on this are unreliable. This is not only because of the male bias in recording workplace problems and sexual harassment not being seen as a serious Health and Safety workplace issue. It is also because women are not at all willing to report instances of sexual harassment because of the repercussions and lack of reliable workplace procedures. I know from my time as a workplace rep how incredibly hard it is for a woman to pursue a sexual harassment case and stay sane or keep her job. However many shiny new policies employers may develop, the reality of pursuing or 'proving' complaints can bring down the whole weight of patriarchal scorn and male resentment upon the woman. Again, feelings of low self-esteem and worthlessness can lead women to believe that they must have done something to 'deserve' the attack, or have 'aroused' the perpetrator in some way - never mind the power relationships at work, with often male supervisors/ managers in charge of largely female workforces. With increasingly irregular working conditions, the opportunity to demand, or take, sexual favours in return for hours of work or continuing insecure contracts increases all the time.

Emotional Labour

Another characteristic of much of women's work is the idea of emotional labour. This is an extension of the assumption that women's caring role within the family reaches into the workplace. Not only are the jobs around this role- caring, cooking, cleaning, childcare and so on- assumed to be suitable for women and consequently paid less, with less status, but there are many jobs that demand that women act in a caring and emotional way. The employer demands, not only our labour, but an emotional commitment. The employer not only profits from our labour, but from our appearance, our ability to smile and to flatter and to be constantly cheerful, whatever our internal state of mind might be. Think of: flight attendants, receptionists, shop workers, hairdressers, beauticians, secretaries, and many other public-facing jobs which require us to put up with abuse, rudeness, physical attack, insults and demeaning behaviour as a requirement of the job and part of our 'nature' as women. This can lead, not only to stress and physical injury, but take a terrible toll on the mental health of such workers. Workers at the front line of the care industry, for example, have often cited worry about what will happen to their service users if they take any industrial action.

Unions and organising

Unions reflect the patriarchal values of employers and the state despite their declared aim to support and defend the rights of workers. Neither the arrangements of work hours, nor those of union meetings take into account the needs of working women. In my experience, women activists in the unions are either young (pre child-rearing) or middle-aged to elderly (post child-rearing). Women in their late twenties to thirties are thin on the ground as activists, although they are certainly employed. (Of course this is not to imply that women are obliged to rear children!) Union meetings and conferences rarely provide a creche or take place at times when women with domestic commitments can attend. The bureaucratic structures of many unions are still mainly made up of men along with workplace and branch structures. Sexual harassment, violence and even rape are not uncommon between male full-time union officials and female members and staff. These are rarely pursued because the bureaucracy closes ranks to defend the perpetrators in question. GMB is currently taking part in an external enquiry because of accusations of rape and sexual harassment against the ex-general secretary and to look into the "casting couch culture" within the union. This is deplorable, but in my experience, has been going on for years and not only in GMB. For many women members who have recourse to the support of the union, male union officers hold as much power and authority as employers and some do not hesitate to abuse it. Many unions allow a man in a different section to be shop steward for whole groups of women. When I worked in the schools it was commonplace for the

steward to be the caretaker, representing cleaners, teaching assistants and school meals cooks, despite also being first line management for the cleaners. I believe that is still the case in many factories and shops. This makes it very difficult for women to formulate demands, build solidarity, discuss problems and plan tactics and strategy - never mind negotiate for better pay and conditions. The old adherence to the protection of pay differentials and notions of worth are still rife. Some years ago, when recruiting for the union I was told not to recruit cleaners because, "I would only be recruiting problems". Likewise I was told off for getting stewards elected in care homes while recruiting a group of carers, rather than just getting someone to volunteer as a "postbox" to receive mail and newsletters from the union without the support and protection given to a steward.

Separate organisation

Despite many years of struggle, the idea of separate organisation or self-organised groups is still contentious within many unions. When I was an activist in NUPE in the 1980s we succeeded in shaming the men on the London regional committee to support us in setting up a women's advisory committee with a budget. There were no female full-time officials at the time, so we were left to get on with it and report directly to the regional committee. This allowed us to make it open to all women members (and they could bring a friend if they didn't want to travel on their own), to pay for childcare, speakers, organise women's weekend schools and set our own agenda. We organised a minibus to go to Greenham Common, an educational visit to the Dutch women's union in Amsterdam, solidarity visits to striking miners and organising accommodation and travel for miners' women's support groups along with campaigning for the union to have a creche at national conference and discussion of organising around our workplace issues. Then the union appointed two women full-time officials and control and the budget were taken away from us. However we were able to build a good organisation and draw in many women to become activists.

The academic theory behind the more widespread development of separate women's organisation was that, by encouraging women to meet and discuss union matters without men present would begin to redress the dire lack of women in leadership positions, as the women became more confident and gathered support. However, the lack of women leaders is only a small part of unions' failure to represent women members fully. Separate organisation mainly allows women to develop a voice, access training, support and develop solidarity without interference (and being endlessly coached in the rules, regulations, bureaucratic structures and the 'bible' for running meetings of Citrine). Unison, when it was set up as the new amalgamated public sector union in 1993, built self-organised groups (women, race, disability, LGBQT, youth - along with different

Jayaben Desai in 1977 outside the Grunwick factory.

trade groups) into its structure. This has clearly enabled a whole new range of activists to develop and promote new agendas. Whether it has succeeded in changing the overall bureaucratic representational structure significantly remains to be seen and so far does not appear to have challenged the position of women's low-paid employment. GMB has come to develop self-organised groups (SOGs) fairly recently (last 10-15 years) and they have definitely brought forward a large number of new activists, some of whom have been elected to positions within the structure. (Although we still don't have widespread creches - too costly I guess). One aspect of the women's organisation has been to mount wide and successful campaigns around sexual harassment, domestic abuse and menstrual/menopausal problems, along with mental health issues, enabling many workplaces and branches to negotiate workplace procedures around these issues. My main issue with the new structures, is that they are advisory rather than representational or decision-making and we still have to go cap-in-hand to get any new policies adopted by the main structure. And they do not hold a budget, so branches are expected to finance the activities of women delegates - which can be a problem in male-dominated branches. They still only attract small numbers of activists and do not reach the large numbers of women in, for instance, food factories, retail and care. Nor do they really challenge the hierarchical / patriarchal structures of the unions where the 'old boys'

continue to hang on to positions and be delegates to conferences year after year. In GMB branch secretaries are paid a substantial honorarium which in large branches can amount to a decent salary and also guarantees that they will fight tooth and nail to maintain their positions and discourage younger activists from taking on the role. They are often supported in their positions by the full time officers, which means that any attempts to unseat them and elect a new branch committee can become very nasty.—In NUPE in the eighties, the left pursued a campaign, which was eventually won at national conference, to disallow retired members from standing for any representational role (steward, convenor, branch secretary etc). This radically changed the composition of the branches and regional/national structures almost overnight.

Some women's struggles

Despite the difficulties and prejudices, there have nonetheless been some significant struggles hard-won by women over the last years. Notably equal pay/equal value actions, but also anti-privatisation and anti-cuts campaigns, along with union recognition and fights against zero hours and insecure contracts. On the whole unions have not been over keen to pursue equal pay/value cases, although groups of women have been successful in spite of a luke-warm response from them. As I recall, the argument against pursuing such cases from the bureaucracies,

has been that it is dangerous to pursue the legal path in case a detrimental precedent is set. Obviously there is no substitute for direct action, which is a collective response rather than the pursuit of individual cases (albeit handled as a group). Again, notions of value and worth are central to the demand and can cause resentment and discomfort to both unions and employers in relation to pay differentials and acknowledging the status of women as workers.

Whatever the structural problems of unions' approach to women organising, they are often the only recourse we have to organise and fight. Unions will not usually willingly initiate militant action and will have to be forced by the workers themselves to support and maintain a workplace campaign. Some unions are better than others and recently more radical unions such as the United Voices of the World (UVW), the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the Cleaners and Allied Workers Independent Union (CAWIU), have provided much needed dynamism to union organising. As anarchist communists we have a much wider and ambitious vision as well as different ways of doing things to the traditional model of mainstream union organsing. But thanks to the actions of women themselves, working within unions has achieved significant changes in the workplace. Grunwicks, the Ford machinists and Trico, the equal pay actions in Glasgow and Birmingham, the Barking hospital strike against privatisation and many other hospital anti-cuts campaigns led by women, have shown us the possibilities. As an example, the Barking hospital strike of a group of hospital cleaners and domestics led the way in an initial fight against privatisation. They were employed by Crothalls, a multinational cleaning contractor and they held a 24 hour picket line outside the hospital for over a year. Although they lost the fight eventually, they were able to forge international links with Crothalls' employees in other countries (New Zealand in particular, where workers took solidarity action), command national support with coach-loads of pickets coming from all over the country, and forge close links with miners (on strike at the same time) and miners' women's support groups. They challenged their unions (NUPE and GMB) to support and publicise their action and provide them also with practical support (warm winter clothing to protect them while sitting by the brazier at night in the winter - being one

thing). Many of the hospital occupations in the 1980s were organised and carried out by women, who were able to arrange shifts to sit-in, with domestic responsibilities and shared childcare.

Unite led a campaign to organise migrant worker cleaners in London some years ago and the IWW, UVW and IWGB more recently have prioritised supporting groups of peripheral and 'unorganisable' workers such as cleaners, foster carers, hospitality workers in bars, cafes and restaurants, private hire drivers and delivery workers - among these many migrant workers. These unions have developed a different, less hierarchical structure with an emphasis on direct action and/or the pursuit of exemplary legal cases, without paying large salaries to paid organisers. Unite's community branches could also prove to be a positive method of organising. GMB has attempted to organise sex workers, with two branches - one in London and one in Glasgow along with Equity which organises exotic dancers and porn actors. (Many of the exotic dancers came out of the GMB branch and joined Equity because they wanted a separate identity, however the two unions worked together on campaigns) These workers have been desperately affected by Covid 19.

The current situation of public-facing workers, and particularly of front line key workers in the health and care industries, could prove to be critical in the development of new strategies and forms of organisation. 75% of high risk workers are women and 95% of those in high risk jobs who are being paid poverty wages are women (Plan C 5th April 2020). The government's cruelty and hypocrisy has been obvious; clapping for and praising these workers, while at the same time bringing in new immigration laws which will penalise the many migrant and immigrant workers who have held the coronavirus NHS response together, and making plans to ensure that it will be these workers who will pay for the current crisis. They will pay for them through continued wage cuts, the removal of workplace protections, and job losses as well as a roll-out of privatisation.

Resisting this must be a priority for all unions, not just in the form of advice and support for employment tribunals, but to promote direct action and organisation. Most of these workers are unionised, or at least work in unionised workplaces. The TUC has recently announced

a surge in recruitment to unions. 170,000 women have joined unions in the last year so there is now the highest female membership since 1995 (TUC May 2020). However, it is not obvious that traditional unions are using this increased membership to initiate effective campaigns for health and safety in the workplace and fight for higher wages for low paid women workers in the health service and care industry.

The inequalities highlighted by the corona virus are stark, with Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers being twice as likely to die of the disease as white workers; for instance 30% of Bangladeshis living in overcrowded conditions (alongside 2% of white British households). Health, housing, childcare and insecure work with low pay and insecure immigration status must all form part of the organised fight back.

Home, work and community

Social reproduction and capitalist production are inextricably linked, whether through low-paid caring and servicing work or through the unequal division of labour in the home and family. The distinction between home and work is often blurred. *Capitalist production depends on the unpaid and low-paid work of women*. There has been a contentious debate within the women's movement about Wages for Housework - which on the face of it might seem an attractive demand. If women were to withdraw their labour at home and at work in an organised manner (million women strike), then society would grind to a halt, as childcare, the feeding of families, shopping, laundry, cleaning, and care of the elderly are all left to partners thus bringing all work to a halt. In October 1975 90% of women in Iceland had a day off and refused to do any paid or unpaid work, attending large rallies. This led in 1976 to the passing of the Gender Equality Act which outlawed sexual discrimination in workplaces and schools. However, the demand for wages for housework also just compounds the relegation of women to the domestic sphere. It also leans toward the demand for a universal income - which is the subject of another debate. Women still do 75% of the world's unpaid care work and spend between three and six hours on it (men's average is thirty minutes to two hours). On average globally, 61% of housework is done by women. (2015 McKinsey Global Institute), In the UK up to 70% of all unpaid dementia carers are women (Alzheimers Research 2015). And so on - we get the picture. Women have been very active in housing and community struggles, where they may have been less active in workplace issues. One woman explained to me why she had got fed-up with attending union meetings: "the agenda is designed to carry on with all the old format of business". When they had attended to bring up workplace issues, they were always left for 'any other business' at the end of meetings, by which time many had needed to leave because of domestic commitments or the sheer boredom of sitting through formal discussion that seemed irrelevant to them. There is no reason why workplace issues or AOB can't be taken at the beginning of meetings and, whilst formality and order are sometimes necessary for the smooth running of business, it is quite possible to be more friendly and welcoming in meetings.

Conclusion

'Social reproduction is what keeps us alive; capitalist production is what's killing us' *(Plan C - Building a Feminist Response to the Pandemic, 5th April 2020)*.

The position of women workers under patriarchal capitalism, despite being an old and long struggle (the first equal pay resolution was passed by the TUC in 1888) has had its ups and downs. Until we can challenge the status of women's paid work as peripheral, unskilled and low value along with their servicing role in the home we cannot challenge the capitalist structures of oppression. We need to look at the form, times and style of meetings; the perennial problems of women's double burden; the issues that women put forward for action (often belittled or ignored by mainstream unions); encourage and facilitate the demands for separate organisation. Domestic responsibilities and community struggles tend to be high on the agendas of women workers and must become part of our organising practice.

What can we do to support women's organisation and power?

- Encourage women to join and participate in trade unions; especially IWW, UVW, CAIWU and Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB). It is possible to hold dual cards. This applies particularly to the 'invisible' and 'unorganisable' groups of women workers - cleaners, childcare

workers, home carers, foster parents, child minders and so on.

- Promote and support separate organisation both within unions and other organisations and deliver women-only training and education.

- Explore the possibilities of different timings for meetings and also pursue campaigns for different hours of work where it would be possible for parents to take children to school and nursery and start and finish work within those hours without loss of pay or status. Perhaps the hours of school should also be examined.

- Make sure women workers are properly consulted about any form of action - straight to strike ballot is not the only way to take successful action against employers.

- Childcare: women will be excluded from taking an active part in organisation while childcare is scarce, expensive and not easily accessible. In Hackney in the 1970s women got together to establish community nurseries, run on a rota basis by and for the mothers. These were later taken over by the council, however, at the time were able to provide positive and community based facilities, not only enabling some women to take up paid employment, but also creating a solid community. This must be a central demand. Would we get a different group of members if we provided childcare at ACG meetings?

- In all of our workplaces explore the gender data gap: collect disaggregated data on Health and Safety issues and pursue sexual harassment cases (where the victim wants it) and at least gather data on them. Promote Domestic Violence, menstruation/menopause and mental health policies at work. I daresay that if the agendas of Health and Safety committees included serious exploration of women's H&S issues and data gathering, women might be more enthusiastic about becoming involved.

- Key workers and Covid19 - This virus has brought into stark contradiction the position of frontline key workers: low pay, low status, appalling conditions of work, risks to health and life, family commitments and so on. Politicians and managers have clapped and mouthed hypocritical words of gratitude while cutting pay and conditions, lying about protection and PPE, planning barriers to migrant workers and doing nothing to assist these workers. The fight of care and 'frontline' workers must surely be the priority struggle for the moment. Groups of cleaners, care workers, public-facing service workers are now taking industrial action all over the Country about pay and status. We must throw our energy behind these struggles (e.g. cleaners and porters at Homerton hospital June 2020).

The fight against capitalism and for an equitable society cannot succeed without the fight against patriarchy and the full involvement of women. None of this is new, (more is the pity) and I do not wish to state the obvious, but in the face of the current onslaught against the poor and disenfranchised, through cuts in jobs and wages and working conditions, it is important to emphasise the particular nature of the patriarchal attack upon working class women. It remains to be seen whether the huge public support for frontline workers and carers remains and develops into solidarity support for any struggles arising out of the current situation. No going back!

Further reading:

Invisible Women - exposing data bias in a world designed for men: Caroline Criado Perez (2019).

Servitude with a Smile (and other articles), Patricia Chong in various journals.
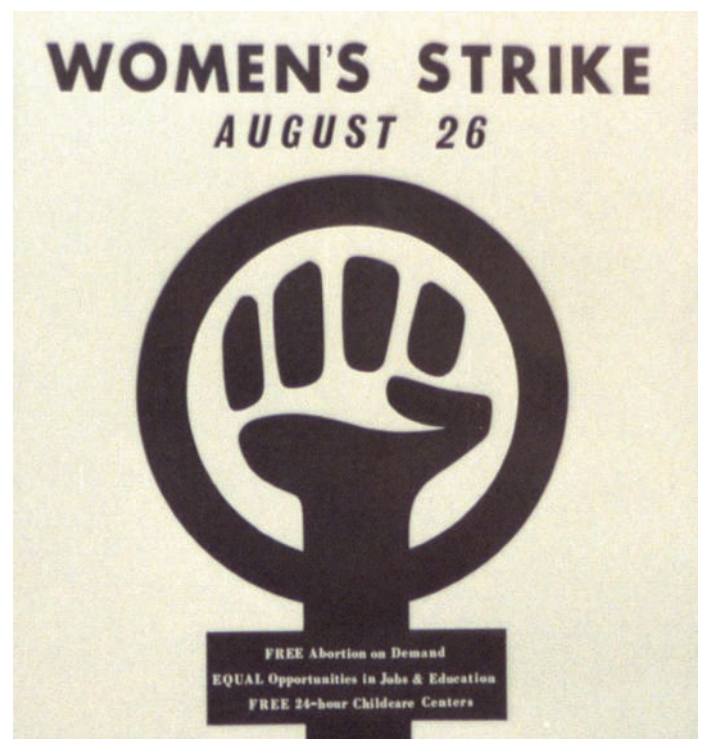
WHAT IS ANARCHIST COMMUNISM?

The following is the introduction to Brian Morris's forthcoming book on anarchist communism, projected to be published by Freedom. He has kindly allowed us to give readers a sneak preview.

Around 2002, at the age of eighty-one, the social ecologist Murray Bookchin suddenly announced that he had ceased to define himself as an anarchist, leading Ian McKay (2007) to suggest that Bookchin in his last years attempted to "trash his own legacy". Nothing could be further from the truth. For in his last years, under the rubric "communalism" (Bookchin 2007), Bookchin in fact re-affirmed his commitment to the kind of "libertarian socialism" that he had advocated all his life, and which in the past he had variously described as either anarcho-communism or social anarchism.

What Bookchin then meant by "anarchism" was the "post-left anarchy" that had become popular in the United states, and was equivalent to what he had earlier critiqued, in a highly polemical tract as "life style anarchism" (1995B). It was, according to Bookchin, comprised specifically of five strands of contemporary radical thought. These were, namely; petty-bourgeois Stirnerite egoism (Jason McQuinn); the anarcho-primitivism of John Zerzan (1994) with its anti-civilization rhetoric; the Nietzschean aesthetic individualism of Hakim Bey (1991) and his advocacy of the "poetic terrorism"; the reactionary romanticism of the crypto fascist and spiritualist Rudolf Bahro who yearned for a Green Adolf, and, finally, the individualistic tendencies that Bookchin discerned in the writings not only of Emma Goldman but of the existentialist Susan Brown (1993).

Anarchism, for Bookchin thus came to mean "post-leftist" anarchism; the kind of anarchism that completely repudiates the socialist legacy of the nineteenth century libertarian socialists, prototypically identified with the radical politics of Michael Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin. Indeed Bookchin was simply relating to the "chasm" that had already been created but the egoists and radical primitivists themselves in their highly dismissive attitude towards not only the Enlightenment and civilization but to the socialism that was intrinsic to so-called "classical" anarchism – the libertarian socialism of Bakunin, Kropotkin, Goldman, Malatesta, Landauer and Rocker, otherwise known as revolutionary socialism or simply anarcho communism.

In his last years Bookchin therefore came to describe four contemporary radical traditions; anarchism (as described above), revolutionary syndicalism, Marxism and his own brand of libertarian socialism – communalism (Bookchin 2007). Consonant with earlier forms of anarchist communism, Bookchin expressed his commitment to its four basic tenets. These are:

"a confederation of decentralized municipalities; an unwavering opposition to statism; a belief in direct democracy and a vision of a libertarian communist society" (1995 B: 60).

In his las years Bookchin envisaged an ecological society that was libertarian, socialist and democratic. However, quite misleadingly, Bookchin identifies anarchism as the "post-left" radicalism of the anarcho-primitivists and the devotees of Stirner and Nietzsche, and radically separates anarcho-syndicalism from his own libertarian socialism. Both of these moves are problematic to say the least.

There is now an absolute welter of books on anarchism – on its philosophy, its politics and its history, and there are many biographies on some of the key figures in anarchism as a political movement. (How different from when in February 1966 I first visited the Freedom Bookshop in London, and eagerly gathered some pamphlets – not much else was available then – on and by Michael Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin and Emma Goldman).

Leaving aside Bookchin's own narrow and highly idiosyncratic definition, anarchism as a political tradition has been described in two very distinct ways, both of which have validity. On the one hand anarchism has been described as a broad current of political thought going back to ancient times, to Lao Tzu in China and the Buddha in India. It thus incorporates any person, movement (religious or otherwise), or social philosophy that has expressed libertarian sentiments, or in some sense opposed the state and all forms of coercive authority (Marshall 1992:53-107) Contrary to what post(modern) anarchists often imply in the past not all revolts and acts of insurrection can be viewed as either progressive or libertarian: for the outcome was often the re-affirmation of other forms of authority; specifically what the sociologist Max Weber described as charismatic authority. This is a form of theocracy. Insurrectionism or "revolt" cannot be equated with anarchism or with a libertarian sensibility.

Around 1900 a German academic lawyer, Paul Eltzbacher, wrote a book which met with Kropotkin's approval, outlining the political philosophies of seven "exponents" of anarchism. They have come to be known as the "seven sages of anarchism" for all were fundamentally opposed to the modern state (Van der Walt and Schmidt 2009:36). They include: the 18th century English utilitarian philosopher William Godwin; Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, a libertarian French socialist who envisaged a form of "market socialism"; Benjamin Tucker, an American individualist anarchist, a follower of Proudhon and Josiah Warren; the German schoolteacher Max Stirner, who in the early nineteenth century extolled the virtues of an extreme form of individualism; Leo Tolstoy, the famous Russian novelist who advocated a form of religious anarchism, and, finally, two Russian libertarian socialists, both from aristocratic backgrounds, Michael Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin.

What is remarkable is that when there was a resurgence of anarchism in the 1960s most of the anthologies of anarchist writings produced in that decade (e.g. Horowitz 1964, Shatz 1971),as well as George Woodcock's (1962) classic history of anarchism, tended to adopt Eltzbacher's conceptual framework and thus describe several distinct "types" or "currents" of anarchism – the key criteria linking them being their opposition to the state. The types indicated include, specifically, religious, anarcho-syndicalist, individualist and communist forms of anarchism.

With the publication of Peter Marshall's book *"Demanding the Impossible"* (1992) subtitled a "history of anarchism", some thirty years later, anarchism was further widened to include anyone who expresses in any way libertarian sentiments, or who even pretends to be anti-state. Although an excellent text in many ways, well-researched, lucidly written and engaging, Marshall expresses in the book a marked antipathy towards Murray Bookchin's libertarian socialism, viewing the social ecologist as akin to Lenin in his sectarian politics (though Bookchin is no more sectarian than the Stirnerite egoists and the anarcho-primitivists in their opposition to socialism – indeed in being "enemies" (no less) of society (S.E.Parker et al 2011).Marshall contends that Bookchin's critique of "life-style anarchism" is "muddled and absurd" (1992 (2008):694). Marshall, however, completely misjudges Bookchin's critique of "post-left" anarchy. Bookchin expresses a fervent opposition, a "chasm" as he rhetorically put it, between libertarian socialism and all forms of what he envisaged as "bourgeois" individualism – as well as opposing, equally fervently, statism and capitalism. He was not suggesting an opposition between libertarian politics and socialism, which he felt, like Bakunin, were inextricably linked. In fact, Bakunin extolled the libertarian aspects of an earlier generation of libertarian socialists (anarchist communists).

In his history of anarchism, Marshall includes many people who are not by any stretch of the imagination, anarchists. They include, for example, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who, by Marshall's own admission, was an advocate of

the corporate state with totalitarian implications; Margaret Thatcher along with her guru Ayn Rand, who were both student advocates of free market capitalism and the minimal (but highly coercive) state; and the authoritarian Marxist Che Guevara (1992: 516-18, 559-62), as well as many other figures whose status as anarchists is at least debatable, and certainly marginal to anarchism as a political movement.

The fact that anarchism has been viewed simply as an "anti-authoritarian impulse" it embraces a bewildering variety of historical figures who have been described as anarchists, besides the anarchist communists like Bakunin and Kropotkin. They include, for example, Herbert Spencer, Mohandas Gandhi, Nicolas Berdyaev, Murray Rothbard, Leo Tolstoy, Max Stirner, Ayn Rand and Friedrich Nietzsche. This has led many scholars, especially Marxists, to dismiss anarchism as a completely incoherent political philosophy (e.g. Molyneaux 2011:10).

This is certainly not the case, for there is another way of describing anarchism as a political tradition, and that is to recognize that anarchism is fundamentally a historical social movement and political philosophy that emerged around 1870, mainly among working-class members of the International Working Men's Association, widely known as the First International. It involved a "split" or a "great schism" – as James Joll (1964: 84-114) called it – within the Association. It is usually described as if it focussed around a personal dispute between Karl Marx and Michael Bakunin. But as G.D.H.Cole (1954; 88-133) and others have suggested, this schism wasn't simply a clash of personalities, but involved two factions within the socialist movement, and two quite different conceptions of socialism, of the processes of social transformation – revolutionary change – and the conditions of human emancipation. The anarchist faction did not originally describe themselves as anarchists but rather as "federalists2 or as "anti-authoritarian socialists", but they came to adopt the label of their Marxist opponents, and described themselves as "anarchist communists". As a political movement and tradition anarchist communism thus emerged among the workers of Spain, France, Italy and Switzerland in the aftermath of the Paris Commune. It had its iconic founding at an international congress of anarchists at St.Imier in Switzerland in September 1872 (Morris 2018: 231-34).

Among the more well-known proponents of anarchist communism were Elisee Reclus, James Guillaume, Errico Malatesta, Carlo Cafiero, Jean Grave and Peter Kropotkin. Louise Michel was closely associated with the movement, but had been deported to New Caledonia after the defeat of the Paris Commune. She spent six years in exile (Thomas 1980). Between 1870 and 1930 anarchism, as revolutionary/libertarian socialism, spread throughout the world and was by no means restricted to Europe. Kropotkin, who was a key theorist of anarchist communism, described it as a kind of "synthesis" between radical liberalism – libertarianism – with its emphasis on the liberty of the individual and socialism (or communism) which implied a repudiation of capitalism and all forms of coercive authority and puts an emphasis on communal life and voluntary associations, on equality and social solidarity. (Baldwin 1970: 53). The ethos of anarchist communism is well expressed in the famous adage of Bakunin: "That liberty without socialism is privilege and injustice and that socialism without liberty is slavery and brutality" (Lehning 1973:110).

Two points may be made here. The first is that towards the end of the nineteenth century, given the *avant garde* ethos that was characteristic of the period, several varieties of anarchism emerged. Nevertheless, anarchist communism seems to have been the main form of anarchism, especially among working people and trade unionists. Secondly, the tendency of Marxists, academic philosophers, and egoists (including the post anarchists) to set up a radial dichotomy between anarchism and socialism is quite misleading – on both conceptual and historical grounds and distorts our understanding of socialism. Anarchist communism is a form of revolutionary or libertarian *socialism*. It needs, therefore, to be acknowledged that "both Bakunin and Kropotkin defined anarchism as an anti-capitalist ideology and a form of socialism" (Van der Walt and Schmidt 2009:46, Morris 2018:231-32).

The anarchist communism that emerged as a distinct political philosophy at the end of the nineteenth century was not the creation of one iconic figure, nor was it the creation of academic scholars: for it emerged from within a historical class movement. It arose out of the struggles of working people against the social oppression and the exploitative working conditions of industrial capitalism. It may be defined(below) in terms of four basic tenets, although it is worth noting at this juncture that distinction needs to be made between *metaphysics,* the basic ontologies that people hold regarding the nature of reality (the natural world) and the place of humans within it; specific *political philosophies,* such as that of egoism or anarchist communism; and thirdly, the various political *strategies* that people may

engage in, both in their struggles against the state and capitalism, and in creating alternative forms of social life through mutual aid and voluntary co-operation.

The four basic tenets or principles of anarchist communism are as follows:

Firstly, anarchist communism entails the rejection of state power and all forms of hierarchy and oppression; it is a critique of all forms of power and authority that curtail the liberty of the individual person. For social anarchists, of course, the individual is viewed not as an abstract possessive individual, still less a fixed benign essence, but as a <u>unique</u> being who is both <u>natural</u> – for humans are earthly beings – and <u>social</u> in being involves in a multiplicity of social relations, identities and social groups.

In being against the state, anarchist communists are also opposed, not only to the formation of political parties and participation in parliamentary government (i.e. elections) but also against any form of "revolutionary" government or "workers" state" (of the Marxists) as well as being opposed to the ideology of the modern nation-state – namely nationalism. Anarchist communism, it is worth stressing, is a synonym of libertarian socialism, and places a crucial emphasis on freedom, the liberty of the individual person. However many anarchist communists, in supporting, and often eagerly embracing anti-capitalist struggles and national liberation movements (such as Zapatistas in Mexico) can all too easily support authoritarian structures and hierarchy! Likewise, in emphasizing that the anarchism at the end of the nineteenth century was an intrinsic part of a wider working class (socialist) movement, and had close links with revolutionary syndicalism, radicals like Daniel De Leon, James Connolly and William Haywood, tend to be portrayed as a part of a broad <u>anarchist</u> tradition. In fact, these men were committed Marxists – state socialists. (Van der Walt and Schmidt 2009, Peacott 1991, Anchorage Anarchy 28 (2017) 1-9).

Contrary to Stirnerite egoists (discussed below) for anarchist communists the human individual is not sovereign, free to do whatever they like, using people and other life-forms purely as objects to be controlled and enjoyed. People have liberty only to the extent that they respect the integrity, well-being and equal liberty of other unique human beings. Liberty thus intrinsically entails both equality and social solidarity – the three key values of radical Enlightenment and anarchist communism.

Secondly, anarchist communists completely reject the capitalist market economy, along with the wage system, private property, its competitive ethos, and the ideology of possessive individualism (egoism). In fact, the early class-struggle anarchists were fervently anti-capitalist, referring to the wage system as "wage slavery". Equally important, anarchist communists like Kropotkin, agreed with Marx in recognizing that there is a close and symbiotic relationship between state power and capitalism, whether this implied the laissez-faire or welfare state, or state capitalism Although of comparatively recent origin, throughout history the essential function of the state, for anarchist communists, has been to uphold systems of hierarchy and class exploitation, and the modern nation state, with its representative government, is no different (Kropotkin 1993: 159-201).

The idea that it is only in recent years that capitalism has come to infiltrate the state, as suggested by such radical scholars as George Monbiot and Naomi Klein is quite misconceived; state power and capitalism have always been linked, together with that of religion, forming what Ricardo Flores Magon describes as the "dark trinity" (Morris 2018: 208, on Flores Magon see Bufe and Veryer 2005). Equally significant anarchist communists were emphasizing, long before post-anarchists that capitalism and the modern state were

PIERRE KROPOTKINE

LA
CONQUÈTE DU PAIN

PRÉFACE
PAR
ÉLISÉE RECLUS

DEUXIÈME ÉDITION

PARIS
TRESSE & STOCK, ÉDITEURS
8, 9, 10, 11, GALERIE DU THÉÂTRE-FRANÇAIS
PALAIS-ROYAL

1892
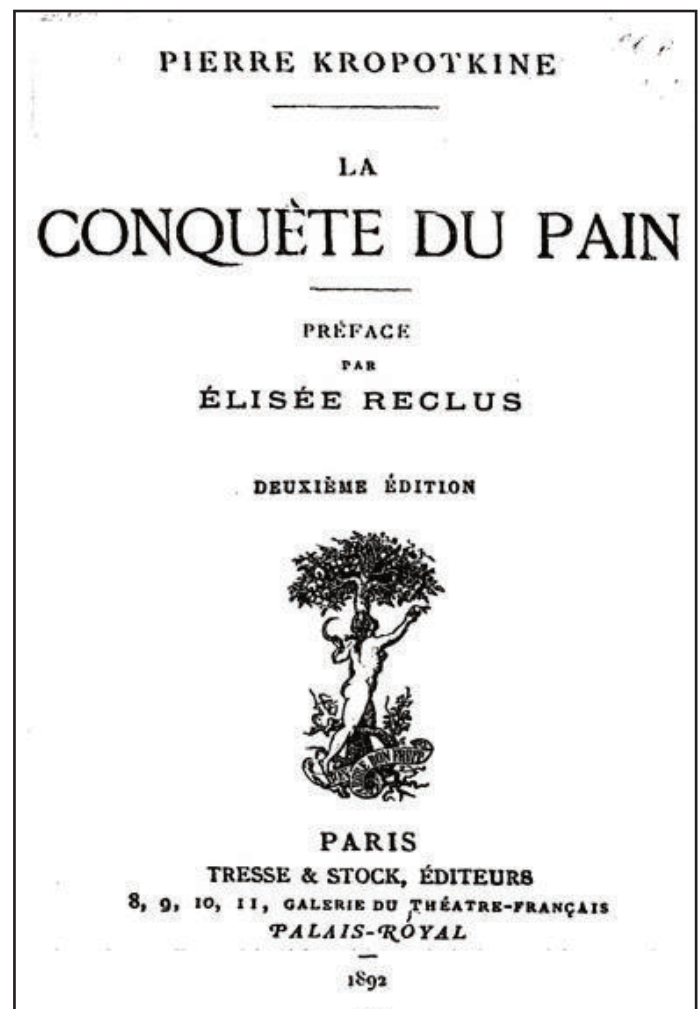
penetrating and "colonizing" not only the natural world but all aspects of social life and culture.

Thirdly, it expresses a vision of a society based solely on mutual aid and voluntary co-operation; a form of social organization that would provide the fullest expression of human liberty and all forms of social life that were independent of both the state and capitalism. Anarchist communists, as class struggle anarchists, thus believe in voluntary organisation, not in chaos, ephemerality, or "anything goes" and they view both tribal and kin-based societies and everyday social life in more complex societies as exhibiting some of the basic principles of anarchy. Both Elisee Reclus (1903) and Kropotkin (1902) were deeply interested in the social life and culture of tribal societies or "people without government" (Barclay 1082, Morris 2004; 2014B: 217-232). Anarchist communism is not, therefore, simply based on a future utopian ideal of a libertarian society, but on a socio-historical understanding of human social life and culture for "anarchy" (as a social form) has long existed among humans. Anarchist communists were also expressing an "anarchistic sensibility" (the "spirit of revolt") long before pretentious postmodern egoists, those devotees of so-called "ontological anarchy" (Hakin Bey 1991, Newman 2016). Long ago, of course, Errico Malatesta described freedom (liberty) as a "method" (Turcato 2014:143).

Fourthly, the anarchist communists grounded their political philosophy in a metaphysics that can be described as evolutionary naturalism (or emergent materialism). They were therefore ontological realists (like everyone else in their everyday social life), affirming that the material world (nature) exists independently of human cognition and human symbolic culture. Realism, of course, is experienced every time a volcano erupts or we get lost in the woods, and is confirmed by the fact that the material world – according to the contemporary science – existed long before humans appeared on the planet earth.

As evolutionary (dialectical) naturalists, anarchist communists like Bakunin and Kropotkin held that the world (reality) consists exclusively of concrete material things, along with their dispositions, qualities, actions (events) and relations with other things. Life, consciousness and human symbolic culture, are, therefore, all emergent properties of material things, and have no independent existence. As such all things, including humans are unique, historical entities, with an enduring identity.

Anarchist communists, like Marxists, also embrace the radical aspects of the eighteenth century Enlightenment, namely: its stress on empirical reason – not the disembodied rationalism of Cartesian metaphysics which "philosophers" like Diderot had brought down to earth; empirical science, with its ratio-empirical (relational) epistemology; a rejection of knowledge based on authority, mystical intuition or divine revelation; an affirmation of universal human values such as liberty, solidarity and equality; and, finally, an ethical naturalism that based morality on our knowledge of human earthly life, not on subjective whims, Kantian duty, utility, the local culture or divine edicts.

In embracing these radical aspects of the Enlightenment the anarchist communists essentially adopted the philosophical materialism of Alexander von Humboldt, Charles Darwin and Karl Marx and other left-Hegelians. They thus tended to be critical of religion and all idealistic philosophy, whether subjective (Kant) absolutist (Hegel) or cultural (later to be adopted with enthusiasm by postmodernists.)
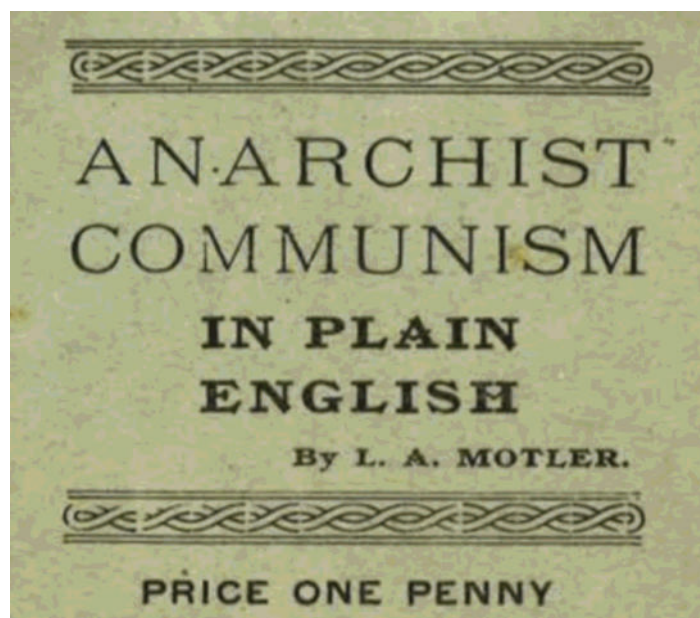
ANARCHIST COMMUNISM

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

By L. A. MOTLER.

PRICE ONE PENNY

poll tax rebellion
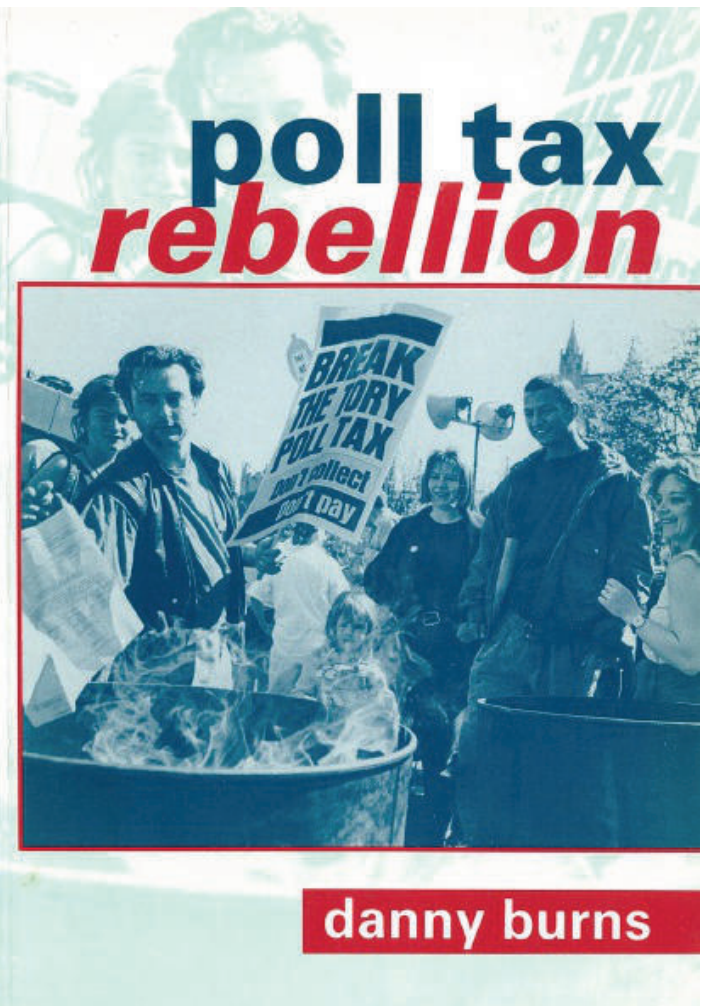
danny burns

The Poll Tax, officially known as the Community Charge, was a form of taxation introduced by the Thatcher government to replace domestic rates from 1989. It was first applied in Scotland, prior to its introduction in England and Wales from 1990. It was widely regarded as unfair and weighted against the less well-off. It resulted in a mass non-payment campaign and large demonstrations. This contributed a great deal to the resignation of Thatcher in 1990 and the abolition of the Poll Tax the following year.

As a flat tax rate which applied to everyone over the age of eighteen the Poll Tax meant smaller bills for the rich and higher bills for those least able to afford them. For many, the rates had been included in their rent. When the Poll Tax replaced the rates, many landlords refused to cut the rent they charged, and tenants were faced with finding the additional money. In introducing the Poll Tax Thatcher changed the tactics that had worked so well for her administration previously. Where their targets had been attacked one at a time, and the rest of the population had been used against those targets - the miners, the GLC – the Poll Tax took on too many at once.

Indeed, that it was likely to be a mistake was something that even some of her own government counselled. The last Poll Tax, after all, had sparked The Peasants Revolt of 1381.

People came off or didn't register to vote – there was a significant drop in the number of people who were then able to vote, mostly from the poor and the young. These were people who, naturally, were less likely to vote Tory.

As the tax was to be introduced in Scotland first it was here that the initial conflict on strategy developed. How best to stop the Poll Tax – protest or resistance? The Labour Party's tactic was to try and stop the tax before it was implemented. Their primary concern was (then as now) to be seen as electable. They would not support breaking the law.

Citizens Against the Poll Tax – a group that tried to sway public opinion through publicity was established. It was non-party political but was broadly seen as a middle-class protest, not involved in the communities which would be hardest hit. Whilst they were successful in getting information out to people, and they did not condemn illegal action, they were not able to organise a mass movement and the failed to see that for many non-payment was not a choice.

In Scotland more community-oriented organisation started to develop. The Anti-Poll Tax Union, set up by The Workers Party of Scotland – was the first to try to gather mass support for resistance to the tax but did not play a major role

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going forward, although their emphasis on grass-roots organising with local people in the schemes would become the approach increasingly adopted throughout the UK. It was the first group to call for non-payment and non-registration (Maryhill, Glasgow). Other organisations also made a call for resistance to the tax in late 1987 including the Labour Party based Militant and Community Resistance Against the Poll Tax (libertarian socialists). The former emphasised a centralised campaign to be orchestrated by their All Britain Anti-Pol Tax Federation, established in November 1989, whilst the latter wanted to build a federation of anti-poll tax unions from the bottom up. Their decentralised approach, talking directly to people and keeping things local, as well as their insistence that resistance be non-aligned encouraged people who had never been involved in politics to join. The momentum for non-payment was building.

By May 1988 even the STUC were talking about non-payment, a position the Labour leadership in Westminster were adamantly against. On September 13th the STUC called for 11 minutes of action against the Poll Tax. Some workers decided not to return to work after the 'tea break' protest.

There were Scottish Labour MPs who refused to pay and called on others to do the same (the Committee of 100 – prominent Scots). In November 1988 in a by-election in Govan the SNP took the seat from Labour after its candidate stood on a non-payment platform. The Labour MP dropped a majority of nearly 20,000 to lose by 2,500 votes. When the Poll Tax was implemented in April '89 Labour and the STUC's protest was dead. The anarchists were quick to point out the dangers in thinking that an effective struggle could go through the official labour movement.

The anarchists

The Anarchist Communist Federation wrote two pamphlets on the Poll Tax struggle, the first of which was *The Poll Tax and How to Fight it*, published in October 1988 as Anarchist Communist Editions (ACE) No. 2. The pamphlet particularly attacked the Labour Party, who, along with the TUC and the STUC, had by then launched the Stop It! campaign. The pamphlet attacked both the hypocrisy of the Labour Party, who were already gearing up to implement the Tax at a local level, and the "pathetic" and "useless" People's Petition that the three organisations were sponsoring. Unlike the Trotskyists, who were either invested within the Labour Party like the Militant Tendency, or who offered critical support to it, especially at times of elections, like the Socialist Workers Party, the Anarchist Communist Federation came from a current intransigently hostile to Labourism and social democracy. It was also able to see that the local State, as embodied in councils, were merely an extension and form of the central State. The ACF argued that the Poll Tax would be stopped through action taken by working class people in the streets and estates where they live, backed up by the action of council workers inside each local authority. The nature of the Labour Party role as well as that of the trade union bureaucrats as saboteurs of the poll tax struggle were noted: as well as the dangerous concept of "anti-Toryism" where no criticism of Labour was offered, a characteristic of groups like Militant and the SWP.

The anarchist communists exposed Labour sabotage of the movement, characterising it as a twin strategy of trying to disguise its total compliance with the poll tax, and spike all effective opposition to it, and that the first battle they waged against the emerging poll tax struggle, was to predict its 'certain defeat'.

They showed how the Labour leader Neil Kinnock, as early as January 1988, had warned a conference in Edinburgh, that even to consider building a mass campaign of poll tax non-payment was 'a fruitless council of despair'. He called on those working class families faced with finding money for massive Poll Tax bills they simply could not afford, to 'do nothing and wait' for a certain Labour victory in the next election. His pleadings met with a contemptuous response. As anger against the poll grew and became more vocal, the Labour Party and the Scottish TUC decided that they needed to be seen to be doing more to 'oppose' the hated 'community charge'.

So, while Labour controlled authorities throughout Scotland busied themselves spending thousands on computer systems to compile registration lists, the Labour Party and STUC promoted their 'Stop-It!' campaign - claiming they wanted to help people disrupt and delay the registration process! While Labour bureaucrats organised token symbolic 'opposition' to the compiling of the lists, their party colleagues in local town halls prepared to despatch snoopers to working class estates and threaten with fines those who wouldn't sign up. Many Labour authorities paid for purpose-built new office space to house their poll tax operations - hoping that by separating it from other council work, people might somehow not realise what the council was up to. Birmingham Labour council

named its new poll tax office 'Margaret Thatcher House'. Labour slimeball David Blunkett, shadow local government spokesman, condemned the non-payment movement and Scottish Labour councils fell over one another to show how tough they were going to be on non-payers.

The ACF and others who had no trust in the Labour Party or the Trade Union leaderships made arguments for how the imposition of the Poll Tax could be defeated: opposing registration to begin with. Although this action was individual, if it was coordinated in communities by Anti-Poll Tax Groups, the tactic could be collectivised and the pamphlet gave examples of this already happening in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Opposition to implementation was also put forward as crucial to an effective campaign, with council workers refusal to collect and process the Poll Tax, working in conjunction with the Anti-Poll Tax Groups. Finally, non-payment was seen as key to beating the Tax and the campaign to promote non-payment would be dependent upon the establishment of networks and federations of anti-poll tax groups working cohesively, outside the control of political parties and trade unions.

The ACF was as scathing about the role of the different Trotskyist groups as they were about the Labour Party. In issue No 17 of Organise! (November 1989) there was a major article on "Militant and other parasites on the Poll Tax Struggle" where they spelt out the "enormous threat to the potential success of the community end of the anti-Poll Tax struggle…that could wreck the chances of a confident and independent working class campaign of resistance". This was the role of Militant in trying to ensnare anger over the poll tax, seeking to direct energy into demanding the Labour bureaucracy take up the cudgels and fight on our behalf". We categorically stated that tying the campaign to the very institutions that want to suffocate the possibility of successful actions, was a recipe for disaster.

Militant, after the collapse of its march through the councils and its municipal socialism, and especially the defeat of the Militant controlled Liverpool council, had been affected by demoralisation, and a fall in membership. We saw that the leaders of Militant, Ted Grant and Peter Taafe, saw the need to revitalise their organisation and that the poll tax struggle was a golden opportunity to do this. Relatively weak at the industrial level, Militant pushed the need for community organisation. As early as December 1987, Militant had established the 'Labour Movement against the Poll Tax' with a conference in Leith. Non-registration was rejected by them, in part because of the fear that non-registration might not gain mass support, but also because they were tied to the Labour Party and the idea of a Labour electoral victory.

The Community Resistance organisation, after some debate, did support non-registration, but what all the emerging anti-Poll Tax groups were agreed on was non-payment and the creation of local, community based action. In January 1988 the various Community Resistance groups and anti-Poll Tax unions established the first City-wide federation in Edinburgh.

There were over a 1,000 local Anti-Poll Tax Unions by November 1989 and it was these that formed the basis of resistance across the country. They would initially start small, often from existing informal networks, meeting in homes before expanding into larger public meetings. Groups would provide information and support to people setting up new groups in their community. People were kept up to date with what was happening in their area and grew more confident about not paying the tax when they knew how many others around them were in the same boat, and that support would be there when the time came. Building solidarity was important with street canvassing, local bill-burnings and city-wide marches crucial for creating and maintaining momentum. Informal networks were very important. Most of the non-payers were not activists, nor did they attend a meeting. Clearly information was circulating through communities after meetings through these informal networks and some local shops displayed Anti-Poll Tax information in their windows. Also, saturation coverage – with flyposting going on, including Wanted posters featuring photographs of bailiffs. Local groups often came up with their own imaginative propaganda, something that reinforced the feeling that the campaign was rooted in the community.

Generally, the groups organised by locals were much more democratic than the groups organised by Militant. Militant even started groups in areas where APTU's already existed in order to try and take control of the movement. Militant groups were generally less effective with their top down structure and their formal bureaucracy meaning that they were less open to, and less interesting to, ordinary people. There priority was control and getting people into Militant. Amongst other things this meant they were less able to tap into and influence informal local networks.

In the summer of 1989, Anti-Poll Tax unions who did not come under the sway of Militant called a conference for September in London as a precursor to establishing a UK wide federation. Every known Anti-Poll Tax group was invited but Militant called a rival conference for two days later and set up a Conference in November to Establish a UK Anti-Poll Tax organisation (with them as the leadership). They sent Tommy Sheridan, then little known outside of Scotland, to convince the 200 assembled to join their initiative. The independents decided to work with what became

the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation (ABAPTF) but to also establish the 3D Network (Don't Pay, Don't Collect, Don't Implement) in order for an independent voice to be heard. The ABAPTF packed its executive with members of Militant whilst presenting itself as the face of the movement. The 3D Network associated members of the executive were in a small minority but, responsible for the production of the bulletin of ABAPTF, found that the Federation had little interest in communicating via their own bulletin, preferring to use their newspaper, *Militant*. Whilst the anti-Poll Tax momentum grew, the ABAPTF lost touch with the grassroots and underestimated the level of organisation and the numbers of people committed to resisting the Poll Tax.

The ACF's second pamphlet, *Beating the Poll Tax* was a larger, more in-depth pamphlet which benefited from the experience of the more developed anti-poll tax movement which, by the time of publication in March 1990, was in full swing across Britain. The pamphlet talked about the various direct-action tactics that many local anti-poll tax groups were using and gave examples of council and other worker's collective resistance. Although the relentless attack upon the fake opposition of the Labour Party and Trade Unions continued on from the first pamphlet, there was a section on The 'Left' and the Poll Tax, which focused upon the policies and behaviour of the, at the time, big two on the non-Stalinist left: The Socialist Workers Party and the Militant Tendency. The former had been initially dismissive about any community campaign – arguing that only through trade union action in the workplace could the poll tax be stopped, a position shared by the Anarchist Workers Group. Their r tune was to change when they saw the momentum of community based resistance. The pamphlet drew attention to the fact that in the summer of 1989 the SWP were talking about the defeat of the anti-poll tax campaign and by 1990 they were mobilizing their membership in other directions. The SWP came and went and came back again. The Revolutionary Communist Party, the precursor to today's Academy of Ideas Ltd and Spiked, launched its Smash the Poll Tax Campaign front in 1989 only to wind it up a few months later upon realising that they were unable to dominate the movement, arguing there was no revolutionary potential in the non-payment campaign...

Beating the Poll Tax was published shortly before the Poll Tax Riot in central London on March 31st, 1990. There had been a number of Town Hall demonstrations when councils set the tax. Some of these became violent at the instigation of the police. They set the scene for Trafalgar Square a few weeks later. The national demo was called by the ABAPTF but, out of touch with the movement, they expected far fewer numbers than the 200,000 demonstrators that converged on London that day (there were 50,00 simultaneously in Glasgow).

The demonstration turned into a riot after a variety of police provocations. These included the needlessly brutal arrests of a man in a wheelchair and a woman, who was stripped in front of the crowd, the use of police horses in crowded areas from the beginning and, most recklessly, the driving of police vans into the crowd at speed. Thousands of demonstrators were injured but the subsequent official report into the day's disorder made no mention of these, concentrating instead on the injuries to police officers. There were hundreds of arrests on the day and many more in the days following, aided by calls to 'shop 'em' in the tabloid press. It was clear in the run-up to the demonstration that there were going to be far more people turning up that was originally expected. Trafalgar Square holds 60,000 so the organisers requested that the march be changed to Hyde Park. This was refused by the Department of the Environment on the grounds that they hadn't been given a weeks' notice. Squeezing 200,000 into a space for 60,000 was a recipe for disorder and injury. Laughably, the police estimated the crowd on the day as 40,000! No police officers faced charges despite the photographic and video evidence and no responsibility was taken by anyone in the police hierarchy for the disorder.

Responses to the Trafalgar Square riot on March 31st 1990 affirmed the analysis of the ACF. Labour stayed true to form with Deputy Leader Roy Hattersley being one of the first to denounce working class resistance to the poll tax and remarking that "'hope that there have been substantial numbers of arrests and the sentencing is severe".

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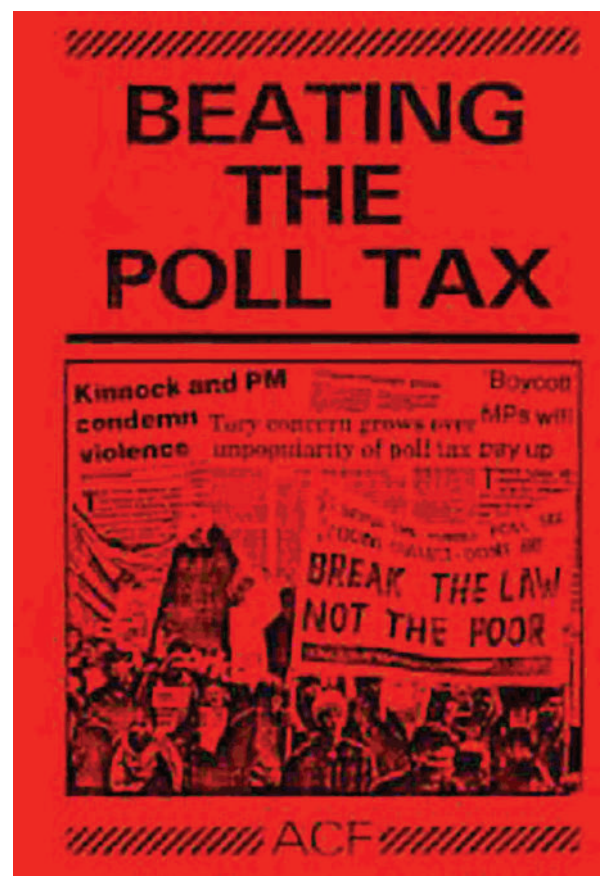
As to Militant, it was quick to denounce the riot. They were the first to show themselves as police collaborators after the 31ˢᵗ, with Steve Nally (Militant Poll Tax organiser) losing no time in announcing that the Militant dominated All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation…would be 'naming names', swiftly followed by the ABAPTF calling on the 'labour' movement to ' unmask' and deal with the disrupters and disorganisers. Tommy Sheridan followed this up in Scotland by saying that the ABAPTF would have 'no qualms' in 'informing the police' of any rioters it could identify. The role of Militant was thus revealed. Anarchists were blamed, notably the Class War Federation, which was at its hight at that point and one of their spokespeople defended the rioters as "working class heroes" on national television. Contrary to those who condemned the violence as derailing the movement, and many who supported it, the Poll Tax Riot lead not to a collapse of the campaign, but to the growth of APTUs and a burst of confidence. Militant was forced to back peddle and to support the Trafalgar Square Defendants Campaign (TSDC), an independent defence initiative whose nine-point programme included unconditional support for all defendants, political non-alignment and a commitment that the initiative would be controlled by and accountable to the defendants. The ABAPTF was forced to support the TSDC, albeit begrudgingly, in order to keep up with developments. It became clear in the subsequent court cases that the police had fabricated much of their evidence, at times so obviously so that cases were dismissed, and evidence was referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions (for perjury).

Local organising went from strength to strength. A march in solidarity with the defendants was organised for October 20ᵗʰ, 1990 without the support of the national ABAPTF organisation (although affiliated APTUs supported it). The day began with a picket outside Horseferry Road magistrates court, followed by a march to a rally in Brockwell Park and then another march to Brixton to picket the jail were most of the Poll Tax prisoners were being held. There were 1,500 at the court, 25,000 in the rally and 3,500 on the final march. While the earlier parts of the day had been peaceful, 3,000 police went with the march to Brixton (there had been 2,000 officers to police the 200,000 at Trafalgar Square). The had been rumours leading up to the march that the police intended to use Brixton as a rematch, and after the head of the march had reached the prison riot police charged the crowd. Again, many demonstrators were injured.

TDSC did a huge amount of work before the march, knowing there was good chance it would be attacked by the police. Stewards were briefed weeks in advance, trained crews were there to photograph events in a way that would not incriminate defendants, and there was organised communication on the day that allowed for support to be called upon. Names and numbers were recorded in real time and someone was sent to greet every single demonstrator who had been arrested and was released on bail. This meant that all those arrested were in touch with the campaign within a week of the march and the when TDSC gave a press conference after the march they were able to provide exactly information about who had said and done what. As a consequence, the papers the day after the march carried two versions of the events where after the Trafalgar disturbances, they had only carried the police version.

Early in 1991 it was recognised that in addition to the other solidarity work the poll tax campaign were involved in they needed to include prison work for those who had been jailed. This included support and advice, a newsletter and fundraising to provide welfare for the prisoners.

The non-payment strategy was initially helped by councils struggling with the massive administration involved in the new tax. They were further hindered by the harassment and intimidation staff who were involved in trying to get people to register were subjected to. The non-payment strategy was initially helped by councils struggling with the massive administration involved in the new tax. They were further hindered by the harassment and intimidation staff who were involved in trying to get people to register were subjected to.

Danny Burns, secretary of the Avon Federation of Anti-Poll Tax Unions and one of the three non-aligned members of the ABAPTF executive said that "One of the unique factors about the Poll Tax court cases was that magistrates were not allowed to take into account the circumstances of the people who were up before them. This was written into the legislation and marked a complete departure from the rates system." This infuriated people further as many were not paying because they couldn't afford to and had brought a full accounting of their expenditure to prove it. That this was disregarded by so many magistrates affected the way many viewed the Justice system, questioning it for the first time.

Different strategies were adopted in Scotland and the rest of the UK for dealing with bailiffs. In Scotland, if they gave four days' notice they could legally break and enter, but they couldn't elsewhere.

Advice was provided by APTU's to non-payers about what bailiffs could and couldn't do. Bailiff's premises were visited to make it clear that the people they were targeting had support, even going so far as to visit the home of one of the owners of the bailiff companies, staging a mock sale of the goods he had been foolish enough to leave in an unlocked garage. Some transferred ownership of

their possessions to their children so they could not be sold off, others hid their belongings in neighbours' houses. Hundreds of people would turn up to stop bailiffs removing goods from a neighbour's home. By April 1991 Bailiff companies were struggling financially. They worked on a commission basis so didn't get paid if they didn't recover debts. They had to take on additional staff to cope with the workload, but they were taking in less money. A number went out of business.

Wage and benefit arrestment were additional weapons in the armoury of local councils as was, in Scotland, the freezing of bank accounts. There were however serious problems with using these. Scottish local authorities had only managed to get some money from a tiny fraction of the non-payers and English and Welsh councils fared no better. The next step was the threat of imprisonment. People did begin to be sentenced to prison terms, as unbeknown to many, around 300 a year had been for inability to pay their rates. However, it soon became clear to local authorities that it would be impossible to jail everyone, (and that a two-week prison sentence would cost the state ten times the money they would have taken in poll tax from that individual), they slowed down. As people recognised that the last threat of non-payment was gone, they had even less reason to pay.

There were some in Thatcher's own party who had warned that the Poll Tax would be a disaster for them, and it wasn't long before more and more came to the same conclusion. The government made a series of concessions, offering rebates to various demographics, in an attempt to stem the public anger. This not only caused further administrative chaos, but it completely failed to mollify the public. Recognising the electoral danger Thatcher, once seen as indestructible, was ousted by the end of 1990, and less than six months later the abolition of the Poll Tax was announced. All the other main parties claimed the victory was there's but that was nonsense. John Major had admitted that the Poll Tax couldn't be enforced.

Danny Burns again: "From the very start, they argued that we would never build a community campaign because there was no longer a community. They said that people were only interested in themselves and didn't go to meetings; that people were demoralised by the political defeats of the last decade and would not be prepared to take risks over the Poll Tax, and, that people in Britain might demonstrate, but would never be convinced not to pay because they were law-abiding citizens with no tradition of breaking the law. Yet millions of people broke the law for the first time. Local communities turned out against the bailiffs; hundreds of thousands went to meetings; and many more contributed in other ways. Individuals and communities took the risks that the labour movement was not prepared to take."

It is the capacity for the working class to self-organise, mobilise, and act collectively in its own interest without the 'leadership' of political parties that is one of the important lessons of the Poll Tax struggle. Another is that consistent and co-ordinated organisation and agitation by libertarian revolutionaries in our communities and in our workplaces is vital and that this lesson should be acted upon in our activity today.

Putting the poll tax rebellion in perspective

Can't Pay Won't Pay: The Fight to Stop the Poll Tax (2020).

Simon Hannah. London: Pluto Press.

CAN'T PAY WON'T PAY

The Fight to Stop the Poll Tax

By SIMON HANNAH

This book marks the 30th anniversary of the Poll Tax rebellion. It's the first comprehensive history of a social movement that helped bring down one of the most powerful British prime ministers of

IT WAS THIRTY years ago that a full-scale riot erupted in Trafalgar Square in central London as the political temper of a march against the hated "poll tax" reached a collective boiling point. On 31 March 1990, protestors fought with the police, seized and held their ground, trashed and burned targeted buildings and repulsed repeated attempts by counter-attacking cops to contain the disorder. The clashes gripped the Square and locked up central London for many hours, spreading out towards the West End, as marchers and rioters dispersed.

The Trafalgar Square riot was a lightning rod for the rage and discontent that ran through the struggle against the poll tax. While it was the largest and most intense physical confrontation generated during the campaign, it was far from being the only one. There were numerous smaller scale battles between protestors and state authorities at town halls and council premises across the country, aiming to thwart the implementation of the new regressive local tax system. As the months of struggle continued, physical mobilisations to disrupt and delay proceedings at the courts, and to prevent bailiffs seizing goods from the homes of non-payers, became key to maintaining the momentum and effectiveness of the resistance.

But above all else it was the sustained mass campaign of non-payment, involving hundreds of thousands of working class families and individuals across the country, that rendered the poll tax unworkable. That mass act of refusal did not pivot on the exercise of class power at the point of production. What was key to wrecking the poll tax was action in local neighbourhoods and working class communities, much of it organised outside of the usual structures and practices of the official labour movement, and much of it prosecuted through instinctively non-hierarchical and politically independent means.

The "Community Charge" (aka the poll tax) was integral to the plans of the Thatcher-led Conservative government of the 1990s to slash that part of the social wage provided through the local state (libraries, community services, drop-in provision, home-help, day-centres and the like). The leverage for this was the introduction of a flat rate tax, to replace the local rates system, levied equally on every council resident regardless of income. The intention was to force the poor to vote for councils that would slash social provision: and so keep poll tax bills low. It was a vicious and vindictive act of class war, and from the moment it was announced a campaign of working class resistance to its implementation cumulatively sealed its fate.

The defeat of the poll tax was not (as some of the left claim) the singular cause of the demise of prime minister Margaret Thatcher. But the Thatcher administration's humiliation over the poll tax, signalled the exhaustion of her government's neo-liberal agenda and accelerated her ignominious departure from office at the hands of her Tory rivals.

In the context of a decade of setbacks and defeats for the working class, victory over the poll tax was a remarkable high point in the continuing struggle against the power of capital. Given the significance of the years of poll tax resistance, and the way in which so much of that resistance unfolded "with the grain" of class based libertarian politics, it's surprising that, even thirty years on, the history of the defeat of the poll tax has yet to be given a comprehensive retrospective anarchist treatment.

The work that's come closest is *Poll Tax Rebellion*, published in 1992 by AK Press. Written by independent left activist Danny Burns, the book provides an enthusiastic grassroots activist perspective on the struggle. Burns' politics were left libertarian, and he displays an instinctive affinity with community-run aspects of the non-payment campaign. Written in the immediate aftermath of the tax's abolition, the book delivers a readable first-draft history of the rebellion, which celebrates effective examples of successful class-based action. Yet Burn's vivid account is weakened by his reliance on some muddled libertarian politics. While he's critical of the behaviour of Militant, the Labour Party and others on the left, he continually misrepresents their role in the conduct of the class struggle: which is to obstruct, disable and prevent its effective prosecution. It's a political characterisation that misrepresents the nature of enemy forces in the class war.

Author Simon Hannah's new book *Can't Pay Won't Pay: The Fight to Stop the Poll Tax* recounts the story of the mass struggle from a somewhat different "independent left" perspective to Burns. This means that, while Hannah's account is similarly undermined by leftist assumptions which hobble his class analysis, his book also provides a robust defence of the utility of independent working class action, and a clear articulation of the central role of the non-payment campaign. Unusually amongst his left-leaning peers, he refuses to present the riots and "scenes of disorder" that were an integral part of the resistance as "damaging" or as a "distraction". Far from being an arid Trotskyist route-march around the usual way markers, this is a "socialist" assessment of the poll tax struggle that merits attention and has much to recommend it. And while Burns' story is focused on the intricacies of the campaign, Hannah's narrative reinforces the history from the front-line of the rebellion with a fuller sense of the decisive political context than Burns' book provides.

Can't Pay Won't Pay tracks the key phases in the development of resistance to the poll tax. Beginning with the build-up of momentum around the non-registration campaign, Hannah tracks the adoption and spread of mass non-payment, then documents the rise of neighbourhood level resistance to enforcement. He analyses the rise of opposition to the tax through a clear prism of class politics, and focuses in particular on the utility of implacable, resilient independent working class opposition. In addition, Hannah is clear that working class power can be leveraged in the context of community and in the streets (at the nexus of consumption and reproduction) as well as at the point of production: in the workplace. A key part of that is an impressive examination of the pitiful level of industrial action that was inspired directly by opposition to the poll tax.

While working class communities across the country rendered the poll tax all-but uncollectable, action in the workplace was limited to terms-and-conditions disputes by public sector workers and civil servants. While such action was wholly justified in itself, it remained entirely contained within narrow sectional concerns about training and workload: none of the small number of walk-outs (and even smaller number of brief strike actions) broke out of that confine to become political strike action *against* the poll tax or *in solidarity* with those facing tax demands that they could ill afford to pay.

As Hannah persuasively argues, despite the near total lack of workplace resistance to the poll tax (rather than to its impact on the workers charged to implement it), the act of refusing to pay, taken by hundreds of thousands of working class families and individuals, shattered the government's poll tax ambitions entirely. It demonstrated that, in the late twentieth century, the exercise of working class power was not something only possible through the axis of factory and office.

What dilutes the power of Hannah's analysis is the treatment that he affords the Labour Party, the far left and the official trade union movement. Time and again, Hannah is critical of the *behaviour* of each of these agencies at key moments in the unfolding of the campaign. But he does not take seriously the anarchist contention that this behaviour is the result of the *nature* and *function* of these institutions. It's not a question of *poor temperament* (and certainly not of "weak leadership") that leads left-wing parties to obstruct and attack effective opposition to capital. It's the fact that these

organisations are inimical and antagonistic to working class interest. This confusion leads Hannah to accept the motivations of a parasitic leftist organisation like the Militant Tendency at face value, rather than to recognise them as detrimental and actively hostile to genuine working class endeavour.

Yet Hannah's determination to defend the actions of working class communities in refusing to pay the tax, in routing bailiffs and council officials, battling with cops, defying court officials - and accepting anarchist involvement in the campaign as legitimate and warranted - sets him apart from so many of his left peers.

His celebration of the success of the campaign in securing the repeal of the tax is an inspiring read. But it also offers a sober and realistic assessment of the balance of class forces in the UK in the early 1990s, and is devoid of the absurd triumphalism of so many other perspectives on the left.

As Hannah observes in the closing analytical section of the *Can't Pay Won't Pay*, the mass mobilisations and resolute community resistance that killed off the poll tax quickly dissipated in the months that followed its abolition. Some within the anarchist movement who had been active in support of the poll tax struggle had been reluctant to put forward explicit arguments for revolutionary class politics as part of their involvement. Those voices argued that the focus had to be on the immediate and pressing threat of the poll tax, and that wider advocacy for an anarchist case risked alienating some otherwise sympathetic community activists. Prioritising a shared focus on activism certainly made the mechanics of poll tax protests easier to organise. But it was an ultimately self-defeating compromise. It made it much more difficult to win over poll tax resisters to the kinds of revolutionary politics that recognise the need to prosecute the class war in other areas of struggle in the longer-term.

In several inner-city area across the country, some anarchist activists who were particularly suspicious of national organisations tried instead to set up local neighbourhood campaign hubs. These were intended to serve as the catalyst for future acts of community resistance. But despite laudable intentions, the difficulties that such groups faced in sustaining purposeful neighbourhood activity in even the medium term highlighted once again the acute limits of localism.

One of the more satisfying ironies of the struggle is that Militant's efforts to secure leverage for their work within the Labour Party through interference in poll tax resistance failed so spectacularly. For all their nefarious and toxic political manoeuvring, the poll tax would be Militant's last hurrah. The organisation first split in two, with the Scottish section declaring independence and sliding closer to the politics of Scottish nationalism. The rebranded "Socialist Party in England and Wales" suffered a series of ruptures and breakaways, enduring compound membership losses before being reduced to the lowly status of one of the leftist "sects" its leaders used to disdain.

Within a few years, each of Militant's former leaders was marooned inside rival micro-parties. Their shared experience of disaster was made all the more distasteful by the self-destructive antics of the party's previous anti-poll tax "hero" Tommy Sheridan. Consumed by a combination of arrogance, hubris and self-delusion, Sheridan was jailed for perjury following a tabloid exposé of his personal life, to which he responded in a calamitous (and wholly unnecessary) way in the courts. No longer the political "martyr", he was soon abandoned by most of his dwindling band of allies. It was an endpoint as ignominious as it was well deserved; and left only the detritus of Militant to be swept aside.

The defeat of the poll tax was a significant victory for the working class in Britain, in a period so often characterised by retrenchment and defeat. The end of the poll tax did not, of course, mean the end to attacks on social provision and the social wage, which have continued in different forms to this day. But the anti-poll tax movement demonstrated the nascent power of community-based working class resistance to assaults on social provision. It hinted at how defensive action might be transformed into a more widespread, pro-active assertion of need unconcerned by the limits of capitalism's profit logic. A comprehensive anarchist history of resistance to the poll tax could be a vital contribution to understanding how that transition, from defence to offence, might be accelerated in the class struggles to come.

We Fight Fascists: The 43 Group and Their Forgotten Battle for Post-War Britain (2019).
Daniel Sonabend. Verso.

At the end of the Second World War the defeat of the Axis powers did not eradicate antisemitism or fascism in Britain. Though many of the country's most prominent pre-war fascists and their supporters had been interned during the war under special regulation 18B, the allied victory had done nothing to dent their faith in their repellent ideology, and soon they were holding public meetings, often in heavily Jewish areas of London, just as they had done before the war. Sickened that they had fought fascism overseas only to find it alive and well on their own doorstep a group of Jewish ex-servicemen decided to do something about it. That something was the 43 Group, and between 1946 and 1950 they terrorised and demoralised Britain's home-grown fascists.

Some will already be familiar with the 43 Group from the memoir of one of its founding members, Morris Beckman. Having interviewed surviving members as well as the families of those who had passed away Sonabend is able to provide a fuller account of the group's activities and member's rationale for joining. He also provides a great deal of contextual information about the fascists and their organisations, particularly Oswald Mosley, and the broader political climate in Britain at the time. The group grew from the original 43 members to a paramilitary organisation of 2,000 members, men and women, Jews and gentiles, with its own surveillance and intelligence operations, and its own headquarters and newspaper, On Guard.

The group's initial activities involved disrupting the public meetings of fascists. They would heckle the speaker and generally cause disruption, before rushing the platform and attacking the speaker, at which point the police would shut the meeting down. This was the groups aim from the start. They would begin by using legal means, asking the police in attendance to shut the meeting down, but this request would always be refused.

The post-war Labour government had chosen not to ban fascist meetings and organising. They argued that protecting free speech was what a liberal democracy should do, but they also thought the fascists in Britain now posed little threat. Those who joined the 43 Group didn't agree and nor did a sizeable section of London's Jewish community. As a result the group were able to draw on significant legal and financial support from the community. Their supporters included wealthy businessmen (including the founders of Marks and Spencer's), sports stars and even gangsters and occasional glitzy fundraisers were run to get money from these groups.

There were also those within the Jewish community, not least the Board of Deputies, who were strongly opposed to the violent and illegal activities of the 43 Group, fearful that they would reflect badly on Anglo-Jewry as a whole. Though news and images from the concentration camps had begun to filter through at home, antisemitism still existed in Britain. During the years of the group's activities this antisemitism was stoked by fascist speakers who seized on the events in Palestine where Jewish paramilitary groups were fighting the British. News reports of British soldiers being hanged by one group, the Irgun, for example, played right into fascist hands. The Board founded the Jewish Defence Committee as an organisation for community protection but would not condone instigating direct confrontation with fascists, and tried throughout the group's existence to get them to disband and work with the Board instead.

43 Group members were not interested in debating the end of fascism, they meant to wipe it from the streets. All of the members had memories of their brutal treatment at the hands of the fascists before the war, and some had seen the inevitable result of the ideology in Europe. One of the group's fiercest supporters was Rabbi Leslie Hardman, who had been the first Jewish chaplain to enter Bergen-Belsen, overseeing the burial of more than 20,000 people. Group members vowed "never again" and a righteous and understandable rage is evident throughout the book. Fascists and their fellow travellers are often on the receiving end of it and the book is filled with, hugely enjoyable, stories of their defeats. The fascists are variously humiliated, outsmarted or given a bloody good hiding, both in the streets and occasionally in their own homes, but the group didn't come off best in every encounter. Some members were badly injured and others were imprisoned for their actions on behalf of the group.

Sonabend tells the story of Wendy Turner, an intellectually brilliant spy who spent time embedded in the fascist organisations becoming close to their leaders. The cell structure of the 43 Group and the clandestine nature of their intelligence operations meant that group members would not be aware that some of the fascists they were fighting with were in fact embedded members. Turner was spotted by some of the female members in the street and beaten very badly. She disappeared after the encounter and spent her final years in an asylum. The group's head of intelligence held himself responsible for her tragic fate.

Sonabend finishes the book with an afterword in which he encourages us to remember the lessons of the 43 Group, as fascism and antisemitism continue to fester. The first is that sometimes physical action has to be taken and we should ignore those who would try and shame us for using violence against fascism, pointing out correctly that fascism cannot be reasoned with or debated. The second is that we should join together, regardless of political differences, to fight fascism – that its defeat is more important than anything else. We can agree with the first lesson but must take issue with the second. The 43 Group was a cross-class alliance, funded, in part, by wealthy business owners sympathetic to their aims, but with no political agreement beyond the attack on fascism. Many members were communists but there were conservatives too. Sonabend states "(t)he 43 Group turned to radical means to achieve moderate goals" (p. 324), doing so only because the Labour government would not. Our goals are broader and more radical and Sonabend clearly fails to recognise how much the current British government's policies and rhetoric chime with those of the far right. The story of the 43 Group is a vital part of British history, and it should be more widely known, but it would not be realistic to see it as a model for contemporary anti-fascism in Britain. The 43 Group were a product of their time and of the Jewish community. Much of what made them successful in the fight against fascism could not be replicated.

Having said that We Fight Fascists is well worth reading.

Class Power on Zero Hours (2020).
Angry Workers.
PM Press.
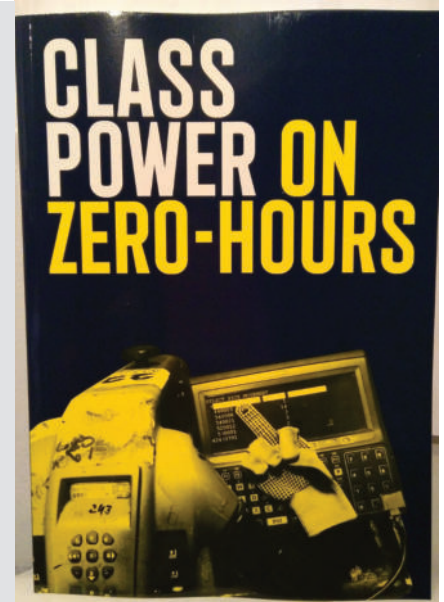
Angry Workers, a collective who self-describe as 'left communist' but whose perspectives and approach are influenced by the workerist tradition of parts of the Italian movement for 'workers' autonomy', have been around for a number of years. Six years ago, the collective decided to focus on sustained organising, in West London's manufacturing and logistics sector. This book is the product of those years and is probably one of the most important contributions to revolutionary politics in recent times.

The book covers their experiences and their analysis of their time working in several workplaces in the food production and logistics sector, an area "...ignored and neglected by the left." (p.8) in a part of London not on the map of most of London's would-be revolutionaries – Greenford in West London. They draw their conclusions and make proposals for how militants can "rebuild class power" though establishing themselves in workplaces or, as they put it, "getting rooted" (p.8). Their attempts to do this are discussed in detail and with a refreshing honesty that is often missing in political writing. They are open about their tactical errors and the limitations of the results of their activities over the six years. Their approach blended optimism with realism and benefited from it.

Divided into 15 chapters over three sections: Layers of Organisation, Workers' Enquiry and Revolutionary Strategy, the book is intended to be "...dipped in and out of..." (p.18) although an initial start to finish reading is recommended. The first section lays out the group's intentions, their starting point, which for those unfamiliar with the territory, of both West London and the perspective of workers' self organisation, is useful. One of the first projects discussed is the West London Solidarity Network, which the group established to run concurrently with their workplace activity. This SolNet (Solidarity Network), which still exists, helped them become familiar with the local area and the lives of people who live and work there. Aware of the dangers of becoming a 'service provider', the SolNet did not become overtly 'formalised' but managed to provide, alongside members of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and others, successful solidarity with individual and small groups of workers, particularly around unpaid wages. The presence of the Angry Workers was also heralded by the distribution of their newsletter, the Workers Wild West, outside large workplaces in the area. 'Layers of Organisation' also talks about the specific issues

facing working class women and the crisis of the modern family as well as the group's understanding of working class women's role in maintaining 'the family' when everything around them is both militating towards the destruction of the family whilst simultaneously idealising it.

This section also discusses trade unionism, syndicalism and what they describe as 'class unionism'. Like ourselves in the ACG, the Angry Workers believe the trade unions "...exist to mediate the relationship between capital and labour rather than to break it." (p.107). Like the ACG, they view syndicalism through a critical lens, understanding its limitations and the danger of successful syndicalist unions becoming service unions. And, again, like the ACG they see the need to work within syndicalist unions where this can be useful (some of the Angry Workers, like ourselves, are also in the IWW) and describe effective syndicalist and 'base' union activity in Poland and Italy, organising amongst logistics/warehouse workers. However, they posit a different form of organisation as more suited to worker's self-organisation: 'class unionism' which they suggest shares many of the anti-bureaucratic characteristics of syndicalism, but is "...an explicit organisation to fight the bosses..." (p.111) which, unlike the IWW in the UK, does not speak "...in favour of national 'liberation' movements." (p.111). However, the IWW, like most syndicalist organisations, does consider itself explicitly an anti-boss union and its token support for Catalan independence and the 'revolution' in Rojava actually reflects the influence of muddle-headed anarchists more than any inherent tendency within syndicalism. Further, the 'class union' envisaged is a legal entity that can take official strike action whilst also acting as an 'association' of workers when organisation is insufficient for the class union to operate as a union. This organisation, which the Angry Workers do not see as a "revolutionary organisation" (p.112) does, without more elaboration available, sound like...syndicalism. This is probably something up for more discussion as Angry Workers develop their own organisation beyond West London. Regardless of their reservations about syndicalism, in 2017 the group invited the IWW to undertake outreach/Organising drives in the Park Royal area for six months. By the end of the project, which was well planned and was helped by the support of the libertarian left and even the United Voices of the World grassroots union, there had been little progress and the

campaign lost momentum. More detail than the 5 pages provided on this period would have been welcome.

The intention of the Angry Workers is not to limit their activity to action outside workplaces, a limitation of the SolNet model, but to organise within workplaces. The second section of the book, on Workers' Enquiry, covers in great detail their workplace activity. This activity was in food production (Bakkavor), distribution (Tesco) and in 3D printer manufacturing. The presence of recognised unions in the Bakkavor food processing plant (the GMB) and at Tesco (USDAW) brought new challenges and possibilites and these are carefully explored and will be of particular use for any partisan of workers' self-organised struggle that finds themselves in a 'unionised' workplace. The authors explain their decisions to become reps in their respective unions. The GMB, a large general union with a private as well as public sector membership has a slightly more combative reputation than the supine USDAW whose domain is shop and warehouse workers. Their experiences navigating the practice, the procedure, the hierarchy and bureaucracy of the trade union movement will be familiar to anyone who has been a shop steward or rep. If the Angry Workers were miffed before entering the suffocating world of 'partnership' they must have been incandescent by the time they left it. Angry and exhausted from having initiative after initiative stifled or sabotaged, sometimes by other union reps not wanting to ruffle the feathers in their own nests and sometimes by local and regional officers, the authors felt that their time as reps had some definite positives but these were outweighed by the negatives. The day to day grind of union as representation, of the "...theatre pieces we call grievances and disciplinaries." (p. 200) where potentially collective anger is dissipated through individualisation of the dragged-out process eventually took their toll.

The book does not suffer from a denial of the real differences that stand in the way of workers unity and therefore, potential power: the challenges of workforce composition – divisions of gender, ethnicity, language and age can all militate against against building a sense of class unity. These divisions are reinforced by management and are maintained by "informal but rigid hierarchies" (p.168) often along 'racial' lines. These were particularly prominent at Bakkavor, where management used familial domination within the established union reps to great effect. Represented by the GMB since 2008, the workforce exhibited a "...deep-seated mistrust and aversion..." to the union. In Tesco the 'possibilites' opened by becoming a USDAW rep were even more limited as the autonomy and freedom to take initiatives were curtailed by the vice-like grip of the imbedded partnership culture. The attempts by Angry Worker reps in both workplaces to use the union, to navigate and to circumnavigate their structures are revealing, as is the role of the Trotskyist left in constituting a left cover for the bureaucracy.

Being a rep at the ununionised hip capitalist, 'cutting edge technology' 3D printing workshop, was not an option and attempts to organise the workforce through the IWW met with no success. The authors make a scathing attack on the much of the left's perspectives on these 'new' technologies. They see these views stemming from a lack of any real experience and knowledge of what working with these technologies actually looks like and, therefor, what the potentials are for a 'liberatory technology' might be.

Overall, the experience of working and agitating/organising in unionised and non-unionised workplaces leads the authors to the conclusion that whilst there are some limited, but not insubstantial, advantages to be had from revolutionaries becoming stewards/reps, the possibilities for building class power are extremely limited given the "moral decomposition of the union apparatus (p.294).

Which leaves the final part of Class Power on Zero Hours – Revolutionary Strategy. This section attempts to consider the present situation both on a global scale and closer to home. The chapters in this section cover the current moment (the book was published very shortly before the pandemic in March) and offer criticism of social democracy, specifically in its left or Democratic Socialist form. This form, manifested in the UK by the Corbyn phenomenon but with equivalents across the world, is dangerous as it sucks militants into a project that offers nothing, given that Democratic Socialism, with its notion of socialism equaling state ownership plus some form of workers' "participation" in decision making and all within a national framework, cannot cope with a global system. Their analysis of Democratic Socialism is similar to our own. The Corbyn bandwagon (and the Bernie equivalent in the USA and the experience of Syriza and Podemos in Europe) offers nothing but a distraction from building a revolutionary movement.

What this revolutionary movement might look like and what it might do takes up the latter part of the book (other than the appendix – a potted history of workers' West London). In part necessarily speculative, they see the necessity of workers' enquiry – of researching and sharing information and analysis of the actual condition of the working class taking into consideration the uneven development of capitalism across the globe, the application or otherwise of technological advances by regional bourgeoisies and the location of the working class in the process of production in both nation and transnational contexts.

Although the authors acknowledge that the approach that they have taken, of immersion in industry, in attempting to "get rooted" in workplace and community has not been taken up by others during the six years, they feel that the experience has not been wasted. They deny being "voluntaristic" (p.369), which is certainly a criticism that their project might be accused of. Without doubt they have shown remarkable commitment to the project. Whether their example will be followed by 'activists' remains a moot point. The "Let's Get Rooted" network which has recently emerged may prove to be a beginning and the ACG will be watching developments closely and supportively.

But how many graduates of a revolutionary persuasion will be willing to reject the (dubious) comfort of white-collar work to leave their comfort zone and 'get rooted'? Whilst class-conscious workers tend to want to escape the drudgery and boredom of the factory or warehouse floor in search of a life less at the mercy of supervisors.

That said, without doubt, the Angry Workers have provided us with a very serious piece of working class research and have asked many important questions, the answers to which will help us to begin to build class power. Everyone interested in such a project should seek out this book and give it a suitable level of serious consideration.

For information about getting copies of Class Power on Zero Hours contact: **angryworkersworld@gmail.com**

McMindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality (2019).
Ronald E Purser.
Repeater Books.

Mindfulness has exploded into the public consciousness over the last few years. Books, talks, articles and classes are everywhere. Presented as a way to cope with stress, anxiety and depression as well as chronic illness and pain, many people feel practising it has helped them. In *McMindfulness* Ronald E Purser, a Professor of Management and a practising Buddhist, offers a scathing critique of what he sees as the mindfulness "industry" and its claims to be a cure-for-all-ills with positive and far-reaching consequences for human society. Purser does not suggest that there is no value to this secular Mindfulness practice but he is scathing about any suggestion that it may be all that people (and society) needs. Advocates for mindfulness claim that much of what ails us can be found in our individual minds and that practicing mindfulness can help us (individuals, and by extension, our societies) find clarity and peace. Little or no account is taken of the circumstances that people find themselves in and the effect these external influences may have on their physical and mental well-being. This is why neo-liberal capitalism and corporate culture more generally has embraced mindfulness (in those workplaces where at least lip service is paid to the idea that our health and wellbeing matters). It's an individual's response to an individual's problem. The responsibility can be devolved down to the individual, even when it is the workplace that is damaging their health. While advocates promote the idea that stress in the capitalist world appears to be endemic, because they see it as endemic, the only solution they offer is finding a way to cope. An analysis of the causes of that widespread stress and suggestions for fundamental change to alleviate it are almost entirely absent. You just have to find ways to deal with all the shit coming your way rather than work collectively toward real change. Purser correctly sees this as getting people to collaborate in their own exploitation. If pushed on the claims that their mindfulness practice can make positive change in society those selling it will suggest vaguely, and unconvincingly, that changes in individuals will have a cumulative, long-term effect. Apparently, it's a long game.

This is the justification amongst practitioners for taking mindfulness training into the corporate world and even into the military. The belief is that a mindful CEO will make more compassionate decisions and a mindful soldier will be less likely to kill by mistake, or do damage to themselves or others on their return home. While Purser does not completely dismiss "harm reduction" as a worthwhile goal he thinks that using mindfulness to make people more resilient to the physical and psychological harm inflicted on them by capitalism or combat is not something to celebrate. A mindful soldier is simply a more effective killer. Purser highlights far-right terrorist Anders Breivik's use of mediation to bring himself to a calm, concentrated state so he could commit mass murder, unburdened by compassion or mercy.

That is an extreme example but it highlights one of Purser's main criticisms – that contemporary mindfulness practice is shorn of the ethical framework that it sits within in Buddhist practice, and as a result it cannot live up to the claims that are made for it. He is sceptical about much of the research that secular practitioners use to promote it and scornful of the dishonest way that some of the biggest names in the industry will claim the practice is divorced from Buddhism to a secular or corporate audience while suggesting that it is Buddhism in microcosm to a more spiritually-inclined audience.

McMindfulness is a polemic, arguing strongly that the problems we face in the modern world are not all in our heads and they will not be solved individually. He does not suggest that practising mindfulness won't help us get through the day. He's not suggesting that everyone should become a Buddhist. What he is saying is that fundamental changes need to made in the way we live, and that these won't be made by a spirituality which sits so comfortably with capitalism, but they could be made by us, working collectively.

Anarchist Communist Group (ACG)
Preamble

We are a revolutionary anarchist communist organisation made up of local groups and individuals who seek a complete transformation of society, and the creation of anarchist communism. This will mean that the working class overthrowing capitalism, abolishing the State, getting rid of exploitation, hierarchies and oppressions, and halting the destruction of the environment.

To contribute to the building of a revolutionary anarchist movement we believe it is important to be organised. We are committed to building an effective national and international organisation that has a collective identity and works towards the common goal of anarchist communism, whilst at the same time working together with other working class organisations and in grass roots campaigns. We do not see ourselves as the leaders of a revolutionary movement but part of a wider movement for revolutionary change. In addition, we strive to base all our current actions on the principles that will be the basis of the future society: mutual aid, solidarity, collective responsibility, individual freedom and autonomy, free association and federalism.

AIMS & PRINCIPLES

1. The Anarchist Communist Group is an organisation of revolutionary class struggle anarchists. We aim for the abolition of all hierarchy, and work for the creation of a world-wide classless society: anarchist communism.

2. Capitalism is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling class. But inequality and exploitation are also expressed in terms of race, gender, sexuality, health, ability and age, and in these ways one section of the working class oppresses another. Oppressive ideas and practices cause serious harm to other members of our class, dividing the working class and benefitting the ruling class. Oppressed groups are strengthened by autonomous action which challenges social and economic power relationships. To achieve our goal we must relinquish power over each other on a personal as well as a political level.

3. We believe that fighting systems of oppression that divide the working class, such as racism and sexism, is essential to class struggle. Anarchist communism cannot be achieved while these inequalities still exist. In order to be effective in our various struggles against oppression, both within society and within the working class, we at times need to organise independently as people who are oppressed according to gender, sexuality, ethnicity or ability. We do this as working class people, as cross-class movements hide real class differences and achieve little for us. Full emancipation cannot be achieved without the abolition of capitalism.

4. We are opposed to the ideology of national liberation movements which claims that there is some common interest between native bosses and the working class in face of foreign domination. We do support working class struggles against racism, genocide, ethnocide and political and economic colonialism. We oppose the creation of any new ruling class. We reject all forms of nationalism, as this only serves to redefine divisions in the international working class. The working class has no country and national boundaries must be eliminated. We seek to build an anarchist international to work with other libertarian revolutionaries throughout the world.

5. As well as exploiting and oppressing the majority of people, Capitalism threatens the world through war and through climate change and destruction of the environment.

6. It is not possible to abolish Capitalism without a revolution, which will arise out of class conflict. The ruling class must be completely overthrown to achieve anarchist communism. Because the ruling class will not relinquish power without their use of armed force, this revolution will be a time of violence as well as liberation.

7. Unions by their very nature cannot become vehicles for the revolutionary transformation of society. They have to be accepted by capitalism in order to function and so cannot play a part in its overthrow. Trades unions divide the working class (between employed and unemployed, trade and craft, skilled and unskilled, etc). Even syndicalist unions are constrained by the fundamental nature of unionism. The union has to be able to control its membership in order to make deals with management. Their aim, through negotiation, is to achieve a fairer form of exploitation of the workforce. The interests of leaders and representatives will always be different from ours. The boss class is our enemy, and while we must fight for better conditions from it, we have to realise that reforms we may achieve today may be taken away tomorrow. Our ultimate aim must be the complete abolition of wage slavery. Working within the unions can never achieve this. However, we do not argue for people to leave unions until they are made irrelevant by the revolutionary event. The union is a common point of departure for many workers. Rank and file initiatives may strengthen us in the battle for anarchist communism. What's important is that we organise ourselves collectively, arguing for workers to control struggles themselves.

8. Genuine liberation can only come about through the revolutionary self-activity of the working class on a mass scale. An anarchist communist society means not only co-operation between equals, but active involvement in the shaping and creating of that society during and after the revolution. In times of upheaval and struggle, people will need to create their own revolutionary organisations controlled by everyone in them. These autonomous organisations will be outside the control of political parties, and within them we will learn many important lessons of self-activity.

9. As anarchists we organise in all areas of life to try to advance the revolutionary process. We believe a strong anarchist organisation is necessary to help us to this end. Unlike other so-called socialists or communists we do not want power or control for our organisation. We recognise that the revolution can only be carried out directly by the working class. However, the revolution must be preceded by organisations able to convince people of the anarchist communist alternative and method. We participate in struggle as anarchist communists, and organise on a federative basis. We reject sectarianism and work for a united revolutionary anarchist movement.

10. We have a materialist analysis of capitalist society. The working class can only change society through our own efforts. We reject arguments for either a unity between classes or for liberation that is based upon religious or spiritual beliefs that put faith in outside forces. We work towards a world where religion holds no attraction.

Paper of the Anarchist Communist Group

Why Jackdaw? Looking for a name that was not the usual, we settled upon Jackdaw because of the characteristics often associated with this bird- characteristics which are an important part of a revolutionary anarchist movement for a new society: resilience and a fighting spirit, as well as being social and co-operative. 'Jack' means 'rogue' and 'daw' means 'call.' We are rogues in the current society and our paper calls for a working class revolution and the creation of an anarchist communist society.

Carlo Cafiero's Compendium of Capital: First edition in English published by the ACG. Price: 7.00 plus postage.

ACG Pamphlets

New pamphlets

1. Food, Health and Capitalism: Beyond Covid 19
Price: 3.50 plus postage

2. Anarchism and Violence by Malatesta
Price: 1.50 plus postage.

Other pamphlets

Malatesta and Organisation	2.00
Our NHS? Anarchist Communist Thoughts on Health	2.50
Towards a Fresh Revolution	3.00
Land and Liberty	2.00
Whatever happened to the Revolution?	2.00
The Italian Factory Councils and the Anarchists	2.50
Is Class Still Relevant?	1.50
The Wilhelmshaven Revolt: A Chapter of the Revolutionary Movement in the German Navy 1918-1919 by 'Ikarus' (Ernst Schneider)	3.50

The Fight for the City: out of print but available for free download

Podcasts: At the Cafe

Key ideas of anarchist communism including: what is anarchist communism, work, crime, war, internationalism and more!
https://www.anarchistcommunism.org/2018/12/16/at-the-cafe-acgs-new-podcast/

ACG on Youtube

An exciting series of videos now being produced. Have a look!

Inside Stormy Petrel

ACG Anarchist Communist Group