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VIRUS

In the body politic

Theoretical Journal of the Anarchist Communist Group

Issue One: 2019



WARNING: The ideas contained in these pages
could seriously damage the health of capitalism.

Virus in the Body Politic

At a recent Coordinating Meeting of the Anarchist Communist Group, it was decided to bring out a new theoretical magazine that would also include articles on history, culture, and reviews. This would supplement our programme of producing pamphlets and our agitational news sheet *Jackdaw*.

We have named the magazine *Virus- in the body politic* in memory of the late Colin Parker, one of the founders of the Anarchist Communist Federation, a precursor of the ACF. He had set up and ran a magazine of the same name in the early eighties that subsequently became the magazine of the ACF.

For issues of the original *Virus*, see:

<http://thesparrowsnest.org.uk/index.php/digital-library/187-spotlight-on-virus-organise>

Colin Parker

Colin Parker was born in the pit village of Crook in Co. Durham on 15th December 1948. From a mining family, he apprenticed as a fitter-turner after leaving school at the age of fifteen. He worked in the local factory for a number of years.

At an early age he joined the local library and became an avid reader of books on politics, art and history. With three of his brothers he joined the local Labour Party and was associated with the Militant Tendency within it. He and his brothers were expelled after confronting a local Labour Party official, Colin being the most vociferous of all. He subsequently joined the Communist Party.

He was sponsored by his union to attend Ruskin College in Oxford in 1969. Following this, he moved to London to study a politics degree at East London Polytechnic. He then went to the London School of Economics and got an MA in politics in 1974.

The following year Colin took a teacher training course and in 1976 became a teacher at Barking College of Further Education where he worked until his retirement in his early sixties. As his son Martin noted: "He aimed to reach out and empower working class people to achieve greater educational success and get more from their lives".

In the meantime he had left the CP and gravitated towards Trotskyism. The Workers Revolutionary Party considered him an important enough catch to send around Vanessa Redgrave to his council flat in central London but he was not convinced. He then attended Socialist Workers Party branch meetings but started asking too many questions about their politics. This was all part of his evolution towards class struggle anarchism.

He began producing a duplicated magazine *Virus*, subtitled *For Militant Anarchism* in 1984, during the height of the miners' strike. He contacted the Libertarian Communist Discussion Group the following year and suggested that *Virus* become the mouthpiece of the group. Regular meetings were held at Colin's flat and a network of contacts was built up around Britain, leading to the founding of

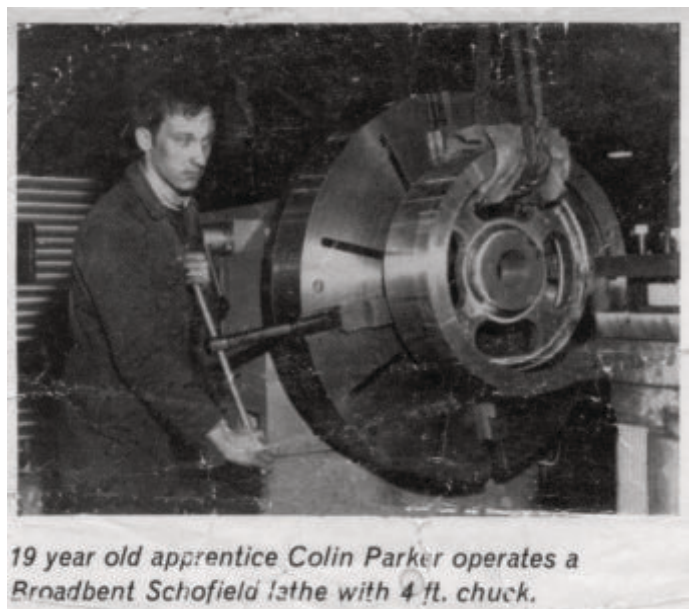
the Anarchist Communist Federation in March 1986. He was active in the ACF, subsequently renamed the Anarchist Federation, until his death.

He was an active in supporting for the miners' strike and then attended many demonstrations during the Wapping printers struggle. He threw himself into the struggle against the Poll Tax. Colin was arrested during an anti-Poll Tax demo and subsequently fined. He was a stalwart of the London group of the ACF/AF for many years, always warmly welcoming new contacts and providing an accessible introduction to its ideas.

After his retirement he returned to Crook. He died as a result of a brain aneurism on January 22nd 2015.

He passionately hated the police, the various Leninist outfits and former radicals who had sold out, which included some of his workmates who had accepted management positions. He remained devoted to revolutionary anarchist ideas to the end.

He was a warm and generous person, with a wide knowledge of politics, history and art, acquired through his own reading. Colin remains greatly missed by family, friends and comrades.



Editorial

We are living in interesting times. The ascendancy of Trump to US President has encouraged the growth of far right and populist groups in Europe and elsewhere. In Turkey Erdogan still keeps a tight grip, whilst elsewhere we have far right leaders and reactionary populists and nationalists like Narendra Modi in India, Bolsonaro in Brazil, and Viktor Orban in Hungary. We have also seen the rise of far-right groups in Spain and Germany. In Greece there have been disturbing attacks on the Greek anarchist movement and migrants carried out by the incoming right-wing New Democracy government in Greece, after the fiasco of Syriza, which demobilised social struggle in that country.

In Britain the false choices over the European Union have both encouraged the populist and far right and created the sort of constitutional instability not seen since the English Revolution and Civil War of 1642-1660.

At the same as this wave of reaction throughout the world in response to deteriorating conditions under capitalism, we have witnessed some resistance. We have seen the mass movement in Hong Kong, which encompassed a general strike, and which threatens the regime in mainland China. In Algeria, ten days after Abdelaziz Bouteflika announced his intention to run for President for a fifth term, a powerful movement involving up to three million people resulted in his resignation. This uprising was ignited by the deteriorating economic conditions in Algeria and widespread disgust with the spiralling corruption. The leading role of both young people and women was significant. This was replicated in Sudan, where a mass movement motivated by the same conditions as apply in Algeria forced the resignation of Omar al-Bashir who had reigned for decades. Unfortunately, the revolt in Sudan has met with horrific repression. The same conditions that sparked the Sudanese and Algerian revolts exist in Morocco, which may produce a similar scenario.

In this first issue of Virus we look at the Gilets Jaunes, the mass movement that appeared in France, and its development in both its positive and negative aspects. Apart from these revolts, we have also seen the development of large-scale movements against climate change. We analyse in detail the politics and actions of Extinction Rebellion, an important movement against climate change.

If the situation in Britain is brittle, we would hopefully have expected what passes for an anarchist movement here to take advantage of events and become a credible alternative. Unfortunately, this is not the case. In this issue, we look at the politics of oppression, how critiques of patriarchy and homophobia have been important aspects of the anarchist movement of the past. But as we note in a major article on intersectionality. "The retreat from class politics, indeed collective politics generally, is a product of political privatisation, a form of individuation that is itself caused by a period of political retreat. The emphasis on individual responses (call out culture, responses to micro aggressions etc) to oppressive behaviours as opposed to the structural source of that oppression through collective struggle is a product of the crisis in the belief that society can be transformed through working class revolution." This is now plaguing the 'movement' in this country, as well as strong anti-organisational tendencies and a capitulation to social-democracy in the shape of Corbynism and various nationalisms. We look at ways we could organise effectively, based on contemporary struggles.

As this is the centenary of the events that shook many parts of the world in 1919, we have in-depth analyses of some of these, many forgotten or half-forgotten, such as the extraordinary flourishing of soviets in the supposedly 'backward' country of Ireland. We look closely at events like the general strikes in Seattle and Winnipeg. We publish articles on these events as a source for inspiration, as to what could be possible, whilst at the same time addressing the dangers to these movements and the mistakes they made. What was possible in 1919 could be possible now. At the same time we evaluate the powerful forces ranged against us.

This issue of Virus also takes a detailed look at the political ideas of the Polish revolutionary Jan Machajski and his interesting theories about the role of intellectuals. As well as this we look at some recently published books.

We hope that this first issue of the new series of Virus stimulates people to think and act. We believe that both serious thought and action must be developed in these desperate times.

Beyond XR: The Limits of Extinction Rebellion



Over the last year Extinction Rebellion (XR) has played a key role in mobilising action against climate change alongside the global climate school strike movement. It has organised and continues to organise blockades of roads and other acts of civil disobedience and has drawn many thousands of people into action, both in the UK and around the world. Not only this, it has put the threat of climate change in the spotlight like never before. Started in October 2018 in Britain, it has since spread to 35 other countries.

One of the main leaders of XR, Roger Hallam, says that there are only three options for those fighting climate change.

1. More cheques to NGOs
2. Violence.
3. Mass participation civil disobedience by which he means a large number of people closing down the capital city “until something dramatic happens”.

In the run up to the big blockades planned by XR in early October, the following XR statement was released. “Time is running out. Climate and ecological breakdown has already begun. Leading scientists and public figures (including the UN Secretary-General) have estimated we have as little as 18 months to turn it around. The situation is urgent and we need to ACT NOW. In the UK, we will peacefully shut down all roads into Westminster in Central London and non-violently disrupt the government until our leaders agree to TAKE

EMERGENCY ACTION NOW. Other nonviolent actions will target corporations, ministries and infrastructure that maintain our toxic system.”

In this scenario, XR sees mass arrests of those taking part in the blockades and other actions. As Hallam said in the Guardian newspaper: “Only through disruption, the breaking of laws, do you get the attention you need...only through sacrifice - the willingness to be arrested and go to prison - do people take seriously what you are saying. And... only through being respectful to ourselves, the public and the police, do we change the hearts and minds of our opponents.”

So far, this has resulted in over 1,100 arrests arising out of the April blockades in London. The Crown Prosecution Service has announced its readiness to pursue all those arrested, which will result in fines and imprisonment.

No clear vision

It can be seen from the above that XR has no clear vision of an alternative non-polluting and environmentally friendly society and no clear vision of building a movement to end climate change beyond these set piece blockades. Indeed, it sees its task as awakening the political establishment to TAKE EMERGENCY ACTION NOW. There is no critique here in XR’s outlook that capitalism itself is to blame for the crisis of climate change and that if only spurred into action by capital cities being paralysed by blockades will various governments and heads of corporations and businesses finally act to save the situation.

XR has three main demands: 1. “That the Government must tell the truth about how deadly our situation is”. 2. The Government must enact “legally-binding policies

to reduce carbon emissions in the UK to net zero by 2025” and 3. The creation of a Citizens’ Assembly to oversee these changes.

Essentially what is being argued is that capitalism can be reformed and can turn from productivist models to those of zero growth and sustainability. This new green capitalism would turn from fossil fuels to renewables and would seize its death wish to bring the planet to ecological devastation.

The XR leadership advocates participatory democracy, what it calls “holarchy”, that is, the rule of society by all. This sounds on the surface like something akin to what we anarchist communists envisage in a new society. But alongside this holarchy, XR calls for governments to take emergency actions, although it is not clear what this means. It does give carte blanche to the State to enact emergency legislation and thus condones giving the State more power, something somewhat at odds with the idea of participatory democracy. In this scenario, the State itself is seen as a major engine of change.

Beyond this, it is highly unlikely that capitalist governments and corporations will act to arrest climate change in any serious way. We have seen various minor reforms and ludicrous projects like carbon trading and carbon pricing which have no effect on the environment whatsoever and let corporations off the hook. Various ‘greenwash’ solutions will be put forward, but in reality, these will be like handing out elastoplasts when what is needed is major surgery.

Anarchist?

As one retired GP and XR member, Bob Rivett, wrote in the Guardian on Friday, July 19th: “On Tuesday Extinction Rebellion was accused of being an anarchist organisation. To my mind, anarchists are anti-government, are destructive in their aims, and are not afraid to use violence. We are none of those things: we

are resolutely non-violent, recognise the need for a government, act in the interests of the people and are trying not to destroy, but to save life on Earth.” He is referring to an accusation by the right wing think tank Policy Exchange who published an article written by Richard Walton (A former Head of the Metropolitan Police Counter Terrorism Command)(1) and Tom Wilson (a Senior Research Fellow in the Security and Extremism Unit at Policy Exchange who specialises in the study of extremist groups and counter-terrorism strategy). They wrote:

“Those who accept planned mass law-breaking in a liberal democracy to further a political cause, are effectively condoning the breakdown of the rule of law. They may assert breaking the law is a means to an end, there is a crisis that needs addressing and law-breaking is the only tactic that will change government policy, but in doing so they have become extremists for their cause. Extinction Rebellion is an extremist organisation whose methods need to be confronted and challenged rather than supported and condoned. If we fail to confront those who incite and encourage mass law-breaking, we fail in our duty to confront extremism. This new form of extremism needs to be tackled by Ministers and politicians, the Commission for Countering Extremism, police and the general public. The honeymoon that Extinction Rebellion has enjoyed to date needs to come to an end. Members of the public need to be made fully aware this is not an organisation whose strategy and tactics should be applauded and copied”.

Now, Rivett’s caricature of anarchism aside, this clearly highlights XR’s political outlook. It could be argued that this is just the view of one individual member of XR and does not represent its views as a whole. Further investigation will reveal the truth of this.

Richard Walton went on BBC TV shortly after his article was published to state that XR are: “a hard-core anarchist group that want to basically break up our



democracy. It's anarchism with a smile." An XR spokesperson, Rupert Reid, responded by saying that: "What this is not about is breaking up democracy, what this is about ... is creating a real democracy." Liberal journalist Nick Hilton came to the aid of XR, writing in the Independent: "After all, Extinction Rebellion are not a rabble in the mould of France's quarrelsome gilet jaunes" (!).

It is clear that the political establishment intends to counter XR in a drastic way. Policy Exchange is a very influential organisation founded by, among others, Michael Gove, and has influenced Conservative governments over a large number of issues including Brexit. This will mean increasingly heavy-handed actions against XR protestors, increasing fines and imprisonment, and the characterisation of XR in the bourgeois media as extremists.

Tactics

The tactics employed by XR look towards cooperation with the police, despite what the Policy Exchange zealots say. XR sees the police and prison warders as somehow allies to their cause, tied as they are into a rigid non-violent strategy. They cooperate with the police through their liaison officers, they keep a lookout for radicals and 'troublemakers', they seek to subvert the police rather than 'denigrating' them. Hallam claims that the Metropolitan Police are: "probably one of the most civilised forces in the world". This goes against all the empirical evidence, the experiences of miners, people of colour, youth in general, and countless political activists. It goes against the increasing body of evidence that the Met has consistently infiltrated various social movements and campaigns, that it has acted as an agent provocateur, as a source of misinformation, and that it has given the go-ahead to its undercover agents to manipulate activists into having long-standing sexual relationships. It goes against the rising number of deaths in police custody. Responding to criticism, the XR leaders have acknowledged institutional racism within the police but

not the real role of the police as an instrument of oppression of the State and capitalism. Their benevolent attitude to the police, prison officials and the CPS have led to the legal support organisation Green and Black Cross withdrawing from any cooperation with XR.

Between 2006 and 2010 a large movement against environmental change developed with the Camps for Climate Justice that could be seen around Britain as at Drax and Kingsnorth power stations, Heathrow airport, Royal Bank of Scotland HQ, and in the City of London. At a Climate Justice Camp demonstration in London in 2009, the Metropolitan Police used 25 undercover agents, employed kettling, and murdered Ian Tomlinson, an unfortunate not even involved in the protests. The role of the police in attacks on anti-fracking camps have further highlighted their true nature. But still XR persists in liaising with the police and providing them with information.

Arrest and imprisonment are vaunted by XR leaders as enlightening experiences. No XR funds for legal support have been supplied to those arrested despite the urging of local XR groups. XR spreads the myth that you can only be detained for 14 days in custody, ignoring the fact that you can be detained on remand for months. It also spreads the myth that most prison officers are black (not true, the overwhelming majority are white) and therefore supposedly more sympathetic to the aims of XR!

Apart from that, there is the factor that white, educated middle class people are treated a little differently than black and/or working class folk by the police. Witness the brutal arrest on 19th April of a black woman, who had nothing to do with XR, for challenging a police cordon stopping her going where she wanted to go. Witness the XR police liaison officials reporting a group of Asian activists to the police for suspected pickpocketing (!) resulting in their detention and immigration checks.



Gail Bradbrook, co-founder with Hallam of XR, believes that “ongoing civil disobedience leading to short jail time for some”, will “move the Overton window”. The Overton window is “what’s seen as normal and acceptable” as “part of the mainstream of public discussion of issues”. This would entail “periods of action” with organising in between. Hallam himself writing in the essay- Common Sense for the 21st Century: Only Nonviolent Revolution Can Now Stop Climate Breakdown and Social Collapse - he published in April 2019 believes that the blockades will lead to collapse of the government or structural change “after one or two weeks”. This has patently not happened with the April blockades.

The blockades have so far only disrupted the flow of traffic in London. They have not, so far, targeted the corporations or ministries that contribute so much to environmental degradation.

If the next round of blockades in October are not successful, where does XR go, especially bearing in mind the likely increased heavy response from the police, as presaged by Walton and Wilson’s article?

Catastrophic

Another key factor in the XR game plan is the “catastrophic” alarmism of its leaders, with the aim of frightening people into action. As Bradbrook stated in April: “Has it landed with you that your kids probably won’t have enough food to eat in a few years’ time?” We don’t take the threat of climate change lightly. For instance, a scientific paper written in 2017 stated that there was a five per cent probability that global warming would reach appalling levels by 2050 if there were no changes implemented. This is something of great concern. However, to conclude from this that we face food shortages in a few years is a quantum leap, and is revealing about the ideology of Bradbrook, Hallam and co.

The XR leadership is increasingly centralising its command structure, to the disquiet of local groups. We have also been told that there is an inner group called The Guardians, whose task it is to preserve the original core politics of XR and to see that it doesn’t go off script. Most disturbing of all the fact that Bradbrook posted up on Twitter on Easter Monday this year plugging a website called XR Business. As a result of protest from the XR rank and file Bradbrook had to remove the post and made the following statement.

“I have been supporting a group of people associated with the business sector to think about what Extinction Rebellion means to them. A similar process has happened for arts and culture, for academics, and for various other communities of interest. This independent group formed in a busy period without full involvement of Media and Messaging and wider teams. The entity, formerly known as ‘XR Business’, will now be more clearly communicated and branded: it is not part of Extinction Rebellion. It will obviously therefore no longer be called ‘XR Business’. It

is essentially similar to ‘Culture Declares Emergency’ in format (also not part of Extinction Rebellion but closely related in ideas and vision), though challenging and educating business and finance, rather than culture in Extinction Rebellion demands and the reality of our global Emergency...I also believe that additional, very radical messaging from some business and finance leaders regarding the need for systemic change is also needed and I would welcome that. If that is possible we will take wider feedback before anything becomes official”.

Business leaders

The XR Business group includes people like “business leaders Seth Bleloe, of WHEB which describes itself as “actively involved” in organisations “at the leading edge of sustainable and responsible investment”; Amy Clarke of Tribe Impact Capital LLP, whose aim is “long-term positive impact and growth for everyone”; John Elkington and Louise Kjellerup Roper, involved in Tomorrow’s Capitalism Inquiry, which is backed by Body Shop, Unilever, Aviva Investors and Covivo; Jake Hyman of Ten Years’ Time, which “is tailored for the next generation of high-net worth families who are looking to invest capital into ambitious new ideas rather than following the crowd to safe ground”, and various others connected to Unilever and other capitalist ventures. For further details on XR business see: <https://winteroak.org.uk/2019/04/23/rebellion-extinction-a-capitalist-scam-to-hijack-our-resistance/> As Annie Logical wrote on her blog: “Gail epitomises the new generation of ‘professional activists’, having positioned herself at the epicentre of the revolving door between big business, government bureaucracies and establishment-friendly NGOs, campaign groups and charitable organisations, all of which increasingly function as the public face of international corporate and financial power.” See: <https://www.vigiliae.org/dr-gail-marie-bradbrook-compassionate-revolutionary-for-hire-by-un-extinction/>

Julian Rose noted that: “In the case of Extinction Rebellion, the co-founders and leading light is Gail Bradbrook, assisted by climate change lawyer Farhana Yamin, both of whose backgrounds have lines of direct working connection with people and organizations committed to exactly the opposite objectives to those of the green protesters following their leadership directives.”

According to ‘Nowhere News’ investigations, Gail Bradbrook has a history of working with top-down elitist organizations committed to upholding the neoliberal capitalist status quo. She is quoted as being an enthusiastic supporter of ‘Otpor’ - an organization funded by the US National Endowment for Democracy - a body closely affiliated with US government promotion of regime change around the World.

Farhana Yamin is CEO of ‘Track O’ a business whose partners include the Rockefeller Foundation and Chatham House, where she is also an associate fellow. Chatham House, aka The Royal Institute of

International Affairs, is perhaps the leading empire upholding think-tank in the Western hemisphere.” See: <https://www.globalresearch.ca/uk-really-leading-rebellion/5679379>

It could thus be argued that the clash between XR and Policy Exchange represents antagonism between different sections of the ruling class, a “green capitalist” reforming faction versus one invested in the State apparatus of repression.



Despite much from the anarchist movement on the dangers of climate change going back to the 1960s, it has not managed to engage with the mass of the population and has not succeeded in creating a large movement against climate change. XR has been successful in this, on the other hand, at least in the short term, and has drawn thousands into action. We can offer our criticisms, we can condemn their sterile actions, but at the end of the day they have been able to

mobilise where we have not, and they have been able to highlight the dangers of climate change like never before. The Green Anti-Capitalist Front, created primarily in response to the emergence of XR, has potential but a potential that has yet to be realised. It cannot mobilise the numbers in the way that XR can.

The lesson to be learnt here is that we must engage with the grassroots of XR, aim propaganda at them and continue to criticise the XR leadership. The evolution of XR over the next few months can either lead to radicalisation of their rank and file, or to defeat and demobilisation. We must be there to communicate and debate with this rank and file and to attempt to move them towards radical anti-capitalist positions and to break with the pro-capitalist leadership of Bradbrook and Hallam.

(1) Walton retired from Scotland Yard’s counter terror command just six days before the Independent Police Complaints Commission established that he had charges of corruption to answer of the Stephen Lawrence case. The IPCC found that Robert Lambert and Richard Walton both had a case to answer for discreditable conduct in that their actions could have brought the force into disrepute. “As neither of the men are now serving police officers, it is not possible for misconduct proceedings to take place to determine whether or not the case would be proven.” Walton met with the undercover cop chief Bob Lambert and N81 the under-cover cop who had infiltrated various anti-racist groups including the Stephen Lawrence campaign, Walton’s hurried retirement saved him from further investigation and saved his pension too.

want to save the world?



Capitalism, Land and Climate Change



Extinction Rebellion has three basic demands. One of them is for the UK to be carbon neutral by 2025. They do not elaborate on what needs to be done to achieve this- they just leave it to the Citizens' Assemblies. However, stopping climate change will demand certain major changes and it would be helpful when developing a movement to have an idea of where we should direct our efforts. Actions that are needed include: keeping fossil fuels in the ground, less intensive, chemical based agriculture, decreasing the amount of livestock, significant afforestation and preservation of peat bogs, moving away from air travel and private cars to public transport, and in general reducing human demand for energy. Little progress has been made. If anything, things are getting worse. For example, the new Johnson cabinet is considering relaxing the regulations on fracking. There is an overall reliance on technological solutions, such as electric cars and alternative energy (which itself requires resources and energy) without seriously attempting to reduce production. And the main source of waste and consumption is capitalist production itself. Capitalism does not want to reduce the use of energy; it relies on continuous growth.

The rhetoric of declaring a 'climate emergency' is meaningless if these issues are not addressed. But what are the chances of this government or a Corbyn government taking the necessary steps? Very small!! The main reason is that all these changes require a major upheaval in our economy and in how land is used. Our economy, a capitalist one, requires continual growth and relies on the cult of consumerism. The basis of capitalism is private ownership, in particular private ownership of land. The land and its resources are used to this end- using more and more, producing more and more- and all to make a profit for those who own and control the land.

This growth and profit-driven system has devastating environmental consequences, eg industrial farming, massive windfarms on wild land (destroying peat bog), grouse moors (18% of Scottish rural land) and high deer concentration on sporting estates, opening up mines and fracking, building skyscrapers for overseas investors, tearing down community centres to make way for luxury flats etc. There may be some owners who leave the land wild, keep the forests and woodlands and peat bogs- all important for combatting climate change. But this is not necessarily because they want to fight climate change; it may be because they want a hunting reserve or have a personal like of trees. We cannot rely on the whims of private landowners who can easily change their mind or sell their property to someone else. We are dependent on them for every aspect of our lives and our future.

State-owned land

Problems arise as a result of land being privately owned, but even when the land is owned by the State we have little say over how it is used. Decisions about land use and access to land are therefore made by a small group of people which includes the traditional aristocracy (30% of land), government organisations such as the Ministry of Defence and the Forestry Commission, other private landowners such as celebrities and corporations (eg the Canary Wharf group- Qatar- the biggest land owner in London), large farmers, the Crown and heritage/conservation organisations such as the RSPB and the National Trust. The State also controls the planning system which can decide what to do with a piece of land but is heavily influenced by private interests.

Government ownership of land in theory should be a better option. However, this would only be the case if there was any real control of those who represent us.

Despite the rhetoric on climate change, fracking, and pollution, the State, regardless of who is in power, continues to pursue disastrous policies by granting planning permission to airports, unquestioned support for road building and the road haulage industry, agricultural policies that support the large industrial farmers, selling off of public land to private developers, parks turned into money-making ventures. A report recently produced for the Labour Party, *Land for the Many*, makes little reference to land and climate change. The main focus is housing and how to promote more home ownership. Though they argue for 1 million new socially rented homes, the solutions involve building new towns and expanding the built environment rather than redistributing and renovating what we have. The effect on energy use from estate demolition and new builds is much greater than if estates are refurbished.

Challenging unequal land ownership

Therefore, the only answer is for us to gain control of land and ensure that it is used both to reverse climate change and provide for the needs of all. Land reform has been on the agenda in Scotland with several land reform acts passed. However, there has been no major change in the inequality of ownership- one of the worst in the world with 432 owners owning 50% of the land. The SNP has only really tinkered with the system, providing a small amount of funds for communities to buy the land they live on. However, this is still less than 2% of the total land leaving the feudal system still in place. Nor does the Labour Party intend to make any fundamental changes to land ownership. The commissioned report, *Land for the Many*, has some recommendations that would certainly challenge the current ownership system,

aiming to reduce the amount of land used for speculative investment and introducing a community right to buy. However, the proposals in the report have not been officially adopted by the Labour Party and even if they are, it is unlikely that they will take on the strong vested interests that will oppose any reform.

That leaves only the anarchist communist solution: turning the land into a Commons that we all own and benefit from. If we owned and controlled the land we would be able to make decisions collectively about what is best for everyone, including future generations and the planet as a whole. The Commons model is not compatible with capitalism, as there would be no private property (this does not mean that you cannot own your own toothbrush!) nor any State to make decisions. New forms of collective and participatory decision-making would need to be developed. And, it is something that will need to be fought for- no government will give the land to us- we need to take it ourselves.

“All is interdependent in a civilized society; it is impossible to reform any one thing without altering the whole. Therefore, on the day we strike at private property, under any one of its forms, territorial or industrial, we shall be obliged to attack them all. The very success of the Revolution will demand it.” *Kropotkin*

For more information see:

Land and Liberty: ACG pamphlet

People's Land Policy:

<https://wordpress.com/view/peopleslandpolicy.home.blog>

www.whoownsengland.org



The Yellow Vests: Where Now?



The Gilets Jaunes (Yellow Vests) Movement, henceforth referred to in this article as GJ, emerged in November 2018 in France. As we said in December 2018:

“It got its name from the high visibility tabards that those who take part in the actions wear. It is a movement mobilising around rising taxation, in particular the tax on diesel. It was able to undertake actions in rural areas like the Aveyron department where 2,000 took part in blockades in villages, in small towns like Villefranche de Lauragais where 300 demonstrated and Montgiscard, where 200 came out on the streets. On November 17th more than 300,000 took part in blockades of roundabouts, supermarkets and petrol stations. This action continued on the following two days. However the demonstrations have seen large scale brandishings of the tricolour, the French national flag. Indeed the extreme right is one of the components of the movement, with groups like the monarchist (and anti-Semitic) Action Française, the openly fascist GUD, etc. A Muslim woman wearing the veil was forced to take it off by some demonstrators and there were many racist insults against black and Arab people. At one blockade Yellow Vests saw immigrants hiding in a truck and called the police. People perceived as homosexual by these demonstrators were insulted or held up longer in the blockades. These acts are partly attributable to the

far-right groups. But, and a big but, in many places there were attempts at self-organisation, with social and ecological demands that went beyond the Macron tax on diesel.”

Hatred of the police

Since then the GJ have seen off the far right. They forced Macron to withdraw the fuel tax. One would have thought that this would have demobilised the movement, but the protest against that tax had only been the catalyst for widespread dissatisfaction over the austerity measures of Macron. The protests continued with large numbers mobilised. As a result, Macron was forced to put up the minimum wage by 100 euros a month, he climbed down over increasing tax on pensions, and gave way on tax on overtime work. He had to free up 17 billion euros to pay for this. The GJ movement combined with strikes against the austerity measures have been a bane to Macron’s first term as President.

At the same time, the police have become increasingly militarised and have brutally attacked GJ demonstrations. Hatred of the police has increased exponentially and GJs have hurled lumps of excrement at them during the course of actions. This increasingly brutal police force recently teargassed thousands of men, women and children celebrating the progression of the Algerian football

team to the Africa Cup of Nations on the Champs Elysees in Paris on July 12th. Hundreds of tear gas canisters rained down on the crowd. Police racism towards this crowd of people of North African origin was apparent. Two days later on Bastille Day the police again used tear gas on the Champs Elysees against GJs, followed by 75 arrests. In another incident on June 21st, police in Nantes attacked a dance on the banks of the Loire at 4.30 am, using tear gas and batons. Fifteen people fell into the Loire and one was drowned as a result. In other incidents police pepper sprayed Extinction Rebellion protestors who were peacefully conducting a sit-down.

The Gilets Jaunes actions mobilised hundreds of thousands. Now though, due to police repression and arrests, numbers have fallen to a few hundreds. Will the Gilets Jaunes movement return to its old strength after the summer holidays? At the moment this seems unlikely.

The Gilets Jaunes movement has confounded various analyses, it has remained an autonomous movement. It concentrated on social demands and on purchasing power. It started out saying it was against the system, but failed to draw anti-capitalist solutions. The movement was framed by the last 40 years, by the discourses of populism and 'citizenship'. However more and more GJs became politicised and they turned out in December to support the movement that had emerged in the high schools against cuts in education. They began to give support on picket lines of various strikes. For example, they reinforced a blockade of striking Primark workers, did the same with strikers at a Carrefour supermarket, and supported bin workers.

Assemblies

On the weekend of April 5th to 7th the Assembly of Assemblies (AdA) of the GJ met at The House of the People in Saint Nazaire, with delegates from many of the local general assemblies present. Each delegation consisted of a man and a woman with observers from the same assemblies to make sure they kept to the mandate given them. The Assembly was attended by 800 people.

Six points previously submitted to local assemblies were up for discussion, the main one being to define the functioning of the Assembly of Assemblies. The others - actions, demands, repression, communication, "what consequences for the movement" (strategy and possible alliances) had been discussed in local groups thus facilitating an increase the grassroots control of the AdA. The discussion over strategies involved the following: Call for Citizens' Assemblies, Call for European Elections, Call for a National Act for the Annulment of Penalties, and Call for Ecological Convergence.

The discussion highlighted differences in the GJ movement between citizenship and a break with capitalism. On the one hand, participation in

municipal elections, creating associations or joining existing ones related to ecology and the environment (indicating a growing concern over climate change). On the other hand, a willingness to create new forms of organisation that clearly break with capitalism. Nevertheless, the discussion around creating Houses of the People in different localities involved buying or renting premises rather than sequestering empty properties, even though the St Nazaire House of the People was occupied 'illegally' itself.

Local struggles

There was support for local struggles including those in the workplace. There was also support for the Climate March and for the high school and university students on climate strike, which led on to the Call for Ecological Convergence. The first Assembly of Assemblies at Commercy had been influenced by the libertarian municipalism of Murray Bookchin. This was less apparent at St Nazaire. There were messages of support for Rojava and for the Algerian revolt and a call for joint action with the "peoples of Europe".

Long term activists tended to dominate procedures, and there were more contributions from men than women. Certainly there was no clear consensus for a break with capitalism although it was implicit in many of the calls made by the AdA. The decisions were sent back to the local groups,

Whilst the St Nazaire AdA did not represent the whole GJ movement it certainly spoke for a large part of it, indicating an important development.

Another interesting development has been the rise of women's groups within the GJ movement, made up primarily of women in precarious jobs. The first of these was the Femmes Gilets Jaunes (Paris - Île-de-France) which began to coordinate other groups of women. At the St Nazaire meeting they demanded a space for women at the following AdA. These groups mobilise around women living in social housing and against high rents. They mobilise against evictions. What is undoubtedly the case is that the struggles over the last four years, which included the rise and fall of the GJ movement, the public sector strikes, the movement in the high schools, herald a new phase in French history. Whether this will lead to new openings and the fall of Macron, or to an increasing repression and drive to war, remains to be seen but it is quite possible that the GJ movement along with other social movements will metamorphose into new combative movements.



Anarchy, Punks, and Sweatshops



The punk T-shirt has been a staple of the punk scene since the beginning. Punks have always sought to use clothes to identify themselves and as time has moved on and the more exaggerated fashion statements have taken a back seat, the band T-shirt has become the main item bought and sold by punks.

With the second wave of punk in the late 1970s/early 1980s came a sharp left turn politically as punks took Johnny Rotten's lyrics to heart and embraced anarchism. Bands, such as Crass and many others, adopted an anarchist and Do It Yourself attitude.

This DIY attitude to clothes in the late 70s led to stronger political statements being scrawled on T-shirts as the anarcho-punk of Crass took hold. Stencils were given out at gigs so that punks could make their own self-styled clothes, patches and banners.

As the 80s became the 90s and neo-liberal policies led to globalisation, clothing manufacturing moved overseas to developing nations, where workers' rights had not developed to the extent they had in the West and large corporations found money to be made off the backs of the world's poorest workers. Suddenly the clothes you wore became a political issue regardless of the slogans they held, as people were suffering in the new sweatshops of the global south.

Sweatshops, notorious in the garment industry but prevalent in many others, are places where workers

are forced to work long hours in dangerous conditions for low wages. They are often staffed by the most vulnerable in society; migrant workers without official documents, women who culturally may not be able to stand up for themselves to a male boss; even children, forced into work to support the impoverished family increase a meagre income.

Fast forward 20 years and the state of the global garment industry, worth \$30 billion, is still sweatshop ridden and rife with exploitation. Meanwhile punk has seen many changes in that time but the anarcho-punk attitude towards human rights and a rejection of oppressive society remains.

But what of the punk T-shirt?

There are still too many punk bands that opt for the cheapest option when sourcing their T-shirts, offering up their money to large corporations that exploit people for blank T-shirts then, ironically, printing their anti-capitalist message on the back.

But some change is happening. One collective called Punk Ethics has created a campaign to kick sweatshops out of the punk scene, and has called on some heavy hitters from the global punk scene to relay the message. In their Punks Against Sweatshops campaign film the likes of Jello Biafra of Dead Kennedys fame, former prominent members of Crass and faces from the newer generation such as Propagandhi, Wonk Unit and Petrol Girls speak of

the exploitation workers face and the hypocrisy of sweatshops in the punk scene.

Printing punk T-shirts has become a common trade for punks over the years that often struggle to find work elsewhere. Nowhere is this more highlighted than in Burma, where a new generation of punks have fought their way out of poverty by creating a T-shirts printing collective and bootlegging T-shirt designs of their favourite bands in the West, creating their own economy that has grown in scope as their scene has grown. But they didn't stop there. The spirit of anarcho-punk, standing up for the dispossessed took centre stage for these punks as they spent their spare time cooking food to give out to the homeless people of the nation's capital. In a country coming out of 60 years of dictatorship, where no safety net exists when you fall through cracks, this act of solidarity from the punk community is a beacon of light. Through the Punk Ethics campaign they are now learning about the exploitation of sweatshop workers and are joining the campaign to give sweatshops the boot.

But what is the solution?

According to No Sweat, the group that has helped launch the 'Punks Against Sweatshops' campaign, the answer is in workers co-ops, formed by former sweatshop workers, where the workers control the conditions of their work and make sure they can earn a living wage. For us in the ACG, workers' co-ops are no threat to the existence of capitalism, in fact they tend to be just a more gentle form of the same capitalist racket. That said, we understand that they can provide a more positive form of work under the present system. But is this the answer for all workers? While co-ops are one temporary solution in the here and now they are not an option for all workers. Others see the only option is to form a trade union and fight for their rights. And while we are

critical of trade unionism, we recognise the positive role of some base unions and rank and file initiatives.

If we look to Bangladesh, a powerhouse of the global garment industry, we find workers forming themselves into anarcho-syndicalist unions and fighting for their rights. The Bangladesh anarchist workers' movement is less than six years old, and was born out of the ashes of failed Marxism-Leninism. Bangladesh Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation (BASF) organizes workers at the lowest levels of diverse industries. The BASF is already organized in about 60 groups in different places, whose membership currently is over 1,600 with 45% of the membership being women.

There is still a long way to go. The largest trade union federation in the Bangladeshi garment sector is the National Garment Workers' Federation (NGWF) that has some 64,000 members in nine branches around the country uniting 45 factory unions. Yet, Bangladesh alone has an estimated four million garment workers, mostly women, employed in over 5000 factories. So for now No Sweat's workers co-ops, and anarchist trade unions, and even the garment workers' union federation, remains a drop in the ocean.

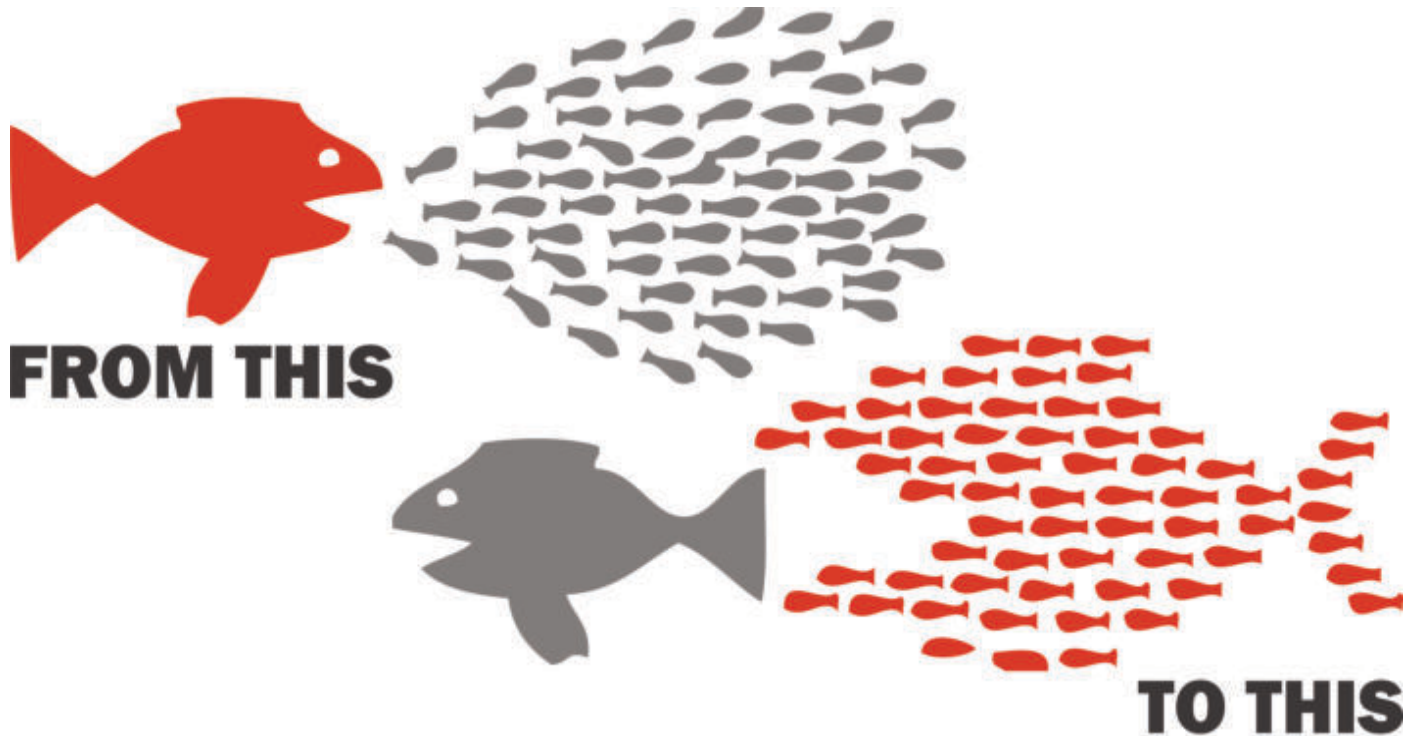
Anarchism is on the increase both in Bangladesh and the whole region, both through the organization of workers but also through the music, symbolism and DIY attitude of the international punk scene. In places like Myanmar and Bangladesh they are embracing the true nature of anarcho-punk and organising in many ways, and we can learn a lot from their self - organisation.

For more information on both Punk Ethics and the BASF:
www.punkethics.com/ and bangladeshasf.org/

*(Article written by Jay Kerr from Punk Ethics,
Edited/additions by Mike ACG)*



ORGANISING TO WIN



Introduction

The ACG held Libertarian Communism 2018 last November. During the workshop ‘Organising to Win’ participants reviewed a number of examples of organisational forms and developed some ideas on what makes for effective organisation. This article is based on that discussion. Thank you to all who participated.

The working class is on the defensive in all areas. Bosses have kept wages low and working conditions are in many ways getting worse, with longer hours and an increase in job insecurity. Meanwhile, landlords and corporations benefit as we suffer increases in the cost of living in the basic necessities of housing and food. We have a generally poor quality of life with our time dominated by work and survival. With gentrification there has been a loss of social networks and community. Our environment is also under threat as a result of both climate change and development pressures.

A main problem is the divisions within the working class. Instead of uniting and organising to resist effectively, we find ourselves in a situation of sharp divisions with the rise of reactionary and racist and sexist ideas. Gentrification has contributed to the fracturing of the working class. Slum clearances in the 70s, 80s, and 90s, which improved the lives of many thousands started the process of transforming the human geography of the working class. Additionally, the traditional organisations of the working class – the trade unions – have shrunk and collective organisation has been greatly absent from the lives of working class people. The rare examples of working class engagement in any culture of resistance are few and far between.

The struggle against the Poll Tax is now more than a quarter of a century away. Since then the struggles against the Job Seekers Allowance and the Bedroom Tax failed to mobilise significant numbers; whilst the changes made were detrimental to many, they did not affect enough people directly.

Whilst there are examples of people fighting back, there are also limitations. The struggles of communities fighting estate demolition and fracking have attracted many local people who are directly affected as well as activists, but have been painfully isolated. The victories of base unions such as the United Voices of the World (UVW) and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) have been very inspiring and have shown what can be done in very specific circumstances with a particular demographic. However, they have not spread outside those very specific circumstances and are little known, even within the broader trade union movement. So though there may be some small victories, it is like a gnat biting a lion – the system can easily accommodate a few defeats.

So what’s wrong? What can we do to be more effective?

“Organisation, far from creating authority, is the only cure for it and the only means whereby each of us will get used to taking an active and conscious part in collective work, and cease being passive instruments in the hands of leaders.” **Malatesta**

As Malatesta argues, we will only be able to change society effectively if we are organised. He explains why those fighting the system must organise collectively:

“It is natural that they should agree among themselves, join forces, share out the tasks and take all those steps which they think will lead to the achievement of those

objectives. To remain isolated, each individual acting or seeking to act on their own without coordination, without preparation, without their modest efforts to a strong group, means condemning oneself to impotence, wasting one's efforts in small ineffectual action, and to lose faith very soon in one's aims and possibly being reduced to complete inactivity."

Organisation can be defined as:

Coming together in some kind of structured relationship in order to work towards common aims.

For many in the anarchist movement the idea of 'organisation' is a dirty word. This tells us something about anarchism, something about the nature of British anarchism, and something about the kind of people attracted to British anarchism. Firstly, anarchism is such a wide collection of disparate ideas that it is almost useless as a categorisation that brings any semblance of clarity. Secondly, British anarchism remains dominated by individualism, localism and what we might call anarchy-ism, a vague set of ideas (probably better described as attitudes) that glorify spontaneity, temporary autonomous zones and lifestyle policing. Finally, British anarchism is like catnip for egotists and dilettantes.

The unwillingness or the inability of people to come together in some form of organisation is one of the main reasons we are so ineffective. For some, they believe that action will happen spontaneously. They may point to events that have been very militant and effective that seem to have come out of nowhere. But they don't see all the organisational work that has been done beforehand. In many cases a particular action is unplanned. However, this does not mean that there has not been organisation that led up to the 'spontaneous' actions.

The Spanish Revolution is a good example of something that might appear to have just sprung out of nowhere. In fact, anarchists had been organising for decades, creating structures, networks and practises that they were able to call upon when the situation was ripe for revolution.

Another example is the various actions of the American Indian Movement (AIM). In the 1970s the AIM marched on Washington and ended up occupying the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), causing major disruption and panicking bureaucrats and politicians. According to Mary Crow Dog in *Lakota Woman*, this action was taken because the accommodation they had been given was rat-infested and completely unsuitable, especially with a number of children. Someone said: "what about the BIA office? After all, it is meant to be ours!" So off they went! However, this could only have happened because they had organised for a number of different tribes to come to Washington in the first place. And for this to happen, years of organisation had gone into bringing the different tribes together.

The lack of commitment to long-term organising often leads to groups/campaigns being unable to achieve their stated aim. People may show up to one meeting, start planning something, and then not come to

another, or else come months later expecting something to have been done. Not enough people want to do the basic admin or commit to the group.

People may come together to organise a particular event such as a book fair, conference or protest. These events are useful in bringing people together. Much work and co-ordination is involved. These events can spark off interest in creating more long-term structures, eg the XR protests led to local groups being set up. But often nothing more comes of it. The event might have been very inspirational but does not lead to more lasting organisational structures.

Others may believe in organisation, but only on a limited level, eg one issue, in one locality. There is no sense of linking up to build a united movement against capitalism or the State. For example, there are myriad groups working on housing issues. However, they rarely link up with other people who are working on saving a community garden in the same area. Similarly, there are different radical base unions, but they do not generally work together. Each of these may be effective in their own right and achieve important gains, but how much more could be achieved if there was more collaboration - more structured interaction between them? And, the idea of coming together across the country and internationally as part of a long-term organisational project often meets with outright hostility amongst many anarchists.

Building effective organisations

In addition to committing to the idea of organisation, these organisations need to be effective, ones that can actually advance the struggles of the working class towards anarchist communism.

Effectiveness depends on the aims. On a very basic level, the aims are to win a particular demand or resist an attack. These are important. However, for anarchist communists, the ultimate aim is revolution and the creation of a new society. Our aims, therefore, are directed to this end. They include:

- **Building up community, mutual aid and solidarity within the working class**
- **Setting up effective networks in the workplace and geographical locations**
- **Building up a movement that goes beyond the activist or anarchist ghetto**
- **Reduce the power of the bosses and the State such that we are in a better position to overthrow them**
- **Share ideas and experience**
- **Spread anarchist communist ideas through a wide variety of mediums**
- **Achieve practical outcomes that increase the confidence of the working class and encourage increased combativity**
- **Gain experience in running society**

Different organisational forms might be relevant depending on the aims. However, there are some forms that are an obstacle to achieving our aims or even actively undermine them.

Reformist Social Democratic Parties, eg the Labour Party



Social democratic parties across the world have often been associated with a kinder, gentler neo-liberalism. The rightwards direction of politics globally has seen social democracy move right, adopting not just privatisation but anti-immigration rhetoric. So, when the Labour Party elected Corbyn there was much losing of heads by all. Not just the usual suspects such as the Trotskyists and the socialist left who were nominally outside the Labour fold (Left Unity for example) but amongst some ostensible anarchist communists outside the AF/ACG and particularly amongst the people who have coalesced around the Plan C project ('anti-authoritarian communists'). This is to be expected with a new generation of militants whose only knowledge of the Labour Party is, at best, Blairism and the immediate pre-Corbyn era. Something like Momentum has drawn in many young people with radical ideas and energy alongside the mouldy old Trotsam and Jetsam.

There is no doubt that these reformist parties can mobilise resources. The reformist parties have money and are embedded in decision-making structures, eg in the local council. People think they can achieve results as they have the power. For example, this means that credit is given to the Labour Party for achievements, such as the NHS or the saving of a particular school, despite the fact that these were won through struggle. There is continuity of membership and shared history that means it has a continual presence in society and in people's consciousness. The reformist parties work in a co-ordinated manner and offer direction to people looking for something to belong to.

One major disadvantage of these forms of organisation is that despite all of these advantages, they actually rarely achieve anything positive for the working class. In reality, rather than according to their rhetoric, they are anti-working class as seen in policy after policy once in government. So the main disadvantage is the fact that their aims are in contradiction with our aims. However, there are other disadvantages in the form of organisation itself. Though they have the potential to mobilise resources, they rarely do except during election periods. The rest of the time their members remain passive, letting their leaders get on with their work in Parliament. So in fact, this hierarchical structure demobilises people and discourages them

from doing for themselves. In addition, the party itself is full of inner conflict as various leaders and factions compete for power. Despite the illusion of party unity, it is a vehicle for fulfilling individualistic ambitions.

This analysis would be disputed by many in the current Labour Party. With the election of Corbyn as party leader, effort has been put into developing other structures and activities such as Momentum and the The World Transformed (a big event that takes place at the same time as the Labour Party Conference. However, despite some grass roots activity, both of these are geared to getting Corbyn elected, not really focusing on building a mass movement no matter what the government is.

So whilst it would be great to have so many resources and members, reformist political parties are not the way forward.

Leninist Parties

The Leninist left have shrunk in recent years. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) is a shadow of its former self and the Socialist Party seems to have just about sustained itself. The Scottish Socialist Party, great hope of the left north of the border, limps on, but has been a rump for a decade whilst the leftist electoral projects that have been launched have garnered pitiful results (RISE in Scotland, TUSC UK-wide). But, the Leninists haven't gone away. Despite much of the libertarian scene bestowing pariah status upon the SWP following the Comrade X case and the general bleeding (Counterfire, RS21 and in Scotland the ISG) of what was the most active and highest profile Leninist party in the UK, the SWP still recruits, still manipulates and attempts to dominate any and all social movements. There has even been some growth in Stalinist groups such as the Revolutionary Communist Group and the Young Communist League. Many anarchists get annoyed with the SWP and the rest being everywhere they turn but the SWP and the rest are cadre organisations and most anarchists can't match their level of commitment.

Similar to the reformist parties, the Leninists appear to have immense resources at their disposal. They have up-to-date websites, their own papers and hold regular public meetings. They are able to swamp demos with their placards and publications. Their centralised structure means that they are able to channel their resources, including their members, into co-ordinated actions. They have an effective street presence when they decide to focus on something. For example, after Grenfell, when many others were concerned to let the survivors and local community take the lead, the SWP galvanised their forces and were able both recruit and influence the campaign. In east London, members of the Revolutionary Communist Group committed themselves to long-term work on housing and gentrification issues and have managed to build up a strong presence in the area through Focus E15. This commitment of members is a real strength when aiming to have an influence in working class struggles.

This efficiency comes at a cost, however. As in the Russian Revolution, having centralised structures leads to a lack of internal democracy and a general culture of

passivity, conformity, and unequal power relations. In the end, the outcome of achieving your goals through such means is counter-productive; the worst aspects of the old society are replicated. In the Soviet Union and other so-called communist countries, the result was a disaster. Despite calling their structure democratic centralism, anyone who has passed through these organisations will testify that they are immensely authoritarian, making it extremely difficult for people to dissent from the decisions of the centre. It is hard to stand up and disagree amid a cultish atmosphere that ostracises and belittles dissidence. This often means that abusive and sexist behaviours get swept under the carpet. The history of these Leninist groups is that they use people in as 'cannon fodder'. Though some may rise through the ranks to become part of the leadership but many others get worn out and disillusioned.

We also question the supposed effectiveness of these parties. Though there are some examples of long-term work, most of the interventions of the Leninist parties last as long as something is in the news and they can profit from their investment. These interventions are often very artificial- done for their own interests, to recruit, and not in order to help people win. When there is no longer anything to be gained, they pull out their forces and move on to something else. This does not mean that individuals are not sincere, but strategy and tactics come from the centre and not from those on the ground. Also, their involvement can literally kill off a campaign. Their behaviour puts people off as they come with their own agenda, and don't want to be just another supporter of the campaign. They often propose actions that will enable them to promote themselves, such as demonstrations, which may not be the most effective campaign method.

There can be no short-cut to constructing a libertarian communist movement that will create the kind of society we actually want to live in. The structures we create now need to mirror as much as possible the kind of structures we hope to have. If we don't do that, the end result will not be libertarian communism, but yet another authoritarian regime.

Single issue campaigns

There is a wide variety of such campaigns ranging from specific ones such as scrapping universal credit, to broad ones against climate change. They also can take many forms such as big campaigns with hierarchical structures, to grassroots campaigns that have much more participation from the supporters. Here we focus on grass roots campaigns which are an important part of our activity as revolutionaries.

The obvious advantage is that resources are not spread too thinly and there is a clear focus on an issue or the needs of a particular oppressed group. It can be very motivating to get involved in campaigning around an issue that you care about and that in some cases seems winnable. People become very knowledgeable on the issue and are therefore more effective in winning arguments. Gaining experience of grass roots organising which brings working class people together to fight an aspect of capitalism or oppression is an important part of building a movement for a revolution.



There are dangers, however, with these campaigns if people lose sight of the broader goals. With the focus is on this one issue or one group of people, they may fail to see the link to the wider capitalist context or even other very similar issues, and therefore not be as effective in organising a strategy, eg they might rely too much on gaining the support of politicians or not mobilise all potential support. These campaigns are by definition reformist, in that they aim to achieve a reform in the current system. Therefore there is always a risk that the more limited goal of the campaign becomes the only goal rather than seeing the campaign as a way of building a much bigger movement.

Such campaigns can be incredibly time-consuming. As it is often more political people, with their ideas and experience, who end up doing a lot of the work, their input is lost to more revolutionary struggles. There are thousands of people involved in a variety of worthwhile campaigns, but they rarely join forces to fight for what in fact are common goals. For example, there are hundreds of campaigns around some aspect of gentrification but the different campaigns remain separate from each other.

It is the weaknesses of single issue campaigns that can be to a certain extent overcome by local anarchist groups and by networks.

Local anarchist groups

These may take many forms. Some may be explicitly called anarchist whilst others may operate on anarchist principles but not use the term.

Local anarchist groups have many advantages. Firstly, unlike political parties, reformist or Leninist, their goal is to create a society without capitalism, States or hierarchies. Each group has absolute autonomy and is only accountable to their own members and the local situation. There is usual a social/friendship element which gives these groups a sense of community and solidarity. This helps to keep the group together and can encourage participation. The level of agreement is fairly broad within basic anarchist principles, such as solidarity, mutual aid, and horizontal decision-making. This means that it can attract a wide range of people from the area, making the group more effective. They are able to link single issues, eg anti-gentrification, workplace and universal credit, helping to unite different struggles. Their local knowledge is useful for

producing informed propaganda and they will be fully grounded in local campaigns.

There have been a variety of local anarchist groups and therefore some will be better than others. The less effective ones can have a clubby, cliquey feel, putting off people who don't fit the particular group's culture. They can be unstructured, fearful of seeming to be too organised and thus may obsess with internal issues. If they have no real set of clear principles, they may not have enough agreement to act. Some groups may lose themselves in a single issue, rather than having a role in linking struggles. If the group is too informal then the members may come and go. In places like London, where people move around a lot, it may be difficult to maintain continuity in one local area. One of the major weaknesses of all local groups is that they have a tendency to focus so much on the local that they do not have a sense of co-ordinating beyond their own area, thus not gaining from the experience of others or helping to build a much bigger movement.

Local anarchist groups are an important part of building a revolutionary movement for anarchist communism. We need to be grounded in our local area, in direct contact with the struggles and day-to-day lives of working class people. However, it is important that local groups have a broader perspective than just their local area. We need to seek to co-operate and come together at every opportunity. This can be seen in London with the Rebel City Collective. People from different national organisations such as the ACG have joined forces with local anarchist groups and individuals to produce a common paper for all of London. Ideally, this kind of experience would expand to encompass an even wider area. In addition, local groups need to have a clear set of principles in order to ensure that they are able to act effectively together.

Protest camps

This form of organisation has been used in a variety of contexts, eg Occupy, G8 summit protests, Faslane Peace Camp, climate change and anti-fracking. These are events that involve considerable preparation prior to the camp itself. Some are relatively short-term, others last longer.

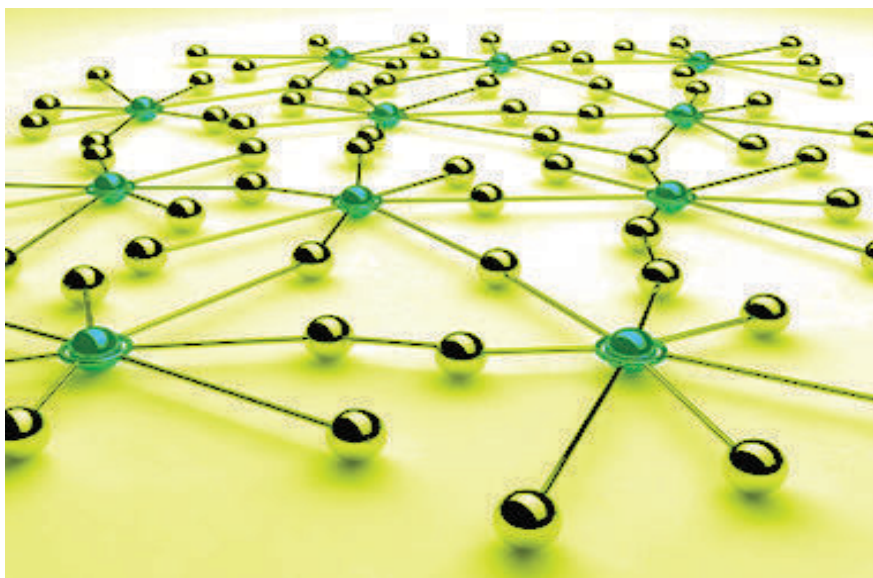
Protest camps are usually held on or near the subject of protest. The aim is to take some form of direct action, with the camp providing the base. They are able to bring a variety of people together, from different countries, campaigns and networks, and therefore they offer opportunities for sharing experiences and building links. In addition, the sheer numbers are able to attract media attention and may have an effect on those with power. They can be very inspiring for those who attend and motivate people to go back to their locality and engage in struggle with renewed vigour. They are often a model of self-organisation, giving people the opportunity to develop useful skills and to experience other ways of organising the satisfaction of day-to-day needs. They are also a place for experiment in decision-making and getting along with a large group of people for a period of time, based on collective principles.

However, these camps take a huge amount of effort to organise and maintain. It is not evident that so many people spending so much energy on what is often internal processes and logistics, unrelated to the actual struggle, is an effective use of time. Camps tend to attract a particular kind of person, often young, not tied down to a job or family, with time to spend weeks or longer away from home. It is these camps have in part created an activist scene consisting of those who devote large amounts of time to their political activity-effectively a lifestyle. This kind of camp will exclude the majority of the working class. The best camps will make links with the local community but often there is a large gulf between the activists and the more conservative communities.

Networks

A network is defined by the fact that it consists of affiliated groups and individuals. They tend to be looser than a specific local group, though some networks have clear membership criteria. An example is the Radical Housing Network, made up of a number of different housing campaigns. Individuals may attend meetings but they do not have the same status.

Networks can bring together a wide range of groups and individuals so that there is a united front approach to campaigning, whilst still retaining the autonomy of the components. This enables more co-ordinated actions as



well as helping local groups or single issue groups to focus on the wider issues. For example, the Radical Housing Network in London was able to organise actions directed at the property developers' fair. The Land Justice Network brought together many different groups, eg community, housing and food campaigns to focus on the big issue of land reform. Formal networks tend to have regular meetings and some explicit structure, eg membership criteria and processes for making decisions. Extinction Rebellion is also an example of an effective network. Groups exist all over the country and are able to involve themselves in their local area as well as engage in co-ordinated big actions.

Unlike local groups, networks are able to mobilise greater resources as there are greater numbers. In fact, the bigger groups in the network can help support newer or small groups. The Radical Housing Network has managed to raise considerable sums through various grant applications. This money has been used to support requests from individual groups and campaigns. Extra resources enable the network to employ a co-ordinator who can take over some of the admin from members. A network can also accommodate a range of strategies and tactics.

As with local groups, there are many different networks and diverse ways of operating. Some have an unclear decision-making structure which can lead to lack of transparency and informal hierarchies. Decisions will be made through informal contact between 'leading' members. When a clear structure exists, such as in the Radical Housing Network, democracy relies on the different groups and campaigns actually attending meetings as well as those people representing the affiliated groups and campaigns canvassing for views from their group. In the end it is normally those who attend meetings who make decisions. There are so many different levels of commitment and participation as well as large turnover in who is active, that it may be difficult to maintain continuity. This has an impact on both the participatory nature of decision-making and the ability to organise on long-term projects.

Groups and campaigns often affiliate more for what they can get out of the network than with a view to contributing to the network as a whole. They will ask for support from others but not necessarily return that support. And, often the affiliated groups do not actually send delegates which brings into question to what extent the network reflects its component parts rather than just those who turn up at meetings.

Extinction Rebellion is an example of an effective network that aims to avoid hierarchies. From their website:

"We organise in small groups. These groups are connected in a complex web that is constantly evolving as we grow and learn. We are working to build a movement that is participatory, decentralised, and inclusive."

However, looking at their description of decision-making it is unclear how it works. There is a clear distinction between national and local in terms of organisation. Local groups are autonomous and therefore can develop their own decision-making

processes and ways of being inclusive. However, trying to do this on a national level is difficult even with the best intentions when trying to organise big events- the Rebellions. There is no clear link between the local group and the national though some people in local groups may be part of some of the structures of the national. However, according to one member many in the local groups do not know how the 'national' works but it is seen as the main source of decision-making for the big events. Members of local groups may attend some meetings of the national but not as delegates as such. There is an array of different groups, roles and structures that to the uninitiated will be a complete mystery. Another member referred to a group called the 'Guardians'. This group is meant to safeguard the basic founding principles of the movement but it smacks of secrecy and hierarchy, though it is at least referred to on the website <https://rebellion.earth/the-truth/about-us/>. It will be interesting to see how the movement develops its decision-making structures as more and more people come into its ranks.

The tendency for networks, such as the Radical Housing Network, the Community Food Growers Network and the Land Justice Network to be able to raise funds and employ a co-ordinator has had unintended disadvantages. Those that used to do work as volunteers are happy to take a back seat and let the co-ordinator do the work. This then causes problems of a lack of participation and over-reliance on the co-ordinator. When funds run out the network struggles to get the volunteers to take over the work. This has caused problems for several networks which have now lost their co-ordinators. The RHN once organised working parties and a series of unpaid volunteers to deal with the very heavy workload of a successful network. However, they then employed a co-ordinator which was very helpful. But when they left, there was a vacuum: the RHN has a backlog of e-mails and a website that hasn't been up-dated.

Despite the disadvantages, networks are crucial for building a revolutionary movement because they bring people together in a co-ordinated manner and mobilise resources more effectively. However, the best networks will be aware of the potential disadvantages and take steps to minimise these.

Organising in the workplace: unions

There are many different kinds of unions so it is difficult to generalise. The traditional trade unions have many of the same advantages and disadvantages of political parties. Though they are large and can mobilise considerable resources, they mainly exist to control and stifle struggles, channelling militancy into support for a political candidate or token one day strikes. The existence of the union is more important than the class struggles and the members are used more as cannon fodder to support the very limited political objectives of the leaders as well as to finance the large bureaucracy which has its own interests in maintaining its privileges. In addition, they have shown little interest in organising precarious workers. This is why alternative unions - 'rebel' or 'base' unions- have sprung up.

Here we focus on these alternative unions such as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), United Voices

of the World (UWW), the Cleaners, and the Allied and Independent Workers Union (CAIWU).

These unions have a militancy not usually found in the traditional unions. They fight to win and are willing to use a range of innovative tactics, including direct action, to do so. The repertoire of tactics being much wider than traditional unions, their strikes tend to have maximum effect. They will use people not at risk of sacking, such as other union members and supporters, to organise protests against the bosses. The noise protest has been used to great effect.

In many ways similar to a network, these unions are able to bring a wide range of workers together for a common purpose and have been particularly successful with precarious workers such as cleaners. Presenting a united front to the bosses is crucial for resisting attacks and winning improvements in working conditions and wages. The union can also support individuals by providing advice and legal support. They also organise solidarity protests which have been critical in winning demands. Coming together with other workers helps to create class consciousness and awareness of wider political issues. There are also opportunities to develop skills. The bureaucracy is much smaller and those who take on positions of organisers are not well-paid or are often volunteers who are still doing, or once did, the same work as the workers they are organising.

The new base unions tend to be much smaller and have far less resources than the traditional unions. They are therefore limited in who they organise and tend to focus on small groups of workers. Campaigns to organise larger groups of workers are difficult. The most successful campaigns have been when the union has one or two members in the workplace already or when a groups of workers are already interested in doing something and contacts the union to help. However, what might be an advantage in some respects, willingness to focus on small groups of neglected workers, can be a disadvantage in terms of having an impact within the wider working class. It is the traditional unions that have a monopoly in the bigger workplaces.

The base unions will also have problems of hierarchies. This is because there is still a division between organisers and the workers who are being organised. Of

course the extent to which the workers themselves become their own organisers depends on the situation but often the workers will have considerably less experience than the organisers and this can therefore lead to inequality. The IWW tends not to have paid organisers, unlike some of the others, but there is still the idea that organisers are special in some way- they have the expertise and have been through training.

Bureaucracy in traditional unions is well-known but it can exist in the alternative unions as well. The IWW has a huge amount of rules and procedures, a large number of officers, regular meetings with numerous motions, and e-mail lists. It can be very hard for many workers to participate.

As with all organising, there is still the problem of divisions within the working class and the general lack of political awareness of wider issues and the need to go beyond one's own individual interests. The Industrial Workers of the World have the aim, given in the name itself, of uniting all workers. This is a great aspiration but is an uphill struggle. Because of the nature of work, there is a focus on a particular occupational group, such as couriers or language teachers. This focus on particular work demands means that the wider political context remains in the background. Often when a group of workers win their demands they do not carry on and support others. This happens especially when doing individual case work. Huge efforts are put in to help a few individuals who often disappear once their problem is solved. A general political awareness is not necessary to fight at work. Also, workers may hold racist or sexist views and this could prevent solidarity within an occupational group. The most successful campaigns tend to be with those that have some pre-existing political awareness such as many of London's Latin American cleaners.

Nevertheless, the whole point of organising in the workplace is to bring a variety of working class people together. Of course it is going to be more difficult than organising with people that largely share your views. That is one of the issues with anarcho-syndicalist unions. Members will mostly be of the anarchist persuasion. This makes it easier to organise and is certainly more militant but it could mean that overall the working class remains divided.



A weakness of even the best base unions will be the division between workplace and community. It is usually more political groups such as the Solidarity Federation and the Angry Workers of the World who make a link between work and community issues such as housing, though this is usually by doing individual case work which brings its own disadvantages.

It is very difficult to do workplace organising and the efforts by the new base unions have been impressive. Nevertheless, without an overall political perspective it will be impossible to overcome the many divisions in the working class and create an effective anti-capitalist working class movement. That does not mean that bringing workers together and fighting over economic demands at work is not important- it is crucial in building up working class confidence. However, we need to have a wider vision of what the aims are if the new alternative unions are going to be more than vehicles to make economic gains for small groups of workers. Ultimately, our aim is to actually take over the workplace and run them ourselves.

Some ideas for workplace organising

- **Build up links between different groups of workers, users, pensioners, the unemployed etc. Unite the Union has tried to do this with its Unite Community. How successful and militant it is depends on who joins at the local level. The Angry Workers and IWW have a project in west London that aims to do this. So local networks that involve all members of the working class would be a goal.**
- **Within workplaces organised by traditional unions, aim to organise outside the union- bringing together people from all the different unions as well as the non-unionised.**
- **Be creative in thinking of strategies. Strikes can be crucial if they are not token and do not spare resources. But there are other strategies, eg work to rule, using supporters or consumers to disrupt the company, using key workers who move about the workplace to spread ideas.**
- **Be conscious of the potential for hierarchies to arise between organisers and those being organised. Training and education, strategies to enhance participation, rotation of tasks etc must be a priority. Just having an awareness of the problems of inequality is the first step to thinking of ways of limiting the impact of unequal power.**

Anarchist Communist Political Organisations

As the ACG, we of course believe that these organisations are crucial. Having a national or even international organisation that brings people together with the aim of building a revolutionary working class movement overcomes many of the disadvantages of

other forms of organisation, such as single issue campaigns and local groups. Like the political parties, such an organisation has a broad view of social change, seeking to transform all society rather than just one aspect. However, a crucial difference is that an anarchist communist organisation has a very different vision of society as well as very different methods of organising from the reformist and Leninist parties. Our aims are the overthrow of capitalism and all hierarchies, with the full and active participation of the working class, and the creation of a libertarian society.

Any member of the working class can join and there can be a variety of focuses whilst at the same time retaining co-ordination and a view of the bigger picture. The focus is on wider structures and institutions, capitalism, the State, patriarchy etc and seeks to understand how they are interlinked. Members will be involved in single issue campaigns, workplace organising, local anarchist groups and networks but by coming together in a political organisation, they can share ideas and experiences, analyse the links between different issues, and devise strategies for overcoming divisions. They are also in a position to undertake a more global analysis of the issues and spread this to a much bigger audience through a range of mediums. They will also be able to promote general anarchist communist ideas about the future society which extends well beyond the reforms that we campaign for on a day-to-day basis.

The main disadvantage is the limited size and influence of such an organisation. Unlike the big political parties and unions, the small anarchist communist organisations are not well-known. Without the resources, they cannot spread their message very far. In addition, the aims will not be the aims of the majority of people which are limited to wanting a better life within the current system. There will not be many people who will initially share our aims, even if they do get the chance to hear about our ideas.

Another disadvantage is that the organisation itself will require continuing work and effort to maintain. As with all organisations, this will mean potential hierarchies and inequalities in participation. Also, trying to unite all working class people in one organisation means that there is potential for conflict between different interest groups or perspectives. This is largely solved by having a clear set of aims and principles and structures, but this in itself restricts membership to those who agree with these. It is also necessary to carefully consider how to enable diversity within the framework of these aims and principles and find ways of making decisions and resolving disagreement and conflict.

The organisation as a whole can develop an overarching strategy which is anti-capitalist, anti-State, and anti-hierarchy. Individuals and local groups necessarily will be unable to do everything and will therefore need to decide what to prioritise, based on a consideration of their situation and interests. The larger and more diverse the membership, the more areas can be covered. However, many people who are very involved in particular struggles often do not then have the time to devote to building the wider anarchist communist

organisation. Somehow the organisation has to have members who are involved in real struggles as well as maintaining the broader perspective, analysis and structures.

Nevertheless, an anarchist communist organisation is vital for ensuring that struggles and movements are not trapped in single issues or reformism. It can provide an essential overview of the bigger picture, keeping in mind the ultimate aim of a full revolution for anarchist communism. (For more information see the forthcoming pamphlet: *Role of the Revolutionary Organisation*).

The Internet

This is not a form of organisation per se but it has become a key part of the way that we organise. It is used by all the types of organisation discussed above but at the same time in some ways its own organisation.

The internet has been a huge help to those organising against capitalism and for a new society. It is hard to imagine organising anything without Facebook, websites, Twitter, etc. The internet is able to connect people who otherwise would not be connected. It enables geographically isolated individuals to link up with those in more urban areas, puts people with similar issues in contact with each other, informs people of different struggles, actions and events, and does this so much quicker than traditional forms of communication. It is also cheap!

However, despite the obvious advantages, we have to keep in mind that effective change can only happen in physical reality. Therefore, the internet cannot be an alternative to face-to-face organising and activity. It needs to be seen as an important tool- but just one tool. There is much debate as to how effective using the internet is. For example, when planning an action there are no more people attending than in pre-internet days. People seem to think ticking a box on FB or signing up to Eventbrite is a substitute for actually participating! It can create illusions about how many people will turn up. The amount of people active on social media bears no relation to the number of people who are involved in particular campaigns, networks and organisations. It can give the idea that there is a movement but in fact it is all in cyberspace and does not have any corresponding material reality.



Using social media to spread ideas, analysis and information is also limited. People gravitate towards sites or are friends on FB with people and groups they already agree with. We are not reaching out beyond a limited group of people and thus existing in our own bubble. People with radically different ideas from us will be reading the Daily Mail or looking at sites that contain the ideas that they are already comfortable with. People are very unlikely to look at other sites that might challenge their established beliefs.

Social media and digital communication can actually be counter-productive. People do not always consider carefully what they are saying when they are communicating by e-mail, posting comments on FB or a forum. Without face-to-face contact, the exchanges are often more aggressive, de-humanising those involved. This can lead to unnecessary conflict and disagreement, undermining our efforts to build a united revolutionary working class movement. It promotes 'armchair' anarchists, people whose only contribution to struggle is going on line and making negative comments.

Another major disadvantage is the lack of security. The internet is controlled by several big companies. FB in particular is open to all to see. If the State really thought we were a threat it would be easy enough to gain access to everything despite what we think of as being secure, for example with riseup.net.

Many point to how useful the internet is for finding out information, especially concerning what is going on around the world. This is only meaningful if you are going to do something with the information, eg organise a solidarity action, develop an international perspective on struggles etc. But even with just focusing on what is going on in this country, the sheer amount of information is overwhelming. Wading through information takes up a huge amount of time. The end result being that we become very well-informed but with no time to do anything practical about any of the issues.

Nevertheless, the internet will inevitably remain an important tool but it is important to keep in mind that change happens at work, in the community and on the streets.

Social Centres

Social centres, like the internet, are both a tool of organisation and can be organisations in their own right.

These can take all sorts of forms and have differing dynamics and roles. Some are more explicitly political and some are more counter-cultural and intent on creating a safe space where people of like-mind can reinforce each other's world-view whilst the rest of the world can go away. For example, in Glasgow there are two social centre initiatives. One is tucked away in a part of town that whilst easy enough to get to, is where very few people live. It makes no bones about the fact that it is essentially a 'scene' but it does good work with refugees and asylum seekers and allows local libertarian groups to use its facilities. None of the people who run it are involved in any anarchist

organisations (or syndicalist unions) but they would probably consider themselves anarchists. The other social space is run by community activists/entrepreneurs and serves a wider community than the 'scene'. It is not explicitly political but it probably has more practical use for the local (working class) population as it has a cafe, undertakes community outreach and is not run entirely by activists.

Social Centres in the UK tend to reflect the nature of the 'movement' as a whole, in that they do not have any engagement with organised anarchism but prefer to see their projects as an end in themselves. There are exceptions - DIY centre and May Day rooms in London and the Sumac Centre in Nottingham are two examples. Having solid bases, including social centres, is good but only as good as the politics that dominate them and the extent to which they operate as centres of a resistance that go beyond their own walls.

Conclusion

All the forms of organisation, apart from the political parties and reformist trade unions, can be a useful part of building a revolutionary working class movement. However, for all of them, there are disadvantages that can be overcome to an extent. None of them on their own are sufficient. The anarchist communist organisation will not be effective if its members are not engaged in direct struggle in grassroots campaigns, networks, local anarchist groups, base unions etc. But these forms of organisation will be unable to develop a mass working class movement on their own, without a basic vision, analysis and strategy that brings everything together - which is the task of the anarchist communist organisation.



DOSSIER: 1919

Year of Struggle



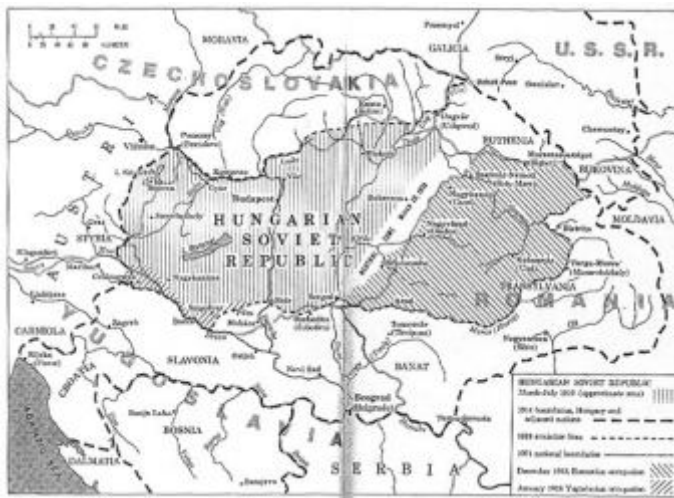
The Year 1919

In this issue of Virus, we highlight important events that happened one hundred years ago in 1919. We have articles on little known events like the soviets in Ireland, the Seattle and Winnipeg general strikes, and the unrest in Britain, including the Luton riot, the police strike and mutinies in the armed forces. But 1919 was more than those events. There were uprisings all over the world.

In Mexico the Revolution that had started in 1910 rumbled on until 1920 but in 1919 one of the most important revolutionaries, Emiliano Zapata, was murdered on April 10th by the forces of President Carranza. The United States took the opportunity of the attack by the revolutionary forces of Pancho Villa on the border town of Ciudad Juarez to send its troops into Mexico, to repulse Villa's forces.

In Malta began the Sette Giugno (Seventh of June). This was triggered by food shortages and a massive rise in the cost of living, including rent rises, brought on by the results of the First World War. Malta had become highly militarised during that war, and the mass of the population had suffered whilst a few made enormous profits out of military spending. In the aftermath of the war, many working in war-related industries like the dockyards lost their jobs. Workers protested, whilst university students held demonstrations over changes to their courses. Rising tension resulted in riots breaking out on 7th June 1919. British soldiers fired on the crowd, killing three people. The Maltese nationalists seized control of the unrest to demand greater autonomy for Malta and the establishment of a Parliament.

Hungary



In early 1919 in Hungary, conflict increased between workers and the coalition government. The number of demonstrations increased and there were seizures of land by peasants. Estate workers and servants set up cooperatives and workers councils. Factories were occupied, whilst soldiers' councils took over control of many arms depots. On February 20th, unemployed workers marched to the offices of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party newspaper, Nepszava. The police responded brutally and anarchist self-defence squads

retaliated by killing four cops. 68 anarchists and Communists were arrested and beaten. This resulted in a wave of protest which led to a dropping of the most serious charges. The tempo of the unrest increased with a workers' council being created in the city of Szeged. On 20th March print workers refused to print Nepszava, triggering a general strike that demanded the release of the prisoners. On March 21, 1919, the Hungarian Council Republic was set up. The Bolshevik Bela Kun engineered the amalgamation of the Social Democratic Party and the newly emergent Communist Party. Opposition to this move came from the left opposition including many anarchists. Some of the anarchists who had been in the left of the Communist Party left to form the Anarchist Union, allying with anarcho-sindicalists. The Hungarian Council Republic called for the abolition of the police and army, the socialisation of banks and transport, the confiscation of assets, the abolition of bureaucracy and the secularisation of society. The Communist Party attempted to increase its hold over the developing Revolution and re-appointed the old estate managers as commissars for production, sabotaging the revolution in the countryside.

Meanwhile the Romanian army marched against the Revolution, resulting in the mobilisation of workers in the Hungarian cities. This force of 50,000 defeated the Romanians and their allies and sent them reeling back to Romania. In the course of these actions a Republic of Councils was set up in Slovakia. However the Revolution was now being undermined by the Bolsheviks in the Communist Party on one side and the plots of right-wing socialists. Kun began secret negotiations with the reactionary governments of the Entente, resulting in a peace treaty similar to the one negotiated by the Russian Bolsheviks at Brest-Litovsk and the giving up of the Slovak Councils, leading to the incorporation of south east Slovakia into the state of Czechoslovakia. This led to demoralisation and the defeat of the revolutionaries by the Romanians on July 20th. The inept and bungling Kun was forced to resign. The Council Republic came to an end on August 1st. The Romanians installed the reactionary Admiral Horthy and a White Terror began, with the torture and murder of many revolutionaries whilst Kun and his Bolshevik associates negotiated a safe passage out of Hungary in a sealed train. Anarchists and left communists were deliberately excluded from this, and suffered terribly in the aftermath. The Revolution had been destroyed.

Germany

The Revolution that had begun in Germany in 1918 continued into the following year. The revolutionaries grouped around the Spartacists joined with other groups to found the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). Rosa Luxemburg, on the right of the Spartacists wanted the KPD to run in the forthcoming elections but was outvoted by the majority, who wanted to concentrate on agitation in the workplaces and the streets.

A new wave of agitation began on January 4th when the chief constable of Berlin, Emil Eichhorn, a member of the left socialist party, the United Social Democrats (USPD) was sacked by the government led by the Social

Democrats (SPD). He had refused to use the police to attack a workers' demonstrations. The USPD, the KPD and the group of Revolutionary Shop Stewards called a demonstration the following day, which to their surprise became a huge show of strength of the working class, as hundreds of thousands turned out, many of them armed. The train stations and the offices of the bourgeois newspapers and the SPD paper were occupied. The so-called Spartacist uprising that followed was initiated by the working class and groups to the left of the KPD and KPD members were a minority.

The KPD leader Karl Liebknecht, together with a newly formed Revolutionary Committee called for the overthrow of the SPD government led by Ebert. Luxemburg and the majority of KPD leaders spoke against an armed uprising.

However the armed forces failed to support the uprising and remained loyal to the government. The SPD with the aid of the Freikorps, which had been set up by reactionary nationalist officers, and acted as death squads, attacked the uprising and brutally crushed it. Following this both Liebknecht and Luxemburg were murdered by the Freikorps.

The Berlin uprising was followed by others throughout Germany. The SPD government now decided to move against the Council Republic that had been set up in Bremen. It used the Freikorps to put a bloody end to the Council Republic. 400 were shot, including the leading members of the Council.

This triggered mass strikes in the Ruhr, the Rhineland and Saxony. Street fighting began again in Berlin and this time the SPD again deployed the Freikorps who murdered 1200 people.

The Munich Council Republic, which had been set up in April was the last to fall when the Freikorps and the Prussian army units again acted brutally. The Council Republic was smashed on May 6th with the killing of between 1,000 to 1,200 anarchists and Communists. The Social Democratic leaders, Ebert, Scheidemann and Noske had joined with the forces of outright reaction to crush the German Revolution, and they now led a new coalition which now administered the Weimar Republic.

In Italy, the Biennio Rosso (Red Two Years) began. Facing the same conditions as elsewhere in the world, with rising costs of living, food shortages and low wages, the working class responded by creating factory councils in Milan and Turin, centres of metal production and occupying the factories. On the land, there were many land seizures and peasant strikes. The membership of the anarchist organisations and the anarcho-syndicalist union USI increased massively. A million industrial workers went out on strike in that year. On July 20th-21st, a general strike was called in solidarity with the Russian Revolution.

USA

In the USA, apart from the Seattle General Strike, there was the strike of women telephone operators in April. Concerned by the rising cost of living, they demanded a pay rise which was rejected. 9,000 went on strike. The company hired university students as strike-breakers but

they were attacked by supporters of the strike. The company gave in after a few days and the strike was won.

The union confederation, the American Federation of Labour, called strikes in the meat industry, steel and other industries. The bosses replied that strikes were controlled by Communists whose aim was the overthrow of capitalism. They used the patriotic card to undermine the strikes, which were defeated with workers being forced back to conditions similar to those in 1910.

The miners went out on strike on November 1st, to continue the wage agreement that had been signed at the start of the First World War. The new Attorney General, A. Mitchell Palmer, invoked the Lever Act, also introduced during the war, which made it illegal to disrupt production and transportation of necessities. Nevertheless, 400,000 miners came out on strike. The coal bosses used the same campaign of Reds under the Beds as during the AFL strikes, saying Lenin and Trotsky had ordered miners to strike! The leader of the United Mine Workers union (UMW), John L. Lewis, now called for the strike to end, but was ignored by many miners. The strike went on for five weeks, with the miners eventually getting a 14% pay rise, far lower than they had demanded.

On April 13th, Eugene V. Debs was sent to prison for having spoken against the war. This sparked the May Day Riots in Cleveland where a May Day parade in support of Debs was organised. The police and 'patriots' attacked the march, and captured German tanks and mounted police were deployed against the demonstrators. Two people were killed, and 130 were sentenced to prison or fined. The Cleveland administration passed laws to restrict demonstrations and banned the display of red flags.

On September 9th police officers in Boston, in a union affiliated to the AFL, went out on strike to gain recognition and for better conditions and higher wages. Again the anti-radical card was used, with strikers being called 'agents of Lenin' and 'deserters'. The AFL leader Samuel Gompers called for the cops to return to work. They did so on September 13th. All of them were not re-hired. They were replaced by 1,500 new officers, who received higher wages.

Throughout 1919 there were mass trials of members of the revolutionary union, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) on charges of being opposed to the draft, vagrancy, and "criminal syndicalism". IWW halls were burnt down by "patriots" of the American Legion. The worst incident was the lynching of IWW organiser Wesley Everest on November 11th. Despite the repression, the IWW helped organise strikes of orange pickers in California and silk weavers in Paterson.

The First World War had created a call for jobs in the North, and many black workers took advantage of this to leave the South and go North for factory jobs. Those left behind took advantage of the more favourable labour situation and demanded higher wages and better conditions. Black orange pickers in Crescent City, Florida, went on strike, demanding 10 cents per box for oranges picked. Other black workers in the potato fields near Palatka also organised. Many growers' associations were forced to grant wage increases. This brought on police

repression and the Ku Klux Klan murdered several black activists.

Attorney General Palmer instigated the first Palmer Raid on the second anniversary of the Russian Revolution in November. Aided by the young J. Edgar Hoover, future head of the FBI, 10,000 anarchists, socialists and Communists were arrested in 23 different cities. The Red Scare which had been employed against the Seattle strikers, the miners and the AFL strikers, and the Boston cops, was now used to justify the deportation to Russia of 249 radicals, including the notable anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman on December 21st. Thus ended this year of unrest in the USA.

Unrest in Britain

In Britain in 1919 the level of unrest could be gauged by the number of strike days that year, 35 million compared to six million in 1918. Soldiers returning from the war were dissatisfied, often facing unemployment, bad housing, and poor work conditions.

In January of that year, 2,000 troops at Folkestone refused to go on ships to be sent abroad, fearing that they would be used to put down revolutions on the continent, and fed up with the way they were treated by the arrogant officers. They were joined by other soldiers and then 10,000 of them marched through the town.

The next day there was another demonstration. At nearby Dover, 2,000 soldiers also mutinied. A soldiers' union was set up with a committee made up from the rank and file. On 9th January the revolt spread to camps around London. 1,500 soldiers based at Park Royal marched to Downing Street. The military authorities, terrified by this, agreed to their demands, the end of the draft to Russia and better conditions.

At Calais, British soldiers organised a mass meeting at the end of January and a mutiny broke out with the demand for demobilisation. Soldiers broke into a prison and released a soldier who had agitated for demobilisation. Soldiers' Councils were set up in various regiments. At nearby Vendreux, 2,000 soldiers mutinied and marched to Calais. These combined mutineers then marched to Army headquarters and demanded the release of the re-arrested agitator. By now 20,000 had joined the mutiny. French troops now began to fraternise with the mutineers. The soldiers set up a committee, with each group electing delegates to camp committees, which then sent delegates to a Central Area Committee. At Dunkirk soldiers were sympathetic to the Calais Mutiny, General Byng surrounded the Calais mutineers on January 29th, but his troops also started to fraternise. Again the government backed down, with no one being punished for involvement with the mutiny.

Mutinies

The mutinies spread through both the Army and Navy with the patrol boat HMS Kilbride running up a red flag. For this one sailor received a two year prison sentence,

three served a year in prison and another 90 days. In far away Archangel in North Russia, British troops of the Yorkshire Light Infantry, sent there to intervene in the Russian Revolution, mutinied and set up a soviet.

On February 8th, 3,000 soldiers marched to Whitehall, protesting over the bad food they were given and poor sleeping arrangements. They were met by a battalion of Grenadier Guards with fixed bayonets and were forced back. The authorities now acted quickly and started speeding up demobilisation from February onwards.

Also in late January strikes broke out in both Glasgow and Belfast, involving 100,000 engineering workers. They demanded the reduction of the 54 hours a week that they were working to 40 hours. Mass meetings took place every day. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE), the official union, sabotaged the strike by infiltrating the workers committees that had been set up.

The strike committee called for all trams to be stopped in Glasgow. When the transport authorities refused to do this, workers cut tram cables and used the immobile trams to block roads. Police were beaten off. In one instance two cops who were intervening to stop the sabotage of a tram, were stripped of all their clothes and ran away naked!

However now the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE), the official union, sabotaged the strike by infiltrating the workers committees that had been set up. On January 31st, strikers assembled in George Square were brutally attacked by the police in what became known as Bloody Friday. The following day, troops marched into Glasgow, supported by tanks, field guns, machine guns and planes. The State were scared to use local troops, in case they went over to the strikers. Faced with this armed might, the strikers were defeated, although later in the year 100,000 Glasgow workers came out on May 1st.

The government was concerned that the movement in Scotland would merge with the wage demands of miners, rail and transport workers, who all had national wage claims. Projected strikes were sabotaged by union officials like Robert Smillie, the miners' leader, and Jimmy Thomas, the railworkers union leader. Thomas managed to halt a strike on 27th March but when the Government ordered wage cuts, 100,000 rail workers came out on strike and got better wages for the lower grades.



Troops out: a lorry-load of soldiers demanding demobilisation in January 1919

Riots

During summer of that year cotton workers went out on strike for 18 days, involving 450,000 workers. As well as this there was the police strike that year (see separate article).

Unrest manifested itself in other ways apart from strikes and mutinies. In July in Luton, the local council made preparations for a lavish celebration of the Armistice. They were prepared to spend large sums on this at a time of unemployment and poverty, which disgusted many in the town. There was also the question of unsatisfactory allowances made to discharged soldiers and their dependents. In addition it was believed that the Mayor and members of the Corporation Food Control Committee had made large profits by raising food prices during the War and that they were now responsible for food shortages and continuing high prices. On 19th July on a public holiday declared Peace Day, thousands gathered outside Luton Town Hall. An expensive banquet was going on inside. It was so expensive that no ex-soldier could afford to go. As a result the town hall was stormed and then burnt down.

The rioting went on for three days. Pitched battles with the police took place and the Food Office was also burnt to the ground. The crowd sarcastically sang the pro-war tune "Keep the Home Fires Burning". A large body of troops and police was brought in from nearby Bedford to put down the uprising.

Similar riots broke out in Swindon, where a flagstaff erected outside the town hall at considerable expense was burned down. The police station and several businesses were also attacked. At Bilston near Wolverhampton a riot was set off by the arrest of two soldiers by the police. Several thousands marched on the police station, demolished a brick wall and then used the bricks to bombard the building, breaking all the windows. They then attempted to set fire to it with petrol but were driven off by police reinforcements.

On Peace Day, riots broke out in Coventry involving 3,000 people. The immediate cause of this was the exclusion of ex-soldiers and munitions workers from the celebratory parade. The riots lasted three days, with windows smashed in the city centre, and the looting of shops. In nearby Birmingham there was also unrest on the streets during the Peace Day and its aftermath.

In July, 400 Canadian troops in Epsom rioted after two of their number were arrested by police. The troops attacked the police station and a police sergeant was hit with an iron bar and killed.

In August in Liverpool, there was rioting and looting in Liverpool following the police strike there. 2,600 troops with 4 tanks were brought in to quell the disturbances and the battleship Valiant and two destroyers were brought up the Mersey to menace the city.

The Police Strikes in Britain in 1919

The police had a rough time during the War. Added to the already existing draconian discipline there was a massive amount of unpaid overtime and cancellation of leave. At the same time their wages had lagged far behind inflation. By 1918, police constables with 20 years' service were receiving less wages than the average rate for unskilled labourers before overtime. In such a situation petty corruption was rife; for many policemen it was a choice between accepting the occasional backhander from local bookmakers and publicans for looking the other way, and starving.

The National Union of Police and Prison Officers had been founded in 1913 by ex-inspector John Syme. Syme, a notable figure in radical circles, who had been victimised in 1909 for 'undue familiarity' with his men, had been waging a campaign for his re-instatement ever since. The union had a largely underground existence until 1918, although five union members had been sacked in December 1916. In February 1917 there were a further 17 dismissals following a raid by the military police on a meeting of the London Branch of the Union.

The first strike started on August 30th, 1918. There were two issues: the dismissal of PC Tommy Thiel for union membership, and the demand for a wage increase. One of the first stations to be affected was Kings Cross Road, where meetings were held in the station yard, the men then forming a procession and marching to Whitehall. The strike spread like wildfire. Over half the men at Upper Street Station joined in immediately, and within a few hours 6,000 men throughout London were out, and with more joining all the time; even the Special Branch was affected.

The strike was robust. Flying pickets forcibly entered a number of stations and section houses in search of blacklegs who, if found, were forced to join the strike. There were also a number of assaults on special constables who had been hurriedly drafted in to take over strikers' work.

Mass Meeting

The next day - August 31st - began with a mass meeting of nearly 1,000 strikers at the Finsbury Park Empire. These then marched to Whitehall where they joined up with contingents from other parts of London. The men's delegates negotiated directly with Smuts (General Smuts, member of the War Cabinet) and Lloyd George (leader of the War Cabinet); the authorities caved in; the wage demand was conceded and Tommy Thiel was reinstated. The men returned to work triumphant.

In the months which followed, the police union mushroomed to a claimed 50,000 members, and it became an accepted part of the labour scene. Its Islington Branch met at the North London Herald League's (NLHL) premises in Green Lanes, and was affiliated to Islington Trades Council. It is possible that there were subliminal connections and influences between the police and the radical movement long before the strike. The police in those days were far less isolated from the working class than is the case today, whether it was standard of living, style of life, or their fundamental value system. While this in no way undermined the role of the police as an institution in defending the established order, it is an interesting fact that there had been considerable police unrest in both 1872 - which began in 'N' Division, covering Islington and Stoke Newington - and 1890, both years of industrial unrest in their own right. The police on both occasions tried to form unions, in the latter case with the help of the socialist movement. Edward Hennem indicated another possible route of influence, when he describes how in 1917 he:

"and one or two other youngsters (from the NLHL took an apple box to Fairfax Road, Harringay, outside the baker's shop at 8 pm one murky November evening, to proclaim our baptism for the Red Flag - one chairman, one heckler, plus me - 17 years of age. We got no audience, a cat sitting on the hot grills of the bakehouse, and a policeman. . . . after a speech lasting 25 minutes. . . the copper asked us if we were going home - we were depressed that we had not influenced the nation. But, that policeman became the local leader of the police strike and an active worker in the movement. I like to think that my speech started him thinking."

Among the local activists of the Police Union were Alf Pack of Upper Street Station, who was a member of the Union's Executive, and Sergeant Fred Hillier who was the local Branch Secretary. Both stayed at work during the 1919 strike and left the Union.

The authorities had been caught unawares by the first strike and used the breathing space created by the settlement to prepare for the next round. General Cecil Mcready was appointed Metropolitan Commissioner and he used the ensuing months to get ready. Militants were isolated, moderates won over, and a number of partial reforms introduced, and when everything was ready the authorities introduced a new Police Bill which, apart from wages, nullified the men's gains.



The second police strike started on July 31st, 1919. It was a disaster. Only about 1,000 men struck in London, all of whom were instantly dismissed, and although a bitter struggle continued for some time -for example, strikers broke into the Islington section house to force the inmates to join them, eventually being forcibly ejected - the strike was absolutely crushed, and along with it the Police Union.

Stoppages

There were numerous arrests during the strike, and there were even a couple of sympathetic stoppages - of railwaymen at Nine Elms, and the tube motor men. One other interesting feature of the dispute was when Inspector Dessent of Stoke Newington Station - the only Inspector to strike - formed his men up in a body and marched them to the main strike meeting at Tower Hill.

The sacked men never got their jobs back, but many of them became active in the socialist and labour movements. After the defeat, the NLHL's paper, Rebel, noted a large influx of new members from the Police Union. Tommy Thiel, on whose behalf the first strike had been fought, joined the Communist Party, as did a number of others. A local striker, Henry Goodridge, joined the Labour Party and eventually became Mayor of Hackney. Another Islington man, Sergeant William Sansum, who had been arrested and bound over during the 1919 strike, was arrested again for his support of the General Strike in 1926. Sansum, by this time a boot salesman, got three months in prison.

There had been considerable support for the 1919 strike from the socialist movement, but many supporters, looking back on police harassment, or police inaction while they got bashed by jingoes, felt a bit awkward - to put it mildly - with their new allies.

Excerpted from: ***Don't be a soldier! The radical anti-war movement in north London 1914-1918*** by Ken Weller

The Seattle General Strike

On February 6, 1919 Seattle workers became the first workers in United States history to take part in an official general strike One hundred thousand workers went out on strike for 6 days and paralysed the city. This event has been hidden from history.

Seattle came to prominence with the gold rush in Alaska to its north, with miners stopping there on their way to seek their fortune. In addition the lumber industry began to take off and Seattle became an important port for the transportation of timber.

Many workers in North West America in the lumber industry and other industries were migratory and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the revolutionary unionist organisation founded in 1905 did much

organisational work among them. They agitated against the bosses organisations which attempted to counter organising among workers, keep wages low and working conditions cheap.

The First World War brought further prosperity to Seattle with the expansion of the ship building industry. With the USA's entry into the War in 1917, the American Federation of Labour (AFL) unions were given permission to organise among workers, as long as their leaders squashed any chances of strike during the war. At the same time repression began against the IWW, the only union which had opposed the War, the anarchist movement and anti-war members of the Socialist Party of America like Eugene V. Debs.

The membership of the IWW rose to 150,000 in 1917 with Seattle as one of its main bases. There was great sympathy among Seattle workers for the Russian Revolution of 1917 and it should be remembered that many Russian ships docked at Seattle and so there was contact between Russian and American workers. The Socialist Party in Seattle, seen as on the left of the party nationally, had 4,000 members.

Sympathy for the Russian Revolution and growing sentiment against the War merged with discontent over wages and conditions to create a volatile situation. In Tacoma, 32 miles south of Seattle, A Soldiers, Sailors and Workmen's Council was set up and talked about the overthrow of the government and the takeover of industries by the workers. In Seattle itself there was a mass meeting at which speakers called for a general strike to stop supplies being sent to Siberia to help the White armies there.

City wide strike

The AFL had 110 craft unions in Seattle, with 65,000 members. IWW membership was much smaller, but there was quite a lot of dual carding, where IWWers took out AFL membership, to gain entry in to jobs. Unlike the IWW, the AFL banned white workers organising alongside black, Asian and Hispanic workers and there were a few segregated black unions.

The AFL unions created a coordinating body, the Central Labor Council (CLC). Membership of the CLC was composed of radical workers.

On January 21st, 1919, 35,000 shipyard workers went out on strike to demand higher wages. The following day they approached the CLC to demand a city wide strike to support their cause. This was agreed and a ballot was started in the 110 unions to support the strike. Only a small number of unions voted not to support strike action, with the result that 100,000 workers came out on strike. The CLC voted on January 29th to set up a General Strike Committee. This would combine the CLC and grassroots delegates from the unions. In reaction to this, reactionary union leaders in the craft unions set up a Committee of 15 to stop the strike.

Between February 3rd and 6th food kitchens and child care were organised, as well as communications -the publication of newspapers and press releases, and the

removal of rubbish from the streets. Conservative union leaders and their supporters were worried about the radical nature of the strike and the proposed slogan 'Workers, You Have Nothing To Lose But Your Chains' was replaced by 'Together We Win'. They also attempted to set an end date for the strike but this was defeated.

The establishment press in the city now began a vicious campaign against the strike. The Seattle Star appealed to the 'Americanism' of the workers and talked about Bolshevik agitators who were preparing a revolution.

The rich began to stockpile food. Ole Hansen, Seattle's Mayor, ordered in State and Federal troops. These were linked with the city police and the anti-strike volunteers made up of university students and members of the middle class.

In response to this, Anna Louise Strong wrote the following in the CLC paper Union Record on February 4th:

"We are undertaking the most tremendous move ever made by LABOR in this country, a move which will lead—NO ONE KNOWS WHERE! Labor will feed the people. Labor will care for the babies and the sick. Labor will preserve order. Labor will not only SHUT DOWN the industries, but Labor will REOPEN, under the management of the appropriate trades, such activities as are needed to preserve public health and public peace. If the strike continues, Labor may feel led to avoid public suffering by reopening more and more activities. UNDER ITS OWN MANAGEMENT. And that is why we say that we are starting on a road that leads—NO ONE KNOWS WHERE!"

Strike and backlash

On the 6th 65,000 members of the AFL unions went out on strike, as well as 3,500 in the IWW unions, and black and Japanese workers in their segregated unions, as well as many non-unionised workers. Pickets put up by the strikers blocked 40,000 others from going to work. The supply of food to strikers and their families was very efficient. An unarmed War Veterans Guard was also set up by the CLC to protect the strikers against attacks by cops, troops and anti-strike militias. However the Committee of 15 had exempted telephone operators, government workers and food market workers from the strike, hindering its effectiveness. On the third day of the strike the Committee of 15 attempted to end the strike but were defeated on the floor of the assembly of the General



Strike Committee. Hansen began to up the ante on the threat of armed attacks on the strikers. This resulted in the return to work of street car workers, as well as some restaurant workers, barbers and shop workers.

The Committee of 15 again attempted, on Saturday February 8th, to end the strike the following day. This was again rejected. However on Sunday, there were meetings within union branches to end the strike on February 11th. Under pressure, workers reluctantly ended the strike on that day. None of the demands of the strike had been won.

Now the backlash began. The Union Record was shut down by federal agents and there were raids on the halls of the IWW and the Socialist Party. 39 IWW members were arrested in connection with the strike. The CLC to their credit supported the arrestees. This repression was to escalate with the murder nine months later of five IWW members at Centralia and the Palmer Raids, where many anarchists, socialists and IWW members were arrested and deported from the USA.

The Seattle General Strike illustrates the power of the working class and how it can successfully run society. At the same time it illustrates the nature of trade union leaderships and their sabotage of workers struggles. The example of Seattle needs to be resurrected to show that the working class can paralyse the workings of capitalist society and prepare for a new world and that this is still possible in the USA and throughout the world.

The Winnipeg General Strike

Far to the east of Seattle, at Winnipeg, Manitoba in central Canada, another general strike took place. Whilst the general strike in Seattle lasted six days, that one in Winnipeg went on for six weeks. In 1918 there had been the first general strike in Canadian history in Vancouver, after the murder of Albert Goodwin, who had called for a general strike if anyone was drafted into the Armed



Forces against their will. This one day strike was met with violence by soldiers, who beat strikers. The strike leaders promptly resigned their position but all were mostly re-elected following a ballot, showing widespread support among workers for the strike.

Due to the War, prices has risen considerably in Winnipeg, with wages not keeping up with. Housing conditions were poor and deteriorating. There was resentment about the huge profits some bosses had made from the War. Unemployment was rising, and soldiers returning from the War found few jobs.

Metal workers and building workers in Winnipeg decided to take action. They had tried to negotiate contracts with the employers, who promptly rejected any collective bargaining. At meetings of the Trades and Labour Council, representing various union bodies, it was decided to call for a vote for a general strike. There was an overwhelming yes vote to this idea.

At 11a.m on May 15th 35,000 metal workers and building workers went out on strike, as well as other workers in both the public and private sectors. Only a third of these striking workers were unionised. In fact, the first group to come out, female telephone operators, were not in any union. In addition most of the local organisations of returned soldiers agreed to support the strike.

Women

Women played a key role in the strike. There were two women on the Strike Committee, and there were appeals to women workers via street corner and indoor public meetings. The Women’s Labour League raised money to help women workers pay rent.

Local businessmen and professionals grouped together in the Citizens’ Committee of One Thousand to produce an anti-strike newspaper The Winnipeg Citizen. Government ministers threatened striking postal workers that they should return to work or be sacked. The Immigration Act was amended too that anyone not born in Canada could be deported for “seditious activities”.

On June 5th the Winnipeg mayor banned public demonstrations. Meanwhile workers in other urban centres went out on strike in solidarity, realising that if Winnipeg workers won, this could be repeated nationally. In Edmonton and Calgary, strikes started on May 15th and ran through until June 15th. This involved 2,000 workers in Edmonton and 1,500 in Calgary. In Lethbridge and Medicine Hat workers voted to strike but union leaders obstructed this. Miners in Alberta and elsewhere also went out on strike. Thirty cities were effected by strike movements.

On June 17th seven strike leaders were arrested, with the arrest of another strike leader in Calgary. In addition several foreign-born socialists were arrested.

On June 21st a demonstration was called by returned soldiers in protest against the arrests. This was attacked by Mounted Police wielding clubs. Facing resistance the Mounties then fired on the crowd with their revolvers. Two strikers were killed, many injured, and there were 80

arrests. Two editors of the Strike Bulletin were then arrested. This violence broke the confidence of the strike leaders and there was a return to work on the 26th June.

In the aftermath the arrested strike leaders were put on trial for seditious conspiracy. Most received one year sentences, with one receiving two years in prison and another six months imprisonment. Two of the arrested foreign-born socialists were deported.

The miners in Alberta continued their strike to the end of August. Eventually after attacks by thugs hired by the mining bosses and threats by the government the miners were starved into submission.

Thus ended a key moment in Canadian working class history with the biggest strike movement recorded so far.

Soviets in Ireland

"The whole of Europe is filled with the spirit of revolution. There is a deep sense not only of discontent but anger and revolt amongst the workmen against pre-war conditions. The whole existing order in its political, social and economic aspects is questioned by the masses of the population from one end of Europe to the other".

David Lloyd George, British Prime Minister, 1919.

The revolutionary wave that swept across the world as a result of the revolutions in Russia and Germany towards the end of the First World War reached Ireland in 1919. Ireland was living in the aftermath of the 1916 Easter uprising, when the socialist and syndicalist James Connolly had thrown in his lot with the Irish nationalists of Padraic Pearse and formed a cross-class alliance against British imperialism. In such a way the Irish working class movement became allied with the Irish national bourgeoisie.

Sinn Fein had been created as an organisation of a section of the Irish national bourgeoisie in 1905. It clearly showed its anti-working class positions from the start. It stood against higher wages for workers, and indeed strikes by them, as this would harm the interests of Irish business. During the Dublin Lockout of 1913, its leader, Arthur Griffith, called for strikers to be bayoneted. Its membership was based on shopkeepers, employers and large farmers.

The Irish Citizen Army which had been created as a defence corps for the 1913 strikers was led into the Easter Uprising by Connolly, alongside part of the nationalist Irish Volunteers led by Pearse. The playwright Sean O'Casey described the Irish Volunteers as "streaked with employers who had openly tried to starve the women and children of the workers, followed meekly by scabs and blacklegs from the lower elements among the workers themselves, and many of them saw in this agitation a

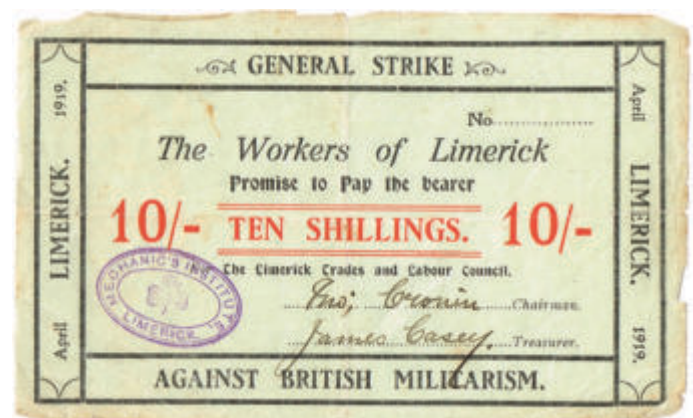
plumrose path to good jobs, now held in Ireland by the younger sons of the English well-to-do."

The Irish Republican Army in direct line of descent from the Irish Volunteers was founded in 1919 and indeed some members of the ICA joined it.

But alongside these developments was the growing influence of the revolutionary wave, that affected even an Irish working class seemingly disorientated by nationalism. There were an increasing number of strikes, and these were reinforced by well-organised pickets, solidarity action from other workers and even the creation of defence units called Red Guards after the worker squads of 1917 revolutionary Russia, as in Naas and Tralee.

The economic context

The Irish capitalists did well out of the boom caused by the First World War. Both manufacturing and agriculture were boosted, as was trade. However the Irish working class saw few of the benefits from this boom. Wages fell behind rising prices caused by inflation. Between 1914 and 1918 the prices of many staples rose by 250-300 per cent. As agriculture was booming, this affected urban workers far more, with an increase of emigration, primarily to munitions factories in England and Scotland. Housing conditions in urban areas were appalling, whilst rents were high.



The Monaghan Soviet

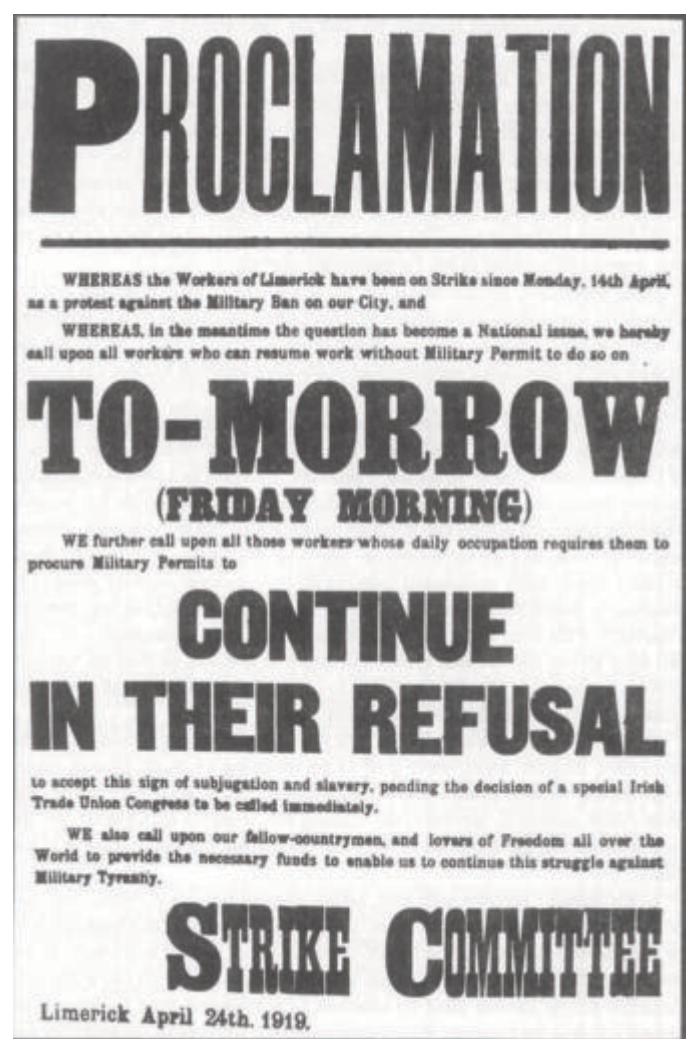
Peadar O'Donnell was an active militant in the Irish Transport and General Workers Union of Jim Larkin and James Connolly. He had tried to set up a unit of the ICA in Derry in 1919. When this failed he joined the IRA. When workers at the Monaghan Lunatic Asylum went on strike in February 1919 O'Donnell and the strikers occupied the building, and ran up a red flag and declared a soviet. Staff had been working a 93 hour week and had to remain on the premises between shifts. The medical superintendent thought that this was reasonable, as they "get off every 13th day and every fourth Sunday from 10 O'clock".

The occupation (in fact O'Donnell is credited with using the term "occupation" for the first time in Ireland in the sense of seizing a workplace) was met with the arrival of armed police. The workers responded by barricading the building.

A 48 hour week was introduced by the strikers. When the authorities offered a pay rise that left out female workers, the soviet pushed for pay equality. In fact, the women strikers proved to be the most determined. The patients themselves aided the strike by exchanging clothes with them to help with the smuggling in of supplies.

The strike was won by February 20th, with a pay rise for both women and men, a 56 hour week, and the right of married workers to go home after shifts.

The Limerick Soviet



Two months later, a soviet was declared in the city of Limerick. Robert Byrne had been active in the workers' movement and as a member of the Irish Volunteers. In January 1919 he was sentenced by a British military court to a year in prison. He went on hunger strike and subsequently was transferred to Limerick hospital. A rescue attempt resulted in the death of Byrne and a resulting military lockdown of the city. Anyone who wished to enter the area under martial law had to have permits issued by the British Army. No exceptions were made for workers commuting to and from their jobs. As a result the workers at the Condensed Milk Company's Lansdowne plant went out on strike on 12th April. The Limerick Trades Council threatened to call a general strike and transformed itself into a strike committee. It took over a printing press and produced placards explaining the strike.

The strike was successful with 15,000 workers taking part. A daily Workers' Bulletin was produced which maintained publication throughout the stoppage.

The British Army brought in an extra 100 police and was equipped with an armoured car and a tank, and put up barbed wire along the route to the restricted area. But a Scots regiment had to be sent home quickly when it was discovered that its soldiers were letting workers go in and out of the military area without permits.

The rail workers had refused to handle freight in Limerick, except when permitted by the strike committee or where it was under military guard. It was expected that this action would soon become a full scale railway strike. However the national executive of the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress –ILPTUC (in fact one single organisation) made no recommendation to broaden the strike. On 21st April, H.R. Stockman speaking for the British TUC in London declared the Limerick strike to be a political strike and instructed the unions whose members were striking, to refuse them strike pay. This was backed up by the executive of the National Union of Railwaymen, which ordered its Irish members to stop any action.

Meanwhile the strike committee were under pressure from the workers themselves. 500 people refused to show their permits on the evening of 21st April. The British army stopped them entering the area, with the support of 500 police and two armoured cars. Most of the defiant crowd stayed the night at a dance hall. They boarded a train next day and avoided the Army by getting out on the side of the station opposite to where the soldiers were waiting. During the following days, soldiers fired shots at a fair when people again refused to show permits.

William O'Brien and Thomas Foran, leading lights in the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU) and the executive of the ILPTUC, arrived on 20th April, followed over the next two days by the other members of the executive. They told the strike committee that they had no power to call a general strike without the approval of a special conference of the ILPTUC. Instead they proposed that Limerick city should be evacuated by its population. This was clearly to avoid any confrontation with the British Army. This was rejected by the strike committee. Whilst William O'Brien constantly paid lip service to James Connolly, in fact he was a leading advocate of the integration of Labour and the unions into the emerging Republic. As early as 1918, in a speech to fellow ITGWU officials, he talked about strengthening the assets of the unions and integrating the ILPTUC into an independent Ireland. Not only did he exert influence through the ILPTUC, but through domination of the Socialist Party of Ireland, for which Connolly had been an organiser.

The mayor and bishop of Limerick in negotiations with the military appeared to have parleyed an offer that if the Limerick soviet ended, and if for one week there was no trouble, then the military restricted area would be abolished. The strike committee backed down and said that strike notices were withdrawn for workers within the restricted area.

This was met with disgust by many, some calling for a second soviet. Some attempted to stop permit holders crossing a bridge but were dispersed by the police.

However only half of the strikers returned to work but on 27th April a Catholic priest denounced the strike from the pulpit. The committee caved in, and the general strike ended on 26th April. The following day workers returned to work, except those diehard strikers in the bacon factories.

The Limerick Soviet had based itself on a cross-class alliance with shopkeepers, the Limerick Chamber of Commerce, Sinn Fein and the local mayor and elements of the Catholic Church. This had proved its undoing, as had the sabotage by the union and Labour Party leaders, and as had the hold of the Catholic Church over many workers. A potentially revolutionary situation had been undermined.

The Knocklong Soviet

The Limerick soviet was followed a month later by the Knocklong soviet. Creameries owned by the Cleeve family were occupied near Knocklong in County Limerick. The Cleeve family were Anglo-Canadian supporters of the British Empire and employed more than 3,000 workers and 5,000 farmers in their dairy industries. They were strong recruiters for the British Army in Limerick during the First World War, in the process supplying food to the British Army and making a profit of £1m by the end of 1918. At the same time they were one of the lowest paying employers in Ireland, with average unskilled workers in their plants earning only seventeen shillings a week.

Workers seized the creameries and began running them themselves. A red flag was run up over the main building as well as a banner reading: Knocklong Soviet creamery: We Make Butter Not Profits. After 5 days of occupation, the Cleeves agreed to a wage rise, a 48 hour week, 14 days paid holiday, and improved ventilation systems. The agitation within the Cleeve creameries was led by John Dowling, a socialist and associate of Connolly, along with Sean McGrath and Jack Hedley.

The Cleeves responded by trying to lay off workers using a national general strike by the ITGWU against handling British munitions as resulting in a knock-on effect of a "lack of work". The workers responded by forming a strike committee. The Cleeves now insured the creamery at Knocklong against an outbreak of fire on 24th August, and it so happened that a squad of Black and Tans (British irregular troops) turned up and burnt down the creamery!

Soviets spread

There were further soviets the following year in Waterford in April. Here the short-lived soviet was set up during a national general strike against the imprisonment of Republican hunger strikers. This strike began on April 13th. An indication of what was to come was seen on the eve of the strike when a large crowd gathered outside Mountjoy prison in Dublin. This was reinforced by organised groups of dockers and postal workers, whilst

leaflets were distributed to the British soldiers appealing to them not to attack the crowd. Then a Sinn Fein member of Dublin Corporation, John O'Mahony arrived with a group of priests, formed a cordon between the crowd and the soldiers, and drove the demonstrators back, with the cry of "In the name of the Irish Republic, go away".

The Ministry of Home Affairs was to state in 1921:

"1920 was no ordinary outbreak...an immense rise in the value of land and farm products threw into more vivid relief than ever before the high profits of ranchers, and the hopeless outlook of the landless men and uneconomic holders...All this was a grave menace to the Republic. The mind of the people was being diverted from the struggle for freedom by a class war, and there was every likelihood that this class war might be carried into the ranks of the republican army itself which was drawn in the main from the agricultural population and was largely officered by farmers' sons...the republican police had been established just in time to grapple with the growing disorder and withstood the strain upon its own discipline."

The Bruree Soviet



Another Soviet emerged in County Limerick at the bakery and mills owned by the Cleeves at Bruree. In August 1921 the workers occupied the plant, hoisted the red flag and a banner proclaiming the 'Bruree Soviet Workers Mill' and stated that they were now running the mill and would sell at a lower price. The Countess Markievicz, who was now Sinn Fein's Minister of Labour, did a deal with the Cleeves and threatened to send the IRA against the Bruree Soviet if they did not accept the results of arbitration. The soviet ended on September 3rd 1921. In fact Markievicz was to go on record to later state:

"the unemployed are already looking to us to do something towards providing work...one has to face the fact that complaints have come to this office of men of the I.R.A. taking part in labour disputes. Evidence has also come to me that in some areas the workers are not willing to submit to the authority of their Executive and are beginning to get out of hand. What is to be feared in the near future is:- small local outbreaks growing more and more frequent and violent, the immediate result of which will be, destruction of property and much misery which will tend to disrupt the Republican cause".

Finally at Cork Harbour in September 1921, workers fighting for a pay rise seized the Cork Custom House, again ran up a red flag and declared a soviet. The New York Times was to write:

"Cork is a Sinn Fein city, and the strike interested the city not so much from the point of view of the wage war but from the effect it might have on the present national peace negotiations. It was said openly that the act of the strikes amounted to treachery to the nation and it was urged that unless negotiations between the Harbour Board and the strikers were at once resumed, the Irish Republican Army should clear the building of strikers and reinstate the Harbour Board.

However, the intervention of the Labour Ministry of the Dail Eireann altered the situation, and the negotiations between the Harbour Board and the strikers were reopened, as a result of which it is expected that a settlement will be arrived at. The men are to resume work pending a decision."

Other soviets emerged between 1921-1922. The North Cork railway, the quarry and the fishing boats at Castleconnell, a coachbuilding plant and the local gas works in Tipperary (the latter of which was under workers control for 6 weeks), a clothing factory in Rathmines, Dublin, sawmills in Killarney and Ballinacourtie, an iron foundry at Drogheda, Gasworks at Waterford, and mines at Arigna in County Roscommon, Ballingaray in South Tipperary, all saw occupations and declarations of soviets. In addition there was a soviet at Broadford in County Clare, and soviets in Whitechurch, County Dublin, Youghal and Fermoy where the IRA moved in to break them up.

At the end of 1921 the Cleeves stated that they were £100,000 in debt and that they had sustained £275,000 losses during the year. On 12th May 1922 they declared a lockout of their workers, putting 3,000 out of work. In response almost 100 creameries were seized and soviets created, the principal ones being at Clonmel, Carrick-on-Suir, Bansha, Kilmallock, Knocklong, Bruree, Athlaca, Tankardstown, Ballingady and Aherlow, Bruff, Dromin, Tipperary town, Galtymore, and Mallow.

Boycott

The Irish Farmers Union now organised a campaign to boycott the occupied creameries and stated that it would "forbid our members to supply under the Red Flag, which is the flag of Anarchy and revolution". At the same time the press began a campaign against the soviets, the Irish Times writing that the occupying workers had "neither allegiance to the Irish free State, nor the Irish Republic, but only to Soviet Russia. In addition Sinn Fein, at the illegally established Irish parliament Dail Eireann denounced the class struggle, saying that it was "ill

chosen for the stirring up of strife among our fellow countrymen". It was known that the leading Free Stater Michael Collins was extremely opposed to the Soviets.

The farmers' boycott dealt a death blow to many of the soviets. In addition the soviets were now under attack by both the Free State National Army of De Valera and the Anti-Treaty Republicans. There was a shootout between the Tipperary soviet and the anti-treaty forces, who also destroyed the gasworks there. For their part the National Army began destroying the Soviets. The newly established Free State was pressurised by the British government to restore order, to crush both the Anti-Treaty nationalists and the soviets. When the Free State National Army entered a town or village, it arrested leading members of soviets, and tore down signs of radicalism like the red flags.

The Munster News reported in 1922 that martial law had been declared in the Kilmallock area with the presence of 200 IRA volunteers. On 4th March 1922, the IRA arrested Dowling, McGrath and striking workers, accusing them of burning the hay of a Kilmallock farmer. Dowling was severely beaten and kicked whilst on the ground, carrying a permanent scar on his face as a result. Immediately hundreds of workers came out on a general strike in Kilmallock and Dowling and his associates were released a week later.

The soviets had been defeated, with the dispersal of the soviets by the Free State and with the ITGWU leaders saying virtually nothing about this. The final phase of this period of heightened class struggle in Irish history began with the "autumn crisis" of 1923 when 20,000 workers went on strike or were locked out. This led to defeat.

The ITGWU forced out militant workers, replacing them with careerists and increasing the number of bureaucrats. Dowling, McGrath and Hedley were sacked from their positions in the ITGWU.

The revolutionary wave of 1919 to 1923 had a profound effect on a supposedly backward and rural country like Ireland. The soviets were defeated by a combination of the British Army in occupation, the different nationalist forces whether pro- or anti-Treaty, the employers and big farmers and the Catholic Church, and the ILPTUC. Despite all the odds against them, they had written a page in working class history, a history that is now being re-discovered. The lessons are obvious, the working class can only rely on themselves, and must shun the various nationalist gangs and the clerical obscurantists.



Anarchist Communism and the Struggle against Oppression

Part One

Anti-Oppression politics have had a heightened profile amongst radical and revolutionary groups in the latter half of the 20th Century and particularly so in the last 20 or so years. This article looks at international anarchist politics and the struggle against oppression in historical context, starting with the early movement and on into 20th Century anarchism.

The importance of the fight against oppression in anarchism stands in no contradiction with the centrality of the class analysis central to our politics. Anarchist communism, in its call for total revolution and the overthrow of not only capitalism, but the end of all hierarchical social relations, pre-dates (post) modern ideas of Intersectionality. It can be seen as having a holistic approach to emancipation that makes it, in a sense, a revolutionary antecedent of contemporary ideas concerning the interconnectedness of oppression.

Anarchist opposition to hierarchy implies an explicit rejection of the domination of one human being over another, against all oppressive associations - and, in the words of Malatesta, the removal of coercion from human relationships. But theory and practice are not always consistent.

It would be useful to present an overview of anarchist contributions to the struggle against patriarchal and other oppression, many of which have remained marginal or obscure in the Euro and male-centric histories of the movement, but as this is not a book we will restrict ourselves only to some of the more notable.

Not a good start: Proudhon

In the 1840s, J.P. Proudhon, celebrated for being the first person to consciously adopt the designation *anarchist* defended the patriarchal family and considered women as inferior and incapable of involvement in politics! Despite his many contributions to early libertarian socialist thinking, his status as father (aptly) of anarchism, is undermined somewhat by his explicit anti-feminist and blatantly sexist ideas which, unlike his anti-Semitism, were openly expressed.

However, Proudhon's misogyny was powerfully condemned by his contemporary, the proto-anarchist communist Joseph Déjacque who argued that "...the emancipation of woman is nothing else than the emancipation of humanity - both sexes" (On the Human Being, Male and Female, 1857) and he

publicly challenged Proudhon on his views, stating that the latter's overt sexism contradicted his claim to be an anarchist.

All revolutionary anarchists count Michael Bakunin as the seminal thinker and militant of our politics and he, and the organisations he was involved in forming, were clear on the need for women's equality and freedom. The most well-known of those organisations was the International Alliance of Social Democracy whose manifesto of 1871 called for not only the "...complete and definite abolition of classes" but also the "economic, political and social equality of the sexes." In stark contrast to Proudhon, Bakunin also argued for the end of the juridical family and for sexual freedom for women. More than that, although he admired the communalism of the Russian peasant community, the Mir, he argued that the position of women within it must be confronted by revolutionaries for the "patriarchal despotism" that it was. Bakunin's anti-patriarchal position was broadly accepted in the early anarchist movement, whilst Proudhon's outlook was rejected.

The anarchist communist International Working Peoples' Association, established in England in 1881, but more well known in the United States, where its members included some of the Haymarket Martyrs, made both racial and sexual equality part of their manifesto. They called for the "organisation of education on a secular, scientific and equal basis for both sexes and equal rights for all without distinction of sex or race". This was in an environment of widespread and vicious discrimination against immigrants and a deeply patriarchal culture, not least in some of the immigrant communities that the anarchist communists were trying to organise within.

Louise Michel

Louise Michel, anarchist veteran of the Paris Commune of 1870, was deported to New Caledonia, a Pacific island part of the French Empire. There, the indigenous inhabitants, the Kanak people, were treated in a casually brutal fashion by the French colonial power. Amongst the many Communards imprisoned on the island, only Michel defended the 1878 anti-colonial insurrection of the Kanak people. Michel had established relationships with the local people, learning their language and teaching them French and she continued to champion their freedom after she was released under the general amnesty for Commune prisoners in 1880.

Women played a major role in the late 19th century anarchist movement in Europe and beyond. In Latin



America, anarchist communist women were active in working class communities and in Argentina *La Voz de la Mujer* ('Woman's Voice' 1896-1897), an explicitly anarchist communist newspaper which championed women's emancipation, was the first of its kind edited by women for a female readership. It carried articles from the most prolific libertarian women writers of the period. The journal was initiated by Virginia Bolten, believed to have been the organiser of the first May Day demonstration in Latin America, and a lifelong anarchist communist. Her foregrounding of women's specific oppression met with hostility from some male anarchists but Bolten and the group around her defended themselves resolutely.

He Zhen

Chinese anarchist communist He Zhen, who established the Women's Rights Recovery Association in 1907, fought the domination of the then dominant nationalist thinking amongst Chinese feminists and argued that the liberation of women was central to anarchist communism. Indeed, she argued that a social revolution that liberated women would be the key to liberating all of humanity. Women in China had been systematically disempowered under feudalism and this was destined to continue, in a different way, under capitalism. He Zhen argued that women held the key to freedom as their liberation would undermine all hierarchy and all exploitation. She stated that "[Women should] completely overthrow rulership, force men to abandon all their privileges and become equal to women and make a better world with neither the oppression of women or the oppression of men."

He Zhen's work met the fate of the work of so many women and non-European anarchists in being both profoundly important whilst receiving inadequate acknowledgment.

Sexual Freedom

Some late 19th and early 20th Century anarchists were keen to discuss areas that many other socialists often either ignored or paid token lip service to. Sexual freedom and a critique of the patriarchal relationships within marriage and the family led to many anarchists becoming advocates of what was then called 'free love'. This term covered sexual relationships outside of marriage, non-monogamous or open relationships or 'unconventional' relationships such as those between the same sex. Journals such as *Lucifer the Lightbearer* (1883-1907) and *The Firebrand* (1895-1897), both published weekly in the USA, focused on issues of sexuality, marriage and feminism from an anti-authoritarian perspective. This propaganda for what was called sexual 'variation' was not always welcomed by other anarchists, notably the Black anarchist, Lucy Parsons who said that variety in sexuality was not related to anarchism as she understood it. In this, Parsons clashed with Emma Goldman.

'Red Emma', is amongst the most famous of 19th/20th century anarchists and has become symbolic of anarchist opposition to oppressive social practice, particularly in the area of sexual freedom and gender. Although she did not self-describe as a feminist, she has become an anarcho-feminist icon. Goldman stated that her political development as an anarchist led her to "champion the cause of women and devote my life to their emancipation" (Interview in *Chicago Inter Ocean* 1908). She did not, however,



feel the need to do this through the existing feminist movement, which she considered bourgeois and only interested in making women the legal equals of unequal men. In this, she reflected a general distancing on the part of anarchists from the early feminist movement, which was primarily, although not exclusively, interested in women's suffrage. Goldman also wrote passionately about the racism in the United States and elsewhere and what would become termed white supremacism. She was scathing of the attitudes of too many of the 'native' working class. In 1895 she asked, in an article concerning the condition of workers in the USA: "Were not the men who first settled down in America robbers and swindlers?" stating boldly that: "The only true Americans were the native Indians...cruelly robbed of their land and happiness by the ancestors of those who now rule the country."

She condemned the anti-Chinese labour campaigns on the East Coast that many socialists had become involved in through their work in the trade unions. Indeed, the US anarchist movement of the end of the 19th Century, which itself suffered from attacks as 'foreign' (Jewish, Italian, Russian and Finns particularly) did, however, generally defend the Japanese and Chinese against racism, including racism from within the labour movement. However, although it condemned the racially segregating Jim Crow laws of the South and the lynchings of black people across the USA, it did not appeal directly to the Black community, in part because it remained an urban and white oriented movement with little presence in the south.

A more consistent and direct appeal to Black (and Hispanic) working class was the Industrial Workers of the World, the labour organisation established in 1905 that most anarchist communists either joined or supported from the outside. The IWW looked to organise the excluded, the marginalised, the 'foreign' and the unskilled as well as the mainstream of the working class in the United States and, as the name suggests, beyond. Organising the unskilled, who were largely denied membership of other unions, meant organising large numbers of immigrant, female and Black and Hispanic workers. Whilst the IWW was never a specifically anarchist communist organisation, it was influenced by anarchist ideas and its commitment to direct action and political independence made it a union increasingly identified with the global anarcho-syndicalism movement. And the IWW had a militantly anti-racist outlook, rejecting the idea of segregated union branches and favouring the integration of all workers into One Big Union. This was particularly successful on the Philadelphia waterfront between 1913 and 1923 in the longshore workers union Local no. 8 led by Black Wobbly Ben Fletcher.

In Australia, the IWW stood almost entirely alone amongst labour movement organisations in opposing the openly racist White Australian policy of the early 20th Century. This policy sought to exclude

non-Europeans and unsuitable Europeans such as Italians, from entering Australia to compete for jobs with white Australian workers. This policy was predicated upon an explicitly insular, racist perspective held by most trade unions. The IWW rejected any attempt to divide the working class and attacked "...appeals to racial hatreds and ignorant prejudices..." calling upon workers to "Lay aside national prejudices, crush race hatred beneath your heel...". The Wobblies also condemned the decimation, dispossession and oppression of the aboriginal people of Australia. Despite being outlawed in 1914, the IWW's staunch opposition to racism started to influence other labour and socialist tendencies (although the mainstream of Australian left wing politics adhered to the racist policy for a very long period).

Lily Gair Wilkinson and Edward Carpenter

In the United Kingdom, the highest profile state socialists, whether reformist or nominally revolutionary, tended to shy away from the 'sex' or 'woman' question. Influential orthodox Marxists like H M Hyndman dismissed discussion of the oppressive nature of the family and of women's sexual freedom as irrelevant to the struggle for socialism whilst the reformist and frankly backward looking Robert Blatchford actively promoted the traditional family and women's role within it. Anarchist communists like Lily Gair Wilkinson and the more libertarian among the socialists such as Edward Carpenter, led the way in promoting the need for the liberation of women and, in the case of Carpenter, homosexuals. Wilkinson's 1913 *Woman's Freedom*, if at times idiosyncratic and obviously a product of its times, nevertheless reflected the anarchist communist objections to the bourgeois variant of feminism and to 'separatism'. She saw "...three types of women in bondage - the lady sold in marriage, the working woman, and the prostitute. The bondage of these three types is different in kind, but the manner of entering bondage is the same in all three cases. All these women enter bondage by selling their bodies; selling them for man's pleasure or selling them for the profit of an employer, but always by selling that sacred thing, a woman's body." Wilkinson's rejection of Women's suffrage as a panacea is powerful: "The call for 'votes' can never be a call to freedom. For what is it to vote? To vote is to register assent to being ruled by one legislator or another."

Edward Carpenter's *Love's Coming of Age* (1896) engaged the question of repressed sexuality and asked whether established differences between the sexes were as great or as fixed as bourgeois social norms insisted. He later expanded his work, in 1906 adding a chapter called 'The Intermediate Sex' which suggested that a transitional sex existed, particularly amongst the young, that led to confusion and anguish as people were expected to identify with one

or the other sex and the roles expected of each. Carpenter's thinking was, in some ways, an antecedent of discussions around issues of queer and non-binary sexualities/identities.

Some anarchist *organisations* took the 'woman question' very seriously. With the exception of August Bebel's *Woman and Socialism*, the bible of Marxist orthodoxy on 'the woman question', German Marxists tended to leave questions of sexuality to personal choice. The anarcho-syndicalists of the Free Workers Union of Germany, however engaged with these questions in the first thirty years of the 20th Century with a very organised and distinctive approach, mainly through the Syndicalist Women's League (SFB), a group within the union which operated with a high level of autonomy. Rather than focus on women in the workplace, the SFB focused upon women's domestic labour and their gender specific role in society. Working women would concentrate on specific workplace union activity through their union, whilst girls, housewives and retired women would work through the SFB. Even in the 1920s and 1930s this was controversial in that it tended not to challenge the division of labour but rather sought to valorise women's domestic activity in and of itself. Syndicalist Women's League militants also worked within the Association for Birth Control and Sexual Hygiene, which assisted primarily young working class families with the provision of contraception and advice about abortion and family planning. Their activity often met with the indifference and even antagonism amongst the male members of the Free Workers Union.

Mujeres Libres

Although you wouldn't necessarily know that from either the mainstream, bourgeois histories, or most of the accounts written by anarchists and other revolutionaries, women played a major role in the mass anarchist movement Spain in the late 19th and 20th centuries and in the Spanish Revolution of 1936. Anarchist journals and education centres would regularly discuss the need for women's emancipation from domestic, cultural and sexual oppression as well as economic exploitation. The mass nature of Spanish anarchism meant that more than one

perspective was defended and there was a healthy debate in the movement. The practice of the movement, however, did not always reflect the theory and women's involvement faced barriers and patriarchal attitudes on the part of anarchist men. Congresses of the anarcho-syndicalist union, the CNT, would hear speeches condemning the fact that women faced exploitation from the factory owners at work only to come home and face more exploitation from their husbands who expected them to perform all domestic chores. Despite the rhetoric, women's interests were often ignored or deprioritised in the struggle.

In part to address this, an organisation emerged within the libertarian movement that was to fight for the liberation of women from their "triple enslavement to ignorance, as women, and as producers." This was *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women), established in the revolutionary days of 1936, to address the specific oppression faced by working class women in society and the failure of the libertarian movement to adequately this. They encouraged the adoption of a new sexual morality, which allowed sexual freedom for men and women and promoted the widespread use of birth control in order for women to control their own fertility. A major focus for the group was the struggle to undermine the causes of prostitution, which they considered "the greatest of slaveries". Rather than blaming prostitutes or banning prostitution, they argued that social inequality between men and women gave rise to prostitution - both in the traditional sense but also in marriages which were essentially economic arrangements. *Mujeres Libres* therefore organised education and support for prostitutes who wanted to leave prostitution, giving them opportunities to empower themselves and to become financially independent.

Coming in the middle of the civil war, resources were limited and their projects, relying greatly upon the wider movement, were often curtailed. But the organisation grew and demanded to be taken seriously in the movement and to be supported materially. It insisted that it was an autonomous part of the libertarian movement, that it rejected mainstream feminism and separatism and should be treated not as an auxiliary organisation but as an equal. By the end of the Civil War, after a battle against entrenched sexism, they began to be treated as equals to the CNT, FAI and Libertarian Youth.

French libertarian communist and anti-colonialist writer Daniel Guérin is probably best known in the English-speaking world for his anthology, *No Gods No Masters*, the seminal analysis of fascism in *Fascism and Big Business* and his *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*. But Guérin was also a queer anarchist pioneer, considered the grandfather of the LGBT movement in France. During the 1950s Guérin wrote about the specific oppression faced by homosexuals and endured the homophobic wrath of the French left. Despite the pain and sense of



rejection, these attacks only spurred him to write more. This was in the face of a boycott by the sections of the left, whose attitude to homosexuality, Guerin believed, poisoned working class attitudes generally.

“To my mind, the homophobic prejudice, in all its hideousness, will not be countered only by means which I would call ‘reformist’, by persuasion, by concessions to our heterosexual enemies; it will be possible to eradicate it definitively, as with racial prejudice, only through an antiauthoritarian social revolution. Indeed, despite its liberal mask, the bourgeoisie has too great a need, in order to perpetuate its hegemony, of the domestic values of the family, cornerstone of the social order. It cannot deprive itself of the help provided for it by, on the one hand, the glorification of marriage and the cult of procreation, and on the other, the support given it by the Churches, determined adversaries of free love and of homosexuality. [...]. The bourgeoisie as a whole will never entirely lift its ban on dissident sexualities. The whole edifice will have to be swept away in order to achieve the complete liberation of man in general (a generic term which includes both sexes), and of the homosexual in particular” (*Homosexuality and Revolution*, 1983).

In the post-war era, struggles against racism, for women’s liberation for gay liberation and sexual freedom emerged across the world. Anarchist involvement in these was sometimes marginal as the movement was slowly recovering from the crushing defeats of the period since the 1920s.

In the Women’s Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 1970s there developed a distinct but diverse anarcho-feminist current (now generally referred to as anarcha-feminism). This current was influenced by Radical Feminist, Eco-Feminist and Socialist Feminist ideas but had its own anti-hierarchical perspectives in keeping with the anarchist tradition. The first Anarcho-Feminist Manifesto appeared in Chicago in 1971. Two famous essays emerged from this period: *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* by Jo Freeman (1971), a feminist activist and *The Tyranny of Tyranny* by Cathy Levine, an anarcha-feminist rejoinder. These two short pieces of writing reflected

differences in the feminist and the anarchist movements. Freeman argued that informal hierarchies and leaders emerge when there is a lack of structure and democratic accountability in small groups. This makes getting things done in a genuinely open and egalitarian way difficult. Levine, to the contrary, argued that small groups were a “valid, conscious strategy for building a revolutionary movement” and were the best organisational form for anarchists and feminists.

Soon after publication, Freeman’s text was republished in the UK by the Platformist Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists who agreed with much of its critique of informal, small group organising and the *Tyranny of Structurelessness* has become an important text for anarchist communists. Levine’s *Tyranny of Tyranny* has become an important text for more localist, small group anarchists. The two articles often appear together and both have been influential.

In 1975, anarcha-feminist Peggy Kornegger attempted to bridge the gap, combining a belief in spontaneity and small group initiative-making, with larger, more formal co-ordinations and organisation. In *Anarchism: The Feminist Connection*, she argued that:

“If we want to ‘bring down the patriarchy’, we need to talk about anarchism, to know exactly what it means, and to use that framework to transform ourselves and the structure of our daily lives. Feminism doesn’t mean female corporate power or a woman President; it means *no* corporate power and *no* Presidents. The Equal Rights Amendment will not transform society; it only gives women the ‘right’ to plug into a hierarchical economy. Challenging sexism means challenging *all* hierarchy—economic, political, and personal. And that means an anarcha-feminist revolution.”

Issues with the mainstream feminist movement in the United States, but around, amongst other things, its irrelevance to Black women, would give rise to the theory of Intersectionality and the second part of this article will discuss this and other ideas which have become dominant amongst a large part of ‘progressive’ social movements and also amongst anarchists.

Part Two

It is fair to say that anarchism, in its desire for a universal liberation from oppression, has often failed to take into consideration the *particulars* of oppression. Anarchist practice has not always mirrored our theory. Historically, anarchist women often faced indifference or animosity from male comrades when they spoke about the specific oppression that affected them. Black anarchists felt that their experiences of racism and exclusion were ignored or dismissed by white anarchists. Although it



may have been rarely articulated thus, there was a sense that oppression would be solved by the revolution and didn't need to be prioritised before the glorious day.

The reverse is very much the case today, with the loss of the 'totalising' revolutionary perspective. How did this happen?

Pre-figurative politics

Pre-figurative politics - operating now as we mean to go on and having a politics that is in keeping with our vision of a liberated future - has been an aim that anarchists have tried to work towards. If we want to create a future without order-givers and order-takers, then that is how we should organise in the here and now. If we envision a post-capitalist world free of oppression and coercion, then replicating oppressive and coercive relationships in our own organisations would be completely counterproductive. Anarchists have tried to be standard bearers for a new civilisation and the personal conduct of anarchist militants is encouraged to be in keeping with our vision. Of course, socialised in a racist, sexist, homophobic society, anarchist militants are not immune, pure, 'saint-like' individuals. And, the rest of the working class is the same. We cannot include only the most 'developed' individuals in a movement to transform society and need to recognise that these attitudes will only change as we struggle together. In any case, no one, no matter what their particular identity, is free from the influence of this society and focusing on becoming 'perfect' would make building a revolutionary movement impossible.

However, in large parts of what passes for an anarchist 'movement' in the Global North, the focus on the behaviours and language of activists has become fetishized and individual behaviours have been championed, over collective endeavour, as a means of changing society.

So, how has this happened?

The retreat from class politics, indeed collective politics generally, is a product of political privatisation, a form of individuation that is caused by a period of political retreat. The emphasis on individual responses to oppressive behaviours (for example call-out culture, responses to micro-aggressions, people being encouraged to check their privilege etc) as opposed to the *structural* source of that oppression through collective struggle is a product of the crisis in the belief that society can be transformed through working class revolution.

This is not to say that sexist, racist, homophobic or transphobic and other oppressive behaviours should not be challenged – they must be – but that believing that this, alone, is likely to lead to any form of social transformation is illusory and has contributed to the

dominant culture of contemporary anti-oppression politics. Ironically, it has promoted an elitist and insular environment that is directed by those who are most capable of understanding and articulating the nuance of the lexicon of oppression. This is not to say that insights cannot come from or during periods of defeat. Far from it. Lessons are learned, modified or new approaches are developed in light of experience. But much confusion and despair also emerge.

The post-World War II 'settlement' and the short blip of economic buoyance brought a relative affluence amongst sections of the European and North American working class and the propagandists and intellectuals of the ruling elites were quick to claim the disappearance of that class. Parts of the left also started to doubt the capacity of the working class to transform society and searched for other agents of change or abandoned the idea of radical change in favour of a capitalism that appeared to be able to deliver. In the USA, large sections of the white working class were pro-Vietnam War and intensely racist, reinforcing the tendency for many to think that the working class was part of the problem not the main driving force of change.

The working class 'mysteriously' reappeared in the struggles of Paris May 1968, and the wave of wildcat strikes that took place in the Italian hot summer of 1969, followed by the unofficial miner's strike in the UK the same year. But whilst in Europe the class struggle had re-emerged, in the United States, over the next couple of years, organisations that had inspired people of all ethnic origins alike such as the Black Panthers collapsed, partly from internal contradictions, but greatly through state repression. Likewise, the Revolutionary Union Movements of Black factory workers began to unravel and decline. The Postal Worker strike of 1970, the largest wildcat strike in U.S. history seemed like a last hurrah of organised labour. The Vietnam War dragged on despite the protests and the disaffection amongst the troops.

Much of the left 'intelligentsia', which had already lost touch with the experience of working class life and struggle, was co-opted into academia in this period and increasingly embraced the noisy despair of Post-Modern thought. And that noisy despair was echoed in a quieter despair on the part of many in the social movements. It is in this gloom that the development of 'critical' analysis and theory shifted from real world struggles into the realm of academia. The liberation movements, of women, Black people, LGBT+ and others facing oppression became increasingly mirrored back from academia as a poor reflection. Abstract, ineffectual, insular and often expressed in a language intentionally difficult to understand, the ideas increasingly turned away from mass struggle to creating political micro-climates and the regulation of social interaction amongst a left scene, what would now be called the 'Woke community'. This accommodation to the system sold itself as subversive and wore the clothes of a

transformative politics but it failed to operate even as a coherent or consistent version of reformism. Increasingly it simply became part of the establishment it set out to attack.

Intersectionality and the politics of privilege

Intersectionality, the notion of a 'matrix of domination' and the idea that struggles against oppression are interconnected didn't come as a revelation for anarchist communists but its birth was outside either the anarchist or socialist movement. The origins of present-day intersectionality lie in the experiences of Black lesbian feminists in the 1970s and 1980s who found themselves impacted by sexual, gender and racial oppression and felt that the intersection of patriarchy and racism had to be understood as a phenomenon that made their position specific. Sections of academia picked up these ideas and developed them, in the process creating what has become known as Privilege theory. This theory (or variety of theories) argues that people have advantages based upon sex/gender, race, sexual orientation, able-bodiedness, skin colour/shade, mental health, socio-economic status and dozens of other characteristics. Whether they are aware of these 'privileges' or not – they benefit from them. How this privilege plays out in daily life depends upon specific circumstances and individuals can be both oppressor and oppressed in different circumstances and at different times, being the dominated and the dominator depending upon who they are interacting with at any given time. Some intersectional approaches have a more 'systematic' understanding of these power relations - which have their origins in the development of global capitalism - but most reduce the issue to a need for individualised solutions, for people to acknowledge their personal privilege even though they *cannot necessarily give them up*. This leaves us in a circular argument where, ultimately, all that individuals can do is be aware of their privilege and attempt to ameliorate it through changes in speech and behaviour or, in some circumstances, through legislation.

This reflects the fact that Intersectional politics are not automatically anti-capitalist or communist politics. This can be seen in the way they have been utilised by people who have not the remotest interest in a revolutionary transformation of society. Academic associations, non-governmental organisations, international institutions, political parties and even the number one oppressive institution, the State itself, have adopted some variety of Intersectional perspective and for a variety of reasons, some well-intentioned and some highly instrumental. A host of 'experts' in oppression have emerged in academia and what has been descried as the Non-Profit Industrial Complex.

Intersectionality and Privilege theory filtered down into anarchist activist circles initially in the USA, in part because it seemed to explain the lived experience of oppression felt by some activists but also because of the weakness, material and theoretical, of much of the that milieu and its separation from the working class, much of it coming from a university educated background. The counter-cultural tendencies in large parts of the anarchist scene in the USA (and elsewhere) dovetailed with a practice of self-regarding and insular practices that built a cordon sanitaire around the scene, a refuge from the oppressive interactions in the outside world. This small group culture focusing upon addressing power dynamics within the activist circle, organised around common customs, understandings and rules sometimes ends up as an end-in-itself, rather than preparing participants for real world activity. Activists are encouraged to see struggle as a matter of personal development and growth like a form of radical self-help programme.

One aspect of this is Safe or Safer Spaces. This is based upon some very *sound* basic principles: That political work should be undertaken in an environment of respect and mutual support, that it should be consciously inclusive, egalitarian and not be dominated by the most confident/loudest mouth or hierarchies, official or unofficial. It should be a place in which people who want to be involved feel welcomed *into* and not alienated *from*.

What has often happened is that a 'callout culture' emerges, policed by those with the best understanding of anti-oppression language, which aims to regulate all social interactions of the collectivity and make sure that participants are aware of their privilege and are always adopting the right terminology. Sometimes, this has meant some people with specific privileges are required not only to not dominate discussion, but not to speak at all.

Safer spaces of course are desirable and do not have to be like this. It is often a confluence of a highly 'woke' minority and group insularity that, ironically, creates alienating spaces. The further away from the struggles of working class people, the higher the likelihood that a Safer Space will be focused on



individual micro-aggressions and privilege-checking and less on creating a space for effective organising or even sustaining any dynamic and open discussion. Effectively, the more that radicals orientate towards the rest of the working class and less towards achieving their own sense of individual 'enlightenment', the less they are likely to disappear down the rabbit hole that comes with striving to be the person with 'their shit together' the most in their activist bubble.

If we are to have a politics that are purposeful beyond consciousness raising, much of the time those involved in anti-capitalist politics will be consciously putting themselves in the most *unsafe* of spaces: the spaces where, presently, most people live, work and struggle.

Class as identity

One of the more grotesque ideas that has come out of the intersectional and privilege theory world, and one which probably exposes the reformism at the heart of much of it, has been the notion of 'classism'. Classism is seen as prejudice or discrimination on the basis of social class. Sometimes this is understood as an interpersonal phenomenon and sometimes as also being systemic. It is often addressed in the former way as an oppressive *behaviour* along with (particularly) racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia. Educated, 'middle class' and ruling class people condescend working class (sometimes described as 'poor') people. Working class or poor people face discrimination and limitations because of class prejudice. There are few working class voices in the media, in national politics, amongst upper management.

This is, of course, all true. But that is how capitalism works, everywhere! At best, the opponents of classism want to see a change in attitude of those in charge, more opportunities for the voices of the working class and poor to be heard. They want to 'Bridge the Class Divide' rather than get rid of the economic system that creates and reproduces the division of society into classes itself. At worst, it means that culturally 'middle class' activists should try not to dominate or patronise culturally working class people. Welcome of course, but also ultimately *in no way* undermining the system that will inevitably create the material conditions that create class division. Certainly, 'classist' attitudes exist and they impact working class people, but it's missing the important point that for revolutionaries our understanding of class as a relationship to the ownership of the means of production is much more important than a socio-cultural category.

The accusation of Class Reductionism is a common accusation used to criticise those who look at a situation where people are being oppressed and see *only* class. Wilfully blind to those divisions within the class that must be addressed and overcome they the call upon working class people to unite and fight, in

an ahistorical, contextless manner and wonder why they find no echo from the class. But, in most cases, it is a strawman. Anarchist communists centre class because it is the universal, the key to the transformation of society, the unifying factor for the majority of the world's population, not because we 'identify' with class. We reject class identity politics, based, as they generally are, on a narrow cultural understanding of class which is often little than a caricature of the working and ruling classes.

Way forward

Anarchist communists aim to use an approach that is respectful, aware of, and welcoming, difference and attempt to understand experiences of oppression. However, this is different from the way Intersectional analysis has been applied and developed. Anarchist communists are seeking to acknowledge and understand difference in order to create *unity* rather than accentuate or foreground difference as an end in itself. Intersectionality is generally used (even by some in the 'anarchist community') without this aim. Whilst we should never seek a forced 'unity' that papers over the cracks of those differences and reinforces exclusion, we must be working to achieve an equality of purpose. There cannot be a real unity when some people's voices are not heard, and their experiences not validated. But neither can we build that unity without working to ultimately *transcend* those differences rather than to relentlessly seek difference for its own sake. It is the latter which can, with justification, be described as Identity Politics.

This is because we work within a wider perspective of revolutionary change – of fighting for the unification of the working class in struggle against capitalism and against the State. We are looking for systematic change not a more 'equitable' rearrangement of the present system with oppressed people better 'represented' in positions of power. The latter can be achieved whilst leaving the position of the vast majority of those suffering from an oppressive system essentially unchanged. We must reject an Intersectionality that is understood as a tool to re-structure capitalist society, to improve it through the integration of oppressed groups into its structures and to make the hierarchies in society more representative and inclusive. This is a (Post) modern version of Reformism: the belief that the present exploitative and oppressive system can be substantially reformed, improved, and be made to work in the interests of the majority.

We want to create a movement of conscious comradeship amongst equals, rather than of oppressed people and their allies. A movement where people are not allies of each other in someone else's struggle but comrades standing in solidarity in our common, if sometimes different struggles.

What Is Fully Automated Luxury Communism?



Fully Automated Luxury Communism (FALC) has been much in vogue lately, especially with the publication of Aaron Bastani's book of the same name by Verso this year. It was originally a slogan/meme developed by people around the group Plan C. They began using the expression "Luxury for All" and this was backed up by a Tumblr called Luxury Communism. Plan C members spotted the slogan "Luxury For All" on a demonstration in Berlin, and at first adopted it as a tongue in cheek joke but they then started taking it seriously. They believe it had its origins in the science fiction Red Mars trilogy by Kim Stanley Robinson, where a socialist utopia is established on Mars, and in A Pattern Language written by three architects, Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa and Murray Silverstein in 1977 which describes a similar utopia. We also have the book written by Massachusetts Institute of Technology professors Erik Brynjofflsson and James McAfee, The Second Machine Age, who envisage an increasingly robotised world where work has been abolished.

The expression has picked up traction among the 'Woke' generation, who seem also inspired by Corbynism. In some ways it has recuperated the concept of communism, originally more or less the reserve of anarchist communists before being seized as a label by the Bolsheviks with the resulting discrediting of the idea.

Both Plan C and Bastani seem to think that the development of technology under capitalism will lead to the end of work and the end of capitalism itself. In this scenario somehow capitalism assists at its own death, it voluntarily places a gun against its own temple and pulls the trigger. Technology, rather than being seen at the moment as an instrument of capitalism to further itself, is seen as an agent of radical change.

Marx too thought that advances in technology would bring about the conditions for communism. Bastani says that this was flawed, that capitalism had to reach

a higher stage that Marx could not foresee. He thinks we have now arrived at this higher stage, further, he locates this to the year 2008 with its financial crisis.

Unemployment

Like another predictor of the future, Paul Mason, Bastani believes that advancing technology will lead to widespread unemployment. This cannot be answered by the creation of new jobs, which Bastani believes are impossible to create. At the same time the development of technology will replace scarcity with abundance, "extreme supply" as Bastani calls it. The capitalists will respond to this with artificial scarcities, because abundance leads to a fall in prices and of markets.

This new abundance will be facilitated by the development of solar technology and the mining of asteroids! (Bastani says: "More speculatively, asteroid mining — whose technical barriers are presently being surmounted — could provide us with not only more energy than we can ever imagine but also more iron, gold, platinum and nickel. Resource scarcity would be a thing of the past.") But who would control this asteroid mining? The State? Whoever would be responsible would gain enormous power and there is the problem. In addition all of this would require a huge expansion of space technology and as with all Bastani's ideas on technology, this would require the use of resources and energy hardly compatible with zero emissions.

During the course of the book, the whole concept of class struggle is rarely touched upon, as is the nature and role of the State. The working class is not seen as the agent of social change and instead Bastani envisages a scenario that would find favour with the Corbynists of Momentum. He believes that at the national level, outsourcing would end immediately and privatised industries like rail would return to the State and the public sector would wipe out outside contractors. On the local level, there would be "municipal protectionism" where public sector organisations would spend as much of their budgets locally, to keep money circulating in the local economy. He bases this scenario on what he calls the Preston model after the town which carried out such a plan.

Furthermore, local businesses would be favoured, being those which operate within ten kilometres of the locality, are a worker-owned cooperative, or offer organic products and renewable energy. Central banks, too, would move "away from low inflation" and instead relate to "rising wages, high productivity and affordable house prices". National energy investment banks would invest in sustainable energy and housing with the result that by 2030 "the world's wealthier countries would see their CO2 emissions fall to

virtually zero". The State would create a network of regional and local banks and credit unions, with the same aims as above. They would encourage the growth of worker-owned businesses.

In addition, there would be a system of Universal Basic Services (UBS) which would provide the necessities of life- for example, education, housing, transport- free to all at the point of use. This in a society heavily dominated by the State.

Unclear

It is unclear how Bastani sees this plan being activated. Which government would do that? It is not openly stated but is implied that this would be brought about by a reformist government. How would such a government come to power? Would it not seem logical that such a government would need mass support (but see later for Bastani's views on mass engagement)? What would elements within the State and among the capitalist class resist such developments? Bastani talks vaguely about a "workers' party against work" but he fails to elaborate on this party and what its role would be in this transformation to a new society. And indeed, there is no indication about what would develop after this State-heavy economy as envisaged by Bastani. As noted earlier, the working class itself would have no serious role in this Brave New Utopia of Bastani. To us, anarchist communism, libertarian communism, free socialism, call it what you will, has to come about through the involvement of the mass of the population. But for Bastani "the majority of people are only able to be politically active for brief periods of time". He uses this false scenario to advocate engagement in "mainstream, electoral politics".

Unfortunately, capitalism CAN deal with abundance. There are many products now that were expensive, that are now cheap like some mobile phones and many other electrical appliances, not to mention the various pound stores. Capitalism can adapt very easily and indeed big capitalist outfits like Facebook and Google are free at point of use. They obtain their profits in other ways. The whole history of capitalism indicates that it can, time and time again, turn scarcity into "extreme abundance".

Capitalism has indeed destroyed many old industries and services, but it has replaced them with others. Certainly, certain industrial sectors are threatened, have disappeared or are in the process of disappearing, not least the high street as we know it but the capitalist system itself is not threatened, it continues to find ways of renewing itself, as seen in the rise of the online market. The continuing tooth and claw eradication of various industries is part and parcel of the capitalist system.

Bastani is enamoured by the idea of "accelerationism", that is that the "rate of historical change is accelerating" and will very soon bring about the changes that he envisages. This is debatable, as various commentators have noted economic stagnation and technological slowdown. Tyler Cowen, for example, posits a "great stagnation". In addition,

we could counter the ideas of degrowth (decroissance in French) which are gaining traction which argue strongly against production for production's sake (productivism) and which clash with the eco-modernist ideas of Bastani and Mason. Accelerationism believes technology can be used for progressive purposes, whereas degrowth argues that certain types of technology need to be limited and must relate to availability of resources. Some eco-modernists still believe in the use of nuclear power, although Bastani, to his credit, rejects this.

Technological Determinism

Bastani is aware that he will be accused of technological determinism and admits that "technology matters, but so do the ideas, social relations and politics which accompany it". However he uses an unhappy example. He believes the emergence of mass veganism and vegetarianism has led to the development of synthetic technology. This is worrying for two reasons. First he appears to think that demand leads supply, as any common or garden theorist of capitalism believes rather than the reverse views of revolutionaries that supply leads demand. Companies are producing vegan products like never before because they can create very highly processed products to make substantial profits. And, do we really want to eat these highly processed foodstuffs grown in vats that Bastani has enthusiasm for, when evidence points to processed foods being dangerous to health? It has been established that there is enough food to feed the world adequately, and if an unequal society was replaced by communism it would be able to provide for all and it would be unnecessary to manufacture these vat-grown synthetic foods.

Bastani is also enthusiastic about electric driverless cars in this new world of his. He envisages electricity being able to be supplied 100% from renewable sources which will fuel these cars. But this still fails to deal with traffic congestion, with roads still being dangerous for children and the aged and disabled, and communities bisected and blighted by highways. We should reject these ideas and instead look towards environmentally friendly free public transport.

Bastani talks about the eradication of work and describes a 10 hour week. We in the anarchist communist movement have long argued against the ideas of work, and certainly a 10 hour week would be an improvement on the 40 hour and rising week that many have to suffer now. But it would be still 10 hours a week in the same unsatisfying and boring work for many. Again when he refers to the abolition of work he means in the workplace, whilst the work of social reproduction and care in the home, looking after children, elderly parents, the disabled and infirm, and housework in general, mostly undertaken by women, is ignored, again revealing Bastani's blindness on gender oppression and his failure to include this in his 'utopia'.

He waxes lyrical about genome sequencing being able to eradicate "nearly all forms of disease" in the near future with little evidence for this. He talks about

“Cartier for everyone, MontBlanc for the masses and Chloe for all.” But are these not prestige goods spectacularly exhibited by the rich precisely because they are expensive and do we really, really, want these items? Many under the goad of the looming environmental devastation are increasingly turning away from consumerism in the light of limited natural resources and the damage that a productivist capitalism is dealing to the planet. Degrowth and sustainability have to be key factors in the construction of a new society but instead Bastani talks about a luxury communism which would result from an increase in production.

Disturbing

What is also disturbing is Bastani’s vaunting of the “seven-decade survival” of the USSR as “one of the great political achievements of the last century” which brings him a tad too close to a minority of “woke” hipsters who have turned to praising Stalinism as with for example, the Red London group.

Bastani turns a blind eye to the environmental and social consequences of previous advances in technology under capitalism. He believes that the technological breakthrough that he foresees will solve the problems created by a capitalism that is inherently environmentally destructive. But who makes and who controls this technology, who decides how it is used? What about the glaring problems of limited natural resources, what about the continuing environmental damage that further growth would continue to perpetuate?

We remember Bastani from the 2010 student movement when he attended Royal Holloway College and when he described himself as a libertarian communist. Like many of his associates in that particular student movement, he gravitated towards Corbynism. Indeed his Novara Media organisation quickly transformed itself into an engine for the building of Corbynism. Ultimately Bastani’s vision of a new society is a narrow and dull vision. It does not address itself to the oppressions of class, race and gender, and fails to envisage blueprints for their eradication. It’s the Attlee government of 1945 with new added technology. Far from being revolutionary, it is a tame social democratic and reformist programme that any Corbynist would be proud of. To call this communism is a travesty.

What about Plan C’s conception of FALC? To their credit, they have been critical of technological determinism. They are also considering the ideas of degrowth and are aware of the danger of ignoring the agency of the working class in bringing about these technological utopias. It appears that their concept of FALC is more nuanced than Bastani’s and is still a work in progress. We await a fuller development of their ideas on the subject. Nevertheless, their connections to Corbynism are causes for concern.

Final thoughts. Whist FALC envisages a fully automated society where work is eradicated or at a minimum, do we really want a world where robots wait on us while we lounge in luxury, like ‘today’s billionaires’ to quote Bastani? Of course drudgery and toil should be minimised as much as possible, but don’t we want a society where the creative powers of all human beings are liberated, where we all develop practical AND artistic skills and are able to create beautiful objects built to last? We should equally reject the idea of a return to primitivism as we do FALC and we need to develop other conceptions of a future communist society, one neither based on a po-faced hair shirt economy nor on a billionaire playboy way of life a la FALC, but one where all the creative abilities of all will be realised.

P.S.

Before FALC, there was Post-Scarcity Anarchism as developed by Murray Bookchin. Like Bastani, Bookchin talks about the positive aspects of technology as enablers of a new society:

“The seeds for the destruction of bourgeois society lie in the very means it employs for self-preservation: a technology of abundance that is capable of providing for the first time in history the material basis for liberation.”

Again the question has to be asked, how can this technology become liberatory? Certainly Bookchin’s views of a post-scarcity society are far more imaginative and far-reaching than Bastani’s and are in stark contrast to Bastani’s pawky and miserable Statist utopia. Whilst Bastani is blind to a mass movement as an agent of social change, Bookchin emphasises it.



The Socialism of the Intellectuals: Jan Wacław Machajski



Mikhail Bakunin was the first to predict that a new elite could emerge from the socialist movement. The late Colin Parker, writing on Bakunin in the Anarchist Communist Federation pamphlet *Basic Bakunin* stated:

“Once the role of government was taken out of the hands of the masses, a new class of experts, scientists and professional politicians would arise. This new elite would be far more secure in its domination over the workers by means of the mystification and legitimacy granted by the claim to acting in accordance with scientific laws (a major claim by Marxists). Furthermore, given that the new state could masquerade as the true expression of the people’s will, the institutionalising of political power gives rise to a new group of governors with the same self-seeking interests and the same cover-ups of its dubious dealings.” In a letter to Albert Richard in 1870, Bakunin wrote: “There must be anarchy, there must be - if the revolution is to become and remain alive, real, and powerful - the greatest possible awakening of all the local passions and aspirations; a tremendous awakening of spontaneous life everywhere. After the initial revolutionary victory the political revolutionaries, those advocates of brazen dictatorship,

will try to squelch the popular passions. They appeal for order, for trust in, for submission to those who, in the course and in the name of the Revolution, seized and legalized their own dictatorial powers; this is how such political revolutionaries reconstitute the State.” In his *Statism and Anarchy* Bakunin wrote: “Idealists of all kinds - metaphysicians, positivists, those who support the rule of science over life, doctrinaire revolutionists - all defend the idea of state and state power with equal eloquence, because they see in it, as a consequence of their own systems, the only salvation for society. Quite logically, since they have accepted the basic premise (which we consider completely mistaken) that thought precedes life, that theory is prior to social experience, and, therefore, that social science has to be the starting point for all social upheavals and reconstructions. They then arrive unavoidably at the conclusion that because thought, theory, and science, at least in our times, are in the possession of very few, these few ought to be the leaders of social life, not only the initiators, but also the leaders of all popular movements. On the day following the revolution the new social order should not be organized by the free association of people’s organizations or unions, local and regional, from the bottom up, in accordance with the demands and instincts of the people, but only by the dictatorial power of this learned minority, which presumes to express the will of the people.

This fiction of a pseudo-representative government serves to conceal the domination of the masses by a handful of privileged elite; an elite elected by hordes of people who are rounded up and do not know for whom or for what they vote. Upon this artificial and abstract expression of what they falsely imagine to be the will of the people and of which the real living people have not the least idea, they construct both the theory of statism as well as the theory of so-called revolutionary dictatorship.

The differences between revolutionary dictatorship and statism are superficial. Fundamentally they both represent the same principle of minority rule over the majority in the name of the alleged “stupidity” of the latter and the alleged “intelligence” of the former. Therefore they are both equally reactionary since both directly and inevitably must preserve and perpetuate the political and economic privileges of the ruling minority and the political and economic subjugation of the masses of the people.

Now it is clear why the dictatorial revolutionists, who aim to overthrow the existing powers and social structures in order to erect upon their ruins their own dictatorships, never were or will be the enemies of government, but, to the contrary, always will be the most ardent promoters of the government idea. They are the enemies only of contemporary governments,

because they wish to replace them. They are the enemies of the present governmental structure, because it excludes the possibility of their dictatorship. At the same time they are the most devoted friends of governmental power. For if the revolution destroyed this power by actually freeing the masses, it would deprive this pseudo-revolutionary minority of any hope to harness the masses in order to make them the beneficiaries of their own government policy."

New elite

The Polish revolutionary Jan Wacław Machajski was to develop this idea of a new revolutionary elite. Born at Pintzov (now Brusko Zdrój) in Russian Poland (that part of Poland then ruled by the Russian Tsar, other parts being ruled by Austria and Germany) on 15th December 1866, he was the son of a clerk, whose sudden death threw the family into destitution. His mother ran a pension for students at Kielce High School. A gifted pupil, he entered Warsaw University and took courses in natural sciences and medicine. At first attracted briefly by Polish nationalism, he moved towards revolutionary socialism and Marxism. He was first arrested in 1891 for distributing revolutionary literature and served a four month sentence at Cracow. He was then allowed to emigrate to Zurich. There he lost any illusions he had about Polish socialists who he saw were not fighting to liberate the working class, but to establish an independent Polish state. He was arrested again in 1892 following a strike in Łódź as a result of his writing an appeal to the workers to fight both the Tsar and the bosses.

He now served a three year sentence, first at Cracow and then at Saint Petersburg. After this he was sent to exile in Siberia for 5 years.

In exile Machajski met social democrats and narodniks (populists) who debated what was the way to socialism for Russia, a European model or a transition directly to a new society founded on the rural commune and cooperatives of workers. He had access to the well-stocked library of another exile, where he read both Russian texts and those German social democrat texts that were only then circulating in Russia.

The result of this was a pamphlet that he self-published in 1898, *The Evolution of Social Democracy*. This was a critique of the reformism and opportunism of German Social Democracy and its increasing integration into the State apparatus. This meant a collaboration of the Social Democratic MPs, elected by the working class, in the conduct of the affairs of the bourgeoisie. This critique did not mean a break with Marxism, it was an attempt to correct its practice. It came before the appearance of the revisionism of Bernstein within German social democracy, which confirmed his theses.

Machajski now began to look for reasons for the development of opportunism and reformism, examining both the late writings of Engels and the early writings of Marx.

Trotsky met Machajski in exile and felt that the latter, in his rejection of the political struggle, was influenced by anarchism, and in particular by anarcho-

syndicalism. But Machajski was as unsparing of his criticisms of anarchism as he was of Marxism.

He began to posit the idea that not only the capitalists and the big landlords but a "democratic fraction" of the bourgeoisie were the enemies of the working class. He believed that the development of industry under capitalism led to the emergence of a new layer of qualified workers-technicians, scientists, engineers, managerial and administrative staff. In conjunction with the already established intelligentsia-lawyers, journalists, professors and literati - this group had an important role in the running of capitalism, but without the command structures that industrial and financial capital, big landowners and the military leadership had. "A larger and larger part of bourgeois society receives the funds for its parasitic existence as an intelligentsia, an army of intellectual workers which does not personally possess the means of production but continually increases and multiplies its income, which it obtains as the hereditary owner of all knowledge, culture and civilisation."

New class

This new class, Machajski thought, was in a vulnerable position, trapped as it was between the old ruling class and the working class. Sometimes it spoke in favour of the working class, sometimes it actively defending its cause, but only to attempt to control the working class, and at the same time to substitute themselves for the old working class. Thus Machajski developed an early theory of state capitalism, that is, that "the socialisation of the means of production signifies only the suppression of the private right of property and management of factories and the land". Further, "The expropriation of the capitalist class still in no way signifies the expropriation of all of bourgeois society. By the suppression of private capitalists, the modern working class, the contemporary slaves, do not stop being condemned to manual labour for all their lives; consequently the national surplus value created by them does not disappear, but passes into the hands of the democratic State, in as much as funds of maintenance of the parasitic existence of all the plunderers, of all of bourgeois society. This last, after the suppression of the capitalists, continues to be a society dominating all as before, that of the cultivated directors and managers, of the world of "white hands..."

From an orthodox Marxist position Machajski progressed to seeing Marx as the prophet of this new dominant class. His reading of *Das Kapital* led him to believe that Marx privileged this new class. So for Machajski, the "first task of Marxism is to mask the class interest of cultivated society, at the time of the development of big industry; the class interest of privileged mercenaries, of intellectual workers in the capitalist State".

As a counter measure to this, Machajski posed the revolt of the "horny handed". In many ways he proposed an apolitical economism similar to some forms of revolutionary syndicalism. In place of social democracy and anarchism, there would be an epoch of international workers' conspiracies, imposing their demands on the State through world general strikes. This would eventually lead, through a series of

insurrections, to the expropriation not solely of the capitalists, but also of all cultured society, of all the consumers of revenues exceeding that of the worker.

Escape

After his five years of exile, Machajski was again arrested and eventually assigned to live in the far east of the Russian empire, at Irkutsk. Here a group of workers gathered around him and produced a leaflet calling for the 1st of May 1902 into a day of economic struggle. He was again arrested and sentenced to 7 years exile in deepest Siberia at Kolyma. He managed to escape to Geneva in Switzerland in autumn 1903. Here he republished his *The Intellectual Worker*, followed by 2 more pamphlets, *The Bankruptcy of Socialism in the 19th Century*, and *The Bourgeois Revolution and the Workers Cause*.

His taste for pure alcohol and his exile and imprisonments had aged him and he appeared to be fifty years old rather than forty.

Meanwhile a workers' group based on his ideas was formed at Odessa. The 1905 Revolution led to similar groups being formed at Ekaterinoslav, Vilnius, Bialystok, Warsaw and St Petersburg. Machajski himself returned to St Petersburg in 1906 and took part in the Workers Conspiracy group there. Here he reedited his works, now rejecting the idea of progress as sketched by Marx. He refused to call the actions of certain classes revolutionary, rejecting fatalistic economic laws, under the guise of progress. For him the motor of historic change was not the dialectical contradiction between the development of productive forces and social relations, but the antagonism between the elite and the masses, between the order giver and order taker, between the intellectuals and the manual workers.

Whilst denouncing anarchism as part of the intellectual plot against the masses, in many ways his ideas came close to anarchist positions. It should be remembered that he read Bakunin whilst in exile, although he never acknowledged his debt to him. He remarked that the destruction of the State would lead to the suppression of secular pillage, and that whatever regime was in place, bourgeois or socialist, reactionary or progressive, it would matter little if the situation of the workers remained the same. Like the anarchists, he grouped the peasantry together with the proletariat as part of the toiling masses, and added the lumpenproletariat to these categories, meanwhile regarding self-educated workers who had integrated into the system as privileged intellectuals.

Bolsheviks

Machajski fled Russia in 1907, returning to Switzerland and then moving on to Poland. After fresh persecution he moved to France. The outbreak of the Russian Revolution saw his return to Russia. Like many others he welcomed the Bolshevik seizure of power, but criticised the new regime for its timidity in not fully expropriating the bourgeoisie. He soon realised that the new regime was not a friend of the masses and that the intelligentsia was filling all the bureaucratic posts created by it. Thus a new "people's" bureaucracy was

created. Machajski finished by asserting: "the working masses must lead their revolution themselves, despite the socialist hypnotists. The workers' revolution goes further than all the socialist plans and problems. The emancipation of the workers, the overthrow of the oppression they undergo, are much stronger causes than that of socialism. The latter brings forces for the sole overthrow of the capitalists, but then wants to replace them with the class of hereditary "white-collar" workers, while leaving the class of manual workers and their families in servitude."

Machajski was obviously not viewed favourably by the new authorities, and the magazine in which his criticisms appeared, *The Workers Revolution*, was closed down by them in 1918, after one issue. His health took a turn for the worse, and he survived by acting as a technical proof reader for an official economic magazine. He died of a heart attack on February 19th, 1926.

The anarchist communist Piotr Arshinov writing in the exile anarchist magazine *Dielo Trouda* in Paris, remarked after the death of Machajski that "From the dawn of the Russian emancipatory movement (1900-1905), Machajski had warned the Russian working class against the belief in democracy, against the so-called "popular power", declaring that behind all these slogans was the offensive of a new dominant group seeking to attack the freedom and independence of the slaves of manual labour, and he called those to fight for their own class interests." Arshinov noted the extreme hostility that Machajski's ideas were received in the socialist parties. He delineated the differences between the ideas of anarchism and those of Machajski, who had ended up rejecting all ideologies, whereas anarchism had developed its own ideology based on the daily struggle against capital. All the same, the experiences of the Russian Revolution had confirmed Machajski's theses as being essentially correct about the character of the current regime in Russia. The movement around Machajski, the *Makhaevschina*, had in practice according to Arshinov, been closely allied to the Russian anarchist movement.

Indeed leading anarchists like Olga Taratuta and Vladimir Striga worked closely with Makhaevists in Odessa. Similarly the anarchosyndicalist Novomirski echoed Machajski's ideas when he wrote in 1905 "Which class does contemporary socialism serve in fact and not in words? We answer at once and without beating about the bush: Socialism is not the expression of the interests of the working class, but of the so-called *raznochintsy*, or *déclassé intelligentsia*". Machajski's ideas also heavily influenced the Social-Revolutionary Maximalists, a party whose ideas were close to those of revolutionary anarchism.

Criticisms

What criticisms could be made of Machajski? To begin with, at the time some anarchists criticised him for his lack of ideology, and that he ended merely as a revolutionary syndicalist with economic ideas. Machajski saw demands for higher wages and shorter hours as the fulcrum for revolutionary social change. As Max Nomad wrote: "Under the system of government ownership, the workers, in Machajski's opinion, would

still continue their revolutionary struggle. Not in order to "abolish the State," which would be childish, for the State as an instrument of class domination will exist as long as there is a separate class of educated managers and organizers of all branches of economic and public life, as opposed to the mass of uneducated manual workers. Neither would that struggle have to aim at changing the government, which would be an idle pastime and only lead to the substitution of a new set of intellectuals, or self-taught ex-workers, for the old ones. The only aim of the workers' struggle would be to force the State to raise wages until the manual workers had equalized their standard of living with that of their educated masters. Equality of incomes would create equal educational opportunities for the offspring of technician and menial alike, thus ushering in a classless, and consequently stateless, society."

Furthermore, in actual fact, if the Bolshevik leadership was primarily made up of intellectuals, as can be seen from a questionnaire put out and answered at a conference of the central committee in 1917, (1) it represented only a fraction of that grouping, as intellectuals in the Cadets, Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries were to see their parties harassed and banned by the Bolsheviks.

We also have a problem with Machajski's definition of the term intelligentsia. The intelligentsia (intelligentsiya) in Russia was used to describe a grouping- artists, professors, some teachers, lawyers, engineers, writers, journalists, men of letters, philosophers and sociologists. The intelligentsia had been created by the modernising and Westernising Tsar Peter the Great and as such were imbued with ideas of "progress". Later Tsars frowned on the concept of "Progress" which accounted for the large number of intellectuals that entered the Narodnik movement. As Isaiah Berlin was to write: "The phenomenon, itself, with its historical and literally revolutionary consequences, is, I suppose, the largest, single Russian contribution to social change in the world. The concept of *intelligentsia* must not be confused with the notion of intellectuals. Its members thought of themselves as united, by something more than mere interest in ideas; they conceived themselves as being a dedicated order, almost a secular priesthood, devoted to the spreading of a specific attitude to life (in *A Remarkable Decade in Russian Thinkers*, Penguin 2013). However Machajski meant it in a different way, applying it to all those who had a higher education, and including self-educated workers and peasants who had somehow risen out of their class.

Intelligentsia

We also have the problem of the Bolsheviks' attitude to the intelligentsia. Lenin was to write in a letter to the writer Maxim Gorky: "The intellectual forces of the workers and peasants are growing and getting stronger in their fight to overthrow the bourgeoisie and their accomplices, the educated classes, the lackeys of capital, who consider themselves the brains of the nation. In fact they are not its brains but its shit..." So whilst Lenin was himself a member of that intelligentsia, he had a very low opinion of it.

Not only was the Russian intelligentsia divided and decimated by emigration after the 1917 Revolution but it was divided between the Whites and the different left parties. In addition Lenin and the Bolsheviks led a campaign against the intelligentsia, including mass arrests of professors and scientists identified with the Cadets. He deported intellectuals from the Cadets, Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries and the various nationalist parties to Germany on the so-called Philosophers' Ships in 1922.

So it can be argued that the development of state capitalism in Russia and with it the development of a new bureaucratic class, was not so much due to the incipient need of the intelligentsia to become a new ruling class, but to the politics and ideology of the Bolsheviks, their centralisation and increasing bureaucracy, their separation from the working class and their antipathy towards the peasants. In fact a purge of the revolutionary intelligentsia was initiated by Stalin in the late 1920s and early 1930s, resulting in the imprisonment of at least 2,000 of them and the deaths of 1,500 of these in jails and labour camps.

So whilst Machajski's ideas on the subject of socialism and the intellectuals are thought provoking, it can be demonstrated that socialism was never the universal ideology of the Russian intelligentsia, which remained divided on many levels. At best, it was a fraction of the radical intelligentsia that led the Bolshevik seizure of power.

Finally there was the paradox that Machajski was himself from the intelligentsia, and his rather ineffectual Workers Conspiracy groups included other intellectuals.

Nevertheless his most important theses point to the centrality of the working class as the motor of revolution and that intellectuals should not be allowed to form a leadership elite within that revolutionary movement. As we wrote when we were members of the Anarchist Communist Federation in the pamphlet *Role of the Revolutionary Organisation* (1991 edition): "The intellectual has a role to play in helping to clarify positions inside the organisation, but he/she should never have a privileged position inside it. In fact the practicality of working class people very often outstrips the intellectual in theory and practice. Workers must be the vast majority inside a revolutionary organisation."

(1) See:

<https://libcom.org/history/social-origin-educational-level-chief-bolshevik-leaders-1917>

Further reading:

Nomad, Max - White Collars & Horny Hands: the revolutionary thought of Wacław Machajski

Skirda, A. - Le Socialisme des Intellectuels. Paris (1979)

Shatz, Marshall S. Jan Wacław Machajski - A Radical Critic of the Russian Intelligentsia and Socialism

Review: Clans and Clearances: The Highland Clearances, Volume One

Alwyn Edgar, Theory And Practice, 2018. 849 p.

The beautiful but seemingly empty landscape of mountains, lakes and islands that forms the Scottish Highlands covers 16,000 square miles, an area bigger than Belgium. From around 1350 to the mid-18th Century it was home to over 400,000 Gaelic-speaking highlanders, who lived in townships along the coast and in the many river valleys. The Gaels, as they described themselves, were not a race but pastoral farmers and hunters from mixed backgrounds who shared a common language, culture and a unique tribal social system we know in English as clans.

In the first of five volumes Alwyn Edgar describes, in details drawn from many sources, the sophistication and adaptability of these clans-people and their world. This in contrast to the contempt shown by many outsider writers, travellers and professional historians, who have frequently portrayed highlanders either in near-racist terms as wild, lazy bandits, or, following their dispersal, sentimentalised them as noble savage warriors and victims.

Edgar is a barrister by training and one of the entertaining features of this interesting book is how he forensically takes apart academic historians' accounts of the Gaelic clans and their subsequent disappearance.

Clan members were not necessarily linked by bloodlines but by their common ownership of an area of land that was worked, hunted and fished collectively. The defence, welfare and general morale of each clan was overseen by a chief, nominated and holding office by common consent, although over time this position became more hereditary in nature. No-one was employed by anyone else. The scarce arable land available was allocated fairly and used to produce staples like oats and barley for everyone. In a harsh landscape and climate, no-one went hungry. Widows, the sick and the disabled were cared for by the whole clan.

They were answerable to no-one but themselves and were regarded as ungovernable, despite several armed

attempts by the Scottish Crown to gain control of the region and collect taxes.

By the end of the 16th Century, however, this way of life was gradually disappearing. Over time and through blackmail, legislation and fines the Scottish Crown managed to convince highland chieftains that they were the legal owners of their clan lands, able to charge rents and treat their fellow clans-people as tenants. The chiefs subsequently became landed gentry and absentee landlords with fancy titles. Following the Union with England in 1707 and the support of some Highland chiefs for Jacobite rebellions, Crown forces mounted a full-scale invasion of the Highlands, culminating in the battle of Culloden Moor in 1746.

This crushing defeat, the ensuing repression and economic and social forces over the following 150 years combined to compel many highland families, faced with destitution, to leave for the industrial cities of the south, or to work as paid labourers and tied tenants on the big sheep and cattle farms that took their place. Many more migrated to the New World or served in the British imperial forces overseas. In the 1840s and '50s forcible mass evictions of remaining crofters took place in some areas, to be replaced by deer parks and grouse moors for the rich. Today fewer than 500 people including Anglo-Scottish aristocrats, overseas millionaires and offshore hedge fund managers own more than half the private land in Scotland, using it either for recreation or further wealth accumulation.

If there is criticism to made of this first volume, it is that Alwyn Edgar perhaps goes too far in his effort to redress the negative image of the highlander and the clan system. It would be good to hear more about the complicity and collaboration of some Gaels in the downfall of their fellow countrymen, and to read more about the resistance and solidarity that surely took place among them against the betrayal by their chiefs. Hopefully these points are addressed in the subsequent volumes of this ambitious series.



Review: The Triumph and Tragedy of Comrade Max Hoelz

The German Robin Hood: Soldier, revolutionary, political prisoner: the extraordinary life of Max Hoelz.

RedLine Press (2019). Edited by Ed Walker. 424p.

All revolutionary periods throw up dynamic, heroic individuals and few more interesting than the German communist Max Holz, whose autobiography, in new translation, has been made available in English for the first time since 1930. Max Hoelz (1889-1933) has tended to be at best a footnote in many histories of the German Revolution of 1919-1921. Often dismissed as a 'bandit' or 'adventurer', rather than a committed revolutionary, Hoelz is reduced to a caricature in the history of the period.

But Hoelz, in this autobiography, is given the opportunity to speak for himself. And what is revealed is a passionate, but reflective, individual with an understanding of struggle and a strongly held humanism. Whilst never an anarchist, he was nevertheless a rebel amongst rebels and rarely less than independently minded. A member (or at least sympathiser) of the KAPD (Kommunistische Arbeiter Partei Deutschlands or Communist Workers Party) and then the VKPD (Vereignigte Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands or United Communist Party), Holz considered himself a Marxist. However, he enjoyed the support of the anarchist communist movement in Germany - particularly of Erich Muehsam and the journal *Die Schwarze Fahne* (The Black Flag)- especially during his years in prison following the failed insurrection in Vogtland in the east of the country.

The book starts with a useful Introduction, which situates Hoelz in his historical and political context and gives the reader some idea of the revolutionary turmoil Germany was experiencing during the period of his insurgent activity, roughly April 1919 to his capture two years later. November 1918 had seen the Wilhemshaven Revolt (see our Classic Revolutionary Reprint on this) by revolutionary sailors, which started the German Revolution, rapidly followed by the establishment of workers and soldiers councils throughout the country, 1918 saw the Spartacist Uprising in January (see elsewhere in this Virus for details), Council Republics established in Bremen and Bavaria and subsequently crushed by the army and reactionary forces, the establishment of the Red Army of the Ruhr and the failed 'March Action' of 1921. By the time Max Hoelz and other communist workers launched the Mitteldeutschland Aufstand (middle German uprising), the momentum of the international revolutionary wave had dissipated and their movement was isolated and defeated, despite a furious resistance.

But the core of the book is Hoelz's autobiography 'From the "White Cross" to the Red Flag' first published in 1929. It covers his childhood as the son of rural labourers, his time in London, his entry into the German army during world war one and his increasing disgust with the carnage and his subsequent disillusionment with capitalism. His

relatively brief life as an active revolutionary, as an unemployed organiser and as a guerrilla leader in 1919-21 is covered, although understandably he does not reveal all the actions he was involved with. It is an exciting story in itself but Hoelz never loses sight of the political implications and is highly critical of the leadership of the Communist Party, who distanced themselves from the actions of the Red Guards of Vogtland, whilst calling for revolution. Hoelz found support from the KAPD but little leadership.

His long struggle to survive and remain human during his imprisonment is fascinating and moving. Hoelz's humanity and compassion for his fellow 'non-political' prisoners is notable but he is not sentimental about the damaged characters he encounters in the prison system. His autobiography ends with his liberation in 1928, following a long campaign that was in part lead by anarchist communist Erich Muehsam.

Hoelz, whilst feted by the Communist Party upon his release, was soon found to be a loose cannon and difficult to manipulate. After he was badly beaten up by Nazi Brownshirts at a Party election meeting, the Communist Party sent him to Moscow to 'recover' but he was never to return. Hoelz, whose theoretical awakening came through the work of Herman Gorter and Otto Ruhle, two Marxists who became highly critical of the Bolsheviks, soon saw the reality behind the 'Workers Fatherland'. His criticisms of the Communist Parties of Germany and the Soviet Union sealed his fate and he was found dead, ostensibly from a 'boating accident' in September 1933. The truth is that there was an adventurist element to the whole Vogtland uprising (as there was with the KPD-led Hamburg Uprising two years later) and the activities of the Red Guard was in part responsible for bringing terrible retribution upon the heads of revolutionary workers in the industrial heartlands of the east of Germany. The communist militias had tried to push the revolution, which they saw as slipping away. In retrospect they were tactically in error, although from their own perspective, it appeared that all was needed was a push to kickstart the revolutionary process...

Many criticisms could be made of Max Hoelz: he was egotistical, impulsive, sometimes treated people in an uncomradely way and was capable of some very poor decision making. But he was also of the stuff that makes for a revolutionary and a communist - more than a Robin Hood but never less than fully human.

Publisher, translator and editor Ed Walker has done an excellent job with this book, which is a welcome contribution to the reclaiming of revolutionary working class history and, particularly, of the German Revolution.

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.

Jackdaw: 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.

ACG Pamphlets

(Prices for direct sale without postage, see website for prices with postage)

New Pamphlet: Malatesta and Organisation

£1.50



Our NHS? Anarchist Communist Thoughts on Health

£2.00

Towards a Fresh Revolution

£3.00

Land and Liberty

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Whatever happened to the Revolution?

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The Italian Factory Councils and the Anarchists

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Is Class Still Relevant?

50p

The Fight for the City (a few copies left)

£2.00

The Wilhelmshaven Revolt: A Chapter of the Revolutionary Movement in the German Navy 1918-1919 by 'Ikarus' (Ernst Schneider)

£3.00

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/>

Inside Virus

Beyond XR: The Limits of Extinction Rebellion	Page 3
Capitalism, Land and Climate Change	Page 8
The Yellow Vests: Where Now?	Page 10
Anarchy, Punks, and Sweatshops	Page 12
Organising to Win	Page 14
Dossier: 1919 A Year of Struggle	Page 24
• Introduction	
• Unrest in Britain	
• Police Strike	
• The Seattle General Strike	
• The Winnipeg General Strike	
• Soviets in Ireland	
Anarchist Communism and the Struggle Against Oppression	Page 36
What is Fully Automated Luxury Communism?	Page 44
The Socialism of the Intellectuals: Jan Wacław Machajski	Page 47
Book Reviews	Page 51



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