

# Stormy Petrel

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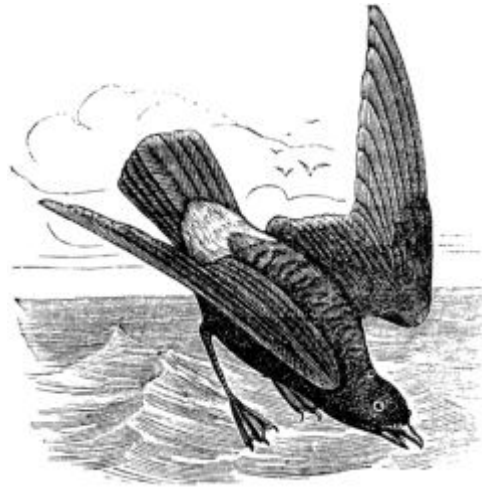
**This is  
capitalism!  
Covid Chaos...  
Climate Crisis**



**Class Struggle, Solidarity and Mutual Aid**

# Song of the Stormy Petrel:

Maxim Gorky



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It's the storm! The storm is breaking!

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

Let it break in all its fury!



# Editorial

## Capitalism is Burning

Welcome to the third issue of our magazine. Within it you can find in-depth articles on the COVID pandemic, Land, Food and Revolution, Especifismo and Social Insertion, Anti-fascist football, Nationalism, the New Green Deal, and Attacks on the Counter-Culture in the UK. We commemorate key anniversaries in the history of the working class: the Paris Commune, the Kronstadt Revolt, Blair Mountain and the March Action in Germany. We review books on land ownership and trespass, rewilding and biodiversity, and workers' struggles.

Whilst the pandemic has raged around the world, the world's richest saw their fortunes massively increase by 60%. There are 2,200 billionaires in the world who all added to their profits. Meanwhile many millions of workers have lost their jobs and many forced below the poverty line. 250 million people now live in extreme poverty around the world. The worst examples of this greed and the widening gap between rich and poor were the space flights of Jeff Bezos and Richard Branson in July 2021. These flights, in the time of COVID, caused widespread disgust as Bezos and Branson were patently revealed to be more interested in playing boy's games in space at huge cost than in using their wealth to alleviate poverty or the effects of the pandemic. Branson did very well out of the £350 million granted to capitalists by the Johnson regime in March 2020. Meanwhile Branson had told staff at Virgin Atlantic to take 8 weeks unpaid leave to, according to him, save jobs!

Bezos saw his wealth increase to \$212 billion during this period. He didn't tell his workers to take unpaid leave, because he needed them for the massive rise in online sales that ended up lining his pockets. He forced workers back into delivery and distribution centres, which were unsafe and subject to the spread of COVID, causing the death of Amazon employees. For his part, Elon Musk, who has a finger in the pie of 'space tourism' as well, demanded that workers at his California factory go back to work despite both State and Federal lockdowns.

One and a half billion workers in the informal and casualised sectors lost much of their incomes because of the pandemic. Meanwhile the International Monetary Fund makes the prediction that by the end of 2022 the average loss in wages for workers in the developed North will be 109%. The working class is under severe attack and is suffering increasing immiseration.

While this is going on, proxy wars between the great powers of the USA, Russia, China and their various allies continues. One of the USA's and Britain's great adventures has ended in ignominy, with the fall of the extremely corrupt regime led by Ghani in Afghanistan, and the pullout by American, British and other NATO forces. Like America's defeat in Vietnam, this signals a further stage in the decline of the USA as the world's supreme power, as well as a blow to the now shaky NATO alliance.

At the same time, one of the last 'Communist' regimes in the world, Cuba, experienced a series of riots that shook its power. Thousands turned out on the streets. Despite the Cuban regime and its defenders claiming that the protests were counter-revolutionary and manipulated by the USA, it is apparent that the vast majority of protestors were working class and that the protests began in working class neighbourhoods. The demonstrations, sometimes developing into looting, were driven by rising unemployment, and increasing poverty, as well as shortages of food, medicine and services and power cuts. Added to this cocktail are the effects of Covid-19, which have affected both the health services and the tourism on which the Cuban economy partially relies. This crisis means that 80% of Cubans are maintaining themselves at a basic level. Unemployment has principally affected the public sector, whilst in the private sector, now approved of by the ruling bureaucracy, workers are paid low wages. Inflation is galloping up to levels of 500% and above. In this situation the working class sees that the Party bureaucrats and managers are maintaining their life styles. This drove the protests and the Cuban

state responded with repression, imprisoning many and killing at least five protestors. The crisis of the state capitalist regimes is also seen in the ongoing situation in Belarus, where Lukashenko maintains himself in power with the support of Putin and with massive repression, and in Hong Kong, where similar repression has been implemented by the regime there, fully supported by their masters in Beijing.

Alongside all of this, the environmental crisis continues to unfold and accelerate. Floods in Germany, Belgium and China accompany wildfires in northwest America, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, France, Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, Syria and Lebanon, in fact in practically the entire Mediterranean basin.

We have attempted to explain here that fixes like so called green technology and Green New Deals are fixes that do not work. It is capitalism itself that drives the ecological crisis, and as such it must be replaced by a new society that we define as anarchist communism. But how to get there? We hope that the discussions here on effective anarchist communist organisation and social insertion can assist in the construction of a global anarchist communist movement. We welcome the green shoots of an anarchist communist movement developing in places like Australia, New Zealand and across Latin America and we look towards the reinforcement of this movement as the various crises come together and indicate increasingly that it is imperative that capitalism has to be replaced.

The uprisings and revolutions of the past can indicate both what not to do and also what new forms of social organisation can emerge. That is why we look towards examples from the past to aid us in the present and for the future, not because we are history hobbyists. The working class has shown that it is capable of great things and that it must avoid the twin perils of social democracy and Leninism and develop its own autonomous movements. The bankruptcy of Leninism in all its forms and examples of the crisis of social democracy like Starmer's purge of leftists show that new solutions need to be sought out.

The boss class has no solution to any of the crises that we have described. That is why it is increasingly turning towards attacks on the social wage (pensions, free prescriptions) and fire and rehire tactics. At the same time, the State is increasing its powers of repression. Here in Britain it can be seen in the Policing Bill, the savage attacks on the Sarah Everard vigil in London and the vicious sentences doled out to protestors in Bristol. This strengthening of the State is to deter and crush any looming trouble. The State and the ruling class know that discontent could flare up into a prairie fire at any moment, as the anniversary of the 2011 riots reveals their concerns that the circumstances for further unrest are still in place.

We know that the present situation does not seem encouraging, but at the same time we know that struggles and new social movements will re-emerge. It is now more than ever necessary that we build a movement aimed at creating a society based on need not profit, a world without the State, classes, wars and borders. Speed the day!



# No One is Safe until Everyone is Safe: *Lessons from the Pandemic*



The Covid 19 pandemic has impacted every aspect of human life throughout the globe. It has had devastating effects on people's physical and mental health, social relations and communities, livelihoods, and freedom to move about. It has significantly curtailed our ability to organise effective political protests and strengthened the hand of the State.

As a result, it has highlighted the fundamental problems of the global system we live in. Capitalism's need for continued growth and profit, and the State's support for those goals, has been behind the origin, spread, and tragic consequences of the disease. The need for revolution has never been so apparent.

However, as we struggle to fight back, the weaknesses of the working class movement have also been revealed. We have seen a mounting death toll, health services overwhelmed, key workers treated as expendable, and the economic costs borne by those least able to afford it, yet resistance has been negligible. Nevertheless, the pandemic has also brought out actions and sensibilities that are key to social transformation: solidarity, mutual aid, self-organisation, and internationalism.

This article will examine capitalism, the State and associated aspects of the system through the lens of the pandemic. It then hopes to show how we can harness the positive features of the working class response to Covid in order to build an effective revolutionary working class movement for anarchist communism.

## **Covid-19: Origins and Initial Spread**

The actual origins of the pandemic are often forgotten in the effort to cope with the day-to-day consequences. Covid- 19 is a zoonotic disease, which means that it passes into humans from animals. These diseases have been with us ever since humans came into contact with animals, initially through domestication. Capitalism has accelerated the process because it is behind the increased encroachment of humans into the habitats of other species, through deforestation, the development of industrial agriculture, and the consumer fad, amongst the well-off, for eating exotic species. As a result, humans are coming into contact with new species and new viruses such as Covid-19, one of a

series of coronaviruses (airborne transmission) that have emerged in the past decades.

Globalisation means that viruses can quickly move from one place to the rest of the world in a very short time. International air travel, for business and tourism, meant that people picked up the infection in China and brought it back home. Though air travel needs to be drastically reduced because of climate change, people moving around the globe is part of our interconnected world.

The virus spread quickly once it arrived within a population. How fast it spread and how far depended on government responses. This initial response was crucial and has determined the number of cases, deaths, the amount of pressure on hospitals, the need for lockdowns, and the impact on the economy. Those countries that took swift action and went for a Zero Covid strategy, aiming for complete suppression of the virus, such as Australia, New Zealand, China, Singapore, and some other East Asian countries have kept deaths low and lockdowns to a minimum. The UK, along with the US and most other countries, were reluctant to halt life, or rather business, as usual. Capitalism requires continual growth to survive. Effectively shutting large parts of the economy down goes directly against the interests of capital and therefore was last resort for the State. This does not mean that the other governments are any less supportive of capitalism. In some ways a Covid-suppression strategy has been more effective in keeping capitalism going. Nevertheless, the UK was very slow in taking the pandemic seriously, following a strategy of herd immunity, which in many ways has been the policy to this day.

Lockdowns were eventually imposed by most governments to some degree. By then the virus had already spread throughout society, especially among the elderly and the vulnerable. It swept through care homes, largely privately owned, profit-making enterprises, leaving hundreds dead. It took several months of lockdown for Covid to be brought under control.

After a summer of low cases and relaxed public health measures, the infection rate soon picked up again. Instead of using the summer to prepare for the second surge that everyone predicted, the government did



nothing. It had put a huge amount of money into a track and trace system that was run by a private company that just happened to be a 'friend' of the government, rather than letting local public health authorities run the scheme. This system, which has now swallowed £37 billion of our money, proved to be ineffective. The whole point was to make sure those who have the virus are isolated from the rest of the population. But we never really knew enough about where people were getting the virus and there was no actual support, financial or social, for those who needed to self-isolate (See: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jul/27/british-government-covid-strategy-virus-incompetence-ignorance-pandemic>).

The weakness of the whole system can be seen in the approach to workplaces. Many people were still going into work, especially key workers, and health and safety was just left to employers to deal with. Obviously, putting in features such as ventilation cost resources and most were reluctant to spend the money. Hundreds of cases of breached health and safety were brought to the Health and Safety Executive with no prosecutions. And because of the inadequate track and trace system, there was no data on which workplaces were spreaders. Now and again, some stories would reach the news, eg about break-outs in food processing plants, but mostly people didn't know where it was spreading, unless they had personal experience. Again, it was keep the economy going, the health of the workers comes second.

## **Covid in Schools, Colleges and Universities: The Second Wave**

The government's attitude towards educational establishments was especially ignorant and the failure to take the spread of Covid seriously among young people has been behind both the second and third surge. Johnson, and the leaders of the other 'nations' kept repeating that schools were safe. Young people were thought to be not affected by the virus so the government completely ignored the fact that they could still spread it. They encouraged university students to start their courses and kept schools open during the second lockdown.



University students caught the virus over the summer and brought it with them to campus where it ripped through student accommodation. Universities wanted fees and rents so they didn't tell students not to come. The infections then spread out into the community. Schools opened up, with few having actually put in place measures to mitigate the virus, eg ventilation, face mask wearing, smaller classes. As the autumn progressed, cases increased in schools and into the community and workplaces. By November, the situation was bad enough that the government was forced to lockdown again. However, not the schools. Again, it is profits before health. Business needed to have parents free to go to work. There had been no support for parents having to school and entertain their children in the first lockdown and so parents themselves were keen to keep their children at school. Laptops were never provided as promised. The end result was that the lockdown never really succeeded in bringing cases to summer levels and as soon as lockdown lifted, there was a massive surge.

This was amplified by the government's confused messages about Christmas. They wanted to make people think there could be a 'normal' Christmas, largely to make sure they went out Christmas shopping. When they eventually became more cautious it was too late, and even a few days of mixing indoors, with case levels still quite high, meant that there was a massive surge. They were even going to keep schools open from January, still reluctant to identify schools as a problem, but in the end were forced to make another U-turn. It took months of restrictions to get the virus under control, with deaths rocketing to over 120,000.

## **International Travel**

UK policy on international travel has been confused and chaotic, with quarantine enforced sporadically and profiteering from companies offering test to travellers. Unlike those countries that have gone for a zero-Covid strategy, the UK, under pressure from the airlines, has been keen to keep international travel open. The rise of the Delta variant, originally identified in India, is a classic case of putting profits before health. India was on the amber list of countries when the Delta variant broke out but was not put immediately on the red list. This was partly because Johnson had been hoping to travel to India to make a trade deal. 500 infected people were able to travel from India to the UK and not in any way prevented from spreading the infection when they arrived here. This decision has cost hundreds of lives and we don't know where it is going to end.

It is not just about stopping infected people coming into the UK. The UK has been a major exporter of variants, first the Kent, now Alpha variant, and now the Delta variant.

## **The Four Nations**

What was unusual about the managing of the pandemic was the way each 'nation' was able to determine their own policies to an extent, though things like the ineffective track and trace system have been common to all. This has reinforced the sense of distinctiveness within the different territories, with

implications for support for independence. There were some differences in policy, with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland being quicker to lockdown and more cautious about opening up. The death figures show that different policies did have an impact. Whereas England has had 201 deaths per 100,000, Scotland has had 144, Northern Ireland 114 and Wales 177.

However, looking more closely at Scotland, for example, the policies has not differed significantly. It's widely accepted in Scotland that the first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, has done a better job in handling the pandemic than Boris Johnson. While that may seem faint praise, it is true that she is a far better communicator than he. You can watch a presentation of hers and come away with the feeling that you have actually been informed of something (sometimes whether you have or not), whereas Johnson seems even to confuse himself. The SNP government in Holyrood has taken a more cautious line than has the Westminster government, but this contrast hides another truth.

The SNP government is still business oriented. It still errs on the side of smoothing things over for the bosses, while those expected to self-isolate are left dangling without adequate support. Business has had neither compulsion nor support from Holyrood to take effective measures to protect workers against the virus such as improving ventilation. It could be argued that the Scottish Parliament does not possess sufficient powers for such measures – for example furlough remains in Westminster hands – but on closer inspection we can see that Holyrood has carefully shadowed Downing Street's every step, sometimes appearing more decisive by anticipating Johnson's next move, sometimes issuing statements condemning words Javid has uttered, but in fact always but a small margin from the path taken by Westminster.

### **“Freedom Day”**

England lifted most restrictions on July 19th, 2021, with the other nations keeping more public health measures in place. This was despite a high level of infection, largely among young people. After an easing of restrictions in April and May, cases surged again (how many surges have we had? It is easy to lose count!). Again, without an effective track and trace system, it is difficult to know exactly where this surge is coming from, but age data shows clearly that it is the younger age groups that are being infected, leading again to the obvious conclusion that schools are the main source. Schools still did not have adequate ventilation or social distancing when they opened again in April. Facemask wearing among secondary students was stopped in May. The other source of increased infections was Euro 2020, which brought many people together, indoors at home or in pubs, or outdoors with extended periods of contact. Travelling to and from games, such as the cases identified in Scottish fans travelling by coach to London, all contributed to the rapid rise in cases. Football is big money, especially for the media industry. Along with the financial pressure, the government also wanted to make itself popular with the millions of football fans.

The government took a big gamble; they were hoping that the vaccine programme would break the link between cases and hospitalisations and deaths. They have lifted restrictions and want everyone back at work. It is hard to know what will happen at the time of writing. Independent Sage argues that this pandemic is far from over and that reliance on vaccines, and what one of the scientists called the medical-industrial complex, to replace public health measure and social solidarity, will be a disaster.

### **Medical-Industrial Complex**



There is no doubt that an effective vaccine is one of the keys to turning the virus into another version of the yearly flu. Scientists over the world rushed to develop one and within a year, several had been given the good ahead. This is impressive. It is partly due to the dedication of many scientists but one of the main motivating factors has been the potential for pharmaceutical companies to make big profits. Pfizer, the first to develop a vaccine, has made billions in revenue (<https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/features/pfizer-covid-19-vaccine-revenue/>). All the companies stand to make much more as the pandemic continues, new variants emerge and boosters are needed.

Governments have forked out billions to buy up vaccines, and the money to pay for this will have to come from somewhere- the usual source will be the working class. This medical-industrial complex has been a burden on health care for decades. Patents on important drugs push prices up beyond what many countries can afford and companies are quite happy to sue those who seek to develop cheaper, generic versions. Drugs and medical technology makes up a large portion of the NHS budget. Health care may be in public hands but the vital resources are not.

Companies objected strongly to any talk of waiving the patent rights on the Covid vaccine in order to make it more affordable. Companies were ready to manufacture more doses if they were given the 'recipe'. The US, Russia and China came out for an Intellectual Property Rights waiver in May, 2021, but as of yet the waiver has not been implemented and is still not supported by countries such as the UK and Germany despite the terrible need for cheap vaccines (<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-01242-1>).

The way vaccines have been developed and distributed means that there is a huge inequality. Nearly 85% of the COVID-19 vaccine doses administered to date have gone to people in high-income and upper middle-income countries. As of



May 2021, the countries with the lowest gross domestic product per capita had only 0.3% of the vaccine supply (See: <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2021/05/rich-countries-cornered-covid-19-vaccine-doses-four-strategies-right-scandalous> and <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations>).

## **The UK and reliance on the vaccine**

Though the UK put in a number of public health measures to halt the spread of the virus, it has become increasingly clear that the vaccine is seen as the main saviour, which fits with their ideology. The government wants to promote profit-making, technocratic solutions and individual responsibility. This means they can pass the blame onto individuals if things go wrong, rather than encouraging social solidarity and collective responsibility,

Despite the successes, there are many problems with relying on a vaccine programme to do the heavy lifting against Covid. It doesn't really work in completely stopping community transmission unless a large majority of the population is fully vaccinated. This includes children who can spread the disease (<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-00728-2>). There cannot be complete coverage for a number of reasons. Some people cannot safely be vaccinated and about 20% of people are off the public health radar, Black and other ethnic minorities are very mistrustful of the government and the health system and have had lower vaccine uptake. Also, we are soon going to see vaccine waning, which means that boosters will have to be given to millions. And, in any case, even if people are double jabbed, they can still get Covid, be hospitalised and die. The other problem is of course the possibility of new variants. As long as there are many people around who aren't vaccinated, the virus can mutate. This could be anywhere in the world and with the UK being such a centre of international travel, a new variant would soon turn up here.

## **Cost of the UK strategy**

It is possible that the government gamble of July 19th will appear to pay off. The vaccine has broken the link between cases and hospitalisation and death, but only partially. Scientists are reluctant to predict what will happen but many are pessimistic. Cases, deaths and hospitalisations in summer 2021 were higher than in summer 2020. So the autumn could bring

another surge. Even if this surge does not come about the cost of this strategy has been high. The UK has one of the highest death totals in the world, coming after much larger countries like the US, Brazil, India and Russia. Over 130,000 have died by the more conservative official estimate, the NHS is struggling to cope with Covid and the backlog of other cases, and the effects of Long Covid on the population are still not fully researched.

The UK strategy, as well as that of most other countries, has favoured the economy and profits over health through-out. No matter whether the government claims victory over the pandemic in the autumn, the overall result has been a disaster for the working class. And, any success we do have is due to the efforts of health and care workers, other key workers, and the solidarity and mutual aid shown by the majority of the population.

## **The NHS and social care system: workers make the difference**

The response of NHS workers to the health crisis has been heroic and their efforts have meant that many lives were saved. This work has been carried out within a system that has been underfunded and understaffed for decades. Care workers, some of the lowest paid workers in Britain, have been at the front of the battle. Many of these workers became ill themselves and figured high in the death statistic, along with other key workers. During the first lockdown, posters, banners etc proclaimed 'Thank you NHS' and politicians publically came out to join the clapping for the NHS public displays. This hypocrisy soon began to make workers angry- they needed PPE and more resources, including better pay, not claps. They might have won a 3% rather than a 1% pay increase as a result of protests, but this is still an insult. Meanwhile, care workers continue to be treated like dirt by the private care homes and the agencies that often employ them. It is not surprising that many workers are leaving the NHS. Many are at the end of their tether; giving their all during the first wave, then having to deal with the backlog of other cases, then having to do it all over again during the second big surge in January, is too much for many, especially if your wages are ridiculously low (<https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/nhs-delivery-and-workforce/pressures/pressure-points-in-the-nhs>).

The government has no intention of changing these policies. Waiting lists for many life-threatening conditions have mushroomed and many will die as a result. Those who can afford it are turning to the private sector, reinforcing what was already a two-tier health system. The pandemic is just accelerating a process that the government would like to happen anyway as part of their ideologically-driven privatisation strategy. If the government does put more money into the health service, it will come from taxes on the working class.

These efforts show that the successes of coping with the pandemic and the implementation of the vaccination programme are due to the effort of workers. When government failed to deliver on so many fronts, workers themselves sorted things out,





often with the help of local communities, such as the scrubs hubs that sprung up in many places (See Stormy Petrel No 2). Workers and communities must continue to look towards their own self-organisation if the next period is not going to bring more hardship and suffering. If we beat the pandemic, it will be despite the government.

## **Inequalities- all on the same ocean but not in the same boat**

The Covid pandemic has shown up very clearly the marked inequalities at the heart of the system. Though the virus did strike people from all social classes, eg Prince Charles and Boris Johnson, it has been the working class that has borne the brunt of the pandemic. Firstly, what became known as key workers, usually very low paid, had to continue working in order to deliver what were now officially recognised as essential services. Many became infected as a result and these sectors experienced a high proportion of deaths. Employers did nothing to ensure safety at work.

The occupations which could be done from home, were often (but not only) the higher paid ones, such as bankers, accountants, lawyers, who retained their high salaries and worked from the comfort of their spacious homes in places like Surrey. Others were able to benefit from the furlough scheme. Meanwhile, the low paid essential workers had to brave public transport and mix with the public. In addition, many low-paid and insecure workers did not get furloughed; they were just made redundant. Or, they were forced to carry on working in often unsafe conditions in order to continue earning a living, eg construction workers.

In theory, workplaces were meant to be made safe, but despite many complaints not one employer was prosecuted. Education workers have been some of the hardest hit. Though universities have largely been closed to face-to-face teaching, schools and nurseries have been open through much of the pandemic and it is in these workplaces that the virus has thrived.

Class inequalities were also apparent in other aspects of coping with the pandemic. The quality of living conditions has been an important factor in surviving the mental hardships. Those who live in small, cramped homes, with no garden have found it difficult to self-isolate and to look after children. The government promised laptops to help during school closures but these never materialised.

All in all, the poorer you are, the more likely you are to have suffered the negative consequences of Covid, including mental illness, financial difficulties, infection, and death.

## **Essential Workers**

It soon became apparent who are the important workers in a society- those that produce and distribute food, provide services such as health, social care, cleaning, transport, and education, produce vital items such as PPE, facemasks, and the vaccine itself, and maintain essential infrastructure. The ones we managed to do very well without are the bankers, the accountants, the managers, the lawyers,

and the politicians! They were all 'working from home' while front line workers just had to get on with it. What does it tell us about capitalism when work which is essential is so badly paid while so much work that is useless and even destructive reaps huge financial rewards?

Though there was the usual lip service of thanks to these "key workers", like with NHS staff, there was no rush to reward these workers for the vital work they did. Trivial bonuses were given in some cases but largely the level of exploitation was maintained and if anything increased. Many workers didn't even have adequate sick pay and struggled to self-isolate. Meanwhile, the rich actually got richer! Many companies have made a fortune out of the crisis, such as Amazon, the supermarkets and pharmaceuticals. In general there has been a redistribution of wealth from the bottom to the top during the pandemic (See: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/mega-rich-recoup-covid-losses-record-time-yet-billions-will-live-poverty-least>, <https://time.com/5974430/wealth-tax-covid-19/>, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/wealth-gap-year/>).

Nevertheless, it will not be the wealthy, the large corporations and landowners, or the offshore bank accounts, that will be paying the cost of the crisis. As the government begins to look at how to recover the costs of measures such as furlough, support for business, the loss of tax income, they will certainly try and reimpose austerity, which will have a disproportionate effect on the lowest paid- in other words the very workers who have carried the burden of work.

## **Gender, Race, Disability and Age**



Within the working class there have been further disadvantages for particular social groups. Black, Asian and other ethnic minority groups have been at greater risk of Covid throughout the pandemic (See: [https://www.independentsage.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Independent-SAGE-BME-Report\\_02July\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.independentsage.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Independent-SAGE-BME-Report_02July_FINAL.pdf)). This is partly due to the fact that these groups are concentrated in the lower paid jobs that are most risky but also more general institutional racism factors play a role.

Though men have been more likely to die of Covid, many women have been affected because of the work they do. Autonomy (<https://autonomy.work/>) notes that out of 3.2 million workers employed in the highest-risk roles, about 2.5 million are women. As many as a million of those workers – who are

considered to be at highest risk because they normally work closely with the public and people with diseases and infections – are also among the lowest paid. For example, 89% of nurses and 84% of care workers are women.

Women are also less likely to be able to work from home and are also in jobs that have suffered from the lockdown, such as the hospitality industry (See: <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200409-why-covid-19-is-different-for-men-and-women>). During the school closures, women had to do the bulk of the home schooling often having to carry on their job as well. In addition, women are more likely to have the role of carer to elderly relatives.

As with the elderly, disabled people are not valued by capitalism- they do not contribute to profits. Disabled people have suffered disproportionately during the pandemic. It is difficult to work out what is happening because of the use of the term “underlying conditions”. Following official Government advice basically split disabled people into two groups, those that are vulnerable and those that are “extremely” vulnerable, with only the latter being considered at risk.

Many of these will be considered disabled, others will not be. According to one study disabled people accounted for 59% of Covid deaths (<https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/blogs/the-forgotten-crisis-exploring-the-disproportionate-impact-of-the-pandemic>).

By focusing on underlying conditions, the inequalities of disability have been marginalised. The issues facing the disabled are not just directly related to health but also to the general difficulties of accessing support and the effect of the pandemic on isolation and mental stress. It has been very difficult to get about during lockdown as well as risky given the high case prevalence. (See: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)00625-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)00625-5/fulltext)). A recent straw survey by Disabled People Organisations (DPOs) showed that the vast majority of disabled people feel they have been left on “lockdown” while everyone else enjoys “getting back to normal.

Age has been one of the main areas of inequality. The over 70s make up the bulk of the deaths. At the beginning of the pandemic, Johnson referred to herd immunity- letting people get infected in order to build up immunity in the population as a whole. If the elderly and other vulnerable people died as a result, that was an acceptable price to pay. This attitude has continued in many ways. Deaths may have fallen since the various peaks but people are still dying, and it is mostly the elderly. For the government, the lives of the elderly are not so important- they don’t contribute to the economy, they are a burden on society. If it was the under 20s that had been the main age group effected, there would have been a very different response.

However, in many ways the health of younger age groups has also been ignored. Because younger age groups are less likely to get seriously ill, they have been allowed to mix in environments that are rife with the virus, ie schools. We have little idea of the potential consequences of Long Covid to their health.

Covid has therefore shown a spotlight on the inequalities of our society, embedded in capitalism and other oppressive systems, and reinforced by the State.

## Access to Green Space and Inequality



Access to green spaces became a vital part of people keeping sane during the lockdowns. Going out for a daily walk was one thing people could do and many began to realise the benefits of contact with nature for mental health. However, like with everything else, there were huge inequalities, with the wealthiest having the most access and the poorest, which includes many from ethnic minority groups, the least.

The very wealthy have huge estates giving them miles and miles of land to roam. Rural Surrey and Kent are scattered with houses with immense grounds and woods and hills in which to wander at their doorstep. The city, where most of the working class live, is another matter. Taking the statistic- UK housing (including private gardens) occupies only 5% of the country’s land mass, and with a large part of the 5% taken up by big properties of the well-off, it means that the rest of us are squeezed into a very small area indeed. Many are piled on top of each other with no garden or even balcony. A study has shown that private gardens make up more than a third of the area in the wealthiest London wards but just a fifth in the poorest (<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/apr/10/coronavirus-park-closures-hit-bame-and-poor-londoners-most>).

Those in working class areas will often struggle to find green spaces and if they do, they will often be crowded because there is not enough space to go around. The wealthiest wards had the greatest proportion of public space on average at 35% compared to 25% in the most deprived (<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/apr/10/coronavirus-park-closures-hit-bame-and-poor-londoners-most>).

## No one is safe until we are all safe

One of the main problem is that countries did not seem to learn from each other. The presence of the virus in Italy and Spain provided an ideal opportunity for the UK and other countries to learn from their experience. Instead, many governments were determined to manage the pandemic in their own way- keen to show their superior leadership and competence. In the UK’s case, this backfired. The UK has ended up having one of the worst death rates in



the world. The success of the suppression strategy adopted by New Zealand, Australia, Taiwan, China, Vietnam, and others, was completely dismissed, even though the success of that strategy soon became apparent.

International organisations such as the WHO struggled to unite everyone around a common set of policies (<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-un-int-idUSKBN28D2NN>). Despite early warnings, most countries took months to take action. In the case of the UK, the government has continued to ignore WHO advice, such as ensuring that an effective find, track, trace, isolate, and support system is in place.

If countries had worked more closely together, the spread of the virus could have been quickly contained.

The development of the vaccine has shown nationalism at its worst. We have already seen how pharmaceutical companies have looked after their own interests. Rather than international co-ordination, we saw individual companies racing to be the first to produce a vaccine- often with the support of a particular government. We now have at least five different vaccines. If there was more co-operation then maybe we could have developed one that was better than each one individually.

Nationalism also comes into the picture as countries, or blocks like the EU, compete to get hold of the limited amount of vaccines that are on offer. The UK has ordered enough vaccines to inoculate the population twice- that is two sets of the necessary two doses. Meanwhile, other parts of the world are being left without. If patents were waived, it would be a different story but given the scarcity, the rich countries have the money to grab up all the available doses.

According to Professor Costello of Independent Sage:

“Further, global vaccination is progressing very badly, with just 13.7 per cent of people fully vaccinated worldwide, and only 1.6 per cent in Africa. The world’s 27 poorest countries have received just 0.3 per cent of vaccine doses worldwide.



Most countries helped by the Covax system – the World Health Organisation’s vaccine initiative – depend heavily on the AstraZeneca jab manufactured by the Serum Institute of India. But India has blocked exports of the vaccine. Official death rates conceal the scale of the growing disaster among unvaccinated populations. In India alone, a new study estimates excess deaths to be in the range of 3.4 million to 4.7 million – about ten times higher than the country’s official Covid-19 death toll.” (<https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2021/07/we-cannot-escape-threat-covid-19-until-we-vaccinate-world>).

Nevertheless, scientists have made every effort to keep in touch on an international level. When Johnson announced “Freedom Day”, scientists and health staff wrote a letter of opposition and a gathering was organised of scientists from around the world to discuss the global danger to health posed by Johnson’s reckless policies (See: <https://www.independentsage.org/independent-sage-response-to-the-government-moving-to-step-4-of-the-roadmap-on-19th-july/>). This is the kind of international co-operation we also need to see with climate change- scientists working across borders to limit the devastation.

Many are using the slogan: No one is safe until we are all safe. Various campaigns have been set up to support patent waivers so that it is easier for all countries to access the vaccine (see: <https://peoplesvaccine.org/> and <https://zerocovid.uk/2021/05/16/solidarity-with-india-and-the-fight-for-a-peoples-vaccine/>).

## The Media

On the whole, the mainstream media has been next to useless in challenging government policy and providing relevant information about the pandemic. We have been given the impression that the virus is everywhere and this has led to increased paranoia. The fact that the virus was spreading mainly in the workplaces, including educational establishments, was ignored. It took groups like Independent Sage, the Hazard Campaign and No Safety, No Work to do the research and expose the real source of the problem. Other serious inadequacies were also not highlighted, such as the completely ineffective track and trace system which provided no financial and social support for those meant to self-isolate. The general appalling situation the health and care workers found themselves was downplayed and instead we had to listen to the empty rhetoric of politicians. This got worse as the pandemic went into the second and third surge- with the media focusing on the hardships for business.

Anti-lockdown protests got more publicity than any fightback at work, but then the capitalist media has always ignored workplace resistance. The basic facts were ignored- such as how those countries which dealt seriously with the pandemic at the beginning and managed to suppress it, were actually having less lockdowns. Lockdowns were represented as a curtailment of freedom rather than as public health measures that involved social solidarity. But really, it was the freedom of business that the government was

largely concerned with thought there was an ideological element as well. This featured strongly in media reports. Finding more accurate information and analysis was difficult. Independent Sage did their best with weekly briefings but the audience was largely sympathetic already to a Zero Covid strategy. Most people would rely on government briefings, the BBC- which largely toed the government line, and the tabloids such as the Daily Mail.

The general message then was a confused one, as the media followed the various turns of the government. They have done their best to ensure that the facts about the consequences of UK policy are downplayed-like having one of the worst world death tolls. When cases rose in Dec and January, it was all blamed on the new variant and people's behaviour. After July 19th, cases remained high, above 20,000 a day, but the fact that they had come down from an even higher number was what was stressed with headlines like "Cases fall for sixth day in a row!" But when reporting on other countries, headlines talked about surges of cases. During the Olympics in Japan, cases went up to over 2,000 a day and this was stressed by the media as something awful, forgetting that the UK had 20 times that number.

The constant focus on vaccine roll-out also hid what was going on. Yes, the vaccine programme was a real success, but the media was happy to give the government the credit, rather than showing how public health staff at a local level were the ones responsible. People continued to get infected and to die but this was not the 'good' news the government wanted to stress.

Social media had a mixed effect. As with all social media, people tend to gravitate to those sites which support views they already have. For those looking for information on workplace safety issues or what is going on in the NHS, there are useful sites. However, those who came out early on against lockdown and the vaccine, had their own sites and often spread misinformation, and even bullied and harassed NHS staff.

## **The response of the social movements**

The nature of the pandemic, the fact that it is so easily transmissible, made it very difficult for people to organise the usual street protests (except of course those who thought it was all a conspiracy!) People were either too caught up in frontline work to have time to do anything but get through the day or were at home, cut off from their fellow workers. Nevertheless, it was disappointing to see a lack of effective opposition to the government's strategy. The Labour Party and its policy of critical support, really was just tail ending the government. The trade unions provided a lot of good information about how to deal with Covid at work, for example, the need for risk assessment, but pretty much left it to individual workplaces rather than launching a national Covid safety campaign, backed up by strike action. Trawls of the internet, including union sites and the union-backed Hazards Campaign, found next to no coverage of any local actions. The education sector in particular has been a big disappointment. Staff, parents and students were aware from last September that



education was one of main places Covid was spreading. The government could have used the summer to put in mitigation measures, but did nothing. And though local staff and parents groups did their best, without a national campaign and support from the unions, it is difficult to be very effective, as the changes needed to make schools and colleges safe were extensive. In Scotland, most people were actually very supportive of Sturgeon's leadership, so opposition was kept to a minimum. There was some action from the main teaching union- the EIS- but most efforts were confined to writing letters to the government.

The fact that the anti-lockdown, anti-vaccine movement was so large was also a disappointment. Yes, many of those who supported it were conspiracy theorists a few sandwiches short of a full picnic, but others were ordinary people as well as some anarchists, who found the authoritarian nature of the lockdown and corporate and technocratic domination of the vaccine, hard to swallow. We can understand this but have a different perspective based on collective responsibility and social solidarity. In addition, though well aware of the dangers of capitalist science, we are not anti-science. We need to retain a rational perspective and support for the scientific method- looking at and questioning things based on evidence, not rumour-mongering on social media. Stories are now emerging of even the most unlikely people dying because they had not been vaccinated (See: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/covid-vaccine-antivax-alabama-family-death-b1890600.html>, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-56922517>, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/covid-vaccine-hesitant-john-eyers-dies-b1896650.html>). Groups like the scientists in Independent Sage have been a beacon of common sense throughout the pandemic- countering the strategy of government and providing evidence for their own strategy and support for the vaccine. Lockdown was an unfortunate term that only reinforced legitimate concerns about authoritarianism. The police often used it as a pretext for stopping protests, like Black Lives Matter. Funny that there was so little enforcement of safety violations in the workplace! It was necessary to put in place public health measures, and many of these were just common sense. In fact, the government did not



put in enough public health measures. There needed to be support for people to self-isolate, a strong position on facemasks places like schools, and a crackdown on unsafe workplaces.

As anarchist communists we argued in an article in the autumn,

Anarchist communists believe in self-organisation. We do not follow rules because the government says we have to, we follow rules that we ourselves have collectively developed. It is this that lies at the heart of the problem with lockdown; rules have been imposed on people without a sense of them arising from people themselves. They do not come from the experience of people in the community and the workplace but are developed with other agendas in mind. This has resulted in confusing and contradictory messages and has created a general mess, leading to many ignoring guidelines, whether that be individuals, workplaces or other institutions.

And,

All these ideas are based on the basic anarchist communist principles of self-organisation, solidarity and mutual aid. We don't need the government to tell us what to do, nor do we have to go against our own common sense just because the government wants to keep the economy going. Of course, it is hard for people to do what is best when they are in precarious positions at work. This is why class organisation and struggle is the vital element in any strategy.

Full article: <https://www.anarchistcommunism.org/2020/11/17/covid-lockdown-rules-and-anarchist-communism/>

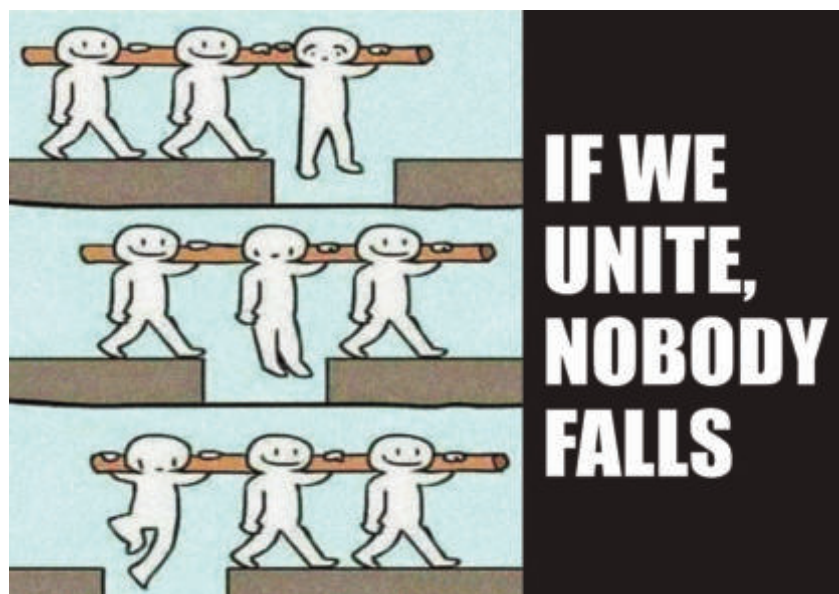
## Inspiration for the future

Despite everything, we can point to a number of positive features of the response of the working class to the pandemic. During the first lockdown, mutual aid groups were organised all over the UK- in cities, towns and villages. People self-organised to look after their less-able or more vulnerable neighbours by doing shopping and running errands. More ambitious projects were set up, including the making of scrubs for NHS staff- so by-passing the inadequacies of the market and the government who were unable to provide what was needed.

A number of food initiatives sprung up as people sought to be more self-reliant and not rely on the supermarkets. Granville Community Kitchen (<https://granvillecommunitykitchen.wordpress.com/>), seeking to buy direct from producers where possible, has organised food aid through-out. Community gardens have been established, for example Crops not Shops (<https://cropsnotshops.com/>). Self-organised food growing and distribution is bringing growers and eaters together, challenging the current toxic food system of industrial agriculture and big supermarkets. These initiatives have carried on and multiplied, showing how people can self-organise to meet their own basic needs.

There were actions in the workplace, not just directly over Covid safety but over the indirect consequences of the pandemic as employers sought to claw back money lost by making workers' pay, such as fire and rehire, redundancies and pension cuts. The United Voices of the World (UVW) organised a number of workplaces that were suffering direct and indirect effects. Cleaners at the prestigious La Retraite Roman Catholic Girls' school in South London won a 24% pay rise, full sick pay in line with teaching staff and the repayment of lost wages following an earlier Section 44 walk out over health and safety concerns. The outsourced, entirely migrant, workforce had begun a 40 Day 'Lenten' strike (40 days and 40 nights) on March 16th whilst their union threatened to sue the employer for institutional racism over their flouting of the 2010 Equalities Act with regard sick pay. The school, no doubt concerned over its public image, buckled.

The contrast with the main unions could not be more apparent. As the UVW says: "Most workers in low-paid and precarious work are either unorganised or 'organised' in trade unions that are happy to take their membership subs but have little interest in fighting for better conditions and equality. The union, for these workers, is a distant 'service' that does nothing unless pushed. It is the opposite of the workers' self-organisation that is needed to stage a successful fightback, whether at a local or global level" (<https://rebelcitylondon.wordpress.com/2021/03/22/time-to-organise-time-to-win-victory-for-cleaners-can-inspire-future-battles/>).





However, there were a number of struggles in the mainstream unions, pushed forward by the workers themselves. The strike at the DVLA has been raging for months as their employer, the government, refuses to let them work from home despite hundreds of Covid cases at work. British Gas workers have also been fighting against fire and rehire. Strike Map (<https://strike-map.wordpress.com/>) has done a brilliant job of showing where workers are taking local action, a necessary supplement to the lack of info in the media and even on some union websites.

The NHS staff have also mobilised, somehow finding the time to fight for the pay increase they deserve. This is only the beginning of what will be a long struggle. The grievances of health care staff are mounting up and the anger seething under the surface will not remain controlled for long.

Campaigns such as No Safety, No Work, set up by members of the ACG and others organised public meetings that brought workers together from different industries, such as the NHS, education, and British Gas, in order to share experiences. They also produced a number of stickers which were aimed at getting the message out to a wider public about Covid safety and solidarity. Such campaigns are vital because they do not focus on just one industry or workplace, and are able to take a more general anti-capitalist and anti-State perspective (See: [www.nosafetynowork.org](http://www.nosafetynowork.org)).

## The Lessons: Conclusion

### Capitalism

The origins of the pandemic itself, the result of viruses in animals jumping over to humans, is based on the capitalist search for profits as corporations rush to exploit land in remote areas for logging, mining, cattle ranching, and soybean and palm oil production. The encouragement of consumer culture has created unprecedented demand among the well-off around the world, and aspirations for American-levels of

consumption from others. Capitalism demands continued growth to survive. Alternative voices which prioritise redistribution of the immense wealth already available and a focus on creating lifestyles based on community and harmony with the environment struggle to be heard (See: <https://www.greenbeltmovement.org/wangari-maathai>).

Government responses to the pandemic were also driven by the need to maintain profits for business and keep the economy going. Again and again we have seen surges in infections as governments rush to open up at the slightest sign of any improvement. The way the vaccine was developed by big pharmaceutical companies, reaping huge profits, has meant that most of the world has not been vaccinated. Not only is this morally objectionable but leaving huge swathes of the planet's population unvaccinated during a global pandemic undermines the vaccination programme everywhere.

The pandemic has shown clearly that human and environmental health are not priorities for capitalism. It cannot be changed so clearly it has to go if we are to survive.

### The State

As anarchist communists we seek to abolish the State and the pandemic has given us plenty of evidence for the correctness of our position. Firstly, the State's main goal is to actually prop up capitalism and provide the environment for business to thrive. UK government policy has been directed to that end, though they have had to make some effort to keep deaths down under pressure, in theory abandoning herd immunity as a strategy. They had to at least control the virus in order to ensure that there were enough people to do the necessary work.

Despite the rhetoric of concern for the NHS, increased resources were negligible and instead £37 billion was spent on an ineffective track and trace system that lined the pockets of their business chums.



We saw ideological and strategic variation across the world, with some countries pursuing a Zero Covid strategy, aiming for suppression of the virus rather than just mitigation. In the end, this proved to be a more effective one even in terms of an economic logic. Johnson's ideological stance was such that he was unwilling to introduce the needed public health measures which would have suppressed the virus by last summer.

Government incompetence was extensive with deadly results. If workers themselves had been listened to and given the resources, we would not be in the situation we are in today. One of the highest death rates in the world cannot just be explained away by blaming individual behaviour or new variants.

Some might see the fact that some governments were better at handling the pandemic than others as evidence that the State doesn't have to be abolished, only reformed- made more responsive to the needs of the working class. Though the Covid situation certainly improved in the US when Biden replaced Trump, it is still only a partial improvement. All governments will continue to put the interests of capital before those of the working class and an effective Covid-repression strategy is in the interests of capital. The fact that workers will be better off as well is incidental. And we have only begun to see the full impact on the working class in terms of who pays. The rich have got richer during the pandemic and no State will be forcing them to hand over their windfall profits to pay for the huge costs of Covid.

We are currently not in control of our society and are dependent on the State. Instead of being able to take action and organise things for ourselves we have to make demands on the State. Depending on how well-organised we are, it is possible to force governments to make some concessions But that is all we will ever achieve without getting rid of the State. The pandemic shows that we do have the potential to self-organise and become more independent. We were able to show solidarity to the vulnerable, follow the public health guidelines that we deemed important, produce PPE for NHS workers, organise food growing and distribution, and provide practical mutual aid to those in need. This self-organisation needs to be developed and extended, without for a moment easing the pressure on the State to provide the services we need.

### **Inequalities and injustices of the system**

The rhetoric of "we are all in this together" was soon shown to be a sham. The pandemic revealed deep class inequalities as well as inequalities within the class: race, gender, ability and age. The working class and many oppressed groups have suffered disproportionately throughout, financially, physically, and mentally. The huge divisions in society should be obvious to all- there is no sense in which the ruling class and its supporters in government are ever going to change. The coming period will see massive attacks on the working class and we must be prepared to fight back.

The pandemic has also made it clear what kinds of work are actually of value to society. Health and social care, transport and other services, food production, looking after children at school or at home, are all

examples of essential work which is undervalued by capitalism. And, these jobs are often done by women and/or people of colour, revealing important underlying inequalities.

### **Creating a revolutionary movement**

We are in a weak position. Despite the impressive examples of resistance, the working class response was largely ineffective due to the unwillingness of the mainstream trade unions to mount a campaign of action. And of course, many workers are in insecure and precarious jobs where it was difficult to do anything. To make matters worse, the sense of solidarity that characterised the activities of many, was not universal. The anti-lockdown movement put their individual personal freedom (wearing a mask is such a big imposition!) above any concern for those that would get infected and even die as a result. This movement emerged from the right, another aspect of their nationalistic, racist and generally myopic views, but the pandemic revealed that the left and those claiming to be anarchists harbour their share of conspiraloons. To build up a working class resistance, these ideas will have to be challenged.

There have been a number of examples of effective organising which can inspire us in the struggles ahead. These include the initial mutual aid movement, food-growing projects, scrub hubs, Black Lives Matters protests and numerous workplace struggles. Some of the best examples are coming from unions like the United Voices of the World, where effective workplace action goes hand in hand with an inclusive and internationalist ethos. We have the basis for a revolutionary movement but there are many challenges ahead of us. The key to success is to ensure that our strategy is based on class organisation and struggle.



### **The big issues: the future of humanity**

Anarchist communists believe that without a completely new society, which we call anarchist communism- a society without capitalism, the State and hierarchies, humanity may very well be doomed. The desperate immediate situation means that most of us have not been able to step back and look at the bigger picture. Firstly, this pandemic will not be a one-off. Others are waiting to happen given the

exploitative relationship humans have with animals and the natural world. Capitalism has brought the underlying potential dangers to the surface. And we forget about climate change and the disastrous loss of biodiversity and habitats which undermine humans' very presence on earth. Again, capitalism and the growth economy has accelerated this process by plundering the earth for all available resources. One would have thought, and many did at the beginning, that the experience of the pandemic would inspire a new way of living- one with more mutual aid and solidarity and respect for the environment. But this optimism was lost very quickly; we were soon back to business as usual with governments keen to get us all spending again. The encouragement of air travel is a prime example of the complete disregard for climate change. Fossil fuel exploitation, logging and deforestation, have continued throughout the pandemic. In the desperation to get profits back up for business, climate change will take a back seat for some time to come.

The next period will see people largely focusing on coping with attacks from government and employers as they seek to make the working class pay the cost of Covid. The NHS struggles are only just getting going- the impact of the pandemic on all aspects of the health service has been devastating. Workers are facing threats to wages, conditions, and pensions. They are increasingly being threatened by hire and rehire schemes as a way for employers to save money. Much of our time will be spent fighting these economic battles. We need to make sure that the working class is united so that we can support each other and make sure that the worst off are thoroughly supported. We need solidarity and mutual aid rather than everyone fighting their own corner in one workplace, union, or disadvantaged social group. The whole nature of work needs to be questioned. This became apparent in the pandemic when we could see clearly what work is actually important. This is very difficult to do, because people understandably do not want to give up jobs- even if those jobs are alienating and harmful to themselves and the rest of the planet.

It is up to those who can see the bigger picture, to continue to raise the need for revolution. We cannot continue to focus just on the immediate issues facing us, seeking to merely avert the worst of the attacks and claim a few crumbs. We need to be challenging the whole system- or else the unfolding health and environmental crises could well make this humanity's last century. This is difficult to do. People will often say we need 'systemic' change but what this means in practice is unclear. Nor is it clear how we get to the point where a rupture with the system is possible.

## **A strategy?**

Using our experience of the pandemic, which forced many people to restrict their lives to their immediate surroundings- their home, neighbours, community, and green space- might help us develop a strategy. It is in a specific place, around issues that we can experience for ourselves, that movements for much bigger changes are created. By focusing on the places where we live, challenging developers, creating alternative social spaces and food growing initiatives, fighting for better and cheaper housing, expanding green space and places for nature, people will be able to relate to the big global issues that are played out in their area.

Nevertheless, a wider perspective is essential- as the changes needed are both huge and interdependent. We cannot get rid of inessential and harmful work if there are no jobs for people to go to. The reasons there are problems in a particular place are because of decisions made in corporate boardrooms, or the result of market forces that ensure profit is the main criteria shaping places. A strategy therefore may be based in a place- a community, a workplace- but it will need to be firmly embedded in an international perspective.

Though climate change is also a global issue, the pandemic was much more immediate and personal. Everyone could not help but be aware of the fact that we are interconnected and that what happens in one place on the other side of the globe affects us in the UK. This means that there is potential to develop more internationally-focused movements. The slogan "we are not safe until everyone is safe" has become part of the thinking of many. Though they lack teeth, there are campaigns for solidarity and for a people's vaccine, supported by internationally-minded scientists. Though people got fed up with internet meetings, the scope for having international meetings was a very positive feature of the pandemic. Campaigns based in the UK could have participation from similar campaigns in other countries, enriching the content of many meetings. The Oxford Real Farming Conference in January 2021 saw the biggest ever coming together of growers and grass roots campaigns from around the world- providing an amazing variety of inspirational ideas and actions. We in the ACG were able to meet up with comrades in New Zealand, Australia and Latin America.

The Covid-19 pandemic has been the defining event of the last two years, embedded in the general environmental crisis. The future depends on the extent to which we can build on the positive aspects of the grass roots response and create a movement that goes beyond immediate concerns and demands to one that will lead us to a fundamental rupture with capitalism and to an anarchist communist society.





## Resources

The ACG has produced regular updates, both articles and podcasts, on the Covid pandemic, including information and analysis and news of resistance.

- See our website: [www.anarchistcommunism.com](http://www.anarchistcommunism.com).
- We also produced a pamphlet looking at the origin of the pandemic in the capitalist-dominated food and resource extraction system.
- To order see: <https://www.anarchistcommunism.org/product/food-health-capitalism-covid-19-beyond/>
- The No Safety, No Work campaign website has news and analysis, information on how to get support, as well as resources and lists of contacts. [www.nosafetynowork.org](http://www.nosafetynowork.org).
- Independent Sage has led the way with regular weekly briefings and in-depth reports on key issues. <https://www.independentsage.org/>

## No Safety No Work! The Fight Continues

The pandemic is far from over but the government is desperate to pretend it is in order to get the economy going. This means that workers will be forced to return to work, often with worse pay and conditions, and will lose furlough. Schools, colleges and universities in England are planning on opening with no safety measures in place, threatening both staff and students.

Over 130,000 people have died in this pandemic, and additionally many die in the work place every year. None of these deaths were inevitable but were the results of the greed of the bosses and the rulers of our society. As more and more people are returning to work, the government has not passed a single law guaranteeing workers safety but has issued guidance to employers. This is not enough to keep us safe. We also fight for measures that make it possible for people to make choices about going to work: safe transport, furlough, ban on evictions.

If you have a problem at work or want to get involve contact: [safere@riseup.net](mailto:safere@riseup.net). Have a look at the website for news of fightbacks and resources such as advice, leaflets and stickers: <https://nosafetynowork.wordpress.com>



# The Green New Deal: a fake solution to the climate crisis



The Green New Deal (GND) has gained traction both here and in the United States, as a touted solution to the worsening threat of climate change.

The GND originated in the United States where a leading 'left' Democrat, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (usually known as AOC), proposed a Green New Deal Bill. This called for a fully decarbonised economy by the year 2030. It received the backing of fellow left Democrat Bernie Sanders. AOC called for 70% taxation on the rich to fund a transition to such a decarbonised economy. When it was introduced into the US Senate in March 2019 it failed to gain the support of any Senator. Since then, the election of Biden has seen his administration adopt some aspects of the GND.

The GND bases itself on the New Deal of the 1930s in the USA as implemented by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. In order to pull themselves out of the economic crisis that had led to mass unemployment and great hardship, some sections of the capitalist class were prepared to accept a certain amount of State intervention, with various projects like the Works Progress Administration and the Public Works Administration, which engaged in tasks like the building of dams and transport systems, hiring many unemployed workers in the process.

The GND seeks to provide funding to stop extreme weather conditions and to provide resources for refugees of climate change.

The GND was enthusiastically supported by various environmental movements like Greenpeace and the Sunrise Movement. The latter organisation interpreted the GND as a radical break with the market economy. It called for the creation of "millions of good, high wage jobs"

through State investment and the guarantee of "wage and benefit parity for workers in the transition". As noted above Biden incorporated some elements of the GND into his Climate Plan when he assumed the US Presidency. These included funding for climate jobs and considerations of equity and environmental justice.

One aspect of the GND advocated by AOC and co. is its idea that the USA will be "the international leader on climate action." There is no call for cooperation with other countries to bring environmental change. Instead the GND calls for "investments to spur economic development" through public funds. So the State would further subsidise those companies already responsible to a great degree for climate change in the first place. The GND shows its concerns that climate change acts as a destabilising agent in the world order created by the USA. Rather than offering internationalist solutions, the GND looks towards maintaining US hegemony. The answer to the climate crisis cannot be found with essentially nationalist solutions, but with a truly international mobilisation that is controlled by the global masses.

The idea of the GND was taken up all around the world, for example in Canada and the Green New Deal for Europe plan. In April 2020, the European Parliament called for the including of a European Green Deal in its recovery programme from the COVID pandemic. The Green New Deal for Europe was put forward as an alternative plan in order to "...redress Europe's colonial past, providing reparations to communities that suffer from centuries of European pollution and ensuring that we do not outsource extraction to the global South."



## GND gains momentum

In Britain the GND idea was taken up by the Green Party of England and Wales and elements inside the Labour Party. The Decarbonisation and Economic Strategy Bill was introduced to Parliament by the Green MP Caroline Lucas and the Labour MP Clive Lewis before the 2019 election and declared as its aims the reduction of emissions, the restoration of nature, the reduction of inequality and increased well-being. In effect it was a GND Bill. There was also activity inside the Labour Party around the same time which organised around Labour for a Green New Deal, gaining the support of the Corbynite support group Momentum. With this development came a call for environmental activists to concentrate their efforts of working inside Labour. One of Labour for a Green New Deal's founders, Claire Hymer, insisted that Labour "was the 'only viable political vehicle for something like a GND, meaning the usual long slow march through the institutions by 'building support for bolder climate justice policy within Labour branches and unions across the country'".

Labour launched consultations for a 'Green Industrial Revolution' and the think tank Common Wealth published plans for such a GND. This would be a green industrial revolution controlled by workers, with renewable energies powering the national grid, and electric public transport systems. There would be the creation of affordable homes that were energy efficient. Only socially useful products would be manufactured, there would be full employment with shorter hours (a four day week) and higher wages and greater control of workplaces by workers. There would be a low-carbon way of life for everyone, and the transition to renewable energy would not involve the exploitation of resources outside the Western developed economies.

This enticing vision does not match up to capitalist reality, unfortunately. The GND relies on continuing growth, in line with the tendency of capitalism towards increased production. But this economic growth cannot be separated from increases in energy use and the mining and exploitation of materials. It merely legitimises the search for profit by the boss class in a world hurtling towards the breakdown of the climate.

Renewable energy is not the answer to climate change. A transformed capitalist economy powered by renewable energies would still be a capitalist economy, one that continues to inflict damage on the environment.

Renewable energy means high use of land. For example if Britain relied completely on solar energy, 30% of available land would be needed. This would have disastrous effects on biodiversity and there would be a clash between the use of land for energy production or for food production (forget about rewilding and wilderness). Factored in to this are the limits of mineral reserves, needed for the development of renewable energies.



The be all and end all of capitalism is infinite growth. It needs fossil fuel consumption, it needs to exploit the mineral resources of the Global South. This need to expand production infinitely means the exhaustion of finite resources and the creation of increasing mountains of waste and of pollutants with their grievous effects on the planet.

This has resulted in the massive rise in carbon emissions and the resultant global warming.

If the capitalist economy cannot grow, it faces recessions, the closing of businesses and increasing unemployment. The ruling class and the State cannot sustain economic growth and deal with climate change at the same time. Some capitalists might accept investment in renewable energies and infrastructures but they will not allow a green transformation that abolishes the use of fossil fuels within ten years or less.

The GND fails to confront this situation. It believes it can handle continuing growth by using ethical standards, and talks about full employment. This is in a society where millions of people are in jobs that are completely socially useless, creating products and services that exist just to perpetuate the profit system. Capitalism is not founded on ethical considerations, profit is the driving force. There can be no such thing as 'green growth'. Capitalism deliberately fosters over consumption to maintain its profit levels.

Capitalism has relied on fossil fuels to expand and re-create itself. They can be mined, stockpiled and used for energy 24 hours of the day. They are able to be transported and are not localised like power from windmills or dammed rivers. Their use is an intrinsic part of capitalism. The main cause of global warming is the continuous use of fossil fuels.



One of a number of protests in South America against the mining of lithium for use in batteries

## Green technology

To create the so-called green technology necessary for a Green New Deal, that is for example, solar panels, wind turbines and electric batteries, requires a number of raw minerals. The principal minerals required are cobalt, nickel and lithium. As well as these, this 'green' technology depends on huge amounts of steel, copper and silver. The main source of these minerals is the Global South. That includes South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, Chile, Argentina and China. A development of "green" technology would mean a massive increase in the mining of these raw materials. The mining industries involved in the extraction of these minerals are notorious for the treatment of their workers and their degradation of local environments.

It has been pointed out by various journalists, for example Asad Rehman in the Independent, that this means 'green colonialism'. It would maintain the colonial relations between Global North and South. As Rehman notes, "The OECD's Global Resources Outlook to 2060, modelled on an annual 2.8 per cent global growth in GDP, estimates that extracted resources would increase from 79 to 167 billion tonnes. This is a 111 per cent increase overall with a 150 per cent increase in metals and a 135 per cent increase in minerals. Resource extraction is responsible for 50 per cent of global emissions, with minerals and metal mining responsible for 20 per cent of emissions even before the manufacturing stage. And behind each tonne of extraction is a story of contamination and depletion of water, destruction of habitats, deforestation, poisoning of land, health impacts on workers and hundreds of environmental conflicts – including the murder of two environmental defenders each and every week" (Independent 4/5/2019).

Another problem with the various GNDs is the question of the State. All the GNDs rely on State implementation of green policies. However the State is intrinsically linked with capitalism. Between them they are responsible for climate change in the first place. Such institutions cannot solve problems they created.

Some more radical interpreters of the GND have attempted to put a greater stress on reparations for colonial injustices (Vijay Kolinjivadi) or in arguing for a radical GND that links to millions of people "organizing, striking and marching, shaping politics and the economy from below" to bring this about. But despite this linking to extra-parliamentary action even a radical GND remains a scheme linked to the actions of the State and the capitalist class. As we have seen, in the USA this means working through the party structure of the Democrats, and in Britain through that of the Labour Party. This is a recipe for demobilisation of grass roots struggle, as has clearly been seen with the recent Corbynite phenomenon which has ended in debacle. These parties are there to contain, sabotage and disperse any grassroots movements mobilising for social and environmental change. The Democratic Party in America is the favoured Party of many elements in the American ruling class, and of the military and security establishments (FBI, CIA). It has been a major agent of the imposition of austerity in the USA.

Richard Smith, a socialist within the left group within the Democratic Party, the Democratic Socialists of America, attempts to critique AOC's Green New Deal from the left. "What's not said is that decarbonisation has to translate into shutdowns and retrenchments of actual companies. How does one decarbonise ExxonMobil or Chevron or Peabody Coal? To decarbonise them is to bankrupt them. Further, the same is true for many downstream industrial consumers...." The solution for him is the nationalisation of these companies through State buyout. Smith realises that the GND is not based on a fundamental understanding that an infinitely growing economy is no longer possible on a finite planet", and the need for de-growth including the abolition of the toxic pesticides industries, the throw-away disposables industries (like for example, plastic wrapping and plastic containers) to the arms industry.

For Smith, nationalisation must go beyond the companies mentioned above and have to include the car industry, aviation, plastics, construction, shipping, tourism etc., all those industries relying on





fossil fuels. Smith admits that “It’s difficult to imagine how this could be done within the framework of any capitalism.” However Smith cannot see beyond the buyouts of these industries and advocates guaranteed State support for investors. In the end, Smith’s vision is of a “largely state-owned economy.”

This concept fails to take into account whether the capitalist class will agree to this, and that its servants amongst the politicians would be amenable to such measures. There is already fierce opposition up to and including climate change denial in the wing of the Republican Party that has grouped around Trump (virtually the entirety of the Party), with its equivalents here in the UK and the rest of the world. Within the Democrats, many original supporters of the GND have backtracked and are seeing this as merely ‘aspirational’, that is, unlikely to be implemented. Biden’s Climate Plan is just a sop to this.

The boss class and the politicians that defend its interests have fought for decades against any policies against global warming. They will not accept the loss of their industries, their profits and their power. They would use all means to stop this, including the rise of authoritarian regimes and the whipping up of nationalism and racism. Even in the highly unlikely circumstances that they would accept buyouts, they would use this wealth to re-establish their influence.

## **False idea**

Within this vision of a State-managed transition to a decarbonised economy is the false idea that the State is neutral. But the State evolved in conjunction with capitalism and seeks to preserve its own power and that of the capitalist class. The State regulates, finances and protects those industries that are key actors in the manufacture of greenhouse gases, like industrial agriculture, the car industry, and the energy companies. To suppose that the State will

facilitate a transition to a decarbonised economy is a dangerous assumption.

The original New Deal of Roosevelt was granted due to mass action by the working class that threatened the American status quo. The US ruling class was terrified by the thought of radical social change and created the New Deal to defuse the situation. Similarly the creation of the welfare State in post-war Britain was a similar response. There will be resort to similar fixes with the growing environmental movements and the various GNDs are signs of this.

The Green New Deal cannot answer the pressing problem of climate change. We need to look for a new social alternative. There is precious little time to stop environmental collapse, which would lead on to social collapse. This is something that the young people involved in the climate strikes have begun to understand, positing as they do the slogan of “social change not climate change”. This can also be seen in an as yet ill-formed and incoherent way within the Extinction Rebellion movement. What has to be realised is that only the complete transformation of society can offer a credible solution, and let us be totally clear what we mean by that, let us spell it out, a Revolution. This may seem a fantasy at the moment but as we have tried to show other supposed solutions like the GND are the real fantasy. The deepening environmental crisis, as witnessed by the fires throughout the Mediterranean area and in northern America and China, and the changes to the oceans and the polar caps, could come together with another deepening crisis, the economic one. Coupled with the various movements developing around racial and sexual oppression a powerful new impetus for radical social change could develop.

This social revolution must totally transform life on the planet and create a system built on need not profit, which establishes new social forms that no longer threaten human existence itself. These new social forms will be Anarchist Communism.



# Land, Food, and Revolution



***The information in this article is based on the People's Land Policy seminar series: "Land and Food: Social Justice and Ecological Responsibility" and subsequent reports. However, the way the information is used and conclusions drawn are the author's and not necessarily those of the People's Land Policy or the speakers who took part in the seminar series.***

As anarchist communists we will need to ensure that we are able to organise and meet our essential needs, such as food. One of the first things people did in the Spanish Revolution was to take over land and organise food production and distribution. In the current society, we are dependent on privately owned farms which grow food for sale, usually to the big supermarket chains. Very few people grow food for themselves. A revolution will need to transform this system, taking over the land and growing food for need and not for profit, and ensuring that food is distributed freely to all.

We do not need, however, to wait until the revolution in order to begin the process of transformation of the food system. During the pandemic, more and more people have realised that depending on the supermarkets for food is expensive and unnecessary. Many have taken direct action, setting up their own food growing and distribution networks. Action for food justice, will necessarily mean land justice: without land we cannot grow food.

This article will look at the problems with the current agricultural system and then consider some of the ideas for change, both long and short-term.

According to the People's Land Policy in their report from the seminar series:

"The food system in the UK has a number of fundamental problems. Land reform is necessary to deal with these issues because currently decisions about what food is produced and for whom are based on the private decisions of those who own the land within the context of vested interests and impersonal market forces. These decisions are supported by government agriculture and trade policy with food treated as a commodity rather than an essential human need.

Instead, decisions about how land is used should facilitate a food system that meets the needs of both people and the environment and in which food is a public good. Access to good quality, healthy, culturally appropriate food should be a right, not a source of profit for a few. These decisions should be made collectively, with full participation of both growers and eaters.

This food system should be based on the principles of **agroecological farming** (see box for information) which aim to enhance the resilience of communities and protect and restore ecosystems. Instead of seeing farming as distinct from other land-based activities, we need to redefine the role of all land workers, using the term land stewardship and land stewards."



## Agroecological Principles

Agroecology is the idea that farming practices, and the environment in which it takes place, should be managed to mimic the functioning of local ecosystems. The expectation is that agroecological practices, like their natural models, can be productive, pest-resistant and conservative of nutrients, with a minimum dependency on additional chemicals and energy. In doing so, agroecological systems promoting recycling, ecological efficiency and environmental protection.

- Agroecology has its roots in ecology, applying the understanding of natural ecosystems as an alternative to industrialised agriculture. The principles of agroecology include:
- Networks: Reinforcing nature as a network of living systems that are interconnected
- Cycles: Reducing waste by encouraging natural cycles of growth and regeneration
- Partnership: Promoting cooperative systems of energy and resources to create stability
- Diversity: Deriving stability and resilience through the richness of ecosystems
- Dynamic Balance: Ensuring agroecosystems are flexible and with capacity to respond to change

To read more go to: [www.agroeco.org](http://www.agroeco.org)

## What is wrong with capitalist agriculture?

### Food is grown for profit, not need

Capitalism is based on the operation of impersonal market forces. This means that those who own the means of production, in this case farmers, produce what they can sell on the market, one that is dominated by large supermarkets. Supermarkets' aim is also to make a profit so they will buy what they think they can sell, which is based on eaters' ability to pay, not need. Growing food is very labour intensive. Smaller agroecological farmers who rely largely on their own labour and have high standards of food and animal welfare, struggle to keep costs down. This means their prices tend to be higher and will not be able to enter the mass market. Box schemes tend to be for the middle classes as are many farmer markets such as Borough Market in London. Large agribusiness benefit from economies of scale, employing low paid workers, intensifying production with machinery, and using pesticides. They are therefore able to make more money and keep prices relatively low. However, this food from intensive, pesticide-ridden agriculture is not optimally nutritious and is often based on blatant animal cruelty.

Though there is substantial government intervention in food production through the subsidy and tax break system, this is designed to work within the market system. But because prices paid to farmers are low, the government steps in to ensure farming incomes. Prior to Brexit, the larger the farm, the greater the subsidy, and smaller farms, often horticultural, were not eligible. This is set to change with Brexit, which will be further discussed below.

### Social injustice

The fact that farming is dominated by large agribusiness has created a centralised and unequal system. Large farmers and agribusiness make huge profits, taking the lion's share of government subsidies and tax breaks. Farm land is being bought up by investors as a way of avoiding inheritance tax, further exacerbating land inequality. It is very difficult for new entrants into farming and the spread of agroecological farm is very limited. Small-scale farmers are marginalised and rapidly going under to the benefit of the larger landholdings, contributing to the decline of rural communities. Land-based workers, often migrants, are very low-paid with insecure and poor working conditions. High rural housing costs make matters worse. In addition, people still go hungry. The supermarkets use their monopoly position to up prices well-above what they actually pay to growers. Eaters end up buying what appears to be cheap food, but is actually very costly in terms of the environment and labour exploitation.

### The food system has a negative impact on the environment

Worldwide the majority of agricultural land is used directly or indirectly for meat (<https://www.globalagriculture.org/report-topics/meat-and-animal-feed.html>). In the UK, agriculture takes up 70% of agricultural land. And of that, the majority is for animal products. "The land footprint used to produce the UK food supply is made up by 62.7% grasslands for animal agriculture, 21.8% for cropland grown for animal feed and 15.5% for crops grown for



direct human consumption” <https://veganorganic.net/2019/05/85-of-land-needed-to-produce-uk-food-supply-used-for-animal-products/>.

The predominance of livestock in agriculture has a number of negative effects on the environment. Livestock is one of the main producers of greenhouse gases and by taking up so much land, we cannot progress with reforestation and rewilding. In addition, techniques of production most commonly used lead to soil degradation, pollution and loss of biodiversity.

### **We are too dependent on an international market**

The current food system is tied into to an international market, exporting and importing according to what creates the most profit. This means that the UK agricultural system is unable to provide the food needed by the UK population. We produce less than 60% of what we consume. We depend on imports to feed ourselves and farmers depend on exports to make a living. According the Land Workers Alliance: “This is unnecessary as most of the UK’s imported food products are also products we export. We import the vast majority of these products from northern European countries with similar climates to our own” (<https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/A-Vision-For-Positive-Trade.pdf>).

The meat produced is not only for domestic consumption. Many farmers rely on the export market. In addition, the UK also imports meat. (For more information see: <https://britishmeatindustry.org/industry/imports-exports/>).

Only 23% of the fruit and veg we consume is grown on UK farms. Looked at separately, we grow just over 50% of our veg and just over 15% of our fruit ((<https://ineews.co.uk/news/environment/how-the-uk-could-become-self-sufficient-in-fruit-and-veg-294060> and [https://foodfoundation.org.uk/covid\\_19/monitoring-imports-of-fruit-and-veg-into-the-uk/](https://foodfoundation.org.uk/covid_19/monitoring-imports-of-fruit-and-veg-into-the-uk/)).

Though we cannot expect to be completely autonomous, the degree of our dependency on exports and imports needs to be reduced. Being more self-reliant is important for a number of reasons: our own food security (shown in times of crisis like the pandemic), for farmers’ livelihoods, to ensure we are not undermining efforts for food justice elsewhere, and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

### **What changes need to be made?**

Looking at the food system is a lens through which we can see the basic systemic issues. Speakers at the People’s Land Policy seminars referred continually to the need to make systematic changes, though many contributors were reluctant to use the term capitalism. Some speakers, especially when looking at agriculture in the Global South, stressed the need to decolonialise the way we produce food. During the empire, the plantation system was widely introduced



in the colonies, growing such products as sugar, tobacco, and tea. It could be argued that this intensive agricultural system, based on slave labour, was then introduced from the empire to the UK. Being overtly anticapitalist, anarchist communists, believe that a complete transformation of the food system will require a revolution- one that overthrows capitalism, which has itself been infused with the colonial system since its origins. However, though keeping in mind our ultimate goal, we can begin to make inroads as part of the process of building up the necessary revolutionary movement.

### **Some key barriers to change**

#### **Private land ownership and access to land**

Potential as well as current farmers struggle with the problem of getting hold of land for agroecological farming. Farm land is largely in private hands and is passed on through the generations. This means that not all members of a farming family will be able to have a farm. In addition, there are many others, from the surrounding area or in cities who would like to be farmers. However, because the land is already taken, there is little to go around. Since 70% of UK land is used for agriculture there is not any spare capacity given competing land uses, such as planting woodlands, restoring ecosystems, and other measure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Even if farmland does come on the market the price is high. This is because farm land has become a source of speculative investment and a way of avoiding inheritance task. This increase in demand has put up the cost of buying a farm beyond the means of the vast majority. It is also difficult for new entrants to get finance as they do not have a track record or own land that could act as collateral so banks are unwilling to lend them money.

Tenant farming is also difficult to get into and there is often not enough security of tenure. It is a short term solution but not a long-term one. Public farmland is in short supply and County farms have been mostly sold off.



New entrants are thus forced to scabble around looking for land and this acts as a major deterrent to many.

### **Access to land: Urban growing and peri-urban farming**

Access to land is also an issue in urban growing and peri-urban (on the outskirts of urban areas) farming. Land is at a premium in and near urban areas so the cost is prohibitive. Would-be farmers need to get a farmer to lease them land - with the attendant problems of insecurity, or else get land that is in public hands. The problem with public land is that there are many competing demands on that land and councils are now selling land to private developers in order to raise money. This means that growers looking for land in and near urban areas also have to scabble around to get hold what little land is available, creating divisive competition.

### **Government Agricultural Policy**

*This section is taken directly from the report from the first seminar in the Land and Food series: Post-Brexit Agriculture: What are the implications for farmers, food justice and the environment?*

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The current system is based on payments according to how much land a farmer has: approximately 200 pound per hectare. 80% of the payments has been going to 20% of the farmers and under 5 hectare farms were excluded. Though there has been some introduction of payments for environmental benefits, most of the money has really just been providing income support, no matter what they do, to landowners, like the Queen, who don't really need it. However, small farmers and tenant farmers have also benefitted from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS).

The actual issue is that post-war policy encouraged and supported land intensification, simplifying both landscapes (e.g. to monocrops from diverse farm land uses including meadows, etc) and the products produced by farmers. This has made farmers reliant on the Basic Payment Scheme and locked into these systems, where they have been pushed to rely on fertiliser/feed and expensive machinery. We need to find and show ways out of these lock-ins e.g. though reduced/no inputs and diversification.

There is a need to transform the food system to one based on agroecological principles ([https://](https://www.agroecology-europe.org/our-approach/principles/)

[www.agroecology-europe.org/our-approach/principles/](https://www.agroecology-europe.org/our-approach/principles/)) which will have positive benefits for the land itself, the wider environment, farmers, local communities, and those who may consume the food in the urban area.

Some of the proposals from the Land Workers Alliance include: limit the amount of payments to the larger farms so that payments can be redistributed among small farms, encourage transition to organic farming, including more fruit and veg production and less grain-fed livestock, engaging with the community, expanding access to farming for people from more diverse backgrounds and support for peri-urban and horticulture farming.

There need to be a change in people's connection to the land, with a different world view about people's place in the ecosystem. Education will play an important role.

**Agricultural Act (so far)** ([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/939683/farming-changing.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/939683/farming-changing.pdf))

### **Details**

- Replacement of the EU payments based on size of landholding, with more targeted payments which will reward farmers for producing public goods. This is called the Environment Land Management scheme (ELM). In this system food is classified as a private good which is a change of language for many farmers.
- Definition of Public Good: Clean air, clean and plentiful water, thriving plants and wildlife, protection from environmental hazards, beauty, heritage and engagement with the environment, reduction of and adaptation to climate change.
- Transition will be gradual over next seven years until 2028 with BPS reduced by 50% by 2024.

### **Positive Features**

- With over 70% of UK land designated as farmland, policy and agri-environment schemes, which are linked to the Agricultural and Environmental Bills, should help promote landscape changes that will help meet environmental objectives.
- ELM will have three components: Sustainable Farming Initiative, Local Nature Recovery, Landscape Recovery.
- Sustainable Farming could mean more farms moving to an agroecological approach. Local Nature Recovery and Landscape Recovery will necessitate collaboration with other farmers and other groups in an area and beyond. This will help food systems move to a more coordinated and co-operative approach.
- Some farmers that Hannah Field knows about or has spoken to in Cumbria and Yorkshire already see the opportunities of the new system and nature By reducing stock they are actually increasing profits, improving soil, and enhancing biodiversity. And, there is an income to be made by 'farming carbon'. Some are not waiting for government instructions and are



self-organising. Hannah Field gave a number of examples of farmers are integrating environmental objectives with their farming.

- The new payment system may (if lobbying from LWA and others is successful) include farms under 5 hectares, unlike the previous system. This means that many small horticulturalists will be able to get payments.

### Concerns and Limitations

- Could lead to a form of ‘clearances’ as bigger farmers and larger landowners and estates are able to harness more resources to take advantage of the new agri-environment schemes and private finance for nature recovery. Landowners will be in a position to raise rents, buy up, or take back into direct control, tenanted farms causing more centralisation and the loss of smaller family farms.
- The big agribusiness farms may be able to ‘farm their way out’ and just ignore the new system-making money just by upping production for the market. Smaller farmers may be tempted to do the same, due to bad past experiences with government schemes, such as erratic payments.
- Smaller farms with less spare resources will need guidance and support in order to make the most of the new scheme. Money will need to be put into this, e.g. provision of 1:1 advice, mapping natural assets on farm.
- The fact that food will not be a public good means that the kind of food produced will still be determined largely by the market and what those with the resources in society are willing to pay. This means that a small organic farm that practices agroecological methods to produce good quality food that is affordable to local communities will not necessarily be rewarded. A large agribusiness farm may be able to start new initiatives that would directly count as a public good, eg plant a hedgerow or a few trees.
- Though the kind of food produced will not be rewarded, the methods used will be rewarded through the provision of public goods, e.g. mob grazing increases biodiversity and improves vegetation and soil quality, which in turn acts as flood mitigation as more water is held, it slows the flow and water is cleaner.
- Farming based on agroecological principles intrinsically enhances the environment. Grass-fed livestock for example, which does not rely the use of land for animal feed, helps biodiversity and climate change (See: <https://www.pastureforlife.org/>). If such benefits are seen as side effects of such farming, there is a danger that they will not count as public goods. Farmers who have already been using ecologically responsible methods will not necessarily be rewarded for the work they have already put in.

### The next steps: Next 12-18 months are critical

- The plan for transitioning to the ELM scheme is lacking in detail so much work needs to be put in over the next period. This is both in terms of the way the



payment system will actually work and how farmers will be able to make this transition.

- Organisations such as the Land Workers Alliance continue to lobby DEFRA to ensure that the Act will be applied in such a way that small agroecological farms will be rewarded for their work and be able to provide a livelihood for themselves. One issue is to make sure the payments go to the tenants rather than the landowner. However, the process is difficult).
- A stakeholder group has been set up by DEFRA as part of the consultation process to co-design the ELM. (See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-environmental-land-management-scheme-an-overview>). The LWA and others have pushed for under 5 hectare farms to be included and farmers to be rewarded for transitioning to organic, grass-fed livestock, for setting up peri-urban farms and growing fruit and veg, and engaging with the community. Currently the LWA is working on a Test and Trial project with horticulturalists who are usually on farms under 5 hectares –critical for land justice. What needs to change so they can be rewarded for what they do?
- Many farmers among the stakeholder group feel threatened by these ideas. They want the payments must go to traditional farms and fear being swamped by small holdings. There was pushback from some farmers when it was suggested that there be payments for peri-urban farms and increasing the diversity of payment recipients, e.g., those from disadvantaged backgrounds such as people of colour. “We cannot spread ourselves too thin.” There are many large and powerful organisations on this stakeholder panel, such as the Country Landowners and Business Association and the National Trust. It is a struggle to get these issues on the agenda- how to include more people in farming, how to expand access to the countryside but it is important to be at the table with these people to push the land justice issues.
- Work needs to be done in local areas to provide support for smaller farmers. There is a lack of detail on how the new payment system is going to work and many farmers are extremely worried. They will need good support on how to make the transition. There are a number of such initiatives already operating (see: <https://ffcc.co.uk/inquiries/cumbria>).



At the time of writing, negotiations are still taking place, but there are serious concerns from organisations that represent the alternative agroecological farming movement, the Land Workers Alliance, as to how successful they will be in shifting some of the support from large, intensive agriculture to agroecological farmers and growers, with the urban and peri-urban left out altogether. One of the other main concerns is that even though production of environmental goods will feature in the new system, it is the larger landowners that will have the resources to take full advantage of the new payment scheme.

## Ideas for a manifesto

The People's Land Policy as gathered together some of the key ideas for change that people could mobilise around. No change will come about that is not supported by a strong mass movement. These are in draft form at the moment and are meant to be points for discussion rather than definitive ideas. They have had feedback and will be updating this and encouraging more discussion. For example, there has been discussion of how exactly to ensure adequate farm incomes while at the same time making nutritious food affordable. Should prices be reduced, and farming income paid differently, or do we need to increase incomes by increasing wages, providing universal services, and/or reducing housing costs? There is also debate about the social organisation of the agriculture: family farms, co-operatives, large-scale collective farms? What terms to use is also difficult because different groups prefer different terms and label. For example, land steward, grower, farmer? Also, what about the terms food autonomy, sovereignty, justice? What should be the role of international trade? How can we make sure we are part of the global movement for food and land justice?

The ideas are grouped according to the following overarching vision that emerged from the seminar series.

**1. Create food justice for both land stewards and consumers: lower prices and more equitable incomes for all. Bring producers and consumers closer together, reducing the supply chains and creating more community involvement in food. Reduce the dependency on the market and develop more direct relations between growers and eaters.**



- Food prices need to go down and land stewards' incomes up. This can only be done when food is not subject to market forces but is provided at a much subsidised price with a guaranteed incomes for land stewards. There are a number of ways this could be done: subsidising prices to consumers, paying land stewards directly (already done to a large extent) so that their income is not dependent on what they sell.

- Ideally, all land stewards would be relatively equal in terms of income. However, currently there are many workers, including migrants, who are paid very low wages to work at key times. If it is necessary to bring workers in then they must be paid a reasonable wage with good working conditions. They should have the right to be in a union.

- Changing the nature of food distribution so that there is more space for social enterprises with less focus on profit and shareholders. They could be owned cooperatively by the land stewards themselves or by a community. An intermediate step would be to have public procurement policies which buy directly from local producers.

- Create food hubs around the UK, thus decentralising the agricultural system so that food is processed and distributed nearer the point of production. These hubs would be where farmers brought their produce, with different sections for different type of agricultural product. This could include small abattoirs. The aim would be to have a food hub for all products in as many areas as possible, depending on what is practical. These hubs would be co-operatively owned and non-profit making. These hubs could also be a place where training and education took place, both for those interested in working on the land and for those in the wider community who want to become more aware how the food system works and/or learn more about different foods and how to cook healthy food.

- These hubs could also be in urban areas, the place where community farms and other growing projects could bring their produce for distribution. These places would be community spaces and provide a number of services and activities as well as a place where growers and eaters can come together to discuss food issues, such as the importance of culturally appropriate food and how to organise mutual aid for those struggling.

- The increase in the number of land stewards, either as individuals, families or co-operatives will lead to a repopulation of the rural areas and the urban fringes. Investment will be needed to provide the infrastructure and to help people make the transition.

- These measures will require investment in food infrastructure in order to ensure that food produced here will be able to be sold here affordably for shoppers and profitably for producers, processors, distributors and retailers <https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/A-Vision-For-Positive-Trade.pdf>.

## **2. Make agroecological farming the dominant system and integrate ecological restoration and environmental objectives into land management**

- The Environment Land Management scheme and the farm payment system for public goods should also be for managing the land and producing food according to agroecological principles.
- Education, training and support system needs to be in place to support land stewards who are transitioning to agroecological farming.
- Farming practices that damage the environment and/or are inhumane should be penalised through the tax and subsidy system.

## **3. Reduce the land used for agriculture, especially that which is focused on livestock, extend land use for afforestation (agroforestry) and biodiversity**

- A land use strategy commission needs to consider how much land we need to divert to environmental objectives such as forestation and rewilding. Once general targets have been set, then the process should be decentralised with areas working out to what extent it is possible to transfer farm land to environmental uses, as well as other uses such as housing. Every area should have a land management plan. It may be that some areas will be able to do more than others, especially those areas which are devoted to arable crops to feed livestock.
- The new Environmental Land Management scheme, especially the Landscape Recovery component, has a role to play in supporting land stewards in the transition from farming to environmental outcomes.
- Local support networks for the Landscape Recovery need to be put in place, bringing together a range of land stewards.
- Reforestation, essential for halting climate change, can also be an alternative source of income for land stewards.

## **4. Create food sovereignty/autonomy so that the UK is largely self-reliant in food production**

- Break with the current trading system in which food is a commodity and establish a new system based on sovereignty/autonomy not just in the UK but globally. Aim to produce locally but accept that international trade will be needed. This trade should not contribute to injustice and inequality in other parts of the world. The Land Workers Alliance estimates that 80% of our domestic food consumption could be produced locally and agroecologically and only 20% would need to be imported.
- Stop exports of live animals and other animal products. This is not only inhumane but the land used for this is not contributing to feeding people in the UK nor is it supporting food sovereignty in other countries. There are alternatives to generating incomes for land stewards.



- Stop imports of meat products from other countries. Given the amount of land devoted to raising livestock, the UK should be able to provide enough meat for the population, especially as meat eating is declining and needs to decline both for environmental reasons and for health. It also encourages livestock raising in other countries which causes similar problems to those in the UK if the land is used to raise livestock to such an extent.
- Increase the amount of horticulture to reduce dependency on imports and produce the healthy food we need. If we reduce the amount of land used for livestock, indirectly or directly, then more land will become available to grow grains, legumes, vegetables and fruit direct for human consumption. A commission consisting of arable and horticulture land stewards could be set up to investigate what kind of crops the UK land could produce.
- Subsidies for locally grown produce and limits on the amount that is imported- gradually phase out imports for produce that we can produce in the UK.
- Financial and logistic support for transition- part of the transition to agroecological farming.

## **5. Increase access to land for agroecological land stewards so more people can enter agriculture- increasing participation and creating jobs, revitalising the rural economy and culture**

- Map out land ownership and use, in both rural and urban areas in order to identify land that could be opened up to new entrants or to anyone interested in doing land work. What is considered as possible sites would depend on the land use strategy. Some land uses will be identified as not contributing to the public good and will be phased out.
- Create a public land trust to hold all land that can be leased out on a long-term for a variety of public goods, including food growing, agroforestry,



environment, as well as other needs such as housing. This could be decentralised so there are regional or community land trusts. This land could be leased to individual families or to land co-ops.

- County farms could be used as another form of public land ownership that could be leased to new entrants.

- Make it possible for land trusts to compulsory purchase land that is underused or used for purposes that go against the general land use strategy, e.g., industrial farming of livestock crops, golf courses, investor-oriented housing developments.

- Cap the amount of land anyone can own, adding this land to the land stock of the public land trust, which can then be leased out to new land stewards.

- Provide the necessary training for new entrants with a national land steward college.

- Ensure that appropriate housing is available near rural farms.

- Reduce the price of land so that these policies will be easier to implement. Such policies are already part of the People's Land Policy because it is central to making it possible to achieve public and community control and ownership of land. These include: land value or property tax, abolishing the inheritance avoidance loopholes in agricultural land, and in general reducing the speculative value of land.

## **6. Ensure that the UK's food system supports, enhances, and learns from the global food justice movement**

For this aim we support the vision and policy demands put forward by the Land Workers Alliance in **A Vision for Positive Trade: Building global food sovereignty through trade of food and agricultural products** (<https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/A-Vision-For-Positive-Trade.pdf>).

- International trade should be based on fair trade principles: well-paid labour, no environmental harm, doesn't undermine the autonomy of local communities to feed themselves, and provides an income direct to growers rather than to agro-corporations. Food should be exported only when it is ecologically and socially beneficial to do so.

- Trade rules for a sustainable economy, not free trade. Various tax, quota and other measures could

be used to ensure that what we import complies with our aims of more self-sufficiency, high quality and animal welfare standards, and support for agroecological farming here and abroad.

- Supporting global food sovereignty must be a unified aim across foreign investment, development funds, trade policy and our role within international institutions.

- Decolonialise the UK's role in food production in the global south. This would include: returning land to democratically-controlled local communities, control on the actions of agro-corporations (wages and treatment of workers, environmental degradation, kinds of food being produced), taking food products out of the commodities market.

- With 70% of the world's food produced by small-scale farmers in the global south, we need to consider what we can learn from their successes.

## **Conclusion**

Many in the movement for food and land justice are well-aware of the role capitalism plays in the food system and that the vision is not realisable without revolutionary change around the world. This of course will not be an easy task given the forces lined up against us. However, increasing number of people are getting involved in the alternative food movement, both in rural and urban areas. The Ecological Land Co-op has helped hundreds of new entrants to farming by buying up land and giving it to tenant farmers on very long-leases. The Land Workers Alliance has more and more members and the Oxford Real Farming Conference gets bigger every year, attracting a more diverse range of growers, both from the UK and around the world. The pandemic saw many setting up growing initiatives, including guerrilla gardening, and alternative distribution networks. People also continue to fight to preserve local markets that are often targeted for development. If all these people came together it would be a very strong movement indeed.

However, we cannot forget that other aspects of struggle are also important. Many of these relate to land, for example, environmental-climate change, biodiversity, reforestation, and the protection of wild land, support for communities around the world threatened by mining and other resource extraction



such as logging and palm oil plantations, fights to keep and extend green spaces and community resources in the city for social and mental health benefits, campaigns for truly affordable housing and against estate demolition. Other struggles, equally important, take place in the workplace, around wages, working conditions and general exploitation. Struggles against oppression are also a vital part of a revolutionary movement such as Black Lives Matters, gender equality at work, more public, free facilities for childcare, and against all forms of discrimination.

However, food is an issue that has much potential to build links with other struggles. The food industry is a major employer, including agricultural workers, food processing, and retail workers. Food projects are also vehicles to build community and give oppressed

groups a chance to self-organise. There have been a number of food and land projects initiated by people of colour and women are very visible in the alternative food growing movement.

Workers are also eaters and as employers and government begin to clawback the money they have put in to the pandemic through real wage cuts, worsening of conditions, fire and rehire, and austerity and cuts, leaving workers worse off and less able to afford the rising cost of food. This might indeed motivate more people to get involved in community food growing as well as to demand more money to pay for the food from super markets.

Remember, many revolutions have begun with the demand for land and bread!

## **Organisations and Resources**

**More resources can be found in websites listed here:**

**People's Land Policy**

***[www.peopleslandpolicy.org](http://www.peopleslandpolicy.org)***

**Land Workers Alliance**

***<https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/>***

**Rootz into Growing**

***<https://landinournames.community/projects/rootz-into-food-growing>***

**Sustain**

***<https://www.sustainweb.org/>***

**Growing and Food Initiatives:**

**Glasgow Food Growing Network**

***<https://glasgowfood.net/about-us>***

**Granville Community Kitchen (London)**

***<https://granvillecommunitykitchen.wordpress.com/>***

**Organic Lea (London)**

***<https://www.organiclea.org.uk/>***

**Sow the City (Manchester)**

***<https://www.sowthecity.org/>***





# Especifismo: Challenges and Opportunities



Especifismo (or Specifism in English) refers to an anarchist organisationalist current which has its origins in Bakunin's thought, but which is generally seen as a Latin American counterpart to Platformism although it is not generally considered as such by its own supporters. However, the two currents both emphasise theoretical and tactical unity and are distinct from the 'educationalist' current of anarchism and the 'propagandist' mode of activism.

We attempt an outline of Specifist thought, using the text **The Strategy of Especifismo** based on an interview with Juan Carlos Mechoso of the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation conducted by Felipe Corrêa between May and August 2009. We then will go on to consider what the difference is between the present dominant form of anarchist communist organisation and activity looks like in the UK. We ask the question: What would a specificist approach look like in the context of the UK and is it feasible?

## Especifismo: How does it differ from other currents?

*All quotes are taken from the interview.*

Other currents did not have:

"regular activity that corresponded to what we consider fundamental in terms of daily work at the social-political level; which we thought should be articulated with a strategy and tactic that we believed to be coherent and necessary for the process of rupture, our final objective".

Within the Especifismo tradition, what are the tasks of the political organisation?

Ensure the continuity of an agreed strategy and its theoretical elaboration, the search for effectiveness in confrontations, the general vision about partial or reformist struggles, the study of the enemy's strategy at each moment, the constant learning of what the popular struggle involves and the forming of alliances favourable to the process.

### Political organisation and popular struggles

"A political organisation in tune with its time and with the popular movement has a fundamental role to play. However, its strengths lie in the people themselves... The independence of the popular movement, of all its organisational forms - self-managed, self-organised, effectively participatory and federalist - is what will solidify the process and provide real possibilities for a socialist transformation."

"The political organisation must always be within popular processes". The new ideology does not come from outside, but is "produced within the very practices, ideas and behaviours that people develop in their confrontations"

### Political organisation is crucial

Profound social transformation can only be resolved at the political level. "Only through its action-rooted in the masses and the different popular processes- is it possible to attain the destruction of the bourgeois state apparatus".

Not a vanguard nor an elite, the political organisation must contain new values, different ideological and ethical practices. Efficient organisation is not synonymous with hierarchy.

### Difference with Marxist-Leninist Parties

Those parties see the popular movements as subservient to them- the masses act as conveyor belts and the party steers the process. It is the party that 'does the politics'- a vanguardist conception. Those 'from below' are subordinate to the party.

### Social Insertion

The notion of Social Insertion is central to Especifismo.

"Knowing the environment in which one acts, being inserted in it, having a political purpose in this daily routine, having proposals in line with what the people want and need and establishing priorities are some of the elements that allow the development of a political organisation like ours. These are instruments of our ideology that must be put into practice in concrete circumstances: direct action, direct democracy, self-management, federative forms of organisation etc".

### What are social activities to be involved in?

Unions, cooperatives, issue-based community work, human rights, indigenous movements, peasants, general and specific themes of a demand-centred type or struggles for immediate improvement like health, housing etc. Oppressions in communities of

different ethnicities, of African descendants (in the Latin American context), of women and the marginalised.

“You cannot create a classical proletarian ideology, since that would mean disconnecting the subject from their daily experience and also from their way of life”.

How to create the conditions for revolution with so many different “class fractions”?

The regular and concrete social conditions that must be faced by a group of people at any given moment produce specific behaviours. Many “class fractions” have only a distant relationship or connection to class consciousness.

The need to develop an “ideology of resistance” that is not an intellectual elaboration but a social dynamic, stressing the importance that people are united and the need to overcome fragmentation within popular movements.

“The unity of their struggles must be a primary foundation for a social force to be able to carry out effective struggles and to advance qualitatively”.

### **Need a clear strategy for activity- part of the role of the political organisation**

Because it is impossible to be able to be involved in all the social spheres and with all the oppressed groups simultaneously, it requires there a flexibility and fluidity depending on the key issues and possibilities of the particular period

### **Use of the term ‘power’**

“The capacity to accomplish something and not as repression...the ability of a people to realise their various interests and to constitute for themselves a form of organisation that is founded on other bases,

## **Specifismo on the UK?**

Undoubtedly, Especificist understanding of anarchist communist organisation and action is an attractive one, particularly by a movement plagued by dilettantism and the lack of medium to long term perspectives for development and growth.

The Anarchist Communist Group is affiliated to the Anarkismo network, an international co-ordination of libertarian communist and anarchist communist organisations who stand in what is variously described as the Organised Anarchist, Platformist or Especificist current. The ACG is influenced by the Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists, from whence comes the designation Platformist and obviously identify as part of an Organised Anarchist perspective. But Especificism is also an influence

Anarchist communist groups can take a number of approaches. These can be described as Educationalist, Interventionist and Socially Inserted.

The educationalist group produces analysis based upon its political perspective and distributes this analysis in a broad, generally untargeted manner via a website and perhaps in its newspaper, pamphlets etc. Members of an educationalist group (or a commentary group - producing commentary on subjects) may or may not be involved in any activity other than the production of literature or web articles and the development of ideas and analysis. Members may be involved in social struggles, workplace activity and community organising but this isn't connected to the group beyond their distributing group literature to people at their workplace, community group etc. The relationship to struggle is essentially one of commentary and analysis and, on one level, this is something a revolutionary organisation should be doing anyway. Although, if it is all it is doing, that is problematic.

The interventionist group produces analysis based upon its political perspectives but unlike the propagandist group, their literature is generally highly focused and may be consistently distributed around specific industries or communities. Bulletins are usually produced, or in part produced, by writers who have firsthand

on values different to the existing ones and which ensure solidarity, freedom, and justice”

Recognition of the need to replace the State with mechanisms of popular power that have a political perspective.

### **Creating Popular Power: Anarchist Organisation is Indispensable**

Fights for immediate demands do not lead spontaneously to revolution

“.. to demonstrate to the people a perspective of victory, a path of hope, of confidence in the possibility of a profound and revolutionary transformation is something ideologically fundamental. This ‘demonstration’ is a function of a political organisation; in our case, of organised anarchism. In all its actions the political organisation promotes an ideological level of consciousness, different from that generated by the spontaneous practice of the masses-saturated with notions, values and representations that the system promotes with its mass media and the discipline promoted through various mechanisms.”

### **Elements of a Strategy**

All of this requires the development of a clear strategy- a strategy that contains within itself a different world- “that can be promoted within the shell of the world it is antagonistic to”.

Creating “a network of permanent relations, programmatically linked, starting from the multiplicity of grassroots organisations, capable of expressing in struggles the immediate interests of these social sectors, of developing and deepening them, seeking to constitute transformative orientations and objectives, and making them into social forces of effective gravitation.”



experience of the industry or community they are working in. The bulletins get distributed inside and outside the workplaces/communities with the aim of either building the group. However, the interventionist group is closer to a propaganda group than may appear at first.

The social insertion group also produces analysis based upon its political perspectives and, like the interventionist group, may produce focused bulletins. However, it concentrates its forces on building a 'practice' within the workplaces/communities that reflects its revolutionary politics rather than focusing on the distribution of literature. And whilst it undertakes its activity inside the areas of struggle or potential struggle, it maintains its coherence by reflecting back to both other members of the group who may work in similar areas and to the wider group for political guidance and direction. It aims to both influence the struggles it is inserted into and to build the revolutionary organisation.

The most common form of anarchist political group, besides the direct action/armed struggle groups, which are beyond this discussion, is the educationalist group. The recent history of British anarchism has been one of educationalist groups and interventionist groups. The Anarchist Federation was and remains for the great part, an educationalist group. The anarcho-syndicalist Solidarity Federation is an edu group with some interventionist activity (their industry based Networks) but with social insertion as an aim, albeit as a 'union'. The short-lived Libertarian Communist Initiative/Collective Action had pretensions towards social insertion and some of them became influential in the New Syndicalist IWW milieu. The ACG is an educationalist group with some interventionist practice (Rebel Education Worker bulletin, Gray Panther bulletin etc.).

All of these types of groups need *some* level of seriousness and commitment on the part of their members to continue and the social insertion model requires this plus significant strategic and tactical unity and a consistency of practice.

Globally, most anarchists effectively reject specific political organisation and prefer to work in local, groups which may, or may not, co-ordinate, usually on a regional level. The model is often affinity based, short-project work and is very often focused on a particular aspect of oppression (prisoner solidarity for example). The requirements for seriousness, commitment and consistency that are associated with a praxis of social insertion are probably quite challenging to many self-describing anarchists who are often attracted to anarchism because of its image of rebelliousness and outsider status, rather than its requirement for long-term engagement in social struggles that require self-discipline and an acceptance that results are unlikely to be immediately forthcoming.

### **So, are we up to the task?**

However important producing and distributing literature is, there is a real need for a practice beyond that of the educationalist group. Without our active and ongoing involvement with the social struggles of the working class, we are unfortunately condemned to being a marginal, obscure and ineffective side-show. But there is a question of whether we, as the ACG, are up to it! Ultimately, the specific organisation can only grow not through the recruiting people from the anarchist scene, but through our consistent involvement and relevance to actual social movements.

But do we have the wherewithal to initiate a socially inserted practice, given our numbers, our composition, our starting point of relative marginality and weakness? We have to be realistic about this. We are talking about a momentous change of culture and the development of a practice that is significantly different from what we have generally previously experienced, and which is at odds with the dominant culture of the anarchist milieu (and indeed the Left and 'Ultra-left') in the UK. The few groups which have attempted something like this type of renewal of anarchist practice in the past have hit brick walls and have tended to either disintegrate, or immerse themselves in social movement activity, perhaps keeping their anarchist communist perspectives but jettisoning the project of an anarchist communist organisation of social insertion.

So, there is a need for a sober discussion amongst libertarian revolutionaries about the desirability and possibility for a socially inserted practice and the potential for building an organisation that takes on board the lessons of Especifismo and relates them to the reality of the composition of both anarchism and the working class in the UK.



# Working Class Antifascism: Engaging the working class where traditional politics has failed



## Normative Ethics

Why ethics first? It is key when engaging hard to reach working class communities that a sensible approach to ethics is considered. Although the aim is to engage with people who are anti-racist, it is not appropriate to assume everyone will have exactly the same views and values when it comes to wider issues and politics within society.

Therefore it is key for organisers to adopt a normative ethical approach. Normative ethics is the process where we still hold our own personal views and values, but we are able to accept other people may possess a different outlook with regards to varying topics. In short, it is that it is fine to have different beliefs with regards to various subjects. We should not automatically dismiss or discriminate against any comrade just for having a different view. Of course there are some fundamentals that no antifascist can be flexible on, for example racism, extreme bigotry, and authoritarianism.

To maximise effectiveness, antifascism should be approached with a unifying goal around a single issue. All too often I see other antifascist groups getting sucked into contributing to many other campaigns, which leads to a loss of momentum and activists.

## A point of unity

What do I mean by a point of unity? The best way to engage the working class is outside the political spear. Therefore we have to look at other areas and strategies in order to build a movement/group/campaign. Things like music or sports are important parts of culture in most communities.

**Football Lads and Lasses against Fascism (FLAF) is a great model to look at, and I believe serves as an example of best practice when reaching out to people where politics cannot.**

In the UK, Football is synonymous with working class culture and is often part of the heart of our

communities nationwide. FLAF is a coalition of working class football fans that directly challenge fascism from within football and local communities. People are brought together in unity around football as opposed to political views, thus expanding their platform, and appealing to a wider number of activists.

To start the campaign FLAF designed stickers (personalised to clubs) and sent them out to personal contacts (and those that came forward in support) around various clubs in the country. These were put up around stadiums and terraces by football fans nation-wide. The message was simple, but resolute... "Fans Against Fascism" and "For a United Working Class". This led to small fan run groups forming at many clubs, and thus a much wider movement was beginning to surface. A simple leaflet was produced to be handed out on match days at football grounds all around the U.K.

## Concise Communication

Within elitist leftist circles those who know the biggest words and are versed in the most theory, reign supreme on a throne of intellect and political prowess. However, out here in the real world it doesn't hold as much value. It will probably only serve to reduce your platform, send people to sleep or even worse turn people away. Antifascism is universal, not just for intellectuals. If you are the sort of group that spends more time reading than doing, then you are probably less effective.

The FLAF leaflet that was produced had the above in mind and was wrote very concisely with appropriate language. This allowed FLAF to widen their platform and target people often missed by lefties selling papers.

## Solution Focused

The strength of FLAF has always been that it has clear aims, realistic achievements and stepped goals. As touched on above, too many antifascist groups end up scatter gunning and trying to achieve too much,



which in turn spreads their movement thin and prolongs meaningful positive outcomes. To enhance engagement, keep up retention and maintain morale it is important to set and work towards achievable actions.

FLAF's primary aim is mobilise and eradicate racist football fans from our stadiums and terraces. The slogan is "For a United Working Class" which is a nod for community-based, fan-led actions and mutual aid projects.

Small actions such as stickering and having very visible propaganda is a way for activists to take meaningful action. Handing out leaflets at football games is a great way to remain visible in the heart of the community. Being there to support people who experience or witness racism/racist violence at football grounds (or in the areas near) also instils pride and promotes self-governance of local communities. Such actions can also lead to a good dialogue built up with various communities, which ultimately can lead valuable localised intel.

FLAF takes ownership and responsibility for dealing with far right ultras and hooligans to give other groups space to do their work too.

From visibility to actions, it's important to use a stepped approach of smaller, meaningful actions that can easily be measured in order to work towards a bigger goal.

### **Keep politics to minimum**

Antifascism is political ...duh? I hear you think. While this is the case, the point of keeping politics to a minimum is absolutely key to maintaining unity and preventing the old splits that seem to plague groups on the left.

Large groups of organised people built around a single issue is bound to bring a variety of political views with it. It is perfectly normal to find people you disagree with and in fact in many cases it's healthy.

There is also the challenge of organising with people who are not political at all, and have no understanding of political theory. This is far more common when organising on mass and focusing on hard to reach working class communities.

Political debates, and hot political takes can lead to disagreements and arguments in the group. This can be destructive and a distraction from the goal. It's best to take the position as a group to not support any single political party.

Groups like Stand up to Racism, the Labour and Socialist Party will circle your campaign if you successfully mobilise others. They will either look to infiltrate and take over so they can claim your good work for political gain, or try and politically influence your group for their own needs. So it's a good idea to be strict about keeping political groups away from any steering group, or handling of how the campaign/group actions are run. .

There are a plethora of community action and mutual aid groups that exist outside of politics which focus on localised needs. Those who become organised in FLAF that want to get involved in more activism, are directed to local community action groups and/or fan led community groups away from politics.

So.... A quick recap.

- Remember, it's fine and healthy to disagree on some subjects, you are still comrades!
- Build movements away from politics, appeal to those where politics doesn't reach
- Be single issue focused
- Don't be a smart ass. Communicate concisely and make everything accessible (that includes any texts such as leaflets etc).
- Have clear measurable goals and aims, preferably ones that also build community engagement and pride.
- Use a stepped approach (Solution focused) towards any bigger goals , and do not scattergun a multitude of issues
- Keep politics to minimum
- Keep the Liberals and Trots away!

The working class do not need their hands holding, nor do they need permission from political parties to organise.



# Anti-imperialism: A critique

*Stormy Petrel* is reproducing here a statement produced by the Berlin group of Die Plattform: Anarchakommunistische Organisation (The Platform: anarcha-communist organisation), a new formation in the tradition of organised anarchism in the German speaking areas of Europe. We are doing so because we feel that it is an important statement on the nature of Imperialism and how it can be fought. Some groups who adhere to the Platformist or organised anarchist perspective have, we believe, erred in this area, adopting a Leninist line when it comes to the question of National Liberation. Rather than understanding the struggle for national 'independence' as a fight by a nascent national bourgeoisie to become the new ruling class, using national oppression by a 'foreign' power as it mobilising agent, some libertarians have supported various factions 'critically' or otherwise in the belief that this weakens Imperialism. This text challenges that perspective.

It is not without its problems, however. The text, whilst defending the idea of the independent interests of the working class, differentiates the notion of the 'Volk' (a German notion of The People with racial undertones) from that of the Pueblo or People, often used in left and anarchist circles in Latin America and elsewhere including Britain (the left sometimes talks about The People in semi-mystical terms). We are not so sure that the People is a useful term, believing that it obscures more than it clarifies. If we are to have a "class conscious2 anti-Imperialism, then we must be very clear on our understanding of class and talk of the 'The People' is not helpful.

Ultimately, implicit in the text, we believe, is the perspective that the struggle against Imperialism can only be successful if it is a struggle against capitalism itself, not any national manifestations of it. And that means that support for one faction of the capitalist class or another, indigenous or foreign, is to be opposed by anarchist communists.

We look forward to sharing more from our comrades in Die Plattform.



## For a class-conscious anti-imperialism. By Red-Burned-Boulet

This text aims at briefly outlining a class-conscious and anti-national perspective on today's imperialism from the perspective of a 'capitalist hub'. It does not claim to be a comprehensive analysis of imperialist history and explicitly declares its solidarity with the working class (1) worldwide. Furthermore, the aspect of colonialism (2) is deliberately left out, although it is often put in the same context as imperialism. This is done in order to better focus on the central theme.

Imperialism today is used as a capitalist tool. It is not the 'final phase' of capitalism, instead it is the very core of what constitutes capitalism. The political class of a nation 'expands' into new territories for economic reasons (if necessary, by waging war) in the interest of and together with national capital. The goal is to expand or strengthen its 'own' position in the world market against the competition. This is not a struggle of 'nations' or 'peoples' against each other or even a struggle 'against evil' (3) (even if rulers want to claim this), it is simply the expansion of

(monopolistic) national capital beyond the national 'borders' which hamper economic growth. The goal is always the expansion of surplus value production, subjected to the iron-clad laws of capitalist growth, i.e., simply: the maximization of profit. The capitalist manner of production is the crisis itself. Capitalism produces until its collapse (whether Keynes, Smith or anyone else serves as a guide to the political class), in an ever-recurring crisis due to overproduction (though the exact timing may not be predictable), which leads to the impoverishment of the wage-earning class, far beyond the existing miserable conditions. But the root of the evil is not some 'foreign power', or 'foreign peoples', not even the capitalists themselves are to blame (though we still aim to overthrow them). There is a reason why Karl Marx titled his book *Capital* and not *Capitalists*. Capitalism as the economic and social order is responsible for endless production and the subsequent exploitation of the wage-dependent class.



It is not the capitalists who 'make' capitalism, capitalism is a system which conditions humanity.

The nation (4) is a precondition for imperialist activity and 'national liberation' (5) is not the way forward. It is an aberration that goes in circles. The nation, the 'Volk' (not to be confused with, for example, Pueblo or People) is a social construct that always carries with it the identification of the foreign, of an evil which befalls the 'national body'. It generates racism, antiziganism (editors: (anti-Gypsyism is the literal translation, prejudice against Romani and other 'travelling' peoples) and anti-Semitism, nations fantasise about a good existence which is being corrupted by the 'foreign' and at the same time negate anything wrong with the ruling class is negated.

So, what is to be done against today's imperialism? With the awareness that it doesn't matter in which pubs I work and in which ones I drink, one thing always remains the same: the conditions of production of capitalist reality. The consciousness about the fact that the capitalist conditions are the enemy. With this knowledge, we must fight imperialism. The struggle against imperialism is a class-conscious one, with the understanding of the explicit class relations of the owning 'bourgeoisie' and the 'proletariat' selling its labor or being exploited in unpaid care work.

We must also be very aware that it is not the 'financial sector' (6) that 'destroys' a form of production that is usually good, the idea of 'good production' is nothing more than a figment of imagination in the existing wrong conditions set by capitalism.

To reiterate, capitalist production itself is the crisis. There is no difference or even antagonism between a supposedly 'evil and ravenous' financial capital and a supposedly 'good and constructive' producing capital.

The finance industry as we know it today exists because capital is being accumulated from the exploitation of the wage-earning class and the possibilities of continuously 'financing' the exploitation of the wage-earning class through production has long reached its limit. Not only that, the false distinction between a supposed 'reaping' and 'producing', capitalism paves a way straight to anti-Semitism and to a misdirected 'critique of capitalism' (which does not, in fact, criticise but uses anti-human rhetoric to cement the existing order).

The struggle against imperialism is a struggle against capitalism. It is the struggle for emancipation, the struggle against degradation to 'human capital', the struggle against objectification, the struggle towards the free individual! (7)

Anti-imperialism is class struggle, anti-capitalism is class struggle, class struggle is anti-national. Class struggle has one goal: to change the existing conditions.

May Day is coming, the day not of "labour", the day of the wage-earning class, the day of class struggle, worldwide, in rejection of borders and other social constructs of inequality! The day is a symbol, based on the Haymarket strikes of 1886 in Chicago, the symbol of a united working class. See you in the streets!

Get Organized against 'Volk' and 'Vaterland'! For more class struggle!

## Notes:

- (1) Class is an analytical category that results from the analysis of existing conditions. It does not serve to create identity, because although the bitter classist experiences virtually provoke a class identity, there is only one goal – the dissolution of all classes.
- (2) Colonialism: "Colonialism is a relationship of domination between collectives, in which fundamental decisions about the way of life of the colonized are made and actually enforced by a culturally different minority of colonial masters who are hardly willing to adapt, with priority given to external interests. In modern times, this is usually associated with broadcast ideological justification doctrines based on the colonial masters' conviction of their own cultural superiority." A definition to be discussed from: C.H.Beck Knowledge – Colonialism p.20
- (3) "The morality of capital lies buried in the logic of its circulation." Karl Marx
- (4) Nation: "The nation is the territorial body that delineates the boundaries of location within world market competition. Furthermore, it serves as an ideological construct that provides the exploited classes with a supposed 'reason' for the same." Definition from the consensus of Die Plattform, which refers exclusively to capitalism.
- (5) "The workers have no homeland. You cannot take from them what they do not have." Karl Marx
- (6) "Since the amounts, prices and speed of circulation of commodities in circulation are subject to constant change, their circulation also requires sometimes less, sometimes more money. Reservoirs (containers) are therefore necessary, where money flows out of circulation and from where it comes back into circulation as needed. The most developed form of such supply and withdrawal channels of money, or treasuries, are the banks" (Johann Most – Capital and Labour). The producers, the traders and the banks are together indispensable factors for capitalism. The attempt to separate them shows ignorance of the capitalist economy (see also anti-Semitism here). 'Finance capital' is insurmountably intertwined with 'producing capital'. One cannot exist without the other, they are two sides of the same coin." From the capitalism consensus of Die Plattform.
- (7) It is necessary to "overturn all relations in which man is a degraded, a subjugated, an abandoned, a contemptible being." From On the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Karl Marx



## **“Freedom Come All Ye”: An anarchist communist critique of nationalism**

*This article is based on a talk given by ACG member from Scotland at Libertarian Communism 2020 in November.*

The point I want to start with ought to be self-evident, but often, in left wing discourse especially, is not. We think we know what we mean by certain terms, but seldom stop to examine them. I want to consider for a moment the words nationalism and internationalism.

It's usual for socialists, using the term generally, to think nationalism is bad, so we must therefore be internationalists. But the two are not opposites. Internationalism is not the opposite of nationalism, since it refers to relations between nations, and therefore requires the existence of nations, or rather nation-states.

As anarchist communists, we oppose the nation-state. The nation-state and free association stand in opposition to one another. The nation-state, since its inception, has been an instrument of capitalism. It exists in order to provide a political structure for the capitalist mode of production. It's the political articulation of the economic structure of capitalism, and it evolves with capitalism, adapting to the economic conditions. It concentrates power in the hands of property owners, and limits access to property ownership. It is a form of authoritarian hierarchical organisation that passes itself off as 'natural' and desirable.

Free association on the other hand nurtures individual self-development and group solidarity. It is the practical demonstration that organisation does

not need to be either authoritarian or hierarchical. That knowledge, that realisation, goes against the assumptions of capitalist society. Organisation is assumed necessarily to contain elements of both authority and hierarchy. So, free association is something we need to learn. Or rather, it's a constant process of unlearning hierarchical organisation.

So, in many ways, the true antonym of the nation-state is free association.

### **A Contrived Structure**

People are sometimes surprised to hear that the nation-state is such a recent development. Weren't there nations in mediaeval times? This is why we need to distinguish between nation and nation-state. A nation-state is a contrived structure. It is a bureaucratic response by power. Nation, on the other hand, originally meant a cultural or linguistic grouping, rather than implying any form of political organisation. Polities – that is, the organisational entities of governance – tended to be called *kingdoms* or, increasingly, *countries* until well into modern times.

Nation, when used in that earlier sense, was much the same as was meant by our German comrades when they talked of their organisation existing in and covering the “German language area”. It is simply a matter of human existence that all known human communities engage in language. And that each



community talks using a particular language or languages. There is not a universal, constant pan-human tongue. Indeed, it's a constant that languages evolve. In her book, "Language Change: progress or decay", Jean Aitchison describes the inevitability of change as *the ever-whirling wheel*.

Language can stand here as a symbol of a culture, of which it is a part. Humans, then, are culture-bearers, and culture is neither fixed nor homogenous. So, in that sense we each belong to a nation, but that nation is not a static thing, nor is it a polity. It is the culture, the language, we were brought up in. We cannot *not* have a language we use. We may have more than one, but we will also know when to use which. The dangers lie not in belonging to a nation (in those terms) as such, but in viewing those nations as necessarily units of politics, in seeing the state and nation-in-the-sense-of-a-culture as facets of the same entity. And there are even greater dangers when the state sees that as desirable and sets about enforcing it.



If we look at the nation-state of France, the territory we now think of as France did not widely speak French until the situation was deliberately manufactured by Napoleon's state. In 1789, very few people in France spoke French. Indeed only 12-13% spoke it even well enough to be described as "fairly" well. It was bureaucratically imposed from above, and the regional languages and dialects were eradicated, precisely to create a unified national identity. A nationalist identity, since now the state was setting up a unity of interest wherever that language was spoken. A national interest. And then the boundaries of the state became coterminous with the boundaries of the culture, and not before. The so-called national interest pre-dates the cultural uniformity, not the other way around.

It's that notion of 'national interest' of which anarchist communists are critical. Our analysis of the way in which interests are divided in society is not that they are divided along cultural or linguistic lines, but along economic lines. More specifically, class

lines. There is no unity of interests between those with power, property, and hands on the levers of state, and those who need to work for a living. Indeed, the nation-state is designed to ensure those divisions remain by and large how they are.

So, our analysis is not to claim that humans do not, or even should not, have many cultures – or nations, in that older sense - but that these are not the lines down which interests are or should be divided. Furthermore, anarchist communists want to replace the nation-state with free association.

## Nationalism and Scotland

If there's a phrase that most emphasises why anarchist communists have reason to be critical of nationalism, civic or otherwise, it's *the national interest*. We hear it in many contexts: macro-economic, security, immigration, import and export, law and order, education, the environment, energy generation and supply, and on and on. All of this serves to give the impression of, if not an absolute unity of interests, then at least a core of shared interests. But we know that there can't really be a harmony of interests between bosses and workers in any of those matters.

A class analysis of power in society can be distilled into one word: ownership. Class is not an identity; it is a relationship. It is a relationship with that noun: ownership. Do I need to work in order to live, or can I live on the performance of my capital? Those polar interests cannot be reconciled.

Sometimes you'll see this kind of analysis referred to as *the politics of envy*. That is to deflect from the point. Leave aside the negative moral connotations of the word *exploitation* and focus for now just on the practical economic meaning. If we exploit resources such as hydropower to generate electricity, then we are using raw materials for gain. Even without the issues of environmental depletion or degradation, the relationship between the exploiter and the resource is clear. It is that relationship that we call class.

So, there can't be a unity of interests between the two parties to that relationship.

And yet, that is what nationalism would have us believe. That the nation state is a polity within which there exists at some level fundamentally shared concerns.

This is the background, then, to any critique of nationalism.

I'm speaking from Scotland. The notion that I would have a unity of interests with the Duke of Buccleuch or with Anne Gloag - of stagecoach fame - is preposterous.

And here is where we come to the But. The practicality of the situation here in Scotland is not that the working class is being offered a choice between nationalism or non-nationalism; rather, we are presented with a choice between two nationalisms. The obvious nationalism of the Scottish National Party or the disguised British Nationalism of the Union.

Unionism is nationalism hidden in plain sight. The nationalism of Britain is the common sense, the unquestioned hegemonic discourse and Scottish Nationalism, being counter-hegemonic is easily spotted whereas British nationalism is simply how things are.

In the 2014 independence referendum, the Better Together campaign – the official campaign promoting a No vote – tried to walk the line between anti-nationalism and presenting us with the cozy belonging of Britishness. You might argue that they were successful, since they won. But look at what happened to the Labour Party in Scotland after that vote. If you want a graphic illustration, you need only Google the Labour MP Ian Murray in his Union Jack suit. This was the Labour Party of the infamous “tough on immigration” mugs. The Labour Party who shared the Better Together platforms with the Tories, trying to convince the Scottish working class that their interests lay in voting the way the Tories wanted us to vote. He is now Labour’s only MP in Scotland. Scotland, where not so long ago it was said of Labour majorities that they were so massive the votes were weighed rather than counted. Whether we wish to accept that historical portrait or not, it remains the fact that Labour is a spent force in Scotland, this side of Independence. The SNP would presumably soon fracture along traditional left-right lines once its goal of independence was attained.

My background is in that portion of the working class in the West of Scotland whose ancestry is Irish Catholic. While the census puts the Irish born population in Scotland at about 1%, it is estimated that around 1.5 million Scots have Irish ancestry. To much of this constituency, Unionism has additional connotations. Along with the Britishness we have already discussed, you have to add the history of the

experience of the working class in Ireland, especially the North, visible across the sea from various points on the western Scottish coast, and, frankly, you have to factor in Irish nationalism. This may sit at a somewhat subliminal, cultural level, rather than forming a part of an overt political ideology, but whether or not your father discussed James Connolly at the dinner table, as mine did, or whether there is just a more general sense that you feel unwelcome and uncomfortable in a place like Larkhall, with its fabled kerbstones painted red, white and blue, that’s a sizeable proportion of the working class in Scotland for whom the Union Jack is not the rallying point the Better Together campaign envisaged.

It is unconscionable that the ACG support a No vote. Not only would that be seen in Scotland as support for a reactionary strand of British Nationalism, it would also be seen as having common ground with the Orange Order, and a Unionism that now plays very badly to many working class Scots of Irish ancestry.

(This, incidentally, is not how it was a generation or more ago, when Billy Wolfe was leader of the SNP. Although Wolfe tried to steer the SNP leftward in the late 70s, he also made a series of anti-Catholic remarks in 1982, including saying that Pope John Paul II should not be visiting Scotland, as it was a “protestant country”. The SNP distanced itself from the remarks, and Wolfe himself later recanted, but the fact remained that at the time many Scots of Irish descent were suspicious of Scottish Nationalism for precisely that reason. And indeed to this day, some Irish Republicans are contemptuous of Scottish nationalism, not least because of the particular history of Protestant Scottish planters, and the continuing political implications - in the North - of the term Ulster Scots).





## Abstention?

As anarchist communist individuals, we are faced with a choice therefore of abstaining or voting Yes. I'm not so interested here in that individual choice. What I want to try to tease out is what organised anarchist communism should be saying about the national question in Scotland. We need to make certain that the anarchist communist view does not look like it has tin ears. And we need to show that our analysis has relevance. This will not be possible if our slogans around the national question are at best a turn-off, and at worst risk tarring us as allies of reactionary Unionist British Nationalism.

Furthermore, since our criticism of nationalism is that it sees a unity of interests between the boss class and the working class, it would be odd for us to join the Yes campaign beside our class enemies.

So, our response, whatever we decide it should be, needs to reference the interests of the working class in Scotland as with all the working class, and not *Scots*.

This will of course not be enough for the nationalist partisans. They will see that as fence sitting, and tantamount to supporting the other side. It is in their nature to polarise this debate. We saw this in the response of a hard core of their activists in 2014 when they gloried in their status as a minority. "We are the 45" they proudly proclaimed - meaning the heroic 45% who voted Yes but lost - oblivious to the irony that this doomed them to perpetual minority status, in exchange for proclaiming their ideological purity.

That body of partisan purists – not the 45% of voters who voted Yes, but many of the vocal core of zealots who gloried in the name The 45 – are particularly hard-line in shouting down dissent. Their attitude towards any criticism coming their way is frightening to watch. There can be no debate. There is to be no dialogue. Even the SNP is under fire from hard-line nationalists, for not moving fast enough, for not

having yet held a second referendum. They seem to believe that just because they want it so much they would necessarily win, regardless of what the polls suggest. This impatient wing fell in behind Alex Salmond's new Alba party, but it failed to make any dent on the recent Holyrood elections. The new party was seen by most as a home to conspiracy theorists, paranoid reactionaries and bigots.

There are no allies or fellow travellers to be found in that number.

I used to be of the opinion that independence would provide the working class in Scotland with an historical moment in which it could force the hand of capital in Scotland and gain useful concessions. By no means the social revolution, but still concessions worth having. Much in the way that after WWII, the working class gained the prizes of the NHS and Welfare State, and an ongoing post war consensus that ran until overturned by the New Right.

I still think that chance can be created, but I am no longer confident that it will be taken. There just is not the organisation with roots in the working class to see such a case being made. The groundwork is just not there. The left nationalists, such as Commonweal, do not have the voice within working class communities.

So, what we are left with is the case that says: if we, the working class in Scotland, have a chance to ditch Boris, should we not take it? How does it help the working class in England if we refuse to take that chance? I am under no illusions that this is equivalent to ditching neoliberalism. The SNP talks left but is in fact a party of pragmatic managerialism. (In as much as it has any coherence). I would certainly not be advocating for an SNP government.

So, while there is a part of me that would certainly find pleasure in the break-up of the UK state, I know full well that the political class in Edinburgh is no more trustworthy than the political class in Westminster.





# From the Commune to Kronstadt

Both the Kronstadt and Paris Communes share some interesting features and tell us a great deal about the states which drowned them both in blood after only a few weeks of existence.

## Inspiration

The Paris Commune provided revolutionaries with an example of the possibilities inherent in spontaneous popular self-activity. Though defeated, it inspired anarchists, including Bakunin, who claimed it as their own. Even Marx, who had hitherto emphasised the necessity of 'political', i.e. parliamentary struggle, temporarily adopted an almost libertarian position on the Commune. The Communards, he declared lyrically: "have stormed heaven" and, though careful not to abandon the concept of proletarian dictatorship, Marx and Engels identified that dictatorship with the self-activity of the masses that the Commune brought about.

Lenin, ironically, was for a brief period before the October revolution enthusiastic about the Paris Commune, advocating the creation in Russia of the "Commune State". However, Marx's, Lenin's and Engels's libertarianism were extremely temporary. Lenin in particular soon abandoned the superficial libertarianism of his "State and Revolution" and imposed an iron dictatorship of the Party and Cheka (secret police). Having praised the Paris Commune for its libertarian self-activity, he subsequently crushed Russia's home-grown variant: Kronstadt.

## Example

What did the Paris Commune achieve? Firstly it created a popular army from the ranks of disaffected government soldiers and the armed populace of Paris. Though ultimately defeated by the forces of the state, it fought valiantly from street to street until the final surrender. Militarily, the Commune made the strategic blunder of awaiting the government attack on Paris. Had it met the invading army some way outside Paris the outcome might have been very different. But, as a model of military organisation, the Commune gave us the people's or workers' militia as an alternative to the standing army which acts as guardians of our oppressors.

On the social level the Commune carried out a number of reforms. It was extremely egalitarian, fixing a modest upper limit on earnings for servants

of the Commune. Those employers who had fled Paris were expropriated and the workshops were run by the workers. This latter development was of crucial importance since it demonstrated the feasibility of ordinary working people taking control of production themselves. Similarly, the question of distribution was placed in the hands of the Paris masses. In addition, whereas bourgeois "democracy" effectively removes any decision-making from the people, the Commune destroyed political hierarchy and initiated a system of delegate democracy. Delegate democracy gave the workers a direct say in the administration of their everyday lives by which elected delegates were mandated to carry out their wishes and were subject to dismissal should they fail to do so.

The Commune in its day to day activity carried out a number of changes which stemmed from their everyday oppression. For example, night work was abolished for the bakers of Paris. The Parisians would have to wait for their bread! Pawn shops, which were seen as exploitative, were closed down and the church which had played the role of ideological oppressor of the masses was disestablished, its property socialised and its involvement in education terminated.

These measures, though inadequate from an anarchist communist perspective, were all part of a thoroughly progressive and anticapitalist popular social experiment. Anarchists would today perhaps point out the limitations of the Commune, for example the continuation of the wages system and the introduction of the cooperative as an alternative to private capitalism. However, had the Commune not fallen and had the model been adopted elsewhere in France (and abroad), a more thorough-going federation of communes might have arisen to replace the nation-state.

## Last Gasp

The Paris Commune arose in response to a conservative bourgeois capitalist state, determined to maintain its power in a period of war. The Kronstadt Commune, in contrast, arose at the end of a period of civil war. But again, it was the libertarian expression of revolutionaries exasperated by the activities of a dictatorial state. The Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917 had been carried out in the name of the



soviets or workers councils which had sprung up spontaneously earlier in the year. The Bolsheviks very quickly created a highly authoritarian police state which by early 1921 had abolished virtually all political activity except that of themselves.

The period from October 1917 to 1921 had been one of continual civil war which had sapped the morale of even the state's most enthusiastic supporters. However, rather than harness popular anti-capitalist feeling, the government strove to harness it within its own ideological and organisational straight-jacket. It was against this system that the Kronstadt sailors ("the flower of the revolution", according to Trotsky) rose up. The Bolsheviks brought into being a dictatorship which extorted produce from the peasants at gunpoint, which enslaved workers under a hierarchy of political commissars and which granted privileges of extra food rations and accommodation to Communist Party members. The whole perverted system of restrictions and state corruption (there were over 50 levels of food allocation, depending on rank) was documented by Emma Goldman in volume two of her autobiography.

It was in the Baltic fleet that the original ideals of the closing months of 1917 were retained in their strongest form. Despite attempts to condemn the Kronstadters as Whites or backward peasants or worse, all of which have since been shown to be false, there is no doubt that they wanted a libertarian society controlled by the working class through their own assemblies. At the naval base and on the ships the sailors held mass meetings to formulate their demands. These were summed up most clearly in the "Petropavlovsk resolution".

## Soviets

Far from being counterrevolutionary, the demands of the Kronstadt Commune continued a tradition that went back at least to 1905 when Russian workers first brought about the reality of the soviet. In fact, the first demand called for "immediate new elections to the soviets" which had by then become mere rubber stamps of the government bureaucracy, being totally devoid of any independent life whatsoever.

The Kronstadters also wanted to see a restitution of proletarian freedom which had been systematically eliminated by the Bolsheviks since 1918. The communards had absolutely no desire for any restoration of power to the exploiters, but freedom of speech and assembly for the peasants, workers and their political allies was an important demand. This attempt to restore the freedom of the pre-October days was of some urgency since it was not only the bourgeoisie who were to be found in the prisons: virtually the whole of the non-Bolshevik left had been incarcerated.

In reality, a whole dictatorial, oppressive state system had been brought into being by Lenin and his party. Their knee-jerk response to any difficulty which arose after their seizure of power was to tighten the screw further: repression, bureaucracy and control were the methods used. A pleasant irony in all of this is that Lenin died a deeply unhappy man once he belatedly realised the reality of his Frankenstein society. Not

only was Lenin's Russia a dictatorship but it was also an extremely hierarchical one. Bourgeois privilege had given way to the privileges of the "commisarocracy". Not surprisingly, the sailors of Kronstadt demanded the "equalisation of rations" for all workers except those engaged in dangerous or unhealthy jobs.

There is no doubt that the insurrectionaries had had a gutful of the Bolsheviks and their methods. Only the overthrow of the Bolsheviks and their replacement by organs of self-organised production together with the granting of freedom to artisans and peasants (as long as they didn't hire labour) could retrieve the situation, argued the Kronstadters. But the Kronstadt demands, even though they had been mouthed by the Bolsheviks themselves, were met unsurprisingly with repression and slander. Like the communards of Paris, those of Kronstadt put up bitter resistance to the state's bullying and military assault. With the destruction of this last breath of 1917 died the last hope of Russia's oppressed.

## Self-Organisation

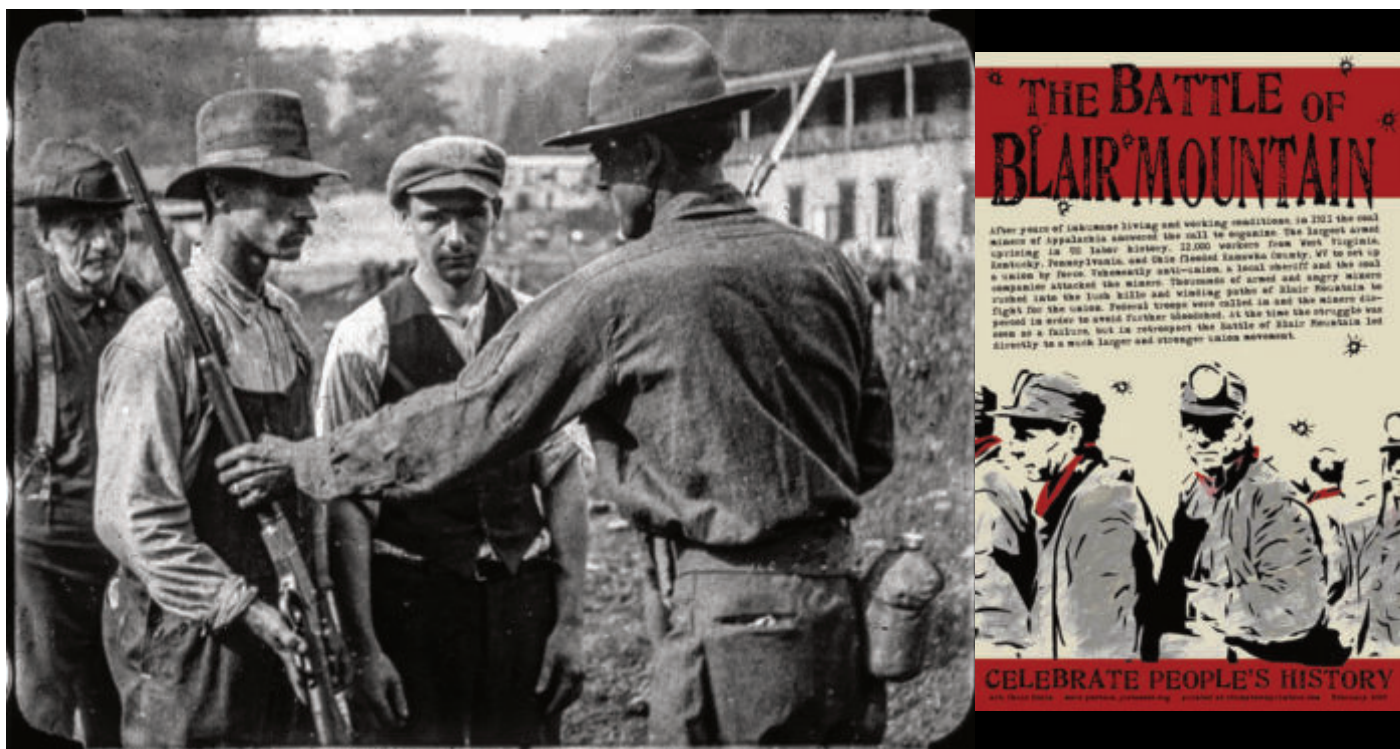
The Paris and Kronstadt Communes were expressions of working class self-activity which continue to provide inspiration. Marxist-Leninist-Trotskyist groups will cynically invoke the former when it suits them whilst, inconsistently, condemning Kronstadt as counterrevolutionary. If they are particularly hypocritical they will cry crocodile tears over the destruction of Kronstadt, pointing to the "tragic necessity" of it all.

But we anarchist communists see in the commune a sketch of how society could be organised. The commune model provides an organisational basis for creating self-directing, integrated units which when federated with similar bodies could have a national and even international character. The Paris and Kronstadt Communes were both brought about under extremely difficult circumstances and lasted only for a matter of weeks. Despite their preoccupation of survival, they demonstrated the practicability of the commune as an organisational form which generated the maximum level of freedom, solidarity and equality. The commune as a geographical entity can accommodate both community and workplace anarchy. It is a model for the future.

*The above is a slightly adapted version of an article written by our late comrade, Colin Parker. It was first published in Organise, the magazine of the Anarchist Communist Federation in 1991*



# The Ides of March



The spring of 1921 was a time of intense class conflict. In Italy the Biennio Rosso was in full swing, whilst in America the Coal Wars were heading towards a bloody conclusion on Blair Mountain.

Germany, the heart of Europe, was also deeply disturbed. Reeling from military and political collapse, industrial disputes were endemic. In most places, however, the working class was on the defensive, smashed by repeated blows from a military machine made vicious by defeat wielded by the best organised and most power hungry politicians in the world – the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD).

One of the islands where the workers remained unbowed was the Prussian province of Saxony (now part of Saxony-Anhalt State). The south of this area, around Halle, was an important industrial area. Immediately south of the city was the vast Leuna chemical works fed by gigantic opencast brown coal mines, whilst in the mountains to the west was a major copper mining region, centred on the towns of Mansfeld and Eisleben.

On 17th March 1921, tired of ceaseless strikes, sabotage and thefts, the Social-Democratic government announced their intention to occupy and pacify the mining district. Chief architect of the campaign, testing the new armed 'security police' (*Sicherheitspolizei* – Sipsos or Sips) rather than the army, was Carl Severing, Prussian Minister of the Interior. Severing was party to the conspiracy with the generals in the creation of the so-called Black

Reichswehr, and later, as national Interior Minister, helped prepare the ground for Nazi oppression with attacks on free speech and assembly.

An important factor in this decision was the rise of the Communist Party (KPD). At the end of the previous year, the KPD had absorbed the bulk of the Independent Social-Democratic Party (USPD) to become *the* party of the left. Now half a million strong, on 20th February the KPD had won the Prussian state elections in Merseburg – precisely the area now targeted. Bolstered by election success and targeted by Comintern representatives such as Béla Kun, the famous Bloodthirsty Butcher of Budapest, the KPD had also decided on a confrontation.

The KPD's new stance was also influenced by its external left – the Communist Workers' Party (KAPD). This anti-parliamentary group had been formed the previous year in the wake of the KPD's failure to capitalise on (or even meaningfully participate in) the resistance to the Kapp Putsch and was achieving some degree of success. Given the deviousness of the "Communists", one cannot rule out the possibility that this "turn" was intended to be a demonstration of the uselessness of the KAPD's strategy. Certainly the lack of effective support from Central and the rapid reversal of the "insurrectionary turn", suggests that, so far as the KPD is concerned, the "March Action" was set up to fail.

On 19th March, the security police arrived in Mansfeld and Eisleben. The area was placed in lockdown and house-to-house searches in search of



weapons commenced. Two days later the Leuna works' council (the powerless bosses' replacement of the workers' councils) was deposed and a joint KPD-KAPD action committee elected. Although ominous and disorderly (as the forces of order usually are), there was nothing very much out of the ordinary. And then Max Hoelz arrived.

Hoelz was the son of a poor agricultural labourer. Through hard work and study, he advanced to become a surveyor, eventually settling in Falkenstein in western Saxony. Like many others, his service as a soldier radicalised him. After the war, he became an activist for the unemployed, not hesitating to requisition food and fuel for the distressed of the town and going so far as to imprison the mayor and town council for calling the jobless "work-shy parasites". It was, however, during the Kapp Putsch of March 1920, that he rose to fame, organising a Red Guard. A contemporary describes their makeup:

The commando, motorised, counts 60 to 200 men. In front, a reconnaissance group with machine rifles or lighter arms: the heavily armed trucks followed. Then the "chief" in a motorcar, "with the cash" in company of his "minister of finances". As cover, another heavily armoured truck. All decorated with red flags. From their arrival in a locality, provisions are requisitioned, the post offices and savings banks are ransacked. The general strike is proclaimed and paid for by the employers with a "tax" levied. Butchers and bakers are ordered to sell their merchandise 30 to 60 per cent cheaper. All resistance is crushed immediately and violently...

The Robin Hood of the Vogtland roamed the countryside burning the villas of the rich, destroying tax records, freeing prisoners and distributing booty. He was, naturally, extremely popular with the poor folk. After the end of the Putsch, the army occupied the Vogtland and Hoelz vanished. On the 22nd, he reappeared in Mansfeld and, on the following day, the March Action really began.

Making incendiary speeches, the good looking rebel spurred the locals into action. Miners and the unemployed were supplied with weapons and another campaign of villa burning and bank robbery began. The local newspaper offices were blown up and troop trains derailed. The 2,500 strong column had a smashing time!

Meanwhile, at the approach of the "Sips", the Leuna came out. Here, however, the workers confined their activities to defence and the construction of an armoured train (whose purpose, given that the rails in the area had been pulled up by the column, remains a mystery). Within the works, disputes between the various types of communist arose. All concerned, of course, condemned the "adventurism" of Hoelz.

Faced with the escalation, the President of Germany, Friedrich Ebert, declared a state of emergency on the 24th. The Communist Party, in turn declared a national general strike.

In the event, the anticipated general uprising against the government, on the model of the response to the Kapp Putsch exactly a year before, failed to materialise. Not only was armed activity at a minimum but the general strike, a tactic which had brought the Putschists of '20 to their knees, was a non-starter. On the 29th, the Leuna was forced into surrender. 34 workers had been killed, mostly summarily executed, and 1,500 prisoners taken. The last armed group was broken up in Beesenstedt on April Fool's Day. The total casualties were 180 dead, including 35 police. A very light toll compared to similar actions by the army. 6000 were arrested, around half of whom, including Hoelz, received jail terms.

The "March Action" was a last desperate attempt to unleash the collective power of the working class. But the hold of social-democracy and the trade unions, not just physically, in their institutions, but mentally, in the inherited legalistic and hierarchical mindset, was too strong. On the part of the Communist Party, it had been a cynical attempt to use an existing dispute to seize power. Even in the affected area, to go against 'democracy', even when that democracy was visibly on the side of the enemy, visibly against one's own interest, even, in some cases, against one's own self-preservation, was taboo.

The response of the Communist Party was predictable: A retreat to the legalistic parliamentarianism, working within or with the trade unions and existing left parties, prescribed by Grand Master Lenin in The Kiddy Book: "...you must soberly follow the actual state of class consciousness and preparedness of the whole class (not just of its communist vanguard), of all the toiling masses (not only their advanced elements)" straight into the ever loving arms of the class collaborationist social democrats.

The lesson for anarchist is less clear. Hoelz's "Propaganda of the Deed", understandable as it might be in the circumstances and enjoyable as it undoubtedly was (imagine seeing Jeff Bezos's house disappearing in smoke – just think of it now, don't, of course, do it), generated as little response as the connivings of the 'Communists'.

But anarchists are not glorified Luxemburgists or Situationists looking to attentats to generate good little party workers or to smash some putative spectacle of the mind. Like any seed, to bear fruit the word of the anarchist must fall on good ground. Without education and organisation, the fostering of industrial and community self-activity, any revolutionary talk will fall on stony ground.

## Quotes and References

“Hölz’s army dominated the region for ten days, but only fought particular aspects of capital without changing anything essential. It was primarily an armed gang which executed certain operations. The proletarians constituted themselves as a military force but would not change anything. Their violence remained without an objective, and destroyed the visible enemy, but not the enemy’s roots. It was a negative movement. Occupied by close to 2,000 workers, the industrial complex of Leuna was not directly utilized for revolutionary ends. One part of the proletarians remained outside of the workplace and fought without the social weapon which, for the proletariat, is production. The other part shut itself up within the factory. There was neither any coordination between these two groups, nor was there any concentrated employment of military force against the State. The movement ran out of steam due to both its purely military generalized offensive, and because it had ensconced itself at the point of production. Hölz robbed money, but he did not abolish it.”

**Gilles Dauvé and Denis Authier: “The Communist Left in Germany 1918-1921”**

<https://libcom.org/library/chapter-15-march-action-1921>

“The Executive Committee and its representatives in Germany had already been insisting for some time that the Communist Party, by committing all of its forces, should prove that it was really a revolutionary party. As if the essential aspect of a revolutionary tactic consisted solely of committing all one’s forces... On the contrary, when, instead of fortifying the revolutionary power of the proletariat, a party undermines this power by means of its support for parliament and the trade unions, and then, after such preparations (!) it suddenly decides on action and puts itself at the head of the same proletariat whose strength it had been undermining, throughout this entire process it cannot ask itself whether it is engaged in a putsch, that is, an action decreed from above, which did not originate among the masses themselves, and is consequently doomed to failure. This putsch attempt is by no means revolutionary; it is just as opportunist as parliamentarism or the tactic of infiltrating cells of party members into all kinds of groups.”

**Herman Gorter “The Lessons of the March Action”, *L’Ouvrier Communiste*, May 1930**

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/gorter/1921/march-action.htm>

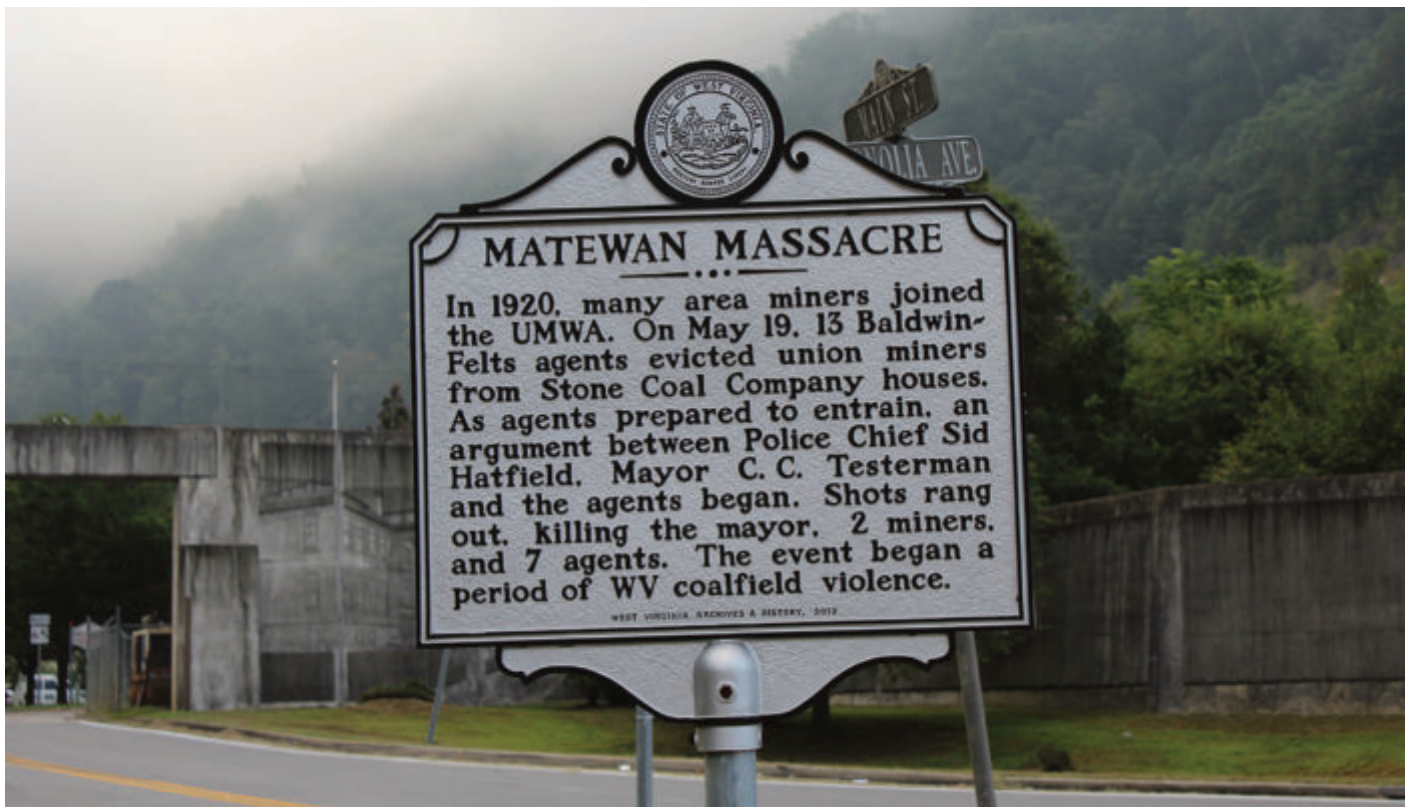
“Two years ago, I still believed that the communist idea, the concept of emancipating the proletariat, could be carried out by means of an economic struggle, without the use of force. At the time I would have been ashamed to shake hands with someone like myself today. But when the revolutionary working class uses force, it does so only in response to the violence that the ruling class unleashes against the proletariat’s existential struggle and its attempts to raise itself up. It is the ruling class that was first to use violence. When a communist speaker appears today before a gathering and proclaims his views, he is persecuted, and violence is used against him. Yet every use of violence by the oppressed class is branded by the bourgeoisie’s public opinion as an injustice, as a crime. The ruling class grants us freedom of expression and freedom of speech only on paper. In practice, communist newspapers are banned, and communist assemblies prevented – all by means of violence.”

**Max Hoelz, “Indictment against Bourgeois Society”, Franke Verlag, 1921**

<https://www.marxists.org/subject/germany-1918-23/hoelz/indictment.htm>







## The Battle of Blair Mountain

It is now one hundred years since the Battle of Blair Mountain in West Virginia, USA. The Battle was the biggest working class insurrections in US history. A large number of miners armed themselves and took on the coal bosses and their creatures in the local law agencies.

The coal mines in West Virginia were ruled in feudal style by the coal bosses. Practically all miners lived in company towns, and membership of the United Mine Workers (UMW-founded in 1890) meant instant dismissal. Miners in the company towns lived in homes owned by the coal companies, and were paid in “miners’ scrip” instead of cash, which they could only use in company stores (the much later song *Sixteen Tons*, by Merle Travis, memorialises this practice in the lines “I owe my soul to the company store”). Fatality rates in these mines were exceptionally high. A number of struggles broke out in the 1910s, in particular with the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek strike of 1912-13 when miners were confronted by hundreds of armed thugs employed by the Baldwin-Felts detective agency, a strikebreaking outfit used by the coal bosses.

Sniffing the smell of revolution in the air, the state of West Virginia imposed the Red Flag Law in 1919, which curbed free speech and demonstrations in the mining areas. The state government, including its two Senators, had close ties to the coal industry and were prepared to come in on the side of the coal bosses against the miners.

Because of pressure from both rank and file miners and those coal bosses elsewhere in the USA who had accepted unionisation and were being undercut by the non-unionised mines in West Virginia, the new president of the UMW, John L. Lewis, began a drive to unionise the West Virginia miners, beginning in Mingo County in 1920. The situation in the coal fields was already tense, with sixty three wildcat strikes breaking out between 1919 and 1921, with at one time seventeen wildcat strikes happening simultaneously.

The unionisation drive of 1920 saw the noted labour organiser Mary “Mother” Jones giving fiery speeches at the age of 83. Also heavily involved in the drive was Frank Keeney, local president of the union. As a result 3,000 miners joined the UMW in Mingo County. They were immediately sacked. The coal bosses then ordered the Baldwin-Felts thugs to evict the miners from their homes.

### Matewan

On May 19th, a dozen of these gunmen arrived in the town of Matewan to enforce the evictions, led by two brothers of Thomas Felts, co-owner of the strikebreaking agency. One of these had already tried to bribe the Mayor of Matewan, Cabell Testerman with \$500 so that machine guns could be placed on roofs in the town. Testerman rejected this.

The gun thugs made their first eviction, throwing out a family into the rain. As a result of this, the

sheriff of Matewan, Sid Hatfield, deputised some miners and caught the gunmen at the station, telling them that they were under arrest. In the following gunfight, both the Felts brothers and five other thugs were killed, as well as three miners.

This incident became known as the Matewan Massacre and had an important influence on what was to follow. The Baldwin-Felts thugs were now seen as not invincible, and union membership shot up in Mingo County.

In late June state police attacked the Lick Creek tent colony, where miners lived under canvas. The cops shot miners and tore down the tents, and threw the belongings of miners' families into the bushes.

Hatfield and his deputies were tried for the death of the Felts but were acquitted. However by now the coal bosses had replaced the sacked miners with imported blacklegs and miners who had given in and signed "yellow dog" contracts to go back to work and leave the union.

Unionised miners attacked the non-unionised mines in May 1921 and a three days battle ensued. The State of West Virginia imposed martial law, and hundreds of miners were arrested. As a result the miners now began to engage in sabotage and guerrilla tactics.

On August 1st Hatfield and his friend Ed chambers were brutally murdered by Baldwin-Felts thugs in front of their wives. Outraged miners began to arm themselves. The Sheriff of Logan County, Don Chafin, a servant of the coal bosses, sent troopers to the Little Coal River area, where miners had set up armed squads. These troopers were captured and disarmed and sent flying.

UMW leaders met with the State Governor Ephraim Morgan at the state capitol in Charleston. Morgan rejected UMW demands. Miners now started to agitate to call for a march to free arrested miners in Mingo. But Blair Mountain and Don Chafin were in the direct line of march. Thirteen thousand miners began to march towards Logan County.

Meanwhile Chafin had fortified Blair Mountain, digging machine gun nests and trenches, and gathered together the 'Logan Defenders', two thousand gunmen paid for by the Logan County coal bosses. Warren Harding threatened to deploy federal troops and Army bombers.

The miners were persuaded to demobilise. But Chafin immediately started taking revenge, shooting miners and their families in the town of Sharples, to the north of Blair Mountain. The miners re-mobilised and marched on Blair Mountain, determined to kill Chafin. Ten thousand miners clashed with the Chafin gunmen on August 29th, and a five day battle began.

Chafin hired three private planes and dropped poison gas and incendiary bombs on the miners, fortunately with no casualties.

Governor Morgan now appointed Colonel William Eubanks of the West Virginia National Guard to intervene on the side of Chafin. On September 2nd, federal troops arrived. Miners, many of them veterans of the First World War, were uneasy about fighting U. S. Troops. Miners buried their weapons and made their escape from Logan County. In the five day battle, around one million rounds of ammunition had been fired.

In the aftermath, 985 miners were arrested on various charges including murder and treason. Some were acquitted by sympathetic juries, but others suffered long years of imprisonment.

The coal bosses had won. Forty thousand miners left the UMW, which only was able to re-organise in West Virginia in 1935. Elsewhere, the defeat effected union organisation in Pennsylvania and Kentucky.

In 2006 a local archaeologist agitated for Blair Mountain to be turned into a protected site under the National Register of Historic Places. Despite this, subsidiaries of two of the biggest coal companies, held permits to blast and strip mine the upper slopes of the mountain. After lengthy legal proceedings, the mountain was finally again put on the National Register, despite the objections of the coal companies.







## The Attack on Counter-Culture in the UK

*This article seeks to chronicle the sustained attacks on the counterculture that emerged in Britain in the 1960s and shows how the British establishment attempted to use first repression, and then co-option, to control and subdue it. It should be seen in the context of the present re-instituted attacks on the gains of the 1960s by the Johnson regime and the right-wing media, in their culture wars. There is much to criticise about the various counter-cultures, but the aim of this article is to chronicle the repression against them, and how the ruling establishment saw them as a clear threat to their rule.*

The emergence of the counterculture should be seen as an international phenomenon. It was generated by the development of the consumer society after World War Two. The baby boom that happened post-War created a large number of youth that had the potential to become disenchanted and disaffected.

The continuation of hostility towards Soviet Russia by the Western allies generated the Cold War and the arms race. The horrors of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the U.S. brought a fear of nuclear annihilation to many, triggering various anti-war movements, including in the UK the Committee of 100 and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. The Cuban Missile crisis of 1962, which brought the world to the brink of nuclear war, fuelled this fear. The involvement of the USA in Vietnam added to a general anti-militarist outlook among young people.

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the Prague Spring of 1968 resulted in an important number of people leaving the Communist Party, and created the phenomenon that was known as the New Left.

At the same time, the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa and the civil rights movement in the USA inspired many young people in Britain. Environmentalism began to emerge as various thinkers and writers addressed themselves to ecological issues. In addition, a sexual revolution began to develop, with rejection of marriage and willingness to live in free unions. The availability of birth control contributed to this sexual revolution,

with the idea of sex without unwanted pregnancy changing the social landscape. Alongside this was the emergence of movements for women's liberation and gay liberation. The oppressive morality of the 1950s was under severe attack.

### Teds and Mods

A first sign of revolt among the youth in the UK was the teddy-boy phenomenon of the 1950s. This involved working class youth, who now had some disposable income as a result of the new economic situation post-war. The post-war boom meant that there was high employment and that working class youth in jobs had higher wages than their parents' generation. The catalyst was a revival of Edwardian-style clothing, originally designed by tailors to accommodate officers (and therefore members of the upper classes) who were being demobilised after the war, in a period when rationing affected the fashion trade. However it proved unpopular with its target audience and the gear was then sold cheaply and adopted by working class youth. This first developed in London by 1952 and then spread out across the UK. The Daily Express newspaper first coined the term 'Teddy Boy' in 1954 to describe this phenomenon. Young working class people, both male and female, were looking for a break with the gloom and conformity of the period and enthusiastically adopted the Edwardian-style clobber, indicating both their impatience with rationing and a working class pride that meant they wished to be as sharp and as well-dressed as their supposed social superiors.

## Demonising

The populist right wing press soon began demonising this display of proletarian dandyism, linking it to criminality and violence and using the term Teddy Boy or Teddy Girl to describe working class youth in general, and feeding on previous caricatures like 'spivs' and 'cosh boys'. The Ted sub-culture very soon became enthused by the arrival of a new music from the United States, rock n' roll, and that too was seen by the establishment as dangerous. Its wildness, which involved a healthy dose of unharnessed sexuality, and its origins partly in black rhythm and blues, indicated a rejection of current social norms and a suspect rebelliousness.

The press promoted a paranoia against the Teds, grossly exaggerating violence carried out by them and the police quickly acted against weekend or holiday excursions by groups of them, as for example a planned visit by Brighton Teds to the nearby town of Lewes in 1955 causing a police frenzy 'to prevent any possibility of trouble' (Sussex Agricultural Express). Andre Drucker, writing in the Liverpool Echo in 1958, contemptuously described Teddy Boys and Teddy Girls as 'rock n' roll addicts, intellectual and spiritual morons, the also-rans.'

The Conservative Government in 1957, seeing that a general election was looming, took tough measures against those it deemed as hooligans. At the same time they banned the importing of American horror comics like Tales from the Crypt, as a result of campaigns carried out by Church leaders and the Communist Party!

The next important youth sub-culture that emerged was that of the Mods. This too first appeared in London, with a small group of young working class people who listened to modern jazz and adopted 'modernist' music and fashion, including Italian style tailoring. The taste for jazz soon reached out to include blues, rhythm and blues, soul and ska. The Mod movement quickly spread out beyond London and soon became another victim of a 'moral panic', a term sociologist Stanley Cohen was to coin for the hysteria in the press over clashes between mods and rockers, the descendants of the Teds.

A counter-culture began to emerge in the USA and Western Europe. It was fed by previous counter-cultures like that of the Beats in 1950s USA, and some of the leading figures of that movement, like Allen Ginsburg, quickly associated with this new hippie sub-culture. In Britain a loose amorphous movement known as the underground started to emerge. As a leading historian of this counter-culture, Barry Miles, noted: "The underground was a catch-all sobriquet for a community of like-minded anti-establishment, anti-war, pro-rock'n'roll individuals, most of whom had a common interest in recreational drugs. They saw peace, exploring a widened area of consciousness, love and sexual experimentation as more worthy of their attention than entering the rat race. The straight, consumerist lifestyle was not to their liking, but they did not object to others living it. But at that time the middle classes still felt they had

the right to impose their values on everyone else, which resulted in conflict."

This new counter-culture was partly fed by mods, some of whom were moving beyond jazz and blues to the new psychedelia that was emerging. This counter-culture voiced itself through a host of local and national underground newspapers and duplicated magazines that addressed themselves to various facets of this, such as art, poetry, cinema and music and the promotion of new lifestyles, which included an advocacy of pleasure seeking, including the use of recreational and mind-expanding drugs, a questioning of the work ethic and of militarism, and either an implicit or explicit challenging of capitalism.

## Emergence

An early sign of the emergence of the counter-culture was the Anti-Uglies demonstration of 1959 when 250 students, mostly from the Architectural Association, the Royal College of Art and Regent Street Polytechnic marched to Kensington High Street to protest against the construction of the new and very ugly Kensington Library. They also protested against the building of the new post office next to St. Martin's in the Fields, and successfully against the demolition of the Piccadilly Circus site, which led to the saving of the Trocadero and the London Pavilion. It was the herald of later movements and campaigns against property development but did not attract repression. A happening at the Edinburgh Drama Conference in 1962, organised by John Calder, and others, like Charles Marowitz, who were to become important figures in the underground, outraged Edinburgh society and led to various charges of offence to public decency being levelled at Calder and Anna Kesselaar, which were later dismissed.

Other victims of the war against the new counter-culture were the pirate radio stations. Set up to provide music that the BBC refused to play, these radio stations operated from ships or sea forts in international waters. In 1967 the Labour Government enacted the Marine Broadcasting Offences Act which outlawed the pirate radio stations. The director of Radio Caroline, Ronan O'Rahilly, reacted by re-opening the station as Radio North Sea International. The Post Master General, John Stonehouse (who arranged his own disappearance as a result of fraud





charges and was revealed as a spy working for Czechoslovakia) responded by jamming the radio station. O'Rahilly had upset the Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson, who at one meeting with him told him that he was 'finished'. Alongside this policy of intimidation and coercion was that of co-optation with the BBC being forced to set up Radio One and employ many of the pirate DJs.

The first establishment attack on the drugs scene, a component of the underground, was the arrest in February 1966 of the poet John Esam, for the possession of LSD and DMT when they were still legal. The police got around this by charging him with the possession of ergot, from which LSD is manufactured, as a 'poison'. Esam successfully appealed the charge, and was acquitted in 1967.

This was the start on the police war against drugs. LSD was demonised, largely thanks to the efforts of the Sunday tabloids like the News of the World and the Sunday People.

On 3rd March 1968, the Drugs Squad swarmed the underground club Middle Earth in Covent Garden, London. 150 cops took five hours to search 750 people, resulting in only eleven arrests, seven for drugs and three for 'offensive weapons'.

The police were also leading an attack on the underground over issues of morality. In August 1966, a vanload of cops rushed into a greeting cards shop on Regent Street and seized all the cards featuring the work of the artist Aubrey Beardsley they could find! At the time some illustrations by Beardsley were hanging at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir

Joseph Simpson, then marched into the V&A without prior notice to its directors to inspect the exhibition. This caused a public outcry. The Labour Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, was forced to instruct the Department of Public Prosecutions to return the cards to the shop.

This didn't stop the police, who continued to act against what they regarded as a moral threat. On 20th September of that year, Inspector Bill Mosley and his men raided the Robert Fraser Gallery in Mayfair and seized 21 drawings of male and female genitals (some of them abstract) by Jim Dine. Though the police raided with a warrant under the Obscene Publications Act, Robert Fraser was actually charged under the Vagrancy Act of 1938, which was meant to stop war veterans displaying their wounds in public to collect money! On 28th November of that year, Fraser was found guilty by Marlborough Street magistrates of putting on an 'indecent exhibition' and fined £20 with £50 costs. The magistrate was particularly exercised that some of the organs portrayed were larger than life! The police then visited the Tate Gallery where some of Jim Dine's work was being displayed. Jenkins was again put in an embarrassing position after Jennie Lee, the Minister of Arts, wrote to him expressing her concern.

In February 1967, in Sussex, the police launched a raid on a house where the Rolling Stones Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, and the singer and actor Marianne Faithful were residing. The Stones at that time were seen as a threat to the establishment, and Jagger in particular was then seen as a symbol of the counterculture. The raid had been preceded by a campaign against Jagger and Faithful by the News of the World, after Jagger began to sue the paper for libel. Others hounded by the paper included the singer Donovan, who shortly after was raided by the police.

Jagger and Richards were arrested on drugs charges, possession of cannabis and amphetamines, and it soon became apparent that the Labour government was determined to pursue them. At Chichester court on 27th June, Judge Block sentenced Jagger to a £200 fine and to three months' imprisonment for possession of four amphetamine tablets, and Richards to 1 year in prison and a £500 fine for allowing cannabis to be smoked on his property. A solidarity demonstration took place outside the News of the World and at a subsequent appeal, the charges against Richards were quashed and Jagger received a conditional discharge.

Block, speaking afterwards at a gathering of the Horsham Ploughing and Agricultural Society, stated: "We did our best, your fellow countrymen, I and my fellow magistrates, to cut those Stones down to size." The music journalist Anthony Barnes later wrote: "To some it is a defining moment in history, the point at which a moribund establishment started to disintegrate. To others, the Rolling Stones drugs trial was another nail in the coffin of old-fashioned "British values." Of course,



the good old strategy of co-option has meant that Jagger eventually received a knighthood and is very much part of that establishment.

## The underground press

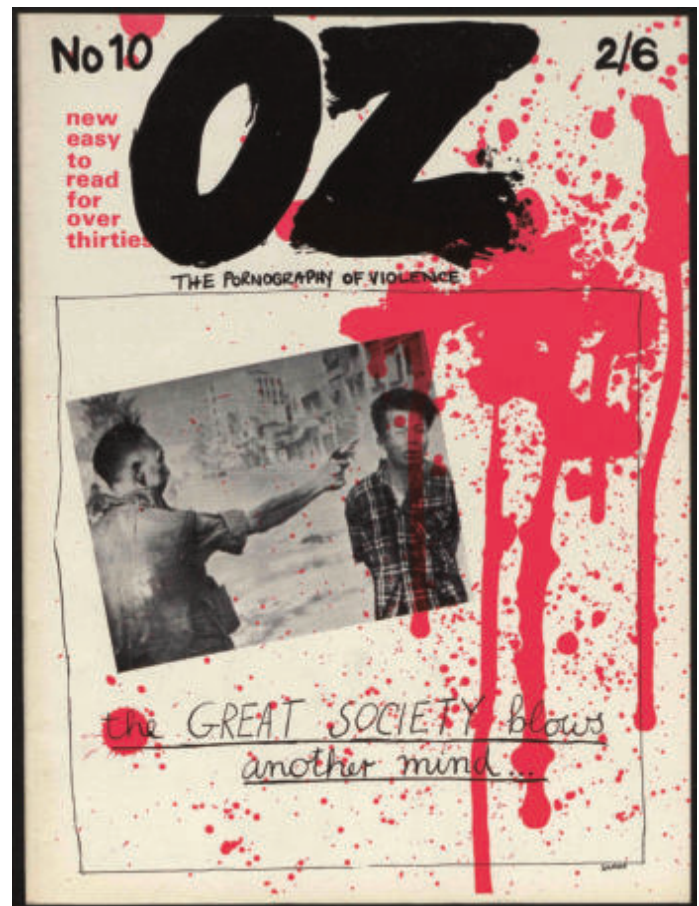
The police also pursued a war against the underground press. On 9th March 1967, a dozen cops raided the offices of the paper International Times (IT) armed with a search and seize warrant under the Obscene Publications Act, a rarely used warrant that allowed them to take away everything from telephone directories to 8,000 copies of back issues in a three ton truck. All book-keeping records, correspondence files, all subscriptions files, half the address stickers for mailing the next issue and even an uncashed wages cheque were confiscated, as well as personal address books and advertising invoices. They also seized copies of the novel *Naked Lunch* by William Burroughs, Kenneth Patchen's *Memoirs of a Shy Pornographer* (which had absolutely nothing to do with pornography) and thirty other books and poetry magazines.

The Labour MP Tom Driberg later told Barry Miles, one of IT's editors, that the police were encouraged in their raid by Lord Goodman, Wilson's private lawyer, who held a grudge against the paper. In a demonstration in Whitehall that followed, the police made two arrests.

The week before the raid the police had also made threats against the Roundhouse in Chalk Farm, where many underground events took place, saying that they "would eventually put a stop to the Roundhouse and all that it stood for." Despite the raid, and undoubtedly because of it, circulation of IT rose to 40,000 in 1968 with an estimated readership of six times that figure. The outcry caused by the raid meant that eventually all the confiscated material was returned and no charges were preferred.

This harassment was reflected at a street level, with any suspect character with long hair or beard stopped and searched on a daily basis (nothing new to black people in the UK who had suffered and still suffer this harassment regularly). The drugs squads that had been formed started going undercover, growing their hair long and disguising themselves as hippies for months in order to make arrests. This culminated in Operation Julie in the mid-1970s, when using undercover tactics and surveillance, 87 homes were raided with 120 arrests and long prison sentences over the manufacture of LSD. In many ways this was a model for the surveillance of left and anarchist groups which has resulted in the Spycops enquiry.

An example of harassment outside London was the raid on the underground bookshop Unicorn in Brighton, run by the poet Bill Butler. Various publications were seized on the grounds of obscenity, and despite a spirited defence, with many noted literary and academic figures speaking for the defence at the trial, Butler was found guilty and loaded with fines and costs which forced him to close down the bookshop. Dave Field, who worked at the bookshop, was charged in a separate incident in the



same year after reading out an Allen Ginsburg poem at a weekly poetry reading on Brighton seafront, which was officially permitted. Police said some people in the 200-strong audience "looked upset". This time the magistrate decided that the poem was part of a published work by a recognised poet and the case was dismissed.

The 'Dirty Squad', as the police unit responsible for obscenity charges was styled, was thoroughly corrupt. From 1964 to 1972 Detective Superintendent Bill Moody, who had been involved in the above mentioned raids, was put in charge of the biggest ever investigation into police corruption. He himself collected large amounts of cash in bribes from porn bookshops in Soho. He was finally jailed for 12 years in 1977 for having collected at least £40,000 in bribes (an average wage in this period was £1,000 per annum). Five hundred other cops were dismissed, and there were three Old Bailey trials of 77 cops, many of them high-ranking.

Meanwhile the raids continued. The IT office was raided again in April 1969, and all the gay small ads were seized. Though being gay was now legal under an Act passed by the Wilson government, three IT employees were charged with conspiracy to induce readers to engage in acts of gross indecency. They were sentenced to 18 months imprisonment, suspended for four years. A subsequent appeal upheld the convictions, and it was stated by the Appeal Court that whilst being gay was now legal, public encouragement of such acts was not. The House of Lords rejected a further appeal the following year though a conviction on a lesser charge was quashed. One of the defendants, Peter Stansill,



was to remark: "It was the last victory in the rearguard action to legally enforce an antiquated morality." One of the cops involved in the raid was later sentenced to 4 years prison for conspiracy to accept money from persons trading in pornography. In the end the Dirty Squad was disbanded.

The harassment against IT continued. John Peel, who had worked as a pirate DJ and was now employed by IT, had his home raided in 1969 and every time he went to buy groceries he was stopped in the street and his bags searched.

Another underground publication with a wide circulation, the magazine *Oz*, was also persecuted. *Oz* had sustained criticism of the Vietnam War and publicising of the anti-war movements, as well as carrying frank articles on sexuality and drugs and investigative articles on breaches of human rights. The Dirty Squad raided them on several occasions, climaxing with the raid over the School Kids issue of the magazine in 1970. The magazine had commissioned a group of around 20 secondary school students to produce an issue and one image in particular, that of Rupert Bear sporting an erection, was deemed obscene by the Dirty Squad. It was clear that the judiciary were out to get the three editors, charging them with conspiracy to corrupt public morals, which in theory carried a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. The prosecution alleged that the School Kids issue "dealt with homosexuality, lesbianism, sadism, perverted sexual practices and drug taking."

The *Oz* trial was the longest obscenity trial in British history, and resulted in the charges of conspiracy being dropped, but convictions on two lesser charges and prison sentences. Widespread dismay at this was compounded when the editors had their long hair forcibly cut in prison. An appeal ruled that the judge had grossly misdirected the jury on numerous occasions and the convictions were quashed. The trial had caused considerable embarrassment to the establishment. In the aftermath circulation of *Oz* rose to 80,000 copies per issue but two years later the magazine was forced to close because of debts incurred.

## **Punk, New Age Travellers, Garage and Grime**

The emergence of the punk sub-culture in the mid-1970s brought demonization by the press. At first the emerging punk scene was not seen as such a threat as the previous counter-culture, despite the emergence of anti-establishment views within it. The police did not react in the same way at first. However the release of the Sex Pistols' *God Save the Queen* during the Silver Jubilee celebrations of Queen Elizabeth's reign began to garner press attention. The punk movement was discussed in parliament, and both Tory and Labour politicians derided it as neither music nor culture, but a deliberate provocation of violence. However, the Home Office seemed to have learnt from previous instances that repression brought popularisation and refused to move against

the punk culture. Instead it was advised that local councils could use powers under the Public Health Act of 1890 to regulate places of music and dancing. This allowed councils to ban punk groups from playing in towns because of the threat of 'social disorder'. For example during the Anarchy Tour of December 1976 by the Sex Pistols, the Clash and Johnny and the Heartbreakers, many gigs were cancelled due to council and police pressure and a campaign by the national press.

Repression against New Age travellers reached its summit in 1985 when the Stonehenge Free Festival was viciously attacked by the police, who beat many people with truncheons, and smashed up the travellers' vehicles at the infamous Battle of the Beanfield. The Thatcher government had deliberately targeted travellers as a threat and the same cops who had attacked miners during the miners strikes were deployed against them. This was the first time where a subculture not seen as openly political was criminalised in every aspect.

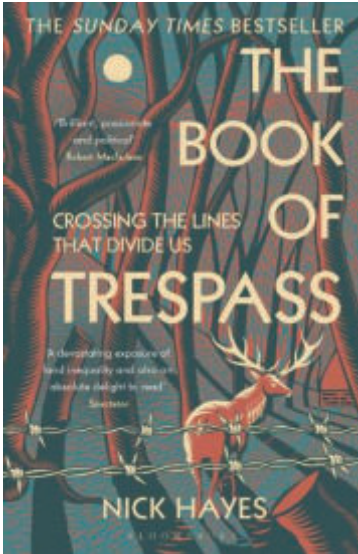
The early Northern Soul scene had also received harassment from the police and the Twisted Wheel club in Manchester, an important venue for that music scene, was closed down in 1971 under pressure from police and Manchester council. Similarly Acid House raves attracted the attention of the State with the passing of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994 which saw raves forced out of the fields where they often took place into clubs where the police had greater control.

The most recent music scenes, garage and grime, have also been the targets of continued police harassment of sub-cultures. They have often intervened to close venues, one instance being the cancellation of the Just Jam gig at the Barbican in London, with Barbican management stating: "The Barbican has taken the decision to cancel the Just Jam concert that was scheduled to take place on 1 March 2014 on the grounds of public safety following dialogue with the City of London Police."

The police have now much greater control over musical and cultural events and their surveillance and intelligence networks means that in general they are up to date on any gathering. Coupled with the grip of the music industry over what gets produced and recorded, this bodes ill for the development of future combative sub-cultures.



# Book reviews: Land



## **Book of Trespass: Crossing the Lines that Divide Us**

Nick Hayes (2020) London: Bloomsbury

Pages: 443 - Price: £9.99



## **Who Owns England? How we lost our green and pleasant land and how to take it back**

Guy Shrubsole (2019) London: William Collins

Pages: 384 - Price: £9.99

### **Introduction**

These two books, written by two friends who have worked together in the land justice movement for several years, are worth reading in tandem. Guy's book is based on extensive research into who owns England and is therefore full of important information vital for land justice campaigners: we need to know who owns the land before we can address the issues. Guy also makes it clear that he believes land should be used for the public good- a common treasury. This leads to examining the important issue of how land is currently used and how current land owners, whether private or public, stand in the way of ensuring land is used for the common good, as well as nature.

Nick's book is also full of information, but this is less structured and woven into his trespass narrative- his own experience of the land owned by the aristocracy and others, and the lines that exclude. This gives a more personal touch and evokes the spirit of the land as well as the facts. He also looks in depth at the role of the colonial legacy in land ownership today. However, it is more limited in scope because its focus

is on trespass. Though this covers a range of issues, not just the right to roam but also the right to protest, the land question is so much bigger than this. He does mention that if people do get a right to roam, like the one in Scotland, that they will become more aware of the problems of how the land is used but this is not the focus of the book.

The focus on access and right to roam limits the analysis in other ways. Land is not just a place for urban dwellers to go to ramble, recreate, revitalise themselves, or rave. The countryside is a place of work, where farmers and others produce food and other things we need. The problem lies, as Nick so clearly points out, that so much of the land is dominated by aristocratic landowners who are not really using the land to benefit anyone but them and their rich friends. However, what about farmers, forestry workers, and those employed by conservation organisations? There may be serious problems with the way agriculture is organised (see article in this issue on Food, Land and Revolution) but in transformed agricultural system, we would want to give access to land for agroecological farming, and forestry, and other



land projects that would use the land wisely and for the common benefit.

We first need to be able to make collective decisions about how we want the land to be used- how much for agriculture, how much for wild land and biodiversity, how much for forests, how much for peat bog, how much for housing etc. Only then can we make decisions about people's rights to access the land. If land was owned by the public or communities, then it may be decided that people should not have access to parts of the land. There is no reason why we have to have the right to walk across farmland and some areas may be put aside for rewilding and conservation. The important issue then is not so much having freedom to roam anywhere, but being part of the decision-making process, which is certainly not the case now as Nick clearly shows.

Urban land issues are discussed in parts of both books but could do perhaps with more extensive treatment in order to overcome the prejudice that land refers to the countryside. If the land issue is to become an integral part of general working class movement, more work will be needed on land in urban areas. Guy has done some work on this on his website (see below). It is often through the lens of housing or food struggles that land issues directly affect the working class. This doesn't mean that working class people do not want to go walking in the countryside but is not going to be a priority for most because of transport issues and generally not having the time.

A final criticism, one to be expected from an anarchist communist perspective, is that though private land ownership is targeted as a key problem, neither author places the land question in the context of capitalism. Nick actually comes out and says it is not a problem of capitalism: "Land reform is not anti-capitalist, or against the free market- instead it shines a light on the fact that with land as a walled-off monopoly the property market has never been free. Land reform encourages the entrepreneurship and flow of earned capital that is so important to the Conservative mindset p. 383)." He goes on to discuss the Land Value tax which has long been a proposal for land reform within capitalism since the days of Lloyd George and is still advocated by the Liberal Democrats.

Nick even goes on to argue that the: "Crown Estate is a highly successful alternative vision of how land can be managed (p. 384)." He says: Crown land "belongs in name to the monarch but in practice to the state: it gives value to all the citizens of England. It belongs to no one and everyone." So the issue is not actually who owns the land or how it is used but whether or not individuals can have access to it. The conclusions seem to contradict the rest of the book, where he questions the very nature of exclusion and discrimination that is the basis of the private ownership of land.

Guy's recommendations for change are much more radical, seriously questioning the way the market

works and the problems of financialisation of land. Though he doesn't actually come out and say it is capitalism and the whole private property system that is the source of the problem, the changes he recommends will be difficult to enact without a mass anti-capitalist movement.

Nevertheless, these books are a call to arms and make it very clear how the issue of land underlies social inequality and injustice, hopefully motivating more people to enter the struggle for land justice.

## Book of Trespass

The book is organised around chapters that each focus on one or more trespasses. In every chapter he highlights some key large landowners, using them to illustrate the nature of the land ownership problem, both historically and current. The fact that he actually goes to their properties gives an insightful glimpse into the power and privileged world that is hidden behind the walls and security cameras.

One of the most important points he makes, is how so many struggles are land struggles. "If only the individual groups that campaign for greater rights to housing, food production and agriculture, mental and physical health, that fight against divisions of class, race and gender, could see that their concerns are all inextricably linked to the one issue that underlies them all: our rights to land (p. 378)."

The first chapter starts with Nick in the area where he was raised- in Berkshire. He spends time getting to know this area, now with a different perspective than as a boy. This is a key point- that we could all benefit from getting to know a place well, both by exploring physically and reading up on the history, culture and stories attached to place. But he soon comes up with a barrier- he cannot fully explore his home place because he soon comes across a farmer who told him: "you have not right to be here." Thus begins the story of how we are all excluded from much of the country and have been turned into trespassers. "A property, whether your back garden or 20,000 acres of grouse moor in the Peak District, had become a hypothetical space, a legal force field, a man-made spell. Whether marked by a wall, fence, sign, or just imaginary line, crossing over it turns the inclination of the law against you (p. 19)."

The chapter goes on to provide useful information on the laws of trespass.

There is a hint in this chapter that there might be another perspective on land- a resource to produce things. When Nick goes to meet a local farmer to ask if he could spend time in a nearby woods that he owned, he acknowledges that the farmer has a long history of ties to this piece of land and knew it intimately, more than Nick as a sometime visitor could ever do. Appreciating the perspective of those who live and work on the land would have given the book a much wider appeal, showing that any movement for land justice must include land-based workers.

The next chapter uses the backdrop of a fox hunt to look at the history of ownership. Ownership can be defined as the right to enjoy and dispose of things absolutely. William the Conqueror is a key figure in this: "I have seized England with both my hands." William kept 20% of England for himself and distributed large areas to his barons. Hunting became the main pastime and soon commoners had their grazing and firewood collection rights removed because their activities disturbed the deer.

The next chapter covers how people became labelled vagabonds as well as the history of the Romas.

Chapter Four starts with a trespass at Arundel Castle in West Sussex and goes on to discuss the enclosures and the critical role sheep and wool production played in causing mass evictions. Land was valued for what it produces for the owners' profits, not for providing for people's needs. This issue of sheep merits much more development because it has had major impacts on livelihoods and the environment. It is now seen as 'traditional' and those who would like to see less sheep and more woodlands struggle when faced with a rather romanticised view of the shepherd. By looking at the history, we can see that the introduction of sheep seriously undermined the ability of ordinary people to make a living off the land- so being a shepherd is merely the last resort for rural livelihoods.

Chapters Five and Six discuss race and gender. The discussion on colonialism as a source of finance for land buying in Britain is particularly insightful. Nick starts with the Drax estate in Dorset, whose ancestors made their fortune from slaves and goes on to show how the shameful history of colonialism has provided the capital for many landowners. Chapter Six looks at gender and land, though focusing mainly on the Greenham Common protests. It shows clearly how trespass laws have changed to make political protest much more difficult, both in rural areas and in the cities where more and more space has been privatised.

Chapter Seven, titled the Pheasant explains how pheasant shooting is another symbol, along with fox and deer hunting, of the aristocratic lifestyle. He also includes an informative discussion of the problems of grouse moors. He uses this topic to reveal the creation of the category of poacher, and the way they were treated. Despite plentiful game, it was the property of the land owner and poaching was punished incredibly severely.

In Chapter Eight, Nick takes us on a trip across national borders to the Calais 'jungle' to reveal another aspect of the lines that divide us - a very moving chapter.

In next chapters bring us back to England, examining ways in which urban dwellers escape the city. Chapter Nine focuses on raves and festivals, which are themselves restricted to those who can pay. In Chapter Ten we get a sense of Nick's passion for the waterways and rivers. This is way for him to escape the stresses of

city life. He is a keen kayaker and lives on the river. Access to waterways and rivers is a particular problem in England and this detailed chapter presents a strong case for opening up our rivers.

This final chapter starts with the Sheffield Tree Action Groups fighting to stop the massive tree demolition programme of Sheffield Council. However, it is in this final chapter that one feels let down. The brief discussion on what needs to be done, is not only inadequate but actually goes against the general message of the rest of the book. Instead of finishing with a rousing cry for land justice we are given the impression that the basic system does not need to change- just open up land more to more public access. (See general comments above).

## Who Owns England

This book is jam-packed with information about who owns England and how they came to own it. It is also highly readable and gives loads of examples and case studies. After presenting the history of land ownership and why it matters, Guy goes into details on different kinds of landowners in a series of chapters: Crown and Church, Old Money, New Money, the State, and the Corporate Capture. It is important to realise that it is not all the old aristocracy or even the Crown and Church that are behind inequality and poor use of land. Land has become a financial asset and is the target for corporate investment and a source of speculation. This is all clearly explained by Guy with loads of examples from both rural and urban areas. The State is also exposed as a poor land manager, eg the Forestry Commission and the Ministry of Defence. State ownership is clearly not an answer if there is no control on what the State does with the land.

The next section of the book critiques the myth of a property-owning democracy and shows how increasingly the Commons has been reduced. He does not advocate "slicing England up like a cake" and giving everyone a small portion. He is scathing in his critique of the sale of council housing. Instead, he explores other ways of sharing out the wealth of the land. He doesn't think that we can return to the Commons system, but the aim still has to be to make land a "Common Treasury for All (p. 234)."

The final chapters focus on what could be done. The chapter "In Trust for Tomorrow" examines why land ownership matters, covering a range of issues- environment, access to land, and social justice. The last chapter presents an agenda for land reform in England, borrowing some of the ideas from Scotland such as community-right-to buy, addressing the size of land ownership and its distribution, stopping the sale of public land, and addressing the issue of "corporate capitalism" and its use of land for short-term profit. In this way, Guy's book provides a much more useful analysis of the problems of land inequality, and moving us towards an understanding of the fundamental role of capitalism.



# Resources

## Websites

- Guy's website that he has developed with Anna Powell-Smith prior to writing the book and regularly updated: <https://whoownsengland.org/>
- The Right to Roam campaign started by Nick and Guy: <https://www.righttoroam.org.uk/>
- People's Land Policy: For more information on all issues relating to land: [www.peopleslandpolicy.org](http://www.peopleslandpolicy.org)
- Land in our Name: A land justice group led by people of colour: <https://landinournames.community/>
- See the article in this issue on land and food for other relevant websites and organisations.

It is also worth pointing out that the Land Justice Network mentioned by both authors no longer exists. This is a shame as it had the potential for bringing together a range of land rights campaigners and now what was always a quite small movement, just getting started, has become fragmented. The LJNI website mentioned in Nick's book will direct you to the other websites mentioned above.

## Further Reading

Both books have extensive notes that refer to the chapters, but neither has a bibliography for suggested further reading. Some to include:

Mark Avery: **Inglorious in the Uplands** for more information about the problems of the extensive grouse moors that dominate large parts of the UK.

John Lewis-Stempel: **Meadowland**, written by a farmer, shows the author's extensive knowledge of his land. It is nature writing at its best, but from the perspective of someone who sees his purpose as managing the land to produce food.

James Rebanks: **The Shepherd's Life** gives a Lake District small farmer perspective.

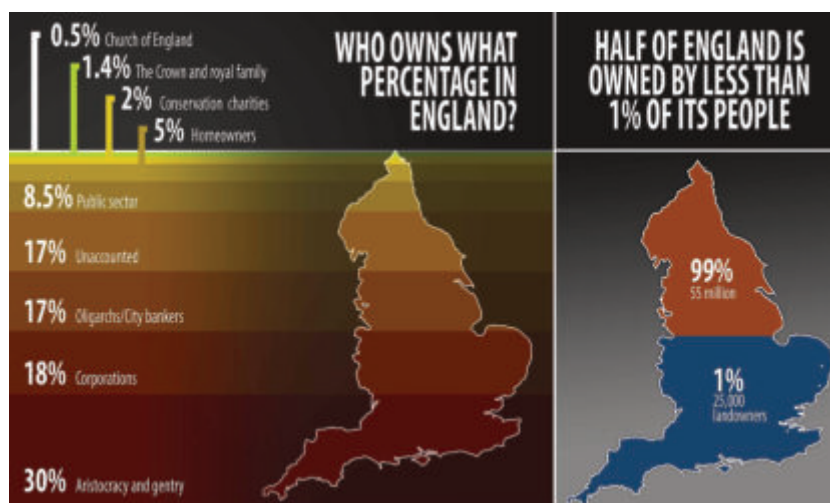
Andy Wightman's research on land ownership in Scotland has been an inspiration to land campaigners in England, eg **Who owns Scotland** and **The Poor Have No Lawyers**.

Anna Minton: **Ground Control** and **Big Capital: Who is London for?**. These focus on urban land issues.

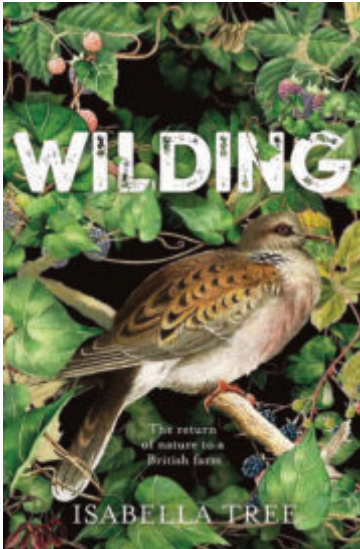
Bonnie VandeSteege: **Land for What, Land for Whom?** (to be published Autumn 2021), based on a year's research in the Cairngorm regions of Scotland, gives a broader perspective on different senses of place, livelihood, recreation, and conservation. She argues that these often competing interests with different views on what land should be used for and who it should benefit would be much easier to overcome if there was land reform and power given to communities, with participatory democracy. To order email [landforwhatlandforwhom@gmail.com](mailto:landforwhatlandforwhom@gmail.com).

### ***The ACG has also published some pamphlets:***

- Fight for the City: Free download. <https://www.anarchistcommunism.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Fight-for-the-city-A5-web-version.pdf>
- Land and Liberty (land issues from an anarchist perspective including the land struggles in the Spanish Revolution) <https://www.anarchistcommunism.org/product/land-and-liberty/>
- Talk given by ACG member at Housmans Bookshop: <https://www.anarchistcommunism.org/2020/04/09/video-this-land-is-ours-acg-talk/>



# Re-wilding and Biodiversity



## **Wilding: The Return of Nature to the British Farm**

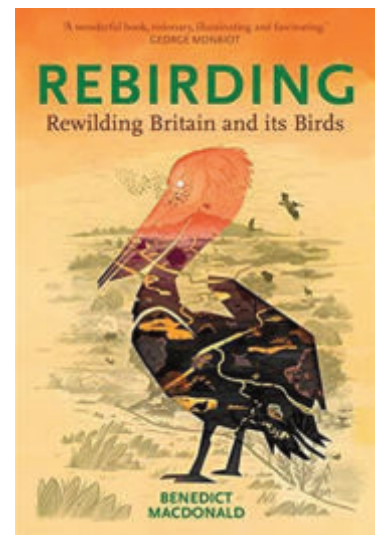
Isabella Tree (2018) - London: Picador.

Pages: 308 - Price: £9.99

## **Rebirding: Restoring Britain's Wildlife**

Benedict MacDonald (2019) - Exeter: Pelagic Publishing.

Pages: 259 - Price: £9.99



How best to counter the systemic destruction of nature? Rewilding is the influential idea examined in these two books. **Wilding** focuses on the pioneering Knepp project in West Sussex undertaken by the long-term landowners, and **Rebirding** is more general, though still largely concerned with the British situation, it comprehensively examines theory and practice worldwide.

From both books we gain important information on the importance of biodiversity and the role of rewilding. Rewilding is the process of restoring natural ecosystems to increase their resilience. Ecosystems are the interdependent communities formed by all the life – plants, insects, fish, birds, animals – in a particular habitat, such as a pond or a wood. However these ecosystems are also dynamic and function at the larger landscape scale. Biodiversity is the sum of all life: the more species there are, the more stable and rich the ecosystem. Those with few species, such as palm oil plantations, the wheat prairies of East Anglia,

or the fished-out oceans, have weak stability, are less resilient: more prone to soil loss, more vulnerable to ‘pests’, diseases and pollution, and less able to adapt to global heating. Biodiversity is also crucial because humans are part of nature: we need clean air and water, and healthy plants, fish and animals to eat.

Rewilding is large scale, connects habitats so that wildlife can migrate, and uses re-introductions and ‘keystone species’ (large herbivores and their predators) to create and drive dynamic environmental change. This is discussed in **Rebirding** using the example of America’s Yellowstone National Park, a rewilding success story. The re-introduction of Wolves in 1995 had a cascade effect: the deer-ravaged vegetation regenerated, benefiting fish and other water life. The valleys were reforested, increasing songbirds and boosting the bison and beaver populations. The beavers created niches for otters, muskrats, fish, frogs and reptiles. A single species behaving naturally, transforms most



aspects of the ecosystem, including the physical geography, changing rivers shape and flow, and land erosion rates.

**Wilding** documents the efforts made by the owners to transform their land from a traditional intensive farm to a haven for biodiversity. Before arriving at what they have today, they had much learning to do. They were able to learn from the problems of a rewilding project in Holland. Oostervaardersplassen (OVP) was a project in which 5,600 hectares were left to 'go wild', with horses, cattle, and deer grazing behind stock proof fences and shows some of the pitfalls of rewilding. After an initial biodiversity boom, the 'non-intervention' policy, lack of predators, such as wolves and bears), led to large scale over-grazing reducing the mixed grass, scrub, and woodland to tightly cropped grassland, resulting in hundreds of starving grazers in 2017-18. After great controversy the Dutch government mandated a culling programme to maintain sustainable numbers; a migration corridor solution was unimplemented. The Knepp Estate was able to learn from this. The book stresses that it is practical experience that counts and they had to make their own way through the often contradictory advice of experts. It was a long process, started in 2000. Knepp (a failing dairy farm) started managing rewilding in 2000. Today there is booming biodiversity, including nightingales and turtle doves, butterflies and moths, and even White Storks. In other parts of the UK there other U.K re-introductions include beavers, corncrakes, cranes, sea eagles and wild boar.

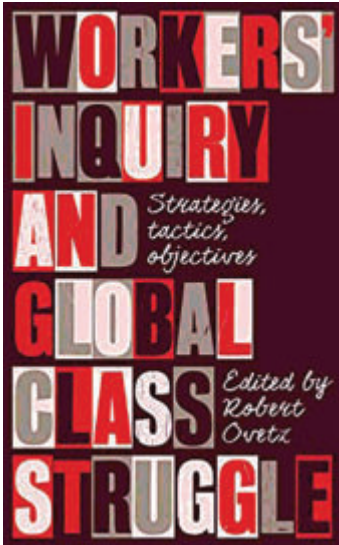
**Rebirding** shows how the UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, without large carnivores (wolves, bears, lynx) or most of its native species such as buffalo and beaver (though the beaver is now returning). It's the slowest and most reluctant to re-introduce missing species. Excuses made are that it is "too small and crowded," though Holland has less cultivatable land and still rewilds, and "too expensive" though poorer countries like Romania, Bulgaria, and the Ukraine have a number of large carnivores.

So why is the UK reluctant to embark on a major strategy to restore ecosystems and enhance biodiversity through rewilding? The UK suffers from one of the world's highest concentrations of land ownership. Large farms dominate food production and land use, with monoculture high yields achieved through pesticides and chemical fertilisers at the cost of loss of wildlife, soil, polluting the water table with nitrates: all funded through huge government subsidies. This is in fact one of the main weaknesses of rewilding projects such as Knepp. The whole project relies on the willingness of landowners to change and could easily be abandoned, as Tree herself points out they don't know what their children will do when they inherit. What happens if food prices go up and there is more profit to be made? A similar situation exists in Scotland where the largest landowner, Dame Anne Borthwick, has become a major force for rewilding on his many estates. What happens when he dies? Therefore, we cannot rely on private landowners.

Large scale rewilding is a vital part of radical change. It must be community controlled and managed. We need grassroots action to make parks and green spaces places for nature, for example wildflower meadows and ponds, as well as for relaxation and play. We need to create and maintain green corridors between greenspaces and rewild large areas, including the National Parks themselves and the extensive moorland that has been seriously damaged. Instead of landscapes maintained for activities such as sheep farming and grouse shooting, we need to ensure that our activities on the land enhance biodiversity, with ecological agriculture and tourism, while at the same time provide housing and other amenities for local people. Mining and other destructive and polluting industries should be banned from places that are set aside for rewilding with alternative employment found. As these two books make clear, the future of humanity and the planet rely on such a comprehensive process of transformation of our land.



# No Politics without Enquiry?



## **Workers' enquiry and Global Class Struggle: Strategies, Tactics, Objectives**

Edited by Robert Ovetz - Pluto Press (2021)

A series of essays by academics, activists and independent labour movement researchers interested in the area of Workers' Enquiry and the nature of class composition and re-composition, coming from a perspective of autonomist Marxism, more or less (with at least one anarchist communist amongst the contributors) the book is part of an attempt "to identify, investigate, and analyze new forms of worker cooperation, self-organization, and struggle, but also to examine the strategies, tactics, objectives, and organizational forms undertaken by these workers and the possibilities for circulating their struggles across borders and unleashing a new cycle of global class struggle." (p.1)

The role played by the working class in the crisis of capitalism and the latter's attempts at restructuring the economy to intensify exploitation and the increase in surplus value created are central to Workers' Enquiry and particularly the theory of class composition. Rather than the working class merely bobbling along on the rising and falling waves of capitalist profitability, it plays an active part in forcing the ruling class to change course, re-structure, develop new ways of combatting it. The book situates the method of Workers' Enquiry as originating with Marx himself in the last year or so of his life and having been "rediscovered" by dissident Marxist currents in the post-World War II world, notably the Johnson-Forest Tendency (C.L.R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya, both Leninists), Socialisme ou Barbarie in France (both in the 1950s) and, most notably by the autonomist Marxist currents on the Italian left in the late 1960s through the 1970s. The 'tradition' was carried on most recently by the U.S. academic Harry Cleaver (to whom the volume is dedicated) and others, most recently in the UK

with the Notes from Below project who are represented with A Brief Survey of Class Composition in the UK.

The battle cry of those who emphasise Class Composition, including the author of this work is "No Politics without Enquiry" and that those who wish to engage in class struggle must first know what they are struggling with, both in terms of the exact position of workers in the workplace, their shifting strengths, and weaknesses also the position of capital, and its own centres of power and Achilles heels. These weaknesses are often what is described throughout the book as "choke points" where workers' actions can make the most impact in disrupting production and distribution, thus leading to workers' victories. This is something which a group such as the Angry Workers of the World (not referred to in this book) in the UK has been doing and doing from their position not as academics but as worker-researchers (probably not a term they would use) involved in direct engagement with the everyday struggles of workers and making their experiences known through publications, some of which are for the immediate distribution to other workers.

The 9 pieces of writing in Workers' Enquiry and Global Class Struggle covers much of the globe and *Transport and Logistics, Education, Call Centres, Cleaners, Platform Work and Gamers and Manufacturing and Mining*. This review cannot examine each essay, but we will highlight some of the most important points raised across the collection.

Some of the essays are very much overviews of labour movements within specific nations, either focusing on one union (the powerful, bureaucratic and truckers union in Argentina for example) or



cross-industry (the struggle for independent worker organisation in China). In the former, the focus is how the Argentinian state has attempted to deal with a workforce that has the leverage to paralyse the country and indeed mould the economy but is represented by a union that is monolithic and “...does not have organized internal opposition.” (p.61). The latter highlights the emergence, eclipse, and re-emergence of alternative worker associations in the period beginning with the student revolt of 1989.

The UK contribution, from the Notes from Below project, which looks at the struggles in Higher Education, in Platform industries (particularly the Couriers fights of 2018) and Hospitality, benefits from being mostly first-hand experience of the re-composition of these sections of the working class in the UK. Since their contribution was written, Notes from Below have launched The Class Composition Project, which continues and extends their workers’ enquiry work.

The Editor’s own contribution is a particularly detailed analysis of ‘Credible Strike Threats in the US, 2012–2016’ which uses the concept of a matrix of the organisational and disruptive power of workers to see where and when workers develop power through the threat of strikes makes for interesting reading. The idea of workers’ organisational, positional and disruptive power is a useful tool to gauge the potential for any group of workers to successfully struggle.

As the aim of the book is to build worker power through, what the book describes as “...an analysis of the class composition and how it can inform tactics, strategies, objectives, and organisational forms.” (p.5) several essays cover the struggles of workers to navigate and negotiate around their ‘own’ representative bodies: the trade unions. Sometimes in open conflict, often circumnavigating them.

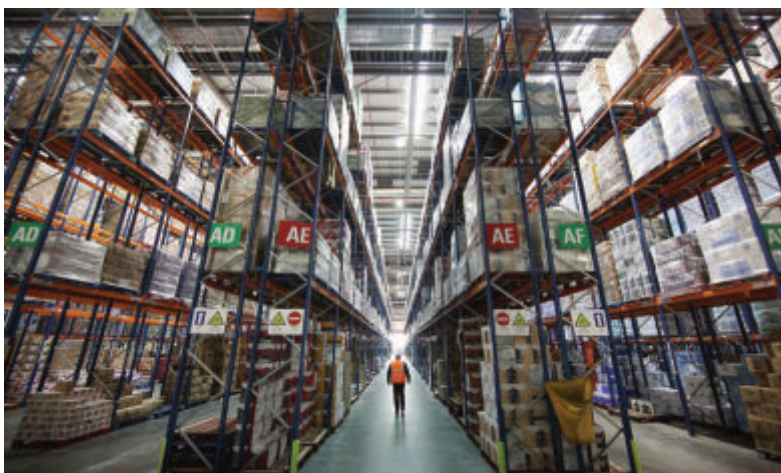
One of major tensions in this collection is found in the differing understandings of the nature of the trade unions themselves, the relation workers have

with them and what worker self-organisation requires. The contribution from South Africa, concerning platinum miners who were in open and violent conflict with their union during a period of wildcat strike action in the 2009-2013 period, describes how they created independent committees before being forced into a different, but no less bureaucratic, union. The South African unions have been greatly integrated into the state and the article points to a “...decomposed and restructured working class under neoliberalism...” (p.237) is beginning to construct organisations outside those unions that better suit its needs.

The essential thing must be that workers themselves carry out these enquiries where they work, supported by independent researchers and academics where necessary. One of challenges workers face is often having a limited knowledge of the process they are involved in due to the division of labour and the atomisation of workers. And there is also the problem of exhaustion. Researching the pinch points of your employer and their dependence on ‘just-in-time’ systems, not to mention the composition of your workmates is not an easy task. It is here that the creation of political organisations that can encourage and support this activity is crucial.

And an acknowledgment that there is a need to move beyond the union form and create self-managed struggle organisations which can express workers’ autonomy in the day to day struggle and ultimately prefigure organs of working class power: Worker and community councils.

This book, which is in some ways an uneven collection of informative but fairly traditional academic writing on labour issues and more incisive analysis, closer to what the Editor sees as identifying: “[...] the existing tactical repertoires, organizational forms of struggle, and assets available to workers to enable them to generalize their self-organization and maximize their strength.” (p. 20), is nonetheless well worth the effort of reading.



# 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 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.

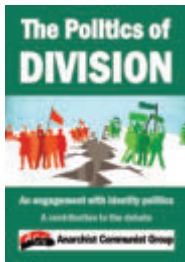


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- Our NHS? Anarchist Communist Thoughts on Health (out of print but soon to be reprinted with updates)
- The Fight for the City (out of print but available for free download)

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