

Stormy Petrel

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Theoretical Journal of the
Anarchist Communist Group



**AGAINST THE DARK TRINITY
OF CAPITALISM, THE STATE,
AND RELIGION**

**Shutting out
the Music Machine**

ECO-MODERNISM

**Mining, Capitalism
and Resistance**

**Workers' Struggles
and Revolution**

INTERSECTIONALITY

Class struggle, Solidarity and Mutual Aid

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Editorial

Welcome to the 5th issue of Stormy Petrel, the theoretical and historical journal of the Anarchist Communist Group. In this issue we take a look at another of the reactionary trends born of post-modernism, the thought and activity

of the ecomodernist current which, like transhumanism critiqued in **Stormy Petrel issue No 4**, has no real solutions for the mass of the people of this planet. Masquerading under the false flag of ecology, ecomodernism seeks to defang and tame the environmental movements, and accommodate them to the needs of capitalism. Ecomodernism is yet another movement of co-option and recuperation evolved by capitalism to spike the guns of oppositional movements. For anarchist communists, the only real environmentalism is one which is revolutionary, which sees that only a complete social change can bring about a real environmental and ecological solution. This cannot be achieved without the destruction of capitalism.

Further to this, we look at the various movements around the world that have emerged in reaction to the global mining corporations which threaten community and environment. Whether in Serbia,

Latin America, South Africa, or here in the UK, local people have resisted these

threats with a lesser or greater success and in doing so affirm some of the fundamental precepts of anarchist communism.

These are some ways in which the struggle for



the environment can be extended. They offer more of an example than the recent The Big One of Extinction Rebellion (XR). In response to the unenacted Climate Emergency declared four years ago by the Conservative government XR mobilised large numbers of people in late April in the vicinity of Whitehall and Parliament. In XR's own words:

"4 years ago, the UK Parliament declared a climate emergency... then did nothing. **Together, we did something.** We got organised. We created an unprecedented coalition working across divides and differences. Tens of thousands of people joined The Big One. And for four days, we picketed and marched and rallied. We gave the Government until 5 pm on the fourth day of The Big One to respond to us. They didn't. Tens of thousands of people sharing a single concern, gathering together peacefully, not a single law broken – and they didn't even acknowledge us."

XR thought that by pursuing totally non-disruptive tactics they could influence the government and failed to question the fact that government, whether Tory, Labour, or whoever, are there to protect the interests of capitalism and that they have no intention of enacting any climate emergency and any concrete measures to counter the impending climate disaster.

Like the Grand Old Duke of York, XR marched them up to the top of the hill and marched 'em down again. A lot of people were mobilised, but like the million who mobilised against the Iraq war under the Blair government, they were ignored. XR went on to say: "The Big One has shown that there are hundreds of organisations committed to taking nonviolent direct action together." However, no particular direct action, non-violent or otherwise, was undertaken during the four days of the Big One, with XR bending over backwards to prove how law-abiding it was, whilst attempting to distinguish itself from Just Stop Oil and Insulate Britain.

Now after the big build-up and subsequent comedown, XR is looking

around for ways of justifying and continuing its existence. It issued a mealy-mouthed call to "1. Picket | 2. Organise Locally | 3. Disobey".

It confusedly called for support for striking civil servants and nurses on the picket lines, saying, "The battle for how the fossil fuel era ends is already being fought on picket lines by workers up and down the country."

What does this mean? XR fails to clearly and openly say that the problem is one of capitalism, although of course, strengthened picket lines should be warmly welcomed.

Similarly, it talks about organising locally, a commendable ambition, but instead of talking about the creation of local neighbourhood councils or communes, it cites People's Assemblies to which 'local politicians' would be welcome.

We have dealt with the present strike wave in a major article in this magazine. The working class is waking up but as yet it had not developed its own means of self-organisation.

The UK anarchist movement has been of little help in developing

consciousness through propaganda and activity, both among strikers and in the environmental movement, being far more obsessed with looking inwards. It has been badly affected by the virus of identity politics, another product of the post-modernism developed among academics. Much of it has also been affected by



war hysteria, jettisoning a No War but the Class War position for support for the Ukrainian regime. All the more reason to develop clear anarchist communist politics based on materialist analysis and a class struggle outlook. The struggle to create a revolutionary core of anarchist communists is a hard task, but one that the Anarchist Communist Group feels it must not shirk. That is why we have included the contribution from Brian Morris. Whilst not agreeing with all of the categories that Brian sketches out for anarchist communism, we feel that it is an important contribution to clarifying those politics and the same can be said about Nick Heath, who has offered the first comprehensive history of anarchist communism.

As we have stated, the struggle to create a clear anarchist communist politics comes as a necessity when the capitalist system is spiralling further and further into war, barbarism and corruption, whilst it inflicts austerity and poverty on ever large numbers of the working class.

We have the spectacle of the lavish coronation, with £150 million spent on security alone, whilst food banks continue to multiply in the UK, and many find it hard to pay their energy bills and afford enough food to survive. We have the never-ending saga of corruption and bullying at both the level of national politics, as with the resignation of both Dominic Raab and of the BBC chair Richard Sharp, the ongoing chain of



events with the Scottish National Party, to mention just a few, reflected at the local level and among UK police forces.

The London Metropolitan Police has become a synonym for rape, murder, sexual harassment, paedophilia, corruption, sexism, racism, homophobia and transphobia. It is a symbol of a degenerate and rotten symbol. But the sexism within the Met and other police forces is widespread throughout society. Even more reason for women to organise against sexual violence and sexual harassment.

All of the crises generated by capitalism and by patriarchy are coming together and the UK is showing palpable signs of that. Against a crumbling system and set of values we posit mutual aid, solidarity, harmony with nature and the collective ownership of the means of production and the land.

For the construction of an anarchist communist movement.

For a social revolution.

Down with the monarchy, parliament and the boss class.

A Trojan Horse: Ecomodernism

Ecomodernism is an idea meant to subvert environmental movements that have profound criticisms of continuing growth and productivism, genetically modified organism (GMO) agriculture and nuclear power. It also sails under the colours of ‘eco-pragmatism’ and ‘post-environmentalism’. These views are now gaining more circulation as can be seen in the decision of the Green Party of Finland to reverse its opposition to nuclear power on 21st May 2022.

Nuclear Energy Institute (NEI) which self-describes as the policy organisation of the nuclear energy industry. Others associated with the Breakthrough Institute include Roger Pielke Jr. who derides any connection between extreme weather and climate change. Writing for *Forbes* magazine, Shellenberger claimed to be speaking for environmentalists when he declared: “On behalf of environmentalists everywhere, I would like to formally apologize for the climate scare we created over the last



Ecomodernism emerged in April 2015 with the publishing of *An Ecomodernist Manifesto* with 18 signatories. These included Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus of the Breakthrough Institute, founded by them in 2007. Shellenberger has connections with the

30 years. Climate change is happening. It's just not the end of the world. It's not even our most serious environmental problem.” He is a persistent and consistent denier of climate change.¹

¹ see here for a detailed record of Shellenberger's statements: <https://www.desmog.com/michael-shellenberger/>

The funding of the Breakthrough Institute remains opaque. Others associated with the Breakthrough Institute include: the journalist Will Boisvert who wrote “How bad will climate change be? Not very”, in an essay entitled *The Conquest of Climate*, Julie Kelly, married to a lobbyist for the agribusiness ADM, and described by the French daily newspaper *Le Monde* as a propagandist for Monsanto, and Tamar Haspel, an enthusiast of GMO agriculture with close links to Ketchum PR, the public relations firm for the agrichemical industry and the Russian oil giant Gazprom. She has defended use of the pesticide glyphosate after it was condemned by IARC, the World Health Organisation’s cancer agency, as a likely cause of cancer in humans.

Recently, Damien Gayle, environment correspondent for the Guardian, wrote favourably on ecomodernism, saying that “Ecomodernism may not, yet, be the most popular idea among those who are campaigning for a solution to planetary crises created by humanity. But it increasingly looks as though it may be the one we will get.” As already mentioned the Finnish Greens reversed their opposition to nuclear energy, thanks to the efforts of ecomodernists like Tea Törmänen. She and others are in the group Finnish Greens for Science and Technology, which has long argued for the use of nuclear power, and she is also chair of Finland’s Ecomodernist Society. The Finnish Greens are now committed to extending the life of current nuclear reactors as well as the addition of new nuclear power plants, which they call “sustainable energy”. In addition, the Greens’ party council agreed to reversing its opposition to GMO crops.

RePlanet

Törmänen recently met up in London with other ecomodernists in the group RePlanet, of which she is the International Coordinator. This organisation as well as enthusiastically supporting nuclear power, is strongly in favour of GMO agriculture. George Monbiot, who originally took a highly critical stance against

ecomodernism, introduced a video by RePlanet which called for animal products to be replaced by fake meat produced in genetically modified microbial soup.

In Britain, Replanet is headed up by Joel Scott-Halkes and Emma Smart, who have backgrounds in Extinction Rebellion, Animal Rebellion and Insulate Britain. Alongside them is Mark Lynas, who allegedly reversed his original opposition to GMO crops (which some have questioned) and is one of the co-signatories of *An Ecomodernist Manifesto*. In a letter signed by GMO experts and campaigners, Lynas’s involvement in anti-GMO activity was questioned: “These claims of Mark Lynas’s importance in GM campaigns are not true. Many of those who were involved substantially in the environment movement or GM campaigns during the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, both before and after Lynas’s engagement in some anti-GM activism including actions to remove GM crops, have confirmed this. They do not recognise Lynas’s contribution as being significant in the ways it is being represented and want to put the record straight on this point of factual accuracy so that there is no further misunderstanding.”²

Lynas writes for the Cornell Alliance for Science, a group that advocates for GMO and pesticides. Lynas has defended the agrochemical giant Monsanto, describing it as a victim of a witch hunt.

RePlanet reveals its adherence to the preservation of capitalism with their advocacy of development and belief in “the power of the democratic state to take control of technologies, to develop technologies.” George Monbiot, who seems to have become a useful idiot to front Replanet, originally criticised the ecomodernists for their opposition to organic farming and “would wish away almost the entire rural population of the developing world”, and quoted the *Ecomodernist Manifesto* which stated “roughly half the US population worked the land in 1880. Today, less than 2 percent does.”

² <https://www.gmwatch.org/en/background-briefing-mark-lynas-and-the-gm-movement-in-the-uk>



Monbiot fronting Replanet

The ecomodernists are opposed to small scale farming which they regard as unproductive. Yet Amartya Sen in her study of agriculture in 1962 revealed that small scale farms have a much higher yield than large farms. The ecomodernists believe that “a growing manufacturing base has long been a crucial way to integrate a large, low skilled population into the formal economy, and increase labour productivity. To grow more food on less land, farming becomes mechanised, relieving agricultural workers of a lifetime of hard physical labour.” In fact, the uprooting of rural populations has resulted in many living a precarious and marginal existence based around informal economies.

Monbiot is not the only pundit to join the rush to climb on the ecomodernist bandwagon. We also have James Hansen, the NASA climate scientist, and Eric Holthaus, the meteorologist and climate journalist, as new champions of the use of nuclear power.

Support for Nuclear Power

As Dr Doug Parr, policy director of Greenpeace has pointed out, what is needed is clean and alternative sources of energy, quick and cheap to deploy and that “Nuclear is the opposite... The new plant at Hinkley C is over a decade behind schedule and billions over budget. The next one in line, at Sizewell C, may not even start generating energy until today’s newborns turn teenagers. Crucially, we don’t

need new nuclear. Solar and wind technologies are a much cheaper and quicker way to cut carbon emissions, and studies show we can keep the lights on with a wholly renewable energy system. All we need is the political will to make it happen.” The French power company which owns Hinkley has agreed to sell the electricity produced there at £92.50 per megawatt. Meanwhile, alternative energies like wind and solar are becoming more efficient and are cheaper.

The most antiquated nuclear power stations are in the UK. It would cost £100 billion of investment to upgrade them. The grid network system is as antiquated and nuclear power plants and coal power plants are being decommissioned and shut down. The ecomodernists, rather than arguing for energy efficiency schemes to be realised mainly through a massive insulation scheme, adhere to the idea of nuclear power, which is archaic and dangerous, as we can see from the examples of Chernobyl and Fukushima. Nuclear power requires a centralised power grid and experts to manage them. They require a round the clock security regime, and above all a centralised maximum-security state. This is to say nothing of the problems of disposing of nuclear waste which has a life span of at least 10,000 years. Do we want a world full of nuclear power stations which is a world of centralised power?



Decoupling People from Nature

One of the obsessions of the ecomodernists is the decoupling of humanity from nature via substitution and intensification. That means in the case of substitution, moving to fully synthetic production. In the case of intensification it means denser human settlement and greater agricultural yields. Environmentalists when they talk about decoupling from nature mean that material living standards can be increased whilst environmental impact is lowered at the same time. For the ecomodernists however it means an actual physical decoupling from nature. Such a divorce, in their eyes, would save nature. This takes no account of the great mental and physical benefits of being in nature as was illustrated by the recent pandemic and lockdown.

The *Ecomodernist Manifesto* envisages an increase in production which will benefit all the world's populations, so that consumption is equal throughout the world, both in the North and South, before it peaks and falls. But can the life systems of Earth take such a change before such a transition is reached? It seems very doubtful.

Humans should be decoupled from nature via a rapid urbanisation, according to the *Ecomodernist Manifesto*. They weep crocodile tears over this saying: "We write this document out of deep love and emotional connection to the natural world. By appreciating, exploring, seeking to understand, and cultivating nature, many people get outside themselves. They connect with their deep evolutionary history. Even when people never experience these wild natures directly, they affirm their existence as important for their psychological and spiritual well-being. Humans will always materially depend on nature to some degree."

So the ecomodernists, whilst mourning for people having to break from nature, insist we are impelled to do so for the sake of modernisation and progress. Nature must be saved by not relating to it.

So ecomodernists deny the fact that humans are inextricably linked with the web of life, with nature itself of which they are a part.

Another obsession of the ecomodernists is with the very concepts of modernisation and modernity. For them, modernisation means "The long-term evolution of social, economic, political, and technological arrangements in human societies toward vastly improved material well-being, public health, resource productivity, economic integration, shared infrastructure, and personal freedom."

However, the development of capitalism indicates that in the real world this is not the case, with immiseration, the widening of the gap between rich and poor, the increasing authoritarianism and development of surveillance societies and increasing environmental devastation. Modernisation has increased the gaps between rich and poor, so that billions are disenfranchised.

Capitalism and class society is not even remarked upon by the so-called ecomodernists. As Chris Smaje noted in an essay, "A word you won't find in the *Ecomodernist Manifesto* is inequality. So there is no mention here of the vast literatures on the changing and varied economic fortunes of the many civilisations that have come and gone, or the changing and varied ideas they've had about themselves. There is no sense that processes of modernisation cause any poverty. The ecomodernist solution to poverty is simply more modernisation. And you then begin to understand why the improvement in material wellbeing needs to be 'vast'. Every year, for example, US citizens each eat 100 kg of meat on average, whereas the rest of the world makes do with 31 kg. Since ecomodernism lacks any critique of consumption, instead choosing to equate increased consumption with increased wellbeing, its only feasible solution to this maldistribution of meat must be to raise up global meat consumption. If global levels equated with US levels, we would need to conjure something like another half billion tonnes of meat from global agriculture annually, and that probably would require the

impressive breakthroughs in technology and resource use efficiency that the ecomodernists crave.”

There is a ‘left’ version of ecomodernism which can be found in the writings of people like Matt Huber, author of *Climate Change as Class War*. He attacks the idea of limits and of degrowth as “almost as austere as Pol Pot’s”. He bases his ideas on 19th century ideas of progress as promoted by Engels and Marx. It can also be found in the ideas of the group around Novara Media, whose concept of Fully Automated Luxury Communism owes much to the ideas of ecomodernism. It can also be found in writers associated with the US left magazine *Jacobin*, for example with Christian Parenti, who calls for increased use of energy, and with Angela Nagle, who sees the environmental concern with limits as “green austerity”.

There is little that is ecological in ecomodernism. Technology that has emerged in the present system isn’t neutral, as the ecomodernists believe. Andreas Malm, in *How to Blow Up a Pipeline*, showed that capitalism was built on coal and oil, and is intimately connected with them, as is the use of nuclear power. Technology is not just a tool, it is inextricably linked to the systems of hierarchy and exploitation developed under capitalism. Sticking on ‘eco’ in front of ‘modernism’ does not change that.

As Aaron Vantsintjan notes in his article *Where’s the ‘eco’ in ecomodernism?*: “Being an ecologist today certainly doesn’t mean refusing to improve humanity’s lot, but it also means having a real conversation about the limits we face. And if an alternative system is to be at all ecological, it would mean democratically weighing the costs and benefits of different technologies: which ones we want, and which ones we don’t. That’s not anti-modern, that’s a basic requirement for a better world.”

Chris Smaje’s trenchant criticisms of ecomodernism brought angry replies from Michael Shellenberger and others. In one of his ripostes Smaje wrote:

“I tweeted to Mike that I see ecomodernism as neoliberalism with a green veneer. No doubt there are different shades of opinion within the movement, but I’ve not yet seen anything to persuade me otherwise. Ecomodernists offer no solutions to contemporary problems other than technical innovation and further integration into private markets which are structured systematically by centralized state power in favour of the wealthy, in the vain if undoubtedly often sincere belief that this will somehow help alleviate global poverty. They profess to love humanity, and perhaps they do, but the love seems to curdle towards those who don’t fit with its narratives of economic, technological and urban progress. And, more than humanity, what they seem to love most of all is certain favoured technologies, such as nuclear power.”

Further reading:

- Damien Gayle. A long overdue moment? The UK Greens pushing for the nuclear option: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/mar/09/a-long-overdue-moment-the-uk-greens-pushing-for-the-nuclear-option>
- Matt Huber. Mish-mash ecologism: <https://newleftreview.org/sidecar/posts/mish-mash-ecologism>
- Timothée Parrique. A response to Matt Huber: facts and logic in support of degrowth: <https://timotheeparrique.com/a-response-to-matt-huber-facts-and-logic-in-support-of-degrowth/>
- Chris Smaje. Dark Thoughts on Ecomodernism: <https://dark-mountain.net/dark-thoughts-on-ecomodernism-2/>
- Chris Smaje. Ecomodernism. A response to critics: <https://smallfarmfuture.org.uk/p=854>
- Aaron Vantsintjan. Where’s the ‘eco’ in ecomodernism?: <https://climateandcapitalism.com/2018/04/16/wheres-the-eco-in-ecomodernism/>

Mining, Capitalism and Resistance

Introduction: Environment vs Livelihood

The first underground coal mine in 30 years was given the go-ahead by Michael Gove, Minister of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, in December 2022. The 'Woodhouse Colliery', a 50-year mine near Whitehaven in Cumbria would produce 2.78 million tonnes of coking coal a year. The large scale underground and under-sea mine would generate over 9 million tonnes of CO₂ per year. Opponents have challenged this decision in the courts, with the main argument being that opening a new coal mine goes completely against the supposed government aim of reducing CO₂ emissions. Many in the local community, organised into *South Lakeland against Climate Change* and *Keep Cumbrian Coal in the Hole*¹ are opposed to the mine and have mounted a legal challenge, which is still ongoing at the time of writing.

so that companies do not actually have to take any serious action. Capitalism requires that the economy continue to grow and fossil fuels are still part of that economy so movement away from fossil fuels is more cosmetic than effective. Climate change cannot be dealt with under capitalism.

However, the other issue is the fact that many in the local community did want the coal mine. South and West Cumbria, away from the honeypot of the Lake District National Park, has been impoverished for decades. Well-paid jobs exist in Sellafield and BA Systems but these are largely sourced from outside the area, with skilled engineers coming in from elsewhere. Alternative employment is hard to come by. The hospitality industry is notoriously low-paid and seasonal. And with farming in the decline, this traditional industry offers no opportunities. Therefore, when a company comes along



and offers jobs, many locals supported the plan. These are not climate change deniers, but people who are desperate and concerned with the short-term future of the area.

Therefore, the opponents of the mine have not had full backing from the local community and this plays into the hands

So why did a coal mine get approval when climate change is high on the political agenda of so many?

We know that the government continues to follow policies that aggravate climate change, putting company profits before any environmental concerns. We saw in the last issue of Stormy Petrel how the preferred method of doing anything is carbon offsetting,

of the company. This is a common source of conflict: land use changes necessary to address the ecological crisis come up against the economic arguments. There appears to be two conflicting approaches to land use-land to be conserved and protected or land to be developed as a resource. It is not just a question of fossil fuels but all resource extraction. It seems we have to make a choice

¹ <https://slacc.org.uk/cumbria-coal-mine/> and <https://keepcumbriancoalinthehole.wordpress.com/>

between dealing with the serious environmental problems and addressing the needs of the working class for jobs and an adequate standard of living.

It is this conflict that makes an issue like the Whitehaven mine a complex one. We want to oppose any extraction of fossil fuel yet at the same time we want to support workers and their need have a satisfactory livelihood.

This article will consider how we can do both: address the ecological crisis and support the working class in its struggle for a better life. The first part will discuss why this conflict cannot be fully resolved without an anti-capitalist revolution. However, as this may be some time in the future, we also need to think about a short-term and intermediate resistance strategy. We cannot build a united working class movement necessary for a revolution if we do not find common ground between those campaigning around environmental issues and those focused more on economic and social issues. The second part will address this question by using examples from both the Global North and South.

Capitalism and Extractivism

What is mining and extractivism?

The London Mining Network (LMN)², which campaigns to support communities who are harmed by mines owned by companies registered on the London Stock Exchange, offers this definition:

“The extraction (removal) of minerals and metals from below the ground, such as copper, coal and gold. Mining is usually carried by a national or international company, with the permission of that country’s government. Some mining takes place by people who are not part of a company and without permission from the government. This is artisanal mining and usually small scale with people working in dangerous conditions, making little profit. This mining is often called ‘illegal’ mining. Mining is extraction. *Extractivism* is the removal of

natural resources to sell on the world market. It does include mining, which is the extraction of fossil fuels and minerals below the ground. But extractivism is more than that – it includes fracking, deforestation, agro-industry and megadams.”

Mining as a necessary activity even in a future society

An anarchist communist society will need minerals and other resources such as wood in order to produce the goods we decide we need. However, it can be done very differently to reduce the negative impact of what is actually a very harmful industry for workers, local communities, and the environment.

Redistribution of wealth and reducing overall consumption will mean less resources are needed. We can undertake a major recycling programme, something that is not done now because it would affect profits. Mine work would be under the control of the workers and local community so that safety and environmental standards would be very high. Work has already been done by campaigners on alternatives, though without directly attacking capitalism.



² <https://londonminingnetwork.org/>

The War on Want produced a report which has been promoted by the LMN which concludes:

“We need to transform our high-intensity, wasteful and growth-oriented economy, so that humanity can thrive within ecological limits. Human rights abuses must be abolished from mineral supply chains and issues of over-consumption must be urgently addressed. That is why we are calling for a Global Green New Deal, to fight for public policies that guarantee energy as a public good, reduce the number of road vehicles and create state of the art, free public transit systems; and focus our technological innovation on mineral recycling and circular production to reduce extraction, and generate abundant green jobs.”³

Mining under capitalism

Mining underpins all capitalist production, whether it be in factories or the service industries. History is divided up into ages according to the main earth resources of the time: stone, bronze, copper, and iron. In the last few hundred years, since the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism, it is hard to pick on material out of steel, oil, and plastic (made from oil). All have been key in driving capitalist production and profits. The 21st century is often referred to as the ‘digital age’ and there are a whole array of minerals required for the digital technology such as mobile phones. Examples are: Copper, Tellurium, Lithium, and Cobalt.

It was the search for minerals, and extractivism in general, that drove imperialist expansion. The obsession with gold and silver brought the Spanish and Portuguese to the Americas and led to the decimation of whole populations. The same story can be told for Africa, eg gold in Southern Africa and diamonds in what was the Belgian Congo. The demands for cheap and expendable labour for mines and other extractivist

industries such as plantations led to one of the worst crimes against humanity in history: the slave trade.

Today, mining is still linked to neo-colonialism. According to the London Mining Network:

“...many mining companies are from other countries – historically in the Global North – although this is changing. Indigenous communities are disproportionately targeted for extractivism and, while companies may seek the state’s permission and even work with them to share the profits, they often do not seek informed consent from communities before they begin extracting – or stealing – their resources. The profit made rarely gets to the affected communities whose land, water sources and labour is often being used. Communities are often displaced, left with physical, mental and spiritual ill health, and often experience difficulties continuing with traditional livelihoods of farming and fishing due to the destruction or contamination of the environment.”⁴

As capitalism needs continued growth to survive, the demand for minerals and other resources continues to increase. As different industries emerge, different minerals may be required. With the demand for alternative energy sources, minerals are required. Cobalt, copper, lithium, nickel, and rare earth elements (REEs) are all essential for producing electric



The African community of the destroyed village of Tabaco in Hatonuevo, La Guajira

³ https://waronwant.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/A%20Material%20Transition_report_War%20on%20Want.pdf

⁴ <https://londonminingnetwork.org/get-informed/what-is-mining/> ⁶ <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/why-are-fossil-fuels-so-hard-to-quit/>

vehicles and batteries, harnessing solar power and wind energy, and other actions to reduce the reliance of consumers and industries on fossil fuels. Demand for these minerals has massively increased, to the point that more minerals are needed for the alternative technologies than were needed for the traditional ones.

“According to the International Energy Agency, a typical electric car requires six times the mineral inputs of a conventional car, and an onshore wind plant requires nine times more mineral resources than a gas-fired plant. Since 2010, the average amount of minerals needed for a new unit of power generation capacity has increased by 50% as the share of renewables in new investment has risen.”⁵

The worry for capitalist corporations is that many of these critical minerals are controlled by countries such as China and others that are not so open to western influence. Geopolitics will therefore limit supply, causing prices to rise and make it difficult to meet any deadlines for transition. It is no wonder that the fossil



Cerrejon mine protest

fuel industries continue to expand.⁶ Apart from the reluctance of these industries to facilitate their own demise, there is a continued need by capitalism for energy, the cheapest possible.

Mining under capitalism is a disaster for workers, communities and the environment.

It will continue to be an essential part of capitalism, even more so with the move to green technologies that aren't actually 'green' at all, and the centrality of digital technology in production and in people's lives. It is clear that we will not be able to make major changes in this without an anti-capitalist revolution that has internationalism and decolonialisation at its core.

However, we can still fight for reforms and these struggles will be the basis for building an international revolutionary movement.

Building a Resistance

Global South leads the way

As so much mining takes place in the Global South, it is not surprising that resistance to mining is extensive. There is not the same degree of conflict between the environment vs jobs argument as people's livelihoods and cultures are still based on more traditional activities which rely on a healthy environment, such as farming and fishing, and these will be badly affected by the mine.

One such example is the Cerrejón mine in Colombia, which opened in 2001, one of the largest open-pit mines in the world. The mine is now completely owned by Swiss-based Glencore, who bought out the other owners Anglo-American and BHP in 2022.⁷

From the LMN website:

“Indigenous Wayuu, African descent and peasant communities have been affected by the operations of Cerrejon, the biggest open cast coal mine in Latin America. The arrival of the mine has caused the displacement of people from their land and with that the disruption of their livelihoods and the breakdown of their traditional culture. The Wayuu people are the largest indigenous nation in Colombia and they keep their language alive, so the mine is threatening an ancient culture.

⁵ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/01/minerals-metals-energy-transition-davos2023/>

⁶ <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/why-are-fossil-fuels-so-hard-to-quit/>

⁷ <https://londonminingnetwork.org/companies-in-focus-glencore/>

The consequences left by the coal extraction are serious. The main consequences are (1) the destruction of the dry tropical forest, as the mine is situated within the Rancheria river basin, the only major river in this dry area, and (2) the destruction of the local economy that was based on agriculture, hunting and gathering before mining began, imposing instead dependency on services linked to the mine.”⁸

The local communities are still fighting for compensation and to preserve something of their traditional livelihoods and culture.⁹

A more successful outcome was the fight of the Dongria Kondh against the mining company Vedanta, which was founded by Indian billionaire Anil Agarwal.¹⁰ This examples shows that the Global North does not have a monopoly on land-grabbing, community-destroying capitalist corporations.

“The Niyamgiri hill range in Odisha state, eastern India, is home to the Dongria Kondh tribe. Niyamgiri is an area of densely forested hills, deep gorges and cascading streams. To be a Dongria Kondh is to farm the hills’ fertile slopes, harvest their produce, and worship the mountain god Niyam Raja and the hills he presides over, including the 4,000 metre Mountain of the Law, Niyam Dongar. The company planned to create an open-cast mine that would have violated Niyam Dongar, disrupted its rivers and spelt the end of the Dongria Kondh as a distinct people.”¹¹

They managed to get the application to mine their land thrown out of court in 2013 which was seen as a victory of a David over a Goliath’. However, the mining company has not given up and has now teamed up with the government-owned Odisha Mining Corporation.¹²

Divisions in the community

There will not always be complete unity in the communities affected by mining, just as in the case of the Cumbrian mining proposal. Mining companies are clever at targeting key people and offering various incentives to persuade others to support the mine.



At the Oxford Real Farming Conference, held on-line in 2021, Nonle Mbutha from the Amadiba Crisis Committee in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa gave an amazing account of the struggle of the Amadiba community to protect their agricultural-based culture. The Australian company, Mineral Commodities Ltd, wanted to mine titanium, offering various incentives, such as fridges and TVs, and also promising jobs. Though the traditional leader and some other leading members of the community were taken in, a grass roots campaign emerged, led largely by women. This Amadiba Crisis Committee fought for many years, enduring death threats and an actual murder. Their argument was that mining was not only damaging to their environment, including the ocean where they fish, but was not a viable long-term option for the next generation. They can now feed themselves and want to continue to do this. “Food must be prioritised before profits and before minerals”.

⁸ <https://londonminingnetwork.org/2022/08/21-years-since-eviction-of-the-tabaco-community-in-colombia-and-still-no-justice/?highlight=cerrejon%20coal%20mine>

⁹ <https://londonminingnetwork.org/2022/09/blockade-by-communities-affected-by-cerrejon-coal-mine-colombia/>

¹⁰ <https://www.forbes.com/profile/anil-agarwal/?sh=18b2cbc661a1>

¹¹ <https://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/dongria>

¹² Not sure what has happened to this. It seems the struggle is on-going



“If we destroy the biodiversity then we won’t be able to produce the food”. Politicians who supported the mining company were forcing them to choose between land and money. “We chose land because it is not going to be finished”.

Like struggles elsewhere, the government favoured the mine using the ‘interests of the national economy’ as an excuse. Their ‘Black Economic Empowerment Initiative’ was used to argue that the mine will help Black South Africans develop businesses. According to Nonhle Mbutha in her talk, traditional male leaders became part of this thinking and then tried to persuade the community, even though it the male leaders themselves who would benefit. She said: “If they want that then they cannot be leaders”.

Like the other examples given, this struggle is ongoing. Along with many others across Africa, there are systematic human rights abuses.¹³ Communities in the Global South may be leading the way in the resistance, but at considerable cost.

The Right to Say No

One of the key slogans of the Amadiba community has been “The Right to Say No”.



This means that those who live in the area which will be affected by the mine have a right to refuse to have it, and not be overridden by the ‘national interest’ argument. It has become part of the tool kit for anti-extractivist mobilisations, many of which are led by women. According to the organisation ‘WoMin’:

“The world’s elites amass wealth through a destructive economic system that has led to an unfolding ecological and climate crisis.

The extractives sector – which includes opens in a new window mining, oil and gas extraction, dirty energy, industrial agriculture, and mega infrastructure projects – lies at the very heart of this violent economic system. A system that allows corporates and the global elites to profit through the exploitation of peasant and working-class labour and the plunder of natural resources that sustain the planet and its people.

In all this, women carry the heaviest burden because of their gender assigned roles to supply reproductive goods and take care of ‘the family’. It is women who must walk further in search of clean drinking water and safer energy and put food on the table under increasingly difficult circumstances. Land grabs and forced dislocations linked to extractivist projects and the climate crisis are fuelling already high levels of violence against women across the continent.

Across the continent, women and their communities resist these imposed ideas of ‘development’ and organise powerfully to claim their Right to Say NO. From exposing the costs and impacts of destructive “development” projects and challenging governments and



¹³ <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/04/16/we-know-our-lives-are-danger/environment-fear-south-africas-mining-affected>



corporations to blockading roads and railway lines and building solidarities between communities across the continent – women are in the vanguard of struggles for justice.”¹⁴

Mining in Europe and the UK¹⁵

Any anti-mining movement in Europe must develop strong links with similar movements in the rest of the world. As discussed above, these movements are strong, radical and courageous. The London Mining Network does excellent work supporting communities against companies registered on the London Stock Exchange, such as Rio Tinto and Anglo-American.¹⁶ Not only do these movements need solidarity but they have much to teach us.

In other parts of Europe, for example, the Right to Say No has become part of anti-mining campaigns. According to the Gaia Foundation, who hosted a webinar in 2021:¹⁷

“Europe faces a massive increase in mining in the years to come, as the EU and national governments seek to repatriate mining operations and secure domestic supplies of ‘critical’ minerals for renewable energy, industrial and military transitions. Communities in Iberia, Scandinavia, Ireland and the Balkans are already feeling the pressure of mining expansion. Their efforts to defend lands, waters and beloved places from mining destruction are spreading across the continent.”

The Loznica community in western Serbia was one such community. They won a big victory earlier in 2022 when the government announced that it would withdraw exploration permits from Rio Tinto for a lithium mine. This project would have not only increased the GDP of the country but would have been a major source of lithium needed for electric cars. But the local community, with support

from many in the rest of the country, said NO! Huge demonstrations were held in Belgrade and Novi Sad. The arguments against included the damage to important cultural heritage, pollution and the negative impact on local farming.

Another example is the Save Our Sperrins campaign in Northern Ireland.¹⁸ According to a speaker at the Oxford Real Farming Conference in 2021, Dalradian Gold, a Canadian gold mining corporation, came to County Tyrone in Northern Ireland around 10 years before, several years before anyone knew what was happening. They managed to get leases (122,000 hectares) for minerals from the Crown Estate, which owns all the mineral rights in Northern Ireland. They submitted a planning application in 2017. The impact on the community and the environment would be enormous so people launched a campaign. The main arguments have been environmental. “25% of the land on the island of Ireland is designated for prospecting for various types of mining. The resources above the ground, the water that we drink, the quality of the food we produce from the land, our sense of place, tradition and history



¹⁴ <https://womin.africa/understanding-the-right-to-say-no/>

¹⁵ A whole article could be written about North America but this focuses on Europe.

In the US there is a very sharp divide between environmentalists and the resource development lobby.

¹⁶ <https://londonminingnetwork.org/about/>

¹⁷ <https://gaiafoundation.org/video-the-right-to-say-no-to-mining-in-europe/>

¹⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/pg/SaveOurSperrins/posts/> and <http://dontmineus.com/>



literally being sold out from under the feet of the people in the bazar of the highest bidder”.¹⁹ The mining company promised to pay people to relocate, but like in Serbia, according to one resident, “they don’t understand people’s attachment to the land and to the area. They don’t seem to understand that. They just think you can, you know, money will solve all your problems, that you can, you know, be paid and just go away.”

The campaign was well aware that the first thing a mining company does is “mine the community”- try and win people over through bribes and getting politicians on their side. Loads of jobs were promised. In the end this worked and they lost this fight when the UK government gave the go- ahead to the mine in May 2022.

Campaigners admit that the issue divided the community. Obviously, the money and jobs argument convinced enough people to weaken the campaign, like it is doing in Whitehaven. The Right to Say No as a campaign slogan depends on the community being largely united. Despite this defeat, campaigning against gold, silver and other mining projects continues.

Mining companies and the interests of the community

“I have nothing against mining, many of my ancestors were miners. What I am against is companies coming in and destroying our landscape for their own gain with little to no care or respect shown to the locals or the local wildlife. The promise of ‘jobs’ and ‘we haven’t broken the law yet’ is not enough to sway me.”
– Adam Walsh, Galloway Against Mining

If there is to be a united front against proposed mines, then campaigns need to stress the fact that mining companies will not have the interests of the local community, or anyone else for that matter, at heart. All they care about is profit and they will say anything to sway people, as people said in Save Our Sperrins, they first “mine the community”.

The mining company that is planning on opening the coal mine in West Cumbria, has tried to make out that there are a local company, with an office in Whitehaven. The actual company is based in Sussex and ultimately owned by a private equity investment firm, EMR Capital, with its base in the tax haven of the Caymen Islands. Executives of this firm have interests in mines all over the world from Australia, to Russia and Indonesia.

¹⁹ https://www.facebook.com/SaveOurSperrins/?locale=en_GB

Daniel Therkelsen of Coal Action Network said the ownership structure could create problems, as it would be difficult for a local planning authority to hold a remote private equity firm to account. He said it could be hard to ensure that working conditions and environmental promises are upheld when the mine ceases to operate.²⁰

People, therefore, need to be very wary of promises made by these companies. Already in another mine in Northern Ireland, workers are being sacked and the future of the company is in doubt.²¹ Mines are struggling to recruit workers because local people don't necessarily have the skills they need. They do not have the time to train people, as they want to start making profits immediately, so they look elsewhere, outside the UK. The Whitehaven mine may well be in a similar situation. Companies will not provide the detailed information needed about what jobs will be available, what qualifications are needed, what the pay will be etc. Once the mine has been given the greenlight, then it will be too late to hold a firm based in the Caymans to account.

Across the sea in Galloway in Scotland, another campaign has been set up to challenge the

proposals of an Australian-based company. In late 2021, JDH Exploration – a subsidiary of the Australian mining company Walkabout Resources – began exploratory drilling operations in Dumfries & Galloway, after being granted exploration licences from the Crown Estate in 2018. The area of exploration covers the proposed Galloway National Park, and includes Blackcraig Wood, a UNESCO biosphere region and an area of astounding natural beauty.²²

As with many of the other European campaigns, is the value of the natural landscape that is highlighted, although economic arguments come through when tourism is factored in.

“While campaigner and Blackcraig resident Billy McWhirter accepts the potential value of the resources beneath his feet, he argues this is exceeded by the value of the natural landscape, which is used for cycling, tourism, horse riding and wildlife habitat.”

““Newton Stewart [...] is called Gateway to the Galloway Hills and we'd like it to continue being called Gateway to the Galloway Hills and not Gateway to the Galloway Mines.”²³

As with the Amadiba campaign in South Africa, the local council seems to be going out of its way to support the mining company. Residents are concerned about the lack of transparency in the consultations. Campaigners such as Kenny Campbell argues that these promised jobs are often myths. He argues that the current conflict is really about land reform. The company have got permission from the Crown to explore the land for mining- it is the exploitation of people and land by a foreign company.²⁴



²⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/dec/08/cumbria-coalmine-is-owned-by-private-equity-firm-with-caymans-base>

²¹ <https://www.wearetyrone.com/news/future-of-omagh-mining-firm-in-doubt/>

²² <https://www.enough.scot/2022/11/01/on-the-ground-activism-in-galloway/>

²³ <https://www.itv.com/news/border/2022-03-25/galloway-community-intensifies-opposition-to-mining-proposals>

²⁴ <https://www.enough.scot/2022/11/01/on-the-ground-activism-in-galloway/>

Alternative economic arguments

Campaigners often call for systemic changes and though it is not started, this can only mean an end to capitalism, and the system that sees the earth and its people as a resource to extract wealth for the benefit of a few. However, in order to create a more united community response, there has to be alternatives presented for how the economic issues of an area can be addressed. In many of the struggles in the Global South, livelihoods were affected as well as the environment. This is partly true in Europe in areas where agriculture is still important.

Many campaigns are doing just this- focusing on both ecological and social justice. In Cumbria, the South Lakeland Action on Climate Change has this in its manifesto: “West Cumbria needs jobs that have a future.

A variety of studies have highlighted the exiting potential for jobs tied to renewable energy, energy efficiency and a low carbon Cumbria. Such jobs would be created across a wide range of companies and sectors delivering a resilient working environment. What’s needed is a collective effort from central and local governments, academia, and business to make these happen.”²⁵

Members of Galloway against Mining have stressed all the changes that need.

“[We need] an underlying solutions focused approach that addresses climate change and environmental destruction, so approaches that involve sustainable development such as properly connected public transport, sustainable tourism like the Book Festival and the TRAD Music Festival, heritage such as The Museum and the various activities in Whithorn and beyond, accommodation like the various bunkhouses.”

– Kenny Campbell, Galloway against Mining

Of course, there will be problems in ensuring that the alternative jobs match the skills and

interests of the people in the community, especially young people. Jobs in tourism can be very low paid and insecure. Then there are the problems with assuming that the new green energy will provide jobs. As pointed out above, other energy forms will also demand resources so the basic problem is unresolved. Another option is to look at what has been called “nature-based economies” in which jobs are created in the area of nature restoration and rewilding.²⁶ This idea has only positive ecological benefits but the question is to what extent it will address social and economic inequalities. What kind of jobs will be created? How well-paid? Will another capitalist corporation or large landowner still be in charge?²⁷

Conclusion

The struggle against mining and other forms of Extractivism is a difficult one. One the one hand, mining does incredible harm to the environment and local communities, but on the other it provides needed resources. The only long-term solution is an end to capitalism and the creation of a society which is based on community and mutual aid, quality of life rather than growth, and a harmonious relationship with the environment and other species. This article has shown the wide variety of struggles around the world that are in many ways aiming for what we would call anarchist communism: questioning the obsession with growth, calling for community control and ownership, such as with the Right to Say No, and denouncing the power and greed of corporations, wherever they are from. People value the place they live in, its history and culture, and environment. They also want to have a decent livelihood. What is promising is that these struggles are linking up. “We are very far from alone in our struggle with Walkabout, and there are communities large and small across the globe defending their land just as we are.”²⁸

– Kenny Campbell, Galloway Against Mining

²⁵ <https://slacc.org.uk/cumbria-coal-mine/>

²⁶ <https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.rewildingbritain.org.uk/documents/nature-based-economies-rewilding-britain.pdf>

²⁷ See our article on the Green Landowners in the Issue 4 of Stormy Petrel

²⁸ <https://www.enough.scot/2022/11/01/on-the-ground-activism-in-galloway/>

Workplace Struggles and Revolution

How do we escalate workplace struggles, ensure their success and create a revolutionary alternative to Labourism and Leninism?

Abbreviation	Union	Represents
RMT	National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers	Transport workers
CWU	Communication Workers Union	Postal and telephonic workers
NEU	National Education Union	Education workers - primarily those in primary and secondary education
UCU	University and College Union	Education workers - those in higher, further and adult education
RCN	Royal College of Nursing	Nurses
ASLEF	Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen	Train drivers
Unite		Construction, manufacturing, transport and technical workers
Unison		Public service workers
GMB		General workers union
IWGB	Independent Worker's Union of Great Britain	Base union (split from IWW)
UVW	United Voices of the World	Base union, active among cleaners

The forces at play in the struggles which have taken place over the winter of 2022-2023 and are still presently ongoing in the UK are characterisable as being generally led from the top. The trade union leaderships of some of the trade unions, such as the RMT and UCU, are broadly left. Their national executives are dominated by some variant of the left, in the case of the RMT, more Leninist than that of the UCU. Others, such as ASLEF have leaderships that are more moderate and some, such as the CWU, have traditional Labour-oriented leaderships.

Unusually, they are, almost without exception, talking about class mobilisations and the need for a concerted fight for improvements in pay in light of the present inflation and the obvious intention of the ruling class to make the working class pay for the crisis.

Indeed, the traditional left inside and outside the trade unions, seem to have been animated by the rhetoric from the left leaders and are throwing themselves into supporting them, in the time-honoured leftist tradition. The left had little to say about the suspension of strikes during the Royal funeral shenanigans, generally not wanting to rock the boat or be seen to undermine the fight.

And the left has little to say about some of the below-inflation pay deals that have been negotiated by the likes of Unite, led by Sharon Graham. Whilst Graham has been presented as a breath of fresh air by many due to her unwillingness to express undying loyalty to the Labour Party and her 'turn to shopfloor organising', they are the head of a machine that practices partnership (with employers) and relies on a large full-time staff to keep that

machine ticking over. Pretty much like every other trade union, of course.

Why the left is so excited about the new talk of class and the left leaderships is because they see no essential problem with the trade unions as organisations. Sure, they have their flaws and they need better, more left, leadership, but they are fundamentally the organisations of the working class. And, of course, any upsurge in the class struggle IS exciting. But, there are some issues that the left generally does not address.

Limits of Trade Unionism

One, is that the trade unions are essentially near-dead organisations that depend almost entirely on, on the one hand a layer of careerists, and on the other, the frenzied activity of leftist activists. The latter particularly gives the trade unions a semblance of life. Without those left activists the unions would struggle to sustain any meaningful activity beyond collecting membership subs and doing individual casework.

Secondly, the trade unions represent a very small part of the working class in the UK. Although there are regular initiatives by the trade unions to establish bridgeheads in the many, many ‘greenfield’ or non-unionised sectors, they have made remarkably little progress in the last 20 years, an estimated 77% of workers aren’t in a union. Organising often transient workforces in small workplaces is time and resource intensive and the trade unions, for all their adoption in that period of the ‘organising agenda’, remain essentially about providing a service to members.

Some ‘organising’ unions, such as the GMB, might better be described as recruiting unions as, although they will attempt to recruit almost any group of workers (or, indeed, individual workers), they are not able to ‘organise’ them for action other than paying subs.

There are always exceptions to this and typically a left trade union activist will say – oh, but our Branch did such and

such, won this for our members and passed a resolution to do that. And it is true, Branches can be relatively dynamic. My union branch once brought a motion to Conference calling for, effectively, a wildcat walkout. It was actually the leftists in the union who were most vociferous in opposition and who moved that the motion should be held over until the wording was more ‘inclusive’. The motion was never heard of again.

The only thing that the left and the trade unions can say when wildcat strikes break out is – “unionise!” Regardless of how effective or not the wildcat action might be, they have difficulty thinking beyond trade unionism. And the GMB even claimed that the recent wildcat actions at Amazon were because of GMB organising!

At a rank and file level, the trade unions have numerous caucuses and factions. They are mostly dominated by a single leftist group, usually Trotskyist or associated with the Communist Party/non-Trotskyist Labour left (for example, all the Broad or ‘Independent’ lefts). Sometimes they are an uneasy alliance between two or more Leninist groups, usually the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party.

There have been in recent times some genuine rank and file groups that are independent of any particular party – such as the Sparks group of electricians, militant and mostly self-organising Unite members. But these are exceptionally rare. In the UCU in recent times, there has emerged the UCU Commons group, which is sort of ‘autonomous’ left but includes Labour Party types. They find themselves in a four way



faction fight with the UCU Left (Socialist Party, various other Trotskyists), the Independent Left (Stalinists, Euro-communists and Labour people) and the new Solidarity Movement (an SWP front).

There is the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), which is now merely a front for the Socialist Party after independent left and syndicalist members left en masse more than a decade ago after the Socialist Party decided to re-orient the network towards an anti-austerity campaign. Because Trotskyist organisations generally won't be part of anything they can't dominate, the NSSN is now the industrial wing of one faction.

In part, because all the left factions in the trade unions struggle as hard against each other as they do against the right, and because they are mainly about building support for their preferred people for the General Secretaryships and the National Executives rather than rank and file self-organisation and combativity, there is no real grassroots movement across the trade unions.

Alternative Unions

So, what about the alternative unions? Prior to the 2000s there were no unions of a syndicalist type, or even militant independent ones in the UK. None at all. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) led the way, going from less than 50 members in 2002 to over a thousand by 2016. They now claim in excess of 3,000 members. The Independent Workers of Great Britain (IWGB), originally a split from the IWW, is twice that size and the United Voices



of the World has almost 5,000 members, albeit (impressively) overwhelmingly in London and the south east of England. There are couple of other quite small unions, including the cleaner's union, CAIWU in London who have

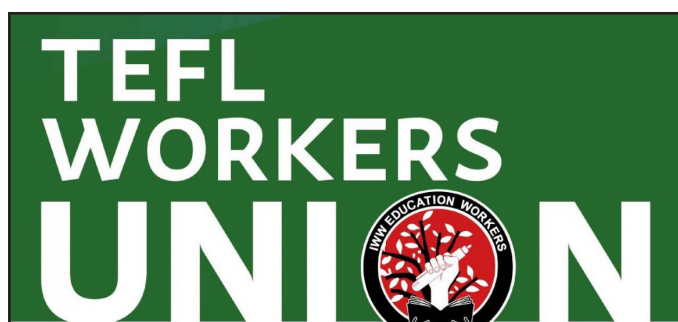
2,000 members. All these small unions have different organising models but generally emphasise internal democracy and member engagement. In that they are not alone, of course, as many of the Trades Union Congress unions now speak loudly about their being member-led.

The IWW, in recent years, beyond a small number of successful initiatives, such as the TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) workers in London and the Brewery



Workers Union, has not really functioned as a union. It tends to recruit on the basis of (a vague) ideology and this means that it recruits activists first and foremost. It has, for example, a large paper membership in the NHS and in education but it has little or no organising initiative in either (with the exception of the TEFL workers, who are generally ignored by the mainstream teacher unions). This 'ideological' bent means that much of the IWW is a broadly libertarian left organisation with minimal involvement in workplace activity. Local General Membership Branches tend to exist as de facto political activist groups.

The IWGB has a very different approach, which is almost entirely focused on workplace organisation rather than building broader membership (although it has recently launched



General Membership Branches) The IWGB, with its full-time staff, whilst probably more democratic and participatory compared to the average trade union, is moving closer to mainstream trade unionism. It has found a niche organising previously unorganised groups of workers, such as Yoga Teachers and Foster Carers. Its relatively successful Couriers union was recently undermined by the GMB, something that union has done to the IWW in the past.



All of these independent, syndicalist and semi-syndicalist unions together constitute about 15,000 members UK-wide and although some of their struggles, particularly the ones by cleaners organised by the UVW, have been inspirational, they are caught between being too weak to have a 'national' impact whilst also becoming, through routinism, constant draining individual casework and the desire to be recognised by employers to play a significant role in the class struggle in the UK.

With their focus on 'organising the unorganised' in what are automatically peripheral sectors (Couriers, TEFL teachers etc.) the IWW has tended to operate as a 'general' union, like a radical GMB, rather than an Industrial union (organising on an industry-wide basis), and also has minimal impact where most of its members actually work because it has failed to develop a dual-card strategy in TUC union dense sectors.

This is not to say that the IWW is irrelevant but that it is limited as a grassroots worker's movement.

Other than the various left factions in the TUC unions and the independent and syndicalist unions, there are the Solidarity Federation's (SF) industrial networks, which defend what might be described as orthodox anarcho-syndicalism. They have recently launched the Solidarity Federation Education Workers Union. SF policy is to create SF union branches

wherever they have two or more members, to join mainstream unions where they exist and to eventually establish an anarcho-syndicalist union in the UK. In practice, it seems the Solidarity Federation's 'union initiative' remains a political group, committed to the promotion of anarcho-syndicalism.

Finally, there is the Angry Workers' initiative, Healthworkers United.

This is a network of healthworkers mainly employed in the NHS, including doctors, nurses, support, cleaning and technical staff. This network seems politically quite loose, though obviously in favour of workers self-organisation and very critical of mainstream trade unionism. Again, they tend to be members of the NHS trade unions, where union density is quite high but there exists up to a dozen trade unions, some very elite and some in competition with other unions for members (RCN/Unison/GMB for nurses for example).

The Angry Workers are not in favour of building factions or caucuses in the trade unions and neither are they in favour of joining the alternative unions, which, in the NHS, would probably not be a realistic possibility anyway. They look to establish 'class unions' or workplace organisations, which, to all intents and purposes, will be a variety of syndicalist union, perhaps more political and, like SF,

without Certification from the state (like the TUC and alternative unions). The ACG and the Angry Workers recently produced the book *Sick of it All*.

So, in terms of workplace organisations and activity, that's where we are.

Social Insertion

There is an upswing of class struggle. Outside the wildcats, it is under the control of the unions and there is not a significant, critical, organised rank and file revolt (as yet). The question, for us, is how does a small group like the ACG orient in this situation. If we are following a social insertionist approach, where should we be meaningfully inserting ourselves?

The ACG's Aims and Principle 7 says "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."

Let's break that down.

Unions by their very nature cannot become vehicles for the revolutionary transformation of society.

So, what we are saying there is that trade unions cannot be changed so that they become revolutionary. In this, we agree with the anarcho-syndicalists.

They have to be accepted by capitalism in order to function and so cannot play a part in its overthrow.

This is demonstrably true in that workers organisations that started out with a revolutionary perspective either became integrated into the functioning of capitalism, were crushed or became highly marginalised. And of course, very few trade unions started out with a view to getting rid of capitalism. Rather, they started out, and have remained, committed to finding a better, more equitable, place for workers within capitalism.

Trades unions divide the working class (between employed and unemployed, trade and craft, skilled and unskilled, etc).

The name trade union tends to give that away. They unite sectionally, at best. Industrial unionism, which emerged later than trades unionism, attempted to solve this with the

idea of one Industry, one union. Revolutionary Industrial Unionism, with the original IWW in the very early 20th Century, tried to develop a form of Industrial unionism that was consciously anti-capitalist.

Even syndicalist unions are constrained by the fundamental nature of unionism.

What this means is that if a syndicalist (or revolutionary industrial unionist) union is to grow and be influential and effective, there is an inexorable tendency for it to become much like any other union. The alternative is for it to maintain its revolutionary or anti-capitalist politics and remain small (potentially growing in revolutionary times).

Our ultimate aim must be the complete abolition of wage slavery. Working within the unions can never achieve this.

So, we are saying that activity in the trade unions cannot achieve the break we wish to see with capitalism. And yet...

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.

This is probably what separates us from, say, the communist left such as our comrades in the Communist Workers Organisation who see no point in being in trade unions. But, if the unions cannot be made into revolutionary organisations, what's the point? Well, because, the class struggle happens within the unions as well as through the unions. The interests of the rank and file, *even within capitalism*, are generally at variance with the interests of the leadership, the structure, the bureaucracy of the union.

Often, leftists will be heard saying, "the union is the membership". Well, kind of yes, but also very much no. At a branch level and below (i.e., the shopfloor, the workplace) the membership effectively constitutes the union, but if the rank and file attempts to assert itself against the interests of the union machine, then that whole

machine will act against the rank and file and re-assert its 'ownership' of the trade union. But the ACG favours activity at the rank and file of the union, where the union exists, because that is where workers have 'power', even if it is limited and is in potential and sometimes actual conflict with the union machinery itself.

The question is then posed, to what extent should we be involved in the structure of the trade unions? Full time officials can't join the ACG. But we have had members who are stewards, reps and some branch lay officials – that is people who are not paid by the union, but may have some 'facilities time' i.e., time during the working day to undertake union activity. These members are involved in the union at a rank and file level in order to further the class struggle. But it is not easy, not least as they are most often isolated. Every union branch has its 'pet anarchist', usually an active union member and a voice in the wilderness that isn't taken particularly seriously because they *are* isolated and do not seem to be connected to an organisation or faction or caucus.

Returning to syndicalism, or alternative unionism. In the UK it is highly unlikely, given the size of these unions, that your workplace has a branch of one. If it did, then the likelihood is that an anarchist communist, an ACG member, would be a member because it would make sense to be one. Even with our critique of syndicalism, being a member of a functioning syndicalist union would be a worthwhile activity. We would be operating in the tension between the militancy of the union and the tendency, considered earlier, of the union to be integrated into the system of exploitation.

But, in most situations, I would argue, joining a syndicalist or alternative union that is not already extant, is not likely to be a good use of time and energy. And, in practical terms, joining an IWW General Membership Branch that does not have a union-organising initiative in your workplace, is probably a waste of time in terms of social insertion, in terms of undertaking useful activity.



So, saying that we should work (and play an insertionist role) at the rank and file of the trade unions, or that we should be involved (and play an insertionist role) in syndicalist/alternative unions, is fine and dandy, but the challenging bit is *how* we play a role that both advances the class struggle, builds workers power in the workplace and also spreads revolutionary (anarchist communist) ideas.

And that is what we must turn to now.

Building Workers Power

The likelihood of the present trade union strikes being successful is open to question. Even under Johnson's regime, the government was intervening in the negotiations with the RMT to encourage an intransigent position on the part of the employers. The Truss government looked to dramatically increase the hoops and hurdles through which unions must pass in order to be able to take industrial action, and this continues under Sunak. Rather than banning strikes outright, they sought to neuter them, including plans to make unions ballot for every individual action. So, for example, at the moment, a union can win a ballot for industrial action and then decide what form that action might

take, for example a series of rolling strikes. The government wants to put in place legislation that would mean that they would have to very specifically ballot for each individual day of action. And give a month's notice to employers as to their intention, as opposed to the two weeks presently. Now, unions can campaign against this new legislation but it is not likely that they will risk sequestration of their funds by ignoring it, any more than they have ignored the existing legal limitations. They are far more likely to put faith in the Labour Party to get rid of these laws when they are in power. Starmer has said that they will do so, in a conscious effort to reinforce the dependence of the unions on the Party. And, of course, there is no guarantee that they would do so anyway.

So, the employers may decide to tough it out. And then, with the new legislation, they will sit back and see what the unions will do. In other times, the employers and unions would come to a compromise with pay rises that are above the percentage that the firefighters and university staff have been offered/had imposed, but still nothing near the rate of inflation. But the ruling class are determined to make the working class

pay for...everything. The latest budget was, more than anything else, a signal that they mean business in this regard.

So, if the government toughs out the present period, and the unions are not in a position under new legislation to continue the strikes, never mind escalate the action, things are not looking good. There is a possibility that some of the unions, such as the CWU, will see themselves under existential threat as derecognition is being talked about (though this an idle threat – Royal Mail need to have someone to help manage the workforce) and as we go to press, they are pushing a miserable deal on the membership. The question is, can the struggles in Royal Mail be sustained and even escalated from below?

Though the independent organisation of the rank and file in the trade unions is not strong, there is obviously anger and, it appears, a readiness to fight. But this this needs to be developed, and quickly, because if the leadership of the unions pull back from action or end up ‘selling out’ in return for way under inflation pay rises, then both the pressure from below and also the possibility of independent action will be the only hope of the workers.

So, to return to the title of this piece, what can we do to escalate the present struggles, ensure their success and create a revolutionary alternative to Labourism and Leninism?

Revolutionary Alternative

What indeed. First of all, who is we?

If we look at the ‘revolutionary’ forces outside the Labourist and Leninist left (and there is obviously a large crossover there!) then obviously they are small, dissipated and have a number of often very different ideas about what is to be done. The IWW will no doubt continue to support whatever is happening, attending marches and demos. With its unwritten policy of never criticising other unions (which is in contrast to the IWW of old, who were loudly critical of the trade unions) the IWW is unable to develop any critique of what is happening or developing a ‘line’. The Solidarity Federation will continue building the embryo of their anarcho-syndicalist union. This leaves groups such as ourselves and the Angry Workers.

But is there the possibility of an anarchist communist tendency in the mainstream unions? What would it look like? What would its aims be? What practical and, importantly, meaningful activity would it engage in? Can a movement that is inside but against the unions, or more accurately, for worker’s autonomous action be built?

And it is to these questions that we will return in the next edition of Stormy Petrel.



Sick of it All: Work, inquiry, and struggle in the NHS

New book on the crisis in the NHS, jointly produced by Angry Workers of the World and the Anarchist Communist Group. It includes essays exploring how workers in the NHS are fighting to improve patient care and working conditions, whilst also having an eye on creating a future of vastly improved health and healthcare for all in a post-capitalist world.

The NHS is often called a 'national treasure', and its workers are sometimes lauded as angels and heroes.

In the last two years of the Covid-19 pandemic we have more than ever seen the reality of how it works – and also sometimes how it doesn't.

How have we ended up in this situation? What are the factors that have led to healthcare being organised and run the way it is? What struggles are happening in the NHS currently, and how might we magnify their impact and win gains now?

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The Right to Be Lazy Criminalised in Cuba

A new law of “vagrancy” under the pretext of fighting crime

Translated from No.1847 (February 2023) of Le Monde Libertaire, paper of the Federation Anarchiste in France

The Cuban government has just launched a “study on people who do not study or work not, but who are in a position to do so, in order to propose appropriate measures.”

The Cuban authorities have threatened to apply measures against people who “do not study or work in Cuba”, in accordance with the campaign launched against the “fight against crime, corruption, illegalities and social indiscipline” by the authoritarian regime in Cuba.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Security is launching, as part of this process, a study on people “who do not study or work when they are able to do so,” wrote the head of the ministry, Marta Elena Feitó Cabrera. The ministry “will analyse the causes and propose the appropriate measures, they will never be based on social assistance”, she added.

This announcement is in line with the threats made by the Cuban Prime Minister, Manuel Marrero Cruz, during recent sessions of the National Assembly of People’s Power, regarding this new crusade against the illegalities inherent in the system.

“Are they going to start with the children of the leaders, and check the foreign accounts of everyone who travels abroad?” asked one Facebook user. Another said: “I don’t know what they’re going to look at. If you can’t satisfy your basic needs through work, why work? If your parents have worked for 40 years and don’t even have a place to sleep, why work?”

And what’s the point of studying, if a professional can’t even buy clothes or a phone with his salary?”

In recent months, Miguel Díaz-Canel, the Cuban president, has used the term “lazy” to designate Cubans who criticise the administration of the regime. This is what he called the Cubans who protested in the streets against the power cuts. During a plenary session of the Union of Young Communists, he also described these demonstrators as “disconnected from studies and work” and “manipulable” individuals.

Independent media threatened

In 2020, the State Security Services threatened *Diario de Cuba* journalist Waldo Fernández Cuenca with the Ley del Vago (vagabond’s law). Previously, during an interrogation to which he had been summoned, a Cuban policeman had already threatened him with the same thing, accusing the journalist of “having no connection with a job.” An officer who identified himself as Captain Machado, an alleged police chief in Havana’s Reparto



Sevillano neighbourhood, where Waldo Fernández Cuenca resides, echoed threats made to him in April by the city's district police chief which had described him on this occasion as a "potential criminal".

The "vagrancy law" of the 1970s

The early 1970s were a very repressive period in Cuba. It wasn't just about the "Grey Five-Years"¹, population control, gay roundups, and harassment of people with long hair. One of the arbitrary measures dictated at that time was the "law against vagrancy", under which thousands of unemployed people were forced to do heavy manual work that no one wanted to do.

These units succeeded the UMAP (Military Production Aid Units) which imprisoned tens of thousands of people between 1965 and 1968, mainly homosexuals, religious and political opponents. They were called "concentration camps" in Cuba. Many artists and intellectuals were deported to these units.

In the 1960s, his criticisms of power and his homosexuality led the great Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas to experience prison and labour rehabilitation camps within military production aid units. This law forced thousands of people to submit to the will of the Castro regime and to annihilate any form of behaviour contrary to the revolution. What Fidel, in a speech delivered in 1961, summed up as: "Dentro de la Revolución todo, contra la Revolución nada (Everything in the revolution, nothing against the revolution). This law was abolished in 1979, but the status of unemployed was defined as a "dangerous state" in the Cuban penal code. The regime has always used it to threaten activists and opponents, and many of them have been sent to prison.

A crime against the state and the revolution

The composition of the group that the authorities considered idlers was very heterogeneous. There were those who, for various reasons, had been unemployed for a long time, those who fell under the law when moving from one profession to another, those who left the country and those who had just left compulsory military service and had not found a job.

Forced recruitment was done through the municipality of residence. The idlers, according to the authorities, were summoned to the labour and social security office near their home. The offer of employment, for those who were summoned, corresponded to the order to go and work in agriculture. For example, some of those relegated were given the 'offer' to become crocodile hunters in the Zapata marshes, in the centre of the country.

Living conditions, very rustic in the camps, were difficult. Military officers were brutal and treated the so-called idlers as prisoners. Anyone fleeing the scene without permission was arrested, tried and could be sentenced to up to five years in prison. Disciplinary rules were strict, due to the physical exertion many prisoners fell ill and many of them had to receive medical treatment. The crime for some people punished was to have presented legal documents to the authorities in order to leave the country.

But the true and only crime committed by these people was not to work for the State and to refuse the values imposed by the Castro regime.

Daniel Pinos

Article written with information collected from the Diario de Cuba website

¹ Quinquenio gris. Term coined by the Cuban intellectual and screenwriter Ambrosio Fornet. From 1971 to 1975, censorship was such that it led to self-censorship, literary and artistic production was limited to "authorised" themes in the service of the Revolution. Many authors kept silent or went into exile during these grey years.

Against The Dark Trinity

Reflections on Anarchism and Capitalist Modernity by Brian Morris

The aim of the present essay is to offer some reflection on what the Mexican revolutionary anarchist Ricardo Flores Magon called the “dark trinity”. It referred to what later came to be known as capitalist modernity, which has three interrelated aspects or components. These



*Ricardo Flores Magon -
anarchist communist*

are, namely, free market capitalism, the authoritarian state, and religion in its various guises. (on Flores Magon see Bufe and Verter 2005). One need only pick up a newspaper to be aware that the world is in a sorry state, and that there is a lot to be angry about, for we are experiencing what Murray Bookchin (1986) long ago described as the “modern crisis”. This crisis is complex, real, and multi-faceted, at once social, economic, political, and ecological.

1) There is a **social** crisis, for under global capitalism and increasing state intrusions, there has been the undermining of local communities, and all aspects of social life are being commodified, public spaces privatised, and everyday life and activities are increasingly under control and surveillance by those in power.

2) There is an **economic** crisis for under neo-liberal capitalism there has been a growing concentration of economic power, and all the continuous expansion of economic inequalities. It is now estimated that the four hundred richest people in the world have a combined wealth greater than that 45% of the world’s

population. The disparities in wealth are enormous and completely obscene.

Out of the world’s population of around seven billion people nearly one billion, or 15 per cent, are severely under-nourished and unable to obtain the basic conditions necessary for human existence. Poverty is evident throughout the world, even though enough food is produced to feed everyone.

3) There is also a **political** crisis, reflected in the widespread existence of weapons of mass destruction, both chemical and nuclear, and the stockpiling of conventional weapons. This can hardly be said to have kept the peace, for since the Second World War there have been well over a hundred armed conflicts, killing millions of people.

This dialectic of violence has led to the destruction of entire communities, the denial of human rights, widespread genocide and political repression by states – whether incipient, national or imperial

4) Finally, there is an **ecological** crisis – the severe and unprecedented challenges that humans now face. This is clearly manifested, not only in global warming, highlighted by Murray Bookchin over forty years ago (1971: 60-67) but in the degradation of the environment under industrial capitalism, the pollution of the atmosphere, and of seas, lakes and rivers; widespread deforestation and the destruction of wildlife habitats, leading to a serious decline of many life-forms, much of it linked to the adverse effects of industrial agriculture, and finally in a serious decline in the quality of urban life (Ekins 1992, Morris 2004 15-17, 2021: 29-30). Bookchin indeed argued that capitalism as an economic system was inherently “anti-ecological”, and was virtually destroying the earth in search of profit.

What then is the cause of the “modern crisis”, specifically the environmental crisis?

1) It is not that there are too many people on earth, a neo-Malthusian argument that has long been discredited ever since Paul Ehrlich in 1968 published his famous book *“The Population Bomb”* (see Angus 2017: 89-112).

2) Nor is it because humans are “aliens” on the planet, and inherently destructive beings, described by Nietzsche as a “pox” on earth, and by another philosopher as *“Homo rapions”* (Gray 2002: 151). Such views set up a false opposition between the earth (good) and humans (bad), reinventing St. Augustine’s concept of “original sin”, and are fundamentally misanthropic. It implies that there is a need for redemption, either by the creation of an overman (ubermensch) and the embrace of hyper-technology (post or transhumanism), or some kind of spiritual redemption, and recourse to some religious metaphysic.

3) Nor is the “modern crisis) due to a lack of religion, or the decline in esoteric spirituality as Karen Armstrong (2006) contends. In fact religion is an intrinsic part of the “dark trinity” that is causing the crisis. Indeed, throughout history there has been a close relationship between religion and the State power, for all the oriental religions, (Christianity, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Islam) were state-sponsored religions, forming the ideologies of expanding empires. The esotericism that Armstrong extols was the religion of empires. In fact religion has been used to sanctify the regimes of even the most bloodthirsty tyrants throughout history.

Also noteworthy is that the colonisation of Africa by European states exemplified the “dark trinity” for it explicitly promoted commerce (the capitalist economy), civilisation (through the colonial state), and Christianity. Religion has always been a part of capitalist modernity.

The real cause of the “modern crisis” is, of course, the “dark trinity” – capitalist modernity – that is now dominant throughout much of the world. For what is characteristic of such

modern states as China, Russia, India, Arabia, Turkey, Burma, or Trump’s vision of America, is that they all exemplify the “dark trinity” combining the wholehearted advocacy of free market capitalism, an authoritarian form of state politics, and the state sponsorship and support of some religious metaphysics. For example, in Russia under Vladimir Putin, the Russian Orthodox Church, in India under Narendra Modi, Hindutva, in China under the Communist Party, a heady mixture of Marxism and Confucianism, while Muslim theocratic states embrace some form of Islam, whether Wahhabism (Arabia), Shi-ite Islam (Iran) or Sufism (Turkey under Recep Erdogan). Buddhist fundamentalism is rife in Burma. Donald Trump’s vision of America combines free market capitalism, authoritarian politics and the embrace of both evangelical Christianity and postmodern nihilism. This “dark trinity, or capitalist modernity, is the cause of the modern crisis.



Anarchist Communism against the Dark Trinity

What is unique and important about anarchist communism as a political movement and tradition is that it repudiates all three aspects of the “dark trinity”.

1) It is opposed firstly to global capitalism, along with the market economy, money, private property, the wage system (depicted by anarchist communists as a form of slavery)

and the ideology of possessive individualism (egoism). In its place revolutionary anarchists advocate a socialist society, based on communal ownership of land productive resources, a society organised through mutual aid and voluntary associations.

2) Secondly, anarchist communism rejects the state and all forms of hierarchy and oppression. It critiques all forms of power and authority that curtails the liberty and self-realisation of the individual person. It thus advocates a libertarian society, one where social life is organised through various forms of democratic self-management. It puts emphasis not on the ego but on “communal individuality”.

3) Finally, anarchist communism is opposed to religion or any spiritualist metaphysics whatever its form, and advocate metaphysics of evolutionary or dialectical naturalism derived from the radical aspects of the Enlightenment. As a philosophy or worldview, it embraces ontological realism (the notion that the world, or nature, exists independently of humans), a ratio-empiricist epistemology, the affirmation of universal values (such as those of liberty, solidarity, compassion, equality, generosity), social ecology as an ecological worldview and sensibility, and finally, an ethical naturalism that bases morality (a concern for others) on our knowledge of human earthly life. Anarchist communism thus advocates a form of social life that is socialist, libertarian, and ecological (secular), and is fundamentally opposed to the “dark trinity”.

False Alternatives

In my short manifesto “*A Defence of Anarchist Communism*” (2022) I outlined and critically discussed the six forms of radical politics that claim to offer alternatives to anarchist communism. These are the following:

1) Stirner’s Egoism

In his emphasis on the “unique one”, the 19th Century German scholar Max Stirner claimed that all humans, along with all other forms, were simply his “property” to be enjoyed and exploited, and that all things were a mere

“nothing” to him. I argue, following Kropotkin, that Stirner’s philosophy was a form of amoral egoism bordering on nihilism, and rather removed from the concerns of everyday life (2022: 20-26).

2) Individualist Anarchism

Although individualist anarchists, or mutualists following Proudhon, advocated a philosophical naturalism and a realist ontology, and rejected the authoritarian socialism of the Marxists, they tended to retain all the trappings of the capitalist market economy. They thus retain a market system and petty commodity production, private property and land, wage labour, and extol the virtues of both competition and possessive individualism. Individualist anarchism thus rejects the communistic ethos of anarchist communism along with strike action and is essentially a form of market socialism. Mutualism is very different from “libertarian anarchy”, otherwise known as anarcho-capitalism. This ideology advocates free market capitalism backed by private armies and security firms (2022: 26-32). The doyen of anarcho-capitalism, Murray Rothbard, was placed by Ruth Kinna in the anarchist “hall of fame”, though she admits he was not an anarchist! (2019: 356).

3) Marxism

Although anarchist communists have always acknowledged Marx’s philosophical materialism and his important critique of capitalism, they have always rejected Marx’s statist politics. They have emphasised that the social democratic parliamentary road to



socialism inevitably leads to reformism, while the advocacy of a centralised vanguard party that sought the “conquest of political power” on behalf of the working class – the workers’ state – as with the Bolsheviks and later Maoists – would only lead to tyranny and state capitalism. This is as Bakunin predicted (2022: 33-35).

4) Religious Anarchism

Though historically associated with Tolstoy religious anarchism has in recent decades been widely advocated and fashionable among many anarchists, who falsely equate atheism (evolutionary naturalism) with “modernity”. Anarchism has thus been linked with a variety of religious traditions – neo paganism, Buddhism, Advaita Vedanta, theosophy and the occult, Islamic mysticism and esotericism. I suggested that these religious traditions rather than “revitalising” anarchism, simply offer an atavistic, spiritualist metaphysic, turning anarchism into some kind of esoteric spirit cult. This is a long way from the evolutionary naturalism and ecological vision of anarchist communism. Moreover, many of the religious visionaries extolled as anarchists – for example Nicholas Ber’dyaev, Mohandas Gandhi and Ananda Coomaraswamy – were not in fact anarchists but keen advocates of state power to uphold human freedom (sic) and to be guided by a spiritual (anarchist!) elite (2022: 35-44).

5) Anarcho-Primitivism

Although heralded as a new approach, anarcho-primitivism in its rejection of civilisation, is an ideology that goes back to Greek antiquity. Associated in particular with John Zerzan, anarcho- primitivism rejects all the important products of human civilisation and the creative human imagination – farming, the arts, philosophy, writing and literature, technology, science, urban living and symbolic thought. This is completely retrogressive, and given the fact that half the human population of around seven billion people now live in cities, and a hunter-gatherer lifestyle can only support one or two people per square mile, the “future is primitive” is hardly a viable option (2022: 47-50).

6) Post Anarchism

Although taking various forms – for example, the Nietzschean aesthetic individualism of Hakim Bey and his advocacy of Islamic mysticism, the neo-primitivist “post left anarchy” of Bob Black and the post structuralist anarchism of Saul Newman – post anarchism is simply a revamping of Stirner’s egoism combined with an uncritical embrace of postmodern nihilism. This was a cultural tradition that took its inspiration largely from Nietzsche and Heidegger, both political reactionaries. I outline a critique of postmodern nihilism and their rejection of the Enlightenment and its evolutionary naturalism. Key problems are: proclaiming with some stridency the “dissolution” or “erasure” of such key concepts as truth, reason and humanity; their rejection of history and class; reducing social reality to discourses on power; their anti-realism and epistemological relativism. Finally, in reducing the human subject to a possessive ego there is an “unholy alliance” between the postmodern nihilism that the post-left espouse and the triumphalism of neo-liberal capitalism (2022: 51-60).

It is somewhat ironic that the “post truth” scenario of Heidegger and the post anarchists – as Stirner put it “you alone are the truth” – is now particularly well-expressed in the autocratic politics of that arch-egoist, Donald Trump (2022: 130).

The Only Viable Alternative

Anarchist communism, as both a political tradition and as a radical form of politics, that is expressed in varied forms of direct action – insurrectionism (Alfredo Bonanno), anarcho-syndicalism (Albert Meltzer), libertarian politics (Murray Bookchin) and community activism (Colin Ward) (2022: 91-128). – seem to me to be a more viable form of politics than any of the six radical traditions discussed above, And in terms of the “modern crisis” we now face, it is a form of politics that we need to take seriously, for all the political traditions that now dominate the political landscape – liberal democracy in its various forms (such as the “green new deal”),

neo-conservatism, including its offspring , authoritarian populism, Marxism and theocracy as expressed in various forms of religious fundamentalism – are all politically bankrupt and found wanting.

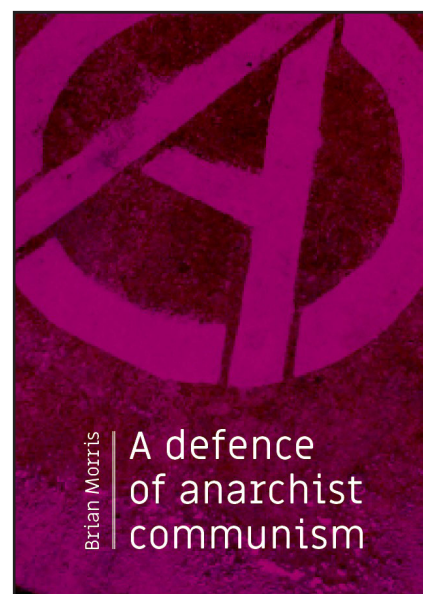
One final reflection; all the ardent devotees of the “new” (sic) or “post left anarchy” – whether anarcho-primitivists, Stirnerite egoists, Nietzschean aesthetes, spiritual anarchists or postmodern nihilists – always pride themselves as being creative, experimental, innovative, original, non-ideological (a pretence!) and flexible – and are so described by Ruth Kinna (2019) – as well as expressing an authentic anarchist sensibility and the “spirit of revolt” (ontological anarchy).

In contrast anarchists communists are depicted and continually rebuked by these same “post left anarchists” for not only being “obsolete” and “outmoded” (Kinna 2019: 144) but also denigrated for being dogmatic, authoritarian, ideological, sectarian, inflexible, confrontational, as well as lacking any anarchist “spirit” or sensibility. Anarchist communists are no more “sectarian” than the “post leftist” (anti-socialist) anarchists, who, of course, express their own ideology (and metaphysic) which they pretend not to have. This biased and negative portrait of anarchist communism is a complete caricature of the life, thought and political praxis of generations of anarchist communists, past and present.

In the bookshops now is a portrait of the real anarchist communist movement and tradition by Nick Heath (2022) contrasting with the negative portrayal of its ideological detractors. It gives an admirable account of anarchist communism as a political tradition – as “the idea”, interesting vignettes of the life, thoughts and struggles of many class struggle anarchists, few of whom were academics ensconced in some university, and provides us with a detailed and well-researched history of anarchist communism as a historical movement, which unbeknown to some academics, is still a flourishing and active political tradition.

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Shutting out the Music Machine

“You think it’s funny”, the punk band The Clash sang on their 1978 *White Man in Hammersmith Palais* single, “Turning rebellion into money.” The song’s accusation was clear: some of the bands in the contemporary punk music scene were using the pretence of being part of a counter-cultural resistance movement as a means to make profit and accumulate wealth.



The irony, of course, is that many other more radical voices in the punk scene of the time levelled the same charge at The Clash: that they were pseudo-rebels, eager for fame and fortune, and willing to abandon any principle to secure a well-feathered place in the entertainment establishment. But the original punk wave was neither the first nor the last time that a music culture which adopted an outsider, anti-system identity found itself splitting between those determined that the scene should remain a threat, and those who saw their involvement as a career opportunity. That dichotomy, between rebels and collaborators, has played out time and again with particular intensity because of the ways that global capital manages the business of music production.

The ‘music industry’ is a hugely profitable area of popular culture, a space in which colossal multinational companies generate billions of pounds of revenue across the globe each and every year. Some musicians willing to play the game can become international celebrities, able

to accumulate vast personal fortunes from their single and album releases, their stadium tours, their merchandise and the licensing of their image.

Much of the material that’s produced by that alliance between artists and capitalists reproduces and reinforces the dominant cultural expectations of their societies: messages of docility, conformity and consumerism encouraging a passive, unquestioning acceptance of the world as it is. But there is always a parallel strand of what’s sold as ‘rebel music’: sounds of ‘dissent’ packaged, marketed and sold by an industry that neuters and smothers its rebellious edge.

The world of culture is one in which the battle for ideas and influence continually plays out in capitalist society. Love for styles and forms of music can generate strong bonds amongst the adherents who identify with the sounds, styles and assumptions of that scene. When that enthusiasm is directed towards commercial, mainstream forms of music, most of all those which emphasise celebrity, fame and wealth, there’s little chance of it stimulating resistance. But when that music’s innate identity is oppositional and hostile to the existing order of things, there is potential for a great deal more.

Subcultures that emerge through the self-activity, and under the self-direction, of marginalised, fringe or excluded groups, often those composed and directed by young people, have always been sites in which oppositional and anti-capitalist ideas find expression. Popular music has always been one of the sites in which such oppositional momentum has developed. But one of the ways that the capitalist order protects its own hegemony is in absorbing threats to the dominance of its ideas expressed through oppositional cultural movements. The challenge that these anti-capitalist cultures face is finding way to maintain the fire and energy that were

that culture's original impetus, resisting incorporation and commodification by the same system that the movement originally opposed.

Irreconcilable Tension

So since the emergence of popular music, in all its diverse genres and styles, there's been a persistent, irreconcilable tension between two counter forces: on the one side, capitalist enterprises aiming to turn musical creativity into products and merchandise that generate profits; on the other, the creative, innovative, independent instincts of artists and performers that resists recruitment by capital. It's not surprising that - musically, lyrically and visually - that commodified cultural product can in itself be bland, insipid and predictable. But if mainstream popular music that seeks to ingratiate itself with existing society has always been the dominant form, that cultural practice has always been opposed by that dissident alternative.

Some of that independent musical and cultural creativity has proudly affirmed its defiantly anti-capitalist credentials, seeing its music as the soundtrack and inspiration for acts of resistance to the forces of capital and the state. Yet at other times dissident music cultures have focused on efforts to carve out an independent cultural space, prioritising autonomy over combativity.

In the era of jazz, that might have found reflection in the creation of underground clubs. During the hippy era, it found expression in the free festival movement, the countercultural press and the creation of new centres of struggle. During the punk era, it was manifest in the creation of new independent labels, venues, gigs and fanzines, many with a strong anarchist bent. Squat gigs have offered one practical demonstration of ways in which cultural events can be organised outside of normal commercial confines.

Faced with oppositional cultural movements based on music state authorities respond in a number of predictable ways to neutralise any threat it might pose. To begin with, that

might be to generate a 'moral panic' with the backing of the media, supportive academics and social commentators who will warn against the risk to the moral fibre of the young attracted to it. The work of black musicians and artists, operating outside of the mainstream, has often being subject to the 'demonisation' that accompanies the cyclical 'moral panic' championed by establishment voices. Similar voices had denounced hippy bands as work-shy druggies, punk bands as violent yobs. Rap and more recently drill music has been the target of this kind of attempt to silence the cultural and political perspectives of black performers. Alternatively, the state may attempt to co-opt movements by producing faux versions of the same impulses as products for sale.

If that's unsuccessful then the application of brute, suppressive force might be applied. That approach was put into the sharpest possible relief by the events of the Battle of the Beanfield at Stonehenge in 1985, when the police brutally assaulted hundreds of people travelling in a vehicle convoy close to the site.

Huge Challenges

Those seeking to carve out a space for autonomous, defiant musical creativity have faced huge challenges in trying to break out of the constraints that capitalist imposes. The most politicized strands within punk, hippy and other scenes have often adopted not-for-profit and free or minimal pricing schemes for gigs, publications and musical releases. The 'pay no more than' legend that has adorned countless punk record sleeves is a powerful statement against commercial profiteering, which – like cheap door prices at live shows, and cost-price magazines – have made this material much more widely accessible than it would otherwise have been.

That's certainly something to be encouraged and emulated, even as it is accepted that this kind of practice cannot eliminate methods of capitalist exchange entirely. Yet it is important to recognise the distinction between the work of consciously political activists and organisers, who are providing platforms for the scenes of



which they are a part, and ‘indie’ organisations, which are effectively small businesses distinct from the major labels only on the basis of their size. That sort of confusion is one of reasons that such scenes have rarely developed the kinds of political outlook that would ensure their musical genre can retain its genuine independence and become an inspiring, fulcrum for effective and sustainable resistance.

In the 1980s, the rave and dance scenes that exploded across the country vividly illustrated the tensions between independence and incorporation, between non-for-profit self-organisation and big business buyouts, and between cultural hedonism and cultural opposition. Raves, and the music that accompanied them, began life as an essentially underground phenomenon, only growing in size and popularity as word of the new scene spread. To begin with, raves were often self-organised affairs, arranged as a new style of squat gig in empty warehouses and buildings in city spaces, or as makeshift marquee encampments in the open countryside.

While this scene began outside of the control of the music industry’s entrepreneurs, and frequently came into conflict with the police and with local authorities, the rave scene sidelined the political concerns that had preoccupied radical punk culture. Instead, with an enthusiasm for recreational drugs (Ecstasy in particular) and collective and individual hedonism, the focus was on providing a welcome distraction from worsening economic

and social conditions in the country at the time, and allowing attendees to revel in being part of an outsider, unauthorised get-together.

But just as had occurred with mainstream punk, the rave scene quickly succumbed to the predatory pressures of capital. Raves

became high-price all-ticket affairs, managed by promoters keen to purge the scene of any radical impulses. Celebrity DJs rose to prominence, as the separation between artist and audience was reinforced. And the music industry found multiple ways to absorb, package and resell the scene’s original impulses. Criminal enterprises saw the potential of the expanding drug market and moved in to extort profit from the demand, while the authorities snuffed out the scene’s ability to organise independently.

It’s the kind of degeneration of an initially subversive spirit that’s played out time and again. The amorphous, porous nature of outsider music scenes make them vulnerable to take over, schism and the corruption of their original intent. Oppositional music movements can be hugely important sites for rallying resistance, and providing support and encouragement for those engaged in struggle.



Celebrity DJ Tiesto

The shared fidelity to oppositional music can heighten and spur protest and oppositional movements, and provide a focus for extending the connection of music and resistance.

Independent and DIY cultural scenes can also be a site in which independent creativity and invention can manifest. Movements generate their own platforms for the distribution and sharing of that culture, and when those tend towards anti-commercial, not-for-profit and participant-driven activities, they can encourage others in the scene to become active and involved.

Sometimes the focus of such activity has been on helping like-minded enthusiasts to find a space in which they could control and celebrate their own musical culture pleasures. Those developments disrupt capitalist normality, but are not necessarily in themselves consciously anti-capitalist in nature. They might draw participants into conflict with the forces of the state, when for example police shut down events, but they are not necessarily consciously intending to be the conduits for resistance. At other times, the link between the music and the need to resist authority and challenge the existing order of things is articulated explicitly.

Defiantly independent music scenes tend either to revel in their 'unacceptable' outsider reputation, shunning attempts to neutralise them, or have consciously positioned themselves as a force opposed to the existing order of things. But opposition music scenes rarely have a single coherent political outlook, despite the shared perspectives that usually shape those scene's worldview. It's more likely that a range of different, overlapping and competing ideas about how the movement's agenda can best be advanced and what that agenda should be – and those ideas can be in direct conflict with one another. Libertarian, anti-system and anarchist ideas have surfaced regularly in such movements, and within the hippy and political punk scenes most visibly. Those anarchist ideas have often been muddled and shallow, and have often focused on individual freedom and unfettered existential

choice. Concern with single issue campaigns, with lifestyle decisions and with personal moral orientation have often displaced any concern with collective class based resistance to capital. But genuinely revolutionary politics have always been threaded through the fabric of those anarchist punk scenes, and have at times risen to challenge the contradictory consensus.

From hippy, to punk, to rave and beyond, subcultures and scenes with music at their core have emerged to challenge the norms of the culture industry and pose an alternative to the social mainstream. They have been locations where innovative and experimental forms of vocal political opposition have found expression, and where creative new forms of art, literature, lyricism, poetry and music-making have been incubated and shared to enthusiastic audiences.

At their most effective, such scenes have been the encouragement, and even the springboard, into committed political action by activists animated by a concern to remake the world. But the politics of such scenes has sometimes been a conflation of contradictory impulses and ideas in which a concern for collective action, and specifically independent class-based resistance, has remained tenuous. Such movements confront the danger of allowing a capitalist takeover or preventing a capitalist shutdown of their activities. That's a battle that's fought out even as those scenes risk succumbing to their own inherent cultural vulnerabilities (such as insularity, exclusivity or tribalism).

But outsider scenes have continued to act as important points-of-entry for generations of anti-capitalist activists and have operated as the sound system for what has often been recognised as inspiring auditory agit-prop, created and controlled by its producers. Despite the inevitable contradictions and limitations of oppositional music scenes, the shared determination to prevent 'rebellion being turned into money' is something that all those determined to drown out the sounds of capitalism can continue to take encouragement from.

David Graeber- a brief critique



***Translated and adapted from
Courant Alternatif (November 2020),
the magazine of the Organisation
Communiste Libertaire in France***

Over the years, David Graeber has become a key figure in the so-called “radical” left and alter-globalisation movements¹. This is a social movement which supports global cooperation and interaction, but oppose what they describe as the negative effects of economic globalisation, which they feel often works against the environment, and economic and social justice. Graeber claimed to belong to the current of anarchist anthropology in which we find anthropologists and ethnologists, known to libertarians for the most part, such as Pierre Clastres, Marshal Sahlins, James C. Scott or Charles Macdonald. Anarchist anthropology “poses, through concrete case studies, the very topical, if not acute, question of power and inequalities, or more exactly of their control and refusal by a certain number of ancient or recent societies”². This current is fruitful as regards the critique of modern capitalist society. In particular it has demonstrated the existence of societies which, although ignoring the State,

the marked inequalities of wealth, and social hierarchy (chiefs without power), live not in poverty as had been supposed, but in a relative abundance (cf. Sahlins).

If he is inspired by the work of the authors mentioned above, David Graeber is nonetheless critical of this current. In his book *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, he criticises Clastres for having been too indulgent about the violence present within the institutions of so-called primitive societies (e.g. rite of passage to adulthood among the Guayaki consisting of scarifications, extremely conflictual relations with neighbouring groups) as well as on the presence of domination in interpersonal relations (elders/young people, men/women). Thus, he did not fall into the trap of idealising primitive societies (unlike primitivists such as Zerzan), nor into that of axiological neutrality (Max Weber) imposed in the social sciences³. In the same vein, he also denounced, in a recent article⁴ co-written with D. Wengrow, the Rousseauist myth of the “noble savage” and the teleological account of “civilisation” which is based on the idea spread by several contemporary authors (e.g. Jared Diamond, Fukuyama, P. Shepard, etc.) that economic inequalities appeared with agriculture during the Neolithic revolution. However, this story has been refuted by numerous counter-examples from archaeological and ethnological observations. This being so, when Graeber and Wengrow announce, as a counterpoint to the idea of evolution of human societies towards always more progress and social inequalities, that the societies of the recent Paleolithic presented signs of inequality of riches on the basis of archaeological “evidence”, one cannot help but read here an opposition by reaction, archaeological “proofs” in question being the object of many debates as to what social significance to give them.

¹ Translator’s note- Alter-globalization is also known as alternative globalization

² This definition of anarchist anthropology comes from a presentation text on the radio channel France Culture announcing a conference of Jean-Paul Demoule recorded 9th October 2019 at the Claude Lévi Strauss Theatre

³ Translator’s note- Axiology is the philosophical study of value. It includes questions about the nature and classification of values and about what kinds of things have value.

⁴ Graeber, D., & Wengrow, D. (2018). How to change the course of human history. <https://www.eurozine.com>

An attractive but... mistaken history of debt

This lack of rigour is also significant in Graeber's main work: *Debt, The First 5000 Years* (2011). To quickly summarise, after a very convincing criticism of the "barter myth" popularised by the philosopher and economist Adam Smith, which he describes as the "imaginary world of barter", he places the concept of debt in historical continuity since ancient Mesopotamia. through the Western Middle Ages to the present day. In doing so, he establishes an anachronism and sociocentrism by projecting the current logic of debt onto pre-capitalist societies with their own cultural logics. Moreover, he proposes an imprecise definition of debt, based solely on quantification (while highlighting the social use of threat/violence to obtain debt settlement, which seems to us to be a more relevant criterion for qualifying it), which does not make it possible to distinguish a debt of a simple moral obligation. We also learn in this book that "money and debt come into play at exactly the same time", which is not true! It is commonly accepted that debt appeared before money. In societies without wealth, it existed in the form of services provided by the son-in-law and it will be replaced by the price of the bride (bridewealth) while the price of blood (wergeld) will replace the law of retaliation. Throughout his book, he naturalises the economy (in its modern sense) without taking into account the fact that the basic categories of capitalism that form it (such as money, commodities, value or labour) have a meaning specific to each social organisation and are not transhistorical. By making it a universal functioning of human societies, it thus makes it impossible to simply overcome it and requires reform to improve its functioning.

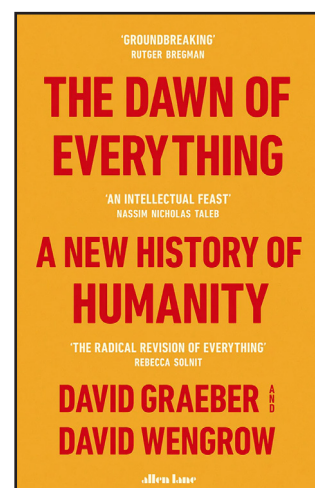
Political positioning

Graeber thinks of History in a completely moral way, and not in terms of social structures, with a binary opposition between creditors and debtors referring to an antagonism between the "rich" and the "poor" who are called the 99%

during the Occupy Wall Street movement. This reasoning implies that capitalism is above all a matter of personal domination (and not exploitation) of a tiny oligarchy over the mass of people through the logic of debt which, according to him, constitutes the engine of History (farewell to the class struggle: it will therefore be a question of moralising the creditors in favour of a sharing of wealth between the debtors). With Occupy, he calls for a moratorium on debt... a strategy which has nevertheless proved ineffective in the past. In fact, his book presents several examples of massive cancellations of debt which have invariably been followed by a new development of debt and by an absence of modification of the means of production... Thus, we cannot see how a moratorium on debt today will lead to capitalism being overcome.

But here we are reassured. We learn, still in *Debt, The First 5000 Years*, that communism has nothing to do with the "ownership of the means of production" but rather constitutes the "foundation of all human sociability" in the form of "fundamental communism" which "manifests itself above all in what we call love" (sic) and which is already present everywhere in society. No need for a revolutionary break, the change is already there: he was indeed convinced that capitalism had already come to an end... Throughout his works or during interviews, it is moreover clearly visible that his criticism focuses on "excesses" of neoliberalism (financialisation of the economy, the generalised credit system (debt), the ultra-rich (1%), extensive bureaucracy, management, "bullshit jobs", etc.) and not on the fundamental categories of capitalism. We are then far from the willingness for a revolutionary break with the existing order that one would expect to see with an anarchist anthropologist.

Auguste



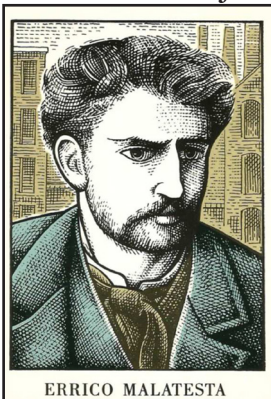
Book Reviews

The Idea: its main themes

Nick Heath (2022). The Idea: Anarchist Communism, Past, Present and Future. Just Books: Belfast. Designed by Jayne Clementson

“We have just been told of two different Anarchisms, of which the one, we are assured, is none at all. I know but one; that is Communistic Anarchism, which has grown among workingmen into a party, and which alone is known in ‘larger circles,’ as we say. It is as old, yes, older than the present century: Babeuf already preached it. Whether a few middle-class liberals have invented a new Anarchism is entirely immaterial to me, and does not interest me any more than any other workingman. As regards Proudhon, to whom comrade Auban again and again refers, he has long ago been disposed of and forgotten even in France, and his place has everywhere been taken by the revolutionary, Communistic Anarchism of the real proletariat.” Otto Trupp in *The Anarchists*, John Henry Mackay. (Quoted by Heath)

Nick Heath’s large book on anarchist communism is the first such comprehensive work on the subject. Anarchist communism



often hides in the shadows in the general works on anarchism available, only clearly emerging when the ideas of Kropotkin, Reclus and Malatesta are discussed. This book seeks to rectify all of that.

Its main sections deal with:

1. The antiauthoritarian wing of the First international
2. The development of the specific idea of anarchist communism

3. The troubled relationship of anarchist communism with anarchosyndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism
4. Platformist anarchist-communism
5. The post-war platformist movement
6. Relationship and interaction with council communism
7. An anarchist communism for the present and future

Heath’s first main thesis is that the revolutionary core of anarchism has been obscured by what are essentially bourgeois histories which pursue an eclectic approach, encompassing many ideas, philosophers and movements. The worst of these are the works by Peter Marshall, James Joll, Roderick Kedward and George Woodcock. So therefore we have worthless speculations on various philosophers outside of the historic anarchist movement. The worst instances of this are in Marshall’s book, which includes the likes of Murray Rothbard, Ayn Rand and Margaret Thatcher! This is “an idealist fashion of thinking more preoccupied with the eternal struggle of humanity for liberty than the concrete struggle of the exploited and the social conditions which have permitted the emergence of an antiauthoritarian point of view in the proletariat.” Heath quotes Woodcock when the latter actually admits that “anarchism as a developed, articulate, and clearly identifiable trend appears only in the modern era of conscious social and political revolutions.”

Heath’s second main theme is a refutation of the assertion that anarchist communism is a poor relation to the mass movements launched by anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism. See for example Alain Pengam, *Anarchist-Communism* where anarchist-communism is referred to as a “poor and despised relation.” Brian Morris in his *Anthropology, Ecology, and Anarchism: A Reader*, replies that this is misleading and asserts that anarchist communism is the main current within anarchism. Pengam further

states that the accommodation of anarchist communism to syndicalism, made it a “simple variant of anarcho-syndicalism”, that it failed to discover the causes of the counter-revolution initiated by the Bolsheviks, and that it died as a credible current with the aftermaths of the Mexican and Russian Revolutions and that it was absorbed or replaced by anarchosyndicalism.

In an exhaustive number of chapters on different anarchist movements in many countries, Heath convincingly reveals that this is not the case, and that anarchist communism had a preponderant hold within those movements, as in France, Italy, Bulgaria, Russia, Latin America, China and Japan; and that indeed it is the dominant current within anarchism.

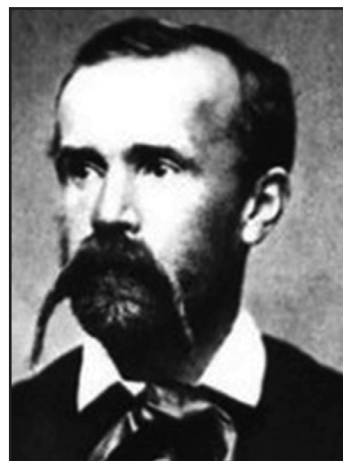
His chapters on anarcho-syndicalism and its relation to anarchist communism reveal an intimate connection between the two, an intimate connection that was often fraught and problematic. He reveals that Fernand Pelloutier, far from being the founder of French CGT syndicalism, was actually preoccupied with creating Bourses de Travail, which he saw as embryos of the Communes as advocated by the theorists of anarchist communism.

Anarchism Communism and the Working Class

Heath's third theme is related to the first, in affirming that the ideas of anarchism, communism and anarchist communism emerged with the development of the working class. He spends some time on movements that developed embryonic ideas on anarchism and communism which emerged with the English and French Revolutions (1640 and 1789), the Diggers and the Enragés. For him, these were bourgeois revolutions where the capitalist class and its supporters overthrew the last foundations of feudalism. In this process, there was a certain amount of room for radical ideas to emerge among the masses, among artisans and the rural and urban poor. However, Heath does not idealise these movements, especially with the Enragés, who he feels have been the subject of a “considerable anarchist mythology” originating in late 19th century attempts to establish an

anarchist lineage back to the French Revolution.

Heath examines in-depth the concepts of both ‘communism’ and ‘socialism’ and shows that they had their origins in the most radical fringes of the 1789 revolutionaries and that communism as both an idea and movement emerged in working class districts of Paris in the 1830s. He goes on to describe the different strands within this movement, and the emergence of the Communist League which Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were to join. He regards the latter's role in this movement as in part destructive. He is not afraid to criticise them and indeed other important figures within this communist movement, like Wilhelm Weitling and Etienne Cabet. In this process he places importance on the ideas of Joseph Déjacque as a pioneer of anarchist communism, seeing him as “one of the grandparents of anarchist communism,” and that “his project of collective class emancipation was linked to complete liberty for the individual, thus



being one of the first to redefine communism in opposition to the authoritarian concepts of Cabet et al.”

However, the real emergence of anarchism as a movement came with the growth of the working class and the establishment of its first international organisation, the International Workers Association, often called the First International. Heath is careful to show that in fact the ideas of revolutionary anarchism did not originate with the Russian Mikhail Bakunin, but emerged among French workers who were breaking with the non-revolutionary and pro-market ideas of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Workers like Bastelica, Varlin, Malon, and Richard. As Heath comments: “it was the encounter of Bakunin with this new wave of young militants that was to bring about a major evolution of anti-authoritarian socialist ideas.”

Thus, Heath shows throughout the book that workers themselves developed advanced ideas, as in 1830, as in the First International, and that thinkers like Bakunin and Kropotkin were not originators of these ideas but contributed by clearly defining and amplifying these ideas.

Heath shows that the events within the First International, the break with Marx and his followers about how the that organisation should function, further defined these radical ideas and led to the emergence of anarchist communism, which then became the predominant current within the anarchist movement, gradually replacing the anarchist collectivism of Bakunin.

Specific Organisation

Heath's final important theme is the struggle for specific organisation of anarchist revolutionaries. He affirms that Bakunin was a partisan of a specific organisation of revolutionaries operating within a broader workers movement. He goes on to describe the turn away from such concepts towards loose networks of affinity groups as a reaction to the manoeuvrings of Marx and his followers, that ended up leading to a marginalisation of the anarchist movement. He shows that Kropotkin later revised these ideas of loose organisation, of which he had been a notable supporter, in favour of more effective organisation.

He demonstrates that in various countries, some anarchist militants were moving towards the construction of specific anarchist communist organisations but that it was the Russian Revolution of 1917 that really changed all of this. The anarchist movement was outmanoeuvred by the Bolsheviks and subsequently dismembered and crushed by them. Seeking to learn from this situation, a group of Ukrainian and Russian anarchists attempted to learn from these defeats. They advocated the need for a specific anarchist communist organisation, based on federal organisation and theoretical and tactical unity. This was in a document entitled the Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists. Henceforth, supporters of these ideas were often known as Platformists.

Heath shows that there was considerable opposition to Platformist ideas, though also that it was taken up in various countries to a greater extent than previously acknowledged. He shows the continuing struggle throughout the international anarchist movement for effective organisation, in opposition to individualist disorganisers and anarchist communists like Galleani and his supporters who clung to the idea of loose networks of affinity groups. He shows that objection to specific organisation was often allied with a rejection of the class struggle basis and origins of the anarchist movement, with an embracing of vague humanist ideas, and that the struggle of partisans of specific anarchist communist organisation versus these objectors profoundly marked the movement and continues to do so to this day.

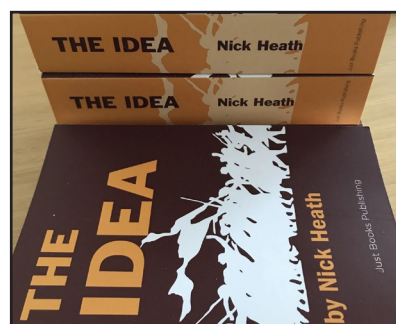
Finally, Heath confirms the continuing relevance of anarchist communism as the only anarchist current that specifically argues for the end of the market economy and of exchange value. As he says, "The history of anarchist communism has been full of many defeats, of scissions and failures. Yet it has perennially renewed itself, attempting to learn from the mistakes of the past. The self-isolation of the 1880s, the failures of the movement during the Russian Revolution,...these and other mistakes have to be rectified if anarchist communism is once more to reveal itself as an inspirer and galvaniser of social struggle."

The Idea can be purchased from:

PM Press: <https://pmpress.org.uk/product/the-idea/>

Housmans: https://housmans.com/?s=Nick+Heath&post_type=product

ACG Website: <https://www.anarchistcommunism.org/product/the-idea/>



Intersectional Class Struggle: Theory and Practice

Michael Beyea Reagan (2021)
AK Press/Institute for Anarchist Studies
pp.200

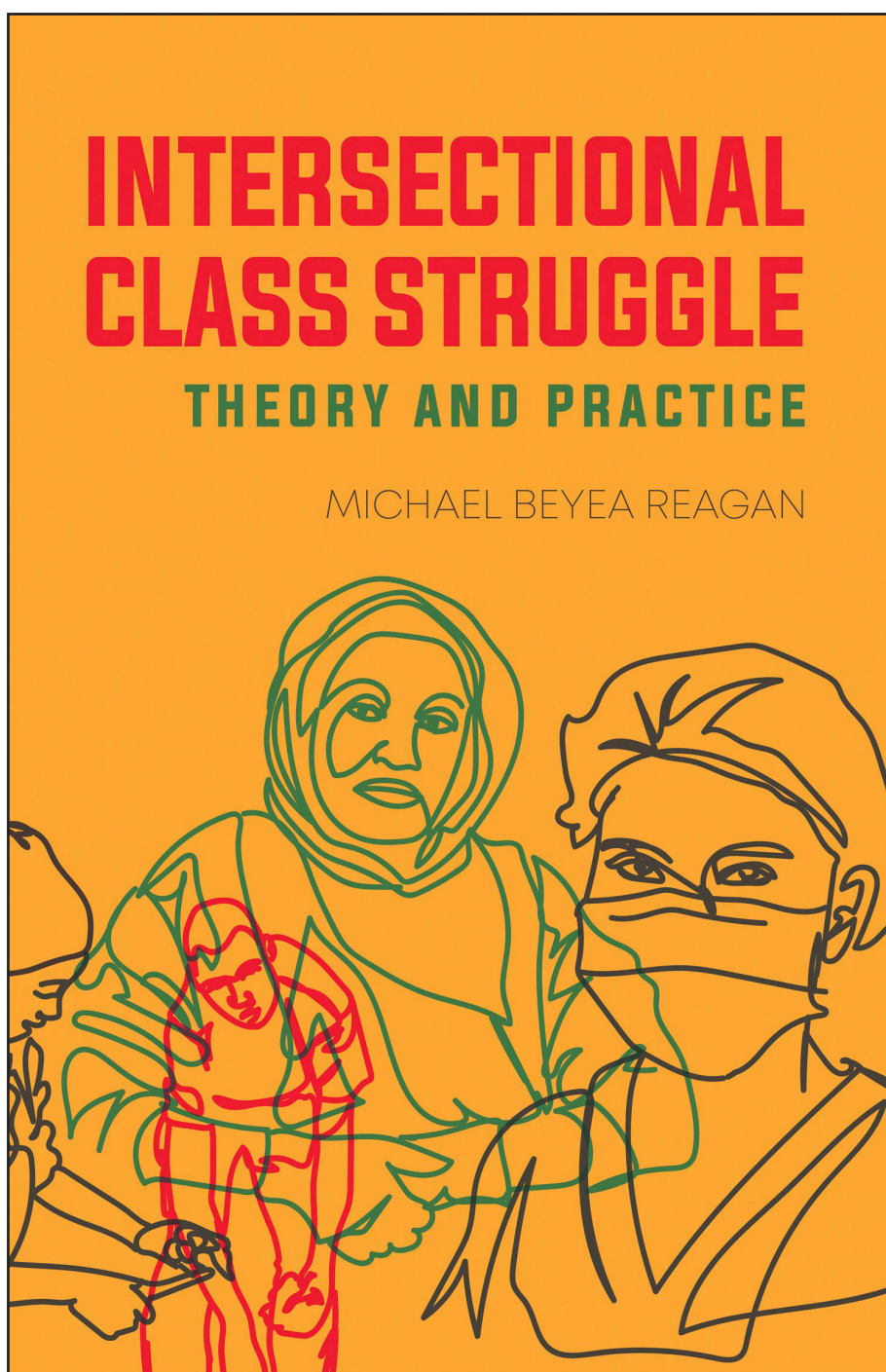
Intersectional Class Struggle is an interesting book and, despite being for a primarily North American audience, certainly worth reading beyond that.

Interesting, but ultimately frustrating.

Author Michael Beyea Reagan, who works in the Department of African American Studies of Princeton University in the USA, argues that social class is defined by the difference and variety of us, regular working people (p.2). This is an unusual perspective, historically at odds with most anarchist communist understandings of what constitutes social class: A group of people sharing a common relationship to the means of production and therefore a common material interest. So, rather than defining class as something which is held in common, Reagan begins by defining by difference. This, of course, is in keeping with what has become the mainstream of 'intersectional' thinking.

That said, Reagan does believe that there is a distinct working class and that it is of importance in terms of the struggle for social change. Indeed, the fundamental purpose of the book is, at least in great part, to explain to the intersectional left, the

social justice-seeking movement, that class matters. However, Reagan rejects the notion of any 'historic mission of the working class' and the idea, common to Marxists and anarchist communists alike, that the universal nature of working class existence, differences and existing divisions notwithstanding, is what makes the working class the only power in society capable of transforming it and ending class society. Rather, Reagan wants "...to restore a tradition of liberation and emancipation to class politics today..." (p.6), believing that class politics has lost that vision and has befallen prey to what has become known as class reductionism.



On the other hand, Reagan also maintains that theoretical attempts to remove the working class from the picture, from Andre Gorz's claim in the 1980s that the working class had simply disappeared, to Guy Standing's 'Precariat' and Hardt and Negri's 'multitude' in recent times, are wrong. And he states, correctly, that there are more people working in 'traditional' industrial jobs now than at any point in human history.

However, Reagan argues that class is both materially and culturally constructed and that "...those that see class as the most fundamental form of social organisation, exploitation and oppression are wrong..." (p.19). And, this notion of there being a material and a cultural understanding of class, is at the very centre of their argument, claiming that class has a "...cultural composition making any singular or "scientific" notion of working class interests an impossibility" (p.19). This idea of working class commonality of interest, despite differences, cultural and otherwise, the author identifies with Leninist Marxism. And this is rejected in favour of a variety of the 'intersectional' approach.

However, Reagan also criticises the intersectional approach of the concept's guru. Kimberley Crenshaw, for failing to take class into account and appears to reject the idea of class being just another 'identity' whilst simultaneously claiming that class is how

people "...identify and understand themselves and the world..." (p. 21). Hmmm.

There is, therefore, a distinct sense that the author wants to have their cake and eat it, stating later that, in the modern era, class has "...some clearly defined parameters that are virtually universal" (p.68) and, presumably, these are based on commonalities of experience (of exploitation, alienation) and interest.

So, what makes the book worth reading? Drawing upon the work of E.P. Thompson, the book foregrounds the intellectual work of pre-Marxist workers in England and also the 1830s Factory Girls Association of Lowell, Massachusetts, who were developing critiques of emergent industrial capitalism before the founding of the 1st International. This part of the work is possibly the most coherent and interesting, integrating history from below with an interesting discussion of class formation with particular reference to gender.

Also of note is the discussion of slavery in the United States and the relationship between racialised chattel slavery and wage slavery, something which some intended audiences in the USA may find challenging. Both, it is argued, are systems of labour exploitation and the creation of surplus value for the owner of the means of production. There are obvious differences and the chattel system relied on openly violent compulsion and the, eventual, ideological dehumanisation of enslaved

Africans, but the imposition of the wage system was opposed by many in the 19th century from an understanding that it was also a form of slavery. The term Wage Slavery was used (and still is, although significantly less) not simply because it has echoes of the horror of chattel slavery but because it is also a system of compulsion.

Reagan makes clear that the property (including slave) owning classes of 17th



century North America were well aware of the potential for unity between black slaves and white servants, which to their great horror had sometimes manifested itself. Although the exact circumstances of their exploitation and oppression differed, slave and servant often lived and worked side by side and organic alliances emerged in opposition to a common enemy. And that common enemy legislated to create a racial hierarchy amongst their workers that would terrorise black people and break the “...interracial class solidarities of rebellion and resistance” (p.55). The conscious establishment of ‘White Supremacy’ which was to follow divided the working class and made inter-racial class solidarity the exception rather than the rule in U.S. society.

Elsewhere, the book takes a whistle-stop tour of the emergence of what has become the Labour Theory of Value and of socialist ideas, paying attention to Proudhon, Kropotkin and Marx. Reagan acknowledges the contribution of each to socialist thought and takes time to explain Marx’s theory of alienation. But for the author, Marx’s ‘materialism’ ends in a form of economic determinism which ignores the importance of culture, amongst other factors. Reagan, therefore, sees ‘culture’ as having a very high level of autonomy from material conditions, making it capable of in effect over-riding those conditions in the creation of ideology. In this, he agrees with the most famous of the Marxist ‘revisionists’, Eduard Bernstein, who he considers to have provided the “... first substantive critique of materialism...” (p. 95). Reagan does not, however, mention Bernstein’s reformism and resolute opposition to revolutionary struggle until the Notes at the back of the book.

So, where does Reagan ultimately take the reader via Bernstein but also the likes of Rudolf Rocker, W.E.B. Dubois, Voltairine De Cleyre, Franz Fanon, C.L.R. and Selma James?

They appear to deliver the reader to an ‘intersectional’ version of class politics that claims that class, understood as a ‘lived experience’ mediated by culture (and race and gender, primarily), is important, but also something that does not have the potential to be a unifier. This is because “...there is no uniform, singular class interest to shape political struggle in the present period” (p.66). So, we might ask is the experience of exploitation, alienation, powerlessness not a universal ‘lived experience’ even if it is not experienced exactly the same for all members of that class? And does a shared (if not singular) class interest not emerge from that?

It feels like this book, which is well researched and at some level, serious, is ultimately beholden to a belief that whilst class is somehow important, it is not the motor for change that can build a libertarian socialist/ communist society, particularly in the United States. So, why write a book that wants to put a class perspective into movements for social justice (and, presumably, to make them explicitly revolutionary and anti-capitalist) only to pull the class carpet from under its own feet, so to speak?

What might be hoped is that, the premise of book may attract some activists in North America and elsewhere, and will lead to its readers further investigating the nature of class and centrality of class struggle in the fight for human emancipation.

So, a book worth reading; interesting certainly, but ultimately frustrating.

Anarchist Communist Group (ACG)

Preamble

We are a revolutionary anarchist communist organisation made up of local groups and individuals who seek a complete transformation of society, and the creation of anarchist communism.

This will mean that the working class overthrowing capitalism, abolishing the State, getting rid of exploitation, hierarchies and oppressions, and halting the destruction of the environment.

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

AIMS & PRINCIPLES

1. The Anarchist Communist Group is an organisation of revolutionary class struggle anarchists. We aim for the abolition of all hierarchy, and work for the creation of a world-wide classless society: anarchist communism.
2. Capitalism is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling class. But inequality and exploitation are also expressed in terms of race, gender, sexuality, health, ability and age, and in these ways one section of the working class oppresses another. Oppressive ideas and practices cause serious harm to other members of our class, dividing the working class and benefitting the ruling class. Oppressed groups are strengthened by autonomous action which challenges social and economic power relationships. To achieve our goal we must relinquish power over each other on a personal as well as a political level.
3. We believe that fighting systems of oppression that divide the working class, such as racism and sexism, is essential to class struggle. Anarchist communism cannot be achieved while these inequalities still exist. In order to be effective in our various struggles against oppression, both within society and within the working class, we at times need to organise independently as people who are oppressed according to gender, sexuality, ethnicity or ability. We do this as working class people, as cross-class movements hide real class differences and achieve little for us. Full emancipation cannot be achieved without the abolition of capitalism.
4. We are opposed to the ideology of national liberation movements which claims that there is some common interest between native bosses and the working class in face of foreign domination. We do support working class struggles against racism, genocide, ethnocide and political and economic colonialism. We oppose the creation of any new ruling class. We reject all forms of nationalism, as this only serves to redefine divisions in the international working class. The working class has no country and national boundaries must be eliminated. We seek to build an anarchist international to work with other libertarian revolutionaries throughout the world.

5. As well as exploiting and oppressing the majority of people, Capitalism threatens the world through war and through climate change and destruction of the environment.
6. It is not possible to abolish Capitalism without a revolution, which will arise out of class conflict. The ruling class must be completely overthrown to achieve anarchist communism. Because the ruling class will not relinquish power without their use of armed force, this revolution will be a time of violence as well as liberation.
7. Unions by their very nature cannot become vehicles for the revolutionary transformation of society. They have to be accepted by capitalism in order to function and so cannot play a part in its overthrow. Trades unions divide the working class (between employed and unemployed, trade and craft, skilled and unskilled, etc). Even syndicalist unions are constrained by the fundamental nature of unionism. The union has to be able to control its membership in order to make deals with management. Their aim, through negotiation, is to achieve a fairer form of exploitation of the workforce. The interests of leaders and representatives will always be different from ours. The boss class is our enemy, and while we must fight for better conditions from it, we have to realise that reforms we may achieve today may be taken away tomorrow. Our ultimate aim must be the complete abolition of wage slavery. Working within the unions can never achieve this. However, we do not argue for people to leave unions until they are made irrelevant by the revolutionary event. The union is a common point of departure for many workers. Rank and file initiatives may strengthen us in the battle for anarchist communism. What's important is that we organise ourselves collectively, arguing for workers to control struggles themselves.
8. Genuine liberation can only come about through the revolutionary self-activity of the working class on a mass scale. An anarchist communist society means not only co-operation between equals, but active involvement in the shaping and creating of that society during and after the revolution. In times of upheaval and struggle, people will need to create their own revolutionary organisations controlled by everyone in them. These autonomous organisations will be outside the control of political parties, and within them we will learn many important lessons of self-activity.
9. As anarchists we organise in all areas of life to try to advance the revolutionary process. We believe a strong anarchist organisation is necessary to help us to this end. Unlike other so-called socialists or communists we do not want power or control for our organisation. We recognise that the revolution can only be carried out directly by the working class. However, the revolution must be preceded by organisations able to convince people of the anarchist communist alternative and method. We participate in struggle as anarchist communists, and organise on a federative basis. We reject sectarianism and work for a united revolutionary anarchist movement.
10. We have a materialist analysis of capitalist society. The working class can only change society through our own efforts. We reject arguments for either a unity between classes or for liberation that is based upon religious or spiritual beliefs that put faith in outside forces. We work towards a world where religion holds no attraction.

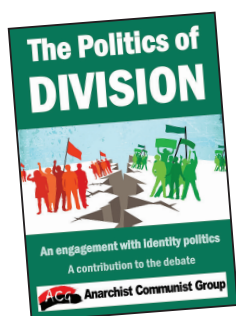
Anarchist Communist Group Publications

All can be ordered from our website: www.anarchistcommunism.org
or from londonacg@gmail.com

- **Stormy Petrel:** Back Issues £1.00 plus postage
- **Jackdaw:** Free paper of the Anarchist Communist Group
- **Carlo Cafiero's Compendium of Capital:** First edition in English- published by the ACG. Price: 7.00 plus postage.

ACG Pamphlets (plus postage)

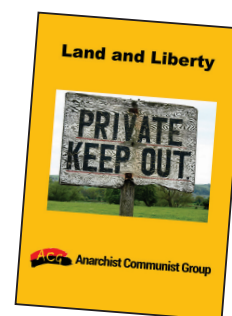
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| • Against Nationalism (2023) | £2.50 |
| • Our NHS? Anarchist Communist Thoughts on Health (2nd edition 2023) | £2.50 |
| • The Third Revolution (2022) | £3.00 |
| • Politics of Division: An engagement with identity politics | £3.00 |
| • Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists | £4.50 |
| • The Truth about Trotsky | £4.00 |
| • Food, Health and Capitalism: Beyond Covid 19 | £3.50 |
| • Anarchism and Violence by Malatesta | £1.50 |
| • Malatesta and Organisation | £2.00 |
| • Towards a Fresh Revolution | £3.00 |
| • Land and Liberty | £2.00 |
| • Whatever happened to the Revolution? | £2.00 |
| • The Italian Factory Councils and the Anarchists | £2.50 |
| • Is Class Still Relevant? | £1.50 |
| • The Wilhelmshaven Revolt: A Chapter of the Revolutionary Movement in the German Navy 1918-1919 by 'Ikarus' (Ernst Schneider) | £3.50 |
| • The Fight for the City: out of print but available for free download | |



Podcasts: At the Cafe

Key ideas of anarchist communism including:
what is anarchist communism, work, crime, war,
internationalism and more!

<https://anchor.fm/anarchistcommunism>



ACG on Youtube

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

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBhViL9VlUoROBjVske0aMA/>

Want to get involved?

- Become a member of the ACG at www.anarchistcommunism.org/join
 - Follow us on social media: FB, Twitter, blogs
- Get on the list for ACG mail-outs, Supporters' Bulletin etc
- Come along to our public meetings, free and open to all

Contact us at info@anarchistcommunism.org

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!