# ORGANISE!

## A Victory for the Commons

- ## A historical look at 'The Commons'

- ## Transforming cities for ourselves

- ## Making space for an international movement

# 86

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# Organise!
## Issue 86 – Summer 2016

Organise! is the magazine of the Anarchist Federation (AF). As anarchist communists we fight for a world without leaders, where power is shared equally amongst communities, and people are free to reach their full potential. We do this by supporting working class resistance to exploitation and oppression, organise alongside our neighbours and workmates, host informative events, and produce publications that help make sense of the world around us.

Organise! is published twice/year with the aim to provide a clear anarchist viewpoint on contemporary issues and to initiate debate on ideas not normally covered in agitational papers. To meet this target, we positively solicit contributions from our readers. We will try to print any article that furthers the objectives of anarchist communism. If you'd like to write something for us, but are unsure whether to do so, then feel free to contact us through any of the details below.

The articles in this issue do not represent the collective viewpoint of the AF unless stated as such. Revolutionary ideas develop from debate, they do not merely drop out of the air! We hope that this publication will help that debate to take place.

For the next issue of Organise! articles can be submitted to the editors directly at:

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# ORGANISE!

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**ANARCHIST AF FEDERATION**

# Editorial:
# A Victory for the Commons

The main theme of this issue of *Organise!* is the 'Commons' and issues related to the control of and access to space. As anarchist communists we reject both private property and state ownership. Therefore, we must consider how we might organise our use and our access to the world's resources. How do we ensure that these resources are managed sustainably and equitably?

The idea of the Commons has often been put forward as an alternative way of viewing land and resources. However, there are two interpretations: It could refer to land or resources that are not owned by anyone but to which a designated group of people have the rights of access; or it could be land and resources that are owned by everyone.

In this issue you can find radical and utopian ideas of the commons and public space. In order to struggle we need to have a vision of a different future, one that will encourage and inform our struggles. We believe that this vision is essential in a society that kills hope and freedom, that our vision must stand in revolt against the sordid and banal reality of everyday life under capitalism.

In the third part of the *Fight for the City* series, we are shown how people are resisting the privatisation of space - both housing and public space. Articles take a look at various subversive practices like nightwalking and psychogeography which question narrow ideas on public space. Such resistance is an example of the fight for the Commons - for access to the resources that we need such as housing and insistence that we have the right to go where we want.

However, it is a hard fight, especially as there are increasing moves towards the militarisation of space, discussed in this issue with an examination of the work of Stephen Graham. We also look at the idea of the Commons throughout history, dating back to ancient times and then on through the Middle Ages. There is also a critique of the essay *The Tragedy of the Commons*.

In addition, we look at positive developments in the international anarchist movement such as the recent Mediterranean meeting of anarchists that took place in Crete in 2015, and in the re-emergence of the anarchist movement in Cuba and the development of a Caribbean Anarchist Federation.

As well as this we have the usual book reviews as well as another article in our regular series on revolutionary culture, with a look at the work of renowned photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson.

# THE CITY IS OURS!

## FIGHT FOR THE CITY
### PART 3

In the last two issues of *Organise!*, we have shown that the city is a target of capital, which seeks out ways of making money at a time when other ways are not so lucrative, nor so easy. In addition, the State, both at a national and local level, does everything it can to facilitate this process. Land is being privatised and sold off to developers in return for more money in the coffers and sometimes a few 'affordable' homes built. In addition, both the new private owners and the State have introduced increasingly authoritarian measures to ensure that all space is closely monitored and controlled in order to ensure that money-making can go on unhindered by activities or people who may get in the way. However, these processes have not happened without resistance. Slogans such as 'reclaim the city' and 'the right to the city' can be heard all over the world. At the moment, there are individual struggles focused on a particular part of city life, eg housing, use of public space or food growing. However, all these struggles are inherently anti-capitalist and anti-State. They may not be located in the workplace and the protagonists may not often be industrial workers, but the struggles all challenge capitalism's need to accumulate more and more money and the State's role in supporting this.

This article will look at the numerous ways that people are resisting capital and the State's attempts to use space for their own interests. We will also ask the question: how can we link these struggles in order to build a united urban social movement that also includes the workplace struggles?

# TAKING CONTROL OF HOUSING

Housing, as a fundamental human need, has naturally been a focus of struggle. The struggles have been largely defensive: against evictions carried out by both private and 'social' landlords and against the general attack on social housing as exemplified by the Housing Bill now going through Parliament. These struggles are immensely important. People need to be defended on a day-to-day basis and social housing, both from the council and social landlords, is preferable to the privatisation of housing. However, both types of social housing are not self-managed by the residents. The properties can be sold off, rents increased, repairs not done without the residents having any involvement in decisions. Colin Ward, the most important anarchist thinker on housing, was very critical of the way the State introduced and controlled housing for the working class. His main point is that housing should be under 'dweller-control'.

Ward analysed the history of housing prior to the introduction of council housing. There were many movements in which people used mutual aid and self-help to provide themselves with housing outside of State control. Most of the world's population lives in houses built by themselves, their parents or their grand-parents. Markets supply only 20% of new housing stock according to ILO research, with most people building their own homes and creating their own neighbourhoods. In Cairo, one million people have taken over the 'City of the Dead' and made homes for themselves in the tombs of sultans and emirs.

In Britain, Ward has uncovered a number of examples of DIY housing in the early part of the century. For example, workers in Oxford squatted land near the quarries where they worked and built their own homes which lasted many years. The Plotlands movement that lasted from the early 1900s to the 1940s was another example of dweller-control. Land came on the market for a variety of reasons including bankrupt farms and death duties on landed estates. The owners wanted to make some money so they divided the land up and sold it off in small parcels at cheap prices to people who wanted to build their own home. These usually started as holiday homes for urban workers, a movement which picked up when the Holiday with Pay Act was passed in 1938. However, the owners extended and developed their initial build and often ended up moving to their 'plot' permanently. It all came to an end, though, in 1947 with the Town and Country Planning Act. The more privileged resented having these chaotic developments and to this day it is very difficult to build your own home as you need to build a fully-serviced, finished house from the start for which you had received planning permission in advance.

So we went from a situation where the working class had to fend for themselves, and came up with imaginative and practical ways of housing themselves, to a State-controlled system whereby housing was provided by the State for the working class. It is considered blasphemous to criticise council housing. However, Ward's point is that we can do better than State housing. His is a critique of authoritarian socialists whose main strategy is to take control of the State and then paternalistically tell the working class what to do. There was no sense of 'dweller-control' and instead of using the working class experience of self-help, mutual aid and solidarity, the State treated people as passive recipients of their policies. The whole process of building council housing could be seen as a form of slum clearance. The terraced streets were replaced with large blocks. People were not consulted on what they wanted but expected to be grateful for what was provided.

Nevertheless we cannot deny that council housing provided great benefits for working class people and it must be defended. But at the same time, we need to look at anarchist ways of people talking control of their own housing needs that go beyond both private and State landlords.

*"Everyone today is so completely dependent upon the housing supply system, whether renting in the public sector or buying in the private sector, that we find it hard to believe that people can house themselves."* (Ward: 1990:69)

### Squatting and occupations

Squatting has always been a way of people housing themselves. This is because of the system of private property that excludes the majority from access to land. The recent history of squatting in Britain begins in 1945 with ex-servicemen, returning from the war to find empty houses but no place for them to live. The movement started in Brighton and other seaside towns. A Vigilante Campaign
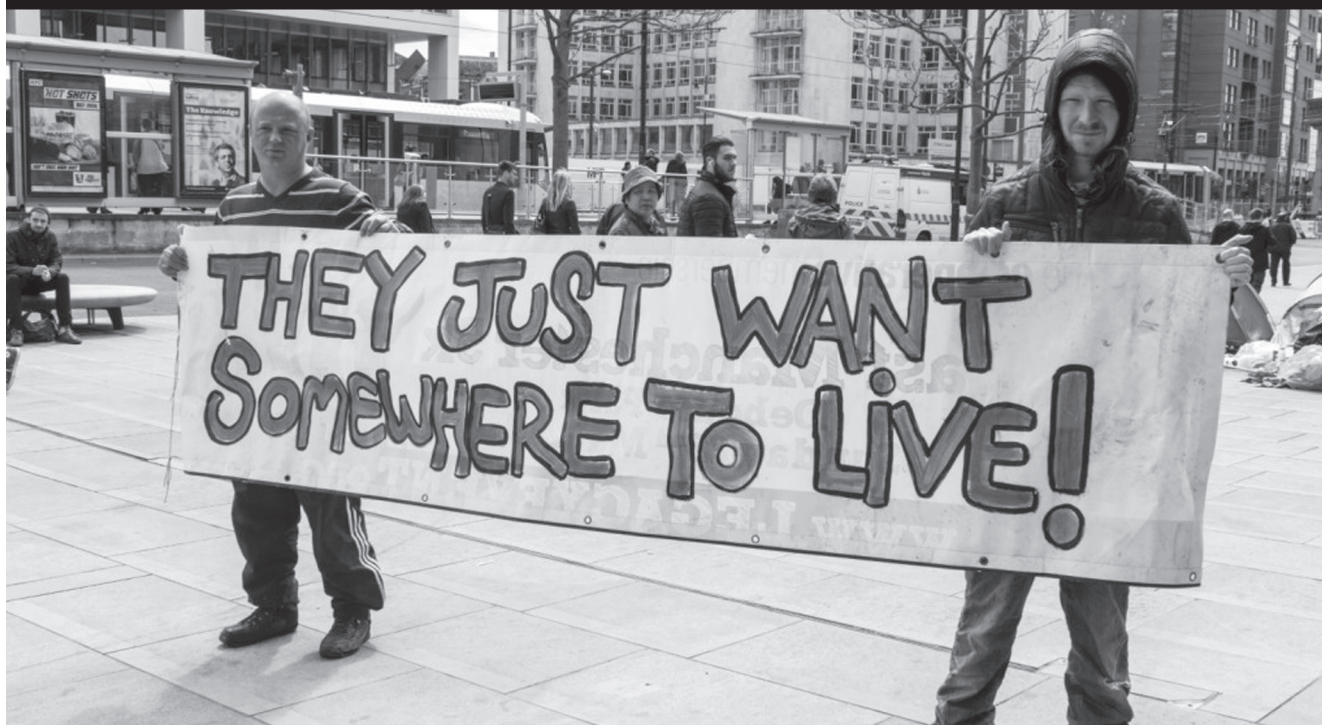
installed families in unoccupied houses. In addition, there was a country-wide movement to occupy ex-army and air force bases. James Fielding moved into the officers' mess at Scunthorpe on an unoccupied anti-aircraft camp and other families followed. The example was taken up in other places in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire and a Squatters Protection Society was formed. By 1946, over a thousand camps in England and Wales had been occupied by 39,535 people. Local authorities were forced to provide utilities such as electricity and water. However, on Sept 14, 1946 the great 'socialist' minister, Bevan, instructed local authorities to cut off gas and electricity. People rallied against this and the local authorities often refused to implement the orders. Meanwhile, the new communities were a model of self-help and mutual aid with families organising communal cooking and childcare.

The squatting movement grew to occupy other places as well - houses, shops and hotels. In London, people occupied luxury flats in Kensington and Marylebone. Gradually, the self-organised housing movement ground to a halt, partly as a result of pressure and attacks from central government but also because council housing was put forward as an alternative. Pragmatic squatting continued in a quiet way but it was not a full-blown social movement.

Squatting as a social issue took off again in the late sixties. Ron Bailey and Jim Radford were angry at the failure of councils to comply with their statutory duty to house the homeless, when there were large amounts of council homes which had been waiting for years to be demolished. Families occupied these homes and local councils responded violently. Council employees deliberately smashed up interiors so squatters couldn't live there. Councils eventually backed down in the face of a growing movement of support and handed over empty properties to housing co-ops.

The current housing crisis has also seen the re-emergence of squatting. However, the State, always hostile to squatting, has made it more difficult for people to squat, passing the Criminal Law Act of 1977, the Criminal Justice Act of 1994 and recently the 2012 law that made it a criminal offence to squat residential properties. This will put a lot of people off squatting, despite a desperate need for housing. However, for many, squatting is the solution to the housing crisis. Government statistics show that there are 200,000 long-term empty homes (over six months) and 600,000 total empty homes in England (www.emptyhomes.com). Increasingly squatting is being supported as a solution to the housing crisis by not-so-radical elements. A Guardian writer: "Bring back squatting. Repeal the silly law 2012 law criminalising it in residential properties. Occupy all those buy-to-leave homes, and the squillion empty premises being hogged and sat on by supermarket chains so that no one else can use them" (Michele Hanson: April 13, 2015). In Manchester, Gary Neville, a former Manchester United player told homeless squatters in the former stock exchange he owns that they could stay for the winter and he would help them find homes once the work was done turning the building into a hotel.

Occupying properties has also been used as a way of stopping evictions. Sweets Way in Barnett, London was an inspirational campaign where residents, supported by housing activists, refused to leave their homes, fending off the efforts of the developers for many months. Though it was not successful in the end, the campaign has encouraged others to resist being moved from their homes, showing that it is possible to at least delay the process. A comment from one of the residents says it all:

*"We do live in ugly world indeed. Since February we were fighting outrageous behaviour of Barnet Homes towards hard working people of the amazing community of Sweets Way. We fight to save much needed homes and the future of*

*neighbourhood. My kids met beautiful people who committed their lives to changing the world, very inspirational people. So what I will teach my kids is very simple – helping others and making changes for better in this world is risky, and you might end up with criminal record or in jail, but making changes is much needed in this world and standing for those in need is essential. The system we live in is design to bully weak and support greed. So dear children, follow your heart, not the rules of the broken system."* (https://sweetswayresists.wordpress.com/)

Occupations have also been used to highlight the fact that there are empty homes that could be used to house people. In Sept 2014, activists from Focus E15 and supporters occupied one of the empty low-rise blocks on the Carpenters Estate in Newham, London. The council has been gradually moving people out of this working class estate, which is adjacent to Stratford and therefore prime real estate. It now stands mostly empty but people fight on. The occupation lasted only a short time but it showed that the flats could easily be lived in. They continue to campaign under the slogan 'no to social cleansing' and 'repopulate the Carpenters Estate'. (http://focuse15.org/)

We need to look back at the early post-war squatters for inspiration on how to make squatting a more effective way of actually housing people. The fact that so many ordinary people occupied empty properties, without any help from 'activists', and housed themselves for many years is something we need to encourage. However, this is difficult as so many people are not used to taking action for themselves. Individuals and families need to be prepared to organise together to occupy places like the Carpenters Estate for the long-term, just as the servicemen and their families did in 1945. Instead, people wait passively for the State to provide them with a home. However, in the current climate, this is less and less likely to happen. People have to be prepared to 'house themselves' and the housing movement needs to provide support and solidarity.

## *Inspiration from abroad*

There are many examples from around the world to show the way forward. In Spain, the serious housing problems have prompted radical solutions. People had been encouraged to take out mortgages to the extent that 80% of Spaniards had mortgages. With the economic crisis and people losing their jobs, many were unable to keep up payments. Between 2007 and 2013 there were 420,000 foreclosures and 220,000 evictions. Meanwhile, 20% of Spain's total housing - 5.6 million homes - remain unoccupied. The Platform for Mortgage Affected People (PAH) has resisted evictions and housed families in unoccupied buildings. They have developed into a mass movement with support from a range of people. For example, the Assembly of Locksmith Professionals in Pamplona unanimously decided in December 2012 to refuse to change locks on houses under foreclosure proceedings. Firefighters in Catalonia and A Coruña have refused to assist evictions.

One example of a PAH action that took place in 2013 is the 16 families who took over living an abandoned, brand-new block of flats in the Catalan town of Salt. This example shows that squatting is about much more than getting a roof over your head. One resident comments:

*"It started out with just needing somewhere to live, but now we're taking control of what we eat, what we do in our free time, how we relate to each other."* (http://libcom.org/blog/salt-earth-pah-occupied-flat-block-cataluñ-foot-door-something-new-involuntarily-homeless-1)

In Caracas, Venezuela a half-built 52-storey tower in the centre of the city provided a home for thousands residents for 8 years. The building had been left empty by a Venezuelan tycoon after the banking crisis. It was first occupied in 2007 and eventually became home to 1200 residents. The occupants transformed the abandoned block into a community with grocery shops, tattoo parlours, internet cafés and a hair salon.

Both these are examples of 'dweller-control' and should be a source of ideas and inspiration to the housing movement and all those who are homeless, facing eviction or stuck in high-rent, unsatisfactory property. And it is not just about a roof over your head, but about creating a community that is self-organised and outside the control of private capital and the State. If we could develop such a movement in Britain, then we wouldn't be so reliant on begging the State to provide more social housing.

## *Self-build*

Colin Ward puts forward self-build as an anarchist alternative to private and State housing. However, there are limited examples of this and it is difficult to know to what extent this is a feasible or even desirable option. We saw that Plotlands was an example but this was limited in scope. More recently, there have been some examples and the idea is now being promoted as a way of providing more homes by the Greater London Authority.

One of the first more recent examples is a scheme in Lewisham, London in 1976. Walter Segal, a German-born architect, wanted to promote a self-build scheme for families

on the council waiting list, using pockets of unused land. Despite bureaucratic delays, the project is a success. People remarked on the communal atmosphere and how people helped each other. The housing professionals also enjoyed the experience, finding that there was amazing creativity amongst the residents. They made countless small variations and innovations. The street of 13 half-timbered houses are still there and receives many visitors every year. Another project was the Zenzele self-build initiative in Bristol, where unemployed young people built their own homes.

A number of agencies now seem to be promoting the self-build concept across the country. The Greater London Authority in London have set up a register for individuals and community groups who may be interested in undertaking a self-build project. This is the result of the Self-Build and Custom House Building Act 2015. One becomes suspicious of any initiative coming from this government. Ward said that the traditional left labelled the Lewisham project 'petit-bourgeois' and 'little capitalist'. He goes on to argue that the Left has let the Conservatives appropriate the anarchist principles of self-help and freedom of choice. Nevertheless, in the current situation it is difficult to know how to respond to the openings for self-build. From an anarchist perspective, we need to look carefully at each project and see the extent to which there is dweller-control and self-organisation. We also need to ensure that the government does not use this as an excuse to get rid of the social housing that there is. Still, it is an example of people housing themselves and many positive things could come out of projects like this - as with squatting and occupations - if people are working together and helping each other then it is a step towards the creation of an anarchist society. We can't just wait for the revolution to somehow magically create the perfect society, but can literally build the new society in the shell of the old.

## Housing Co-operatives

Housing co-operatives are another alternative solution that could facilitate dweller-control. In other countries, co-operatives are much more widespread. In Norway, for example, they provide homes for 14% of the population (www.cds.coop/housing) whereas in Britain the percentage is 0.6%. Co-operatives aren't necessarily distinct from squatting or self-build. You could have a squat that is run as a co-operative, where everyone participates in decision-making. A co-operative could undertake a self-build project for several individuals and/or families. However, the difference is that co-ops would have more security than a squat and would be based on collective ownership or collective management of something which was owned by another body - normally the State.

It is not just a question of getting a home, but of your control over that home. One of the issues with council housing is the fact that tenants do not play a major role. They have been excluded from the plans for their homes and once given the home they have little say in how it is managed. Obviously with private landlords, they have even less of a say. This is why people think that owning their own home is the ideal.

People want security and the freedom to do what they want with their home and it seems the only option. However, private ownership is now beyond the means of most working class people, especially young people. And, having seen what happened in Spain, you don't actually own your home but are living somewhere that is effectively owned by the banks. Ultimately, we need to address the whole issue of who owns the land. Elsewhere in this issue we address the question of "the commons." But in the current situation, where land is either privately or publically owned, we need to consider how to maximise the control that people have over their homes. But you don't necessarily need to own the home yourself in order to be able to have dweller-control. Housing co-operatives can take many forms and are compatible with both squatting and self-build.

There are different types of co-ops and one issue is the extent to which they are actually run by the tenants. There is also the question of ownership and who has ultimate control. One housing co-operative that has been going since the 80s is Bonnington Square in Vauxhall, London. The Inner London Education Authority acquired a large number of properties with the purpose of demolishing the properties and building a school. However, they were left empty and a group of people decided to bring the properties back to use on a temporary basis. They formed a housing co-operative and negotiated with the ILEA. The end result was that the properties were leased to South London Family Housing Association and the management was handed over to the co-op. The co-op did up the properties and opened a café and community garden. The plans for the school were dropped and now the co-operative has a degree of security. Within the properties there are different types of tenure including tenants, shared owners and owners.



The problem of course is that the actual landowner has ultimate power over the fate of the homes. If the landowner is the ILEA which is now defunct, who did the deed transfer to? If the owner is ultimately the State, then there is no guarantee that the land will not be sold off. This is what happened to the Tower Hamlets Users of Short-life Housing (TUSH). This co-op was set up 35-years ago when the council had neither the money nor the will to renovate seven derelict properties. The

original members began renovating and maintaining them and lived there and getting involved in community work and campaigns. The council eventually gave them licenses to live there. Last autumn the council decided to move everyone out and take back possession. One of the residents had been there for 30 years. It is unclear what the council will do with the properties but if past behaviour is anything to go by they are most likely planning on selling them off to private developers.

Other co-operatives have found more security by buying the properties. This is what Radical Routes did when they bought a property in Birmingham in 1986. Radical Routes has now made setting up of co-operatives, both housing and work, a key part of a revolutionary political strategy:

*"We are working towards taking control over our housing, our education and work through setting up housing and workers co-ops, and co-operating as a network. Through gaining collective control over these areas we aim to reduce reliance on exploitative structures and build secure bases from which to challenge the system and encourage others to do so."* (www.radicalroutes.org.uk)

The London Housing Co-operative Group, recently set up by people who are part of the Coin St Housing Co-operative and neighbourhood centre. It seems a unique experience of local people taking control of a prime area of central London under the control of the residents. Eight housing co-ops have been established since 1977 when the campaign was launched. From their website:

*"Thirty years ago the South Bank area of London was bleak, unattractive, had few shops and restaurants, had a dying residential community and a weak local economy. Local residents mounted an extraordinary campaign leading to the purchase of 13 acres of derelict land, since developed into a thriving neighbourhood."*

Of course there are questions to be asked about the extent to which it is still under dweller control. Looking at their website, the structure seems to be based on top-down decision-making. Given the value of the land they control, it will be interesting to see how they continue to reflect the original aims of the campaign. (www.coinst.org, www.andrewbibby.com/socialenterprise/coin-street.html)

Housing co-ops are certainly an idea that the radical housing movement should explore as part of solving immediate housing needs, promoting dweller-control, and creating an alternative vision of housing provision.

# TAKING CONTROL OF CULTURAL AND SOCIAL SPACE

In the last issue of *Organise!* we looked at how private capital and the State seek to dominate all space, increasingly excluding all activities that don't make money or that challenge their authority. In this issue we will show how more and more people, in many different ways, are resisting this colonisation of space.

Colin Ward, in his book A Child in the City argues that there is a continual and consistent struggle between the urban working class and the dominant culture for space in the city. The book documents the importance for children of being able to explore freely and create their own pathways through the city. Traditionally children would be outside on the street, in derelict buildings and brown-field sites exploring, discovering and imagining. Though he focuses on children, the lessons for all of us can be drawn. Everyone should be able to make the city their own and this can only be done if we have freedom to explore and discovery all parts of the city. This has become increasingly difficult. For children the increase in traffic has been a major problem for their use of the street. But it is a problem for all of us as we are squashed onto crowded pavements. Cars rule the city, mainly because they are transporting people to work or to shops. There is no space for play or for idle ramblings. And, the takeover of more and more pace by private capital has also reduced the scope for our free movement through the city. But people are rebelling!

## *Urban exploration*

One of the most daring and imaginative ways of fighting back against our exclusion from the city is 'place-hacking' or 'urban exploration'. Groups of people are actively seeking out the places that have been forbidden to us- the tops of skyscrapers, underground tunnels and empty buildings. Bradley Garrett, a University of Oxford academic, got involved with a group of 'urban explorers' as a part of a research project. His book on his experience (Explore Everything: 2014. Verso) makes fascinating reading. He did not just stand back and observe but became a full, and some would say way too enthusiastic, participant. He admits that the members of the group would not explicitly share his analysis of the implications of what they were doing but the feelings expressed by some, eg "I have to connect with the city" say a lot. Garrett sees urban exploration as both a celebration and a protest. They uncover places authorities want to keep hidden, they are "taking



RADICAL ROUTES
cooperative housing controlled by tenants

back rights to the city from which we have been wrongfully restricted". It is a protest against the "security-entertainment complex". At the same time it gives the explorer an amazing sense of freedom and control of the environment. Imagine what it would be like to stand on top of the Shard without arriving there by approved means or discovering the hidden bunkers under the city! The city becomes 'transparent and within reach of those who feel excluded from its production and its maintenance'.

While this kind of urban exploration is not for the faint-hearted we don't have to go such extremes. Parkour, though still physically demanding, has become increasingly popular. It is defined as physical training by using parts of the built environment; it involves jumping, climbing, running and swinging. For a group of women in Glasgow, it is explicitly about reclaiming urban areas as women. According to one participant:

*"The reclamation of public space as a woman is very central to my understanding of parkour, and my love for it. Practicing parkour has opened up access to new areas of Glasgow that I would have never gone to before. Several of these areas may even be classed as 'dodgy' or 'unsafe', but parkour gave me a reason to enter them, and allowed me to form positive bonds to those areas. Practising parkour in the evening and night time also serves as a way to fight back against fear that, as a woman, I have been trained to feel.*

*Parkour lets us create new emotional bonds to space. We begin to see the city in a new light as our parkour vision develops, allowing us to view our surroundings in a new way. For all practitioners, this allows us to reclaim our city space, using it as our playground, rather than being boxed in or herded by the architecture. I have strong emotional attachments and many happy memories in my training spots. Parkour allows a female practitioner, through new positive experiences in city spaces, the chance to create new emotions towards these spaces, which can replace the old ones of fear."* (www.glasgowparkourgirls.wordpress.com)

### *Skateboarders occupy*

Other youth subcultures are finding the need to reclaim space in order to engage in their activities. Skateboarders are an excellent of example. Last summer, in Greenwich, London, a group of skaters took over an old car wash and turned it into a skate park. They lasted for several months, hosting workshops, art activities and performances as well as skateboarding. It was described as a "skate summer camp in the middle of London". Unfortunately, the developers were able to get them evicted in order for them to proceed with yet another unaffordable housing development. A spokesperson for the collective commented:

*"We've had a fantastic summer here, it really goes to show what an alternative community plan can achieve. We can't understand how planning permission can be given for such high-density developments that squeeze out the children. This is happening all over the borough."*



A more long-lived example is the evening/night time occupation of the shopping centre opposite Westfield in Stratford, East London. While Westfield and the Olympic Park are symbols of the worst that is happening to London with high rise luxury flats and the corporate takeover of all available space, walking through the original mall is refreshing. It has become a place for young people to 'hang out', with a lively scene of skateboarders, roller bladers and street dancers. The space is used by a variety of people, from teenagers to thirty-somethings, of all genders. There is a welcoming atmosphere. One female user commented:

*"What I like about the place is that we're one big community, just having fun. We all end up knowing each other. And it's a great place to learn. People don't judge so harshly as they might in a proper skate park."*

The police don't hassle them. Perhaps there are too many of them committed to using this space, and the space has been used like this for at least 5 years.

This growing movement for taking back public space is one of the most positive developments of recent years in our fight for the city, showing the power of direct collective action. As Garrett said:

*"If you ask people to have access to these spaces, you won't get it or if you do get it you are going to have to pay. And so we've got ourselves into this situation where we don't have any choice but to trespass if we want to participate in our cities."* (www.channel4.com/news/public-space-occupy-private-land-place-hacker)

### *Space and political action*

Political movements need places to organise and take action, for example social centres. (see article elsewhere in this issue). Despite the growth of social media and internet activism, effective political action involves physical spaces. We organise protests outside Parliament buildings, local government offices, embassies, shops, corporate

headquarters, estate agents etc. We need to be able to physically confront our class enemies. We also need space to communicate with other members of our class. At work, we need to be able to hold meetings and to socialise with workmates in order to discuss issues. In the community, we need to be in the places where people live their lives. And, we need space to organise ourselves - where we can gather together to discuss ideas, plan actions and socialise. However, this political space is being eroded.

Occupy is an important recent political movement that highlighted the importance of public space as a base for political protest and activity. The point of these protests was not explicitly about space but nevertheless had the occupation of a particular space as a key part of the movement. The movement began in Wall St, New York, the physical and symbolic centre of global capitalism. For nine weeks, people occupied Zuccotti Park (Liberty Plaza). This physical place was the site of the daily assemblies and the base from which other activities were organised. The protesters had originally wanted to occupy Chase Plaza, the location of the charging bull, the Wall St icon. However, as this is public property, permits were required for a protest so the police barricaded the area. So ironically, it was easier to occupy private land which is owned by Brookfield Office Properties, which is big property owner in Manhattan, including the World Financial Centre. Obviously Brookfield was not keen on people being on their land; there are park rules banning tents, sleeping bags and other structures. Therefore, the Occupy Movement, though aimed at the general problems created by global capitalism and the financial system, also led the way in reclaiming public space for public protest. In Britain, protesters were unable to occupy land in the City itself and ended up in front of St Paul's Cathedral. Nevertheless, a space that is dominated by tourists was reclaimed for the purpose of public protest.

The reaction of the authorities to this world-wide movement showed how the State and capital use the monopoly of space to restrict challenging political activity. We already experience the constraints of demonstrations where we are forced to march from A to B in a narrow corridor, hemmed in by the police or by march 'stewards' who do the police's job for them. Increasingly, there is less and less places for people to come together in large groups, whether it be to organise political activity or just to socialise. It is of course ok to have officially-organised events, but the more political, autonomous events are becoming harder to organise. Britain seems to lack the large squares or piazzas of continental Europe and therefore we are forced to 'trespass' in order to be able to organise public assemblies.

Political activists have also challenged the way councils have attacked the homeless. This has often involved the occupation of public space as a way of both providing accommodation for the homeless and staging visible protests against council policies. In Nottingham, activists organised a homeless camp by occupying empty land in the city centre. From a Statement issued in January 2016:

"The services the council claim to work so well, do not work as well as what you are lead to believe. This is where we come in, we are secure, we offered tents to homeless people. Their friends can visit during the day but at night it is a policy that we only have homeless and activists on camp. The camp is 'staffed' 24 hours a day meaning that staff members are always on watch and protecting our camp. As we speak we have our own CCTV systems being put in to place and will be monitored by our staff from our caravan HQ. We shall be getting a medical caravan that will act as place for our residents to speak privately with their social workers or counsellors. Even as a emergency shelter for those who are really ill and need it like a bed in a hospital. We will build a kitchen, a communal space with log burner and start building small rooms for a bed and storage space for their stuff."

The police, on orders from the local council cracked down and many were arrested. However, similar activities are taking place around the country. (http://streetskitchen.co.uk/)

## Camover

One way of protesting against the control of public space is seen in the innovative 'game' played in Berlin called 'camover'. According to the Guardian:

"The game is real-life Grand Theft Auto for those tired of being watched by the authorities in Berlin; points are awarded for the number of cameras destroyed and bonus scores are given for particularly imaginative modes of destruction. The rules of Camover are simple: mobilise a crew and think of a name that starts with "command" "brigade" or "cell", followed by the moniker of a historical figure (Van der Lubbe, a Dutch bricklayer convicted of setting fire to the Reichstag in 1933, is one name being used). Then destroy as many CCTV cameras as you can."

The game was for a fixed time, organised to coincide with the European Police Congress in February 2013 but the idea has been an inspiration to people elsewhere who are sick of the way space is being controlled and monitored by the police.

A less spectacular but equally important political activity is the setting up of political stalls in public places, normally somewhere that people go to shop. People have traditionally met and socialised as part of the process of providing themselves with needed goods. Socrates used to deliberately spend time in the market, called the 'agora' which was the centre of public life, where he would confront the main leaders of the day and ask them difficult questions. The purpose of our stalls is to interact with other people in our communities, to discuss issues and to raise awareness of what is going on. In the past, it has been easy enough to set up a stall. However, there are signs that it is becoming more difficult. Friends of Queens Market in East London has been doing regular stalls at the market for years. But earlier this year they were told that they weren't allowed to hold stalls there. They have held their ground and the stalls continues.

Stratford, by the Olympic Park, has been the site of a few confrontations. During the run-up to the Olympics, private security cracked down on the stalls organised by the London

group of the AF on the concourse outside the station. They seemed happy to allow religious groups to have a large and noisy presence but our stall was immediately pounced on. People instead gravitated to Stratford High Street. For the past two years the Focus E15 campaign (set up to stop the evictions of young mothers in the Focus hostel and now campaigning against evictions and social cleansing in general) has held a weekly stall in the High Street. This has provided a focal point for organising. People facing eviction know they can come to the stall and ask for help and the open mike provides a platform to communicate about the latest attack on working class housing. However, in December:

*"with 40 minutes left to go, a Newham Law Enforcement officer, accompanied by several police, confronted the campaigners, in what was obviously a pre-planned operation. Having already told the SWP stall to remove their table, the police and law enforcement demanded that we pack up immediately or else they would seize our table, banner and sound system, quoting the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (regarding the sound system) and the London Local Authorities and Transport for London Act 2003 (regarding the banner and table). However, we were determined that they would not close down our street presence and demanded that our table should be allowed to stay. It was not obstructing anyone and the shopping street is very wide."* (http://focuse15.org/)

The next week, a call-out was made to other campaigns and political groups. London AF brought down its stall and joined many others in sending a message to Newham Council that we won't let them silence political activity.

## CONCLUSION

This article has shown the extent and the variety of resistance, with people using a number of strategies and tactics to campaign for their place in the city, whether it be for housing or political and social space. There is an urgent need, however, to link all these struggles together into a united movement. All the different campaigns and actions are the basis on which such a movement is built, but we must aim for nothing less than the takeover of the city. In the next issue of Organise! we will look at the ways in which the different groups are beginning to come together. We will also consider how we might facilitate this process.

One of the fundamental issues that are common to all the campaigns is the fact that land is not under our control. In order to win our fight for the city, we have to start from the premise that the city is ours. We don't just want access to land, that we need to negotiate or beg to use. This is why the idea of the 'commons' as presented in this issue is relevant. Land should not be in private ownership nor should it be under State control. Instead, it needs to be either owned by us all or by no one, with everyone having access to what they need. Therefore, we will explore both the history and current debates about land reform as part of our strategy to build a revolutionary movement for a new society.

## RESOURCES

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*Author's note: This article has been very wide-ranging in what it has tried to cover. Therefore, it may not be as detailed or fully informed on every issue. If you have any corrections or points to add, please contact the Organise! editors.*

# a radical alternative to airport expansion

The following piece was adapted from information and an article given by a member of Transition Heathrow/Grow Heathrow. This group is asserting control over a number of problems in the participants lives: housing, food growing and the quality of the environment. They are doing this through an inspiring application of direct action and community involvement. Despite being under the constant threat of eviction the movement celebrated its 6th birthday in March.
You can find out more at: http://www.transitionheathrow.com/

Most people will be aware of how the over consumption of air travel has led the aviation industry growing at a wildly unsustainable rate. Airports are multiplying and expanding in size, emitting more and more toxic breath and gobbling up anything that stands in their way. Whether it be people's homes, small businesses, ancient buildings or the earth's resources: the airports get their way. In the far west of London, the village of Sipson is home to a community that has faced up to the aviation industry with courage and strength to stop this troll of brazen expansion digesting them. They have done this with the solidarity and support of the activist group Transition Heathrow.

Transition Heathrow formed in late 2009, after witnessing first-hand the plight of communities around Heathrow airport following the 2007 Climate Camp, where local concerns were ignored in favor of corporate interest. The founders of Transition Heathrow decided to establish a support group for community-based resistance in the local villages ear-marked for demolition to make space for a third runway.

The first move was to 'adopt' a resident: pairing up with local residents to support them in the campaign to save their homes. Then, six activists rented a flat in Harlington and established Transition Heathrow as an ongoing organisation, continuing their outreach to the community with events such as film screenings and meetings to draw attention to the value of the community and the sustainable alternatives to airport expansion. On the 1st March 2010 Transition Heathrow members occupied an abandoned market garden in the centre of Sipson, creating Grow Heathrow.

Overall the residents felt very happy with their new neighbours. The site had previously been regularly associated with anti-social behaviour. Soon after moving onto the site, 30 tonnes of fly-tipped rubbish was cleared and nearly five years later the site has been rejuvenated into a productive community garden and project space. Having been transformed from a derelict mess into a beacon of community strength, it is also a great demonstration of how to live sustainably without hierarchy.

Since the announcement of plans to build a third Heathrow runway, property prices in the Heathrow villages had plummeted, leaving many residents with homes that were worth less than what they paid for them. This fall in property prices was something that Heathrow Airport Holdings Limited (HAHL, formerly BAA, operators of Heathrow Airport), had engineered and been banking on.

Just months before the 2010 General Election HAHL announced that it would buy Sipson homes at 2002 prices under a bond agreement. HAHL had been bought by the Spanish infrastructure giant Ferrovial in 2006 and is now owned by a consortium that also includes 6 sovereign fund investors from Qatar, Québec, Singapore, the United States and China.

In total, 247 out of a total of 548 homes in the village were bought through HAHL's bond scheme, with many tempted by HAHL's added index link to the original price and also cover for all surveys and solicitor fees; potentially equating to an increase in value of 56% at a time where their homes were costing far more than they were worth. A local resident born in the village, describes how one friend received £311,000 for her house valued in 2002 at £191,000.

More and more people leaving their homes and giving into the money temptation has severely impacted local life. A local resident, who previously co-managed the salon with their partner, was forced to get another job with British Airways (BA) as half of their client base has left. The Sipson garden centre was hit even harder as people simply didn't feel secure enough to spend money on their homes or gardens, which resulted in the garden centre closing down.

Yet HAHL's bold move backfired. With the third runway still without approval, the company was forced to rent out these houses as they were not making any money from their huge investment. At first they would only rent to employees. They offered the properties on a short term tenancy agreements and staff were offered a 20% reduction in rent. An employee of BA moved to Sipson attracted by the offer of cheap rent. However, two years later she was forced to leave again when the 20% discount was halted and despite being a BA employee she could no longer afford the rent. Consequently there were not enough employees who wanted to move to Sipson and HAHL had to offer their properties to the public.

Short term tenancy agreements are an increasing problem, due to the tenant's lack of control and security. Glenn, an activist at Tower Hamlets Renters explains: "The problem with short-hold tenancies is that tenants live in a permanent state of insecurity unable to plan more than six months ahead. They are also less likely to request essential repairs knowing the landlord could evict them with a short notice instead." HAHL's policy is further contributing to this UK wide problem.

A local resident said: "Since the third runway plans are still being debated and the village is recovering from the buy-out, Transition Heathrow has been an amazing resource which has really helped lift spirits and keep the campaign alive and interesting. Transition Heathrow has become an important part of me and my family's life." Indeed when the first attempt to evict Grow Heathrow was attempted in August last year this resident's 14 year old daughter used a D-lock to chain herself to the front gate in order to resist the bailiffs.

Under new plans submitted to the Davies Commission, 700 homes in Harmondsworth village are earmarked for demolition, while thousands more will be rendered uninhabitable due to their proximity to a new runway. Despite HAHL being the majority landowner in Sipson many long-term residents have not sold up and are still actively campaigning against the third runway. Sipson is still standing and a third runway has still not been approved, showing that resistance in the face of demolition is possible.

# THEY WALK BY NIGHT

In 1285 Edward I passed a law known as the Statute of Winchester, one of several 'Nightwalker Statutes' that allowed night watchmen to arrest anyone they found on the street and keep them in jail until morning; "if any stranger do pass by them, he shall be arrested until morning." This Statute enabled not just watchmen, but their 'assistants' to act in such a way. This law was not repealed until 1827. It meant that after the 9pm curfew watchmen could police any plebeians - and these included of course sex workers and the homeless.

Even with the development of nightlife in the cities, walking at night is regarded as suspicious and somehow deviant. Of course, in recent years capitalism in its search for new markets has colonised and opened up the night. So we have seen the development of '24/7' culture where supermarkets are open all night (however a shrinking consumerism seems to have severely challenged this), the explosion of night clubs and late night casinos, and the consequent extension of night transport. In London as an example, the number of night buses has increased dramatically in the last decade or so, although Underground workers are still resisting the introduction of all-night tube transport.

This colonisation of the night is described as "the despoliation of sleep" in a recent book by Jonathan Crary on the subject - 24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep. Referring back to the birth of industrial capitalism, Crary reminds us that the mills had two 12-hour shifts so that they never stopped working. Nowadays many city streets are full of consumers and the workers who cater to them, whether in nightclubs, in sex work, transport or street cleaning. Many who work at night are migrant workers.

Walking at night has been raised to an art form by people like Thomas De Quincey, who after taking opium wandered out into the streets:

*"I used often, on Saturday nights, after I had taken opium, to wander forth, without much regarding the direction or the distance."*

Charles Dickens, who went out nightwalking in London as a cure for his insomnia, producing a number of articles and his observations on poverty, homelessness and deprivation are gathered together in the book The Uncommercial Traveller. James Joyce describes the nightwalks of the fictional Stephen Dedalus in his novel Ulysses.

However those who walk at night often attract suspicion from the authorities. Casual conversations between friends while walking in the early hours of the morning can lead to the police taking an interest. Black people and women above all have a hard time if they walk at night.

Women who walk at night are either seen as prostitutes or as potential victims of sexual harassment, assault and rape. The historian Joachim Schlör noted that *"men's freedom of movement has a real restrictive effect on that of women"*. Hence the importance of the Take Back the Night /Reclaim The Night marches organised by women from the 1970s onwards.

As Matthew Beaumont remarked:

*"In an economy in which time, including night time, is money, wandering the streets after dark – when most people are sleeping in order to prepare themselves for the next day's labour – is in symbolic terms subversive. In the aberrant and deviant form celebrated by Dickens in the 19th century, and surreptitiously practised by innumerable others before and since, nightwalking is quintessentially objectless, loitering and vagabond."*

### Further Reading

http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/mar/27/nightwalking-subversive-city-streets-london-matthew-beaumont

Beaumont, Matthew. *Nightwalking: A Nocturnal History of London*. Verso, 2015

Crary, Jonathan. *24/7 Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*. Verso 2014

# Psychogeography and PUBLIC SPACE

The idea of psychogeography emerged in Paris in the 1950s with the revolutionary groupings of the Lettrists, a radical art group, and the Situationists, who developed a critique of advanced capitalism, including the 'society of the spectacle'.

Psychogeography was developed by Guy Debord and members of the Lettrist International (some of its members then became members of the Situationists). Guy Debord in his Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography first developed the idea. Ivan Chtcheglov developed it further in his Formulary for a New Urbanism. He argued that life should be a constant 'dérive' (literally drift). Debord defined this as *"a mode of experimental behaviour linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances."* 'Ambiance' meant the tone or feeling of a particular place, including the effect it had on people. Debord was quick to acknowledge that the 'drift' had its predecessors in De Quincey's night ramblings and in the playful wanderings of the Surrealists (as depicted in Louis Aragon's Paris Peasant and André Breton's Nadja). However, what differentiated the Situationist drift was the systematic and rigid way in which it was applied. It had to be a group experience; it had to be within a limited time.

The English Situationist Ralph Rumney was to later remark that, *"Dérive - it's a French word that's become pretentious now, there's been a sort of sacralisation of it - it basically means wandering, but as Debord defined dérive it was going from one bar to another, in a haphazard manner, because the essential thing was to set out with very little purpose and to see where your feet led you, or your inclinations … You go where whim leads you, and you discover parts of cities, or come to appreciate them, feel they're better than others, whether it's because you're better received in the bar or because you just suddenly feel better."*

## Cure for boredom and monotony

Drifts were necessary because of the boredom and monotony of everyday life under capitalism. The predictability of such a life, summed up in the slogan 'Metro, Boulot, Metro, Dodo' (Tube, Work, Tube, Sleep) could be short circuited by the drift which provided unpredictability and chance. As Debord wrote: *"The sudden change of ambiance in a street within the space of a few meters; the evident division of a city into zones of distinct psychic atmospheres; the path of least resistance that is automatically followed in aimless strolls (and which has no relation to the physical contour of the terrain); the appealing or repelling character of certain places — these phenomena all seem to be neglected. In any case they are never envisaged as depending on causes that can be uncovered by careful analysis and turned to account."*

The theory of psychogeography was meant to inform what a post-revolutionary Situationist city would look like. As Chtcheglov wrote: *"This city could he envisaged in the form of an arbitrary assemblage of castles, grottoes, lakes, etc. It would be the baroque stage of urbanism considered as a means of knowledge. But this theoretical phase is already outdated, We know that a modern building could be constructed which would have no resemblance to a medieval castle but which could preserve and enhance the Castle poetic power (by the conservation of a strict minimum of lines, the transposition of certain others, the positioning of openings, the topographical location, etc). The districts of this city could correspond to the whole spectrum of diverse feelings that one encounters by chance in everyday life. Bizarre Quarter – Happy Quarter (specially reserved for habitation) – Noble and Tragic Quarter (for good children) – Historical Quarter (museums, schools) – Useful Quarter (hospital, tool shops) Sinister Quarter, etc."*

Nowadays, psychogeography is robbed of its revolutionary meaning and its call for the liberation of the imagination and is approached as a purely literary method as can be seen in the books of Iain Sinclair and indeed Will Self, who wrote a Psychogeography column in the Independent magazine.

As Merlin Coverley writes in his book Psychogeography, *"the essential emptiness of modern life is obscured behind an elaborate and spectacular array of commodities and our immersion in this world of rampant consumerism leaves us disconnected from the history and community that might give our lives meaning. Amidst this relentless and regimented monotony, street life has been suppressed and that same hostility to the pedestrian that drove the flâneur (an aimless wanderer or saunterer) from the streets of nineteenth century Paris continues unabated today."*

# TAKING UP SPACE



## SOCIAL CENTRES IN THE UK

Another recent phenomenon in people's struggle for the commons is the 'autonomous space', or 'social centre'. Although the definition is fairly fluid, and differs depending on who you talk to, these are communally-run buildings, operating non-hierarchically and not-for-profit, on a voluntary basis. Aiming towards openness and self-management

beyond the grip of capitalism (or at least as much as possible, when operating in territories that nations and big money have claimed for their own), they also fill the gap left when traditional political places like working men's clubs and trades clubs declined. Anti-capitalists and anarchists may well talk a lot of hot air about what we want and what we don't want, but social centres represent a physical manifestation of our ideals, something that our neighbours and communities can potentially visit and interact with – at least when we do them right.

These centres come in many shapes and sizes: small infoshops and resource centres, venues for radical arts of one form or another, large centres with meeting spaces and bars, and they often come with housing co-operatives attached, providing lower cost accommodation to those who need it and know where to look. They may well have links to various movements and scenes: punk, DIY, anti-fascist, peace, veganism, claimants' unions, squatters, free party,

anti-roads, climate action and No Borders. Social centres come from a need to host radical debate and action, whether it be meetings, communal eating, grassroots music, mutual support, skill-sharing or collective education. They also emerge from a common desire to build networks, and connect to our own communities and locales.

What they are not, though, is independent cafés (no matter how alternative they may be), charities, NGOs, working men's clubs or community centres. Broadly speaking, many social centres emerge somewhat spontaneously, in the lead up to or in the reflecting back on big radical mobilisations, whereas others are more premeditated projects, coming together only after years of solid planning and fundraising.

Recent years have seen relentless property speculation, privatisation and austerity, and an all-round gentrification of our towns and cities, forcing ordinary people into tighter and tighter holes. In a society where it is somehow more acceptable to let empty buildings rot than to meet basic human needs, the need to take direct action and re-occupy the commons becomes paramount.

But this situation has been broadly true for some time. Following WWII, the government's failure to provide for its citizenry led to thousands of empties being seized by squatters: churches, hotels, mansions, hospitals, vacant tenement blocks, all self-managed using community organisation. Owners and local officials bent on eviction were often confronted by Defence Committees, in struggle to keep their homes. The 1960s gave birth to the modern squatters' movement, and the 70s and 80s saw these reclaimed buildings put to use now not just as homes, but also as community gardens, gig spaces, bars, coffee shops, libraries and the like. Also during this period, newer tendencies like LGBT centres and unemployment unions joined the squatters. Somewhere along the way, the social centre was born.

More recently still, a lack of suitable empties (and also the reality of repeated illegal evictions) has led to more social centres turning to rent or owning their buildings, in order to stay viable. 2012's squatting ban has arguably reinforced the need for this tactic.

Rooted deeply in collective struggles for common space throughout the world, the concept of the social centre was inspired by the occupied 'centri sociali' of Italy in the mid-80's (such as Leocavallo in Milan, Forte Prenestino in Rome, Victor Charlie and Macchia Nera in Pisa, 99 and Officina99 in Naples), and the radical 'ateneus' community centres of Catalonia. Another big inspiration is the strong tradition of continental European squats in the Netherlands, Germany, Spain and France.

Imitation is of course the sincerest form of flattery, so the UK soon saw the birth of the Wapping Autonomy Centre (or just 'the Anarchist Centre'), which rented its space in 1981, using money raised from the single 'Persons Unknown/Bloody Revolutions', and also from various Crass and Poison Girls benefit gigs. As well as playing host to live music, the centre put on bookfairs, zine conventions, discussion groups and films. However, those same punks whose money helped create the centre also led to its ruin, managing to destroy every bit of furniture in its first week and graffiting every bit of wall in the neighbourhood; the Anarchist Centre didn't last too long! However, many of those involved later went on to set up the Centro Iberico at 421 Harrow Road in West London, a former school squatted by Spanish anarchists to be used as a gig space and more.

Fast-forward two decades and a big turning point for the social centres movement came in 2004, when the *Dissent! Network* (a UK-wide mobilisation against the G8 summit in Scotland the following year) made available a large amount of funds, earmarked specifically to enable the formation of anti-capitalist social centres throughout the land. Groups in Manchester, Liverpool, Oxford, Leeds, Newcastle, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Glasgow all benefited, and many of those centres still remain. Two years later, the newly-formed UK Social Centres Network formed and met in Leeds: their mandate is to help *"the growing number of autonomous spaces to share resources, ideas and information."*

# ARE SOCIAL CENTRES WORTH THE EFFORT?

Maintaining a long-term autonomous space is a unique form of radical resistance, and, needless to say, it comes complete with its own unique problems.

The biggest problem is that the day-to-day mundanity of running such a centre almost always falls on the shoulders of the few. And we are talking mundane - far from the high octane rush of a riot or other forms of struggle, centre crew are expected to deal with building maintenance, finance, cooking rotas, paperwork and other tedium. It's a huge amount of effort and commitment, and inevitably, when there's a shortage of volunteers, these people feel obligated to put in even more hours. They might never get thanked or acknowledged, nor even get the chance to relax and enjoy the space for which they spend themselves. They'll probably get accused of being a fascist bureaucrat at some point, too!

One reason for this state of affairs might be poor communication of decisions made, and other important information - the overall democracy of a project suffers when only those in the know can find their way to the relevant working group. Another reason is that a lot of people refuse to take responsibility for these collectively-run spaces, but are happy enough to be punters; in this way, social centres become a microcosm of a wider problem for anarchism. But it's important to remember that most ventures - be they anarchist or not - often go this way. We need to acknowledge these dynamics, and work to hold open opportunities for new people to step in and take part. And it can be hard to take part; wandering in off the street for the first time, you might be confronted by a room full of funnily-dressed folk stood around on computers or cooking or just doing their own thing, and there may well be no one there to welcome you or allow you to integrate your own natural pace.

Other issues crop up. Rather than being a radical solution to society's problems, we must ask whether a social centre is instead just a stop-gap between stretched social services? How does a centre cope with aggressive behaviour, particularly with bullies who exploit the safer spaces policy and claim they are being bullied when someone stands up to them? Others ask whether a social centre sucks energy away from 'real' activism? How does a social centre and its denizens 'normalise' itself themselves enough to engage with the surrounding community? After all, the dress sense and attitudes of some anarchists can be enough to discourage people from having anything to do with us. What existing, localised need does a specific social centre meet - does it meet any? And then you have the controversy of whether to squat or not. It is true that in some cases the decision to rent or buy costs a centre some of the oppositional culture that goes hand-in-hand with squatting. In the summer of 2004, a booklet called *'You can't rent your way out of a social situation'* argued that rented or bought spaces would weaken the squatting movement, which was a more radical priority. But permanent centres have also succeeded in building deeper bonds of solidarity locally, especially with those who would never enter a squatted space in the first place. It's difficult to build links when even the people that are ready and willing can't tell where your centre will be from week to week. Debating the efficiency of this pragmatic response to police and legal repression is vital, but we should also be wary of creating false divisions.

Folks from the Cowley Club had this to add: *"The reason that The Cowley Club has carried on whilst other social centres come and go is that we own the building, and this puts pressure on the Brighton community to keep the place going, and making money, but as we have that pressure to make money it means that the club has to be well-used. There is also a big enough anarchist scene in Brighton to support the club, which is a pretty energy intensive project. That's not to say that we don't have problems: we are continually short of people to help run the place, and it has often been very tight over the years financially. Now we've been going 13 years, there are a lot of people that know about and support The Cowley Club, and that gives us a massive base to fall back on if there were problems. Just look at the support Freedom bookshop got when there was an arson attack; once a social centre has been going long enough I think it's very hard to kill it."*

All of the above are important considerations, and I doubt anyone has yet found any conclusive answers. It might be good advice that, if you are considering setting up a centre of your own, you talk to the people in your collective and find out just what exactly they think a social centre is, as even the slightest difference of opinion can cause schisms that will kill your project before it starts.
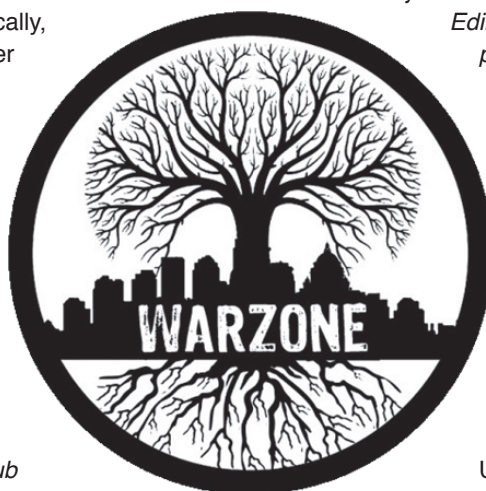
But it's not all doom and gloom. Whereas the rampant expanse of commercialisation has stripped most social space away from our collective grasp, social centres represent the potential to reclaim the legacy of the commons, and act as focal hubs for organisation. They can allow us to take class struggle away from the workplace, and re-insert it back into wider community life. Although we might assume that 'they' (the 'non-political' public) have a conservative outlook, social centres present an opportunity to overcome our misconceptions and find that people might want to improve things through action rather than through empty slogans. Social centres are living examples that can inspire just that.

Writing in 2007 about ACE in Edinburgh, Sarah Young explained that *"social centres can be a relatively accessible way new people can see what the movement is about. Then, another thing, social centres can help bring together different groups and networks of resistance, because they are all meeting in or using facilities in the social centre."* She went on to describe how *"some kinds of important activity just need a stable base, for example for the Edinburgh Claimants' work, we need a phone to ring up the benefits offices or the sheriff officers, we need a space for our benefits guidebooks and information, we need a place that people with these problems can come and find us every week."* Social centres can provide this.

As with the example above of Freedom Bookshop, anything worth fighting for can't be going far wrong. Looking back to 2007, consider the case of the long-running Ungdomshuset ('the Youth House') in Copenhagen. In March of that year the State evicted the centre (believed by Professor Lars Dencik from the University of Roskilde to be little more than a thinly-veiled training exercise for the Danish state's anti-terrorist forces), leading to riots and 16 months of weekly demonstrations; there were nearly 700 arrests in the first three days alone. The centre's closure proved such a flashpoint that thousands came together to literally fight for their space. The Ungdomshuset successfully reopened in a new venue on July 1st 2008.

To quote the 56a Infoshop crew (writing in 2008 in *'What's This Place?'*), *"Social centres are not the next big thing. They're better than that. They are always the next old thing. Wherever there are people there is the desire for the social. Long may the tradition continue."*

We'll finish up with a run-down of the social centres still operating in the UK at the time of writing - if you get the chance and you're in the area, why not pay them a visit?

## BELFAST

### Warzone

The Warzone Collective have been active since the early 1980's, running autonomous social spaces and nurturing music, art and activism in Belfast. They now have a new building in Belfast and the latest incarnation of the gig collective is hard at work promoting shows for local and touring acts of all genre's.

http://warzonecollective.blogspot.co.uk/
2 Little Victoria St, Belfast BT2 7JH

## BRADFORD

### The 1 in 12 Club

Formed from Bradford's Claimant Union, the legendary 1 in 12 opened in 1988, taking its name from a governmental report claiming that one in twelve claimants defrauded the state. Organised as a members-only club, it has long been a venue for punk and other live music, and has grown from anarchist thought and practice. Over the years, the 1 in 12 has gone through various internal crises, but saved itself largely by its willingness to engage with the community, taking on three allotment sites, starting a football team and entering a local quiz league! And they also helped kickstart the UK's radical Mayday demo tradition in the late 90's.

www.1in12.com
21-23 Albion Street, Bradford,
West Yorkshire, BD1 2LY

## BRIGHTON

### The Cowley Club

A social centre on the busy London Road in Brighton, acting as a base for the city's radical grassroots groups. The club is home to a housing co-op upstairs, plus offices, a radical library and bookshop, a café and private members bar. They regularly host gigs, talks, film screenings, info nights and meetings. The building was bought in 2002, and opened in January 2003.

www.cowleyclub.org.uk
email cowleyclub@riseup.net
12 London Road, Brighton, East Sussex, BN1 4JA

## BRISTOL

### Kebele Community Co-op

Since 1995, Kebele has provided space for the development of radical ideas and activities, and features a cheap weekly vegan café, bike workshops, a sound system & party network, an allotment, infoshop, library and meeting space. The word comes from the Amharic (Ethiopian) for 'community place', based on Grenadan revolutionary Rastafarians' term for the neighbourhood community centres. Kebele itself started out squatted, but fierce resistance to eviction pressured the owning bank to sell the site, and cheap! The mortgage was initially paid for as a housing co-op, with donations from Chumbawamba and the like, and it remained partly a residence until 2005.

network23.org/kebele2
email kebelesocialcentre@riseup.net
14 Robertson Road, Easton, Bristol, BS5 6JY

## EDINBURGH

### Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh

Around since 1997, ACE is home to various groups, including Leith Wholefoods Coop, Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty & Edinburgh Claimants, and Edinburgh AFed. It also includes a radical cinema and library, infoshop and vegan potluck.

ww.autonomous.org.uk
ACE, 17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh,
Midlothian, EH7 5HA

## GLASGOW

### Glasgow Autonomous Space

Newly opened as of going to press, this space is still in the process of setting up. It aims to provide a cheap/free meeting space for autonomous groups in the city.

https://glasgowautonomousspace.wordpress.com/about/
Unit 11, 53 Kilbirnie Street, Glasgow, G5 8JD

## LEEDS

### Wharf Chambers

Situated in Leeds city centre, Wharf Chambers is a bar and multi-use venue operating as a members' club, run by a workers' co-op. When the anarchist Common Place social centre came to an end, Wharf Chambers rose in its place, although with an ostensibly more business-like veneer.

www.wharfchambers.org
email info@wharfchambers.org
23-25 Wharf Street, Leeds,
West Yorkshire, LS2 7EQ

## LIVERPOOL

### Next to Nowhere

A volunteer-run, radical, do-it-yourself space for meetings and events. They run a weekly vegan café, and show films, offer public computers & wi-fi, and possess a radical library. As of the time of writing, their website was being overhauled, so details may soon differ!

www.liverpoolsocialcentre.org
email info@liverpoolsocialcentre.org
The Basement, 96 Bold Street, Liverpool, Merseyside, L1 4HY

## LONDON

### The 56a Infoshop

Formed by anarcho squatters in 1991, 56a is located in the back room of Fareshares Food Co-op, a (formerly squatted) ex-grocers on the Pullens Estate in Walworth. The Pullens Estate is notable for its history in the mid-80's, as the tennants held a strong relationship with the various local squats and annual free festival; in 1986, the council and police tried to conduct a mass eviction, but were seen off by overwhelming local resistance. Fareshares and the 56a are the natural continuation of this counter culture. In 2003, the centre was pushed to negotiate a tenancy, but still remains.

www.56a.org.uk
email info@56a.org.uk
56 Crampton St, London, SE17 3AE

# The Sparrows' Nest

## LONDON

### DIY Space For London

A cooperatively-run social centre located in South London, just off Old Kent Road. During the day, they offer low-cost creative facilities, meeting rooms and social space, and in the evening offer space for screenings, talks and performances. They also have an in-house record shop and (the usual!) vegan café. DSFL is one of the newest social centres in the UK, having opened in September 2015, but they began fundraising three years previous.

**diyspaceforlondon.org**
**email hello@diyspaceforlondon.org**
**96-108 Ormside Street, London, SE15 1TF**

### Freedom Bookshop

A British anarchist institution, more or less, Freedom as a newspaper and a publishing house have been around since 1886, but their collective also runs the Autonomy Club meeting room, holds art shows and runs a bookshop, as well as sharing the premises with London Coalition Against Poverty, the Advisory Service for Squatters and Corporate Watch.

**freedompress.org.uk**
**email shop@freedompress.org.uk**
**84b Whitechapel High St, London, E1 7QX**

### The London Action Resource Centre

LARC is a collectively-run building providing space and resources for people and groups working on self-organised, non-hierarchical projects for radical social change. As well as meeting space, radical reference library, banner-making and tool space, they also have a rooftop garden. It was set up in 1999, soon after the 'J18' Carnival Against Capitalism'.

**larcwhitechapel.wix.com/larc**
**email info@londonarc.org**
**62 Fieldgate St, London, E1 1ES**

## NEWCASTLE

### Star and Shadow Cinema

Existing in the current venue since 2006, the Star and Shadow is a not-for-profit, volunteer-run cinema and art space, which also houses a bar and café. Their aim is to show a truly independent programme of inspirational and inspired films as cheaply as possible, as well as providing a venue for artists and musicians of all varieties, acting as a haven for independent creativity and thinking. They will soon be relocating to 210 Warwick Street, NE6, but are currently still open at Stepney Bank.

**www.starandshadow.org.uk**
**email info@starandshadow.org.uk**
**Battlefield, Stepney Bank (opposite the Tanners Arms), Newcastle Upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear, NE 1 2NP**

## NOTTINGHAM

### The Sparrows' Nest

A 'Centre for Anarchist Culture and Education' established in 2008 by members of Nottingham Afed and friends, it is located in a house in St. Ann's, and is open every Thursday 11am-2pm or by arrangement. The Sparrows' Nest was set up to inform people about the ideology and history of Anarchism in its many forms, and about working class struggles in their region. They house an impressive public archive, and run a digital library.

**http://thesparrowsnest.org.uk/**
**email info@ thesparrowsnest.org.uk**
**St. Ann's, Nottingham**

### The Sumac Centre

Nestled in the inner city, Sumac has been open as a community and activist resource and social centre since 2001, and own their building. They support community resistance projects in the form of Nottingham ABC and Notts Solidarity Network, and are also home to groups as diverse as a sewing club, NG7 Women Together (a women's social group for whom English isn't their native language) and the Sumac Youth Club. Veganism has always been a fundamental part of the Sumac, and they are home to the long-running 'Veggies' catering collective, and the centre also features a popular vegan bar.

**www.sumac.org.uk**
**email sumac@riseup.net**
**245 Gladstone Street, Forest Fields, Nottingham, NG7 6HX**

## OXFORD

### The Oxford Action Resource Centre

A volunteer-run facility working towards a more socially-just and environmentally-sustainable society. Their favourite things include grassroots groups that allow everybody to take part equally, actions that empower people, and creating real democracy in their local community. They opened in 2005.

**http://theoarc.org.uk/**
**email oarc@riseup.net**
**Upstairs in the East Oxford Community Centre, Princes St (junction with Cowley Road), Oxford, OX4 1DD**

*Thanks are owed to the Cowley Club and LARC for their help in answering enquiries. Much of the information in this article was derived from the zine 'What's This Place?' (socialcentrestories.files. wordpress.com/2008/06/whats-this-place_lo-res.pdf), specifically writings by Rob Ray first appearing in Freedom in 2005 (www. freedompress.org.uk), and also by Sarah Young's piece, first appearing in Peace News in 2007 (peacenews.info).*

# The Commons in Pre-Modern Thought

Most anarchists would probably agree that the concept of commons goes back at least to the first time that the commons were annexed and lost to people who had otherwise relied upon them. There were certainly uprisings by peasants against lords in the Middle Ages over access to commons. The first recorded was in the late 900s in response to the annexation by noble landlords of rivers and woods in Normandy. Sometimes the landlords were monks, as in the case of an uprising at Wellow in Nottinghamshire against Rufford Abbey.

Anarchists find the rare occasions when such movements leave a record of their ideas compelling, and have written about them often. The Poll Tax rebels in 1381 vocalised tensions over commons, as well opposition to serfdom and unfair taxation. In radical movements of the Civil Wars period such as the Diggers, we even identify antecedents of anarchism and communism, so radical were the demands concerning access to land. These pre-modern movements typically appealed to higher authority, usually to an idealised form of monarchy which would protect the commons, and almost always to God. They can only be partially understood as reflecting class struggle.

However, the concept of commons is also reflected favourably in much elite philosophy and theology going back into the Classical era, as being the original and natural state lived in by the first humans, and what nature intended. Indeed, the annexing and appropriation of land and resources reflected an unfortunate and even debased state of affairs, which gave rise also borders and war. Again, this analysis might appeal to anarchists. But before we get too excited, we should note that few if any of these elite thinkers thought that the common life could be returned to. It was irretrievable, and people should get on with the job of acquiring and restricting access to land and moveable property (and we should highlight that this often meant women and slaves, otherwise absent from the discourse).

Nonetheless, philosophical ideas about commons and why and how they were lost are still interesting to anarchist communists as people who reflect on the different ways in which human society could be organised. The following is a survey of some pre-modern and pre-capitalist thought on commons.

## The Classical World

The mathematician Pythagoras (c. 570-c. 495 BCE) is credited with stating that *"Everything is shared between friends"*, and there is evidence that joining the Pythagorean community involved a provisional surrender of personal property into a communal fund. Plato (424/423 – 348/347 BCE) set out how a larger scale idealised polity might operate. In his Republic, the citizens of the fictional city state Kalipolis recognise that property inevitably corrupts, and so those administering laws have none of their own. But Plato's student Aristotle (384–322 BCE) loathed these ideas and misrepresented Plato, in order to undermine him. He said that Plato meant to apply lack of personal property to the entire community. Significantly, this reading of Plato extended into the Middle Ages, as we shall see, along with Aristotle's counter position, that property was good because it allowed you to be *'generous to friends, companions and guests'*.

A key theme of Roman thought is discussion of what commons and property meant in the state of nature and since. To Cicero (106 – 43 BCE), *"one should treat common goods as common and private ones as one's own. (But) no property is private by nature, rather by occupation, or by law, by settlement, by agreement or lot...because proprietorship develops over what used to be by nature common, every proprietor may keep what has fallen to his lot"*. Virgil (70 – 19 BCE) wrote of the original state, *"it was not even right to mark the land or portion it with boundaries; all need was met in common, and Earth yielded everything of herself, more freely, when none begged for her gifts"*. Seneca (54 BCE – c. 39 CE) agreed, but observed that this was *"before avarice and luxury had broken the bonds that held mortals together, and they, abandoning their communal existence, had separated and turned to plunder"*. And because the clock could not be turned back, you just had to make the best of it; Seneca was famously wealthy. Nerva (30 – 98 CE) observed that the *'natural law'* concerning property survived only in things not yet exploited, i.e. *"taken on land, sea or in the air"* but that these then *"become the property of those who first take possession of them"*. These rights of *'first occupation'* would later prove fundamental to discussion of commons.

## Early Christian Thought

A major influence on pre-modern thought was of course what people understood the first Christian community to have been like. The Christians at Jerusalem in the Acts of the Apostles were, *"of one heart and one soul. Neither did anyone say that aught of the things which he possessed was his own: but all things were common unto them… Neither was there any one needy among them. For as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the price of the things they sold, and laid it down before the feet of the apostles. And distribution was made to everyone, according as he had need"*.

To some people this model of common living was thought to be applicable to wider society, once Christianity became the dominant faith around the Mediterranean. Basil of Caesarea (329 – 79 CE) and Ambrose of Milan (c. 329/30 – 397 CE) considered even first occupation to have been a usurpation. What should now be done to put things right, relates to a Christian doctrine solidifying at the same time: Charity. In On Duties Ambrose says, *"Nothing commends the Christian soul so much as mercy. First and foremost, it must be shown towards the poor: you should treat nature's produce as a common possession; it is all the fruits of the ground, brought forth for the benefit of all alike"*. Basil wrote, *"Where did you get (your things) from...? It is as if someone catching a show in the theatre were to stop other people from coming in, in the belief that what was put on in public for everyone's enjoyment was his property. That's the rich for you. They get first hands on common property and make it theirs because they got it first"*, and *"If each person would only take for themselves what would meet their own needs and then relinquish what was left over to someone in need, no one would be rich, no one poor, no one in need...The bread you hold onto belongs to the hungry person."*

# The Medieval Centuries

The emphasis on charity was so significant that it accounts for the arrested development of the Classical concept of a right to property in the medieval world. The twelfth-century lawyer Gratian synthesised Plato, the New Testament and the doctrine of charity, saying, *"All men ought to have the use in common of all that is in this world… By the Law of Nature everything is shared by everyone….that polity is said to be most justly ordered in which each person does not know his own attachments… This is believed to have been observed not only by those of whom it is written: Among the multitude of believers there was one heart and one soul…It is through iniquity that one thing came to be called one man's and another thing another's…A man who keeps more for himself than he needs is guilty of theft...The bread that you hold back belongs to the needy...When a person is dying of hunger, necessity excuses theft"*.

Gratian was not alone in the Middle Ages in considering appropriation of food permissible to the hungry. The right to life was more important than the right to property of someone holding on to surplus. The lawyer Hugh of Pisa (d. 1210) considered that the starving person would not be guilty of theft because they could reasonably assume that a property owner would grant them food. Hostiensis (d. 1217) said, *"He who suffers from dire necessity seems to be making use of his right rather than planning a theft"*. Significantly, however, the medieval goal was not the eradication of poverty. On the contrary, Jesus had said, *"the poor will always be with you"*. Indeed, charity was important not least because alms-giving was a means to Salvation. As such, it was essential for most people to have property, some of which they should share in common. Thus John of Salisbury (c. 1120 – 1180) had synthesised Aristotle and Acts, saying, *"Virtue lays it down that all the property of friends should be shared between them...who doubts that he ought to share his goods with those who are of one single mind with him…? It is this which unites men's souls in the bond of charity"*.

We should note at this point that the development of charity as a way of denying commons did not go unchallenged in the Middle Ages. In c.1000, the monk Héribert of Périgord warned of certain religious 'heretics' that *"not only do they refuse money, but the funds they possess, they put in common… (and) they say alms are worthless, for since there should be no property, whence can alms legitimately come?"* Variations on this letter were produced in the twelfth century. We hear again of people rejecting alms coming from property, which *"no one should possess"*, and again, *"charity is a useless act because no one should possess the property from which alms can be given..."* The question of commons was soon addressed alongside the marginal belief that Christians should have no property at all, in common or otherwise, but should beg. This was because commons had been appropriated by the monastic orders. Their members were not allowed to own anything at all personally, but nonetheless often owned a great deal 'commonly' and lived in luxury as a result. In 1143 or 4 the monk Eberwin of Steinfeld at Cologne asked Abbot Bernard of Clairvaux for advice concerning heretics who historians have come to call Cathars. He says they considered themselves, *"The true imitators of the apostolic life…possessing no house, or lands, or anything of their own, even as Christ had no property, nor allowed His disciples the right of possession"*. They said to monks, *"You, although owning nothing of [your] own and holding everything in common, nevertheless possess all these things"*. In the 1170s the chronicler Roger of Howden noted such concepts circulating at Toulouse. Around the same time at Lyon Waldensians also went further than the common life and gave everything they had to the poor, whose ranks they now joined, and Francis of Assisi followed suit in the early 1200s. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, similar ideas were held by other radical Christian movements like beguines, the Spiritual Franciscans and the Fraticelli. A fair few people were burned at the stake as a result. But whilst our sympathies might lie with the persecuted, it is important to remember that they were in fact advocating a brand of religious fundamentalism and a return to early Christian values, not a move towards egalitarianism.

# The Renaissance

In the later Middle Ages Classical ideas were returned to both more idealistically and more realistically. In the former category, the Byzantine philosopher Gemistus Plethon (1355 – c.1450) advocated social reform in the Mistra region, so that *"all the land shall be the common property of all its inhabitants, as perhaps it is by nature, and that no man should claim any part as his private property. Every man who wishes to do so should be allowed to plant a crop wherever he will, to erect a house, and to plough as much land as he wishes and is able to plough"*. This would not be taken advantage of because the farmer must keep land actively under cultivation and render one third of its produce to the wider community. Other writers liked commons as an idea too, but did not consider it possible. Marsilio Ficino (1433 – 1499) said of Plato that *"because of his understanding that laws dividing property into private portions brought mankind no benefit over time – indeed things were getting daily worse – he was not wrong to focus instead on rules of friendship, so that once division and the cause of division and misery were more removed we could achieve concord, oneness and happiness"*. But on the actual realisation of Plato's vision, he wrote, *"it can only be brought into being when philosophers are kings, and that until then there will be no respite from evil"*.

# The Early-Modern Period

Logically, at some point in early human history, commons had ceased to be common. If this was not by a just process of some sort, in which everyone had had a say, then what did this say about the legality of possession in subsequent generations? The original partition and appropriation by individuals needed to be both explained and justified by philosophers. This became an urgent issue because of the new occupation of lands where Europeans had not lived before. They wanted to take commons from their first occupants. Some important philosophical questions had to be answered, for example:

- **Who said you could do that?**
  Hugo Grotius (1583 – 1645) and Samuel Pufendorf (1632 – 1694) concluded that there must have been a mutual agreement amongst the first peoples to divide up property. To Grotius, the state of nature must have proven too basic and uncomfortable to be desirable for long, and too impractical once human numbers expanded. So, said Pufendorf, humans established separate dominium over things by a locally agreed pact. After that, property law had to follow because, for example, if the fruits of a tree had been selected by someone for picking when they were ripe, something had to stop others getting in there first. John Locke (1632 – 1704) even asserted that *"all the men in the world at one instant of time"* must have consented to the division and acquisition of property.

- **What about all my hard work?**
  Locke's reasoning doesn't actually require such a pact to have been made, however. His was a multi-layered justification. He argued, *"He who is nourished by the… apples he gathered from the trees in the wood… has certainly appropriated them to himself. Nobody can deny that the nourishment is his...(or can say that) he had no*

right to those apples thus appropriated, (just) because he has not the consent of all mankind to make them his". Furthermore, *"whatsoever …he removes out of the state that nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined something annexed to it, that excluded the common right of other men"*. God, after all, did not give Adam and Eve the bounty of nature to waste, but to use.

In contradiction, Rousseau (1712-78) argued almost what an anarchist communist might that if you argue that you earned the plot by my labour, we can reply: *"who set the boundaries for you?"* Rousseau blamed agriculture for the origins of the problem because it entailed division and gave the fruits to its cultivator alone, saying *"society and laws gave the weak new fetters and the rich new forces [and] forever fixed the law of property and inequality [and] transformed a skilful usurpation into an irrevocable right"*. He asked, *"How many crimes, wars, murders, how many miseries and horrors mankind would have been spared by him who, pulling up the stakes or filling in the ditch, had cried out to his kind: ...You are lost if you forget that the fruits are everyone's and the Earth no one's"*.

- **Commons, or no one's?**
  In the ideal state, had commons been no one's, or everyone's? In other words, did first occupants collectively own everything they used, or use things that nobody owned? This is not a semantical problem; they do not amount to the same thing when considered in a context where real 'first occupants', rather than imagined historical ones, were being inconveniently encountered by European settlers. Indeed, they were often living without land divisions or private goods. Didn't they have the right to the land they occupied commonly? If they didn't own it, then No. But if they held it together, then Yes.

This situation perhaps provides the background for Locke's reasoning that improving land through annexation and labour was what God preferred humans to do: Even if first peoples did 'own' the land they occupied, they were wasting it. Thomas More's Utopia (1516) provided a model. In it, a group of people set out to found a new and ideal society making *"the land yield an abundance for all"*. But More's 'Utopians' are not first occupants. If the people already occupying land which they wanted to settle and improve, did not want to join in, the Utopians, More reasoned, must drive them off. If they resist, should make war on them, because *"it is perfectly justifiable to make war on people who leave their land idle and waste, yet forbid the use of it to others who, by the law of nature, ought to be supported by it"*.

Herein lies a key but unproven assumption behind the 'tragedy of the commons'; whether commons are 'no one's' or 'everyone's', they will not be used or looked after as well as if someone had a unique interest in them. So the earliest humans and the first peoples overseas had no automatic rights to commons after all. As such, the 'tragedy of the commons' is rooted in a calculated pessimism about what can be achieved by humanity consciously acting together to improve and manage sustainably what lies all around us.

# UNPICKING

## 'The Tragedy of the Commons'

Sustainability is of huge global importance. Anyone tuned into the mainstream news media is acutely aware of problems of overexploitation of the world's resources on land and sea and effects of burning fossil fuels and agribusiness on climate due to greenhouse gases like $CO_2$ and methane. Notwithstanding the current blip in overproduction of oil, it is also reasonable to think about a day in the future when many resources people currently depend on could run low. Recycling and energy saving are both regularly in the public discourse.

'The Tragedy of the Commons' was a pessimistic essay written in 1968 by an American 'genetically trained biologist' pronouncing on the inevitability of an unsustainable future resulting from increasing human population. Freedom to choose family size, protected by the then recently passed Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1967, was being contested by the essay's author Garrett Hardin as an example of a 'commons' gone bad. He cited an 19th Century essay from an amateur mathematician William Lloyd about the effect of individual herders selfishly maximising the number of their own cattle grazing unrestricted on common land that would result in it being ruined for all.

In this account, each individual acted in their own self-interest. There was no probability of sharing of the positive utility, that is, the product of their grazing. A short-term solution expands the size of the commons in question as the number of grazers increases but ultimately, taking this to global scale, there is nowhere else to go, no 'technical solution' to the problem of expansion of grazers wanting to get more for themselves.

Hardin asserted that the human right to 'breed' was the same kind of commons that was not sustainable due to its exponential pressure on the earth's resources, and called for action. In modern terms the ecological footprint becomes increasingly large. This combination of population growth coupled with a welfare state that gave equal rights to survival was 'intolerable'. He didn't give a single solution but offered private ownership and external or internal coercion as general solutions to unrestricted use. Nor did he explain how a private solution might work for 'breeding' although a science fiction dystopia with a corporate-run hatchery springs to mind. Importantly the tragedy was offered no relief by enlightened groups doing the right thing. Instead a sweeping Social Darwinian argument stated that even if some people chose to be conscientious and limit their families, others who chose to breed more would act to fill the earth with offspring who would have a similar lack of conscience! In other words, the probability of an enlightened socialised solution always tends to zero, a state of affairs Hardin claimed to be proven through behavioural genetics.

## Against Pessimism

Arguments against such a pessimistic view later produced a Nobel Prize for Elinor Ostrom and Oliver Williamson in 2009, who examined criteria for good management of commons without central authorities or privatisation by studying real-world examples, and many interesting experiments were devised on cooperation. Scientific investigations revealed mechanisms of altruism in groups of people and in the world at large, disproving Hardin's views.

Game Theory showed the possibility of emergent cooperation if games are played more than once between individuals who might otherwise cheat. The 1930s, through the work of William Hamilton, produced an 'altruism equation' by considering genetics of family groups. Behavioural economics considered 'reciprocal altruism' and 'inequity aversion' without introducing a moral decision to cooperate. Parecon, a system devised by Michael Albert, offered a basis of organising communities of producers and consumers to achieve something close to an ideal of maximising utility in the fairest way with a minimum of coercion, based on need and effort of individuals. Our own Peter Kropotkin is credited as the early pioneer of an alternative view of the world framed in terms of cooperation rather than competition – mutual aid.

In spite of all this theory, much of it developed before Hardin's essay, and practical demonstrations, we are still often asked to consider limits of collective agreement. What can be done about 'free riders', those that will take without giving – will they always exist such that full communism is impossible? The idea that humans are capable of a communist psychology is hotly contested.

The Anarchist FAQ in its section 'What about the Tragedy of the Common?' usefully shows how contemporary anarchists and others have demolished the tragedy assertion. Many of these criticise the conflating of commons with a free-for-all. Colin Ward for example is quoted, *"local popular control is the surest way of avoiding the tragedy of the commons"*. Historians explained that commons were traditionally managed according to a set of collectively agreed rules anyway.

For anarchists, it is both private property and state control of resources that are the true destroyers of commons. The combination of the two produced, as Noam Chomsky said in an interview in 2008, *"a system of socialisation of cost and risk and privatisation of profit. And that's not just in the financial system. It is the whole advanced economy."* Anarchists are

clear that capitalism gives individuals the justification to enclose common resources and this is backed up by the State's ability to organise and direct collective wealth to support the capitalists, and to back it up by law and violence whenever needed. After all, the start of the struggle of the Zapatistas in 1994 was all about the Mexican state giving rights to multinationals to exploit resources where indigenous people live, prompted by the North American Free Trade Agreement. And even if states were benign they would still discourage collective responsibility and action.

## Capitalism Undermines the Commons

But for most of our lives we are expected to accept that capitalism will ensure the most favourable use of resources, even after profits are taken out. Either that or that the State at some level is necessary to force us to treat a resource and each other fairly and respectfully. Rarely are we given the chance to have true local and popular control on any aspect of everyday life, never mind the anarchist communist goal of having this control over every aspect of it! This is in part because there are few areas of life that are not already either owned by someone or controlled by an authority, but also because a capitalist society expects us to buy back this stolen resource with our individual labour, which makes sharing a personal moral choice rather than a normal way of living together.

Sadly the few times that commons do get in the media are when there are arguments. Witness quarrels over siting of wind-farms or digging of new quarries or landfills. A recent example at the end of 2015 of an occupied urban park in Nottingham brought the resident housing community into conflict with the occupiers about the takeover of 'their' park, which was ultimately controlled by the council. But, even if there are vested interests, these examples do often involve communities who live locally contesting the use of land or landscapes which is outside of normal State authority and often in opposition to it. When there are disagreements dialogue is still taking place without the direct intervention of authorities or the courts, at least early on in a dispute. More positive examples involving collective agreement over resources are housing associations or community takeovers of libraries facing closure. In the former, as talked

about the Anarchist FAQ, tenants of a housing area or block come together to work communally on repairs. In the case of libraries, the books are the commons, even if they are ultimately owned by someone, because their value is in their use. As a result of community takeover, the local authority is less in control.

So most of the world is owned and exploited for profit and commons are quite rare. Some high profile commons are found in computing, software in particular which is easily copied and share, and internet projects. Music downloads are often discussed in terms of commons. Citizen science projects involve individuals contributing to large scale data collection and analysis projects. Time banks help to organise voluntary effort so groups of people are able to benefit from each other's skills and knowledge without payment. There are many examples of commons thinking in developing countries. This said, when we do get a chance to decide on commons at a human level about basic resources, it's still often framed as dealing with conflict, something which the State has a huge stake in keeping for itself. Also, we are regularly asked to consider the fate of the biosphere as a collective guilt which can be demoralising. Could scaling up a more collective approach to running the world be effective in time to prevent global catastrophe?

This is a major point of contention between libertarian communists and the more authoritarian environmental opinion, such as that of George Monbiot, who believes more state power is needed to save the planet while neo-liberal capitalism holds the reigns. It's clear that a lot more needs to be done by anarchists to change thinking on these matters. As well as promoting the idea of commons as possible, day to day struggles give us space to experiment while a social revolutionary process is worked towards – the one thing likely to make the difference that is needed. Tragedy is not inevitable.

*Readers interested in the original essay 'The Tragedy of the Commons' can find it here: http://science.sciencemag.org/content/162/3859/1243.full*

*The Anarchist FAQ segment discussing The Tragedy of the Commons can be found here: http://anarchism.pageabode.com/afaq/secI6.html*

# INTERNATIONAL GATHERING IN CRETE
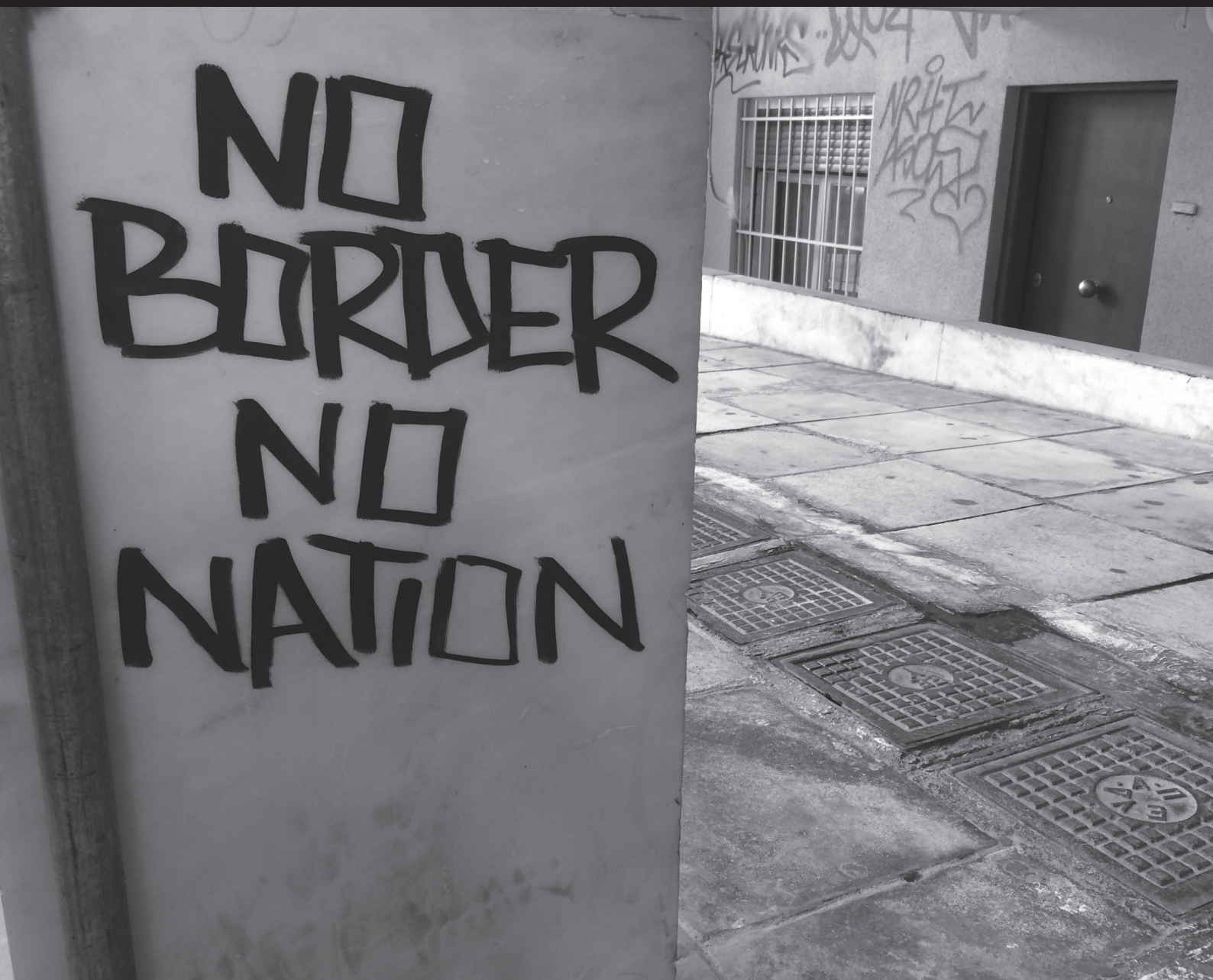


**AN IMPORTANT STEP IN BUILDING A UNITED AND EFFECTIVE ANARCHIST MOVEMENT**

The Anarchist Campaign of Internationalist Solidarity 'Three Bridges', with the coordination of IFA-IAF (International of Anarchist Federations) organised a Balkan and Mediterranean Anarchist Meeting in Greece, from the 9th-18th October 2015. This 10-day meeting was full of open events, discussions and actions held in towns/cities in cooperation with local partnership teams, individual teams or local initiatives that took part in the Campaign. It represented a great opportunity for people and groups from anarchist federations all over Europe and beyond to engage in thematic discussions with comrades, including members of regional anarchist federations, individual anarchist groups or comrades, anarcho-syndicalist organisations, anarchist, libertarian squats and similar minded individuals and collectives.

In a time of political unrest and the so called migrant crisis creating pressure on the ever so confused borders of Europe, the choice of the place and time could not be more appropriate. While States, governments and NGOs try to present the Mediterranean as a sea of disgrace and division, this meeting attempted to create a physical space for a common vision and unity instead.

With the acknowledgement of the importance of the Balkan area for migrants on the way to Europe, the Balkan Meeting was first held at Thessaloniki from the 11th to the 14th October 2015 in order to strengthen the ties between these countries in the attempt to liaise their energies in dealing with the inflow of migrants in coherence with anarchist values. More than 100 comrades from several Balkan countries such as Republic of Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia met and discussed with comrades from Turkey, Greece, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, USA and Canada. There were also comrades from Albania who are living in Greece. Each and every country reported on the current situations and activities in solidarity with migrants and it was decided the creation of a Balkan anarchist website to facilitate the communications between groups with information and call for actions.

## VIOME FACTORY RESISTANCE

However the Balkan meeting was also a chance to discuss other themes and on the 14th October there was a discussion on fighting patriarchy in the Balkans, a chance for groups and individuals to exchange practices in opposing gender repression and have a first discussion. Later the same day there was an open event titled 'Social Resistance and Self-organising' to which representatives of the factory VIOME took part. The group has been struggling to keep the factory of natural soaps and cleaning products open. The owner had abandoned it and many people were faced with losing their only income. In the face of adversity and hostility from authorities the workers managed to self-organise and manage the factory in total autonomy. Although under the constant threat of eviction they are keeping the factory open and the business running and so they are still able to provide an income for their families while at the same time stay producing a sustainable and environmentally-friendly product. At the time of the meeting the workers were

gathering solidarity around an auction which was planning to liquidate the factory on the 26th November. This was also a call for help and an attempt to spread the message about their cause in the Balkan meeting. VIOME is still standing today, their workers providing a unique example of struggle and resistance put in practice. In many ways this can be considered one of the first tangible achievements of the Balkan and Mediterranean meeting because from then on the message of VIOME travelled far collecting support along the way. At the meeting the workers made an official call: "We require your support in this effort, either by applying political pressure (…), or by replacing as much as possible the chemical detergents you use in your house with natural cleaning products manufactured in conditions of liberated labour and direct democracy".

## A THREE DAY EVENT

Thematic discussions that took place in the astonishing backdrop of Chania, Crete, from 16th to 18th October represented the pick of the 10 days event and went under the name of the Mediterranean Anarchist Meeting.

This aimed to network anarchists from the Mediterranean basin with others and to give the opportunity to exchange views and experience on several topics, beside the solidarity with migrants. In the Mediterranean Anarchist Meeting and there was a chance to explore many themes such as the immigrant-refugee issue, the threat of religious fundamentalism, the struggle for democratic confederalism in the Kurdish regions, the economic crisis, unemployment and poverty, the rise of nationalism in the Balkans and in general, the military conflict in the Crimean Peninsula. There were also discussions of struggles against ecological destruction, the emergence of self-organised communities, state repression and the anarchists struggle in each country. Meetings and discussions were held during the day and in the evening everyone moved to the local university to hear lectures from anarchist comrades involved in the struggle in Rojava, Ukraine and with refugee activities.

The MAM began on Friday 16th and the opening topic was migration. Countries reported on the current situations, and tried to look for ways of cooperating to create an alternative to the predominant capitalist narrative that see migrants as a problem to deal with rather than an opportunity for collaboration and free movement. The need for a common anarchist front was agreed, based on concrete actions against the barbarian policy perpetrated by the EU and also the need for a concrete policy and political identity for all the anarchist groups in the Mediterranean. The goal was to build a common ground and unite, make connections and better communications within the Mediterranean and the rest of Europe. Unfortunately however, countries from the southern part of the Mediterranean such as Tunisia, who hosted the event last time, were missing. This was partly due to political unrest experienced by some countries at the time of the meeting but the group decided to take responsibility and work to have a better response from those countries at the next MAM.

## EFFECTIVE RESISTANCE

On Saturday 17th October the topic was 'Resistance and Structure of Resistance'. The debate developed around how to organise an effective anarchist resistance. Some of the groups reported on some of their struggles at home, local struggles such as small cooperatives and projects that can have a big echo and inspire not only within the anarchist movement but well beyond. The question of 'structure of resistance' led to reflection on the way in which a lot of phenomena are developing within society that, although inspired by libertarian movements, do not necessarily fall under anarchist federations or groups. Taking this into account

the meeting reflected on how to strengthen a movement that although weak in numbers, can potentially have a big impact if organised effectively. It was agreed to connect and communicate through a website, and a mailing group. Whereas on a bigger scale there is much to learn from cases such as Rojava and the Zapatista movement, on a smaller level it was considered essential to lead and develop local struggles that can give great resistance to the status quo. As global capitalists have the ability to suppress any opposition they encounter along their way, it is crucial for the anarchist movement to support local struggles as this represents a reaction to the common policy of the EU directed to suppress people and their free will.

The last day of the MAM opened early in the morning with a workshop on technology. Petros, a Polish anarchist who has lived extensively in Greece tells us that, "Technology, as much as economy, is the outcome of the ruling socio-political paradigm and it is a way to replicate it". Technology too could be applied to make people independent. Petros explains that we could be producing our own electricity, have our own water extracted and that would make it possible not to be at the mercy of the electricity and water suppliers. Petros believes in educating people in practical life skills that would make people less dependent. The workshop explained how to build a solar panel in the belief that this sort of knowledge should be widely available to all, free and accessible. Petros also pointed out that engineering should be simple, cheap and community anchored: developed from and for people.

The last discussion session was about Militarization and Militarism. Unsurprisingly the comrades from different corners of Europe told of countries where militarism is still extremely embedded in society. These days, as military ideas become more unpopular, the mainstream strategy sees militarisation glorified in the social and historical profile of the nations. Hence people tend to take pride and celebrate events such as 'Liberation Day' forgetting that these were the produce of capitalist military campaigns that impoverished and destroyed communities and whole populations. In addition, we are witnessing the militarisation of States that engage simultaneously in two wars: one is internal, police repressing dissent, and one is external in which the State engage with other countries or even with migrants that seem to undermine the idea of the State itself.

When the last session of the MAM, we felt that although a lot had been achieved, there was still a lot to do. Much happened outside the meeting, however, because the Rosa Nera squat buzzed 24 hours with discussions, encounters, chats, drinks and music. Although the main goal of the event remained the intention to develop a Mediterranean common front that would start with a joint statement, we all had the feeling that a lot more was done beyond that. International events are there to bring people closer and to realise the full potential of the anarchist movement regardless of the difficulties it encounters on a daily basis in a world that is more and more indifferent to challenges and alternatives.

# CALL FOR AN ALL-BRITAIN CLASS STRUGGLE ANARCHIST CONFERENCE IN 2016!

**Another world is possible, but only if we create it ourselves.**

The anarchist conviction that it will take an autonomous and self-organising workers' movement to bring about authentic social and economic change is historically delineated. However, objective conditions alone - exploitation and oppression, austerity, racism and war - will not spontaneously lead a majority to realise the vision of a libertarian communist society. So to those on the left who argue in favour of a proletarian 'leadership' or vanguard party to show the way, social anarchists counter-pose a "leadership of ideas" and a process of counter-hegemony leading to a situation of dual power as being the requisite components of revolutionary transformation.

Be that as it may, the task of building a new world within the shell of the old will necessitate intent, initiative and desire in abundance.

Regrettably we're still in a situation in Britain where the popularity of basic anarchist ideas, especially among youth, easily outstrips the capacity of extant libertarian groupings to take full advantage of such interest and latent support. The vital need for cohesive organisation, with an attendant strategic and tactical co-ordination across the entire milieu, is plain for all to see. Consequently, and as a matter of urgency, a more dynamic, cutting-edge movement is required.

In light of this, Ffederasiwn Anarchaidd Cymru (the Anarchist Federation in Wales) calls for an all-Britain, class struggle anarchist conference in 2016, or as soon as one can be convened. The last conference, held in London in 2009, raised searching questions which still await resolution:

*Are we relevant?*
*Are we progressing?*
*Are we mature enough to face the challenge?*
*How and where should we organise?*
*Who are we are speaking to?*
*How do we relate to the wider world as anarchists?*
*Do we exist in a form coherent enough to actually be called a movement?*

At the end of the day, regardless of whether our arguments for a more congruous and effective nexus are accepted or not, it is certain that a long overdue coalescence of social anarchist forces for the purpose of a reappraisal of our common strategies and activities can only be to the good. Therefore it is with this objective in mind that we make our appeal. Hopefully, anarchists - as well as libertarian socialists in general - will consider and discuss the possibility of endorsing and supporting our goal.

**If you are interested please contact us via:  http://www.afwales.org/**
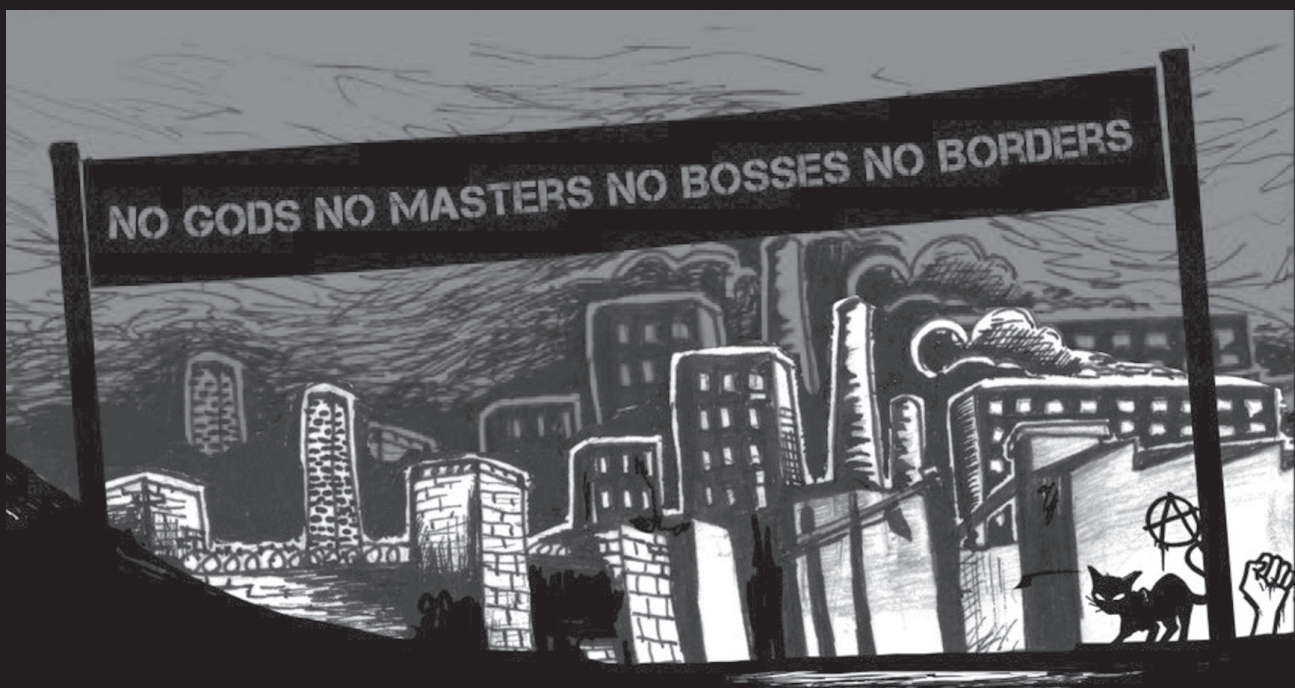
# Cuban Anarchism REBORN

## An interview with Mario from TLAL

*Cuba is often pointed at by leftists as proof of the successes of socialism, despite the constant repression of working class self-organisation within its borders. We recently hosted a tour of the UK by Mario, a member of Taller Libertario Alfredo Lopez (TLAL) and Observatario Critico Cubano. We caught up with him to learn more about the re-emergence of anarchism in Cuba.*

**How did you become an anarchist?**

There was no reference to anarchism in my family or in my social environment. I had some contact with anarchism because my parents lived in the Soviet Union for five years where they worked and studied and I came across material about the revolution in the Ukraine. Later I saw a Soviet film in which Makhno appeared [Nestor Makhno was an Ukrainian anarchist who initiated a vast insurrectionary movement from 1918 to 1921 in the Ukraine]. In this film he appeared crazy and a drunkard. My parents lived very near to the place where the Makhnovschina action happened and the information I received there was very different from that in the film, however this was only a small reference.

The next thing to influence me was when I became a teacher in the Latin America School of Medicine. There were students from all over Latin America. Teachers often learned from students, and it was here that some gave me anarchist papers from different Latin American countries. I had been involved for a few years in the Trotskyist movement in Havana and when I began to look into these magazines I was surprised to see things that I had always had in my mind. Within a few hours of reading I understood that I was an anarchist.

I studied history in the university; I studied to be a teacher. I begin to search for information about anarchism and I was surprised how much there was in Cuba and this was a very happy moment. There were things in the archives, in the libraries, in memoirs. This was because there was an anarchist history in Cuba.

I then became interested, as someone who is part of a working class neighbourhood, to work on the history of the neighbourhood. I began to talk with my comrades, I began to write.

**How did you meet other anarchists? Did you think you were alone?**

I was not completely alone because I was still involved with people from the Trotskyist organisations from university, however at that first moment I felt I was an anarchist, it was a real moment of feeling alone. People were dispersed because they had been at university and then they began to do other things, but some people retained a relationship with me.

There was one person in particular - a Cuban Russian who had studied at the London School of Economics. He had a Russian mother and Cuban father. We began to discuss the history of the Russian revolution and the role of the anarchists. Together we also started a dialogue with Latin American student comrades, creating a new space for discussions about anarchism. This was in 2001- 2003. We organised a study group in my house with students and read Malatesta, Kropotkin, Rudolf Rocker, the history of anarchism in Latin America by an Argentinian author based for many years in Caracas in Venezuela.

**But you are still doing work in the neighbourhood?**

My brother, who was a child at that time, was interested in the houses and the history of the neighbourhood. As we were researching we came across an old Cuban fighter who had volunteered in Spain during the civil war. We talked with the family and they gave us photos of this man in Spain and we made these connections - the local history of our neighbourhood with the national and international.

This led us to create the Critical Observatory Network [Translates roughly as a critical monitoring group]. The aim was to create a network of people who are developing autonomous work. Today there were many people in Havana doing interesting things without the presence of the State: self-education, ecology, the neighbourhoods, autonomous working class history.

**What kind of ecological initiatives were there?**

Reforestation, is one example. One comrade developed over 10 years a seed bank of plants that were in danger of extinction.

The idea was to create a network of autonomous groups and people who had no relationship with the State. The founders were a group of anarchists but the idea was not to impose our ideology. Our idea was to put into practice the ideas of anarchism rather than the ideology of anarchism.

**So how did the group develop?**

In the next few years the Critical Observatorio group went into decline - many people went out of the country, people abandoned political activity, people became parents. As a network we had a precarious existence. That didn't mean it disappeared. So five years ago we decided to organise as anarchists after seeing the process of decline.

**Yes, this is why we organise as anarchists, you need to have a permanent organisation that can survive the ups and downs, as movements come and go.**

Exactly. This is why we decided to create the Libertarian workshop, not to supplant the Critical Observatory Network but to contribute to it. The energy comes and goes but we need to maintain a specific organisation.

We feel a key part of the great experiment that was lived by all of Cuban society which came with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The government even named it as a special period.

**Why was it special?**

It is special because it is a moment (from 1989 until the mid-90s) when the State collapsed and people showed the capacity of self-organisation in their lives. When we have this experience - of growing of food, providing services (such as undertaking a trade or providing transportation), making clothes - it was a moment of an explosion of creativity. The State said do what you can because we can't do anything. Official history named that time the 'special period'. This all happened before the work we did in the neighbourhoods, but we had lived this experience so it influenced what we went on to do.

**Why did the special period end?**

The State took back control and influenced wage relations, taxes, legalised the institutions that had been created in the neighbourhoods. For example in 1999 the State created a terrible institution - workshops of integral transformation of the neighbourhood.

**So there we already networks there but the state took control of them?**

Exactly. It was recuperation. All the experience that people had gained was now co-opted and used by the State.

**How did people react?**

The most important lessons were learned by the state and not by society. All the self-organised activities were taken over by the state which then took credit for them. People didn't understand what was happening. They thought that by the state taking control it would make things more secure, but the opposite happened. Now these institutions are in decline.

For example, the horizontal relations that were produced in the 90s - shoes, food, clothes, education - these were communicated person by person, neighbourhood by neighbourhood. But then at the end of the 90s, institutions were introduced that mediated between the autonomous groups. This was terrible - in a short time the whole nature of the experience had been changed.

**This is similar to what is happening in Britain. There are many grass roots movement for example in housing, and now the Labour Party is saying they want a 'Labour-led' grass roots movement!. They want to use us!**

Exactly! It is another logic to the way we want to organise our lives. Our task is to show them that the special period shows the self-capacity of people, the richness of society. If you make the comparison between Cuban society in the 90s and North Korean society in the 90s, it will show that masses of people were hungry in North Korea but not in Cuba. We did not experience social collapse. In Cuba the State collapsed, not society.

**What would you say your main tasks are now for your group?**

Today we are involved in establishing our energies in one place - one neighbourhood of the city. We are seeing that without physical space there can be no direct connection with society. Social media cannot reach most working class people. One part of this strategy is to have a social centre in one working class neighbourhood because in Havana there will be battles with the gentrification process coming soon. It has already started but is invisible now.

**Could you tell us a bit more about this struggle? Struggles against gentrification are taking place across Britain.**

Yes, I read the article in Organise!. It is a very important issue in Cuba too. For the past ten years the process has been very soft. It hasn't had an obvious impact on the wider society. But in the next 2-3 years we are going to see a big transformation in Havana. The state is in the main instigator at the moment, rather than foreign capital. In old Havana they are organising the city for tourists. This is the most visible presence at the moment, but in a short time we think that the process will change. We can see a massive presence of American money, capital, banks, and the process will take another way, one that is more dangerous, more disruptive of the lives of ordinary people.

It is in this context we think we must take the centre of these places and work directly with the people living there. One limitation of our work is that it is mainly in spaces related to the youth and to students, while it needs to be in the spaces of the working class of Havana.

Our group began with this idea. Reinforce the history of the anarcho-syndicalist movement in Cuban history. That is why the name of our group is Alfredo Lopez - a key figure in anarchist workers organisation in Cuba. We are developing important activities in the neighbourhood where he lived and died.

**Do you have your own publications?**

Two years ago we started a small publication called Tierra Nueva [New Land]. It is our homage to an old anarchist paper that existed in Havana. It is important to publish a paper because the people of Havana do not have access to social media.



**There are people in this country who think that Cuba as it is is great - a model that must be supported. What would you say?**

In many ways Cuba is a marvel. There are many good things that have happened here, such as the quality of human relations, but this is just the people. The Cuban state is no different than other class societies. There is oppression, a dominant class, a working class; but Cuban society has some things they can show to the world.

**Have Cuban anarchists experienced oppression?**

We are very controlled but repression at this moment, no. At the beginning of the revolution they suffered direct repression by the state with many having to emigrate, but at the moment, it is a good time to work as anarchists in Cuba. The state is concentrated on negotiations with the US and the repression of the new right-wing. The right-wing who fled are now coming back from the US and Spain. The old rebels now return as friends of entrepreneurship.

Cuba now is in the process of clarification of the social conflict - who is the enemy. This was not visible in the 1990s. Class struggle has become more explicit. So this is very good.

**The position of women is often held up as something that is particularly good in Cuba. Is this the case?**

In the classical sense - women in the structures of power - this is real. We have women in the police, army, in the government. There has been a great increase in women's studies at the university. However, what I see that is interesting in my circle of social relations is that young women seem to not be interested. They are marrying men very early, going back to traditions. They don't accept this idea of rising in the social structure. It is a reaction.

**Is this a failure of the kind of feminism which focuses on getting women into the power structure?**

This kind of feminism is an expression of social class because the common women don't have access to it. At the beginning of the revolution there was this mobility but from the 90s to now this process has been closed.

**What about in the grass roots movements during the special period?**

It was not as women that they were involved. But they were involved in the main political activities and not just on the margins or at home.

The revolution introduced new relations between genders - this is real. There are more women in the public sphere and it was accepted that there should be no oppression in the private sphere.

In my group there are many women - a little less than 50%. Spaces for women are very good, and displays of inappropriate masculinity are given a sore welcome! Women have sensibility to oppression; the situation has changed. This is very different other parts of Latin America.

**Could you tell me more about the Caribbean Anarchist Federation that you are part of?**

In March we organised the first meeting in the Dominican Republic. There were groups from Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Salvador, Bon Aire, and a communication from Venezuela.

We are involved in three things. One of these is the creation of a regional archive, which will be the memory of the social fight in the region, especially with the comrades of Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic. Secondly, we are involved with a project called Libertarian Spring in Havana. We as a group created this as a movement. It will take place in May - a space for a meeting of our comrades. Thirdly, we created a group to monitor the destruction of the environment. This was proposed by the comrades of the Dominican Republic.

Another priority is the effects of nationalism in our region, especially the conflicts between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. There is a big conflict as they share the same island.

**This has been an eye-opener. Thanks for taking the time to speak with us. Readers are reminded that the Alfredo Lopez group and Observatario Critico Cubano are calling for world-wide support for their efforts to establish a social centre in Havana. For more information and to donate go to: https://www.gofundme.com/gg2wrcac**

# Culture FEATURE

# Henri Cartier –Bresson

## I'm An Anarchist



*"In a world that is crumbling under the weight of profitability, invaded by the ravaging sirens of Techno-Science, the voracity of Power, by globalisation - a new slavery - beyond all that, Friendship, Love exist."*

*"It's an American idea to have to be young, dynamic. Damn it! Let things age."*
- Henri Cartier-Bresson

Henri Cartier-Bresson was one of the greatest photographers of the 20th century. His photos managed to chronicle the whole range of events that shook that tempestuous and bloody time. His sympathy for the common people is apparent and his libertarian ethics forbade him to photograph obvious symbols of hierarchical power like distinguished royalty, always concentrating on the street and the masses. Where he portrays symbols of hierarchy, it is photos like that of the Nazi functionary held at gunpoint by two grinning French partisans, where order is overturned. In particular his photos of children at play in the street conjure up another world, one of free play and harmony, beyond the grasp of iniquitous Power, where Anarchy is Order.

He was born on August 22nd, 1908 in Chanteloup-en-Brie near Paris into an aristocratic family that he later described as Catholic socialists. He attended a Catholic school in Paris. His disastrous attempts to learn music there led him on engage in oil painting lessons from his uncle Louis, a distinguished painter, at the age of five. He also began to take photos of family holidays with a Box Brownie camera. His family expected him to join the family textile business, and this prospect filled him with horror.

At the age of 19, he attended a private art school and the Lhote academy founded by Cubist painter Andre Lhote. Later he remarked that he considered Lhote as a "teacher of photography without a camera," but chafed at his rigid adherence to rules. He began to hang out in cafes with the Surrealists who had emerged in 1924. As the historian Peter Galassi noted:

*"The Surrealists recognized in plain photographic fact an essential quality that had been excluded from prior theories of photographic realism. They saw that ordinary photographs, especially when uprooted from their practical functions, contain a wealth of unintended, unpredictable meanings."*

### Freedom, poetry, love and humour

In 1928-29 he studied art, literature and English at Cambridge University. In 1929 he was conscripted into the French Army, an experience he did not enjoy. He met the American poet Harry Crosby and his wife Caresse. Harry presented Henri with his first camera. Henri began an intense love affair with Caresse which lasted until two years after Harry's suicide. The break-up led to Cartier-Bresson voyaging to Africa.

In late 1931 Cartier-Bresson returned to Paris and renewed contact with the Surrealists. He began taking photography in

earnest, acquiring a Leica camera which he kept for years. He began to move around Europe, taking photos in Germany, Belgium, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Spain. In 1935 he exhibited his work in New York. When he returned, he got work with the film director Jean Renoir, son of the great painter. He acted in two of his films and assisted Renoir in making a film for the Communist Party on the top 200 families of France, which included his own. During the Spanish Civil war he produced an anti-fascist film. Between 1937 and 1939 he worked as a photographer for the Communist evening paper Ce Soir, though he never joined the Party.

During World War 2 Cartier-Bresson fought in the Army and was captured. He spent 35 months in prison camps doing forced labour for the Nazis. The thirty different kinds of manual labour he was forced to undertake opened his eyes to the world of labour, and increased his sympathy for all workers of the hand. He managed to escape after three attempts and then lived with false papers in France, establishing contact with underground resistance groups.

In 1947 together with other photographers he established the Magnum photo agency. He photographed Gandhi's funeral and the Chinese civil war. Some of his first projects were People Live Everywhere, Youth of the World, Women of the World, and The Child Generation, in which he developed his notions of using photography to portray humanity in all its multiple forms and rawness.

He took photos all over the world, remarking: "I don't travel, I live in countries". His flirtation with the Communist Party did not last and he developed strong anarchist convictions that lasted for the rest of his life. He was wont to say that he was an anarchist in interviews and to toast the Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin with red wine. His convictions weren't all talk. He worked with the Spanish anarchist Lucio Urtubia in Belleville, a working class neighbourhood on the hills of Paris, helping him set up a libertarian social space there, the Espace Louise Michel. At an international exhibition organised there by the French CNT anarcho-syndicalist union, on the 1st May 2000, Cartier-Bresson exhibited thirty of his photographs, chosen among thousands, to portray 'A Libertarian View', his own, the themes being the condition of the worker, social struggles, state oppression, real socialism and 'another future', which is to say freedom, poetry, love and humour.

He died on August 3rd 2004, having photographed many of the great events of the 20th century: the Spanish civil war, the liberation of Paris in 1944, the Chinese civil war, Gandhi's death, and the Berlin Wall. In addition, he took memorable portraits of Albert Camus, Picasso, Giacometti, Matisse and other artists and writers. But above all he took pictures of everyday life, in all its ordinariness and made that special. As he said:

> "In photography there is a new kind of plasticity, the product of instantaneous lines made by movements of the subject. We work in unison with movement as though it were a presentiment of the way in which life itself unfolds. But inside movement there is one moment at which the elements in motion are in balance. Photography must seize upon this moment and hold immobile the equilibrium of it."

# Book REVIEW
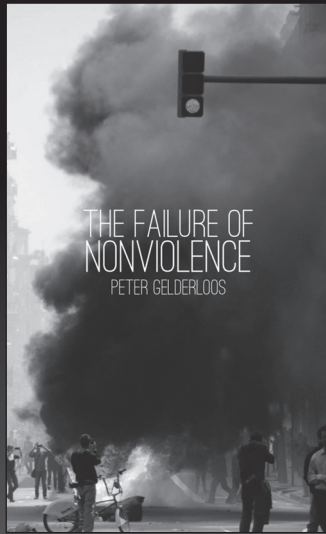
## The Failure of Nonviolence
## Peter Gelderloos

### Active Distribution
### 333 pages
### paperback
### £5.00

I n *'The Failure of Nonviolence'* Gelderloos sets out his central thesis: adherence to strictly nonviolent protest helps the state and favours the preservation of existing power structures whereas struggles involving a diversity of tactics are more likely to be able to exert meaningful societal change without recuperation. The issue of what violence is and who defines it is also prominent in the book. Proponents of nonviolence often ignore the very real and, for many of us, day to day forms of structural violence meted out by the State. They instead focus on a narrow definition involving property damage and confrontations with the police; a definition which is often used by the media to influence the narratives surrounding struggles and generate a moral panic when those involved in struggle do so outside the State's legal framework.

Gelderloos highlights a number of examples where the media has used this moral panic both to stifle a struggle and to silence the voices within it. After the police killing of Oscar Grant in the USA there was widespread rioting in the Oakland area. A number of media outlets and proponents of non-violence portrayed this as a response from privileged white, male anarchists from outside the community. This narrative was used to silence a cross-sectional response from different members of the community and portray the violence as only being caused by a specific, privileged group. Gelderloos argues this silences the many black, female and queer voices which were involved in the confrontational response to the killing and provides evidence from many groups that the portrayal of the rioting as being down to 'manarchists' was false and patronising to the varied groups involved.

Gene Sharp, and particularly his book *'From Dictatorship to Democracy'*, comes under particular scrutiny due to his nonviolent method's reliance on gaining the support of the media and existing elites to create change. Gelderloos points out that although there have been nonviolent revolutions using this method, such as the 'colour' revolutions (referring to the revolutions that took place in places like the Soviet Union and the Balkans). These, however, have been political rather than social revolutions; essentially one privileged elite has taken over from another with more open elections being the only tangible result. This method also falls down when the regime in question is not reliant on outside capital for trade and when the regime is willing to violently repress activists. Belarus is a case in point as it is only reliant on Russia for trade so sanctions do not affect the functioning of state capitalism. The thieves in charge are more than willing to use the secret police against any activists. Here an attempted nonviolent revolution was crushed instantly.

The work of NGOs and 'careerist' activists in recuperation of struggles is also considered. As NGO and careerists such as Gene Sharp are reliant on state money they must operate within a framework which is acceptable to the State and which allows struggles to be recuperated. It is extremely telling that Gelderloos quotes leaked FBI documents which show they have attempted to get protest groups to adopt commitments to nonviolence through the use of infiltrators. This is also backed up by state and military funding for the research and dissemination of the nonviolent method. The strict adherence to nonviolence of some American activists has even led them to unmask members of the black bloc, share photos with police and physically assault protesters who were damaging property. A clear line must be drawn between disagreements on tactics and collaboration with the police; an act which exposes individuals to the full force of state violence.

A current within the nonviolent movement is that somehow more confrontational tactics are acceptable within in global south. Gelderloos quotes a prominent proponent of nonviolence, Rebecca Solnit, who supports the Zapatistas right to defend themselves and violent actions in Argentina yet sees any deviation from nonviolence within North America to be counterproductive. This is a patronising and almost colonial attitude to struggle which only serves to isolate those involved. Whilst tactics must clearly be adapted to the location

they are used, this blanket ban on any confrontational element only weakens a struggle by limiting its options and making it easier for the State to repress or recuperate the movement. What Gelderloos calls for, however, is not a fetishised vision of violent struggle but a diversity of tactics where each individual can choose the role they are most suited to. His list of what is needed to achieve social change is worth quoting in full as a rallying call for everyone, no matter what their abilities, to be involved in whatever way they can:

*"In this multiform struggle that each of us understands in a different way, there is a need for a whole spectrum of activities. Recovering our connection with the land, publishing and spreading our ideas, debating, informing ourselves about the world and the conflicts happening in different places, sabotaging development projects which harm our environment and ourselves, taking care of babies, the sick and the elderly, feeding and healing ourselves, learning self-defence, educating ourselves, providing clothing and shelter, supporting prisoners, running social centres, presses, web-sites, and radio stations, creating a libertarian culture, learning to share and exchange without a logic of accumulation, unlearning the roles that have been imposed on us, taking over spaces and defending them, being able to defeat the cops in the streets, shutting down the economy, attacking structures of domination, stopping evictions, organising clinics and workshops, setting up safe houses and underground railroads, recovering our history, imagining other worlds, learning how to use weapons and tools of sabotage, developing the capacity to subvert or withstand the military for when the government decides that democratic repression isn't enough… by placing more importance on some of them than others, those who fetishize (sic) illegal and combative tactics miss out on the richness of struggle, and the ways by which struggles regenerate."*
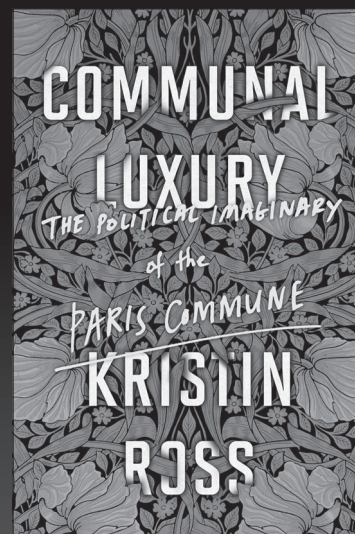
# Communal Luxury
## The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune
# Kristin Ross

Verso
148 pages
paperback
£16.99

I very much looked forward to reading this book, expecting a lot. I had imagined that it would deal with the liberating and liberatory aspects of the Paris Commune in detail. Instead, I was disappointed by the factual errors contained within its pages.

The biggest one is contained in the title itself. The expression *"Communal Luxury"* was first mentioned in the Manifesto of The Federation of Parisian Artists, active during the Commune and which included notable artists like Gustave Courbet, who was influenced by Proudhon, in its numbers. The term itself was probably coined by Eugène Pottier, who went on to write the Internationale. The Federation did not mean it in Ross's sense, that is, as she says in her own words, *"where everyone, […] would have his or her share of the best"*. In fact the Federation meant that artists should produce works for the beautification of the city, rather than for private collectors – public art rather than private art. Ross recognises this to an extent but quickly passes over this to use the term in a number of different ways.

Other errors include The Kanaks, indigenous people of New Caledonia, being referred to as Kanucks (an often quite derogatory American term for French Canadians), whilst Marie Verdure and Elie Decoudray (who initiated plans for crèches under the Paris Commune), are referred to as "two women" when in fact Elie Decoudray was Verdure's husband!

As regards the titular term *"political imaginary"*, it was first appropriated from the French psychoanalytical Jacques Lacan[1] by Cornelius Castoriadis[2] (one of the founders of the French libertarian socialist grouping Socialisme ou Barbarie). He used it to mean that *"societies, together with their laws and legalisations, are founded upon a basic conception of the world and man's place in it"*. Writing on the Commune himself, Castoriadis refers to the Autonomous Imaginary, where a society defines itself without the mediation of religion, economists and politicians. Strangely, Castoriadis is not mentioned once in Ross's book.

I'm afraid I became quite peeved with the impressionistic, scattergun approach of the book, not to mention a sometimes practically inaccessible academic style.

Ross refers to the Gustave Lefrançais's[3] account of one of the many public meetings held by the radical clubs and associations in the run-up to the declaration of the Commune. A speaker *"cried out an appellation that had been deeply forgotten for a quarter of a century: Citoyennes et citoyens!"*.

Ross acknowledges the term Citizen had been kept alive as an expression from 1789 by the various revolutionary secret societies. It encapsulated the ideas of the French Revolution of 1789. In sum, it looked back to that Revolution, rather than forward.

I would argue that its use points to what was one of the main faults of the Paris Commune – that is, that some radical currents, in particular those with influence within the directing bodies of the Commune, looked back towards Jacobinism and its methods like the Terror[4] and The Committee of Public Safety[5]. In fact the libertarian minority, people like Varlin, Vallès and indeed Lefrançais, fought unsuccessfully (as part of the directing committees) against the inauguration of a new Committee of Public Safety and against the use of terror.

However, Ross fails to mention these problems and instead at great length sees the term Citizen thus: *"its iteration in this instance creates the now of a shared political subjectivisation, "the uncomfortable class struggle of the present""*.

Much is made of the influence of the Russian activist Elizabeth Dimitrieff on the organisation of the Commune, in particular the Women's Union For The Defense of Paris and Aid To The Wounded. She quite correctly describes this as an important and effective organisation, with its creation of producer cooperatives sewing workshops. However, Ross seems to think this was down to a single-handed effort by Dimitrieff herself, and not to the collective effort of the Union itself, as well as other leading activists within it like Louise Michel[6] and Paule Minck[7].

In Ross's view this was because Dimitrieff had read the works of the Russian radical Nikolai Chernyshevsky[8], and

in particular his novel of ideas 'What Is To Be Done?' She describes Chernyshevsky as one of the *"two most significant political thinkers of the time"*, the other being Marx; however little was known of him outside of Russia at the time.

In this novel, Chernyshevsky advances ideas of a women's sewing collective, *"transforming private enterprise into a production cooperative, and then a cooperative at the level of consumption as well, encompassing all aspects of daily life"*. Undoubtedly Chernyshevsky's influence on Dimitrieff in turn influenced the Women's Union, but there were also other influences at play. Many of the revolutionaries involved in the Commune were influenced by the ideas of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon[9], who himself posited producers cooperatives.

It might be seen as contradictory that a rampant misogynist[10] like Proudhon would have a strong effect on a women's revolutionary organisation, however quite a few Communards[11] cherry-picked the best of his ideas while turning away from his viciously anti-women obscenities. Despite this influence, Proudhon is mentioned only in passing in the book.

Ross also blurs the acute differences between Marx and Bakunin within the First International stating in an interview elsewhere[12] that *"If you broaden your focus a little beyond the tedious "political theory" discourse, you can see – especially in the people that I studied – a group of thinkers and militants who are slavishly beholden neither to Marx or to Bakunin, but who are busy performing a bricolage of anarchist and marxist ideas – a creative mixture that resonates very strongly with militant culture today"*.
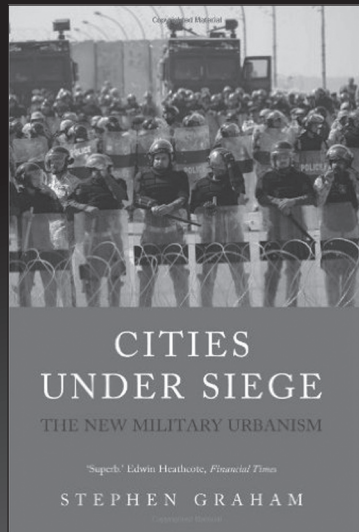
Whilst one of those thinkers she addresses – William Morris – might have attempted such a "bricolage", the others, Kropotkin and Reclus, were both pronounced anarchist communists with Kropotkin in particular being very hostile towards Marx.

It would be mean-spirited to deny that there is not much of worth in this book. Ross's exposition of the development of anarchist communism is worth reading as is much of the description of the positive aspects of the Commune. Too often, though, it felt as if Ross was pitching this book at the Occupy Movement and its supporters in the USA and elsewhere. Not a bad thing if it wins those over to a more radical and explicitly libertarian position. However, this too often gets in the way of a clear account of what were the best lessons from the Paris Commune of 1871.

## References:

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Lacan
[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornelius_Castoriadis
[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustave_Lefran%C3%A7ais
[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutionary_terror
[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Committee_of_Public_Safety
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[9] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre-Joseph_Proudhon
[10] https://afed.org.uk/revolutionary-women/14/
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# Book REVIEW

## Cities Under Siege
### The New Military Urbanism
# Stephen Graham

Verso
432 pages
paperback
£14.99

### At war with the city

Last summer, I attended the London Mela festival in Gunnersbury Park. It's the largest such festival in Europe, a celebration of culture from the Indian subcontinent. I was there with a group of friends, all in their 30s or older, a small child in a pushchair and a Chihuahua called Digby. We spent most of the afternoon sitting on the grass, and as it got later, I started to nod off, helped by the industrial quantities of the vegetarian curry I'd eaten.

Later, I was dimly aware of my friends saying "What's that?" "Is it a model aeroplane?" "No, can't be, it's hovering." I opened my eyes, and there it was in the sky above us. A drone. Was it a police drone, or private security maybe worried about Digby turning into a snarling mass of fangs and fur? I don't know. The odd thing is that I didn't think much about it at the time – in fact, I forgot all about it until I read Stephen Graham's Cities under siege, which aims to plot:

*"the startling militarisation of civil society – the extension of military ideas of tracking, identification and targeting… into everyday life (p. xi)"*

Graham identifies a number of processes, trends and interest groups which have led to the rise of what he calls a new military urbanism, which:

*"renders cities' communal and private spaces, as well as their infrastructure – along with their civilian populations – a source of targets and threats (p. xiii)"*

These processes play themselves out in a number of registers, creating an atmosphere of perpetual war (war on terror, war on drugs, war on crime, even the war on poverty). By framing debate in terms of war, the door is opened for either a full military response, or a response which uses military techniques, tactics and language – all in the name of security.

The early skirmishes in the Tories' internal war over the EU referendum (see, I'm doing it myself now!) have been fought over security. David Cameron did his best to look solemn standing outside 10 Downing Street when he told us, *"Leaving the European Union would threaten our economic and national security."* In a short statement, he managed to use the word 'security' four times and 'safe' or 'safer' five times.

The new military urbanism has real-world consequences outside spats over Europe, however. In his book, Graham writes about the attempts to make the fantasy world of Minority Report a reality, with pre-emptive surveillance identifying dangerous citizens before they have the chance to commit crime. It's a short step from dystopian fiction to government policy, and in this context it's not surprising that the government calls its flagship anti-terrorism policy 'Prevent.'

Before moving on to explore some of the key ideas in Cities under siege, a word of thanks to the author. I dropped him an email out of courtesy to let him know I was planning on writing a review, and he sent me a load of other articles and resources which this article will barely touch on.

### Urbanising security

Military strategists talk more and more about 'asymmetric' or 'irregular' warfare. Since 9/11 (or the fall of the Berlin Wall, or the war in Afghanistan, or whatever), they tell us, we are no longer fighting the kind of wars that involve tank battles and big military set pieces. What they really mean by irregular warfare is war on civilians.

This war brings military techniques of tracking, surveillance and 'target interception' (for which read 'arrest', 'detention', or worse) to bear not only in Baghdad and Helmand, but also in London and Birmingham. It also involves a complete re-imagining of what a city is.

When something like the city as we know it emerged during the late Middle Ages, it was seen – and built – as a place safe from the ravages beyond the city gates. The people who lived in cities were known as citizens, and during the Renaissance people transitioned from being subjects of a king or queen to being citizens of a city and later to a nation. Although the idea of citizenship hid – and continues to hide – massive inequalities in power and status, there was at least the idea that everyone living in a city was on the same footing.

What the idea of a universal citizenship also hides is that the city as a site of resistance is as old as the city itself. As Eric Hazan points out in his fascinating short book 'A history of

the barricade' (Verso 2015), the first barricades in the streets of Paris were built in 1588 and had become an explicit tool of working class resistance by the 1830s. It is important to keep in mind, then, that all attempts to imagine the city as a peaceful and unified whole are precisely that – imaginary.

Indeed, the new military urbanism does away with this quaint idea of citizenship altogether. Rather than placing danger outside the city gates, the city itself becomes a site of risk and threat. Citizenship ceases to be a universal shared by all inhabitants – instead, deviant populations are profiled and targeted, offenders detained before they offend. The distinction between inside and outside the city collapses, as national borders are brought into play in the heart of the city – see for instance the recent increase in multi-agency immigration raids, where local authorities, the police, the Home Office and sometimes even the gas board act in concert against migrants.

The technological war waged on civilians is often justified on the grounds that 'they' (the enemy within) use technology too. Remember when the State wanted to ban Blackberry Messenger in the aftermath of the 2011 riots? Or Theresa May's more recent plans to ban private messenger tools like WhatsApp? Even the simple act of wishing to communicate with your friends without the State being able to keep an eye on what you're up to is seen as a threat to national security.

As borders are brought into play in the heart of the city, there is a parallel attempt to extend State power beyond national boundaries. For example, Graham tells us that the New York Police Department has ten overseas bases. This trend is also visible in the growing number of states that are offshoring their refugee camps – whether it's Calais, Papua New Guinea or Greece.

## Bringing it all back home

A second trend identified in Cities under siege is how the techniques and language of colonialism are increasingly deployed 'at home.' This provides an interesting context for Boris Johnson's beloved water cannon, never used on the UK mainland, but a common feature of 'crowd control' in the north of Ireland.

The kinds of techniques and technologies first tested out in colonial and foreign wars include drones, 'shoot-to-kill' policies (or 'extra-judicial executions', as they're also known). There are also more subtle measures such as 'security zones' in financial districts like Wall Street and Canary Wharf, and secure enclaves for privileged populations in gated communities – with equally secure enclaves for deviant populations, in detention camps.

In order to justify these techniques, the city is re-imagined as a site of subversion, as something that is 'foreign'. My dad hasn't visited London since the 1970s, and all he knows about it – other than conversations with me – comes from The Sun and the Daily Mail. And he thinks there's a mosque on every corner, and a Sharia court in every borough. The key message is, 'they're not like us,' with certain districts – even whole cities – dismissed as backward or 'other.' In the words of the film, "Forget about it, Jake. It's Chinatown."

Migration itself is turned into a weapon – a weapon which justifies military measures in response. Migrants are criminalised and dehumanised as weapons against an imaginary unified national power. Groups like Britain First

and their 'patrols' in what they see as 'Muslim areas' seek to portray a British national identity that is already under threat from alien hordes. It is the ideology of the new military urbanism that help create and keep topped up the ideological waters in which Britain First can swim.

In such a hostile environment, it is unsurprising that:

*"new doctrines of perpetual war are being used to treat all urban residents as perpetual targets whose benign nature, rather than being assumed, now needs to be demonstrated… [people are forced] to prove their legitimacy if they want to move freely" (p xxi).*

So for example, the police are an increasingly common sight at London bus-stops. In a sort of super-charged ticket inspection, anyone without a valid Oyster card[1] is checked for outstanding warrants and immigration status (if they look or sound 'foreign').

## Surveillant economy & the citizen soldier

One of the strengths of Stephen Graham's book is that it does not view the incursion of military technologies into urban space as something that 'just happens.' Instead, he shows in detail the emergence of a powerful lobby group of arms companies, keen to push their vision of a city under siege and sell their technological solutions.

US defence corporation Raytheon is one of them. As well as making Tomahawk cruise missiles, they have developed the UK's 'smart border' initiative, which uses fifty-three pieces of data to identify 'risky' passengers:

*"Was the ticket paid in cash? What is the past pattern of travel? Is the individual a frequent flyer? Which in-flight meal was ordered? [This shapes] the treatment of the passenger as he or she attempts to board the plane".* (p 172)

Likewise, if you filled in the last UK census (or if someone added your details to a census form), your data was processed by Lockheed Martin, who do number-crunching as well as making military satellites and assault helicopters.
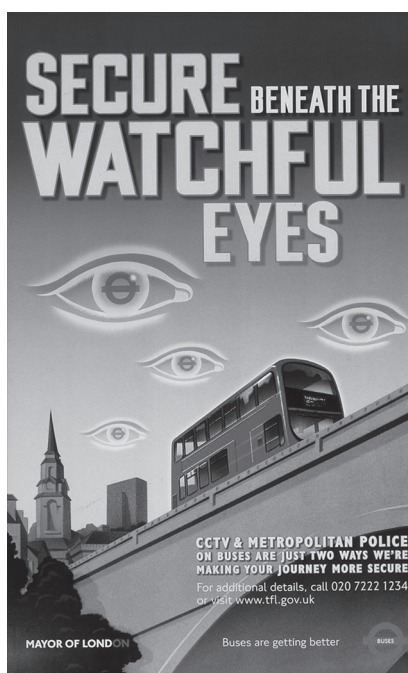
That weapons are big business is hardly news – that weapons manufacturers are pushing their products and tactics into the city is a key element of the new military urbanism. One of the key ways this is done is through the militarisation of popular, urban, electronic and national culture.

Opponents of war and militarism have long been opposed to so-called 'war toys' – toy guns, Action Man figures, and the like. The new military urbanism takes war toys up a notch, even blurring the distinction between real and imagined warfare. For example, the latest Predator unmanned aircraft (made by our chums Raytheon) are controlled in the same way as many computer games. They're quite open about this – the designer argued that:

*"The current generation of pilots was raised on the PlayStation, so we created an interface that they will immediately understand."* (p. 215)

So much easier to kill the people you see on the screen in front of you if the 'look and feel' is the same as your favourite computer game – which, incidentally, the US military and arms manufacturers are involved in the design of, as players in the new military urbanism feed off and reinforce each other.

If computer games aren't your thing, the new military urbanists are all over cars too. The sports utility vehicle (SUV), increasingly popular since the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks on New York and London is a quasi-military capsule for the post-citizen in peril. Because, of course, if the car you're driving looks like a tank, then the place you're driving through must be a warzone, right?

## Urban infrastructure, urban war

The final aspect of the new military urbanism emphasises that the city is at once complex and fragile:



*"The very nature of the modern city – its reliance on dense webs of infrastructure, its density and anonymity, its dependence on imported water, food and energy – create the possibility of violence against it, and through it… [it] is increasingly conceived of as the primary means of waging war by both state and non-state fighters alike."* (p. xxiv)

We have already seen how terrorist threats – real or imaginary – are deployed against civilians and used as a reason for stepping up surveillance and repression. However, the military is also engaged in another war against cities worldwide, summed up in the horrific Vietnam War-era cliché of 'bombing them back to the Stone Age.' This tactic played itself out in the former Yugoslavia ("You want 1950? We can do 1950. You want 1389? We can do that too!"[2]), and more recently with Donald Rumsfeld's 'joke,' "We're not running out of targets, Afghanistan is."[3]

To not only destroy a city but to bomb it into the past links with other aspects of the new military urbanism. In a piece of sick irony, people fleeing from places bombed into the past by Western powers are portrayed – along with their culture – as being backward, different, not as 'developed' as we are. And if you want evidence that 'they' are not like 'us,' well, just look at how they live – in the bombsites and slums created by the Western military and global capital.

## Resisting the new military urbanism

So far, so bleak. Rather than just give an analysis, Graham does at least have some ideas and examples for resistance – these he broadly terms 'countergeographies.' These countergeographies are often playful, parodic or satirical, serving to make the aims and tactics of the new military urbanism visible.

An example of this subversion of advertising can be seen in the billboard pictured left, which makes visible the reality of the Metropolitan Police's commitment to 'total policing'. Although Transport for London's 'secure beneath the watchful eyes' campaign of 2002 (pictured previous page) shows that the line between reality and satire can become blurred.

Another countergeography touched on by Graham is the creation of new public domains. This can be something flashy and hi-tech, like using new media to make global links with people who the new military urbanists. However, let's not forget the old-school public domains and sites of resistance that Eric Hazan writes about, because maybe they're not so different:

*[If] we accept that the barricade functioned above all as an obstruction to the forces of repression, we can still find modern equivalents – where such an obstruction affects no longer streets but instead road and rail communications, the flows of energy and informaton. Future insurrections will rediscover, without knowing it without saying it, and without paving stones, the way of acting by stifling the power of the State that made the good old barricade so effective.*[4]

## Notes:

[1] London buses are cashless now, so everyone needs a pre-paid card.
[2] Thomas Friedman, writing in the *New York Times*, 23 April 1999
[3] Donald Rumsfeld, 22 March 2004
[4] Eric Hazan *op cit*, p 126

# AF PUBLICATIONS

## OUT NOW

**BASIC BAKUNIN**
"We are convinced that freedom without Socialism is privilege and injustice, and that Socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality." This pamphlet will examine the anarchist ideas of Mikhail Bakunin. These ideas were a huge influence upon the 19th century socialist movement. We hope that it will become apparent that Bakunin has a lot to offer us today, that his ideas make up a coherent and well-argued body of thought, and show that there is good reason for him to be described as the grandfather of modern anarchism.
**A5 - £2** (+p&p)

**REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN**
The compatibility of anarchism and women's liberation is clear: opposition to all hierarchy is a requirement of any movement demanding emancipation and equality. Despite this, everywhere that women joined the early anarchist movement they were forced to fight against the prejudices of their male comrades. Not only did they fight, they prevailed, becoming the spearhead of many revolutionary situations. This pamphlet provides a biographical account of some lesser-known revolutionary women of the past.
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The Anarchist Federation 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. This abridged version of our key pamphlet sets out to introduce what all this means and how we think we can do it.
**A6 - Free / Donation** (+p&p)
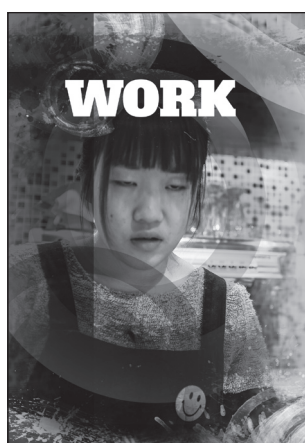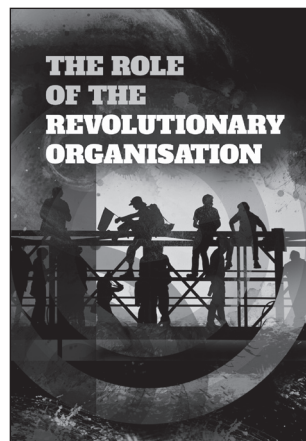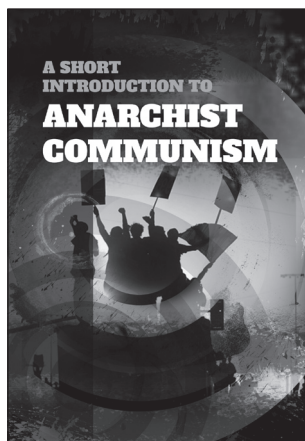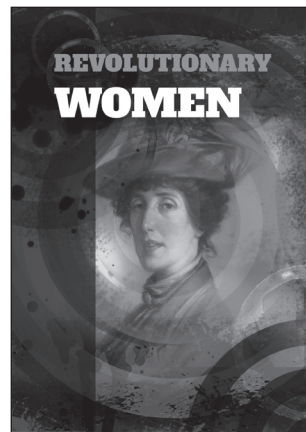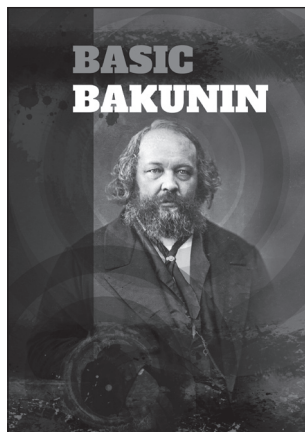
**THE ROLE OF REVOLUTIONARY ORGANISATION**
We in the Anarchist Federation seek the abolition of capitalism and state in favour of bringing about a society based on the guiding principle 'From each according to their ability, to each according to their need.' This is anarchist communism. In order to achieve this we need a revolutionary organisation to undertake a certain role as part of the working class. This pamphlet will explain why.
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**WORK**
We live in a society where the activities we engage in for most of our life are not based on being useful to society or fulfilling to ourselves, but are based upon getting money to have our needs met. Our work is the driving force behind capitalism. The activities we're required to perform are either detrimental to society or have their full worth undermined by the drive for profits. This pamphlet will explain why we must abolish work.
**A6 - £1** (+p&p)

**BASIC BAKUNIN**

**REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN**

**A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO ANARCHIST COMMUNISM**

**THE ROLE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY ORGANISATION**

**WORK**

## FORTHCOMING

RESISTANCE TO NAZISM

INTRODUCTION TO ANARCHIST COMMUNISM

AGAINST NATIONALISM

ECOLOGY & CLASS

# THE AIMS & PRINCIPLES

## of the ANARCHIST FEDERATION

**1** The Anarchist Federation 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. This divides us, causing a lack of class unity in struggle that benefits 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 the 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 or a supernatural or divine force. We work towards a world where religion holds no attraction.