Pause for Breath

Reflections from the anarchist movement

From the Editors

Whilst it always seems that the most important thing for an anarchist to be doing is preparing for the next action, we think that time and space for continual reflection and evaluation is essential for us to be effective. If we want the anarchist movement to grow and become stronger, rather than become obsolete through a lack of innovation, we need to reflect on our strengths and weaknesses, to criticise theory and tactics that we see problems with, and to spread new ideas and information. We hope, through this collection of articles, to present a picture of the current state of anarchism in Britain, through the honest reflection of anarchists from a wide range of different places and struggles.

Dave Morris kicks off with a roundup of the successes of anarchist-led and -inspired movements over the past 20-30 years, and what we can learn from them. Milan Rai challenges the "self-destructive" elements in the anarchist movement, and presents accountable direct action as a threat to the state. In 'Anarchafeminisms are everywhere', Annarchy discusses anarchisms and feminisms and calls for increased dialogue between the two areas. The uneasy life of an anarchist in academia is detailed by Mad Owl, who finds a niche there, for now. The burgeoning green anarchist movement is discussed by Jane Fairweather who notes difficulties in using the term anarchist, and by Matt Clowes, who envisions an important alliance between eco-activists and the animal rights movement. In 'Against State Control' Number 6 describes the movement against ID cards as a natural area for anarchist action - but also one that needs more anarchist support. In the case studies of a squatted community garden in Reading, and the successful Haringey Solidarity Group, the possibility of anarchist ideals becoming reality are evaluated. Finally, Michael Schmidt of the South African anarchist organisation Zabalaza contrasts the political situation in the global North to that in Africa, and promotes the idea of formal anarchist organisation.

We have tried to be representative of anarchists but the multitude of different anarchist voices as well as our financial restrictions and lack of contacts means that many important anarchist perspectives are not included. Two notable omissions are the anarcho-syndicalist and anarcho-primitivist perspectives. Although not initially intended as such, it has become clear that 'A Pause for Breath' is an ongoing project of trying to capture the thoughts and reflections of anarchists. Hence we welcome submissions of contributions to future issues be it articles, responses or letters.

We can be contacted at apauseforbreath@riseup.net and to keep up to date with developments or leave comments visit apauseforbreath.blogspot.com.

Andy & Dan

Some thoughts
on the strength, influence
and potential of the anarchist movement
in the last 20 - 30yrs

Anarchist ideas are the only effective and coherent ideas which point the way to ending oppression and injustice, and to creating a free society for the benefit of everyone. Yet despite the lessons of history and the cynicism of those trying to control and manipulate society for their own ends, people continue to flood into shitty political parties, polling booths, religious sects, drugs and escapism, the lottery etc etc.

This is a paradox that we seem to be able to do little about, at least in the short term, whatever we do - so let's not give ourselves a hard time... We can only do our best and hope that our time will come, and soon - before the whole fucking planet goes to pot.

So, what are the strengths and weaknesses of anarchist activities in recent times?

The anarchist movement includes formal and specific anarchist organisations, the diverse activities of dozens of local groups, and broader anarchist-influenced groups, networks and movements. Key questions we all have to face include:

what can we do on a daily basis where we live and work?
how can we contribute effectively within various movements and struggles?
how can anarchist ideas grow beyond ideological or cultural ghettos into having the influence and effect on our society they deserve?

There is, or should be, continuous interaction and overlap between the specific anarchist organisations/activity and the much larger, wider struggles and movements - with each influencing the other. Just as anarchists work for such movements to move in an anarchist/self-organisation/class-conscious/wider-issues/militant/direct-action direction, so we need to work to enable all anarchist groups to transform themselves into being much more accessible and relevant to the wider tens of thousands of dissidents and activists who can't relate to / avoid / are unaware / or are unimpressed with specific anarchist organisations - or who just get swept up into political parties or single-issue reformism as an end in itself, or just the only show in town.

There's been a very rich history of significant anarchist activity in recent decades. The following is a crude list of some of the most significant anarchist-influenced activities (which many anarchists and local anarchist groups supported or took part in). Some of the activities and movements, at least in part, consciously adopted many anarchist ideas - and in turn also helped influence and strengthen the anarchist movement.

Some current and recent Anarchist organisation and activity (in no particular order):

- the wide range of activities of local anarchist groups including involvement in campaigns, local newsletters (eg. Hastings Poison Pen came out weekly for 5 years in the 1970s, the excellent papers produced in Bristol over decades etc etc), regular leafletting, interaction with grass-roots community groups and workplace struggles etc...
- local anarchist/radical bookshops and social centres
- 'national' anarchist organisations and papers
- the annual Anarchist Bookfairs (including regional ones)
- SchNews, Peace News, CounterInformation and other radical papers around which wider networks developed

Some recent anarchist-influenced 'grass-roots' struggles and movements (in no particular order):

- radical environmental movement, including 1970s anti-nuclear energy movement, Earth First!, anti-road-building struggles
- anti-militarist movements and campaigns (especially the anti-cruise blockades and camps), including the influence of Peace News
- Reclaim The Streets...and anti-capitalist mobilisations (and the early 1980s 'Stop The City' actions)... Maydays... Critical Mass cyclerides
- squatting
- punk movement, and then the free raves/parties movement
- anti-fascist activities
- anti-corporation campaigns (e.g. anti-McDonald's/McLibel)
- civil rights / defence campaigns

- freedom to protest struggles... the Legal Defence and Monitoring Group
- women's liberation movement
- Claimants Union movement (early 60s - 90s)... unwaged and unemployed groups (80s - early 90s)
- animal liberation movement
- local community action (libertarian-influenced grass roots groups and campaigns)
- workplace self-organisation of various kinds (eg rank and file building worker, couriers union etc)... community solidarity groups during strikes etc... Miners Strike and Dockers support work... Picket bulletin (Wapping)... the London Workers Group (1975 - 83), IWW
- coherent libertarian/radical cultural and lifestyle projects and movement (music, theatre, etc)
- conscious co-operative movement (mainly in housing, cafes) ...the Radical Routes network
- the Free Schools in the 1960s... libertarian education initiatives and children-centred activities since then... WEA and U3A?
- consciously alternative/radical media projects (eg radical documentary groups), the indymedia network
- anti-poll tax movement
- right to roam, and 'land is ours' movements
- LETS schemes
- rural libertarian intiatives, including mutual aid.... back-to-the-land / self-sufficiency / grow and make-your-own networks
- international solidarity campaigns, and 'no borders' groups
- prisoner support groups
- disability civil rights movements
- free self-organised and /or green festivals
- new traveller movements

Of course, each of these movements may have different, even contradictory tendencies and limitations, but they also have strengths and a great deal of potential. Most importantly, millions of people have taken part in such activities and we need to analyse and learn from their experiences to see how the anarchist movement can become the 'idea and movement of choice' for everyone who wants to oppose any aspect of our oppressive global system or create a better society. In my opinion the priority should be to build up strong community-based pro-working class local anti-authoritarian organizations in every town and borough, as well as help create strong grass-roots community groups in every neighbourhood.

At the end of the day, society seems to be dominated by its own internal forces. Sheer will power and doing the right thing often can only make small ripples in a massive pond. But forces shift, major movements can emerge, and real change can happen fast. Then revolution and social transformation become possible. But anarchist ideas will need to be prevalent to ensure a genuinely free and sensible society is created. Let us all celebrate our activities and efforts, and our history, and continue to do our best.

In solidarity, Dave Morris - involved with Haringey Solidarity Group
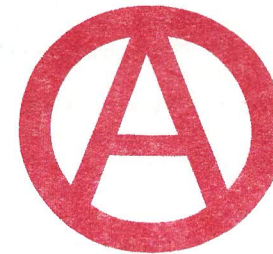
Anarchafeminisms are Everywhere

Over the last ten years a dynamic range of thought, action, work and play has gone on combining anarchist and feminist practices in imaginative and inspirational ways. In addition, feminist and anarchist practices have merged with a range of other issues and movements, directly shaping radical politics.

The WTO, FTAA and G8 summit protests were all home to anarchafeminist contingents. Childcare crèches, communal cooking, consensus decision-making and well-being spaces are now commonplace at meetings, actions and events. Feminist politics are present in queer anarchist spaces, from workshops at annual *Queeruptions* to *Queers Against Borders* to weekly gigs and events. At the same time, issues of sexism, sexual violence and aggression have been confronted by many men within anarchist spaces and movements. Queer People of Colour and Women of Colour collectives continue to create autonomous projects, while generating analyses and actions that influence and shape meetings and movements. Feminist and anarchist dis/ability activists challenge

dominant ways of thinking about 'ability' in their fight for accessible spaces both within radical political communities and against the State. Mental health, alternative medicine, herbal gynecology and menstrual politics form an integral part of movement communities, as skill-shares and support networks grow. While anarchist ecology movements engage alternative technological practices, from building wind turbines to guerrilla gardening, that incorporate ecofeminist thought.

Yet, while anarchafeminsms 'may be everywhere,' they are not usually talked about directly, or as a distinct politics. While some people reject political labels all together, it is far more common to hear someone call themselves an 'anarchist' or a 'feminist' than for someone to say they're an 'anarchafeminst'. This is often even the case for people who are committed to both anarchism and feminism. For various reasons, links between these two politics often remain what the Dark Star collective called "Quiet Rumours."

There are a few groups around the UK that outrightly position themselves as anarchafeminist, such

as Dublin-based the RAG (Revolutionary Anarchafeminist Group), the Brighton Women's Health Collective (whose email list and website are still called anarchofeminist health) and WANC (Women's Anarchist Nuisance Café) in London. Recent anarchafeminist perspectives can also be found in zines, journals and websites including *Do or Die!*, *Green Anarchy, the F-word* and *Indymedia.* However, as these groups and this writing—often by its nature--is ephemeral, localized and scattered around, it isn't always easy to find.

A few years ago, *Quiet Rumours* (AK Press 2002) re-released an excellent collection of early and second-wave anarchafeminist writing from Emma Goldman, Peggy Kronneger and Carol Ehrlich, along with a few recent texts from Alice Nutter of Class War and Mujeres Creando. Many of these texts, especially those by feminist writers from the 1970s, acknowledged the ways in which it can be difficult for both feminists and anarchists to see how their practices have been—and continue to be--shaped by each other.

Feminism can be particularly alienating to anarchists' if they are unfamiliar with its radical roots and activist practices. This is largely because the feminisms we most often see have been coopted by capitalism and ridiculed by popular culture. Some anarchist practices

and politics do share obvious connections to feminism. Most anarchists recognize gender, sexuality (and less often race, class and ability) as inherent concerns of feminist practice. But feminism is not just 'about women'. Grassroots feminisms of the 1970s and 1980s brought creativity and collective decision-making to the fore, influencing current direct action and diversity of tactics approaches to anarchist activism. Ecofeminist thought and practice shapes current anarchist ideas about technology. Black and third world feminisms provide much of the backbone of anarchists' solidarity work, no borders activism, prison support and campaigns against poverty. While queer feminisms, in addition to cultivating anarchists' genderqueer and transpolitics, offer ways to re-imagine borders, identities, relationships and notions of family and home that are at the heart of anti-authoritarian practice.

Likewise, many feminists know very little about anarchist politics— even though they may engage in anarchist practices such as collective decision making and autonomous organizing. As Carol Ehrlich wrote back in 1977, most feminists are unfamiliar with anarchism as "anarchism has veered between bad press and none at all." This remains true today. Yet just as feminism is linked to anarchism, anarchism has a lot in common with feminism. Both offer direct critiques of capitalism, state control,

domination, property, authority and imperialism. In terms of practice, there are also a number of overlaps. Anarchists' ecological practices, along with their focus on autonomy within community and their desire to cultivate nonhierarchical relationships, resonate with feminist politics.

Of course, the point of bringing together anarchisms and feminisms shouldn't only be to celebrate their connections. Differences in anarchist and feminist practices and perspectives often led to debate. Contradictions, conflicts and tensions between them give rise to the 'differences that matter,' as well as to the dreams, ideals and visions that shape radical politics. As feminists and anarchists have long argued, both asking difficult questions and making political links lie at the heart of radical politics. It is only through confronting

differences that conflict can become a productive site for transformation.

So if 'anarchafeminisms are everywhere,' or at least, 'politics combining elements of anarchism and feminism are everywhere,' it seems a good time to ask more questions about these connections, overlaps and conflicts. There are a lot of anarchafeministy folks out there saying—and doing-- inspirational and informative stuff. It is in the spirit of their work that I put together this directory and this call out for a new collection on anarchafeminsims.

Let's amplify these whispered legacies, take the rumours out of the closet, and bring our current anarchist and feminist activisms into dialogue with each other.

annarchist

Anarchism in Universities

At its most self-indulgent, academia views itself as the pursuit of knowledge. In practice, such pursuit is hedged in by official bureaucracies, networks of influence and patronage, neoliberal funding pressures, and the burdens of workload and performance pressure. But even knowledge has two sides. It can mean the extension of maps and grids which contain and control a space, the reinscription of the unknown into the field of the known. It can also mean a relationship with exteriority, a voyage into the unknown, the construction of new languages and ways of thinking. Deleuze and Guattari have christened the former as royal and the latter as nomad thought, and trace their impacts

in different contexts. Both exist within academia, but royal thought predominates. Activist thought is necessarily nomadic, expressing the exterior which royal thought subsumes or denies. Activist knowledge is constructed, by and large, outside universities, in the everyday life of activist movements and by activists who write down their thoughts and become the "theorists" of the movement (people like Starhawk, Alfredo Bonanno, Hakim Bey). But there is also nomadic thought within universities, and a surprising number of anarchist theorists - such as John Zerzan, John Moore, Colin Ward and Murray Bookchin - have emerged from the university system without

losing their (perceived) relevance for (some) activists.

It is the relationship between interiority and exteriority which defines "anarchic" trends in academia. Whereas royal, "mainstream", or "problem-solving" approaches seek to paper over the cracks of the system and solve its problems by putting difference and problems under the microscope, nomad, "critical" or "radical" theory reaches out into exteriority, becoming something which escapes, to a degree at least, the grasp of the imperative to encode on behalf of the system. Royal science reinteriorises the outside; academics continually speak only to themselves, and speak of an outside - their own and the state's - in order to master it (witness the parochially academic attempts to reinterpret anti-capitalism as a liberal demand-politics, a new populism, a proto-Marxist movement). The royal academic seeks to contribute to the system's policies and responses, to make it work better, or to contribute to an abstract Truth which is a name of the state. But the nomad knowledges constructed on the critical wing of academia can sometimes be appropriated to sustain or expand movements of resistance.

The paradox of academia is that while there are many nomad thoughts, many critical tendencies fleeing to various degrees the grip of systematised knowledge, there are precious few anarchists. Critical academic work has an extensive spread. Some of the tighter-organised disciplines

(psychology and economics for instance) have pushed critical perspectives out almost entirely. (Critical economists and psychologists, usually identified with IPE and psychoanalysis respectively, can be found scattered through departments of politics, cultural studies, sociology and so on). More often, such perspectives are tolerated as alternatives, as a necessary part of a healthy intellectual exchange - and often as the disavowed lifeblood which secretly drives innovation in the entire discipline. So one has critical social policy studies, critical or human security, peace (as opposed to war) studies, critical geography, critical international relations and so on. Within each subject or "discipline", it is usually easy for an anarchist to pick out the interesting approaches from the defence-mechanisms of the system, nearly always leading into the marginal and peripheral theories beyond the mainstream.

But even on the periphery there are problems. Isolation, and functional similarity, should cause critical academics to band together. But academia is also a half-feudal, half-bureaucratic craft-economy in which competition for similar posts pits dog against dog. School formation thus flourishes, in which the closest allies band together against their nearest rivals differentiated from them in a "narcissism of minor differences", often constructed as patronage-networks of scholars whose reputation is built on their mutual citations. At worst, the result is akin to Trotskyite

sectoids - each school defends its orthodoxy, and uses whatever influence it has (in article refereeing, appointments, distribution of references and badges of prestige) to exclude or marginalise dissent.

Though varying between disciplines, dominant trends in critical academia are people importing French theory (usually rather badly), often attached to a cult of democracy, and hence reformist); people on the left wing of mainstream approaches such as analytical philosophy; Marxists (and ex-Marxists) of various kinds; and empirical scholars using ethnography, action research and suchlike. Some critical academics are also involved in solidarity activism in their particular area, in trade-union work, or in mobilising activist academics, but a surprising number seem to be critical on paper only, and otherwise don't lift a finger against the system, and many more are politically moderate, drawing from their theory a quasi-liberal outlook. Anarchists and quasi-anarchists tend to operate in one or another of these currents - hence there's anarchistic quasi-Marxists using varieties of autonomism, there's "philosophical anarchists" on the fringes of analytical theory, there's Foucauldian, Lacanian and Deleuzian quasi-anarchists in poststructuralism (some of these terming themselves "postanarchists").

Do academics bother to write about anarchism? A search of Zetoc, the academic search engine which archives journal articles from the

1990s and often earlier, reveals only eight articles on Max Stirner, seventeen on Situationism and 44 on Situationist (perhaps a dozen of which are about the SI as opposed to a separate trend in philosophy), and only one article on Hakim Bey. There are 144 hits for anarchism and 112 for anarchist, mostly on historical topics; "Luis Napoleon Morones and the Mexican Anarchist Movement, 1913-1920", "Esperanto and Chinese anarchism in the 1920s and 1930s" and "An Overview of Individualist Anarchism, 1881-1908" being typical examples. There's also a "Journal of Anarchist Studies" and an "Anarchist Studies Network", both kept alive by a small number of anarchist scholars. History (whether social, political or "of ideas") has always been especially receptive to the study of anarchism (with authors such as George Woodcock and Benedict Anderson keeping alive interest in historical anarchist movements), though this often leaves the misleading impression that anarchism died with Bakunin and is no longer relevant. Historian of ideas David Morland established the academic orthodoxy with his claim that anarchism relies on an essentialist, positive concept of human nature which allows it to deny the "need" for repressive control - a convenient repetition of the Hobbesian line and a misreading of the scholars Morland actually studied, let alone the broader field of anarchist theory. Two of the best-known recent works on "postanarchism" - Nicholas Thoburn's "Deleuze, Marx and Politics" and Saul Newman's "From

Bakunin to Lacan" – both reinforce this view, and treat anarchism as both ending with Kropotkin and outmoded today.

This trend has been partly offset by the impact of the anti-capitalist movement. Even as a royal science, academia is enlivened and given energy by its "outside"; the anomaly, the emergence of unexpected or inexplicable events, is what provides the drive for change, the dynamic of "originality" and "novelty" which acts like a magnet on academics seeking publications, following fashions or hunting evidence for "schools" debates. In the streets, anti-capitalist activists created such a rupture, and the academic shockwaves reverberated through academia, creating a tide of new publications on global resistance, modules and even courses on activism, and an opening for radical academics to put forward alternative agendas. Much of this new work is recuperative, or else fails even at the most basic level to listen to what activists have to say. But new wave of anarchist-inclined theorists, such as Richard Day, Lewis Call, Simon Tormey, and Graeme Chesters, have come to prominence during this period, and "horizontal", "chaotic", or "post-representational" politics – the academic names for the approach taken by activists interested in affinity, direct action and opposition to hierarchy – has belatedly entered academic discourse (about thirty years after it first appeared among activists, but better late than never!)

So what is it like being an anarchist academic? Academia is one of the few places where a self-proclaimed anarchist is still just about employable. It still has some of the inner structure of a craft guild, and the energies of someone committed to social change can be "productive" of an output and originality which helps attain recognition for the quality and quantity of research. On the other hand, neoliberal pressures are increasing. It is difficult to avoid being turned into a mini-bureaucrat, or drawn into the construction and enforcement of technocracy. An academic who treats students as human beings instead of statistics or pests is sadly a rare thing. One needs confidence to develop and deploy alternative, student-centred teaching methods; it is easy to slip into the mode of authority-figure through the trap of "playing a role". Self-defined activist research agendas lead to research which, while original, is sometimes not recognised by the mainstream. People often respond by chasing those fashions and funding opportunities which open a space for "misreading", for creatively reinterpreting a dominant discourse to alternative ends (which is how we are left with such conceptual monstrosities as "non-majoritarian democracy" and "post-state citizenship"). There are pressures to compromise and conform to seem more acceptable to one's "peers" (hence securing publications, jobs and funding). Dilemmas of how far to push things, pressures to fall into a camp or "school" for mutual protection (possibly diluting one's politics as a result), pressures to

prioritise the pressure of interiority, the constant exchanges between academics, over the force of exteriority which drives transformative engagement.

On top of all this, academic environments are becoming dangerously over-regulated. RFID-equipped student cards, card-access buildings and facilities, "gated" areas and buildings, CCTV cameras in "vulnerable" areas (even a few lecture halls), and the low-intensity goonery of a certain proportion of security staff are constant problems or threats. Tolerance is not what it once was; new "anti-terror" measures raise the spectre for each of us of being this generation's Antonio Negri or anarchism's Sami al-Arian. There have been witch-hunts in America lately against anarchist academics such as David Graeber and Ward Churchill; Italy still periodically locks up theorists; Germany bans "opponents of the constitution" from holding university posts. Being above-ground, with writings under one's name in publications anyone with a library card can see, creates a degree of vulnerability about writing really radical things – perhaps one reason for the political moderation of most critical academics. In this regard, an openly anarchist academic is vulnerable in ways that someone immersed in the counterculture is not.

But with this come privileges – an income in excess over most activists, and indeed workers; the ability to attend events like the WSF, on university money, with time off work; to get paid for hanging round interesting mobilisations under the pretext of research; public credibility which can be used to attract media interest or present an alternative viewpoint; resources such as printing, photocopying and library access which can be appropriated for activist ends; the opportunity to influence the (mostly) young people coming through the education system; time and money to pursue reading and writing to a breadth and depth which would be hard to combine with an ordinary job or with life off the grid.

There are ways to make the most of being an anarchist academic, without being recuperated. A few of us manage to remain active, while also keeping up writing, teaching and publishing. But the pressures to conform are strong, and the need to "play the game" to remain tolerated creates constant strategic dilemmas. Universities are not really anarchist-friendly environments. But in a hostile world, they are among the few niches available, where some anarchists can find a not-very-comfortable home.

by Mad Owl

Interview with Jane Fairweather

Interviewer Andrew Burrell

Firstly, would you call yourself an anarchist?

I definitely spend most of my time working within anarchist principles and I very much like anarchist principles but I've never really categorised myself as being an anarchist, probably other people would.

Why do you avoid the title?

I think its because I've not read a great deal about anarchism and anarchist theory so I'm a bit loathe to give myself a label that I don't necessarily wholly understand. But I do understand the basic principles and I do definitely adhere to them in how I work generally, so I probably am but I don't like to say "Yes I am an anarchist", without considering all of what it means.

Did the idea of anarchism encourage you to become active or did becoming active first introduce you to the idea of anarchism?

I think I came across people that were organising in anarchist ways and calling themselves 'anarchists' and got involved with them at the same time. I don't think I had a good understanding of what anarchism was before I started getting involved with anarchists.

So what led you to get involved with anarchists?

The turning point was when I moved into a Radical Routes[1] housing co-op in Manchester, I moved there because I liked communal living. I moved there with a friend who was a political activist and they were looking for more women so I moved in. At the time I had just left university and I was looking for what to do with my life. I had just started a PhD, was working in a hospital and looking for something where I would be doing good in the world. I was starting to feel frustrated with what I was doing as I had ended up in academia and was starting to feel that I wasn't actually doing anything constructive as lots of my work was based around statistics and I realised that it didn't really mean very much. The people that I lived with in the housing co-op had all been involved in the Anti-Roads movement in the 90's so I used to hear their stories and was really

---

1 A network of radical (mainly housing) co-ops. (radicalroutes.org.uk)

inspired by these people who were actually doing something; what they were doing was actually making a difference and they seemed to be having a whole lot more fun than I was as well! And so I gradually got bored, the 9 – 5 life of working just made no sense to me. It didn't make any sense to me in terms of my productivity, I spent most of my time clock-watching and wasting my time. So I broke free!

You said people label you as an Anarchist, do you think its a helpful label?

I think it is a helpful label because anarchism means working within various principles and those principles are very important to me, so in some ways its good to have a label for that. It obviously is also a label that is used a lot to the detriment of anarchists. When I say people would label me as an anarchist, I mean people who know what anarchism is rather than the person on the street that thinks of anarchists as people who blow stuff up and cause chaos and 'anarchy'.

There are lots and lots of different types of anarchys, people talk about anarcho-primitivism, anarchafeminism etc. Are there any types of anarchys that you might disassociate yourself from, or do you think they are all essentially the same thing?

I don't think that there are any that I particularly disassociate myself from, to be honest its possible that there might be but I think I probably don't know enough about them. I don't really know much about anarcho-communists and anarcho-syndicalists, I definitely don't associate myself with them but that's probably partly because I don't know what they are and also its not my movement, its not where I'm from.

Anarchism and radical environmentalism are often seen to go together, especially in Britain. Do you think one leads to the other and if so which way round do you think it normally happens?

There are long histories of anarchism in some countries; Spain is a good example and yet they are seemingly a lot less environmentally aware than the British anarchist scene is. I personally think that the anarchist ideals of equality and non-hierarchy naturally lead to the equality of species and concern for the earth. In that sense I think one leads to the other but in practice it probably just depends how movements form. I think if you look back in the history of British anarchism, it being associated with environmentalism is relatively

recent. My impression is that it really started with the Anti-Roads movement and that was really a coming together of different political and non-political scenes. That has left us with a deep rooted environmental concern in the anarchist movement in the UK. The Anti-Roads movement was such an explosion of activity that there are lots of anarchists who are still active today who were active at that time and are very influential in putting across green ideas to the rest of the anarchist movement. Before the Anti-Roads movement I don't know that there was much of an association with environmentalism.

There seems to be a new wave of eco-action with people getting involved in actions around the issue of climate change. Do you think that this is just a continuation of the Anti-Roads and Earth First! activities of the nineties or do you think it is something new?

I think it is probably a bit of both. Having been involved for a while I can see that there are certainly quite a few people that were involved in the Anti-Roads movement and are now involved in the fight against climate change and that obviously makes sense because if you are concerned about the environment you should be concerned about climate change. Also I think

climate change is such a big issue that it is bringing a lot of people out of the woodwork again, people who had maybe retired a little or were going off doing other things are now back saying "I have got to do this", equally it is drawing on huge numbers of people who have never been involved in anything like this before and with that they bring all a whole lot of new stuff to it as well. In particular the Climate Camp, which very obviously came out of the protests against the G8 in 2005 in Scotland and the success of the eco-village in Stirling which saw the coming together of lots of radical people in one space and creating a bit of the alternative that we would like to see in terms of sustainable living and acting together to take action against, in that instance, the G8.

The interesting thing about the Climate Camp has been the maturing of the movement in terms of its practical organisation. The Climate Camp, this year particularly, was very impressive in terms of the way it dealt with the media, the practicalities of living on site, the fact that there were sorted showers, power and toilets, but also the participatory democracy side of things. I wasn't involved in the Anti-Roads movement so I can only guess, but I imagine that deciding things by consensus was important then, and trying to come to a consensus with a thousand people and managing it in a fair way where everybody can have their say is really very impressive and in that sense it is something completely new and does in some way offer what some anarchists and radical environmentalists get accused of not providing, namely alternatives rather than just saying "No this is bad!". So in some way the Climate Camp was an example of how things could be done differently both in the practicalities of life and also how democracy can be different.

I wanted to talk a bit about the Climate Camp because, like you said it came out of the G8 which was a major event in many anarchist's diaries and now the Climate Camp seems to be a big event and gathering point for anarchists. Do you think that the with the Climate Camp and the general rise in environmental issues there is any danger of losing sight of other political goals?

Yeah I think it is definitely a concern, I have certainly heard people say, about this years Climate Camp, that you could go there having sympathy with green issues but not ever really get your politics challenged or feel enlightened about anarchist ways of organising. I know that lots of people have criticised it for that. One of the strengths of the Climate Camp is that it is organised along anarchist principles with the neighbourhood system and the really good attempt at trying to have a real democracy. So even if it is not spelt out that this is anarchism, everybody who is there experiences it and in that way it must challenge the way that they normally do things. In the fight against climate change you are looking to try and get everybody on your side and its often easier to do that if you are not pressing other issues down people's throats. I think there were a lot of people who went to the Climate Camp and who didn't realise that it was essentially

organised by anarchists with anarchist aims and methods. The urgency of the climate change issue might mean that other stuff gets clouded over.

Many of the demands that radical greens were making 5 or 10 years ago seem to have been slowly picked up by mainstream society, such sourcing food locally, reducing energy consumption etc Do you think this makes the radical green movement more or less relevant? And do you think its a question of saying "More of the same", or should there be a shift in emphasis?

I think that although its true that certain sections of society have taken up green issues, like middle class lefties, I don't think it has been well taken up by mainstream society though, otherwise we probably would be in much less of a mess than we are now. We are nowhere near what we need to be in terms of our environmental standards. I guess its the idea that there is a bell-curve of humanity with most people being right in the middle with extremists on either sides, and there is, unfortunately, still a role for environmental extremists to really shout about what needs to be done to try and move the rest of society a little bit further along that spectrum. When I think about all the things that I could be doing with my life such as

being a conservationist or a teacher, which are both very valuable, I think that at the end of the day there are very few people who are pushing the radical agenda which as far as I can see is where we need to be. There are so few people doing it, that if I am prepared to stick my neck out and take direct action and break the law then I should do it. Unless there are radical people out there then the rest of society doesn't shift.

So do you think in terms of being a radical voice, is it something that people need to take on board that their radicalism means that they are just trying to shift society a little bit as opposed to getting it to where they want it to be?

I think your aim should always be a revolution, particularly if we are thinking about climate change where the only thing that is going to have an effect is massive social change, massive change of our lifestyle. The only way that that is going to happen is by people pushing a radical agenda, if that doesn't happen then generally a welcome side effect is the shifting a bit towards you, which obviously isn't enough but at least its something. I don't think that as a person that has beliefs that are radically different to the government you should be satisfied with just moving society a little to the left or green agenda. We should be striving for the

revolution.

With people beginning to realise the importance of the issue of climate change how do you think the radical green movement can guard against environmentalism being used to increase social control and the mandate of the state, what some refer to as eco-fascism?

I think it is really important that we don't forget the principles that we work along, that we don't compromise them and that we aren't afraid to say where we lie politically. Its really important that there are groups such as Defy-ID and active anti-fascist groups that are specifically organising against social control measures and also that we, as well as pushing our environmental side, are honest about our anarchism that lies behind it.

Using national issue specific networks seem so to be the most common form of organising for anarchists in Britain at the moment. I know you were involved in organising with Dissent! for the anti-G8 protests which was a clear example of this, why do you think this form of organising is so popular at the moment?

Firstly, Dissent! wasn't supposed to be issue specific, it was always intended to go beyond that in

terms of a network. It was supposed to be a general anti-capitalist network that would continue beyond the G8. In some ways it visually disintegrated, I think there were a couple of Dissent! gatherings afterwards. Particularly mobilising around the subsequent G8. So it did end up being issue specific even though it wasn't intend to be. The climate camp again was never organised with the idea that it would be the be all and end all of climate change action in the UK rather the idea was that it would stimulate the growth of a movement around climate change that would then go on to combat the causes of climate change rather than just organising a camp once a year. I think its really difficult to get people to come together and put time and energy into something if there is not an obvious goal and having an obvious goal like the Climate Camp or G8 means that people are prepared to put their time and energy into something which isn't always the case with a non-specific anti-capitalist or anarchist network. With the Dissent network people were saying that it was such a disaster that we had this fantastic protest and now it has just dissolved into nothing but I always thought "Well no it hasn't dissolved into nothing there was loads of stuff that has come out of it". The climate camp came out of it and I'm sure there are lots of other

things as well and although it wasn't called Dissent! the networks that were created with people meeting and working together were carried on.

What are the main strengths and weaknesses of these networks?

One of the strengths of using national networks is that ideally anybody can hear about it and find a local group to get involved in. Another strength when you are organising on that scale is that you can achieve amazing things. The power of lots of people coming together and doing something together and putting their energy into something means you can end up with amazing results. A definite weakness is that it is really hard work organising on a national scale, the meetings can be really hard work and can be really tedious so you often end up with the movement being headed by people that like meetings, which doesn't encompass everybody.

So do you think there is a need for more formal organisation in terms of anarchists and anarchism, like a public face of anarchism?

Certainly with the anarchist stuff that I'm involved in people are afraid to use the term 'anarchism' or use anarchy symbols because of the bad press that the word has and in some ways that's to

our detriment because that leaves unanswered questions such as "What are you?", "Who are you?" and "What do you stand for?". There are national anarchist bodies but then again they might be too dry or intellectual, so people wouldn't want to join. I'm constantly talking about the Climate Camp... even though it organises along the principles of anarchism I don't think it mentions anarchy on its website and I think there would be a difficulty if the climate camp wanted to declare itself as 'anarchist' because a lot of people now involved aren't anarchists and probably wouldn't agree and feel that it wasn't where they wanted it to go. The Sumac Centre[2] is another example of something that is very much an anarchist organisation, it's organised very much along the principles of non-hierarchy, but its long had a veto on using anarchy symbols too obviously or too much red or green and black because it didn't want to be in a sub-culture but wanted to try and be acceptable to other parts of society. Then again that is to its detriment in lots of ways as it seems as though it isn't proud of its politics and where it comes from. It would be nice to reclaim the word 'anarchism' and I like the idea of a broad anarchist network or something where lots of the different groups that I am

2   A social centre in Nottingham. (veggies.org.uk/sumac/)

involved in said "Yes we are an anarchist group", it would be a good advancement in reclaiming the word and putting anarchist politics where they should be. But how you would stop it becoming just yet more meetings and dry discourse that people wouldn't really want to engage with I don't know.

Finally, people that are quite sympathetic towards anarchism often accuse anarchists of being exclusive and secretive to the point of paranoia, to what extent do you think this it is true and how do you think anarchists can best balance the need for secrecy as well as trying to be as open and accommodating as possible?

I think the obvious thing to do is to have open ways into your organisations so even if there is necessary secretive organisation it is still obvious for people how they can get involved and that there is something that they can get their teeth into initially. I think the Sumac Centre really suffers from this, we are anarchic in both senses of the word, both organising non-hierarchicly and also being quite chaotic and because we are volunteer run everyone is already doing as much as they can. Often people don't have time and energy to be especially welcoming to new people and the meetings, although we say anyone can come along, are completely

baffling to anyone who has not been there before and it's difficult for people to take stuff on because they don't know what's going on. There are no real structures for people to guide them into it and also the other issue that comes up is friendship cliques. Things like the Sumac Centre and to a lesser extent something as large as the climate camp can seem as though the people who are organising it all seem to know each other and when things need to be done they just ask people that they know and trust, which again I think is a symptom of not having structures and roles within groups.

So you think there should be more visible structures?

I think in terms of getting new people involved it would certainly help to have people who are specifically thinking about that, we've tried it at the Sumac Centre, we tried having a volunteer co-ordinator but it never really worked out. I'm sure if we tried it again slightly differently it would help. I think it is an area where you do need to give it deliberate thought because it wont just manifest itself. Particularly when you are trying to organise something and everybody is very busy then it can just fall by the wayside even when one of the main aims is to get more people involved and to grow. But people are just too busy

trying to run the centre to have time to do that, its a bit of a catch-22. Something like Radical Routes, which wouldn't necessarily be an anarchist organisation but does run along anarchist principles looks after new people in meetings much better. It has introductory meetings for new people to go to, to try and get them up to speed. It has things like if you're trying to join Radical Routes as a new co-op you have someone in an existing co-op who is buddied with you to help you thorough it. That can often help because certainly in the things that I've been involved in it has only been the really confident people that shove themselves forward and who are confident enough to take things on and become involved. You do need people who have initiative and self-confidence though and this is something that anarchist ideas are good for, saying "You can do things yourself", and "You shouldn't be looking to other people to do things for you", its a sort of a DIY culture and that's really good. After a while it gives people the confidence to take things on and say, "I can give it a go". But often I can imagine that if you are interested but quite shy everyone will seem completely over empowered and it will be difficult to get into it

Creating Common Ground

A squatted community garden as a strategy for anti-capitalists?

By Gerrard Winstanley

In May this year, a few anarchists and other anti-capitalists based in Reading, UK, opened the squatted Common Ground Community Garden to the public for the first time, receiving support from all sides of their community, breaking an injunction in the process and now facing eviction. This is the story so far according to one person involved.

Some background, some inspiration and an idea:

Towards the end of 2006 I was heavily involved with Reading Grassroots Action (RGA), an anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian collective I had helped found two years earlier. Having taken part in various 'activist' mobilisations and activities, a few of us were beginning to reach a consensus on what we considered to be some of the strengths and faults of 'the movement', and were agreeing a rough idea of a direction forwards. Loosely speaking, this meant refocussing our activity towards issues in our local area, without abandoning international solidarity activity or losing the vibrant creativity and DIY direct-action mentality of the anti-capitalist movements of the late 90's and early 2000's. Also around this time, we were hatching a plan to open a squatted social centre in our town, inspired by the various radical social centres springing up around the UK. Being slow to get this off the ground however, we ended up squatting a small building as a temporary home instead.

So by October 2006, we were living in the former Women's Information

Centre in the Katesgrove area of Reading. Over the next month or so, the plan to open a social centre was dropped, as we realised that we just didn't have the organising capacity to run one effectively. Living and working in Katesgrove however, we quickly discovered the total lack of any green or community space. Looking over our wall at the derelict gardens next door, with the stories of New York's community gardens and Zapatista land occupations in mind, I had an idea.

A community garden as a strategy for anti-capitalists?

This idea, to transform this derelict junkyard into a squatted community garden, did not sit in isolation in my mind. Instead I viewed it as possibly the first stage in a long-term strategy. For quite a while, I and some close comrades had been feeling like many UK anti-capitalists - including ourselves - were doing things out of habit, without considering the effects or effectiveness of these things, and certainly without these things being part of any cohesive long term plan. Over these few months, myself and another comrade developed what we consider to be a clear and concise strategy, mainly for ourselves but also applicable to others. Working backwards in our minds from the kind of world we would like to see, through what we considered to be the most likely way of this coming about (a mass 'movement of movements' forming around some commonality, namely a common enemy; capitalism), we identified four main objectives:

1. Recognise commonality between ourselves and others and facilitate the recognition of commonality between others.

2. Articulate and effectively communicate our analysis of society

3. Build collective confidence in ourselves and others.

4. Maintain our own organisations long-term.

It seemed to me that creating this community garden would be a (relatively) short/medium term activity that could fulfil these objectives to some extent. For our own group morale (and to fulfil objectives 3 and 4) I thought we needed to do something where we would feel successful and this project seemed like it couldn't fail to achieve this. If the garden lasted and was used by our community, it would be a great autonomous community project, self-organised and created through direct-action, and would hopefully be a positive way to introduce ourselves and our politics to our community. On the other hand, if the authorities tried to stop us or destroy the garden at any point, it would be easy to articulate ourselves and portray our politics as 'good' and the authorities as 'bad'. Either way, I felt we were onto a winner.

At the same time, I anticipated that it would go some way to fulfilling objective 1. Firstly, creating a space like this allows normally atomised people to get together socially and chat, in itself a good thing. However, because of the *way* the space has been created, it also means much of that conversation focuses on the politics involved. Reading is already a highly developed town, with an economy centred on the retail/consumer and high-technology sectors. In addition to this, development is rampant with new shopping centres, posh offices and luxury hotels and apartments seemingly appearing every day. This is also causing gentrification, as prices increase and long-term working-class residents are being pushed further and further out of the town. With shops, offices and luxury flats on one side, and Victorian working-class housing and council estates on the other, our squat seemed to me to symbolise the 'border' between the 'developed, gentrified and consumerist Reading' and the Reading where ordinary people lived their lives. As it was pretty obvious that the Council planned to sell our space to developers for yet more posh apartments, I felt this would be a perfect space and project to open up communication between ourselves and our neighbours about these issues.

Struggling inside and outside: This is how we do it!

With my proposal accepted by RGA, for the next three months we worked on our occupied land, clearing rubbish, needles and weeds, landscaping our new garden, obtaining materials, painting, planting and constructing decking, benches and a children's play area.

Two major issues became apparent fairly quickly, and to my mind were never satisfactorily sorted out. It is also important to note that whether or not these issues were problems *in reality* or whether it was simply the fact that some people *felt* they were a problem that caused disagreements, is still subjective. In essence the issues were about the 'quantity' of work each person was doing (and whether it was 'enough') and also about the 'quality' of this work. Involved in this were complex issues about informal hierarchies, collectivity and individuality, 'ownership of' and 'responsibility for' collective decisions and what commitment means. These issues are too complex to go into here, but suffice to say that at the time some of us didn't feel like the work was being shared fairly or that others were pulling their weight. Also, frequently we felt that some jobs were rushed or done badly. It didn't help that there were issues about the treatment of the squat we lived in, and even little jobs like tidying up were often left for others to do. As I've said, whether these criticisms were fair or not is subjective and still being debated, and I'm sure others involved would level criticisms at me, but for whatever reason none of us found a way to really deal with them properly. In the end between two and five people (depending on how you determine who is a 'member'), including myself, left RGA.

Despite this, we all continued to work together, in my view slightly better than we had done for a while. And we did identify solutions to some of these issues. Regarding the 'quantity of work' issue, we solved this to some extent by holding full 'work weekends' where lots of people came along, working all day each day and we collectively provided food and drinks for the evening, turning it into an 'event'.

Despite many of us being strongly concerned about ecology, this was not really the central motive for creating the garden. This is largely due to the expectation that the garden would probably be destroyed by the authorities in the not too distant future, despite our intention to resist this. However, we definitely had in mind the lack of green space in our town and the disconnection we have with our natural environment. Also, for both financial and ecological reasons, much of the garden was created using stuff others were throwing away. We received things through the 'Freecycle' network as well as by finding things lying around the streets or in skips. In itself though, this would never have been enough, or at least not in our timescale, and it is frustrating not being able to get on with the work until you get lucky and find the thing you need. So we also relied upon huge amounts of donations from family, friends and neighbours. Unavoidable costs (£150 roughly) were funded out of the weekly subs (voluntarily £3.00) paid by RGA members.

Ignoring the authorities, engaging with the media, opening the garden and meeting our neighbours.

At the last minute (like usual!) we hung a banner on the fence, put up posters and distributed about 600 flyers door-to-door advertising our opening day on Saturday 19th May. Two days before this, however, we were informed that the Council were taking out an injunction "preventing the opening day from taking place" and that they would be seeking a possession order for the land and buildings. Our response was immediate - we distributed another 500 letters telling our neighbours about this and making it clear we would go ahead regardless, giving the same message to the local media and inviting all to defend the garden from owners who clearly hadn't given a damn for five years, and to stand up for the communities right to decide what happens in our area.

Early Saturday morning, pixies removed the front fence, opening the garden up onto the street fully. About midday, two Polish security guards turned up to serve the Council's injunction. After five minutes of being ignored they did the sensible thing and went and sat in their car. Then we just waited for people to come along, and we weren't disappointed - the response from the public was fantastic! Through the day, many neighbours came through the garden, breaking the law to show their support and looking amazed at the difference to the area. Overall we had about 200 people through the garden at various times, as well as the same number of signatures on a petition (supporting the garden and demanding community control over the land) and £100 in the donation bucket. The celebration in the evening was great. The best thing was the diversity; activists and punks alongside neighbours aged 8 to 80!

After the hungover tidy up, the garden has been visited by many more neighbours over the last few weeks, all equally supportive. Through this project we made a conscious effort to engage well with the media. Feeling that it would be difficult to represent the garden in a negative light, we figured we had nothing to lose and much to gain and, looking back, this approach has been really successful. The local press have run great articles about the garden and the surrounding court cases, and a few locals have written letters in our favour to the media and the council. We've even been on television now, as ITN Thames-Valley and BBC South-East have run brilliant pieces, featuring the Council sounding a bit silly, our neighbours sounding great and allowing us to get across our points about the lack of green space, the high house prices and Council neglect versus our self-organisation and direct-action.

So, what now? Do we win?

At the moment, the future for the garden doesn't look particularly great. Despite the judges assertion that we have all kinds of moral arguments on our side and had "done very well", she recently granted the Council an extended injunction making it illegal to open the garden until December 2007, by which time I guess they hope to have developed the site into something none of us want or could afford. The Council have also won a possession order, meaning we will face eviction very soon - a rumoured date is 20th June. But really, that's not the point! Positivity is high, and things aren't over yet! The garden is still being opened everyday and we plan to resist the eviction, with community support I hope. Although we stand little chance of winning in the long-term, to beat the first eviction attempt would strongly increase our collective confidence and maybe that of our community. If this happens, we are also looking at the possibility to hold a neighbourhood assembly to decide the future of the land, and then fight for that future. While mainly symbolic, this would be a good introduction for both us and our neighbours to this kind of radical grassroots democratic politics, and might hopefully happen again in more substantive forms in the not too distant future.

The conversations this project has allowed us to have with many of our neighbours has strongly encouraged me, and the garden has definitely been a space where people can at least begin to recognise commonality, and a common enemy. Certainly, a few people take the view that whilst we have done a great thing by improving land left as a junkyard and providing a green space for our community, property rights are sacred and that we should leave when the Council wants to actually do something with the land. However, many more have agreed outright with what I have said to them, and its been great to see how widely held is the view that the council's model of development - unaffordable flats, roads, posh offices, hotels and shopping centres i.e. capitalist development, gentrification and speculation - is not what local people want or need. Conversations about local democracy and community control have also been very positive and to hear a couple of our neighbours use the word 'anarchist' in a positive way is really nice.

Despite all the internal difficulties we have been through and continue to

struggle with, I would say that this has been the most successful anti-capitalist initiative I have ever been involved with, and it absolutely fulfilled the objectives I thought it would to some extent. On the face of things it might seem like the initiative wasn't so good for the maintenance of our organisation, as some of us ended up leaving the collective. However, to me this doesn't go deep enough. At this point I have the impression that everybody involved feels the same kind of pride and success, and that this positivity will continue for some time to come. People are already debating even more demanding projects, such as social centres and creating concrete links with other local struggles against developers or the Council. Some of this might be a little over-ambitious and based on being a little 'high' from this project, but I certainly don't think that's a bad thing in the UK movements where many activists currently feel a little deflated and are setting sights low. Personally speaking I have every intention of continuing along the lines laid out in our strategy, working in Katesgrove with similar projects and trying to fulfil the objectives more each time. A message to everybody: Break down fences and get together - we've all got Common Ground!

MILAN RAI
– AN INTERVIEW

How would you describe the current involvement of anarchists in the anti-war movement in this country?

What have been the strengths and the failures of the anarchist movement in resisting the occupation of Iraq?

I think it's important to distinguish between the activities of 'the anarchist movement' on the one hand, and the activities of anarchist individuals on the other.

The 'movement' I would define as those groups and papers which self-consciously identify as anarchist. To be honest, I'm not really aware of the activities of these groups and papers in the anti-war movement. I'm therefore not in a position to comment on their strengths and failures, except to say that they have not made an appreciable impact on the wider anti-war movement, negative or positive, that I am aware of.

Anarchist individuals active in the anti-war movement have done a lot. However, those activists who I know to have sympathies with or commitments to anarchism have done little to acknowledge their affiliation (including me!), or use other terms such as 'horizontal' and so on, which blur their positions and perhaps open them out.

Of the people who I know to be anarchist in orientation, their strengths have been in nonviolent direct action, and training, and analysis. Their weakness (taken as a whole) has been in larger-scale organizing beyond the several-affinity-group level.

A lot more one could say, but I hesitate to speculate too much.

The movement, in many people's eyes, has been hijacked by left-wing political parties. What has your experience of groups like the Stop the War Coalition been, and how can grassroots anti-war groups work in the context of the 'official' anti-war movement?

The meeting that gave birth to the Stop The War Coalition was jointly called and mobilized for by ARROW, a largely anarchist direct action affinity group that I was part of, and the Socialist Workers' Party.

ARROW was, however, prevented from playing a role in the setting up of the organizational structure or even running the meeting. These were, to a large part, failures on our side, of not meeting with and agreeing the ground rules with the

SWP at the outset, when we first learned that we were both mobilizing for such a meeting.

I would say that the political and organizational evolution of the STWC - as the only national anti-war framework - has been shaped to a considerable extent by the failure of libertarian groups such as ARROW to do the hard work of organizing and networking that could either have made the STWC a more diverse, tolerant and democratic coalition, or set up a complementary organization, just as in the US there have been three national frameworks for anti-war action (one of them the National Network to End the War against Iraq, which was largely absorbed into United for Peace and Justice).

To call the STWC the 'official' anti-war movement doesn't make sense to me. No one can speak on behalf of the movement as a

whole. No one can give accreditation to anyone to speak on behalf of the movement as a whole. The STWC has done a lot of good and important work, and it's also made some errors, and it also has some structural problems. Same as everyone else.

My advice to grassroots antiwar groups is either to put your energy into improving the STWC structure, or put it into creating alternative frameworks.

I remember meeting you at a gathering of Grassroots Opposition to War (GROW) soon after the occupation of Iraq had begun. Can you explain what you were hoping to achieve through this network, and why you think it failed to catch on?

For myself, and the circles I'm involved in, we did try to create an alternative, complementary framework. The ideas were all good, but they were not coherent, and there were certain

fundamental questions we did not resolve.

For example, was it a network of anti-war groups, designed to empower them? In which case we had a problem because a lot of anti-war groups had a significant number of people in them who were strongly attached to the STWC, and who were suspicious of GROW, even though it was not designed to compete with, but to complement the STWC structure.

On the other hand, was it a network of individuals who felt stifled by the structure and ethos of the STWC? People who wanted, for example, to make more creative events, not just marches/rallies/speaker meetings; or who wanted to develop nonviolent civil disobedience; or who wanted national attention on the bases we knew would be/were directly involved in the war. In which case, how could

we define our common ground? There were a lot of people (including me) who felt that the definition of common ground should include a commitment to nonviolence. This caused a lot of problems.

Here's what we agreed to start with:

***

The aim of the GrassRoots Opposition to War Network is to create a network of local anti-war groups to help them to communicate directly with one another, share ideas, information and campaigning materials and to foster democratic decision-making in the development of local and national campaigning strategies. Now is the time to consolidate, re-build and strengthen our groups. We need good, solid information; direct and forceful campaigns and clear, usable campaign materials.

The GROW Network now exists in several parts of the country. London GROW currently holds open meetings in central London on the first Thursday of every month. National GROW has an on-going programme of campaigning forums and other events taking place across the country - the process by which we hope help to create an independent, national network of local anti-war groups: an open forum for campaigners who wish to exchange information, ideas and resources and engage in joint planning.

The Network is open to any group or individual who supports its 'points of common ground'.

The Network has agreed an interim 'common ground', encapsulated in the following points:

- As a network, we are committed to campaigning solely by

non-violent means.
- As a network, we will operate non-hierarchically.
- We will co-operate and communicate with other networks.
- The Network's purpose is to facilitate groups campaigning against the 'War on Terrorism'.

*Non-violent means 'actions that would not harm or dehumanise any human being'.

***

Why did GROW shrink?

Plenty of reasons. One of them that the movement was shrinking at that moment, and all of us were fatigued by the long run-up to war, and the depression caused by the implacable development of the occupation. Some of the reasons, I think, were to do with the unwillingness of us as the core organizers of GROW to be seen as exerting 'leadership' or 'authority'. As one of

the core organizers, I will hold up my hand, and admit making several bad decisions myself. · ·

There's lots to learn from the experience, but I hesitate to say more right now. (Lots of hesitating going on!)

Many of your actions could be classified as civil disobedience. Rather than take your actions underground, like many environmental and animal rights activists, you have chosen to remain in the public eye and to defy the state within the criminal justice system. Why do you choose these tactics, and, as state repression increases, do you see this avenue being closed off in the future?

I think that in the face of state authoritarianism (ID cards, the Serious Organized Crime and Police Act, etc) and state aggression (Iraq, Afghanistan, possibly Iran) there is an overwhelming case for nonviolent civil disobedience that holds no capacity for, or threat of, harm to human beings.

But I don't think there's any pressing "moral" or legal need to do actions in the open or to wait around for arrest/imprisonment. I think of Dan Berrigan going on the run after being convicted for burning draft cards in 1968.

However, especially in the current climate, where there is growing public sympathy for many forms of nonviolent civil disobedience, but still considerable hostility towards politically-motivated social disruption and/or property damage, I think there is a very strong case for action that is claimed by activists willing to show their faces, give their names, and to take the consequences of their actions.

I think this can be politically extremely powerful in mobilizing support among the uncommitted. In contrast, anonymity and some forms of covert activism strengthen the hand of the state in criminalizing protest by increasing fear and hatred of activists among the general public.

How would you situate the anarchist peace movement within the wider anarchist movement in the UK?

I don't think we have much of an anarchist peace movement or much of an anarchist movement in Britain. But an anarchist peace movement conference sounds like an excellent idea, and I will propose it to my colleagues at Peace News!

How do you think this movement differs from that of other parts of the world?

I'm in no position to judge, unfortunately.

You're one of the few anarchists that I know of putting effort into developing an understanding with the Muslim community in Britain. Why do you think this is? Do you think that the lack of diversity within anarchism in this country is a stumbling block?

The 'lack of diversity' within anarchism in Britain doesn't concern me so much as the rather off-putting totalitarian mindset of many anarchist groups and papers.

It seems that there is a strong possibility of US/UK military action against Iran in the near future. What do you think are the most effective ways anarchists can take action against this?

I don't think anarchists have any special role to play here, except in the traditional ways of arguing for - and actually organizing - direct action; and arguing for - and actually organizing - participatory democratic forms for making strategy, decision on tactics, taking action and building movement institutions.

If we can help to build these ways of working in the anti-war movement as a whole, actively including and respecting groups/activists from all backgrounds, ages and cultural tastes (and not just staying in sealed subcultures), we can make a major contribution.

There's plenty to say about how we can oppose the war threatened against Iran (which Chomsky thinks is low-probability, but extremely dangerous for everyone if it does happen - I'm persuaded, myself), but I think that's a wider discussion, not just 'for anarchists'.

One of the issues we were hoping to address in our zine was why it is that why people who are, ostensibly, anarchists claim not to be, preferring to use fuzzier terms such as 'horizontal'. Perhaps it's a failing of those of us who are more consciously anarchist in explaining what our politics are about?

I think the tendency to go for 'fuzzier' terms mostly comes from the association of 'anarchism' with the most self-destructive tendencies in radical politics. If all anarchists with constructive tendencies abandon the term, then it will indeed come to mean those self-destructive tendencies. I think that should be resisted.

RESIDENTS TAKE OVER!

imagine strong and lively communities, and control over our own lives and neighbourhoods!

The world is in a terrible mess because we're not running our own lives, directly controlling the resources and decision-making for the benefit of all. Currently, governments and big-business boss everyone around for their own benefit. So what can people do to get back control? Obviously we can't expect someone to jet in and liberate us, or wait for some cataclysmic collapse of the system in some way off future. By patiently building up grass roots solidarity and mutual aid, we can sow and grow the seeds of the new society within the shell of the old. We have to act for ourselves, in the here and now.

Here - and now? We need to focus on where there is a real need, and a real untapped potential to fight back, where people can empower each other and spread alternative ideas. This means here - within our local communities, and now - on a day to day basis in our everyday lives.

I'm involved in Haringey Solidarity Group, an open anarchist/ libertarian/ socialist collective which grew out of the huge and successful anti-poll tax campaign in 1989-91. We produce leaflets and newsletters, and support a whole range of activities going on in the borough. But in the last few years I've put most of my efforts into being involved in street level activity in my local neighbourhood.

STREET LEVEL

The front line of politics is outside your door. And also in workplaces - but that's another matter. If we base our political activity around where people actually are, we can achieve a lot. That doesn't mean we can't get involved in other things, but at the end of the day we have to have a strategy to actually change the world, for people to take over all the decision-making themselves. After all, everyone is an expert about their own lives and their own street.

People have concerns which may be surprisingly similar to those of other people in their neighbourhoods – they want more control over their lives, to be part of a safe and friendly community, in a decent environment with good local services and facilities etc. The ruling system only wants obedient consumers and workers, where all the decisions are made from on high in their own selfish and greedy interests. People are not encouraged to feel that they can band together and make changes themselves. There's always someone else claiming to represent' people or act for them - politicians, Council officers, the media, professional NGO's that pay people to organise campaigns and publicity; even direct action groups can be seen to be a specialist lifestyle choice that most people can't relate to or take part in. All of which takes the power away from the people that really count - the majority, in particular working class people and other oppressed sections of the population.

The real challenge is how does this translate to action on a street level that can be taken up by millions of people? For me, the answer is to try and build up grassroots action groups and associations that are open and relevant to everybody in the community. It may not always be easy, but unfortunately noone's yet found any successful shortcuts

from here to the revolution.

THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING

Residents' groups have often been seen as linked to the council, or as just complaining bodies with limited concerns, or with only a couple of people running the show. But they can also be solidarity organisations in which people support each other and take up a range of local issues important to improving the conditions and quality of life in the neighbourhood. The potential is definitely there for all kinds of street level residents' action groups, associations and networks.

For about five years I was involved in a residents' network where we built up a membership of 250 on an estate of about 1500 homes. We organised regular meetings, usually in each other's homes every three weeks, covering a huge range of issues. They were always minuted and all the members got these minutes so you are building up a network of people that are well informed and encouraged to take part in any way they want to. We succeeded in getting a million pounds for traffic
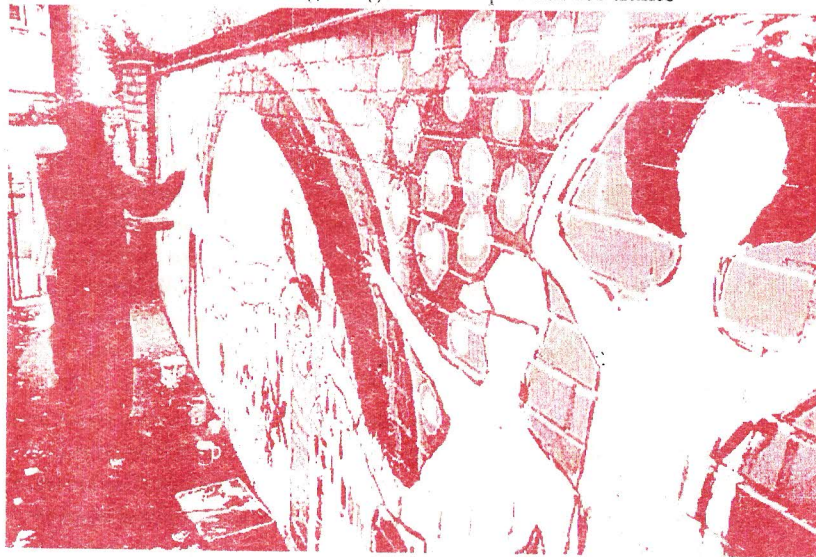
calming, a youth club, and helped get environmental improvements to a local park. We organised an annual 'Home Is Where The Art Is' exhibition of residents' creativity, a local history day and various public meetings. It really brought people together, especially the 20 or so who were most involved.

In 2003 I moved to another part of Tottenham and helped set up a residents association which now has 120 members out of 280 homes. We meet every month, and leaflet every house in the area every six weeks encouraging people to come along. There are about 8-10 regulars. We also have an internal email list. We've got the Council to agree to plant more trees in the streets, we monitor street lighting and rubbish dumping, and got traffic calming measures put in. We campaigned to save the local pub from being demolished for yet another block of flats, and mounted a strong campaign to try to save the local sub-Post Office - including holding a 100-strong march round our local streets. Both campaigns failed to win, but were successful in helping to galvanise people into action. The council recently tried to quadruple the rent of a popular café in the local park, but as a result of protests and pressure they've backed down.

A couple of years ago we and other nearby residents groups helped organise our second annual community festival in the local park - it was bloody fantastic, and attended by about three thousand people. About 20-30 of us worked together on quite libertarian lines, organising it collectively with people volunteering to take on different responsibilities. I helped set up a speakers forum' tent, and there were stalls, music, crafts, treasure hunts, sports and a carnivalesque procession.

It's not all positive. Anti-social behaviour can also be a big problem in some neighbourhoods. It needs to be addressed because if we can't come up with solutions that we can do ourselves, people are going to say we need more police, we need more CCTV etc. It's good to support anyone harassed, and to campaign for more youth facilities etc - but

sometimes groups of people that are causing the problem may need to be challenged.

DIGGING IN FOR THE DURATION

If you're going to start something new it's good to concentrate on positive stuff, things that can build up community strength and empower people. Then you can try and tackle the difficult stuff that takes a long time to make progress on. If you just focus on that at first it can demoralise people and that's when you might become just a moaning group. There can be different ways of doing similar things, some of it is empowering and some of it is frustrating, so patience and persistence are real virtues. After all, its your neighbourhood, so get stuck in!

Every area is different - differing size neighbourhoods (from a single block of flats to a whole ward'), differing geography and populations, and differing issues that are relevant. Build up a list of contacts/members. Try to make every meeting open to everybody, with open agendas, minutes circulated etc. That way your activities are accountable to your community, and its more likely the group will be strongly supported and become a real influence.

DON'T MOAN – ORGANIZE!

The fundamental challenge for any residents' group is to be active and well-supported, but to not get sucked into the way the authorities would like it to be. They want you to have low expectations, limit your agenda, leave it to professionals and experts', and think that politics is about voting in elections and talking to Councillors. What I like about people involved in residents groups is, if you say to them: we should be independent, build up community spirit, support each other and co-operate, we are all equals, we should make all the decisions about our area together, with the decisions based on our community's real needs', nearly everybody would agree - its all common sense! In fact, such

common sense ideas are actually a radical basis for alternative politics, for a real counter-power and a new society if acknowledged and built on. Yet if you were to ask the same people what their ideological or political beliefs were, they would cover the whole range of parties, beliefs and religions etc. Somewhere along the line we've allowed our common sense to be suppressed, or hijacked.

Throughout this whole process, the most important thing is local people coming together as equals with a common interest in the local neighbourhood, meeting in each others houses, getting to know each other, spreading a positive atmosphere because a lot of people are very demoralised and think they can't change anything. But when they come together, they start bringing out their own experiences, their own skills, time and resources, their own views, and they start feeling that there are ways of changing the world and supporting each other based on different principles from profits and power. Working together, face to face, and respecting each other generally works because as neighbours you have common interest with people of all ages, all backgrounds, all colours in a crazy, unjust and alienating world.

A MOVEMENT OF MILLIONS?

In Haringey alone there are 150 residents associations, 30 friends' groups of local park users, as well as local action groups campaigning for traffic calming measures or against various urban and commercial developments, mobile phone masts etc. This involves a membership of thousands, and annual distribution of tens of thousands of leaflets and newsletters. The residents associations have created an independent Haringey Federation of Residents Associations to enable them to communicate and co-ordinate across the borough and take up a range of key concerns. Likewise, the Friends groups have set up their own Haringey Friends of Parks Forum as their own network.

Across the whole country this amounts to, or potentially could amount to, a self-organised and independent movement of millions of people

speaking and acting for themselves and their communities. In this way people are able to directly challenge, influence and potentially eventually make all the decisions which affect them and their communities. Anarchists should be fully involved. At the same time as building up people's self-confidence, solidarity and mutual aid, we should be encouraging people to demand not just a few crumbs off the table, or even the whole cake, but the entire bakery.

KICKING OFF

The trick is to get organised and active! By encouraging neighbours to get involved, being as friendly as possible with everyone, and avoiding getting bogged down with bureaucracy or politicians of any stripe, it is amazing what people can achieve.

Why not get together with a couple of neighbours you know and start meeting regularly in each other's homes or in a friendly local neighbourhood centre? Give yourselves a name. Discuss what people feel are the important issues, and things you can start to do together - post reports of these discussions to all interested neighbours.

Encourage initiative. Gradually build up a list of more and more contacts. Organise public meetings and events, local campaigns and so on. Leaflet door-to-door. Most importantly, take 'ownership' of your area, and stick at it!

In this way we can patiently build up a strong and vibrant grass-roots movement in every neighbourhood.

By DM, a member of Haringey Solidarity Group, 2007

DIY COMMUNITY ACTION!

In almost any community a whole range of positive, practical things can be organised and encouraged which bring people together, build up community spirit and improve our local neighbourhoods.

Some examples of things you could do that are already going on in local areas around the country:

- encourage lots of informal discussion and communication on the street and in each others' homes
- do local door-to-door leaflets and newsletters
- hold public meetings on topical issues
- organise street parties and other events
- set up skill- and resource-sharing schemes
- campaign for youth facilities and activities
- demand traffic calming
- set up housing solidarity and action groups
- resist obnoxious development schemes
- defend useful facilities threatened with closure
- promote recycling projects
- develop informal gathering places (in or around local shops, parks etc)
- organise picnics and other activities in local parks
- set up parents' groups in schools and playcentres
- do residents' opinion surveys
- organise local art and creativity exhibitions
- plan community murals
- set up local clubs/interest groups (gardening, music, sports etc)

The possibilities are endless!

Against State Control

— Reflections on anarchist involvement
in the movement against ID

At the time I'm writing this, the corporate media is in full throttle with attempts to idolise the exiting Tony Blair. According to a piece propagandistically entitled 'Poll shows he will leave with voters' respect': "Mr Blair will be remembered as a force for change in Britain... by 60% of all voters"[1]. Those who have been fighting against the current government's massive campaign to centralise power and bring down repression on those who challenge it would certainly agree that Blair's government was a force for change. Whilst anarchists recognise that this is a project of the state, not linked to any particular politician or party, it should be recognised that the current Labour government under Blair has been particularly successful in overturning all kinds of relative freedoms. Because Blair is particularly skilled at statecraft he has been able to present the state's agenda in a way that cashes in on prejudices and ignorance already present. The current government has capitalised on terrorist attacks, socially-excluded youth, and even identity theft to create a climate of fear, in which the government may do as it wishes with the excuse that it is 'protecting' the terrified masses. As anarchists have argued, the governments only vary in how successful they are in grabbing more power for themselves, and as long as there is a state we will have to defend our efforts towards a free society against it.

The inevitable result of many of the new government measures is an increase of state power in everyone's day-to-day lives [see 'So what's new in the state's article?']. This occurs through surveillance of our personal habits, from which websites you access to how much rubbish is put in your recently RFID-chipped bin. It means more effective repression of the socially-excluded, through monitoring with CCTV and electronic tagging, to the imposition of control orders [home detention without trial or need for evidence] on terrorist 'suspects'. In collaboration with the media, the state paints a picture of a nation under siege from religious fanatics and anti-social youths, and presents the only solution as more crackdowns and state power. This is a very difficult situation to work in for those who want to build autonomous communities and wish to fight state power. In spite of these difficulties, there are many who continue to take action against state control [see 'Anarchists against state control'].

So what's new in the state's arsenal?

To mention just some important measures[2] —

- The Identity Cards Act (2006) has become law
- Britain is the CCTV capital of the world with 4.2m cameras
- Anti-Social Behaviour Orders can be used to effectively criminalise any act deemed 'anti-social' on the basis of hearsay evidence
- The National Extremism Tactical Coordination Unit (NETCU), a political police unit, has the mandate to deal with "any criminal or recognisably anti-social act...that has the purpose of disrupting lawful business or intimidation in order to achieve protest or campaign objectives"[3]
- The Serious Organised Crime and Police Act (SOCPA, 2005) makes unauthorised protest in central London illegal
- The NHS spine is set to become a central database of all patients' medical records

---

Anarchists against state control

Anarchists, unsurprisingly, have been at the forefront of many of the campaigns that have arisen to combat the ever more invasive powers of the state. This involvement has varied from the participation of anarchist individuals in broad-based civil liberties campaigns, the setting up of specifically anarchist organisations and networks, and exposure and analysis of the situation. Here are just a few significant examples of late:

- The Defy-ID network was set up as an anarchist network to oppose ID cards
- The involvement of anarchists in NETCU Watch, the website opposing the activities of NETCU, and in the ongoing Parliament Square protests that are aimed at defying SOCPA
- The Freedom to Protest conference and mailing list were largely the brainchild of London anarchists
- Analysis of the menace of CCTV in a recent Class War publication[4]; analysis of RFID, fingerprinting and ID cards in Anarchist Federation publications[5]

Defy-ID

Anarchists were pretty quick off the mark in opposing the governments ID scheme. Soon after the government started talking about an 'entitlement' card, back in 2002, the Defy-ID network of groups opposing the scheme through direct action was formed[6]. The reasons were obvious: what was being proposed was that the government be enabled to collect all sorts of personal data, including biometric information, on a central database, which would then be linked to a card that people would have to produce in order to gain access to any public service, e.g. health, benefits and legal employment. This would mean a massive acceleration of the state's invasion into everyday life. The network got together for it's first gathering in 2004, and many ideas for action against the scheme were formulated[7]. However, the government had clearly learnt from the lesson of the poll tax not to bring in such unpopular measures in one fell swoop, and have been gradually but determinedly moving towards ID cards ever since their first announcements. As such, many groups in the Defy-ID network peaked too soon, and seem to have disappeared back into the woodwork. However, newer groups still have the energy for action and are keeping the network going. It is this current makeup of the network that I'll discuss in more detail.

What was clear at the recent (2006) gathering of the Defy-ID network was the lack of consensus on what the role of the network within the broader movement against ID cards should be. It was clear that although the majority of active groups seemed to be anarchist in their politics and organisation, there were those who were more closely aligned to the authoritarian left and right libertarian politics. This reopened several of the ongoing debates within the movement over how best to approach defeating ID cards and the NIR. Anarchists opposing ID cards will inevitably make very different arguments and take different forms of action to those with no critique of the state or capital. As such, we are bound to come into conflict with groups like Liberty and No2ID, who oppose the current ID scheme, but not the political system that has produced it. The strongest rejections of arguments such as "ID cards won't stop illegal immigration/benefit fraud/terrorism" have come from the Nottingham group, who produced a leaflet entitled 'Stop Using Their Logic!', urging campaigners not to "seek to refute the official claims without questioning the terms of the debate."[8] The reasons that anarchists should show solidarity with immigrants and those scraping a living from benefits, and should oppose state fear-mongering about terrorism should be obvious. However, these reasons are often put to one side in single-issue campaigns such as No2ID in order to be "pragmatic" by appealing to a mythical "mainstream"[9]. The position taken in 'Stop Using Their Logic!' has often been misinterpreted by other anti-ID cards campaigners as sectarianism (i.e. anti-No2ID), but really the leaflet was an attempt to critically appraise the direction of the anti-ID cards debate,

which sometimes drifts dangerously close to statism. The division between those in favour of the arguments raised and those claiming they were sectarian was quite apparent at the gathering, although the majority seemed in favour of the approach championed by Nottingham.

A related issue is the scope of the network. Defy-ID sounds like a single-issue campaign, but it has often made sense to those working within the network to oppose other forms of social control from the same political standpoint. As such, the group in Nottingham have been engaged in campaigns against the encroachment of CCTV[10], police harassment[11], workplace surveillance and fingerprinting in schools[12], as well as making sure the links between the surveillance of asylum seekers and that of the general public are made[13]. This latter link has led to the formation of a No Borders group in the area, with very close links to Defy-ID. At the most recent gathering a really wide range of different areas of surveillance and control were discussed along with the ID scheme, so it is fair to say that the campaign is a broad one, stemming from an anti-authoritarian politics that rejects all social control. This is certainly one of the strengths of the network – a total and uncompromising rejection of the varied attempts at social control that the state attempts to foist on us.

In taking this line, the Nottingham group have frequently found ourselves coming into conflict with the local authorities. Because it is local authorities that will be ultimately responsible for implementing most of the repressive measures like installation of CCTV cameras and ensuring that service providers only allow those 'entitled' by their ID cards to access services, many anti-ID campaigners have suggested that they are a better target than the national government which seems intent on a programme of social control. There have certainly been some successful campaigns leading certain local councils to make strong statements of non-cooperation with the ID scheme[14]. However, these strong statements may be useful in getting a few more votes for a particular political party or councillor, but may not translate into action when it comes to the crunch. Whilst the local council seem like an easier target than the national government anti-ID campaigners will have to hold them to their promises, and should decentralise their pressure even further, to service providers such as individual clinics and doctors.

There are some serious challenges ahead for Defy-ID. The war against social control seems to be an unwinnable one. The state and big business will never give up their attempts to increase the level of surveillance of citizens, consumers and workers. Even if we manage to win some major battles, such as stopping the current ID scheme in its tracks, there will always be future situations where attempts will be made to have another go at bringing it in. We are in for the long haul. There is also the serious problem of getting sufficient people to actively resist the introduction of new technologies of control. Anarchists have so far been unable to

convince enough people to go beyond vocal protests against ID cards into actually taking action. Indeed, there has been a conspicuous absence of direct action against the about-to-be-opened interrogation centres for new passport applicants, or the companies hoping to make massive profits from the scheme, in spite of a very helpful search tool to find them[15]. The government has been very sly in its introduction of the scheme, bringing it in incrementally rather than allowing the possibility of a mass protest on one day. This has led to an atmosphere of both complacency (it never seems to really be happening) and powerlessness (it seems inevitable) amongst the general public that has to be turned around by the example of an effective resistance.

These attitudes aren't just found amongst the general public. With the notable exception of those like the Anarchist Federation who have championed Defy-ID in recent years, the movement seems fairly non-committal in its approach to ID. Unless it's taking measures to protect themselves and their actions from state detection, most anarchists don't seem to be doing much about the creeping surveillance society. Those within Defy-ID groups need to make the case that resisting these developments is essential to ensuring that we can continue struggling against all of the other injustices that we care about.

There is much to be done. The pervasive culture of complacency over giving away personal details to powerful strangers in the corporate and state spheres must be overturned, and replaced with a culture that defends anonymity. We need to make people aware about the uses which the powerful have for knowledge about their identities and offer practical methods of defending those details. This doesn't mean instilling fear and paranoia – just a healthy distrust of those who claim to protect us. We need to learn from societies where stronger community and horizontal social relations have provided resistance against state intrusion. We recognise that genuine security comes from our interrelations with people who don't seek to dominate us, not agencies and organisations that do. As a network, Defy-ID needs to make links with those most under threat from increased information gathering: ethnic minorities, excluded youths, schoolchildren and parents, those on benefits, etc. Practical solidarity with these groups will be necessary in building a broad-based movement that can mount an effective challenge to social control. There are plenty of ideas for action within the network, and there have been since the beginning[16]. All we need now is the ingenuity and the strength to carry them out.

Notes

1) Julian Glover, "Poll shows he will leave with voters' respect", The Guardian, 10th May 2007, http://politics.guardian.co.uk/tonyblair/story/0,,2076201,00.html

2) More such measures are listed in Nottingham Defy-ID's Bulletin 4, Oct 2006, http://www.nottingham-defy-id.org.uk/download_files/notts_defy-id_bulletin4_oct06.pdf

3) NETCU, "What is 'domestic extremism'?", About NETCU, http://www.netcu.org.uk/about/faqs.jsp#what%20is%20DE

4) Tommy Corrigan, "Surveillance in the city", A Touch of Class, Sep 2006, http://www.londonclasswar.org/A_Touch_of_Class.pdf

5) Anarchist Federation, "National ID on the cards + spychips", Organise, 64, Summer 2005, http://flag.blackened.net/af/org/issue64/idcards.html; "Police fingerprinting goes mobile", Resistance, 90, Dec 2006/Jan 2007, http://flag.blackened.net/af/res/resist90.html; "Get 'em while they're young", Resistance, 87, Sep 2006, http://flag.blackened.net/af/res/resist87.html

6) Anonymous, "Defy-ID", Loombreaker, 33, Dec 2002, http://www.ainfos.ca/02/dec/ainfos00255.html

7) Defy-ID, Ideas for Action, 2004, http://www.defy-id.org.uk/ideas_for_action.htm

8) Nottingham Defy-ID, Stop using their logic!, 2006

9) No2ID organiser, personal communication

10) Nottingham Defy-ID, "Asbo TV", Bulletin 5, Mar 2007; Sock Puppet, "Reclaim slab square", 25th Mar 2007, https://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/regions/nottinghamshire/2007/03/366081.html

11) Gulliver, "A true story of everyday life for Nottingham town folk", 11th Mar 2007, https://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/regions/nottinghamshire/2007/03/364864.html

12) Roger Geowell, "School biometrics in the city and Notts", 21st Apr 2007, https://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/regions/nottinghamshire/2007/05/371212.html

13) Nottingham Defy-ID, "Defy-ID and No Borders. Better together", Feb 2006, http://noborderslondon.blogspot.com/2007/02/defy-id.html

14) Mid Befordshire Liberal Democrats, County Lib Dems win ID card vote, 11th May 2006, http://midbedslibdems.org.uk/news/000116.html; Cambridge Liberal Democrats, City Council says no to ID cards, 25th Feb 2005, http://www.cambridgelibdems.org.uk/news/000063.html

15) A postcode searchable database of companies can be found at http://www.nottingham-defy-id.org.uk/company_search

16) Defy-ID, Ideas for Action, 2004, http://www.defy-id.org.uk/ideas_for_action.htm

ANARCHISM AND ECO ACTION: AN ANIMAL LIBERATION PERSPECTIVE

The idea of living "an archos" or without rulers, goes back to pre-Christian Greece, and remains an unrealised ideal for many who know that they do not require rulers in order to live in an ethical manner. What we now also know is that to be ethical is to be sustainable, and it was good to see that all food at the Climate Camp was Vegan. For it now appears that the policies of those rulers we wish to be without have taken us to the brink of destruction. That is why many who regard themselves as Anarchists are making common cause with others, who consider themselves Eco Activists, to implement Direct Actions designed to stop this headlong rush to disaster. It is my view that those involved in Animal Rights must also join this concerted effort to bring about change to ways of living that are both ethical and sustainable. That was the purpose of this article as originally written for the Animal Rights community. Some slight changes have been made to the article as it appears here in order to reflect my view that the true Anarchist chooses to free all Lives on this planet, both Human and non Human from the tyranny of our oppression.

There is an expression, though not one an Animal Rights activist would tend to use, that describes something so large as to evade notice as the "Elephant in the room." However, we now know that there is an issue so large, so vital, that it might be better described as the very room itself. That issue is of course Climate Change. What started as the relatively innocuous sounding Global Warming, is well on the way to acquiring its more rightful status as likely Climate Catastrophe. Over the last few years this issue has gone from being the preserve of a few scientists and commentators, largely dismissed as cranks, to the front page of every newspaper and the top of most political agendas.

More importantly, this realisation has led to the flowering of a new Eco Action movement, committed to Direct Action in defence of the Earth, and against all those who put greed and material self gratification before the common interest and a sustainable future for all. This Summer (what there was of it!) saw the second annual Climate Camp take place at Heathrow airport, to protest at the exponential increase in aviation, one of the fastest growing causes of human induced Climate Change. It is absolutely vital that this non-hierarchical grassroots movement continues to grow and to succeed. For whilst they might pay lip service to the idea of change, the only real interest of politicians, and their masters in the network of international corporations that make up the global greed machine, is in continuing to grind the Earth into money for their personal benefit.

Over the last year I have made a point of becoming more involved in this movement. For we know that even if we in Animal Rights achieve our goal of eliminating the abuse and exploitation of all Animal Lives, the onset of Climate Catastrophe will render this utterly pointless. The potential consequences of such dramatic change to the weather systems of the Earth, beggar belief. Destruction and death on a quite unimaginable scale, up to and possibly including rendering the Planet incapable of sustaining life. In the face of this possibility it is incumbent on those of us in the Animal Rights movement to take this on board and adapt our strategies accordingly.

It is my belief that it is not possible to separate that which is truly sustainable from that which is properly ethical. As I like to put it, there can be no Life Rights without Earth Awareness. It is possible to argue, and most politicians would, that Climate Change can be tackled without recourse to fundamental change, both in the way in which we view ourselves, and our relationship to the Earth that is home to us all. However, it is the Earth which is the only properly holistic context in which we can come to informed decisions about the way in which we should live. Politicians would argue that we can continue to found ourselves, and our aspirations, on the politics of permanent economic growth. The lie must be put to the madness of this conceit. Money has never made good motivation, and the evidence of this is now made stark for all to see. We need a new ethic on which to base our idea of what it is we are, and we in the Animal Rights movement understand that ethic. Throughout the Summer months, and to a lesser extent the rest of the year, there are an ever increasing number of green gatherings and festivals where people from all backgrounds come together to celebrate and discuss our relationship with the Earth. Some are more overtly political than others, and as Climate Change comes to dominate our thoughts, political activism is bound to seem more relevant than celebration. So what is it that links celebration with political activism, be it Eco Action or Animal Rights? What is it also that is the single most important change an individual can make to their lives in order to reduce their carbon footprint? It is to be Vegan, and it is this which is the indissoluble link between Animal Rights and Eco Action.

For those in the Animal Rights movement it is pretty much unthinkable to be deeply concerned with the equality of all Lives, and yet to kill and eat other animals. Granted, vegetarianism is often a stepping stone on the way to being Vegan, but Vegan is where most people end up as the only rational, reasonable and responsible choice. It is the only ethical way. For those in the Eco Action movement, to be Vegan is coming to be seen as the only sustainable way, given the effect it has on one's carbon footprint. All food at this year's Climate Camp was Vegan, as it is at most green or Eco gatherings. So it is that to be ethical is to be sustainable, and to be sustainable is to be ethical. As I presume that all of us who wish to see an ethical and sustainable future believe that it is better to be kind than to be cruel, we are, from our differing

starting points, coming to the same conclusions and heading toward the same position. That position must be that it is wrong to exploit or abuse, seek to dominate or control, any Life, human or otherwise.

Although it would now seem that the many and disparate groups and individuals involved in Eco Action, Animal Rights or Anarchism are, in effect, fighting the same fight, that is not yet the way it appears to those we oppose. To them we either seem, or can be portrayed as, a collection of minor, single issue groups, easily dismissed as anything from cranks to crazed extremists. I know this to be a matter of much frustration and annoyance to the many good and decent people acting in defence of the Earth and all life. I would like to suggest that there is something that we can do about this, which will immeasurably increase our influence, without losing the intensity that a small but committed group can bring to a particular issue.

Why is it that the state so dislikes those groups and individuals who make up the Animal Rights movement, and is now showing the same reaction toward Climate Change campaigners? Why is it that the state brings so many resources to bear against us, and is even prepared to compromise its stated, if not realised, democratic ideals, in order to silence us? Could it just be that in their quieter moments, or at least somewhere in their being, that they fear us? Not because we pose a physical threat to them, (after all it is they who are the people of violence, not us, it is they who have the guns and the bombs, and who do not shirk from using them), but because they know that we are right! And in being right we threaten not just their

power and wealth, but their very idea of who they are.

Without compromising the integrity of these groups, or of those who prefer to work as individuals, I do feel that we need to operate under a collective, recognisable banner. I say this whilst realising that it is already happening in all except name, and has been for some time. For instance, as someone who has centred themselves in the Animal Rights movement, I chose to work under the banner of Earth First!, a name more associated with Eco Action. Earth First! is an idea not an organisation. As such it is available to all of us working toward ethical and sustainable living in whatever field. Evidence of how the movement is operating under this banner can be seen from the self posting website Earth First! Action Reports. This website is ever more widely used by both Eco Action and Animal Rights groups to post details of Actions or for information purposes. I feel it would help to raise the profile and effectiveness of all that we do, to use the Earth First! name in conjunction with whatever other names we are already using. After all, what better expresses our ethos than to state that what we do, is not done for ourselves, but for the Earth and all Lives. However we choose to operate, as individuals we are all Earth Firsters!

As a visible and tangible demonstration of how Eco Action and Animal Rights are coming together as an Earth First! Movement, the following suggestion has been made. For organisational purposes, the Climate Camp, both in its planning and for the actual event, is made up of a number of neighbourhoods representing different

regions. Animal Rights, however, in its various groups and individuals, is a nationwide movement. We feel, therefore that it would show our understanding of the vital importance of Eco Action, and our solidarity with those already involved, to have an Animal Rights neighbourhood at next year's Climate Camp. Having met a number of people involved in the planning and implementation of this year's Camp, I am hoping to put forward this suggestion as soon as appropriate, and to help with the necessary planning. In this way, it will become increasingly obvious to those in

power who seek only to protect vested financial interest, no matter what the real cost, that they are facing serious opposition. Cogent, coherent and organised opposition working, by way of consensus based non hierarchical systems, toward properly ethical and truly sustainable solutions to the problems we face. We who have decided to care, who have chosen to change, will not sit idly back and watch the Earth and all life being ground into money. As a movement our numbers will grow, and so must the Actions that we take. The future depends on it.
– Matt Clowes

an interview with Michael Schmidt
interviewer Andrew Burrell

Zablaza

Could you start by explaining a little the situation in South Africa and what being an anarchist in this situation means to you?

The struggle for freedom from racist capitalism in South Africa has become rather iconic on the global scale, but like other such iconic struggles – that of the Cuban working class, for example – has tended to become obscured by the new ruling elite's airbrushed, consumer-friendly version of events that pays lip-service to mass struggle, yet at heart is deeply distrustful of any form of direct democracy that would challenge bureaucratisation and the accumulation of wealth. South Africa's ruling ANC, for most of its history a race-specific organisation open to blacks only, and its Stalinist-turned-social-democrat friends in the SACP sing praise-songs about the struggle, but in reality they sing their own praises and insist on a dumb patriotism on which they are busy consolidating class rule and forging the "New South African" state, with all the

instruments of capitalist torture intact. What this means is a market fundamentalist government, unassailable in its parliamentary majority (probably for decades to come) which is entrenching apartheid's economic divisions. This naturally puts me as an anarchist who has been in the movement for some 14 years on the other side of the fence, with those who live in unserviced squatter-camps, dying of Aids-related infections and industrial pollutants that contaminated them at work. Here we have reconnected thousands of households to electrical supplies terminated by the city, and have built community libraries and food gardens. Small potatoes I guess, but practical. Of course, we also work underground in Swaziland and Zimbabwe, where our comrades constantly risk torture at the hands of those dictatorships' almost unrestrained police goons.

What is the role of the anarchist organisation? Is it a vanguard, mass movement or something else?

One of the most fundamental questions that will immediately be faced by any anarchist organisation is: how does the militant minority relate to the working class en masse? Because, let's face it, every big

movement starts small, so how is that bridge of consciousness, from the small group to the masses achieved, how does "the idea" move from being a pet project of a few militants to becoming the lifeblood of a people – without those militants becoming a vanguard, substituting their organisation for the class as a whole? Perhaps the best way to answer this is to quote from my pamphlet Five Waves (2006): We do not need elite political caucuses and "vanguard parties" dictating to us from on high. What we need is working class organisations under workers' directly-democratic control, with strictly-mandated delegates subject to rank-and-file decision-making, mobilising the mass of ordinary people in the process of making a truly social, grassroots revolution.

A most important point, however: anarchists are not, and should not, be the sole organisers of the working class in preparation for revolution. To put it plainly, we anarchists are not fighting for an anarchist world, but a free world, and we are not the only social force moving in a libertarian direction. We need to be deeply and intimately involved in the global anti-neoliberal movement and in the practical day-to-day struggles of the working class,

demonstrating mutual aid, solidarity, responsibility, federalism and all the other principles of revolutionary anarchism in action.

This point was made by the anarchist group Rebel - Libertarian Socialism (*Auca* -SL) of Argentina, in an explanation of its ideas on joining the International Libertarian Solidarity network in 2003: "the model of the Single Revolutionary Party is exhausted. It has demonstrated its lack of flexibility against the different political manifestations of our class".

This echoes the British Anarchist Communist Federation's *The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation* (2000) that stated: "A libertarian communist organisation will obviously not be the only organised tendency within the working class. Unlike Leninist organisations, it does not see itself as the Party but as one of several organisations which will participate in the mass movement alongside those without affiliation."

In opposition to the traditional, narrow-minded political idea of the role of the revolutionary organisation, Rebel promoted the idea of a "Front of Oppressed Classes" where syndicalist, social and political models which, in general, struggle for revolutionary

change will converge. It is there, in the heart of the FOC, where a healthy debate of political tendencies and positions should be engaged in, so that the course the FOC takes is representative of the existing correlation of popular forces."

The FOC idea is totally different to the Popular Front idea common to the Marxist-Leninists in which they form a front organisation supposedly for solidarity purposes, then insert their leaders to rule this commandeered social force which they then order about like an army. Instead the anarchist FOC concept represents the progressive political plurality, anti-authoritarian solidarity and innovative diversity of a united working class in action against both capital and its Siamese twin, the state. Rebel warned against any bureaucratisation of the social struggle along Marxist-Leninist lines.

We in southern Africa made a similar point in our position paper *The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation in the Class Struggle* (1997): "The Anarchist organisation sees itself as part of the working class, its Anarchist ideas a historical development of the experiences of workers, who as an exploited class seek to create a new world free of tyranny and exploitation in any form."

Rejecting the Marxist-Leninist concept of a "revolutionary leadership" of the single revolutionary party, we aim for a "leadership of ideas" of libertarian class autonomy and diversity within the class. "We support all progressive struggles both for their own aims and for the increased confidence that campaigning can give people.

"Secondly, we support them because we recognise that it is in struggle that people are most readily won to the revolutionary ideas of anarchism. Third, we support them because it is in struggle that people can potentially create organisations of self-management that develop their skills and that may possibly help in the revolutionary transformation of society."

By involvement in everyday struggles, we build tomorrow today, build a new world in the shell of the old, creating a dual-power situation as exists now in Argentina: popular power of the base undermining parasitic power of the bourgeoisie. Importantly, "[w]e defend other progressive organisations that are involved in struggles from repression. Where necessary, we will engage in United Front [similar to the FOC concept] actions alongside them".

However, whilst we defend these groups unconditionally,

we do not do so uncritically - we maintain our independence and argue for our ideas ... The natural skills, intelligence, innovation and solidarity owned by the working class are the only things that can produce both the social revolutionary dynamite needed to destroy the neo-fascist neoliberal system - and the fertiliser that will enrich the post-revolutionary soil so that it comes up roses: beautiful, but armed with thorns.

How does an anarchist organisation differ structurally from a Trotskyist one for example?

Most social organisations, whether body corporates in apartment blocks, football clubs, or political organisations tend to mimic, though they are not state organs, the hierarchical formations of the state that are conditioned into society by statist education. That is the collective elects a committee which is the main policy-making body, and which in turn often appoints special unelected functionaries with sweeping decision-making powers in the areas under their control. This "democratic centralism" is common to leftist, and in fact most other conventional, organisations. Opposed to this is the "direct democratic" method practiced by anarchists,

syndicalists and other libertarian socialists: the collective itself is the main policy-making body, and retains all decision-making powers, and which elects narrowly-mandated and immediately recallable functionaries who are merely empowered to implement the decisions of the collective (with some leeway allowing for creativity and the daily conditions of struggle). The net results of these methods are starkly different, of course. Democratic centralism disempowers the collective, turning them into relatively voiceless bums-on-seats (remember Trotsky's comment that labour ought to be ordered about as if it was an army), while empowering the leadership. This is the foundation of the authority principle which preaches social responsibility, but which in fact creates a docile mass which merely follows orders, taking no decisions and therefore no responsibility. By contrast, direct democracy empowers the collective, turning every individual into an active decision-maker, while limiting the ability of a parasitic leadership to develop. This is the basis of the liberty principle, which is at its roots socially responsible because those who carry out the decisions are those

who make them – and those who make them are those who will be affected by them. In practice, the differences between the kinds of personality cults which tend to develop in Trotskyist organisations are shown up quite clearly for the macabre practices they are by the anarchist approach of empowering every single member of a given community.

Do you think a class analysis of society is more relevant in the less developed economies of the global south than in the more developed global north?

In some ways, a class analysis is less important in the global south than in the north. I guess you didn't expect that answer? Well, my reason for saying so is that in much of Africa, to take the most extreme example from the global south, there is a tiny industrial proletariat most of which works in primary industry (mining, fishing, timber), and a tiny middle class of professionals, both of which are often very irregularly waged. You typically have a large, often subsistence peasantry (including herders, hunter-gatherers and pastoralists), and a significant military/bureaucratic ruling class. You'd have to admit that is a very different class structure

to your average northern country, with a large industrial working class which often works in the service and financial sectors, not in factories (including agricultural workers, but very few peasants), a significant middle class, and an elite that draws its power from other sources (hereditary wealth, investments) other than the military. In some ways this makes a conventional class analysis more applicable to the north than the south, but you'll note that the pyramid of exploitation still exists, no matter its different form. In some ways, however, one could say the classical, pre-war class analysis is more applicable to the old-style smokestack industries of the south, whereas an updated class analysis that takes into account the shift away from primary production into information technologies etc. is more applicable to the north.

Is there much difference between 'African anarchism' and the European tradition?

Yes and no. The similarities are embraced in the remarkable coherence that the revolutionary anarchist movement has shared on a global level since it emerged in the 1860s. With notably few divergences (the libertarian statists of Spain and

Korea, or the anti-peasant Red Brigades of Mexico for example), and notably few necessary later innovations (on homosexuality in particular), the global anarchist movement has dealt unwaveringly with issues as diverse as race, patriarchy, gender, the environment, and national liberation. Thus, one finds that the Scottish anarcho-syndicalist movement proved very influential in southern Africa – and, though adapted to combat the racist laws it found here, was in essence the same anti-racist syndicalism as found in Scotland. Also, it is important to note that this movement of ideas was not only from colonial power to colony: for example, the indigenous anarchism in Egypt (influenced initially by Italian workers) directly shaped anarcho-syndicalism in Greece; and again, their structure and substance was the same. And yet, there are differences, of course, because immediate, local conditions weigh more heavily on the working class than international ones (except in times of war). So our comrades in the Awareness League of Nigeria, Sam Mbah and I.E. Igariwey have argued in their book African Anarchism (1997), that the decentralised, communalist nature of many African societies lends them more readily to anarchism than

to statism. Now without interpreting this in an anti-anarchist, anti-human "primitivist" manner, it does suggest that adaptions of tactics, but not of principle, need to be made according to the society within which one works. A good example would be the "Vlassovden syndicalism" of Bulgaria in the 1930s where anarcho-syndicalist organisers took as their model the Bulgarian peasant's traditional mutual aid societies – and transformed them very rapidly with mass peasant participation into a nation-wide anarcho-syndicalist agrarian workers' confederation. In similar vein, the Russian "Mir" village community was often taken as the basis of anarchist models – as in Oaxaca today, anarchist militants have an autonomous municipal model that is based on traditional indigenous models.

What is your experience/opinion of anarchists that reject formal organisation? Post-leftist anarchists for example.

Of course, there is the matter of what revolutionary anarchists call "the tyranny of structurelessness" – where self-described anarchists allow no collective to reign in their selfish practices to conform to

pragmatic social needs. This lack of structure, they claim, is true freedom, but in reality it shows a nihilistic and vanguardist disrespect for everyone else. Accountability to broader class structures is the best means of ensuring that the internal democracy we practice will be adopted more readily by the class at large – and that we remain honest in our pursuit of the liberty of others. In my experience, you will seldom find "anarchists" of this sort anywhere near the working class or their struggles (you may encounter them masked-up for a bit of self-serving drama on a march, but seldom doing the inglorious hard work of building shacks or feeding people in the squatter-camps). Some of these "anarchists" are the nicest possible people, but their impact on their world is severely limited. In sum, these "anarcho"-nihilists avoid working alongside any mass formations of the working class, peasantry and poor, afraid that their personal freedoms will be limited by the reality of class conditions (and it will!). But of course, claim the "post-anarchists", the working class no longer exists! Well, sure the nature of the class is totally different to what it was when the first anarcho-syndicalist unions sprang up in Russia,

Cuba, Uruguay, Spain and the United States in the 1860s and 1870s, let alone its many phases since then. True, the old "industrial working class" with its giant factories and many latifunda-style grand plantations are no more. But factories still exist, and so do plantations, and they are still staffed by workers who create most of the social wealth of the world – on behalf of a parasitic class that lives off that labour. We can only guess in what imagined alternate reality the "post-anarchists" find themselves where this fundamental fact of capitalist exploitation no longer exists. Women continue to work at home in unrecognised labour, and millions still live in de facto slavery through indentured labour, sweatshops and flexibilisation. And if the class and its dire conditions still exist, then the validity of the original anarchist class analysis still stands. This is not "class reductionism", but merely the recognition that class remains the primary mode of oppression and exploitation, and that, as in all classical anarchist texts, it is coloured by specific oppression related to race, gender, language, sexuality, etc, that are used as subsidiary tools of divide-and-rule. Though ballots not bullets are usually used to

pacify the class today, the grim realities of poverty and servitude have not altered. "Post-anarchists" like David Graeber and Andrej Grubacic, argued in the article Anarchism, or the Revolutionary Movement of the 21st Century (2004) that anarchist organisations like the IWW or NEFAC are somehow outmoded and crippled by the "sectarian habits of the last century" simply because they are formal organisations. Instead, they hail the creativity of what they call "small-a anarchists" who work within the anti-capitalist movement, often learning lessons from indigenous activists. These warmer, fuzzier anarchists are so user-friendly, they say, that some even practice anarchism while not calling themselves anarchist in case this somehow infringes on others' rights! Well, the proof is in the pudding. I will readily work alongside a principled Maoist who supports genuine class struggle rather than someone whose anarchism is as vague as the authors suggest – but if these anarchists-who-dare-not-name-its-name do the work and stick to anarchist principles, I don't really care what they call themselves and they are welcome alongside me also. The problem, which Graeber and Grubacic admit to, is that "there has been a

reluctance to go beyond developing small-scale forms of organization". And yet, even the anarcho-insurrectionists, who eschew the mass-line of the anarchist majority in favour of catalytic actions intended to spur the class to revolt, are organised, albeit into small cells. It beggars the mind why organising in tiny "affinity groups" is fine, yet federating them into a broader regional network on the same principled grounds is somehow reactionary or antiquated. And the bigger question facing the affinity-group model is this: if your actions are designed to affect the community in which you live (and who wishes to be ineffective?), then what say does the community have in your decisions? In the final analysis broader social structures are needed within which communities try to match their capabilities to their needs, and within which specific anarchist organisations act – as a pole of attraction to the practice of a politically autonomous, progressive working class.

[Michael Schmidt is the former International Secretary of the Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Federation, southern Africa, www.zabalaza.net]