



### THE CUNNINGHAM AMENDMENT

JOURNAL OF THE EAST PENNINE ANARCHISPS.

DEDICATED TO REVOLUTIONARY ACTS OF JOY AND  
IRREVERENCE IN A WORLD INCREASINGLY WEIGHED  
DOWN BY STERILE BUREAUCRACIES

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# EDITORIAL

After what seems a long winter, especially the bitter month of December, and variable spring, summer is in the air, there are new stirrings abroad. Here in the UK people have woken up to the stark reality of the 'Con-Dem' government's attack on the living standards, livelihoods, pensions and futures of ordinary people both young and old, able and disabled. Whether this can crystallise into an effective movement capable of challenging the government and asserting the rights of people seeking more control over their own lives awaits to be seen.

The Con-Dem government's policy of the 'Big Society' uses the language of empowerment and decentralisation, but it is a smokescreen for dismantling the NHS and selling off what remains of public sector assets and any lucrative public sector contracts to their friends in the private sector. It is a confidence trick and a huge theft of assets from the public to line the pockets of a gang of thieves.

Benjamin Tucker, writing in America in the 1880s used a similar phrase 'the brotherhood of thieves' to describe the activities of a class of rich and powerful men, who sought to use the power of the State, laws and monopolies to amass

immense wealth at the expense of ordinary people. Nothing much has changed, indeed the problems caused by these self serving elites have grown worse as their ambition, greed, and power has extended to encompass the whole globe. Global corporate capitalism has never been more powerful nor has it ever before presented such a risk to the future of humanity and to all life on the planet.

Before we all give-up and sink into a well of despair and apathy, there are things which can be done to oppose them. Individuals can resist using tactics such as ethical consumerism, voluntary collective action by trade unions and communities. These all remain a legitimate response. Strikes, song, protests, occupations of buildings and factories should remain on the agenda. Direct Action is part of the tradition of protest in the British Isles. From the days of the Diggers and Ranters in the 1640s, through the Luddites and Chartists of the 19th century to the Syndicalist revolt in the 1900s. Resistance is an old and legitimate tradition. More contemporary versions of protest including the internet and Facebook have been used imaginatively and effectively. However, all involvement in protest and campaigning requires commitment, energy and a determination to keep going. Especially as governments and corporate companies keep chipping away at communities it will require new commitment from us all to resist the imposition of changes and destructive developments.

E. H. Schumacher's phrase that the 'small is beautiful' remains as true now as it was when he wrote his pioneering book in the 1970s. Anarchists and others concerned with human dignity, the fragile ecology of the planet can still make a difference by acting locally, by supporting co-ops, being involved in their workplace unions and communities, and by raising our voices loudly in protest against the deceitful and self serving policies of governments and global corporate capitalism.

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## A man walks into a pub

No, it's not the start of a joke. The back-end of 2010 saw the latest release by one of the UK's greatest songwriters and all round good guy, Robb Johnson. Titled 'Man Walks Into A Pub', it's the first album in a while from Robb to feature just him and his acoustic guitar. Before a concert together in Belper, Derbyshire and over cups of tea and slices of marmite on toast, fellow folk troubadour, Chris Butler quizzed Robb especially for *Anarchist Voices* about his latest album and about a life of walking into pubs.

**Chris:** *Seeing as you've been a part of the folk scene for over 20 years, how do you see things at the moment? Is folk music in a healthy state?*

**Rob:** "At the moment, I think it's a little obsessed with youth ...it goes through periods of being obsessed with youth and tradition... and the obsession with youth out-weighs the obsession with tradition at present. When I first started going to folk clubs in the 1970's, I thought they were really exciting places. You had all manner of music... traditional music, songwriters, guitarists, blues music and it seemed to be a really exciting place to hear lots of different music in an atmosphere that's pretty supportive. It also had a dislike of pop culture which I thought was quite good because it was about people making music for some other reason than as a

commodity. I think that's changed in that folk music has become more of a commodity with the success of various acts such as Kate Rusby and the Carthys ..."

**Chris:** *But hopefully the people out buying Eliza Carthy's CD's (for example) or seeing folk acts at major music festivals, may then move onto to a whole range of other singers and songs?*

**Rob:** "Yes, but the other thing is the whole concept of the Carthy family as some sort of aristocracy of folk like a 'first family of folk' sort of thing... I find that a bit difficult to deal with as it seems to me to be at odds with what I always saw of folk music. One of the strengths of folk music was it's democratic attitude and its ethos that folk music is made by ordinary people. And I think these people like Mumford and Sons who are clearly nice boys dressing up like their granddads and banging away with a banjo. There are some very calculated folk groups."

**Chris:** *Does artistes success come via marketing and music 'business' in folk music rather than something that's progressed through a love of something other than mainstream pop music ?*

**Rob:** "Yes. That's one of the things I think has happened with increased professionalism of folk music towards the end of the 1980's and early 1990's and the rise of the mega festivals. Folk festivals used to be cuddly events where Morris dancers would fall over drunk and people would just bellow out songs in pubs and there might be a stage where you could do a bit of playing. But with the conscious elevation of certain folk artistes to the level of expert on guitar or expert singing and the emphasis of that, and with the professionalisation of folk music, its sort of positioned itself within the spectrum of the music business and some people within folk music have moved to make themselves part of a business rather than being an alternative voice. Which I thought folk music (when I first encountered it) was a lot more about, being alternative and running away from the mainstream and deliberately standing away from the business of shifting units."

**Chris:** *Which sounds like punk music to me Robb, and is how I discovered folk music - discovering songs and singers which were just as angry, political and different from the mainstream as the punk bands I was listening to...and made by ordinary folk!*

**Rob:** "The punk rock analogy is quite important if you think about the archetypal folk songs, The Jolly Ploughboy and so on. The singers at the time would use whatever technology and instruments that were available to them and very often that would just be the singer's voice or if on

a ship they may have used a concertina or something and in 1979 ordinary folk were using electric guitars. But it's the same impulse to sing about your life for the sake of singing about it. To some extent, you could leave the Sex Pistols and Malcolm McClaren's situationist pranks out of it. Most punks didn't want to do what McClaren did, ripping the music business off, which was just their little game. Most punks saw the opportunity to have their voices heard and an opportunity to reach their community. And an opportunity to set a cultural discourse off and not have culture imposed on them. Ever since then, the business has closed down opportunities for people's voices to be heard and it's made it very important to play the business game. And with the arrogance of the music business to think they can dictate tastes, people have less interest in popular music because it's less exciting. We're in a period of decline for popular music (as we know it) since the 1960's because most kids realise they have no ownership of popular music. In the sixties, the beat groups had record companies chasing them. And the punks had the same. Now, the companies fabricate acts and force them on the kids and so kids are not as interested. So while all this decline is going on and the professionals in folk music are positioning themselves within the carcass of a dying dinosaur, you still get people who want to sing about their lives. People are still picking up acoustic and electric guitars or programming beat boxes and talking about issues..."

**Chris:** *And we're still here too Robb! Still kicking against it all. Still trying to create something... different! Still bashing out our songs in pubs to anyone who will listen!*

**Rob:** "I see posters outside of pubs saying 'Tonight - Live Jam Session' or 'open mic' and that's just a way for pubs to get people to come in and drink their beer to stop themselves dying in the recession but people do want to have a bit of a sing song. People want to express themselves so although the business is changing in folk music, the urge to sing, to express yourself and to share in that process of communication is always going to be there, but it's not sexy at the moment and it's not part of the business design..."

**Chris:** *But those that are media friendly and topping festival bills at major music festivals, I don't think it's any coincidence that they are not the political acts or the ones speaking out and making a nuisance of themselves. Kate Rusby for example, she's a very fine singer but certainly not going to cause any trouble. There's plenty of room for that within folk music of course, but do*

*you think the festival organisers play it safe? Or, to play Devil's advocate, with the likes of The Carthy family filling large venues and playing major music festivals, does that introduce folk music to a new audience?*

**Rob:** "Kate Rusby is a lovely singer and I'm sure she's a really nice person. I've met Martin Carthy a couple of times and he's always assured me of his radical past but there's none of that in his songs. He loves those old songs and he does a really good version of Leon Rosselson's Palaces Of Gold but the Carthys present themselves in an apolitical way so they're not going to upset anybody."

**Chris:** *But is that because very high on Martin's agenda would be championing folk and traditional music, and upsetting the establishment can make you unpopular sometimes.*

**Rob:** "First, a short anecdote: I was once on Andy Kershaw's radio show when he wanted to do something about protest music. And he was told 'you should get Robb Johnson on your show because he plays protest songs' though I've always thought of myself as more than a political or protest singer but anyway, I went along... And Kershaw said to me 'If Bob Dylan turned up at the record company with a copy of Masters Of War, would they have given him a recording contract?' And the answer is of course no, they absolutely would not. The business does not want that sort of voice of dissent. The whole establishment decides what it allows and what it doesn't. I did my songs on Kershaw's programme and when it was broadcast, I listened and thought to myself 'Did I leave that verse out?' No. They'd taken one of my verses out because they thought it would be offensive. So in answer, protest singing? By all means you're welcome. But if you're going to offend anybody, then we'll 'snip snip snip' and cut it out! Secondly, this leads us back to English folk music and what is it? It's a complicated one because it's also suffered a whole load of censorship. Self-imposed, historical and conscious by the people who have collected it. If you look at the history of the English working class, there's a good way of saying that they were the first victims of imperialism and industrialisation. But, the English have also colluded in empire and have become accustomed to being that little bit better than anybody else. So there are an awful lot of triumphalist songs about duffing the Spanish, duffing the French at Waterloo and duffing the Russians at Alma so like anything else, there are lots of different voices but many of those voices are quite triumphalist... and quite naff really."

**Chris:** *Which is a world away from the songs that*

*opened up my eyes to folk music as being radical such as Chumbawamba's English Rebels Songs record.*

**Rob:** "I get really tired of all those songs that go on about 'thousands slain', The Bonnie Light Horseman and that sort of thing. They were clearly written by people who weren't there and weren't having their legs chopped off... Chumbawamba did the world a great service when they brought out their record but that's just a tip of an iceberg. It's a smaller iceberg than it could be because (for example) there are Luddite songs but they are really hard to find. And there are all those disaffected soldier songs from the First World War which are kind of uncollected. So, what's happened is the establishment, whether it was the collectors or the subsequent music business itself, they've edited it out and left us with a collection of triumphalist nonsense. And songs about peasants going out early in the morning and shagging maidens in the hedgerows! They'll allow their idea of working class high jinks as a sort of Carry-On Rumpy Pump! But anything that's questioned the state and the crown has not been collected. All the great collectors at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century came from a certain class. They tended to be vicars on bicycles and they had an agenda. They were preserving English heritage. There's that awful plaque outside Cecil Sharp house that reads 'This house is dedicated to Cecil Sharp. A man who gave the English people back their music'. Well, thanks Cecil! So we didn't have it until YOU gave it back to us! Cheers!"

**Chris:** *And what's annoying to me is that folk music has this middle of the road tag, boring songs by polite singers and hasn't been relevant for the last couple of centuries - when in fact, to go back to what I said earlier - it can be even more exciting than punk rock!*

**Rob:** "Well, we're up against all those difficulties though I have to say, although he was a dreadful old Stalinist who I can't find anybody to have a good anecdote about, I think Ewan McColl did folk music a great service when he actually said it's the music of the working classes. A lot of that revival was writing songs such as Poverty Knock which is a great song about factories... and he made a huge and successful effort to realign folk music with working people."

**Chris:** *And remind us of our trouble making history?*

**Rob:** "Yes. And remind us that there should be songs about work. Or about travellers. And love songs as well but set in 'Dirty Old Towns' like Salford, not... Los Angeles! But that perception of

folk music has been eroded by opportunists who want to make it a business or an industry."

**Chris:** *And thus, waters down our music, our songs, our tradition and our festivals in the process.*

**Rob:** "Some festivals have been polluted a bit since the 1980's when all those old pop and rock stars who'd passed their peak suddenly realised they could get by with an acoustic guitar. So on the downside of their careers, they started headlining what once was Guildford Folk Festival. Bands like Squeeze (for example) who are no longer chart topping but could pull a crowd started topping the bill and folk festivals became just festivals."

**Chris:** *Moving on to your latest CD, Man Walks Into A Pub. It's just you and an acoustic guitar so would you say it's a folk album? And was this a conscious decision to do a solo recording without any full-band arrangements?*

**Rob:** "It certainly is a folk album. It's a roots re-discovery really. I've always liked folk clubs and I started running one in Hove, once a month. I was going through a writers block/bleak period at the time. First of all, I was writing poems on the bus on the way to work so I set myself a task of looking what the headlines were in the local paper and made a poem up about it... which was pretty bleak and miserable actually because it tends to be bad news! And then I was in the pub and they'd had a folk club which had moved somewhere else so I said 'I could run a folk club!' and so I started doing that and set myself a challenge of writing at least one song for every club night which was good because sometimes having a deadline helps. And it also gave me an audience and a framework. I started writing songs with the acoustic guitar and more songs which you can perform with just an acoustic guitar. I then re-discovered things you can do just on an acoustic guitar. I'm not a very good player and I stopped trying to be a good player when I saw Martin Simpson! I thought 'What's the point?' and went back to banging out three chords like Joe Strummer! But I liked finger-picking so there's even a couple of instrumentals on the album."

**Chris:** *Which isn't what you expect on a RJ album.*

**Rob:** "They're not brilliant - one review said musically undistinguished! But they are the best I can do. And that's the whole thing about folk music, you do what you can do."

**Chris:** *Personally speaking, the instrumentals I like are not about complicated pieces of music but about having a good tune!*

**Rob:** "And it was done partly because not all the songs are all that political so I thought maybe, organisers might think 'Oh, I'll give Johnson a booking after all.' And I made an effort to get lots of different gigs in different places because I hadn't been playing folk clubs for a long time because I'd had a full time day-job and we'd moved to Hove... I hadn't been very active. It's been a good kick up the bum for me to go to folk clubs again. It hasn't got me many festival bookings yet though!"

**Chris:** *Which goes back to an earlier question I asked - do festival organisers and booking agents sometimes play it too safe?*

**Rob:** "Well it's like a glass ceiling with my career!"

**Chris:** *Rob does say this smiling so I ask if he's resigned to this fact.*

**Rob:** "I am. There's a glass ceiling that says 'No, Rob - because you're going to upset somebody'. I'm used to this and I'm very happy with the album."

**Chris:** *Is the title inspired by running the folk club?*

**Rob:** "Yes. I'd had the song for a few years before and I got that from an observation while sitting in The Beehive (Brentford FC's supporters club) before a match fortifying myself against the inevitable forthcoming disappointments of the next 90 minutes with a couple of pints. And I watched this old boy totter into the pub looking like he was on his last legs and he heaved himself up onto a barstool, sat down and broke into a beatific smile. And that's what some blokes do. They walk into a pub and they smile... and so I wrote that song. And it had been lying around for a bit and then I thought 'that's what I do!' With an acoustic guitar, I go into pubs, take out my guitar and bash away!"

**Chris:** *I've always found a lot of your work optimistic. I've found your songs inspiring and by and large, there's an enthusiasm or a celebration of our defiance or whatever. Would you agree that a lot of your songs are positive, optimistic and full of hope?*

**Rob:** "Yes. Too many folk songs end up badly, or celebrate disasters and defeats. Even Woody Guthrie does that sometimes with The Ludlow Massacre... So I decided to try and avoid that. Sometimes that means tagging an extra verse on the end, insisting that things will be better (a good example of that is the German Anti-Fascist song Die Moorsoldaten, which says one day we'll have our homeland back)... Sometimes, that means I try to write about victories rather than defeats, but

I suppose for a while now, I have tried rather to write more about ordinary everyday occurrences and events but to show in these how we are positive, cheerful and err...undefeated! I try not to fabricate mendacious happy endings - I hope I don't. And I hope any utopian tendencies are clearly identified as such. And I hope I present things as they are and notice the positive and the triumphant that is so often neglected in our lives and sidelined in popular media discourse by crap like stupid popstars, celebrities and royal weddings."

**Chris:** *Don't songs full of hope and optimism go against what some people would say about us so called political, protest and social comment singers and songwriters?*

**Rob:** "Yeah, common image of anybody engaged in any kind of dissent, or indeed involved with alternative perspectives, is that they are morose, glum, self righteous and humourless! I wonder why that image gets SO promulgated by the mainstream?!"

**Chris:** *And perhaps not just the opinion of the mainstream if festival organisers are so worried by us causing trouble!*

**Rob:** "Yeah, well nothing's politically neutral. We talked earlier about the agendas organisers have, either covert or overt. To be honest, we all have this to some degree. When I book acts for Hove Folk Club, I avoid people who want to sing about what fun it was to kill Frenchmen or hunt foxes and whales, though I have tried to provide a diversity of artistes. I suppose the problem arises when organisers and/or cultural mediators of any kind pretend they have no agenda or that their agenda is necessarily your agenda..."

And with that, marmite spread toast was washed down with slurps of tea and The Queen's Head pub beckoned. On a cold dark night in November, two men walked into a pub carrying guitars. And what followed was a master class in folk singing and song writing by Robb. Wherever and whenever people come along to share an evening of music and song, something special happens. In an upstairs room in The Queen's Head, Belper on this particular night, something special did indeed happen. A crowd of people went home full of hope and optimism.

**Chris Butler**

Robb Johnson's latest CD 'Man Walks Into A Pub' is out now on Irregular Records. More information can be found on the CD and where you can catch Robb currently touring the album at [www.robbjohnson.co.uk](http://www.robbjohnson.co.uk)

Chris Butler's latest CD 'Irritant' is available from [www.ethicalwares.com](http://www.ethicalwares.com)

## For All The People – Cooperatives in America

**J**ohn Curl's book is an exhaustive study of cooperatives, mutual aid and intentional communities from the First Nations to the present. Scores of obscure and forgotten groups can be discovered here. What Curl shows is the record of struggle by ordinary people to construct a humane and democratic way of life in the face of opposition and adversity.

You find that there is no division between class struggle or organization at the point of production and the formation of coops. Nor is there a real split between political movements and alternative building. For the Knights of Labour and the Populist Party alternative building went hand in hand with union organizing or political action. Socialism, from its very inception as a tendency, right up to, and including the foundation of the Socialist Party, meant cooperative production, or as it was expressed as the "cooperative commonwealth."

While parties and unions built alternatives, the people involved with them sometimes did so at different periods. When a union was broken or a workplace struggle defeated, the members would turn to community building or forming a coop. If these failed, they would then return to union organizing or party-building.

It turns out that all left wing organizations built cooperatives and mutual aid societies, including the Communist Party. Even the left wing New Dealers got in on the act, encouraging the formation of consumer and farmer's coops, as well as, surprisingly, cooperative communities. While Curl's study is limited to the USA, one must also remember that in the early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the European Social Democrats built an entire counter-culture of cooperatives, mutual aid societies, schools, and associations. While this development was most prevalent in Austria and Germany, Northern Italy and the Scandinavian counties were not far behind.

This unanimity around cooperation leads me to question the accuracy of the notion of "state socialism." While some people such as anarchists, cooperative socialists and syndicalists were "pure cooperators", the rest of the left preferred a mixed economy of coops, municipal and nationalized industries. State socialism must then be a matter of degree and the term ought only be applied where the economy would be dominated by the state sector. Since everyone likes coops, anarchists and cooperative socialists

ought to be able to approach "state socialists" in a positive, rather than negative manner. The following questions ought to be asked; "You support coops in this area, why not elsewhere? Don't you think cooperative principles could be applied to the industries you seek to nationalize? Couldn't there be a form of national ownership that is not statist?"

Many cooperatives failed, and most intentional communities collapsed in short time. Curl gives the reasons for these failures. One was external problems. The capitalists did everything in their power, from economic warfare to terrorism, to crush alternatives. Governments, in the pay of their corporate masters, were hostile and used the Sherman Anti-Trust Act to prevent the formation of the cooperative federations which could have been of assistance to fledgling coops. Later governments enacted doubled-edged coop legislation which was used to control, de-radicalize and steer the cooperative movement in a more capitalistic direction. There were also funding problems. Banks refused to lend money and the government wouldn't help either. New coops were saddled with heavy debt-loads or were grossly underfunded.

Then there were the internal problems. Ideological differences fractured groups. There were organizational problems, especially a lack of experienced personnel for the "nuts and bolts" daily coop activities. Naive idealism ruined many an intentional community, with unworkable ideas like large-scale communal living and a lack of practical members. (lots of philosophers, fewer carpenters and farmers.) Coops often over-extended themselves in good times, which lead to collapse and bankruptcy in bad times.

For All the People is published by PM Press PO Box 23912, Oakland, CA 94623 Web Site <http://www.pmpress.org>

**Larry Gambone**

### **Anchorage anarchy**

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## War over breakfast

For the last three years I've bought my groceries from one supermarket, but I recently switched to another, a rival shop. As a result our food cupboard found itself playing host to a mix of goods, some from the old supermarket and some from the new. This situation was to be expected, a natural and transient stage in the move from one shop to another. It should have gone by unnoticed. But it did get noticed, and what's more it drew my attention to something most of us experience everyday but don't always pick up on; a kind of constant psychological attack on us by brands.

Step into any supermarket or high street shop and you step into a privately owned space, open to the public at set times and where all information is placed under tight control. The sights, sounds, smells, materials and even tastes are specifically designed and measured to create an effective environment for selling. In this totally controlled space, the brand who occupy it is at liberty to communicate to all who enter, it's own vision of the world. Leave that shop and step into a rival's environment and –not surprisingly– you'll get the rival's world view and experience the sights and smells it has to offer as it attempts to persuade you that it's guiding values and daily concerns are identical to your own, in the hope that you will jump ship and spend with them so that they can gain market share in whatever sector they happen to operate in.

For supermarkets, food packaging is just one small strand of a larger strategy in this attack. But as small as it is, much importance is still placed upon it, because for a brand all packaging is viewed as an opportunity to relay a message to the consumer, to communicate and underline the values of the brand through style of imagery, tone of voice, materials used and the overall design of

the pack. All are messages designed to persuade people to take sides – to buy A and not B.

The thing that drew my attention to this was the sight of my breakfast cereal in the kitchen cupboard. Caught in the mix of goods, my depleted box of own brand weetabix now shared a shelf with its new and unopened replacement, another box of own brand weetabix from the new shop. And it was there on the packaging, in the imagery on the front of each box that it could be seen. At home and far from the immersive and blinkered total brand environment of the supermarket, these two low ranking soldiers of opposing forces were made to stand side by side in a neutral zone; my kitchen cupboard. The situation sparked an interrogation as I began to compare the two images.

The first box was brash, the packaging bright yellow with the cereal pictured on the front suspended in mid-air, the biscuit breaking in two with a flash of white light behind it. The image is a fantasy with the product playing the part of superhero –albeit without costume– bursting apart with unbelievable energy and in pristine isolation. The image on the second box showed the cereal in a bowl with milk, viewed from above looking down so that the bowl is seen as a perfect circle, with a spoon positioned straight alongside. The scene is set on a neat graphic tablecloth pattern. This image appears more realistic than the image on the first box –by showing the food as an actual breakfast to eat and not as ballistic missile– but in essence, it still offers as narrow a vision of the world as the image on the first box. The image on the first contains a promise of fantastic energy and everything that can come with it, while the image on the second box contains a promise of order and clarity communicated through its use of simple shapes, perfectly aligned in a minimal display. Both images are messages designed to appeal to a certain type.

With every communication, be it through image, language, sound, smell or touch, the brand speaks to the consumer hoping to win them over, to convince them that this choice and not the other is the one that best fits the life they lead, or rather, the life they imagine they lead or would like to. Never mind that the products –in this case own brand weetabix– might be identical to one another.

So what to take from this brief analysis of own brand breakfast cereal packaging? That brands target, mislead and manipulate? No surprise there. So really, the only thing to take away can be a small (but hopefully worthwhile) reminder that we experience attempts by brands to win our hearts and minds everyday. These efforts appear

in all forms and occur at every level – from seemingly anodyne images on low value, own brand breakfast cereal boxes, to eye-catching television advertisements for high end whatever, and everything in-between. Even when we know this war of persuasion is raging, it's still easy to forget because the constant multi-sensory chatter emitted by brands forms such a large part of the man made environmental conditions under which so many of us live our lives. It makes up much of the scenery of our lives, and as such is always there, but not always noticed. For this reason it's worth looking out for little reminders, small situations like this one, that when recognised can help us stop, actually look at the scenery and consider the true meaning of the messages contained in or on the things that surround us; to help remind us that in the eyes of brands we are all targets regardless of class, income, intelligence or age. The more often we remember this the better.

William Nilly

## Freewill, free won't...free might

Someone with the knowledge and understanding of a new-born child but the physical and intellectual capacity of an adult confronts a landscape crossed by innumerable paths. He must walk into it; and every day must continue walking. He has no destination and knows no route.

He takes a path which appears easy and agreeable. He comes to a junction and takes the turning which appears easy and agreeable. He does this, time and again, for days and weeks and years and gradually learns that some aspects of a route usually lead into dense jungle; some routes lead into waterless desert; some into gardens full of fruit and clear springs. There is a tendency for each possible route, at a junction, to indicate the conditions it leads to, so the wanderer frequently chooses a path which he has learned will lead to food or water, or which will lead to easy walking, and rejects those which experience has shown lead to cliffs and deserts and dangerous places. He is now a man with experience.

One day he takes a path which leads to a large house; the door he opens takes him to a room full of beautiful young men and young women, sitting around a large table on which is displayed a

notice saying: "Today's discussion is about freewill". The wanderer has been through a variety of establishments on his journey and realises he has stumbled on a seminar for students of philosophy.

"The problem is this", says a woman with blonde hair: "every event is caused; no event springs up, untouched by the past and naked to the world, without antecedents; and since this is a simple truth, any and all events are moments in a continuous chain which leads back to the Big Bang; or beyond. Everything is determined."

"In your case", says her boy friend, "you were naked but not at all untouched. And very determined." They exchange brief, loving kisses.

"When you came into my bed, you appeared to act freely but I see now that a million decisions and actions: forces acting in the world and others acting in your brain and body, impelled you to sin quite beautifully; though you regret it now! Could you have done differently?"

The wanderer half raised a hand and, hesitantly, said: "I arrived here by a path I neither knew nor understood. Were I of a different era, I would introduce myself as Sir Lancelot and seek the pleasures of this lady" – he indicated a girl with short dark hair sitting to his right. She smiled "This is a philosophy seminar, she said. Later..."

"I arrived here as a result of a million decisions which, as I travelled, I made with a growing degree of understanding and wisdom. I came to know the implications of each decision I took when confronted by a choice of routes and now, given any choice, any question, I apply that knowledge. I would argue that, in so doing, I introduce myself – that is, my knowledge and experience – into the factors which are impelling me to a decision. You" – addressing the blonde student – "say a choice is determined by everything that has gone before but I introduce myself into that net – those inter-weaving chains – of antecedent events and so I am now influencing my own actions. Does that not make me to an extent un-determined; and if something is even partially un-determined, it is not determined. Ergo, I am free".

"But your knowledge arose from previous events; your knowledge was determined," said the girl with blonde hair.

"True", said the wanderer, "but each influence on me, each happening which shaped my mind, had to get through the gatehouse of my knowledge and experience. I was not a blank slate. What I learned was mediated by my knowledge and experiences. I hear and see according to my prejudices and understanding; I am one of the forces at work, making the experience take whatever form it did in my

consciousness. I helped to make myself and I continue so to do.

"I might mention", he added, "as this is a philosophy seminar, that Rousseau said something of this. Also, that prejudice is a bigger problem and I could destroy my own argument by introducing the enigma of self-deception. But let's not go there."

"So," said the girl with short hair quite impressed, "when a woman murders her man, having thought long about it, she is both free and culpable. She chose wrong (let's call it that) and all his brutality did not determine her action."

"She didn't have to do it", said a voice. "All the abuse counts as reasons but not as the determinant."

"But if you could rewind her brain, perfectly I mean, nano-second by nano-second, and see every impulse flicking on and off, you would see that she did have to. At the point where she could have desisted, she already had the knife in her hand, arm raised, brain blinded, blood up, panting for breath, unaware... She couldn't stop herself", said the blonde girl.

"I think I was being a bit pure and over-simple", the wanderer said. "I put forward a case in which I could bring myself into my decision and, since I was helping to make my own choice – perhaps dominantly - I was manifesting my free will".

Perhaps many decisions are made with the irrationality of the murderer, not logically. But she could have brought her experience into the event and have chosen not to do the dreadful deed.

She did have that choice. Free will is a fact, I think, but not a simple one.

"What about self-deception?" asked a young man. "You know that it is impossible, logically and factually - and tautologically - to be conscious of your own self-deception. So when you apply your experience in making choice, you can't be certain that that is the free you, freely doing it".

The point is, you say that when you are influenced by an idea, you contribute to the nature of that influence so you make yourself in a way. But you can't get complete control of your responses; you do things you aren't aware of and respond in ways you haven't thought through.

You don't know exactly what your mind is registering, or what gets into your memory and what doesn't. So you haven't got control of the way things influence you; in the end you can't know to what extent self-deception got into the mixing bowl (your brain, I mean). You don't know yourself fully and you don't make you"

"But," said a voice, "it's like he said before: sometimes you don't deceive yourself. Maybe you don't know when but you can be sure that

sometimes you don't, which means that the free you sometimes determines what you learn and sometimes acts honestly; so you are sometimes free."

The wanderer rose to his feet. "I don't know if that hole is big enough even for a very small mouse to escape through I came in here with an idea I quite liked. It has faded away in the heat of your intellect to little more than a grey cloud in a grey mist. But if one of you would like to come with me to examine a little closer, at the next turning on my journey, the nature of self-deception" – he caught the eye of the girl with dark hair – "I'm free."

Richard Frost



## Forests and anarchism

**A**narchism is not a philosophy waiting for some mythical future when the socio-economic conditions are ripe for revolution. We do not have to wait to make our life better. Anarchism is about the here and now, about building change on existing foundations. Anarchism, as a politics grounded in anti-authoritarianism and non-coercion, doesn't, unlike Marxism, have a blue print for the future. While we may recognise the importance of so-called 'classic' anarchists like Kropotkin or Emma Goldman, none of their ideas have acquired the holy-status that Marx, Engels and Lenin have.

This is all well and good. It creates space within anarchism for lots of ideas to emerge and also for us to adapt to changing circumstances. In politics there is nothing more embarrassing than watching some Marxist trying to explain away reality because it doesn't quite match-up to the theory. But this also creates some problems for us. On the one hand we are not particularly 'pushy' about our ideas. We would rather people found their own way to anarchism than shove a

copy of Freedom, Black Flag or Anarchist Voices under their nose (there are, of course, some exceptions to this). It also creates another problem. Unlike Marxists we cannot say to people 'look here's what the future will be like'. We don't claim (or want) to have all the answers. We can talk about 'mutual aid', 'co-operation' and 'solidarity' and say that these principles are better, healthier, more fulfilling ways to lead our lives than capitalism or any other means of organising society but often I suspect we may sound a bit vague. This is where the trees might help us. Seriously.

People like trees. In Britain recently the government tried to flog the forests off. To be fair governments have been selling bits of forests off for ages but this was the first wholesale attempt to raise money by handing them over to private companies. People were furious. In the space of three weeks nearly 500,000 people had signed on-line petitions and up and down the country demonstrations were held. Papers described the proposal as being the government's Poll Tax. The government didn't fancy that and backed down, saying that they 'got it wrong'.

I'm lucky I live on the edge of Epping Forest, one of Britain's few remaining ancient woodland. Although the name dates back to the seventeenth century, the area has been wooded since Neolithic times. Henry III gave it a 'royal status' in the twelfth century. Queen Victoria visited Chingford on the edge of London on 6th May 1882 and declared "It gives me the greatest satisfaction to dedicate this beautiful forest to the use and enjoyment of my people for all time". Epping Forest became and remains (despite the government's best efforts) the People's Forest.

The forest is a hive of self-organised activity: mountain bikers, bird watchers, motor bikers who gather in their hundreds on a Sunday at High Beach (an old speed way track tucked in the heart of the forest), ramblers, families on a day out many from the east end of London, dog walkers and horse riders. Every summer the myriad of voluntary bodies and groups that keep the forest going gather at the free Forest Festival.

Long ago Dick Turpin, the highway robber, was alleged to hang out in the forest waiting to rob the rich. William Morris as a child used to ride a pony there dressed up in armour as a medieval knight in the 1840s-50s!

Anarchist Voices' esteemed editor tells me that in the early 1980s Highgate Wood hosted the annual anarchist May Day picnic and football march. There is still a strong anarchist presence in Walthamstow. Anarchists from the jungles of Mexico, to land squats in Belgium, to anti-logging actions in America to the Newbury by-pass in

Britain, have lived in and defended forests.

Woodland reconnects us to the earth. They are also, in the West, one of the few spaces left free of capitalism and its trappings. In woods we can slow down. We don't need to pay admission or buy anything. A tree doesn't care whether we have a credit card or not. These public spaces support self-organisation. They are to adopt Colin Ward's famous phrase: anarchism in action.

Richard Griffin



## The Wheel of Protest

**I**f you watch things for long enough, and see how it all goes round like a Merry-Go-Round, the same old stories repeat themselves again and again. The recent student protests, the Wikileaks affair, and the return of a Conservative government making cuts all seem very familiar. Of course the particular details of each of these conflicts are different from previous incidents, but the basic plot lines tally. The students turn out in large numbers to protest against university tuition fees, the protests turn violent, and galleries of students' photographs are published in tabloid newspapers. Trials are held, students are jailed. And so the wheel turns about.

There is a similar feeling of familiarity seen in the way that the media alternates between promoting certain protest movements, and then demonising them. We have been here many times before when we read the story of Mark Stone Kennedy, the police infiltrator against the Radcliffe on Soar Climate Change Camp and the 'Plane Stupid' Heathrow Airport expansion protesters [10th January 2011].

Tuition fee protests are somewhat like the large angry protests of the past – the Criminal Justice Act protests of 1994, 'Stop the City' anti-

globalisation protests of 1999 and the early noughties. The ritualistic confrontations between the EDL and UAF are reminiscent of the conflict between the street battles between the National Front and the Anti Nazi League in the late 1970s. Julian Assange and the Wikileaks story is very much like previous examples of whistleblowers, like the Clive Ponting, and the Sarah Tisdall cases, where people annoyed The Powers That Be, and were suppressed.

The new element, is of course, the internet. Face Book, Twitter and Flash Mobs seem to be a new element in the dynamics of protest. These are often credited with helping to bring about change in the Middle East, in Tunisia and Egypt. Mobile phones were used to show the police violence against protesting Buddhist monks in Burma. The 1990s McLibel campaign was credited with being the first political movement to make widespread use of the internet. We need to take note of the success stories here, but as yet, it is not clear whether the new technology really can sustain long term and positive change. Each new development enjoys a brief phase of popularity, but it seems as though the real message is easily lost in the clutter. It is ephemeral.

There are two points to be made here. The first is to do with the lack of a collective long-term memory. The second has to do with the lack of coherent political aims.

The world of Googlepedia has a short attention span. If the information is not present in the internet, then it hasn't happened. When people are searching for information, it is quite possible that the material being presented is false or skewed. There is a need of proportion and balance, a sense of objectivity which can be developed by looking at the longer term, but this is frequently over-looked in the quest for the big hit. So far as I am aware, nobody has ever really taken a step back, and examined the various campaigns in hard information ways; in terms of the money and the effort spent on them, the types of activity undertaken, numbers involved, the pressure points brought to bear, the media, the impact (if any) it has had on policy and on social change.

The second point, regarding the absence of coherent political aims and methods, is more serious. It runs to the question of motives, capacities and methods. Because the protesters lack clear and coherent political aims, they cannot bring about long term changes. Their actions tend to run off in many different directions, and fail to bring pressure to bear where it is most needed. It is easy to criticise some policy, but what do you replace it with?

People need a sensible, practical and achievable answer to this today. We know what protesters are against, but what are they for? Is it possible for them to develop a simple, direct and coherent set of aims?

It ought to be possible to make such a thing, a series of summaries together with an index, accessible on the internet, together with a number of books, perhaps issued yearly, giving accounts of peoples' experiences, what happened, facts, figures, what were the failures, and what success was achieved?

A model of effective political action leading to positive change is possible. To build this, people need good objective information. How does the political system work, and how is it possible to change it? Without this, the would-be radical forever stands isolated, as a lone voice crying out in the wilderness.

Stephen Booth

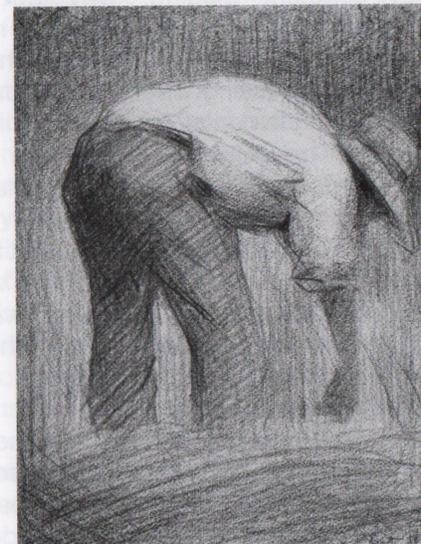


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## Permaculture: Ethical Design for Living

It's become a cliché to say that we are living on the edge of eco-disaster — it's also a reality that cannot be overstated. The ecology of Gaia is an interface between land (the Geosphere), air (the Atmosphere), water (the Hydrosphere) and life (the Biosphere), a delicate web of interconnections on the verge of unravelling right before our eyes.

The global eco-crisis is at least partly a consequence of the way that we in the West consume — cheap post war food production policies and a disconnectedness from the world around us have led us to overlook the true costs of what we eat and drink. In the UK farmers have increased food production by 100% since the war, yet the farming labour force is dwindling and the quality of agricultural land is diminishing. In addition, the energy inputs to achieve that production have increased 1,600%. In other words, farming is actually about eight times less efficient now than it was in 1945. Other hidden consequences of this cheap-at-all-costs/live-now-pay-later ethic include massive soil erosion, nitrification of the water table, loss of biodiversity and wildlife habitat, contamination of fruit and vegetables with pesticide residues and the release of greenhouse gasses such as methane and carbon dioxide caused by excessive cattle farming and ploughing. Even the humble cup of tea that you could well be sipping as you read this very article is a product of a complex chain of

inputs and outputs, few of which are ever fully ethically or environmentally accounted for.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Is there any good reason why our 'cuppa' can't be sourced as part of a self reliant and abundant cycling system? (OK, so 'tea' won't grow well in the Cool Temperate UK, but there are plenty of substitutes which will, such as lemon balm, chamomile, mint, dandelion, rosehips, raspberry leaves, nettles, etc).

Permaculture is a contraction of permanent agriculture (or sometimes permanent culture), a term coined in the late seventies by two Australians, David Holmgren and Bill Mollison. Like Anarchy, it's a concept that is beautifully simple, yet can be notoriously difficult to explain. One useful soundbite summary is "Creating abundant and sustainable human habitats by following nature's patterns". Primarily permaculture is a design system — a way of making links and connections, of looking at how elements are placed in relation to each other in order to maximise their efficiency in creating a self sustaining, low input/high output, non-exploiting whole.

At the heart of permaculture is a core set of values or ethics. These can be summarised as 'Earthcare' (recognising that our Earth, Gaia, is the source of all life and respecting her accordingly); 'Peoplecare' (supporting and helping each other to change to ways of living that are not harming ourselves or the planet, and realising that we are a part of the Earth, not apart from it) and 'Fairshares' (ensuring that the Earth's limited resources are utilised in ways that are equitable and wise).

Permaculture design isn't about having to get your head around untold facts, figures, Latin names and complicated techniques. Rather it is about careful and contemplative observation of nature and natural systems, of recognising universal patterns and principles, and learning to apply these 'ecological truisms' to our own circumstances. These tools and strategies can be utilised to finding 'Earthright' solutions in all forms of human activity, from energy management, sorting out efficient transportation systems, 'Green' economics and trading ventures, waste treatment, forestry practice and land development to promoting holistic health systems and creating sustainable homes and communities.

However, we all need to eat, and it is the issue of food production where permaculture has its origins. If we are to feed ourselves sustainably we clearly need to be moving away from industrialised agriculture and more towards a gardening philosophy — less high chemical input

prairie farming of monocultures and more market and home gardens; places for creating edible landscapes, polycultures, community growing projects and forest gardens. In London alone the potential food growing space includes 14,411ha of agricultural land, 53,600ha of protected open space, 1.4 million households with gardens, 1388ha of derelict land and 980ha of allotments, as well as school playgrounds, rooftops, parks, balconies, etc (figures — NFA/SAFE Alliance). Not many of us would be able to grow ALL of the food we need to live, but all of us could make an often significant contribution to our own diets, and might even have a surplus to share or trade with friends and neighbours. Growing our own not only guarantees a supply of fresh, locally grown high quality produce, but also has many other benefits. These include stress relief, exercise (I particularly like Bill Mollison's description of gardening as a "form of gentle Tai Chi"), a reconnection with the soil and an excuse to simply lean on the spade and philosophise the afternoon away.

The 'pattern language' of permaculture design principles can be clearly demonstrated when applied to our productive gardens, allotments, orchards and smallholdings.

#### **Work With Nature, Not Against**

Francis Bacon's assertion in the early 1600's that we must 'bend nature to our will' has informed our species' relationship with this fragile planet for much of the modern era. Now in these days of desertification, flooding, global warming, ozone depletion and mass extinction we are seeing just how futile and plain wrong-headed such a philosophy truly is. Putting massive efforts into attempting to 'tame nature', such as by damming valleys and flood plains or creating and maintaining bare soil by plough, is not only energy consuming, unsustainable and destructive, it is also unnecessary when we can meet the needs of people and the environment by working in harmony with, or even directly utilising, natural systems.

Everything gardens, or modifies its environment — worms dig and aerate the land; leaf fall mulches bare soil and adds nutrients and structure; spreading annuals such as chickweed provide an over wintering ground cover crop; slugs devour dead plant matter and begin the composting process which is continued by bacteria and fungi; bees pollinate and the droppings of birds sew seeds and add fertiliser. Instead of whipping out the Bug Gun at the first sign of pest damage, why not encourage predators such as ladybirds and hoverflies to do our work for us by planting attractants such as limnathes, nigella or buckwheat? Instead of

damaging the soil's structure and straining our backs with constant digging, why not add compost directly to the soil as a surface mulch and utilise the worms' free labour inputs, whilst at the same time suppressing weeds and providing protection from the elements?

#### **The Problem Is The Solution**

Or, in the words of Bill Mollison, "You haven't got an excess of slugs, you've got a duck deficiency..." It is how we look at things that make them advantageous or not. For example, a 'weed' is often described as any plant that is growing in the wrong place. Yet with a small shift in perspective we can change our definition to "A plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered". Nature abhors a vacuum, and any soil that is left bare will quickly be colonised by native wild plants. Rather than constantly battling to eradicate these 'volunteers', why not adopt a more tolerant approach? Although 'weeds' can compete with our food crops, and given half a chance would very quickly return cultivated land to wilderness, allow some to grow between productive areas. They increase biodiversity, act as 'dynamic accumulators' (that is, they mine the sub soil with their roots to bring up minerals that may be deficient on the surface), attract wildlife and can be harvested for compost or mulch material. Many are even edible or medicinal, or have a host of other uses and properties our post Victorian/Cramphorns haughty-culture have largely forgotten.

#### **Maximise Diversity**

As we enter the twenty first century the world largely relies on some twenty or so staple crops. Yet the Cornwall based permaculture growing and research project Plants For A Future list over seven thousand species of plants that are edible or otherwise useful to peoplekind that we can grow in the UK alone.

In a permaculture growing system each function should be supported by many elements. In other words, nothing should be indispensable as its loss or failure can be disastrous. A person who has had only one well paid but highly specialised job throughout their working life would be less able to cope with redundancy than somebody who has several small incomes earned from a variety of sources. In the same way, the farmer who grows as wide and diverse range of edible plants as possible (a polyculture) still gets to eat if some of them don't make it to harvest. On the other hand, their neighbour who gives all of their land over to one crop (a monoculture) starves if it fails.

The other side of the coin is that every element in the system should have many uses. Permaculture people tend to spend a lot of time

emphasising the importance of planting trees. This is because of the multiplicity of their yields and functions. Not only do they provide food crops in the form of fruit, nuts, berries, beans and leaf protein, they also supply bio-fuels, timber, coppice, medicines and fibre as well as a myriad of beneficial effects for wildlife and on planet wide systems.

#### **Everything Cycles**

In the natural world, there is no such thing as 'pollution'. Within an ecosystem, every 'waste product' is useful elsewhere within that system. Examples include the Nitrogen, Carbon and Hydrological cycles. Yet industrialised society seems to be all about breaking these feedback loops. Nowhere perhaps is this more clearly typified than by our habit of flushing our bodily wastes out to sea every time we pull the toilet chain. Not only are we causing pollution, we are wasting a valuable resource. Composting our faeces mends the cycle of fertility, producing 'humanure' which, after a year or so to ensure that pathogens are destroyed, can be used as a fertiliser for trees or fruit bushes rather than crops which are consumed directly such as leaves or salads.

We have also broken the cycle of time by changing to a linear perception of its passage. For our ancestors, events were not singular but recurrent, governed by the movements of sun and moon, the passing of the seasons, of sowing and harvest, summer abundance and winter scarcity. Nowadays we see no reason why we shouldn't have spring lamb and fresh strawberries in December, but even though our calendars might run in straight lines, our bodies are still attuned to respond to nature's patterns. Christmas feasting was originally about stocking up with the last of the previous season's harvest in preparation for the lean months ahead. Yet goosegrass, one of the first plants to appear the following spring, acts as a natural tonic when drunk as a tea, flushing out the body toxins that build up over the winter. Returning to eating what is locally and seasonally available repairs another cycle and puts us back in touch again.

#### **Correct Placement**

Permaculture design is about maximising the beneficial connections between elements, in other words, putting things in the right place. There's not a lot of point in planting 'Cut And Come Again' lettuces on your allotment two miles away from your house if you only visit it once a week. When you are knocking up a salad for tea, human nature and the law of minimum effort dictates that you will pop round to the greengrocers and buy a lettuce whilst your crop sits running to seed... Permaculture designers

therefore use the concept of 'zones' to help them decide where things best belong. Zones are numbered from 0 to 5, and can be thought of as a series of concentric rings moving out from a centre point, where human activity and need for attention is most concentrated, to where there is no need for intervention at all. Zone Zero is the house or home centre. In terms of food production this might be about using energy efficient cooking and storage methods, or designing an ergonomic kitchen layout. Zone 1 is your immediate back garden, the place nearest the house where "the gardener's shadow" most often falls. This is the place to put crops that require frequent attention, those 'Cut and Come Again' salads, herbs, strawberry plants, espalier trees, seedlings in trays, as well as your greenhouse, worm compost bin and cold frames. Fruit trees and bushes might be in zone 2, whilst main crop vegetables that require weeding and watering on an occasional basis will be a feature of zone 3 (perhaps that once a week cycling distance allotment?) Zone 4 is semi-wild, for example coppice managed woodland used for forage and gathering other wild foods and timber, whilst zone 5 is the wilderness, where there is no human intervention apart from the observation of natural eco-systems and cycles.

Permaculture provides a framework upon which to base Earthright thinking and practice whatever one's lifestyle choices or belief system. To me, however, its ethical philosophies and principles sit well with Anarchist thought, particularly concepts like mutualism, collective networking, decentralisation, autonomy, and placing an emphasis on personal responsibility. The other thing that I like about permaculture is that it asks us to start from where we are now; "at the end of your nose," as Bill Mollison says. You don't have to wait until 'After The Revolution' to sprout a jar of mung beans on your kitchen shelf or join your local LETS. Nor do you need to be able to afford to buy acres of land to plant a windowbox full of herbs or support your nearest Farmers Market. Starting an organic allotment or planting an apple tree are tremendously empowering acts, and positive steps towards creating healthy self-reliant communities. At its essence, permaculture is about making real that other 'green truism', "Think Globally But Act Locally". For cliché or not, that is where the future lies if we are to have one (Originally published 2001 in The Raven.).

**Graham Burnett**

