

FREEDOM

VOL 81:1

2021

ANARCHIST JOURNAL

BY DONATION

THE FALL

VIRUS

CLIMATE

ECONOMY

MUTUAL AID, REBELLION AND ROBBERY IN A TIME OF ENDLESS CRISIS

WHAT'S ALL THIS 'ANARCHISM' ABOUT?

There are many misconceptions about what anarchism is and what anarchists want in the media. Some of the myths are accidental, some spread deliberately — but the most notorious is that we're all about chaos.

Little could be further from the truth, the famous circled A for example is historically a symbolic acronym. Anarchy is Order.

While we have our share of chaotic adherents and experiences, and sometimes comrades' methods can be very direct, we have no desire to simply break the system. We also want to replace it with something better, known as the beautiful idea.

What that represents in its specifics differs from person to person, as with every broad creed (capitalism included), but for the last 150 years, from individualism to mutualism, to anarcho-communism, anarcho-syndicalism and libertarian municipalism, the irony is that we are often obsessed with organisation.

Which will happen when you're trying to frame a whole other alternative society to the one we have now.

This paper is itself produced by an organised non-hierarchical collective and covers some of the broad range of topics where you will find anarchists fighting for a better future.

Every member has an equal say in how Freedom Press runs via our monthly meetings, and no-one is unaccountable for their actions with mandates being subject to recall if people misuse their positions.

About the Front Page Image

This issue's art was contributed by Illustra Feccia, whose satirical work can be found all over London if you know where to look — including on the shutters at Freedom Bookshop. Among other projects, they are a contributor to stealthisposter.org, a large archive of political art open for anyone to use. All content on their website has been released into the public domain under a CC0 license.

(This paper and the freedomnews.org.uk news website uses CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).



For people interested in this sort of thing, the main typefaces are Langdon, Alfa Slab One and Centabel Book. Dingbat symbols are taken from 1910 issues of Emma Goldman's *Mother Earth* magazine.

Kindly printed by Aldgate Press



Talks for schools

Far from being bomb-chucking weirdos always clad in black, bent on destroying society (well, not all of us), anarchist philosophy promotes the idea where people come together and cooperate in a way that benefits all based on the principles of freedom, equality and solidarity.

Rebel City, a London-wide group of anarchists, have been going into schools and colleges to talk to students studying politics or related subjects trying to promote these positive and more accurate views of anarchism, dispelling the myths in a way that can't be achieved by studying textbooks or using conventional teaching methods.

We have found that teachers and students alike relish the opportunity to quiz real life anarchists on their take of what an anarchist society would look like. How do you get there? How do you deal with criminals, lazy people, scarcity, the economy, etc.

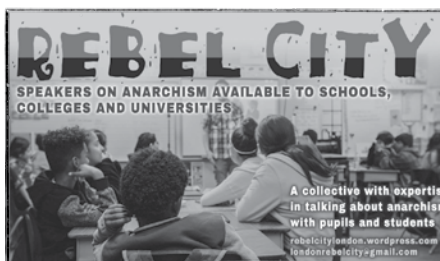
Rebel City are looking for interested groups, schools and colleges to give

their talks to and bring a more accurate account of what anarchism is about to the young masses.

If you, your school, or your group are interested in hosting a talk, please get in touch. We can cover anywhere in the Greater London area in person, or anywhere by Zoom.

Contact: Jane,
a_levelpoliticsanarchism@yahoo.com

The Rebel City collective also produces a freesheet of the same name, which can be found at rebelcitylondon.wordpress.com.



Some resources

Media

channelzeronetwork.com podcasts
enoughisenough14.org Europe
itsgoingdown.org USA
noticiasanarquistas.noblogs.org Spanish
paris-luttes.info French
squat.net squatting
sub.media video

Archives and Research

anarchistlibrary.net books, essays
iisg.amsterdam archive
katesharpleylibrary.net archive, essays
libcom.org archive, books, essays
lidiap.ficedl.info periodicals
thesparrowsnest.org.uk archive
schnews.org & doordie.org.uk archived

Bookshops

Hydra Books Bristol
 Lighthouse Edinburgh
 Calton Books Glasgow
 News From Nowhere Liverpool
 56A S London
 Housmans N London
 Five Leaves Nottingham

HS2 FROM THE GROUND UP

The £100 billion High Speed 2 (HS2) rail project is in serious trouble, with its northern section looking less and less likely to happen and even its southern half under pressure. A large part of this is thanks to green direct actionists who have stymied the destructive project at every turn. **Laura Hughes** gives her view.

The battle over HS2 echoes the 1996 Newbury Bypass protests, which famously cost a fifth of the entire price of the planned road — Stop HS2 has added “cost pressures” of £800 million. Newbury was critical in preventing 600 other proposed roads from happening under Thatcher, with the subsequent Labour government scrapping that wider scheme in 1997.

Public support for the lovable fierceness of the characters fighting their chapter of Britain’s ecowar was fed by media coverage and court battles showcasing the dire science of the situation. The Wild Horses of Newbury shows horses approaching an oak tree about to be felled, and with roaring chainsaws and old English spoken word it sends shivers down your spine. England became what it did from these old oaks and we are the descendents of the people who depended on them to see (and pillage) the world. There is a deepness and darkness to the oak and when you climb a matriarchal tree you feel its pulse. The roots hold tight when you pitch a tent below, protecting us protectors whilst we nod off, to the gentle hooting of almost extinct Barn Owls.

My first action

I was crawling through the undergrowth in Ruislip with a friend who had been expelled from the army after serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. He’d dared to question their war and joined the anti frackers, then had come to London to see what HS2 was up to.

He fell in the river twenty minutes in, trying to climb around a tree overhanging the stream. HS2 is now polluting that stream from Ruislip’s Newyears Green Lane dump, piledriving through our aquifer via this pollution pathway, knowing 22% of Londoners drink it.

As we got closer, we could see our friend Sarah Green had lost faith in us and climbed on top of the company’s only digger. I phoned and asked her to get



Protectors at Euston Station protest camp

Pic: Guy Smallman

down as she was distressed and in turmoil at HS2, which had finally managed to enter the meadow we were protecting. We had stopped them for months successfully.

She caused a distraction for me and I briskly strolled through about 20 men in orange, smiling, then managed to D-lock my neck to the digger’s hydraulics. My friend laid in the bushes watching me for an hour until one of the staff, going for a wee in the bush, spotted him and made him leave. Then no-one could see me as they covered the view from the road.

Police searched me and handcuffed me to the digger, which was terrifying as they had no control over the machinery. I began to panic as my neck was tight in the D-lock but as I looked up, I noticed a kestrel above me, keeping watch. I knew I was protected. My eyes welled up and paramedics turned up (standard procedure), telling the police how dangerous and unprofessional their misuse of handcuffs was. Three-and-a-half hours later I was in the cells and a cop brought me a book, *The Alchemist* — which depicts birds of prey giving signs when they are needed.

XR’s arrival

Much like at Newbury, we have used up every bit of our energy in this ecowar and it can be exhausting, so the 2018 youth movement that arrived with Greta Thunberg and Extinction Rebellion helped us a lot. I was one of the first arrested in 2018 with XR and Stop HS2, and have seen the two movements grow together.

XR provided us at the Stop HS2 campaign with science, media and people power, and Stop HS2 showed them a real, gritty movement of frontline activism.

Support work at Euston

I had to leave the frontlines in 2019 after a bailiff ran me over in front of my children. Instead I studied human rights law and got a top legal team together to stop my mates being crushed under the weight of a crane and metres of London clay at the anti-HS2 Euston camp in February. I did not sleep in the month the Nine were down there.

We ran interviews with the press, created Facebook groups, pulling in support from all over. Screw You HS2 even has its own Dank HS2 Memes group, which is updated constantly trying to find humour to get us through the violence. Lego animations were made using the real voices of activists and bailiffs. Musicians came out of lockdown with songs about the nine brave protectors.

This is more than just a battle about an unwanted railway. It has become a battle against the patriarchy and all that wishes to destroy life and our support systems.

People will not get in the way of what they perceive as progress, but we can certainly chip away piece by piece. This is an ecowar, and a human rights catastrophe.



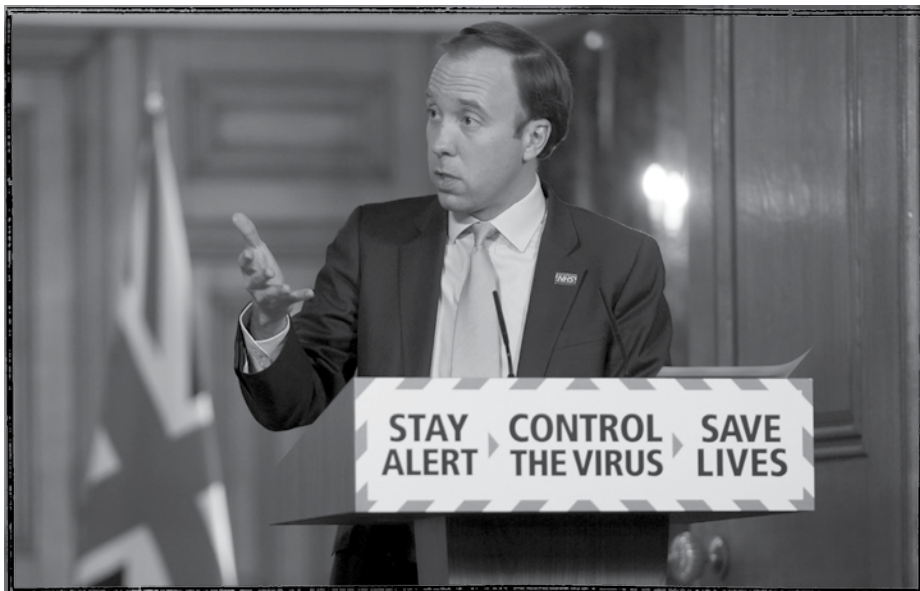
SOLIDARITY OF THE RICH

As if we needed reminding, solidarity and mutual aid are hard work. Covid 19 laid it all bare once again. In building up organisations from the grassroots, time and time again, we see our movements hampered by sectarian interests. There are many examples of mutual aid groups springing up and working well until the inevitable interference from either the Labour Party, trade unions, Trotskyist groups and / or other Marxists. On top of this, we have to contend with the very real problem of the erosion of working class consciousness, making our task of reaching the people that need the most help incredibly tough.

I want to focus on the other class though. They seem to do things differently. The ruling class doesn't seem to suffer from a lack of consciousness. They also don't allow division to hamper their efforts. The second point is pretty easy to address. They hardly need to worry about being a divided class, considering they've got it all sewn up. The first point is much more interesting and something we can learn from. They really know how to show each other solidarity. They really know how to exercise mutual aid.

We've witnessed this as corruption throughout Covid in the UK. We've seen government ministers handing out contracts to their friends left, right, and centre. When Matt Hancock was Health Secretary (pictured) he gave a contract to a friend to produce PPE. The country groaned a little and just shrugged at how nothing ever changes. Except it was a change and the media hasn't charted it very well for us.

Back in the early stages of the pandemic the Tory government deliberately changed the law on government procurement. They relaxed procurement rules so that they could get contracts through more quickly. The idea behind this isn't corruption in their eyes; it's common sense. Let's just be clear, it's absolutely corrupt in an anarchist sense.



The result is they could get equipment and services in place much more quickly and effectively (at least in theory). Obviously, the corner cutting this results in would mean some mistakes along the way, but then cutting red tape fits in with the Tory ideal of the free market too. It also meant that ministers would be much more likely to think of the services their friends could offer first.

It's networking, basically. It's obviously also class based. It means public money going to the mates of government ministers because that's better in their eyes than the state either holding things up and doing them fairly, or else the state actually doing them itself.

Their instinct though, is what is interesting here. Their instinct is to get their mates involved. Their mates can help save lives and at the same time make a fortune. It's an example of Tory solidarity. They changed the law to make it possible and then they just got on with it. They would defend it, regardless of the obvious clangers (like some of these contracts producing nothing) on the basis of trying their best in difficult circumstances. Their belief in authority also comes into play here. They believe that they are just in their actions because they have authority through the political hierarchy to act in these ways.

Thinking about ruling class solidarity in this way forces us to reconsider our own

efforts. We are at a huge disadvantage in our struggle. We are fighting against the system and also within it. Whilst there are many well meaning Labour Party activists at a grassroots level, we have to bear in mind that they are a ruling class party. They are the Official Opposition, and they are therefore not going to think of mutual aid in principled terms. Solidarity for them, at a party level, is influenced by a desire for official power. There are also occasionally Marxists that we have to work with but, let's face it, this organised Marxism is essentially a ruling class fetish. They desire to be the ruling class. That's all they want. It doesn't matter how many silly jokes the wittier Marxists tell you about anarchists and organising, they're essentially ready to take over anything they can get their hands on. We must learn to mitigate against these outside, sectarian forces.

If we discount the Labour party as a ruling class organisation and then dismiss Marxist activists as a sectarian risk to conducive self-organisation, what have we got? It's us. Us and our power to self-organise — our power to take people with us. It's amazing so many anarchists got so much achieved in terms of mutual aid over the last 18 months. Ruling class forces find their brand of solidarity so much simpler but they don't have the infiltrators trying to seize power from them.

~ Jon Bigger

COVID AND MUTUAL AID

In the early days of the pandemic, Freedom put out a call to found mutual aid groups for helping people struggling under lockdown, which went spectacularly viral. Anna K, one of the original organisers of the phenomenon, reflects on lessons learned.

Back in April 2020, I offered five thoughts on the successes and failures of Covid Mutual Aid groups springing up nationwide:

- Most ‘aid’ being offered was mostly a volunteer shopping service and didn’t challenge the state or capital.
- Some groups were aiming beyond commodity exchange, with acts of direct economic redistribution, free provision of supplies and mobilising to resist evictions.
- Even “shopping service” groups offered real material help to tens of thousands, many of whom were battling for their survival thanks to the crypto-eugenics of the government’s response.
- Local mutual aid groups helped to build — at incredible speed — links of friendship and solidarity worn away by 40 years of racist neoliberalism.
- We could push mutual aid groups in a liberatory direction by promoting democratic structures, connecting with other struggles and promoting forms of aid and solidarity beyond shopping.

I largely stand by this today. Covid mutual aid did a fantastic job of escaping the usual insular bubbles of the far left, forging connections between people who inhabited the same geographic area but who lacked a shared political identity and often had little reason to interact.

This was not without problems. Racism, ableism and class domination were rampant in many groups, while local authorities — particularly Labour councillors — tried to

sabotage and/or co-opt efforts outside their direct control. Nonetheless, the localised, non-bureaucratic nature of these groups let them establish and meet people’s material needs much more quickly and effectively than state agencies or corporate charities.

Too many however — including groups in which I was involved — fell into a depoliticised service model, in which one group of volunteers helped another, distinct grouping by doing their shopping in supermarkets (which exploit workers and suppliers, damage the environment etc). Without a wider political vision many groups struggled to maintain themselves beyond the “peak” of the first pandemic wave.

Perhaps most damningly, while the rise of mutual aid groups shamed both government and the third sector, we failed to transform this into a clearly articulated critique of the government’s handling of the pandemic, let alone a movement capable of opposing it. Instead of raising collective consciousness, Covid “mutual aid” was all too easily assimilated into the nationalist “Blitz spirit” narrative. Indeed, the cynically minded might argue that Covid mutual aid came painfully close to the Red Tory dream of a “big society” filling the space left by a retreating state.

None of this is to suggest we shouldn’t have bothered or that we shouldn’t direct our energies into mutual aid projects. Climate change all but guarantees we will face more “once in a generation” disasters, which makes expanding mutual aid projects less a question of tactics than necessity (as Eshe Kiama Zuri pointed out in gal-dem, this has always been the case for oppressed groups). When it comes to mass mutual aid projects, we thus have little choice but to follow Beckett’s injunction: Try again. Fail again. Fail better.

Talking politics

In some mutual aid groups, we were so keen to avoid becoming a leftist echo chamber that we strived to not appear too “political” for fear of putting people off. Instead, we resolved to introduce politics at a later date or, even worse, thought we didn’t need to, trusting that the “inherently” political nature of mutual aid would move people towards an oppositional, liberatory vision.

As the last year has shown, this was naive on our part. The “good” moment to bring up politics never came and insofar as there was a trajectory it was towards charity, not solidarity.

This was compounded by the urgency of the crisis and high levels of need. Even in my ultra-local south Lewisham group, we were fielding so many requests for food and prescriptions that we had little to no time to think critically and, in our stress and exhaustion, it was all too easy to fall into a service provision model.

If we are to avoid such pitfalls in future, we cannot wait until the peak of the next crisis. We must use (relative) lulls in our disastrous present to establish local groups whose commitment to an emancipatory anti-capitalist mutual aid is written into their organisational DNA, so when the disaster comes, they can respond quickly and effectively without degenerating into a DIY third sector.

To build these organisations, we must commit to having long, sometimes difficult, conversations about politics. While once it was the aim of the revolutionary left to engage in these, today it often seems like we’ll do anything to avoid them. The limits of the Covid mutual aid movement show this cannot continue. If we are to build revolutionary class consciousness, we cannot ground our organising in a supposedly neutral fantasy of “helping those in need” but only in a collective desire for a better world. To kindle this desire we must reach out to those we do not know, with whom we do not necessarily identify, and begin talking. Not only about how bad things are, but also how much better they could be.



Pic: Timothy Vollmer



THE DEEP SICKNESS

AND HOW WE CAN FIGHT FOR BETTER

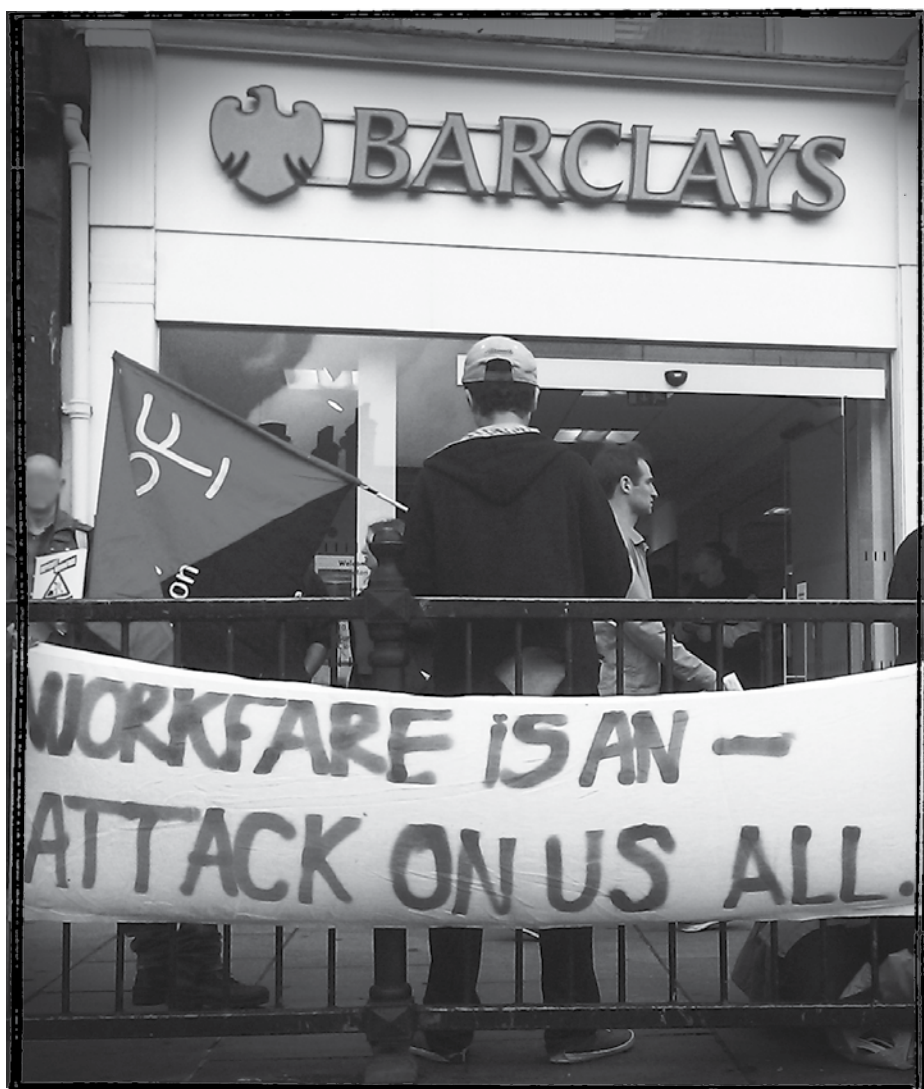
“I would have quit this job months ago, but I’d be sanctioned by the Jobcentre”.

That’s what one friend told me after working unpaid overtime every evening that week, on low pay that barely covered bills and rent. It’s a dilemma faced by everyone working in unsafe or illegal conditions. If you are fired then you have to get by for five weeks with no income while you wait for Universal Credit. If you quit, you risk being sanctioned and left for months with no money at all. This is a system designed to punish workers for leaving, designed to keep us quiet and accept unfair or even illegal demands at work, while the rich rake in the profits. If we want to make better lives then we should all make a stand against the benefits system, or it will undermine every attempt to organise our workmates.

How did it get this bad? It has been going this way for decades. I remember in the 2000s my friend’s mum telling me “you can’t have a life on the dole”. That was after New Labour cut benefits for single parents. I won’t list all the hardships my friend’s family faced — there are enough lefty articles that see us only as victims. But I want to ask: if things were bad then, how much worse are they now?

Apart from a temporary, partial pandemic uplift, our benefits have been frozen for years. In reality that’s a cut. We haven’t seen benefits money this low compared to wages since the 1940s. Housing is almost impossible to find. On top of cuts, Local Housing Allowance is set below the average rent. I don’t know anyone who isn’t paying rent out of the money meant for living costs. Under-35s aren’t funded for a flat, only for shared accommodation. This forces people to live with strangers in unsafe situations. Many shared houses don’t even have locks on bedroom doors. One friend came home to find smashed glass and a pool of blood where a guest of her housemate had stabbed someone and broken down the front door.

The sanctions regime has been ramped up over the last decade, and now you can lose your benefits for months for as little as turning up late for an appointment.



A Solidarity Federation protest outside Barclays over its use of Workfare in 2012

One study interviewed DWP staff who admitted it was designed to cause “psychological harm” to claimants. Anyone “fit for work” is supposed to spend 35 hours a week looking for jobs. In areas with high unemployment those jobs just don’t exist. This is combined with health assessments brought in during the last Labour government, famous for finding severely disabled people fit work. This has led to hundreds of deaths and suicides, many covered up by the DWP.

I’m writing all this, not so we can wallow, but to give a clear picture of what we’re up against. While unemployed people are

seeing the worst of it, make no mistake: this is an attack on everyone. We don’t need pity, what we need is solidarity from all working class people — or it’ll be their feet in the fire next. Nor do we need more words from politicians, more condemnation of the Tories. The fact is that we can’t vote our way out of this. Labour has always treated us like scum, whether it was sending us off to work camps in 1929, or cutting single-parent benefits in the ’90s and 2000s. They had a hand in Universal Credit*, and even Corbyn’s manifesto made no promise to reverse the benefits freeze. No, the only way we can change this is to do it ourselves.

OF BRITISH WELFARE

The Example of Workfare

When we won our campaign against Workfare we saw first hand how solidarity is the best way to stand up to the DWP. Workfare was a brutal scheme where claimants were forced to work for free or lose their benefits. The Solidarity Federation was involved in the campaign to end it, alongside organisations like Afed, Disabled People Against the Cuts, Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty, and Boycott Workfare. These five are named in legal papers where the government admits we were close to forcing the whole scheme to collapse — which in the end, we did.

Workfare was sold as training and “experience” to help people back into work, but in practice it was just free labour for corporations. Free labour that they fired people in paid work to make room for! At least one man even got sent back to his old job, just without any wages.

We beat Workfare by targeting employers, one at a time. When one dropped out of the scheme we’d move on to the next. Sometimes demonstrations escalated to pushing their way into shops and refusing to leave, other times they held a simple picket outside. This was possible because we made it clear how all workers were affected, how it was taking away jobs as well as hurting the people out of work. A great number of people were turned away by the pickets, because they saw how collaborating would be shooting themselves in the foot.

Appealing to everyone also made it easier to organise. Many benefits claimants are in and out of work all the time, so organisations that only appeal to unemployed people tend to be unstable. One claimants union I joined at the time folded because all the organisers got jobs! Recognising that any of us is just a p45 away from the jobcentre made the Workfare campaign much stronger. In the end, by 2017, all four of the main workfare schemes had been scrapped. We made them unworkable. Only a few limited ones are left.

Now, consider that for all the effort that’s gone into promoting Corbyn and the Labour Party, in 2021 we are still stuck with the same sanctions and benefits cuts as we were before. But by solidarity and direct action, a few thousand claimants and their allies were able to bring down a flagship government policy. That’s the power we have when we stand together and are determined to fix things ourselves.

Back in the present, there are two ways I can see to end the benefits freeze. One is to take a leaf from the environmentalists’ book — to start a “dole rebellion” where we blockade roads and infrastructure until the government gives in.

The other way to do it is “death by a thousand cuts,” where we try to resist every small injustice and indignity from the DWP. Try everything: file appeals, protest, occupy the jobcentre and refuse to leave until they help us. That last one is a very effective tactic and we’ve heard of claimants using it successfully. Challenge them for every inch and escalate slowly until there is a major ruckus any time a claimant is sanctioned, anywhere. Either of these strategies could work, and the first thing to do is to throw ourselves into the task of organising at our local jobcentres. Start small, challenge what we can, win small victories, and build up from there.

I’ll end with a few lessons I’ve picked up over the years of trying (and often failing!) to organise on benefits:

- Give people a way to get involved that’s not meetings. Invite non-claimants too, and keep a list of emails and phone numbers for people to invite on actions. Remember you can walk into a jobcentre without an appointment and just demand to be seen, if you are confident about it. It’s best not to do it alone. Sometimes they can sort a problem out right then and there

- One of the best sources on our rights is the *Welfare, Benefits, and Tax Credits Handbook* released by the Child Poverty Action Group every year. Claimants can

call and request a discount which is much cheaper than the advertised price (£20 at the time of writing), so club together and buy a copy!

- Focus on skills, not charity. Organisations like Citizens Advice are already overrun so unfortunately if we help people fill out forms then we will never get around to doing anything else. It’s better to give people the skills to do it for themselves.

Handing out clear and simple know-your-rights leaflets is helpful. SolFed pamphlet *Stuff the DWP (doesn’t want you to know)* is a great example. Training to accompany each other to appointments at the jobcentre is another thing that would be really helpful

- Make meetings as easy to attend as possible. Hold them close to the jobcentre at the same time and place each month. If you have the funds, bring refreshments. Choose a space with step-free access and accessible toilets

- Don’t make “pie in the sky” campaigns. Universal Basic Income is a long way off and divides idealists from claimants’ day to day struggle with sanctions and cuts. Some disabled people have spoken out against how UBI could make our situation worse

- DO go on the attack. After 10 years of anti-cuts campaigns, slogans like “stop this ...” and “bring back that ...” are just depressing because victory would only mean things stay just as bad as they already are. We should ask for MORE, then even if we don’t get it at least it gives us a little hope.

Best of luck with your organising!

This article was first published by the Solidarity Federation, British section of the anarcho-syndicalist IWA. Find out more at solfed.org.uk.



* In 2008 Labour announced their intent to move to the single benefit system recommended by David Freud, who later joined the Conservatives as a key figure in setting up Universal Credit. The paper also recommended tougher sanctions and forcing claimants to do unpaid “Work Experience” — the origin of Workfare.

POSITIVE LESSONS OF

Bill Stickers makes the case for taking good ideas from an oft-criticised movement and asks why its critics haven't produced anything better ...

If the torrential rains, firestorms and heat domes didn't cut through, the release of 2021's IPCC report made it clear even to those not listening at the back that we are on the path to civilisational collapse. 1.5 degrees of warming is locked in. We need a radical climate movement.

By now, the critical hit piece on XR has practically become a genre. Pundits of the various leftist movements have spent thousands of words telling us how much better their red climate movement would have been (more working class! more intersectional! more militant!) if only they'd got round to doing it.

The fact that any such amazingly radical and pure movement has failed to appear, despite a few attempts, is politely brushed under the carpet. We're not really examining our own ideas about movement building, in fact we're stuck with a dogmatic idea of how it's done, that rarely refers to any praxis. One classic from the Out of the Woods collective on libcom.org sums up the back seat scolding: "We admire their commitment and courage, and as we note, hope that the return of large-scale direct action in the UK does provide some pedagogical value even despite (and perhaps because of) its flaws".

Empty rhetoric about violence fills the airwaves, such as Novara Media's discussion piece 'Is The Climate Movement Ready For Violence', or the random Twitter anarchist exhortation "don't sit in the road, set fire to a rich man's car," to which the only reasonable response is surely to say "go on then". Violence isn't talked about as a tool, it's a benchmark to divide edgy radical from wet liberal.

XR get relentless criticism for their attitude to the police, which is pretty odd given that almost every trad-left demo is stewarded and negotiated with the plod in advance. Anyone campaigning for Corbyn in 2019 was arguing for the recruitment of 10,000 extra coppers! This draws comparatively little criticism

compared to the XR approach of willfully disobeying the police by blocking roads or occupying buildings while providing a screen of police liaison.

XR brought large numbers of people into direct contact with public order policing. If you want people to hate the police then get them to meet the police under trying circumstances. Let them feel the magic radicalising truncheon. Anger in XR against the police was building towards the end of the October Rebellion in 2019 as the unfairness of the police's seizure of disabled Rebels gear in particular caused hundreds to gather around New Scotland Yard. Arguably a bit more effective than starting with the ACAB rhetoric.

Added to this, there's a tendency to essentialise XR, to treat one or two mistakes in this sprawling chaotic movement as a reason to condemn the whole, while our own fuck ups are treated as aberrations. An even-handed approach would be more useful.

Slagging XR is good for getting the thumbs up on Twitter, not so good for getting boots on the street. Social media and its required quickfire hot take approach has seriously damaged our ability to analyse objectively. Too many fail to ask themselves what the point of radical critique is. In fact it's fair to say that the onslaught of critique against XR has damaged its ability to grow as a movement, especially perhaps amongst the young, while the work to build something to put in its stead has been completely neglected. Is this really the best we can do?

The irony is, there is plenty to critique about XR (its theory of social change for starters), but almost never, it seems, does anyone in the anarchist or left milieu ask if there's anything worth learning. This is a decentralised movement committed to breaking the law in the face of a dire emergency. From a small core group it grew and achieved an undeniable cultural impact. It empowered thousands to take part in civil disobedience, which rapidly mutated into direct action, with actions shutting down the Murdoch press, McDonalds burger plant, and even oil depots; to building tunnels on the route of HS2.

The protest sections of the new PSCC Act are aimed squarely at XR and shutting down its bi-annual Rebellions in London, suggesting the state at least is a bit rattled.

People whose first taste of activism came through XR are now taking action against HS2 or fracking, or are involved in migrant solidarity and projects like Channel Rescue. XR itself has begun to spawn more radical offshoots, e.g Burning Pink.

If we want to build a movement that goes beyond XR, then we at least need to assess it objectively. So what do XR get right?

Branding and messaging

XR arrived with a clear message and some brilliant graphic design. Every movement needs a symbol that can be scrawled on a bus stop in under ten seconds. Solid branding meant each action fed a perception that this was a big and growing movement.

Recruitment

Numbers are crucial. You can have great ideas but if there's only four of you (and two are a bit sus) you're going nowhere. XR organised public meetings not just in lefty strongholds, but everywhere. They avoided sub cultural venues like social centres or trade union-owned buildings and adopted an approach of getting in the general public. The presentation was well advertised and prepared, a practised 25-minute talk, problem, solution, action. Initially these were given by XR big names but there was an active programme of training.

The bar was set low, aimed at meeting the audience where they were — contrary to fondly nurtured anarchist belief most of the British public are not emphatically in favour of street violence and don't harbour a zealous hatred of the police. These talks were really successful in pulling in the numbers.

Structure & Attitude

There's a tendency for critics to treat XR as a top-down hierarchical organisation. It simply isn't, in fact there's very little central control. The initial slightly vague idea of "holacracy," later modified to "self-organised systems" means that if you sign up to the Demands and Principles you can carry out any action you want.

EXTINCTION REBELLION



Pic: Guy Smallman

This led to a ferment of ideas, some good, some perhaps a little off piste (and a lot of community street theatre), but created a movement without a central committee, capable of growing and learning. It also acted as a brake on internal disputes as faction and schism were built into the structure from the start.

One phrase that appears again and again is “good enough for now,” a pragmatic attitude to the idea that organisational structure is never perfect, that the moment we’re in leaves us no time to perfect it.

Action meetings, at their best, are businesslike, action focussed. (Space is also made for other kinds of sharing, of grief and frustration for example). A ground rule often expressed is the acronym W.A.I.T: “Why Am I Talking?” asking participants to reflect on why they are taking up space. This is great for cutting down on empty rhetoric and dovetails nicely with the idea “we are all crew”. Woe betide anyone who stands up to say “XR should ...” as they rapidly find themselves in charge of making it happen.

Movement of movements

XR also has a practice of reaching out and working alongside other movements, such as supporting striking workers, Black Lives Matter, antifascists, struggles against forced academisation, or trying to link up with the

People’s Assembly. It wouldn’t be surprising if some tendrils or other started bringing in parts of the anti-lockdown movement. Its loose structure makes it extraordinarily flexible. It has bodies and resources to deploy, which often outweighs niggles over ideological niceties.

Messianic Madness

Probably the aspect of XR that makes it the most different from traditional anarchist or left-wing organising, (although very familiar to anyone who was around the ‘90s anti-roads movement) is its spiritual side.

This comes from an awareness that facts are not enough. That being right won’t win the argument. People are motivated by connection, community and the binding power of collective ritual. Just look at how upset thousands of people got when changes were suggested to the European Super League. When the football, their ritual, was threatened.

XR uses this tendency to strengthen and connect activists, through song, deliberate rituals or the beat of the samba drums. A reaching out to the sacred, beautiful and psychedelic has changed many people who have come into XR, made them stronger as activists and as a community. Extinction Rebellion was conceived in an ayahuasca ceremony by Gail Bradbrook

and it shows. Unashamed love and grief for what you love is powerful.

There is also a strong current in the tradition of Christian dissent. The Rebellions of One, where individuals blocked roads in order to explain the climate crisis or made unannounced speeches on public transport, saw people stand up and disrupt the rhythms of everyday life to ask those present to think about the gravity of the crisis.

XR clearly doesn’t have all the answers, but there are some valuable signposts. There are hundreds of thousands if not millions in Britain who realise that things are badly awry. They’re looking for answers.

Once upon a time a strong eco-anarchist counter-cultural movement was capable of mobilising thousands to occupy the City of London. It had a lot in common with XR. As we move forward we need to think clearly about how we engage with “liberal” movements. Our critique needs to be accurate and objective, not a jeering diss. We need to put up or shut up, either create our movement or join this one and see where we end up.



... A WORD OF REBUTTAL

Weimar Republic general Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord, famously, classified his officers as intelligent or not, and either hard working or lazy. This produced four types. Clever and industrious laid cunning plans, lazy and stupid made up the cannon-fodder, smart but slothful took high pressure decisions. But watch out, he warned, for those foolish hard workers.

Thus, the Extinction Rebellion.

Let's have a quick look at their praxis before we consider the responses and whether we could have done better.

Strategy and tactics.

XR's Plan "A," as conceived by Field Marshall Roger Hallam (pictured), was to get as many people as possible arrested — and hopefully jailed — on the theory that the State would be unable to cope and thus forced to cave into the four demands. More on this later, but first let's concede to demand one: "Tell the Truth". To which we could only say: "This plan is not going to work".

The problem here is that XR's attempt to be "beyond politics" means accepting the status quo as their default ideology. That's Western capitalism, unfortunately. So as radicals, we have three options: Ignore, engage or criticise.

Now obviously radicals have been getting on with their busy lives and struggles and, for the most part, card carrying anarchists have done little more than opt for reasoned debate with those involved in XR. Without saying this was fruitless, most of the seed has fallen on stony ground. So maybe a little entryism is in order?

Change from within?

"I've got to follow them. I'm their leader"

~ Alex Ledru-Rollin on seeing a mob march past his office window.

There's a lot of people who jump on bandwagons whenever they appear, and a small band who took the easy money dropping from XR's coffers for need or greed. But let's consider the efforts of those who got involved to try and radicalise it from



Pic: Steve Eason

the inside. Will they "put Jeremy Corbyn in No 10," or land up with Keir Starmer?

One mistake people make about XR is to think they are naive. In fact, the membership are mostly highly skilled individuals who have been successful in their chosen careers and private lives and are, in fact, superbly equipped for organising and carrying out any social enterprise, except political protest.

Their errors are not like enthusiastic protestors who rush into a police trap despite being told they are running into a kettle. It's a deliberate rejection of prior protest movements. The racism, indifference to arrestee support and plain environmental vandalism we've seen manifested across various arenas are not mistakes of carelessness or ignorance. They stem from not having thought about politics before engaging in politics. It's not easy to change the ideology of people who don't recognise they have one.

One extra point here. While not everyone in XR is the same, everyone who uses the branding is affected by the underlying message. Planning and inciting people to break the law is also against the law and this has given the authorities a huge handle for repression and exposed

everyone operating under their banner to criminal charges. That's not the same as innovative protesting leading to new laws or more repressive police tactics.

It's important to put XR's achievements in context. They have managed huge numbers of arrests. In London alone it was 1,130 arrests in April 2019 and 1,832 that October. That's pretty big. There were only 341 on the day of the Poll Tax riot in 1990 but 1,314 on the Committee of 100's anti-nuclear sit-down in 1963 and 11,291 during the 1984-85 miners strike. But getting nicked is not a measure of success. It may be an unfortunate consequence of taking action, but perceptive readers will note that while Britain failed to renounce nuclear weapons, the Poll Tax fell.

The Legal Response — a positive result of criticism.

The "let's all go to jail" plan was always a bit of a non-starter. In the reverse of the old tag "if you can't do the time, don't do the crime". Wags said "If you want to do some time, you've got to commit real crime". But the cavalier attitude to arrest and getting criminal records was something that had to be challenged head on.

Green & Black Cross poured its energy and resources into trying to turn round that thinking, at great emotional cost to its members and the organisation. But with the help of experienced protest lawyers the result has been that XR's arrestees switched to a "not guilty plea" strategy in court and as a result many have avoided conviction.

Hundreds more arrests took place over the August wave of XR actions. But very like in the '60s anti-nuclear movement the high energy and high expectations are likely to be followed by a crash dive of despondency. Hopefully many people who were involved will come out the other side as great activists and I trust more forgiving of the smug "we told you so's" than those who encouraged them to get criminal records and police surveillance for little return.

~ Andy Meinke



GREECE'S ROBIN HOOD

Over the last few months, Freedom Press has been putting together the memoir of famed illegalist Vassilis Palaiokostas for publication later this year. *A Normal Life* is a tale so tall that it would be hard to believe, except that much of it has been exhaustively documented in the Greek press, and our Hellenic comrades swear it to be true.

Vassilis and his brother Nikos, later to be popularly nicknamed “The Greek Robin Hood” and “The Phantom,” were born in 1960 and 1966 respectively, raised within a poor family of goat-herders living in a rural village that hugged the side of the Pindus mountains. The elder of the two, Nikos, was just old enough to remember the years of the Junta, a military dictatorship which dominated life from 1967-74 in the wake of a coup against the weakened democratic State. Vassilis, born a little later, would be among the first generation to come of age in the wake of the Junta’s collapse, when the politicians of the Third Hellenic Republic were struggling to put a brave face on rampant unemployment, inflation, corruption and a strikingly rebellious youth movement.

Direct action and illegalist anarchism was on the rise in Greece as Nikos and Vassilis reached adulthood. A libertarian streak had run through much of the iconic Athens Polytechnic Uprising of 1973, feeding into an attitude of “resistance as duty” which fuelled a series of major university occupations and riots through 1979-81. The election of left-wing party PASOK in '81 failed to silence the young movement, and a high point of that struggle took place in 1985-6 with serious riots taking place in Athens following the police shooting of 15-year-old Michalis Kaltezas, just as Vassilis was experiencing his first arrest, followed by conscription into the Greek army.

This ten-year period of chaos and revolt largely built the foundation of an anarchist scene which has been perhaps Europe’s most resilient and successful, in which young Greeks disillusioned both by the authoritarian left and social democracy turned to sometimes spectacular illegalism in pursuit of their aims. From the end of the 1990s through to Millennium anarchist bank robbers and direct actionists became famous, often



A depiction of Vassilis Palaiokostas as St Basil, the Greek Santa — another popular anarchist nickname for him

hugely popular figures nationwide while causing the State endless trouble.

And among the most successful of the illegalists were Vassilis and Nikos, who made a name for themselves not just by committing crime, but because of their habit of giving away most of the proceeds. One tale told by their close associate Kostas ‘The Artist’ Samaras is of a bank robbery’s aftermath when, in the midst of their getaway, Vassilis stopped the car and thrust a wad of notes onto an unsuspecting homeless man. The redistribution of cash in this manner is a mark of the illegalists, and underpins much of their popularity.

Their exploits made them nationally recognised, starting with an audacious attempt to break Nikos out of jail by ramming a stolen truck into the prison walls in 1990, and ending with Vassilis’ second escape by helicopter from Korydallos Prison’s high-security wing in February 2009. Along the way they were part of the biggest bank heist in Greek history, the Kalambaka robbery of 1992, and pioneered a shift to bossnapping when they ransomed far-right industrialist Alexander Haitoglou — the full story of this latter exploit is overleaf.

Though Nikos, now 61 years old, is back in jail the brothers’ reputation remains so potent that when he developed health

issues earlier this year his trip to hospital was via armoured car, the route lined with armed cops, while police choppers thudded overhead. Vassilis is still free, you see, and they were taking no chances.

Freedom got hold of Vassilis’ memoir, written while on the run with a standing bounty of €1 million on his head, primarily because of what we are. Our 135-year history makes us the oldest anarchist publisher in the English language, and our comrades at Syn Editions were kind enough to reach out to us with it.

We are, as a rule, more used to carrying political histories and philosophical ideas than telling the blockbuster tale of a wanted man, however Vassilis’ urge to reject and confound the rules set by our lords and masters is ultimately the urge to be free. His story, and that of Greece’s anarchist movement, is worth telling in more detail.

A Normal Life will be published on November 1st 2021 and can be pre-ordered via freedompress.org.uk



THE KIDNAP OF ALEXANDER

The following piece by **Rob Ray** recounts the events of 1995 when Vassilis and his brother, Nikos, kidnapped and ransomed a Greek industrialist.

On a bracingly cold day in the winter of 1995, Vassilis Palaiokostas and his big brother Nikos sat down for breakfast on a snow-covered mountain plateau in central Greece. With them was the scion of a large food processing company, Alexander Haitoglou. If you're a fan of halva you may have come across his firm's copper-toned tins. He was their prisoner, but chattered quite happily about his business, giving them a crash course in retail economics.

Haitoglou was a man of considerable confidence and means, a charming fellow who, once he knew the identity of the men who'd kidnapped him, put on a sunny face and treated the thing as a bit of a lark, a story for the grandkids. Years later, he would remark: "My kidnappers' behaviour was not bad at all. I was not scared for myself. Actually, I enjoyed some wide-ranging discussions with them".

And if anything illustrates the sheer mind-boggling difference in wealth and power which characterises modern life, it is that this man, whose release had initially been priced at 3 million Deutsche Marks (£5.3 million in today's money), was so supremely relaxed. After all, what's a few million quid here or there in the life of a successful capitalist such as he? People of his class have paid a great deal more, for far less interesting anecdotes.

Vassilis is often somewhat vague when writing about his motivations in living a life outside the law. He doesn't talk about anarchism a lot in public, and is careful not to link his activities to a political motive. There's a very good reason for this, as crime for a stated cause is sentenced far more harshly than merely doing it for the money. "Exemplary sentencing" in Greece isn't restricted to discouraging the act of riot, as is usually the case in Britain.

And it's no wonder that this is the case. The Greek State has been trying and failing to put down Europe's spikiest

anarchist movement, which has squatted and rioted from the shoreline of Lesbos to the top of the Pindus mountains, since the fall of the military Junta in the 1970s. A parade of governments have responded by dropping all pretense that everyone is equal before the law.

In his memoir however Vassilis is forthright in explaining his motives. He was after a real bastard of Greek capitalism. He notes: "My future target was financially aiding the conservative Political Spring party and its leader — subsequently Prime Minister — Antonis Samaras. They were friends. Every time Samaras travelled to Thessaloniki for some political rally he would stay over at his house. Haitoglou himself told us".

Political Spring was a largely single-issue party, formed to push the government rightwards during a nationalist moral panic over whether Macedonia should be allowed to call itself "Macedonia". Think Ukip, except the Farage character was smarter, more pragmatic, and leveraged his popularity to take over New Democracy (their Tories), eventually running the country from 2012-15.

That the 41-year-old Haitoglou was a lynchpin in the operation, providing deep pockets for a project aimed at replacing an already reactionary status quo with something much worse, puts a very different spin on his matey approach to Vassilis and Nikos. As did his reaction after regaining his freedom. This was a man who would smile to your face while planning a vicious revenge. Following his death in 2016, aged 62, from a heart attack, obituaries would note the presence of Samaras at his funeral — Greece's most successful hard-right politician paying tribute to an old ally.

The official media writeup of the kidnap of Alexander Haitoglou states that on December 15th 1995 he was taken while on his way to pick the kids up from school on the outskirts of Thessaloniki. The Palaiokostas brothers then drove him around the mountains for the next 80 hours, demanding and receiving 260m

A LESSON ABOUT



drachma (worth around £1.25m today). He was finally released unharmed at Karditsa bus station, 200km away. Some versions of the story involve a grenade launcher, others a high-powered vehicle. Yet others focused on the subsequent bounty on the brothers' heads.

Many of these lurid exaggerations are punctured by Vassilis' own testimony. Rather than a grenade launcher, it was a rifle. The vehicle was a Toyota RAV4, newish for the time and a good motor, but no supercar. Haitoglou had actually already dropped his kids off and was headed to his factory. Other "facts" are an undersell — they actually asked for three times' as much money before being negotiated down (and shortchanged) by Alexander's brother Karlos.

The additional press hype hardly seems necessary, given the story itself is such a one-off. Kidnaps had happened before, but bankrobbers ransoming a politically-charged tycoon wasn't in that oeuvre.

ANDER HAITOGLOU

UT THE RICH



Indeed when Vassilis first started asking around for people to get involved he recalls “they’d eye me suspiciously, as if wanting to say: ‘You’re crazy. You’re trying to get us into something impossible’”. Even his brother was jittery, with the prospects of a big score offset against the worries of trying out an untested, and therefore risky, idea.

Vassilis and Nikos planned well ahead, scoping out Haitoglou’s daily movements. They knew when he’d be alone, on an empty stretch of road, and Nikos pulled out in front of the car to make sure it stopped at an intersection where Vassilis was waiting. Pulling him into their vehicle they initially hooded him, but soon took it off when he complained that he couldn’t breathe. This speaks to their specific philosophy, explained by Vassilis:

“I never showed disdain for the value of human life; yet I found the act of taking a life perfectly legitimate and acceptable, under certain circumstances and with

good reason, as when “wider” freedom was concerned. Because death is the inescapable consequence of life. On the contrary, causing pain by torturing is something horrible, something heinous”.

It’s this view, of treating even the worst of people with humanity, which gave Haitoglou his sense of security. It didn’t take long for the magnate to assess the situation and realise he would be treated with a respect that, frankly, he did not afford others in his role as financier and friend to the reactionaries of Political Spring.

The trio’s time in the mountains was, by all accounts, thus a comradely one with the brothers and the boss exchanging jokes and discussing each others’ lives. Haitoglou was more than happy to talk about the corruption inherent in his world of deals and big money, with Vassilis noting: “What I remember most vividly from that free lesson is the blunt blackmail attempted by the owners of large supermarket chains. For a pre-packed product with a new label Alexander wished to circulate through a large supermarket chain, he’d have to give its boss large sums of black money just for the product to reach the shelves. The specific amount required depended on the place (display) inside the shops.

“If the new product wasn’t well-received by consumers within a reasonable period — depending on the deal — he’d take it down as uneconomic, because the new products waiting in line to try their luck on the supermarket displays were numerous, as were the underhand black money deals. Half his company’s expenses were for the promotion of the products through such means or through similar deals, with TV stations to advertise the product etc. And who pays for all this? Those who usually do ...”

After three days of this life, driving their 4x4 through the icy back routes of central Greece, the negotiations were concluded and, somewhat to the younger brother’s chagrin, Nikos unilaterally accepted on their behalf the lower sum of 270m drachma. In the event, not even that was handed over by the Haitoglou family, which true to its roots, instead brought 150m drachma and less than a million

in Deutsche Marks, (worth about 260m drachma in total — hence the oft-quoted figure) to a site in the valley of Lamia to buy his freedom.

When they dropped him off, Vassilis remembers, Haitoglou left them with a joke: “Guys, if only it didn’t cost that much, I’d very much like to have another adventure with you!”

Vassilis doesn’t dwell overly on the aftermath of the kidnapping in his memoir, but it is worth looking at.

It is hard to understate how furious the Greek State was at this latest incident from the infamous brothers. Both of them had been free since the absconding of Vassilis from prison in 1991 and, three years prior, they had been linked to the utterly humiliating Kalambaka heist, where they’d robbed the town bank for record sums of money just 500 yards away from the local cop shop.

On top of that, the State was in for a nasty shock when the Haitoglou family, in true capitalist style, sought to offset their losses by rinsing taxpayers. Alexander sued the government for failing to capture the two brothers — and nearly won.

It is perhaps unsurprising, given all the fuss, that following the kidnap an absolutely apoplectic ministry placed an absurd bounty on the Palaiokostas brothers of 250 million drachma — almost as much as the robbery itself had taken.

As for the brothers themselves, according to Vassilis they went their separate ways. But there is one more story to be told about the aftermath of those four days on the road. Over the next while, money began to mysteriously appear among the region’s farmers and homeless people.

To the poor went the spoils.



IN PRAISE OF CASH

AS THE CARDLESS ARE LEFT BEHIND

Stupidly I forgot my wallet and only realised when I went to pay for my coffee. I flashed a bundle of notes (three, count them, three, fivers) like some sort of king but the barista shook his head, “sorry, card only”. I told him I’d left it at home and tried again but he just gave the coffee to me for free and left me wishing I’d ordered a bagel to go with it.

It’s an odd feeling waving money at someone and they just won’t take it off you. More and more it’s getting harder to pay by cash. We are drawing ever closer to a society where every transaction is invisible to the human eye, but never forgotten in a matrix of data. This is not a good thing.

Personally, I’m not worried if Big Brother knows I bought a pasty at Greggs when it wasn’t even lunch time but I refuse to accept that we shouldn’t resist the decline of cash or even that the growing payment panopticon is a non-issue. While many seem relaxed about going cashless we need to think about what we’re losing, and who loses out the most.

Sometimes advocating the cashless society goes hand in hand with sneering about builders or hairdressers taking cash to avoid tax. Small businesses avoiding card transaction fees is not an issue. Let’s face it if it was about avoiding tax Starbucks would insist on being paid in used fivers.

If we accept that Western governments are liberal and benign (let this slide just for now) none of us know what political futures lie in store for us in ten, 20 years’ time. When we’re living in a world where all of our payment history, our contacts and our activities can be traced in the minutest detail, surely we cannot trust that this will never be misused?

And what is the impact for countries that are more plainly autocratic? Is it genuinely morally neutral for Bahrain’s “Economic 2030 vision” to propose an entirely cashless, traceable society? Given that that government’s response to the Arab Spring in 2011 was to gun people down in the streets and ramp up

repression — perhaps it’s not just about swiping for a latte.

Establishing norms here doesn’t just put us at risk of future dangers, for some those dangers are already here. When every transaction leaves a trace that can only be examined by the state and corporations it becomes a tool we are willingly handing to those who, sometimes, do not have our best interests at heart.

Mind you, the future might not be that far away in Britain. The Telegraph reported on a discussion by the Bank of England that “digital currency could make payments faster, cheaper and safer, but also opens up new technological possibilities, including programming: effectively allowing a party in a transaction, such as the state or an employer, to control how the money is spent by the recipient”. They speculate that benefits could be paid in such a way “restricting the recipient to buying only essentials such as food with the money”.

Collateral in the everyday

look at what it means on the ground. While some might find cashlessness convenient, for others it becomes an obstacle to survival. For the undocumented, while banks are legally required to check immigration status of new account holders, the ability to be given cash, and be able to spend it, is vital to their survival.

I was speaking to a street homeless refugee recently. He described how his family wanted to send him money, just to help him out of his situation, but because his only account was over the limit any transfer they made would simply go straight to the bank to fill that hole and he’d never see a penny. So while many homeless people find it impossible to get an account at all without valid ID and an address, and even when they do their very poverty might make it useless just when they need it the most. If you’ve fallen into the cracks, eliminating cash removes a slender thread that could keep you alive.

If you’ve got one account and it gets closed down, everything is shut to you,

including a cup of coffee or a bus ride, you’re hit with both having no money and no means of just being given a few quid to get home. For those whose accounts always have funds those are consequences they never face and so never see. That’s why the views of the comfortable are not always the most valuable voices to hear, despite their volume.

Of course some homeless people have card readers to combat the increasing “no spare change” they hear, but even if you have a functioning bank account, the reader’s wifi needs to be paid for and working, your phone needs to be charged and the app has to work. Add to this that while many might be happy to pay by card to a Big Issue or Dope seller, card readers themselves make it harder to ask for money as many think they clearly can’t be that badly off. It makes some worry that they are being scammed.

Like the people who once saw someone they thought might be a refugee holding a mobile phone and now they cling to it as evidence that refugees live the life of Riley, it’s based on rubbish. It doesn’t take the world to get a cheap pay as you go phone, that’s a drop in the ocean compared to a month’s rent or getting yourself on your feet, but it’s treated like it’s the preserve of the elite and therefore an excuse to harden our hearts.

The card reader becomes a barrier between those desperately in need of support and those who might otherwise support them, nervous of a card transaction that’s not sanctioned by a brand name. Some are willing to exchange money not payment information. You can say well these are bigots, that’s on them — but if it makes it harder to make a little bit of money on the street their morality is neither here nor there.

At the risk of confusing solid political points with a desire to live in a world that has a soul ... when I hand cash to someone who needs it it’s not just the note that we exchange. It’s also the chance for two people to feel human, there’s a glimpse of solidarity from both sides, it’s not just



the money. There's a recognition of each other's existence in there — you don't get that when you tap a reader.

It's not just the homeless. Serving staff report people are less likely to tip when they can't be sure the tip goes to the worker. Sex workers who once used cash now find themselves using Paypal transactions that can be cancelled after the fact.

Some companies have taken advantage of the pandemic to try to phase out cash. If your shop doesn't take it, you're deliberately making life harder for the most marginal, the elderly, and those who rely on the black economy and you are downright excluding others.

Just like with self-service tills, gone are the days of emphasising customer service and keeping the public happy. We're always dancing to the company's agenda, forever squeezing into their mould until their desires become our normal. Refusing to take cash isn't about serving the customer but cutting corners and shaping the future.

As a retail worker, I've never really enjoyed counting out five pence coins while cashing up, but the argument is

not that cash is effortless but rather that the insubstantial nature of electronic payments comes at a social cost many don't see until they find themselves pushed to the edges of society. And, as a society, if we don't care about those who are struggling then we don't really care about anyone at all.

Let's be clear, it's not about whether we find it convenient. I'm not arguing for the abolition of cards or phones. You not carrying cash is not an argument to stop everyone else from using it or importantly, to stop people from accepting it — it is the purest narcissism to think something that suits you has to suit everyone else.

If we're basing this on what we personally like, and we're not, well then I find cash incredibly useful. The physical notes and coins help me ration my meagre funds.

For some of us, the lightness of electronic transfer is a mortal danger where a miscalculation can have unpleasant consequences.

Find cashless easier? Fine. For some of us keeping cash is more than just a personal preference. You can say budget

better. I say this is exactly how many of us who are close to the line budget better. Cash allows us to organise in a way that works for us, because we can hold it in our hands and see that we've overspent, or are able to treat ourselves.

When I use cash it's clear what I'm spending and on what. Talking of nerves, with transactions where there's a beep and it's done, who's to say if there was an error, who might fail to notice a mistake with invisible payments that might accidentally wipe you out a week later. Sometimes taking a month to find out there was an error can be a car crash.

I can see why corporations might like to integrate all my data, and sync that in with all the information they have on the people I interact with, in order to sell me things more efficiently. However, can they see why I'd like to disembowel their executives and drag their screaming bodies by the heels around the walls of The City until their weeping families come to me at night on bended knee begging for mercy?

It's all a question of choice I suppose.

~ Arnold Beep



COMMUNITY AND CLASS

May 11th 2021 was the 30th anniversary of the Haringey Solidarity Group in North London celebrated with a special online event about some of its activities and struggles. Alongside a recording (available at haringey.org.uk) the following article has been produced reflecting on HSG's three decades of activity.

The bigger picture

At the moment we live in a society based on money and power, where a small minority control all the resources and decision-making — throughout London, and every country in the world. This is unacceptable. It doesn't have to be this way.

Permanent change for the better can only come from collectively taking over all the decision-making and resources in our society. We can then make the decisions ourselves, co-operatively, based on people's real needs and interests. We know that this is not only desirable but also practicable and possible as we have seen the seeds of these possibilities in all kinds of past movements, uprisings and social revolutions.

Change is an ongoing process, not an isolated event or series of events. There have always been people questioning and challenging the various forms of injustice and oppression being imposed by governments and capitalism — and standing up against oppression based on class, race, sex, gender, community, or any other division which the ruling machinery finds useful to maintain power.

This resistance takes place continuously — to greater or lesser degrees, with mixed successes or failures — in every sphere of life, throughout history. And it always will. As people question and oppose what's wrong, they also strive for alternative, better ways of living. Hence the seeds of a better future are in the independent ideas, relationships, culture, activities, struggles and movements all around us.

Things can change very fast depending on all kinds of circumstances: the balance of class forces; economic, social and environmental crises; cultural shifts; increasing expectations; the overlapping of opposition struggles and movements; the collective realisation that there are real alternatives to the way things are etc.



In such times, groups and campaigns can develop into movements, and movements can inter-link and create counterpower to the established order.

We should support and participate in: whatever strengthens people's independence, awareness, solidarity and mutual aid, co-operation and communication, confidence and determination, and collective vision of how things could and should be. We should oppose and refuse to participate in: whatever keeps us dependent, ignorant, fragmented and isolated, powerless, lacking in confidence or which restricts our expectations for a better way and society.

Local organising, sustained local presence and influence are key building blocks towards making a real difference and achieving long term change.

The role and potential of local organising

So what are the local activities, struggles and ideas we want to encourage and be part of? There are a number of key areas:

- Neighbourhoods and community: There are a wide range of independent groups, initiatives and campaigns rooted in local neighbourhoods — including around residents associations, friends of parks groups, parents' and users groups in schools, playgroups, libraries, health services and other facilities. There are also often local action groups or residents' campaigns for specific improvements or purposes. There are independent mutual aid activities and clubs (eg. for sports and pastimes) which can be very positive collective activities in themselves.

IN HARINGEY STRUGGLE

We should be encouraging people to take ownership of their neighbourhoods, and of the facilities and services we need. In the short term this means organising local groups and empowering activities; in the medium term it means developing groups into confident and determined collectives and networks; in the long term it means building the strength to take control of all decision-making.

■ **Workplaces:** Tens of thousands are employed in a wide range of places in each borough/town — from tiny to huge, shops to offices to factories, offering diverse services and products. Workplaces are a crucial yet very distinct part of the community. Obviously workers have potential to organise themselves collectively for better pay and conditions, and challenge bosses. They can question what they are producing and the very nature of their work. Traditionally the labour movement has been much stronger than today, but there is still a collective history and forms of organisation, action and struggle to draw on, alongside many workplace organisations, union branches, reps, and other forms of activity where workers try to assert their rights and interests.

Should we get active in a local Trades Council and/or help people set up an independent Local Workers Solidarity Network? Maybe publicise libertarian workers organisations like the Industrial Workers of the World and the Solidarity Federation? Or all of those?

Again, we should encourage people to take charge of workplaces. In the short term this means organising workplace groups and resistance culture, strikes and disputes; in the medium term it means developing confident and determined collectives and networks; in the long term it means building up the strength to control decision-making.

■ **Sections of society:** There are key groups that organise in order to articulate their needs, oppose particular forms of oppression and discrimination etc, and fight for their interests. This includes women, black and minority ethnic communities, youth, the elderly and the disabled. We need to discuss

these sections of society in much greater depth, and support the movements they have created.

■ **Specific “single-issue” campaigns:** We should support all manner of progressive campaigns. This is an area of activity where some local radical groups have traditionally been very supportive, constructive and effective, but the challenge is to link it with the rest of our activities. Anti-cuts, health services, green activities, resistance to unwanted urban development, anti-fascism, housing, claimants issues ...

■ **Radical currents and ideas, including cultural interests:** The system tries to generate a culture of obedience and consumerism, but there is always an alternative culture based on people’s common sense and humanity, on co-operation, self-expression etc. As part of this, there is an everyday counter-culture of disgust with oppression in its various forms (class, patriarchy, racism, materialism etc). Local radical groups can help articulate these currents, and encourage a wider resistance culture. This could include social media presence, regular local newsletters, public meetings, film nights and other activities. It is important for us to continue to spread radical, libertarian and anarchist ideas wherever people may be receptive to them — particularly to support people and groups/campaigns that are receptive to radical and revolutionary ideas and strategies.

What constructive and effective role can a local radical group/network play in these processes?

It is important that we do participate in all the above, where possible, whether as individuals or as a group. We must not let ourselves become isolated or marginalised from our neighbours, workmates and all the people and activities going on around us in our area, or see ourselves as some elite with the ‘right ideas’ parachuting in from on high.

Whilst encouraging and supporting the things above, we should recognise that the various existing organisations and their activities may have strengths and weaknesses, good and bad aspects. We

obviously should particularly encourage the most positive, independent, radical, militant and libertarian aspects of those groups, and promote libertarian ways of organising and decision-making. We should also encourage people to see the wider context in which they are operating.

What are our long term priorities?

Apart from the basic range of stuff that many local groups already do well in their area (regular meetings and mailings, social media, leaflets, supporting campaigns, newsletters, supporting national radical and anarchist initiatives and events etc) we could focus on actively supporting and participating in community networks, local workplace support networks, and “single issue” local campaigns and movements.

Pacing ourselves for the long haul

We should value greatly all the positive things activists have done and are continuing to achieve. We are operating as small networks within a wider social context. However determined or clear-sighted we try to be, we can only do our best within what’s possible. This is dependent on what else is going on around us — what groups, struggles and movements there are, what their character is.

Revolution

Let’s hope that the seeds of opposition and everyday resistance around us will grow into major movements and struggles. And that they may then develop into the kind of mass movements that can create a ‘dual power’ situation where people attempt to take direct control of their own neighbourhoods and workplaces and transform society. Governments and business would be seen as unnecessary and objectionable ways to run society and would be marginalised and then abolished. Of course, to be successful, this would have to be part of a UK-wide and global popular grass-roots revolution.

~ Dave Morris



GOOD TIMES IN DYSTOPIA

By George F

Zero Books

ISBN: 978-1-789041-90-2

216 pages

£14.99

Additional artwork by Junk Comix

The literary output of squats, occupations and other autonomous spaces is vanishingly small. Squatters, almost by definition, are invisible and unchronicled.

What literature does exist often arrives in the form of anarchist polemics, or lazy and ill-informed journalism. It is rare, then, that we have an accomplished, biographical novel from one still surviving, fighting and thriving in the much-repressed squatting movement.

Good Times in Dystopia is a real-life account of years spent squatting, protesting and travelling. “Bloated on our mischief,” George F’s anonymised band struggles to maintain its “debauched saturnalia,” frequently passing out in the blurred edges of sobriety, monogamy and tenancy. George describes the “erotic agony” of squat mates in the next room “either fucking or torturing each other to death”. There are tales of gate-crashing Pentacostal church services, as well as several amusing attempts to break into a theme park.

Along the way, the book opens an (unlocked) window to the European underground of social centres, squats and protest encampments.

“... it’s like guerrilla warfare. You’re up against a much bigger, much stronger enemy, one who would crush you in direct confrontation ... You hit-and-run. You strike where the capital is weak, get what you need, hold the position for as long as you can ... You find communities that will help you, other cells and units out there in the city ...”

Yet this is not an instruction manual for militant homelessness. There is no attempt to persuade the reader that squatters are freedom fighters, or to

sensationalise them in two-dimensional squat porn of romantic destitution. Instead, real life characters are conveyed in all their complexity as vulnerable, brave, unfaithful believers, stumbling, laughing and vomiting their way through kleptomaniacal speed binges and flash points with the law.

George’s almost ethnographic eye for detail helps to substantiate the miscellany of objects so familiar to destitute buildings. On arriving at a squat in France they describe the “random assortment of lamps and wooden crates of spray cans, power cable extensions, broken amplifiers and bottles of anonymous liquids”.

“One shelf is filled with pickled embryos,” they continue: “... tiny closed-eyed kittens pressed into jars of broken formaldehyde, their little paws pressed yearningly against the glass, mouths

aghast, baring teeth that will never grow ...”

The book is littered with the pathetic fallacy of fallen ceiling tiles, peeling paint and gothic enclaves where ganga smoke creeps through holey steams of Sitex-filtered light. Passages like “I masturbate like a caged chimpanzee in a drug rage at a vivisection lab” show the author’s mastery of comic grotesquery, an aesthetic that

appears to have grown from the anarcho-punk sensibilities of their environment. Here George describes the studio of their lover, the artist Mierda, with its walls covered in: “... pornographic alien vaginas, swollen naked obscenities ... drunken pirates and cackling whores and transgender third sexes with fake tits and tumescent crotch-bulges spilling drinks and snorting lines in some seedy pub ...”

The writing has a viscerality, as well as a sense of humour and timing, that I suspect has also grown from their craft as a spoken-word poet. The resulting style is free of beige niceties and speaks with all the texture and urgency of their situation.

Anyone looking for a subtly crafted plot and well-developed characters may be disappointed. Instead, the book serves as an anthology of dispatches, ricocheting between a litany of empty buildings, protests and hitched road trips. This constellation gives a disjointed feel that mirrors the internal world of someone progressing through a failing relationship with various substances and anything that can be called home.

In short, *Good Times in Dystopia* deserves celebration as a literary trapdoor to a clandestine culture, illuminated in the best way possible — from within. It stands as a rare contribution to the culture that it has grown from and belongs on the shelf of anyone with an interest in urban wilderness.

Peter Bearder is the author of *Stage Invasion*.



LOST IN WORK

By Amelia Horgan

Pluto Press

ISBN: 978-0-745340-91-3

176 pages

£9.99

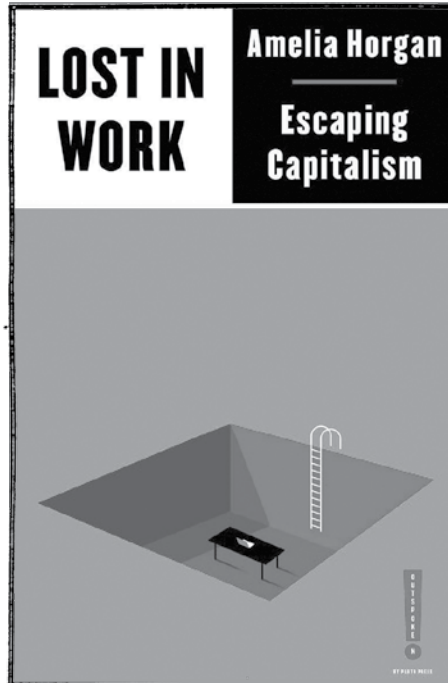
Most of us have, at some point or another in our lives, experienced the drudgery, hardship or harm of a bad job. Many of us will spend our whole lives working without sufficient compensation to live a fulfilling life, let alone enough to meet our basic needs.

Sinisterly, we are often expected to enjoy the bad work we do, buy into the notion that we really like our zero-hours minimum wage retail job and, as work becomes “fun,” the things we do to escape from work (hobbies, fandoms, pastimes and so on) have become “jobified” activities to be leveraged for financial gain. This mixing of work and non-work activities has been exacerbated by the decline of the office. Remote working technologies have created a pressure to be on call at any time.

Amelia Horgan’s *Lost in Work* acts both as a bread and butter introduction to why and how work under capitalism is so bad, and as a provocation to the left’s standard understanding of work and organising. It offers a concise documentation of a society that increasingly revolves around work (or lack of it).

It is a difficult task to write a text that is of use to multiple audiences, yet this book achieves it. Its biggest contribution however is to expand the terms of what we think of as work, and also what we think of as resistance to work. The gendered nature of (often) unpaid and unrecognised care work is one that has been much discussed in recent decades. A chapter on the unpaid work of social reproduction is a welcome, and obviously necessary, inclusion.

The Covid pandemic has laid bare stark inequalities in contemporary work. One of the many infuriating episodes recounted in *Lost in Work* comes early on in the pandemic, when *Guardian* columnist Owen Jones was decried as a misogynist by a certain section of broadsheet opinion writers for saying



Pic: Stuart Simpson

that (poor, largely female) domestic staff such as cleaners should be paid to remain home as a matter of workplace safety.

It was misogyny, according to the likes of Sarah Ditum, to expect well-off families to do the housework usually performed by their help. Across Britain we saw a certain section of workers allowed the refuge of working from home whilst others — teachers, couriers, supermarket workers, and the like — were left exposed.

If there is a criticism to be made about *Lost in Work*, it is that it moves through its chapters a tad too quickly. Of course, this is somewhat unavoidable in a short

book but the reader is at times left with a feeling that arguments could be more fully examined. Thankfully, the text does a good job of pointing the reader towards further reading, so the book never feels particularly limited by its length.

The strongest sections of the book come towards the end with discussions of resistances to work, both through “traditional” trade union organising and through informal everyday actions to take back time and agency. Although some of the references are a little rote, the overall argument for “deep” organising — which doesn’t simply defend ever-dwindling gains but seeks out unorganised sectors and workers to engage in struggle — is potent.

Unlike some books on work, which prescribe policy changes and regulation as solutions, *Lost in Work* places agency and power in the place where it is most potent — workers. It also, rightly, criticises pushes for more equitable access to select “good” jobs and argues for a drive towards improving pay and working conditions for jobs at the bottom of the ladder.

One of the few bright spots in the past years has been the growth, and repeated victories, of radical worker-led unions like the IWGB and UVW. It seems clear that a part of any radical strategy will be growing and strengthening the kinds of grassroots organising they represent.

The election of Sharon Graham to lead Unite, on a specific mandate of workplace organising, may signal a shift in the wider trade union movement.

But we have no time to wait for that, if it comes at all. Any organiser should act strategically, understanding the wider context of contemporary work under capitalism and expand the terrain of struggle.

Lost in Work helps us do that.

~ Adam Barr



KROPOTKIN, 100 YEARS ON

The centenary of the death of classical anarchist theorist Peter Kropotkin is a good time to return to a question he asked in *Freedom in 1886: what must we do?* **Ruth Kinna** considers a thinker whose work evolved through a rapidly changing political and social era but never lost its humanity and faith in the possibility of real change.

Kropotkin's different answers were informed by his changing assessments of the political situation in Europe. In the 1870s he described it as "revolutionary". Ten years later, his terminology had changed: he spoke instead of evolutionary processes and mutual aid. Yet it's not obvious that this shift signalled a major reduction of his political ambitions. Evolution still pointed to "the coming anarchy," a revolutionary proposition in most people's minds.

Kropotkin usually wrote about anarchist transformation as if the glass were half full. He highlighted social and economic trends that could bolster confidence in anarchist change. But he tempered his "utopianism" with a healthy dose of realism. The mass of data he used to show the imminence of anarchy in fact also attested to the rude health of the state-regulated market system should it continue to grow unhindered. The gist of Kropotkin's thinking about social transformation was that the potential for anarchy was not the same as its likelihood.

The contours of Kropotkin's alternative future are well known. To counteract urbanisation and the development of agribusiness he envisaged the integration of agriculture and industry and the creation of what economists now call "ten-minute neighbourhoods". His alternative globalisation prioritised information-sharing over international trade and envisaged communist, decentralised federation to oppose government monopoly and corporate conglomeration. The plan may have looked speculative, but Kropotkin's aim was to boost practical organisational efforts and disrupt existing socio-economic arrangements.

For Kropotkin, the entrenchment of 19th century liberalism was a bleak prospect. He anticipated that the internationalisation of laissez-faire (free market) economics would

lock trading partners into competition for scarce resources and economic advantage. Free trade pointed to the militarisation of the inter-state system, capital investment in war and government sponsorship of industrialised arms production. The uneven, colonising patterns of exchange that shaped economic activity across the globe would simultaneously incentivise opposition to European domination and encourage migratory movements from poorer to richer regions. These pressures were likely to intensify as processes of global warming (which Kropotkin did not link to human activity) affected production and distribution. Sooner or later liberalism would embrace social democracy. Once liberals tapped into the idea of socialism's historic march, the notion of class struggle could be easily neutralised by welfarism. Gas-and-water socialism would command workers' loyalty.

Kropotkin's hopes about the anarchisation of social and economic life were dashed and he was proved broadly right about liberalism's direction of travel. He warned that the democratisation of western states would dampen the appetite for internationalism along the lines he proposed and instead heighten chauvinistic and xenophobic rivalry. Liberal democracy entailed the professionalisation of politics and the abdication of decision-making power to specialists. But it would be misunderstood as a tremendous redistribution of power and a victory for the working class. Enfranchised, the people would be sovereign just at the point when they surrendered their individual sovereignty. Equality would bestow opportunity and entitlement.

Kropotkin predicted the broad lines of liberalism's socialisation though he did not live to see the consequences: homes fit for heroes, free universal education and cradle-to-grave health services. Citizens would seek every protection to maintain their advantages against "foreigners".

The idea that society could ever function co-operatively and independently of the state would seem fantastical.

Kropotkin's world then was not so different from the one we inhabit. It is a misunderstanding to consign his conception of social transformation to some distant past, where the barriers to anarchist change were less formidable than they are now. Some of his immediate priorities — to resist the seductions of representative government and state socialism — were contingent on the support anarchists could gather at the

time. Their actual realisation hardly diminishes the force of his critique. Kropotkin sensed the possible eclipse of anarchism in Europe and witnessed the collapse of his dreams in Russia. Regardless, he continued to promote anarchist politics to the end. As is well known, he believed that anarchy was always discoverable in the nooks and crannies of the state and always recoverable as an alternative social order. Mutual aid was one of the lynchpins of his anarchism.

He also gave us fruitful concepts of free agreement, the spirit of revolt and well-being for all.

Mutual aid is sometimes linked to a narrow set of activities. But Kropotkin did not set limits on types of direct action and was not prescriptive about what ventures people should pursue, as long as these were driven by considerations of justice.

What, then, must we do? Kropotkin gave his answer: Act for yourselves!

Ruth Kinna is a co-ordinator of the Anarchism Research Group and co-edits its journal *Anarchist Studies*. Recent books by the author include *The Government of No-one and Great Anarchists*.



SOCIAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL INJUSTICE WE SEE, BUT WHAT TO DO?

Seventeen-year-old **Eil May** reflects on the role played by social media in radicalising young people.

“There will be no pictures of pigs shooting down brothers on the instant replay ...”

Gil Scott-Heron’s 1971 spoken word hit *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* sparked mass social commentary, highlighting inconsistencies between published media and the revolution happening on US streets. Today, of course, not much has changed; there has been a state of constant revolution since the civil rights movement, but the mainstream media still enjoys obscuring the truth, and pigs are still brutalising people of colour in broad daylight. There is, however, a new factor at play since Scott-Heron’s poem emerged: social media.

As a young white person brought up with every form of social media, witness to the wonders and horrors of the internet. For a long time, like many others, I sat with the immense privilege of the revolution ending when I logged off. I had no idea the extent to which it was prevalent in society — I was a child. I started paying attention in around 2018/19, as I drew closer to leaving school, and started getting involved in 2020. Without the internet, and social media, I’m not sure when I would have woken up to the true injustice of society, despite always having been aware of it to some degree — as someone from a working-class background that is inherent to my experience of life. On March 16th Britain went into lockdown, leading all interpersonal connection to become digital. I began to spend the majority of my days scrolling endlessly.

On May 25th, a video appeared in my feed. It featured an unarmed black man begging for his life as an armed white man knelt on his throat. I watched as George Floyd was killed, and a wave of powerlessness at a level I had never felt before flooded my senses. Here I am, freshly 16. A witness, I was transfixed and unable to do anything about it. If I felt so disgusted and distraught, I could not even begin to imagine how a black person, especially of my age, would feel.



“There will be no pictures of pigs shooting down brothers on the instant replay ...”

But I was watching it. For days I couldn’t avoid it on the news; it replayed in my head. I was forced to confront reality.

Following the murder of George Floyd, I attempted to convert my sense of helplessness into something more productive. I, like many other people my age, began sharing colourful infographics about police brutality and white supremacy. What else could I do? Unable to vote, lockdown prohibiting protest — young people today are radical, but powerless. I started doing research into the systemic nature of racism, and my role in it. I realised infographics and black squares were doing nothing. What else could I do? Every day videos of revolts on US streets appeared on my feed, labelled “riots” by the media, making me angrier and angrier. I read theory and began to see the role capitalism plays in the perpetuation of systemic oppression, and the history of colonialism.

But I was stuck inside.



“It was a bit crazy because the height of it was over lockdown and you’d have a warped sense of reality from not leaving your house and then see some video of people being brutally beaten online”.

~ Sophie Phillips, 17

It is clear to me I’m not alone in my frustration. I’m surrounded by friends and colleagues desperate for change but powerless to enact it. As I draw closer to my 18th birthday, I look forward to finally being able to use my voice. But I feel for people younger than me, watching the revolution through their phones.

“I mean I’m glad things were easily gaining awareness ... but it hurt to see so much performative activism and another side of the internet where people would feel free to share their malicious opinions and even gain popularity from that”.

~ Nafisa Ahmed, 17

All is not lost.

“It makes me feel very excited! I feel that the way we utilise social media gives us huge power as a generation and we have access to so much more information which means we can do a lot more. Plus I feel like our generation has been politically aware from younger”.

~ Olive Bridgers, 18

We have to be optimistic that seeing our elders protest and fight for our futures through our phone screens inspires us. We have endless information at our fingertips, and one can only hope that websites and perhaps articles such as this can incentivise young people, particularly young white people, to educate themselves. To be the change they want to see. In a 1990 interview, Gil Scott-Heron says “the first change that takes place is in your mind. You have to change your mind before you change the way you live and the way you move”. The revolution can be filmed, but it exists primarily in the mind — I hope social media can be a tool to spark that change in the youth, the way it did in me.

FREEDOM PRESS UPDATE.

In this section we usually give a rough rundown of how Freedom is doing, in an effort to be vaguely transparent about the activities of the Press from year to year. For our shop contribution however we're turning the floor over to outgoing co-ordinator **Jim Jepps**, so he can give his impressions of the last few years working with a bunch of opinionated political obsessives, as well as some customers ...

At the bookshop

When I started at Freedom Bookshop three years ago things were in a bit of a state. We owed more money than we had, people were bruised from a bunch of rows and walk outs and the alley stank of piss. I'm glad to say two out of three of those issues have been resolved, and even on number three we're down to an ambient, characterful aroma.

Freedom has a daunting history; well over 100 years in existence and more than 50 down Angel Alley in Whitechapel. As such anyone who works or volunteers there is a custodian of a tradition, bearing a greater responsibility than just to the current team, vital though they are, but also to previous and future generations and the wider movement. My job, as I saw it, was to put the bookshop in a better state to serve that wider movement and well placed to face whatever the future may hold. I think we've done that.

When I first started I had a three point business plan. Get more people into the shop, make sure we had things they wanted to buy (as opposed to what we wanted them to buy) and ensure they could see those things easily. That's what I've concentrated on and it's worked.

It included radical ideas like actually opening the shop when we said it would be open (which Covid has ensured is still a fucking chore) and being nice to people when they walked in rather than judging them, or regarding them as a nuisance. We started doing film showings, book talks and zine events. Who knows, one day we may do again, creating a hub for everyone who wants or needs it.

As it happens I love working in a bookshop. As far as I'm concerned it is a massive privilege. Bookshop customers



are the best customers in the world and radical bookshop customers are the cream of that elite tribe. It's always a pleasure. Often a pleasure. It can be a pleasure. At times. Like I say, what it really is, is always a privilege and I love it.

These days I can honestly say that the shop is on an even keel financially, it looks better than it ever has and people are actually smiling. Even after the pandemic struck we make more money than we spend and have managed to create a cracking space that's a pleasure to spend time in. It's true. Come and see.

As Iggy Pop once said about the early days of the Stooges, it was never about the money, but money was important because it symbolised love. Every pound we made putting a radical book into an impressionable pocket gave us the ability to get more stuff out there, do more of what we hold dear, and do it as near to properly as makes no difference.

Key to this was not judging the shop by its imperfections, but just keep making it better. We're always going to be tucked down a Dickensian alley and, as a fairly small space, we were never going to have every radical book you care to name — but what we can do is stock loads of

things you never realised you wanted until we helped you discover them. We can surprise and delight.

As a radical bookshop we should be a resource for as much of the movement as we can be. A movement that has to be larger than the interests or idiosyncrasies of any single anarchist group. As such this does mean trying our best as a shop to stay out of tedious beefs and territorial pissings. I know this is controversial but given our numbers it just seems like any differences with other activists aren't as important as the tasks in front of us. The role of a radical bookshop is to swell the tide that lifts all the boats in the harbour. No one owns our movement, and we are here to make our one modest contribution among many to its success.

Bookshops are the most dangerous places in the world. Full of vital energy and sneaky ways of emptying your bank account. I'm proud of the rich and interesting space we've created in the last few years. I want to thank the Freedom Collective for lending me the reins for a bit. I like to think that we use our tiny space to full effect. I want as many people to discover it as possible.

It's been fun. Now, go buy a book.

AND A FOND FAREWELL



News Group

Freedom's daily web output has remained pretty consistent throughout the pandemic, though our ability to put out printed issues was weakened by lockdown's impact on us and our printers at Aldgate Press. We are very grateful to them for doing this issue despite their ongoing troubles.

As with many other anarchist publications and outlets, Freedom has had its reach on social media, particularly Facebook, significantly cut back compared to previous years. This phenomenon has been a serious blow to outlets such as *It's Going Down* in the US and *Enough Is Enough* in Europe, which were, of course, sideswiped when "anti-extremism" rules supposedly aimed at the far right came

in. We have adopted some workarounds, including a push to expand kolektiva.social (part of the fediverse.party series of autonomous social media alternatives).

Publishing Collective

The last year has, despite the pandemic, probably been our busiest since the Millennium with Freedom's little volunteer crew putting out several new books (with two more to come) and getting a number of older titles back in print.

Workers in Stalin's Russia is a lesser-known work by Marie Louise Berneri, an outstanding piece of research which used the USSR and its allies' own words and research to showcase the regime's lies from an anti-capitalist, libertarian perspective. Updated with explanatory footnotes, its critique is as potent as when she first wrote it in the 1930s. *Fighting Women* meanwhile, by Isabella Lorusso, brings a rare selection of interviews with veterans of the Spanish Civil War to life, talking not just about the role of women in confronting Franco, but their struggles within the revolution itself.

These were followed by classic Kropotkin text *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, which was footnoted, epilogued and reissued to mark the 100th anniversary of his death this year. Finally the third edition of *Why Work?*, which had sold out of its successful second edition, was released in June with multiple new essays and an introduction by Anti-university co-founder Shiri Shalmy.

Later in 2021 we will be releasing *A Normal Life*, the story of Greek Robin Hood Vassilis Palaoikostas (see pages 11-13) and *A Short Introduction to Anarchist Communism* by veteran thinker and activist Brian Morris.

In Angel Alley

Perhaps the biggest transformation over the last year has been of the Freedom building, which has had significant work done on everything from the electrics to the walls and the shutters (spending the last of our Big Rebuild cash in the process — thanks to everyone who donated). We totally re-organised the shop to take into account Covid safety, and instituted a system to minimise too many people being in the building at one time. Artwork went up, got vandalised by someone who left YCL stickers and spraypainted "junk" on every available surface, and was then patiently fixed by the artists.

Throughout lockdown, volunteers came in to hand out *Dope* magazine twice a week from the shop, and although distro has now moved to the (better placed) Second Shot Coffee in Bethnal Green, Dog Section is keeping up the Friday service.

We waved goodbye to Corporate Watch at the end of Spring, with their room being taken on by Dog Section, and over the Summer were briefly joined by new neighbours, who rented an office in the backyard (owned by Tory landlord Bobby Nagpal). Couldn't tell you what they might have been selling, but it seriously increased the number of giggling young people trooping past until the place was raided by police.

Volunteering and the co-ordinator role

Freedom is always on the lookout for people to get involved in the news crew, publishing and in the shop. If you're interested please do stop by for a chat any afternoon of the week, or email:

- editor@freedompress.org.uk
- publishing@freedompress.org.uk
- shop@freedompress.org.uk

DONATING

ONLINE

www.paypal.me/fbuildingcollective

CHEQUE

Payable to "Freedom Press," mail to 84b Whitechapel High st, London E1 7QX

HELPING

EMAIL

building@freedompress.org.uk

TELEPHONE

(07952) 546-063
and leave your details

SOCIAL MEDIA

FB page: facebook.com/freedombookshop

FB group: Freedom bookshop & publishing

Twitter: @Freedom_Paper

Instagram: freedombookshop

Kolektiva: @Freedom_Press

Mailing list: freedomnews.org.uk/newsletter

COMING SOON

ORDER NOW FROM FREEDOMPRESS.ORG.UK

A NORMAL LIFE

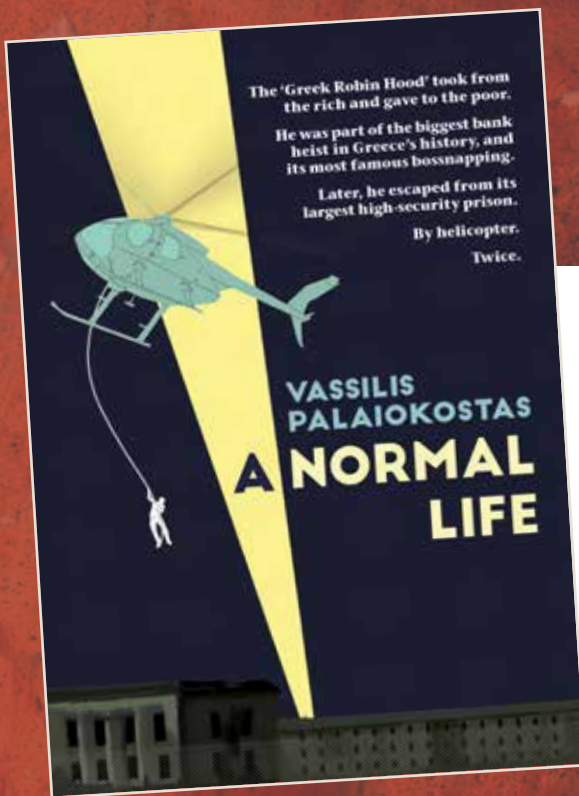
BY VASSILIS PALAIOKOSTAS

A bestseller in his native country, this is the official autobiography of famed “Greek Robin Hood” who has robbed millions from the rich and given it to the poor. Still on the run and with decades of activity under his belt, Palaiokestas is perhaps best known for his daring prison escapes — including not once, but twice by helicopter.

ISBN: 978-1-904491-41-5

352 PAGES

£15



ALSO FROM FREEDOM ...

WHY WORK?

WITH INTRO BY SHIRI SHALMY

The nature of work and our relationship to it is evolving more rapidly than ever. This third edition features a new foreword from union and co-op activist Shiri Shalmy and three new essays.

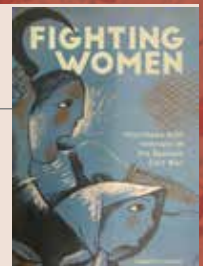
ISBN: 978-1-904491-38-5
200 PAGES
£7.50



FIGHTING WOMEN

BY ISABELLA LORUSSO

This series of interviews with participants in the Spanish Civil War offers a unique insight into the two-front revolution that women were trying to achieve in the 1930s, fighting fascism while confronting men whose commitment to liberation too often stopped at their front door.



ISBN: 978-1-904491-35-4
188 PAGES
£10

MEMOIRS OF A REVOLUTIONIST

BY PETER KROPOTKIN

Perhaps history's most important anarchist anarchist thinker, this fascinating memoir charts Kropotkin's evolution from prince to rebel, and his involvement in historic moments of social struggle.

ISBN: 978-1-904491-37-8
356PP
£13



For a catalogue of Freedom titles currently in print, check out freedompress.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Catalogue-2021.pdf

FINDING FREEDOM

Address:

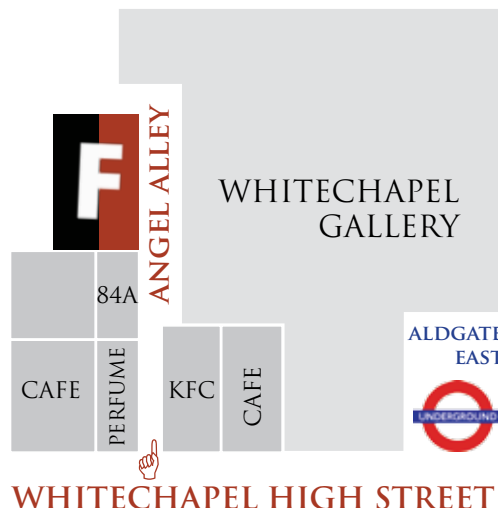
Freedom Bookshop,
Angel Alley,
84b Whitechapel High Street,
London
E1 7QX

Opening times:

Mon-Sat 12-6pm
Sunday 12-4pm

The nearest Tube station is Aldgate East (Whitechapel Gallery exit) on the District and Hammersmith & City lines.

Buses: 25, 205 and 254 stop nearby.



ORDERING FROM AFAR

You can order online, by email, phone or post (details below and left). Our business hours are **12-6pm, Monday to Saturday and 12-4pm on Sunday**.

You can pay via Paypal on our website. We can also accept postal orders or cheques made payable to “Freedom Press”.

In order to make anarchist material as accessible as possible Freedom Press titles are sold at the cover price given when they were printed.

The exceptions are pre-decimal compilations of Freedom, which are now £3 each.

T: (07952) 547-063 | Email: sales@freedompress.org.uk
check out our online bookshop at www.freedompress.org.uk