

# FREEDOM

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WAKE UP  
RISE UP!

SURVIVAL AND RESISTANCE AMID THEIR COST OF LIVING CRISIS

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# IT'S ALL OUT FOR A NEW

*Tube engineering worker and RMT rep Andy Littlechild writes on the background and forming of the latest strike wave, building the wave to a tsunami, and our broader need for community defence ...*

So complex is the situation we've been in over the last six months; with such an amount and range of strikes occurring, that for the first time in my adult life it's impossible to keep on top of who's going on strike. It's worthwhile reflecting back on how the upsurge in feeling and action among workers and the general public has been steadily building since 2008's austerity cuts began pressing down hard on jobs, public services and benefits.

## Establishment Decadence

There has been the obscene expenses scandal of MPs, the bankers' bailout alongside Grenfell and the growing need for food banks. The pandemic witnessed the social murder of our elderly and infirm in care homes, open mass financial corruption in corporations and the top ranks of the government; who partied away while disregarding the Covid rules they made us strictly obey. There was the abduction and murder of Sarah Everard by police officer Wayne Couzens, police racism, authoritarian attempts to ban protest under the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill and continued government inaction over looming climate change.

Stupidly, the government and corporations lost all self-control; revealing the true nature of capitalism, the Establishment and their utter pitiless disregard for us, who pay for their privileges.

As the saying goes: "They keep taking the jug to the well until it breaks!"

The jug has indeed now broken; leaving the government looking on as everything runs through their fingers and they're left holding dangerous, razor-sharp shards.

## Ripples Build To A Wave

Notable strike action had been occurring for some time; bin workers in Coventry and bus workers in Manchester pre-dating the latest main strike wave; but it was the scandal of a vicious application of "fire and re-hire" to the P&O maritime

workers which smashed into the public consciousness; an outrage their union RMT did not meet with effective resistance.

As increasing numbers of industries saw workers on the sharp end of the government and employers' insistence that they pay for the pandemic; the Department for Transport (DfT) and Transport for London (TfL) took on Tube and rail workers in the capital and across the nation. In the build up to the first Tube strike in March, I again carried the debate in RMT for a staggered two-day strike; a tactic I had devised along with others, which had been used to great effect in another Tube strike a few years before.

Around 10,500 RMT Tube workers struck on Tuesday 1st and Thursday 3rd March; crippling London for most of the week but costing just two days' pay to RMT strikers and others from the Unite, Aslef and TSSA unions who had refused to cross picket lines. DfT's response was to bring forward similar attacks on Network Rail engineering workers and train drivers, guards and station staff across more than 14 train operating companies (TOCs). Unfortunately for the DfT, successful strike ballots of 40,000 RMT members occurred across Network Rail and all the TOCs, plus ballots by Aslef and TSSA, with Unite also balloting on London Underground.

Tube workers struck again for a day in June; Aslef struck nationally on August 13th, followed by RMT employing the "maximum carnage for minimum loss of pay" staggered strike again. There was a national walkout on August 18th and 20th; with a joint RMT London Underground and Overground strike squeezed in the middle on Friday 19th, Unite was striking on the Tube plus 85 London bus routes and across other TfL operations.

These growing rail strikes, accompanied by RMT general secretaries Mick Lynch and Eddie Dempsey's public mastering of bosses, politicians and media bigshots, received national and international exposure, connecting with workers everywhere.

Other workers, ground down by the cost of living crisis and more looming energy bill hikes, found themselves hard pressed at work with pay freezes, fire and re-hire, leading to this strike wave



Pic: Guy Smallman

swelling up; taking in workers from barristers to bin workers all over Britain. Inspired workers have been taking to the ballot box and striking: the Criminal Bar Association, 115,000 posties, workers in refuse, telecommunications, buses, education, councils, NHS, mobile phone companies, airports, coop funeral care, docks, RCN nurses, exam adjudicators, cleaners and BMA doctors. Weetabix and Jacobs Cream Cracker workers were having a go too. Spontaneous unofficial strike actions took place at eight Amazon warehouses and at multiple oil refineries.

As I write strikes are taking place, further dates are being set and more ballots are rolling in many unions, industries and workplaces; it's dizzying to keep up with. Similarly to my union RMT, other general secretaries and leaderships are hostage to their members' determination to fight and the kudos this has bought them. This can always change; Lynch may be a household name now but doesn't hide his view that RMT will have to consider some sort of a deal in our various disputes. The rank and file must keep a close eye on union bosses, as always, countering

# WAVE OF STRIKES



any premature settlements which don't matching-up to the aims of their disputes. Most current and new disputes aren't near resolution, the wave has been steadily growing.

## Threats To Consider

An obvious threat comes with the Conservative government's endless war on the freedom to strike and protest. What was once unlawful has now been made an option open to business, employers can now recruit outside agency scabs to break strikes, as just witnessed with Royal Mail and the posties. Liz Truss is ideologically wedded to enriching her business masters at the expense and even deaths of poor and working class people. Truss is incapable of setting out any policy she can stick to, apart from her continuous authoritarian pronouncements, which she collapses into by default as a refuge for her spiteful mundanity.

In regard to workers' desire to continue fighting; the Labour Party is too busy sending business-friendly signals and distancing themselves from strikers to be a demobilising threat. By far the biggest threat to continuing generalised strike action comes in the form of the TUC, who would be its kiss of death. Any involvement of this treacherous arm of the State whatsoever should be opposed; especially the TUC calling a general strike. Handing over the strike wave to them would bury it quicker than you could say "I Heart Unions"; which if you remember the last time the TUC were involved in calling a general strike is all we ended up with: a social media campaign around posting that wretched phrase on our social media profile! Even if the TUC were to call a day or two of strike action it would be used merely as a national cathartic celebration, followed by endless talks which would release the steam from the strikes and open the door for Sir Starmer to intervene, demonstrating his class collaborationist abilities and promoting his general election campaign. Any move by unions for the TUC to call a general strike in reality will be union leaders looking for a bureaucratic way out.

Striking union members must instead insist that generalised coordinated strike action be sought between trades unions themselves; including the new non-TUC, direct action oriented unions such as IWGB, UVW and CAIWU.

## Striking Alone Is Not Enough — The Necessity of Community Defence

Workers, along with citizens, are under attack in communities: the cost of living crisis, cuts to services, benefits and energy bills most won't be able to pay; designed to empty bank accounts and cull our most vulnerable once again. With this double aspect facing us, strikes need to be embedded and supported by our communities to survive the course. Similarly, communities will need the fighting spirit and tactical abilities of

the striking workers they live alongside. In accord with an anarcho-syndicalist approach, which is basically a workers' approach anyway, we must intertwine both this strike wave at work with the broader class war being waged against us by the government, energy companies, corporations and landlords.

Enough Is Enough, a coalition of union leaders, Labour politicians and lefties with one eye on the Labour Party, still provides a cautiously usable network to build resistance. Don't Pay is a resistance tool which has gotten Ofgem, politicians, the media and even Enough Is Enough in a growing state of panic. A most promising prospect could be the re-emergence of mutual aid groups; which sprang up spontaneously across Britain during the complete Covid-19 lockdown of March 2020. Mutual aid was self-organised to varying degrees as community support networks, while the national, regional and local State collapsed and fell into irrelevance. The virus was an invisible enemy; this time as well as the need for mutual support we have very tangible, clear and visible enemies; and it will be obvious, natural and acceptable for people to move beyond important mutual support to include community defence and resistance also.

We must learn from the past experience of the Covid-19 mutual aid groups to avoid local council co-option and charity mentalities setting in again as mutual aid groups re-emerge. Their potential in solidarity with their striking community members as needed support groups for those who won't or just can't pay limitless energy bills may be the piece of the jigsaw needed to win this social class war. What's more, self-organised communities united with the working population is our only hope in the face of impending climate catastrophe; which we must start planning and building for.

Maintain rank and file control of the strike wave, and build community defence!



# ON THE INTERNATIONAL

Founded in 1922, the International Workers' Association (IWA) is celebrating its centenary. Over the last century it has represented many millions of people, faced repression from State forces and bounced back from the precipice. It has fought for the abolition of capitalism and the State, the implementation of libertarian communism and full workers' control.

While the anarchist union's origins can be traced back to the First International and an infamous split with the Marxists in 1872, its key moment was in the aftermath of the First World War.

As the peasants and workers rose up in Russia in 1917-18 there was optimism that the world was finally witnessing the beginning of a great revolutionary wave. Many anarchists from the collapsing Russian Empire returned to help with the evolving struggle.

The revolution was betrayed, however. A faction under the command of Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin took control of many of the workers' councils (soviets), surviving State institutions and military formations. They formed a so-called "workers' state" which in reality crushed workers' autonomy. They merged unions into the State rendering them toothless, and reimplemented many capitalist policies.

The new "Soviet" Republic formed a Third International (Comintern) under its direct control and a Profintern for unions, which revolutionary syndicalists were initially invited to join, but upon their arrival in Russia they found their comrades

facing Bolshevik repression. With direct democracy subverted, publications were suppressed, with anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists facing arrest and execution.

Rejecting both Russian control and the rise of social democrat trade unionism, the anarchist and revolutionary syndicalists decided that it was time to form an international of unions to fight for the working class.

In the winter of 1922-1923 they met illegally in Berlin with representatives attending from Argentina, Chile, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Sweden. The biggest organisation of all, Spain's CNT, had its delegates arrested on the way to Berlin and joined the following year. Together these organisations formed the International Workers' Association with a combined membership representing millions.

In the following years more syndicalist unions and propaganda groups joined, and the IWA established working relationships across the Americas and in Africa.

Over the next decade however the suppression of radicals worsened. In 1937 the Soviet-backed Spanish Republican government, which had depended on anarchist fighters for its survival against Franco's fascist rebellion a year prior, smashed the revolution before itself being defeated. Fascist regimes sprouted across Europe. Their rise saw anarchist and syndicalist unions banned, their members persecuted, arrested and often executed.

Many opted to organise clandestinely or went into exile. By the end of WWII both repression, and the fact many organisations had played an active role in resistance and partisan campaigns, left many IWA affiliated groups reduced beyond effectiveness or defunct.

It wasn't until 1951 that the IWA was in a position to call another conference. Despite the hardships of two decades of counter-

revolution and global war, many previously affiliated sections turned up, albeit much diminished. The IWA was thus able to relaunch. Notably absent were organisations from Eastern Europe, where the new Soviet regimes had banned strikes and prohibited free trade unions.

As the Cold War camps began to establish themselves, the US started heavily investing in and exporting its anti-communist ideology against even the most banal social democratic governments across Latin America, Africa and Asia. Caught up in this global power struggle, between two entities actively hostile to libertarian socialism, progress was slow.

By the end of the Sixties however dissatisfaction was growing with the post-war order and a wave of revolutionary fervour swept Europe, notably in France 1968 and Italy 1969. With the death of Franco in 1975, the CNT too finally returned to Spain after decades in exile and quickly expanded.

The 1980s and '90s saw more groups joining, representing workers in Australia, Brazil, Japan, Britain and the US. Despite arguments and splits it continued to grow and as the Soviet Union collapsed new sections formed, such as the Polish ZSP, Russian KRAS, Serbia's ASI and the Slovakian PA — and most recently the Bangladesh Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation.

The IWA was formed at a tumultuous time in an age of rising oppression. Against that backdrop it has struggled for a century. Learning from the economic tyranny of the West and the failure of the Soviet experiment, time has only vindicated the IWA's dedication to opposing the centralising forces of wealth and power.

Despite heavy oppression it has persevered and fearlessly promoted leaderless organisation from below, direct and accountable democracy, supporting mutual aid projects as well as worker control and self management. Whether fighting for better wages and working conditions, supporting migrants and other marginalised communities or opposing the rising threat of the global far-right, the IWA's heartfelt desire for a truly meaningful libertarian communism continues to burn bright.

~ Sam Skelt



# NO MORE DOG-EAT-DOG



According to neoliberal ideology it is a “dog-eat-dog” world. But where and when do you see dog eating dog? Unless they are starving (due to unnatural conditions), badly socialised (a problem of conditioning) or on a leash (the perfect metaphor for the dysfunctional nature of authoritarianism), you are much more likely to see dog-sniff-dog, dog-play-with-dog scenarios.

Neoliberalism’s focus on competition reveals that, at its heart, it relies on divide and rule. Economist Friedrich Hayek, grandpappy of the selfish, anally-retentive death cult which literally threatens life as we know it, openly admitted that, left to our own devices, human beings naturally organise into autonomous, self-governing, self-supporting, happy and content communities. But where’s the profit in that?

Neoliberalism has created a breakdown in relationships (with each other, other communities, other species, and ultimately with our planet) which has led directly to a pandemic of isolation, anxiety, stress, addiction and depression. Not only do these anti-social diseases make us less capable of organising against exploitation, they have also made us perfect consumers, hungry for little dopamine hits to distract us from the fundamental unsatisfactoriness of life. Shopping isn’t therapy, it’s a symptom.

Happy people don’t keep buying crap.

The neoliberal global economy is so antisocial that building/rebuilding relationships has become a radical act. And anarchism is all about relationships. The grandpappy of mutualism Pierre-Joseph Proudhon said (in the patriarchal parlance of his day): “The freest man is the one who has the most relations with his fellow men.”

In her invaluable book *Anarchism*, Carissa Honeywell examines Proudhon’s statement and its modern relevance:

“For anarchists, freedom depends on relationships of care and interdependence. On one level, this is because these relationships support material survival; our strong dependence on each other means that it is impossible to be free alone (even when this dependence is hidden from us by conventions of exchange, such as money, which mask interdependence).

“For the poor or the marginalised, freedom requires us to create relationships of greater material equality because freedom without access to the resources necessary for survival and other needs is meaningless. In fact, everyone needs help from others. It is hard to think of any challenge we face that does not require human and non-human assistance. ‘It is unselfconscious privilege,’ writes anthropology professor Anna Tsing, ‘that allows us to fantasise — counter-factually — that we survive alone.’”

So a collectivist approach to economics is not only preferable in an ethical sense, it is in fact the daily reality hidden behind the mythology of neoliberalism. But in the 20th century State Communism proved an authoritarian approach to collectivism was as exploitative and dehumanising as the private ownership model. Only anarchism offers collectivism and a healthy respect for individual liberty. Honeywell goes on:

“... those very experiences or senses of ourselves that we understand as freedom — individuality, uniqueness, creativity, expression or selfhood — are the result of deeply relational needs (psychological, physiological, social and spiritual) being met in connection with and in reaction to other beings.

“Human individuality depends on the collaboration of other beings through relationships with them. Intense experiences of ‘selfness’ are the product of the communities and networks of relationship that support and nurture, antagonise and challenge, develop and create us. In this tradition, freedom and individuality are the result of mutually sustaining connections with others, we are ‘we’ before we are ‘I’.

Anarchism is nothing if it is not practically applied. The job in hand is to (re)connect with our communities and with each other (leave puritanism and infighting to authoritarians). One of the most important things we can do as anarchists is to create spaces where interpersonal, community and international relationships can thrive.

At our little South Yorkshire experiment in practical anarchy, Doncaster’s Bentley Urban Farm ([bentleyurbanfarm.com](http://bentleyurbanfarm.com)) we are building a “Commensality Kitchen” to provide pay-as-you-feel meals in warm spaces so that people know they can get both without the addition of stigma, judgment or victimhood. Not as charity, but as comrades together in good company.

Commensality (a word which I learned from *Anarchism*) is the act of eating together, a simple practice which creates bonds and deepens relationships.

Forget dog-eat-dog, better to just eat together if you want to change the world.

~ Warren Draper



Bentley Urban Farm, pic by Unbound Light/CC

# A HARD RIGHT TURN THAT

In October 2021, Boris Johnson proclaimed that this “is the direction this country is going — towards a high wage, high skill, high productivity ... low tax economy.” Ignoring the awkward fact that his government actually increased taxation to its highest level for 70 years, nothing was done to stop wages falling by a record amount, nor to stop productivity remaining low.

Around the same time, he dismissed concerns over rising inflation (just as he dismissed concerns of Covid, presumably because not doing so would have involved some actual work) before pivoting against wage increases because of concerns over a “wage-price” spiral. Putting aside that wage increases were not driving the price increases nor were they — where they existed — higher than inflation, it is of note that you never hear of an “interest-price” spiral or a “rent-price” spiral or a “profits-price” spiral even though these are also part of any price. And all have been rising for some time. It is always a “wage-price” spiral, simply because interest, rent and profits are income to capital and so, by definition, above reproach and sacrosanct. The notion that the capitalist class should not get the income they are accustomed to is taboo.

A few examples. This year the chief executives of Britain’s 100 biggest companies saw their median pay jump by 39% from £2.5 million in 2020 to £3.4m, surpassing the £3.25m recorded in 2019. This means that the average UK CEO now collects 109 times the amount paid to the average British worker, up from 79 times in 2020. Bonuses jumped to £1.4m compared with £828,000 in 2020. The Felixstowe docks company made £61 million in profits during 2020 and its parent company handed out £99 million to shareholders. It even gives Chris Grayling £100,000 a year to work seven hours a week as an advisor, yet its workers are striking over pay. Privatised water companies diverted £57 billion to shareholders between 1991 and 2020

and CEOs get paid millions while leaks increase and raw sewage gets dumped into our rivers and coasts.

In area after area, Thatcherism can be seen to have failed. The first double-digit inflation in 40 years — since Thatcher, lest we forget — is the latest example of the unwinding of neoliberalism. The problems facing Britain are many — as exposed by the candidates for the leadership of the Tories, just as it was exposed by Johnson’s fatuous “levelling up” rhetoric and May’s “burning injustices” and the “just about managing”. So every Tory leader appears to forget who was in office when the problems they so readily denounce during election hustings became so obvious even they could not ignore them any longer.

Most workers — even those getting decent pay rises — are still seeing real terms wage cuts due to soaring inflation. Yet even before that rise began the crisis was obvious. Foodbank use has been steadily rising for 12 years, wage growth was poor at best for many workers, so millions being placed into fuel poverty today is just the latest of a long line of poverties we are being placed into, suggesting that the problem is a general one and systemic — namely, capitalism. Its success in enriching the wealthy in the short term causes social, ecological and economic problems in the long term — in terms of the latter, households who have to pay more for energy, rent, mortgages, food, water, etc. will stop spending on everything else — and many companies will go under, jobs will be lost, public services will be impaired and a spiral towards recession started.

Yet labour applied to nature is the source of all wealth. Without our minds and muscles, all the owners (laughingly proclaimed as “wealth creators” by Tories, amongst other sycophants) in the world would not ensure any new goods or services are created nor existing ones distributed. Yet because they own the means of production and we have to sell

our labour and its product to them, they monopolise wealth and ensure that we see only a fraction of what we produce.

Little wonder strikes — official and wildcat — are on the increase. And the response of the Tories to them is to urge yet more State invention against workers. This is not isolated, with more and more oppressive legislation is directed against protestors as well as organised labour (i.e., ordinary people), which is matched by a steady increase in the powers of the executive, using Brexit “freedoms” as the excuse to utilise more “Henry VIII clauses”. This has been embraced by the average Tory MP who may wish to deprive the State of some of its functions (i.e., those which aid the many rather than the few) but have to increase the repressive functions which are its essence as their policies produce more discord and inequality. As *Freedom* so rightly put it in its first ever issue back in October 1886:

“To understand the governmental application of laissez-faire learn the two following rules of thumb. When the proprietors molest the proletariat, laissez-faire. When the proletariat resist the proprietors, interfere to help the proprietors.”

The Tories have, since 1979, been keen to proclaim the “free market” while passing laws to make it harder for workers to keep more of the value we create in our own hands. Lest we forget, workers kept between 58% and 64% of the wealth we create in the 30 years leading up to 1979. Since then it has gone steadily down to its around 51% — a figure which classes as “pay” the wages of a company’s CEOs.

The rhetoric is of note — “militant” trade unionists is used to describe workers striking for a wage increase close to the rate of inflation, in other words at best a pay freeze in real terms. Then there is the talk of “union bosses” or “union barons”. It is as if the Tories and their hangers-on are unaware of the many, many anti-union



# BRINGS MELTDOWN



Liz Truss,  
pic by UK  
Government

laws they have imposed on the “free market” since 1979. The people being referred to are elected union officials who are implementing a mandate for industrial action voted upon by over — usually well over — 50% of their members with a turnout of more than 50% (the latter being former PM David Cameron’s contribution to labour market red-tape).

Yes, as anarchists, we recognise the problems associated with full-time, well-paid union officials elected to represent the membership, but while this may make them bureaucrats it does not make them bosses — as they are not elected and paid far, far more. Still, healthy signs can be seen in more and more union leaders recognising the pointlessness of waiting for the Labour Party to do, well, anything. Unison and the RMT are leading the way in asserting union independence and self-sufficiency, anarchists need to encourage and support these trends — this includes developing a 21st century rank-and-file strategy.

Can the Tories’ ability to pretend that a new leader means being disassociated

with the party’s previous policies work its electoral magic again? Ironically, in their leadership election both Truss and Sunak indicated a “return” to conservative values as regards the economy, differing only in how quickly it could be done (days as against a few years). Why the Conservative Party has implemented far-left, socialist, presumably “woke” economic policies for the last 12 years in government is not explained — beyond general moaning about how “the left” dominates discourse in the country and so they, rather than the actual ruling party, are really in power, something else that is not explained. Perhaps this reflects the fact that the right has no ideas beyond a half-remembered Thatcherite dream which has brought us to this series of crises?

So they recall how Thatcher cut income tax (particularly for the top brackets). Unforgotten — at least in public — is the fact that when Thatcher cut income tax rates she compensated by bringing in big VAT rises. In other words, it was not a completely unfunded freebie, it was a

conscious switch from taxing income to taxing spending which is regressive, hitting poorer people harder (not to mention also squandering North Sea Oil revenues to help pay for it).

In short, it’s a “return” to the “Conservative” values that have enriched a few and impoverished the many since 1979 — and as implemented since 2010. This explains why the “solutions” offered by the candidates are either tax cuts or more “handouts”. The former will not benefit the poorest whilst granting money to pay energy bills is simply giving public funds to private companies, which is simply more of the neoliberal mantra of private gains, public losses.

So a generalised non-payment campaign is essential but — like the anti-Poll Tax campaign — it cannot be left to calls for individuals to refuse to pay. Community groups are needed to defend those who refuse to pay against attempts to cut-off their energy supply or bailiffs seeking to force them to pay. We need a federation of community unions across these isles — and we must learn the lesson of the anti-Poll Tax campaign and ensure that no leftist sect uses them as a springboard to electioneering as Trotskyist group Militant did. Rather than generalise the anti-Poll Tax groups into a community resistance network, Militant let them wither away after using their influence to get Tommy Sheridan elected to, first, the Glasgow municipal council in 1992 and then Holyrood in 1999 before, after some moderate electoral success, the Scottish Socialist Party self-imploded.

We cannot wait for an election in two years’ time and even if one did take place, the Labour Party has reverted back to Tory-lite — indeed, one of the worse things about the Tories is that they make Labour look better although, to be fair, Kier Starmer is trying his best to not even reach that low bar. So anarchist tactics are, as always needed, with direct action in terms of strikes over bills, rents and wages a necessity. And if anyone is in doubt of the effectiveness and transforming nature of direct action, look at the numerous existing and proposed laws which the Tories have used against the unions and protestors.

~ Iain McKay

# REBUILDING ORGANS OF

Yet again capitalism lurches from crisis to crisis, with the spectre of recession appearing in the consciousness of the media and the State. Inflation is in double figures, and the Bank of England raised interest rates. The constantly rising price of energy and the long, slow, drawn out impact of the barely-planned hard Brexit demanded by the right of the Tory Party have combined with years of austerity and below-inflation pay rises that are, in real terms, pay cuts, to produce a British society that seems close to collapse.

In response, even the major trade unions have been moved to call strike after strike. The media has clamoured about a “cost of living crisis,” while Mick Lynch’s tour of TV programs seemingly put him in the place previously occupied by Corbyn as a star of British social democracy.

For many, however, strikes are not likely. Working in poorly-paid service sector jobs in supermarkets, clothes shops, bars, restaurants and cinemas, or in the gig economy, these workers were struggling to find the money to eat even before the energy price rises.

Austerity had already killed more than 130,000 people as of 2019, according to the Institute for Public Policy Research, and the jaw-droppingly callous Covid policies championed by ex-prime minister Boris Johnson have officially claimed — at time of writing — another 163,445. It looks certain that the current crisis, driven by recession, profiteering, and war will claim yet more over the winter.

The reaction to this, beyond strikes, is heartening to see — the grassroots Don’t Pay UK campaign on the one hand, and the “official” Enough Is Enough campaign spearheaded by the Communication Workers Union (CWU), *Tribune* magazine and housing campaign Acorn. These efforts aim to force action through, in the first instance, a mass payment refusal campaign along the lines of the Poll Tax resistance that occurred from 1989-92, and in the second to support rallies, pickets, and community organisation.

Community organisation in the form of mutual aid is going to be critical, not just for ensuring that people survive this winter, but also to resist capitalism and



Crowds gather at the G20 Meltdown protest in London, 2009

the State. Organisations that seek to feed the homeless and hungry around the world are already in place, but the current crisis requires all of us to, where possible, reach out in our own communities to develop local groups that can check on the elderly and disabled, provide help with odd jobs and maintenance on homes and gardens, and pool food and money, among other things.

Both new and existing affinity groups will be needed for people to get through what may well be not just a difficult winter, but difficult years ahead against a far-right laissez-faire force seeking to break strikes, once more crush the unions, and pull apart and sell off what little remains in public hands.

As usual, we cannot expect the mass media to be supportive. Even the weak, Nordic-style social democracy proposed by Jeremy Corbyn resulted in years of concerted attacks on every conceivable platform, so we must be prepared for mutual aid groups to be attacked in

the same way as it becomes clear that they can be a nucleus for resistance. It is critical, however, that we do not lose sight of the principle reason for us to join and create these groups — survival.

Survival is, in the short term, the most important goal for many people around the country. Capitalism has pushed them — again — into the position of asking if they can feed themselves or their children, or if their elderly relatives will be able to heat their homes. Meeting this need is the most pressing concern for any mutual aid group, and should be the first priority for us as anarchists and members of our communities to focus on.

Inspiration can be drawn from early trade unions and anarchist groups across the world, who pooled resources to provide everything from childcare to clothing for their members and those who needed aid. As the State struggles and fails, we must be present to plug the gaps that appear and continue our work to “build the new society in the shell of the old”.



# SOLIDARITY



By helping people to survive by feeding and clothing them, and helping to care for their homes and pets, we can use mutual aid to develop people's understanding of what is possible outside the constraints of capitalism and the State.

Resistance to the death cult of capital is, of course, the next most valuable impact of mutual aid and where it must link up with larger groups and campaigns like the Anti-Raid Network, Enough Is Enough and Don't Pay, as well as strike actions like those planned by the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) or CWU. Mutual aid groups allow people to resist bailiffs, pose obstacles to the police, and sustain long-term campaigns of action and strikes. The resulting networks of affinity groups built by local mutual aid societies can pool resources

to supply food, clothes, and money to areas of the country most in need, and provide a much greater safety net than would otherwise be available. In addition, they can multiply the effect of mass campaigns by bringing in more people, encouraging their membership to continue to act, and greatly expanding their reach through principles like "each one brings one".

It is critically important that, because we need to use these mutual aid groups to both survive and resist, we as anarchists should not be afraid to propagandise as we get involved in our local communities. It is vitally important to take inspiration from the anarchists and social revolutionaries of the past, from the Black Panthers to the Spanish CNT to Lesbians and Gays Support The Miners\*. That said, we should not, however, go down the road travelled by the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party and its ilk, where pamphlets and placards are handed out with wild abandon while little else is done. The impact of, for example, providing food to those who cannot afford it and visibly being anarchists is in itself powerful: the Black Panthers' breakfast programme was more instrumental in getting their message across than any number of newspapers, for example.

Whilst this current crisis is of course extremely unlikely to lead to a revolution, we can use it to further undermine the capitalist system. People's faith in capitalism is already shaky, with polls from 2016 showing that even then about 36% of the British population viewed socialism favourably, and 19% considered themselves socialists of some stripe. It is easy to fall into the trap of pessimism and defeatism, particularly as for a long time, anarchism in Britain has been a fringe movement. However, this is fertile ground for anarchists and anarchism, and we should recognise it as such.

Here, then, is a chance to demonstrate with concrete action the benefit of

anarchism — horizontal organisation leading not only to better outcomes for all, but being a real and valid alternative social system. We as anarchists must run with the grassroots national response: from strikes to protests, from mass payment refusal to food banks, we can provide much needed practical support and in turn can benefit from greater exposure to large numbers of people. As we help our neighbours, communities, and fellow workers with food, shelter, and whatever else they need, we will also develop a greater awareness and understanding of anarchism and what we can do together not just as local groups but as a popular mass movement.

Indeed, our existing organisations such as Solidarity Federation and Anarchist Federation should seek to reinforce existing links not only with each other, but with sympathetic unions like the Industrial Workers of the World and Independent Workers Union of Great Britain. It is entirely possible and indeed desirable for all the anarchist and sympathetic groups in the country to come together as a larger whole to provide much needed support to local affinity groups that we start or join.

If possible, as a movement, we should aim to shift the goals of groups like Enough Is Enough and Don't Pay from their current relatively tame suggestions to much more radical demands; at the same time directly showing people across the country how anarchism can help them and their friends and families. However, even if we are only able to support our local communities we should see this as a net positive. It is by building, and maintaining, mutual aid connections in local communities that we can expand the reach of anarchism across Britain. From small affinity groups to national networks, today's crisis is an opportune moment for us as anarchists and we should act accordingly and quickly.

~ Fliss

\* The Black Panthers are best known for their militant attitude to US urban resistance, but also ran extensive community support projects which built significant networks of supports for their more spectacular activities. The Spanish CNT was the most powerful anarchist expression of revolutionary unionism of the 20th century and its networks successfully underpinned production across much of Catalonia during the Spanish Civil War. Lesbians and Gays Support The Miners was a group which built lasting links of solidarity with striking miners in the 1980s, famously portrayed in the 2014 movie *Pride*



# ON CRISIS AND SUCCESS

In ‘Lessons of the Covid Mutual Aid Projects’ (*Freedom News*, Dec 2021), Anna K noted the idea “was all too easily assimilated” into forms of relatively apolitical community support work. This rings bells when it comes to many anarchistic schemes, beyond community-led disaster relief.

In long term radical projects there is always a risk of becoming de-politicised as the membership changes, matures and finds a balance with the status quo. “Back to the land” and collective housing can degenerate into retirement homes and garden hobbies for lefties. Union and community activism easily becomes a form of semi-professionalised service provision.

difficult to handle. And this is particularly true when both phenomena — relatively small, stable groups of political radicals facing a sudden influx of enthusiastic, but chaotic, people spurred on by events — collide.

Historically the view has been that the public run well ahead of political during periods of systemic crisis, as the former have less jaded views of what’s possible. But initial fury never lasts and the trick, for activists, is how to help this wave place everyone in a better position when the early enthusiasm fades, without splits, burnouts or a decline back into obscurity — or becoming apolitical.

As Covid mutual aid in 2020 and Don’t Pay in 2022 showcased, going from a small

explain, harder to implement and can be nigh on impossible to enforce (as Occupy discovered to its cost). Let alone when, inevitably, you are also likely trying to do so in the face of active sabotage from left, centre and right trying to put down or co-opt a perceived serious challenger.

Getting ahead of the curve

Part of the solution to these sorts of problems arising within solidarity projects is simply identifying them. Far too often we get blindsided having no plan on how to scale up and cope with the chaos of sudden breakthroughs. This is not to do with whether there are formal constitutional rules or guidelines dealing with the mechanics, but with simple facts of numbers, which frequently overrule guidelines in times of crisis.

Going from 100 people to 1,000, for example, means not just a loss of coherent internal norms but also has other knock-on effects, from the establishment of new self-organised groups to the likelihood that a majority of those involved will not be au fait with (or even in favour of) how we do things, or how the group is structured. People cease to know each other (the Dunbar limit is often over-egged, but its suggestion that humans can only maintain maybe 150 relationships is an important consideration). Older members may feel disrespected, newer ones patronised. And that’s before genuine bad actors (there are always a few) are thrown into the mix. The conditions for a split arise almost immediately and generally it will be held off by a sense of forward momentum, which lasts maybe a few months, or even weeks.

Elsewhere in this paper, the possibilities for rapid expansion are discussed at length. The practical task of doing so however will require that we address this “crisis of success” question and prepare our limited circles as best we can to cope. Otherwise we’ll continue to experience cycles of spectacular boom and bust without the long-term gains we need to see.

~Rr



This isn’t unique to anarchist projects of course. Marxist-Leninist groups like the SWP, Socialist Party and CPB for example regard and promote themselves as revolutionary but largely exist, today, to grind out member subs to pay “professional organisers” for largely useless activity. A far cry from Lenin’s view that “history will not forgive revolutionaries for procrastinating.”

The near-hegemony of an aggressive, hostile ideology over our everyday lives is corrosive, forcing daily accommodations with the system and its moulding of everyone who grows up in it. Organisations which survive long enough are bowed and reshaped by such relentless pressures.

But at the other end of the spectrum, rapid growth of a new project can also be

group to mass engagement introduces a bewildering number of complications. Rather than a handful of like-minded comrades, you have everyone from Labour Party liberals to (in the latter case) Katie Hopkins looking to glom on for personal gain while others — conspiracy theorists, well-meaning liberals, confused reactionaries etc — try to push their own views while honestly wanting to be involved.

In this initial sharp rush of day-to-day organisational practicalities, entrenching the radical cultural norms of our own small scene is tremendously difficult. They take time to bed in even with the best of circumstances and the cleverest planning, let alone when every activist is scrambling to adapt at short notice. Radical administrative ideas are hard to

# CAN TORY CHAOS BE AN OPPORTUNITY?

## SPACE TO BREATHE

When it comes to anarchist activities, we are often in search of physical space that we can occupy and use. In this search we are subject to outside influences such as the law, ownership of spaces and competition for it as a resource. We have to take our opportunities to use space in anarchistic ways or else those opportunities just disappear.

The same is true of political space. For the last four decades the political space around ideas such as common ownership has contracted, thanks to successful governments pursuing small State agendas. In 2022 it seems that political space is shifting in ways we haven't seen for decades and common or public ownership of industries is back on the agenda. It remains to be seen if the Labour Party will occupy the space and make it their own. In any case there may be opportunities in the physical world for anarchists to take advantage.

During the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, the government intervened in the economy with a furlough scheme, effectively paying a portion of the wages of millions of people. Conservative politicians were horrified at this abandonment of free market economics, coupled with a lockdown. What horrified them more was that the public on the whole seemed to agree with the measures.

With the end of lockdown they tried to go back to small State business as usual. In September 2021 there was a shortage of lorry drivers in Britain and this caused a brief crisis at petrol forecourts as fuel pumps ran dry. Industry figures claimed that it was caused by Brexit, with some drivers returning to their European Union countries of origin. Former transport secretary Grant Shapps retorted that the industry had known about Brexit since 2016 and they should have ensured that enough British lorry drivers had been trained up. This incident showed us that the Tories believe in capitalism so much that they are willing to tell industry bosses that it is their fault if their industry falls short in some way, regardless of government policy.



After a period of large scale State interference in everyone's lives, the country finds itself in multiple crises which are off the scale. The public have got used to the idea that the government exists to help them through such crises and yet they only seem to help after being dragged kicking and screaming. People might reasonably assume that if government exists then it should actually do stuff. Yet the same messages have come from the government during the summer, regarding the cost of energy bills and the various strikes. Shapps (again) spent much of the summer claiming it wasn't down to the government to intervene in the rail dispute — despite some of the parties needing government approval for any deal.

Moreover, the public might well have noted that inaction is, in fact, an action.



This is an obvious contradiction at the heart of neoliberal thought. On energy bills the government were pushed into half adopting the Labour policy of a windfall tax in the spring and then spent the summer on the backfoot as their two leadership candidates tried desperately to out Thatcher one another.

While physical space is tangible and detectable, political space is ephemeral and emerges over time. It can creep up on you and it appears to have crept up on the Conservative Party. While their leadership candidates were arguing about tax cuts, radio phone-ins were discussing with the general public the idea of nationalising the energy companies. The public mood has clearly shifted and presents possibilities for discussion on the role of the government and public ownership.

Whilst left wing ideas could flourish it should be remembered, however, that a powerful Tory government is still in place. They could win another election and force this political space closed, because general elections normally settle the direction of our politics. A Labour win requires them to command this political space and be bold, but under Kier Starmer the party has shown a distinct timidity thus far. They will need to show they are the change the country needs.

Any likely media criticism will form around the idea of turning the clock back to the 1970s, except the Tories have already got us there whilst simultaneously praying to the ghost of Thatcher. This new political space requires forward thinking, not harking back to the past. For that reason, Labour would do well to rethink public ownership so that it need not resemble simple nationalisation. On the Tories' own terms, privatisation of the energy companies and railways simply hasn't worked. There isn't a market in these areas for them to get excited about being "free".

We should note the change in public mood, note the possibility for political change that it can bring, and be ready for the possibilities.

~ Jon Bigger

# LESSONS FROM THE

The Common House, an activist collective that had provided meeting space for radical groups in Bethnal Green, London, since 2013, closed down its physical venue in 2021. During the pandemic, many members had to drop out and those who remained decided to wind things down gently with care while they still had some energy left. The Common House is continuing organising events in other spaces as well as online, such as skill shares and a regular “Activist Cafe” networking event.

I am a grassroots organiser and writer, and friends with one of the Common House organisers. I asked if I could interview members of the Common House and write about their experience. The group consented and three people agreed to be interviewed. We talked about the history of the Common House, its structures, relationships and wider activist networks, and the process of ending the project.

The Common House was founded by a number of feminist, anti-capitalist, radical education and self-organised worker groups. Some of the groups involved from or near the beginning included Feminist Fightback, X Talk (a sex worker-led workers co-operative), Sex Workers Open University, Plan C, Precarious Workers Brigade, and Autonomous Tech Fetish. The space was run collectively by member groups who sent representatives to regular assemblies and shared the day-to-day admin work.

The Common House was an experiment in creating “urban commons” as collective praxis. They did not see the commons as something that already exists and is then collectively shared, but as something that is always in the process of being collectively created. The central idea of “commoning” is that everyone contributes something, and everyone takes something from the commons.

There is no straightforward relationship between what we give and what we take. Figuring out what someone is able



to contribute and what they need to take away from a space are two separate processes that are intertwined in the commons. This means that at the heart of commoning there is a conflict that has to be addressed and resolved over and over again. Commoning is the ongoing work of harmonising what each of us needs and what each of us can offer to a collective.

Scholars Fred Moten and Stefano Harney argue that Karl Marx’s words “from each according to his ability to each according to his needs” are misunderstood when thought of in terms of property\*. If we possess our “needs and abilities” as property, that means they are quantifiable and translatable. In theory, then, we could work out a system to distribute from each according to their ability to each according to their needs. However, needs and abilities are actually power relations rooted in our interdependency with other human and non-human beings. They can never be resolved in a straightforward system.

This is why our needs are often contradictory and conflict with the needs of others. For example, the Common House was a rented flat inside a warehouse building, hidden away in a side street. It was not a space where one could just show up and meet other people. They couldn’t throw parties because of the neighbours. However, that also made the Common House a great space for sex workers and activists to meet confidentially. No single group or project can meet all the contradictory needs in our communities.

Many activist groups implicitly or explicitly work on the principle that the more time and energy someone is able

to contribute, the more influence they should have or the more they should be able to get out of a project. Commoning challenges this assumption. The reality is that often the people who need a space the most are able to contribute the least time or material resources. However, that does not mean that they can’t or don’t contribute anything at all.

At the Common House, there were a few individuals who put in a lot of admin work, worried about the finances, and regularly took part in meetings. However, many others contributed to the life of the space by organising and attending events and using it to directly meet their needs. For example, there were regular sex worker breakfasts, English classes, self-defence classes, and all kinds of workshops and skill shares. One of the people who put in the admin “grunt work”, said that they got out “so much more” because they got to be part of a vibrant and diverse space that was serving people’s needs.

Ecofeminist Maria Mies writes that “no commons can exist without a community”\*\*. We need to build reciprocal social relationships in order to maintain common spaces. And we need common spaces in order to meet, get to know each other and build trust. Privatisation breaks down the commons, which breaks down our communities, which undermines our ability to create commons. For example, paying rent was a constant source of anxiety and stress for the Common House. Paying rent to a landlord means that you have an exploitative relationship built into the commons from the outset. The landlord takes a profit out of the commons which means that everyone else is putting in more than they are taking out.

The exploitative relationship built into the commons through private property is one of the reasons why groups end up with a dynamic where a few people do a lot more work, and shoulder a lot more responsibility, than others. Importantly, there are no winners in this dynamic.

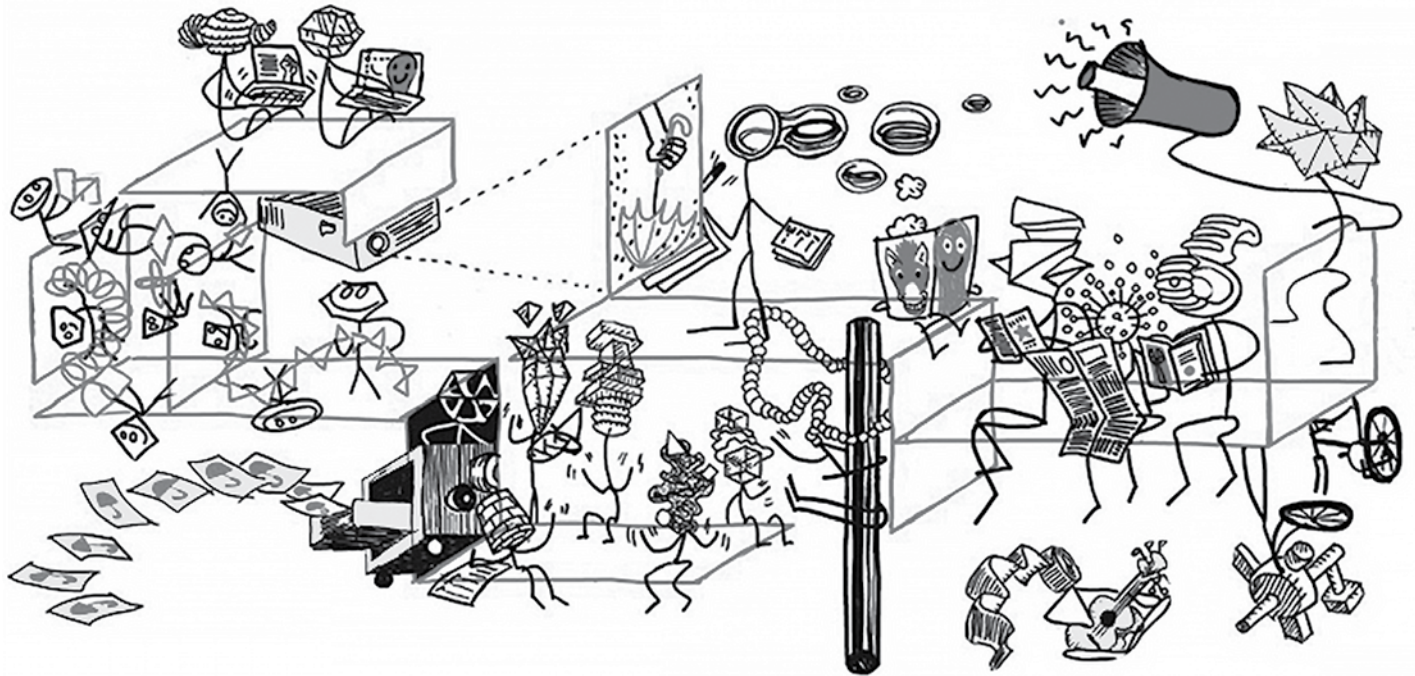
\* Fred Moten and Stefano Harney. 2013. *The Undercommons: Fugitive planning and black study*. New York: Minor Compositions. P.99

\*\* Maria Mies. 2014. “No commons without a community”. *Community Development Journal* 49 p.106

\*\*\* Erica Lagalisse. 2016. *Good Politics: Property, Intersectionality, and the Making of the Anarchist Self*. Montreal: McGill University. P.92

\*\*\*\* Selma James. 2021. *Our Time Is Now: Sex, Race, Class and Caring for People and Planet*. Oakland: PM Press. P.205

# COMMON HOUSE



A few people lose more sleep and do more work than others. However, those members who do not have the capacity to take on as much work and responsibility, also find that they have less influence in the collective. For example, one of the organisers had not been able to attend the meetings where the decision was made to close down the Common House. The decision was therefore effectively made without them. On the other hand, two of the other organisers said they felt anxious because they were making a huge decision that affected many people who did not have the capacity to give their input.

This dynamic is further polarised and complicated by divisions such as class, sexism, racism, ableism, and migration status. For example, Erica Lagalisse observes that women have to do more “operational” work such as taking minutes at meetings or checking emails than their male comrades in order to gain influence in a group.<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Therefore, women who do not have the capacity to attend meetings will have less influence than the men who don't attend, and women who do have the capacity to be actively involved are likely to take on more work and become more overwhelmed than the active men.

Grassroots organising within capitalism is inherently unsustainable. Individual

groups can only sustain themselves over time by reproducing exploitative relationships. This is why we get that familiar pattern where young activists are chewed up and spat out by campaigns that claim to be growing and escalating when really, they are burning through and depleting grassroots resources.

The diversity of our movements is what makes us resilient and enables us to grow collective power. Our individual groups and campaigns don't have to and can't be the whole movement, they just have to be part of it. The relationships we build and the knowledge we gain through our organising outlast particular groups and campaigns and can feed into new things. This also means allowing ourselves and our comrades to take breaks or leave groups without losing their friendships and networks. It's important that people who need to step back can do so without any guilt or pressure, are still actively welcomed to social events, and can become active again when they are ready.

Building commons within and against capitalism means (re)building reciprocal social relationships across capitalist divisions of power. This involves finding ways of making collective decisions and holding each other accountable. Collective decision-making and accountability are

relationships where people affirm each other's efforts, communicate their needs, voice disagreement, and challenge each other when necessary. They are not reducible to horizontal structures or formal processes.<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> This is especially tricky when the majority of a group is already so tired and disengaged it becomes difficult to find out what people are thinking and what they want.

The decision to close the Common House was explored through a series of one-to-one conversations. Following these informal conversations, a motion to close down the Common House was brought to a monthly assembly and passed. Before finally leaving the space, they organised a big clear out day. Lots of people came by to pick up bits of equipment, books, and furniture, or just to chat and reminisce. There were people from other social centres, squatters, activists, neighbours, friends, and former Common House members. People who used to be involved came back to help wind things down. One organiser described this as a “life raft”, a “last-minute injection of support and comfort”, reassuring the small group that their decision to wind down the Common House was supported by their wider activist community.

~ Nora Ziegler

# A LETTER OF LOVE TO THE

I don't think we are just legal. I think we are a repository of collective knowledge.

— Kim, he/him

The Advisory Service for Squatters (ASS) was set up in 1975 as a successor to the Family Squatters Advice Service which had been providing support for squatters since the late 1960s. The purpose of ASS has shifted over time, but its central premise is to provide legal and practical advice for squatters.

This can range from assisting with legal defences upon receipt of eviction notices, attending court, offering advice on how to access electricity and other utilities, helping people find a new crew to live with, and generally helping people ensure their home is secure.

Since 1976 the ASS has also published *the Squatters Handbook* — a practical guide for squatters on the various different elements involved in opening and maintaining a building. *The Squatters Handbook* is currently on its 14.5th edition and can be purchased from the ASS itself and Freedom Bookshop, among other disreputable establishments.

I volunteered with the ASS for a year, during the pandemic, during which time I spoke to several squatters past and present about the service and the importance of the solidarity and mutual aid it provides.

Below is a brief overview of the ways in which ASS helps squatters, and why the work they do is so valuable.

I would go to ASS, I've probably got multiple copies of the *Squatters Handbook* upstairs that I've read through religiously and I think it was the backbone of the London squatting scene for decades. I think the work that ASS have done is phenomenal and if I was holding somewhere that was getting an eviction notice and I needed legal advice, then I would go to ASS.

— Jim, he/him

One of the first things I was struck by was the immediate nature of what ASS do.

It was like a routine, wasn't it, you get the papers, you bring them down to ASS straight away.

— Oliver, he/him

Many times we are given notice of hearing only a few days, sometimes less than 24 hours, before the defendants are due in court. And the stakes are impossibly high: losing your home.

This means that long-term goals and development have to come second to the pressing issues we deal with. Not to mention that due to leading precarious lives, and not necessarily having access to wifi, computers, printers etc, squatters are often difficult to contact in advance and get an explanation of their situation with enough time to go to court.

## Surviving legal changes — and a pandemic

Prior to the pandemic and when ASS was functioning normally, there would be a volunteer in the office every weekday afternoon, so people could bring their papers and have a sit down discussion with the volunteer about their situation and what best to include in a defence.

Because I'd been through the poll tax struggle, through the poll tax struggle, I'd realised the use of the law, and how fun it could be.

— Kim

This changed during the pandemic to the office being run largely virtually, via allotted days being managed through phone conversations and the email list, which made it much harder to communicate with squatters facing eviction — especially when, oftentimes, English was not their first language, or there was confusion over which member of the crew to be in contact with.

I was at ASS. Because I started learning Spanish at the absolute peak of huge

numbers of Spanish people moving to London and squatting. The absolute peak of that, I was learning Spanish. Being able to speak Spanish meant that I was helping people ... And people would be getting me to come and translate and other people in the ASS crew would need me to translate for people or people were telling people to go in on Monday because the people there speak Spanish on a Monday and people would explicitly tell people to go and see me so they could speak to me in Spanish. So that was quite good.

— Siobhan, she/her

A major takeaway from my time with ASS was that we never ever judged people for their situation — for bringing in papers impossibly last minute, for providing papers as blurry, wonky photographs, for dropping out of communication, for forgetting to go to court after we had spent hours drafting their defence — whatever.

We approached every single case with compassion and understanding and zero blame, something I had rarely come across even in left-wing organisations. I think the fact that the collective was made up largely from current or former squatters and people who'd experienced other forms of housing precarity added a lot to this. We all had experience of different impossible situations and nothing, nothing at all, would stop us from trying our absolute hardest to help someone avoid losing their home.

I used it a lot. I went to a few meetings for one reason or another. But I was also one of the people that would go to ASS to deal with the papers. So if any possession, court, papers come up. So I was there a lot.

— Layla, she/her

The nature of ASS and its relationship with the state has changed as the UK has become increasingly antagonistic towards squatting. In the early days the ASS was considered one of the voluntary organisations you could work with in order

\* This is in reference to the Focus E15 occupation on the Carpenters Estate in late 2014 which sparked a wave of housing estate occupations across London.

\*\* Property guardianships are a relatively recent phenomenon, where someone enters into an agreement to live in a building or part of a building that would otherwise be empty (or squatted). They have very few legal rights and often live in appalling circumstances.

# A.S.S.



An original hotline phone for the ASS, which was partially melted in a fire.

to increase your benefit contributions.

A friend of mine was working at ASS for an extra tenner a week on his dole and suggested that I did the same. This was in 1994. So there were lots of people. The meetings were lively. There was quite a good structure. I mean things worked around things written in the daybook, things written on notes and left for the next shift or for the meeting.

— Kim

As squatting has decreased in size and increasingly hostile laws have come into place the remit of ASS and the range of assistance it can offer has shrunk but it is still recognised as an integral part of the squatting movement, not only in London ( its office is situated in London, currently in the Freedom Press building in Whitechapel), but across the country.

The 2012 residential squatting ban, a late addition to the Legal Aid, Sentencing, and Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPO),

was an enormous blow to the squatting movement, forcing ASS to recalibrate what was possible to achieve under increasingly intolerant circumstances. It banned the squatting of even long-derelict residential units, only exempting squats of commercial sites, or buildings in the process of conversion. However, out of this came a wave of protest squats, utilising a loophole in the law to allow squatters to occupy residential buildings if it was seen as a political protest.

When LASPO came in, we worked out how you could have a protest squat and what it meant. It was a solid grass roots campaign, taking over an empty block of flats for a limited period of time as part of the campaign to take back the estate — it's just that since then it's just ground on and on, and it's the same people, less people trying to do the same thing and without actual successes.

— Kim

And over the last decade the laws have tightened further, the most recent addition being the Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts Act 2022 which criminalises trespass. Designed to target the already heavily marginalised gypsy and traveller community, this act could also see further restrictions on the practice of squatting. However, all this means is that organisations like ASS are more vital than ever and deserve your support any way it can be offered.

Despite LASPO, I still feel like I'm doing something useful. Before LASPO, we were helping people house themselves. That was it. Now it doesn't really feel like that. It's not a mass thing. You have to be fairly hardcore to squat these days. You have to want to do it. So many of the people who housed themselves by squatting before LASPO are probably now the fucking guardians\*\* because it's exciting, it's edgy. It's easy. It's got a bit more legitimacy. So what we have to offer has been undercut for the moment.

— Kim

The ASS has been the backbone of the British squatting movement for over 45 years, helping thousands of people resist eviction, find safe — if temporary — housing, and providing support, compassion, and practical advice to those on the brink of homelessness. Its impact and its importance can not be overstated.

It's an incredible organisation that helps so many people and it's fucking amazing.

— Layla

If you need legal advice or other support with squatting you can contact ASS via email on [advice@squatter.org.uk](mailto:advice@squatter.org.uk) or text them at 07545 508-628. Likewise, ASS are always in need of more volunteers so do let them know if you have enthusiasm or expertise to contribute to keeping people safe, secure, and housed.

~ Rowan Tallis Milligan



# IAN BONE AND THE PEOPLE

Best known as a founder of *Class War* and lifelong irreverent troublemaker against the Establishment, Ian Bone has been an anarchist since the late 1960s, with particular highlights including the time he was designated “the most dangerous man in Britain” by *The Sunday People* and his role in organising legendary festival *Anarchy in The UK* in 1994. He was also active during the 1990 anti-Poll Tax campaign, and talked to **Rob Ray** about his memories of Hackney at the time ...

## So you were in London when things started kicking off?

Yeah I used to live on Brook Road — a little estate near Clapton Pond, one of my kids was born there. It has changed a lot.

There was Stamford Hill squatters, just loads and tonnes of stuff happening, housing issues with all sorts of different groups. *Class War* was going really full pelt in Hackney, loads of graffiti everywhere. occupations of Mare Street Town Hall, all sorts of stuff, a big squatting movement.

The Pembury (pub) was like a sort of red base, with squatters, red actionists and class warriors, also a palpable anarchist community, like maybe there'd been in Brixton in the early '80s, lots of anarchists per head of the population and a lot of little magazines like *Hackney Heckler*, loads of other stuff, a very vibrant scene. There was the music scene, then we'd do stuff like chase the housing manager down the road. Yeah, people were declaring it the People's Republic of Hackney.

## What was driving that?

Well in Hackney at the time ... quite a few people actually lived there. It works best within a sizeable squatting infrastructure, so we got a lot of people squatting. It gives you a solid base for action.

There was a lot of empty accommodation, a lot of big squats from Stamford Hill down to the Pembury and others, there were a lot of people who lived cheek by jowl, big music scenes, parties, there was a whole heap of punk, squat gigs, a lot more than normal you know? There were a lot of easy to



Ian Bone at an anti-poor doors rally in 2014

Pic: Guy Smallman

access squats along Mare Street. And there were a lot of just quite imaginative squatters who put a lot of time in.

I can't recall any massive sectarianism among the anarchists in Hackney, even the ones that were reflected nationally they got stuck in for the Poll Tax, people worked together really well. I mean there was a lot of them, a lot of people who were identifiable as anarchists just from the clothes they were wearing, loads of slogans everywhere.

And yeah, we'd seen this amount of corruption in the Labour Party which had been there for years and years and years, housing was going down the swanny. The council's probably been more corrupt round about then than it was before, there's jobs for the boys and also some of the unions played a pretty active role.

I worked in Holly Estate as a tenant worker for a bit and our chair, Harry Shaw made a complaint, some cleaner wasn't cleaning the roads, he was in the office and these three blokes get out of the car,

like mafioso faces, so he goes and hides in the back room til they find him. And they just tell him, you know, don't make any other complaints about our brother comrade thankyou. A lot of those areas where hacks, where Labour's been in for a long time, they're totally corrupt.

And you can't underestimate the influence of Crass on the younger generation. Crass, to a lot of people, they liked Crass at the time, like you know they come into anarchist politics through Crass without a doubt.

The movement in Hackney, apart from people in *Class War* or older, was mostly 16 to 28, something like that. No, no, we're not talking about a well-balanced movement.

I guess if you wanted to you know, leave home to go somewhere else in the country, wearing those sorts of Crass clothes and such then Hackney was the obvious place to move to, probably you knew people there. There weren't kind of other struggles going on which they gave support to in terms of industrial



# E'S REPUBLIC OF HACKNEY

strikes or this that and the other, it was all over housing and occupation, see who was in control of housing.

So the sort of political philosophy of ours and I think a lot of the squatters was to make no-go areas, you gain control of estates like in Stamford Hill, which they did for a bit, and then develop from there.

**So there wasn't a strong link between university activism and that squatting based movement?**

There wasn't, no. I mean, it was fine. There wasn't that crossover, it was very much the young music scene and just housing, housing, there were squats fucking everywhere you know.

**How do you reckon that bigger scene impacted when the Poll Tax was announced, how it gelled in organising terms?**

To be honest, the kind of hard work, which Militant Tendency did in Scotland patiently building up anti-Poll Tax unions, you know, building up this setting, that didn't exist in Hackney. There was a Hackney anti-Poll Tax union, Haringey and that, but no-one did the kind of hard work, we were all too fucking lazy, we wanted to go straight to rioting. Even the strikers were not so patient with just not paying.

So there wasn't a lot of "don't pay the Poll Tax" apart from demos. The patient work was totally bypassed, which irked Militant even more later on I'm sure. And it was much more than we won't pay — that we'll have a riot.

But it was interesting that riot, because you know the later one, in 2011, people were stealing stuff, smashing in windows. When the Poll Tax riots went up Mare Street to the Pembury they were just smashing stuff, I walked onto the pavement and someone's just sitting on three colour television boxes. And it hadn't become acquisitive, you know, pick something up and leg it, it was very communal and very non-runawayish.

Mind you, I think all these places have their time and then they move on, you know, like Tower Hamlets a few years ago was the place to be.

There's like, four or five years, they can be good years, right, but then we get fed up and move somewhere else.

There were some leftover arguments and such, Crass and non-Crass, peaceful and not, but it didn't really inhibit people working together. There was obviously some arguments with Class War but mostly we worked really well with everyone. Even people like the Hackney Hell Crew, Eat Shit and legendary bands like that.

**So I guess the question there is, the Poll Tax obviously has an impact on the people paying it, but if you're a squatter that's not necessarily you ...**

Well there's other issues come up, I mean the key issues come up all the way to the Poll Tax riots, like the defeat of the miners, Stonehenge, Battle of the Beanfield, Wapping Strike again, anti-Traveller legislation, this that and the other, so people were antagonistic to Thatcherism all the way through.

So jumping to the Poll Tax, it's basically revenge for all those people. The miners, the printers, the Travellers, that was when they all got back together to get her back. So they might not have been affected by the Poll Tax, but they were certainly politicised throughout the '80s. And it was also substantial, the Traveller communities who would overwinter in Hackney as well, and there was music and other things coming out of that.

Yeah, I think the miners strike, the daily images coming on your screen and that, meant we were continually being politicised through the '80s and still plenty were class conscious around the time of the riot and that would have been seen as a major event, Thatcher was defeated, playing the major role in her resignation. So that was an amazing victory, but unfortunately it was the last.



**Trying to organise in Hackney now is more of an uphill struggle because of the whole transition to a precarious, transient renting population, but also because the class composition has gentrified.**

Well yeah that's it, the achievement of Thatcher is she completely destroyed class consciousness. The victory over the miners changed ... I mean now who identifies as her class enemy, you and me, now there's people voting Tory in the North, she's still winning you know, getting rid of class consciousness was her major fucking achievement.

Like we've done a lot of work with the UVW (grassroots union), that's one very hopeful new phenomena, that way of radical industrial organising going after Sotherbys, Harrods and all that kind of stuff and that was really good. It was nice that "we want Class War here" they said.

I still think that politically you've not got enough people in certain areas. Even the old German autonomists had Red bases where you can control things and operate out of, I mean Thatcher deliberately dispersed the working class out to Basildon, every area you can think of — Notting Hill was designed out of existence, people have all moved away and there's no class consciousness. And that's still, that's the problem.

I think the left and everyone sort of didn't cotton on to the depth of Thatcher's picture in ideological terms. That time when she'd just won the election again, she whispered something, "we must do something about the inner cities." Yeah, destroy them. The old frontline in Hackney and all over the country. It'd be Chapel Town in Leeds or All Saints Road in Notting Hill, and she deliberately policed all those out you know by putting in art galleries, this that and the other, all those sites don't exist anymore.

Instead you got street gangs, kids killing each other, as opposed to you know, there isn't that class consciousness. But certainly up to the Poll Tax riot we still had that level of class consciousness back then.

# A POTTED HISTORY OF THE

For many, the long history of people in Britain resisting the greed and corruption of the ruling classes, from Kings to lords to tycoons and politicians, isn't really spoken about. In the following article **Maura Framrose** picks out some gems.

There's a reason most of us pass through school without a single lesson on the roots of inequality or the workings of politics and capital. The history of ownership is a story of theft.

In 1215, 15 barons — wanting not to be taxed — negotiated the Magna Carta with the king and set up the first Parliament. The first laws they made protected the church (big landowners). The first Statute (of Merton and Labourers) in 1235 allowed "lords" to enclose common land, fix maximum wages and tie serfs to one landlord. This was the basis of English Common Law and ownership.

Medieval peasants, under no illusion they had representation in Parliament and unable to comprehend how one man could possess all rights to one stretch of land to the exclusion of everyone else, responded with a series of ill-fated revolts.

In the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, Wat Tyler led 10,000 serfs, with questioning minds, on a march to London demanding that the King (then aged 14) allow people to work where they like and for the gentry to stop exploiting them. They were promised this would happen, an oath which was later annulled and many were killed.

In 1450 Jack Cade, the self-styled Captain of Kent, led a rebellion of 5,000 to London in protest that those closest to the King (aged nine) were manipulating for their own gains and using their positions to oppress those below them. They were tracked down and killed.

In 1549, Robert Kett, a Norfolk landowner convinced that privatisation of land, inflation, unemployment, rising rents, and declining wages were unjust, tore down his own fences. He led a rebellion demanding a limit to the power of the gentry, measures to prevent over-exploitation of communal

resources, and that bondmen be made free. The king sent a pardon, which they declined, instead taking Norwich. Fourteen thousand mercenaries and 1,400 German landsknechts then slaughtered 3,000 rebels. Kett was captured and hung for treason.

Between 1760 and 1870, about 7 million acres of common land (one sixth of England) were privatised by 4,000 acts of Parliament to maximise the income of landowners grazing sheep. Enclosure of the commons, more advanced than anywhere else in Europe, drove people into factories.

The Black Acts of 1773 were a vicious reprisal of the Walpole government to increasing resistance of enclosure. Over 200 minor acts were made punishable by death. Any village failing to hand over dissenters risked punishment.

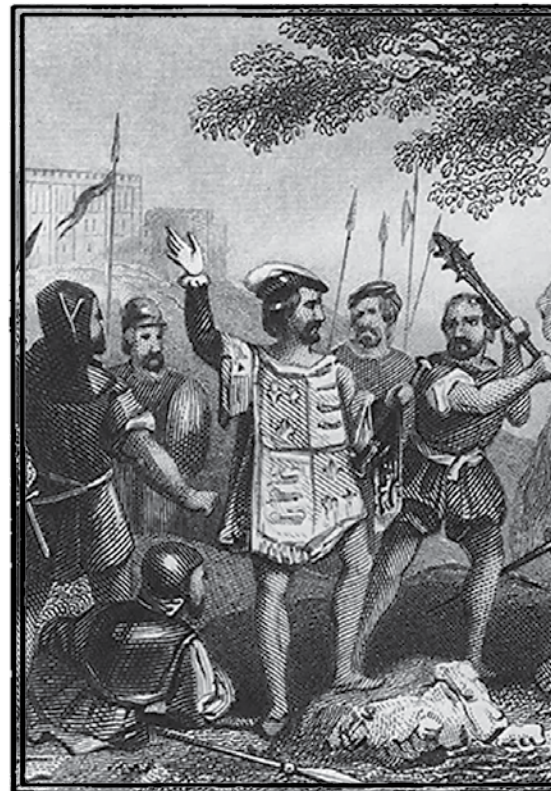
In a constant search for land, labour and markets, the formula of; "this exists for me — I'm having that" was repeated with staggering levels of cruelty justified by racism in India, Africa, the Americas and Australia.

With their livelihoods and customs gone, people were driven into waged labour to survive, working long hours in cruel conditions. Rather than paying fairly, the Poor Laws of 1601 introduced workhouses, an early form of detention centre.

The Unlawful Oaths Act of 1797 was set up by Parliament to prevent the formation of dissenting groups. Until 1824 the Combination Acts of 1799 outlawed "combining" or organising to gain better working conditions and suppressed the right to strike. The penalty was three months in prison or two months' hard labour. At this time, the government was elected by 3% of people, who were the landowning gentry.

In the Swing riots of the 1830s, almost every county south of the Scottish border protested in large numbers at tax, abuse of power, exploitation and redundancy.

In 1834 the Tolpuddle Martyrs, deported for organising a collective for



Engraving of the Kett Rebellion

better pay, were later returned following an 800,000-strong petition.

In 1844, tradesmen in Rochdale set up a co-op for items they could not afford. The ethical principles of this early food bank became the basis of the co-operative and trade union movement.

Throughout the 19th century, workers began to petition for representation in parliament. Up to 60,000 Lancashire cotton workers were brutally attacked with sharpened swords at the Peterloo Massacre in Manchester in 1819. Fifteen died, 600 were injured. The government then introduced the Six Acts, banning mass meetings. Reform leaders were jailed.

The Chartists petitioned the government to extend the male vote beyond the property-owning class with 1.25 million signatures, which was rejected by Parliament in 1839, and a further 3m which were rejected in 1842. Any unrest was swiftly crushed.



# WORKERS FIGHTING BACK



Millions of people, their efforts, lives and contributions were dismissed as irrelevant by a system dominating to protect profit. Democracy, in all, clearly wasn't found there. Men and women over 18 were deemed eligible to vote only as recently as 1968. For all the difference it would make.

In 1926, 1.7m workers went on General Strike for better pay and working conditions. The government used propaganda to undermine their efforts. Their wages were eventually decided by the owners. The 1927 Trade Disputes Act made general strikes illegal.

The post-war consensus and Bretton Woods agreement gave a brief spell of stability and socialised healthcare, housing and utilities. All later to be exploited.

With manufacturing in decline the Pentonville Five, jailed in 1972 under the Industrial Relations Act of 1971 for picketing against redundancy, lay-offs and wage cuts were, after massive demonstrations of striking workers marched through North London to Pentonville prison, were freed, effectively destroying the Act.

In 1979 there were 13m trade union members in Britain. The government broke this collective voice with restrictive acts in 1982 making secondary pickets illegal and demanding "proof of full consultation before decisions were reached". Shame they don't apply the same rules to themselves.

Coal miners who had fuelled industry and died with rotten lungs so industrialists could profit were violently attacked by the State while picketing Orgreave in 1984. Marginalised by the press and government, their compensation payments came too late as neoliberalism set in, like rot.

Throughout history, workers have been unable to participate because the wealthy capitalist class will be the ones deciding the future of mankind as the planet burns to ash. Most people aren't bothered about pushing other people around, so we don't. But they are, so they do.

During the 1980s, with privatisation and deregulation, the franchise widened to incorporate and impose free market ideology. That is, money supposedly regulating itself without interference from government. Council houses were sold to encourage behaviours conferring legitimacy to the State, social assets were transferred to private hands. The public was colonised by finance. All of life, reduced to a cost-benefit-analysis, vulnerable to the economic behaviour of unregulated financial markets.

Privatisation is a rent collecting mechanism. Essential services (fuel, transport, bin collection) are rented from private enterprises on the justification of reinvestment. Taxpayer money is then used to subsidise losses against projected and vastly overinflated targets. It's basically criminal fraud.

Society has been deformed as this wealth concentrates into unaccountable hands.

The excessively rich fail to acknowledge that all wealth is a collective effort. For example, in the case of fuel, the infrastructure, the people working, the people who discovered and invented it, consumers buying, the fact it's a natural resource and belongs to all of us equally, demonstrates how anti-social they are.

Shareholders don't share. Equity is not equitable. They value their contribution at a higher worth than anyone else. There is no material wealth that cannot be held in some suspicion. It's all linked at some point to exploitation somewhere.

The merits capitalism claims; to have lifted people out of poverty and improved living standards, do not absolve guilt. Who's to say how things might have developed without their interference and manipulation?

Since Parliament was formed it has legally protected the right to exploit, and made it illegal to oppose that exploitation. Laws made by few have been endured by many. Any sign of life, protest, or even doubt, have been silenced.

The State controls the narrative, manufacturing desires and behaviours for profit. Its media is populated with people who hold corresponding beliefs. Decades of deception have been presented as "conventional wisdom". The weight of finance manipulates us into lives we might not otherwise have chosen, denying potential and possibility. Many people embedded in this structure unquestionably celebrate wealth, aspire to ownership and believe they govern themselves others, are disenfranchised or running to stand still.

A system which continues to enable overt pathological greed is verging on delirium.

If you think it's okay to take land from people without a sense of property or land value, you're with them. If you believe in economic exploitation and a hierarchy of subordination for profit, you're with them. If you think it's alright to take money from people without a sense of economics, you're with them. If common sense tells you "that's just the way it is" you reinforce their dominance. The act of living within the structures they have determined is considered, by them, to be consent.

The first condition for changing reality is to understand it. The patterns are there. The story is clear. It's not inevitable the world is this way. It's history, it's fact. It's not an opinion, it's a story of theft, oppression and intentional exploitation to protect private wealth. And it's not something anyone has to accept.

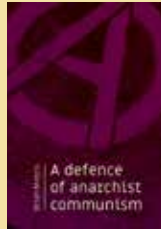
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# ABOUT ANARCHISM

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 famous 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 are 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 idea 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, and no-one is unaccountable for their actions.

### Some resources:

- [libcom.org](http://libcom.org): Huge repository of history and theory on every aspect of anarchism
- [enoughisenough14.org](http://enoughisenough14.org): News from all over Europe about what anarchists are getting up to
- [channelzeronetwork.com](http://channelzeronetwork.com): Collection of podcasts and anarchist-aligned radio shows from across the globe
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We are socialists, disbelievers in property, advocates of the equal claims of all to work for the community as seems good — calling no-one master, and of the equal claim to each to satisfy as seems good to them, their natural needs from the stock of social wealth they have laboured to produce ... We are anarchists, disbelievers in the government of the many by the few in any shape and under any pretext.

*Freedom*, a Journal of Anarchist Socialism, Vol 1, No. 1, October 1886