

"To all radical organizations, if their groups are defeated, and if their groups are dying, then all is dying. In such pronouncements therefore they reveal the true motivation for their rebellion and the true character of their organizations. We, however, should find no cause for despair in the impotence of these groups."

- Sam Moss, The Impotence of the Revolutionary Group



The Scoundrel

KNOCK IT DOWN AND START AGAIN

#3

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lack of 'proper' work and say we lack aspiration. Of course

"Because pro-revolutionaries have not learned how to wait, have not learned to engage at the level of their experience (they are always wanting to lead the way, wishing to push forward their hot-brained solutions), they are forever looking back and wondering why nobody is following them."

- Monsieur Dupont, Nihilist Communism

The Scoundrel SAYS

For the third issue of The Scoundrel it's time to do something different. Having worked out a formula that could be run with forever, it's time to break up the pattern and develop something new.

For this issue The Scoundrel will be examining the local anarchist milieu and running a critical comb through the findings. This will not be pleasant for some and The Scoundrel expects accusations of uncomradely behaviour, defamation and pessimism to be winging their way here soon.

The aim is not to 'have a go' or to find some measure of purity that no one could ever live up to, but simply to be honest about the effectiveness of what goes on and to initiate critical debate.

The Scoundrel welcomes responses to this issue and will be using future issues and the blog as spaces to develop new theory and critical reflection.

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WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO?

There is really very little going on in the anarchist scene that is making any difference to the world. The groups, 'movements' and unholy coalitions that claim to be 'fighting back' against unfreedom and exploitation are merely spectacular arrangements that provide a convenient illusion of dissent against the capitalist system. They do not come even fractionally close to disrupting business as usual. At their worst, these activist and leftist initiatives actually help capitalism to remould itself so that it can tighten its hold over our reality. By calling for a more humane and stable capitalism, some campaigns, unwittingly or cynically, increase that system's legitimacy and power.

If I am honest, there is very little I, or any of the other people involved in these vain attempts to break free can do. Certainly it seems to me that people who want revolution must wait for a (genuine) crisis of capitalism before we will have any influence on its fall whatsoever. In the meantime, all that can be done is to clear the path of all those who would lead a 'revolution', those counter-revolutionary power structures in waiting, and to try to live as freely as we can within the cramped confines of the capitalist prison.

There is a common delusion held by many within leftist organisations that all that is required is quantity. 'If we can just recruit more members/make more people aware of our ideas,' their argument goes, 'we will increase our chances of bringing about the revolution.' Ignoring for a moment the pitifully low numbers of people even talking about taking down capitalism at present, this wishful thinking seems to conveniently sidestep the mechanics of the capitalist mode of production itself. Capitalism won't be halted by people becoming 'aware' (being told by leftist organisers and publications) that it's inherently exploitative and nor will it be adversely affected by a swelling in the membership of trade unions, the Anarchist Federation or the Occupy

movement. Capitalism can only be brought down by a permanent cessation of capitalist production. It is a qualitative change, not a quantitative one that is required. The drive to recruit betrays the left's lack of imagination and honesty regarding the situation we are in.

Another holy cow of the left is that what is required is consciousness raising. 'If only we could make people aware of their exploitation and unfreedom, they would rise up and overthrow the system' says the leftist organiser. And of course, it is the role of the 'revolutionary' organisation to formulate these ideas and badger its followers into accepting them. What is meant by this consciousness raising is really nothing other than passing on the infection of ideology. These people are often fundamentally dishonest; the ranks of ideologues who have dumbed down their theories to appeal to and be accessible to a mythical proletarian is legion. Theories must constantly be tested, must adapt to new terrain and be open to criticism in order that they do not become dead dogmatic weights to drag us down. Ideologies are spouted by those who have given up thinking for themselves and need their ideas pre-packaged and inflexible. Beware of those with a blueprint for revolution – they are usually in someone else's pocket.



It would be liberating to dispense with the ideas of recruitment and consciousness raising which have demonstrated themselves, at best, to be useless and at worst, enslaving. Should the crisis of capitalism come, we can be sure there will be many competing sects of revolution who will jockey with each other to become a new ruling priesthood and put us all back to work for them. I see it as the role of those in search of freedom to challenge and defend against any attempts to form a 'revolutionary' leadership or vanguard, which is simply an attempt to form a substitute ruling class.

It is my feeling that a potentially revolutionary situation is not imminent. So what can we do in the meantime? My answer, which will be uncomfortable for many, is not a lot. Although it seems like an impossible task, trying to get rid of the habits conditioned in us by the capitalist political and economic system is one thing that it seems sensible to try. If and when we arrive at a moment when a decisive break with the old exploitative system is possible, it will be wasted if the vast majority of people are still so cripplingly psychologically dependent on that system that there will be enormous pressure to simply go back to the devil we know. Like victims of Stockholm Syndrome, we have become emotionally attached to our kidnapper. Any wriggle room we may find within our current restraints could be used to loosen those attachments, to start thinking and acting for ourselves instead of according to the patterns that have been ground into us by the ideologies of power.

I am pessimistic about what is possible. It often seems that every group that arises makes the same old mistakes and learns nothing from the extensive history of similar groups' failures. Much of this seems to arise out of a distrust of criticism, giving rise to unwarranted mutual back patting and self-celebration. I think that there is very little for us to celebrate. We would be better off engaging in genuine attempts to analyse the ineffectiveness of the milieu and acting accordingly. I would encourage people to start making the atmosphere one where critical thought is possible. Without it we will be condemned to follow in the footsteps of those who failed before us.

The Coalition of the Unwilling: Notts SOS

Notts Save Our Services (Notts SOS) is an uneasy united front of campaigners opposing the local effects of neoliberalism's austerity agenda. It features the usual leftist suspects: trade union backing, Trotskyist parties, attempts by the Labour party to hijack it, and a large dose of woolly liberalism. In spite of these, the local Anarchist Federation is highly supportive as are some libertarian socialists. This coalition has so far engaged in extensive lobbying of the local authorities backed up by demonstrations and consciousness raising activity and some minor civil disobedience (disrupting a council meeting).

Lobbying for an end to cuts is not revolutionary and I don't expect anyone involved in the campaign thinks that it is. The campaign seems to be plodding the well-trod path of transitional demand so beloved of leftists despite its apparent inability to deliver the goods. The campaign is a prime example of the 'bigger cages, longer chains' approach to politics, emphasising a false choice between poverty and despair or dependency on state welfare.

"These deep cuts could also push Britain back into recession" warns the Notts SOS website, suggesting that people's problems are the result of mismanagement of the economy rather than the inherent nature of the economic system. The suggested solution is statist and disempowering: calling for public ownership and making demands for "solidarity" from politicians. The state's and business' interests are not separate and competing interests, but different arms of the same economic system. Notts SOS is calling for freedom from one form of capitalist tyranny whilst propping up another.

The muted and reformist demands of the campaign are backed by people who entertain more radical ideas in private because they see it as the best way to appeal to the masses, in spite of all evidence to

the contrary. This rather dishonest approach is not so different from that favoured by mainstream politicians whose cynical courting of the voters is similarly spurned.



The presence of a sizeable anarchist presence within the ranks is a familiar and depressing phenomenon. It usually follows a pattern: anarchists who are used to having miniscule influence, get dazzled by the chance to perform on a broad left platform. They then convince themselves that this is how to reach the working class, ignoring the the reformist methods, hierarchical structures and sheer cynicism of the Trots. Because they are used to acting on their own initiative they end up doing all the hard work whilst the party aparatchiks get on with their political engineering. Their streak of leftist self-sacrifice comes to the fore and the former anarchists end up ignoring their exploitation and thinking of the greater good, which of course never comes.

These broad left campaigns are always stifling and ineffective. They lack imagination, flexibility and any chance of success because the

constant warfare between fundamentally opposed factions means that all decisions are the result of power struggles. Often injunctions are placed on doing anything too radical out of fear of alienating the public. The result is that the campaign ends up looking so insipid and toothless that potential supporters have no confidence in it to deliver and no desire to join the interest groups jockeying for power. Notts SOS is a group strictly for those who enjoy leftist power struggles rather than changing anything.

The Hippy Priesthood: Occupy Nottingham

Although inevitably a temporary phenomenon, Occupy Nottingham has come to dominate the city with its prominent physical location and considerable media attention. It is the local manifestation of the global Occupy franchise making a protest against inequality and corruption, particularly within the financial system but often seeking to expand this much wider.

“The current system is unsustainable,” they say, “It is undemocratic and unjust. We need alternatives; this where we work towards them.” Problematic appeals to democracy and justice aside, this statement seems like a good start. However, as always, it’s how this is to be done that causes problems. “We demand an end to global tax injustice and to our democracy representing corporations instead of the people.” They fall down at the first hurdle. They don’t want to be rid of the state-capitalism, they just want it to be fluffier. They want states that look after the little people so that they can live long happy lives of toiling for the ruling classes.

Put simply, the Occupy movement lacks the imagination to think outside the system. “We want regulators to be genuinely independent of the industries they regulate” they demand, apparently oblivious to the fact that putting profit before people is systemic, not something that can be regulated away by people who magically exist outside of capitalism.



Most of Occupy’s ideas seem to consist of the same leftist baggage that has failed time and time again since anyone can remember: “We support the strikes and student actions, and actions to defend our health services, welfare, education and employment, and to stop wars and arms dealing.” The movement seems willing to confine itself to being the latest hobby horse for the left to pin its hopes and dreams on, weighing itself down with the millstones of previous generations.

But it’s not just the left’s baggage that is being flogged at Occupy Nottingham. Their propaganda messages also indicate a strong tendency towards conspiracy theory, as well as flirting with patriotism, localism and Freemen on the Land reaction, as an attempt to portray themselves as the ‘real’ people, opposed to phoney political and corporate elites.

Conspiracy theorists have dogged the Occupy movement from the start, mysticising the workings of the world as fervently as any other religious nutters. The patriotic identity politics is an apparently populist twist that again papers over the reality of the struggle and diverts it into conservatism that militates against change. The high priests of these competing ideologies are using the Occupy



bandwagon to divert its followers into their own recruitment systems and power structures.

Nottingham Occupy, like many new radical movements before it, started out as something with a lot of potential before rapidly degenerating into the same old problems of hierarchical organising, take over by mystics and sinking under the weight of its inherent contradictions. In the end, the only demand left seems to be that the organisation should survive.



The Scattergun Anarchists: Autonomous Nottingham

Evolving as an apparent reaction to leftism are the anti-organisational anarchists of Autonomous Nottingham. Defining themselves as “a flexible collective of individuals who aim to exist within a non-hierarchical, stateless society that is free of all forms of domination”, they have put their name to a wide range of activities, from offering support to rioters to opening squatted spaces. They favour direct action and informal organisation and have tended to

avoid single-issue politics.

Compared to the other groups profiled so far, Autonomous Nottingham seems to be more realistic of its chances of success. Realising that there is little that can be done in the present moment to bring about the goal of a society “free of all forms of domination”, they seem content to take on the causes and activities that are important to them as individuals, avoiding the pretence of unity and the watering down of radical ideas.

This focus on action, however, seems to have come at the expense of reflection and analysis. There seems to be little rhyme and reason to which whims are satisfied in action and little self-criticism expressed. The philosophy of individual autonomy seems to have encouraged the same culture of complacency seen in the wider left. A strong emphasis on the form of activity (autonomous action stemming from individual desire) seems to take precedence over that activity's content.

This philosophy results in the fetishisation of the activist role, wherein all that is important is constant activity and all that is necessary is more action. The activist loses the ability to rest and recuperate, a lack which pushes her towards burnout. The constant activity negates the possibility of conserving energies for targeted bursts of activity, for strategic purposes, instead generating a constant noise of action that fades into the background.

The activist also risks seeing himself as a specialist of social struggle, placed at the top of an illusory hierarchy of importance in bringing about change by virtue of her constant effort. As has been pointed out above, the impossibility of ‘revolutionary activism’ means that these efforts are inevitably squandered, calling into question the high value that activists often attach to their role.

Autonomous Nottingham do not mention capitalism much, and it is not clear whether they view it as of paramount importance or simply

one amongst many forms of domination. Indeed, they seem to shy away from any kind of theoretical underpinning to what they do, leaving those activities ungrounded and easily distracted by the cause of the day.

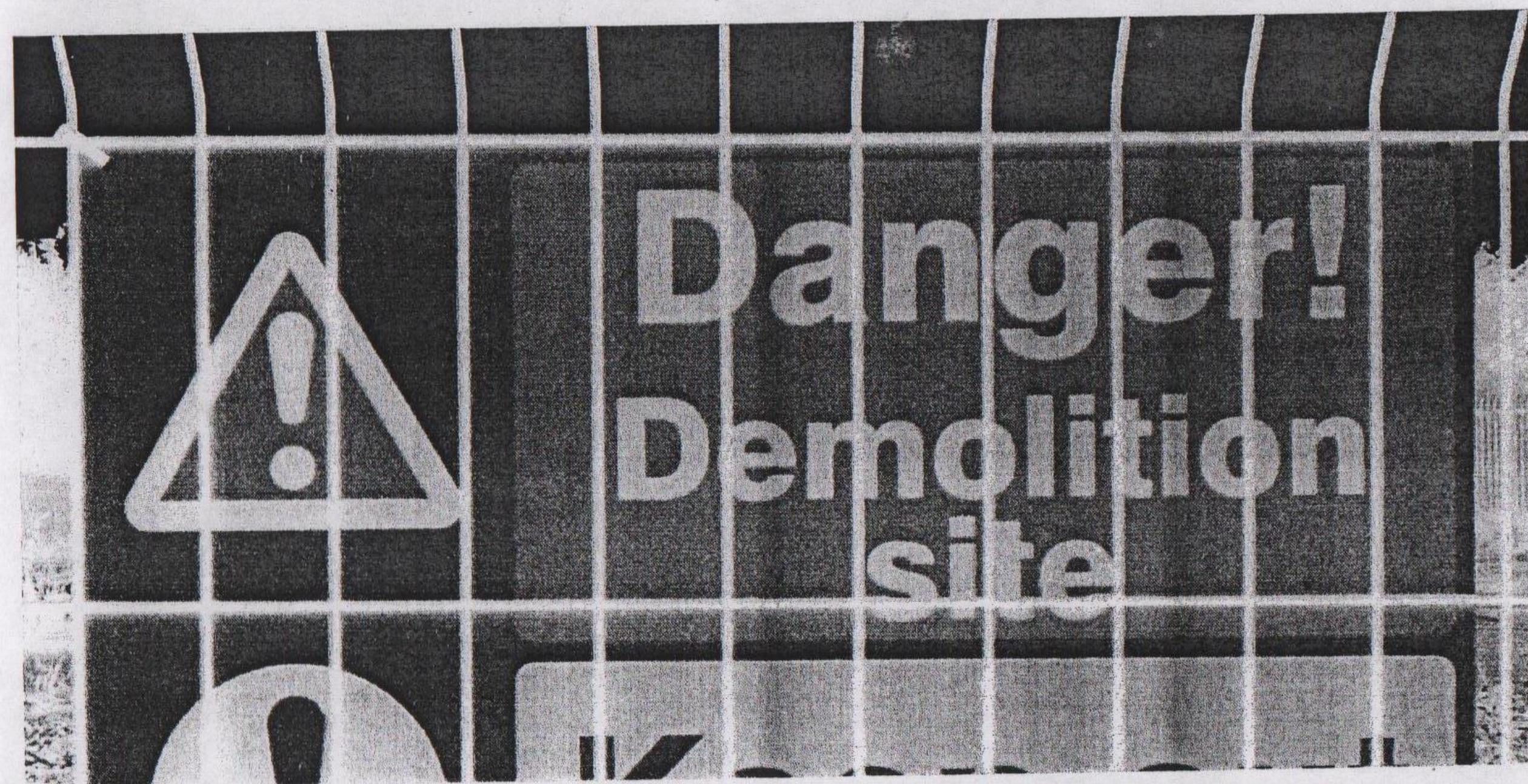
Although this approach appears initially to be free of leftist self-sacrifice, the endless plodding along after impossible goals indicates that some sense of activist duty, rather than genuine desire, motivates these actions.

Although the Autonomous Nottingham structure seems designed to avoid falling into the most obvious leftist traps, some of those tendencies become stealthily reinscribed around the pole of activism instead.



Do no harm

It's all very well to gob off about what's wrong but it's also worth trying to offer some ideas about what can be done about it all. Or, in this case, what we shouldn't do. Given my sincere pessimism about the possibilities of actively destroying capitalism, I think that the best thing we can do is not reinscribe its values and practices in our own efforts. Rather like the medical profession's Hypocratic Oath, we should agree to do no harm, not to promote or condone power structures and to actively seek to destroy them. Too many anarchists roll their eyes and do nothing whilst leftist demagogues take the platform. It's time we started kicking them off it.



Likewise, we need to understand the devastating effects that 'emancipatory' ideologies have and root them out. Whether it is leftism, liberalism, conspiracism,

workerism or anything else, the role of these ideologies is to simplify (and hence misrepresent and mystify) reality and suck people into a collective delusion. Whenever any of us resorts to ideological justification or reasoning we need to be called on it. We should have our own ideas not be owned by other people's.

I would encourage people to talk and write and, most importantly, to think much more about what they choose to do, even if that means they end up doing nothing. Everything should be examined, questioned and experimented with. Nothing should be considered sacred or immune to criticism.



DISCLAIMER

The Scoundrel is a vanity publication for a grumpy anarchist who has been around too long to have energy and not long enough to have wisdom. Take it with plenty of salt.

All ideas contained in this zine are stolen. Particular credit due to Monsieur Dupont, the Situationist International and Give Up Activism.

LETTERS

I am very interested in your new newspaper. I would love to know a lot more about it and yourselves. Perhaps we could arrange a time for a discreet meeting where I could question you at length about it.

Yours faithfully

'Mike', Nottinghamshire Police, Special Branch

The Scoundrel is a reactionary, individualist, adventurist publication that seeks to divert the proletariat away from hard labour and bureaucratic organisations into bourgeois posturing. Like many anarchists, the writers seek to encourage criminality and direct action instead of taking the proper course, prescribed by the party. Revolutionaries: do not be fooled! This trap set by the capitalists to trick you away from the one true path will not prevail. Like all other revisionist perversions it will wither away when exposed to the blinding light of true socialism.

Onwards comrades!

Hector Bongfirst, Revolutionary Workers Communist Party of Britain
(Marxist-Leninist)

I don't understand why you hate me so much. I'm a committed environmentalist who has always used low energy lightbulbs and am very open minded about the activist movement. That was why I enjoyed prying into your private lives for the best part of a decade so much. You're such amazing people. I always stuck up for you guys when deciding which bits of personal information to give to people who wanted to destroy you. Why don't you understand? It's so unfair!

Matt Kenetty, Dark Moon Security Ltd

Your zine is proper good. When you roll it up and dip it in petrol it makes a sick fuse for Molotovs. If you ever want to go out and smash shit up I'm up for it. Where can I join?

Love and rage

Smashy