

# shift magazine

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Where now for anti-fascism?  
ANTIFA in Germany  
No Borders in Calais  
**THE STATE WE'RE IN**

**THE CAMP FOR  
CLIMATE ACTION**

Green Authoritarianism  
Reflections on camping

**ANARCHA  
FEMINISM**

No Pretence's intervention

**CARTOON**

An American in Manchester

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# editorial

“What’s wrong with taxes?” – We were confronted with this sentiment by a large majority of those attending our workshop session at this year’s climate camp on Blackheath Common. To us it seemed a bizarre and surprising question coming from many of those who had come to an event that saw itself explicitly in the footsteps of the Wat Tyler-led anti-tax rebellion on the same heath some 650 years earlier.

Let’s get this straight. There is nothing wrong per se with fighting for state concessions. The fact that an autonomously-controlled no-go area for police was maintained was essentially a concession to the camp’s ability to mobilise public anti-police sentiment. But the arguments brought forward by the pro-state campers were cynical at best: there is no comparison to be made between the demand for a minimum wage, for example, and the hope for higher taxes (on us, not the rich), population surveillance and control, or carbon permits. The former is a result of workers’ struggles for better living conditions and is not contradictory to an eventual fundamental break with state control. The latter is essentially the self-flagellating demand to punish and manage the behaviour of the majority for the crisis that is capitalism.

The question that we really wanted to ask at our workshop (which ended up being more of an open floor discussion with over 150 in attendance) was: how do we respond, and move forward, when state actors are recuperating our concerns and ideas for the restructuring and strengthening of a new green era of capitalism? The overwhelmingly state-centred response from the floor only confirmed the need to develop our understanding of the relationship between the reproduction of capitalism (many if not all participants self identified as anti-capitalists) and the functions of the state.

Top-down government intervention may be the fastest way of reducing CO2 emissions. However considering the intrinsic necessity of capitalism to reproduce wealth from the exploitation of human and environmental resources and the role of the state to manage and maintain this, all calls on the state to lighten the load on the environment, will inevitably find the burden falling onto the human.

If we only define our radicalism through our marginalisation from the mainstream, what happens when the status quo aligns itself with our position? Warning of the ‘recuperation’ of ‘radical’ positions has weaved not only through environmental protest (consider Ed Miliband’s “keep on protesting”) but also through the anti-fascist movement. Maybe this says something about the hegemony, flexibility and innovation of capitalism and the state to respond to political, economic and environmental events but it also highlights the weakness of the anti-authoritarian left.

What do we do when the mainstream of society – as in the run up to the Euro elections – suddenly discovers that BNP-bashing is a vote winner? Are we allowing liberal anti-fascism to take the edge off a more radical, anti-capitalist fight against neo-fascist and nationalist-populist movements and parties? The broad mobilisation of Hope not Hate, for example, does not speak to the growth and strength of the anti-fascist movement in the UK but rather reflects a ‘my enemy’s enemy is my friend’ approach in the place of radical political analysis.

The question is whether anti-fascism in itself carries a revolutionary perspective. Or, if not, what distinguishes radical and liberal responses to racist and fascist agitation? What is certain is that we need to come up with an emancipatory response to those who take the BNP or the climate crisis seriously only because they pose a threat to their image of capitalist democracy.

Rather than building a movement from sand with state concessions that will inevitably crumble we have to develop our politics, be bold in our positions, and imagine the un-imaginable.

L.W. & R.S.



# anti-fascism in the 21st century



In Britain and Europe today, organised fascist groups have been gaining strength and popularity on a scale unseen since the end of the Second World War. A majority of European countries now have fascists elected to government, they form a significant coalition in the European Parliament, and their appeals to popular racism on issues like immigration are easy fodder for mainstream politicians determined to push the agenda even further to the right.

The important question, for any dedicated social activist, then, is how do we stop this?

The fascist agenda quite clearly runs contrary to the goals of liberty, equality, community, and solidarity that are at the heart of labour, socialist, and anti-capitalist organising. Thus, a strong anti-fascist movement is vital to the class struggle and to grass-roots community activism.

## The rising tide

The sheer scale of the rising tide of fascism across Europe is startling. To give just a few examples, the Swiss People's Party (SVP) rose to power in Switzerland on the back of an openly-racist "black sheep" anti-immigration campaign. In Greece, the police have been openly collaborating with fascist paramilitary group Golden Dawn to

wage a war of terror against migrants and left-wing workers' groups. In Italy, the government has revived the Blackshirts as part of its vicious pogrom against the Roma people. Both Germany and Russia are experiencing an unprecedented level of neo-Nazi thuggery.

In Britain, traditionally the strongest bastion of anti-fascist sentiment in Europe, the British National Party (BNP) have made leaps and bounds in local council elections, as well as having their leader as an MEP. Meanwhile, militant groups such as the English Defence League (EDL) and Casuals United have taken over the mantle of street violence that the BNP have at least officially abandoned.

The consequences of such a rise are apparent for all to see. Amnesty International has pointed to a "growing trend of discrimination against Roma people across Europe," from recent attacks in South Belfast to Government discrimination in Slovakia and fascist marches through Roma areas in the Czech Republic. Every so often, anti-Semitic attacks and vandalism will spike in France, among other places. And across the continent, attacks on Arabs and anti-Muslim sentiment have reached fever pitch.

Faced with such consequences, it is clear

how anti-fascists must respond. What we need, quite simply, is solid organisation willing to take the fight to the fascists on any ground that they choose. If they have groups of thugs amassing on the streets, then we must be prepared to take the streets back from them and stand up as a physical opposition to their violence and intimidation. If they hold rallies and marches, then we must drown them out with our own rallies and marches. If they attempt to organise, then we must fight this by dispersing their meetings and disrupting their calls to arms. If they hand out leaflets, then we must oppose them with our own leafleting campaigns, combating their lies and fear-mongering whilst making sure that their message of hate does not spread. And, most importantly, we must be ready to combat their ideas with our own.

Every piece of misinformation must be exposed by way of facts and reason, and all their claims to "credibility" and "legitimacy" shown up for what they truly are. This is particularly important at election times as, though undoubtedly there are a myriad of problems with the status quo, what the fascists represent is a thousand times worse.

For the most part, the above describes tactics that are already in use by anti-fascist

organisations. However, there are some serious flaws that need to be addressed. For instance, whilst groups such as Antifa are firmly rooted in grass-roots, non-hierarchical structures, the bigger anti-fascist groups such as Unite Against Fascism (UAF) are extremely hierarchical, and the decisions at the top aren't influenced by the opinions of the supporters on the ground.

This, to my mind, is serious folly. What this means, in essence, is that UAF are completely detached from the ordinary people whose lives are affected by fascism every day. They hold rallies and protests where the destination is set by upper-echelon planners after negotiations with police, with no input at all from the bottom, and they release statements to the press. As far as serious activism and organising goes, however, their achievements are non-existent.

This kind of "anti-fascism," then, is precisely of the kind that we need to avoid. One cannot wave a placard whilst hemmed in by police, shout out a few chants, and buy a copy of the Socialist Worker, and call it activism. It is not. Quite simply, performing this kind of action whilst remaining detached from the local community is not only ineffective but counter productive.

## Addressing the roots of fascism

Anybody can see the consequences of organised fascist activity and know instantly how to respond to it. What makes a successful movement, however, is also looking towards the roots of such sentiment and trying to address that.

Fascism did not emerge one day from a vacuum and nor is it populated solely by people who are simply irrational racists the world would be better off without. No, a popular and growing fascist movement quite clearly contains a significant number of quite ordinary working class people who have for one reason or another thrown their lot in with the far-right. Unless we want to bow to snobbery, we cannot simply write this off as proof that the "lower classes" are all simply vile racists, we must

begin to address the concerns of these people.

Unfortunately, an awful lot of people who oppose fascism on an intellectual level do move towards that conclusion, and fascists prey upon that fact. So, when somebody says that we need immigrants because "poor people are all lazy, ignorant, benefit-cheating scum" they are able to use this to their advantage and appeal to yet more people. We must reject this tactic and see it for the thinly-veiled class hatred that it is.

What we need, instead, is education. At the core of any workable organising effort is a group of dedicated activists doing their utmost to educate people about the problems that need to be overcome, about the importance of organising as a community and networking with similar groups, about the realities that we're faced with, and so on. This involves going into schools, colleges, workplaces, and local communities to find people willing to hear our message. We have to spread the word on what fascism is, why it is a bad thing, how we oppose it, and what the alternatives are.

This cannot be done through sloganeering, either. Whether the audience is students, workers, or concerned local people, they are not stupid, and they will not see your point of view by being patronised or by having a slogan drilled into their heads. Fascists are gaining support by playing on and twisting legitimate grievances, and the only way to combat that is by addressing both the distortions and the underlying worries openly and honestly.

To take a more common example, it is quite clear that immigrants are not "stealing our jobs," as fascists claim. However, what is happening is that corporations are exploiting immigrants and turning the native and foreign elements of the working class against each other in order to maximise profit. We need to get this message out, and to show that the solution isn't to simply "kick them out." A far more realistic and viable way of combating this problem is to work with immigrants, to bring them into trade union struggles, and to work together to fight the real cause of our problems – corporate capitalism.

That's just one example, but it's quite clear that anti-fascism needs to link into social activism: labour organisation, anti-capitalist organisation, local health and social programs for those abandoned by the government, education, and the like. In other words, engaging with local communities on issues they're concerned about.

Anti-fascists also have to be careful with how we campaign during elections. In the first instance, we should not overstate the importance of voting. Voting is neither the prime nor the most effective way of combating fascism. It has its uses, particularly when it can be used to help keep the extreme right out of power, but it also has its limits.

For example, we cannot be seen simply as another arm of the campaign for the ruling parties, as a lot of people are – quite justifiably – disillusioned with them. To take the recent European Parliament elections as a case in point, one of the main follies of the British anti-fascist group Hope Not Hate was to involve Labour Party MPs, including Prime Minister Gordon Brown, in what they were doing.

Particularly as one of the main ways in which the BNP won support was by portraying themselves as the "alternative" to the Labour government, this was a grave error. New Labour have, during the last decade, continued the Conservative policies that entrenched private power and annihilated the organised working class. Hence, utilising them for a campaign will only serve to alienate ordinary people from the anti-fascist cause.

What we need to be doing, instead, is countering the idea (put about by the government as much as by the BNP) that fascism is radically different from the incumbent ruling class. Rather, the likes of the BNP merely represent a logical extreme of mainstream politics. It is the government which has destroyed the labour movement, wedded private power ever tighter to the state, waged a vicious war on migrants with internment and forced deportations, and used race to turn the working class in on itself. The role of the fascists on the fringes has been to help push the government agenda even further rightward



whilst providing a convenient foil to mask this fact.

## The folly of sloganeering

A common mistake of anti-fascist groups is that they play into this deliberate misconception through their use of sloganeering as a campaign tool. As an example, take the favourite slogan of UAF; "the BNP is a Nazi Party – smash the BNP."

Undoubtedly, the sentiment expressed within the slogan is true. The BNP are fascists, utilising extremely authoritarian nationalism to promote a world order in which state and corporate power are absolute and intertwined. Their manifesto includes a pledge to "restore our economy and land to British [state] ownership" as a part of their "third position" economics, which echo Mussolini's statement in *The Doctrine of Fascism* that "Fascism recognises the real needs which gave rise to socialism and trade-unionism, giving them due weight in the guild or corporative system in which divergent interests are coordinated and harmonised in the unity of the State."

At the same time, the party goes beyond fascism to Nazism with their ethno-nationalist ideology, opposing "miscegenation" (race-mixing) and a "multi-racist" society in favour of the one composed of "the overwhelmingly white makeup of the British population that existed prior to 1948," as outlined in the party's constitution. Even if this is achieved by expulsion rather than extermination, as was Hitler's original intention, this amounts to nothing less than ethnic cleansing.

It is true, then, to declare that "the BNP are a Nazi party," but what exactly does chanting such a slogan achieve? In my own opinion, the answer is nothing at all. Presented with the evidence, from the party's own constitution and policy statements, the public could very easily conclude that the BNP are Nazis and fascists. But whilst the BNP are framing their ideology in sophisticated polemics which address the concerns and fears, if grossly distorted for doctrinal purposes, of ordinary people, chanting "the BNP are Nazis" only serves to put people off.

Parties such as the BNP are seen, falsely, as offering a radical alternative to a mainstream political system that has annihilated working class culture and marginalised great swathes of the population. If all anti-fascists are doing is chanting and saying "no, they're bad" without offering our own grass-roots alternative, then we will be seen merely as cranks and we will get nowhere.

If we are to present a credible alternative to organised fascism for ordinary people, it must also be an alternative to what is on offer in the mainstream. Here we have to be extremely honest. People have to know that there's no quick fix to the problems that we all face if they're not to vote for fascists offering exactly that. They have to know that the electoral system and reform have their limits, as history tells us. If we take any successful progressive movement of the past, whether it be civil rights, the suffragettes, the abolitionists, or anybody else, then we can see this. They used votes and petitions and so forth, but they also broke the law and were sent to jail for struggling. They used sit-ins, occupations, blockades, strikes, and virtually every other means at their disposal. Had they not, then we certainly wouldn't enjoy the freedoms that we do today. So, yes, there is a hard fight ahead, but it can achieve real results and certainly offers greater promise than voting for or supporting fascists.

## Opportunity and danger

We have reached a point, right now, where people are disillusioned with the status quo. They can see the effect that a culture of greed and selfish pursuit of profit, fostered under the dominant corporate-capitalist system, has on society.

Workers are losing their jobs so that their bosses can maintain profits in the recession. Billions of pounds of public money have been poured into keeping the banks afloat as they repossess homes at unprecedented rates. Social atomisation brought on by corporate dominance of the public sphere has led to spiralling crime rates and an entire generation marginalised by the system.

Such a situation offers both opportunity and danger to those struggling for serious



social change. A population this disaffected by the status quo can go one of two ways, providing of course that a resurgent capitalist class doesn't quickly reassert control through the propaganda system. Either they can be mobilised into mass popular movements that will challenge the injustices we see all around us and make a real, positive difference to the world that we live in, or they will turn to fascism.

At the moment, it is the latter course that is winning out. Instead of seeing the chance to organise the entire working class and fight against a system that has brought our society to its knees, they are turning on immigrants and minority communities. Instead of creating a real alternative to the disastrous policies offered up by a government in thrall to private power, they are voting for parties that will strengthen the ties between state and corporate power. Instead of fighting the disastrous division of the working class along racial lines, they are further withdrawing into their own, atomised racial "community." The people are choosing fascism over activism.

This is precisely why anti-fascism has to be tied to class struggle and social activism to be truly effective. We have to make a serious effort to mobilise the population in a positive way and show them that there is a real alternative to the problems we currently face. Otherwise, all we are doing is driving away one fringe group for the benefit of a ruling class already enacting some of their worst policies.

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# interview with anti-fascist group top berlin

**In the UK, we hear a lot about a strong autonomous Antifa movement in Germany. Could you give us a bit of an idea how this has come about?**

The autonomous Antifa is part of the radical left movement which developed following 1968. After the protests of the early 1970s had faded, the radical left seemed to be in a dead-end. A large part of the left occupied itself with the debate over the armed struggle of the RAF and other armed groups, as well as with their conditions of imprisonment. Another part organized in orthodox communist splinter groups. Although strong in numbers, by the early 1980s both approaches had lost contact to societal discourse and struggles.

The autonomous movement reacted to that with a changed concept of politics. Change should be begun now, instead of waiting for a far-off revolution to take place. The more anarchist outlook of the 'autonome' led to a relocation of focus from class struggle to the sphere of reproduction. Therefore struggles for adequate housing, over local planning issues and against large projects like the construction of Frankfurt Airport and a large Mercedes testing-road in Northwest Germany became important. The struggle against organised Nazis had always played a role

for the radical left. Since the foundation of the NPD in 1969 and its electoral success in the following years there had been protests against its conferences and other events. An autonomous antifascism could follow on this tradition.

Organised neo-Nazis were seen as posing a threat to the living conditions of those on the radical left, who felt that their occupied houses and autonomous youth centres were under threat. In addition, the struggle against the neo-Nazis was understood to be a revolutionary struggle as the Nazis were perceived as the storm-troopers of the pre-fascist Federal Republic. This system would make use of the Nazis to suppress social and radical left movements. In the 1980s it was possible to achieve wide mobilisation with this analysis. In the early 1990s, however, as a wave of pogrom-like riots and attacks on asylum seekers swept through the country, the radical left found that with this analysis it was not in a position to do anything against it. Racist and fascist ideas seemed to be held by a large part of the population.

Under the impression that the autonomous movement lacked the ability to intervene, many activists founded small autonomous Antifa groups. In order to combine their potentials and become capable of action of a national level, in 1992 they founded the 'Antifaschistische Aktion-Bundesweite Organisation' (AABO) and a little later the

'Bundesweites Antifatreffen' (BAT). The AABO attempted to establish a stable organisation while the BAT aimed purely at creating a network of autonomous groups. Both attempts proved successful in mobilising large numbers of people against the few Nazi marches which took place in the 1990s. Their meaning decreased significantly, however, as nationwide mobilisation against Nazi marches became problematic, due to the sheer number of marches taking place. In addition, analysis hadn't advanced much further from the 1980s. Antifa was understood as 'der Kampf ums Ganze' ('the struggle against the system as a whole'): by attacking the most reactionary parts of society a blow would be struck against the whole system. This lacking analysis was proved dramatically wrong during the time of the Red-Green coalition.

**When racist attacks in Germany peaked in the 1990s the state and police became increasingly active against neo-Nazi groups. In 2000, you had the 'Antifa-Summer'. What was that?**

In 1998 the conservative government fell and was replaced by a coalition of the Social Democrats and the Green Party. This government, unlike the previous government, made the problem of neo-fascist organisation into a political issue, as well



as racist and anti-Semitic attitudes in society. Following a failed bombing on a Dusseldorf Synagogue in 2000 came a wave of repression against the organised right. The most important action against the neo-Nazis was the government-initiated attempt to ban the NPD. Although this failed in the end, because too many leading NPD members turned out to be employed by the secret service, the trial led to a series of investigations, confiscations and a large sense of insecurity in the neo-fascist scene. In addition to this, the government pushed through a row of legal changes, which limited the right to demonstrate, banned certain fascist symbols and made it easier for the government to ban organisations which were opposed to the constitution. In the end the government made millions of Euros available for education against racism and anti-Semitism. On a governmental level, the democratic parties in many parts of Germany agreed not to work with representatives of the extreme right-wing parties. The conservative party also often took part in this agreement.

**How was the state's anti-fascism different from that of the Antifa movement? Why was the state suddenly interested in tackling the neo-Nazi problem?**

The reasons why the state moved against

fascist structures are complex. A major reason is that the government had recognised that it was damaging to the investment climate to have gangs of armed Nazis wandering the streets, or to have fairly openly national socialist parties sitting in the local government. This was especially the case as just at this time foreign investment was urgently needed in East Germany, in order to halt the total decay of the region's economy.

But also important was that in the time of the Red-Green coalition the German self-identity had changed. While the years after the war were still marked by a denial of guilt, from the 1990s on Auschwitz and National Socialism became an integral component part of the German identity. The responsibility for National Socialism and the Shoah was not only acknowledged but also turned into something which could be utilised for the German identity. The reunited Germany, redeemed from its past misdeeds, and with 'the experience of two dictatorships' behind it, could enter the world as a democratic state. In this way the German attack on Yugoslavia during its civil war was justified, as the Serbians were supposedly planning a second Auschwitz for the Kosovans. On the other hand the new German democracy refers to the Eastern Bloc, the 'second German dictatorship', to stress the lack of alternatives to the bourgeois capitalist system. In this tense relationship between a newly

formed totalitarianism theory and the striving for a good position on the world market stands the new German political outlook. To this also belongs the public memorials to the victims of National Socialism, as well as the German victims of air raids and expulsions in a 'European history of suffering'. Also belonging to this are the interventions in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, as likewise the German push for the strengthening of the European border regime. And, finally, also belonging to this are the decided measures against neo-Nazis, who threaten the new German self-confidence and the state's monopoly of violence.

**How did radical anti-fascists react to this? Did it strengthen or weaken the movement?**

The state's action against neo-Nazis led the antifascist movement to an identity crisis. If fascist and neo-Nazi groups had up till then been seen as the storm-troopers of the system, who were supposed to suppress social movements on the government's behalf, now, at the latest, the radical left had to confront the fact that Antifa was not 'der Kampf ums Ganze'. A part of the radical left denounced the state's action as hypocritical. It was pointed out that despite the state's measures against neo-Nazis there remained in society a right-wing consensus. This consensus was supposedly based on a continuity of the



concepts of national socialism, which were still virulent in society. This would express itself in the 'volkisch' (blood based nationalism) German foreign policy, for example the early recognition of Croatia and the support for the Palestinian cause, as well as in a tendency to historical revisionism. The state's actions against Nazis were seen as hypocritical as the social structures on which both the German national project and the Nazis were based, were left untouched.

Another part of the antifascist movement accepted that the struggle against fascists offered no revolutionary perspectives and attempted to sharpen their opposition to the system in other ways. In particular the criticism of capitalism came into the foreground. Capitalism was now analysed as a complex network of social relationships, which are structurally prone to crisis. Neo-Nazis provided a negative solution to this inherent tendency of capitalism towards crisis. This solution, however, was based on a mistaken and structurally anti-Semitic analysis of the way capitalism integrates individuals into society and therefore not only had no emancipatory potential but had the potential to create something far worse than bourgeois capitalist society. For this reason neo-Nazis had to be fought, even though this fight had no revolutionary perspectives. These should instead be sought in a confrontation with bourgeois-democratic society. While the following heavy debates seriously reduced the ability of the radical left to mobilise for years to come, and the resultant insecurity mobbed many antifascists to retire from politics, these tremors opened up the critical examination of the left's own positions and in the end led to a strengthened theoretical confrontation with the basics of radical left politics.

**How, in your group, do you think of anti-fascism now? Did you reconceptualise it to distinguish yourselves from liberal, bourgeois anti-fascism?**

TOP Berlin comes out of the tradition of autonomous Antifa groups and still has in this field its greatest potential to mobilise. Accordingly we have intervened in the antifascist movement and taken part in an-

tifascist protests. In the process we have always tried to insist on our own critique of mainstream society.

**A part of the antifascist movement accepted that the struggle against fascists offered no revolutionary perspectives and attempted to sharpen their opposition to the system in other ways**

Two examples of this: On 1 May 2008 Nazis demonstrated in Hamburg for 'Volksgemeinschaft' (blood based national community) and against capitalist globalisation. In meetings and texts before the protest, we tried to work out a critique of the volkisch and anti-Semitic positions of the Nazis. In addition, we took part in the direct action against the march in Hamburg. Another mobilisation was against the 'Anti-Islamisation Congress' organised by an extreme right-wing party in Cologne, in collaboration with other European extreme right-wing parties. We undertook a nationwide mobilisation with the nationwide communist 'ums Ganze' federation, in which TOP Berlin is organised. In articles and in our own congress we tried to work out what role a culturalist understanding of society plays for the German national narrative. With this we wanted to fight not only the thinly masked racism of the extreme right, but also the everyday nationalism of mainstream German society. As well, we presented a criticism of Islamism as a reactionary crisis solution.

The 'ums Ganze' federation took part in the protests by organising a large demonstration on the eve of the congress.

These two mobilizations display well our approach. We take part in antifascist protests, but try with theoretical content to lay a basic critique and bring this into the movement.

**What has that meant practically? Has the focus of your activities changed?**

TOP Berlin was only formed in 2007 before the G8 summit in Heiligendamm. Therefore our group positions haven't been affected by the Antifa Summer. But in contrast to its predecessor groups, Kritik und Praxis and Antifaschistische Aktion Berlin, we try to initiate more of our own campaigns, instead of following the fascists' movements. In 2009 with ums Ganze we have initiated an anti-national campaign with the motto 'Staat. Nation. Kapital. Scheisse. Gegen die Herrschaft der falschen Freiheit' ('State. Nation. Capital. Shit. Against the dominance of the false freedom'). As part of this campaign we have published a book on the criticism of the state, organised a series of events on the critique of the nation and called for a nationwide demonstration against the celebrations of the 60th birthday of the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany. In the second half of the year ums Ganze and TOP Berlin will mainly work on the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall and broaden our criticism of the nation to a criticism of real existing socialism. Besides this we will hold our second Marx Autumn School and devote ourselves to the second volume of Capital.

TOP (Theory. Organisation. Praxis) is a Berlin-based antifascist, anti-capitalist group. They are part of the "...ums Ganze!" alliance (<http://umsganze.blogspot.de>) which consists of more than ten groups from all over Germany. Parts of this text are based on a paper written prior to the G8 summit which can be found in English at [www.top-berlin.net](http://www.top-berlin.net). To get in touch with them write to [mail@top-berlin.net](mailto:mail@top-berlin.net).

no borders

**interview with no borders in calais**

**What was the No Borders camp in Calais last summer set up in opposition to?**

**Joe:** The camp was organized in association with the UK No Borders network, so of course the camp was set up in opposition to controls on the movement of people. In particular the camp was set up in opposition to the French-British border in Calais, but most importantly in solidarity with those undocumented migrants currently living in and around the port who are both suffering from and resisting the imposition of this border on their lives. It is the incredibly concrete and practical opposition of the undocumented present to this border every day that made the No Borders camp possible. To say 'No Borders' is not a demand for rights, but an expression of solidarity with all those who use their capacity to move in resisting oppression, exploitation and the global divisions of desire.

The French-British border in Calais has for sometime condensed many of the anxieties and tensions surrounding migration in contemporary Europe. Between 1999 and 2002 the Red Cross had a refugee reception centre stationed just outside Calais, in the village of Sangatte. The centre became the topic of at times vexed political

exchanges between the French and British governments. The British charged the French with providing a magnet for illegal immigrants who were using the centre as a stop-off point before trying to enter Britain. The French complained that in having to provide for undocumented migrants trying to reach Britain, they were being forced to foot some of the bill for the UK's purportedly over-generous asylum system – supposedly the real magnet for illegal immigration. With both administrations vying for the electoral capital to be gained from being seen to be tough on immigration, the centre was closed in 2002 by none other than the current French president Nicholas Sarkozy, then Minister of the Interior. Since the closure of Sangatte the UK and France have been working more closely on border control in Calais, with the UK adopting a kind de facto policing responsibility, funding many of the new security initiatives in and around the port.

Today the provision of all but the most rudimentary services to undocumented migrants in Calais has been outlawed. As a result a number of makeshift settlements have sprung up, locally known by all as the jungle. Living conditions in the jungle are very bad, and those living there are constantly harassed by a police force that ac-

tually have targets for how many migrants they must arrest – and inevitably release again a day or two later – each week. The No Borders camp was set up in opposition to this particularly brutal border regime, and in solidarity with all those who actively oppose it in their struggles for a dignified life.

**Where did the idea for the camp come from and how was it organised?**

**Dan:** During the Gatwick No Border camp of September 2007 the idea of a transnational action/gathering in Calais and/or Dover was proposed. Late last year, activists from the UK, France and Belgium met in Calais and decided to plan a camp in Calais.

The camp was organised by a series of meetings in Calais between British, French and Belgian activists. The camp was organised on a non-hierarchical basis, and all decisions were made by consensus. There were general meetings every morning and evening on the camp, and everyone was welcome to all meetings. The meetings were facilitated by a number of different people, and the agenda was set collectively. All the meetings were held in French and English, and sometimes there



were translations into other languages as well, including Arabic and Farsi.

Who was involved?

**Dan:** Various groups and individuals were involved in the camp, including local activists in Calais, many individuals from Lille including from their local anarchist group, activists from other parts of France and Belgium and people from various No Border groups in the UK. Migrants were involved in all aspects of the camp itself, some of the migrants lived close to the site of the camp and were present most of the time. Some people from the local area also came to the camp to chat with the migrants and the activists.

What were the aims of the camp?

**Dan:** The aims of the camp included: showing solidarity with migrants in Calais, showing solidarity with the local organisations working daily with the migrants, strengthening networks between British, French and Belgian activists, raising awareness of the situation amongst the local population and the public at large, and taking action to demand freedom of movement and an end to border control.

What were the main problems organisationally and politically considering the camps aims?

**Dan:** A main organisational problem that we had was involving migrants in the planning of the camp. This was for many reasons, including the transitory nature of the migrants in Calais and difficulties with translation. A main political problem was overcoming the propaganda in the local press, which painted us as terrorists coming to intimidate, steal and to destroy local property. We worked hard to communicate our message and let local people know of our intentions for the camp.

The No Borders position attempts to move beyond humanitarian responses to immigration controls and restrictions on freedom of movement. How were these political aims negotiated at

the camp considering the immediate situation of migrants there?

**Joe:** This was perhaps one of the most difficult things to come to terms with in Calais. When confronted with human suffering you want to know what you can do to help – and help immediately. Of course the camp infrastructure ameliorated some of this suffering for the week we were there. Police couldn't harass people inside the camp and food, shelter, washing facilities and basic medical assistance was provided to anyone who came to the camp. On a singular level there is and was no problem in mixing humanitarian concerns with politics. The problem in Calais was that the immediate situation of the migrants living there was so bad – living without basic sanitation, medical care, adequate food, access to clean water and so on – that even in the space for political discussions made possible by the camp, humanitarian sentiments too often overrode more explicitly political discussions.

**the separation of humanitarianism from politics, and the consequent triumph of humanitarianism thanks to its emotive pull, was one of the borders that the camp really struggled to break down**

The frustration felt by many at this situation was captured in a meeting where the public statement to be issued by the camp was being discussed. A young Afghan in-

terjected: 'Every time I come to the meetings we discuss about blankets, but we are not hungry, we do not come for blankets, open the borders!' This separation of humanitarianism from politics, and the consequent triumph of humanitarianism thanks to its emotive pull, was one of the borders that the camp really struggled to break down. At times such bordering made itself manifest in political discussions through the implicit reservation of political agency for those who could afford it (i.e. the citizen-activist) and correlatively, by making those who couldn't afford it into objects of humanitarian concern (i.e. the non-citizen). Perhaps the border between politics and humanitarianism presented less of a problem to be negotiated than a field of tension through which the camp was experienced.

Some people have criticised No Borders as being an idealist position that is irrelevant to the British working class and anarchist politics. How would you respond to this criticism?

**Joe:** 'No Borders is an idealist position.' Yes, but only if you think like a state. 'You can't make this work, its unmanageable, its not practical,' the anxious statesman will cry. From the perspective of the state No Borders is indeed idealistic. But for us, No Borders is an axiom of political action, a principle of equality from which concrete, practical consequences must be drawn. It means recognizing, on the basis of our equality, solidarity in struggle irrespective of origins. It is this principle of equality which distinguishes the No Borders position from the ideology of free marketeers, of whom it is said also advocate the removal of controls on movement. Crucially of course they only advocate the removal of controls on the movement of labour-power - which only means people insofar as they are the bearers of a potential to work, or more precisely, be exploited.

Today the movement of labour is free, so long as it is profitable, which also means disciplined. It is precisely in this disciplining that the border affects all of us. The disciplining of the border separates us from one another, such that politics ceases to be about something common







and collapses into the simple play of private interests. Thus it becomes possible to mark out some political positions as more or less relevant to your social group, and then choose your politics like you choose between fair-trade, organic or smart price brands in a supermarket. Is there really a need here to rehearse the closing lines of The Communist Manifesto? Doesn't the weakness of left-movements today stem precisely from the kinds of sectarianism and state fetishism that both Marx and Bakunin in their different (red and black if you will) ways warned against? At the border the calculation of interests meets the lived reality of our lives. It is thus, like the factory, both a site of suffering and a vector of antagonism.

**A list of demands were drawn up at the end of the camp. What were they and how did the demands reflect the aims of the camp?**

**Dan:** The demands were as follows:

1. Entry to the UK for all unconditionally.
2. The cessation of attacks and destruction of places of life of migrants. Access to care and showers must be guaranteed.
3. Freedom of movement for all in and around Calais: the ability to move anywhere without restrictions, harassment or

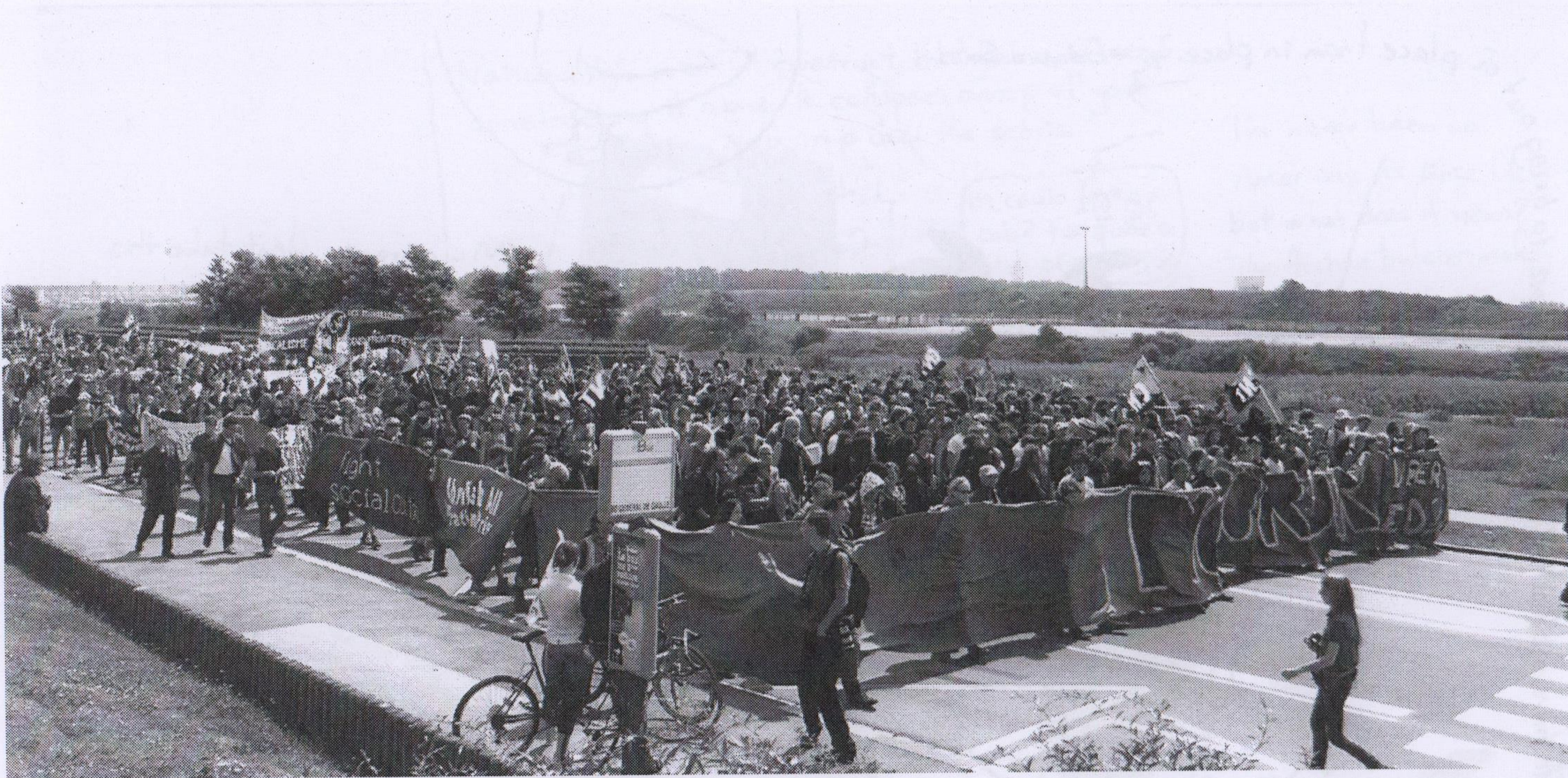
fear of being arrested.

4. The cessation of repeated arrests.
5. Freedom of expression for all, including migrants, the right to protest and complain to the authorities individually or collectively.
6. To stop evictions whether by charter or not to countries at war or not.
7. The end of the repression of associations and individuals who support the migrants including the provision of means of transport.
8. Provide free and impartial legal advice in the UK on the rights of asylum and immigration.
9. The British policy of arbitrary detention without time limit cannot be exported to Calais. No new detention centre can be built and particularly a structure of the Guantanamo kind.

**Joe:** Drawing up the list of demands was a difficult process. A mixture of practical demands and principled propositions made it in to the final draft. The real difficulty was in trying to get these two dimensions to work together without the practical demands appearing like a request for better social policy and the principled positions looking like empty radical gestures. Of course the greatest challenge to the border

in Calais was the actions of the migrants themselves, the actual attempts to cross day and night. No arrangement of words could ever match this force.

The statement focused, not mistakenly, on highlighting the situation of police repression on the ground in Calais. No doubt this was in part because police harassment really was a common experience shared by activists, migrants and local youth, albeit in significantly differing intensities. One of the demands read something like 'freedom of expression for all, including migrants, the right to protest and complain to the authorities individually or collectively.' I remember this demand getting a quite a laugh when it was read out in Pashtun in the closing meeting. It does sound like a ridiculous demand; the police violence in Calais is in a very direct sense a manifestation of the violence of the border. But this is the sort of demand that the No Borders camp made it possible to think. Despite the phrasing it is not really a right which is given, bestowed or handed over - like charity - but a capacity which must be exercised. It is only understandable when it is concretely put to use. If words have any power at all it is encouraging action, in instilling it in their audience. Hopefully some of these words sketched out hurriedly and collectively did indeed encourage action, not necessarily to lodge complaints against the police, but simply to carry on kicking back.



**Was this the only tangible outcome?**

**Dan:** No, I believe there were other tangible outcomes from the camp. Firstly, there was a heightened awareness of the situation of migrants in Calais amongst British, French and Belgian activists, and a willingness to take action. Since the camp, there had been a continual presence of activists in Calais, monitoring police activity. Secondly, the idea of freedom of movement and settlement was introduced to a large number of people (locals, migrants and various associations and individuals). I believe that the camp achieved a lot of the aims that it set out to achieve.

**Joe:** Well the border is still there, so the camp failed on that measure. Yet for a week its naturalness and necessity was manifestly called in to question. That the French state was actively unnerved by this was evident enough in the truly hysterical show of force we were confronted with. Helicopters, some 2000 armed and anxious police officers, road blocks across the town throughout the week, arrests for buying toilet roll and distributing flyers, the list of absurdities is endless. Yet however transitory, and however limited given the resources put in to policing the camp, the action shouldn't be dismissed for failing to 'break the border', or whatever. There are less geographical borders

which also need to be challenged and broken down, very intimate borders you carry round inside your head. In this I think the camp had more success. Physical movement against physical borders will always provide a more effective challenge than any amount of protest. But not all borders are physical, and it is really the confluence of physical and social borders which people suffer from. In the camp some of the social borders which accompany physical ones were actively broken down. Some meetings and discussions were held in four or five languages, and discussions, exchanges and encounters occurred which disrupted the rhythms of everyday lives and the habituses of the activist, the citizen and the undocumented. In facilitating this, the camp helped undermine assumptions and preconceptions about different kinds of difference. We shouldn't underestimate both the necessity and immensity of challenging the manifold borders we carry round in our heads, including the border between citizen and non-citizen.

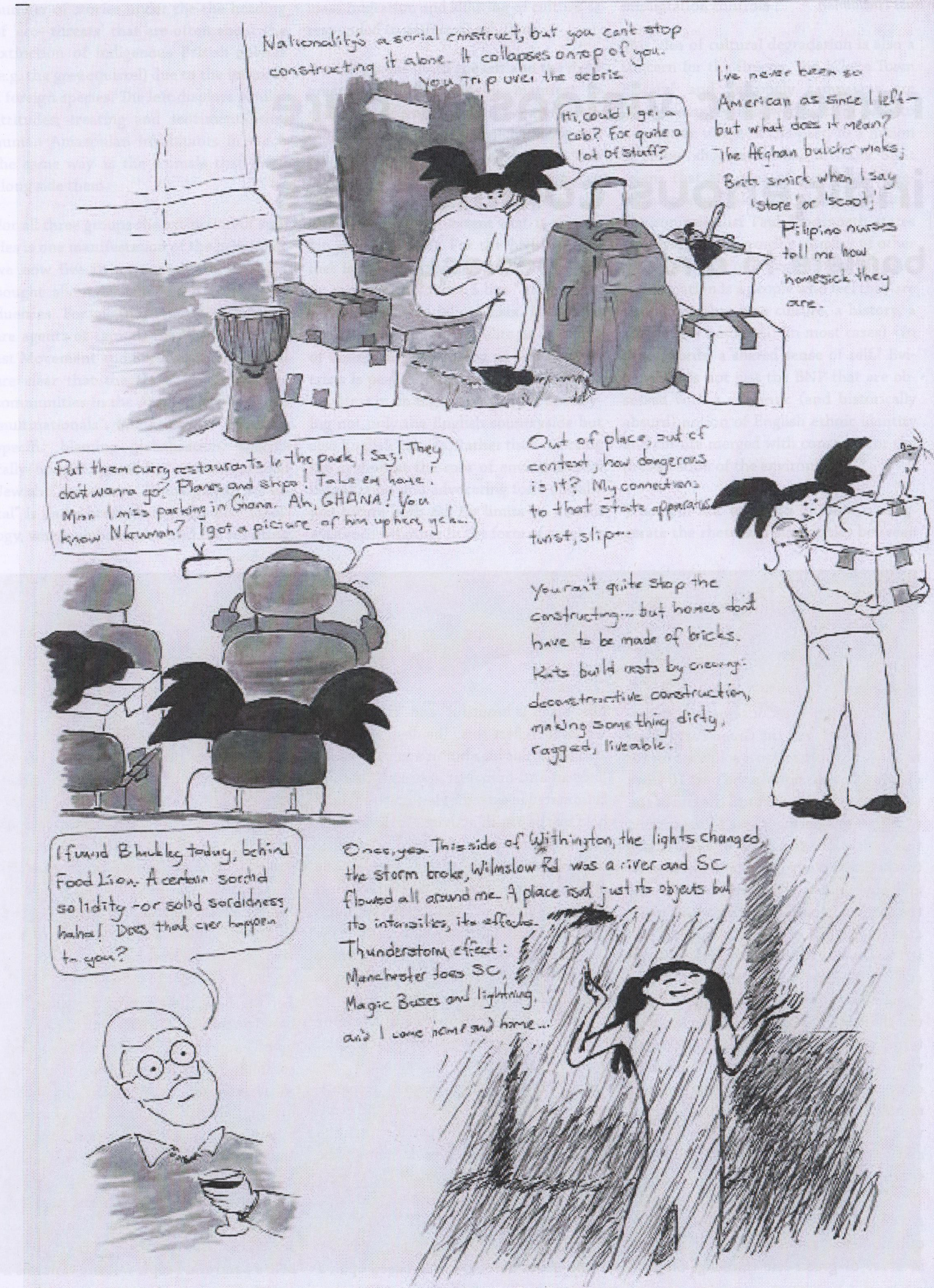
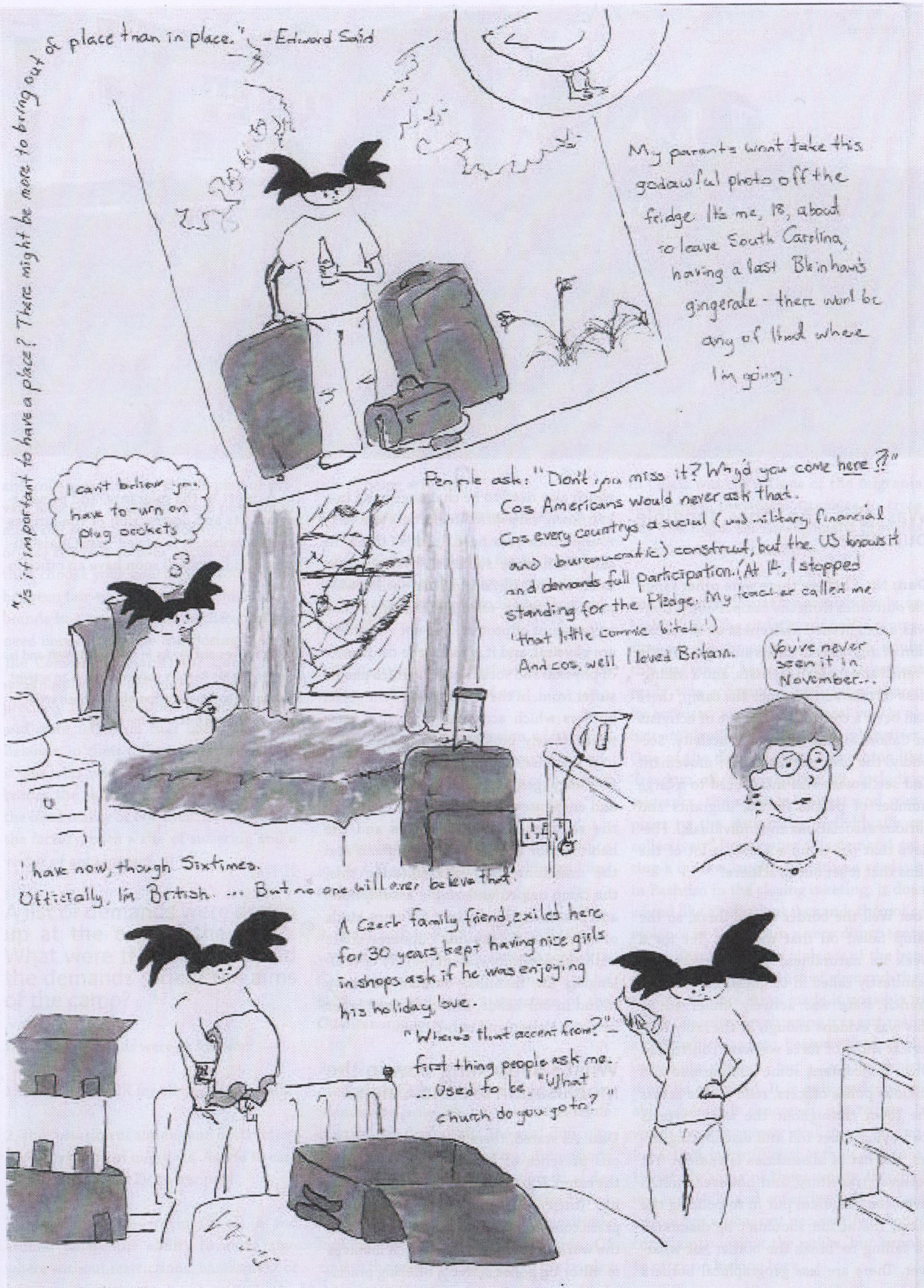
**What's happening now in the mobilisation around Calais?**

**Dan:** As stated, there has been a continuous presence of activists in Calais since the camp. A group, Calais Migrant Solidarity, (<http://calaismigrantsolidarity.wordpress.com>) has been formed to coordinate the work happening there, which involves monitoring police activity, offering practi-

cal support to the migrants, and preventing arrests and destruction of the jungles when possible. It is hoped that Calais Migrant Solidarity will soon have an office in Calais.

Joe Rigby lives and works in the North West and is active in the No Borders network. Dan is an activist based in the south of London who has been active in Calais during and following the camp.







# romantic visions of pure indigenous communities barriers to a radical ecology

Everyone from the Conservatives to Labour, the BNP and the Green Party claim to have the most rational solutions for reducing CO2 emissions in the next 10 years (or however many it is until the end of the world). Considering these dire options this article looks at some of the barriers to a radical ecology that would place social and environmental justice at the top of the agenda. In particular, this article looks at three strands of political thinking, the left Greens (e.g. the Green party), the deep ecology movement and the BNP. It investigates the way these three broad groups use the words "indigenous community" a term that has become increasingly loaded with political meaning. From the housing estates of Stoke-on-Trent to the Amazon rainforest, the term is used to describe a variety of peoples: but what does it mean and what does its usage tell us about those who use it?

A romantic vision of small indigenous communities is overwhelmingly evident in a lot of green left thinking. Slogans

like "small is beautiful" and "think global act local" reflect this. The deep ecologists also share this idea but in addition to this have an anti-humanist approach that has culminated in extreme views such as those held by the Finish activist Karrlo Linkola. For them pre-industrial society, even the hunter gatherer existence, is the pinnacle of human existence and they press for a return to small self contained communities that live in harmony with nature. The Greens don't have a monopoly on these romantic visions of 'pure' communities. In the UK the BNP extends its usage to include the white British working class. The romanticised notion of 'indigenous' and 'rooted' communities is evidently connected historically to German romanticism (as epitomised by Wagner) and eventually fascism, and similarly for them the British working class are something to be lionised and protected against the threats of modernism and globalisation.

Practically these communities, whether in the UK or abroad, are all based upon a

myth. For the Green left it seemed to grow out of Marx's and Engels' view that indigenous peoples often practised a "primitive communism" that showed market relations are not inevitable. However the reality of these pre-industrial societies are quite out of step with the modernist values that Marx espoused such as equal rights for women. The left often seem only too happy to tolerate in these imagined societies conditions that they would not want for themselves.

For the BNP the myth of Britishness is based on the idea of a pure white race made up of "Anglo-Saxon, Celtic and Norse folk communities of Britain", what they refer to as "indigenous Caucasian". In reality Britain is a mixture of ethnicities brought together by a history of invasion, conquest and peaceful migration (a recent report in the Daily Star stated that Nick Griffin could trace his ancestors back to gypsies). These imagined indigenous communities are treated like endangered species. The BNP's Land and People website contains a

number of stories under the heading of 'eco-threats' that are often about the extinction of indigenous British species (e.g. the grey squirrel) due to the influx of a foreign species. The left displays similar attitudes; treating and sentimentalising human Amazonian inhabitants in much the same way as the animals that dwell along side them.

For all three groups the extinction of species is one manifestation of the belief that we now live in an apocalyptic dystopia brought about by corrupting outside influences. For all three the main culprits are agents of capital. The World Rainforest Movement and Survival International are clear that the threat to indigenous communities in the Amazon are "western multinationals". Some fascists are more specific blaming globalisation, specifically 'finance capital' (i.e. an international Jewish Conspiracy). "Think global, act local" is undoubtedly within the BNP ideology, where globalisation and the resulting

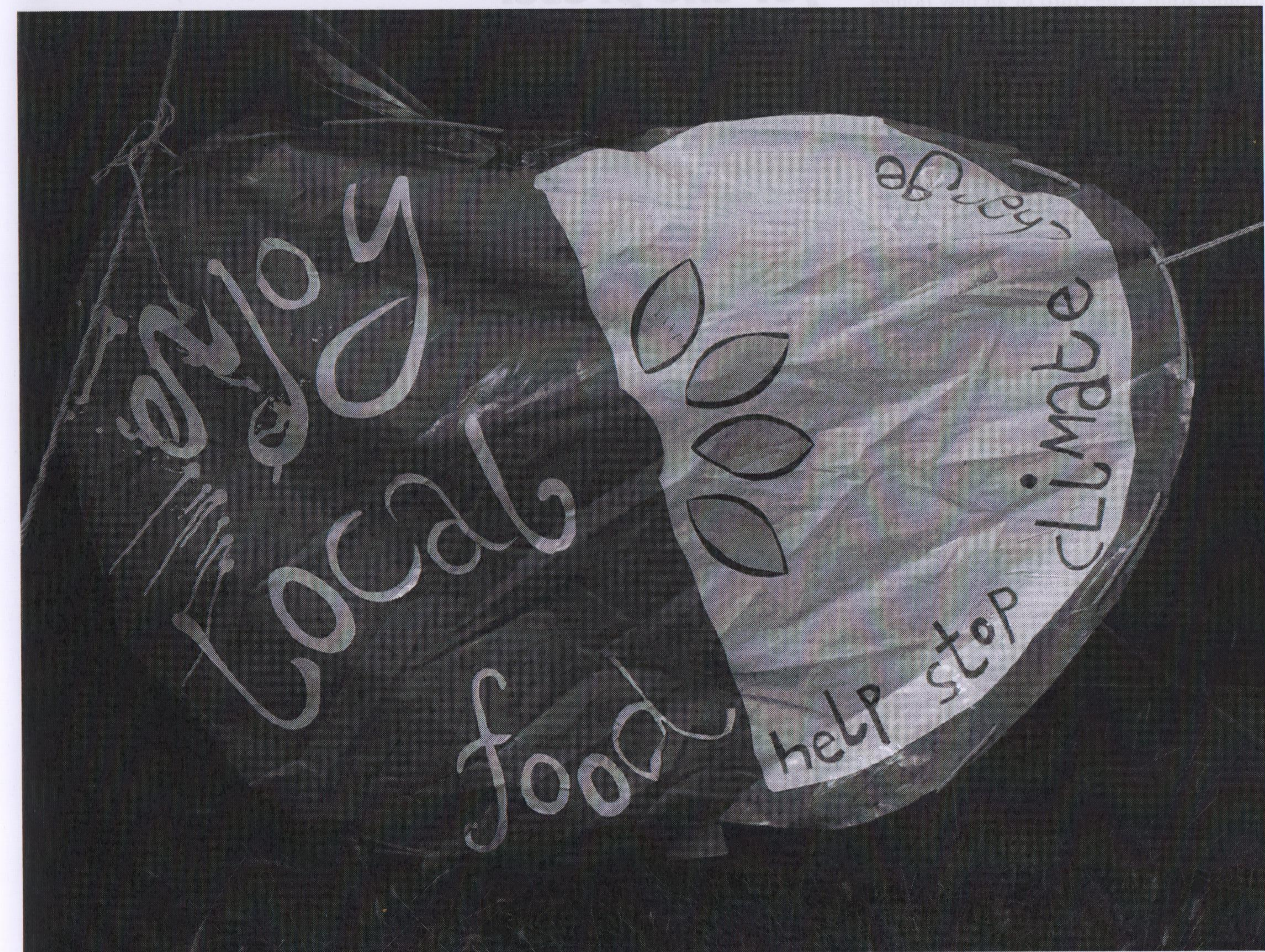
mass migration and 'diluting of culture' is responded to with local solutions.

For the greens (both the left and the deep greens) the apocalypse is manifest in many other forms: from a move away from organic farming (the petro-chemicals will kill the land and hence people when it is no-longer able to provide us with food) to climate change (humans have altered the atmosphere to the extent that it can no longer sustain us). For the BNP the former is true but not the latter. Nick Griffin recently told radio 5 live "that global warming is essentially a hoax. It is being exploited by the liberal elite as a means of taxing and controlling us and the real crisis is peak oil." Instead they also see it manifest in immigration which is destroying not only the English countryside but also English culture. Rather than rejecting the system at the root of environmental degradation and advocating for a socially just future both ask for limits on human existence- whether in the form of taxes or

immigration controls.

This idea of cultural degradation is also a concern for the Greens. The "Clone Town Britain" and Tescopoly campaigns are good examples of how they hark back to a romantic vision of the past, to a nation of corner shops and small artisans. So it seems that the idea of purity and Englishness also leaks into Green thinking. Environmentalist Paul Kingsnorth states "As myself and a growing number of other people feel that our 'English' identity matters. A nation is a people who feel they are bound together by a culture, a history, a language, a homeland (in most cases) - in other words, a shared sense of self." Evidently it is not just the BNP that are obsessed with a romantic (and historically absurd) notion of English ethnic identity and culture merged with concerns for the preservation of the environment.

What I'm not trying to do here is exaggerate the rhetorical similarities between





sections of the green left and far-right parties such as the BNP, however it is important to explore why these similarities manifest and to ask: how do we distinguish ourselves from such positions. The problem is that all three positions as outlined above believe that our communities have simply become too big and as a consequence of this unsustainable. The BNP say that the environmental damage done to the UK could be reduced if we stopped immigration (reducing their criticism of globalisation to an attack on national 'others'). Their website states "Britain is one of the most densely populated countries in the world and our population is increasing, due entirely to immigration... independent environmental organisations believe that Britain's population needs to be significantly reduced. Our immigration policies will achieve this." The British National Party also argues that "our countryside is vanishing beneath a tidal wave of concrete" and argue that "the biggest reason all these new houses are needed is immigration. One-third of all new homes are for immigrants and asylum-seekers", "Britain will become a tarmac desert". They attack the Green party's stance on immigration and claim their more liberal approach shows they are not true environmentalists.

However environmentalist Paul Kingsnorth has similarly described Britain as "a small, overcrowded and overdeveloped country". While an organisation closely connected to Jonathan Porritt, The Optimum Population Trust, argues that mass immigration is causing environmental collapse. Mark Lynas has said greens must now openly address 'rising levels of immigration' which are contributing to 'urban overcrowding and rural over-development'. This logic has also been applied globally, owing in some way to an emphasis on global warming. People will be polluting the sacred earth whether they do it in England, Germany or Angola. At the extreme end of this some deep greens have advocated a global reduction in population (Karrlo Linkola has even talked of his admiration for Stalin and the Nazi holocaust). With this comes an elitist attitude. They are the vanguard, the enlightened minority who can deliver the masses from themselves and also the belief that

nature will judge us in the end and destroy the human race if we don't change our evil ways.

## **evidently it is not just the BNP that are obsessed with a romantic (and historically absurd) notion of English ethnic identity and culture merged with concerns for the preservation of the environment**

The logical consequence of all of these arguments is the diversion of attention from the root causes of climate change and the shifting of attention to easier targets (whether that's migrants, supermarkets, the rich...). This 'foreshortened' analysis of capitalism and its inherently destructive mechanisms is evident in the apparent attitude that indigenous communities cannot, and will not, repeat the mistakes made by the 'bad humans', those that have caused this dystopian world. Ironically some groups seeking to 'protect' people and natural habitats have attempted to do this by introducing western capitalist models to their traditional ways of living.

The Centre for Amazon Community Ecology aims to "develop the sustainable harvest and marketing of non-timber forest products" in order to preserve the community. I'm not sure how turning social relationships into value based ones will "strengthen its traditional communities" or ensure that they don't succumb to the very thing that is responsible for environmental destruction, capitalism. Again

what is overwhelmingly evident here is a 'we know best how to protect you' syndrome.

This failure to break with capitalism, the very thing they blame for the desecration of sacred communities, is shared by the Greens and also by the BNP. Neither have managed to display any radical anti-capitalist views, both are essentially reformist and the BNP reactionary. From big capitalism and multinationals to 'small is beautiful' and nationalisation. In the end it is safe to say that the three strands of political thinking are very different. However they do have a strong belief in a dystopian present that tends to equate big and global with capitalism, which in turn is equated with environmental destruction. Consequently all are guilty of upholding some form of indigenous, small community above all other form of social organisation, whatever their geographic location or racial extraction might be (however this romantic vision only extends so far as they attempt to guide and change the 'pure' communities to fit with their own elitist narrative) and, despite intentions, we have seen what the consequences of that can and will be.

Russ is a writer, researcher and activist.

# climate camp and us

At the 2008 Climate Camp in Kingsnorth an open letter was circulated by anti-capitalist campers raising concerns that the movement was increasingly being influenced by state-led approaches to tackling climate change. A more developed version was later published by Shift magazine. The original argued broadly that the camp should adopt anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian principles and objectives.

The 2009 Climate Camp, sited this year in Blackheath, London, saw continued debate over the future direction of the struggle against climate change. As a part of this, anarchist and libertarian communist activists hosted a debate on what we saw as a growing trend towards Green authoritarianism within the movement. Key concerns discussed included the assumption within some sections of the movement that the state can be used as a tool in combating climate change, and the general danger of the state co-opting the green movement and stripping it of its radical potential. While the ecological crisis is a pressing and potentially catastrophic issue for our class, it should also be under-

stood as one in a series of crises, economic and political, that are created by the very nature of the capitalist system.

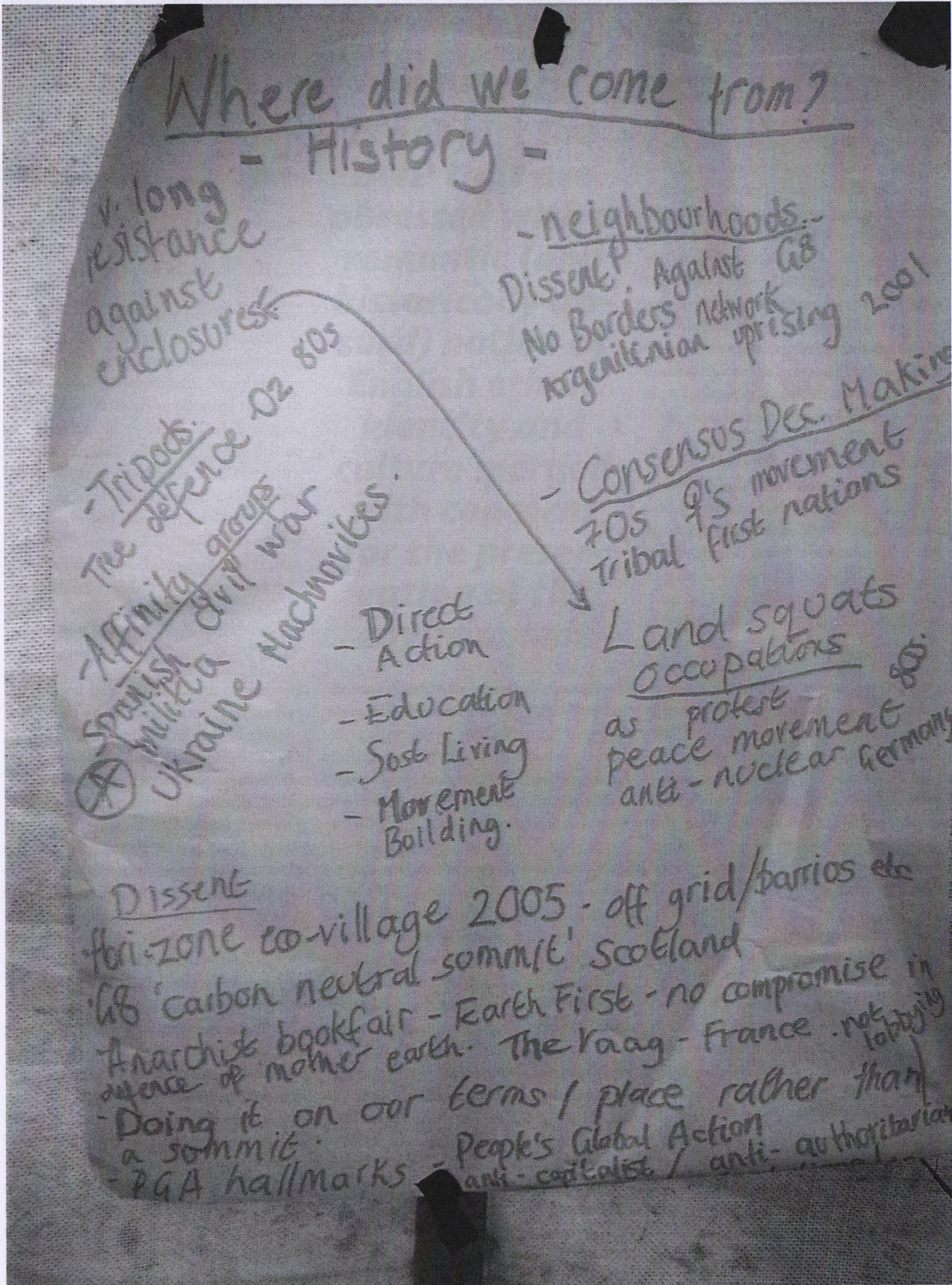
A lengthy debate followed amongst campers in attendance. The points that were most commonly raised were:

- The possibility of using the state as a strategic tool for our movement,
- The urgency of climate change, and the time scale we have to work with,
- That idea that grassroots activity and state-led solutions may work in harmony,
- The need for some form of coercion to promote lifestyle change and
- What "our" (i.e. anti-authoritarian) alternatives are.

Following on from this debate, we felt it was important to work out what place we, as anarchist communist militants, can have inside this movement. It has become increasingly obvious that, despite a com-

mitment to direct action and horizontal organisation, anti-statism is by no means a widely held principle inside this movement. The Climate Camp is moving further and further away from the radical, anti-capitalist politics of the organisations it grew out of, such as Earth First!, the 90s road protests, or Reclaim the Streets. While this movement has equipped itself with the skills (direct action, media relations etc.) and the knowledge (scientific analysis) to intervene in the climate change debate, it has not really worked out what its future political direction will be. The direct action, climate change movement has moved over the years from being fairly politically homogeneous, to being quite wide and diverse. While this has been positive in terms of building mass support, this growth has not been accompanied by any real, meaningful commitment to political debate. The result is that it is action against climate change (whatever that may be), not any sense of shared aims and values as a community of activists, that is holding our movement together. With this year's camp having less of a focus on mass action, the real contradic-





tions inside the movement are starting to show.

This is most strongly shown, as ecological campaigning is starting to spread into the workplace, in the wholly uncritical way that many Green activists have adopted the strategy and tactics of the traditional Left. Calls for nationalisation, eco-lobbying and work within the trade union bureaucracies have been widely accepted as legitimate tools in our struggle. Without an analysis of capitalism, and an understanding of the historical successes and failures of the workers' movement, we leave ourselves exposed to recuperation by existing political organisations and elites (whether from Right or Left). With the possibility of a "Green capitalism" on the horizon, we're uncertain how committed many activists will be in the face of a potentially carbon-reduced, but still capitalist and therefore unstable and exploitative, economy.

The "anti-capitalism" that is common amongst camp participants is one that objects to capitalism in its excesses, i.e. in the destruction of the planet, not in its everyday functioning. This was particularly obvious at the discussion on "anti-capitalism ten years after Seattle" - while this should have been one of the more radical, politically sophisticated discussions, the speakers still tended to present a view that saw capitalism as a system that only really harms the most super-exploited portions of the "Third World/Global South"'s population, and anti-capitalism as a matter of exotic, idealised people on the other side of the world fighting back. In this worldview, the role of activists in Europe (i.e. everyone who was actually there for the discussion) was simply to provide verbal solidarity with the Bolivians and South Africans in their fight against capitalism, not to take practical action right here and right now for our own class interests. The class nature of climate camp has been much discussed, and we should be careful to avoid falling into simplistic sociological views of class. But at the same time it's hard to imagine anyone who's had to deal with the miserable reality of working-class life for many people in Britain talking about anti-capitalism as if it was simply a process of cheering for the good guys in

Asia or South America, and failing to see that any meaningful, effective anti-capitalist movement must be rooted in the struggle to win control over our own lives.

We feel the movement is at a cross roads. Much of the radical base has slipped away from the camp and our ideas are being lost. This is reflected most strongly in the changed dynamics and culture in this year's camp. A lack of mass action and the "softly, softly" approach of the police meant that some aspects of this year's camp resembled a festival more than a political gathering. The debates and discussions in the neighbourhoods were largely concerned with the anti-social behaviour of campers on site towards other campers.

**the Climate Camp is moving further and further away from the radical, anti-capitalist politics of the organisations it grew out of**

There was even some support for the idea of allowing the police to enter our autonomous space in the spirit of future "good relations". Again, this in itself shows the naivety of many campers, and the narrow social base from which the camp was drawn: no-one who's had much experience of the police (whether they've encountered them in the course of political activism, ecological direct action, or just through the experience of being an ethnic minority or "underclass" youth) could be taken in by the police's strategy towards the camp, which essentially amounted to a well-thought-out PR campaign. In truth, the only real political work that has come out of this camp is the "eco-lobbying" of

the media team, aided by spectacular "direct" action geared towards generating media commentary (in truth, many of this year's actions were not direct in any meaningful sense of the word, just purely liberal protests). These are also roles that are routinely filled by those from high income backgrounds. The voice of Climate Camp is overwhelmingly white and privileged.

It is true that anti-statism is not a stated principle of the camp, but we believe that true anti-capitalism cannot be separated from anti-statism. The state is a fundamental part of capitalism. As anarchist communists, we reject state structures and argue that they are incapable of either preventing climate change or creating a better world. Instead, we focus on inclusive, participatory solutions that work from the grass roots up, educating each other about the alternatives that we can build today, and by extension how we see an anarchist-communist society operating. The goal of stopping climate change is vitally important, but so is radically changing society, and we believe that you cannot do one without the other. The state has never played a progressive role in society. Its purpose is to secure, maintain and promote the power of the ruling class. Where radical movements have arisen (in workers struggles, suffrage movements etc), the state has fought and repressed them. Where the state can no longer just rely on violent oppression, it incorporates some of the movement's demands into its existing structures in order to strengthen them. Past radical movements have been recuperated in the same way, and there is a very real danger of the Climate Camp being turned from a genuine movement for social change into a lobbying tool for state reform.

With regards to the climate crisis, estimates for the time we have left vary from 10 years to 100 months, 5 years, or years in the past depending on who you talk to. The one thing we agree on is that time is of the essence. There is a broad assumption amongst our critics that the state is able to act more efficiently than the anarchist "alternative" we are proposing. The simplest argument to raise here is that the state, capitalism and its way of managing society have gotten us into this mess, so it seems



unlikely that they'll get us out of it. Their way of running the world has landed us in climate chaos, with the logic of profit and the market economy coming before all other concerns. The state's purpose is to secure the status of the ruling class and protect their profits against any potential threat, to make sure that the smooth running of the economy is not disrupted. We have to raise the question of whether this institution will take the drastic actions we need to combat climate change? Is it able to act against the capitalists who hold its reins?

The origin of Climate Camp's politics are in radical direct action to inspire and demonstrate how a more ecological society can work. The only way a climate crisis can be averted is by radically changing society. Only by a conscious effort of every person to act more responsibly can we change how we operate, how we produce, consume (or more importantly NOT "consume") and live. But we believe the only way to accomplish this is from below, by inspiration, example and education. Not by taxation, involving the state in our lives and encouraging them to monitor our actions. How can we possibly preach the need for responsibility and reduced consumption whilst with its two hands the state continues to feed capitalism's excesses and beat down any alternative movements? Like-

wise, it is naive to believe that top-down state control and bottom-up social movements should be working side by side to combat climate change. Suggesting that state control can co-exist with a movement that advocates radical social change is not only counter-productive, it is completely irrational. The state doesn't want us to change, it certainly doesn't want us to stop being good happy consumers who perpetually buy new cars, shop at supermarkets and keep voting for things to stay the same. If ultimately all we want is better laws and state intervention on climate change, then why participate in a movement that openly breaks the law and challenges the power of the state?

Despite all this, there were also some very positive developments within the camp. The involvement of campers in the recent Vestas dispute and the Tower Hamlets strike showed a commitment to breaking out of the Green activist ghetto. The importance of workplace organisation as a critical tool in anti-capitalist struggle is gaining greater credibility, and this is the direction we need to take our struggle if we are to expand our movement, generalise our demands and take our place as part of a continuing culture of working class resistance. We have no doubt that anarchist communists belong inside the ecological movement. The positive exam-

ples displayed by the organisation of the camp and its decision making structure are important. Climate Camp potentially represents a useful tool for workers in struggle, helping to bring the lessons of collective living, horizontal organising and direct action to a class that is being battered by economic recession. The future political direction of the camp is key. We need to expand the debate and clarify the direction of our movement. When political conservatives, corporations, and even fascists are "turning green", it is no longer enough to avoid debate and declare we must simply do "everything we can" to avert the coming crisis. At the end of our speech we posed a question to the Climate Camp and we feel that collectively we are still far from reaching a definitive answer.

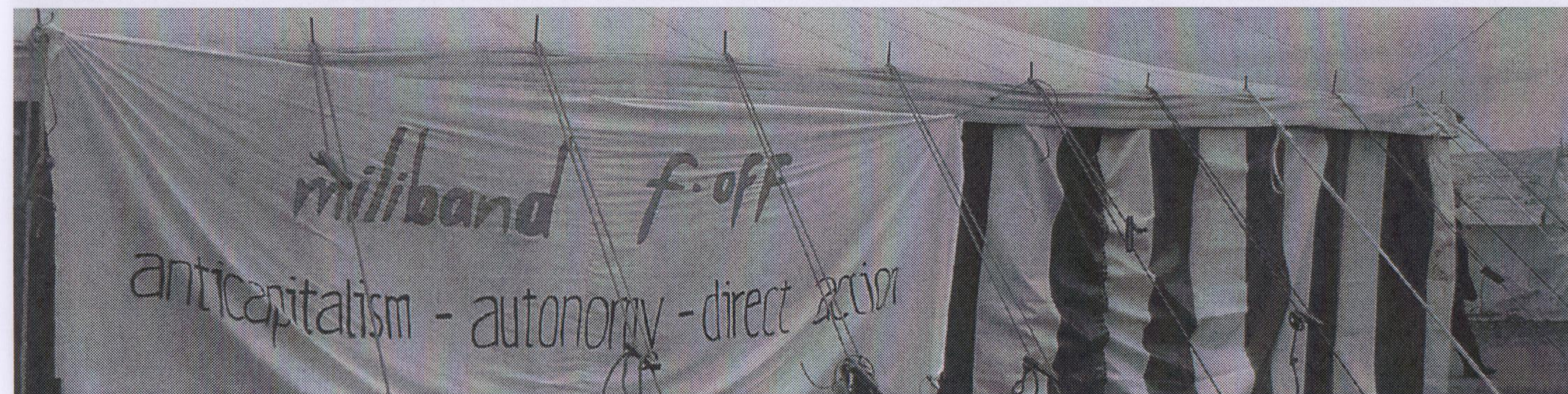
Do we want to simply change the way that the current economy is managed or do we want to build a truly radical society? Do we want a bigger slice of the cake, or do we want the whole fucking bakery?

A perspective paper produced by members of the Anarchist Federation within climate camp 2009.  
www.afed.org.uk



Lewis Bassett

## the climate camp as radical potential



So it's three days before the camp and I'm sitting here, debating why I've spent the past couple of weeks tatting bits of wood and old carpets, making posters, organising workshops and the hundred of etceteras that come with holding a Climate Camp. What is it I'm (we're) creating, beyond being one of the most beautiful, heart in mouth and weird events in my calendar? Is, or could the Camp be, a vehicle which offers a potential challenge to capitalism in any meaningful, relevant way?

I'm coming to a conclusion (as you will see) that the sites of the Climate Camp's 'struggle' are an abstraction. This is because (as I will argue) the Camp fails to meaningfully engage in relevant conversations and struggles over production.

The main argument I draw from Climate Camp has been 'we have to take action for ourselves because no one else will.' But what does that mean - to take action? How is action manifested? Is it just a matter of resisting nodes, old and forthcoming, in capitalist infrastructure like whacking weasels popping out of holes? Or do we need to root our struggle in the power behind capitalism itself: production. Production as in what is produced, by who, for what purpose and, crucially, according to whose decisions?

Climate Camp as an abstraction

What I mean by this is the location of the Camp's dissent. This year, Climate Camp 2009, came to challenge The City of London itself, a 'command centre' of the global economy. The Camp's aims were to make clear the links between the financial crisis and the ecological crisis. That link, we can assume, is capitalism. The City is a poignant symbol of capitalism and the Climate Camp is a symbolic movement. From pirate boats to colourful marches its defiance is temporary. Its greatest strategic aim must be to engage as many people as possible in resistance in order to halt the cogs of the capitalist carnage that has been developing in the last 500 years or so. However, in the process I feel we need to see that such a strategy will be limited to include those with some independence (economic/social) from the current system and lead to the alienation of others, primarily the working class, who have built up dependence upon this system (and have already offered right wing resistance to our ideals). As well as failing to create productive spaces that resist hierarchical state/corporate control, we are thus essentially enslaving ourselves and each other in the long term.

CO2, 90% cuts, 2030, 2050, etc, etc are all abstract notions that do not take into account people and their dependence, through employment and consumption, to a society geared to produce capital. Yes, let's imagine a new world! A revolution

without imagination is dead, yet one with only imagination is hungry. This is a call to the Climate Camp to decide whether to identify itself as a revolutionary movement and, if so, to have a meaningful discussion about production.

By avoiding struggles over production and turning to The City in order to highlight the links between the economic crisis and the climate crisis perhaps we could argue the camp becomes no more than a spectacular event similar to the launching of Inconvenient Truth or Age of Stupid. That is, it is an engaging and educating spectacle that tells us the dark clouds of climate change are fed by capitalism and are looming, mainly in the global south, and we 'simply have to do something!'

A quick note about the COPs: There are other things to do than fight COPs. Yes, like the summit hopping movements prior to it, we should be delegitimising these decisions. But let's not forget that scientists, NGOs and a whole host of other etceteras will do that job also once the deal doesn't show any significant progress. What else we can achieve by going there for a riot, besides having a good time, will be minimal. And at the same time if we are not careful we also run the risk of delegitimising ourselves. So far there has been no conversations to turn Copenhagen over, occupy it and reclaim it for an eco village utopia. But if these are logical conclusions



we would like then we should be unifying with struggles over production in our own localities.

Is it behind the sofa? Is production the key we've lost?

There is evidence, during this recession and the large scale retrenchments of jobs in the UK and internationally, that occupations are on the table as a form of resistance and even getting the goods. There are struggles taking place where workers and supporters are rising up for their livelihoods in the face of capitalism, working as always for the growth and protection of profit margins.

One of the interesting points during the Vestas occupation was its facilitation by the Rail Maritime & Transport union. The RMT were playing for a 'dignified defeat' all along. Although we have to consider that the occupation consisted of 9 out of the 600 or so workforce there was no strong support, in words or actions, to resist the workers' removal. Little or no voices discussing how workers could be reinstated and the factory adapted to cooperative production of wind turbines. Such agitation and solidarity is a meaningful area that the Climate Camp could invest time into supporting and energising. It demands developing a discourse around the importance of production within the camp and fierce active solidarity at the sites of these campaigns when the time arises. The present model for the Climate Camp (having single moments where alternative public utopias rise from the ground, soon disappearing) is highly resource intensive demanding the continuous work of many people restricting their ability to connect with, as it is, quick to spark labour struggles highly relevant to ecological progress. Again, a discourse needs to be developed so that we are receptive and listening out for signs of these struggles.

Occupations occurring in the global retrenchment of jobs have been calling for negotiations with bosses primarily over redundancy pay. For us to engage with this energy I believe we need to develop a movement that can take these actions further, and challenge the hierarchy of production and the product itself.

Fossil fuel that powers the machines and fertilises our crops allows capitalism to maintain growth. As fuels with worth-while extraction value peak and decline, the first to suffer will, of course, be those dependent on and at the bottom of the capitalist system. Energy as a site for struggle will intensify over the coming years and must do sooner rather than later if we wish to have some alternative to total eco nightmare and, lest we forget, some control over how energy is produced to fulfill each others needs (i.e. will it be co-operative or ladled out with a truncheon?).

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When failing to engage with occupations and other industrial/productive resistance for livelihoods and dignity (and whatever is left of community) we are failing to put in our word about political hierarchy as an inherent problem and about ecology relationships with industry.

"People are inherently cautious and take extraordinary action only when they have little to lose and something to gain." (Immanuel Ness) If this is true then the predominantly middle classes that understand climate change as a threat see the need for action, yet working classes whose lives are less historically stable still feel a lot to lose through both reactions to climate change (from a social movement or the state) and the current recession.

However those out of the wash of the cur-

rent economic system, though still dependent on state welfare (that cushion of general revolt), enter a potential class of people who are susceptible to new ideas and action. If again we are interested then we should not allow this potentially radical force to be absorbed and utilised by the far right.

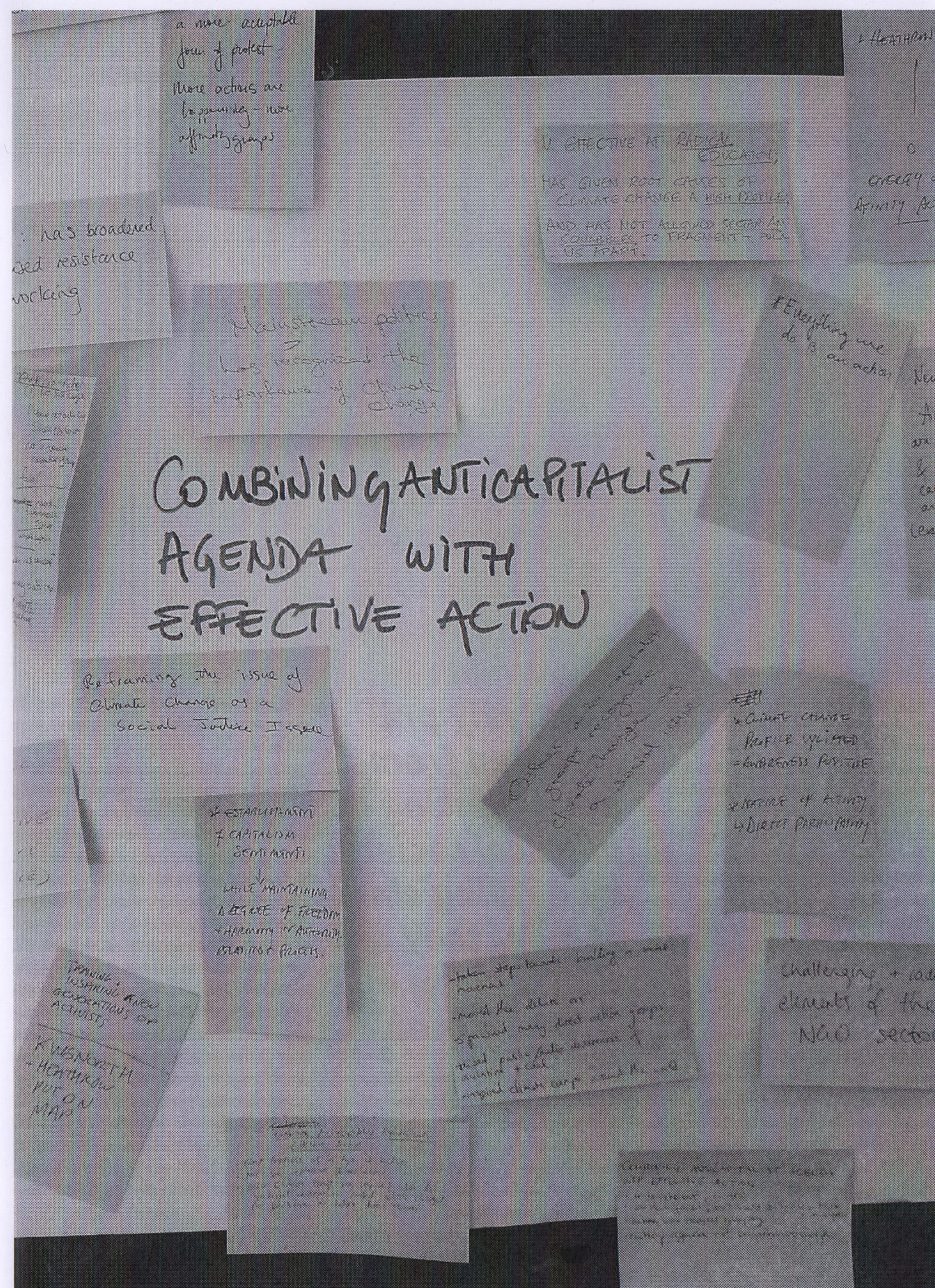
## Conclusion

This essay goes little way in addressing all the issues a discourse like the one I am calling for in the Climate Camp should consider. For example, if and how we would select sites of production for solidarity based on their environmental impact, how we relate to global struggles and even what we mean by production within a climate change (post industrialist?) concerned vision. Yet this is a plea, mainly for clarity of who we are.

The Climate Camp, like the process of writing this article for me, is a process of continual learning and discovery for ourselves. I came to the Camp, for example, deeply worried about climate change with little knowledge of definitions for capitalism, state, anarchy and class, arriving with the firm intention of cutting CO2 emissions and a vague idea (and love of) moving closer to nature. I'm still driven by these factors but I know for myself and now argue that CO2 has for this movement become an abstraction, and perhaps even a distraction, from the necessary challenge we meet in the struggle against capitalism for ecological and egalitarian values.

I feel that Climate Camp has a lot to give to struggles over class and production (this was demonstrated in part in and around the roundabout camp outside Vestas) and yet these movements have something to teach the Camp - that without locating our struggles in production we are dealing with the abstract and are disempowering ourselves and the millions who have a dependent relationship upon a capitalist engine, running out of petrol, and waiting for someone to make a sharp turn.

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# some thoughts on anarcha-feminism

You might have heard the story. It was about 4pm on Sunday 7 June and the Anarchist Movement conference in London was drawing to a close. The 15 discussion groups had finally all had their turn at the mic in what had been a painstaking 2-hour final plenary. Perhaps more interesting than the much distilled feedback from each of the groups on 2 days of discussion among 15 near strangers was the fact that for the 200 odd people in the large hall, this was the first opportunity to get a sense of their fellow participants at the conference. Inspired by what seemed to have emerged somewhat more organically at the famed Bradford gathering of 1998, the conference organisers' were determined that class-war anarchists should spend the weekend sat alongside climate campers in small discussion groups. Along with tube delays that prevented many from arriving for the opening plenary on Saturday morning this meant that until this point, the numbers and make-up of participants had been impossible to gauge.

The arrival of anarcha-feminist group No Pretence couldn't have been better timed. Although I can only speak for myself, surveying the room, my doubts of the past 2 days seemed to be shared by others: just how much of an affinity did each of us feel with the people around us? And just how much did this room reflect the movement we had each felt we were part of?

Enter No Pretence, projector, screen and very own mic a-blazing.

***If anarcha-feminists are trying to tackle a feudal form of sexism, where women are actively prevented from participating in political society by a ruling class of men, they are attacking a straw man***

As I say, the intervention was well timed. With the discomfort described above hanging over the room and the conference organisers about to facilitate the ominously-titled "What next?" part of the programme, the sight of eight masked, black-clad figures bursting onto the floor, hastily setting up their kit and launching an impassioned critique of the movement, as exemplified (for them) by the Anarchist Movement

conference, certainly offered the possibility of seeing some of these doubts articulated. Five minutes later and No Pretence's raw yet well-rehearsed attack on gender discrimination in our movement (and the absence of this issue from the conference programme) was over, and the group were bounding triumphantly out of the room. The statement they had read out claimed: "No matter how much we aspire to be 'self-critical' there is a clear lack of theorising and concrete action around sexism, homophobia and racism in the anarchist movement." But what had the intervention achieved?

Lamentably, the intervention cannot claim to have shaken the conference out of its inertia and forced it to acknowledge not only the patent fragmentation of the movement it supposedly represented, but also that movement's present weakness despite sharp new increases in class conflict and social unrest with established institutions. But that was never its intention, I suppose. It didn't bode well either that the most the onlookers could muster in response to the intervention was polite applause; that the male conference organiser who resumed proceedings immediately after No Pretence's exit didn't even make the gesture of offering the mic to a female; or that the same guy's misjudged comment about it "all being planned" was the only acknowledgement that the "interruption" had even happened.

Beyond the confines of that room, however, the intervention has certainly been able



to provoke a reaction. If at first the intervention received applause from most, if not all, of the anarchist audience, since then the response seems to have fallen into two camps. Firstly, there are those individuals or representatives of various feminist and anarchist groups who have applauded the action as long overdue. They echoed the sentiment that women in the anarchist movement have not been spared sexist behaviour from men (and other women). The second camp, which we will examine in more detail later, is made up of those, including some of the conference organisers, who have predictably rejected the comparisons drawn between mainstream society and the anarchist movement.

Unfortunately, both sets of responses fail to distinguish between the No Pretence statement and the accompanying video. The latter, which has sadly proved the most enduring talking point since the con-

ference, features a stark comparative look at male domination of political activity and the persistence of traditional gender roles in the photo albums of liberal democracy and the anarchist movement respectively. The sort of facile finger pointing at overt gender hierarchies in which the No Pretence video indulges is not without its place (after all, if it creates a space in which we can vent our frustrations with the gendered society we all experience daily, either within the movement or beyond, it can be considered a useful exercise in and of itself). This is especially true at a conference which did tend to give primacy to the issue of class struggle and thus tend (whether unintentionally or otherwise) to accept agency to lie with the male factory worker.

Unfortunately though, this finger-pointing is not without its pitfalls either. The preoccupation with obvious sexism draws attention away from the crucial point: that

is, the relationship between sexism and social domination in a capitalist society. It is this relationship that should be scrutinised if we are to understand the truly incipient forms of sexism embedded in our social relations. A case in point: No Pretence far too easily cried "Oppression" when they misheard a heckler from the audience: "Are you going to dance, sexy?" It has since been revealed (and I can confirm first hand), that the line was actually "Are you a dance act? Diversity!"; a remark not on the gender of those storming the stage, but a reference to the winning act of Britain's Got Talent, who chose a similarly black-hood/concealed-face outfit for their popular audition. While occurrences of overt sexism are not unthinkable also in anarchist circles, real oppression will come much more subtly than that.

If anarcha-feminists are trying to tackle a feudal form of sexism, where women are actively prevented from participating in



political society by a ruling class of men, they are attacking a straw man. The particular form that capitalist patriarchy, or patriarchal capitalism, takes is of a more structural, indirect kind. Capitalism, ironically, is based on the (liberal) principles of freedom and equality. Only when we are free and equal can we sell our labour power for survival – it is the basis of a class society. Capitalist patriarchy is not shaped by direct exploitation of women, obvious discrimination and domination. It is more subtle, and therefore more persistent, than that. We should not ask of society, and its representation in the anarchist movement, a liberal awareness of feminist issues, gender inequality and positive discrimination. I'd much rather hear the speeches of feminist men than sexist women.

To be fair to No Pretence, they have recognised this themselves, when they write that “hierarchical social relations cannot be reduced to personal insults or behaviour. Sexism thrives upon subtle and intangible processes which make gender domination and exploitation endemic.” But the vocabulary of gender “exploitation” nonetheless tends towards outdated understandings of sexism (under capitalism) as analogous to similarly misled concepts of class as a crude slave vs. master relationship.

Earlier waves of radical feminism adopted an anti-capitalist position based on the asymmetrical way in which capitalist economics impose value on traditionally gendered social roles and divisions of labour. Today, the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, one of the more contemporary radical feminists to which the No Pretence statement proudly alludes, has paved the way for just one of the many more sophisticated lines of analysis that have been developed in more recent years in response to the onset of the advanced global capitalism we know today. The body of radical research that emerged from Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, for example, based as it is around the physical and psychological violence inflicted by the new digital industries of the unregulated US-Mexican border zone upon their increasingly feminised labour force, is a stark reminder that more sophisticated critiques of the interstices between class, gender and production – traditional un-

derstandings of which are now blurred – are required if we are to unearth the indirect structures that underlie to sexism in society.

Likewise, today we are faced with much more complicated forms of social control, with liberal society adopting women quotas for representation in public life, positive discrimination embedded in employment legislation and formal equality of opportunity. Does this make modern capitalist society anti-sexist? No! But at the heart of an anarchist feminism must be the understanding that capitalist exploitation is structured in a more complex manner. If future No Pretence actions are to be taken seriously they should refrain from seeking a liberal response by insinuating that more female participation in anarchist platforms would in any way constitute a rejection of capitalist patriarchal forms of domination.

## **Capitalist patriarchy is not shaped by direct exploitation of women, obvious discrimination and domination**

But there is perhaps an even more compelling lesson to be learnt from No Pretence's use of sensationalist visual material which, as I have demonstrated, might have detracted from, rather than reinforced, their more astute accompanying statement. It seems to me that the use of such a montage betrays a certain naivety as to the response of a movement that, outside of radical feminist spheres, is largely indifferent to and comparatively unsophisticated in its analysis of gender politics (when compared to other Western European countries, for example). Indeed, it has been all too easy for those who are reluctant to engage with No Pretence's proposition, for whatever motive, to dismiss the

intervention based on the (fair?) assertion that the examples used by No Pretence to illustrate sexist behaviour in anarchist circles were selective and misleading. The fact that the intervention has given way to this sort of refutation is disappointing, but not particularly dangerous in itself. Conversely, that criticisms on these grounds have proven to be so easily and widely accepted/acceptable has in turn allowed far more sinister comments to creep into the debate relatively unnoticed, under the guise of springing from objections similar to those that dismissed the video as unrepresentative.

Some anarchists have suggested, for example, that the group should have brought feminism to the discussion table during the conference group sessions, rather than set their own. Comments such as this prove that while the video was perhaps a mistake for the group, covering up was certainly the right thing to do. It does not matter whether No Pretence are men or women, masking up was an adequate way to anticipate the response from the conference organisers: that the anarchy-feminists should have brought their opinions to the available structures of the conference. This to me was the truly sexist response: the suggestion that a feminist critique of patriarchal hierarchy could be adequately addressed – and thereby recuperated – within the constraints of facilitated discussion on anarchism, movement, and class.

Summing up, it seemed to me that the anarchy-feminist intervention was held back by a pseudo-radical proposition: that anarchism is opposition to hierarchy in its amalgamated multiplicity; i.e. anti-capitalism + anti-racism + anti-sexism + anti-homophobia + etc = anarchism. The intervention seemed to say that ‘you can't be an anarchist without being a feminist’. Maybe they had it the wrong way round: ‘you can't be a feminist without being an anarchist’ would be a radical slogan based on the recognition of capitalist patriarchy. Sexual liberation can only be achieved in freedom!

## what next?

We are now accepting proposals for articles to be published in the next issue. Please send us your ideas and comments.

Also, we recently had our website hacked and are hoping to restore its full content soon. However, as the print edition is our priority, please be patient!

Issue 8 of Shift Magazine will be published in January 2010..

Thank you,

Shift Editors.

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