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The final issue

M31 AND BLOCKUPY: A SUMMER OF PROTEST IN GERMANY

PRIVILEGE AND TRANSFORMATIVE POLITICS

REGROUPMENT ON THE LEFT



September '12

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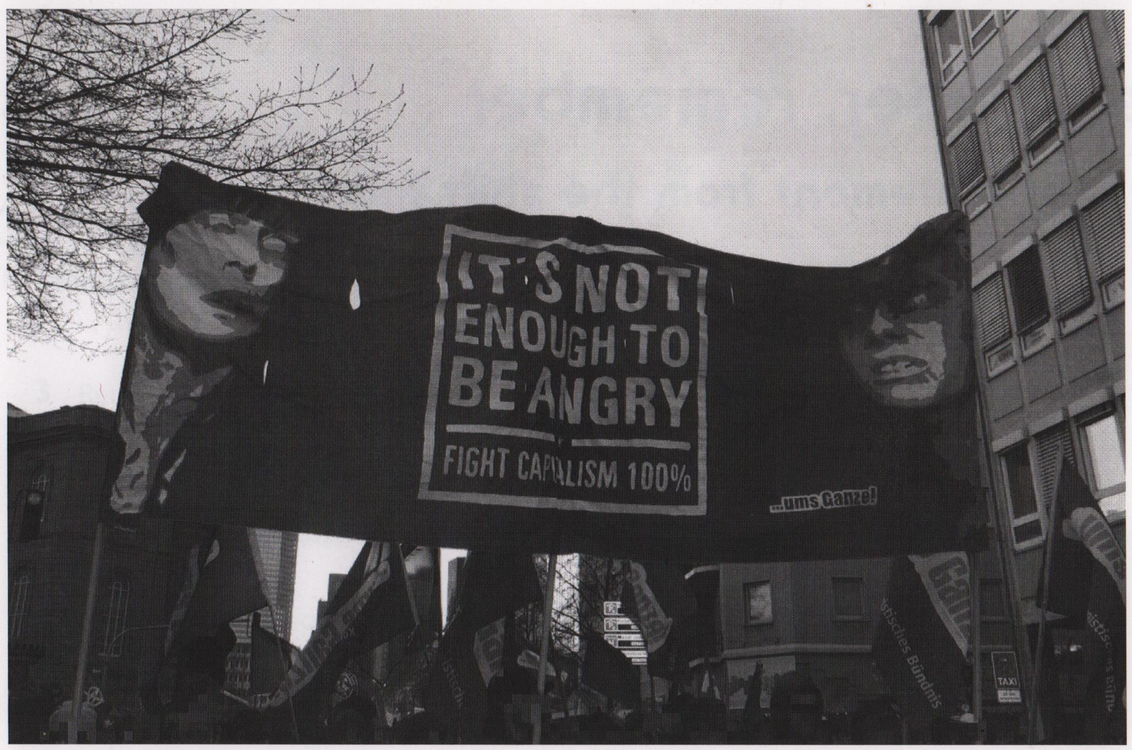
remember, remember

a final statement from the shift team

Shift's semi-regular 'Remember, Remember' feature was conceived as a chance for reappraisals of past political events, projects and social movements. In our last issue we want to use this space to take a look back at our own project, evaluate our own successes and failures and explain some of the reasoning behind our decision to end the project for now.

Shift was started as an attempt to intervene into the movements we found ourselves a part of, from the inside and in a comradely way. This intervention was always envisaged at two levels. Firstly, we wanted to create a space for individuals and groups to explore or critique specific analyses, ideas, practices or strategies relevant to our movements, especially those that we as editors felt were particularly exciting or problematic. Secondly, in a political scene lacking somewhat in the mechanisms for developing shared analyses and perspectives, we saw Shift's aim of encouraging a climate of debate and reflection among radicals as an intervention in itself. The motivation behind the project has always been to contribute to the on-going development of a socially relevant and politically vibrant anti-capitalist movement committed to challenging both the state and capital, while also refusing to promote non-emancipatory politics. For us, a space for asking difficult political questions and for exploring new ideas or finding new relevance in old ones has a crucial role to play in this process. And so Shift, with its emphasis on publishing accessible yet challenging and rigorous yet engaging material, was born.

Over 5 years and 15 issues we've featured material based around many different groups, events and debates within the movement. Many of our early contributions were levelled at forms of anti-capitalism that failed to recognise the social nature of capital or which, implicitly or otherwise, were supportive of national borders, population control or austerity-based politics (before austerity became the touchstone of a new political programme of the state!) We also advocated for a shared politics between what some argued were antithetical manifestations of radical left activity, by highlighting the common anti-capitalist and anti-statist foundations of the No Borders and Climate Camp movements. Where relevant, we published material from prominent movement-oriented theorists such as John Holloway, Werner Bonefeld, Michael Hardt and Alberto Toscano; and from the radical left in other parts of the world - for example, a number of translations from the German non-dogmatic left (including the one in this issue on the M31 and Blockupy mobilisations and the former's 'international anti-national' ori-



entation). We also engaged with the education struggles of 2010-2011, the potentials and aftermath of M26 (the TUC 'March for the Alternative' held on 26th March 2011), and the riots of August 2011. Our recent series on lifestyle politics has received attention in different parts of the movement, in particular within the Radical Routes housing co-operative network and has inspired a series of discussions in Bristol. And Inga Scathach's piece on Popular Education remains an important and relevant intervention today.

Our articles have been reprinted in mobilising magazines, books and translated into several languages including German, Latvian and Finnish. The editorial team have presented and hosted discussions and interventions at Climate Camps, No Border camps, independent cinemas, universities and anarchist bookfairs. As we come to the end of our project, demand for our printed magazine is still rising and our website is receiving more visits than ever. We feel proud of creating a space for critical reflection on current practice and arguing for the contribution that an anti-authoritarian, Marxian-inspired politics can make in a period characterised by political stagnation within the Left in general, the increased marginality of radical politics and a resultant retreat into subcultural activity and uncritical action-ism. Despite, or more accurately because of, the recent upsurge in political struggle across the globe, we feel that continued commitment to the on-going revitalisation of the anti-authoritarian left is as vital as ever.

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The motivations that have animated Shift throughout its life remain important to us as editors. Much as we've always been excited by the conversations that readers have struck up with us at bookfairs and social centres over the years, we were touched to read the many messages of support that we received at the news of the project's closure (and tickled pink by the trolls on Indymedia). They've been a great reward for our hard work and an affirmation that the debates Shift has had the privilege of hosting must continue. Despite all this, Shift is coming to an end in the current moment for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons are personal, our life situations have changed and running a print and online magazine with a small team and an even smaller budget is a taxing and challenging endeavour at the best of times. Whilst maintaining a print presence in an increasingly digital world certainly has its place, it also has drawbacks: it is intensive in time, makes it difficult to be responsive and relevant, and, for the size of audience for which we are publishing, far from financially sustainable. Meanwhile, just as the political landscape has changed significantly since we began this project, so too have our political perspectives shifted. Whilst at times divergence among the editorial group has led to a creative tension within the project, it has also led in other moments to inconsistency in editorial choices. We leave Shift to dedicate our time to a variety of projects, some theoretical in orientation and others based on organising. Although Shift may return at some point in the future, either in the same format or as something different, we are hoping to take the politics and spirit of the project into our new endeavours in the near future.

As our project comes to an end we have had some time to reflect on our experience of running a UK-based, movement-oriented publication. The years of Shift's lifetime have largely corresponded with a low period for the Left, including the radical left, in the UK. With the dwindling of the anti-globalisation movement and no reverse in the decomposition of the organised working class, for example, during this period the Camp for Climate Action and the No Borders network were two of the few spaces for sustained and vibrant anti-capitalist organising within the UK. These were therefore a strong focus of our project. Of course, many other groups were active in this period, as a glance over the various newsletters and action bulletins of the period will confirm. However, the relative fragmentation of these groups - both internally and vis-a-vis one another - along with a general tendency towards actionism over strategy and movement-building meant that they were not generating the sorts of debates that Shift was most interested in hosting. Indeed, at times it was difficult to find content that fitted our criteria of being analytical, evaluative, polemical or theoretically informed and of contributing to the development of a socially relevant and politically vibrant anti-capitalist movement committed to challenging both the state and capital, while also refusing to promote non-emancipatory politics.

These challenges were compounded by (and in no doubt resulted from) a reluctance from some parts of the anarchist and activist world to engage in public debate and disagreement and the difficulty of finding writers on certain topics (we often mused that a writing group might have been more appropriate a project). These factors led us at times down more obscure angles and away from the concerns and experiences of large parts of the audience we were meant to be writing for. This didn't help claims against us as a group of aloof pseudo-academics that were not 'real activists'. Alongside charges of being unengaged outsiders, many of our articles were not accepted in the comradely spirit of critique in which they were written. We made enemies and lost potential political allies through the publication of some of our articles on topics such as climate change, Palestine and Indymedia.

"we've found it particularly difficult to navigate the delicate balance between addressing the questions already circulating within 'the movement', and challenging the latter to look beyond itself for inspiration"

This said, we are willing to admit that despite these aims, at times our material has been overly polemical. What is more, in some cases we have also slipped, unwittingly or too quickly, into glib or cynical criticism. The latter denigrates the worth of the sort of constructive critique and questioning, aimed at challenging ourselves to do better, that is so vital to healthy, ambitious and vibrant political movements. Undoubtedly there's been an element here of overcompensation for an exaggerated lack of critique in the movement. Perhaps also our insistence on challenging sloppiness and resignation have, ironically, played into exactly the defeatist tendencies that they were intended to confront (tendencies that, after all, are the product of the historic crisis of the left); and, despite ourselves, had a dispiriting rather than a rallying effect. Shift's engagement with the Occupy movement, for example, could have fallen prey to this shortcoming. On one hand, our challenge to Occupy's accommodation of conspiracy theory-based politics remains an important intervention. On the other hand, we were slow to balance this with discussion of the movement's achievements and innovations, and to recognise that, emerging as they do from contradictory social relations, radical movements will always carry such contradictions with them.

Nonetheless, the strong hostility that Shift has sometimes experienced has amounted in some cases to a damaging anti-intellectualism: whereby political interventions are not seen as legitimate parts of movement but rather as external, less legitimate forms of political activity. On this point, we agree wholeheartedly with Tabitha and Hannah Bast-McClure when, in their article in this issue of Shift, they point out that intellectual activity has somehow – and so very mistakenly – become branded a tool of oppression rather than a weapon of emancipatory politics. As well as working on Shift all of our editors have been involved in other capacities with many of the groups, initiatives and areas of organisation that we have published about. However, we feel that demonstrating 'activist credentials' should not be a necessity for arguments to be taken seriously.

Another question that has surfaced perennially when making editorial decisions has been that of who exactly we are addressing through the project. What exactly is the movement in which we have sought to intervene? Whilst inspired by Marxian politics our work was not aimed at existing socialist groups but rather at groups from the anarchist and 'activist', direct-action tradition. At times of high creativity and traction, the movement came to resemble exactly that, a movement (or at least the fuzziness of its boundaries became less problematic, and more of a creative tension of movement); but in periods of stagnation or lesser coherence, the question of who we were addressing – and with what purpose – became more problematic. Particularly during such periods, we've wondered, variously, whether an anarchist movement even existed, whether we were writing for an imagined audience, or whether we'd slipped into addressing a constituency inspired by different politi-



cal traditions and aims (and with different historical baggage) than our own. Again, in times of stagnation, we found it particularly difficult to navigate the delicate balance between addressing the questions already circulating within 'the movement', and challenging the latter to look beyond itself for inspiration (with the latter sometimes being conservatively conceived, by ourselves as much as others, as an external imposition or as intellectual vanguardism). Facing thorny issues such as these should by no means be reason to give up on projects with similar aims as Shift. They merely highlight some of the challenges that movement-oriented magazines inevitably encounter.

Finally, as with other projects with which we're involved and those we see around us, Shift has also felt the humbling and disorienting effect wrought by a changed political landscape in the wake of the upsurge in struggle, nationally and globally, since 2010-11. As with the other projects with which we're involved, Shift has had its assumptions and ambitions starkly challenged. We've witnessed the birth of a new chapter of struggle. And with this new chapter has come new political actors, new political forms and new infrastructures. When the student movement kicked off, for example, its debates found expression not in the pages of Shift or other veterans of the anarchist publishing scene, but instead in an explosion of new platforms and voices, some appropriately ephemeral, others more lasting. Faced with this new terrain, Shift has made some first steps to adapt, to make ourselves relevant, to reach new audiences. Increasingly though we've felt that our continued engagement with the politics we've sought to promote via Shift might be better channelled through different vehicles. It's not that a project like Shift is not capable of adapting (and of becoming stronger for it), simply that Shift's current editors are ready to move on and to allow new projects to flourish. These considerations surely chime strongly with John Holloway and Michael Hardt's discussion, featured in this issue, of the respective roles of habit and institution-building versus invention and subversion. The 'Experiments in regroupment' series featured in this issue, in which we interview some of the new groupings that have emerged since the dust has settled on 2010-11, is evidence that these questions of regroupment and continuity are being taken up by the movement.

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Ultimately, we are proud of what we have achieved with Shift and pleased to be quitting while we're ahead. We believe we've instigated some important debates, suggested interesting new avenues for others and, perhaps, helped steer still others away from dodgy terrain. We hope we've been a strong advocate for an anti-authoritarian, Marxian-inspired politics and a reasonable and principled voice in several of the debates we've seen in our corner of the left over the past few years. Above all, we've enjoyed it, good, bad and ugly. We'd like to thank all our writers, artists, distributors, supporters, readers and even our trolls – it's been a blast!

The Shift Editors

...ums Ganze! (translation by Stefan Köhler)

we haven't even started yet!

on the state of anti-capitalist protest in germany in the summer of 2012

The following article is a translation of a German text written as an evaluation of the recent M31 and 'Blockupy' mobilisations in Germany. Its author, the ...ums Ganze! alliance, was one of the key organisers of the M31 initiative, which is an attempt – via an initial international day of action on 31st March – at co-ordinating action against capitalism across Europe. The M31 network includes the ...ums Ganze! alliance and the anarcho-syndicalist FAU (Free Workers' Union) from Germany, anti-fascist groups in Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands and groups from the Ukraine and Russia. The day of action was also supported by organisations such as the Spanish CNT and the Solidarity Federation in Britain who picketed businesses profiting from the British governments Workfare scheme on the same day.

Shift decided to translate and publish this article to help continue the discussions which the M31 initiative has begun, further discussions around the opportunities and difficulties of international organising and bring out some of the differences between the M31 day of action and Blockupy. In particular, we wanted to highlight the authors' vision for the emergence, on a European-wide scale, of an anti-capitalist movement based on a radical 'international antinational' perspective of the crisis: that is, a perspective critical of nationalist or social democratic responses to the crisis (for an important theoretical contribution to the development of such a perspective, see Shift's translation of the text 'International Antinationalism!', authored by the 'Just Do It!' working group of AntiFa AK Cologne, available at: http://shiftmag.co.uk/?p=603). We believe that such an orientation could significantly strengthen the UK anti-austerity movement. With its strong focus on public sector cuts and reforms - and with internationalist gestures largely remaining limited to statements or acts of solidarity with movements elsewhere - the latter's 'official' (TUC-led) face, at the very least, has so far lacked such an outward orientation grounded in a joined up analysis of global crisis.

The text was published in German in August 2012.

Until spring, everything seemed to be just the way it has always been. While thousands of people in Spain and Greece took to the streets to protest the biggest austerity program since World War II, the German Bild Zeitung [a populist, conservative German tabloid - the translator] unabashedly agitated against the 'bankrupt Greeks'. Moreover, the German chancellor, Merkel, even demanded the right to intervene in matters of fiscal policy of states that receive EU aid, while the foreign minister, Guido Westerwelle, implored the Greek government to 'do their homework'.

This newly instigated German chauvinism has been shored up by the domestic pact between labour and capital, led by the Social Democratic Party (SPD), who supported authoritarian austerity measures against the 'southern European good-for-nothings', along with the unions, whose outreach of solidarity usually ends at the German border. However, the pan-European day of action 'M31' in late March and the 'Blockupy' protests in May boldly opposed this development with heavy protest. Both M31 and Blockupy strongly criticized the German handling of the crisis in the Eurozone. Further, they emphasized that neither financial crises nor authoritarian austerity measures are inevitable natural phenomena; rather, they have much more to do with the capitalist excess that has historically been a permanent crisis for the largest part of the world population. With this critique, a couple of thousand people went out on M31 and during Blockupy to protest for a better, more solidary society beyond capitalism. Despite the different results of both events, they might mark the beginning of a new, more political and critical perception of the crisis for many people, entailing a challenge to the dominant discourse of Germany being the 'winner' of the crisis, and its justification for inaction.

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Clearly, we are, as of yet, far from establishing an intelligent anti-capitalist counter hegemony. Much too often, coarse criticism is directed towards the greedy bankers and fat cats and not against structural problems of capitalism. Against this

background, M31 and Blockupy offered different answers: that is, for emancipatory perspectives beyond state, nation, and capital. M31 was conceived as a pan-European, locally organised day of action with a clear anti-capitalist agenda. In Frankfurt, M31 peaked in a demonstration [Frankfurt is Germany's main financial hub and thus a symbolic place for anti-capitalist protest – the translator]. We, as the ...ums Ganze! alliance, made up of over 10 groups from across Germany, tried to scandalise both the German doctrine of austerity-based policies and neoliberal concepts of economic order. Our most important goals as organizers were to have ... ums Ganze!'s anti-capitalist and anti-national position publicly discussed in the context of the Eurocrisis; and to demonstrate solidarity with the Greek people who have been affected by the austerity measures. It worked. In preparation for the day of action, we agreed on five common goals with the Krisenbuendnis Frankfurt (Crisis Alliance Frankfurt) and the FAU (Free Workers' Union), both of whom were signatories to the initiative. Firstly, the protests were to have an anti-capitalist, anti-national, anti-statist, self-organised, and inclusive character. Our second demand was to transcend the national limitation of crisis protest. The latter will be a political process in the proper sense. But it is also one that calls for new structures and forms of actions. By establishing a network together with activists from other countries with whom we share strategic goals and a strategic repertoire, the recent protests were a first step in this direction. What these agreed goals meant in practice was a strong rejection of both the German government – in its self-appointed role as European taskmaster – and the European Central Bank (ECB), with its technocratic project to raise the competitiveness of European capitalism at the expense of the working and the unemployed alike.

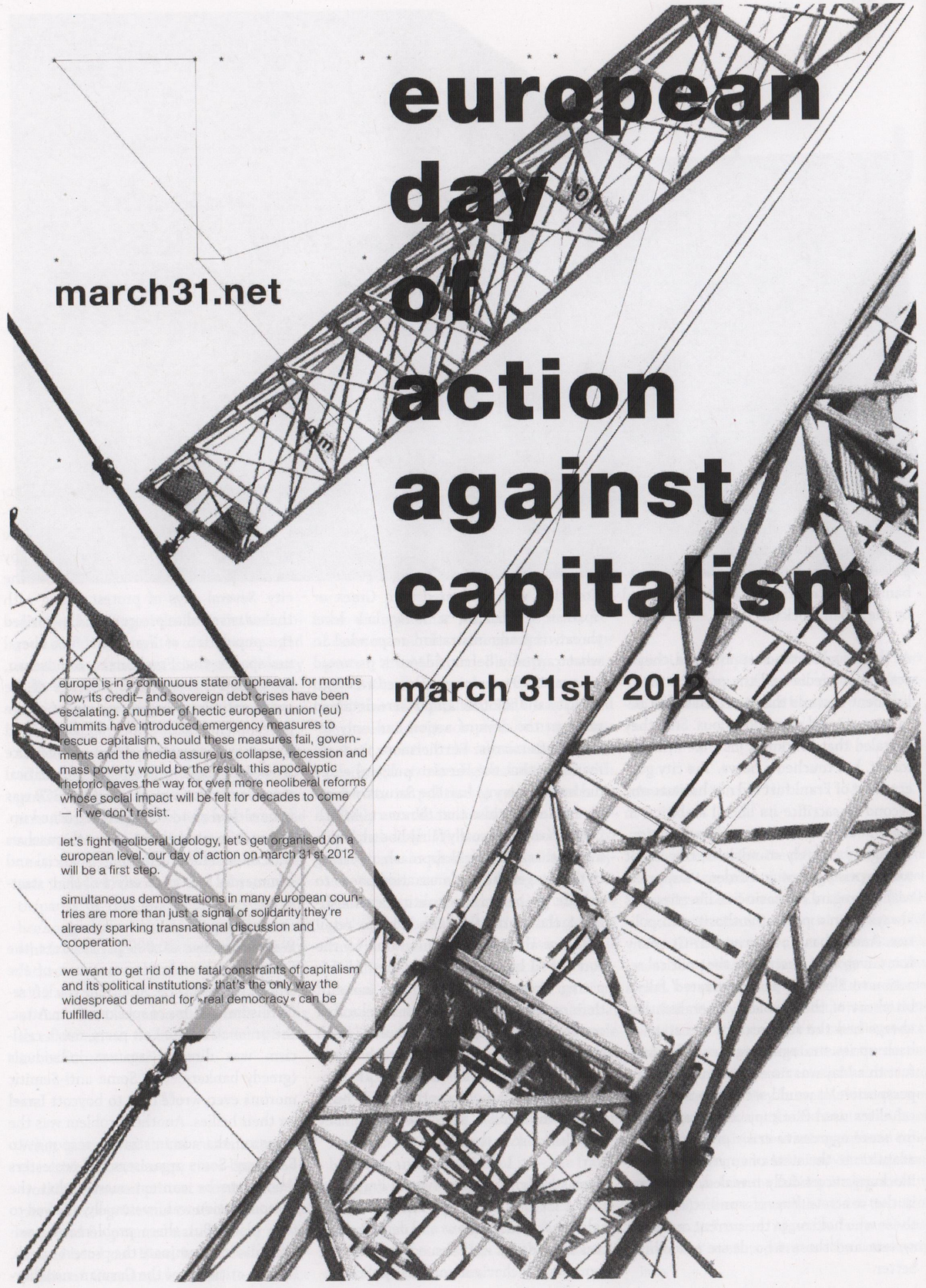
It was important for us to present a perspective for a better life beyond state, nation and capital. What we did not expect, however, was the positive reaction across Europe around the day of action. In Germany, many groups, from Flensburg to Munich, followed our lead and called for protest. Further, people in more than 30 cities all over Europe participated in rallies and demonstrations: for example, in Athens, Milan, Kiev, Utrecht, Zagreb, and Vienna, in many Spanish cities and even in New York and Mexico City. Some of these events just had symbolic character, but still, the M31 actions succeeded in establishing a tangible political reference point for the crisis. For us, this response indicates that, after two decades of neoliberal redistribution, there is a widespread desire to express general criticism against capitalism beyond the established forms of representation. For this reason as well, we would evaluate M31 as success that did not need to be assessed by the number of smashed windows, but rather by its role in promoting a rebirth of popular anti-capitalist protest in Germany. Still, the media reports were largely negative, portraying the demonstration as a largely Black Block protest. Given this context, the behaviour of the media and the political establishment towards M31 was, even by their bourgeois standards, dishonest and cynical: while the effects of German-European crisis politics is social devastation in southern Europe, while people in Spain and Greece die because neither they nor the state can afford public healthcare, M31 was depicted as violent rioting just because some symbolic windows were broken – at a Jobcentre, an employment agency, a government immigration unit, a police station, and a bridal shop. Indeed, as the Blockupy days of action approached, the state and the media sensationalised about an unpredictable political threat in Frankfurt.

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In contrast to M31, Blockupy was not an overtly anti-capitalist form of protest. The Blockupy alliance, especially the Interventionist Left [a coalition of groups from across Germany, most famous for its efforts to create a pluralistic yet radical mobilising platform as part of the 2007 G8 summit protests in Heiligendamm. For more, read Red Pepper's excellent feature: www.redpepper.org.uk/moving-against/ – the ed.], was aimed at all those who wanted to protest against the policy of the German federal government and of the Troika. Additionally, Blockupy made use of mass mobilisation and openly cooperated with unions and parties from the left. We, as the ...ums Ganze! alliance, again participated in the protest, this time with a designated anti-capitalist space, featuring newspapers, flyers, and workshops about 'social-chauvinism' [see Endnote 1 below for an explanation of this term – the ed.], 'international anti-nationalism' and the wretched hopelessness of left reformism. Due to repressive police action, we were only able to carry out about half of this programme, but we are still quite satisfied with the results.

Blockupy was intended to become a kind of anti-capitalist Wendland – the long-time heartland of Germany's strong, non-violent direct action anti-nuclear movement – in Frankfurt. However, the German government's reaction was unprecedented. In May, the city authorities of Frankfurt and the state government of Hesse, the state in which Frankfurt is situated, decided to ban all planned public events that were to be held as part of Blockupy. Several thousand police officers were brought into the city, all protest was criminalised, usually justified in the media by referring to the M31 'riots'. Thus, Blockupy revealed the fragility of liberal commitments to civil liberties when faced

> ***"the political elites used Blockupy as a preparation for more aggressive crisis protests, as an adaption to the state of emergency."***



"We need to recognise and confront the small-scale and fragmented nature of our movements head on"

with meaningful popular protest: several courts legitimated the ban on protest in the city, arguing that protest might infringe upon the basic right of private property, especially for the inner-city bankers and traders who might be affected by the urban blockade.

As the actual blockade approached, the reactions of media and the political establishment towards the perceived threat became more and more ridiculous. Still, they revealed that Blockupy, just like M31 before it, has touched a nerve. The city government of Frankfurt did not hesitate one second to sacrifice its liberal ambition in favour of a police-state like reaction. Though absolutely scandalous, this is not too surprising. Law and order at any price, without regard for basic civil liberties, has always been a part of authoritarian politics. And it has now arrived in Germany too. Given this, describing the political reaction to Blockupy as 'exaggerated' falls a bit short of the problem. Liberalism has always had the full force of the state to back up its strategic assets – and Frankfurt this May was no exception. From this perspective, it would seem that the political elites used Blockupy as a preparation for more aggressive crisis protests, as an adaption to the state of emergency. What Blockupy successfully revealed, therefore, is the concrete line of conflict between those who hold on to the current capitalist system and those who desire something better.

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From a position of ideological critique, the reactions of the German administration in Frankfurt are very interesting. In a situation that was, compared with Greek or Spanish conditions, a fairly low level threat, the administration responded in what can only be considered a paranoid manner: 500 people were denied access to the city and another 1,500 were detained prior to the days of action and only released afterwards. Furthermore, it is remarkable that the Hessian political elites did not only try to ban the Saturday demonstration, but also that the courts, which in Germany are usually fairly liberal, legitimated this anti-liberal approach, referring to the danger the demonstration posed to private property. The political establishment, the courts, the banks and the retail industry alike feared limitations to the conduct of business in Frankfurt. Anticipating violence, the banks gave some of their employees time off and relocated certain operations to the suburbs. With the media gladly picking up on this fear, anti-capitalist activists were quickly rendered as violent mobsters that would hunt down white-collar professionals if they were let loose in the city.

Consistently, the police turned Frankfurt into a fortress. Although the courts later ruled that all detentions and denials of access to the city were issued illegally, the repressive behaviour of the police remained in force throughout the days of action and they continued to detain activists. Despite this, and thanks to the defiance of hundreds of people, many smaller protests occurred throughout the city. Several days of protest, along with the massive police presence, also polarised the population of Frankfurt. The liberal newspaper the Frankfurter Rundschau, for example, changed its coverage of the event entirely: it began in support of the government reaction but gradually shifted to a more bourgeois criticism of the police strategy. Despite all of this, the critical mass needed for a blockade of the ECB was not reached as too few people turned up. Meanwhile, at least the police themselves shut down Frankfurt's main financial and commercial area as an effect of their strategy.

With more than 30,000 participants, the Saturday demonstration was one of the largest in some time. Alongside the left reformist reductions of speakers from Attac, the unions and the Left party, much criticism was directed against individuals (greedy bankers etc.). Some anti-Semitic morons even wrote calls to boycott Israel on their bellies. Another problem was the focus on the administrative response to Blockupy. Some organisers and protesters seemed to be content merely that the demonstration was, eventually, allowed to take place. But these problematic positions did not dominate the protest march. Rather, criticism of the German, neoliberal-styled handling of the crisis in the Eurozone stood in the center of the protest and most demonstrators showed solidarity with those affected by the German-imposed austerity programmes.



More than 5,000 people also demonstrated in an explicitly anti-capitalist bloc: organised by the Interventionist Left and ...ums Ganze!, this bloc borrowed from the strategic repertoire and outward appearance associated with the black bloc, yet was inclusive, colourful and vibrant. Participants of this bloc countered the police's aggressive tactics with good humour, which we consider to be a positive sign for future projects together. In sum, both M31 and Blockupy put the political aspect of the crisis back onto the agenda. This is an achievement we must seek to replicate in our future actions.

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What is required in the current stage of the crisis is bottom-up, cross-border networking between protest movements. We need to recognise and confront the small-scale and fragmented nature of our movements head on. Here, in the Federal Republic of Germany, we want to embrace the dialogue that has been opened between us and the those groups who supported the M31 and Blockupy protests and with all those interested in a radical criticism of capitalism. M31 has proved that we can forge complex alliances within a short period. In the near future, we want to strengthen interregional networks with a variety of political groups in order to quickly coordinate activities on an international scale. We would be delighted to participate in shared international projects and we are always interested in discussions, no matter where. Our collective goal should be the delegitimisation of the current crisis politics and crisis analysis and the development of a social and intellectual counter-hegemony made up of all those affected by it on an international level. We are not megalomaniac: the scale of our ambition is determined by the almost permanent nature of capitalism itself. Our critique of current conditions, which refuses to be directed at anything less than the whole system [...ums Ganze! loosely translates to 'All of it! – the translator], will need to prove itself in the future. Clearly, there are as of yet few tangible alternatives to capitalism. But they do not just pop out of thin air, they are made in the political process.

...ums Ganze!, August 2012

Special thanks to Stefan Köhler for his hard work with the translation of this text, which was completed with editorial assistance from Josie Hooker.

ENDNOTES:

1. Social chauvinism is a term used on the German anti-authoritarian left. The definition provided here is a loose translation of the one given in a recent pamphlet on social chauvinism, produced by the 'Alliance against Racism and Social Chauvinism' (of which TOP, another of the groups in ...ums Ganze!, is part): 'social chauvinism' is the ideology of capitalist crisis. It promotes enmity against all those who do not fit the ideal type of an efficient, driven and motivated individual competing in the capitalist rat race. Its proponents stigmatise and exclude others as 'unproductive', 'lazy' or 'benefit cheats' in an attempt to cement their own utility for capital. 'Social chauvinism' denies the social origins and structural causes of poverty, presenting instead an image of social exclusion as resulting from a lack of individual aspiration. Its logic forecloses the thinking of alternatives to (national) economic competition and to the cult of business performance. Aggressive forms of 'social chauvinism' are (a populist) manifest across party lines.

Several attempts at regroupment of the Left have emerged within the last year here in the UK. As many of the anti-cuts, occupy and student groups that exploded onto the scene in 2010-11 have struggled to maintain momentum, 'Experiments in regroupment' is a series of interviews with some of the groups that have emerged from the wreckage. The interviews offer a brief introduction to the groups in question: looking at their origins, motivations, influences and ambitions and probing the political questions that their respective approaches raise. As Shift comes to an end, we wanted to put the spotlight on some projects that are just beginning.

We asked each group to respond in 500 words (no easy task) and some went over. We also asked some groups further questions of clarification. We decided to print each groups full responses despite the disparities in length.

experiments in regroupment #1

an interview with collective action

Why has your organisation formed?

As we state on the 'About Us' section of our website the Collective Action project aims to re-visit our anarchist communist political tradition and re-group and re-kindle our political action in relation to the challenges of the 21st century in a country located at the centre of the system of global capitalist hegemony. We also state that this focus on re-groupment is complemented with the aim of practicing and developing the approaches we advocate through our conduct as both militants and members of Collective Action. In other words, while critically assessing the historical experience of anarchist communism we look to further enrich our revolutionary theory through an ongoing involvement in the living struggle of classes. Moreover, future dialogue and interaction with like-minded groups and individuals from around the world will, over time, naturally inform and influence our international perspectives.

What are you hoping to organise around and how?

Launched on 1st May this year, Collective Action is a new association and, as yet, is relatively small in numbers. However, as we reject the concept of political vanguardism in favour of one of a leadership of ideas, by way of social insertion we seek to develop a strategy and tactics capable of building a strong, effective base for our anarchist communist ethos within the wider working class. In practical terms this will involve principled co-operation with diverse anti-authoritarian militants in conflicts as they ensue. Anarchists often speak of the need to nurture a new society of freedom within the shell of the old. For this vision to become reality a consistently pro-active approach to revolutionary struggle is imperative. We refer to this required process as building counter-power.

What are the differences between CA and Afed and Solfed? Does the UK need another anarchist membership organisation?

Simply put, Collective Action is a current within the anarchist communist movement seeking re-groupment. The Solidarity Federation, by contrast, is an anarcho-syndicalist union and, as such, has very little to do with our perspective. Acknowledgment of this fact, of course, implies no disrespect to SolFed whatsoever. CA emerged from the Anarchist Federation largely as a response to the latter's penchant for propagandism and apathetic attitude towards coherent organisation. In contradistinction to this our association has identified with Especifismo; the need for specifically anarchist organisation built around a unity of ideas and praxis. In order to carry our project forward a membership structure is essential.

Especifismo or "Specifism" refers to a organisationalist current within the anarchist tradition which is principally elaborated by the FARJ (Anarchist Federation of Rio de Janiero) but has its roots in the writings of Bakunin, Makhno and Malatesta (among others).



"we reject the concept of political vanguardism in favour of one of a leadership of ideas"

Specifists argue that a lot of the mistakes of activists result from a confusion of the social and political level. The social levels are those struggles that exist within the material and ideological framework of capitalism (bread-and-butter issues in layman terms). These are heavily determined by a wider cultural, economic and political framework that will cause them to ebb-and-flow, one example being the way that the ongoing financial crisis has provoked an acceleration of working class resistance in certain sectors and geographical areas. Anarchists need to find a way of engaging with these struggles in a way that relates directly to their existing composition and level of class consciousness. However anarchists also need to maintain their own coherent vision of an alternative society - anarchist communism. This is the political level. Strategically what results from this understanding of the political and social levels is a practice of "organisational dualism" where specifically anarchist groups (hence the term "specifism") with well defined positions of principle and operating under conditions of political unity at the political level intervene, participate within or seek to build popular movements at the social level. The objective of this intervention is not to "capture" or establish anarchist fronts but to create the correct conditions, by arguing for anarchist methods and ideas, for the flourishing of working class autonomy. This autonomy is the basis for working class counter-power and revolutionary change.

Specifism is a praxis that seeks to strike the balance between a healthy relationship of influence within the class and an ideologically coherent communist organisation, while rejecting the vanguardist approaches of Leninist groups. Many people associate these ideas solely with Makhno's "Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists" but they actually date from one of the first organisational documents of social anarchism - Bakunin's programme for the International Alliance of Socialist Democracy.

There has been debate in certain sections of the anarchist movement around the reasons why many of your members left the Anarchist Federation to found Collective Action. Could you explain some of the thinking be-

hind this?

We felt that there was no longer a space within the Anarchist Federation for the kind of fundamental reorientation that we were arguing for. Unfortunately many anarchists have been too long entrenched in this cycle of political activism to look beyond this as the only means of building anarchist communism. CA, in many ways, was a search for a new critical space in which developing ideas could breathe.

Following our formation there has been a great deal of hostility to the internal composition of our organisation which runs closely to the FARJ's model of "concentric circles," as well as our idea of an explicitly organisationalist approach. Both of these, wrongly we believe, were accused of being "vangaurdist" or "hierarchical". Our response, as indicated above, is to argue that these ideas have a long tradition within anarchism and are fully compatible with its principles.

"our association has identified with Especifismo; the need for specifically anarchist organisation built around a unity of ideas and praxis"

Even with its existing Aims and Principles there are many areas of the Anarchist Federation's activity that are very loose or ill-defined. We've pointed out before, for example, their propagation of the "workplace resistance group" without any following strategy for putting these into practice (or any analysis of how these relate to the existing composition of the class). The AFed's central idea of creating a "culture of resistance" also, we believe, confuses the social and political level and gives no clear guidance on practice at both a local or national level. It was this desire for coherence, as well as theoretical re-assessments that motivated us towards the formation of CA.

Many of the recent struggles that have emerged have not consciously identified with existing left wing traditions such as anarchism and socialism, do you think there is a future for an explicitly anarchist politics? In particular the anarchist movement which exists in the present.

We are neither on the left nor of it. Anarchist communism advocates the abolition of the state and capitalism in favour of common ownership of the means of life with production and consumption based on the principle, "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs." For such a society to succeed it must be based on the norms of direct democracy and horizontalidad, thus enabling personal autonomy to flourish within a framework of social equality. None of this bears any resemblance to the machinations of the left wing of capitalist management which strives only to replace one state apparatus with another. We forget our history at our peril. The tragic outcome of both the Russian and Spanish revolutions must constantly be borne in mind. The prevailing anarchist milieu continues to be a tremendous engine of ideas, but in many ways it is badly organised. Its future development and success, therefore, rests on redressing this imbalance as a matter of urgency.

The only way there can be a future for anarchist politics is in making anarchist ideas and methods a practical and coherent tool for organising workplaces, intervening in social struggles and empowering working class communities. Anarchism needs to recapture its traditional terrain of organising, what Bakunin referred to as, the "popular classes" and abandon the dead-end of activism. This means a fundamental re-assessment of what we do and what we hope to achieve. It also means returning, as Vaneigem would call it, to the politics of "everyday life". To put it bluntly, if your politics cannot relate and potentially organise around the problems and struggles of the twenty or so people you routinely meet through your day (and we don't mean "activist" friends and circles here, the people you ride the bus with, work with, live next to etc.) then you have no theory of social change. And to clarify, by this we do not mean watering down your politics or dissolving yourself into "community projects", rather it's about finding ways to radicalise those connections you have with existing communities to a point where they take on a specific political content - anti-capitalism. It is us, after all, who produce the wealth of this world and any social conflict needs to be waged on the basis of this fact and the need for re-appropriation of the collective product of our labour. Now this is, of course, incredibly difficult. But we'd argue that even minimal progress in this area would be a leap forward compared to even twenty of the best attended A-B marches or "spectacles". The tasks as we see it now, as Collective Action, is both to be making this argument to the wider movement, re-establishing our understanding and relationship to the wider class, as well as furnishing ourselves with an organisational theory and praxis suited to this task.

You can contact Collective Action on collectiveaction@mail.com and their website is http://www.anarchistcommunist.org/

experiments in reqroupment #2

an interview with anti-capitalist initiative

"The almost inevitable collapse of attempts to unite the left demands that we need to begin at the beginning."

What is the idea behind your project and what are it's political influences?

The Anticapitalist Initiative (ACI) is an attempt to bring together the new political activists who have been inspired by the Occupy movement, the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa, anti-austerity campaigns and the fractured groupings of the revolutionary left. We are making a conscious effort to take time to debate and discuss what politics we collectively wish to pursue. Instead of declaring a platform decided on by the initial supporters, we want to draw in a diverse range of views from across the movement. The Initiative currently has supporters who consider themselves communists, many from a Trotskyist tradition, as well as more libertarian traditions including anarchists and those who draw on Autonomism as a guide to action. Many in the movement will see the ACI as an attempt to set up a UK franchise of the French Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste, but this isn't accurate. We have much to learn from similar processes but we ideally want to circumvent the damaging dissolution of previous projects by not repeating the same mistakes. That means taking our time to consider where our movement is and through common work and discussion attempt to articulate a credible anticapitalist alternative.

Does the UK need another anti-capitalist initiative? What makes yours different?

We have had several anticapitalist initiatives in the UK in the last two decades; the larger projects were crushed by bureaucratic control of this or that group. For example, the Socialist Labour Party drew in many militants from the Great Miners Strike and the anti-Poll Tax movement, yet under Arthur Scargill and his supporters the possibility of a significant left force emerging in opposition to the Labour Party was lost. The almost inevitable collapse of attempts to unite the left demands that we need to begin at the beginning. From the very start of previous initiatives a bureaucratic and sectarian tumour slowly but surely killed those projects. We want to go a different way: the ACI is not the plaything of this or that Trotskyist grouping but an open space for all of us in the movement to create a new left. We are not urging the left to repeat previous initiatives with a few democratic tweaks; we are asking the left to question the basis of its politics, activities and ultimately its existence.

What makes the ACI stand out from previous initiatives is that we have prescribed no set outcome on where we will end up. The debate over what kind of organisation we need so that we can participate in struggles in a useful fashion is completely open. Some of us would like to see a new party emerge, others a network or a united front organisation. We hope to avoid making decisions too quickly with too little variety of opinion. Where previous initiatives were rashly defined, often by confused reformist politics, the ACI is more concerned with listening and learning first.

What are you hoping to organise around and how are you hoping to move beyond the current limitations of the Left?

The Initiative wants to organise spaces for those of us coming from the Marxist left to learn from the new movements, libertarian activists and from our shared experiences of struggles. Our current goals are to organise in campaigns to strengthen them but also to break down the barriers of mistrust of decades of factional separation and fighting. We will also be organising forums to debate the immediate problems the movement faces but also its strategic and political problems. The left has been stuck at a dead end for over 80 years by generalising the strategies and politics from an era of political retreat when the revolutionary processes unleashed by the the October Revolution were reversed. The best way to consider the Initiative is as a reboot for the revolutionary movement, not just a democratic upgrade.

You can contact Anticapitalist Initiative via their website http://anticapitalists.org

Tabitha and Hannah Bast-McClure

the poverty of privilege politics

"It is not woman's voice we should be seeking but feminist voice."

"Feminist voice is not one based on identity but rather on a shared transformative politics...[it] is a stance rather than a given"

Privilege. Now there's a word we are hearing a lot. The concept and finger-pointing of privilege is coming to increasingly concern us as a problem and a poor semblance within the alternative left. We feel not only embarrassed by the simplicity of this undisclosed and undefined overarching theory but concerned that it further leads a stagnant movement down more dire dead ends. And yet our disquiet is not because we believe interpersonal politics are less worthy of our attention, nor because we are without awareness and rage about the oppressive power structures within our lives and political milieus. We do not believe that these are minor details that can wait til after the revolution. Whilst we are currently organising what is suspiciously like a women's consciousness raising group, we dismiss those laughable and cringeworthy lists that have gone viral in the social networking world. These might appear as conflicting positions, but as we hope to explain, we do not find them so.

As mentioned, we are confronted with endless lists asking us to 'Check our Privilege.' We have encountered the 'heterosexual privilege checklist" the "cis privilege checklist" and the "able bodied checklist." (links to these example checklists are included in the Endnotes the article - the ed.) We think you get the picture? Soon we will be carrying around score cards wishing to be the most victimised person in the world. This sort of privilege scorekeeping is tallied in our everyday encounters but most often called out in a certain political context, such as a political meeting, discussion or lecture. We now are presented with the 'manarchist' who uses his male privilege taking up space in meetings. Taking up space is not seen as only about the amount a person of privilege speaks but often the language used. We see a growth in these subcultural movements in the UK of an adherence to a new political language and analysis with a centrality of privilege as an overarching ideology. We find an anti-intellectualism where both theorising and militancy are seen as a privilege in and of themselves, as if acting on the front line as WELL as analysis are only weapons of the oppressive rather than weapons of the oppressed. We find this dangerous because it evokes that the most 'oppressed' are helpless and weak, encourages a lack of activity and analysis away from 'make do and mend' circles, and further rarefies the notion of resistance.

Another vagary is the self-flagellating groups emerging that prop up a culture of shame. For example, recent workshops have emerged under the theme of 'Men dealing with their patriarchal shit.' Whilst we want individuals to examine, analyse and challenge their own behaviour in political terms these punkier than thou equal ops sessions reinforce the holier than thou attitude of the attendees....and the ones who could do with it rammed down their hairy throats wouldn't dream of attending. These examples of new emerging themes demonstrate that on one side of the coin you have a points based oppression outlook (we've made the complexities of power into a handy ticklist for you!) and on the other you have individualised guilt and self- victimisation (which is another way of re-focusing on the 'more privileged' ironically). This focus on the individual and self as the problem is a product of privilege leading us nowhere. It's a dead end. We feel a political lens of privilege is divisive and unhelpful when we are part and parcel of a system that already thrives on the division of the working classes, through gender, class and sexual oppression.

So how then do we divide these concepts so we neither become a self parodying shell of victim politics nor replicate the power structures we seek to destroy? How does this differ from an analysis of power? Does it permit spaces for movement and resistance? Or does it revert back to the activist quagmire of guilt, shame and stagnation? These are questions that should be discussed within our wider political groups.

We recognise the well meaningness of checking your privilege. We too understand that people are silenced not just as individuals but due to identities. However, we perceive wrong footed attempts to right this balance. In meetings we witness call outs where someone will announce that six men have spoken and no women. This is an attempt to expose the hidden subtleties of patriarchy and male dominance, and to empower women. We have never seen this work to readdress power relations. This call of male privilege may serve to quieten the six men who have spoken, but it does not give more voice to the silenced. More awkwardly, it is often uncomfortable for the women in the group who may feel, as we do in this scenario, an obligation to speak, but with it comes an unnatural sense of representation. The opposite usually takes place; a silencing of people rather than the growth of new conversations. One that is forced, fake and full of disdain. Whilst the next person, woman, is to speak but feels an artificial pressure of representation that we are supposed to be speaking on behalf of all women, from an identity as 'woman', and only as 'woman'. And when we, or she, speaks, it is of course as a woman within patriarchy and to a room where she is being observed and judged by the six men who have spoken, under a political male gaze. Because of these things, and more, we do not see these clumsy attempts moving any steps toward challenging sexist oppression. To do that we need first to acknowledge intersectionality of power, history and privilege. With a singular identification of privilege we reduce the myriad of power relations within the group to a straightforward visible one. We don't want a politics that reduces and simplifies power into an ideology of privilege. Intersectionalities of power, oppression and privilege need to be examined mixed with relations of capital. Analysing and pinpointing privilege to an obsessive extent in political circles can be demobilising as well as futile. But most damaging of all, these performances of privilege call out, mislead us into believing that challenging patriarchy within our interpersonal relations occurs within the formalities of a meeting and it is who speaks rather than what they say.

"to resist we must understand our power; the strength in our collective power rather than this frugal analysis of power where privilege divides us into mundane categories of oppression"

Because ultimately, it is not womans voice we should be seeking but feminist voice. A feminist voice is not one based on identity but rather on a shared transformative politics. A feminist voice is a stance rather than a given. As bell hooks reminds us; feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression. We suggest this will often be best realised through those most facing sexist oppression but also we are vigilant to note that not all oppressed are resisting, subverting or fighting this oppression, nor are those who seem to benefit in ways from it always or automatically in alignment with the oppressive forces. So where does that leave identity and privilege in the struggle for freedoms? Understanding politics through the lens of privilege is intrinsically entangled with identity politics. And, for reasons stated, we find identity politics a monolithic and restrictive way to understand the world. We are our identities but we are never just one identity, we are a complexity of them. And identities do not line up in a straightforward ABC of oppression, no matter how much the privilegists want them to. This just falls into binaries that we are attempting to escape from, or creates more. The queer movement challenges the notions of "men" and "women" yet seems to be opting instead for "cis" or "trans" giving new permanence and boundaries to our gender. This is not to downplay the struggles but we believe that these fixed linear positions are not just unhelpful but often false. Cis gender may not seem intrinsically a privilege to the women killed by domestic violence or childbirth. Nor male privilege to a gay Ugandan. The relationality of power has to be optimistically understood if we are to move beyond an idle determinism and singular identity code. But, also, to resist we must understand our power; the strength in our collective power rather than this frugal analysis of power where privilege divides us into mundane categories of oppression. We need to galvanise on our power as a class, as this class being fucked over by capital within all it's facets of everyday life. Rather than creating new prisons and new boxes to further tear ourselves to pieces within, we need to analyse and act with fluidity and creativity in terms of our intersectional identities in the kitchens, the bedrooms, the meeting spaces, the pubs and in the streets we demand to occupy.

Tabitha and Hannah Bast-McClure are engaged in the following crimes of passion; mostly together, but some as singular adventures – the Space Project (a radical education Space), as writers (latest article in "Occupy Everything: Reflections on Why its Kicking Off Everywhere), New Weapons Reading Group, various Queer ventures, Plan C, Footprint Worker's Co-operative, working with domestic violence perpetrators, parenting, and general Leeds/Redhills based agitation.

There will be a presentation and discussion, led by the authors, of the issues raised in this article at the upcoming Shift magazine 'Goodbye' party on Sunday 7th October in Manchester at 4pm. Full details can be found in the inside back cover of the magazine.

ENDNOTES:

1. The checklists mentioned in this article can be found at the following urls:

http://queersunited.blogspot.co.uk/2008/10/heterosexual-privilege-checklist.html

http://takesupspace.wordpress.com/

http://manchesterafed.wordpress.com/2012/03/09/how-not-to-be-a-manarchist/

experiments in regroupment #3

an interview with platypus london

"The Left is dead! Long live the Left!"

What's the idea behind the Platypus project?

At present the Marxist Left today stands in ruins. Platypus is a project for the self-criticism, self-education, and, ultimately, the practical reconstitution of a Marxian Left.

Platypus contends the Left suffers, as a result of the accumulated wreckage of intervening defeats and failures, from a very partial and distorted memory of its own history; and that at crucial moments the best work on the Left is its own critique, motivated by the attempt to escape this history and its outcomes. The Left is in such a grave state of decomposition that it has become exceedingly difficult to draft coherently programmatic social-political demands. At certain times, the most necessary contribution one can make is to declare that the Left is dead.

Hence, Platypus makes the proclamation, for our time: "The Left is dead! — Long live the Left!" — We say this so that the future possibility of the Left might live.

We take our namesake from the platypus, which suffered at its moment of zoological discovery from its unclassifiability according to prevailing science. We think that an authentic emancipatory Left today would suffer from a similar problem of (mis)recognition, in part because the tasks and project of social emancipation have disintegrated and so exist for us only in fragments.

We have organized our critical investigation of the history of the Left in order to help discern emancipatory social possibilities in the present, a present that has been determined by the history of defeat and failure on the Left. As seekers after a highly problematic legacy from which we are separated by a definite historical distance, we are dedicated to approaching the history of thought and action on the Left from which we must learn in a deliberately non-dogmatic manner, taking nothing as given.

How does the international aspect of Platypus influence your project? What challenges and possibilities does it open up?

We take the question of internationalism seriously and we do so through hosting the conversation at different cities, such as in Greece, Germany, Canada, US and UK. Through our reading group and public fora we try to raise the same issues in numerous contexts and thus build a continuous conversation through multiple locations. The similarities of the problems at an international scale faced by the Left are greater than what we might have expected. By our efforts to educate ourselves on the question of an international Left (and capitalism), through posing it in different concrete circumstances, we hope to provide a space for renewed debate and unexpected agreements. We try to clarify problems not only in specific locations but to understand what internationalism and solidarity could mean today. We hope to provide the Left with a platform on which it can clarify and transform itself. Platypus as a project, though it started in the US, was able to grapple with a problem that is: understanding the global defeat of the Left and the possibility for global human emancipation.

Whilst attending a talk hosted by Platypus in Berlin we heard the project described as a "pre-political" one. At what point might Platypus move to a more overtly political project?

The importance of hosting the conversation, as opposed to organizing debates or varying forms of activism, is due to platypus's self conception as a pre-political project. We don't seek to host debates but instead "curate conversations" in which the differences among various tendencies on the "Left" can be manifested and worked through. We hope to clarify the problems these differences raise, or at least identify unexpected agreements. The choice of a pre-political project is not merely a choice to abstain from politics, but rather, it is informed by what we recognize as a greater absence of politics, that is, the absence of radical democratic social transformation in our moment.

What is the #Occupy movement?



It has become clear that previous and current far Left political models are inadequate to the task at hand. What is required is hosting the conversation about what it means to be political in order to create the possibility for new political forms to emerge that are capable of posing the question of human emancipation. Platypus would dissolve itself once the possibility of more overtly political organization emerges. In the future, either Marxism will be forgotten or a political form will emerge that allows Platypus to dissolve itself.

What do you think the future of the Left here in the UK looks like?

We are an internationalist project, we contend the future of the British Left is dependent upon the future of an international emancipatory Left.

You can contact Platypus London at london@platypus1917.com and their website is http:// london.platypus1917.com

You can find out more about Platypus at http://platypus1917.org/

london@platypus1917.com

An exchange between Michael Hardt and John Holloway

creating commonwealth and cracking capitalism: a cross-reading (part 2)

"Revolt comes first but spontaneity is not enough. Rebellion must be organised in a revolutionary process."

What follows is the latter half of a two-part exchange between the authors regarding some common themes raised in their work. You can read the first part at http://shiftmag.co.uk/?p=596

June 2011

Dear John,

I think you're right that walking so closely together can sometime make us trip and stumble when reading each other. A kind of irritation arises when, after having agreed so much with the other's argument, we come across a point or argument that sticks out and that we can't accept. Part of our task here is to clear up the seeming conflicts that are merely due to misunderstandings or terminological differences (no small task) and clarify the important points on which we disagree.

I appreciate how much the term institution sits poorly with you and thus I am grateful that you work through it so tenaciously in your letter until you finally arrive on a formulation where we do, in fact, agree. You can accept a mandate to institutionalise if that is always accompanied with a simultaneous process of subversion. Yes, institutionalise and subvert – a good motto we can share.

But, of course, our views of this do differ so let me return to them a bit more. As you note, Toni and I come to the discussion of institution from our preoccupation with the need for organisation. Revolt comes first but spontaneity is not enough. Rebellion must be organised in a revolutionary process. On these basic points I think we differ little. The contrast comes, as you say, in where the accent falls and, in particular, the extent to which the stability of organisation is emphasised.

On the molecular level I'm not convinced that our difference in emphasis is very significant. I understand that notions of habit, custom, and repeated practices seem restrictive to you and you fear they can blunt innovation. I insist, however, that forms-of-life only exist through structures of repetition. Our lives and bonds to each other are supported by innumerable habits and repeated practices, many of which we are not aware. This is not only a matter of the time we have dinner each night and when we go for a walk on Sundays, but also how we relate to each other and maintain both intimate and social bonds (Marcel Proust's novel seems to me the classic investigation of how a life is constituted by complex webs of habits and

repeated practices). Such institutions do, as you suggest, link the present to the future but not necessarily in the way you fear. You worry that social habits restrict us to repeating the social and organisational forms of previous generations. I am more oriented toward what Spinoza calls prudence: regarding the future as if it were present and acting on that basis. This is not only how we act today against the industries and practices that will create by 2050 catastrophic CO2 levels but also the way we constantly create a perspective of duration in our relations with each other. This is also true with regard to love. Love is not only an event of rupture, shattering, and transformation but also a bond. I continually return to those I love. That does not mean that love is a static, fixed relationship. Love is innovation, you rightly say, going beyond. Yes, but there is also a ritual to love, returning to the beloved and repeating our shared practices. In the context of those rituals the innovations of love emerge. Institutionalise and subvert, as you say, or repetition with difference. In any case, at this molecular level I understand that you and I approach the question of institution from different perspectives but I don't see great consequence to our differences.

At the molar level, in contrast, I think our differences are more significant. Toni and I put the emphasis on institution or, really, on creating new institutional forms in order to develop an alternative governance. I think you can accept and even be comfortable with some version of this project. Some of the greatest successes of the EZLN in Chiapas, for example, have been their creation of institutions of an alternative governance. Caracoles, Juntas de buen gobierno, and the myriad norms and procedures that govern Zapatista communities are excellent examples of the kind of experimentation with new, democratic institutional forms that we are advocating. My sense is that you are generally supportive of this level of Zapatista institutional practice. Here too the slogan institutionalise and subvert works well: all practices should be submitted to a constant force of critique, walk forward questioning (this is a translation of a phrase popularised by the Zapatistas. The Spanish is: 'preguntando caminamos' - th ed.).

Our differences come out more clearly with regard to established institutions of which we are critical. Like you, Toni and I are critical of the official trade unions and their traditions but for us that does not position us in complete opposition to the entire union movement. Small segments of the union movement continually try to move out of the tradition and in new directions: for periods (sometimes brief) portions (often small minorities) of the FIOM in Italy, SUD in France, and the SEIU in the United States, for example, have sought to chart new directions.

"I am more oriented toward what Spinoza calls prudence: regarding the future as if it were present and acting on that basis."

Our inclination is to enter into dialogue with these syndicalist elements while at the same time subverting their traditional logics, both inside and outside their institutional structures. Does institutionalise and subvert make sense to you also in this context? Or, rather, here is another way of approaching the same question in terms of your book: can and should "doing" be organised and, if so, what relation would these organisations bear to the history of organised labour? How would you characterse the syndicalist practices of doing? I'm attracted to the idea of constructing "soviets of doing" but I fear that idea would horrify you.

Our differences are probably most pronounced with regard to the so-called progressive governments in power today, especially those in Latin America. As you know, Toni and I, like you, are critical of all of these Leftist parties and governments, from Argentina and Brazil to Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. And like for you too our hopes and inspirations are linked primarily not to the governments but the powerful social movements that created the possibility of their electoral victories. But we do not regard these governments solely as antagonists. Here too I like the dual stance of your slogan, institutionalise and subvert. I would say, in other words, that the advent of these governments creates a new (and in some respects better) terrain of struggle in which the movements need to continue the struggles against neoliberal practices, economic paradigms based on extraction (including reliance on oil, gas, soy monoculture, and the like), racial hierarchies, and many others. I sense that the kind of critical engagement with which Toni and I feel comfortable seems alien and even dangerous to you. This is probably a real difference between us and I'm not sure there is much to say about it.

(One small clarification: You are perplexed by a passage in our book in which Toni and I seem to be proposing that the UN institute a global guaranteed income. Your instincts are right that we are not proposing this. The passage comes in a paradoxical section of our book in which we attempt a thought experiment about how capital would reform if it were able to act rationally in its self-interest. We try to follow through the logic of capitalist reform, we say, all the while knowing that such reforms are impossible and the logic will eventually collapse.)

This might be the right time to bring up another question I had reading 'Crack Capitalism', which is probably related to the issue of institutions but in different frame. A primary antagonist in your argument is abstract labour and, if I understand correctly, the conceptual processes of abstraction more generally. I don't think I share your opposition to abstraction. Let's start with abstract labour in Marx by way of exchange value. In my reading of the opening pages of 'Capital' in which Marx details how the exchange value of a commodity obscures and takes precedence over its use value, just as abstract labour takes precedence over concrete labour, this does not imply a symmetrical anti-capitalist project pointing in the opposite direction. In other words, a politi-



cal project to affirm use value over exchange value sounds to me like a nostalgic effort to recapture a precapitalist social order. Marx's project instead, as I see it, pushes through capitalist society to come out the other side. In the same way I don't see abstract labour as the antagonist. It's a simplification (but an important one, I think) to say that without abstract labour there would be no proletariat. If the labour of the bricklayer, the joiner, the weaver, the agricultural worker, and the autoworker were each to remain concrete and incommensurable, we would have no concept of labour in general (labour without regard to its form of expenditure, as Marx says), which potentially links them together as a class. I know this must sound to you like I'm turning around and affirming the tradition of working class organisations now, but I'm not or, at least, not uncritically. In fact, abstraction is necessary for us to argue against the corporatist structures that have plagued that tradition. Such abstraction too is what made possible the domestic labour debates in social feminist circles in the US and the UK in the 1970s and 80s, recognising as work the unwaged domestic activities and practices of care that continue to characterise the sexual division of labour. Abstract labour, then, as I understand it, is not a thing but an analytic, a way of grasping the continuities across the worlds of labour.

In part I think what I just wrote might obscure the issue because you and I are using the terms differently. My guess is that you are using abstraction (and abstract labour) to name the processes and structures of exploitation by which capital measures and expropriates the value produced by our labour and exerts command over our lives. And, in contrast, "doing" serves for you as the self-organised, autonomous labour that we could create a space for in the cracks of the capitalist order. Ok, that can work for me. In fact, your argument in this regard corresponds well with and complements our argument in Chapter 3 of 'Commonwealth' about what we call the crisis of capitalist biopolitical production, the emerging composition of labour, and the new possibilities for autonomy from capital.

But, I suppose that even though I was trying to move away from the question of institution it sneaks back in here again. Yes, I want to appreciate each doing in its singularity but I also want to grasp what is common to the myriad doings across society (is this a logic of abstract doing?) I want organisation. Try to wash out of your mouth the bad taste of my proposition earlier for creating soviets of doing. How are doings organised and what is the form of their organisation?

It's not so easy to move away from the question of organisation and institution. It keeps coming back. I guess that's an area where we still have work to do to understand our differences.

Best, Michael

October 2011

Dear Michael,

Lots and lots of stimulus here, agreement and disagreement, lovely.

Let me go straight to a sentence that slips unobtrusively into your argument but that I suspect is an important key to our differences. You say, in the context of the discussion of abstract labour: "Marx's project instead, as I see it, pushes through capitalist society to come out the other side". But I do not want to push through capitalism to come out the other side: I want us to get out now, while there is still time, if there is still time. There must be some kind of way out of here (as Bob Dylan/Jimi Hendrix put it) – though of course there may not.

This is Benjamin's emergency brake (Walter Benjamin's comment that: "Marx called Revolutions the locomotives of world history. But perhaps it is totally different: perhaps it is the people in these trains reaching for the emergency brake." the ed.) We are on a train heading for disaster, rushing toward the total annihilation of humanity. It no longer makes sense, if it ever did, to think of coming out the other side. We need to pull the emergency brake, stop the train (or, jumping metaphors, capitalism is an over-ripe, rotting apple, or a zombie, already dead but marching on, destroying all). Not progress, then, but rupture. Here, now.

I suspect that much of your argument in your and Toni's trilogy rests on the view that pushing through capitalist society will take us to the other side. Certainly you say that capital is on a path of destruction (p.306), but that is not quite the same as saying that capital is a path to destruction, as I would. Your formulation suggests that its course can be altered, whereas my feeling is that breaking with capital is a necessary precondition for stopping the rush to destruction. You follow your statement about capital being on the path of destruction by proposing a reformist programme for capital as a way of moving towards a transition to a different society, whereas I see capitalism as being already in an advanced stage of decomposition, with all sorts of projects for alternative societies overflowing its banks, and suggest that we should throw all our energies into those overflowings or cracks.

This helps to situate our differences on institutionalisation. We meet happily on the ground of institutionalise-and-subvert, but I feel that within this tension we lean in different directions. You put your emphasis on the importance of institutionalisation, whereas I want us to throw our weight on the side of subversion, of constantly moving against-and-beyond. Institutionalise-and-subvert is not, for me, "repetition with difference", as you suggest, but a repeated process of rupture, of breaking, negating.

"the proletariat's existence is the struggle against its own existence as proletariat."

Of course it is not just a question of breaking. Revolt is not enough – that is the shared starting point of our exploration. What then? Communise. This is the word that I am drawn to more and more. Break and weave social relations on a different basis. Obviously it comes close to your Common Wealth, but I feel it's important to think in terms of verbs rather than nouns, in terms of our doings. The problem, as always, is the material production of life. If we scream against capital but are not able to live in a way that breaks with capital, then we won't get very far with our revolt. In order to break capitalist social relations we need the support of new productive forces, not in the old orthodox-Marxist sense of technology but rather in the sense of a new weaving of human activity. So absolutely YES to your soviets of doing, which you think will horrify me. Doing-against-labour means for me a collective or communising movement of self-determination which has at its centre a self-determination of our own activity – our own productive force. Perhaps the movement creates new institutions, but only as the water in a stream rests for a moment in pools and then flows on. I think that would be my answer to your final question, "How are doings organised and what is the form of their organisation?" If we think of doing as a movement of communising self-determination, then we can hardly lay down what form it should take. At best, we can look at past and present experiences and draw suggestions from them.

We differ on the issue of abstract labour. I understand abstract labour as the substance of the social bond that is money. In other words, the fact that we exchange our products as commodities abstracts from us, takes away from us, control over our own activities. Abstract labour (and therefore money) is the core of the negation of social self-determination, and therefore any struggle for social self-determination must be a struggle against abstract labour (and money). To say, as you do, that there would be no proletariat without abstract labour is true, but who needs a proletariat? I imagine you agree that the proletariat's existence is the struggle against its own existence as proletariat. To say that "a political project to affirm use value over exchange value sounds to me like a nostalgic effort to recapture a precapitalist social order" seems to me completely wrong. It could well be so, but for me it is the essence of the struggle to create a communist or anti-capitalist society. If you do not see the struggle as being to create a different sort of creative activity (a doing liberated from abstract labour) and therefore a different sort of product (a use value liberated from value), does this not bring you very close to Leninism, which, of course, was blind to the distinction between abstract and concrete labour, with disastrous results?

There's much more to be said. On the progressive governments, for example: it is not that I regard them solely as antagonists. It is rather that the organisational form which they have adopted (the state) integrates them into the generality of capitalist social relations and turns them, tendentially at least, against movements that are directed against capitalism. Look at Bolivia in the last couple of months.

But rather than go on and on, I want to end with a quandary. A dilemma perhaps for both of us, but I suspect we lean differ-



ent ways. You say near the beginning of your letter "Revolt comes first but spontaneity is not enough. Rebellion must be organised in a revolutionary process." I'm fine with the first sentence, it's the second that makes me pause, wonder, feel shocked, wonder again. Rebellion for me is a massive and explosive confluence of discontents and other-doings, the dramatic coming together of so many puncturings of capitalist social relations. In order to avoid being swamped by a re-surging of capital, there must be a communising (or a confluence of cracks) so strong that the social nexus of money is shattered or rendered irrelevant. If you like, the rebellion must organise itself in such a way as to gather sufficient momentum to break capitalism completely. Organisation is crucial, but not an organisation: it has to be an organising that comes from below, a communising. Is that what you mean when you say "Rebellion must be organised in a revolutionary process"? I wonder.

A pleasure.

John

October 2011

Dear John,

Some misunderstandings persist. It's clear, for example, that we understand abstraction and abstract labour in very different ways. And the paradoxical passage in Commonwealth in which we conduct a thought experiment about capitalist reform to demonstrate its impossibility comes up again in this letter and leads you again to think that such reform is our programme. But really such misunderstandings are minor and I suspect that even when they loom large in our eyes they matter little to our readers.

What strikes me most strongly reading over our correspondence, though, is the common theoretical and political terrain we share. We meet happily, as you say, on the terrain of "institutionalise and subvert" – as well as "subvert and institutionalise" (since the process certainly works both ways). But then, you add, we move in different directions or, at least, put the accent on different sides of the equation. This difference comes out most clearly, I think, when we express apprehensions about the formulations of the other. I am often on guard against placing too much faith in spontaneous revolt because on its own it fails to create lasting alternatives, and thus I insist on constituent processes. You instead fear more the fixity of repeated practices and institutional structures, and thus you privilege rupture and movement. I found particularly interesting in this regard the apprehensions expressed in our brief exchange about love. But even such differences of emphasis should not be exaggerated since we clearly share each other's preoccupations to a large degree.

I'm happy, then, to leave off our correspondence here, with the hope that we can take it up again when the movements, and we too, have taken a few more steps forward.

All the best, Michael

John Holloway is a Professor in the Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades of the Benemerita Universidad Autonoma de Puebla in Mexico.

Michael Hardt is professor of Literature at Duke University in the USA and has published several books, including 'Empire' and 'Commonwealth', with Antonio Negri.

experiments in regroupment #4

an interview with climate justice collective

CJC was formed during the closure of the Climate Camp. Could you explain the reasons behind this move? How have your experiences with Climate Camp influenced CJC?

In 2011 Climate Camp held a week long gathering called 'Space for Change' to resolve ongoing discussions around the camp's political identity, its forms of action and methods of organising. At the gathering, following a great deal of discussion, a decision was made not to organise as Climate Camp in 2011. The gathering released a statement, entitled 'Metamorphosis' (http://climatecamp.org.uk/2011-statement), in order to explain the reasoning behind the decision. It says: 'This closure is intended to allow new tactics, organising methods and processes to emerge ... With the skills, networks and trust we have built we will launch new radical experiments to tackle the intertwined ecological, social and economic crises we face.'

The Climate Justice Collective (CJC) was one of the groups that emerged. Of course people involved in Climate Camp also moved on to all sorts of other groups and movements including Frack Off, UK UNCUT, Green and Black Cross, UK Tar Sands Network, the student protests, Occupy, Traveller Solidarity Network and many more.

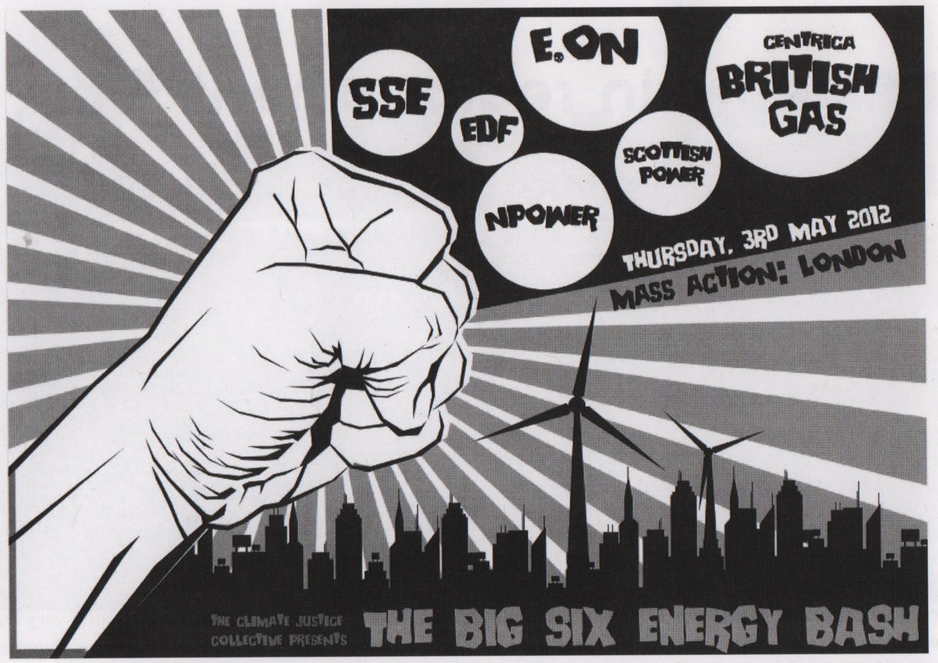
The discussions around climate camp centered on a number of themes, including 'anti-capitalism', 'radical lobbying', and how climate activism related to other movements, particularly those focussed on social justice. But there were also issues that anyone involved in non-hierarchical organising will be familiar with, those of power relationships and hidden hierarchies, openness and accountability, some of which were described back in 1970 in the 'Tyranny of Structurelessness' (which was met with it's own critique, 'The Tyranny of Tyranny'). In forming CJC we aimed to try and learn from the lessons of organising Climate Camp, keeping the good bits and trying not to repeat the mistakes (and in case you are wondering, we are anti-capitalist!).

What are you currently organising around and what is your long term strategy?

CJC is committed to taking action against the root causes of climate change and building towards new models of political and economic organisation, based on sustainability, participatory democracy and social justice. We see ourselves as part of the wider movements for social and ecological justice, and aim to build toward a common future free from exploitation, oppression or environmental devastation. That may all sound very high-falutin, but we have been experimenting with how to carry this out on a practical level. Some of what we are currently up to was mentioned in a reply to Shift's write up of the Big Six Bash [see Shift issue 14- the Eds.]; a mass action we organised early in the year targeting the the big 6 UK energy companies (British Gas, EDF, E.ON, Npower, Scottish Power and SSE).

For example, just over a year ago, 'Fuel Poverty Action' formed as a campaign within CJC that is devoting much time to building links with tenants' and residents' associations and the communities affected by rising energy prices. Fuel Poverty Action's 'Winter Warm-ups' in January mobilised pensioners, students, anti-cuts groups and environmental campaigners in ten boroughs and cities across the country to take a variety of different forms of action from street theatre, to public flyering, to town hall demonstrations, to energy company occupations.

We are also trying to make links between anti-austerity, climate justice and other ecological movements. Linking different energy struggles together, both in terms of how it is produced and accessed, referred to by some as Energy Justice, is an important area for future work. At the moment we are discussing how we might try and organise a way of creating links be-



tween climate justice and austerity on the 20th October when the TUC are planning a march in London.

"In forming CJC we aimed to try and learn from the lessons of organising Climate Camp, keeping the good bits and trying not to repeat the mistakes"

Does climate change politics still have an important part to play in the anti-capitalist movement? Can it be relevant in a period of austerity?

There is no doubt that the economic crisis and ensuing austerity has drawn a lot of political energy away from climate change and other ecological issues. It's also true that there are difficulties around linking climate change and anti-austerity, especially when the growth mantra dominates discussion around the response to the economic crisis. But ever increasing economic growth, market economics and neoliberalism are not just a threat to the environment, they also cause great social harm and are behind the current economic crisis.

In a world with ever more extreme weather events, rapidly diminishing arctic ice (NASA recently published a study linking climate change to extreme weather and Arctic sea ice reduction) and worsening climatic feedback loops, ignoring climate change or any of the other global ecological crises, such as biodiversity or the nitrogen cycle (see stockholmresilience.org), simply isn't an option. If we are to meaningfully address the root causes of all our current crises, ecological and social justice must be seen as complementary and not in competition. Sure it's not easy, but if it was easy it wouldn't be a struggle! If you're interested in getting involved, or want to chat to us about anything drop us a line.

Climate Justice Collective can be contacted at climatejusticecollective@gmail.com and their website is www. climatejusticecollective.org/

what next?

While Shift is closing shop for the time being, there's still the possibility that the project will resurface in some guise in future. So look out for that.

For now, all that remains is to say a heartfelt thanks to all the supporters who've accompanied us over the years: thank you for your compliments, your insights and your rage (at the system and at us and the more controversial articles we've published!). Thanks also for paying the solidarity price we've charged for this final issue in a bid to ensure that the project doesn't end its life in debt (the price we've paid for our commitment to print publishing!) If you would like to donate, you can do so via our website or by contacting us on the email address below. Any surplus funds will be gifted to organisations and campaigns that have featured in Shift. On that note, we invite you to join us for an afternoon/evening of politics and dancing at Kraak Gallery (Manchester) on Sunday 7th October from 4pm. We'll be raising money, as well as hosting a discussion on privilege politics and hearing from some of Manchester's finest new acoustic artists.

We will be archiving all our material on Libcom in the near future and hope to have this completed by May 2012.

The editorial team are contactable at the email address below and are especially happy to offer any advice we can to any projects seeking to fill a similar niche or use a similar format to Shift. Similarly, if you think we might be interested in a project you are involved in, please get in touch.

That's all folks!

CONTACT SHIFT

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CREDITS

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