

# Anarchism

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We have nothing but our freedom. We have nothing to give you but your own freedom. We have no law but the single principle of mutual aid between individuals. We have no government but the single principle of free association. We have no states, no nations, no presidents, no premiers, no chiefs, no generals, no bosses, no bankers, no landlords, no wages, no charity, no police, no soldiers, no wars. Nor do we have much else. We are sharers, not owners. We are not prosperous. None of us is rich. None of us is powerful. If it is [anarchism] you want, if it is the future you seek, then I tell you that you must come to it with empty hands. [...] You cannot buy the Revolution. You cannot make the Revolution. You can only be the Revolution. It is in your spirit, or it is nowhere.

— Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*



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# imminent rebellion

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THIRTEEN

hand bound with a **hatred** of the State infused into every page

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## Contributions

Issue 14 will coincide with the ANZAC centenary and will be themed around NZ and Australian nationalism, militarism and imperialism. As usual, contributions can be sent to our email address. We prefer articles to be kept below 5,000 words. Deadline is 23 January, 2015.

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## An irregular anarchist journal from deep

in the South Pacific.  
A politics that refuses to reduce the complexity of life to the singular logic of the State cannot be simple, it cannot be the domain of easy slogans. Nor can an *anarchist politics* ever take the risk of believing it has achieved a finality, even if only theoretical. This journal is therefore not propaganda, but a genuine attempt to articulate an anarchist practice and theory, one whose articulation must be without end.



# 'Nameless in the crowd of nameless ones...'

Some thoughts on *The Story of a Proletarian Life*, by Bartolomeo Vanzetti, 1923

—Barry Pateman

I can't remember when I first read *The Story of a Proletarian Life*. I just know that one edition or another has been in and around my life for a long time. I read it most years, and usually I find myself reading it in a different way from the time before. Sometimes I read it as the voice of the immigrant experience and am moved by the image of Vanzetti, alone in the Battery, trying to make sense of where he was and realising his essential loneliness and alienation from all that he saw around him. His portrayal of the exhausting search for work and the seeking out of fellow country people for help and support is both grim and poignant reading and one can understand how the acts of kindness he receives begin to drive and shape his philosophy of life. His experience (and the experience of many others, I would guess) reflected the experiences of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman who, although rebels of a kind in their home country, were made anarchists by the conditions and situations they encountered in America. In early 20<sup>th</sup> century America, anarchism wasn't necessarily a foreign import, even if the press did live in fear of being swamped by immigrant devils arriving with hidden anarchist newspapers and

pamphlets written in alien and crude languages. In truth it was American capitalism, with its casual, everyday cruelties that helped turn some immigrants into anarchists, Vanzetti and his comrades among them.

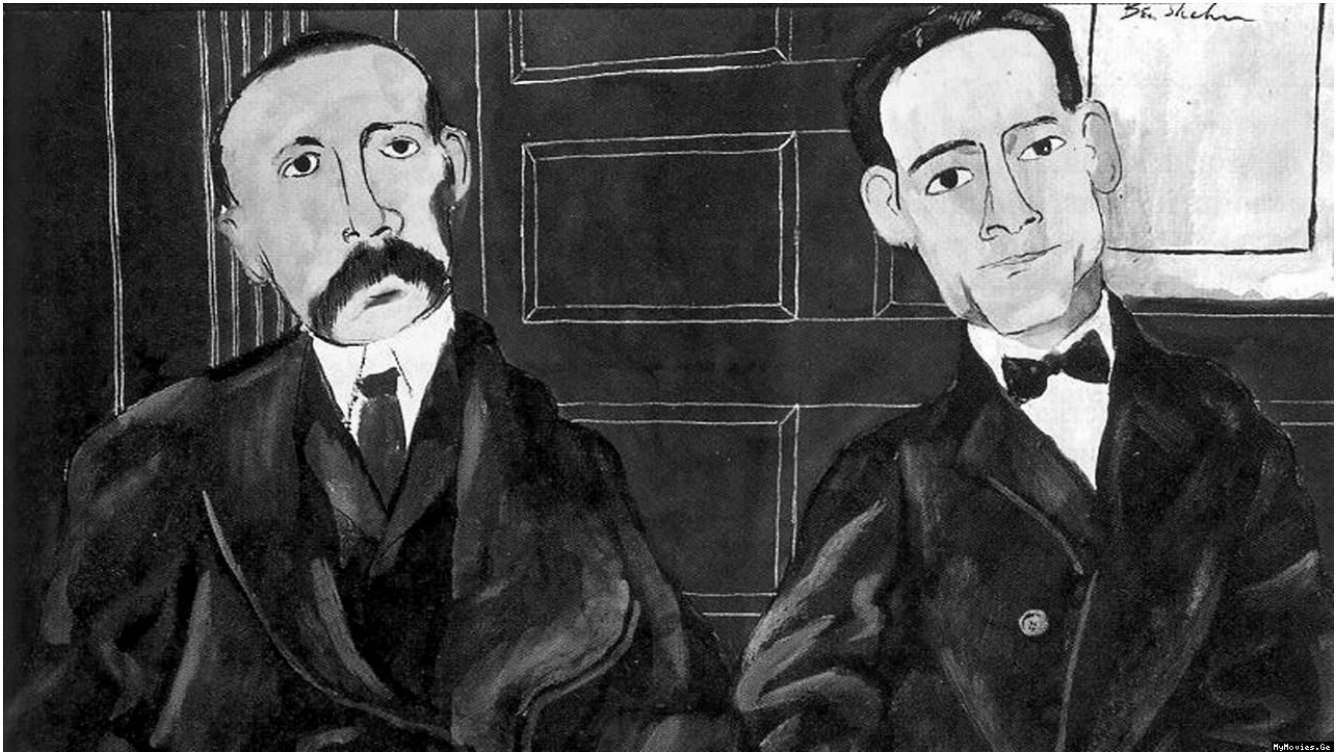
Other times I read the pamphlet in the way I think Vanzetti wanted us to read it—as the autobiography of a working class man—as a 'proletarian.' I think he was very clear as to what he actually meant by the word proletarian and it is important to him that we discover that clarity through our engagement with his writing. He wanted us to understand in concrete terms what it meant to be working-class. In *The Story of a Proletarian Life* we read of the physical cruelties of his working life in Italy, a life that led to his contracting pleurisy, while his work experiences in America are no better. He endures hard, brutal labour in unbearable conditions that leave him exhausted and ill at the end of each working day. We need to be acutely aware when we read this section: the words on the page convey the smells, the aches, the exhaustion, and the mental misery that lie behind them, and it would be inexcusable if we did not reflect on the life he is trying to describe. I sense he saw

this as the most important section of his text and was trying to guide us into a foreign place, one few of us have any understanding of. Simply put, the experience he describes is the existence that constituted the living, everyday reality for many immigrant and poor working-class communities torn between unskilled and skilled labour. It shaped who Vanzetti was and until we realise that I think we cannot even begin to understand him or the ideas that gestated from the economic and emotional situation he found himself in. Such a reading of his writing leaves us astonished as to how he and others could maintain their dignity and sense of self in the world they had to inhabit. The 24 or so pages that detail his experience of both finding and enduring work can stand with the very best of working-class autobiography. Concise, detailed, and passionate they still somehow ensure that we never lose sight of Vanzetti the human being amidst all the squalor and viciousness that made up his day-to-day existence, just as he never did. He was more than that. As he wrote, 'I learned that class-consciousness was not a phrase invented by propagandists, but was a real, vital force, and that those who felt its significance were no longer beasts of burden, but were human beings.'

**W**hat has always fascinated me, though, is the idea of Vanzetti as a self-educated man—an autodidact—and what that meant with regard to his anarchism. Time and time again I go back to his chapter 'My Intellectual Life and Creed.' I know, I think, why this chapter fascinates me and, perhaps, other anarchists of my generation. When I was growing up I met many self-educated working-class men and women. They were everywhere in the community I lived in. They had left school at 13 or so—often having shown some promise there—because economic necessity had driven them to work. This was especially so in the case of women like my

mother, never without a book in her hand, who left school early to work in a factory wrapping boiled sweets. Their learning had never followed the accepted trajectory of a university or 'higher' education, that sense of order, shape and chronology that formed what we might call intellectual knowledge. Instead their intellectual life could be described as messy and contradictory, sometimes confrontational and often consisting of patterns that they had picked out for themselves from what they had read. Proscribed by what they could find in libraries, afford to buy, or could borrow from friends, they became autonomous learners in charge of their own education. They always recognised the 'literary canon' and had, sometimes, a rather exaggerated respect for it. That said they brought their own frame of reference to the classics. I can remember sitting in a pub listening to two old miners tell me that Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* was a radical novel because they read it as an exercise in solidarity and anti-racism. Others felt the same about those awful novels of the English public school, (*The Bounder of Greyfriars*, that sort of thing) which they saw as friends together against the world, and authority in general, rather than the classist, racist novels that many critics felt they actually were. Sometimes these readers did meet in small groups to talk about what they were reading. Mostly though it was, I think, a rather solitary and lonely business. Some of these people were in the English anarchist movement when I joined all those years ago. Like many working-class autodidacts they saw learning in unique and individual patterns that cut across all sorts of disciplines and genres, informing both how they saw anarchism, and their relationships with other anarchists not from their background.

It was like that for Vanzetti. He very carefully lists what he was reading after his arrival in America. There are the usual anarchist suspects as well as Marx, Darwin and Spencer. I imagine him, in his room after, or before work, poring over Re-



nan's *Life of Jesus*—a popular (and it has to be said, rather turgid) mainstay of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century freethought—and re-affirming his antipathy to religious belief. We sense his coming to terms with history and discovering its cycles and movements from Greece and Rome onwards and his belief that only now was humanity leaving the prehistoric age; indeed, 'human history has not yet begun.' Of course there was also 'literature'—Hugo, Tolstoy, Zola, poetry and, above all, *The Divine Comedy*. One senses that the latter was as much an influence on him as any anarchist writing that came his way. All of it, all this reading shaped, cemented and challenged his ideas. The words of these writers struck a chord, crystallised what he was already sensing and made him aware of the beauty that could be found in the way words related to each other. Literature provided a balm to the exhaustion of his everyday life and lit up the world around him with a hope that was tangible. Waiting for him was anarchism and a movement that celebrated workers' culture and literacy, containing comrades who had a shared understanding of the dignity of life that he recognised and related to, and helped him read, what

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he called, 'The Book of Life; that is the Book of Books! All the others merely teach how to read this one.'

Through *The Story of a Proletarian Life* we can trace what contributed to Vanzetti's embrace of the 'ideal,' the pursuit of which made his life worth living. Given his circumstances when he wrote this pamphlet it is understandable that he does not mention some matters, but we should remind ourselves of a few things about the anarchist world he moved in: his 'anarchist context.' Vanzetti was a committed and passionate anarchist communist whose anarchism meant a permanent contestation. Vanzetti's comrades, influenced by the ideas of writers such as Luigi Galleani, Peter Kropotkin and Max Stirner, and reinforced by their affinity with each other, had been at war with the American government since the summer of 1914 using any weapons they could. Theirs (and his) was an anarchism that combined a fierce belief in the right of the individual to fight back and resist any 'invasion' of his or her freedom and individuality, combined with a practical recognition of mutual aid and support: from each according to their ability, to each according to their need. Their anarchism was atheistic, opposed to any form of conciliation with capitalism, all embracing, and passionate in a way that might make some of us uneasy. Galleani's writings in the paper he edited, *Cronaca Sovversiva*, constantly celebrated individuals and groups who had carried out attacks on the rich and powerful. He lauded those men and women who had fought back by refusing to be acquiescent to the economic, physical and mental cruelty he defined as characteristic of both authoritarian and 'democratic' states. This paper was critical in developing Vanzetti's appreciation of how anarchists should be, how they should carry themselves in a world that saw them as the enemy. That said, we do need to be careful when we talk about influences and how they work. We can't say a paper said that so they did this. That's a convenience of approach that belongs in the archive and nowhere else. Processes of thinking went on, experiences in life were considered and a constant assessment of words was taking place, even if the words of anarchism resonated with them like only a few other words had ever resonated in their lives. A did not necessarily lead to B without often pulling in F, Q and S. If anarchism was the end of their journey we need to know far more about their intellectual, economic and emotional journeys before we make



too many casual or sweeping statements about any comrade's relationship with it, never mind the relationship between reading and action. We should also remember it wasn't just Galleani doing the writing. In some cases it was working-class and 'uneducated' writers striving to find the right words to describe the elation and possibilities that were inherent in the struggle for the attainment of anarchy. If anarchy was to be new and original and startlingly wonderful, what words could they find to express these hopes, dreams, and potential possibilities? Inevitably they drew on their experiences with the

*'literary canon'* and,  
as a result, their **writings** are  
often *awkward*, ungainly,  
**hyperbolic** and  
*hauntingly beautiful*,  
often **all at the same time**.

We also know that this anarchism offered an alternative cultural life that appealed to the self-educated militant. One in which they could play an integral part. Drama performances, picnics and musical concerts proliferated, all put on by the anarchists themselves and seen as integral to the pursuit of the ideal and the promotion of worker culture. Vanzetti and his comrades embraced all of this with a passion. Watching a play by Gori, listening to arias and folksongs, reading novels and poetry, talking and learning, all became part of the fabric of anarchism and, we might suggest, this anarchism became for Vanzetti, as much intuition and feeling as it was intellect.

**W**e are entering awkward territory here. For so long we have seen Vanzetti as a victim, as the innocent man executed by the American state alongside his comrade, Nicola Sacco. He has been characterised as a simple working man with a devoted, if rather awkward belief system. This pamphlet shows us that those images will not do. He was a complex man, driven by a fierce morality. He reflected deeply on the world around him and was clearly aware of the power and possibility of language and its relationship to literature, ideas and action. His writing traces the journey that led him from Italy to the prison cell where he awaits execution, but it does much more. As well as describing to us just what proletarian could mean, it presents us with an anarchism that we cannot fully trace in anyone's writings or in any newspaper. This is an anarchism that is equally based upon emotion and intuition as it is on any theoretical writing. It's a fierce, uninhibited ideal, centred on the assertion of dignity in the face of appalling economic and emotional oppression. It maintained Vanzetti's dignity in the face of the most disgusting living and working conditions that capitalist America threw at him. Knowing this we would do well to remember that the anarchist communism of the Galleanisti was aimed not just at the solid and hardworking man of Kropotkin's *Appeal to the Young* or Morris' *News From Nowhere* but rather to the outsiders, those men and women at the very edge of capitalist life, living and working in a grim squalor we cannot imagine. These people were the very lumpenproletariat that Bakunin appealed to in some of his writings.

Of course they are people that anarchism has very little contact with nowadays. It has little regular relationship with the multitudes of des-

perate poor and, in truth, the working class self-educated men and women who Vanzetti and his comrades were typical of are, for the most part, people of the past. Both of these realities mean we may have lost something very precious from our ranks—something that made anarchism richer and more complex. Anarchism, once, was able to reinforce the dignity and self-perception of outsiders like Vanzetti, and we should realise that any state that threatened that dignity had to bear the consequences. Vanzetti and others like him had not much else to lose except their own sense of worth. If they couldn't choose their battles they would not run away from one. They would fight rather than surrender who they were or deny the hope that anarchism gave them.

So, after all those years I mull over the words of this man whose pamphlet has played no small part in my own life. If I became confused on some readings, uncertain or contradictory, I have never really worried. I feel pretty sure that he wouldn't have minded. Life for him was thinking, questioning, and always tangling oneself up with words and meanings, never forgetting they are worthless without the emotions they stir in us. Ninety-one years on and Vanzetti still has much to offer me. I am thankful I have had the chance to read him, and I am thankful to him for his words that have always encouraged me to think, question and act. ■

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I am and will be until the last instant  
(unless I should discover that I am in error)  
an anarchist-communist,  
because I believe that communism is the most  
humane form of social contract, because I know  
that only in liberty can man rise, become noble,  
and complete.

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# Lessons from the past?

Reflections on the history of the Brisbane Self-Management Group

— Tim Briedis

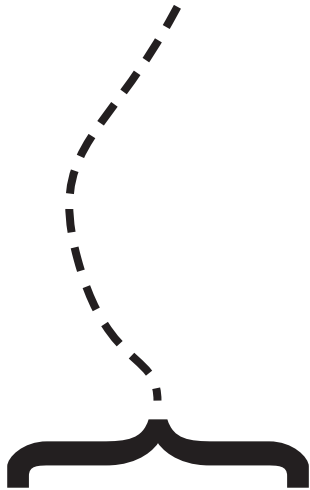
FROM 2009 TO 2010 I SPENT MUCH OF MY LIFE researching an organisation called the Self-Management Group: a libertarian socialist group that existed in Brisbane from 1971 until 1977. I tracked down posters, leaflets and police files, waded through boxes of ephemera gathering dust in people's garages, and interviewed around 30 activists.

Why should this be interesting? One reason is that this group was unusually large, considerably bigger than most anarchist and libertarian socialist collectives in Australasia both then and now. The SMG had a two-tier structure: throughout its existence it consisted of 200–300 activists in cells at places of work or study, and 60–70 full members.

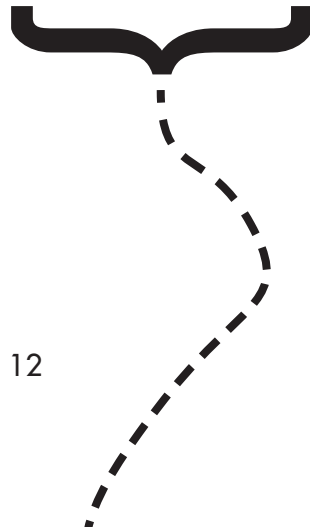
Another reason is that, in a small way, it helps to overcome the cultural cringe that can pervade activist scenes and broader Antipodean

culture. One can get the sense that, in both past and present, radicalism is something that happens in Europe and America but not here. In itself, this cringe can encourage activists to take up conservative platforms—as nothing else is possible—and reduces understanding of local conditions, as it seems more interesting to read about exciting things overseas.

It's also important to connect study of the past to the political aspirations and dilemmas that



SMG critiqued the left-wing tendency to fetishise a narrowly defined working class, and stressed the power of youth and white-collar workers as revolutionary subjects.



radicals face in the present. Of course analysis of a specific time and place necessarily limits the extent to which you can draw out lessons that can be applied today. Nevertheless, in its history you can see a number of political issues that are deeply relevant to questions of practice today.

I'll hone in on some of these issues in this article—ranging from their attempt to relate to everyday life, 'revolutionary maximalism' and idealism (that is the prioritising of specific ideas above looking at the context that you are faced with), the SMG's limited gender politics, and its attempt at internal democracy.

#### INTRODUCTION TO THE SMG

The Self-Management Group was formed in 1971, with a core of about eight people. A number of these activists had backgrounds in Brisbane's student movement of the late 1960s. Influenced by the wave of global radicalism at the time, they wanted to articulate a revolutionary politics more openly than they could within the student milieu. Specifically, they were deeply influenced by the group *Socialisme ou Barbarie* from France, whose most prominent theorist was Cornelius Castoriadis. SMG, alongside *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, critiqued the left-wing tendency to fetishise a narrowly-defined working class, and stressed the power of youth and white-collar workers as revolutionary subjects. The term 'self-management' itself was a common one in radical circles at the time, and referred to a desire for collective control over the central institutions in people's lives.

SMG also tried to organise democratically, 'creating in our own lives the self-activity and co-operation without which we would [...] be whimpering through the bars of our cages.' Their practice differed from activism-as-usual in Brisbane—they argued that rallying had degenerated from an experiment in participatory democracy to mere ritual. By focusing on a single overarching issue, marches neglected to analyse how capital affected all 'aspects of social life.' Instead, SMG members threw themselves into agitation in the institutions in which they studied or worked.

While it had started as an extremely small group, this activism was fuelled by the growth of the organisation. From 1971 to 1973 it grew rapidly. As a result of this, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) noted that SMG had 'developed a maturity and crystallisation of purpose' and that its 'policy of Self-Management/Workers' Control [...] has a distinct appeal to all sections of the Community.' This growth was related to a few factors: one was that there was less competition from organised socialist groups in Brisbane, unlike in Sydney and Melbourne where there was a significant Trotskyist and Maoist presence respectively. Brian Laver, one of the founders of SMG, was a significant figure in the Brisbane student milieu and was able to use that influence to build SMG. Beyond this, its

growth should be linked to its particular political characteristics, which I will now explore.

#### THE CELLS AND A POLITICS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

The first of these was a focus on relating radicalism to everyday life. This politics was inextricably linked to the SMG's cell structure. In 1972, they shifted from working as a united group to a system based around cells. The cells comprised members at 'points of production'—the institutions in which activists studied or worked. This allowed SMG to critique oppression at 'the level it existed,' that is, in the everyday. The cells made decisions autonomously, and then reported back on their activity to general meetings. General meetings were held whenever a cell felt the need for one. They determined membership and dealt with anything else that affected the SMG as a whole. By 1973, cells existed at the two Brisbane universities, in hospitals, industrial workplaces, high schools, training colleges and in white-collar jobs.

Frank Jordan, a former SMG member, summed up some of the strengths of the system. For him 'the cell structure was fantastic [...] it prevents bureaucratic degeneration, the focus on workplaces reminds people of their own oppression [...] it discourages you from being a boss over other workers.' This structure resulted in campaigns that focused on the social relationships that define people's daily existence.

For instance, a classroom campaign in the colleges and universities was initiated around 9 March 1972. One leaflet commented:

[...] most of us would have had the experience of not going to a lecture because it is so boring, tedious, only to feel just as alienated on not going because we felt that we really should have gone anyway [...] Learning for most students takes on the aspect of doing just enough work to pass exams [...] Writing an essay becomes not a creative exercise,

but the collection of various fragments with just enough organisation to make it look as though there is some unity in it [...] Learning becomes a process of deception, and even self-deception when people come to believe that this succession of devices really *is* learning.

The classroom campaign made use of inventive tactics. A particularly original approach was a strategy of trying to turn lectures into political discussions. Activists would barge into a class and propose that it not be another 'boring lecture.' Instead it should be a 'discussion on some aspect of human liberation,' such as the democratisation of universities. They would ask for a vote over whether students wanted to have one, leaving if they lost. This was deliberately confrontational, intended to force students to make 'a decision about their powerlessness where they submit to it.'

On 3 November 1972 the first high school cell was established. They also agitated about issues related to daily life, such as dress and authoritarian teaching, and were met with a warm reception from students. SMG's leaflets were condemned in parliament and the police minister declared that 'action would be taken to prevent further distribution.' This was not just bluster as leafleting was illegal in Queensland. Undeterred, one member recalled:

Several carloads of us would get to a school during recess or lunchtime [...] the kids loved it. They'd rush out of the classrooms. We'd hand out the leaflets bamm bamm bamm and then we'd leave before we got caught.

The white-collar cell stressed a similar politics. They produced a brilliant leaflet, *Boredom at the Office*, in May 1973. It began:

It's nine o'clock. Once again I'm at my utterly boring, monotonous job. My eyes wander to the grey-haired man near me. This office has drained thirty precious years of his life. I can expect the same.

Brian Laver of the SMG in a confrontation with Communist Party of Australia members in Brisbane, 1970



‘The response to it was electric’ recalled one member. Despite this success, the white-collar group struggled to build up a consistent presence, and was the smallest SMG cell.

A number of ex-members argued that these attempts to connect ‘the personal to the political’ formed one of their most effective strategies. It was one of the things that distinguished the SMG’s practice from the other left groups at the time, and it is possible that this distinct focus was one reason why the SMG experienced a greater level of growth than other Brisbane far-left groups did.

#### REVOLUTIONARY FERVOUR

Another important characteristic of the group was its ‘revolutionary maximalism.’ While this may have been a point of attraction for some, particularly in its early years, this also helped foster a problematic idealism. Such revolutionary fervour was manifest in the constant use of slogans like ‘For a Society based on Workers’ Councils’ and ‘For Freedom,

Equality and a Society based on Human Needs.’ Nearly all of their leaflets were signed with these sayings. SMG attacked reformist organisations such as unions, which they saw as only offering a nicer form of exploitation.

One justification for this was an argument that this kind of activism would shift politics as a whole leftward. It is difficult to assess the exact relationship between the two, but the pressure created by SMG’s revolutionary enthusiasm might have forced some of the schools in which they had cells to improve conditions, such as at Nashville High, where more progressive courses were introduced.

Perhaps another example of this was a 1974 campaign initiated by the University of Queensland cell against high workload and assessment levels. On these lines, it was argued that their earlier, more propagandistic campaigning at the university had opened a space for broader struggles. In this case, the SMG cell won allies

and a small movement sprang up. The campaign demanded the abolition of the semester system—SMG members believed that the university had deliberately introduced semesters so students had continuous assessments and no time for activism. The system was kept, but the SMG won some victories: compulsory three-hour exams were abolished and students could make a choice between exams and a final essay.

#### INTERNAL DEMOCRACY?


As discussed earlier, SMG aimed not only to create workers' democracy in society as a whole, but also to abolish hierarchies in the group immediately. However, simply declaring that a group is democratic doesn't make it so, and the existence of significant hierarchies was an element of SMG practice that can be critiqued.

SMG had a 'semi-clandestine' structure, in which people had to be interviewed by a committee before becoming full members. The committee then made a recommendation to the group about whether or not these activists should be allowed to become members, which was then voted on by the group at a general assembly. These assemblies themselves could only be attended by full members, and one activist (who was regularly part of the interview process) recalls that the committee was usually made up of the same two people. This fostered some division between full members and a rank and file in the cells, and a further division between an informal leadership on the committee, which influenced who could become a member, and everyone else. The rationale for this policy was 'security,' to prevent police infiltration.


This policy was ineffective and the group was spied on extensively. It seems almost certain that there was at least one agent in the group. While understandable in a context of police intimidation, there was little to be gained from 'security' that created a hierarchy and confined membership, when they were going to be subject to a significant level of surveillance regardless.

Other activists argued that Brian Laver exerted too strong an influence on SMG when it was supposed to be a non-hierarchical group. While it is hard to substantiate the exact level of Laver's influence, the number of accounts of this gives the argument credence. For instance, one account from the time describes how two activists visiting Brisbane began talking to members about concerns that Laver dominated SMG. Laver promptly:

[...] rocked in [...] answering at least 70% of the questions asked by the two people [...] when there were at least ten or



Simply calling a group non-hierarchical is not enough to actually make this true. These problems reflect the social relations that pervade the world outside any organisation. Rather than thinking that particular structures will create a perfectly democratic group, it seems better to conceptualise struggle against hierarchies as an ongoing process.



fifteen other people in the room anyone of whom could have answered these questions.

### IDEALISM

Another problematic element of their practice was a tendency towards idealism, which I don't mean in the more common sense of a general belief in the possibility of a better world, but in the Marxian sense of referring to the prioritisation of Great Ideas over examining the specific nature of conditions in which people live. Although many leaflets written by the cells did pay close attention to the material circumstances of daily life, the group's relentless promotion of self-management meant that at times their practice was closer to abstract propagandism than anything else.

One example that highlights this slippage into idealism was a letterboxing campaign of the leaflet *Equal Wages—Equal Power* around a prices and incomes referendum initiated by the Whitlam government. 165,000 copies were distributed around Brisbane. *Equal Wages—Equal Power* was a double-sided A4 leaflet that, although well-written, essentially just described the Great Idea of Self-Management. It was revolution by mass leaflet distribution. Afterwards, a discussion paper noted that 'there was very little that a person could actually do after reading it,' and despite a huge effort in distributing them, one member recalls that 'we only got 3 replies!'

This idealism saw SMG prioritise building itself as a group, at the expense of working with others and putting its beliefs into practice. A similar sectarianism even led them to promote their success in making it 'impossible for Marxist groups to work effectively on campus.' Idealism also made participating in struggles against racial and gender oppression difficult. As issues of war and imperialism faded from prominence, these movements became increasingly significant. The SMG's emphasis on self-management above all else led them to criticise these movements

for being insufficiently revolutionary, and they condemned what they called 'white sycophancy'—uncritically supporting the ideas of black militants regardless of their political content.

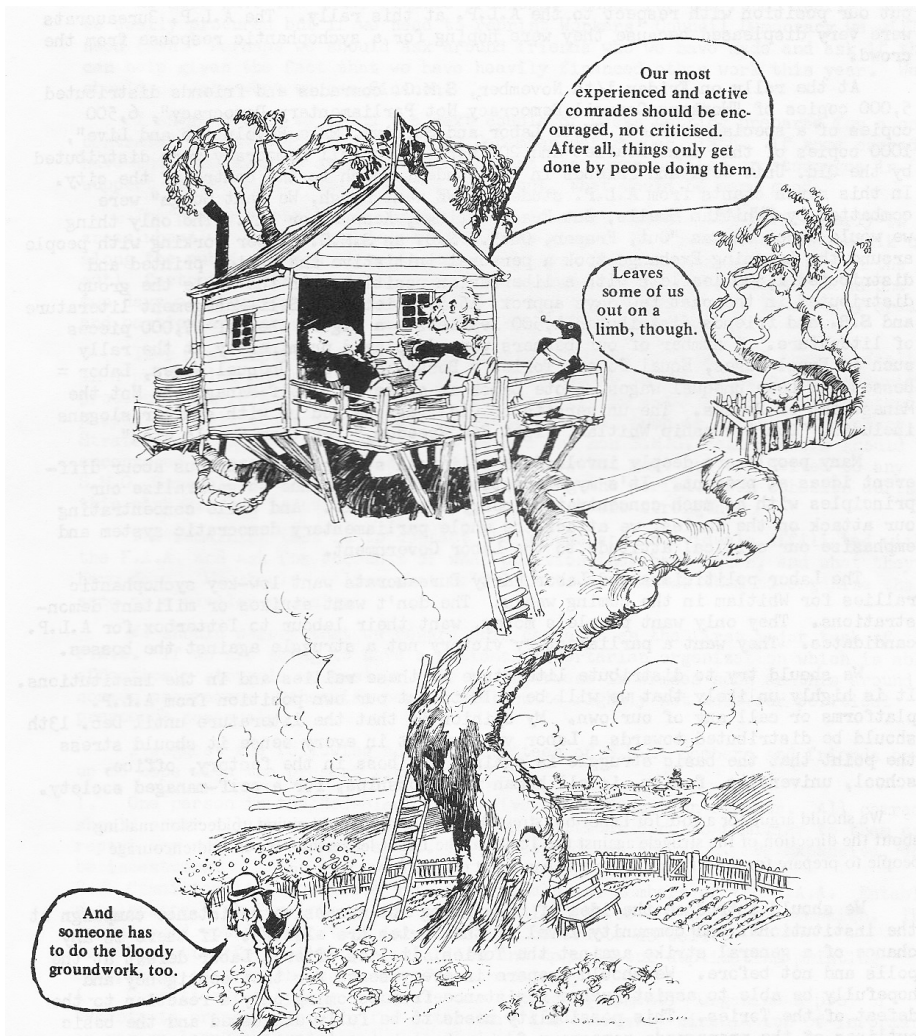
This insistence on critique led to a confrontation between SMG and Denis Walker, a Black Power leader in Brisbane. Following an argument with a member in the SMG's bookshop, Walker cut a member's face with a pair of scissors. In response, SMG distributed thousands of copies of a leaflet titled *Solidarity with Thugs and Fascists*, which condemned Walker. This experience confirmed their pre-existing scepticism about the value of allying themselves with Aboriginal struggles in Brisbane. Idealism eventually became central to disagreements within the group, with members critiquing SMG's 'abstentionism.'

### GENDER POLITICS?

Such idealism also made working with feminist groups difficult. One member noted that 'for the SMG equal power was most important, whereas feminists focused on the destruction of patriarchy [...] As equal power was the crux of revolutionary politics, therefore feminism was seen as non revolutionary.' However, SMG leaflets do suggest some attempt to incorporate feminist insights into their activity. They were interested in examining personal relationships and making them less hierarchical. In 1974 they wrote a pamphlet demanding the repeal of abortion laws, and argued for 'free, safe contraception, free, community-controlled child-care centres [and] the communalisation of housework.'

Despite this, members recall experiencing serious amounts of sexism in SMG. This played out perhaps most significantly in relation to membership. As explained earlier, before you could become a full member of the SMG, you had to undergo an interview with a committee essentially made up of informal leaders who would make a recommendation for or against you.





From *Wither the S.M.G?*  
On internal hierarchies in the group

As this informal leadership was predominantly male, one person recalled that:

It was very difficult for women to get in. You had to get in through a man [...] We used to joke that every woman in it was the partner of a man [in SMG] Eventually something happened and they let other people join.


Like idealism, feminism became a very significant source of division within the group. This was particularly true after the rise and radicalisation of feminist social movements in the mid-1970s. At this time, SMG experienced an influx of new members, one of whom recalls that she was:

[...] a revolutionary feminist, highly politicised by the women's movement and in search of an organisation (inherently lacking in the nature of the women's movement) through which to work for the overthrow of capitalism and patriarchy.

Instead, this activist, alongside others, was outraged by some members' ignorance of feminist theory. Tensions over feminism were important in the development of the Marxist tendency, and another more libertarian faction as well.



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#### SPLIT

These divisions over feminism and idealism were at the heart of a three-way split in the SMG in 1977. The Marxist Tendency soon comprised the bulk of the International Socialists (IS) in Brisbane. Another section left and formed the Libertarian Socialist Organisation (LSO). Those who remained in SMG—the anarchist, pro-feminist group, formed the Self-Management Organisation (SMO).

#### SUMMING UP

Throughout its existence, SMG tried to avoid the traditional left's mistakes and generate a new approach. But in turn it too made significant mistakes. Perhaps an awareness of the difficulties encountered by SMG might serve some use as a cautionary tale. In particular, issues of sexism, racism and internal democracy suggest that simply calling a group non-hierarchical is not enough to actually make this true. These problems reflect the social relations that pervade the world outside any organisation. Rather than thinking that particular structures will create a perfectly democratic group, it seems better to conceptualise struggle against hierarchies as an ongoing process. SMG's slippage into idealism also provides hints as to what basis a materialist politics might start from today. Rather than being centred around a Great Idea or a particular line, a materialist practice could understand politics as constantly subject to change. Instead of simply shaping politics ourselves, we are caught in its ebbs and flows, and can try and contribute to struggles when possible.

Yet the SMG provides some more positive lessons too. Their revolutionary politics were a creative response to the conditions they faced. The cell mode of organisation, the focus on points of production and everyday life, and the attempts at confrontations in classrooms were hallmarks. Rather than demanding 'little bits of grace from the rulers,' they articulated a desire for revolutionary change. For one member, 'No one else was doing this stuff [...] and that's why we had success.' Their adventurousness should encourage us to try and dream up new forms of organisation and struggle.

Governance across the Global North today relies more on the production of a feeling that *there is no alternative* than direct state violence. Against such power over thought, a sense of revolutionary possibilities like the SMG had gains critical importance. It can stretch the boundaries imposed by liberal democratic ideology, in which details of policy can be challenged, but never the system itself. Eduardo Galeano has pithily described how a vision of utopia is 'good for walking,' motivating continued struggle.



It can also be a trap. At times the SMG made the mistake of abstracting utopia, of making it an idealism, an ‘unconditional impossible demand’ that isolates a pure group of revolutionaries instead of inspiring struggle. The Marxist tendency, during the split, assailed the SMG’s fetishisation of:

the Self-Expanding Idea of Self-Management. We keep the Idea, we propagate the Idea, we are the Idea (tossed in a stormy sea). All struggle for the S.M.G, is the struggle for the Idea. When struggle is engaged in [...] the strategy is to neglect what people are struggling about and advance the maximum, and only programme.

Yet revolutionary aspirations can invigorate movements. They can shift politics to the left, even if utopia is sometimes more a guide than a destination. Today, we grapple with the same kind of issues as the SMG—whether to honestly declare our revolutionary politics or to moderate our demands in the hope of gaining a broader audience, how to produce material that articulates some kind of a critique and resonates with the conditions of people’s lives, how to minimise hierarchies within our milieus and organisations. Fundamentally political organising involves a wager—we don’t know how people are going to react to our actions in advance, and we guess that whatever we do will resonate. It follows that the art of helping generate emancipatory politics is a difficult balancing act, and that there are no easy answers. Perhaps by looking at the history of groups like the SMG we can be more cognisant of the kind of challenges that we will face in our own activism, and thus be better prepared to negotiate them when they come. Its history, and that of other left organisations, do not provide a map, but can at least suggest some footprints in the right direction. ■

Cartoon from *Self-Management and the High Schools*



words: Mohamed Hassan

image adapted from photo by Jonathan Rashad



home/state/home

my country is lathed in ink  
she is speaking through my eyes  
watching her history dissolve  
i don't ask her questions like i used to  
she is grateful for that

my country reeks of old glory  
skirts her stories through old streets  
cheeks hollowed from neglect  
mint leaf eyelids saturated heavy

my country has lost her children  
they have built ivory towers to escape her  
run bulldozers out from her spine  
and i am the last one left

she stumbles on my tongue  
trying to keep her secrets  
from spilling out of my mouth  
i tell her it's to ward off  
the strange men in her life

my country won't speak to me  
tells me i have betrayed her  
but she won't look me in the eye  
i am the only one  
who reminds her of her youth



*Ko te manu e kai ana i te miro,  
nōna te ngahere*

*Ko te manu e kai ana i te mātauranga,  
nōna te ao*

*The bird that partakes of the miro berry  
their domain is the forest*

*The bird that partakes of knowledge their  
domain is the world*

## Fast Times at Anarchist High

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—Comrade Tuiono | Images MZ

WELL THIS IS SUPPOSED TO BE A RECAP OF THINGS I TALKED ABOUT AT THE ANARCHIST BOOK FAIR which was an incoherent ramble on my one-sided view of history and lots of fond (and at times hazy) memories of back in the day rolling with the Welly massive. Except I can't remember a word I said, and as usual I didn't take notes so this probably isn't anything like what I said at the Book Fair. Ah well.

### FIRST A BIT OF HISTORY...

A bit about me—so the rest of this spiel makes sense—I've been interested and involved in Indigenous and Left politics my entire adult life, a natural expression of my bicultural upbringing. I'm Māori and a first generation New Zealand-born Pacific Islander (Cook Island Māori, so Māori-Māori if that makes sense). Like many people, my Pasifika family migrated here for work.

My Māori whānau are from the Taitokerau. When you're from two minorities the cultural divide between you and the majority culture becomes a familiar gap you have to bridge in order to function in this society. If you are an indigenous person, there is extra shit you have to carry across that bridge. I was also a bit of nerd at school, so I had a bit of a minority in a minority in a minority thing going on.

My grandpa on the island side was a railway worker and active in the unions. My mum on the Māori side was a cleaner and also active in the unions; this was before Labour sold out the country in 1984 to economic theories of privatisation. In my youth I got involved in the tino rangatiratanga movement.

In fact the first protest I remember going to was with my mum—protesting against the Springbok tour in 1981. I was in primary school at the time. We lived in Auckland city on Symonds Street at a takeaway bar. Next door was a pub where punk rock bands played; it was frequented by gangs and bands with names like the Boot Boys, King Cobras and Storm Troopers. The inner city then was where all the immigrants, Māori and Pacific Islanders (PI) lived. This was before we all got shifted out to South Auckland.

Along the way, I learned about colonisation and imperialism, and how it was part of a systematic way of dispossessing my people. It explained clearly why so many things had happened in my family: how our ancestral lands were stolen, how our language was made illegal, how the cops will routinely search you if you're a young Māori/PI male, and all the flow-on shit that follows through the generations. That side of colonial history wasn't the kind we were taught at school. When I was 14 we learnt about Canada—we spent months learning about the different regions and lakes and maple leaves and pointless bollocks like that, and yet nothing about the Indigenous Peoples of Canada. They were invisible, just like how Māori history was invisible, glazed over with the 'we are all just New Zealanders now' shtick that gets dribbled out in columns of the nation's newspapers every Waitangi Day.

I later realised that the English-speaking White settler colonies of Australia, Canada, New

Zealand and the USA routinely practice a collective national amnesia about the establishment of the State with the resulting dispossession and near genocide of Indigenous Peoples.

Realising that shit can really politicise an 18-year-old.

The first Māori activist group I was in was with my mum; I was out of school then. I spent one of those summers hitchhiking to different land occupations in the 1990s—that was cool. Outside of my whānau the people that inspired me to take action were all activists—Eva Rickard, Tame Iti. I also learnt about the Polynesian Panthers and Ngā Tamatoa. I picked up most stuff from personal experience as opposed to some shit I read in a book.

While in Cuba, I learnt about socialism, and later, how fucked the Soviet Union was as an alternative to capitalism. We still need to desperately establish that alternative; currently we have the situation where capitalism, unleashed by neoliberal economics and fueled by consumerism, is quite literally eating the planet, leaving nothing for a tomorrow that is quickly approaching if not already here.

I eventually ended up in Wellington and organising against neoliberal globalisation in a crew called Aotearoa Educators or AE! (a tactically friendlier name as an alternative to the angry Māori shit the mainstream media liked to paint at protests). We organised all sorts of stuff. It was at one of these meetings at Donald Maclean Street in Newtown that I met with Wellington-based anarchists. From my dusty memory banks I think Marky, Ross, Lynnne, Toby, Geoff and Lucy and maybe Mary and Sam were there, but I'm probably mixing up my meetings a bit. We were talk-

ing about working together on globalisation stuff. That was my introduction to the anarchist community in Wellington.

Unbeknownst to me, it was the start of some real good fucken times. I look back with a lot of fondness, nostalgia even. Good times, sometimes fast times, sometimes hard times, and I think I learnt some stuff along the way.

#### ANYWAY ENOUGH NOSTALGIA

#### HERE'S SOME LEARNING IN BULLET POINTS

When looking to work with a different crew in Māori circles there is some stuff you can do to build relationships between groups: whanaungatanga. The online dictionary that I just cut and pasted from defines this as:

1. (noun) relationship, kinship, sense of family connection—a relationship through shared experiences and working together which provides people with a sense of belonging. It develops as a result of kinship rights and obligations, which also serve to strengthen each member of the kin group. It also extends to others to whom one develops a close familial, friendship or reciprocal relationship.

I always think this stuff is important (tikanga/practices). Just because you read the same books and believe the same shit that doesn't mean that person will have your back, or that you can rely on that person; you have to really

“ I later realised that the English-speaking White settler colonies of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA routinely practice a *collective national amnesia* about the establishment of the State with the resulting **dispossession** and near genocide of Indigenous Peoples. **Realising that shit can really politicise an 18-year-old.** ”

know them. If I think about the anarchists/socialists/activists that I trust and respect it's because we went through some shit together: we ate together, got drunk together, got arrested together or whatever. Is this a Māori/Islander thing? Maybe. There are of course many of these values that I know I take for granted because I grew up living with this sort of stuff. I am certainly more comfortable with the anarchist theories that emphasise the collective rather than the individual. I think that is due to my upbringing.



**SHOULD ANARCHISTS HAVE SOME UNDERSTANDING ABOUT COLONISATION?**

I think so. Certainly in Aotearoa that is important. Capitalism wasn't born here; it came by ship from England, and it grew here out of the barrel of a gun. Understand that you are working with people with a long history of resisting capitalism and imperialism. It's important for Māori activists to identify who to work with, and the converse is equally important.

**IDENTITIES YOU CHOOSE MAY NOT BE AS STRONG AS IDENTITIES YOU ARE BORN INTO**

Some people change their political identities like I change my socks—three times a year: anarchist one day, socialist the next, Presbyterian the day after that. Being a Māori is not something I volunteered for. When you're in a protest group with your whanau and/or your wider hapū things are more personal. You don't choose it because you read Chomsky, Bakunin or Goldman; I see that participation as privilege.

**ANOTHER THING I'VE LEARNT OVER THE YEARS IS THAT WE SHOULD SPEAK PLAINLY**

I love ideological bollocks as much as the next anarcho-nerd but the bros down at the pub or peeps at the club might not read the same books you do, or be into using big-ass words, or necessarily give a shit about non-hierarchical ways of organising.

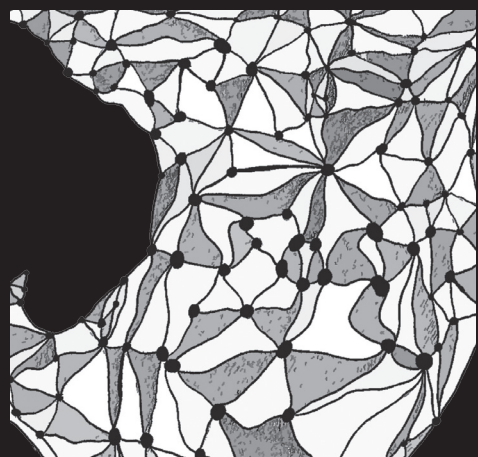
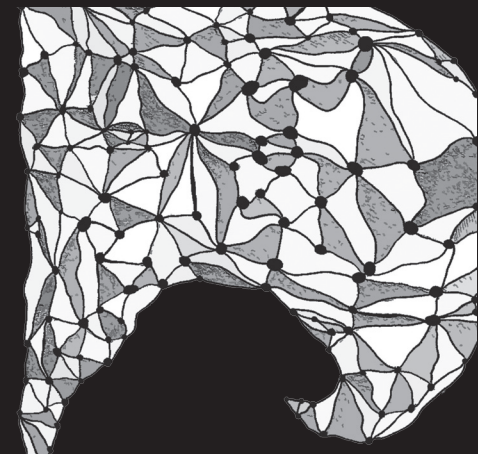
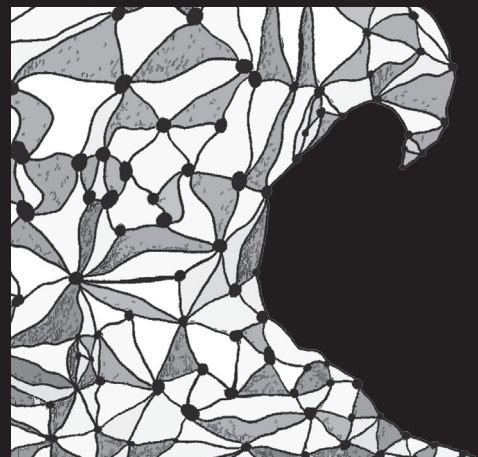
**NEWBIES: PEOPLE ARE PEOPLE AND THEY PROBABLY DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU KNOW**

They are still learning; cut people some slack, and judge them instead on whether they are gonna show and do some work. This can often be more useful than someone who is politically and intellectually on-point, but doesn't do jack shit. Anyway Malcom X agrees with me—or the internet thinks that Malcom X does when he said:

'Don't be in a hurry to condemn because he doesn't do what you do or think as you think or as fast. There was a time when you didn't know what you know today.'

**ART**

If you want to make your politics sexier, get some art up in there. Because let's face it, people like artists more than they like activists. There are also other ways looking at the issues. I usually work at the intersection of indigenous people, activists and creative communities. Some communities lend themselves by definition to poli-



tics: punk and politics seem to go hand in hand, hiphop is also a good mix, and visual arts can allow people to see and understand the issues from in a way that straight out talking can't do.

#### **PREACHING TO THE CHOIR**

I love preaching to the choir because it's familiar, especially when everyone travels relatively in the same political orbit. It's probably not going to change shit though. These days I just try to organise where I am with the diversity of people around me—within the community that I am living in. I basically don't have a choice really since I live in the middle of nowhere, but I think it's a worthwhile strategy if we are to spread the anarchist gospel. Can I get an amen?

#### **MY LAST PEARL OF WISDOM IS THIS**

Bigger is not always better. Things can get lame real fast if you boil everything down to the lowest common denominator. You can get more people along to participate in whatever you're organising by making your politics broader and more liberal, but then you run the risk of not achieving what you set out to do. It happens all the time, particularly when political parties are involved. The seabed and foreshore hikoi is an example of that. We had thousands of people come together; there was real momentum and a desire to see things happen at the local level. In the end all of that energy was captured to create the Māori Party that is now propping up the National Party in government. You only need critical mass to get shit done. I've worked on protests/projects/campaigns that were smaller and managed to achieve their original intentions.

Anyway, enough from me, keep on keeping on Comrades. ■



Above: Protest against the US–NZ Partnership Forum in 2007, Auckland.

## **A Decade of Resistance**

Photos by John Darroch





Peace activist Tyler Culpepper on the roof of Rakon HQ, Auckland, after graffitiing the building's facade to protest Israel's 'Cast Lead' assault on Gaza in 2008–9. Rakon make specialised guidance technology used in Israeli missiles.

Opposite top: Protesters lock themselves to Mt Eden prison in solidarity with hunger-striking asylum seeker Ali Panah. Two days later the Ministry of Immigration caved and allowed Ali Panah to be released on bail, 2007.

Opposite: In 2009 thousands of people joined a hikoī against plans to exclude Māori from Auckland's new Supercity council.



The National  
Distribution Union's  
Skinny Santa parade,  
Auckland 2008.



Above: The Mushroom House squat in Kingsland, Auckland.



Left: Supporters of the Waihopai Ploughshares set up camp across from the US embassy in Wellington during the trial of three Catholic Workers charged with intentional damage and unlawful entry at Waihopai spy base. The three were acquitted on all charges, 2010.



Above: Queers Against Israeli Apartheid disrupt Auckland Pride 2014 to protest the Israeli embassy's inclusion in the parade.

Opposite top: A Port of Auckland worker and member of the Maritime Union prevents a container truck from leaving the terminal. The company planned to contract out stevedoring jobs in an effort to lower wages and weaken workers' collective power.

Opposite: TV presenter Paul Henry's racist remarks sparked a protest outside the headquarters of TVNZ in Wellington, 2010.







Above: Street Chant play at a block party outside the Young Nats Ball, MC'ed by Minister of Social Development Paula Bennett. The party was organised by Auckland Action Against Poverty to call attention to National's attacks on beneficiaries and low-paid workers.

Right: In 2006 Assistant Police Commissioner Clint Rickards, and former police officers Bob Shollum and Brad Shipton were found not guilty of raping Louise Nicholas. Thousands of people protested the verdict.





## The Purple and the Black

— Ali | Images by Henna

ANARCHISM IS A MOVEMENT against capitalism and the state, but at its most powerful it is a movement against all forms of power and domination. Feminism is a movement for women's liberation, but it is at its most powerful when it is a movement for liberation from all forms of domination. So bringing anarchism and feminism together is an obvious combination.

What feminism brings to anarchism is a move away from a narrow focus on class and state power, and an analysis of the ways oppression is gendered. What anarchism brings to feminism is a move away from trying to use the apparatus of the state to liberate women, and an analysis of how state power upholds patriarchy.

This means that we need to have an understanding of structural oppression and of the ways that people's lives are shaped by economic and political circumstances. It also means

understanding that people have agency, and that individuals will make the choices that are best for them, out of the limited options available. So we have to respect people's autonomy.

### PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE

One example of this is sex work: this is an issue that has long divided the feminist movement. On one hand there are feminists who view sex workers as victims, who believe that no one would

freely choose to work in the sex industry, and who support criminalisation of sex workers (for their own good). On the other hand there are feminists who think that sex work is liberating and empowering, because it allows women to make an income from their sexuality.

I think both these views are flawed. Having to exchange your labour for money isn't liberating: it's economic oppression. This is true for sex workers just as much as it is for baristas, mechanics, nurses, librarians, editors, and anyone else who relies on selling their labour in order to stay alive. I know many sex workers who love their job, but even when you love your job there are days that you don't want to work and you have to anyway, so that you can pay your rent. I also know sex workers who hate their job but continue to do it because it's the best option available to them in a society that hasn't given them a lot of options.



The important point here is that people's choices aren't made in a vacuum—they're a response to circumstances. This doesn't mean that you should disrespect their choices. It certainly doesn't mean that you can liberate them by ignoring their choices and legislating for the state to force them to make the choices that you think they should be making. Women's liberation will not be granted by the state, and giving the state more power over women is dangerous. Laws that give police more power over women are dangerous. Think of all the women who have been raped by police officers: do we really want to give cops more power over any woman? The solution is not to give the state power over sex workers; it's to give workers power, by supporting sex workers' unions and organisations.

That's one example of how we put anarcho-feminist theory into action. In fact, for the most part anarcho-feminism has existed more as practice than as theory. There isn't a huge body of published work on anarcho-feminism—which in some ways I think is a shame. It's mostly existed at a grassroots level of people organising on the ground, taking inspiration from a variety of feminist, anarchist, communist and anti-colonial sources.

#### ANARCHIST FEMINIST ORGANISING

At the turn of this century there were a lot of women anarchists in Wellington who were organising against free trade, against the War on Terror and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, against coal mining in Happy Valley, against releasing genetically-modified organisms into the ecosystem, against low wages and exploitation of workers. What we found was that the groups we worked in were really sexist. This manifested in a bunch of ways. Sometimes it was subtle: men did

most of the talking in meetings; men made the decisions; issues that affected women were ignored and weren't seen as political issues. Other times it was overt: anarchist men who committed rape and relationship abuse were being defended by their comrades, and women who were raped and abused weren't supported.

In response to that, we started up an anarchy-feminist group. Most of us didn't know a lot about feminist history or theory. We were learning as we went. We spent a lot of our meetings talking about our own lives. We talked about experiences that we had in common and experiences that we didn't have in common. Sharing our experiences with each other helped us connect the dots and understand the ways that our personal hardships were political in nature, and were caused by living in a patriarchal society.

When we started our group we decided that our meetings would only be open to women. At the time it was important to us to have a space without men, where we felt safe speaking our minds—and where we were allowed time to speak our minds without being talked over. In retrospect having women-only meetings wasn't a good idea. It meant that we had to police who was and wasn't welcome, which excluded a lot of people, especially trans women and genderqueer folks. It also meant that we had a tendency to homogenise women's experiences and assume that we all had particular things in common. We often ended up ignoring the ways that racism, colonisation, class, heterosexism, transphobia and disability shape women's lives.

When we started talking about what issues we should organise around, I think we made the mistake of taking a really narrow view of what constituted a feminist issue. We talked about rape, domestic violence, abortion, sexuality, diets, beauty standards—these are all really important issues and they're often dismissed because they're seen as 'women's issues.' But what I've come to realise is that every political issue is a feminist issue. Poverty is a feminist issue, war is a feminist issue, prisons are a feminist issue, colonialism is a feminist issue, benefit cuts are a feminist issue, workers' rights are a feminist issue. Part of the reason that I'm not involved in a feminist group at the moment is that I don't feel like I need to work in an explicitly feminist organisation: I bring my feminist practice to all the political work that I do.

In spite of our mistakes, all that fighting to make women heard did have an effect. The anarchist movement in Wellington has changed: there are more women active, there are more women being listened to, and issues that affect women are treated as political issues. This has caused a lot of conflict—in some ways the movement is divided between those who think feminist issues are important, and those who think feminist issues are a frivolous distraction from the real struggle.

#### DECOLONISING ANARCHISM

Nowadays I see the same pattern being repeated. Anarchist activity is dominated by Pākehā. There's a lot of racism, both explicit and implicit, to the point where many Māori and other people of colour are fed up and don't want anything to do with anarchism. A big part of that is that for some people anarchism has become synonymous with a kind of class-reductionist politics that ignores the relationship between class and sexism, racism, transphobia, disability and homophobia.

Pākehā anarchists have a tendency to be Eurocentric: they take ideas developed by people like Bakunin and Kropotkin in Europe and try to apply them to Aotearoa. These are useful ideas, but there is a different context here.

The **New Zealand state** exists as a *direct result of colonisation*, and if we want to **dismantle the state** then we need to put **decolonisation at the centre of our anarchist practice.**

#### DON'T BAN BOSSY, BAN BOSSES

In the last couple of years feminism has made a comeback. Being a feminist is no longer taboo—Miley Cyrus, Beyoncé, Tina Fey, Sheryl Sandberg, National's Jo Goodhew and NZ First's Tracey Martin are all self-professed feminists. Being a feminist has been reduced to an individual identity and a brand, rather than a political movement and a set of ethics. Instead of mass grassroots organising we get viral Youtube videos and Facebook memes.

One of the most prominent—and grating—examples of this type of feminism is Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In* book and NGO. *Lean In* encourages women to achieve their goals by learning to overcome their fears and have confidence in themselves. This brand (and it literally is a brand) of feminism has no room for collective struggle or for recognising structural oppression. Instead of naming and abolishing the many barriers to women's freedom, *Lean In* places the blame for women's suffering on women—we just need to overcome our fears and learn self-confidence. In this way, feminism is reduced to an individualist aspiration for individual success.

*Lean In*'s main contribution to the feminist movement is *Ban Bossy*. The campaign aims to encourage girls to take leadership positions by banning words like 'bossy' and 'know-it-all.' There are countless reasons to criticise *Ban Bossy*. It fails to acknowledge the ways that girls' experiences are shaped by class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and assigned sex. It emphasises individual achievement over collective liberation. It assumes that the solution to sexism is putting more women in positions of power, instead of abolishing power inequality and constructing horizontal models of social organisation.

It's also incredibly inane—functioning as an advertising campaign, not a social movement. It transforms women's liberation into a commodity you purchase, rather than collectively fight for—like everything else in a capitalist economy. The *Ban Bossy* online shop sells branded T-shirts, tote bags, mugs and even iPhone cases.

There's nothing new about feminist ideas being co-opted and used to uphold capitalism. At best it's brought us nothing, at worst it's created the illusion that sexism no longer exists, because women can exploit the working class as efficiently as men. This is why it's so important to articulate a feminist politics that aims for liberation from all oppression.

#### SMASHING PATRIARCHY ON THE INTERWEBZ

New forms of media have made it easier to spread feminist and radical ideas. Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, Youtube and Instagram allow people to share ideas, dialogue, and orchestrate mass activist campaigns without relying on conventional media to give them a platform. It's been a double-edged sword. We risk having feminism reduced to a fad—a youth subculture defined

by a love of cupcakes, winged eyeliner and Beyoncé, instead of a political movement based on shared principles.

But the rise of online feminism has also meant that feminist ideas can flow from the periphery to the centre, or from periphery to periphery, without commercial publishers acting as gatekeepers. Some of the most useful and exciting feminist commentary is coming from bloggers like Budour Hassan in Palestine, Sara Salem in Egypt and Razan Ghazawi in Syria—and in a world where Arab women are consistently portrayed as passive victims of their own culture, these women's voices are incredibly relevant. Likewise the group blog *Tits and Sass* provides a perspective on sex work from the people whose perspective matters the most—sex workers.

// There's nothing new about feminist ideas being co-opted and used to uphold capitalism. At best it's brought us nothing, at worst it's created the illusion that sexism no longer exists, because women can exploit the working class as efficiently as men. //

When Cece McDonald was incarcerated for defending herself and her friends from a racist and transphobic attacker, the website *Support Cece* featured updates from her support team and blog posts written by McDonald in prison. The website didn't just build solidarity with a political prisoner—it also served to link her struggle with a broader struggle against racism, transmisogyny, and the prison-industrial-complex.

Here in Aotearoa Kim McBreen's *He Hōaka* is an amazing resource on decolonisation, gender and sexuality. The group blog *Mellow Yellow* publishes feminist perspectives on racism and migrant identity. *Capitalism Bad, Tree Pretty* covers everything from

labour struggles to rape culture to Buffy the Vampire Slayer, but I particularly recommend it for Maia's articulate discussion of the politics of human bodies.

The worldwide web is an incredibly useful tool for political organising—but it does lend itself most easily to individual action. There is no replacement for the experience of organising collectively with a group of people, discussing problems and solutions, principles and tactics, and making collective decisions.

// ...think of them as entanglements: identities, experiences, material circumstances, interpersonal and structural oppressions get tangled together. If we want to undermine oppression, we have to start by mapping these tangles so we can understand the relationship between different types of oppression, and the ways that they uphold each other. //

#### TANGLES, ASSEMBLAGES AND INTERSECTIONS

In 1989 Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term 'intersectionality' to illustrate that different types of oppression don't exist in isolation, they intersect with each other.

Since then it's become a bit of a feminist buzzword—people throw it around a lot, but don't always stop to think about what it means in practice.

I actually don't think that intersectionality is a very good model for understanding oppression, because it suggests that different types of oppression exist on separate axes that occasionally intersect. The reality is that they are deeply intertwined. Class is racialised, racism is gendered, and so on. Jasbir Puar suggests that we need to understand these as assemblages rather than intersections. I tend to think of them as entanglements: identities, experiences, material circumstances, interpersonal and structural oppressions get tangled



together. If we want to undermine oppression, we have to start by mapping these tangles so we can understand the relationship between different types of oppression, and the ways that they uphold each other.

#### WHERE TO FROM HERE?

What attracted me to anarcha-feminism as a teenager was this idea that all oppression is connected. Instead of arguing over which is more important, fighting capitalism or fighting sexism or fighting colonialism, we need to be fighting all of them simultaneously. That's the theoretical basis of it anyway. In practice people don't always do that. Feminists can be incredibly racist, transmisogynist and ableist. It's important to acknowledge that. When someone tells you that your political organising is throwing them under the bus, it's important to listen. We can only get

better if we're willing to be honest about our fuck ups.

I'm trying to think of what I want for the future of anarcha-feminist organising: I think the most important thing is that we prioritise the needs of the people who have the least power in this society. All anarchists need to focus on decolonisation and fighting racism. We all need to organise in ways that are welcoming and inclusive to people who aren't Pākehā—and not make it the responsibility of Māori and other people of colour. We need to prioritise making spaces safe for trans women and other trans people—without making it the responsibility of trans anarchists. We need to make spaces accessible, to organise in ways that don't disable people—without making it the responsibility of disabled anarchists. And we need to do this everywhere all of the time. ■





THERE ARE FEW PEOPLE IN AOTEAROA who would immediately think of the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) as a ‘war machine’ or a ‘killing machine’. And there are few who recognise the growth of the military both in terms of its physical infrastructure and its social status. But while New Zealand ranks 108<sup>th</sup> on the Global Militarization Index (GMI),<sup>1</sup> the road to a militarised society—one that valorises the military and prioritises its needs—is a short one.

The GMI is a limited tool insofar as it does not attempt any measurement of the role or place of the military in society, nor does it measure the frequency, duration or scale of troop or weapons deployment. As a relative measure against a country’s own GDP, the GMI is limited as it doesn’t convey the enormity of the US military budget: ‘the U.S., after all, accounts for nearly

half the world’s military spending. It maintains more than 1000 military installations across more than 100 “sovereign” nations spread across every continent.’<sup>2</sup> No other country even comes close, yet the US is ranked 28<sup>th</sup> on the GMI.

Like most nations, New Zealand’s military carries out the agenda of the ruling elite. It serves as the big stick in enforcing a particular set of

economic and social arrangements across the globe. New Zealand's role in terms of foreign military engagements is largely limited to participation as part of US-led operations, but in the past few years it has also served its own neo-colonial agenda with interventions in Tonga and the Solomon Islands.

The once vibrant peace movement in New Zealand is for all intents and purposes dead. Peace Movement Aotearoa and the Anti-Bases Campaign are really the only still-visible national organs, and their capacities and roles are limited. There is little of the in-depth peace research that characterised the late 1970s to the early 1990s. And just as importantly, the local grassroots groups that were typically the instigators of action have almost entirely disappeared from the scene. In one sense, that isn't surprising. The peace movement reached its apex in 1987 having secured its major goal of a 'nuclear-free New Zealand' and without a clearer shared picture of the multifaceted agenda that a peace movement might advance (decolonisation, equality and feminism, for example), it slowly faded away. The Afghan and Iraq wars certainly breathed life into the movement, but it was short lived and many left disheartened after the March 2003 invasion. Most believed New Zealand had little involvement, buying into the Labour government's well-crafted 'peacekeeping' propaganda.

Yet, unfortunately, an anti-war movement is as vitally important today as it ever was, perhaps even more so, not the least because none of those issues have gone away. Its importance is not only in struggling against the rapid institutional militarisation in terms of involvement with

the US, but in struggling against the cultural indoctrination of militarism and all that it entails.

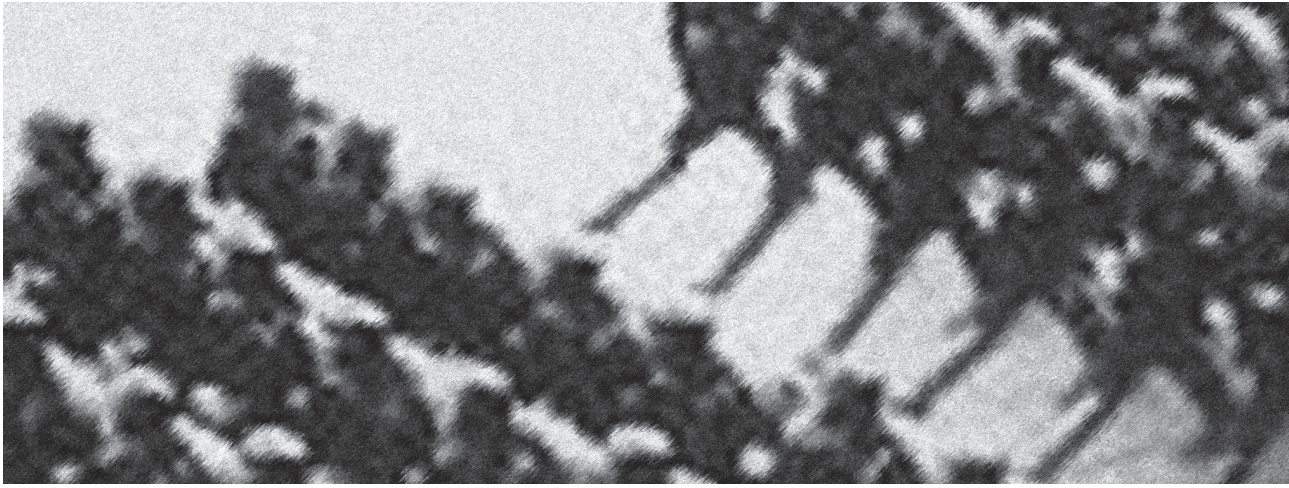
#### **VERY, VERY GOOD FRIENDS**

'War is the health of the state,' said radical leftist author Randolph Bourne in 1918,<sup>3</sup> and certainly the New Zealand state is counting on its continued health by enhancing the military-industrial-complex. Measures include signing of the Wellington and Washington Declarations, the development of drones, and the vast public commemorations of World War I planned for the next few years.

The Wellington Declaration<sup>4</sup> signed in 2010 by Hilary Clinton, then US Secretary of State and Foreign Minister Murray McCully was really a prelude to the much more explicit and extensive 2012 Washington Declaration<sup>5</sup> that was signed between the US Department of Defence and NZ's Ministry of Defence and Defence Force.

The Washington Declaration is a template for sustained military cooperation and integration of the NZ defence forces into the US's military structure. This was cemented in late 2013 when Minister of Defence Jonathan Coleman travelled to Washington and formally renewed military relations with the US, securing NZ Navy access to Pearl Harbour for the first time in 30 years at the June 2014 Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) Navy war exercises.

Another manifestation of this closer cooperation were the three-week long 'Southern Katipo' exercises in late 2013 that included 'the defence forces of the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, France, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Tonga and New Zealand.'<sup>6</sup> They conducted an exercise that appears



to be a thinly-veiled practice run to invade Fiji. In May 2014, the NZDF and US Marine Corp carried out exercise 'Alam Halfa'—a month-long exercise with the goal of enhancing interoperability, which involves a scenario where the troops must restore peace between two fictitious nations, Bekara and Alpiria. Clearly, there is not a shred of irony in either military.

Another development relating to US–NZ military ties is the recent disclosure that the US government was involved in seeking an expansion of powers of the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB) to conduct warrantless mass surveillance.<sup>7</sup> As part of the UKUSA agreement, most of the signals intelligence collection is ultimately used in a military context. The NZ agency has clearly been privy to the most sensitive National Security Agency programmes.<sup>8</sup> As importantly, the GCSB has had a direct role in providing signals intelligence to the US military in Afghanistan.

Despite widespread public opposition to the expansion of the GCSB's powers, there are no serious plans on the table to fundamentally alter their role, scope of operations or budget.

#### PRIVATE PRACTICE

Development of a homegrown military-industrial-complex has been underway for a number of years.

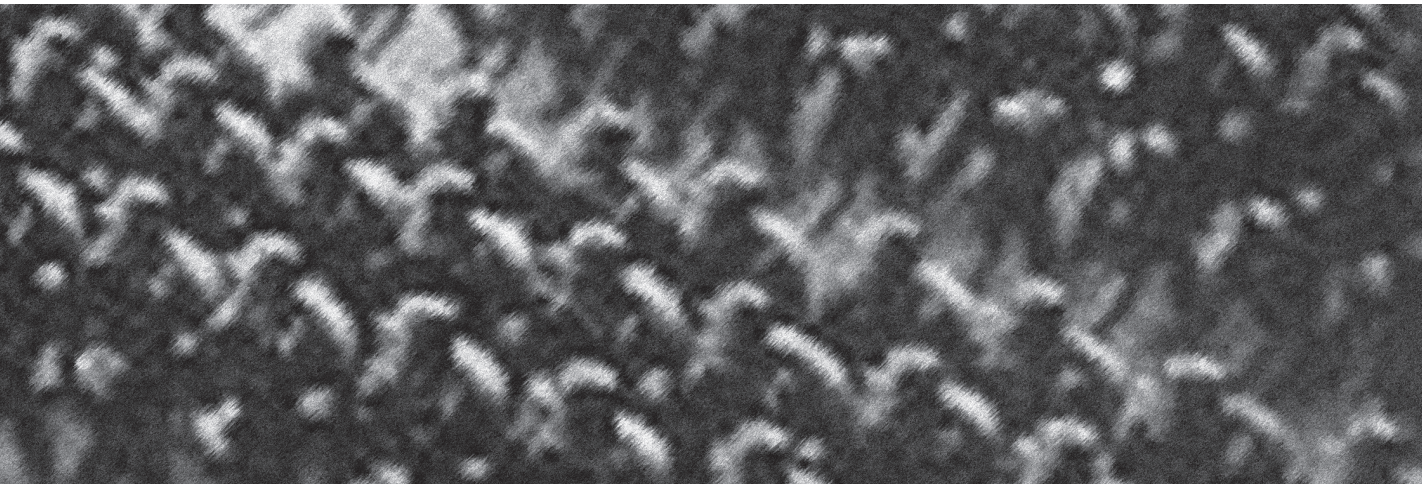
The New Zealand Defence Industry Association was created in 1993 as a means by which to secure local involvement in the Navy's frigate purchase, but it now has a much-expanded role that includes promoting the NZ defence industry at overseas forums, providing market information to members for both general defence opportunities and specific projects and lobbying government on issues of interest to its members.<sup>9</sup>

At the 2013 annual industry conference, the world's largest weapons manufacturer, Lockheed Martin, was the host for the conference cocktails.

While New Zealand's own budget for the military is relatively small, there is money to be made when significant purchases (helicopters, armoured vehicles, etc) are made, and there is clearly a desire to develop local expertise for export to other countries.

The NZDF Defence Technology Agency is the part of the military specifically involved in developing new war tools, and they have had some success in the last couple of years commercialising developments of drone aircraft, a radar threat system, and an encryption console, all of which have been sold to foreign militaries.

The growth of local military contractors represents a very real part of the growth of militarism as an ideology. Those who contribute to the material upkeep of the military do more than



support and champion its existence—they require its growth for their own survival.

#### HEARTS AND MINDS

The growth of militarism, for me, however, is most pointedly about culture, about understanding and ideas. That is why the growth of it feels so profound to me.

2014 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World War I. It is an event that is being ‘commemorated’ with a fund of some \$17 million for projects.<sup>10</sup> One project already underway is an ‘official’ history of the war being written jointly by the NZDF and Massey University.<sup>11</sup> The university as an institution of social reproduction and cultural interpretation has long been a useful place for militarism to flourish. Massey in particular has embraced its role with a dedicated Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies where many of the lecturers are commissioned officers in the NZDF.

Countering the effects of Anzac day in aggrandising war is particularly challenging given the stated desire of the government to include the stories of war resisters as part of the 2015 Gallipoli commemorations. It feels as if these stories are being co-opted in the arsenal of national identity creation, as if to say, ‘we were all in it together’ when the reality was that objectors like Archibald Baxter stood against everything that the war machine in its widest terms represented. They weren’t ‘all in it together.’ Objectors were stripped of their rights and imprisoned, while Māori were being dispossessed of their lands.

Another recent event has also revealed much more about the sanctified place of the military in New Zealand life. In 2011 journalist Jon Stephenson published an article outlining human rights abuses by the NZDF and discussed what the SAS were doing in Kabul. In response, the NZDF embarked upon a systematic character assassination of the journalist undertaken with the

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intent to discredit Stephenson's assertions of abuse. In 2013 Stephenson took a defamation case against the NZDF and the then head of the NZDF, Rhys Jones. In court it became abundantly clear that senior members of the NZSAS along with Rhys Jones personally worked to defame Jon Stephenson. Nevertheless, the jury returned a hung verdict, unwilling to convict despite the evidence being both uncontested and accepted. The shiny brass and repeated incantations of 'national security' were enough to cement the will of the pro-war jurors to win one for the Defence Force, illustrating that the military occupies an elevated place above the law.

#### ONTO THE STREETS

Without a doubt, I would like us to have robust and inclusive conversations about 'national security' and the military. In light of the Washington declaration, the development of drones and the expansion of surveillance powers, it is urgently necessary.

We can be sure, however, that such a conversation is not going to happen without people being willing to take it onto the streets and force it to happen. If war is the health of the state, then 'we cannot crusade against war without crusading implicitly against the State.'<sup>12</sup> We can't roll back militarism by one action or one demonstration, but often one thing grows from another. If we wait for even the hint of another war, the contagious fever is 'so infectious that the people catch it before anyone realizes what has happened; and when war breaks out at last, it comes as a relief like vomiting after nausea.'<sup>13</sup> ■

- 1 The Global Militarization Index is a comparison of each country's military expenditure with its gross domestic product (GDP); a comparison of military expenditure with its health expenditure; a contrast between the total number of (para)military forces with the number of physicians, and the overall population; and a ratio of the number of heavy weapons available and the overall population. [www.bicc.de/old-site/index.php?page=ranking-table](http://www.bicc.de/old-site/index.php?page=ranking-table)
- 2 Paul Street. 2014 "Uncle Sam: Top Menace to Peace on/and Earth" *Z* magazine. [zcomm.org/zmagazine/uncle-sam-top-menace-to-peace-onand-earth/](http://zcomm.org/zmagazine/uncle-sam-top-menace-to-peace-onand-earth/)
- 3 Randolph Bourne. 1918. 'War is the health of the State'. [www.antiwar.com/bourne.php](http://www.antiwar.com/bourne.php)
- 4 Full text of the Wellington Declaration: [www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/4309206/Full-text-of-the-Wellington-Declaration](http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/4309206/Full-text-of-the-Wellington-Declaration)
- 5 Full text of the Washington Declaration: [media.nzherald.co.nz/webcontent/document/pdf/201225/WASHINGTON%20DECLARATION%20ON%20DEFENSE%20COOPERATION.pdf](http://media.nzherald.co.nz/webcontent/document/pdf/201225/WASHINGTON%20DECLARATION%20ON%20DEFENSE%20COOPERATION.pdf)
- 6 Tracy Miles. 2013. "Defence force training in South Canterbury" *Stuff*. [www.stuff.co.nz/timaru-herald/news/9282666/Defence-force-training-in-South-Canterbury](http://www.stuff.co.nz/timaru-herald/news/9282666/Defence-force-training-in-South-Canterbury)
- 7 "Snowden outlines spy movements". 2014. *Stuff*. [www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/9816419/Snowden-outlines-spy-movements](http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/9816419/Snowden-outlines-spy-movements)
- 8 In documents leaked by Edward Snowden, a header and/or footer appears on pages that reads 'Top Secret//COMINT/REL to USA, AUS, GBR, NZL' or alternatively 'Top Secret//COMINT REL to US, FVEY' where FVEY refers to the 'Five Eyes' UKUSA countries.
- 9 [www.nzdia.co.nz](http://www.nzdia.co.nz)
- 10 Funding to commemorate the centenary of World War I, [www.mch.govt.nz/funding-nz-culture/funding-commemorate-centenary-world-war-one](http://www.mch.govt.nz/funding-nz-culture/funding-commemorate-centenary-world-war-one)
- 11 [www.ngatangata.ac.nz/massey/about-massey/news/article.cfm?mnarticle\\_uuid=3E02207C-FA43-AC43-D284-8D5563A819AE](http://www.ngatangata.ac.nz/massey/about-massey/news/article.cfm?mnarticle_uuid=3E02207C-FA43-AC43-D284-8D5563A819AE)
- 12 Bourne, *ibid*
- 13 Nicolas Walter. 2011. *Damn Fools in Utopia*. PM Press. p50.



# The personal is polytical

—SEAHORSE

“ Our thoughts and our social construction of reality are always one step behind the complexities and abundance of the real world. — I Hofmann

**A** FEW YEARS BACK when I was finally packing up my life in Europe to move to Aotearoa New Zealand for good, one of my flatmates suggested we prepare a discussion on open relationships<sup>1</sup>. A local group was organising ‘anarchist meetings’ and we thought we could bring a new topic into the realms of that group—and the local anarchist scene in general.

Another friend took our idea to the meeting and the reaction was somewhat astonishing. People said they were not interested, wondered what this had to do with anarchism, and anyway, no one here is non-monogamous! Hmmm... sure!

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1. I use open relationships, non-monogamy and polyamory interchangeably for this article.

While polyamory—the openness to, and practice of, multiple loving as an alternative model to monogamy—is discussed and visibly practiced in queer circles, it is obviously not so for groups that focus on other political and social justice issues. Maybe I shouldn't have been surprised that a group working predominantly on anti-fascism, anti-racism and anti-militarism wasn't going to be excited to talk about sexuality. But I was.

My friend proposed the hypothesis that the men in that group were particularly scared to talk about it because it reaches too far into their personal arena—a masculine comfort zone. It might mean they would have to open up to each other, and it would mean they would have to look at their personal relationships. It could mean their partners might get interested in non-monogamy and start questioning the status quo not only on the streets but also at home and in bed.

So I believe the old feminist analysis still holds true, that there are strong connections between the personal and the political arena. Our social position influences the way we do things and whether we are willing to discuss what we do or feel or think in the first place. This incident didn't leave me with a feeling of rejection but with the quest to better understand how my relationships and sexuality link to a broader political perspective on freedom. For me (and I can only speak for myself) discovering multiple loving and the ongoing journey to practice this in an ethical manner has been guided by some important factors. There is the personal liberation of my (female, queer and kink) gender and sexuality. There is the deconstruction of my Christian upbringing. There is the questioning of a monogamy-honouring culture. There is a passion for communication and challenge. And there is a desire to spread love and the plain joy of sexual play.

**F**OR ME, discovering political consciousness and activism was intertwined with learning about a new concept of freedom. The starting point was myself—as a woman. That focus on myself was the most pressing for me at that point in time, but liberation does not occur in isolation from others. And through those others I encountered I discovered other questioning worlds and my attraction to other women and other genders. Feminism led me, literally, to queerness. By participating in a new culture I was also surrounded by people who not only dared to defy mainstream norms of gender and sexual orientation but also explored the ways in which they wanted to create their relationships beyond monogamy.

**Multiple loving** as a feeling wasn't new but I could finally *validate and own it*. My *natural attraction* to a **diversity of people** found an accepting environment, found words to define my feelings, found a **political framework**.

Traditionally Christianity is sex-negative and misogynistic. I grew up with feelings of secrecy and uneasiness towards anything to do with sex(uality) and the assumption that it must be a dirty, forbidden thing—hence no one spoke about it openly or joyfully. Apart from biological reproduction, sex education did not feature in the curriculum at my private school (Christian in its underlying principles). When some classmates decorated the blackboard with a condom, the teacher became unreasonably angry and had it removed without being able to name what it was. Really he should have been thankful for the creative invitation to talk about safer sex! Whatever values and beliefs are instilled in us



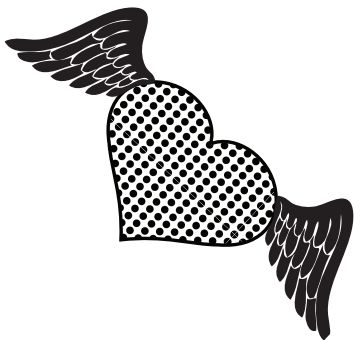
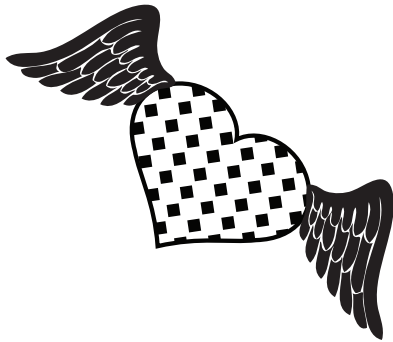
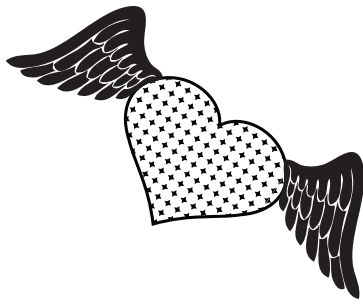
over many years take effort to deconstruct. It is no surprise that I started my journey of sexual exploration after I left my parents' home and in conjunction with entering the realms of critically-thinking groups of people. Breaking out from those constraints brought me home to myself. I learned to say no but more importantly I learned to say yes. I am outgoing, consensual, sex-positive and not apologetic for being a woman or promiscuous.

I used to think polyamory was the new golden key and that everyone should subscribe to it and abolish monogamy. My radicalism had a notion of having found the perfect solution to a problem, to judge by my own standards, as if liberation occurs in the same way for everyone (and as if everyone had the same issues as me). At the time it seemed easier to simply replace one model with another, rather than creating a culture where diverse forms of relationships are equally valued. It's a bit like struggles for the celebration of gender diversity instead of expecting people to fit into a gender-binary (but this is a whole other topic).

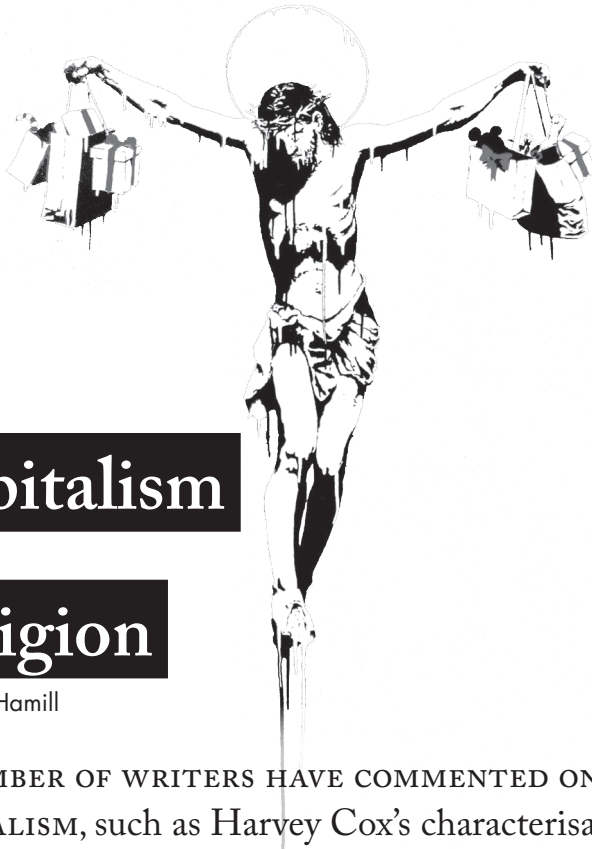
Today I understand that the kind of relationships people have, and who they share their minds, hearts and bodies with, is their choice entirely. There is a difference between following a model because it is all we see and know and making an informed choice after considering other models. It's also not a given that either an open relationship or monogamy is safer than the other, if there is no awareness of power inequalities or understanding of consent. The work to be done in order to lead healthy relationships remains the same—only in polyamory there are more people involved. Struggles for self-determination and questioning society's norms are both inherent to political activism and social movements (which is why I *was* surprised by the dismissal of discussions on open relationships). I acknowledge that my unsubscribing from monogamy is primarily personal in its focus, yet in discussion with others we can draw connections to greater issues.

For example there is—and this might be mostly unconscious—an expectation that we should be the only person our partner loves, has sex with and is intimately connected to. It isn't even talked about—it is assumed. If the silent code is broken, people usually get really jealous and either dispose of their partner or increase their expectations. For me this has always created a strong feeling of being the possession of someone else and being told who I can love and in which way. We don't own other people; we only own ourselves. Making a commitment to someone else—a relationship, a family—is really special but those commitments might change over time. That is natural and human.

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**I**NTIMACY AND SEX ARE DEFINITELY UNIQUE. So is each person and the chemistry between each combination of people. If we are committed to being open and ethical, sex shouldn't be seen as an exclusive right that needs to be guarded, but maybe as an act of free-flowing pleasure. Among other things, the capitalist world functions on control and greed and teaches us to work and pay for our needs. A way to maintain social control is by creating a scarcity of desirable things—or more correctly, the access to those things. For me, everything that is part of non-monogamy—friendships, flirting, cuddles, sex, intimacy, discussions, humour, empathy, commitment—cannot be commodified if it is genuine. (And I don't mean that sex work isn't an absolutely legitimate profession within a capitalist society full of income and opportunity inequalities). I do think that the rigidity with which monogamy and White nuclear families are openly aspired to, upheld and valued serves capitalist economics—and also patriarchy. A one-size-fits-all is easier to control. A stay-in partner at home nurtures the economically productive partner. If there are fewer people (community, extended family) around each individual, there is more dependence on the state and on income. Non-monogamy is only one form of breaking a social norm and one form of building meaningful relationships. It isn't easy to have time and emotional capacity for plenty of relationships when we have to work hard to survive, feed our families and fight many other battles against discrimination. Yet it doesn't mean that we can't believe in, and strive for abundance, of all sorts of human connections. ■



# Capitalism as Religion

— Chrissy Hamill

A NUMBER OF WRITERS HAVE COMMENTED ON THE RELIGIOUS NATURE OF CAPITALISM, such as Harvey Cox's characterisation of the Market as God, or of the mall as modern day cathedral (Smith). These arguments can often sound a little facetious, but I think that they point to some very important insights about the nature of 21<sup>st</sup> century capitalism.

I want to argue that capitalism is religious to the extent that it provides a worldview and institutional structures which are spiritually formational. This is to say that it shapes and forms people holistically, creating and nurturing a distinctive way of relating to ourselves, to others and the world around us. Capitalism is certainly not conventionally understood as a religion. It is perceived as neutral, scientific and natural, and because of this, often avoids association with ideology and religiousness. The presentation of neoliberal capitalism as common sense is a mark of how successfully it has achieved hegemonic status; however, this disguises its own very particular

theology of the human person and her salvation. While capitalism will never be understood as a religion in the traditional sense because it has no self-acknowledged body of dogma, in practice it functions as a religion in many ways. Understanding and resisting the power and dynamics of neoliberal capitalism requires understanding this essentially religious nature.

To begin with, I wish to problematise the task of defining religion, or of separating the 'religious' from the 'secular.' Definitions often seek to include belief in deities or the supernatural such as 'the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods'

(Oxford) but this seems far too limiting. Under this definition, practices such as Buddhism and Confucianism which don't include a deity but are commonly understood as religious cannot be accommodated. Furthermore, even an emphasis on belief itself in defining religion is problematic—Goodchild argues that it is a Christian prejudice to think that religion is dependent on belief or profession of faith (whether or not that entails belief in a supernatural being). Religion can be defined in much broader, functionalist terms, in terms of what it does or how it acts, but along this train of thought there seems to be no clear line at which religion can be discerned from worldviews or ideological orientations that we would usually consider secular such as liberalism or socialism or capitalism, as Cavanaugh outlines convincingly in the *Myth of Religious Violence*. Ultimately, it seems both impossible and highly problematic to meaningfully separate religion from culture.

As a number of thinkers have observed, this is because all human culture has an essentially religious quality, to the extent that religion is concerned with articulating and responding to ideas about ultimate value and meaning. In Ernest Becker's *Denial of Death*, he argues that all human culture and society arise in order to create meaning and significance to human life. The need to do so is an inescapable part of being aware of your own mortality and thus a universal human trait. He writes that 'every society is a religion whether it thinks so or not.' Being religious then, is an inescapable part of being human. Rather than classifying culture into 'religious' and 'not religious' boxes, it seems more useful to think about, as Cavanaugh articulates, religious behaviours—those aspects of life which 'tell stories of order and meaning.' The core aspect of religiousness is not so much about a privatised belief system but the question of what

is absolute in a person's life, or in the analysis of Goodchild, what we show piety to.

From this perspective, it seems very clear that capitalism operates in a religious way, constraining and shaping our lives in the modern West to an extent that no other religious system can hold claim to. In *Capitalism and Religion*, Philip Goodchild argues that after Nietzsche's 'death of god' it is the logic of secular modernity, and by extension capitalism, which functions as the new 'eternal truth.' He writes,

**If God has been murdered,**  
this does not mean the *end of religion*. Not only is there a RESURGENCE of collective needs for *social cohesion* but there also remain global and UNIVERSAL ABSOLUTES which in practice mediate our relations to ourselves: **money, information, time, death...** Religion becomes *resurgent and ubiquitous*.'

In place of God, the free market becomes the primary principle of social order, and money or capital as the definer and controller of value. Mammon, god of material gain, becomes the newly ascendant divinity. This does not mean that we must necessarily 'believe' in capitalism, or self-consciously engage in the worship of money or the market. However the fact that we participate in the system uncritically means that our lives are being shaped and formed in accordance with the theology of the market. In the post-Christian, supposedly secular world, arguably the capitalism of western modernity becomes the pre-eminent 'religious' structure, the primary thing we show piety to.

In effect, capitalism functions as the new ‘opiate of the people’ by disguising oppression and ideology as common sense. Zizek, for example, insists that the hegemonic nature of liberal capitalism results in what he terms a ‘prohibition against thinking’ (quoted in Moon). Because there is no other alternative for seeing the world, because we have reached the ‘end of history’ as Fukuyama famously asserts, the inevitability and justice of the market is the only eternal truth left.

**Y**ET AS WELL AS OPERATING in an ideological sense, market capitalism offers other traits that are more instinctively understood as religious, that of a distinctive theology, and ritual and liturgical practices. Market capitalism offers, as Cox phrases: ‘an entire theology, comparative in scope to that of Barth or Aquinas.’ Neoliberal economic theory establishes a fundamentally individualistic understanding of human persons, as separate rational beings who aren’t bound to one another in any particular way. Freedom and fulfilment are not communal projects; the only legitimate social bonds are through the pursuit of mutual self-interest. The market presents a theology of scarcity by which there is never quite enough, orientating humans in competition with one another and situating virtue in acts of self-interest. It offers a soteriology (a theory of salvation) by way of faithful adherence to the free market, through which scarcity is transformed to excess, abundance and eternal economic growth. It is pursuit of this free market which becomes the new idol, the new absolute. Through our piety to the demands of the market, the ‘invisible hand’ will ensure prosperity and growth for all (we must simply have faith the wealth will trickle down). The interests of the market have become sacralised, an unquestionable absolute by which anything and everything is liable to be sacrificed to. In the recent words of Pope Francis, ‘whatever is fragile [...] is defenceless before the interests of the deified market.’

Capitalism also maintains religious power through ritual and liturgy. This is perhaps especially important in understanding its religious nature because if capitalism is a religion it is a primarily cultic one, concerned with material rituals (Benjamin). Capitalism is spiritually formational not just because we profess belief or adhere self-consciously to it but because we participate in it and have our lives shaped by its structures. A number of contemporary theologians (Bell, Cavanaugh and Smith) all place emphasis on consumerist ‘liturgies’ as a locus of desire formation, shaping our ‘most basic attunement to the world’

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(Smith). The experience of being a consumer in a capitalist world is rife with what can be understood as ritualistic, liturgical practices. The experience of taking a trip to the local mall, of shopping, choosing and purchasing is, as Smith suggests, a religious experience, with its own icons, sacraments, cathedrals and relics. It is essentially liturgical. which is to say it is not morally neutral, but trains us in certain ways of thinking, feeling, desiring and relating to one another, not just on an ideological or thinking level but a spiritual and religious level.

**I**F ALL OF THIS IS TRUE, it raises a couple of relevant aspects to the way we think about capitalism. The first is that, regardless of our conclusions about capitalism's practical use and effectiveness in bringing about material abundance, it can legitimately be rejected on purely spiritual grounds. Even if it were true that limitless economic growth was possible, and that capitalism was not intimately connected with catastrophic climate change, and that it was not entrenching and



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intensifying inequality (or perpetuating colonisation, racism and gender oppression), it can still be said that capitalism is profoundly spiritually unhealthy. Adam Smith famously asserts that it is not the benevolence of the butcher or baker that matters in us getting dinner but their own self-interest, however the fact that capitalism spiritually orientates us towards our own self-interest and preservation is problematic in and of itself regardless of the correctness of his theory. Daniel Bell in the *Economy of Desire* articulates this very clearly, arguing that 'relations fostered by the capitalist market actively work against both supply and demand of traits like love and generosity.' He argues, as do both Cavanaugh and Smith, that capitalism as a form of spiritual allegiance exists in direct competition with Christianity (and I think arguably many other spiritualities) because of the way it orientates desire. Inasmuch as we subscribe to a values system that is identifiably different from that of capitalism, it can be rejected because of its religiously formative nature.

The second point is that effective resistance to capitalism means resistance at least in part on a spiritual and religious level. Effective resistance requires not only knowledge of capitalism's flaws, of its ideological nature, or even recogni-

tion of its formative power, but active orientation towards a different absolute, a transformation in our spiritual imaginations. Because we are 'affective, desiring, liturgical animals' (Smith), we are deeply affected by the institutions that govern our lives. We need not only alternative ways of thinking but an alternative community and structures that are strong enough to shape us in a different way, to orient and direct us to different patterns of relating, thinking and consuming. As Audre Lorde famously wrote, 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.' To effectively resist capitalism we need to be able to step outside its formative power and to draw strength from alternative spiritual traditions.

As I hope to have shown, there are many ways that capitalism can be understood to act religiously. Writers such as Goodchild go as far as to characterise it as the dominant 'religious' system. Certainly, it is fair to say that it forms a dominant ideological framework for understanding social life, offering a very distinctive 'theology' of the market. But it also structures and organises our existence, forming humans into disconnected consumers. Both the ideas of capitalism and its structures and rituals can be seen to be essentially religious in the way that they orient human persons spiritually, offering salvation and transcendence through participation in the market and by forming particular ways of relating to, and engaging with, the world. The power of capitalism therefore needs to be understood not only as philosophical or structural, but also profoundly spiritual. Acknowledging and contesting this religious dimension is essential in our resistance to capitalism. ■

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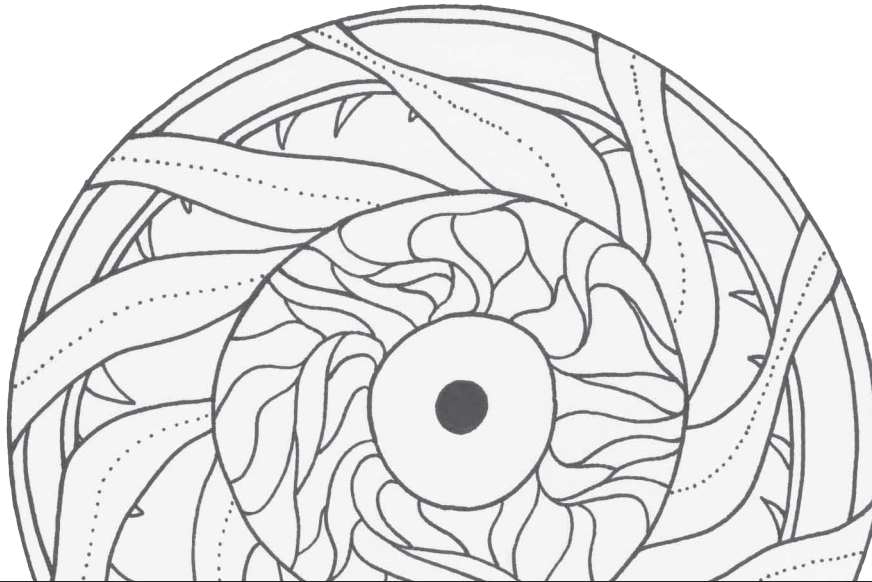


Image by Jess

# A MAP TOWARDS REVOLUTION

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL SCHMIDT

Michael Schmidt is an investigative journalist, anarchist theorist and radical historian based in Johannesburg, South Africa.

—Interviewed by  
Anarchist Affinity

In your recent book, *Cartography of Revolutionary Anarchism*, you argue that the history of anarchism is global and that anarchists have failed to draw insights from anarchist movements outside of Western Europe. What lessons does the global history of anarchism have to offer those engaged in struggle today?

First and foremost: the historical record shows that anarchism and its primary mass-organisational strategy, syndicalism, are a remarkably coherent and universalist set of theories and practices, despite the movement grappling with an immensely diverse set of circumstances. From the establishment of the first non-White unions in South Africa and the first unions in China, through the resistance



to fascism in Germany, Italy, Eastern Europe and the Southern Cone of Latin America—to the establishment of practical anarchist control of cities and regions, sometimes ephemeral, sometimes longer-lived. In countries as diverse as Macedonia (1903), Mexico (1911, 1915), Italy (1914, 1920), Portugal (1918), Brazil (1918), Argentina (1919, 1922), arguably Nicaragua (1927–1932), Ukraine (1917–1921), Manchuria (1929–1931), Paraguay (1931), and Spain (1873/4, 1909, 1917, 1932/3, and 1936–1939). These circumstances included everything from extreme poverty under capitalist modernisation campaigns to outright extermination by the parasitic elites.

Lucien van der Walt and I published a comparative analysis of the anarchist and syndicalist movements in Southern Africa and North Africa in the forthcoming Spanish-language book *Springwaters of Anarchy*. We found that despite dealing with very different challenges of trying to overcome class fragmentation (primarily along religious and national lines in Egypt, but along racial and linguistic lines in South Africa), the movement's ethics and ideology were remarkably uniform, even if the tactics employed in its pursuit of mass-organisational counter-power differed in detail, tempo and sequence. The South Africans and Egyptians both built national syndicalist labour centres in 1921; in both countries mass anarchist class mobilisation was the chosen vehicle for the overthrow of capital and the state. Our research has shown that this pattern is replicated time and again internationally.

The results of this historically-revealed universalism are vitally important to any holistic understanding of anarchism and syndicalism.

The movement did not in fact arise in Europe within the French trade unions in 1894 and

spread outwards from the imperial centre to the periphery. It arose in the trade unions of the First International, almost simultaneously in Mexico, Spain, Uruguay, and Egypt from 1868 to 1872. In other words, it arose internationally, on four continents, and was explicitly *not* the imposition of a European ideology. The Greek syndicalist movement, for example, was an import from Egypt, which was in turn partly under Syrian/Lebanese and partly under Turkish influence, which may in turn have owed some of their influences to the early movements in Georgia, Armenia and Persia.

There is in fact no such thing within the movement as 'Third World,' 'Global South' or 'Non-Western' anarchism that is in any core sense distinct from that in the 'Global North.' In fact the movement was infinitely more dominant in most of Latin America than in most of Europe (excluding Portugal, the Netherlands and France) and North America—where its militant minority syndicalist unions more closely approximated in size the smaller movement of the Russian Empire, North and Southern Africa, and the Far East. In Europe (outside the likes of Spain, where the CGT is the third-largest union centre representing two million workers in workplace elections) and North America, the movement today is more similar in strength to the historical movements in Vietnam, Lebanon, India, Mozambique, Nigeria, Costa Rica, and Panama—so to look to the Northern movements as the centre of the ideology produces gross distortions.

In sum, the lessons for anarchists and syndicalists is that the movement always was, and remains, universally ideologically and ethically coherent because of its implacable engagements with the abuse of power at all levels—from

the domestic home to the empire—in all, intersectional, circumstances: gender, race, colour, creed, sexuality, ability and so on.

Anarchists in the South Pacific are often ignorant of their own history. In your research for *Cartography* and your upcoming volume *Global Fire*, have you come across any interesting anarchist and syndicalist history from this region?

We've taken an explicitly regional (Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand) and transnational (the two countries in the context of Southeast Asia, South China, Japan and Oceania) approach towards reassessing the historical record of anarchism and syndicalism in the region. This approach does recognise the specific objective conditions of the broad working class (poor, peasantry, proletariat and wage-slave middle class) in different countries and territories, but also recognises that migrant labour and other forms of diaspora blur national boundaries and strengthen the international and thus multiracial nature of the movement.

For example, we'd have to recognise that in the colonial era, the three territories that today constitute Vietnam—Tongkin, Annam and Cochinchina—had different legal statuses under French rule, which had a very real impact on how the anti-colonial struggle could be expressed in the three territories. At the same time, it is vital to look at how the Vietnamese working class more generally was influenced by activists radicalised in Paris and southern China, and how their experience of oppression was shaped not only by the French colonial regime, but by their migrant labour on the plantations of the Philippines under Spanish rule.

So, to come to Aotearoa, it would be really foolish to try to isolate the Kiwi experience as a British colony, then dominion—and its peculiar

segregationist working-class ideology of White Labourism—from not only the rest of the British Empire (Britain, India, South Africa, Canada and Australia in particular), but from the linkages of the maritime world (Indonesia, China, Japan, the Philippines, Oceania and the US in particular). And it is important to recognise that ideas and practices of liberation are not necessarily transmitted within these overarching and overlapping worlds of imperialist domination and the maritime networks in a unidirectional way—from the imperialist centre outwards—but that the processes are multidirectional.

For example, racist White Labourism was implanted in South Africa from Australia, resulting in the formation in 1909 of the South African Labour Party (SALP) which was firmly in this tradition, favouring segregation, the job colour bar and the repatriation of all Asians. Cheap steamship travel provided the basis for something of a cross-national labour market. Relatively high wages on the South African mines attracted Australian workers, many of whom promoted the doctrines of White Labourism, but high living costs and appalling industrial conditions in South Africa, plus Aotearoa's and Australia's reputation for social reform made them more attractive destinations for many immigrants. Anarchist ideas were not far behind and in 1886 the Melbourne Anarchist Club became the first anarchist organisation in the Antipodes (predating those in what became South Africa, in Mozambique, the Portuguese enclave of Macau in China, in Japan and in the Philippines by more than a decade).

In 1907, a Socialist Federation of Australasia was formed as an explicitly trans-national organisation, with groups in both Australia and Aotearoa, and began to promote revolutionary syndicalist ideas in its paper, the *International Socialist Review of Australasia*. At the level of individual militants, Tom Glynn was a British



soldier who had fought in the South African War and was discharged in 1907, apparently for refusing to shoot a Zulu during a raid on African rebels. In 1910, a South African branch of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was formed in Johannesburg; the key figures included Glynn and Andrew Dunbar, a giant blacksmith born in Scotland in 1879. Glynn left South Africa in 1911, spending a period in Ireland and the United States, where he rejoined the IWW before ending up in Australia, where he became editor of the IWW's official organ, *Direct Action*. Glynn was a leading propagandist against the White Australia policy and author of the 1915 IWW booklet *Industrial Efficiency and its Antidote*. He was also one of the 'Sydney twelve' arrested in 1916 for treason.

The role of the Australian Labour Party government in suppressing strikes (especially its repressive role in the 1908 miners' strike at Broken Hill) proved fundamental in shifting leading British militant Tom Mann—who visited South Africa, Australia and Aotearoa in 1901—to syndicalism. In later eras, of course, Australian anarchism benefited from the diaspora of militants fleeing repression elsewhere, notably Italians from fascist rule from

Revolutionary portraits: MPT Acharya (India), Melissa Sepulveda (Chile), Kaneko Fumiko (Japan), Manol Vassev (Bulgaria), Ha Ki Rak (Korea), Lucia Sanchez Saornil (Spain), Marusya Nikiforova (Ukraine), Taiji Yamaga (Japan), Jose Peirats Valls (Spain), Petronila Infantes (Bolivia), Li Yung Kyu (Korea), Ann Hansen (Canada)



Migrant  
labour and  
other forms  
of diaspora  
blur national  
boundaries and  
strengthen the  
international  
and thus  
multiracial  
nature of the  
movement



1922, Spaniards from Francoist rule from 1939, and Bulgarians from Soviet-agrarian-fascist Fatherland Front rule from 1948.

The IWW's Marine Transport Workers Industrial Union (MTWIU) integrated Sydney, Melbourne, Wellington and Auckland into a global network of ports: Cape Town, Hong Kong, Canton (Guangzhou), Shanghai, Manila, Rangoon (Yangon), Yokohama and San Francisco among them. This had a direct impact on labour organising in all those cities—in 1918 anarchists formed the first Chinese union in Guangzhou, the Teahouse Labour Union, which drew 11,000 members from among trade guilds and teahouse employees. In the next year, barbers were organised, and anarchists were also influential in the Mechanics' Union.

Verity Burgmann, historian of the IWW in Australia, notes that in the same period the Australian IWW was in contact with Chinese and Burmese radicals who translated and distributed IWW materials. Many of these Chinese radicals were presumably located in the British colony of Hong Kong, which lies close to the emergent anarchist stronghold of Guangzhou. Guangzhou was run as an anarchist commune between 1921 and 1923, expelling nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek, who had to seek refuge on a British gunboat.

In 1916 the IWW launched a fishermen's strike in the British colony of Fiji. This was probably under the influence of the Australian IWW or the Aotearoa IWW (founded in 1908 and re-founded in 2000) or perhaps the IWW-influenced New Zealand Federation of Labour, better known as the 'Red Feds,' which was organised on a craft, rather than industrial basis. By 1912, the Red Feds numbered all the dominion's unionised miners and dockworkers in its ranks—it had 43 affiliated unions, and 15,000 members. It is important to recognise that given the small size of the New Zealand population, the Red Feds were—in relative terms—15 times larger than the American IWW. The Red Fed journal *The Maoriland Worker* had a circulation of 10,000 a week in 1913. That year the Aotearoa IWW's *Industrial Unionist* appealed for interracial solidarity with the growing Māori working class.

By the end of 1916 total Australian IWW Club membership reached around 2,000. Burgmann refers to the higher figure of 11,000 cited by some IWW veterans, but suggests that this was an exaggeration. Even the lower figure would mean around one IWW member to every 2,250 citizens, given a population of around 4.5 million. It is important, however, not to reduce IWW influence to simple numbers, as there is no doubt that syndicalist ideas permeated a substantial part of the labour and socialist movements at this time—notably amongst dockworkers—even if the hold of the Australian Labour Party continued to grow in strength. Burgmann also takes care to stress the radicalism and coherence of IWW ideas, notwithstanding her tendency to delink these from the broader anarchist tradition. The IWW



'If blood be the price of your cursed wealth, good God we have bought it fair'. Anti-conscription demonstration street march.

was remarkable, in her view, for its consistent anti-militarism, opposition to the White Australia policy, support for interracial unionism, links to radicals in Asia, and its advanced positions on the 'woman question.'

I'm not going to go into the anti-militarist actions of the Red Feds, Australian Wobblies and related anarchists during World War I, or its later rearguard actions against the growing influence of the Labourites and the Communists, because these are, I presume, pretty well-known to Antipodean progressives. What is likely to be poorly known is the fate of the movement in the post-war era. Here *Cartography* and *Global*

*Fire* acknowledge the affiliation from 1948 of the League for Freedom in Australia to the new Anarchist International Relations Commission (CIA) which maintained ties between the dispersed and rather battered, but still vibrant, post-war anarchist movement. CIA established a sister organisation in Latin America, the Montevideo-based Continental Commission of Anarchist Relations (CCRA). In 1958, the CIA/CCRA transformed itself into the Anarchist International Commission which survived until about 1960, and was supplanted in 1968 by the International of Anarchist Federations (IFA) that linked anarchist federations from Australia

(Federation of Australian Anarchists), Aotearoa (New Zealand Federation of Anarchists), Japan (Japanese Anarchist Federation and Libertarian Socialist Council), Europe, North America, Cuba (Cuban Libertarian Movement in Exile) and Latin America.

Is it important to advance anarchism explicitly? Or is it enough to engage in social movements whose objectives we support without adopting the anarchist label?

This is primarily a tactical question, because the approaches adopted by anarchists have to be suited to the objective conditions of the oppressed classes in the area in which they are active, and the specific local cultures, histories, even prejudices, of those they work alongside. Using a very simple example, in South Africa, we explicitly use the term ‘communist’ in the name of the main anarchist formation, the Zabalaza (Struggle) Anarchist Communist Front (ZACF), because on the one hand, communism has a proud and widely-recognised record of fighting apartheid here (whereas the formation in 1917–1919 by anarchists of the first unions for people of colour is largely forgotten), and on the other hand, we are indicating that we are communists—but that we represent a very different kind of communist tradition to that espoused by the state-capitalist South African Communist Party—a grassroots, directly-democratic one.

Likewise, the proper meaning of ‘anarchist’ as a democratic practice of the oppressed classes clearly needs to be rehabilitated in Australia and Aotearoa, but this can only take place within the

extant traditions of each territory. The Bulgarian syndicalists who built unions in rural areas relied upon ancient peasant traditions of mutual aid to locate syndicalist mutual aid within an approachable framework. The Peruvian anarchists rooted their agitational work within Aymara or Quechua cultural practices. Likewise you too must find a good match for anarchism within your cultures. We, for example, have relied heavily on traditional township forms of resistance to explain solidarity, mutual aid, egalitarianism, and self-management.

It is also a strategic question, because where you have the bourgeois-democratic freedoms to organise openly and without severe repression, it is important to form an explicitly anarchist




organisation in order to act as (a) a pole around which libertarian socialists, broadly speaking, can orbit and to which they can gravitate organisationally, perhaps graduating into and replenishing your ranks—though it is important to recognise that there can be more than one such pole, and (b) as a lodestar of clear directly-democratic practice, offering those who seek guidance by its light a vibrant toolkit of time-tested practices with which to defend the autonomy of the oppressed classes from those who would exploit and oppress them.


When we were debating founding the ZACF—based on the existence of Black Action Groups in townships such as Dlamini and Motsoaledi (in Soweto, near Johannesburg), and Umlazi (in Durban)—plus a publishing collective (Zabalaza Books), a collective that ran the Workers’ Library and Museum, and the local Anarchist Black Cross chapter, our friends among the autonomist Marxists were horrified at the idea of us forming a formal organisation. And sure, it is difficult to judge when the time is right to form such an organisation (and we were in fact premature, as we admitted in the restructuring of the organisation in 2007 as a unitary organisation rather than a federation of collectives).

But it is the question of responsibility that compels us, I feel, to nail our colours to the mast. This is for three reasons. Firstly because we are not terrorists or criminals, and we have nothing to be ashamed about that requires hiding, even from our enemies (we should be able to openly defend our democratic credentials before mainstream politicians). Secondly, by setting up a formal organisation, people we interact with are made aware that none of us are loose cannons driven by our egos, but that we are subject to the mandates of our organisation (with those mandates being public, fair and explicit). Lastly but most importantly, the communities we work within, whether territorial (such as townships or cities) or communities of interest (such as unions, LBGTI rights bodies, residents’ associations) know that we are responsible to them—that our actions, positions and strategies are consultative, collaborative, responsive and responsible to those they may most immediately affect.

The second and third points refer to the threat to direct democracy known as ‘the tyranny of structurelessness’ where unmandated activists who often inveigle their way dishonestly into leadership positions can sow chaos, and even destroy social organisations and endanger community members and their initiatives through irresponsibility. I cannot understand



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this being defended by self-described anarchists who by such actions hold themselves superior to the communities affected by their actions. It is intolerable and unethical in a direct democracy. For all of these reasons, if you are not facing prison or the firing-squad merely for your beliefs, then formal organisation with mutually-agreed and publicly-known ethics and procedures is required.

How is anarchism still relevant in the world today? What do anarchist strategies and tactics have to offer people active in social movements today?

I'd say there are several ways in which anarchism is relevant today.

Firstly, it provides the most comprehensive intersectoral critique of capital and the state and their backbone, class rule. It fleshes out that critique to encompass all forms of domination and exploitation relating to gender, race, colour, ethnicity, creed, ability, sexuality and so forth, implacably confronting grand public enemies such as war-mongering imperialism and supposedly 'little' intimate ones such as patriarchy. Of course it is not the only ideology to do this, but is certainly the main transmitter of a consistently freethinking socialist approach to such matters.

Secondly, with 15 decades of militant action behind it, anarchism provides a toolkit of tried and proven tactics for resistance in the direst of circumstances, and has often risen above those circumstances to decentralise power, what we term the creation of counter-power. These tactics include oppressed class self-management (autogestion), direct democracy, equality, mutual aid and a range of methods rooted in the conception that the means we use to resist determine the nature of our outcomes. It is obvious that the global anti-capitalist movement of today is heavily indebted

to anarchist ethics and tactics for its internal democracy, flexibility and its humanity.

Strategically, these tactics are rooted in direct democracy, equality and horizontal confederalism—in particular the submission of specific (self-constituted) anarchist organisations to the oversight of their communities, which then engage in collective decision-making that is consultative and responsible to those communities. Some formations prefer making such decisions by majority vote—with the minority sometimes allowed to abstain from, or choose alternate, action—and others by consensus, but this is a community's choice. It was the local district committees, cultural centres, consumer co-operatives, modern schools and prisoner support groups during the Spanish Revolution that linked the great CNT union confederation and its Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) allies to the communities they worked within. The militia that fought on the frontlines against fascism, and the unions that produced all social wealth, would have been rudderless and anchorless without this crucial social layer to give them grounding and direction. In order to have a social revolution of human scale, we submit our actions to the real live humans of the society that we work within—this is our vision of socialism.

In sum, anarchism's leaderless resistance is more about ensuring the primacy of the sorts of ideas and practices that offer communities tools for achieving their freedom, and not about dominating that resistance. Anarchists ideally are fighting for a free world, not an anarchist world—one in which even conservatives will be freed of their statist, capitalist and social bondage to discover new, happier and more harmonious ways of living in community with the rest of us. Without waiting, we build that future now in the ruins of the old world. ■





On my first day as a union official I found myself representing a young Burger King worker in a disciplinary meeting and managed to bluff my way into saving her job. This was to be my initiation into representing workers in fast food, cinemas, retail, hotels, language schools, parliamentary services and security services.

## Solidarity on the fault line

— Matt Jones


I IMMIGRATED TO NEW ZEALAND in early 2000 and shifted from one service job to the next, scrapping with crappy bosses and eventually meeting my Kiwi partner. After the birth of our first child I started sending out CVs, a couple of which found their way to union offices. I was blown away when I received a call from a guy called Matt McCarten, who turned out to be the general secretary for Unite Union. The area I tended to was huge, spanning the length of the lower North Island (including Napier, New Plymouth

and Palmerston North) and the upper South Island (including Nelson, Blenheim and Motueka). I was armed with a handful of flyers, a heap of sign-up forms and our trusty family car, affectionately called 'Silver', also known as a beat-up 1981 three-door Ford Lazer.

What brought me to apply for work with a union was my interest in labour history, which dates back to my discovery of anarchism in my school days, and reading books like John Quail's *The Slow Burning Fuse* and Chomsky's *Class War*.

I brought my experience of anarchist activism back in the UK with me and soon started working on finding worksite delegates to help with the impossible task of organising industries that are infamous for high turnover, irregular shift patterns and operating 24/7 businesses.

I knew from the beginning that I had to help empower the workers I represented and give them the confidence necessary to tackle the issues they and their co-workers faced on their own two feet. I couldn't do much as an individual so I took on the task of finding new delegates in each of the worksites I tended to. I remember McCarten's face when he joined me at the Wellington delegate-training day during my first year as an organiser.

 *The room was packed, full of*  
**keen young faces** ready to tackle  
their issues and *empower their*  
*workmates*, it was an **exciting time**  
and I could see that the  
impulse of *pushing down any*  
*influence and resource to the crew*  
on the shop floor was really  
**starting to gain traction.**

The momentum resulted in delegates, members, and local anarchist activists joining Unite's picket outside of the HRV call centre in central Wellington. The company was one of the first to take advantage of the 90-Day 'Fire at Will' Act and made the mistake of firing one of my most outspoken delegates.

I never once had to ask for permission to take action, put pen to paper or expose a shoddy boss—it was all part of the role and that was what I loved about the job. Some of my delegates were to become union officials themselves, elected onto

the union executive board and became key decision makers within Unite.

#### WORKING WITH BUREAUCRACY

Unite Union was born out of the Labour–Alliance Party split during New Zealand's role in the bombing and reoccupation of Afghanistan post-9/11. Some of those that defected established Unite and within a matter of years achieved some incredible victories. The best-known campaign, *Supersize My Pay*, took place between 2006 and 2007. Dozens of strikes in McDonald's, KFC, Starbucks and Burger King stores across New Zealand led to a climatic demonstration outside of the McDonald's AGM where an effigy of Ronald McDonald had a match put to him. The threat of a burning clown, and a massive swell in union membership, was enough to break the back and what started off with a handful of hard-working activist organisers led to fast food workers being awarded 15-minute breaks, greater security of hours and the end of youth rates.

The union movement is deservedly attacked by the anarchist community for its bureaucracy and conservative nature. Internationally unions are losing membership faster than they are recruiting, and it is becoming increasingly hard to differentiate between union officials and company human resources departments. I witnessed this myself on numerous occasions when I had to drop by another union's office or rub shoulders on a picket line. Officials would read from a scripted speech, chant reluctantly and demand 'a little more—but not too much.' I soon learned to distance myself from the Council of Trade Unions and their respected officers. I despised how they talked down to their members and how quickly they took up their cup of tea and biscuits to have a natter about how we were to get Labour back into power.

## ON THE GROUND

For an out of town organiser (not based in Auckland), I was afforded a huge amount of autonomy. I could dictate my daily tasks, organise worksites my own way and take advantage of the privileged access that being a union official afforded me. The media and employers would jump whenever I picked up a phone or sent a press release and that was something I put to good use in my later days in the role.

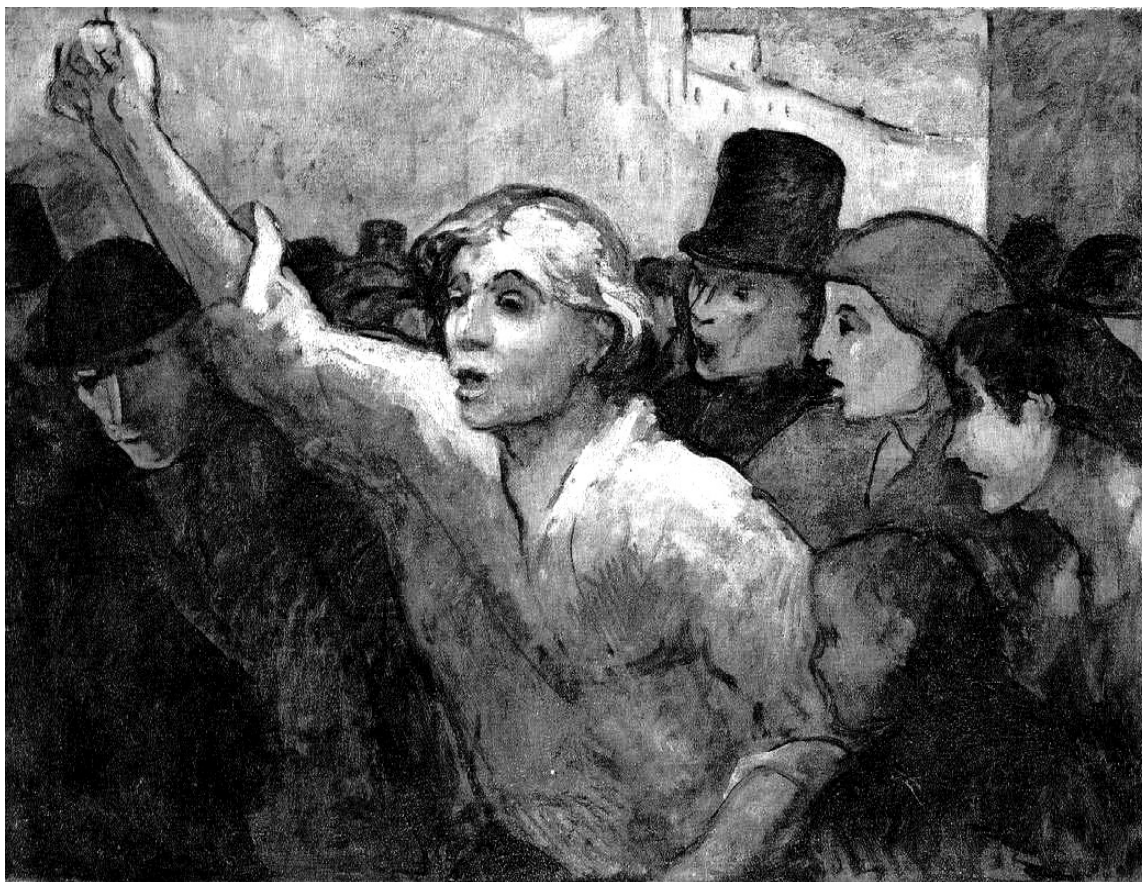
My family and I moved to Christchurch just before my first-year anniversary in the job. The union allowed me to relocate my position, and I soon began the same process of getting to know the worksites and finding the people that were going to help turn things around. I remember holding an impromptu delegate training session one evening with a dozen workers practicing their megaphone skills and how to pull off a successful picket. I can't imagine this style of training being found in your average union office. We did everything on a shoestring and had to beg, borrow and steal venues and resources.

Within a year the workers at Reading Cinema The Palms were some of the highest-paid cinema workers in the country, I had Restaurant Brands (who own KFC, Starbucks and Pizza Hut) running in circles with disputes and mediated meetings and the franchise owners of McDonald's in the region couldn't understand why their staff were demanding a greater share of the deal. But it wasn't all victories: businesses function by running workers to the limits, squeezing the number of staff on a shift, pressuring the supervisors to send people home as quickly as possible and turning a blind eye when corners were inevitably cut. This style of management isn't sustainable, and I witnessed a lot of burnout and frustration in the worksites. What was worse was how the bosses would use their own procedures and processes to set workers up. If someone fell out with human resources, all of a sudden the rulebook would be pulled out and they would list a dozen rules that had been broken. This was despite the company actively encouraging rules to be broken to reach their targets, through their ridiculous staffing levels and expectations. I managed to stop many unjustified dismissals but there are still cases that I feel deeply bitter about.

## AFTER THE QUAKE

When a 7.1 earthquake hit Christchurch in September 2010, the job didn't stop. I found myself being inundated with calls from scared union members who had been encouraged to work that day.

**But it wasn't all victories: businesses function by running workers to the limits, squeezing the number of staff on a shift, pressuring the supervisors to send people home as quickly as possible and turning a blind eye when corners were inevitably cut.**



I managed to close down a KFC when the staff unanimously voted to go home—during the vote we were hit by several large aftershocks. I did my best to pass the message throughout the union membership, and within a couple of days Unite had sent two organisers from Auckland to help. We spent hours visiting the sites and ensuring everyone was okay. I began to hear of workers being forced to use their annual leave to cover their lost time and others who were instructed to work immediately after the quake. With help from local anarchists and left activists we held a tour of shame, visiting the companies that exploited the situation. Within hours all of the companies we exposed had backtracked, returned their workers' money and apologised for their behavior. The response from the CTU and larger unions during the initial period was next to zero. We were very much in the wilderness.

The anarchist community rallied together and sent supply packages that were soon distributed across the city. Individuals came to make a documentary to help get the message out that the management of the crisis was not what it should have been. Al (a member of Beyond Resistance) and I were flown to the capital to speak publicly of our experiences.

My role had taken on more of a community focus, delivering food parcels to members in the eastern suburbs, helping Beyond Resistance organise very well-attended public assemblies, churning out dozens of press releases and doing radio and TV interviews demanding that bosses look after their staff and encouraging communities to nurture the spirit of cooperation and direct action. When we were hit by a second quake in February 2011, it was as if the city had been kicked in the gut. Everyone was exhausted and the shock of what happened hit everyone very hard. The responses of the companies Unite deals with were very different this time. Everyone was looked after and stores were shut throughout the city. As a union we lost all of our language schools, hotels and central fast food and cinema sites. I spent the following weeks and months dealing with redundancy meetings and watched as our members and my friends lost their jobs while their homes lay in waste.

It's easy to see it now but the warning signs were already there. I remember the days when I couldn't face answering the phone or opening my emails. Eventually I ground to a halt and hid from the world. I took a few weeks off work and was diagnosed with anxiety and depression—something that I still struggle to deal with today. During this time it became clear that I had also upset some of my friends within the local anarchist community by making decisions and acting on their behalf without taking their thoughts into consideration. In many ways their criticism was deserved. I was in a very privileged position, with the resources and opportunities to make a lot of noise at my fingertips which I may have taken for granted. With time to reflect on this I wouldn't change anything. I know that the brief time when the media ran my press releases and put my quotes across the airwaves had an effect on the way bosses managed the crisis and encouraged workers to stand up for themselves and their workmates.

Shortly after my burnout I ventured to Auckland and spent time with my colleagues. The message from the leadership was very much 'welcome to the club,' which left a bitter taste in my mouth. Unions as a whole have a terrible record of hurting organisers who under different circumstances could have done incredible good. In Unite's defense the resources simply are not there; it operates on the smell of an oily rag. However there are times that I wish the democratic principles it stands by had been displayed at a deeper level in the way it operates. There are great people working there who I fear are on a fast track to serious burnout, if they haven't already reached that point. This could have been avoided if the union was structured differently.

#### AFTERSHOCKS

It's more than two years since I handed in the towel as a paid union official and even now I receive the occasional email from workers desperately seeking assistance and advice. The issues remain the same: bullying bosses, pay disputes and forgotten breaks that are synonymous with working in the service and retail sector.

My frustration with the larger unions and the CTU continues. The most recent example is being requested to replace a Facebook profile image encouraging people to riot instead of voting in the general elections. The request was indirect but I knew where the instructions were coming from. I reluctantly conformed only to keep a good comrade from getting into grief.

#### LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

The debate over whether anarchists are better placed inside or outside of the union movement is an age-old question and beyond the scope of this article. What I do know for sure is that being in the union afforded me access to people I never would have reached otherwise. I got to discuss and fight for democratic workplace practices that di-



rectly impacted the sites I dealt with, something I could only dream of before becoming an official. I believe anarchists need to become better at interacting with ongoing campaigns and popular movements. We have a terrible habit of deciding that a group is reformist or simply not anarchist enough and somehow doesn't deserve our time or energy. This is a mistake. My experience is that people respond really well to those that encourage and nurture independent thinking and inspire action. If we continue to keep our heads in the sand, the Trots, politicians and the Right will continue to stifle and suffocate any popular movement leading people to cynicism and disengagement. Wherever we can we should be supporting our resources such as Rebel Press, Katipo Books, Aotearoa Workers Solidarity Movement, Beyond Resistance, Food Not Bombs and so on. Let's be proud of the fact that despite everything we are still here and still standing.

An example of how our ideas can inspire others is happening as I type. One of my past union delegates is now spearheading the Canterbury Justice for Palestine campaign. It is an incredible example of direct-democratic principles and theory being put into action. She has made use of public meetings and social media and ensured that everyone's opinions and ideas have been aired and debated. The group has grown from a handful of dedicated individuals to dozens of talented people from all corners of our community. It's been inspiring to witness and a real pleasure to help advise from what capacity I can these days.

#### MOVING FORWARD

In recent times I ran a 'what is anarchism?' talk in Christchurch that drew a good crowd. Who knows where it will take us but it's great to know that there are interested folk out there, and the wounds sustained between good comrades during the earthquake emergency period are beginning to heal. There was a genuine interest in building toward a community union movement, such as the successful Seattle Solidarity Movement that has tackled bosses and landlords using little more than public pressure and empowering the individuals who had been treated unjustly. This is something that I know Canterbury would greatly benefit from. A union organiser national hui is also being discussed, with the hope of an event sometime in 2015. The idea of organisers from various unions getting together without the fossils and bureaucracy of the CTU stifling discussion is heart-warming and can only be a good thing. Facebook groups are springing up for both union officials and union members, helping workers to share in their struggles, victories and losses. This is something I always wanted to see—breaking down artificial boundaries between one set of workers and another. My hope is that the unions are smart enough to recognise the importance of these initiatives. Industry-based unions that simply wait for the next round of collective bargaining never have, nor ever will, work—here's to the worker and the organiser! ■



# the criminal justice system is set up to — Vol fail.

AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND HAS THE SECOND HIGHEST RATE OF IMPRISONMENT IN THE WESTERN WORLD, second only to the US. Out of every 100,000 people in New Zealand, 197 are in prison. The criminal justice system currently has more than 8600 prisoners and that number is growing by the day. Average daily prison musters increased by 99% from 1985 to 1999.<sup>1</sup>

The media reports horrific crimes on a daily basis. Politicians go on and on about the need to be 'tough on crime,' and therefore to fund the police and prisons. In the 2009 national budget, the government committed \$10 million to roll out tasers to every police station in the country, and to putting 600 more police officers on the streets. They also allocated 'funding of \$385.4 million

over the next four years to ensure there are enough prison beds to cope with a rising prison population.' By double-bunking prisoners they gain 1000 new beds.

The tough current law-and-order rhetoric has widespread public support. The government is appealing to the need for security, and many believe that the way to solve the problem of crime

is by arresting, charging and imprisoning more people. This approach certainly removes some people from the streets for a period of time, but it can hardly be said to solve crime. Crime rates have risen and fallen only marginally over the past 40 years through a succession of left- and right-leaning governments. The recorded offence rate rose steadily from 55 per 1000 people in 1970 to an all-time peak of 132 per 1000 people in 1992. The offence rate remained fairly steady between 1992 and 1996, before decreasing to 111 per 1000 people in 2000.<sup>2</sup> The rate in the year 2007–2008 was 100 recorded crimes per 1000 people.<sup>3</sup> Contrary to media portrayal, the rate of crime has actually been decreasing slowly but steadily. It is reasonable to deduce that crime rates do not correlate to particular law-and-order policies. The rate of imprisonment, on the other hand, does correlate to tough law-and-order policies and tactics. Recent changes to bail, parole and sentencing—including the notorious ‘three-strikes’ policy—will result in a dramatic increase in prison musters and require more prisons to be built.

These methods—more police, more prisons and harsher sentences—clearly do not stop crime, yet these same remedies are carted out year after year. So if they don’t work why do we keep using them? And why do these methods find popular favour with the public?

To put it simply, we use these methods because the failure of the criminal justice system provides benefits to the powerful in our society. As Jeffrey Reiman writes, ‘to provide this benefit, however, not just any failure will do. It is necessary that the failure of the criminal justice system take a particular shape. It must take a dive in the fight against crime while making it look like serious crime and thus the real danger to society is the work of the poor.’<sup>4</sup> I would add that in New Zealand, it must make it look like the work of poor Māori.

These methods find popular favour because the media portrayal of crime, in conjunction with political posturing, presents a distorted picture of both crime and criminals. Given this picture, the methods offered seem a reasonable response. They are not. They are simplistic slogans based on repressive, reactionary ideas that will do nothing to solve the problem of ‘crime.’

#### JUSTICE MAKES CRIME

The fight against crime is a set-up not only because it is designed to fail, but also because it is designed to shape our ideas about who and where the greatest harm in society comes from.

We need to ask, ‘what is crime?’

A relative answer is that ‘we do not reprove certain behaviour because it is criminal; it is criminal because we reprove it.’<sup>5</sup> In other words, crime is what we say it is, and what we say is criminal is that which we believe to be the most harmful in our society.

The decisions about what is most harmful in our society are made by politicians, and enacted into law through an ostensibly democratically-elected representative government. This may seem a reasonable way to determine a consensus about what is criminal. However, this method is flawed because it starts from a set of assumptions about what constitutes crime.

In our society, the criminal justice system holds that the most heinous crimes are intentional violent acts—one person intending to harm another. This may seem obvious as it appeals to widely-held beliefs about what is morally right and wrong. However, this definition is already laden with certain assumptions. It assumes that intention to do direct harm is morally worse than acts that cause indirect—albeit knowing—harm.

One cannot appeal to ordinary moral notions to defend the criminal law, since the criminal law has already had a hand in shaping ordinary moral notions. It is probably safe to



say that in our own time, civil rights legislation [in the US] has sharpened the public's moral condemnation of racial discrimination. Hence we might speculate that if the criminal justice system began to prosecute—and if the media began to portray—those who inflict indirect harm as serious criminals, our ordinary moral notions would change on this point as well.<sup>6</sup>

Is the man who kills another in a heated argument more or less morally reprehensible than the coalmine owner who, in order to save money, does not upgrade safety equipment and thus causes the deaths of mine workers? The first person's intention is direct harm, driven by the heat of the moment. The second's intention is indirect—but knowing—harm, driven by cold, calculated greed. This was painfully illustrated by the 29 miners who were killed due to 'failure at every level' at Pike River. Four years later, it is clear that no one will ever be held accountable.

In an attempt to highlight the hypocrisy of lawmakers' claims that they are concerned with protecting the public from the worst possible harms in society, people working against the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) asked if multinational corporations who introduced GMOs into the environment would be prosecuted as terrorists under the counter-terrorism bill being considered by parliament in 2005. The bill contained a clause that would classify any act that introduced or released disease-bearing organisms, and that was intended to compel the government to act, as a 'terrorist act,' if likely to devastate the national economy. As can be expected, anti-GMO campaigners were largely ridiculed or ignored by those in power and their concerns dismissed as unfounded and ridiculous. Those corporations who do widespread harm through contamination are exempted from the definition of criminal acts. Why are these concerns any less valid than concerns about theft or fraud?

It is because the definition of what is criminal is determined by a set of interests that may or may not reflect what actually are the most harmful acts in society. The paradigm of crime is already set in place before the laws are even made. Crime as envisioned by most people is one-on-one violence, not corporate or state violence, whether perpetrated intentionally or not. 'Negligence' and 'recklessness' are well-used and highly-defined terms in law, seldom applied to states or corporations. And this is the image that those who have power wish to maintain. It largely exempts them from crime at the outset.

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with the public?**

Let's turn to what is defined in New Zealand law as 'criminal'—those intentional violent one-on-one acts. Despite changes in laws and policies, the crime rate remains the same. This is because the criminal justice system is not designed to stop crime but exists to give the impression of stopping crime while actually contributing to its maintenance.

We know what the causes of crime are. A March 2009 ministerial meeting on the drivers of crime identified key systemic reasons for crime including socio-economic disadvantage (poverty, lack of education), the breakdown of families, child abuse, alienation and the on-going effects of colonisation.<sup>7</sup> It cannot be said that those in power are blind to the things that drive people to crime. They are unwilling to address these issues in any real and meaningful way because to do so would require systemic change that is both politically untenable and counter to their interests. In essence,

'the *tendency* of capitalist societies to set up DESIRABLES (*such as wealth*) which are inaccessible to large categories of people actually *creates* the conditions in which DEVIATION from accepted means of obtaining these goals is *likely*.<sup>8</sup>

Those in power create an imaginary world in which everyone is equal under the law and everyone has the same opportunities and responsibilities. In reality New Zealand has one of the highest rates of inequality between rich and poor of all OECD

countries. The social safety net, if there ever was one, is long gone in this brave new age of individualism. Those in power say that they want to solve the problem of crime, yet everything they do perpetuates systemic discrimination and exploitation, including a raft of user-pays programmes for essentials such as education and water, cuts to public health, and work-for-the-dole schemes. They continually create and reinforce an image of crime, which simultaneously excludes the acts of the rich, while vividly portraying the acts of the poor.

The value of this to those in positions of power is that it deflects the discontent and potential hostility of middle [New Zealand] away from the classes above them and toward the classes below them. If this explanation is hard to swallow, it should be noted in its favor that it not only explains our dismal failure to reduce crime, but it also explains why the criminal justice system functions in a way that is biased against the poor at every stage from arrest to conviction. Indeed, even at the earlier stage, when crimes are defined in law, the system primarily concentrates on the predatory acts of the poor and tends to exclude or deemphasize the equally or more dangerous predatory acts of those who are well off.<sup>9</sup>

At the outset the criminal justice system largely excludes the acts of the rich and powerful from the definition of 'criminal'. It cloaks the greatest harms to society from view. By not calling these acts criminal, the criminal justice system actually protects those who cause the most harm in society. There are a series of filters that exclude whole classes while channeling others through to the prison gates.

At each of the crucial decision-making points in Criminal Justice, the decisions made do not reflect the real and most serious dangers we face:

1. Of the decisions of legislators: that the definitions of crime in the criminal law do not reflect the only or the most dangerous of antisocial behaviours
2. Of the decisions of police and prosecutors: that the decisions on whom to arrest or charge do not reflect the only or the most dangerous behaviours legally defined as 'criminal'
3. Of the decisions of juries and judges: that criminal convictions do not reflect the only or the most dangerous individuals among those arrested and charged
4. Of the decisions of sentencing judges: that sentencing decisions do not reflect the goal of protecting society from the only or the most dangerous of those convicted by meting out punishments proportionate to the harmfulness of the crime committed
5. And of all these decisions taken together: that what Criminal Justice policy decisions do reflect is the implicit identification of crime with the dangerous acts of the poor.<sup>10</sup>

This is no better illustrated than by looking at arrest, conviction and imprisonment rates for Māori. In 2007, Māori were four to five times more likely to be apprehended, prosecuted and convicted than their non-Māori counterparts.<sup>11</sup> Māori were also 7.5 times more likely to be given a custodial sentence, and 11 times more likely to be remanded in custody awaiting trial.<sup>12</sup> While Māori made up 14% of the general population, they made up 51% of the prison population.<sup>13</sup> It comes as little surprise then that Māori figure disproportionately in

poverty and unemployment statistics. The unemployment rate for Māori increased to 9.2% for the year to March 2009 compared with 8.2% for the year to March 2008. The percentage point increase in the Māori unemployment rate since 2008 was greater than the increase for Pākehā.<sup>14</sup> While Māori unemployment rates were consistently higher than those for non-Māori, the difference is especially marked between the ages of 20 and 40. The proportion of Māori in this age range who were unemployed was over two and a half times higher than that for non-Māori.<sup>15</sup> Māori are more likely to be poor, thus they are more likely to be the targets of the criminal justice system. The nature of institutionalised racism as a factor in the overrepresentation of Māori is accepted fact.

**The criminal justice system—and this includes the entire complex, from the lawmakers to the police and the probation services, not only the courts and prison system—is set up to fail. On one hand, it protects those with power in society by excluding their harmful acts from the definition of what is criminal. On the other hand, it resolutely refuses to address the things we know are the causes of crime. In this way, the system maintains crime.**



### JUSTICE MAKES CRIMINALS

One of the key goals of the Department of Corrections is to reduce recidivism—the rate of re-offending. There is widespread understanding that once in prison, the likelihood of returning is much greater. That is because our system of ‘correction’ is based on coercive imprisonment and is fundamentally at odds with living in a free and just society.

The prison cannot fail to produce delinquents. It does so by the very type of existence that it imposes on its inmates: whether they are isolated in cells or whether they are given useless work, for which they will find no employment, it is in any case, not to think of man in society; it is to create an unnatural, useless and dangerous existence [...] The prison also produces delinquents by imposing violent constraints on its inmates; it is supposed to apply the law, and to teach respect for it; but all its functioning operates in the form of an abuse of power [...] The conditions to which the free inmates are subjected necessarily condemn them to recidivism: they are under the surveillance of the police; they are assigned to a particular residence, or forbidden others.<sup>16</sup>

The conditions of existence within the prison also perpetuate crime in that those interned within

its walls are likely to learn from their co-habiters. Prisons have frequently been referred to as ‘universities of crime’ wherein prisoners gain an understanding of how to function in an organisation based on violence and arbitrary power—exercised not only by prison guards and administrators—but by other prisoners. Prisons are ‘criminogenic,’ that is to say, they are crime-making. Moreover, ‘the prison makes possible, even encourages, the organization of a milieu of delinquents, loyal to one another, hierarchised, ready to aid and abet any future criminal act.’<sup>17</sup>

The criminal justice system continues to criminalise people after their release from prison. A whole host of conditions can be imposed upon release: regular reporting to police, curfews, ankle bracelets, requirements for a residential address, and restrictions on travel, association with other people or behaviour (such as drinking alcohol). In New Zealand there are nine standard conditions that must be adhered to by parolees, and the Parole Board can impose a whole host of others at its discretion. In California all prisoners who have been granted parole must be re-incarcerated immediately for violations such as missing a meeting with a parole officer or getting married without permission. As a result, more than 70,000 parolees a year return to California prisons—about 70%—though many have not committed new crimes.

In most US states, one out of three people who enters prison does so for a parole violation, but the rate is two out of three in California. In New Zealand, 49% of people released from prison were convicted of a new offence and were returned to prison at least once during the 48-month follow-up period.<sup>18</sup> If you go to prison once, there is a great likelihood that you will go back again.

The criminal justice system impoverishes many families by removing the primary wage-earner. Even after release, the conditions of parole are often so onerous or restrictive that they make regular work difficult. Moreover, the stigma attached to ‘doing time’ makes getting a job, or returning to one, difficult if not impossible. In this way, the criminal justice system explicitly contributes to one of the central causes of crime: poverty.

### THE DANGEROUS CLASS

How is the criminal justice system designed to construct public opinion about who and where the greatest harm in society comes from? Earlier, the process of creating crime was described. This process largely excludes the crimes of the powerful in our society. The converse of this is the creation of the criminal. Most people have a picture in their mind of what a criminal looks like. He—and it is usually a male—is young, belongs to a minority group (generally Māori, although Middle Eastern also comes to mind), lives in a poor neighborhood and is relatively uneducated. These stereotypes are echoed on the evening news, and are given veracity in the courts wherein daily lines of such people fill the docks of the accused. This is the image that is beneficial to those with power.

Consider first the benefits that the system provides for those with wealth and power [...] criminal justice policy diverts attention from the harmful (noncriminal) acts of the

well-off and confronts us in our homes and on our street with a real and substantial threat of crime, and in the courts and prisons with a large and visible population of poor criminals. This in turn has the effect of conveying a vivid image that there is a real threat to our lives and limbs, and it is a threat from the poor [...] It carries an ideological message that serves to protect wealth and privilege [...] crudely put it is this:

The threat to ‘law-abiding middle [New Zealand]’ comes from below on the economic ladder not above [...] the poor are morally defective and thus their poverty is their own fault not a symptom of social or economic injustice.<sup>19</sup>

The terms ‘criminal class’ and ‘dangerous class’ have often been used interchangeably to conjure up images of those people who represent the greatest threat to society. These terms have changed over time to describe different groups of people at different times although they are in essence the urban poor. In Aotearoa New Zealand, they are Māori urban poor.

Through the criminal justice system, the poor are blamed for their own situation and the system is exonerated of injustice. The offender is held solely and individually accountable for his actions. The criminal justice system does not ask if society has met any of its responsibilities to him or if it has failed him. Its focus is entirely on individual guilt or innocence.

When we call an act a crime, we are saying that the conditions in which it occurs are not themselves criminal or deadly or oppressive or so unjust as to make an extreme response reasonable or justified, that is, to make such a response noncriminal [...] *it implicitly conveys the message that the social conditions in which*

*the crime occurred are not responsible for the crime, that they are not so unjust as to make a violent response to them excusable.*<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, the criminal justice system acquits itself of injustice by presenting itself as a neutral prerequisite of social order. Laws against murder, rape, theft, assault, and so on—these laws are considered to be the minimum requirements that ‘any individual owes his fellows to make any social life of any decent sort possible.’<sup>21</sup> If one steals, then one is not only criminal, but is against society. It follows then that those who attack current property relations are against society and thus criminal. The criminal justice system appears neutral when in fact it is grounded in a capitalist economic arrangement that protects existing property relations, and a patriarchal and racist social system that protects existing institutions. For centuries laws legalised a husband’s rape of his wife and ownership of his children. Laws that protect some and disenfranchise others exist: the laws against theft of property are considered immutable, yet the state theft of the foreshore and seabed from Māori was considered necessary and just. The criminal justice system is not neutral. It is embedded in a system founded upon the powerful’s exploitation of the powerless.

For the observation that prison fails to eliminate crime, one should perhaps substitute the hypothesis that prison has succeeded extremely well in producing delinquency, a specific type, a politically or economically less dangerous—and on occasion, usable—form of illegality.<sup>22</sup>

The current broadening of ‘criminality’ deepens the investment and enhances the benefits (to those with power) of maintaining crime. Only a year ago, the government passed a law criminal-

ising protest at sea, imposing stiff penalties on people who might challenge deep-sea oil drilling. Through this greater criminalisation, the powerful blunt the collective economic and political force of those who are below them on the socio-economic ladder.

Crucial to this discussion of the benefits of the criminal justice system to the powerful, is the clarification that such benefits are not intentionally sought. There is not a grand conspiracy to imprison all Māori or all poor people. Rather, there is a confluence of interests and institutions that manifest into a system of injustice: a system where the greatest harms to society are not criminalised, but the people believe that the system is protecting them from the greatest harms.

Our picture of the common criminal is distorted by an agenda that is not interested in solving crime, only in presenting the façade of fighting crime. The responsibility for changing that lies with all of us. Critical Resistance in the United States has put forward a comprehensive agenda for transformative justice that moves communities beyond not only police and prisons, but seeks to radically alter communities in order that a modified restorative justice process can meaningfully be realised. Similarly, in Guerrero state in Mexico, eight indigenous communities have formed community policing squads to protect their people against both the forces of the State and organised criminal groups.<sup>23</sup>

#### **THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM: IT’S CRIMINAL**

Seeing that the criminal justice system is a sham takes an open mind willing to question long and deeply-held assumptions about crime. Here, I have tried to demonstrate how the criminal justice system is set up to fail.

First, the system that we think of as providing protection from the greatest harms in society not only does not do that, it actually works to protect those who commit those harmful acts. It does this by failing to acknowledge the acts of the powerful in society as harmful. We are not protected from the greatest harms in society because they are not defined as criminal. The criminal justice system has conferred neutrality upon the definition of crime that is beneficial to those with power. We are looking at the wrong people and in the wrong places for the real harm in our society.

As a corollary, we are led to believe that the greatest harms in society are the ones most assiduously prosecuted by the criminal justice system. Thus, not only are we not protected from the greater harms to our safety and well-being, we are also misled into believing that we are. We are unable to enact any self-protection against these acts. It directs our gaze, and our rage and anger, at the ‘criminal class’—the already poor and disenfranchised in our society—rather than at those who profit from maintaining the causes of crime.

As importantly, the criminal justice system is a failure because it is criminalising the people who pass through it and failing to address the issues that cause crime. It impoverishes people, it denies them dignity and for those who ultimately go to prison, it enforces the idea that arbitrary force and violence are an appropriate way to get along in society. It (re)creates and reinforces the very things that cause crime in the first place: poverty, powerlessness and marginalisation.

The criminal justice system is a racket, but not one run from a dark, smoky room full of men with a hidden agenda. It is a system founded upon a set of assumptions that provide particular benefits to those who construct the system in the first place. It does not seek to end injustice; it seeks to appear to fight injustice while perpetuating the madness of a society in which crime is a reasonable response to the conditions herein. ■

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