MUTINY

A PAPER OF ANARCHISTIC IDEAS AND ACTIONS ISSUE 69 JAN/FEB 2013

FREE



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Welcome to the 69th issue of Mutiny Zine. Atop the shifting sands of a changed editorial team we have once again (thanks endlessly to the dedication of our contributors) compiled a zine covering inspiring and enraging events and struggles.

This issue, we have:

An update on the struggle against Income Management in the western Sydney suburb of Bankstown.

An excerpt from an article published on Indymedia about anti-police brutality protests in Sydney following recent Gay-bashings by cops during the Sydney Mardi Gras.

A very poignant article on the death in custody of Kwementyaye Briscoe, placed in the context of institutionalized racism in Australia.

In light of the recent death of Hugo Chavez we have an exploration of the complexities of politics in Venezuela, criticising the Western Left's oversimplified narrative about this country.

Jeremy interviews several anarchists from Madrid, discussing the M15 movement, the economic crisis in Spain, the state of Spanish anarchism and more.

A report upon the first of two recent strikes at the University of Sydney. Solidarity with the workers there, struggling to maintain decent working conditions and against further casualisation.

In love and rage, Mutiny (Syzygy, Filion, Blackbeard & sci_fi)

Strike!!

To the Picket Lines at Sydney University

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), and the Community and Public Sector Union at Sydney University have called a strike campaign in response to the outrageous position of management in enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations. What follows is a recount of some of my experiences with the first strike day. This article is written from the experience of a student, I make no claim to speak to experience of staff at the pickets.

The strike on the 7th of March was big. It shut down the university. There were probably five hundred or more on all of the pickets. Management were upset. From these perspectives, it was a success.

On the footbridge across Parramatta road, militants linked arms and sang songs, waved red and black flags and turned around many. Outside the law school, a small band of militants talked to drivers in cars, moving aside only reluctantly when the drivers made the choice to scab. Eventually the cops chose to block off the entrance themselves, declaring that the banked up traffic was dangerous.

On the footbridge over city road, students held a banner, linked arms, shouted through a megaphone and would not move. Disgracefully many received minor injuries at the hands of scabs and strike-breakers who chose to charge the line rather than finding another entrance.

Each of these pickets was a victory in itself, and defied the rules handed down by management and the cops. We asserted our absolute right, as the people who run this university, to control the campus. At the rally afterwards, anarchist and libertarian militants chanted "no class, class war." Many students who I had previously picked for liberals joined in enthusiastically, it's clear that class-consciousness was almost unbelievably high.

In a sense, a strike is the most polarising of all actions. A line of people is created, and workers choose which side of the line they want to stand on; politics are made physically manifest. Sadly though, not everyone on the right side of the line was in full solidarity. We would not ask for unconditional support but there was an astonishing lack of solidarity on the day from some quarters.

A friend of mine was assaulted by a strikebreaker who charged his picket. I screamed and swore at the scab, as I think is pretty natural and fitting. Later that day I was approached by an authoritarian socialist who said there had been a bit of a "commotion" at my picket, and could I tell her anything about it. Somehow she managed to both glare and look smug at the same time, (I think it must be something they learn in party school). I told her what had happened and she said "mmmmmmm" like the headmaster from an American high school film peering over her glasses and addressing a naughty pupil.

It's important that the differences among student organisers not be made to seem more severe than they are. I do not disagree with Solidarity, for example, that we must form a political line as well as a physical line around the campus. We need to do more work to persuade students of our case in preparation for further strike days. Though we ran an extensive campaign telling students and staff that the 7th of March would be a strike day, I don't believe we did anywhere near enough to articulate why we were going on strike and what that meant.

I recently was speaking to a member of the philosophy department. She told me that we should do more to publicise the NTEU's log of claims. Yes, but that this wouldn't be enough in itself. We need to articulate a vision of how we think the university should be run, to oppose the vision of the management. I agree and I think it's one of the most insightful things that has been said thus far about the campaign. We need to articulate our politics generously, to not merely steer people away from campus, but to tempt them to the picket lines.

In Love & Rage

Timothy Scriven

What's happening with Income Management in Bankstown?

In 2012, the Labor government passed Stronger Futures legislation, which extended the NT Intervention for another 10 years. It also extended income management to five new "trial sites" around Australia, including Bankstown in Sydney.

A strong, locally-based campaign in Bankstown that has brought together Aboriginal people, community organisations, migrants and trade unions has stopped income management in its tracks. So far, only one person has been placed on income management in the area. However, up to twenty people have been put on "voluntary" income management, which is no longer so "voluntary" once people are on it, with serious barriers to getting off the program once a person is on it. The Public Service Association (PSA), who represent Child Protection workers, have placed a work-ban on income management, and have not referred any of their clients for IM. They are refusing to carry out the policy.

The government is trying to break the ban, by changing the rules. From July 2013, compulsory Income management will apply to anyone in Bankstown who is under 25 and is considered 'unable to live at home' by Centrelink. This reinforces the incredibly cruel nature of the policy, as it targets people on the basis of already being vulnerable, and makes that vulnerability all the more severe. It further has ominous implications for young people who identify as lesbian, gay, trans or queer, whose parents may make it impossible for them to live at home due to their sexuality. It also applies to those under 25 who are exiting prison. With these changes, the government hopes to break the union's solidarity action, and force child protection workers to refer their clients and break the union. The fight continues. The campaign has started making contact with people in other states in the areas where the policy is being implemented. As we go to press, a protest is planned in Sydney for Thursday, March 21, against Income Management and the ongoing NT Intervention, at 12.30pm at Tanya Plibersek's offices, 150 Broadway Sydney.

More info:

http://stoptheintervention.org/ http://www.facebook.com/pages/ Say-No-to-Governments-Income-Management-Not-in-Bankstown-Not-Anywhere/125713987517756

IMPRISONMENT, DEATHS IN CUSTODY & THE NT INTERVENTION

BY EVELYN ENDUATTA.

Kwementyaye Daniel Briscoe was 27 years old when he died on 4 January 2012, in police custody in Alice Springs. He had committed no crime. This account is based on the Coroner's Report into the incident, and all quotes in the main text of this article are taken from it -http://www.nt.gov.au/justice/courtsupp/coroner/inquestlist.shtml. Eds

THE CENTRAL FINDING OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO ABORIGINAL DEATHS IN CUSTODY WAS THAT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE DIE IN CUSTODY AT A RATE RELATIVE TO THEIR CUSTODIAL POPULATION. HOWEVER, 'THE ABORIGINAL POPULATION IS GROSSLY OVER-REPRESENTED IN CUSTODY TOO MANY ABORIGINAL PEOPLE ARE IN CUSTODY TOO OFTEN.

THE ROYAL COMMISSION FOUND THAT THERE WERE TWO WAYS OF TACKLING THE PROBLEM OF THE DISPROPORTIONATE NUMBER OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN CUSTODY. THE FIRST WAS TO REFORM THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM; THE SECOND APPROACH WAS TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF THE MORE FUNDAMENTAL SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS WHICH BRING INDIGENOUS PEOPLE INTO CONTACT WITH THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM - THE UNDERLYING ISSUES RELATING TO OVER-REPRESENTATION. THE COMMISSION ARGUED THAT THE PRINCIPLE OF INDIGENOUS SELF-DETERMINATION MUST UNDERLIE BOTH AREAS OF REFORM. IN PARTICULAR THE RESOLUTION OF ABORIGINAL DISADVANTAGE COULD ONLY BE ACHIEVED THROUGH EMPOWERMENT AND SELF-DETERMINATION.

* * *

On the evening of January 4th, Kwementyaye joined a large group of friends in the vicinity of Flynn Oval, which is approximately 5kms from the centre of town in Alice Springs.

Constable Gareth Evans began walking towards the group, wanting "to see if they had any information about an alleged fight at the shops." When he was half way across the oval, however, one of the young women in the group shouted out to the others and they all began to disperse. Constable Evans called for back-up on his radio and began to pursue the group on foot. He jumped a fence and began to jog after a smaller breakaway group of five or six. At the back of that group was Kwementyaye, "and when he got close to a large iron gate beside the school, he slipped on the bitumen or dirt and fell." When Kwementyaye got up, he had a cut above his left eye, described as a "laceration above his eyes that had burst. There was fresh blood around the cut but it wasn't gushing or dripping down his face."

After this initial "fall" Kwementyaye got to his feet and allegedly started swearing. Constable Evans then allegedly gave him a direction to "take a step back" which Kwementyaye allegedly ignored. Constable Evans then "pushed him in the chest with an open left hand, causing him to stumble and fall into the gate, before falling forward." Kwementyaye was then secured on the ground using a three point hold position, which involves placing one knee on the side of his shoulder and securing his right hand behind his back. Keep in mind that Kwementyaye was not even suspected of having committed a crime. He was taken into Protective Custody because he was deemed too intoxicated to look after himself.

Upon arrival Kwementyaye was placed in an observation cell with two other men. Approximately thirty minutes later he was ordered to come out from the cell to join four or five other detainees who were being processed in reception. On the way into the corridor towards reception, Kwementyaye swayed slightly, turned back and grabbed the door handle, appearing then to lean in to get his shirt that was left on a bench. Constable Evans noticed that Kwementyaye wasn't following behind the others and "he took him by his wrist to escort him to reception. While Kwementyaye was being escorted his legs went out from under him and he fell forward onto the floor."

Kwementyaye was then dragged by Constable Evans into the reception area where he was left sprawled out on the floor. A number of other detainees were being processed around him. Kwementyaye lay on the floor for several minutes before Constable Evans "took a pen and applied pressure to his fingernail to see if he would respond to a pain stimulus, a technique he learnt while working as a security officer at a Hospital." CCTV footage shows that Constable Evans left Kwementyaye lying face down on the ground as he walked away.

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IN UNDERSTANDING THE USE OF IMPRISONMENT, CUNNEEN WRITES, ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT POINTS TO GRASP IS THAT A RISING IMPRISONMENT RATE IS NOT DIRECTLY OR SIMPLY RELATED TO AN INCREASE IN CRIME. THE USE OF PRISON IS A FUNCTION OF GOVERNMENT: IT REFLECTS GOVERNMENT POLICY AND LEGISLATION, AS WELL AS JUDICIAL DECISION-MAKING. GOVERNMENTS MAKE CHOICES THAT EITHER DIRECTLY IMPACT ON THE USE OF IMPRISONMENT (FOR EXAMPLE, LEGISLATION COVERING SUCH MATTERS AS STANDARD NON-PAROLE PERIODS, MANDATORY SENTENCING, MAXIMUM PENALTIES FOR PARTICULAR OFFENCES, ETC) OR LESS INDIRECTLY (FOR EXAMPLE, AVAILABILITY OF NON-CUSTODIAL SENTENCING OPTIONS, PRESUMPTIONS IN FAVOUR OF BAIL, AVAILABILITY OF PAROLE, ETC).#

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At one stage Kwementyaye was clearly emotionally distressed and can be seen on the CCTV footage to be sobbing and groaning. He was incapable of taking his own shoes off and he lay on the floor barely moving while another detainee took them off for him at the request of police. The CCTV shows Kwementyaye lying on the floor for several minutes while several officers walk around him, concerning themselves with the other things. As he lay there, police were joined by Sergeant William McDonell, who was performing the role of Watch House Commander. He

appeared untroubled by Kwementyaye's state, in spite of observing a smear of blood on the reception floor caused by a laceration above Kwementyaye's right eye. Sergeant McDonnell merely cleaned up the blood smear, asked who Kwementyaye was and ordered him to get up. Kwementyaye did not respond, but Sen Sgt McDonnell was then distracted by another detainee and he left the area.

After repeated commands from Constable Evans to get up, Kwementyaye managed with some difficulty to lift his weight up onto the bench seat, but he was obviously unsteady and lacked control of his faculties. Soon after he sat down on the bench, he got up and leant against the wall. "He was then sat back down, firmly but fairly by Constable Evans." Kwementyaye stood up again, but this time, "instead of firmly guiding him again or giving him a stern verbal direction, Constable Evans pushed him hard with an open hand and sent him sprawling backwards into the wall."

After the push, Kwementyaye "looked upset and picked up a blue plastic property box that was between him and another prisoner. He did so in a drunken manner, and the plastic box was easily taken from him by an older man seated beside him who was being processed as a protective custody." Constable Evans looked relatively unperturbed and motioned for Kwementyaye to put the box down. Kwementyaye stood up with a clenched fist, although his arm and fist stayed down by his side. In response, Constable Evans "grabbed him by the arm and slung him towards the reception counter with undue vigour, causing Kwementyaye to hit his arm and head on that surface."

* * *

THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM CONSTITUTES SOCIAL GROUPS AS THREATS,' CUNNEEN WRITES, 'AND REPRODUCES A SOCIETY BUILT ON RACIALISED BOUNDARIES. INDEED IT HAS BEEN ARGUED THAT THE PROCESS OF CRIMINALISATION ITSELF NOW CONSTITUTES A SIGNIFICANT RACIALISING DISCOURSE - THAT IS WE UNDERSTAND RACE THROUGH DISCOURSES ABOUT CRIME AND PUNISHMENT, AND WE UNDERSTAND CRIME AND PUNISHMENT THROUGH IMAGES OF RACE. THE NORTHERN TERRITORY INTERVENTION PROVIDES A PARTICULARLY GRAPHIC EXAMPLE OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF INDIGENOUS MEN IN PARTICULAR AS SEXUAL AND PHYSICAL ABUSERS OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN. SUCH ABUSE WAS ALSO LINKED TO TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL CULTURE. AN INCREASED CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESPONSE WAS SEEN AS APPROPRIATE TO DEALING WITH THE PERCEIVED PROBLEM AND INDIGENOUS IMPRISONMENT RATES IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY HAVE CONTINUED TO INCREASE DRAMATICALLY.

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Kwementyaye was then spread out on the ground and searched by Constable Evans, assisted by Constable Blansjaar and Constable Grey. It is apparent from the CCTV footage that where his head was positioned, a small pool of blood formed from the leaking wound above his eye brow. Kwementyaye was then carried face down to Cell 9 by the three officers, with one on each arm and one picking up his legs. Prison officer Parker hurriedly threw a mattress into the cell on an awkward angle which stretched diagonally across the two concrete slabs in the room, and Kwementyaye was placed faced down at the same angle without anyone moving the mattress into a more comfortable position.

When Kwementyaye was carried along the corridor, blood from the head wound fell in droplets on the floor. That drew the attention of four or five sober prisoners in cell 16 who saw the blood and called out to the officers, telling them that the man they saw should be taken to hospital. After being placed on his mattress Kwementyaye was left alone in Cell 9. What happened next was captured on CCTV. Seconds after being placed on the mattress, he rolled onto his back and hit his head on the concrete bench. A minute later he attempted to stand up but fell hard onto the bench, hitting his head again. At 10.14pm, he attempted to sit up but fell and landed face down with his head and chest on the bench and the rest of his body on the floor.

Soon after Kwementyaye was placed into Cell 9, Prison officer Parker began a series of brief but regular checks, which involved her standing in the corridor and looking in to confirm that he was breathing. Prisoners in Cell 16 were watching from their vantage point and, once again, expressed their concern that Kwementyaye needed immediate medical care. In her own words, this was Prison officer Parker's response: "I just turned around and I might have been out of line when I said it but I just turned and said, 'Well, youse all carry on like this when youse are drunk,' and you know, 'And when youse are sober you just want to be nice to us,' then I – I think I've walked off."

At around 11pm the evening Watch House shift changed over to the overnight shift. Over the next two hours, the two officers on duty rarely left their desks; only three cell checks were done by Constables O'Keefe and Kershaw. In evidence they admitted being distracted from their duties 'by various things, including an iphone, an ipod and the internet.' The officers also failed to respond to the distress calls made by prisoners in Cell 16, who could see and hear that Kwementyaye was in trouble.

* * *

INCREASED POLICE NUMBERS IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES WAS A KEY MEASURE OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY INTERVENTION (2007). THIS HAS TRANSLATED INTO OVER-POLICING, RACIAL PROFILING AND A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN THE LEVEL OF ARRESTS. AS ALTMAN AND HINKSON NOTE OF CENTRAL AUSTRALIA, 'MANY ARE FOR VEHICLE RELATED OFFENCES. MANY OTHERS RESULT FROM ANOTHER OF THE INTERVENTION'S MEASURES—THE OUTLAWING OF CUSTOMARY LAW, ESPECIALLY THE USE OF PAYBACK TO SETTLE DISPUTES. WHEN ABORIGINAL PEOPLE ATTEMPT TO USE THEIR OWN CUSTOMARY MEASURES TO RESOLVE SIGNIFICANT TRANSGRESSIONS, POLICE WHO ONCE TURNED A BLIND EYE ARE NOW LEGALLY OBLIGED NOT TO DO SO.'

* * *

At 11.44pm, prisoner Warren McDonald activated the call button in his cell. It is clear from CCTV footage that he and other prisoners were looking across to Kwementyaye in Cell 9. The Coroner writes that, "it is likely that the prisoners in Cell 16 were seeing Kwementyaye in the last moments he was alive and at the last opportunity police had to save his life. I heard from Warren and Kyle McDonald and from Mr Impu that they could hear distressing noises from Cell 9, described by the men as coughing, gasping and choking. A review of CCTV footage shows that the last movement of Kwementyaye's body was a very slight twitching of his limbs, at 11.42pm, just two minutes before the call button was activated."

The call rang three times over several minutes. Constable O'Keefe answered the call a few minutes later, however, he hung up the receiver, "because when he glanced up at the CCTV screen in front of him and could see that the prisoners in cell 16 were seated back on their mattresses."

The prisoners gave evidence that they also tried to get the attention of police on more than one occasion, by calling out. The report notes that Officer Kershaw had "shut the door between the corridor and reception area, in order to block out the noise of a prisoner who was at the end of the row of cells where Kwementyaye was housed."

When Sen. Sgt Barram returned to the Watch House at 1.30am, he commenced a round of cell checks and at 1.41 am, he noticed that Kwementyaye had not moved from the position he had last seen him in at 11pm. The Watch House Commander moved straight to Cell 9, entered it and found that Kwementyaye was not breathing. He yelled for an ambulance to be called and commenced CPR, but his body was cold. According to the Coroner's report, "he had probably passed away around two hours earlier."

In October 2012 Deputy Chief Minister Robyn Lambley ruled out taking disciplinary action against any of the Police officers involved. This is the story of so many Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. There is nothing 'post' about colonialism in Australia.

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ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE COMPRISE 2.5% OF THE TOTAL POPULATION IN AUSTRALIA, & YET THEY COMPRISE 26% OF THE TOTAL PRISON POPULATION.

ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE COMPRISE 32% OF THE TOTAL POPULATION IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY, & YET THEY COMPRISE 82% OF THE NT PRISON POPULATION.

THE IMPRISONMENT RATE OF ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE HAS RISEN 46% IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY IN THE PAST DECADE & CONTINUES TO RISE. #

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REST IN PEACE KWEMENTYAYE BRISCOE & ALL WHO HAVE DIED AT THE HANDS OF POLICE WHILE IN CUSTODY.

Queers against Cops respond to attacks

Below is an extract of an article written after a recent anti-police brutality rally in Sydney. The full version is online at http://indymedia.org.au/2013/03/10/queers-against-cops-respond-to-attacks. Eds

Following the 2013 Mardi gras parade (the corporate gaystream shadow of a radical and militant queer protest in 1978) a video was released online that showed a young shirtless man being choked by a police officer, then slammed headfirst into the pavement while handcuffed.

Outrage quickly spread across the Queer community and far beyond.

Within two days, Community Action Against Homophobia (CAAH) called for a demonstration against police brutality on Friday 8th of March.

The rally was to gather at 6pm Taylor square, then to march to Surrey Hills cop shop then back. Dozens of anarchists and antiauthoritarians attended, some came dressed as mock riot cops while others brought about a thousand copies of 6 different leaflets and three large banners reading "NO JUSTICE NO PEACE FUCK THE POLICE," "ALL COPS ARE BASTARDS" and "GAY BASHING IS A NSW POLICE TRADITION".

Throughout the demo the large banners were used to protect demonstrators from police harassment.

As we marched from Taylor square to Surrey Hills police station, two banners were used to flank the side of the demo, creating a barrier between the line of riot police and the crowd. The other large banner was used to create a physical separation between protesters and the line of police horses and arrest vehicles which tailed the end of the rally.

Those carrying that banner marched far slower than the rest of the crowd, and were able to create a large gap between police horses and the demonstration. We have attended many demos in the past where police horses are used to intimidate and harass those at the back of a demo, and to force

those marching to hurry up.

Once the crowd arrived at Surrey Hills cop shop, we tied our banner reading "GAY BASHING IS A NSW POLICE TRADITION" from the balcony of the massive pig centre, while some queers held the ACAB banner by the entrance to the cop shop, and the FUCK THE POLICE banner was used to block police horses and their arrest vehicles on Pelican St, and prevent them from coming down onto Goulburn St to where the rally was being held.

While speeches were being made, some of us distributed boxes of chalk throughout the crowd, and a few of us wrote a bunch of anti-police slogans on the steps, balcony floor and across the outside walls of the police station.

Once the demo started moving again a group of us stayed behind and used a banner to block police horses and their vehicles from following the demo back to Taylor square.

After years of attending fairly small demonstrations against police brutality, we were extremely pleased to see cops cowering inside their concrete fortress while thousands of angry queers and activists chanted against police violence. Hundreds of people thanked us for the leaflets, and for having the courage to carry those banners and keep the horses away. Dozens posed for photos in front of our banners and many people we'd never met

asked if they could hold them alongside us.

This text has been written as a response to a small, but very vocal minority at the demo who aggressively opposed our messages and our stance towards the police. Some of them harassed, threatened and abused us, telling us to put our banners away, others ordered us to remove the masks a couple of us were wearing, and one man even kicked our banner and attempted to pull it away from us. Unsurprisingly, the only protesters who confronted us were white, middle aged, cis-gendered males. Some of them accused us "not really being a part of the gay community.

Almost every anarchist and anti authoritarian who handed out leaflets, wore mock police uniforms, held our banners and yelled "fuck the police" instead of the official "stop violent police" chant, was either bi, poly, trans, queer or a poc. If the "gay community" is just for police loving, middle class white men then fuck that community.

We have no interest in repressing our rage towards those that harass, abuse and incarcerate us and our loved ones out of some bullshit attempt to look tame, safe, and acceptable for the corporate media and straight colonial Australia. We are not gay as in happy but queer as in fuck you.

We found it quite amazing that anyone would be speaking in favour of police at a rally against police brutality. Some of these idiots even told us that "this is only about officer 266, not all cops" or "we're only here because of one bad officer" or "the police are here to protect us. what would we do without them?" One woman tried to delegitimise our message by taking the microphone and saying "I want to remind everyone here that this protest is not against the NSW police force, we're fighting against police brutality, just one bad apple, officer 266 has a lot of questions to answer, but there are a lot of good cops out there, and we wouldn't be where we are today without them."

In response we say fuck you; it's not about one bad apple, or one single instance of police brutality. Police violence is endemic in the culture and institution of the force and they certainly do not protect us queers. Police are ultimately responsible for upholding property laws that favour rich and often white businessman and professionals.

Every day cops fill the prisons with the poor and marginalised sections of the population. While indigenous people make up 2.3% of the Australian population, they make up about 30% of the NSW and national prison population. In the NT indigenous people make up over 80% of the prison population. One in 4 homeless youth are queer

and many engage in illegal sex work to survive. As such they are systematically targeted and repressed by police and property laws. Following the Friday demo one young homeless queer, accused of swearing at the pigs was arrested, detained and charged with 'failure to comply with a police direction' 'offensive behaviour' and 'offensive language.'

We are freedom loving, cop hating queer hooligans who've had enough of police oppression. Police violence is business as usual and if we seek to actually put an end to it, we must be willing to respond in kind.

The only thing that could be described as justice in this twisted society is the revenge of the oppressed and our justice will be found in the streets, not in any courtroom or external police investigation.

Conversations with Anarchists in Madrid – Interviews by Jeremy

There are massive social movements shaking Spain. In 2012 I spent six months living in Madrid and participating in anarchist and other movements. There are anti-austerity mobilisations virtually everyday, and at least monthly demonstrations which see tens of thousands in the streets. Many of these are largely organanised through the 15M movement, although the struggle for 'control' of the movement is ongoing. In November a million workers marched through the city as part of a union-led general strike. In many neighbourhoods there are weekly assemblies and frequent direct actions such as stopping people being evicted from their homes. There are hundreds of squatted houses and more than a dozen squatted, self-managed social centres in Madrid alsone. Millions of people are involved, from students and workers to 15M 'Indignants', anti-fascists and anarchists. These movements are complex and diverse. There is a complicated interplay between Spain's politically radical history and culture, and the current capitalist attacks in the name of the 'crisis'. There is also a many-layered relationship between reformist and radical tendencies - the latter including anarchism, which is an undeniably significant force in the political landscape.

Rather than offering you my own incomplete observations and misunderstandings, I thought it would be better to present some interviews. So in December, I conducted 4 interviews with 5 anarchists. They have differing and sometimes overlapping perspectives - insurrectionist, social anarchist, syndicalist, and radical anarcha-feminist. The perspectives aren't meant to represent the whole anarchist 'movement' by any means, but rather offer glimpses of anarchist ideas in Madrid at the moment. Three are presented below and the other two will be published as a separate article in the future. The subject of the interview below is broad: Spain, 15M and anarchism. The three interviewees below are all men. The second interview is with two radical anarcha-feminist womyn and focuses mostly on issues around gender and anarchism. I realise this is a very problematic division. It partly reflects problems within the anarchist movement in Spain (as the second article will discuss), partly space constraints in Mutiny, and partly the inadequacies of my own organising and language skills. I'm deeply sorry about that. I also apologise for any mistakes because of my poor Spanish. I've edited and changed expressions for clarity, but I've tried my best to maintain the sense of what people had to say.

The interviewees

Y is a student who has participated in lots of different political groups and squats. He recently lived in Greece for some time. Mario is an anarchist and a squatter. Kostas is from Greece and has been living in Madrid for 6 years. He is involved with a number of projects in the anti-authoritarian movement including the CNT.

The context and the crisis in Spain

Y: It's very important to remember, that here in Spain we had a dictatorship that lasted for more than 35 years and only ended in 1975. Most of our parents were born when that dictatorship still existed. We're all influenced by that. There is still a strong current of fear of, or respect for, authority, especially for people over 40. But on the other hand, we don't have the same sense of identification with the State that they have in the UK for example. In the 80s and 90s there was a strong movement of autonomous groups. But it was repressed by a mix of drugs introduced by the State and extreme repression in the form of a brutal prison regime. The rate of incarceration in Spain has skyrocketed. In 1984 there were 8,000 prisoners; in 2012 there were 77,000.

Mario: The theme of the crisis is complex. It's undeniable that we're in a crisis. But in the history of capitalism, there have been many crises and they always use crisis as a tool to oppress the people. For example, with the crisis, they've achieved reforms that remove many of the rights of Spanish workers, and introduced a new penal code that is much more repressive. What was a small misdemeanour before - for example stealing something from the supermarket - is now a crime. The government is using the crisis as a way to unite people against a common enemy - just as has been done before with 'terrorism'. It's a social and political strategy for control. But at the same time, I don't know to what extent the crisis is under control by the powers that be. Because it's also creating a climate of dissatisfaction among people. Many collectives and assemblies are happening in the barrios. And the 15M movement arose with the crisis.

15M - the beginning

Y: 15M began with the 15th May 2011. Some days before the 15th, there was a demonstration organised by the group 'Real Democracy Now'. 'Democracy' is a word that many anarchists in Greece reject, but here some still use it. So, some anarchists continued the demonstration to see what would happen. and there was a little riot, and some of them were detained. And in the process of defending the arrestees, the occupation camp at Sol began. Many people began to go, and within a few days hundreds of people were camped. And many of them were anarchists. It was complete chaos. The good thing was that what happened was spontaneous, in the beginning it wasn't controlled by any political party.

Lots of people were there, from anarchists to right-wing people. It was a loud shout that 'the world is not OK!' And there was a sense that 'we're going to begin talking and organising ourselves to make something happen'.

But when you have something as open and utopian as 15M was, you'll always get people trying to use it. People from political parties are like vultures. Most people here know that political parties are corrupt, even if they declare themselves close to them. The left parties are isolated, because many people of the left refuse to vote. So the parties are always looking for people to try to get them to join. They spread their tentacles in the movement, looking for a few members - people who are not confident enough to face a revolution without leaders.

Mario: From the beginning, 15M was useful for the State. My theory is that things were going very badly for the State in Spain. And 15M was used to manage the rage of the people. It was inevitable that people would go out onto the street. So the State had two options: show themselves as the enemy, or help the people to struggle in a manner that was useful to the State. 15M has been useful for inducing people to vote and for party campaigning. Both IU and the PSOE [the two major parties of the parliamentary left] have run campaigns presenting themselves as helping 15M, and have put their own sections inside the movement.

although it has to face different problems. And this is why the movement is still here, years later. That is something positive. Some of the 15M groups which weren't dependent on the central assembly emulated anarchist actions. For example, the people of Carabanchel [a working-class barrio in the south of Madrid] have squatted a 15M social centre.

Mario: As I see it, at the time of the

15M - tensions and decentralisation

Y: There comes a time when after you've discussed things, you need to think of an action. So. 15M began to separate into some tendencies. There were many nasty things, for example, when some people would be shouting a slogan or spray-painting, and others would shout 'go away!' 'you're a radical!'. This reflects the fear people have of being a 'radical'.

Most of the people saw that if they really wanted to do something for the movement, or make the movement worth something, then what needed to be done was to decentralise it. It was so huge with so many assemblies, and hundreds of people in one assembly, that it was difficult to coordinate. Anarchists learned a lot in that time about assemblies, decentralisation, anti-hierarchical ways of organising. 15M was a practical lesson.

Through the decentralisation, they made the movement more effective and diverse,

camp at Sol, there was a lot of tension inside 15M, among the Committees [which coordinate the 15M movement - ea the Committee for Animal Rights, the Committee for Feminism, etc]. And so the central occupation grew smaller and the assemblies in the barrios grew bigger. In the end the occupation in Sol was small and was evicted, and the nucleus disappeared. 15M lost force

15M - now

Y: The repression of the dictatorship and postdictatorship years helps to explain why 15M was so successful socially. But it also explains why 15M doesn't use words like 'communist' and 'anarchist'. For many years, these words were taboo. So 15M has a strong anti-system view, but doesn't use the names of the ideologies that developed that kind of view.

and was cemented into a marginal position.

But before, most demonstrations were single issue, and most anarchist demonstrations

were made up of people younger than 30. Now, you have 50-year-olds on the street shouting that all politicians are corrupt and should be sacked.

Also, 15M groups have put direct action into practice. They have actually stopped loads of evictions of people who can't afford to pay their mortgages. Without using the circle A of anarchism, they are putting anarchism into practice. It's not really anarchists involved - although you never know. Maybe that old guy you see has been an anarchist all his life.

The strength of 15M is achieved by focussing as much as possible on the errors of the system. It makes people more and more fed-up with everything. But since they avoid political proposals, the position of the left-wing parties is left intact. 15M doesn't make an anarchist proposal for the total self-management of society; this benefits the left-wing parties.

15M is not a success - because they're reformist and focused on citizenship; they defend the State and support the police. But still, in my opinion, they are one step nearer to the ideals described by Kropotkin and other anarchists. Before, when people met an anarchist they might say 'who's this fuck?', now they might say 'I'll give it a try.' Before, people would say 'the banks are stealing our houses and we can't do anything.' Now they say 'with direct action we can.'

Kostas: For me 15M is a demonstration that, human beings are not naturally capitalist or authoritarian. 15M is proof (as anarchists and anti-authoritarians always say) that human beings are naturally collaborative. 15M has proved that people don't need a radical background. They naturally started to function in a horizontal and transparent way. As I have lived it, 15M is something positive. It is transparent and not a typical leftist movement

with a 'leader'. In my opinion, the Indignants movement in Greece is more superficial – it hasn't evolved in the way it has in Spain.

There are anarchist comrades who criticise 15M, but in my opinion, they aren't looking at its essence. We anarchists don't need to be the sole representatives of anti-authoritarianism! We don't have to be elitist like Marxist-Leninists. Anarchism is an idea without a trade mark. For me, a collective that functions in a horizontal way is good even if it is not identified as 'anarchist'. It's true that 15M are populist and reformist. They demand 'clean the State', and 'we want politicians, but good ones'. The truth is that's ridiculous. But we have to focus on the people who participate. They're people who, in the past, would have delegated their agency to a representative. Now they're in an assembly deciding for themselves.

Mario: In my opinion, 15M has massive problems. In almost all the 15M Committees, there are secret police, politicians of a low level (members of political parties), and reformists of all kinds. Ironically, the Committee for Assemblies actually started to boycott and distance itself from the grassroots assemblies. The Committee for Communication monopolises the communications and puts forward their own perspective in the blog, the Facebook page etc. 15M is structured in a hierarchical way, with leaders, which is very dangerous.

15M has also introduced internal police - not secret police, but rather people involved in the movement who behave like police and control the movement. 15M always presents itself as 'pacifist', and calls this 'respect' - but it isn't. I experienced their form of 'respect' during a demonstration when I was running away from a police charge, and then threw some stones. People from the same demonstration came to hit me and others for 'using violence'.

Also, 15M has led to the growth of reformist tactics. They are always using signatures, petitions, requests for changes in the law. They never demand the destruction of the State.

Ultimately, 15M now consists of small assemblies in different barrios. The majority are very reformist. The movement doesn't really exist.



Anarchism in Spain

Kostas: After the Spanish revolution in 1936, anarcho-syndicalism pretty much vanished. Right now, it's good that we have some level of anarcho-syndicalist organisation in Spain, albeit small and limited. In Greece there's nothing of the sort. Here there is the CGT – a more reformist anarcho-syndicalist group that accepts money from the State, and has full-time, paid officials. The CGT also participates in workplace elections. The CNT on the other hand still functions in a more anarchist way. But there is currently a debate within the CNT about whether to collaborate with the more reformist unions – like the CGT.

In Greece, we have maintained our right to respond to the violence of the State – to defend ourselves against physical repression.

But we need more social structures and antiauthoritarian organisations in other aspects of life, in order to go further. In Spain - like in the majority of the world – we don't have the right to defend ourselves in the street against the State. But here there are, in an embryonic stage, some other things – for example, anarcho-syndicalism, projects in libertarian education, and 15M. Anarcho-syndicalists are trying to create horizontal structures at work, while 15M are trying to create horizontal structures in neighbourhoods. But anarchism is about more than workplaces or neighbourhood assemblies. It's about creating a libertarian culture, education, and whatever else exists in society. It's about applying libertarian decisionmaking in all aspects of human life. And this still being developed. But, as they say, we shouldn't be afraid of making small steps - we should be afraid of standing still.

Y: For years, in the media, anarchism didn't exist. The powerful people here are very scared of anarchism, because of our history. When there are fights between neo-nazis and anarchists, they say 'gang fights'. From the end of the dictatorship, anarchism in Spain was reserved for radicals and associated with violence and the youthful, punk style. When I was in Athens, I didn't see a generational gap in the anarchist movement. But here, anarchists older than 30 years have been absent. The image of the young, rebellious punk has been the image of anarchism.

Now, you see the circle A everywhere. However some of us don't use the term 'anarchism'. In this social centre for example [La Gatonera], we don't officially use the term, in order to make it more open to everyone. It's a social struggle, so you have to open it up and go outside. Most of the squatted social centres here have social projects. That's why they're called 'social centres'.

'Centro Social Okupado Autogestionado' represents key ideas for us. Firstly, 'okupado' - squatted, and everyone who comes here must know we squatted it, with all the political implications that involves. Also, 'autogestionado' - self-managed, meaning we don't do things hierarchically, we do things horizontally. And 'social' because we want to share it.

Mario: I am quite pessimistic about the anarchist movement here. It's small and divided. There are many personal and political problems, including sexism and authoritarianism within the movement.

In terms of strategies within the anarchist movement, a pattern has emerged of certain defined strategies that have been repeated many times in past decades: squatted social centres and houses; talks; concerts; practical workshops; and demonstrations. These 5 strategies are often combined in a 'journada' - a day or weekend of talks and workshops, that will also include a demonstration or occupation. They have good and bad aspects. We've been doing them for years and we do them well. In general I think they're all important to spread ideas and create a point of encounter for other anarchists and people who want to unite with us.

But I see two big problems with these strategies. Firstly, there are people who make use of them for their own ends, and destroy them. For example, selling drugs in squats and concerts, or squatting to live for free, without political ideas. Secondly, the other problem is that we don't do anything else. We are stagnant. The important thing for me is to do more. For me this means direct action in many senses. It also means serious danger. In Spain there do exist insurgent direct action groups. They're coherent and act at a very concrete level, but they are also generally isolated.

And they are far too few. We don't have the mentality of direct action. And we don't have good, secure methods of communication to create large-scale coordinated direct action that could create real problems for the State.

There is a 6th strategy, namely hunts of nazis. In fact, many anarchists start out in the movement with these actions, and continue to think of political action as hunting nazis. I think it's good to expel nazis from the streets, but I don't see it as the priority. I don't see them as the real enemy. Enemies yes, but marginalised and small. It's an error to focus our struggle on them. For many people (not only new, or young people), this is their only action. I see it as important, but the danger is stagnation.

I recognise that in Spain we have an anarchist movement that is more or less solid. It is like a rock with cracks in it. We have serious internal problems. But we have a strong movement of squatting - above all in Barcelona, but also in Madrid. We also have a strong culture - of music, zines, books, information to share and relationships between areas that connect lots of different people. We have a web. It is weak, but it exists.

Beyond Chávez Some thoughts on the Western left's presentation of Venezuela

President Hugo Chávez's recent death has prompted different responses from the Englishspeaking left. From the organised socialist left, the UK Socialist Workers' Party points to a social democratic legacy but not one of radical change, given the concentration of state power within the personality cult of Chávez (Gonzalez 2013). Green Left Weekly in Australia, the paper of the Socialist Alliance, paints him as an electorally undefeated revolutionary socialist that challenged Capital, backed by the people of Venezuela and the Latin American continent (O'Keefe 2013). Many blogs and websites closer to anarchism, such as Libcom, have republished Venezuelan anarchist newspaper el Libertario's (2013) reflections which reduce the Venezuelan state to a 'grotesque' and 'populist' personality cult around Chávez, and entirely dismiss the professed aim of socialism. There is no recognition of the improved quality of life for many marginalised Venezuelans. While many of these oft repeated left views on Venezuela hold some truth (or no truth), they paint a simplistic picture of a process that is far more complex.

Firstly, focussing purely on Chávez dismisses the protagonistic role of the many Venezuelans that support the aim of socialism but not necessarily the manner in which Venezuelan state officials conduct themselves. In particular, there is often a tendency for the Western left to posit Venezuelan state institutions and grassroots movements as mutually exclusive. Both state institutions and grassroots organisation are active agents and are somewhat mutually dependent. It is not simply a debate of abstract positions derived from John Holloway's Change the World Without Taking Power or Vladmir Lenin's State and Revolution.

While there are definitely problems with chavista state officials attempting to coopt and/or actively create obstacles for grassroots organisation, significantly more space and resources have also been opened up to grassroots organising. This has been done through the creation of new parallel state institutions such as the social missions. communal councils, urban land councils and other forms of local organising that attempt to cut through the bureaucracy from longestablished state institutions. In regards to the established traditional channels, many barrio (shantytowns) organisations have successfully campaign to be elected in local parroquiales (equivalent to a ward in a local Australian council) to defend their interests from local state officials. This has also made them part of a layered state structure composed of very different interests. Given this complexity in the relationship between the Chávez government and grassroots movements, the Venezuelan state cannot be taken as a homogenous whole focused purely on the charismatic leadership of Chávez

Moreover, poor and marginalised Venezuelans from barrios were organising themselves to resolve local problems and defend their interests against local state officials long before Chávez came along in 1998. Economic decline from a combination of declining oil prices and neoliberal restructuring throughout the 1980s and 1990s had forced many of them to take matters into their own hands. As the Venezuelan economy declined, the neoliberal state cut public services and disenfranchised young people without employment opportunities turned towards to the drug trade, resulting in increased levels of violence in the barrios. Barrio residents organised to reclaim territory from local drug dealers, promote awareness through murals, community radio and newspapers, and promotion of cultural activities with children such as baseball, dance and music (Fernandes 2010: 60-61).

The Venezuelans who elected the Chávez government are also active agents on an everyday basis. They do not only emerge when the government is in trouble such as the April 2002 coup d'état or the oil management strike later that year. Every step taken by the Chávez government in regards to social policies and new participatory governance structures would not have been realised without the participation of local communities in actually implementing them. Whilst the materials for the first adult literacy program Misión Robinson were supplied by the government, the program would not have been achieved if neighbourhoods had not organised a space for teaching and learning, and encouraged local residents to enrol in class. The initial primary health program Misión Barrio Adentro that brought thousands of Cuban doctors to poor neighbourhoods in Venezuela could not have been achieved if local residents did not first organise places for Cuban doctors to live within their neighbourhoods, let alone places for them to set up practice. Communal councils would not have been established if communities did not push for governance structures in which they could directly voice concerns and control resources to address them

Secondly, the claim that the Venezuelan process is merely 'social democratic' or 'populist' (see Gonzalez 2013) reduces a complex and dynamic process to simplistic Western-centric political science categories. The Venezuelan process is not considered 'radical' enough to be called socialism because the traditional 'working class' is not the prioritised agent (Harman, cited in Angus 2007). These simplistic labels applied by organised socialists also imply that Venezuela is not following a 'correct' model of socialism.

Latin American theorists such as Cuban Independence hero José Martí and Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Maríateguí have long argued against copying models from elsewhere. An oft repeated remark I have heard from

chavistas was 'Not the Cuban model nor the Russian model but the Venezuelan model'. What is missed by the 'social democratic' and the 'populist' tags is that the Venezuelan government and Venezuelan people are attempting to create their own version of socialism consistent with their history and culture. It is not some Western-centric idealised version of what socialism should be. In an economy where oil is the dominant economic activity, falling oil prices during the 1980s led to currency devaluation which in turn increased unemployment due to closure of factories and culling of the public sector. This increased unemployment forced many to turn to informal economic activities such as street vending (buhoneros). By the late 1990s, informal employment made up 50 percent of the Venezuelan workforce (Ramoni Perazzi et al 2010: 10). The significant presence of the informal sector creates difficulties for the idealised notion of the 'working class' which has traditionally only considered waged labour or formal employment.

Thirdly, the simple portrayal of Chávez as a revolutionary socialist that symbolises a threat to Capital (see O'Keefe 2013) ignores the complex and contradictory dynamic between the Chávez government's nationally 'socialist' policies, and international policies that range from 'capitalist' to 'solidaristic'. In particular, these foreign policies oscillate between capitalist-orientated economic interests related to the oil industry and solidarity-orientated geopolitical interests related to Latin American integration. On the one hand, oil wealth has allowed the Chávez government to invest socially and form solidaristic trade alliances with Latin American countries such as Cuba, Bolivia and Ecuador. These have included cataract operations for thousands of Venezuelans jointly funded by Venezuela and Cuba, fair prices for Bolivian soy exports, technical assistance for Bolivian hydrocarbons industries, and the establishment of TeleSUR (the Latin American

alternative to CNN). This solidarity has also extended to low income families in the United States through subsidised heating oil.

On the other hand, the Chávez government has not always extended its solidarity when that solidarity conflicts with its economic interests particularly in expanding the oil industry into the international circuits of capital accumulation. During former Mexican President Calderon's attempt to reform Mexico's nationalised oil company PEMEX (Petróleos Mexicanos), Venezuela's oil company PDVSA (Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A.) expressed interest in investing in PEMEX. President Calderon's reforms included opening PEMEX up to foreign investment in exploration and production but more importantly would allow foreign and local investors to buy shares of PEMEX (CNN 2011). These reforms were intended to liberalise PEMEX's structure and involve private capital in its management. Given the Chávez government's own struggles to reform the Organic Hydrocarbons Law in order to correctly tax its foreign partners and wrest control of PDVSA from a management that was setting it on a path towards privatisation, PDVSA's support for Calderon's reforms highlights a hypocritical attitude. Although the Chávez government has challenged local capitalist interests through nationalisations and expropriations, it is also constrained by international capital through its dependency on the international oil market.

While there is definitely a personality cult surrounding Chávez, chavistas also emphasise the point that 'With Chavez, the people rule. With the people, Chavez rules.' In light of Chávez's death, time will tell how true that saying is. I have hope that the Venezuelan process will continue for some time.

Written by: Red Tomato

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anarchy.org.au
Your online source for anarchy in Australia.
Currently administered by the Melbourne
Anarchist Club.

disaccords.wordpress.com
An anarchist news blotter following events in Australia & Indonesia (and other nearby places).

Email noisland@riseup.net with links and recommendations.

withsobersenses.worpress.com
Fault Lines of Capital Accumulation &
Front Lines of Class Struggle.
'may be useful for those trying to understand and change the society they live in and make up'.

goldenbarleyschool.wordpress.com
An anarchist, a communist and a feminist walk
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slackbastard.anarchobase.com Anarchy and apathy battle it out on @ndy's blog.

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