

Kicking off the 2011 Revolts in the age of the Networked Individual

A review of Paul Mason's 'Why its Kicking Off Everywhere'



To what extent do the revolutions and revolts of 2011 reflect a new world born from the shell of the old? Were these revolts of the internet generation -- networked individuals? Are people not only using new technology but becoming transformed by it? For anarchists, what lessons can we learn and to what extent must we transform our organisational methods and structures?

Paul Mason's 'Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere' is word for word the best writing published so far on the crisis and resistance to it. Every chapter contains at least one 'now why didn't I think of that' moment. Mason's powerful but easy to read journalistic style meant this reviewer read it cover to cover during snatched moments in 3 otherwise busy days.

From the introduction anyone who has been involved with the emerging movement of the last decade will recognize their own experience reflected

back. Mason's description of the people, events and locations of resistance read as those of an perceptive insider. Which is not to say he never gets things wrong, or that I'd agree entirely with his perspective (more on this later).

Mason's insight probably comes in part because he was an activist in the Trotskyist Workers Power group, which obviously provides him with an inside perspective on how the radical left and activist movements function that most mainstream journalists would lack. His politics have moved on quite a bit from orthodox Trotskyism, although there are sections where I think hints of it creep in. Today he works as the economics editor for the BBC's flagship Newsnight program, but his journalistic background has also seen him working for technology publications.

Mason doesn't explicitly describe his own politics. I suspect BBC rules may prohibit him, but his other two books, in

particular 'How the Working Class went Global,' seem to be a mix of revolutionary syndicalism, unorthodox marxism with a strong emphasis on working class self-organisation and neo-Keynesianism. He obviously finds the emerging 'horizontalist' movement both fascinating and inspiring even if he is quite critical, ending 'How the Working Class went Global' with the observation that it 'has a lot to learn.' In 'Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere' he writes as an observer rather than a participant of the events he describes, but it is clear enough that the line between the two roles is blurred. Where he writes about events in London, this is actually a problem, as we shall see, but for the most part it provides an added energy to the account.

Part of the book's readability comes from the more theoretical chapters being preceded by journalistic accounts of particular struggles in 2011. But these accounts are not there simply to add colour; they provide both the context for

the more theoretical discussions while the stories he tells serve to inoculate the reader against some of the more obvious counter arguments that might be made to the theory he advances.

Mason's most interesting arguments in the book are largely related to the ways that the internet & mobile phones have transformed the way revolutions can be organized. But this also profoundly impacts the way news is now reported. In the introduction he contrasts the situations of the 1960's when 'a few fearless reporters' broke the big stories (and are remembered for it) with the current "great river of human hope flowing" online where all he can hope to do is "dip my fingers" into the massive quantity of blogs, tweets & updates that now provides our understanding of events.

For the purposes of this review which became very much longer than what I had first intended I'm going to do a chapter by chapter examination of the core concepts before looking at what I think the core issues have to say to anarchists in particular.

Chapter 1 - Cairo

Unlike those who simply saw the revolution in Egypt as being about Facebook & Twitter, his account in the first chapter opens by locating his story telling in the slum district of the Coptic garbage recyclers in Cairo - one of the poorest section of the cities population whose net access would be very limited. He uses a sequence of stories from the Egyptian revolution to sketch out what will be the key groupings ('the graduate with no future': the urban poor and the urban workers) in the chapters to come. The stories of the connections between these groups told here illustrate the later theory chapters.

It's a very effective technique. Mason's ability to vividly describe a scene grabs your interest in the way a good novel would. This is no mean achievement -- various books on the emerging movement have passed through the 'everyone involved should read this' stage in the last decade. I am very certain that almost everyone who picks up 'Why its kicking off everywhere' will actually finish it. This is in contrast to previously brief holders of that title like Hardt & Negri's 'Empire' that 90% of readers probably put down, and never return to, long before they had reached the midway point.

The speed with which the book has been published is another of its strong points -- he appears to have completed it when Occupy was starting to go global. This means the emerging movement Mason

describes is still emerging; it is still a movement in formation. I received the book in the post on January 25th 2012, a day I spent following (on twitter) the mass protests in Egypt which marked one year since the start of that unfinished revolution. I read most of it on Saturday 28th, on the train to Belfast where I visited the Occupation of a disused bank building before returning to Dublin to catch up with comrades who had Occupied and been evicted from a NAMA building the same day. [NAMA is the Irish 'Bad Bank' set up to rescue the Irish banking system.]

He warns at the start of the book that some sections will be obvious to those already involved in the movement. But I have to say while there is little in his discussion of the internet I would be unaware of (my own use of the internet for activism goes back to before the web existed) I still find he makes obvious connections that either I should have spotted myself or which I have failed to give the weight they deserve. This is another reason I consider the text extremely useful -- I have always tended to be most convinced by ideas which make me go 'why didn't I think of that' rather than the 'oh that sounds really clever I wonder what it means'.

A common response when people criticize the elitism of academic language and writing requirements is that those invested in that system accuse the critic of being anti-intellectual. Perhaps one of the things I like most about Mason's book is that while it is very intellectual in terms of being packed with provocative ideas even when it deals with complex topics it avoids the trap of specialist jargon, unexplained obscure references and latin quotation.

Chapter 2 - No one saw it coming

'No One Saw It Coming' is a reminder of how recent this new world of revolt is. Mason points out that not only did no significant mainstream source publishing in 2010 see the Arab revolt brewing, but even when it was underway they kept proclaiming the impossibility of it spreading from Tunisia initially and then elsewhere once that happened. He is probably keen to establish this in part because it gives him greater scope later in arguing that something fundamentally new is happening in the world. After all, if the major upsurges of 2011 were not predicted then the current models people use cannot be valid. He charts how the writings of the western left, from Chomsky to Zizek, before this period of revolution had come to see fundamental change as impossible. In what

is presumably a nod towards Hardt & Negri's 'Empire' he says that the left came to believe that "only irony or flight are possible."

This belief was also somewhat similar to the triumphalist argument of the right as the soviet bloc crumbled from within and Social Democracy signed up to neoliberalism. The slogans of the right ran from 'The End of History' to 'There is no Alternative.' Mason argues that this 'capitalism triumphant' worldview came to an end on 15th September 2008 with the collapse of Lehman Brothers when "Suddenly it became possible to imagine the collapse of capitalism".

Elsewhere in his book on the Crash, 'Meltdown: The end of the age of Greed' Mason has criticized the left of this period for not realising what was going on in the early weeks of the crisis. He gives as an example the Washington G20 Summit which saw almost no protests, to the puzzlement of those running it. The NGO's were focused on putting out a 'Don't forget Africa' message. No one in the activist scene seemed to quite understand the scale of what was underway. This ties in with my own experience of the Autumn of 2008 when at the Cork Grassroots Gathering two of us who had experienced the 80's (when Ireland was in deep recession) did a session trying to explain what was coming and why we needed to rapidly shift both gears and focus. We had titled the session 'The moment we are in: Kicking capitalism when it's down' to make the argument that there was going to be a narrow window of opportunity for which the movement as a whole should put most of its energy into building a truly massive opposition movement, and that this window would be brief and followed by one of deep demoralization. That discussion was frustrated by an audience that wanted to continue the same old conversations about organic farming and the other routine issues of more normal times. As the crisis bit, people then tended to want to be able to react instantly to what was being done in a militant fashion, as if a few hundred people blocking the parliament could reverse a budget. There was a collective failure on the part of the movement in general to recognize that the scale radical politics could and needed to work on had shifted a couple of magnitudes.

It is really only in the last months in Ireland that I'm getting a sense of people starting to think of resistance, not as an instant moment of activism, but a longer term project of building truly mass opposition. It hasn't kicked off yet in Ireland, although many of the features Mason outlines exist here too. The safety valve that is the long tradition of mass

emigration alongside the deep roots neoliberal ideology sunk into our minds during the Celtic Tiger book have acted to limit protest, but we may yet have our 2011.

In this chapter Mason traces the development of the resistance in the post Lehman's period from the streets of Athens to Gaza. He briefly diverts to the Iranian election protests of 2009 where the first proof of the potential of Twitter, Facebook and mobile phone videos to achieve mass mobilization emerged, even if on that occasion the movement was defeated. But he ends the chapter on one of two trips to what still feel like the obscure texts of the ultra left.

This first incidence takes us to the Communique From An Absent Future that came out of the University of California Santa Cruz occupation of the Autumn of 2009. It pointed out that in these changed conditions "A university diploma is now worth no more than a share in General Motors." A central theme of Mason's argument is that like the revolutions of 1848 the destruction of graduate opportunities from 2008 created the conditions for a revolutionary alliance between the urban poor, urban workers and college graduates -- the last group because all over the world their promising future has vanished. This figure of the 'graduate with no future' will appear several times in the text. [at <http://wewanteverything.wordpress.com/2009/09/24/communique-from-an-absent-future/>]

Chapter 3 - London riots

Mason covers the cycle of protest and riot in London that began with the student protests of Day X (November 24 2010) and ran to the massive August riots of 2011. This chapter was the one that gave me the strongest face palm moment as I realised that we completely forgot to discuss the role that must have been played by the smaller, preceding protests and riots in our 11,000 word analysis of the 2011 August riots. [<http://www.wsm.ie/c/london-riots-causes-consequences-anarchist>]

Mason's overview brings the role of these earlier protests back into the story of the August riots. In particular in a humorous section where he discusses his mistake in confusing Grime with Dubstep (and all the tweets he received correcting him) on the student demonstration. He is using Grime here as a signifier for the 'youth from the estates' and the fear that exists of the 'underclass youth' in mainstream society, a fear that received its clearest expression in the high level of public support for extreme repression in the aftermath of the Au-

gust riots. As we reported then, "The impact this process is having can be seen in the results of the YouGov poll carried out for the Sun. It found that 33% thought "police should be able to use firearms/live ammunition" and support for 'less lethal' options was far higher: "9 out of 10 respondents (90%) thought that the police should be able to use water cannon in the course of dealing with rioters. The potential use of other tactics also proved very popular with mounted police (84%), curfews (82%), tear gas (78%), tasers (72%) and plastic bullets (65%) all attracting support from a large majority". "

His original account from that December 2012 student protest included a section on how the "hippy .. from an eco-farm" running the sound system was moved aside by a "young black girl" who "inserts the plug into her Blackberry .. and pumps out Dubstep." Half the crowd on that 9th December 2010 demonstration he estimated was made up of "banlieu-style youth from places like Croyden and Peckham, or the council estates of Camden, Islington and Hackney." Later in the account he describes the attempt to storm Parliament where "at the point of the wedge, alongside the estate youth, are the self styled 'Book bloc' - a literal meeting of the 'graduates with no future' and the 'urban poor' discussed in the previous chapter.

He doesn't really make the argument directly that the August riots owed much to the previous protests. This is perhaps the first indication of the cautious and contradictory manner he talks about the role of riots throughout the text as they start to approach home. The closest he approaches in the case of the August riots is where he says in the aftermath of the TUC march "The urban youth crept back to the estates where, as Spring turned into Summer, they cranked up the Grime. They pondered the meaning of all the situationist slogans they had heard." He then launches into a brief and, to be frank, not very interesting (compared with what could be said) discussion of the riots and the use of Blackberries before ending with the assertion that these protests "also showed how, in developed societies, organised labour is still capable of channelling and overwhelming the more chaotic, spontaneous protest."

Newsnight, UK Uncut and the Black bloc

This is clearly a reference to the earlier section in the chapter where he describes the events of the massive TUC march of 26 March 2011 and the actions of the 'Black bloc.' Here he quietly back peddles on the incorrect claims he made on Newsnight that night that the Black

bloc had never been part of the TUC march, claiming they had simply "appeared on London's Regent street this is the so called Black Bloc on bigger numbers than ever seen on the streets of Britain before. This is not a breakthrough from the march because these people were never on the march". Here instead the Black bloc is formed "at Piccadilly Circus" where "the edges of the demo are swarming with youths dressed like members of the anarchist 'black bloc'". This sentence is disappointing in several ways, but moving on he acknowledges that "it is the students and school students from December that have really swelled the numbers."

Overall the account describes the tensions between the majority of the marchers and the actions of the black bloc in a far less judgmental way than did the Newsnight report, which set the tone for a nasty, aggressive interview where the presenter tried to push responsibility for the rioting on the UK Uncut spokesperson because she refused to play along with the 'good protester, bad protester' narrative they had setup. Specifically, in his introduction Mason claims the Black bloc property destruction "raises questions for the avowedly non violent anti-cuts movement UKUnCut." Later on in the chapter Mason mentions how UK Uncut was paralyzed in the aftermath of that demonstration because of having to deal with the fall out from black bloc property destruction that day. But he fails to acknowledge his own role and that of Newsnight in forcing that 'good protester, bad protester' agenda on them. Mason's participation in the events move beyond mere observation with a 'Schrodengers cat' type effect (where the observer alters the chain of events through his act of description). (youtube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5lhS7yBcMnE>)

He doesn't touch on the significance of the failure of the alliance that Mason described in the previous chapter to emerge. In the events described on the London protests the three groups, urban poor, urban workers and college graduates are all present. But apart from the student riot, no two are ever acting together and on March 26th he sees them acting against each other. By the August riots the urban poor are largely left to go it alone and face the full force of state repression in the aftermath. When you view it in those terms the resulting questions are very different to what Mason seems to want to pose in the chapter and the debate shifts to the question of why solidarity did not emerge as it did in the North African risings.

Chapter 4 - Social roots of the new unrest

Chapter four sees Mason move towards putting forward a general theory to answer the question in the book's title, why, in 2011, is it kicking off everywhere? He puts the 'graduate with no future' at the center of this theory citing youth soaring unemployment rates from Libya to Spain to Britain. The orthodox left still tends to publicly take the attitude that 'students are all middle class'. Mason argues that reality of student life today is that, "their free time is minimal: precarious part time jobs are essential to their existence...Plus they have become a vital asset for the financial system. In 2006 alone Citigroup alone made \$220 million clear profit from its student loan book." He writes that the global participation rate in higher education, which stood at 19% in 2000, is now 26% and that in the US 70% now complete post-secondary education. Students, in other words, are everywhere and in ever increasing numbers.

The other important aspect of modern student life is that the internet made possible the emergence of a global student culture. This he argues meant that at least some of the Egyptian student leaders had "no noticeable difference .. clothes, language and culture" with students in London, something which facilitated common identification with each others' struggles. Although it has to be said, the specific American-Egyptian woman he uses as an example, Gigi Ibrahim, had moved back to Egypt from California shortly before the revolt. Perhaps the case still holds in the sense that London students would have expected an Egyptian student to have a very different appearance and set of cultural influences to them but then found this not to be the case. This made it possible in turn for students to travel from Britain and the US to take part in the later stages of the insurrection. London students he followed on twitter later tweeted from Tahrir square, and of course there was also the famous case of the three American students arrested and prosecuted by the Egyptian police for their part in rioting there.

Over a decade earlier it was not unusual to find students who had travelled to Chiapas for Zapatista solidarity work expressing a similar sense of surprise on discovering not only how similar they were to the students from Mexico City who had also travelled down. But, and this may apply in Egypt today, the students from Mexico observed that the gulf between themselves and the rural poor was far greater than that between themselves and the international students.

Mason argues that because students are now a very large percentage of the population this makes them an effective "transmitter of unrest" to other sections of the population. Part of the reason for this is that the new conditions of student life mean that in 2010 students are now "thoroughly embedded both in the workforce and in low-income communities." It does strike me here that while this may very well apply to the relationship between students and the urban poor the massive gap discussed in the case of Mexico with the rural poor is probably unchanged. The rural poor are absent from the book, the accounts and theory here are very much of urban insurrection. Leaving that aside he argues that since the modern student will almost certainly have a laptop and thus already be a 'networked individual', they can be a key transmission belt by which ideas can rapidly spread into local populations who may not have the same level of access -- another core concept in the book.

This is where he starts the discussion of the role of networks, a discussion which is central to the book and which runs over a few chapters. He begins with an explanation of what is referred to as the 'network effect.' Basically the more people that use a network the more useful it is. If you were the first person in the world with a phone, it would have been of no use. When two people had a phone it would still have been of very limited use to either of them. The more people had phones the more useful they became to each individual with a phone. They become most useful to everyone in the phone network when everybody not only has a phone but has it on them at all times. That 'network effect' is the reason so many of us are stuck using Facebook even though we dislike its corporate greed, unethical methods and use by the police and other state forces as a surveillance tool. Almost all of us make the judgement that these disadvantages, all of which are significant, are outweighed by the advantage of not only being able to reach out to hundreds of similar activists, but also thousands or even hundreds of thousands of random folk. There are attempts to set up alternative activist social network sites, but very few of us use them because the only people there are a rather small minority of other activists.

A local example - The 'Garda rape tape' story

It's easy to lose sight of the potential impact this network effect allows and the way it has already transformed the potential for communication. As an example, I was part of the Shell to Sea media group that broke the story almost a year

ago in April 2011 when women campaigners who had just been arrested accidentally recorded the arresting police joking about threatening to rape them as an interrogation technique. State media initially refused to broadcast the recording, but using Facebook and Twitter the recording we put online was listened to by 70,000 people in the first 12 hours, which spurred the state media into finally broadcasting it. (<http://www.wsm.ie/garda-rape-threat>)

An article I'd written explaining what had happened was shared by over 2,000 people on Facebook in the same period. <http://www.wsm.ie/c/garda-corrib-rape-pipeline> Close on 20,000 people read it in the first 48 hours. This genuinely new development in communications allows any one individual with something to say but without access to the mainstream media to communicate relatively easily with vast numbers of people. This happens because hundreds or thousands of other people make the small and low commitment decision to click 'share' or 'retweet' on an item in their feed and thus recommend it to their friends. Compare this to a pre-internet situation where we would have had to not only print 20,000 copies of an article up, but had to find 100's of people willing to distribute them and get the leaflets into 20,000 individual sets of hands. This was only possible for large organisations or those with the financial resources to pay for such distribution; today the equivalent effect is potentially available to anyone with computer access.

Tunisia or Egypt saw a similar process occur during their revolutions, but hundreds of times greater. It could of course be objected that a relatively small percentage of the population had internet access, but this lacks an understanding of how information from the net is then communicated to individuals who don't have access from those who do. The republican insurrections in Europe saw a similar effect. Although quite a small percentage of the population were literate enough to read the radical press, they read out articles in coffee shops and other social spaces to those who were not. If anything, this limited access translated into a greater organizing potential since small numbers needed to share a collective space to exchange information. This effect is in part why 'the graduate with no future' have been given a central role by Mason -- they may have no future but they do have a laptop.

Talking back to the media
Mason argues that Twitter has also greatly undermined the old anchorman structure of the news where a very, very

few well known news figures got to interpret, spin and twist the news for everyone. This of course still happens from Fox News to Newsnight, but now such stories and those putting them out can be challenged on Twitter. The status of anchors in the industry no longer protects them from criticism because their critics are no longer journalists worried about the impact making powerful enemies might have on their future careers.

Again, in the example of the police 'rape tape' we were able to use twitter to bombard the state media Twitter accounts with questions as to why they had not yet broadcast the recording. These postings would have been visible to other journalists as well as the general public, not only resulting in a public shaming in front of colleagues, but also undermining the credibility of the broadcaster with a section of the general public, causing cumulative damage to the ability of state media to perform its primary function.

These processes are powerful but, at least as yet, they are no substitute for the automatic reach the mainstream media maintains. In the case of the Garda 'rape tape' the state was able to recover much if not all of the credibility lost through a cleverly worded and highly misleading report which was uncritically covered by the mainstream media and successfully created the false impression that the original story was suspect. see <http://www.wsm.ie/c/gsoc-garda-rape-threat-tape> We continued to provide often highly detailed corrections to these reports but despite the use of the same internet mechanisms & resources these never achieved a fraction of the circulation the original recordings received. <http://www.wsm.ie/c/shell-sea-garda-ombudsman-spin-misinformation>

Organising tool

The internet also allows protests to organise and rapidly change organically. This Twitter for Iraq, Facebook for Egypt, the Blackberry for the August riots in London, no one centrally set which of these would be used as the key tools for the organisation of each revolt; they were simply the tools people used. This makes it hard for those in power to neutralize such organizing tools. For all the talk in London of shutting down Blackberries or the show trials and jailing of individuals who issued calls to spread the riots on Facebook, the reality was that this will simply result in a new form of co-ordination next time.

We need to be clear here, as Mason is, that the lack of centralisation implicit in the network is not to say the North African revolts were simply spontaneous affairs. There are well documented

examples of relatively small numbers of activists preparing the ground. The opening chapter shows how this happened in Cairo. These are the people a good deal of the book is about. But while they may have drawn up careful plans, the actual reach they achieved through social media was the result of hundreds of thousands of spontaneous 'like' and 'share' decisions. You can decide to print 20,000 leaflets and arrange 100 people to hand them out but you can't decide or arrange to have 200,000 people share or retweet something.

Network v Hierarchy

Masons' attitude seems to have radically shifted since he published his earlier book 'Meltdown: The end of the age of Greed'. In that he bemoaned the refusal of the anti-globalisation movement to organize for power, here though he seems to have developed a more critical understanding on that question and writes: "The network, in short, has begun to erode power relationships we have come to believe were permanent features of capitalism: the helplessness of the consumer: the military style hierarchy of boss and underlings at work, the power of mainstream media empires to shape ideology, the repressive capabilities of the state and the inevitability of monopolization by large companies." This is an important realisation as the orthodox left has tended to defend its authoritarian organisational methods by saying if you are fighting top-down authoritarian systems you can only win if you organize in the same way. Increasingly we are seeing this is simply not true.

Mason argues against the assertion that hierarchy is needed to defeat hierarchy pointing both to the famous US military exercise where the US fleet was defeated by a swarm of Iranian small boats and planes but more importantly that "the networked protest has a better chance of achieving its basic goals because its is congruent with the economic and technological conditions of modern society." Or more humorously he writes that not only is it possible "to find, on any demonstration, self-described communists for whom the idea of a Leninist party is alien. Every nightclub contains people -- maybe even a majority of people -- who are happy to pay for the entrance fee, and for their drugs, but who find the idea of paying to own the music itself as, again, incomprehensible."

The disciplined worker

There is a deliberate technological determinism to this argument which he will move on later to spell out in detail. In that context the use of social networks substitutes for the strong ties that used to exist amongst workers when we all

left the same streets every morning to work in the same factories or down the same mine. Under such conditions the social pressure to stand by your fellow workers and act collectively was enormous, but your connections seldom extended far from that pit village or industrial district. You were dependent on the union or party leadership for coordination and information from afar. The ties generated by networks may be very much weaker; they require very little commitment but they also have a very much greater reach.

The orthodox left tends to bemoan and wish for a return to those earlier days when mass labour intensive factories concentrated and disciplined thousands of workers in the way that both Leninist parties and many unions found useful. It's no coincidence that leftist terminology from that period is riddled with military terms and analogies -- the working class was literally an army that was ordered into battle. Left to one side in that longing for the old days is that while these methods might have looked efficient on paper, in historical reality they were a disaster. The imposed centralized discipline created the mechanism by which small, well meaning or otherwise, minorities could impose an increasingly brutal discipline to ensure that what the party considered the correct course was taken. Stalin's gulags could not have existed without the centralized discipline required to command millions to both enter and operate that system. In 1956 at the British Communist Parties conference those few who tried to raise the Russian invasion of Hungary were drowned out by mass chants of 'discipline, discipline'.

One thing that does need to be said, and this Mason must be aware of, is that the old factory system is not so much dead as displaced and transformed. In the Foxconn factories of China where up to 450,000 workers work in the 3 sq km of the Longhua Science & Technology Park, many living in company barracks, the old style factories churn out the core components of the new style economy. Foxconn is the world's largest maker of electronic components and, among others, manufactures the iPad, iPhone, Kindle, PlayStation 3, Wii and Xbox 360. Because a quarter of the workers live in company barracks, Foxconn is able to fill sudden spikes in demand for products by waking them up to do mid-night shifts. Many of the workers work 12-hour days for six days each week. There seems to be plenty of old style labour unrest in China. That said as Chinese workers continue to win significant wage increases and the cost of technology falls we are in a situation where the old style mass factory worker owns a

cheap smart phone allowing her to also be a 'networked individual'. Quite how the intersection of those two worlds will turn out we don't know, but it would be a mistake to assume that one will simply prevail over the other. Mason's recently published SF novel *Rare Earth* is actually set in contemporary China and at least in part is about these intersections.

Chapter 5 - From austerity to social breakdown

Chapter 5 sees Mason's account take a dark turn with the traditional warning that the end of the tunnel could well be barbarism rather than socialism -- a theme he will return to. It starts as an account of his time in Athens, in Syntagma square, and how there, as elsewhere across Europe, the youth are disengaging from the political mainstream. Meetings & discussion are continuous in the square but people are hostile not only to politicians but also the media. The chapter is scattered throughout with references to green lasers being used by protesters to 'blind' broadcast cameras.

When covering the General strike and mass demonstration in June 2011 after he gets tear gassed, he watches as hundreds and then thousands of Black bloc youth using SMS messages for co-ordination attack the police from three directions. They are joined by leftists, horizontalists and "even nationalists". Meanwhile the Communist Party and their KKE union stays out of the fighting and after a while form up and march away. As in London he sees "rivers of antagonism flowing between the anarchists and the organised labour movement" but here in Greece "the organisation imposed by the workers movement, is all that stands between order and chaos." The contradiction here between that view and the failure of the alliance of the 'graduates, urban poor and urban workers' to emerge is all the more stark in the more extreme conditions of Athens but again is not explicitly discussed.

Mason states that most of the rioters of the second round of rioting at the end of June 2011 are not anarchists but are from all sectors of society. He argues that the legitimacy of the Greek state is collapsing, that both democracy and globalization are being challenged fundamentally. He credits the rioters with "breaking the resolve of German Chancellor Angela Merkel. And technically they bring down Papandreou's government."

But by the ECB/IMF austerity plan has not been stopped by day after day of rioting, and by June 2011 Mason is reporting on the exhaustion of the horizontalists, saying they are dropping out of the

political struggle. He quotes one saying, "Our generation that's spent their whole lives since Genoa fighting for change, feels exhausted."

Mason's description of the disintegration of Greece is a curious mixture of observation of the process unfolding and commentary that never quite seems to come together into a whole. As elsewhere in the book this is particularly the case in relation to the block bloc -- there are the edges of a criticism that are never quite clearly expressed. Perhaps because for Mason it is impossible to see a way out for the people of Greece short of imagining "the collapse of capitalism." In his accounts of North Africa, Mason embraces, or at least sees as inevitable, the street fighting playing a central role in taking down the old regimes. But when this moves across the Mediterranean to Europe, he seems much less certain, especially when writing of the August riots in London.

This criticism must be tempered against the counter tendency among a section of anarchists to look at the militancy & scale of the Greek riots and imagine this must translate into a movement that is going somewhere. This however does not accurately reflect reality, the Greek government has been able to drive through round after round of austerity as the police & the black bloc batter each other on the very steps of the parliament building. The US railroad boss Jay Gould remarked during the Great Southwest Railroad strike that "I can hire one-half of the working class to kill the other half." There is no particular reason to believe the Greek capitalist class never mind the ECB care much more for injured cops than protesters.

Chapter 6 - Economic causes

In chapter 6 he explores the specific economic circumstances that have given rise to these new movements. This is both a quick summary of the causes of the current crisis but also a look at the way neoliberalism has driven down wages and working conditions for many across the globe. He compares the toxic debt of the crisis to the acid blood of the Alien in Ridley Scott's film *Alien* eating its way through deck after deck of the ship and just stopping short of breaching the hull (the state) -- something he warns may yet happen. He then goes on to look at one of the major political negatives: the growth of the far right as mainstream politics becomes increasingly polarized.

He then returns to the causes of the Arab spring. After highlighting the high youth unemployment, he goes on to sketch how US Quantitative Easing

(QE) had the effect of causing massive hikes in food prices. This was where the USA literally printed hundreds of billions worth of dollars to increase the money supply. Because of the special position of the dollar as the world currency of reckoning, one of the effects the printing had was to inflate prices outside of the US. In the same period, the wealth of the global 1% was shifting as it sought to hide from the crisis. One place it went was the commodities markets, driving up prices of all raw materials and food. In the year that ran to February 2011, food prices in Egypt increased 19%, turning in Mason's words "the 'acceptable' poverty of \$2 a day into utter destitution."

If this helps explain why the risings happened in 2011 rather than at some other point in the previous decade, it is important to understand that a reduced standard of living is probably a permanent rather than temporary feature for almost all of us on the planet. He predicts that "From California to Cairo, it is certain that the rising generation will be materially poorer than those that came before. Even if we do not have deflationary slump, 1930s-style, countries like Greece will experience 1930s levels of austerity" before ending the chapter with the warning that "Any repeat of the 1930s economically could provoke a culture war just as bitter as the one that turned Berlin from a tolerant, jazz-age metropolis into a racially pure Wagnerian wasteland in the space of five years - but this time on a global scale."

This is a chilling warning and one that we do need to heed. The choice facing us is not one between revolution and return to pre-crash liberal capitalism, but between radical transformation of global society or a retreat to stultifying nationalism where many of the 'liberal' gains of the post war boom will be rolled back. Perhaps even some modern day equivalent of fascism will emerge.

Mason briefly mentions it later in the book but beyond this immediate economic crisis we are also facing into the twin crisis of the end of the era of cheap fossil fuel energy and the start of the period of runaway climate change brought on by our escalating use of non-conventional fossil fuels whose very extraction requires huge energy inputs. This crisis may kill economic growth for a decade but we may also be looking at a recovery where such growth, at least on the basis of the past, is neither desirable nor possible.

As he approaches the end of the chapter, however, Mason has chosen to frame the choice as "a very stark alternative, either fight for a new more equitable and sus-

tainable form of globalization -- with new treaties, new transnational organizations, a new deal on global currencies; or retreat behind national barriers and state the battle between the classes over social justice and redistribution there". Is this really all there is, a new form of the post war top down Bretton Woods settlement battling against a new form of the collapse into nationalism of the 1930's? Are not both choices both sides of 'business as usual' rather than the fundamental break with the logic of capitalism that offers the only permanent way out?

Chapter 7 -The networked individual

Midway through the book Mason takes up in detail one of the core themes: today's revolutionary subject. He opens by showing how the individual freedoms that were won in the period from the late 1960's were not, as many think, a unique step forward in history. In terms of such freedoms we are not in fact always moving forward making gains; gains won can, and have been, rolled back by reaction -- sometimes slowly and sometimes in jumps. This follows up from the ending of the last chapter which ends with the warning of the danger of such freedoms being lost. This time though, rather than talking of Berlin under the Nazi's, he references the period before World War One and its "zeitgeist of globalized trade, technological progress and sexual liberation .. a false start .. followed by a century of economic crisis, militarism, genocide and totalitarian rule." That period ended in the trenches of World War One, an ending he has explored further in relation to German social democracy in 'Live working or die fighting.'

This is one of the sections where he very clearly breaks with old left orthodoxy, and with some of his own previous writings, at least to an extent. Referring to the movement of the 60's and the 1962 Port Huron statement in particular, he rejects the idea that the break with collectivism that statement represented was "the doomed precursor of neoliberalism" and instead argues that it failed because it was premature. Premature because technology was not developed enough to allow freedom for the majority and premature because "the forces of collectivism, nationalism and corporate power were, at that point, stronger than the forces fighting against them."

Mason argues that these possibilities are now open because technology has allowed the development of the 'Networked Individual' whose use of the internet and smart phones has resulted

in "profound impacts on individual behavior and even consciousness" so that by 2003 "web use had begun to produce new attitudes and behavior away from the computer." If he'd have argued this in 2010 most people would probably have scoffed at the idea. By early 2012, the role of Twitter, Facebook and smart phones in sustaining the movements in Tunisia & Egypt is clear, while Blackberry phones were believed by many to be responsible for the coordination of the four days rioting in London. Now this concept is starting to receive more careful attention.

The idea that the internet opened up a revolutionary potential is not new. As far back as the mid 1990's I can remember the Irish version of Socialist Worker feeling the need to publish an article explaining why the internet isn't revolutionary. There is a school of historical research that constructs an impression of radical movements of the distant past by examining what it was that the rulers passed laws against -- these after all must have pointed to what people were doing, even if those people left no record of their own. The same was true of that Socialist Worker article, which was both bizarre and also answering through denial an emerging realization that perhaps in fact the internet was revolutionary. The centralized top down nature of the SWP has meant it has had a hard time dealing with the new movements. Following the police attack on the Mayday 2004 EU summit protest in Dublin, the SWP turned up to the street party the next day with a later suppressed leaflet calling the organizers 'Thatcher's Children' precisely because they had favored diversity of tactics over central discipline. One among many incidents of the old left not getting this new era.

My own online activism had started around 1991 when I discovered alt.society.anarchism and the anarchy listserv, way back in the deep geek days just before the web itself had been developed. Using the text-only gopher system, a group of us in Europe & the US built the start of an online library of anarchist texts called Spunk Press. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spunk_Library) As a result of that online meeting, a number of us met up in London in 1994 for the Anarchy in the UK festival where we "held workshops on computer networking and held discussions with publishers and other BBSes". <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/david.cavalla/ian/sp000866.htm>

Zapatista solidarity - an early example
By that point the first large scale successful use of the internet for building an international movement was underway: the Zapatista rising at the start of 1994. This looked in many aspects to be an

old school peasants-with-rifles military struggle but its international supporters used the net to rapidly transmit information, build links and form lasting networks. If Mason's opening chapter that describes the links between the internet and the impoverished recyclers of Cairo seems exotic, consider that back in 1996 the internet was the primary organizing mechanism by which some 3,000 of us mobilized to travel to their base for the Zapatista encuentro. The roads have improved since, but at the time the last stage of that journey was a grueling 15 hour trip on a convoy of old school buses deep into the jungle and quite a distance beyond the reach of phones, never mind internet access. A lot of people met there and formed relationships that would pop up from time to time in the next decade from the WTO blockade in Seattle to the World Bank riots of Prague -- 'see you on the streets' became anything but a rhetorical parting.

The Zapatistas were an influential early illustration of just how powerful the internet could be at building a global movement despite the actors at the heart of the movement having no access. The communiques that were rapidly and lovingly translated and circulated globally, far from being emailed from the rebel HQ near La Realidad, were probably carried on foot, horseback and only then on the long truck journey to San Cristóbal. There they went online and then in less than a second covered 50 times the distance it had previously taken 24 or more hours to cover. This illustrates two points: firstly that the internet can have a substantial impact on a struggle even if almost no one directly involved has access, and secondly that this effect has been observable for at least 16 years now.

Mason uses sociologist Richard Sennett's conception of the networked individual as one with "weak ties, multiple loyalties and greater autonomy." He looks back through history at how revolutions were the moments when "the poor got an accidental glimpse of human freedom" until the level of development reached in the pre-1914 belle époque (known in the US as the Gilded Age) and how this brief flowering was "the real precedent for the past twenty years of ecstasy-fuelled, iPod-engrossed, latte-sipping individualism." He returns to traditional marxist methods in this section to argue that "the materialist explanation for 2011...is as much about individuals versus hierarchies as it is about rich against poor." Elsewhere, in 'Live working or die fighting', he has argued that for sections of the working class, even as far back as 1831 Lyon, a significant enough level of wages and control had been won by some artisan

workers for issues of power and control rather than wages to become central to struggle.

The standard objection to this line of argument used to be that only a narrow layer of the population have access to internet & smart phone technology. Mason sprinkles counter examples throughout the book which illustrate how this isn't true. In chapter 7 he describes the impact cheap Chinese mobile phones have had on Masai tribespeople in Kenya. That said, it's easy to forget how quickly the technology can spread into every aspect of life, particularly for those of us who've been using it for a while. One statistic stood out for me in the entire book: "Facebook put on six-sevenths of its user base in the three years after Lehman Brothers went bust." Indeed I found that insight so profound that I straight away posted to my Facebook profile.

The transformation of people

The argument he makes here is not trivial: these technologies are transforming people. In the book he launches into a description of how the transformation of people who play multi-user online computer games affects real world interactions: "a woman tweeting at work or from the front line of a demonstration is experiencing the same shared consciousness, role-play, multifaceted personality and intense bonding that you get in World of Warcraft." He is very much writing as an insider here even while trying to keep some distance. He follows up a listing of tweets (about Libya) that he received over ten minutes with the comment that this "beats any ten minutes of Counter-Strike ever played."

Later in the chapter he returns to the theme, saying "observers of the early factory system described how, within a generation, it had wrought a total change in the behavior, thinking, body shapes and lee expectancy of those imprisoned within it. People grew smaller, their limbs became bent; physical movements became more regimented. Family units broke down. Why should a revolution in knowledge and technology not be producing an equally frantic - albeit diametrically opposite - change in human behavior?"

I've been recommending the book to fellow activists. I know for a good few this chapter, and this part of the chapter in particular, is where they are going to be rolling their eyes. To an extent it probably depends on what their experience of the online world is -- those who have been immersed in the gaming end will be quicker to accept the concept than those who still find Facebook a little

weird. I believe the argument is basically correct, in part because I am one of those who has been immersed in this constantly connected world for over 20 years.

Mason has again clarified that yes he is talking about human behaviour itself in a recent interview, saying "When I speak about my thesis, I boil it down to three things. One is the collapse of the economic narrative. Two is the availability of networked technology and network kinds of thinking by people, networked protest, circumventing of mainstream media, horizontalist activism, but the third thing, and I would say a lot of my audience switch off when I say this, we're talking about different types of people. Who knows whether there's anything neurological, but certainly behaviorally, people are exhibiting a greater propensity to behave in a networked way" (http://www.alternet.org/story/154273/how_financial_crisis_economic_inequality_social_media_and_more_brought_revolutions_in_2011-and_changed_us_forever/?page=5)

Economic transformations

All this is happening faster than any research on what it actually means. And we are not just talking of the behavior of individuals but also large, significant and increasingly central parts of the economy. Many aspects of this transformation in economic relations are already too big for anyone to ignore: the Open-source projects that literally run half the internet on Linux servers, Wikipedia, Wikileaks, Drupal and so on. These represent a transformation of economy whose significance is seldom realised, with the exception of Bill Gates worrying about the related free culture advocates amounting to "some new modern-day sort of communists". <http://boingboing.net/2005/01/05/bill-gates-free-cult.html> Gates in turn was following up on Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer who in a 2001 interview declared that "Linux is a cancer that attaches itself in an intellectual property sense to everything it touches" before going on to say Our goal is to try to educate people on what it means to protect intellectual property and pay for it properly" http://www.theregister.co.uk/2001/06/02/ballmer_linux_is_a_cancer/

Significant sections of the economy now exist on the remnants of broken business models -- Hollywood, the music industry and newspapers being the three most obvious. But as Gates realised, the Free Culture and related Open-source attitudes to intellectual property doesn't just threaten old businesses models like these it also threatens cutting edge ones like Microsoft. As Mason has pointed out earlier there has been a profound shift in people's willingness to buy ideas with nightclubs full of people paying for drugs but "who find the idea of paying to own the music itself as .. incom-

prehensible." This refusal to recognise capitalist intellectual property rights is classed as a serious a criminal act that lawmakers are creating increasing draconian punishments to curb. A sure indication that they feel they are failing in an area of fundamental concern.

It's around now that you start to realize that Mason has some awareness that he is mashing 'The Communist Manifesto' into his '10 days that shock the world.' Like the original, this is a brief, readable text full of fine turns of phrase. In that way it's streets ahead of recent claimants to that title, with 'Empire' probably heading that list. I'd started this review with the intention of it being brief. As it became longer and longer I wondered about producing something so long on a text that is brief and journalistic. Then I realised that if I wasted a chunk of time producing a 8,000 word review of Empire that concluded it probably wasn't worth reading, it made a lot more sense to put the same effort into a text that I think everyone should read.

Whether or not prompted by self-awareness of the parallels with The Communist Manifesto, Mason ends this chapter with a return to Marx and a focus on how Marx saw capitalism as a dynamic system, how he was "the most pro-capitalist of the revolutionaries of the age." Like many of other recent Marxists, Mason is keen to reclaim the humanistic Marx of the 1840's, who was all about individual freedom, from the dusty deterministic Marx of the British library period. Unlike most he is happy to recognize the distinction between these two Marxes and to admit that on many questions Marx was wrong.

Echoing the old anarchist slogan of "Building a new world in the Shell of the Old" he wonders what if, "instead of waiting for the collapse of capitalism -- the emancipated human being were beginning to emerge spontaneously from within the breakdown of the old order". This just after asking what if the most advanced form of capitalism is in fact "this emerging, semi-communal form of capitalism exemplified by open-source software and based on collaboration, management-free enterprise, profit free projects and open access to information?"

The conclusion of this chapter is worth quoting for the blend of optimism tempered with fear it offers: "I cannot help believing that in the revolutions of 2011 we've begun to see the human archetypes that will shape the twenty first century. They effortlessly multitask, they are ironic, androgynous sometimes, seeming engrossed in their bubble of music -- but they are sometimes

prepared to sacrifice their lives and freedom for the future. By the middle of the second decade of this century it will be clear whether that is enough: whether hope, solidarity and ironic slogans can prevail against austerity, nationalism and religious fundamentalism. Right now the future hangs in the balance." The price of failure could be very grim indeed.

Chapter 8 Jobless America

The other side of the coin to the idea that the poor don't have access to modern communications is that everyone (or at least all the 'white' population) in the US is loaded. In the 'Jobless America' chapter Mason explodes that myth in part by re-travelling the route of Steinbeck's 'The Grapes of Wrath.' It's a very anecdotal journalistic chapter for the most part but anyone who has allowed their image of life in the US to be formed by watching episodes of Friends will get a lot from it. I spent 2007 and 2008 traveling around North America speaking in 44 cities and although I didn't get to many of the places he mentions the picture he paints is a picture of the America I saw then - and that was just after the sub-prime collapse but before the crash proper arrived.

This is the America of mass poverty, derelict cities and broke farms, a situation all the worse if you are not 'white' or worse still undocumented and subject to the constant terror of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids. Traveling south of the Canadian border through the rustbelt there were regular ICE checks on the Greyhounds I was on, often with at least one passenger being removed. Mason concludes the chapter with the warning that the America he has painted may well represent the future for many in Europe. In the case of Ireland in particular but also from his recent reports from Greece that is a world that is coming into being as we speak.

Chapter 9 The last Global Wave

In the last Global Wave Mason attempts the ambitious project of putting the uprisings and revolutions of 2011 into both the context of previous revolutions stretching back to 1848 and as importantly into the context of each other.

He starts with the revolutions of 1848 which have particular relevance for two reasons. Firstly the role played by one of the groups he has earlier identified as key to understanding 2011, the 'graduates with no future' a group also created by the economic crisis of the 1840's. But secondly and as importantly because of

how the pattern of initially successful revolts in 1848 turned to reaction. Specifically once the demand for democracy had made progress if "the workers began to fight for social justice, the businessmen and radical journalists who had led the fight for democracy turned against them, rebuilding the old dictatorial forms of repression to put them down. Conversely, where the working class was weak or nonexistent the radical middle classes would die on the barricades, often committed to a left-wing program themselves".

We saw this same process at work in Egypt in the opening months of 2012 when after the elections had returned a conservative Islamist majority the army moved to repress the left of the movement. The fresh eruption of street battles that culminated with the massacre of football Ultra's ('the urban poor' part of the alliance) in Port Said read as the re-imposition of reaction but that story is not yet played out. (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/middle-east-live/2012/feb/02/egypt-port-said-football-dsaster-live-updates>)

He also cites historians Leo Loubere's study of the Languedoc region in France in the 1848-51 which demonstrated that the radical political demands and cafe meetings were accompanied by constant social happenings that "turned the region into one giant festival until the military coup of 1851 ended the revolution", an ending that saw 5,000 arrests and the deportation to Algeria of 2,000 "organizers of something we can recognize all too easily now: a network." As well as being an example of the important role radical culture plays in creating truly mass movement Languedoc serves as a warning of stopping when profound changes have been won locally. Revolutionary Germany of 1919 or Italy of 1921 could have also served as examples, indeed Mason has written of both in 'Live working or die fighting'.

His second historical example uses something instantly recognizable to many anarchists but under studied by the rest of the left, the syndicalist wave of the 1910's and early 20's. This is generally ignored by the left because it doesn't fit into their organisational models. It wasn't simply the product of particular leaders and it certainly wasn't the creature of political parties. Rather it was a "global fight-back of the working poor." Yet it shook much of the world in that period, even reaching deep into Ireland where on Mayday 1919 some 50,000 workers gathered in Burr, Co Offaly for a Mayday demonstration. The Syndicalist wave also had a significant cultural component with the creations of schools, social centers and radical versions of hit songs of the day.

Returning to today he argues that 1848 warns us to beware of strong men who will put down this new movement, a "new Saif Gaddafi, a younger version of General Tantawi, an Assad with more brain cells, a moderate mullah in Tehran." Into this context he drops the escalating culture wars in the US (with a brief mention of the movement in Israel). On one side we have the Tea Party and lunatic right wing host Glenn Beck, on the other the Wisconsin Occupation and Occupy Wall Street.

Unlike 1848 however he says there is no coherent mainstream left. This sounds like an astounding comparison to make but he is arguing it not on the existence of parties but rather on the scope of their ideas. The problem for the mainstream left he says is "free-market capitalism has failed; there's a wave of resistance to wage cuts and austerity; the political leaders of social democracy cannot accept points one and two." There is however an advantage to this lack of coherence in that "it undermines the rationale for a 'democratic counter-revolution' of the June 1848 type." The police may have broken up Occupy but there was no need to shoot down demonstrators. We can imagine that if something like Occupy had happened in the USA in the 1950's or 1980's it would have been portrayed as a creature of the Communist conspiracy, today that claim would sound ludicrous.

In this chapter he mentions the Communist Manifesto a couple of times, but interestingly suggests that the modern equivalent may be "The Coming Insurrection". That tract published in 2007 has been pretty much ignored by the mainstream, the only other significant journalist to comment on it I'm aware of has been - Glenn Beck. It's a long poetic rant about the modern world that is also, I suspect, written with one eye on the Manifesto. Its importance for Mason is in predicting the network form of revolt. (<http://tarnac9.wordpress.com/texts/the-coming-insurrection/>)

Mason concludes the chapter by arguing that the revolutionary potential of 1848 was headed off by a new economic boom creating the conditions under which republican socialism came to be replaced by social democracy. But today's economic crisis shows no sign yet of turning into a boom. And without such a boom a new social democracy or equivalent is not possible.

Chapter 10 Slum Dwellers

Mason doesn't end his text with Chapter 9 but instead gives us an additional chapter of anecdote. Slum Dwellers is

a return to journalistic description, this time based around the slums of the Philippines. The description of a slum in the mega city of Manila feels like a scene from 'Bladerunner' or a cyber-punk novel with its fusion of overcrowded desperate poverty and technology. The purpose though is to demonstrate that under neoliberal capitalism slums have to exist. Attempts at slum clearances are a failure as they starve the city of the low paid workers which the low wage economies of neo liberalism need and the now displaced low paid ex-workers face something close to starvation in the distant ideal towns where there is no work.

Mason visits a slum (Estero de San Miguel) where self-organisation among slum-dwellers has produced "the orderly, solidaristic slum" where slum-dwellers are part of the modern workforce. I'm also reading Debt: The first 5000 years and I'm reminded here of the somewhat different argument Graeber makes, that our assumption that wage labour is typical of capitalism and that the various forms of effective slavery are exceptional is not an accurate reflection of reality. Instead Graeber finds a world where a significant percentage of the global workforce under capitalism has always been in conditions of effective slavery, via debt.

Mason's conclusion is a return once more to the old question of 'socialism' or 'barbarism,' warning on the one hand of how a return to capitalist growth would not only take 100 years or more to offer the slum dwellers a decent life but also runs into the environmental problems of "climate change, energy depletion and population stress". For an alternative he says "the plebeian groups that kicked things off .. possess, in fact, a surplus of the most valuable properties on earth: skill, ingenuity and intelligence" before warning "there is a dangerous disconnect between the mass of the people, especially the young, and the political structures and systems in place". The ending feels unsatisfactory but then perhaps this is because the movement described has not ended and is perhaps only coming into being.

He signs off with a chant from Tahir square

*When the people decide to live
Destiny will obey,
Darkness will disappear
And chains will be broken.*

Overview

The above is a chapter by chapter summary of what I consider to be the most interesting points made in the book with

some additions and discussion from my own experiences. But it is by no means a summary of the book as a whole, so don't let it stop you going out and buying it, there is plenty more.

What I now want to do is take a few of the core concepts and look at what they mean for anarchists - a lot of this section will focus on where I think Mason has it wrong before moving on to see what, despite this, the book has to tell us about revolutionary organization today.

Violence & the triple alliance

The first issue I see in the book, and one I have highlighted a couple of times already is the way it deals with rioting, violence & property destruction. Mason argues that change was created in North Africa through a 'triple alliance' of students, the urban poor and urban workers (by which he means the section of the working class organised into unions). In Tunisia and Egypt it was when these three forces acted together that 'regime change' became possible. As anyone who followed the Al Jazeera footage from Cairo will know this included a lot of very violent street fighting, most memorably the 'battle of the camel' when Tahir square was attacked by pro-regime 'thugs' mounted on camels and horses. Many of the hundreds who died and the thousands who were injured in Egypt were either directly involved in such fighting or were alongside and acting in support of the street fighters.

A text from 'Comrades from Cairo' addressed to the Occupy movement addressed the use of violence. "Those who said that the Egyptian revolution was peaceful did not see the horrors that police visited upon us, nor did they see the resistance and even force that revolutionaries used against the police to defend their tentative occupations and spaces: by the government's own admission, 99 police stations were put to the torch, thousands of police cars were destroyed and all of the ruling party's offices around Egypt were burned down. Barricades were erected, officers were beaten back and pelted with rocks even as they fired tear gas and live ammunition on us. But at the end of the day on 28 January they retreated, and we had won our cities." <http://www.wsm.ie/c/occupy-movement-tahir-square-police-violence>

Mason fails to deal in a satisfactory way with the question of why this triple alliance failed to form in Britain or Greece. In both countries there were significant link ups between the students and the urban poor but there was a large gulf between these groups and the organised workers. He doesn't mention it in the book but in Greece this gulf was so large as to see significant fighting between the

Communist Party KKE union security group and the black bloc anarchists on at least one occasion.

He does talk about the divisions in the Mute interview saying, in the context of the comparison with 1848, "it's the workers' movement versus a sort of lumpenised middle class that's probably poorer than the workers and has lower life expectations. They have different ways of struggling but the point is - apart from in Greece and Syntagma Square, with the communists fighting the anarchists - they're not really fighting each other. And what that is in part to do with is that at the moment the workers don't have very radical demands - in many senses they don't go beyond what democratic revolutions can deliver to them. In 1848 they did: they wanted their idea of socialism and the middle classes wanted liberal democracy."

The question of state legitimacy

The reason for the gulf between the groups in Europe is political, centered not so much around the issue of violence but of the legitimacy of the government. The fighting between the Greek Communist Party and the Anarchists arose fated the Greek Communists lined up in front of the riot police to protect the parliament building from attack. In North Africa all three groups saw the government if not yet the state as illegitimate and something to be overthrown by the movement. Where the yellow union leadership of Egyptian or Tunisian government unions failed to act on their members views they lost control of the membership and break away unions were created or alternative decision making and co-ordinating structures within those unions formed. So we can say that all three groups defined themselves as being for the overthrowal of the regimes in North Africa.

In Europe the TUC (in the UK) and the KKE (in Greece) accept the legitimacy of the government, even if they want another government elected. Both reject the idea of a political general strike aimed at overthrowing the government rather than reversing particular policies or forcing the creation of a new coalition. This has been the situation in Europe for many decades, certainly since the Yalta agreement reached between Stalin, Churchill & Roosevelt at the end of WWII but arguably since the failure of the workers movement to react to World War One with the long threatened general strike. The left generally fails to acknowledge that deeply engrained political understanding, preparing to ask 'Why won't the TUC call a general strike.' Mainstream European unions are against political general strikes as being anti-democratic because the un-

ions separate the political struggle from the economic struggle and see the political struggle as being waged through parliamentary electoralism.

That is one side of the equation. The other is that while the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt clearly had little popular support this is not the same case with the governments in Britain and Greece. In both cases then cleaner electoral system allows the governments to claim a popular mandate even if the program that they ran on is very different from the austerity they are implementing. The vast majority of the European people and almost all the political parties accept the system of representative democracy that allows this to happen under the rubric of 'showing leadership and making unpopular decisions' that is at the heart of removing any real democracy from European electoralism. But with the crisis we saw for the first time mass popular movements like M15 and Occupy rejecting the logic of representative electoralism. This was one of their most important departures yet Mason more or less ignores it and as we shall see advocates that such 'horizontalist' movements become electoral parties.

The violence unleashed on protesters in Egypt or Tunisia was clearly of a different type and scale to that unleashed in London or Athens. If it was similar then both cities would have seen hundreds die when the state responded to the large scale rioting there. This meant that in London certainly and Athens to a significant extent those who took the fight to the police were getting way ahead of what most people found acceptable.

Many of the more insurrectionary anarchists in particular are guilty of refusing to be tactical about the question of violence, property destruction and public opinion. The militancy of a minority can be quite counter productive if it gets so far ahead of the masses that it fractures alliances that needs to be built. But the failure to construct the triple alliance clearly cannot be simply laid at the door of the black bloc as Mason comes close to doing. Apart from anything else there was no black bloc in the London August riots, and it was those riots that saw the deepest fracture in any potential alliance between the urban poor and organized workers. A fracture so deep that in fact even discussing the possibility of unity in relation to the August riots seems a little ludicrous.

Political inconsistency

Of course as a journalist, as an observer rather than participant, Mason can hardly openly advocate such an alliance. The state controlled BBC would probably not be keen on the economics

editors of their flag ship news program advising rioters in London or even Athens how to link up with broader forces. But elsewhere he manages to convey ideas in a way that stops short of advocacy so this is probably not the explanation here. What seems more likely is that his position, though contradictory, is not that far from that of the union officials. That is that the governments of Britain & Greece are legitimate - the way he talks about fears of the disintegration of Greek civil society also seem to suggest this.

At the root there is an inconsistency to Mason's politics that also runs through both his previous books. In historical and 'outside the west' terms he sees the value in militant, self organised action in the context of this triple alliance. But at other times, in particular when he is writing about western countries he seems to value top down radical social democratic solutions and see these same uncontrollable elements as the problem. I have already mentioned the way he frames the choice at the end of the 6th Chapter as one between a new Bretton Woods or a retreat to Nationalist protectionism. This isn't so different from Meltdown, the End of the Age of Greed where he proposed the "re-regulation of global finance" along with wealth re-distribution. Towards the end of the chapter on the USA where he has retraced the route of the Grapes of Wrath he points out that Steinbeck's novel was also "about the search for a new economic model based on state intervention to guarantee full employment, and about a new social model based on solidarity and tolerance." He then points out "this was Roosevelt's New Deal" which he then contrasts with Obama's "\$2.5 trillion in spending cuts, mostly on infrastructure and welfare payments to the poor."

In his interview with Mute he even explicitly denies saying a new socialism is possible "No, I've never said that. I think what we're looking at is a different form of capitalism emerging. That's what I'm trying to write about, to try and spot and understand what that is. Within that there is a debate about how much social justice it can deliver."

<http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/rip-roaring-markets-and-massive-inequality-interview-paul-mason>

Can the answer really be more electoral parties?

In his interview with Red Pepper he compared the current situation with "the early years of social democracy. The debate in German social democracy in the 1890s was 'are we trying to overthrow capitalism, or aren't we?' The left said 'Yes, but it will take a long time and we're doing it through a combination of voting and workers' struggles.'

The right said 'No, but in the process of building the movement, we'll build a better capitalism.' " <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/tweetin-bout-a-revolution/>

And a little later from the same interview "The big question for horizontalist movements is that as long as you don't articulate against power, you're basically doing what somebody has called 'reform by a riot': a guy in a hoodie goes to jail for a year so that a guy in a suit can get his law through parliament. After a while in the 19th century workers saw there were other ways: form your own party and stand in elections, with all the difficulties that has, or your own newspaper, and basically join the grown-up world of taking responsibility for stuff. I think a lot of people in the horizontalist movement are at the point of considering this, but are hesitant."

He is right here about the limits of riot and indeed the insurrectionary approach that militancy is in itself an answer to reformism. It's not - if you leave an organisational / political vacuum then something will step into it. After the experience of the various European Green Parties its all too easy to see the emergence of various astro-horizontalist parties that would like the Greens remain somewhat radical until they started to approach power.

It's seems then that what Mason is seeking is the emergence of a new political movement that will use a mixture of struggles and electoralism to change the world. In terms of what program that would be around it looks a lot like the 1940's Social Democracy of the British Labour Party with an icing of environmentalism. What is not at all clear is how he sees such a movement being able to systematically control capitalism in the long term and not simply leave us with a repeat of the long cycle that in the case of the UK started with the NHS, passed through Thatcher and ended up with New Labour. To be fair there may also be something of the old minimum / maximum program in what he is putting forward with the minimum being the Neo-Kenysian transformation of the global financial system as a set of demands to organise around on the journey to a more transformative but largely unstated maximum revolutionary program.

Decision making & anarchism

We can draw these conclusions from what he has said above but also what he has not written. He sees Free & Open Source Software as part of a new form of nicer capitalism rather than something that threatens the existence of capitalism. He writes at length about the power of social networking to spread news and

protest but not at all about its potential in mass decision making. His version of the 'networked individual' can communicate but not decide, quite remarkable given that one of the strongest impacts that Occupy and the other movements have had on people is the decision making experiments they have undertaken. These are entirely absent from Mason's accounts, his descriptions of the meeting in Syntagma or Plaza del Sol seem to be those of rallies rather than assemblies.

But most of all the tendency in the book towards a quite mainstream reformist electoralism comes across in his attitude to anarchism. Here he has moved very little from the position that was typical of Workers Power activists a decade ago. They tended to see the bulk of anarchists are rather unformed naive types who make useful cannon fodder whenever there is to be a confrontation or a blockade. Not far off the "a guy in a hoodie goes to jail for a year so that a guy in a suit can get his law through parliament." For them there is nothing useful to be learned from what anarchism says of the left.

Like Negri before him Mason comes at times to some close to anarchist conclusions without seeming to notice he has done so. It's a problem that is also visible in 'Live Working or Die Fighting' where anarchists crop up, often as central figures, in some of the stories he tells. There in the last paragraph he tries to deal with it by suggesting that when the working class enters into mass struggle such people will be transformed. His very last lines read "I have seen the young Louise Michel dancing to a samba band in a field outside the Gleneagles summit; her face was painted and she was wearing pink fairy wings. She still has a lot to learn."

Alongside this like a whole generation of recent Marxist writers he avoids a strong direct criticism of the negative role of Leninism by seeing it simply as a product of its time. That is the other side to his technological determinism about the factory system.

It's also why it is important to point out that the factory system is not extinct. If anything more workers are in factories than ever before when China, India and Brazil are taken into account. If Leninism was the inevitable revolutionary form for workers in Russia or Germany 100 years ago because they were organised in factories is the same true for a substantial section of the working class today? That section that at least under the current conditions can't afford to buy the iPads they find themselves manufacturing.

We should be fair here as in the Red Pepper interview Mason showed awareness of the contradictions here saying "In the Fordist era, you would have big, hierarchical companies that would persist for a long time on one strategy, and you also had oppositional movements with hierarchies, permanent strategies, strong ties. Here's the heretical thought: those old movements thought they were movements for overthrowing capitalism. By and large they didn't, they co-existed with it and mirrored its attributes."

It is also true that Mason doesn't clearly advocate either an organisational form or a political program anywhere in the text. The discussion here is based on what he has said in interviews and other books but while this is useful as a guide it would not be useful to turn those threads into something more thought out and considered. But what we can say is that nowhere in 'Why Its Kicking Off Everywhere' do we find either a fresh model for revolutionary organisation or a program such organisation might be based around. And in so far as we can see hints of what Mason might spell out they sound very like the failed social democratic model with little more perhaps than the hope that the 'networked individual' will do a better job of implementing that model than the factory worker in circumstances that the advance of technology has made more favorable.

The role of the revolutionary organisation in the networked age

Mason has no answers for us when it comes to the question of revolutionary organisation. Yet much of what he has written still has enormous impacts on the forms such organization might take. For someone like myself, a long term member of a revolutionary anarchist organisation, what does what he writes have to suggest about what the role of that type of organisation is today.

Let us start by mentioning that here is another side to the technological discussion, one Mason does not touch on at all in the book. That is the dark side of state surveillance and repression, both very much enhanced by exactly the same sort of technologies we are treating as tools of liberation. As the North African revolts rolled from Tunisia to Egypt to Libya to Syria the initially crude attempts by the Tunisian regimes to fight back on the network level started to become the more sophisticated and effective methods of Syria or Israel. One news item when Tripoli fell was that a recently set up office had been discovered in which a French company was about to begin

the process of waging network war for Gaddafi. The 'Arab Revolts' may prove to be quite atypical because the initial revolts saw long in the tooth conservative regimes caught out by something that was quite new and making what in retrospect were quite fundamental errors.

The technologies of repression very much undermine what had been some of the advantages enjoyed by traditional left organisation - in fact further they turn those advantages into disadvantages. A centralized organisation with a long term leadership and clear limited channels of internal communication is a very soft target indeed for modern surveillance. The various sciences of human manipulation have also expanded massively in the last decades and there is significant evidence that state intelligence agencies have become quite adept at using such methods to influence who rises in the ranks of such centralized organisations. Harvesting membership lists is now a matter of ease as is gathering intelligence lists and constructing automated but elaborate databases that show what the connections between people are. All of this will tend to work against the effectiveness of permanent and centralized organization. Just like the related advances in military warfare this tends to give clear advantage to asymmetric resistance that is not based on trying to match state capability.

When asked about the repressive use of technology Mason has pointed out that capital can always choose to impose a North Korea type state, that it chooses not to is because the large scale deployment of repression undermines the creative freedom that modern capitalism needs. He certainly has a strong point yet we can also see that both China & the USA are in different way developing quite effective methods to crack down on dissent on the one hand but still leave open enough room for innovation to still take place.

But let us put all this aside because for better or worse it doesn't matter where we think the balance lies. The technology exists and will be used, we need to deal with the world that is being brought into existence whether we consider that transformation good, bad or indifferent.

If the central thesis of the book is correct, that is that the advent of mass one to many communication in the form of the internet is transforming both production and the way people behave then there is a strong argument to radically re-examine everything we understand by revolutionary organisation. This after all is a very, very different situation than that faced by any previous genera-

tion of revolutionaries for whom mass communication was non-existent unless you had built the mass organisation that could produce and distribute a daily paper.

What is our model

The current model of revolutionary organisation for all of the far left and most of the anarchist movement draws on organisational models that are derived from the organisations built under the old factory system. That is they are based on tight ties between people and a relatively high level of discipline, either self or collectively agreed in the case of anarchism or imposed from above in the case of the various types of Leninism. Anarchist organisations tended to allow considerably more autonomy to local sections but they were still largely expected to stay within the confines set by the decisions of regular conferences and statements of aims and principles. They certainly are not based on "weak ties and multiple loyalties" -- indeed most organisations would rule out being a member of other anarchist organisations.

The point here is not that the new tendency towards "weak ties, multiple loyalties and greater autonomy" makes it impossible to construct such organisations. Clearly they continue to exist and recruit. As is the case for unions, which are organised on the same basic lines but limit themselves to the economic sphere of struggle. The point is that perhaps it is no longer possible to imagine these organisations building into the sort of mass forms that would be needed to coordinate revolution as once happened in Russia in 1917 or Spain in 1936.

We are also at least a decade into a process where it has become apparent that attempts to impose that old model of organisation on the emerging movement have shown very little success and in many cases have done considerable damage. The worst case examples are typified by centralized old style parties that have enough wisdom to recognize they need to market themselves as part of the movement in order to have any hope of recruiting. In Ireland and Britain the Socialist Workers Party have been most successful at playing that game, often through the creation of front organisations like Globalise Resistance and the whole scale appropriation of movement slogans, imagery and language, often almost as soon as it appears. But while this does result in short term recruitment, in particular of those just getting involved, in the long term the contradictions between the real decision makers of the core of the centralized party and the astroturf fakery of the movement fronts blows up into in-

creasingly messy rows. The movement is then put in the fractious position of either trying to expel what come to be seen as hostile counter productive elements and all the nastiness and fallout that will involve or simply ignore it and move on, losing perhaps a lot of the accumulated networking that might otherwise have been preserved.

In Dublin in late 2011 we saw this dynamic destroy the local variant of the Occupy movement, reducing it to a small core of paranoid activists afraid of alliances with any other forces lest they turned out to be yet another front. The heat and nastiness generated in that argument drove 80% of those involved away as two small factions, the campers on one side, the SWP on the other destroyed the movement in order to control it. In the light of the overall discussion it is telling that despite its vastly superior numbers, experience and resources it was the SWP that actually lost the battle to the camp. That was a microcosm of the result of trying to impose the old model of revolutionary organisation on the emerging movement but similar drama's have been played out across the globe with similar results in the decade since Seattle. I suspect a large percentage of the readers of this review will be able to immediately think of at least one local example of the same process.

Where does that leave us? When I delivered a talk on the networked individual section of the book to the Dublin branch of WSM it was notable that a lot of the reaction was to find examples of negative elements of usage of the internet or reasons why the old factory based model was preferable. In both cases there was truth in what was pointed out but I had to respond that this really didn't matter. There is little to be gained from a debate over whether these changes are good, bad or indifferent for revolutionaries, the point is that have and are happening. We either find new ways of organising around "weak ties, multiple loyalties and greater autonomy" or we retire to the sidelines to comment, archive and hold the occasional meeting about the Spanish revolution.

Giving full consideration to this question is the task of another article (or indeed a shelf of books and decades of experimentation) but what can be said is that we are talking here not of a theory but of an emerging process that can already be observed and learned from. One that is over a decade old, and some of the examples I have used are from 20 years ago. From Zapatista solidarity to the Seattle WTO protest through to Tahir, Real Democracy & Occupy the methods of the old left have not been to the forefront of emerging moments of

struggle. Instead we have seen the development of a largely new set of structures and methodologies that do indeed reflect the "weak ties, multiple loyalties and greater autonomy" of those drawn into involvement.

Where the terrain has been such that the advantages of the left organisations in terms of the concentration of resources has put them in the driving seat the result has often been ugly and disempowering. The old left controlled the anti-war movement at the time of the 2003 invasion of Iraq and was unable to do anything to slow or halt the drive to war despite the mass opposition. The old left, if we understand it to include the union leaderships, controlled the mass union marches and token strike of 2008-2010 and were unable to halt or even slow the drive to austerity. In both cases the price of failure included massive levels of demoralization that made many less willing to engage in future activity even if it also resulted in an angry minority.

Just about the only terrain the old left has advanced on in Ireland is the electoral one. This perhaps not only because the crisis has made anti-capitalist politics popular but more fundamentally because the crisis of organisation arising from this new age of "weak ties, multiple loyalties and greater autonomy" is destroying the traditional organisations of the political party system of the right at as great if not greater a rate than it has destroyed those of the left. The meteoric rise of the Tea Party network over the more traditional Republican's in the Republican Party in the US being one example. The electoral gains of the left are of course also on a terrain that is precisely composed of "weak ties, multiple loyalties and greater autonomy" - the electoral process is one area of traditional politics well suited to this. Tens or hundreds of thousands can vote for the radical left at an election, but the next demonstration called by the same organisations may attract only hundreds.

In the last couple of years many on the left, including my own organisation the WSM have started to try to shift their organisational structures and engagement models from the traditional forms to new forms. In Ireland initiatives like 'Claiming Our Future' are very obviously based on trying to find ways to work with a large network of people with "weak ties, multiple loyalties and greater autonomy" rather than try and recruit them into a single organization. There is probably a very interesting question around just how conscious such organisations are that they are attempting a fundamental transformation and how much it is simply a reaction to

the changing world around us and in particular the new technologies that are available.

Lessons from the summit protests

My experiences in the early summit protest movement led me to sit down and write a relatively detailed discussion of the emerging networks and the role of technology in revolutionary politics back in 2004, published as 'Summit Protests & Networks.' <http://www.wsm.ie/c/summit-protests-network-organisation-anarchism> The argument I made back in 2004 was that while some "see the two organisational methods as in competition with each other. This need not be so, in fact for anarchists both forms should be complementary as the strengths of one are the weaknesses of the other and vice versa. The rapid growth of the movement has strongly favoured the network form, it's now time to look at also building its more coherent partner. That is to build specific anarchist organisations that will work in and with the networks as they emerge."

This was perhaps an acceptable fudge but one that avoids rather than answers the central issue. There are models of revolutionary organisation that would be based on a very small revolutionary cadre influencing much larger mass movements but experience has indicated that even in the internet age it is hard for a small group to ramp up mass influence fast enough in a crisis. Previously I've argued that at an absolute minimum a revolutionary organisation should aim to recruit one person in 1,000 into its ranks, around 6,000 as a target for the island of Ireland. Our experience of the early days of the crisis is that the small numbers that the left had in the unions meant that although arguments could and were won in union branches where there were active leftists this was a tiny minority of branches so the argument was lost overall. At least at that point in time internet reach did not compensate for a lack of people on the ground to make the arguments.

I think this rough maths still applies but what does make sense is to recognize that the costs of maintaining a large loose periphery in terms of both time and money are magnitudes less than they used to be because of the new technology. Up to now its simply wasn't possible never mind worthwhile for a small number of volunteers to maintain contact with large number of individuals with "weak ties, multiple loyalties and greater autonomy." When my political involvement started that could only be done though addressing envelopes and licking stamps, something that very quickly became too expensive and time consuming.

Coherent organisations in networks

There is a political issue here as well though. When you have a coherent organisation intersecting a network it will have an influence on that network a magnitude or two greater than the number of members it has should allow. The internal dynamics of a coherent organisation will mean that its members will be immersed in a culture of regular political discussion and education and will almost certainly have discussed issues in outline long before they appear in the network at a formal level. They will also have faster, more reliable and more trust worthy contact through their coherent organization with members in other cities than almost anyone in the network will have.

That sort of formal intervention is mirrored by the similar abilities that the informal leaders that arise within networks will have. Both can only be guarded against through good process, awareness of such potential threats and a practice of challenging them and defusing them as they arise. But while the experience of doing so can be an informal one, based around people with experience and who are not inclined to abuse that to become the informal leadership themselves, at least in the early stages of networks appearing and expanding, such skills will be few and far between. As the example of Occupy Dame Street shows this may very well result in the formation of hostile formal or informal fractions with democracy going out the window as the would be leaderships fight each other and disrupt the network to the point of breaking the decision making structures.

Part of the role of the revolutionary organisation has to be then to build the needed skills within the network to identify and diffuse such problems as they arise. It can also carry over these skills from one network to another in both time and space as its activists accumulate knowledge and experience.

Do we still need to build the revolutionary organisation

What about building the organisation itself. Does this new 'networked individual' and the ease of one to many internet communications mean that the size of a revolutionary organisation no longer matters. That the three men and a dog organization 'with the right ideas' are as important as an organisation of thousands?

I've already explained why I think size still matters when it comes to organizing in real world meetings but I do think the new technology changes the way a coherent organization should operate. It

now makes sense to see our work in network forms of organisation as also being a way of accumulating engagement over time with a very large number of people most of whom will never join a coherent revolutionary organisation in normal circumstances. To use the WSM as an example the 7,000 people currently following us via Facebook would have been impossible to find never mind retain contact with 20 years ago, As of now every one of them has the potential to see a link to each new article published on our site and to not only thus read it but also recommend it to their friends. Doing this via the postal system would have cost in the region of 3,000 euro and dozens of hours stuffing envelopes.

In the past these realities necessitated that volunteer based revolutionary organisations had what has been called an 'engagement cliff' between a very dedicated hardworking membership and the broad mass of the population. Leninist parties tried to get around this through ploughing a lot of resources into having their leadership as paid full timers. This gave them greater resources to maintain contact with a larger periphery but in doing so created very ossified organisations that magnified the problems inherent in centralized top down parties as that core group monopolized communications within the organisation and between the organisation and its periphery.

In any case the revolutionary anarchist organisation can never be more than a guiding light. Unlike Leninists we do not aim to be the physical leadership of the revolution, we do not seek to put our organisation in power. The anarchist concept of instead being a 'leadership of ideas' ties rather well into a movement composed of people with "weak ties, multiple loyalties and greater autonomy" because it addresses the weak spots of such a movement without being in opposition to its fundamental characteristic of both individual and collective autonomy. In such a system the coherent anarchist organisation aims to be a scaffold along which the many of the major nodes of a network can rapidly grow and link up as they are needed, a scaffold that gets reconfigured and hopefully increases its effectiveness with each new round of struggle.

The program

The last weakness I want to touch on briefly is the program for transformation that is mostly missing from 'Why it's Kicking Off everywhere.' In the final chapter Mason makes the strongest argument for revolution rather than reform in pointing out that the gradual accumulation of improvements will take 100 years to fundamentally change the

lives of slum dweller and that it may run against the barriers to increased development imposed by environmental considerations. But this insight never translates into anything even vaguely defining a coherent suggestion for what the alternative to reform is. And his treatment of the Free & Open Source Software (FOSS) simply sees it as a fundamental to the way emerging capitalism works rather than the challenge to the very concept of capitalism it is bringing into being.

I don't see his approach as offering anything other than perhaps another cycle of kinder gentler capitalism to be rapidly followed by its more red in tooth and claw neo liberal brother. Another repeat of a long established pattern that exists not because of evil capitalists or poor supervision from politicians but because it is recreated by the innate tendency of capitalism to expand into every nook and cranny where a profit is to be made and to 'corrupt' every regulatory body created to limit it. A new round of regulation will just re-start that cycle but more fundamentally it will do little to tackle the emerging environmental crisis and the risk that this will come to a culmination long before this economic cycle reaches its next terminal crisis in three or more decades.

The revolutionary program must be one of transformation not regulation. Mason is correct to point to FOSS as an emerging different economic model but we are with Bill Gates on this question. What is emerging is a working model of communism being implemented on a mass scale, what is emerging is a working model of the most technical of problems in the modern world being dealt with without bosses or management in the traditional sense. Of course as this model is emerging in a world dominated by capitalism, and is emerging out of the most dynamic capitalist companies, this tendency towards communism is anything but complete. But it makes far more sense to explore and push that tendency towards communism and self managed work then to accept it simply as a new model of how capitalism functions.

The revolutionary moment of the networked individual

If we are to distill everything in his text into a simple paragraph or two of what all this means for the project of abolishing capitalism and introducing freedom in every aspect of our lives I would suggest the following.

We find ourselves on a planet in crisis, where most of the 7 billion of us face lives constrained by poverty and a future made uncertain by the instability of

the capitalist system, a system we have no control over. It's chaotic nature also means we face the destruction of the environment we rely on. But we have also reached a point in history where for the first time we can truly communicate with each other across cultural and national boundaries. Where the class nature of the 'us and them' divide on the global level becomes increasingly apparent. Yet the geographic scale involved alongside the insecurity of work today means we are increasingly networked individuals with "weak ties, multiple loyalties and greater autonomy."

This also means that the fire that starts in Cairo can ignite in Madrid and New York seemingly without effort. Capital-

ism has more sophisticated ways of controlling us than ever before but such is the speed that a good example can now be transmitted that the work of overthrowing it globally may turn out to be the work of weeks or months once the first fires truly take hold. The role of today's revolutionaries is to prepare the ground, create the kindling and when the moment comes be ready to fan the flames.

Andrew Flood- April 2012
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