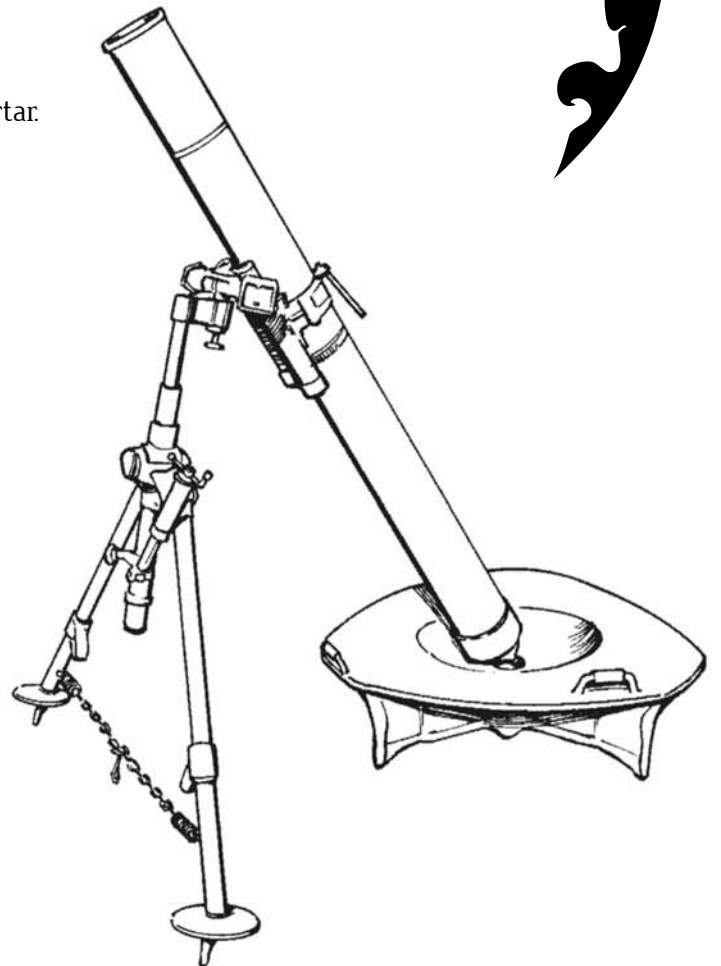# Mortar

Volume 1

Mortar

mor·tar

Noun

1. A cup-shaped receptacle made of hard material, in which ingredients are crushed or ground, used esp. in cooking or pharmacy.
2. A mixture of lime with cement, sand, and water, used in building to bond bricks or stones.
3. A portable, muzzleloading cannon used to fire shells at low velocities, short ranges, and high trajectories.

Verb

1. Attack or bombard with shells fired from a mortar.
2. Fix or join using mortar

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We can do this the hard way or we can do this the easy way. If you'll kindly bear with us, we're gonna try something different here: we're gonna opt for the hard way.

We could expound on the "special" times in which we find ourselves, about how the collapse of capitalism is imminent and the masses are poised on the brink of rupture. Or present the concurrent struggles taking place around the world as pristine opportunities for revolutionary struggle. We could point to the insights of past revolutionary thinkers as adequately encapsulating, with only minor revisions, what is to be done here and now; or rhyme off turgid slogans or facile academic vagueries. Better yet, we could pretend we're hot shit and all that need happen is everyone listen to us. We could do all or some of these things, and we wouldn't be alone. We could but we shouldn't. So, we won't.

What we're going to do instead is try and produce a journal... original, we know.

Why? Not out of frustration or insecurity. Nor hubris or self satisfaction. Rather, because we think we should. We'll use this journal as a way to develop our politics and refine our organizing. To seek feedback and engage in discussion. Though always with a mind to coming to conclusions. This journal is of no merit in and of itself, and is no vanity project. It's a tool we intend to improve ourselves with. We want to take up strategic and political questions that we and our comrades are facing -squarely and seriously- but always with the intention of action.

How? Frankly, arduously: as much as possible, the content in our modest journal will be collectively written. There's no singular voice here and while there's no party line that will be adhered to, we can all have our say on what gets in. We intend this to be a place where arguments are made, disagreements are had, and maybe even understanding is achieved - as though we were the revolutionaries we claim to be. This journal will be free. We don't feel this requires explanation other than it may, in fact, be bad business sense but it's good politics.

As much as possible, we will endeavour to strike a balance between the academic-revolution-aficionado jargon on the one hand, and the piss and vinegar "REV" rhetoric on the other. Both of which we are all too prone and familiar. Neither polemical diatribes nor equivocating "nuance" is sought in these pages. We seek conclusions but not satisfaction in the answer.

With that in mind, let us clarify what the content of these articles represent. By no means are they the definitive word of Common Cause. From organizing experience, discussion, observation, and collaboration, topics are chosen and writing produced. The intent is to move discussion forward, not shut it down; to advance our politics, strategies, and methods; and seek input and clarification – both from within Common Cause and from without. We want our discussions not to quarantine themselves within these pages but be brought into our organizing to thrive or perish on their merits.

Here we go.

Sincerely,
Common Cause Anarchist Organization

Run this Town:
Building Class Power in the City

3 Hamilton Members, 1 Toronto Member

*T*he Marxist urbanist Henri Lefebvre wrote that the working class is made out of urban material. His point was that to understand the working class and to organize it, one had to look at everyday working class life from the totality of urban life, not only at the part of it that occurs on the factory floor. Further, one had to look at the totality of the urban working class, not only at its industrial or factory segment.

David Harvey, another Marxist urbanist, points out that most Marxists have largely not taken Lefebvre's lessons to heart, and have instead tended to ignore both working class life outside the factory and working class segments outside of the industrial proletariat. This point is less true of anarchism as a whole. Anarchists have historically theorized about and organized amongst the full range of working class and dispossessed groups, such as the peasantry and indigenous people. Neither the anarchist canon nor anarchism in practice identified the industrial working class as the indisputable vanguard segment of the dispossessed.

Indeed, since the revival of anarchism in the 1990s, a great deal of anarchist theory and practice has focused on the terrain of *urban* class struggle; particularly, in the form of squatting, anti-police and anti-racist organizing, local food security, struggles against ecologically destructive and colonialist urbanization, building counter-cultural spaces in the city, and building urban sanctuaries for migrant workers. This is especially true in North America where the link with the broader anarchist tradition has been almost completely broken.

In this piece, we will argue that workplace organizing or community/urban focus is not an either/or proposition.

Historically, anarchist and other modern revolutionary social movements have been strongest when they address, as much as possible, the totality of exploitation and domination under capitalism – that is, organized along class-wide lines, in the workplace and in the streets. We begin with a reflection of the anarchist movement in revolutionary Spain, and how their organizations attempted to fulfill that task. Next we will lay out a theoretical basis to examine the particular role that cities and urbanization play in the (re)production of capitalism and what this means for our current context. Then, we will explore how the mode of production and phase of urbanization creates and informs a corresponding class composition and associated forms of struggle. Finally, we provide a practical example of applying this framework to a Toronto neighbourhood, and conclude with proposals of how this analysis should inform our organizing work.

Historic Study: The CNT as an Urban Social Movement

Besides allowing the introduction of our topic in concrete terms, the experience of the CNT before and during the Spanish Civil War also has the benefit of showing the profound connection between workplace and urban struggles that acted as the foundation of one of anarchism's most celebrated movements. Although we must account for almost entirely different conditions in our current context, this should, we hope, make it easier to start thinking about how today's anarchists may see their different areas of work as potentially stronger if related together in the form of some sort of class-wide, city-wide strategy.

The CNT may seem like a surprising or even one-sided choice. The CNT is after all most loudly claimed by the syndicalist wing of North American anarchism. However,

a recent work of social history by the anarchist historian Chris Ealham shows that the CNT was far more than a workplace-based organization. In fact, Ealham argues and shows convincingly, through a meticulous social history from below, that the CNT is best described as a community union based in Barcelona's rebellious working class *barrios* (neighbourhoods). While this exposition will need to be brief, Ealham's book provides a fuller discussion. We hope the following outline will clarify the kind of strategy we have in mind, as well as provide some fuel for the radical imagination as applied to today's urban class struggle. To be clear, we do not argue that the CNT of pre-Franco era can be "cut and pasted" onto today's urban class struggle. Rather, this example provides us with an outline that helps us think about how we might organize in our cities today.

The historic Barcelona CNT shows us four key characteristics that can help inform our urban organizing today. First, the Barcelona CNT *was organized both in the workplace and the neighbourhood.* Organizationally speaking, at the heart of the CNT's "community syndicalism" were the *comités de barriada* or district committees. Operating out of newly-established union centres inside Barcelona's working class neighbourhoods, the *comités* were the functional equivalent of shop stewards, except that in this case the "shopfloor" was the neighbourhood itself. These "community stewards" acted "as the eyes and ears of the union in any given neighbourhood" transmitting information back and forth between the local Barcelona federation, which coordinated the local unions, and the neighbourhoods. The result was a high degree of overlap between the CNT's organizational networks and the rich networks of Barcelona's rebellious neighbourhoods, which by that time were already bastions of rebellion, self-organization, autonomy and class unity.

Not only did this structure allow the CNT to mobilize community support for workplace struggles and vice versa, it also allowed the local Barcelona federation to plan actions at a city-wide scale. It did this by bringing neighbourhoods together in collective action across the city. And also by giving the CNT power to disrupt and take space – the streets, in addition to workplace or industrial power. The ability *to operate strategically at the scale of the city, that is to organize the city*, is the second key feature of the community syndicalism of the CNT.

The CNT, and this is its third key feature, *fought for issues of concern to the whole of Barcelona's working class, within and beyond the workplace.* It brought the power of its whole organization to bear on struggles against landlords, police, price-gouging merchants, the rising costs of public utilities, and other enemies and issues faced by the local working class - though one important exception was its failure to fully organize against patriarchy inside and outside the movement. Theoretically, we can say the CNT fought back inside capital's productive, commodity and financial circuits, as well as against the Spanish State: the vicious tool of Spanish and international capital. One famous example is the 1922 Barcelona rent strike, organized by the CNT's Tenant's Union and fully supported by the CNT's Builders' Union. In this way, the CNT came to organize both around the production and reproduction of working class urban life. If, to paraphrase Lefebvre, the Barcelonan working class was made out of urban material, the CNT can trace its success as the leading working class organization of the time to the fact that it made itself out of this same urban material.

But, as Ealham points out, the CNT did not only adapt itself to this urban social terrain. It also changed it by *promoting a working class universalism* that allowed the Barcelonan working class to scale-up their identities and loyalties from individual neighbourhoods to the working class as a whole. This is the fourth key feature of the CNT that we want to point to here, because from an anti-capitalist perspective finding ways to build a class-wide allegiance from the existing material of local and/or more narrow identities is a key challenge to our organizing, especially at the neighbourhood level.

These are then the four features of the Barcelona CNT that we find helpful in thinking about what an anarchist approach to organizing at the strategic scale of the city might look like today. While there is a vast gulf between the conditions of Spain circa 1930 and where we find ourselves today, wherever revolutionary situations have taken place in urbanized societies, we see them nurtured by dense patchworks of association developed in neighborhoods, towns and cities.

While much can be learned by looking back to historical examples (for inspiration at the very least), the real starting point is to examine the nature of capital and the working class in our cities today. Is there something specific about the urban experience that foments class struggle? Or are cities merely the containers for struggles emerging from production? This question is even more important to contemporary anarchists, as cities have grown in number and size, and undergone dramatic structural changes. Urban social movements, many of them grassroots and militant, have worked to address the problems associated with neoliberal cities, while academics increasingly address issues of "the city".

Urbanization as a Site of Production

Incorporating knowledge of capitalist urbanization into experience with militant urban-based social movements contains revolutionary possibilities. For anti-capitalists to engage on an urban terrain, they must understand how cities figure in the processes of capitalist accumulation. For this, we return to the work of David Harvey, which focuses on two ways that urbanization plays a central role in the development of capitalism: as a major process of capital absorption and as key means of implementing capital's necessary *spatial fix*.

Harvey points out that cities, even before the development of capitalism, have always been class projects to control the surplus product of labour. Under capitalism, urbanization has become one of the key stabilizers of the system,

providing an outlet for the necessary re-investment of profit that capitalists need to compete with one another, shape consumption, and direct flows of labour and capital to their advantage. Harvey posits that the city is itself a point of production essential to the development and maintenance of the capitalist system. The city is essential to absorb surplus capital; provide shelter and sustain workers; and create and transport commodities. Viewed as a whole, it can be seen as a primary site of production and the creation of value - in addition to individual factories and workplaces.

In order to survive, capitalism must constantly grow. However, this constant growth creates barriers, such as "high labour costs" which must be addressed, or else capitalism will go into recession or depression. Historically, Harvey argues, capitalists have used urbanization as a means to transcend barriers to capital, by restructuring the built environment and the lives of people living within it. Post-WWII, capitalism needed to shift production from war economy to mass motoring and consumerism. The suburbanization of North American cities provided a spatial fix to the barrier of an overaccumulation of capital. Later, as trade unions based in these same industries gained power, capital responded with deindustrialization and a shift of production to lower wage zones.

While the urban spatial fix can open up new phases of accumulation, it can also set the stage for new crises. Investment in the built environment can fail to materialize in the way capitalists had planned. This contradiction is at the heart of today's crisis of capitalism. As capital surpluses grew under neoliberalism, so too did the pressure on the urban process to absorb these surpluses. In the US, this pressure resulted in an aggressive loosening of regulation to open up access to mortgages for lower income workers under the Clinton administration. Debt, a downward pressure on wages, sketchy financial instruments, and an over-supply of housing stock became a recipe for the sub-prime mortgage crisis of 2008, which was in essence a crisis of urbanization. This crisis continues to shift around the world in search of a spatial fix.

Urbanization as Exploitation

Spatial fix has a secondary meaning. Not only does capital fix its contradictions through cities, it also "fixes" in place a whole set of physical infrastructure (fixed capital) and social relations to go along with it. Each phase of capitalist urbanization carries with it its own mix of technology, consumption patterns, and class politics – Harvey's "socio-technical mix". The Fordist city combined a highly energy-intensive spatial form, a high wage structure for privileged sectors of the working class, and a class alliance between privileged workers and local elites into an urban growth machine based on suburbanization. The flip-side to this was a disinvestment from inner cities, which were left to less privileged sectors of the class and allowed to decay.

In recent years, neoliberal capitalism has turned back to the inner city for fresh sources of accumulation and capital absorption. While deindustrialization continues to grip the rust belt, larger cities have become centres of capitalist innovation in financial services and their spin-offs. Sociologist Saskia Sassen maps the development of these "global cities" in the context of the broader scale of capitalist globalization. As information technologies and globalization have taken hold, Sassen argues that cities have become the most dynamic and profitable sectors of the economy in advanced capitalist states, providing transnational corporations with producer services, like: legal, human resources, financial, etc., to manage transnational production and servicing chains.

The social violence of gentrification must be understood as part of this larger canvass. A new urban growth machine, with its own culture and set of social relations, develops around the processes of the global city. Secondary forms of exploitation, in addition to the exploitation of labour in the workplace, reveal themselves as capital restructures the neoliberal city. Arts and culture, bound up with new urbanist ideologies of the "creative class", become recuperated by financial capital and real estate speculators to seize monopolistic rents on urban space. Downtown condominium developments flourish while the urban poor - preyed upon by payday loans, slumlords, and temp agencies - are displaced to the periphery. Large sectors of the formerly industrialized working class are relegated to poorly paid and unstable jobs servicing the needs of the white-collar urban middle class. Meanwhile, the destruction of the countryside through suburban sprawl continues, despite the new urbanist mantra of intensification and "smart growth".

Class Struggle over the Urban Commons

Under capitalism, the city is a key site of production, exploitation, and ultimately class struggle. Cities, regardless of their particular character, are immense repositories of value to be contested. The commons includes the obvious artifacts of public space and municipal services, which can provide respite and enhance the lives of working class people. This is to say nothing of the prospects of socialized production concentrated in the urban space. As Kropotkin declared in a much earlier phase of capitalist urbanization:

> The cities... are organisms which have lived through the centuries. Dig beneath them and you find, one above another, the foundations of streets, of houses, of theatres, of public buildings. Search into their history and you will see how the history of the town, its industry, its special characteristics, have slowly grown and ripened through the co-operation of generations of its inhabitants before it could become what it is today. And even today, the value of each dwelling, factory, and warehouse, which has been created by the accumulated labour of the millions of workers, now dead and buried, is only maintained by the very presence and labour of legions of men [sic] who now inhabit that special corner of the globe. Each of the atoms which compose what we call the Wealth of Nations owes its value to the fact that it

is part of the great whole. What would a London dockyard or a great Paris warehouse be if they were not situated in these great centres of international commerce? What would become of our mines, our factories, our workshops, and our railways, without the immense quantities of merchandise transported every day by land and sea?

But the commons also include less tangible embodiments of value in the form of arts, culture, education, and opportunities for a rich sociality. In the neo-liberal city, to a much greater extent than in earlier phases, physical production is augmented by what autonomists have called the products of "immaterial labour". Hardt and Negri argue that the shift away from industrial production in advanced capitalist countries has given rise to a new dominant form of production where what is created is not physical commodities, but "immaterial goods such as ideas, knowledge, forms of communication, and relationships." These goods, Hardt and Negri argue, lend themselves to socialization due to immaterial labour's "intimate relation with cooperation, collabouration, and communication". And, as we have seen, this new production is tightly coupled with the production of urbanization.

Struggle for a free (communist) distribution of the immense value of the urban commons can comprise a major set of demands from a politically-composed working class. In turn, the political composition of the class has long manifested itself in sectional, neighbourhood-based forms, from the insurgent *arrondissements* of the various Parisian revolts, to the soviets of revolutionary Russia, to the more recent popular assemblies of Oaxaca, Buenos Aires, Spain, and Egypt.

Made of Urban Material: Class Composition and Consciousness

When we talk of class composition, we mean the product of the division of labour that stratifies the proletariat, and is necessary to serve the functions of capitalist production and reproduction. The imposition of gendered social roles, waged and unwaged work, employment and unemployment, the regime of white supremacy and patriarchy: these are some of the forces which form the division of labour and the composition of the class. This composition is constantly in flux – regenerating and transforming as a result of the ongoing process of class struggle waged both within and between classes. As capital is confronted by limitations to its growth and expansion, new ways are found to divide, exploit and dispossess the class, providing means to overcome its limitations. As a result, the working class is changed and must find new ways to attack and resist the control of capital.

This ongoing conflict means that particular combinations of forces will lead to the development of multiple layers of consciousness, and revolutionary potential amongst the class. For much of the radical left, this has meant that it is possible to deduce a section of the class, which can be identified as the revolutionary subject most capable of leading the overthrow of capitalism and establishing socialism. Though varying in degrees of orthodoxy and dogmatism, the commonly held line is that this subject is manifested in the industrial proletariat. Positioned at the heart of capital production, their exploited labour within the factories, mills and workshops is understood as the primary site of value creation, and also the element exceptionally capable of disrupting the accumulation of wealth by strike, sabotage, or occupation. Therefore, the workplace and struggles of the industrial proletariat become theorized as the most cutting edge section of the class struggle, or at least of primary concern for revolutionaries.

The Social Factory

The advent of the assembly line, automation, and the strict regimentation of the workplace, allowed for incredible increases in the productive capacity of industrial capitalism. Along with an increase in productivity, came the necessity of negotiating a labour peace with the trade union movement. This historic period of Fordism was defined by an arrangement built on the exploitation of the wage worker's labour, as well as built on the pillars of white supremacy and

patriarchy.

In her seminal essay, *Sex, Race, and Class*, Marxist-Feminist Selma James identifies the implementation of the wage system as a primary tool for maintaining the sex, race, and class division, and explores its consequences in terms of class composition. James' examines, in particular, the creation and maintenance of the nuclear family as the basic unit of social organization fundamental to the expansive domination of capitalism. Within this social organization is the realm of unwaged labour outside of what is commonly considered "work" - the work of child rearing, of raising the next generation of workers to be exploited by capital, preparing food and maintaining shelter for the nuclear family. This unwaged labour has historically, through socialization, been gendered as the inherent domain of women. By gendering domestic labour, its exploitative nature is obscured as being 'women's work' and outside of the standard exploitative/ productive relationship in the workplace – despite being a function that is "*if not immediately, then ultimately profitable to the expansion and extension to the rule of capital*".

While the relationships examined in *Sex, Race, and Class* focus heavily on the particular condition of the house-wife and role of domestic labour, James' methodology provides a powerful tool for illuminating the terrain of the class struggle that stretches far beyond the factory gates. In doing so, it also exposes the deficiency of trade unions as organizations, "*which reduce the continual struggle for social power by [the working class] into 'economic determinants – greater capitalist control for a pittance more a week*" and as a result, will often reinforce or maintain the capitalist division of labour and internal contradictions of our class, rather than provide an avenue on which to have them smashed.

Class Warfare in the Neoliberal City

Amidst de-industrialization in the US and Canada, production is less likely to be contained to one particular section of the economy, and instead, is spread out over the entire planet in a vast network made possible by widespread access to advanced communication technology and the political and military strength of the bourgeoisie. The unions which once represented thousands of workers, and secured healthy pensions and wages are in a decades-long retreat. Material conditions have provided the means and the necessity to surpass the Fordist arrangement - capital can now travel at lightning speed, bound by neither borders, nor a formidable class adversary. Organized labour is no longer a limit to wealth accumulation in cases where the conditions are such that standard organizing practices are made unfeasible, or in some cases illegal. Rather than negotiate a contract with a unionized workforce, capital is much better positioned to "negotiate" with the individual and isolated worker.

For the everyday wageworker, this has translated into a "career" that is typified by working for dozens of employers for low and inconsistent wages in a variety of industries. The precarious worker is a categorization that has become the rule, rather than the exception. It is important to note that such precarity has always been forced upon the most exploited segments of the workforce; after all, the categorization of migrant worker itself is defined by its inherent precarity. While capital is free to move and provide employment wherever it finds most appealing, the proletariat must literally chase after it – across the planet if necessary. So it has become that it is not a matter of simply being "between jobs", but the reality that instead we are *always* between jobs. *It's More than Poverty*, a recent report published by the Labour Studies department at McMaster University and the United Way, found that more than half of all workers in Hamilton and the GTA are in precarious work situations.

Within this context, the sites which hold the most promise for developing a revolutionary potential or combativeness among sections of the class can no longer be as easily contained to the struggles of the industrial proletariat, as deficient as this assumption may have always been. Likewise, capital has adapted to correct its vulnerability to standard trade unionism striking at key sites of production, both by extracting the teeth from these organizations and restructuring the nature of production.

However, when we consider the city as the social factory and the relationships that build, maintain and reproduce it as the forces that will determine the course of struggle, new potential for strategy, tactics, and political orientation become evident. The shopfloor becomes the city block:

a shopfloor made up by the temp agency, the high rise complex, the household and family, the pay-day loan office, the construction site, and so on. The grievances to be addressed become the police, landlords, immigration enforcement, access to public services, childcare, and gentrification. And "bargaining" for a "collective agreement" or a change in conditions, may sometimes become the stuff of transportation blockades, public square occupations and anti-police riots. The concept of class composition is thus key, because it can push revolutionaries to base our organizational forms and the content of our struggle on the study of an always-changing working class experience and everyday life.

Examining the Terrain

The task then for revolutionaries is to determine how to nurture the conflicts erupting within the social factory, and how to engage in emerging forms of struggle in a manner that maximizes their revolutionary potential and addresses contradictions, while acknowledging the necessity to ultimately surpass and negate them. As a thought experiment on anarchist interventions in city-based organizing, we turn to the hugely diverse and gentrifying neighbourhood of Parkdale, Toronto. Here, we will attempt to apply our theoretical framework to examine the neighbourhood's class composition, as well as its prominent sites of class struggle, in order to identify possible interventions and forms of class-wide organization.

Parkdale is a historic working class neighbourhood in the southwest of Toronto. It contains a concentration of high-rise apartment buildings, which are home to tens of thousands of low-income renters. Drawn to its relatively cheaper rents and proximity to downtown, Parkdale has historically served as a first place of residence for immigrants to the city. Since the 90's, bars and retail shops

catering to higher income young professionals have moved in. This development is consistent with the global trend of capital returning to the inner cities in search of new sources of accumulation.

However, despite capital's push to gentrify, Parkdale's high-rise apartment buildings have largely prevented the displacement of neighbourhood residents. In this way, we see these buildings as presenting a particularly difficult spatial fix for capital. The buildings are a massive infrastructure of concrete and steel. In order for Parkdale to become fully gentrified, the buildings would require massive renovation or need to be demolished altogether.

South Parkdale's residents are overwhelmingly poor. Unemployment is high, with many residents on social assistance. The population is also highly diverse with significant numbers of Tibetan, Hungarian Roma, Vietnamese, and Sri Lankan immigrants, amongst others. While it is certain that a significant number of Parkdale residents are among the working poor, there is no available data on where Parkdale residents work. We can infer from the large immigrant population that Parkdalians are more likely to be working in precarious, low-paid jobs in the service, manufacturing (temp work), and care work sectors.

In recent years, the Parkdale Business Improvement Area (BIA), an association of commercial property owners and tenants, has worked to solidify an image of Parkdale as an up-and-coming neighbourhod. Re-branding it as "Parkdale Village", the BIA calls its mix of immigrants, artists, and young professionals, one of Toronto's "premier destinations for shopping and business." The BIA's propaganda campaign creates value for landlords, who can charge higher rents to the more affluent young professionals, and opportunities for developers, as more affluent people are attracted to the neighbourhood. The image projected here ignores the reality of growing poverty and the disparity of wealth in Parkdale today.

The ethnically heterogeneous composition of Parkdale's population contains divisions, which need to be significantly overcome in order to build class power. Parkdale stands in stark contrast to the Barcelona of the 1930's where working class barrios were largely ethnically homogenous. Consider the case of Parkdale's Hungarian Roma population. Fleeing persecution from right-wing paramilitary groups in Hungary, Roma people have been arriving in Toronto in significant numbers since the late 2000's, many making their homes in Parkdale. Yet, these refugees have not escaped anti-Roma racism in Canada. The Federal Government has

made it clear that the Roma are not welcome in Canada, listing Hungary on its list of Designated Safe Countries and funding an advertising campaign in Roma areas, indicating that the Roma are not welcome in Canada. Roma people in Parkdale also face discrimination from landlords, social agencies, and their own neighbours in the high-rises.

Housing continues to be a key concern and site of struggle around reproduction for the working class in Parkdale. In South Parkdale, 93% of residents are renters. Tenants face rising rents, deplorable housing conditions, and landlords keen to displace poor tenants in favour of more affluent renters. The Parkdale Tenants Association has organized around these issues since 1970, bringing media attention to bear on bad landlords. However, especially in recent years, the group has struggled to contend with racial divisions among renters, especially with respect to the Roma.

Other sites of struggle include state immigration policies. The deportation of Parkdale high school student Daniel Garcia in January 2011 was a catalytic moment in the neighbourhood, which saw different sections of the class unite in a campaign to stop his deportation, including teachers and neighbourhood residents. However, the campaign exposed contradictions in class consciousness; many involved in the campaign mimicked the State's ideology of the educated, professional immigrant in characterizing Garcia as a good student and productive member of society.

Building Power 'Block by Block'

Given the class composition of a territory like Parkdale, if we are to conceive of the project of building class-wide power as one that requires an urban approach and analysis, how do we proceed from here? What forms of organization can lend themselves to this project, and which hinder it? To begin to answer these questions, we look to the neighbourhood assembly.

A neighbourhood assembly can be conceived as a mass organization made up of residents and workers living or working within a defined urban territory. The neighbourhood assembly is autonomous – it does not take its direction from any political authority, whether politicians, religious groups, social agencies, unions or left-wing organizations. This allows the assembly to take on a proletarian character that the trade unions and social agency-dominated 'community organizing' initiatives cannot achieve.

In our contemporary milieu, class struggle anarchists have often fetishized the trade unions as a site of political intervention. But what is the actual content of the trade union organization in our current context? It's the bureaucracy of paid staff reps, lawyers, and organizers, plus a number of elected executives, and sometimes a layer of union activists. The majority of the membership does not participate in union activity. Even in strikes, the percentage of workers doing picket duty is often very low. And as Selma James has pointed out, the trade unions play a role in maintaining the

division of waged and unwaged reproductive labour under capital. So while the workplace itself remains one potential site of political intervention, we reject the notion that the trade unions are the primary strategic site of intervention for anarchists.

Community organizing, which is dominated by social agencies is just as ineffectual. This model confines class struggle to established avenues of recourse such as legal battles, lobbying, and consultation with government. The West Lodge Avenue rent strike in Parkdale in the early 90's was steered in this direction by the local legal clinic. At the advice of lawyers, the tenants entered into a court legal battle with their absentee landlord in an attempt to have the buildings incorporated as one housing co-operative. The case was lost when the landlord came back out of the woodwork to claim their private property rights and the strike was demobilized.

Social movement unionism and agency-dominated community organizing share in common their role as mediators of class struggle. Both are directed by a layer of bureaucrats and professionals whose interests diverge from rank-and-file union members and neighbourhood residents. While the rank-and-file worker and poor high-rise tenant's interests lie in abolishing themselves as members of an exploited class, the trade union bureaucrat and agency director rely on class divisions for their very existence. This is why a meaningfully liberatory organization of the class must be by and for the class, and operate outside and against the purview of these social managers.

As an organization that is generally concerned with working class life, both in production and reproduction, the assembly also has several advantages over the single-issue group, one-off campaign, or activist organization. The assembly is flexible in that it is an autonomous organization with the ability to take on a variety of issues and projects. Its flexibility lends itself to greater longevity than your average campaign group, because the assembly doesn't need to fold once the campaign is either won or lost. Instead, the assembly's activity may fluctuate from struggle to struggle, but it should be capable of passing lessons on from one struggle to the next. We offer the general assembly model here based on our current study and efforts in the urban territory, and we think it best corresponds to current class composition. However, more study and practice is needed to test this model out and further its development.

Conclusions

While an organizational form such as the neighbourhood assembly holds promise for being a means to recompose class power in our cities, it also presents challenges and raises the question of our specific role as anarchist militants. There are preexisting divisions within the class, which anarchists must struggle against politically, while seeking to build class-wide unity.

Contending with the various "community" based institutions

meant to channel grievances and mitigate conflict (such as churches, local politicians, conservative homeowners groups, and community policing initiatives) is no small task. While pushing for self-organization and direct action, anarchists mustn't flee the scene if ever the assembly decided to lobby their city councilor as a course of action, for instance. Instead, anarchists must be present to point out these contradictions and orient towards struggles or conflicts that lend themselves to overcoming them, while avoiding opportunism or "ambulance-chasing". It would also require the political intervention of anarchist militants to foster principles of self-organization and direction, and to attack white supremacy, patriarchy and homophobia within the class. Furthermore, the assembly is likely only to take on a mass character in a period of low class struggle when catalytic moments of struggle arise.

A neighbourhood assembly could take a radically different approach to organizing class struggles, but is not a be-all and end-all proposition. We must still be vigorous in analyzing and responding to the various struggles and ruptures as they continue to emerge from within the neoliberal city. We also cannot fall into insulating ourselves to one section of the city or the class in the hopes that it holds all the necessary components to move our class forward. As capital continues to push further division and more total exploitation upon the urban environment, our efforts must strive to be as far-reaching and comprehensive as possible. Assemblies must federate across neighbourhoods and across cities, connect with rank-and-file and workplace committees, adapt and grow according to conditions, and be armed with the political capability of mounting decisive attacks that will win actual gains for our class in its entirety.

What Wears Us Down: Dual Consciousness and Disability at Work
2 Toronto Members, 1 Hamilton Member

Anarchists have in recent years taken up the topic of disability in our political analysis and activism, which is a positive development. The historical resistance of disabled people to segregation, institutionalization, poverty, and oppression has yielded strong political theory from which we can learn, and social movements in which we should participate. To avoid confronting disableism ignores its profound implications for the entire working class.
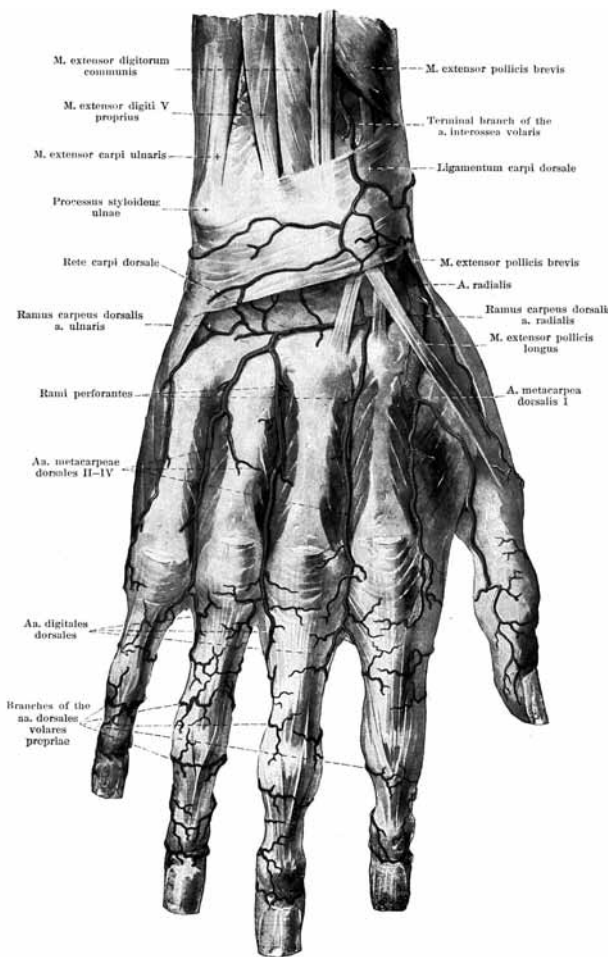

Fig. 1.
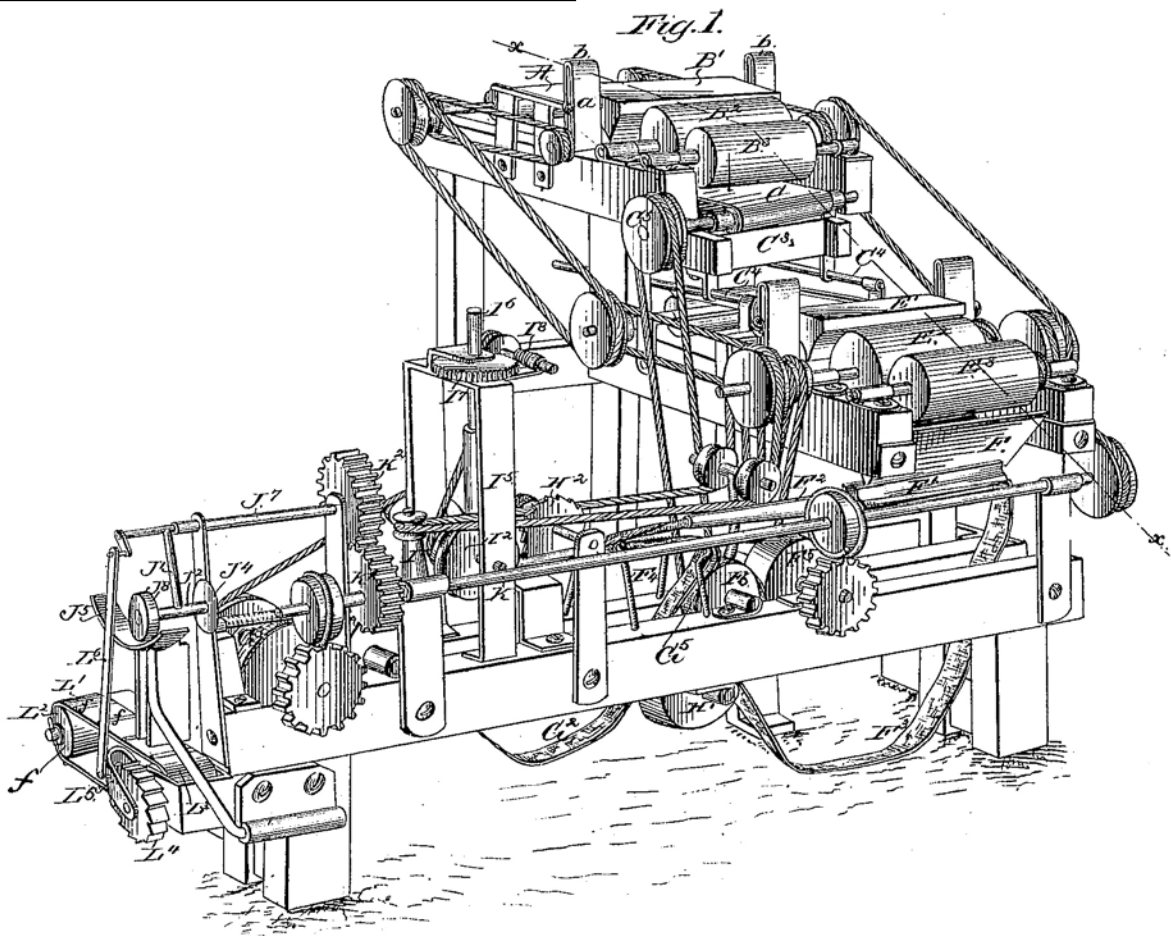
Historically and presently, anarchist orientations toward disability are extremely varied. While a clear refutation of Social Darwinism and eugenics can be found in Kropotkin's writings on Mutual Aid, some of his contemporaries and followers promoted these backwards and vicious ideas. Presently, anarchist orientations range from the extreme disableism embedded within anarchoprimitivist thought, to an almost exclusive emphasis on identity politics and intersectionality from the social movement activist milieu, to the vulgar class reductionism often encountered within the anarchist communist tradition. Our goal is an understanding of disability that avoids class reductionism, while remaining firmly based in class struggle politics.

There remains a great deal of ambivalence, discomfort, and contradiction in our actions surrounding disability. Able-bodied working class people often times actively participate in the oppression of disabled people, while at other times standing in solidarity with their struggles. In working toward building strong working class resistance, these divisions and contradictions within the working class must not be stepped around, but examined and addressed head-on. Stating 'we are all disabled', or 'we may all be disabled some day' are insufficient; what's needed is an examination of disableism's broad manifestations in the class.

This article draws from the example of the Sojourner Truth Organization (STO), a Leninist cadre primarily active in the midwestern US from the late 1960's to mid 1980's. STO's early mass work centred on shop floor organizing. As a predominantly white organization, they saw a role for themselves to examine and challenge racism from within the white working class. STO identified the racism of white workers as a barrier to revolutionary organizing. Their theoretical and practical work on this pivoted on their analysis of *dual consciousness*, which seeks to explain how and why white workers act in contradictory ways when faced with white supremacy and class struggle.

Our intention here is to examine how theories around privilege and dual consciousness put forward by the STO might apply to disability or, more particularly, to non-disabled workers. Our goal is not to try and wrench a theory from one context and force it onto another, but to contrast similarities and differences in an attempt to offer strong possibilities for an orientation towards disability. In particular, it is our hope that the conclusions may offer up some ideas for how we can fight against disableism in our mass work as revolutionaries.

The Shifting Terrain of Disability in Capitalism

The social model of disability makes a separation between *impairment* - the physical condition of an individual - and *disability* - the social condition. In liberal discourse, this is often understood in relatively limited scope - the impairment is, say, being paralyzed; the disabling condition is the lack of a ramp to enter a building. However, many disability activists and theorists understand this much more broadly. What is considered disability, who is considered disabled, and what that means in relation to broader society changes greatly depending on context. The major shifts in what is considered disability over time and location show that disability is not so much defined in relation or extension to impairment, but by external economic and social conditions. The employing class has shifted definitions and uses of disability to their benefit, to discipline and divide the working class and to hold back revolutionary movements or to minimize their gains.

The industrial revolution marked a significant shift in work and in disability. Work became more regimented, with longer hours and less flexibility on how a job might be done. For those who were not working, it was in the interests of the state and employing class to make divisions between those who could not work and those who could, but did not. The medicalization of disability played a role here in legitimizing the divide between deserving and undeserving poor. For those who were disabled, the result was charity and often institutionalization. Those considered undeserving, or capable of work, were often criminalized. This allowed the state to appear charitable by providing some basic relief, while also adding pressure to maintain class structure. The

FREIGHT-CARS AND ENGINE WRECKED BY RIOTERS AT KENSINGTON, NEAR PULLMAN, JULY 6TH.—DRAWN BY G. W. PETERS FROM A SKETCH BY G. A. COFFIN.
The Strikers wrecked the Freight-Cars and then started a Switch-Engine without Engineer or Fireman at full Speed for the Cars.

horribly inadequate supports for disabled people provided impetus for workers to continue working despite horrific and dangerous conditions, and even through workplace injuries or ailments. The remnants of these divisions persist today, and continue to serve the same function in dividing and disciplining the working class.

A clear example of the economic rather than physical roots of disability can be found in the Pullman railway company in the 1910's. At the time, the company faced many pressures: dealing with customers' racist anxieties about the health risks of Black railway porters; new demands around providing life insurance for workers; and controlling workplace organizing - including a wildcat strike of 4000 workers in 1894. In response, Pullman implemented a plan across the company for intensive medical testing of all employees and potential hires. Across different areas of the company, these tests rejected ten to twenty percent of applicants. Workers were tested and rejected for things such as high blood pressure, unknown heart or lung ailments,

or poor vision. Pullman official D.A. Crawford stated: "I am very strongly of the opinion that we should take all steps to prevent physical crooks from getting on the employment list. I think there is just as good reason for not employing a man with a bad heart or bad arteries as there is for not taking on a new one-eyed man." This example makes clear that disability is very much a class relationship, one that in this case excluded workers who would likely never have been considered disabled in any other aspect of their lives, for the economic benefit of the employer.

Disability also plays out in broader society and struggle outside the workplace, interacting with race, gender, sexuality, and social movements. Jonathan M Metzl's *The Protest Psychosis* examines how the definition of schizophrenia changed drastically in the 1950's and 1960's from a diagnosis associated primarily with white women and not with violence, to a much more violent definition of paranoid schizophrenia that became particularly associated with Black men. Writing in particular about a large Michigan

institution for the criminally insane, Metzl looks at how the revised DSM-II diagnosis was applied to Black men, particularly those who participated in civil rights and Black power movements, both in psychiatric institutions and in broader public discourse. The men were described as violent, delusional (believing white people were conspiring against them), hostile to white authority figures, and diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia on that basis. This was used both to control individuals, by institutionalizing them, and to delegitimize Black power movements. While disability often presents as static and scientific, closer investigation reveals the significance of social context and, often, a close relationship with oppression and social control.

We Get the Health Problems, They Get the Profits

Injuries and accidents bring the class relation into sharp and infuriating contrast. When old, rusty scaffolding collapses and a worker dies, it's clear that the company's push to cut costs cost the worker his life. But it's no better if that company has the newest scaffolding and the best safety equipment. Management doesn't fall off roofs. We do. Even the good worker can't escape. He's worked hard, turned a screwdriver repetitively for thirty years, made a lot of money for the company and never had a major accident in his life. One morning he reaches for his coffee mug and his elbow just gives out - never to work right again.
- Prole.info, *The Housing Monster*

At work, the shaky terrain of disablement may not often be at the forefront of our minds. Nonetheless, it plays out in diverse and often challenging ways in the lives of working class people. Disability functions for workers as a threat, or a type of discipline. Working people are aware of the ramifications of being labelled unfit, and are often reticent to complain about workplace conditions and the effects those conditions have on their bodies. In this way standards of production need not only avoid accommodation of the production process to different bodies (which often incur material costs), but can also raise standards of uniformity and production efficiency using the 'disabled' bodies as an abject lesson for those who don't conform. Working people are taught not only that their value is dependant on their ability to produce commodities, but also tied into their willingness to accommodate, without complaint, the rising demands of efficiency.

The division of the fit and unfit or 'other' has been a tool of capitalism for centuries in the maintenance of a divided working class, with race, gender, sexuality, nationality etc. used as a means to justify slavery, endemic disenfranchisement, imperialist aggression, chronic poverty, and social control. As with other oppressions, while disability is beneficial to capitalism, its maintenance is often reinforced by the working class itself. Injuries at work often go unreported, and working through pain or intense anxiety is a common feature of our working lives. This works to the employers' benefit and also limits the likelihood of the employment of workers who either refuse or are unable to endure environments that cause psychological and/or physical injury. What might be classified as 'standards of excellence' or 'achievement' may simply be the ability to endure an intense escalation of rote, physically and psychologically draining tasks as means of preserving one's job against competitors.

In many industries, workers have fought for better health and safety standards, but often choose not to use them, as they find it easier or more comfortable not to; these processes can slow work down, meaning that the boss gets angry. There may also be an element of competition or machismo between workers influencing the decision. The likelihood that such dramatic levels of injury, sometimes to highly trained employees, is helpful for capital is questionable. Yet a contradiction emerges for both the worker and the employer; workers often see safety standards as an imposition in meeting production goals, despite the fact that these very standards have been historically fought for by their own class. Simultaneously, employers and the state attempt to impose *some* of these standards to avoid losses of skilled labourers, while demanding a level of efficient production that is impossible to meet when all safety standards are applied. What emerge are the necessary conditions of our current working world: workers ignoring safety standards to their own detriment, and employers demanding the impossible. What we must fight for is both an increase in safety standards and a simultaneous reduction in production goals, which would make the application of these new standards realistic. A block exists only when we see ourselves as individual workers fighting each other in the labour market, terrified of not meeting production goals as we may appear unfit. The enduring spectre of poverty and disability keeps us in line, even though it is increasingly likely to produce the very disablement we fear.

Able-Bodied Privilege and White Privilege

While addressing disability, this article finds its real focus in examining ways in which able-bodied workers relate to disability. Although that term is at times controversial in disability politics, we chose to use it for a reason. The reason is that being able-bodied carries its own privileges. It is not simply a case of being non-disabled, but of benefiting from, and at times participating in the oppression of disabled people. So, we felt that it was important to use this term, in order to highlight able-bodied privilege as a construction in its own right. In writing about race, WEB DuBois used

the term "the wages of whiteness" to describe the material and social benefits granted to working class white people, a sort of public wage, that granted them access and respect denied to even the most well-off Black people. And it is in this way we use the term privilege - to describe collective material benefits (higher wages, first hired/last fired, adequate housing, better access to healthcare and government institutions) that apply to all members of that social body. This section will first examine how STO, with great influence from DuBois, conceived of and challenged white privilege, before outlining the similarities and differences between white privilege and able-bodied privilege, and what we might conceive of as a "wages of ability".

Coming out of the civil rights era, STO identified racism and white supremacy as an important division holding back the working class from revolutionary struggle. Like DuBois, STO did not view racism purely as prejudice, but identified that white working class people got real benefits from going along with racism, such as better job security, access to better schools, etc. However, these gains were only short-term. The challenge for STO - as an organization of primarily white workers - was to convince their fellow white workers to organize in solidarity with revolutionary workers of colour, willing to give up short-term benefits for the long-term collective benefit of a successful revolution. The point we draw from this is that it's not just capitalists who indoctrinate the white section of the working class; the white working class participates in the reproduction of white supremacy through the maintenance of their privileges.

There are some clear similarities between white privilege and able-bodied privilege. Many of the material benefits (wages, housing,etc) accrued through able-bodied privilege are similar to white-skin privilege. In terms of housing and transportation, the worker with able-bodied privilege is afforded not just better quality but a larger variety of options. For example, not all public transportation stops are accessible to people with different impairments. Those with able-bodied privilege have greater mobility and are not limited to specific routes, stops or times of day. Able-bodied privilege gives individuals a false sense of dignity and independence. Although we are all interdependent, and rely constantly on the labour of other workers - in this case bus drivers - the material benefits of being able to get where we want reliably and affordably, and the social benefit of being treated as an independent person are examples of able-bodied privilege.

An important difference between white privilege and able-bodied privilege is trajectory. Social histories of whiteness have examined how groups previously considered non-white have been able to *become* white and gain white privilege - most often through participating in racism and establishing a useful social role for themselves. In disability, the trajectory is most often in opposition - through age, injury or illness, we lose able-bodied privilege much more regularly than we gain it. In STO's examples, a white worker may be penalized or criticized for acting in solidarity with workers of colour, but he will not stop being white. In examples around workplace safety, the potential to lose able-bodied privilege is intensely clear.

Another important difference is the relative flexibility of disability. A person's race may change if they travel to a country across the world or access a time machine, but it will not change on their way home from work, or from one industry to another. With disability, this is not the case. A person may be read as able-bodied in one workplace, say, academia, but as disabled when they attempt a construction job beyond the limitations of their particular impairments. The exact reverse also holds: work tends to be particularly disciplining, wearing us down in the specific body parts and abilities most crucial for our jobs.

As such, many of us find ourselves at the edge, and push ourselves to maintain privilege. This social process reinforces the various standards under which able-bodied privilege is produced. What's peculiar is that these various standards often ensure that we lose our privilege in the long term; someone doing data entry might deny intermittent pain or express its existence while 'toughing it out' until their hands become useless due to a serious repetitive stress injury; a construction worker inhaling toxic dust might deny or disavow an ongoing breathing problem until the development of a serious lung disease. We actively engage in the production of our privilege while creating restrictive conditions that only some might be able to endure and which can ultimately relegate us to the same category we sought to avoid. And it can't be said enough: the long-term benefit goes only to our bosses.

Dual Consciousness and Able-Bodied Privilege

In his work *The Souls of Black Folks* DuBois uses the term "double consciousness" to describe the two worlds Black people experienced - Black and American. He described it as a somber, almost immaterial veil that divided the South. STO's work on dual consciousness also pertains to race, but takes a somewhat different character. In part, STO developed ideas of dual consciousness as a rejection of Lenin's stage theory of consciousness, which described workers going steadily from bourgeois to working class consciousness.

Similar to DuBois, STO saw this, not as a progression, but a condition of both consciousnesses existing at once in the mind of workers. In STO's understanding, race played a central role in the minds of white workers. At times, they would ally with Black workers, demonstrating proletarian consciousness, while at other times they would engage in racist class collaborationism, demonstrating bourgeois consciousness. In his 1972 work, STO member Noel Ignatiev uses an example of white workers displaying proletarian consciousness to stand up to managers on the factory floor in defence of Black workers, then the same evening participating in a demonstration to maintain racial segregation in their neighbourhood schools. Again, it is important to emphasize that STO did not see dual consciousness as illogical or divorced from short-term material benefits, but as something that needed to be contested to secure long-term revolutionary gains.

Dual consciousness plays out in the able-bodied working class, in how we act toward our coworkers, other people, and even how we view ourselves. A group of graduate students all participate in a competitive and nasty work environment, ignoring symptoms of anxiety, depression and physical ill-health in each other and themselves - while also being sure to make department events physically accessible; a construction worker helps out the family of an injured long-time coworker, but doesn't intervene on younger coworkers or the boss when the same unsafe working conditions crop up; a supermarket worker sticks up for her disabled coworker, until the stress of long hours, an aching back and a nasty boss make it too difficult; a healthcare worker is dedicated to the people she supports, but votes for a party that would decrease disability income because it lowers her taxes. Even when we have the knowledge of what is right, the pressure not to act on it is immense. For this reason, dual consciousness points toward collective organizing: it is not about changing our individual minds, but about organizing together to change social conditions until these contradictions no longer exist.

Forming in the late 1960s, STO believed that Black working class people in the United States were the most revolutionary sector of the class. As an organization composed largely of white workers and activists, they viewed their role in relation to this as one of addressing white supremacy within the white working class. If white workers could overcome this dual consciousness and commit to class consciousness and solidarity across racial lines, STO believed this would help clear the way for revolutionary action. So, dual consciousness was clearly developed not just as a theory to understand race relations within the class, but as a way of directing the actions of revolutionary white workers. In practice, STO prioritized work on the shop floor that challenged white supremacy and promoted

class solidarity.

As anarchists, we reject this understanding of a section of the class being the revolutionary vanguard, regardless of who is in this position. Also, we are not proposing that disabled people would be the vanguard in this orthodox equation, even if we did agree with this model of revolution. Dual consciousness is still relevant to our work around able-bodied privilege and disableism, not in spite of this view, but because of it. Anarchists believe in a united class struggle that fights all forms of oppression and divisions within the class. Our hope in connecting disability with dual consciousness is to propose a model for doing so that offers concrete and useful possibilities for action, and a material, rather than ideological basis for thinking about oppression.

Identity and Mass Politics in Disability: Sharpening the Anarchist Approach

For many years, there has been a strong and active disability movement organizing around issues such as accessibility, poverty, employment, and more. Some of these movements have had a left character - for example, the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation, which helped create the social model of disability, came to these ideas through a socialist analysis. However, the socialist tradition has generally not incorporated disability politics into their analysis and mass work to any great degree. This is not simply an oversight or indicator of disableism, but is related to the ways those who follow a socialist tradition conceptualize class.

Anarchists have been somewhat more aware of disability issues, and have made more significant efforts to address disability, with mixed results. As mentioned above, the severe disableism found in anarchoprimitivism is something other anarchists must actively assert disagreement with and put forward arguments against. Arguably the most successful current of anarchism with regards to disability thus far has been that associated with anti-oppression or identity politics. Those who adhere to those politics have brought awareness and activism around disability, with the result that - at least in Toronto - an access van at a large demonstration, an ASL interpreter at a political event, or a serious discussion around balancing accessibility needs when planning a bookfair are, while certainly not standard, a relatively consistent part of activist practice. We don't always do a good job with it, but due to the strong efforts of activists, disability and accessibility are on the radar in ways that they weren't ten years ago.

Without minimizing the importance of this work, we would like to offer up a few critiques. One is that identity politics tends to rely very heavily on individual identity. Because disability is a somewhat flexible identity, this has at times contributed to arguments such as "we are all disabled" or "we all will be disabled someday" as reasons to be involved in these struggles. Our concern in this regard is that opening up a massive spectrum of disability may serve to obscure the realities faced by people most severely affected by disableism, possibly reinforcing the structures that we seek to undermine. Another political argument is the one we put forward in this article: that able bodied working class people also have a stake in this, not because we may be disabled or we may become disabled someday, but because disability is a fundamental part of class structure.

Another critique is that the direction that comes from identity politics is the focus on accessibility at activist events. While this is an important thing to do and the exclusion of disabled people from activist events is a real and serious issue, it is a limited project. While our own events and meetings may be a sensible starting point, a great deal of this type of activism tends to stop here, caught up in perfecting accessibility practice. In order to effect real change, we must not neglect our internal practices - but we also must not let them become a barrier to action in mass struggles.

Lastly, identity politics frames the fight against disability in terms of individual transformations, rather than collective change. Identity politics teaches us that with workshops and trainings we can become more self-aware of our privilege and become better allies. This is really a form of liberalism – the notion that we can change the world one individual at a time. It doesn't take into account that able-bodied privilege and disableism are social processes and must be struggled against as a collective process on all of our actions and ideas. It is not enough to change the individual's ideology; we need to participate in projects that seek to undermine the material basis (wage-labour, housing, etc.) that produce able-bodied privilege and disableism.

Class struggle anarchists, as a tradition, have done little with disability politics, either internally or in mass work. This is in part due to our conceptions of class and class struggle, which too often focus entirely on workers and the workplace, and don't take proper account of the community and of reproductive labour. Even within workplace organizing, our focus tends to be similar to that of mainstream unions - wages and benefits, and often throwing our support behind strikes initiated by unions. Tackling issues like dual consciousness and disability requires a different approach, one that gets to the heart of how we conceive of ourselves as working people. We need to develop strategies on the job, using anarchist principles such as direct action and mutual aid, to address issues

that could never be written into even the best collective agreement.

It is our hope that this piece expresses a class struggle approach to oppression that is not an either-or choice between class and identity. Class and social oppressions such as disableism are linked, and can - and must, in order to be effective - be holistically addressed. While we critique identity politics for being too inwardly focused, we must also not ignore prefigurative politics in our own organizations. Rather, we should challenge ourselves to apply principles such as mutual aid and collective responsibility to tackle disableism in our organizations and in our mass work.

Conclusions for Action

Able-bodied privilege is deeply embedded in our culture. It is not something, as identity politics might present, that individuals can carve out of themselves with careful self-attention. It is something we must fight collectively, consistently, and with commitment as a critical part of our class struggle. Fighting able-bodied privilege is not high level theoretical politics. It is something all working class people can do, and it is a part of our daily struggles.

A plumber we know was called to a group home for people with developmental disabilities. Left alone in their basement, he noticed a room with padding, restraints and heavy locks. He called in to his employer, stating that he would not be completing this job, and left. Our labour has value and we can commit to using it in ways that do not sell out others in our class. This example is both exemplary and part of the problem: it takes the form of individual action, which is not extended to their coworkers, the staff or the residents of the group home, but it is admirable nonetheless. The issue of extending a struggle against able-bodied privilege into collective working class projects is far more difficult to pin down.

What if construction workers refused to build all forms of segregated institutions, or brought up demands around physical accessibility of the buildings they worked on? If their direct experience and skill with building could meet with disabled peoples' experience and skill with navigating space in different ways, the spaces constructed would likely be more functional and sturdier (and probably less ugly) than what architects and funders come up with. What if workers in grocery stores and coffee shops implemented a 'march on the boss' tactic to demand that the unpaid work placements carried out by people with developmental disabilities be paid? By doing this, they would reject notions of charity and state that everyone's labour has value. What if direct support workers working with impaired individuals took on a union strategy that placed the demands of the

impaired at the forefront? Sufficient staffing ratios would be presented, and won, not only as better working conditions, but as necessary practices for respect and social inclusion.

It might also mean that we not only address the outcome of our work and the ways in which it is used, but also the content. What if we refused to be relegated to a narrow set repetitive tasks that eventually caused chronic debilitating pain, and instead organized our workplaces to demand both ergonomic supports and greater job sharing? By moving what is often considered a personal health issue to the realm of collective struggle, we take to task core issues around how work is structured, and expand notions of workplace issues to organize around. What if we collectively decided to adhere to every possible safety code at the construction site, refusing to compromise regardless of how long it took and how far from quotas we fell because our own safety and well being are more important than the bosses profitability? We would declare the inevitable wearing down of our working bodies, which eventually robs many of our livelihoods and affects our lives outside of work, as unacceptable. We would also challenge the narrow conceptions of what labour struggle is and openly take on the core issue - their profits vs. our lives.

Within and beyond the workplace, addressing disableism also opens up important anarchist discussions around mutual aid and interdependence. Individualism and independence are capitalist notions that have kept us divided and unable to fight against disableism effectively. As stated before, there is a false sense of dignity around independence. We all rely on each other for certain aspects of our life. It is the case that some activities are considered to be "normal" to be dependent (such as car repairs, haircuts or childcare) and some are not (such as personal care or working). We are all interdependent, disabled or not. We all need each other. This is why the notions of interdependence and mutual aid must be at the centre of our struggle. Instead of fighting against disableism at a private or individual level we need to act collectively, as disableism is part of the class structure that affects all of us. By promoting values of individualism and independence, we stay divided. Why don't we strive for autonomy - which is being able to make the choices that affect our lives ourselves - as opposed to independence?

It's clear that the currently narrow focus of disability politics, which is ubiquitous amongst much of the left, is falling short of seriously addressing the pervasive and systemic exclusion of, and brutality toward members within our class. Anarchists should be aware of the framework of mutual aid that we as a class can only truly progress if we support each other in the pursuit of our collective good. We've attempted in this article to draw

out some of the most useful theories that might uncover our own short-fallings in applying mutual aid within the terrain of disability politics. The content of our lives and countless others must regain the dignity and well-being that has been lost through our own failed perceptions and the ongoing machinations of the exploitative machinery of capitalism. If we truly care about the possibility of a more just and equitable society, it is incumbent on us to better understand how disability is produced - and how we can fight it.

The Nature of Militancy

1 Toronto Member, 1 KW Member

*I*t is a truism common among Western anarchists, and the revolutionary left more generally, that militancy is in short supply these days. This sentiment is often expressed in a rather offhanded way, as a lazy excuse to rationalize decades of working-class defeats, or else through fiery polemics denouncing the cautious reformism exhibited by trade unions, "progressives", liberals and social democrats. Far too infrequently is an honest attempt made to clarify precisely what we *mean* by the term militancy—or better yet, how we can help to qualitatively develop this characteristic within movements struggling for social and economic

justice. Instead, militancy is often presented uncritically, as though it were some sort of esoteric derivative of political ideology, a synonym for violent tactics, or even as a tactic unto itself—a vital and yet somehow unattainable *sine qua non* of radical change.

In this article, we will attempt to clear up some of this confusion by providing a working definition of the term militancy, and an answer to the related question of what it means to be a militant. We will then move on to explore the contentious 'diversity of tactics' debate that emerged within the anti-globalization movement, and continues to this day—a disagreement rooted in the heterogeneous political composition of the movement's participants, and two opposing, yet ultimately liberal conceptions of violence. Finally, we will offer a brief study of past movements that have exhibited a high level of militancy and political cohesion,

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with an eye to distilling common characteristics that could potentially aid in the development of a contemporary North American movement able to effectively wage war on the forces of neoliberal capitalism currently embodied under the rubric of austerity.

I: Mapping the Terrain: Towards a Common Conception of Militancy

The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.
- Frederick Douglass

Outside of academic journals, there have been few articles published in English that attempt to define the term militancy. One noteworthy exception is *What Do We Mean by "Militancy"?* by Steve D'Arcy, published in 2011 by ZNet. The article sets out to reconcile the type of nonviolent militancy favoured by Martin Luther King Junior to the property destruction and street-fighting most frequently associated with black blocs. Using these two seemingly disparate examples to frame its analysis, the article offers four criteria for defining militant actions. According to D'Arcy, for an action to be considered militant it must be:

a) Grievance-motivated, that is, motivated by a desire to protest against something/fight for social change.

b) Adversarial, that is, an action that identifies clear enemies; targets are not treated as potential allies to be won over or convinced, but rather, as adversaries that must be pressured and defeated by means of struggle.

c) Confrontational, that is, it must seek to initiate, intensify or escalate conflict, rather than seeking accommodation and compromise.

d) Collective, that is, part of struggle that is collectively carried out. Even in the case of individual actions, they are done within the context of a wider social movement.

To this list, we would add a fifth qualifier:

e) Unmediated, that is, an action that is carried out directly, without the mediation or representation of a third-party. This addition is required in order to preclude possible actions such as appealing to politicians or union officials, and engaging in campaigns over social media sites such as facebook.

These criteria should be flexible enough to offer an exhaustive, value-neutral definition of the term militancy. D'Arcy goes on to list four 'modes' (or forms) that these types of militant action can take:

1) Symbolic Defiance – entails communicating defiance by means of 'symbolic' or 'theatrical' acts, to convey publicly one's rejection or refusal to recognize the legitimacy of some person, practice, policy or institution that is upheld as authoritative by the powers that be. For example: the public burning of draft cards, or staging a march in open defiance of a court order prohibiting it, etc.

2) Physical Confrontation - entails some sort of physical conflict with adversaries. For example: street fighting with police, confronting neo-nazis, forcing one's way through a police line or into a public building, defending a squat from eviction, etc.

3) Property Destruction - entails the destruction or damaging of property. For example: breaking a window, sabotaging a piece of machinery, vandalizing a statue, etc.

4) Institutional Disruption - entails the disruption of the functioning of an institution. For example: occupying an office of a government official to prevent them from being able to carry out their job, workers withdrawing their labour to shut down a business, sitting-in to disrupt a retail store, etc.

Of these four 'modes' of militancy, symbolic defiance seems out of place, by virtue of its fundamentally passive nature; its more militant manifestations would assumedly be covered by one of the three other categorical forms. We will explore the issue of symbolic militancy further in our discussion of the role of violence. For our purposes here, it is worth noting that D'Arcy is addressing members of the global social justice movement, in hopes of encouraging a mutually respectful conversation on tactics. Borrowing from King, he ends the article by providing two considerations with which to judge the merits of a particular tactic: *strategic* and *moral*. Through this evaluative framework, D'Arcy reveals his own preference for King's favoured strategy of nonviolent struggle, which drew its strength from widespread notions of Christian morality, and the contradictions between the promises of liberal democracy and the reality of Jim Crow style segregation. Morality, however, is a fundamentally subjective concept, and is therefore not particularly useful in objective considerations of whether or not a tactic will be successful in achieving its strategic aims.

Who Are the Militants?

We refuse a politics which infantilizes us and people who look like us, and which continually paints nonwhite and/ or non-male demographics as helpless, vulnerable, and incapable of fighting for our own liberation.
- Croatoan, *Who is Oakland?*

The answer to the question posed by this section should be fairly self-evident: militants are individuals who habitually engage in militant tactics. We felt it important, however, to briefly elaborate on this point in order to address a current trend of thought that in recent years has become increasingly prevalent within the activist milieu — particularly among activists steeped in the dominant stream of anti-oppression politics — and to make a point about where militancy comes from. In doing so, we are not attempting to minimize or gloss over the vital contributions made by anti-oppression activists and theoreticians over the past several decades. Rather, we are taking aim at a particular tendency that has emerged out of contemporary anti-oppression discourse: *privilege theory*, also pejoratively referred to by its detractors as *identity politics*.

A common argument advanced by many proponents of privilege theory is that the ability to safely employ militant tactics is intimately linked to an individual's relationship to systems of oppression and privilege, and accordingly, that it is the most privileged members of society (ie white, cis-gendered males) who are most likely to carry out militant struggles. When this type of militant action is carried out (by white, cis-gendered males or otherwise), it is often denounced by self-appointed representatives of oppressed identity groups and/or their "allies" for allegedly putting marginalized groups at risk. This often results in those seen as responsible for these transgressions being asked to "check their privilege." The exceptional essay *Who is Oakland: Anti-Oppression Activism, the Politics of Safety, and State Co-optation*, which describes the authors' first-hand experiences dealing with proponents of privilege theory at Occupy Oakland, does an excellent job of discrediting this line of argument. They explain:

"For too long there has been no alternative to this politics of privilege and cultural recognition, and so rejecting this liberal political framework has become synonymous with a refusal to seriously address racism, sexism, and homophobia in general. Even and especially when people of colour, women, and queers imagine and execute alternatives to this liberal politics of cultural inclusion, they are persistently attacked as white, male, and privileged by the cohort that maintains and perpetuates the dominant praxis.

[...]

"Contemporary anti-oppression politics constantly reproduces stereotypes about the passivity and powerlessness of these populations, when in fact it is precisely people from these groups—poor women of colour defending their right to land and housing, trans* street workers fighting back against murder and violence, black, brown, and Asian American militant struggles against white supremacist attacks—who have waged the most powerful and successfully militant uprisings in American history."

As the authors point out, the greatest demonstrations of militancy have historically come from the ranks of the most exploited and oppressed segments of society: those who quite literally have the least to lose, and the most to gain by risking their personal safety. Revolutions are not safe affairs, and the militant actions taken as part of a genuinely revolutionary strategy are not congruent with a politics of safety. As the authors of *Who is Oakland?* eloquently put it, "[t]he choice is not between danger and safety, but between the uncertain dangers of revolt and the certainty of continued violence, deprivation, and death."

II. The Anti-globalization Movement & 'Diversity of Tactics'

I ask you to judge me by the enemies I have made.
- Franklin D. Roosevelt

In the closing weeks of the 20th century, a new movement burst onto the world stage. "The Battle of Seattle", as it became widely known, was preceded by other opening salvos of the "Fourth World War"—the 1994 Zapatista uprising, timed to coincide with the introduction of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the 1989 Caracazo riots in Venezuela offering two salient examples. Nevertheless, the shutting down of a World Trade Organization (WTO) summit in the middle of one of America's preeminent cities is widely understood as the official birth of the anti-globalization movement. From its inception, however, this fledgling movement was hamstrung by bitter disagreements over tactics—disagreements that often spilled out into physical confrontations, such as those frequently witnessed between so-called pacifists and black bloc participants engaged in corporate property destruction.

This now-familiar dynamic played out repeatedly throughout the early mass demonstrations of the anti-globalization era: a militant element would emerge from the safety of

large, "peaceful" demonstrations and smash some windows, often leading to conflict with more reformist elements of the demonstration and/or the police, mass arrests, and a litany of mutual denunciations within the independent and corporate media. This problem eventually led, following the 2000 demonstrations against the G8 counter-summit in Montreal, to the establishment of a system of separate colour-coded protest zones (broken down into green, yellow and red, based on risk) before the movement was temporarily put on ice by the attacks of September 11th, 2001, and the intense atmosphere of insecurity and repression that followed.

By the time the 2003 protests against the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) occurred in Miami, the police and security forces had adapted their tactics. *The Miami Model* effectively seized upon the pre-existing divisions within the anti-globalization movement; aided by a massive corporate media blitz and the increased domestic security expenditures of the War on Terror, the state employed the spectre of violent anarchists as justification for a well-orchestrated counter-insurgency operation that included the use of pre-emptive and mass arrests, and the enactment of *de facto* martial law in areas of the city considered strategically important to the functioning of the convention. Based on the "success" of Miami, this model of policing became the standard protocol for dealing with subsequent anti-globalization convergences.

In an effort to pre-empt internal divisions over tactical disagreements and to build on the colour-coded model of spatial separation, the coalition organizing protests against the 2008 Republican National Convention (RNC) in St Paul, Minneapolis drafted a document which attempted to set guidelines for a code of conduct among participants. The document, dubbed the *St Paul Principles* was composed of four points of unity:

1. Our solidarity will be based on respect for a diversity of tactics and the plans of other groups.

2. The actions and tactics used will be organized to maintain a separation of time or space.

3. Any debates or criticisms will stay internal to the movement, avoiding any public or media denunciations of fellow activists and events.

4. We oppose any state repression of dissent, including surveillance, infiltration, disruption and violence. We agree not to assist law enforcement actions against activists and others.

The perceived grand compromise of the *St Paul Principles*

served as a direct inspiration for the subsequent *Pittsburgh Principles*—used during the 2009 demonstrations against the G20 in Pittsburgh — and the *Statement of Solidarity and Respect* passed by the Toronto Community Mobilization Network (TCMN), which coordinated demonstrations against the 2010 G8/G20 Summit in Toronto. Yet, despite their laudable intent, these statements of principles have failed to accomplish what they set out to do; the divisions that they were intended to resolve still persist — if anything, the two sides of the dispute have merely hardened their positions. The political fallout from the Toronto G8/G20 demonstrations, where a black bloc broke away from the main labour/NGO march and rioted in the city's downtown core, factored heavily into divisions at the Occupy Toronto encampment the following year; a similar antipathy towards anarchists and militant tactics was seen in Occupy movements across North America. This antagonism reached its climax following the publication of an article entitled *The Cancer in Occupy* by journalist Chris Hedges, which described "Black Bloc anarchists"[sic] as a "cancer" within the Occupy movement; a subsequent debate between Hedges and a member of anarchist group Crimethinc on the topic of Diversity of Tactics was watched by thousands of viewers over livestream — with both sides claiming victory.

On the Logic of "One No, Many Yeses"

Good revolutionary theory, strategy, and practice, or good revolutionary politics and practice is a totality which is always incomplete but constantly going forward, each aspect providing the criteria for the worth and growth of the others.
- Michael Albert, *What is to be Undone?*

In hindsight, the Diversity of Tactics debate was, at its core, the inevitable product of a movement defined by its heterogeneous political makeup. The anti-globalization movement prided itself on being a movement composed of "one no and many yeses"; this pluralism helped attract hundreds of thousands of activists from across the world, united by a shared rejection of neoliberal capitalism (also referred to as corporate globalization), but it lacked the cohesion necessary to overcome these activists' underlying political differences. As the movement's initial strategy of shutting down the meetings of the global elite became less and less feasible, these political fault-lines came into clearer focus.

In his 1974 book *What is to be Undone?*, Michael Albert provides a useful framework for understanding why the anti-globalization movement was unable to come to a compromise on the question of tactics. Drawing lessons from a critical analysis of Marxist-Leninism, Anarchism,

Maoism and the New Left, Albert outlines three interrelated elements that, taken together, form the basis of any political movement.

1) Theory – an analysis of existing society that seeks to understand its contradictions and provide a competing vision of society that addresses these contradictions. Good theory provides a movement with tangible goals and a greater understanding of the dynamics that need to be navigated in order to achieve them.

2) Strategy – the path taken to achieve desired goals. Strategy seeks to advantageously engage the contradictions in society identified by political theory; the more comprehensive the theory, the more potentially precise the strategy; the more incomplete the theory, the more vague the strategy and the greater the need for constant enhancement.

3) Practice/Tactics – the tangible actions taken to implement strategy. Tactics must be flexible enough to adapt to a given situation, and should be abandoned if they fail to yield desired results. The repeated success or failure of particular tactics can lead to corresponding changes to strategy and the sharpening of political theory.

As noted above, the anti-globalization movement was a diverse coalition of groups and individuals with differing political ideologies and interests, united by a shared opposition to the effects of neoliberal capitalism. As long as its participants could feasibly pursue a unified strategy of shutting down the trade summits that they had come together to oppose, differences in political theory could be safely glossed over, and a variety of complementary tactics could be successfully deployed in order to achieve a tangible goal. Robbed of the capacity to impede the functioning of these summits by advancements in state contingency planning, the movement was forced to come up with a new strategy. At this point, pre-existing differences in political theory surfaced, effectively splitting the movement into two camps. The moderates, who formed the vast majority of the movement's participants, chose to use these summits as a way to register their dissent through the socially accepted channels of liberal democracy, in an effort to reform capitalism by mitigating its neoliberal excesses. Inspired by their own liberal conceptions of the legacy of US civil rights activists, this group pursued a strategy that sought to grow the movement *quantitatively*, to use these summits to "get their message out" and "have their voices heard" in the hope of "speaking truth to power", and attracting ever more participants, for ever larger demonstrations. On the other side of the split were the radicals, an active minority often characterized by their use, or acceptance, of black bloc tactics. Comprised primarily of adherents of political theories that saw dialogue with capitalism and liberal democracy as pointless, members of the radical contingent sought to intensify conflict with the police and "break the spell" cast by the corporate spectacle through sensational acts of property destruction. This strategy could be seen as one of *qualitative* development, in that its participants sought to advance struggle by fostering a more effective capacity to wield violence. These two contradictory political tendencies were always present in the anti-globalization movement, and have persisted into the subsequent struggle against the present phase of neoliberalism: the age of austerity.

Representative Politics and Productive Violence

We will know the decisive moment has come when we can cease to be followers of causes and become producers of effects instead.
- AK Thompson, *Black Bloc, White Riot*

At the crux of the Diversity of Tactics debate lies a dispute between those favouring a strategy of nonviolence, on one hand, and the practitioners and sympathizers of (primarily) spectacular violence on the other. The terms of this debate were frequently muddied during the course of the anti-globalization movement by the claims of some advocates of black bloc tactics that attacks on corporate property did not constitute violence. These attempts to draw an ethical distinction between harm caused to human beings and the destruction of inanimate objects represent an understandable, yet ultimately misguided appeal for liberal legitimacy, and have served as a distraction from the much more important debate over the proper role of violence in movements struggling for social change.

In *Black Bloc, White Riot: Anti-Globalization and the Genealogy of Dissent*, author AK Thompson tracks the semiotic development of the anti-globalization protestor and the post-9/11 conflation of black bloc participants with terrorism. While contextualizing these attempts by the state and corporate media to represent black bloc violence in such terms as part of a larger strategy of reconciling the liberal democratic notion of the right to protest to the regulatory framework of the War on Terror, Thompson nonetheless identifies an important similarity between these two political subjects. He notes that both black bloc participants and terrorists were similar in that they "sought to affect the public by launching assaults on constituted power in order to intervene in political processes to which they had no direct access." The black bloc's recourse to purely spectacular violence — i.e. the smashing of a Starbucks window — is thus held up as evidence of its participants' inability to escape the "bourgeois epistemology" of representational politics. Spectacular violence is "an action in excess of the law that serves in the end to reaffirm the law itself" through the implicit acknowledgement of its own limited effect. "Without a decisive challenge to bourgeois epistemology, even the seemingly pure act—violence as an end in itself—can be recuperated as image. And while the intensified image heightens the experience of presence for the viewer, this presence is not yet direct engagement with the material world. For that, another type of violence is required."

For Thompson, the direct action tactics of the black bloc offered its participants a pedagogical means to pass through violence—a process of qualitative political development similar, in principle, to that experienced by the colonized subjects of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. But in order to complete this process of development, North American black bloc participants need to break through the glass ceiling of representative politics promoted by liberal democracy and begin to move from the relative safety of spectacular violence to the more dangerous, yet potentially rewarding world of *productive violence*. Largely synonymous with Walter Benjamin's concept of *law-making violence*, productive violence is violence used to achieve material gains—"a contest between competing sovereign agencies", rather than an act of symbolic defiance. A clear example can be found in the difference between smashing a window at a demonstration and defending an occupied building or a barricade from the police. If we are to develop a militant movement capable of wielding violence in pursuit of a revolutionary strategy, this step cannot be avoided.

III. Militancy and Mass Movements: Collective Identities and Affective Bonds

And the moment when they discover their humanity, they begin to sharpen their weapons to seize its victory.
- Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

As the authors of *Who is Oakland?* noted, militancy tends to emerge from the most oppressed and exploited segments of society — from those who are motivated by intense grievances, and simultaneously denied justice through their exclusion from "legitimate" channels of redress. Yet these conditions alone do not automatically produce the phenomenon of mass militancy. Nor can a high degree of political theory, contained in a small group or political party isolated from the population in which they operate, accomplish this feat. Indeed, mass militancy requires a high level of political consciousness widely dispersed among a population that identifies itself as under attack, or otherwise threatened by the dominant order. A requisite factor in the formation of revolutionary militancy lies in the affective bonds formed between participants who see themselves as part of a collective identity. From this springs the development of political theory that accurately assesses the material basis of their subjugation, leading to a strategy and corresponding series of tactics that can effectively contend with the institutional structures that reproduce this condition.

As anarchists, we cannot ignore the fact that one of the most potent catalysts for mass militancy is nationalism. The myth of the nation remains one of the most powerful myths in human existence, unique in that it contains within it the entirety of a people's history and culture; its latent militancy is unleashed through anti-colonial insurgencies and wars of national liberation. Born from the violence of colonization, Fanon noted, "decolonization is always a violent event." Maintaining a foreign occupation requires a constant resort to the most extreme forms of repression, sanctified by a dehumanizing racism on the part of the colonial regime; this makes the shift to armed uprising a

natural development in the struggles of colonized peoples. Through this formative political process, Fanon explains, "[t]he very same people who had it constantly drummed into them that the only language they understood was that of force, now decide to express themselves with force. In fact, the colonist has always shown them the path they should follow to liberation." Yet, while it provides a strong impetus for mass militancy, nationalism also glosses over important internal contradictions in a given society. With very few notable exceptions*, anti-imperialist struggles are temporary cross-class alliances that end up recuperated by an emergent national bourgeoisie or political class whose interests are ultimately entrenched through the establishment of a "revolutionary" national government. Formal colonization thus gives way to a new reality, in which the national economy remains subjugated to the whims of transnational capital, while the original impetus for struggle becomes masked by the national character of the new state security apparatus.

Some of the most militant and politically sophisticated mass movements of modern history have emerged in response to the shared oppression of groups persecuted on the basis of race, ethnicity or religion. As socially constructed identities, these categories intersect and overlap in different ways depending on the social context from which they arise. In secular, white supremacist nations such as the United States and Canada, race plays a much more central role in social stratification and class composition than either religion or ethnicity, whereas in Iraq or Sri Lanka, the opposite is true. These social divisions can serve a similar role to nationalism, in that they provide a set of similar experiences relative to dominant power structures, and a collective identity that informs and reflects these experiences; the bombing of a Shia shrine in Baghdad can thus be interpreted as an attack against all Shia muslims, while the news that cops in Oakland have murdered a young black man will resonate with millions of black Americans' own experiences of dealing with racist police. These individual acts of injustice can cause long-simmering resentment to boil over into intense flare-ups of mass militancy. In the absence of a coherent strategy or collective political program, however, these singular events are easily isolated and manipulated by the ruling class into provoking a backlash from reactionary elements of society — leading to an escalation of intra-class conflict and/or the further hardening of racial, religious or ethnic divisions. The United States' history, replete with militant black uprisings savagely repressed by the lynch mobs of the white working class, is a tragic case in point.

The recent rise of so-called "vigilante feminist" movements in Egypt and India has served as a stark reminder that militancy is not a strictly male affair. Not only have women historical played important roles in militant struggles

based around nationalism and race, the shared experience of patriarchal oppression itself can also be a powerful factor in the spread of mass militancy. Women united around issues such as pervasive sexual assault, economic and political marginalization, and reproductive rights have waged struggles both independently, and within broader movements — such as the Mujeres Libres' multi-faceted campaigns undertaken within the context of the Spanish Civil War, which often drew them into conflicts with the sexist tendencies of their male comrades in the CNT. Attacking patriarchy, and the gendered division of labour, is a vital component of spreading militancy to larger segments of the class.

Also frequently drawn into militant conflict with the violence of patriarchal society are those who are marginalized due to non-conforming gender expression and sexuality. Although these oppressions are distinct and often complex, they nonetheless share a similar material structural oppression in the hetero-normative ideals of patriarchal society. In the face of recent advances in gay and lesbian rights, and the moderate reformism championed by bourgeois representatives of the movement, it can be easy to forget that the Pride parade — before its successful liberal assimilation and capitalist recuperation — had its roots in the Stonewall riots of New York. This militant legacy has been carried on by anti-assimilationist queer groups such as the Bash Back! network, and the racialized queer collective Check It, based out of Washington, DC. Organizations such as Transgender Nation and The Transexual Menace have employed militant direct action tactics to highlight their exclusion from the LGB community, leading to a growing acceptance of transgendered oppression as framing part of the demands of the broader LGBTQ movement.

Disabled people and their supporters have also demonstrated a high propensity for militancy in their struggles around accessibility, with examples including the long-standing US direct action based group ADAPT, or the coalition of disability activists that clashed with Bolivian riot police in 2012. Radical disability movements, often comprised of people with a diversity of physical and mental impairments, struggle against disableism — the structural and ideological process through which disabled people are denied individual agency and collective participation in society.

The point of highlighting these seemingly disparate examples is not simply to offer a litany of identity categories, but to drive home the point that militancy is a collective phenomenon, fostered by shared opposition to dominant structures of oppression and exploitation. Solidarity grows through the affective bonds formed through identifying another person's struggle as your own. The collective

identities outlined in this section are by no means intended to be exhaustive; other relevant examples could include the role that collective identity has played in recent student struggles in Québec and Chile, in fostering the militancy of the Luddites and early syndicalist movements, or the role that a shared anarchist identity played in kicking off the 2008 insurrection in Greece.

Beyond Violence vs. Nonviolence

It is not our desire to participate in violence, but it is even less our desire to lose.
- Comrades from Cairo, *Letter to the Occupy Movement*

Capitalism is perpetually engaged in its own reinvention, constantly adapting to incorporate new technological developments, overcoming obstacles to investment and recuperating potential adversaries through political representation. As these transformations occur, they produce accompanying shifts in class composition. Anarchists should be attentive to these changes and willing to modify our tactics and strategic orientation as need be. Our political theory must aim to identify the segments of the working class with the greatest potential for militancy; not to assume the role of their political representatives — as liberal activists and Marxist-Leninists would seek to do — but so that we can actively demonstrate our solidarity, either by joining with them as fellow militants, or by otherwise helping to prepare the conditions for their struggles to bear fruit. In some cases this support may require the resort to violence, though in many other instances it will not. The important point is not to fetishize violence or nonviolence, but to asses particular tactics based on the contribution made to an overall strategic effectiveness.

Our task as anarchists is to actively participate in the formulation of a revolutionary collective identity, imbued with a militant class consciousness, and the capacity to engage in productive violence against the institutions that reproduce capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy and disableism. The working class is not, as reductionists would have us believe, a homogenous block with identical material interests. Nor will the overthrow of capitalism magically fix the hierarchical social divisions fostered by systemic oppression. It is therefore necessary to attack the structural pillars of oppression, while simultaneously combating the influence that these systems exert on segments of the class that materially benefit from their perpetuation under capitalism. Anarchists must do this, not only because it's the politically principled, or moral thing to do, but because it's a necessary step towards building a revolutionary working class movement. This strategy requires the development of self-organized campaigns on the intermediary level; autonomous struggles that can

join together, whenever practical, to create larger, more effective networks of resistance. For a movement to retain its militant character as it grows, these networks must be built, not by the glossing over of political and tactical differences, but by recognizing the pursuit of common strategic goals. Advances made through struggles waged by one segment of the class can expose the contradictions inherent to capitalism for all to see; the resulting epiphany can often be catalytic in the spread of generalized class consciousness —particularly in the case of tactics.

We must also work hard to build towards a movement that defines itself not simply through its militant opposition to existing power dynamics, but through its creation and uncompromisingly militant defence of liberatory institutions of counter-power. Whether these be physical institutions, such as occupied apartment blocks converted into free housing and social centres, or political institutions such as neighbourhood or workplace assemblies, these gains must be defended and expanded upon if we are to sustain a revolutionary movement beyond its initial gains. Building counter-power, and framing our struggles with this in mind, is the only way to remove ourselves from the never-ending circuit of representational politics, and to begin to assert ourselves as free human beings, fighting for a future of our choosing.

[*]Exceptions to this rule include the stateless anti-imperialist struggles waged by the Makhnovists in Ukraine (1918-1921) and the Korean Anarchist Communist Federation (KACF), which led to the temporary establishment of the Shinmin Autonomous Region (1929-1932) in the Chinese province of Manchuria, as well as the many non-statist Indigenous resistance movements of North and South America.

Some Assembly Required: Beyond a False Conception of Democracy

2 Toronto Members

*D*emocracy is a term of primary importance to liberals and radicals alike, used as a means of justifying the legitimacy of their power or political position. Whether the ability of all citizens to make decisions extends only to allowing them to periodically vote for their leaders, or whether it reaches the perceived-radical level of people directly making decisions on issues that affect them, it is democracy nevertheless. Similar to politicians who justify the legitimacy of their rule by pointing to a successful election result, the left points to our positions being the will of the people – or at least it would be, leftists tell themselves, if the working class ever had the opportunity to make decisions for themselves.

In this radical race to the most-democratic democracy, anarchists claim that directly democratic structures are the best way for the working class to make decisions according to their collective class interests. As anarchist communists, we herald a federated structure of assemblies and councils who provide delegates carrying directly-determined mandates to higher-scale decision-making bodies as the ideal decision-making structure, both as a way to bolster the class in workers' bodies under capitalism, and the way to run a post-revolutionary society.

With the prevalence of Occupy, and the successes of the Québec student strike being attributed to CLASSE's federated general assembly model, the topic of direct democracy has in the past couple years reached beyond the realm of anarchist lip-service, and become a more broadly talked-about concept in the media, on the left, within universities and amongst community organizing bodies. What remains unclear is the political content of these discussions. Are leftists just looking to legitimize their positions and actions, as any politician does, by saying theirs is the will of the people, or is a true anarchist position being put forward: a decision-making process that assists in building an empowered working class ready for militant direct action, and free of the hierarchies and oppressions that are endemic in the current capitalist liberal democracy? One of these is revolutionary; the other is not.

As a mobilizing tactic, the general assembly model of CLASSE has been proven effective, but what we are left to contend with is whether these directly-democratic spaces are inherently positive and productive, and if not, how it is that we, as anti-authoritarian leftists, are to engage with these bodies. In a context where the working class is inculcated with bourgeois, patriarchal, and white supremacist mentalities, it may be that people will not make the decisions that we think are right or even in their own best interest. The balance that must be struck for any revolutionary anti-authoritarian leftist is to remain anti-authoritarian in this context, while confronting and not capitulating to, backwards politics. Without either idealizing or condescending to the working class, we must push for direct democracy while identifying that it is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for revolution to occur.

Assemblies in recent and historical times

Occupy

As Occupy spread throughout North America in 2011, the concept of general assemblies garnered a lot of attention, and in many places, provided an easy target for those with the

preconceived notion that direct democracy doesn't work: decisions don't get made; it's slow and messy; marginalized people and minorities will be bulldozed by those in hegemonic positions; and in the end, nothing will get done. In many ways, the Occupy general assemblies provided a quintessential example of how to utilize direct democracy in an ineffective way, especially for the development of radical politics. Though we want to avoid putting an undue level of focus on rules of order as a solution to political or social problems, putting thought into the structural elements of decision-making bodies is important - not so that we can avoid confronting more fundamental problems, but so that we create the best environment in which to do so.

At its inception, Occupy was a movement based on the assembly as a space of consensus decision-making. The idea behind this was that it would facilitate discussion and the creation of ideas, and ensure that minority opinions were not being ignored in the conversation. Although consensus is often seen as a friendlier and more inclusive way of making decisions, what is not being recognized are the often coercive and bullying aspects of this process, especially in large groups. People were told that to "block" or disagree with a proposal meant they were willing to leave the movement if that decision was made. The social pressure to not express dissent can create a false consensus, rather than inspiring the healthy expression of disagreement, and developing a culture of confronting reactionary or oppressive ideas. Most manifestations of Occupy soon realized that the ability of an individual to block the work of a large group of people was not practical or even principled, and switched to a modified consensus where a 90% majority vote was required to make decisions. Though voting models also do not ensure that a culture of

debate and the confrontation of ideas develop, it provides a better framework for this to happen.

As Occupy Oakland expressed, "[t]he bulk of the work of Occupy Oakland does NOT happen in the General Assembly. It happens in various committees, caucuses, and associated groups that report back to the general assembly." It is outside of a general assembly that much of the real work, the real education, and the real debate has to take place. It was those Occupy movements, such as Occupy Oakland, who were willing formulate a more explicit and specific political position that were able to create movements capable of initiating a port shutdown in conjunction with a one-day general strike, fight against foreclosures, and take action against community issues like police brutality.

This is not to say that Occupy Oakland was a uniform group of people. As with many other Occupy encampments, anarchists were singled out as a destructive or divisive element. Particularly, the act of property destruction became a point of contention within the movement, with certain members of Occupy calling on people to unmask, photograph and physically attack anyone seen to be participating in black bloc tactics. In the spirit of openly confronting and not capitulating to backwards views, the response on the Occupy Oakland website, put forward by the Anti-Repression Committee, did not resort to some vague call for a diversity of tactics, but encouraged debate about tactics, while cautioning against Occupy Oakland members doing the work of the state to criminalize, demonize or persecute fellow activists.

In other Occupy camps, the lack of political direction and action was not just a product of the inefficiencies of their assembly model structure, but also of an unwillingness to clarify and develop the politics of the group beyond the populist 1% and corporate greed rhetoric. Leftists at Occupy Toronto often tried to incorporate their pre-existing activist struggles into the 1% rhetoric, as opposed to developing and challenging the politics of Occupy itself. Though we are not saying that Occupy Toronto was an ideal or even worthwhile space to organize in, this leads us to the question of what is the best way for radicals to push discourse forward in uninitiated organizing spaces.

The Québec student strike of 2012

The politics of the Québec student movement, as put forward by ASSÉ,

involved an escalation of radical ideas and tactics throughout the strike of 2012. Embedded deep in their movement was the fundamental importance of direct democracy, to the extent that it became a defining characteristic, and a point of collective pride within their movement. It was the strength of this culture that prevented the strike from being demobilized when substandard deals presented by the government were brought back to their membership for a vote. As we know from labour disputes, a membership is highly likely to vote to accept a proposal once it goes to a ratification vote. Union leaderships who are attempting to demobilize their membership, and prevent a strike will often claim that they are being democratic and deferring to the will of the membership. They are aware, though, that their membership is disempowered and has been inculcated with a deference to authority based on an executive-heavy workers' institution, and an expertise-modeled grievance process. Consequently, this appeal to the will of membership is an act of lip-service with a convenient conservatizing effect on the decision to be made. This is not, however, how things initially played out with the direct democracy, direct action-based ASSE, who made up the core and basis of the coalition CLASSE that was strategically created for the purpose of strike mobilization.

In April of 2012, leftists in Ontario were holding their breath after word had come in that an offer from the Liberal government in Québec was being brought back to the general assemblies of CLASSE for a vote: "would this be the end of the 2012 Québec student strike?", we worried, based on our knowledge of how this power dynamic so often plays out in our own worker bodies here. We couldn't have knowledge of how this plays out in our own student organizations, as no such struggle has ever occurred in Ontario. However, after a series of assemblies and the CLASSE delegate conference, the vote was unanimous: they rejected the government's settlement. We had underestimated the extent of the political development that had occurred and the strength of their resolve, bolstered by their strong assembly model.

Beginning years earlier, ASSE began their plans to mobilize against an announced tuition increase. The idea was to reinvigorate the general assembly model and to increase support for the strike through autonomous organizing bodies known as mobilization committees. These mobilizing committees generally existed outside the sanctioned structures of their student unions or associations. Many students at the time were unaware of the planned tuition hike, and especially at the anglo schools, they were unaware or unsupportive of student strikes as a tactic of resistance. Before a strike could happen, this had to be dealt with.

The heavy-lifting of the organizing work done to contend with this was not done through well-worded interventions in assemblies, though this can be important. Rather, it was done through one-on-one conversations, on-the-ground mobilizations, and a concerted, sustained effort to argue with, present information, and listen to fellow students. There was a dedication to honesty about what a strike would entail, and an unwavering commitment to argue that these were risks worth taking. This was all essential work that happened outside assembly spaces, and was done with the intention of involving as many students as possible in the struggle.

The escalation of tactics that occurred was a clear one. They

tried petitions; they tried rallies; they tried one day strikes, the whole time making the political and strategic argument that what they required was an action without a time limit – an unlimited general strike that would end when the tuition hike was revoked. The escalation of ideas that occurred was even more ingenious. There was a progression of messaging from the mobilization committees depending on the political culture within departments or a particular school. The general trajectory went from arguments against this tuition hike, to critiques of the austerity agenda, to the role of education as public good, to being against tuition entirely and ending up in a clear anti-capitalist sentiment. Combining this anti-capitalism with their direct action orientation and basis of direct democracy, this was a movement made for (and actually, in a large way by) anarchists.

With CLASSE, and even more so ASSE, there was a clear basis of unity. To join, a student association must have voted on a strike mandate through a general assembly, ensuring that they practice direct democracy, and furthermore, must ensure that their student association meets the following criteria: they must have a mandate to resist any increase in tuition costs with the goal of free education; the general assembly must be the supreme decision-making authority of the student association; the student body must vote to join CLASSE in the general assembly or a referendum; a financial contribution is made to CLASSE; and that they are willing to hold a meeting to vote on the idea of having an

unlimited general strike. The reason for these principles was that the goal in creating CLASSE was to expand the strike beyond just ASSE, without watering down the politics in such a way to make further participation unhelpful.

What ASSE proved more than anything else was that a smaller association with better politics is more valuable than a larger association which lacks political cohesion - or lacks the will to see things through utilizing militant tactics. With all of this being done right and with CLASSE reaching such amazing heights of mobilization, what then went wrong with the Québec student strike that led to students becoming demobilized when an election was called? We would argue that it was a consolidation of strategic and political power within the executive of ASSE.

Though they claimed to act only as spokespeople and facilitators, directed by the mandates of their membership, there were clear leaders of the Québec student strike of 2012. The executive of ASSE still possesses a level of power that does not truly meet anarchist ideals, and in the end, this was the undoing of the strike. Though this dynamic was unclear to many anarchist outsiders during the strike, we finally saw touches of it playing out in CLASSE as the strike votes failed, and the elements of the structure that were counter to our anarchistic principles became evident.

Word has now spread that the poster child of the Québec student strike, Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois colluded early in the struggle with unions and politicians to direct the mobilizations of CLASSE towards an electoral end. Rather than argue the facts of this case, we should analyze not the details of exactly how this happened, but why it is that an individual in a directly democratic institution would even hold such power. This is a structural liability from an anarchist perspective: the executive of the institution, whose job is to ensure that the mandates of the assemblies are followed, should not also be responsible for the strategic orientation of the larger body. In struggles, it is essential that there is long-term strategic political planning, but this shouldn't be delegated to those who possess official positions within the institution. Historically, a solution to this problem has been the creation of specific anarchist organizations. However, this leads to its own particular set of considerations and concerns - a critical point being whether the strategies of the anarchist organization are implemented through control of power positions, or through argument in open assembly spaces with the rank-and-file.

The CNT and the Spanish Civil War

When thinking about the problem of reformism as a current that must be addressed within assembly-based revolutions, one of the most salient examples for anarchists is the Spanish Revolution of 1936. While the CNT succeeded in broadening the anarcho-syndicalist conception of sites of production to include neighbourhoods, an anemic anarchist ideology persisted within the organization in regards to the state and representative democracy. What was proposed in 1927 was a separate anarchist organization the FAI (Federación Anarquista Ibérica), which would attempt to direct the ideological development of the CNT. This directive did not, however, develop through thorough integration within the CNT rank-and-file, but focused instead on taking control within a developing representative leadership, which ultimately may have been the undoing of the revolution itself.

As the more politically developed anarchists aimed to take power within the CNT, they were unable to contend with a growing membership that was not averse to narrow economistic concerns or reformist politics, which were swelling the ranks as the revolution took root. Ultimately, this led to reformists being elected to the CNT leadership, and some of these so called leaders joining a popular front government. Though the popular front government was largely in ruins after the July days, the CNT reformists decided not to disband it, and left to recover, it eventually acted to take control of key sites of production and propaganda through military action. These incidents led to many CNT militants leaving the front to fight against newly strengthened republican forces back in Barcelona, and their traitorous acts. It is perhaps hyperbole to claim this is the only factor that contributed to the fall of anarchist Spain; fascist forces of both Germany and Italy were ready, along with Franco, to crush revolutionary forces in Catalonia - but the CNT leadership joining the popular front government certainly weakened the revolution, as elements of the CNT went back to Catalonia to defend their once secure gains. What is highlighted here, is the danger of both structural representational leadership, and the weakness of political neutrality, or more precisely a lack of strong political development within the ranks.

What remains interesting about the CNT's faltering in regards to disbanding the republic was that it was not just a byproduct of its reformist leadership, but also its fear that this was a form of 'substitutionalism', as the CNT's membership represented slightly less than half of the working class at the time. Anarchists have always been wary of substituting themselves for the class, as this is the hallmark of vanguardism, but the nature of the state itself is a form of the very substitutionalism they feared. State forms of representation, regardless of their proclaimed political character must never be understood as true representatives of the class. This very substitution is a Bolshevik turn, which lead to the dismantling of the Soviet

system of democracy following the 1917 revolution.

An anarchist approach to revolution is that the so-called false consciousness of the class can never be ameliorated by a vanguard party state, elected or otherwise. No state is capable of reorganizing society so that false consciousness is destroyed: it is the very process of building assemblies and councils towards collective self-management of the economy and all aspects of daily life that ensures revolutionary consciousness. These organs of a new society will not necessarily be revolutionary unless their growth is integrated with a developing and explicit anarchist politics within their ranks. At the crucial moment, the state cannot be left as the supposed representative of the class - as it is this final hesitation that has led to the downfall of some of the most promising revolutionary moments in history.

The Industrial Workers of the World

The IWW in North America exhibits similar flaws to the CNT, but in what is possibly a more extreme form. The CNT has a rule in its constitution that no one who is a member of a political party can hold an officer position within the union. It is for the same reason that the IWW does not allow, in their constitution, to be associated with a political group or tendency: to keep out the Socialist and Communist parties. Though there is nothing wrong with these declarations, these types of rules are only valuable when they are at the behest of a rank-and-file who have participated in a political debate around the subject, and not the attempts of a political vanguard to safeguard themselves against co-option through the use of rules instead of rank-and-file development. These political tendencies need to be contended with openly, and in a group like the IWW who have historically had large turnover in membership, these political debates need to be had often.

Particularly in the United States - where there was a peak membership in the 1920s of approximately 40,000 members with a sharp decline in the late 20s - what needs to be acknowledged about these membership figures is that people often joined the IWW during strikes in their place of work, but didn't stick around much after that. When their militancy saw better results than more institutionalized and conservative labour organizations like the American Federation of Labour, people were glad to sign a card, but a sustained membership requires sustained political development outside of these struggles over immediate material benefit. As radical institutions, we certainly must produce results to prove our efficacy, but to continue the struggle we must fight against the syndicalist tendency to ignore ideas, instead of contending with them.

This dynamic of high-turnover rank-and-file membership, and the maintenance of the membership of a cadre of dedicated leftists has affected the modern state of the IWW. Currently, there is a tendency towards one of two branch dynamics: the first, the existence of a small radical wobbly branch who still hold illusions in making large numbers of workers and workplaces in their city unionized under the IWW. If they were successful in doing so, the likely result would be an intellectual and political vanguard within a wobbly branch who would determine the overall strategic orientation of the organization, while their rank-and-file members dealt only with organizing within their own workplace. The second is that the wobblies act as a radical cadre within, more often than not, an already unionized

I.W.W. SPEAKERS
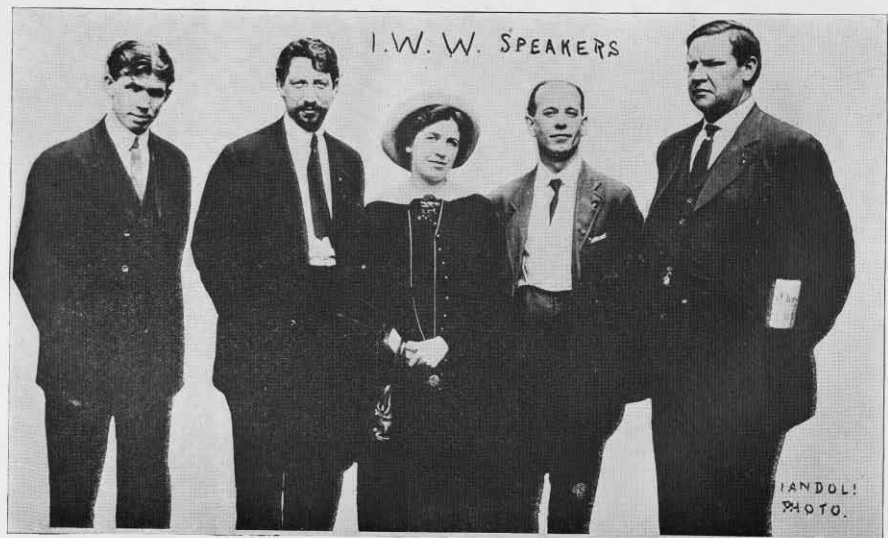
Patrick Quinlan, Carlo Tresca, Miss Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, A. Lessig, William D. Haywood

environment and push towards workplace councils and more radical action, while either trying to radicalize their legal union, or acting pretty much autonomously from it. The latter is arguably less politically questionable than the former, but the real point is that the IWW needs to decide what it wants to be.

Often, anarchists say that the IWW is "basically" an anarchist union, but we should think critically about what we mean by that. It certainly argues for more militant workplace action, wildcat strikes, and increased worker control of the workplace, but it also has a central executive board that has full power and authority over all IWW publications, guides policy, and oversees the organization between yearly conventions. On a local level, with its current insular form,

there is a significant risk of the creation of an unofficial political leadership if their membership does ever swell with rank-and-file workers. And as we've seen from the example of the CNT and the IWW in the early 20th century, the near-apolitical syndicalist idea that through industrial unionism, we will have a revolution is insufficient. On top of workplace struggle, there must be concerted effort put towards the empowerment of the rank-and-file in strategic and political debate. As we noted with ASSE, direct democracy hasn't gone far enough if a membership is only ratifying motions or deciding when to take a particular action, but is otherwise absent in the highest level of political conversations happening within an organization.

The Movement for Justice in El Barrio

The Movement for Justice in El Barrio is a community group in New York, founded by mostly immigrants and low-income people of colour to fight against gentrification and displacement in East Harlem, inspired by the structures and organizing methodology of the Zapatistas. Based on principles of autonomy, self-determination and participatory democracy, they are a perfect example of an organization that is not explicitly anarchist, but which works using democratic principles that are so in-line with our politics that we should see them as a near-optimal mass organization. Though they largely focus on protest, not direct action, and have utilized legal action where it seems beneficial, they have taken a strong stance against electoralism as a solution to the problems that they face. The fundamental element of their organization is assemblies based out of buildings. In order to join the Movement for Justice in El Barrio, they require that 10% of a building's tenants wish to join.

Organizing in a grassroots, non-activist heavy space, they have managed a principled and firm position against white supremacy, patriarchy, and hetero and gender-normative chauvinism. Particularly, they describe themselves as fighting "for the liberation of women, immigrants, gays, lesbians, the transgender community, people of color, and indigenous communities." Their way of enforcing this within organizing spaces and assemblies has not been through policies or equity statements, but by confronting the bigotry and chauvinism of people in their community head-on, and prioritizing it as an essential part of their struggle. For instance, in buildings with entrenched racism between hispanic and black tenants, they have prioritized the creation of mixed race committees to deal with the organizing or logistical work of the assembly. Their thought being that if people who have reservations about each other based on cultural differences or preconceived bigoted notions could work together on projects where they have a common goal, their racism or even just racially insular

behaviour would be broken down, and a collective free of this intra-class expression of racial oppression would be achieved. They also readily admit that there is no step-by-step guide on how to deal with oppressive behaviour. To do so requires people to be dynamic and responsive. What is clear is that these issues must be prioritized and contended with; that these won't be easy to deal with; and that to not do so will provide fault lines within our organizing body that will be utilized by the ruling class to create cross-class alliances with working class people in order to subjugate people of particular races, genders and sexualities.

This is not to say, as the CNT national secretary Galo Díez Fernández argues in his treatise "The ideological essence of syndicalism" that there is a revolutionary need to re-educate women because they are a weak point, even a reformist liability, in the class. In fact, it's closer to the opposite. By dealing with issues of white supremacy, patriarchy, and hetero and gender-normative chauvinism expressed within the working class, it prevents more privileged members of the class from being the easy target for cross-class alliances. Consequently, it is the more privileged workers who form the weak points in the class, as they are the most likely to both be offered this kind of buy-off, and the most likely to sell out their fellow workers - who they anachronistically see as lesser, or as a liability in struggle.

The Appropriate Revolutionary Anarchist Orientation

Of the examples above, we argue that revolutionary anarchist principles of democracy are most active within the Movement for Justice in El Barrio. A troubling conclusion for us, in that the others are almost universally granted a distinct democratic standing by anarchists. More troubling is anarchists uncritically aspiring to democratic standards that, upon further examination, leave much to be desired, and the prospect of being blindsided time and again by the inherent deficiencies born of a refusal to take on the sacrosanct standing of historical movements that, while they achieved much, ultimately fell short of victory for similar reasons. Assemblies are often used by political vanguards or executive committees to validate their positions, and to increase the mobilization of the masses to benefit the organizing of radicals, without the true empowerment of the rank-and-file through political development, debate and decision-making. This is evident structurally, through the consolidation of intellectual and strategic work in executives and political vanguards; in the end, this leaves movements open to co-option by less radical groups or individuals, and vulnerable to state-initiated demobilization via the presentation of electoral solutions.

If we insist on seeing the downfall of the CNT or the failures of ASSE as products of unique circumstance, and refuse

to criticize them because they got closer to success than we have in Ontario, we fall into the same trap as state communists and Stalinists who claim that the downfall of the Soviet Union was exceptional, and not a clear product of their politics or the logical end-result of a particular trajectory. We identify the flaws of their political orientation, not to be armchair revolutionaries and shit on everything from the sideline, but so that we can do things right by identifying the best way forward. If and when we fail, we should critique ourselves just as harshly, because the goal here isn't just to pat each other on the back, but to have a revolution.

We must fight to break down formal and informal leadership structures as they develop within directly democratic bodies. We need to be constantly vigilant about the formation of an intellectual elite, or political vanguard who keep higher level strategic concerns away from the rank-and-file. Strategic political planning is required for success, but should not be delegated to those in official positions, carried out behind closed doors and out-of-reach of the general membership. Here is where we see the value of specific anarchist organizations to participate in strategic conversation, but who can only have these plans enacted if they win the battle of ideas in an open, democratic forum. We must constantly remind ourselves that even though taking control through power positions may lead to short-

term gains, if the development of the general membership hasn't reached the same level, it will most definitely lead to long-term failure.

Anarchists need to question more deeply whether the groups we label anarchist actually are. The problem with the CNT isn't that they didn't call themselves anarchist, but in critical ways and at critical times, they didn't act like anarchists. Similarly, with ASSE, we see that groups that run in a directly democratic fashion and who espouse direct action as their main tactic may still exhibit a consolidation of power and a deference to authority that will be their undoing. So even though what they did was better – even much better – than other political organizations, the weaknesses of these movements are clear, and in fact, are almost too politically convenient for us anarchists. They failed because they weren't anarchist enough.

A reader of this piece may be forgiven if they conclude these to be the uninvested criticisms of hair-splitting armchair revolutionaries... it is not. As organizers, the concerns and conclusions herein should and do intimidate us. History has time and again attempted to clarify for us that there are no shortcuts to an informed, empowered working class movement, and there are no revolutionary tricks or slights of hand that will lead to revolution. Anarchist communism is a long haul that need necessarily build and

root itself in popular institutions capable of mounting a truly democratic resistance that can take power on its own behalf. It follows that we can't take comfort in a moderately attended rally of activists or the removal from office of a particularly vicious politician. The temporary satisfaction we derive from a victorious power grab within our unions or militant one-off actions involving confrontations with police or the destruction of property are simply that – temporarily satisfying. Therein is what intimidates us. The small victories and misconceptions we afford ourselves may, in fact, be our undoing. The truth is, the revolution is a far way off and it will be a struggle every step of the way. We put forward this perspective not to be demoralizing or to put off action till later, but because if we can get past spinning our wheels in this type of short-term, satisfying work, we can begin to move towards the kind of organizing that will actually build something revolutionary.

Short Circuit: Towards an Anarchist Approach to Gentrification
2 Toronto Members

I. Defining Gentrification

No matter how different the reasons may be, the result is everywhere the same: the scandalous alleys and lanes disappear to the accompaniment of lavish self-praise from the bourgeoisie on account of this tremendous success—but they appear again immediately somewhere else, and often in the immediate neighbourhood.
- Freidrich Engels, *The Housing Question*

*G*entrification, etymologically speaking, is a relatively new word, coined in 1964 by the English Marxist sociologist Ruth Glass. Conceptually, some would claim that it has been a feature of urban life for hundreds of years. Between 1853 and 1870, for instance, the *Haussmannization* of Paris forced thousands of poor people from the centre of the city, where rents had traditionally been cheaper, to the urban periphery; these migrations was the forced results of structural changes Baron Haussmann had proposed to the city's urban geography, and rapidly increasing rents. We might anachronistically consider displacements such as these an example of gentrification, but, as we will explore below, the term has some specificity and nuance that such comparisons fail to capture.

Glass came up with the term gentrification to describe the growing displacement of residents of working-class neighbourhoods in London by middle-class property buyers, often under the auspice of "urban renewal". Much like in the United States, London witnessed a flight of monied residents from the city-centre to the suburbs following the second World War, precipitated by a boom in suburban housing stock. This boom was largely facilitated by the state: plans for the post-WWII reconstruction of London favoured the suburbs as the supposed future of the city. High demand for housing in the city-proper led policy planners to envision a city population dispersed across a wider geographical area. Financial and infrastructural incentives, like those included in the U.K.'s 1946's New Towns Act and 1952's New Towns Development Act, provided developers with public capital to create new suburban areas designed to contain "overflow" from crowded urban centres. This meant that many older neighbourhoods in London quickly converted to multi-occupant dwellings; as monied residents moved to the newly expanding suburbs, the demand for housing in the city decreased and became more affordable for working-class people. Like it did in many other cities, this transformation involved converting dwellings that had previously been single family houses into rooming houses or shared accommodations.

The state, preoccupied with its vision of suburban expansion, relegated these increasingly working-class areas to decay and ruin. Repairs and renovation were considered unnecessary or wasteful and resources were funnelled into suburban development. Given these revisions, two major changes to many London neighbourhoods become salient to our discussion of gentrification: 1) Housing stock in these areas became affordable to working-class residents due to the migration of more affluent residents to the new towns and suburbs, thus creating predominantly working-class neighbourhoods; 2) The flight of more affluent residents also created a disinvestment in these new working-class areas: existing housing was repurposed but also fell into disrepair as necessary capital was now not available for maintenance uses (owing to a combination of state indifference and the migration of private capital).

Thus, by the time Glass was writing, portions of London were populated by working-class denizens who occupied architecturally older buildings that had often fallen into disrepair. This configuration of space meant that real estate in many of these neighbourhoods was cheap and often of historical or architectural significance. By the late 50's and early 60's, many middle-class professionals began to take

an interest in these dwellings and neighbourhoods, purchasing cheap property and renovating it. These "pioneer" gentrifiers usually employed their own labour and capital, as government subsidies were still tied up in the New Towns plan and financial entities were reluctant to offer loans, as the neighbourhoods were considered risky investment prospects, on account of their primarily working-class composition. As more and more middle-class people adopted this strategy, rents rose as landlords and property owners realized that their existing properties could be more profitable if utilized by or sold to non-working-class residents. This led to the displacement of many working-class residents as their neighbourhoods became prohibitively expensive. By way of example, the Barnsbury neighbourhood of London witnessed a drop in unfurnished rental units from 61% of the housing stock in 1961 to just 6% in 1981.

For Glass, this shift represented the jumping off point for her definition of gentrification: the "rehabilitation" of working-class areas by middle-class property buyers and the subsequent displacement of the original tenants. Glass also emphasized the class element of this transformation; gentrification is a play on the English term *gentry*, used to denote the class of landowners and bourgeoisie immediately below the nobility in the social hierarchy. The affluent middle-class professionals who saw investment and housing opportunities in traditionally working-class areas were, according to Glass, the contemporary manifestation of the gentry. By this rationale, we may define the classical approach to gentrification as the displacement of poor people from areas and housing by the economic and social pressures brought on by having new residents with more access to social and financial capital move into their neighbourhood(s) and make substantial alterations to both the housing stock and demographics of the area. Or, in the words of English geographer Tom Slater, gentrification is "the neighbourhood expression of class inequality."

II. The Multiple Stages Theories of Gentrification

Capital doesn't care if we feel at home somewhere. That feeling is a barrier to investment.
- Prole.info, *The Housing Monster*

Building on Glass' work in the mid 1960's, American urban theorist Philip Clay postulated a four-stage model of gentrification that aimed to describe its mechanics more substantially. Clay's work proved highly influential in shaping discourse around gentrification, illustrating, in part, how neighbourhoods actually become gentrified. This was a contrast to Glass' classical approach, which was more a descriptive theory of a process already well underway by the time she was writing. Clay's four-stage model was broken down as follows:

Stage one: Pioneering gentrification - New residents of a neighbourhood, often with more access to financial resources and cultural/social capital, move into traditionally working-class neighbourhoods. They renovate property, usually using private capital because mortgages are unavailable due to the perceived risk of the area. Little or no displacement occurs at this stage, as existing properties are often vacant and new properties are built on unused land.

Stage two: Expanding gentrification - Word spreads about the emerging "viability" of the neighbourhood; perceptive realtors begin offering property in and around the area. The

associated financial risk implicit in stage one is minimized, but not eliminated: large scale developers are still wary of injecting capital into the area. Displacement begins, as the stock of available housing falls and rents begin to increase. Small mortgages start becoming available and renovation may expand to adjacent blocks. Buildings may be held for purposes of real estate speculation, as landlords and property owners see emergent changes to the area.

Stage three: Adolescent gentrification - More risk-averse people may start moving into the neighbourhood, as there now exists a growing consensus that the area is a "safe investment." Gentrifiers, old and new, may band together into associations to exert additional political/social pressure to further the gentrifying process (i.e. neighbourhood associations, business improvement associations, historical preservation societies, etc.). Rents increase dramatically at this point and class struggle between gentrifiers and older residents becomes most pronounced. Media attention may develop as physical changes to the area become more evident and external private capital (loans, mortgages, etc.) becomes more easily available.

Stage four: Mature gentrification – The area is considered safe, trendy, a good investment; homeowners may begin to see themselves displaced; major developers and financial institutions may begin to profit off the area. Buildings held for speculation now appear on the market. Interestingly, even the first wave of gentrifiers may be displaced at this stage, as even wealthier people decide to move in and financial entities see land in the area as a profitable investment site.

Clay's model is both a strength and weakness for gentrification theorists. On the one hand, as noted above, it provides a relatively concrete picture of how neighbourhoods actually become gentrified. It is useful both as historical metric for examining how gentrification has affected an area and, simultaneously, as a tool to evaluate possible interventions in the process: for example, if a neighbourhood exhibits characteristics typical of stage three or four, actions appropriate to stage one would be counter-productive.

Conversely, Clay's model is very much a microcosmic theory: it focuses on the process of how a specific neighbourhood undergoes gentrification, but offers little insight into the broader forces that drive the process; it emphasizes "how" at the expense of "why". Perhaps the most useful feature of Clay's model, from an anti-capitalist perspective, is the treatment of gentrification as the progressive reduction in risk for outside investors. Movement between the various stages of Clay's model describe how barriers to outside investment are gradually removed; from a financial point of view, a gentrified neighbourhood is a safe neighbourhood. But, in the absence of a broader account of the functioning of capitalism, this analysis is incomplete. Subsequent models, like those discussed below, attempt to address these deficits by linking the transformation of neighbourhoods to the larger operation of globalized capitalism or, put another way, to add a macrocosmic dimension to the microcosmic particulars of Clay's stage model.

Owing to several of the weaknesses cited above, two noted urban sociologists, Neil Smith and Jason Hackworth, proposed a model that takes into account the broader processes that create the conditions that make gentrification possible. Consisting of three stages punctuated by recessions, the Hackworth and Smith model views gentrification as a cycle of investment and disinvestment, and is a useful counterpoint to the narrower focus of Clay's four-stage model.

Stage one: Sporadic and State-Led (1950-1973) - Smith and Hackworth identify this early stage of gentrification as something of a successor to Clay's stage one. In contrast to Clay, they emphasize the role of the state in providing the impetus for further gentrification. Between 1950 and 1973, in both North America and much of Western Europe, gentrification was a relatively isolated phenomenon, largely confined to smaller neighbourhoods in larger cities. As noted by Clay's model, pioneer gentrifiers employed their own capital and sweat equity to redevelop existing housing stock. Spurred by successes in this regard, the state began to see gentrification as a shorthand, cheaper means of accomplishing "urban renewal" projects. Limited federal funding became available after early pioneer attempts at gentrification proved successful, often in the form of grants and subsidies for the renovation of damaged or unused buildings. By controlling these funding streams, especially given the initial reluctance of private sector investment, the state exercised a primary role in determining the course

that gentrification took.

1973-1977: Recession - An emerging global economic recession created a situation where the state sought to move capital from unproductive to productive sectors, favouring investment in areas that actively produced surplus value. This discouraged tendencies at play in stage one: money used for grants and subsidies was redirected towards sectors of the economy that provided a higher return on investment.

Stage two: Expansion and Resistance (1970's and 80's) – Within this stage, gentrification took on both a cultural and financial dimension. Recovering from the recession, cities began to view gentrification not so much an occasion for urban renewal, but as an opportunity for investment. The state, still reeling from the recession, began to take a more cautious approach, realizing the necessity of creating new investment opportunities, but still reluctant to actively subsidize gentrification as it once had. In this light, state funding for gentrification took a more *laissez-faire* approach, trying to prod the private sector into further investment. As a consequence of these developments, gentrification became much more widely dispersed: in order to attract the investment necessary to further urban restructuring, cities began investing in cultural and commercial centres adjacent to potential gentrifying neighbourhoods (museums, promenades, stadiums, galleries, etc). These cultural centres, in the words of Smith and Hackworth, "smoothed the flow of capital." And, as globalization continued apace, links between local urban restructuring and international finance became more tangible; the state sought to attract globalized capital, with gentrification as a primary target of investment. This loosening of global capital on disinvested neighbourhoods created much more rapid, ruthless, unchecked pace of gentrification, which was often resisted by the residents facing displacement.

Early 1990's: Recession – Another, smaller global economic recession led several theorists to postulate "de-gentrification" as many neighbourhoods saw the process ground to a halt or severely clawed back, indicating general post-recession skittishness from investors.

Stage three: Further Expansion (1990's-2000's) – Rebounding from the recession, this third wave of gentrification again witnessed a shift in strategy. States and corporate powers began much more actively colluding in the process of gentrification. Gentrification became viewed, by both parties, as a strategy of generalized capital accumulation. In contrast to the casual *laissez-faire* support of stage two, the state was now actively partnering with larger corporate entities to further gentrification—often as development partners. Concurrent to these developments,

this attitude of viewing neighbourhoods solely as sites for potential global investment and development saw gentrification branch out from its traditional roots in disinherited urban areas to many other parts of the city. Also, developers now began to play a much more active process, supplanting pioneer gentrifiers as the primary engine of gentrification. Finally, this stage also saw effective community resistance to gentrification minimized or ignored because the approach to space encoded within gentrification - that of an internationally distributed network of financial capital tied to the state's urban planning policies - became viewed as something close to inevitable or "common-sense". Gentrification had become, in many places, something akin to a hegemony of urban space, something healthy cities aspired to, as inevitable and regular as the tides. History has now reached a point where gentrification is no longer merely middle or upper-class buyers displacing working-class people, but an approach to space that privileges existing class relations and props up global capitalism in very real and tangible ways.

Developing a coherent picture of a phenomenon as complicated and multifaceted as gentrification requires both large-scale and small-scale analysis. We need to be able to both identify what is happening in our communities and link it to what is happening the world over. In this light, the works of Glass, Clay, Smith and Hackworth should be seen as broadly complimentary. The next section of this article will explore in greater detail some of the bigger economic questions at play within gentrification and how they relate to debates on the use of the city.

III. The Economics of Gentrification

With the upheaval of the market economy, we begin to recognise the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled.
-Walter Benjamin

The 1970s witnessed a number of critical theoretical contributions to the field of urban studies that challenged the dominant assumption that changes to urban demographics and geography were reflections of the sovereignty of consumer choice — a belief which framed the long-standing influence of the Chicago School of Sociology on the study of urban development. An important contribution to emerge from this shift was the Rent Gap Theory pioneered by Neil Smith (of the Smith and Hackworth model). This theory has not been without its critics, but it remains one of the best means of understanding the individual incentives that lead landowners to contribute to gentrification.

Land is a unique form of commodity, in that its exchange value is entirely dependent on its potential use value. In an

urban setting, the use value of land is a social construction based primarily on its location — the general desirability of a surrounding neighbourhood, proximity to transportation corridors, public parks, shopping centres etc. Landowners and developers capitalize on property's latent use value through the addition of labour and investments of further capital, whether the end result assumes the form of an economic venture (a factory, theme park, etc), owner-occupant housing or a multi-tenant apartment building. The type of fixed capital investment pursued by the landowner will vary, depending on zoning regulations and the maximized potential for profit derived from the use of the land — a factor that Smith described as Potential Ground Rent. However, this capital investment, once completed, becomes a barrier to further investment; once a building has been constructed, the land cannot be used for anything else. At this point, the land's Potential Ground Rent materializes into Capitalized Ground Rent, in the form of a steady income stream (in the case of rent) or a lump sum (in the case of sale), while finance capital moves off in search of new opportunities for investment. This cycle of investment/divestment explains why areas of the city face staggered waves of development.

As time passes, technological and architectural innovations, coupled with changes to the surrounding neighbourhood combine with the inevitable deterioration of the buildings and corresponding rise in maintenance costs. This creates a gap between Capitalized Ground Rent, and the Potential Ground Rent that could be actualized by the redevelopment of the property. The more time passes, the larger this gap growths, and the stronger the incentive for redevelopment. Once the rent gap reaches a certain threshold, it becomes more profitable for a landlord to let their property sink into an abject state of disrepair than to continue paying for its active upkeep; they thus give up on the "hard work" of being a landlord and become a speculator — biding their time for the right opportunity to sell their land to developers eager to capitalize on its Potential Ground Rent. And so the cycle continues.

Changes in the structures of the city

As capitalism has transformed itself through the neoliberal restructuring of global production, cities have undergone a parallel process of urban restructuring. In developing regions, this change has manifested most clearly in the spread of Export Processing Zones (EPZs)—concentrated industrial trading hubs designed for the manufacture and transportation of cheap goods, on a mass scale, to global consumer markets. In developed regions, on the other hand, this shift has been marked by the transition to a post-industrial economy characterized by the growth of finance, advertising and service sector jobs, and the

relative downgrading of the manufacturing sector. Cities, traditionally built to house workers in close proximity to large factories, nowadays reflect an economic environment in which the working class has been dispersed among a much larger number of companies, each composed of smaller, more flexible workforces.

The shift to a post-industrial, information-based economy has also forced a recomposition of the working class itself. Large metropolitan cities have become the managerial epicentres of global commerce, with wealth creation dependent on a new technocratic class based in finance, insurance, real estate, marketing and I.T. This swarm of white-collar workers is attended to by an even larger contingent of service and hospitality workers in the food and beverage, customer service and retail sectors — types of employment marked by their precarious nature and low wages. The decline in the traditional manufacturing sector has been mitigated by a corresponding rise in construction jobs, largely tied to the cyclical boom and bust nature of urban restructuring.

This shift in demographics hides the true economic forces that drive the process, as influxes of yuppies come to be seen as the cause, rather than the symptom, of gentrification. This perception is most palpable in neighbourhoods where increased condo development is synonymous with urban displacement. Yet this situation is not without historical precedent; the social and economic divisions between those who benefit from the new, higher-paying jobs of the post-industrial economy and the more precarious segments of the class echo earlier divisions between so-called "skilled" and "unskilled" labourers of the late nineteenth century. Now, as then, the primary agent of capitalist restructuring remains the capitalist class.

From boom to bust

Emerging from the economic recession of 2000-2001—a crisis triggered by the bursting of the dot-com stock market bubble—the period of 2000-2007 was characterized by massive growth in the housing sectors of many developed nations. A mixture of low interest rates and financial deregulation combined to produce unprecedented housing bubbles in the United States, Ireland, and Spain, with significant price increases also occurring in Britain, China, Australia, France, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Canada. By 2005, *the Economist* was reporting that the combined value of all residential property in the world's developed economies had shot up by an estimated $30 trillion over the previous five years — an increase that not only dwarfed any previous housing boom, but was also larger (as a percentage of GDP) than the stock market booms of the 1920s and early 1990s, effectively making it

the biggest asset bubble in human history.

These grossly inflated housing prices spurred a frenzy of new home construction. Between 1996-2005, there were 553,267 new houses built in Ireland (a country with a population of 45 million); while the three years of 2004-2006 saw over 1.8 million new homes built in Spain, and over 57 million in the United States. This glut of new construction produced an incredible windfall for the banking sector, which profited both from the financing of development projects and the corresponding explosion in home mortgages.

We all know what happened next. As the housing bubble in the United States burst, it soon became clear that the banks financing the boom had seriously over-leveraged themselves. Toxic subprime mortgages, hidden from balance sheets through the use of securitized debt instruments, were now spread throughout the global financial system; the result was the international economic crisis of 2007-2008, which was quickly followed by several rounds of successive bank bailouts and the prescribed solution to the fiscal deficits created by this swindle—austerity.

Looking into the future

Alone among G8 nations, Canada emerged from the global economic crisis in relatively good shape. A stricter financial regulatory system in the lead up to the crisis had barred Canadian banks from engaging in some of the riskier practices of their US counterparts and kept them from overexposing themselves, unlike their European counterparts, to the turmoil of the credit derivatives market. Following a short downturn in 2008, the housing market soon stabilized and continued its expansion.

But problems in the Canadian market were brewing, even then. Financial deregulation introduced by the Harper administration in 2006 subsequently led to the rapid creation of a large subprime housing market where none had existed before: persistently low interest rates have flooded the balance sheets of the Canadian Housing Mortgage Corporation (CHMC) to nearly $600 billion; and

rising housing prices have led to exponential growth in Home Equity Lines of Credit (HELOCS), leading to a corresponding explosion in household debt levels. And over the past year, housing sales have finally begun to decline, causing many financial analysts to declare that the bubble is about to burst. Because the loans insured by the CHMC are backed up by the Canadian taxpayer, a mortgage crisis triggered by a housing collapse will automatically lead to bank bailouts and massive federal deficits, thus requiring the implementation of further neoliberal restructuring, almost certainly coming in the form of punishing austerity measures. While it is impossible to predict how this will play out in the urban environment, there are some things that we know for sure.

Much of the growth that has occurred during this bubble has been concentrated in Canada's two most overpriced housing markets: Toronto and Vancouver. Both cities have witnessed a flurry of high-rise condo development that has accelerated the displacement of low-income residents from their respective downtown cores. These condominium towers are being built quickly, en masse—and often on the cheap. In an article entitled *Faulty Towers*, journalist Philip Preville spoke to a number of recent condo buyers in Toronto, who pointed out some of the structural issues they discovered soon after moving into their shiny new homes. These problems included, but were not limited to: collapsing glass balconies, faulty ventilation and drainage systems, cracks in the foundation, poor insulation, thin walls, cheap cement coating on steel rebar, improperly installed floor-to-ceiling windows and leaky sprinklers. Maintenance costs for these buildings typically begin to skyrocket within the first two years, as the "owners" of the building are forced to pay for repairs to the initial shoddy construction, and install more energy efficient water heaters, air conditioning units and fluorescent lighting systems.

When these buildings, facing the divestment cycle outlined in Smith's Rent Gap Theory, begin to decay, they will pose unique obstacles to reinvestment, owing to their diverse per-unit ownership structure. As these condo units become more and more dilapidated amidst the context of

a collapsing real estate market, their value will drastically plummet. Owners of these condos will be faced with the choice of either continuing to live in them, while paying ever mounting maintenance fees, selling them at a loss, or converting them into rental units. As many current condo owners will likely have no interest in becoming landlords, these units could foreseeably be subcontracted out to rental agencies or sold off in blocks to a new generation of slumlords, who could seek to increase their profits by neglecting to carry out required repairs. No matter how this plays out, in a decade or two these high-rise condominiums, currently epitomized as the status symbols of the urban "middle-class" and the cutting edge of gentrification, are fated to become the slums of the future.

IV. Anarchist Responses to Gentrification

Houses are ours because we build them and need them, and for that reason we're going to have them!
-Rent Strike Participant, Milan, 1970

Anarchists understandably feel an intrinsic and visceral opposition to gentrification. It represents a capitalist attack on our neighbourhoods and homes, a destructive expression of state and corporate power that uproots entire communities. Perhaps most of all, it enrages us because it so often seems largely beyond our control, watching landlords and speculators mould neighbourhoods as they will, with the firm support of the state. As disgusting as this situation is on its own, there are also several reasons that anarchists should oppose gentrification from a purely strategic point of view.

As we have noted, gentrification is both a process of transforming the city to reflect changes in the global economy and a restructuring of urban space to meet the constantly expanding needs of capital investment: this effectively makes gentrification the urban front line of capitalism. If we can halt the incursion of gentrification into a neighbourhood, we are effectively halting capitalism's expansion, and denying capital the chance to reproduce itself at our expense.

Gentrification brings with it increased repression through the installation of additional CCTV surveillance cameras, the further commodification of public space, a broken window approach to policing and the spread of private security. It is a process perpetuated by local business and resident associations, developers and city counsellors: manifestations of the ruling class banding together to collectively assert their class power. Struggling against gentrification thus means struggling against the spread of this repressive apparatus and a chance to sharpen our skills while defying the collaborative efforts of capitalists

and the state.

Finaly, neighbourhood-level struggles against gentrification can build a capacity to assert our own class power by spreading confidence in the possibilities of collective action. The violence of gentrification pulls back the veil of capitalism, showing it plainly for what it truly is: a contest between classes with mutually opposing interests. The state's willing collaboration in this process, be it through the blatant doublespeak of city counsellors or the eagerness of police to defend the private property rights of absentee landlords, can make our neighbours increasingly receptive to anarchist ideas, as they become validated through lived experience.

Conceptualizing an Anarchist Intervention Against Gentrification

Resistance to gentrification is a pervasive feature of the gentrification process. The form such resistance takes, however, is nowhere near universal and varies widely from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. In some places, acts of property destruction, sabotage and propaganda assume a place of prominence; in others, neighbourhood groups or associations form in order to exert organized political and economic pressure on gentrifiers and their agents. Historically speaking, concerted anti-authoritarian responses to gentrification have been limited and have usually been closer to the former approach, as borne out by numerous historical examples (Mission Yuppie Eradication Project in San Francisco; the Anti-Gentrification Front in Vancouver; and the Toronto Solidarity Cell in Toronto)

Both of these approaches have individual strengths and weaknesses but, broadly speaking, most neighbourhood responses to encroaching gentrification seem to fall somewhere on a continuum between the two. On the one hand, acts of property destruction, sabotage and propaganda are usually enacted by individuals or small groups, working alone and often isolated from larger political projects or neighbourhood engagement. On the other, the emphasis on organizing tenant or neighbourhood committees necessitates a wider focus and often employs tactics like door-knocking, social research and lobbying. The primary difference between the two poles of this hypothetical continuum is where the effective locus for resistance is located: the "direct action" pole locates the site of resistance as the individual or small group, whereas the "advocacy" pole situates the network or group as primarily important.

It is important to note that no individual or group that we know has taken a hardline stance that either the social or the individual is the sole force capable of

attacking gentrification. We have divided actions along this continuum not to caricature perspectives on struggle, but to talk about how energy and resources are expended in anti-gentrification work and to foreground how both poles presuppose perspectives on gentrification that are problematic and incomplete. To further develop this distinction, we will look at two recent approaches to anti-gentrification work that have coexisted in the same geographic area, Vancouver's Downtown East Side (DTES).

Vancouver's DTES is often colloquially referred to as "Canada's poorest area code". Recent years, however, have seen an influx of gentrifying capital in neighbourhoods like China Town and Gastown, with the attendant new condos and businesses familiar to the process. The rapid changes in the neighbourhood have seen longtime residents displaced and necessary social services rendered inaccessible. The volume of people affected by the DTES' gentrification has produced a range of responses, two of which typify both the strengths and weaknesses of the continuum proposed above.

The Anti-Gentrification Front (AGF) is a moniker used by several anonymous individuals who have staged acts of targeted property destruction and propaganda, usually in the form of communiqués posted on the internet. These attacks on businesses and developers, including the destruction of a new pizza restaurant's windows in late 2012, have attracted enormous media attention and placed questions around the gentrification of the DTES at the forefront of discussions around development in Vancouver. In some ways, the AGF's choice of tactics demonstrates a relatively sophisticated, if incomplete, understanding of gentrification. AGF actions seem to be designed to increase investor trepidation by ensuring the neighbourhood remains "risky". Its actions demonstrate that members of the DTES community will continue to resist ongoing gentrification with direct action.

Conversely, however, the very nature of these tactical choices ensures that the AGF will remain small and largely anonymous. This risks creating a vanguardist clique, where "effective" resistance to gentrification remains the province of a small, politically homogenous group that may not reflect the broader wishes of the neighbourhood they claim to act for. Small group formations like the AGF are, by their nature, largely politically unaccountable and do not articulate an alternate vision for the area. Seen in this light, anti-gentrification work is an inherently *negative* political project: it opposes, but does not propose. The limitations of this perspective are already apparent, as AGF actions are recuperated and depoliticized by those eager to paint their resistance as the work of mere criminals and agitators—a trope that has been front and centre in media and popular

discussions of AGF actions, and has limited broader public support for their work.

The Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood Council (DNC) is a community group formed in 2009, out of the ashes of several other neighbourhood groups, including the Downtown East Resident's Association (DERA). The DNC has done much to highlight the gentrification of the DTES, including publishing reports and studies on the impact of gentrification and organizing meetings and town halls for residents to discuss and strategize around gentrification issues. The DNC is open to all residents of the DTES who agree with its organizing principles and constitution, and has a broader focus that many anti-gentrification groups, engaging in work around harm reduction and anti-colonialism, among other issues. In contrast to the AGF, the DNC actively engages in the political process, even having a member of its Board of Directors on the Local Area Planning Process (LAPP) committee—a City of Vancouver-run project to produce a development plan for the "revitalization" of the DTES. The DNC receives funding from several other community organizations and donors, including the Vancity credit union.

The approach to gentrification presupposed by the DNC understands resistance to gentrification as a communal effort, but also creates some confusion regarding the scope and limits of their activities. By accepting a role in official discourse around development, the DNC largely focuses on advocacy and research. The ties between the city, businesses and non-profits like DNC also create a web of associations that serve to obfuscate the way gentrification actually proceeds, painting it as a process to be managed, with the participation of anti-gentrification groups like DNC serving as means to legitimate this perspective. Additionally, the flow of funding, resources and legitimacy that organizations like the DNC rely on from outside entities can diminish the effectiveness of the organization, linking them to those that may seek to influence their politics. For example, in 2012, DNC member Ivan Drury was removed from a seat on LAPP when the city manager accused him of being "threatening" and "bullying" for employing direct action tactics by leading a neighbourhood delegation to confront a Development Permit Board meeting on condo development.

As anarchists, we need to situate our efforts to resist gentrification between these two poles, developing a perspective that retains the social focus and flexibility of groups like the DNC but also acknowledging the necessity of extra-governmental resistance to gentrification proposed by formations like the AGF. We need structures that are accountable to and reflective of the neighbourhoods

we struggle in, but that also develop a radical and comprehensive indictment of the broader capitalist forces that produce gentrification. In short, we need to develop structures in our communities that can effectively bridge the gap between "direct action" and "advocacy". We would argue that the assembly form is the only structure that can viably incorporate these criticisms and function as an effective challenge to gentrification.

Understanding gentrification as a multifaceted process that encompasses many struggles, including work around police harassment and defence of immigrants, we need structures that are both flexible enough to respond to a variety of community issues while retaining a political perspective rooted in a sound understanding of how global forces shape our neighbourhoods and communities. Directly democratic neighbourhood assemblies can focus involvement in neighbourhood struggles, serving as both an impediment to unwanted investment (by serving as a viable conduit for collective action and a means of developing class consciousness and identity) and a tool for bettering the neighbourhood for current residents. This can be done by ensuring its composition reflects their needs and desires (social services, new development, etc.) of the local residents and mobilizing broad segments of the community to fight for them.

The possibilities for urban assemblies can be glimpsed by looking at the successes of events like the Milanese rent strikes of the 1970s. Tenant unions were formed by autonomists who sought to take the class consciousness of workers in the factories and transpose it to the neighbourhood level; to accomplish this they built structures capable of addressing tenant grievances with direct action, in a manner similar to the way radical unions operated in the workplace. For the Autonomia, struggle could not be compartmentalized into neat divisions and so their project emphasized listening to their community and acting on their material needs, while injecting a broader program for political action. This led to several large scale occupations, rent strikes and other direct actions that both secured their neighbourhoods and advanced a radical anti-capitalist program. While not explicitly centred on anti-gentrification efforts, these struggles opened up the neighbourhood as a site of organization and contestation, a development necessary for successful anti-gentrification work.

It seems positively utopian to argue that such formations could quickly emerge in today's neoliberal metropolis. North American anarchist politics, especially as it applies to anti-gentrification, seems irreducibly tethered to either pole of the continuum. But, as the example of the Italian Autonomia demonstrates, the essential prerequisite for action that bridges this divide is the construction of a tenant or neighbourhood identity, just as effective action around labour struggles requires identification as a worker. In order to build a neighbourhood assembly, residents must both believe in a common identity and the capacity of collective action to address their material needs. The autonomist theory of the social factory provided this groundwork in the Italian context. Lacking that in post-industrial North America, the project of building neighbourhood assemblies becomes one of creating these foundational prerequisites in the communities we live in.

We would argue that community-focused direct action campaigns resulting from social research and lived participation in our communities (rent strikes, anti-police brutality campaigns, and actions taken to stop evictions and deportations) can both produce concrete gains and protect existing services for community members under attack, while serving as intermediary building blocks for producing larger-scale grassroots structures. Over the past twenty years in North America, many groups have sprung up that mirror this trajectory. In New York City, Movement for Justice in El Barrio is an immigrant-led anti-gentrification group that has organized with tenants in Spanish Harlem via *encuentros*, which are open assemblies designed to listen to residents' concerns about and form plans of action to see that they are addressed. This format has produced a large, diverse movement against the ongoing gentrification of East Harlem that has won several major victories against landlords and developers, all the while emphasizing the root of the process as being neoliberal capitalism. Less specifically, the solidarity network (solnet) model also broadly reflects this understanding, offering the flexibility to respond to various neighbourhood struggles while forging ties among participants. Seen in this light, the solnet format has great possibilities for anti-gentrification struggles. Resistance to a phenomenon as both distributed and localized as gentrification requires new forms of organizing and it is groups like the solnets or spaces like the encuentro that serve as necessary stepping stones for the broader, wider assemblies that could effectively contest the emerging neoliberal consensus that the cities and neighbourhoods we live in are just opportunities for investment and that we, as working-class residents, are merely impediments to the free movement of capital.

Conclusion

The macroeconomic forces that ultimately drive this gentrification are, at least for the moment, firmly beyond our reach: anarchists couldn't change interest rates, even if we wanted to. We can, however, contest these manifestations on the local level, and we should do so with urgency. By building local structures of neighbourhood class power,

we delineate physical territorial gains that can be defended from further capitalist incursions, and which can inspire others facing similar conditions. Gentrification is a relatively ubiquitous phenomenon within the developed world, and so it represents a potential entry point of anti-capitalist resistance for almost anybody. As these struggles proliferate, grounding themselves in different neighbourhoods, they can network together, thereby increasing their participants' collective capacity to attack and defend.

Anti-gentrification struggles elucidate the connection between the macrocosmic economic forces of capitalism and the microcosmic experiences of everyday life in our neighbourhoods. In this way, struggling against gentrification can represent a negotiation between the global and the local that ought to prefigure all anarchist thought and praxis. The fight against the transformation city into a desert of capital grounds us in a place and time: we struggle where we live, but this itself is a contingent fact. In cities, towns, slums and neighbourhoods across the planet, the same struggles are being enacted by the same class, differing only in minutiae like zoning regulations or height restrictions. In electrical engineering, a short circuit is a connection between nodes that results in an overcharge of energy, possibly causing damage, fire, etc. We believe that anti-gentrification work can prove a short circuit to the smooth functioning of capital, a coming together of atomized people and neighbourhoods to assert their power collectively and provide the small spark, the brief flare, that can place the entire system in jeopardy.

COMMON CAUSE

Common Cause is an anarchist communist organization based in Ontario, Canada with branches in Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo, London, and Toronto. For further information please visit our website at linchpin.ca or contact a branch closest to you.