MORTAR

Revolutionary Journal of
Common Cause Anarchist Organization

Volume 2

MORTAR: VOLUME 2
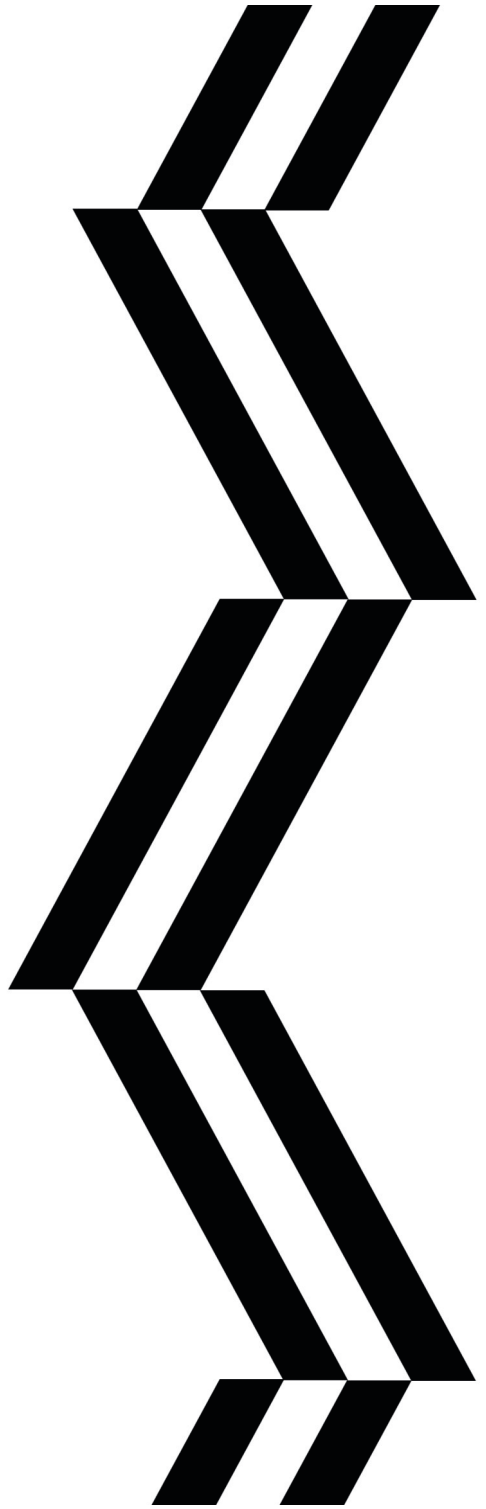*Revolutionary journal of Common Cause Anarchist Organization*

Common Cause is a specific anarchist-communist organization, founded in 2007, with active branches in Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo and Toronto, Ontario. We believe that anarchists must participate in campaigns for social, environmental and economic justice as an organized force in order to help spread anarchist principles of direct action, autonomy and self-organization amongst wider segments of the class. We believe that the best way of spreading these principles is through active participation in struggle, and to this end, our members are actively engaged in many different fronts of the class war, ranging from labour and community struggles, to campus organizing, Indigenous solidarity and prison abolition work. As part of our larger fight against capitalism and the State, we seek out intermediate struggles and methods that challenge the institutions of patriarchy, white supremacy and disableism that serve to divide the class and perpetuate oppressive hierarchies based on gender, sexuality, race and "ability".

For more information on Common Cause, and how you might join, please contact the branch nearest to you.

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EDITORIAL
Try again. Fail again. Fail better.

This journal is the product of an arduous collective process. It is the end result of hours of intense discussions, multi-city meetings, collective research and writing, followed by more intense discussions and late-night editing sessions. It is also, we hope, a contribution towards a broader conversation amongst anarchists and anti-authoritarian revolutionaries – particularly here in Canada, but also amongst our international comrades – on where we're at, and how we can best move our struggles forward.

Many of the arguments and conclusions presented in this journal will be controversial. While it is not our intention to offend, we have nonetheless sought to look at hard questions, and to draw honest conclusions. In doing so, we are motivated by a sincere desire to shift not only the discourse of the revolutionary Left, but also our praxis. We find that our members are shaped and influenced by many of the problems that we identify as existing within the broader activist culture, and we hold no illusions that we are somehow exempt from the criticisms we outline in these pages. This journal was initially conceived of, and continues to serve as a tool for sharpening our politics and our members' individual and collective development. This is often a painful process, but one that we believe is worth the effort.

Many of these articles will be self-referential, and sometimes the themes will overlap. In constructing our criticisms of what are often taboo subjects within the anarchist and broader activist Left, we have opted to speak from our own experiences. We believe that this is

the only principled means of framing our arguments, and also the most useful in terms of analyzing our own shortcomings. We hope to elicit feedback from other organizations and individuals, both from those who agree with the conclusions we have reached, and even more crucially, from those who don't.

We kick off this volume with an article that begins with an examination of anti-organizationalist sentiment within the North American anarchist movement, then shifts into a brief history of Common Cause's structural and political development over the past six years. It concludes with some projections on the form and direction of future urban struggles, and shares some of the concrete lessons we've learned from our study and recent experiences with neighbourhood organizing in southern Ontario.

We then shift our sights to a critique of anarchist struggles against, and often paradoxically in support of, the Welfare State. This article focuses on the reformist strategies pursued by much of the activist Left around social assistance programs – strategies that are often uncritically adopted by many anarchists engaged in labour and anti-poverty organizing. In contrast to these strategies, we examine alternative approaches to welfare provision that centre around the anarchist principle of mutual aid, and which can fit into part of a broader strategy of building revolutionary dual power.

The third article will continue this exploration of the so-called "anarchist community", drawing inspiration from Luigi Fabbri's classical polemic text *Bourgeois Influences on Anarchism*. In attempting to bring this analysis up to date, we focus on the influence of conspiracy theorists, health and care mysticism, and academic obscurantism on both the contemporary anarchist movement and the broader working class. We also explore how our own response to these influences has often been insufficient, and can often lead to a crude class reductionism and bitter denunciations. Both of which amount to unproductive, and eminently negative reactions to what should be issues of grave concern to us.

Next, we explore our own often inadequate experiences of attempting to contend with sexual violence – both within our own organization and the broader Left, and as a structural underpinning of

patriarchal capitalist relations. We critique several problematic tendencies that we see as common to contemporary community accountability processes, while stressing the need to build a shared politics around sexual violence that incorporates a more realistic understanding of the interlocking systems of oppression and structural forces that give rise to rape culture. We end this article by looking at how organizing against Men's Rights Activists (MRAs) and struggles around reproductive justice can be catalytic in the development of a feminist movement that can more effectively contend with sexual violence in society at large.

We conclude the journal with an examination of anti-oppression politics, as they have come to be understood and practiced within much of the radical activist community. In this article, we interrogate the role of academia and the Non-Profit Industrial Complex in recuperating the dynamic struggles of the 1970s and 1980s, leading to an increased focus on discourse that often obscures the underlying structural conditions that reproduce systems of privilege and oppression. We contrast these political approaches with examples of struggles against racial and gender-based oppression that have achieved material successes, while attempting to distill lessons that can be used to inform struggles waged within our own context.

As we stated in the editorial for the first volume of *Mortar*, the conclusions drawn within these pages should not be read as the definitive word of Common Cause. Though they are conclusions that have been reached, to as great an extent as possible, collectively, they are not set in stone, nor are they shared equally by all members of our organization. For us, anarchism is a social and political process of development. We hope that readers will see this journal as an invitation to honestly question their own analysis and practice, and to share with us any misgivings or disagreements that our conclusions have provoked. You can get in touch with us by emailing mortar@riseup.net.

In solidarity,
Common Cause

CHARTED AND UNCHARTED TERRITORIES:
Common Cause and the Role of the Anarchist Organization

1 Kitchener-Waterloo member, 1 Toronto member, and 2 Hamilton members

I. On the Question of Organization

> "The decision by a group of people, no matter how few, to commit themselves to collective and protracted struggle and to reject 'on the go' politics, shapes everything that follows."
> – Grace Lee Boggs (1972), *Organization Means Commitment*

These days, the phrase "anarchist organization" is widely seen as a contradiction of terms. For those whose opinions of anarchism are shaped by dominant society, this is perfectly understandable. In the crude caricature fashioned by capitalist media depictions and reinforced through popular culture, anarchy is synonymous with chaos, spontaneous violence, and a vicious, Hobbesian state of nature.

However, more pertinent to us is that even within anarchist circles, the idea of an anarchist organization is often seen either as an oxymoron, or more commonly, as an inherently authoritarian structure somewhat akin to a Leninist cult. And as anarchists who have derived considerable practical benefits from our participation in a formally structured organization, we feel that much of this confusion boils down to a misunderstanding of terms and history.

There has always been well-defined distinctions between different types of revolutionary organization. Whereas Marxist-Leninists of various stripes have sought to lead the masses to revolution under the strategic direction of a vanguard party (with the goal of seizing state power for themselves), anarchists have sought to create, through the establishment of specific anarchist organizations, a "vanguard of ideas." That is, through direct participation in struggle, and through the creation and distribution of revolutionary propaganda, anarchists have historically attempted to provide insight on movements of the class, while popularizing anarchist strategy and tactics. Because specific anarchist organizations yield no kind of authoritative power, nor do they seek to, they rely solely on the strength of their ideas and practice to influence others.

Going back to the founding of classical anarchism, Mikhail Bakunin viewed the ideal anarchist organization as a decentralized federation able to direct a people's revolution "... by a force that is invisible ... that is not imposed on anyone ... [and] deprived of all official rights and significance." He argued that organization was necessary in order to clarify ideas, maximize the revolutionary classes' strength, and contend with the massive power and resources of the capitalist class.

Ericco Malatesta, too, made his stance on organizationalism clear in his arguments against syndicalism:

> ... anarchists must work among themselves for anarchist ends, as individuals, groups and federations of groups. In the same way as there are, or should be, study and discussion groups, groups for written or spoken propaganda in public, cooperative groups, groups working within factories and workshops, fields,

barracks, schools, etc., so they should form groups within the various organizations that wage class war.

Nestor Makhno's bitter accounts of anarchists' activity during the Russian Revolution consistently stressed the importance of formal organization. Writing from exile in Paris, following the success of the Bolshevik counter-revolution, he suggested that "... had anarchists been closely connected in organizational terms and had they in their actions abided strictly by a well-defined discipline, they would never have suffered such a rout. … Disorganization reduced them to political impotence." The level of connection and revolutionary discipline that Makhno describes can only be achieved through the establishment of formal anarchist organizations.

In our contemporary context, formal organizations have fallen out of favour to the extent that a fetishization of informal structures and affinity groups has become popularized through the spread of insurrectionist and post-structuralist theory. Adherents of the former camp are often heavily influenced by the theories of Alfredo Bonanno, whereas those in the latter are often inspired by the writings of academics such as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deluze, and Félix Guattari.

For our purposes, we will attempt to address the critiques made by insurrectionists, as they come from fellow anarchist comrades, with whom we share a common aim (and, as some of our critiques of post-structuralist and related thought are laid out in the other articles in this journal). In the pamphlet *Insurrectionary Anarchy and Revolutionary Organization*, a member of the Black Wave Communist Collective, writing under the pseudonym Sabotage suggests that much of the debate around formal versus informal organization is based on a false dichotomy.

Insurrectionist anarchism, in its contemporary form, emerged from the struggles that took place in Italy in the 1970s, and was centred around a critique of closed militarist groups such as the Red Brigades, as well as anarchists grouped into either specific organizations of synthesis (such as the Anarchist Federation of Italy, or FAI) or specific organizations of tendency (such as the platformist Anarchist Groups of Proletarian Action, or GAAP). As Sabotage

explains:

> It was out of this reality that a third type of specific organization emerged, around local groups based on affinity. Affinity in this scenario did not mean that anarchists should just organize with their friends, or not organize at all like the anti-organizational individualists, but based around clarifying where comrades are at based on political discussion, analysis, and most importantly through experience working with each other in struggle. In short, a focus on building unity with others through praxis.

Particularly in North America, affinity groups are often spoken of dreamily as something of a non-organization. The reality, however, is that any group of people consciously working together is an organization of sorts, whether they want to conceive of themselves that way or not. Affinity groups are deliberately determined associations of comrades who seek to build a shared politics through action—the same as any more formal organization. Structured organizations simply tend to be more deliberate, and thus more effective with this process.

In other cases, affinity groups are temporary associations formed purely on the basis of executing a specific tactic, such as those carried out during participation in a black bloc. While this makes immense practical sense, it should be noted that this tactical role of affinity groups does not preclude the presence of a more long-term anarchist organization—and in fact the existence of one can only compliment the other. An unfortunate consequence of the absence of more long-term specific anarchist organizations in North America has been that anarchists often spend a disproportionate amount of time focused on tactics, without giving much thought to the very strategy that those tactics are intended to implement.

As we have already mentioned, within much of the anarchist milieu the very idea of formal organizational structure is often labeled authoritarian—but it is worth stressing that the question of authoritarianism here is incidental. Jo Freeman, in her critical essay *The Tyranny of Structurelessness*, addressed this point by noting that

the development of informal structures (or cliques) are inevitable in any organization. The absence of formal structures to put a check on these groups' influence thereby contributes to the creation of an unaccountable elite. Freeman was addressing her arguments to the so-called "unstructured organizations" of the 1970s women's liberation movement, but her point remains salient: informal structures and affinity groups are prone to authoritarianism, just the same as any formal organization. In fact, informal groups of comrades, more often than not, lack any kind of structure to prevent or discipline harmful behaviour, thereby contributing to an informal authoritarianism often centred around friendships and the cult of personality.

Anarchists' mistrust of formal organizations is not entirely without merit—countless leftist parties and organizations are to thank for decades of betrayal, recuperation, and outright repression of anarchist militants. Having said that, we feel it is extremely short-sighted to ignore the vast amount of time, effort, and rigorous debate that anarchist theorists and militants have put into thinking up and creating systems of organization in line with anarchist principles.

The key to finding the proper organizational structure is to avoid "organization for the sake of organization." Specific anarchist organizations must always be linked to the concrete struggles and needs of the class, and should never outlive their usefulness. They must be flexible, and adaptive to the ebbs and flow of material conditions.

As members of Common Cause, we feel very strongly that the current state of anarchism in southern Ontario requires a serious change in trajectory. We are plagued by cliquey social-circles, pet projects, a general lack of strategy, and correspondingly poor tactics. We need a more sustained and collaborative approach to revolutionary organizing. This requires formal, ongoing spaces for collective thought, scrutiny, mutual support, and development. It has been our experience that these things are done best in formal political organizations. This is not to suggest that these types of organizations are without their challenges, or that they somehow accomplish these goals automatically. Organization is simply a vehicle, or structure for sharpening our praxis collectively. As the Batko Group succinctly put

it, in a postscript to an issue of their journal *Dissident* entitled *Insurrection and Anarchy*: "form is always dependent on the capacity of initiative."

II. Common Cause's Historical Development

"Only if we recognize the relationship of organization to class struggle can we be clear about what is possible and practical in the here and now."
- Solidarity Federation (2009), *Strategy and Struggle*

To give some context to these arguments, we will now look briefly at Common Cause's historical development over the past several years, focusing specifically on those themes most relevant to the subject of this article. As such, this should not be taken as an exhaustive history of Common Cause. Instead, we will focus on three main areas of organizational development: a) our partial shift from platformism (as we practiced it) to a more cadre-inspired form of organization, b) a move away from what in practice amounted to a simplistic "rank and file" movement strategy to our present disillusionment with that strategy and the institutional Left, c) and to a lesser extent, a partial move away from workplace organizing to a growing focus on territorial-based neighbourhood organizing. As we will attempt to demonstrate, these developments have been the result of our theories being tested in practice, and an increased intellectual engagement with a broader range of revolutionary thought and traditions.

From WSM-style Platformism to Cadre-lite
Common Cause was founded in the summer of 2007, emerging out of discussions between a small group of anarchist communists from the platformist tradition. The main driving force for this process came from a crew of Irish anarchists with a combined experience of decades organizing in the platformist organization, the Workers Solidarity Movement (WSM). The others involved were mainly either past members of the North Eastern Federation of Anarchist Communists

(NEFAC) Toronto collective, or individuals otherwise somewhere in the NEFAC orbit. With the WSM widely seen as a successful example of a platformist organization, and given the key role played by long-time WSM members in the organization's founding, the WSM was very much the model that we sought to replicate in Ontario. In other words, platformism was the main influence on the organization in its initial years.

The context of anarchist organizing in Ontario (and largely in North America) is also important in terms of explaining why platformism was initially chosen as the core political tendency of Common Cause. At the time, platformism seemed to a lot of us to provide the only approach for an anarchism linked to the historical anarchist movement; that is, an anarchism rooted in class struggle and focused on building both a specific anarchist organization and combative mass organizations of the working class.

This was important because by 2007, nearly a decade after the start of the anti-globalization cycle of protests, many of us had come to see major weaknesses in the affinity group, informal anarchist organizing projects centred largely on summit demonstrations, or their localized equivalents. Platformism presented an attractive alternative to those of us looking for a political organization and tradition that could go beyond the limitations of these anti-globalization networks, which many of us had been, or continued to be a part of. In other words, this was not a wholesale rejection of this model, but a means of surpassing some of its perceived limitations.

Also, as far as the anarchist movement itself was concerned, platformism was, to put it mildly, far more appealing to us than the then not-insignificant primitivist scene, as well as the often overlapping "lifestyle anarchist" scene. Neither of these approaches offered much to anarchists like us, who for a number of reasons (not least of which being a more blue/pink collar class background), were more attracted to the classical anarchist tradition.

As with every new political project, over the next few years we underwent our share of growing pains, while managing to maintain a decent level of internal and external activity. More importantly for a new political group, we survived—mainly by attracting a small but

steady stream of new members that brought new energy and experience to the organization. However, throughout this period (roughly between 2007 and 2011) we found ourselves running into a recurrent problem of recruiting new members that we would soon come to realize did not share a proper understanding of the core politics of the organization. In other words, we began to identify a tension between growing in numbers and maintaining theoretical and tactical unity. This realization was driven home by the loss of an entire branch in 2010 almost at once, followed by the slow death of a second branch over the following two years.

This contradiction was made worse by our emphasis on growing quickly. Inspired by the WSM's stated goal of becoming a political organization of thousands, we did not develop sufficient standards for membership, or devote enough time to internal work (study groups, collective writing, etc.) It's more than debatable whether platformism calls for the establishment of a mass anarchist organization, but that's how we understood it at the time. And we believed that this growth would be achieved by maintaining a fairly high level of external work—both in terms of propaganda and work inside mass organizations like the unions. In other words, we did not place sufficient focus on developing our members' politics (what we call internal education), largely because we stretched ourselves too thin. In hindsight, we would have benefited at the time from a more inward-focus and from being more deliberate with our external organizing.

This problem of member retention was made worse by the Ontario-wide scale of our organization, which made internal work more time consuming and expensive. It's not the only reason, but the local branches that have been around the longest are located in cities that are less than 100 km from one another, while the branches that we've lost have been those that were the furthest away from this geographical core—the most far-flung, for example, was located over 400 km away from the nearest branch.

Starting in 2010-2011, a number of new members joined Common Cause, just around the same time as some of the key founding members left (the WSM exiles returned to Ireland for

personal reasons). These new members, who were often experienced militants, exposed the organization to a wider range of political traditions and tendencies, such as the contemporary Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), insurrectionist anarchism, especifismo, various strands of libertarian Marxism and the Black liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

During this same time period, a great deal of new anarchist and libertarian Marxist theory was being produced, which we became aware of thanks to our growing international networks and of course, the Internet. A key concept that the organization studied closely was the "intermediate-level analysis" (more on this in the following section) developed by the anarchist communist group, Miami Autonomy and Solidarity (MAS). We also began looking at the organizing and writings of new cadre groups such as the Black Orchid Collective and the wider tendency that they belong to.

So to summarize, we were being exposed to new ideas, while our own experience was telling us that our platformist-inspired model needed changing. It was within this context that the quality over quantity model of cadre groups, combined with the application of an intermediate level strategy seemed to provide an answer to one of our key problems. Here was a potential solution that provided us a way to maintain a high level of political unity among members, while allowing us to work with and mobilize a broader layer of sympathetic militants without the need for, or emphasis on them joining Common Cause. The political organization of hundreds or thousands of members that we had originally envisioned could be replaced by a smaller, but more politically coherent organization working within larger intermediate networks of militants to influence the direction of mass struggles. This, in broad strokes, is the organizational strategy that Common Cause is now pursuing. Its main features are a higher bar for membership, a greater focus on developing our members' politics, a greater commitment to subjecting our members' external organizing to collective scrutiny and direction, and an orientation towards movement building that puts the emphasis on growing networks of anti-authoritarian revolutionaries—rather than on growing Common Cause itself.

It should be emphasized that we have come to see that developing an internal culture of collective scrutiny and "thinking together" is the foundation upon which successful practice is built. It is also the most challenging aspect of this strategy, because the tendency has been for members (especially our strongest and most active militants) to act as free agents in their organizing—within the bounds of Common Cause's core politics, but with little collective direction beyond that. We can see now that too often in the past this amounted to us acting more like an activist club whose members would meet regularly to inform one another of our activity, than as a political organization where the organizing efforts of individual members is strongly guided by the collective politics of the organization—politics developed through a process of deep discussion and intense, but constructive criticism.

This internal cultural shift continues to be a work in progress. Realistically, for the immediate future we will continue to face both individual resistance to change, as well as our fair share of collective mistakes. There is also, of course, a fine line between constructive criticism and being shitty to one another. These factors are also made more difficult by the persistent influence of a broader activist culture that tends to shy away from critical discussion of tactics and campaigns (lest friends offend each other) and has little patience for the hard work of developing theory. One consequence of this culture is the preponderance of actions guided by considerations of what issues are currently trendy, or by the repetition of worn-out tactics. Common Cause members are not immune from this influence, and this is something we continue to struggle against internally.

Nevertheless, in a relatively short time we have made some important steps in developing an internal culture of collective thinking and scrutiny. The most visible manifestations of this shift have included the replacement of our quarterly *Linchpin* newspaper with a theoretical journal (and its attendant emphasis on the collective writing and editing of articles) and the tripling of our organization-wide Day Schools (day or weekend long conferences of internal workshops and strategy sessions). It has also been marked by a de-emphasis from being present at every (often ritualistic) protest or action and the

organizing of public events such as speaking tours, in favour of setting aside more of our members' limited time for study groups and strategic discussion of our organizing, which otherwise remains at a high level of activity.

From "Organizing the Rank and File" to "Building Autonomy" and Open Conflict with the Institutional Left

The testing of our ideas by practice—specifically our experiences organizing inside the institutional Left—produced another important change in our politics: the move towards open conflict with the living dead subjects of what remains of the historic working class movement.

By 2013, several of our members had been organizing for five or more years inside their unions—above all in universities as precarious academic workers—and inside student unions—mainly within locals affiliated with the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS). The approach that had guided much of our mass work up to that point was a formula prominent in platformist circles: organize with your co-workers/classmates inside the unions, because despite their many problems, they remain the main mass organizations of the class. Following this formula, we worked inside the structures of the institutional Left to reform them, and to build up the militancy and activity of rank and file members. The only real clear direction that we gave ourselves in doing this work was that we were not to take up positions that were not elected by the rank and file. Everything else, such as running for executive positions or working within the legal labour relations framework, was fine so long as we believed that what we were doing increased the activity and militancy of the rank and file. Accordingly, members at various times served on local executives, participated in several rounds of state-sanctioned bargaining and strike mobilizations (including a short-lived strike of teaching assistants [TAs] at McMaster University in 2009), did a fair amount of solidarity strike support (with the Canadian Union of Postal Workers [CUPW], Ontario Public Service Employees Union [OPSEU], Canadian Auto Workers/Unifor [CAW/Unifor], various Canadian Union of Public Employees [CUPE] locals) and attempted to reform their organizations through available institutional channels such as

mobilizing around grievances and bargaining, changing local bylaws, moving motions at provincial and federal conferences, and other similar efforts.

Following this period those of us most involved in this work had become thoroughly disillusioned with our efforts. While warning signs could be seen prior to this, the rather rude wake-up call that our approach was not working came in 2012, with the failed strike mobilizations of CUPE 416 (City of Toronto outdoor workers) and CUPE 3902 (TAs at the University of Toronto). To make a long and complicated story short, in both cases, members in Toronto spent a significant amount of time preparing for strikes that were ultimately contained by the union bureaucracy. This did not happen without a fight. For example, at CUPE 3902, one of our members was instrumental in mobilizing their fellow TAs towards both a record turnout for the strike vote (unheard of in the sector) and a record strong strike mandate. Despite this, our member's efforts were ultimately recuperated by entrenched union staffers, who used the high level of mobilization to negotiate a contract with slightly less concessions than they otherwise would have received, while simultaneously demobilizing the membership in order to avoid a strike.

This experience, as well as other similar, if less dramatic examples inside other unions, began a discussion inside the organization that would fairly quickly end with us concluding that fighting on the terrain of the institutional Left is a losing battle. Our goal had always been, and still is to go beyond the limits of the existing bureaucratic and legalistic union form—or its equivalent on campuses and the non-profit sector. We learned the hard way that we could not fight and win, no matter how well we organized, against the entrenched Left bureaucracy as long as we played within the rules that they had spent decades crafting and testing against exactly the kind of organizing we were doing. As long as we did this, our efforts, despite our intentions, would amount to serving the function of a "loyal opposition." Our organizing would ultimately be made to serve and strengthen the institutional Left, rather than destroy it. It's truly depressing to think of how many people we inspired to action only to see them ultimately recruited by the promise of well-paying careers

doing "good work" for the working class. Or even worse, how many workers and others we convinced to go along with the faux-fightbacks of the institutional Left, despite their better instincts. After a short period of reflection we decided that instead of playing the role of an unwitting loyal opposition, we should focus on building autonomous organizations—as opposed to rank and file groups based within the legal-institutional framework of unions, student unions and community NGOs.

This decision can and has taken several forms. We very quickly realized that we can ignore the institutional Left completely whenever possible, and that the terrain free of their presence is pretty wide by now, and growing every day. This understanding has been useful in our subsequent neighbourhood organizing in Toronto, and for the Solidarity Networks (SolNets) that all our branches are involved in, to some extent. Or we can organize within and against the institutional Left, while showing no respect for its structures—except, at most, as a temporary tactic. This was the approach taken in the IWW-led organizing efforts during the Porter Airlines refuelers strike at Toronto Island Airport. This campaign saw this international airport shut down three times in "illegal" strike actions (carried out with the aid of the black bloc tactic) that escaped the control of COPE, the union formally representing the workers—at that point, in name only. Another example was a community picket line put up at a local high school in Hamilton on the day that the Liberal provincial government took away teachers' right to strike, without the permission (or even knowledge) of their union.

The massive Quebec student strike in 2012, in which a large percentage of our members participated in a significant way in some form or another, was another big inspiration for our current work. Not only was it the most significant social movement in Canada in decades, it was also initiated by a student federation created by militants who had pursued a strategy of combative syndicalism—that is, who had built a fighting organization outside of the structures of the institutional student Left. The lessons learned here helped to inspire the current and ongoing Canada-wide defederation campaign from the CFS, which our members are active in, and which comes after years of

trying to reform the student federation from within.

It is early still, but so far the impact of this new direction on Common Cause seems to have been to earn us the disdain of those sections of the activist community most loyal to the institutional Left, while bringing us closer to our neighbours, classmates, and co-workers—especially those among them who are already fighting back on their own terms. It is a trade-off that we should have made from the beginning, and one that is unavoidable for any revolutionary organization working to loosen or avoid the zombie-grip of the institutional Left on the precarious struggles of today.

On to Neighbourhood Organizing

To sum up, first, in the six years that Common Cause has been around, we've moved from a contemporary platformist focus on building a large anarchist communist organization, to a contemporary cadre-inspired organizational model. The four platformist principles of theoretical unity, tactical unity, collective responsibility, and federalism remain in our constitution, but how we understand and how we practice our politics has changed. And platformism is now only one influence among a set of other libertarian communist traditions.

Second, we have learned the hard way that if we want to go beyond the limits imposed on class struggle by the institutional Left (and the post-World War II class compromise that, increasingly, only they remain loyal too), we need to build autonomous power outside of the structures of existing mass Left organizations—be they in the form of autonomous worker committees, student mobilizing committees independent from existing student unions and federations, or neighbourhood groups that are disconnected from the non-profit industrial complex, progressive city councillors, and the New Democratic Party (NDP).

Most recently, we have begun to put more of a focus on neighbourhood organizing. This shift was partially influenced by our experiences in the unions. While our members remain active in workplace organizing—mostly within the Toronto IWW, and Hamilton and Kitchener-Waterloo SolNets—we were certainly left with a bitter taste in our mouths after our experiences within the

institutionalized Left. And yet that frustration only nudged us into looking more carefully at our own members' lives, at current class composition and at the strategies of global capital. We don't have the space to properly cover it here, but our internal discussions on this subject have been extensive. These have included dedicating an entire Day School to the topic, numerous branch and organization-wide strategy sessions, reading groups, a handful of external workshops, and one of our members helping to organize the Contested Cities conference, held in Toronto in April of 2013. Some of the resulting analysis from these discussions, and our early research can be seen in the first issue of *Mortar*—especially in the articles *Run This Town: Building Class Power in the City* and *Short Circuit: Towards an Anarchist Approach to Gentrification*. Out of this work has come a decision to focus on the spaces where we live, and on building autonomous institutions of neighbourhood dual power that do not forget the workplace as a key site of struggle.

III. The Anarchist Organization and Neighbourhood Organizing

"The fact that we have brought our focus to the neighbourhood we inhabit spares us from the abstractions and mediations of politics, allows us to measure our success not in meaningless figures like the number of people who come out to a protest, but in very real, increasingly visible quantities, such as the extent to which we know each other, to which we are no longer strangers in our own neighbourhoods, and the extent to which these relations of acquaintance are transforming into relations of material and emotional solidarity."
- Peter Gelderloos (2011) *Reflections for the US Occupy Movement*

While strategy and organizational structure are important, ultimately they are of little consequence if not firmly rooted in practice. With this in mind, we will now share some of the lessons we have learned through our early experiences with neighbourhood organizing, and

some projections on where we hope to go. To do this, we will first elaborate further on something we view as a particularly useful conceptual tool, the "intermediate-level analysis" put forward by Scott Nappalos, a member of the Miami branch of the IWW and former member of MAS.

Both the WSM-inspired platformism that Common Cause originally pursued, and our more recent cadre-inspired organizational structure belong to a broader anarchist tradition known as dual-organizationalism, or "specifism". Implicit in this concept is the idea that there are two different types, or levels of organization: the mass level and the specific/political level. Broadly speaking, under this model the role of the specific anarchist organization is to develop theoretical and strategic cohesion, and a shared anarchist politics, which can then inform its members' participation in struggles on the mass level. This distinction between levels is partially a matter of scale, but also a matter of orientation. The term "mass" is often ascribed to organizations that have large numbers of members, but more importantly, it describes organizations that exist not on the basis of political affinity, but collective self-interest. Specific/political organizations, on the other hand, are often smaller groups of people based around a shared political analysis, which pursue a more long-term strategy in the service of their particular brand of political ideology. As we've noted, platformist organizations, when applying this framework to workplace struggles, often point to unions as the prototypical example of a mass organization. Because of this, one of the primary roles of a platformist organization often becomes to coordinate the activities of their members within a particular union–or within unions more generally–in order to move workplace struggles in a more anarchist direction.

The intermediate-level analysis is a refinement of this model that attempts to paint a more accurate picture of how struggles and campaigns actually play out in the real world. As the name implies, the intermediate level is conceived of as existing between the mass and political level. Intermediate level organizations might be comprised of active members from the mass level and/or a number of militants from the political level who, despite holding different political views, see

the utility in working together to accomplish short to medium-term goals–either by taking on a shared project or coordinating actions within their constituent mass organizations. In keeping with our earlier workplace theme, a good example of an intermediate organization in Toronto would be the Greater Toronto Workers Assembly (GTWA). The GTWA is comprised of members of various trade unions, as well as a hodgepodge of radical leftists loosely united around the idea of building a stronger voice for socialist politics in Toronto. While this is a rather particular example, in practice intermediate organizations dealing with workplace issues can be as simple as a flying squad–a group of individuals who organize together for the sole purpose of demonstrating solidarity with striking workers.

While much of the existing writings on the intermediate level tend to focus on workplace issues, we believe that this model has great utility when applied to neighbourhood organizing. Instead of focusing solely on existing mass organizations (the most obvious corollary on the neighbourhood level being tenant unions and religious/cultural groups), we find it more useful to view the mass level as encompassing the entire neighbourhood itself, as this allows us to deal with the totality of class composition and capital accumulation within a given physical territory. The task for the specific anarchist organization, then, becomes one of organizing within both mass and intermediate organizations to aid in the construction a new mass formation–one which is deliberately fashioned as a self-organized manifestation of working class dual power. We believe that the ideal form that such a formation should take is the neighbourhood assembly—similar to those that have now spread across neighbourhoods in Spain, Greece, Turkey, Brazil, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montreal.

As anarchist communists, we imagine a post-revolutionary society as being composed of a decentralized network of autonomous, self-governing assemblies and councils, where decisions are made collectively by those most directly affected by their outcomes. These local structures would be federated, when necessary, into larger decision-making bodies that could address issues of broader regional significance—such as water and waste management, the maintenance

and construction of critical infrastructure, etc. The level of self-organization that this type of society requires won't emerge out of thin air, but is something that must be built through struggle. Neighbourhood assemblies provide an important medium-term goal in the realization of this vision, as they can serve as prefigurative nodes of dual power with the potential to swell and multiply during periods of heightened social rupture. More than that, the struggles that they serve both as the conduit and political manifestation of, can help to heighten class antagonisms in the broader capitalist society, thereby aiding in the creation of social ruptures themselves.

When we speak of institutions of dual power, we are describing systems that meet the following interconnected criteria:

1. Antagonism to the State and Capital

Institutions of dual power operate as a competing framework of legitimacy, based in opposition to the institutions of the State (politicians, bureaucrats, state-funded NGOs, police, judges, courts, prisons, etc.) and Capital. On the level of a neighbourhood assembly, this might begin with a refusal to dialogue with local politicians and state agencies, non-cooperation with the police, and a healthy aversion to wage labour, slumlords, and the depredations of financial capital.

2. Capacity to provide services traditionally provided by the State and Capital

The seeds of autonomy lie in the capacity to replace the myriad dependencies reproduced under capitalism with new interdependencies firmly rooted in solidarity and mutual aid. In material terms, these services might initially include any number of local experiments, such as projects dealing with conflict resolution and local decision making, independent media, cultural production, autonomous community health clinics, local food security, and labour and skill-sharing mechanisms such as time-banks or mutual aid networks.

3. Prefigurative social relations

The purpose of dual power structures is to create spaces where new

social relationships can be formed that prefigure a society beyond capitalism. A vital component of this work entails understanding the ways in which our class is stratified and shaped by the institutions of white supremacy, patriarchy, and disableism, and confronting the myriad of ways in which these systems manifest in the material world. This means replacing the hierarchal power dynamics that shape everyday life under capitalism with new relationships based on collective and individual autonomy.

4. Expandability/scalability

Systems of dual power are a manifestation of struggles against the dominant order, which must constantly deepen, lest they face stagnation and recuperation. Within a specifically defined territory such as a neighbourhood, the trajectory that this development takes must be measured in terms of the density of organization and the qualitative development of the previous three criteria. So antagonism to the State and Capital might begin with an agreement to not cooperate with police, but should develop towards an understanding that police not be allowed to operate within the physical territory uncontested, whereas a disdain for slumlords should develop towards questioning the sanctity of private property and a corresponding increase in support for expropriation. Spatially, the structures and forms of dual power should be easily reproducible, so that they can serve as an inspiration to those living in other neighbourhoods who want to form similar institutions.

We believe that building these systems of dual power in the here and now is the most important task for anarchist communists living in urban environments. But, it's definitely worth repeating that this theoretical analysis is useless unless it is rooted in action. So, with that in mind, where do we start? We will now offer some potential starting points and strategic considerations, based on our reading of past and present urban struggles, as well as recent experiences over the past three years with urban organizing in the Toronto neighbourhoods of Parkdale and the Downtown East, and to a lesser extent, anti-poverty, anti-police, and SolNet organizing in Kitchener-Waterloo and Hamilton.

Mapping the Terrain

Neighbourhood organizing can often seem like a daunting task, particularly to leftists who have grown accustomed to perpetual hand-wringing about the inadequate level of political consciousness found within the working class. It requires breaking free of the insular circles of speaking events and political workshops that seem to be our bread-and-butter. It means dropping the pretension that our interest in radical politics somehow imbues us with an overriding level of theoretical clarity that is in any way relevant to those who are justifiably turned off by what they identify as the hidden agendas behind our rhetoric. It means meeting people where they're at, which in turn requires humility, empathy, and patience.

Before putting our shoulder to a particular campaign, it is important to spend some time mapping out the surrounding neighbourhood in order to better understand the complex dynamics at play within the territory. Otherwise, anarchists are often prone to ambulance chasing, or cycling through a laundry list of projects (SolNets, Food Not Bombs, Cop-Watch, etc.) in the vain hope that something will stick. Also, this should be obvious, but it is nonetheless worth stressing that anarchists should be rooted in the neighbourhoods where they organize. The saviour complex so prevalent among much of the revolutionary Left is a rather disgusting and transparent attempt at self-validation, and this dynamic is only compounded when activists parachute themselves into areas because their analysis tells them that material conditions are ripe for revolution, and then pick up and leave as soon as things get tough.

The first step in this process might be figuring out the territorial boundaries of the neighbourhood, if these are not well-established. As cities undergo gentrification, neighbourhoods are often given trendy new names as part of a rebranding campaign aimed at attracting investment and new, wealthier residents. These artificial hamlets are usually carved out of existing working class neighbourhoods that have their own histories and shared cultural identities. An example in Toronto would be South Cabbagetown, a partially gentrified area in the city's downtown east end that has historically been part of the working class neighbourhood of Regent

Park. Anarchists should be particularly attentive to these rebranding efforts, as they point to potential sites and agents of class conflict.

Once the territorial boundaries of a neighbourhood are well established, the next task should be to begin researching the area's physical geography and class composition. Where is housing most concentrated, and where is it more diffuse? What is the proportion of renters to homeowners? Who are the major landlords/property owners in the area? Where are the schools, hospitals, community centres, and other community/service hubs located? Where are the areas that people congregate–the spaces of encounter where activity in the neighbourhood takes place? Where do the people who live in the area work? Where do they shop? What types of working class and/or community organizations currently exist? What about past organizations or campaigns from recent history? Why did these campaigns succeed or fail? Are there any resident or business improvement associations in the area? If so, who are on their board of directors, and where do they live and work? What are their ties to local politicians and the police, and how are they involved in ongoing gentrification efforts? What are the most apparent sources of class antagonism (gentrification, slumlords, heavy handed police or immigration-enforcement agents, etc)? What are the main contradictions within the class (racism, sexism, anti-immigrant sentiment, homophobia, etc)?

These are some of the questions that an anarchist organization should attempt to answer before its members jump directly into organizing. No neighbourhood is exactly alike, and there is no cookie-cutter formula to follow. In order to be strategic in our efforts, we need to know the terrain we're operating in.

Getting Down to it

Any anarchist strategy for neighbourhood organizing should seek to exacerbate class tensions, while contributing to the development of a combative neighbourhood identity. There are a number of ways to do this, and different approaches are called for in different situations. In some cases, it might make sense to join established organizations that are already active in the neighbourhood, and in some others it might

make more sense to start new organizations/campaigns. The important point is that these decisions should be based on existing conditions, not driven by purely ideological considerations.

Working within existing mass organizations, such as tenant unions and community associations, poses both benefits and pitfalls to anarchists. On the one hand, they are often excellent repositories of experience and knowledge about the neighbourhood, and tend to attract some of the most active members of the community. On the other hand, they often possess an entrenched hierarchy with established relationships to agencies and/or local politicians, and therefore tend to channel class antagonism into advocacy and other legalistic avenues. Sympathetic workers at local social agencies can often be vital resources–they may be able to provide free photocopying and access to translators–but ultimately the non-profit corporations that they work for are hamstrung by legal mandates and their reliance on state and private funding streams, so strategies that depend on their cooperation should be avoided.

Intermediate organizations are an important terrain for anarchist organizing, as they draw in the most active members of the community and are generally free from the pitfalls of more established mass organizations and social agencies. They can take many different forms, whether temporary, informal coalitions set up to accomplish a particular goal (such as fighting a school closure or a deportation), long-term single-issue organizations (such as anti-poverty groups) or more dynamic multi-issue organizations. A crucial aspect of intermediate organizations lies in their capacity to develop the class consciousness and militancy of their participants through the shared experience of struggle. Due to their dynamic nature, they are also well suited to make strategic interventions against the cultural and material manifestations of white supremacy, patriarchy, and disableism that divide working class residents of a neighbourhood.

Over the past several years, SolNets have become a sort of go-to intermediate organization for anarchists. Beginning with the launch of Seattle Solidarity in 2008, these networks have since spread to dozens of cities across the United States and Canada–to the extent that they are often referred to as "the Food Not Bombs of workplace

organizing." This rapid proliferation stems from the fact that SolNets are relatively easy to set up, and often crudely effective in achieving their aims—their tactical repertoire often boils down to getting a bunch of people together to brainstorm creative ways to harass bosses and landlords into paying back unpaid wages and stolen rent deposits. Yet despite their popularity, SolNets in many cities have faced recurring problems of limited retention and growth. Their traditional focus on cases where individuals have already lost their jobs or moved out of their apartments means that those who come to rely on their assistance often have little incentive to keep engaged once their particular case has been won. This problem with long-term engagement means that these organizations often run the risk of turning into what essentially amounts to an unfunded social agency—albeit one that engages in direct action pressure tactics. There is nothing inherent to the SolNet model to limit them to these types of actions, and in fact on the neighbourhood level, these networks can easily be repurposed into community groups focused on addressing recurring problems such as landlord harassment, above-market rent increases, and the failure of landlords to deal with pest infestations or needed repairs. At their core, SolNets are essentially just organized mobs. This makes them an ideal structure for addressing a wide variety of grievances within a given neighbourhood. The trick for anarchists is to proactively seek out the day-to-day class antagonisms that people are socialized into viewing as individual burdens, and reframe them as collective problems that require a collective response.

Intermediate organizations offer an effective means of normalizing confrontational tactics and exacerbating class tensions within a given neighbourhood. This makes them indispensable for anarchists seeking to help foster a combative neighbourhood identity. But they are not the only options available, and should be seen as encompassing part of a broader strategy. Resident and business improvement associations are often quite successful in promoting a shared neighbourhood identity (albeit for entirely different purposes), and many of their tactics can be easily replicated and subverted. Community events such as block parties, BBQs and potlucks play an important role in breaking down the atomization of contemporary

urban life that so often proves a barrier to organizing with one's neighbours. These casual get-togethers can also be the sites of discussions on neighbourhood-wide issues that can serve as early precursors to neighbourhood assemblies. Producing and distributing community newsletters can be a way of building up a neighbourhood identity while simultaneously informing local residents of upcoming events and campaigns being carried out by intermediate organizations. Cultural events, such as anti-capitalist music festivals, film screenings, community sports leagues, youth-themed events and theatre troupes also play a constructive role in building up a neighbourhood identity, particularly if they are the products of local residents' self-organization. These types of events can help spread anti-capitalist politics by embedding them in a local counterculture that can sustain itself during lulls or other periods of low conflict. While they are no substitute for confrontational class struggle, they are nonetheless fundamental for the growth and long-term reproduction of neighbourhood autonomy.

Conclusion

It is worth stressing that members of Common Cause view the establishment of neighbourhood assemblies as a strategic medium-term objective - not as an end in and of itself. While not a panacea to the ills of capitalism, the drive to establish territorially based assemblies provides a tangible goal around which to orient our efforts in the here-and-now, and a viable project of working class recomposition that will put us in a more advantageous position to confront future crises. The actions undertaken by these assemblies, their capacity, orientation, and comfort with militant tactics, will vary from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, and will be conditioned, at least in part, by the struggles that go into building them.

Neighbourhood assemblies are political projects, in the literal sense that they seek to serve as the collective decision-making bodies of emergent systems of dual power. But since they exist within a hegemonic system of representative democracy that is fundamentally subservient to the dictates of Capital, their efforts to assert their autonomy will inevitably come into conflict with the dominant system in those areas where politics and economics intersect: namely with

laws protecting private property and the sanctity of the so-called free market. Anarchists will need to be active within the neighbourhood assemblies, making the case for strategies and tactics that treat these conflicts as opportunities for escalation, lest they become occasions for recuperation.

Glimpses of the exciting potential for neighbourhood assemblies can already be seen in cities like Athens, Barcelona, Madrid, Istanbul, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Following the M15 plaza occupation movement that swept through Spain in 2011, twenty autonomous neighbourhood assemblies were established in Barcelona alone (up from about half a dozen that had been functioning previously). These assemblies have since functioned as a kind of glue that holds together a vast network of self-organized initiatives, and have served as feeders to larger, city-wide mobilizations such as general strikes and riotous May Day celebrations.

Neighbourhood assemblies in Canada would face different material conditions than those of Spanish or Greek urban centres, where the effects of neoliberal austerity measures have been more keenly felt by the population. Yet without waiting for things to get worse here (and realizing that they almost certainly will), we can begin to imagine some campaigns that neighbourhood assemblies could attempt to take on in the here and now. For instance, what if a determined and well-organized assembly decided to set its own neighbourhood minimum wage, and enforced this decision through a campaign of targeted economic disruption of those businesses who refused to comply? Or if tenants in a high-rise apartment block all decided to collectively determine their own rent, and resolved that Canadian Border Service Agents not be allowed to enter their building to carry out deportation raids? What if neighbourhood residents took a page out of the Italian auto-reductionists' playbook, and started setting their own public transit fares, or refused, en masse to pay increased rates for their gas/electricity—while simultaneously vowing to defend one another from disconnections?

We don't yet have the answers to these questions—but if you'll kindly bear with us, we intend to find out.

ANARCHISM, THE WELFARE STATE, AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

1 Toronto member, 1 former Toronto member, 2 Kitchener-Waterloo members

Unemployment is a permanent fixture of capitalism. It is not simply the outcome of those who make bad life choices. There are no "cracks" to fall through when the entire foundation is designed with gaping holes. Mass unemployment is not merely a failure to apply a more compassionate capitalism, or a more Keynesian economic model with progressive taxation and better state provisions for the working class. Even the major structural reforms that brought about the post-World War II establishment of the Welfare State never ended unemployment. In fact, in hindsight we can see that these reforms merely set up a system whose subsequent dismantling has left a pacified and disorganized working class in its wake.

For too long, many anarchists have adopted a defensive posture to these issues, focused on the short-term and immediate needs of the unemployed and those on social assistance. Reformist goals cloaked in militant tactics have drawn anarchists like moths to the

flame, and have born little reflective analysis on how appeals to the State could ever truly prefigure our broader goals of mutual aid and revolutionary dual power. In this article we've attempted to find contemporary and historical examples than can potentially aid in realigning this tendency towards a broader revolutionary strategy.

Defining Parameters

Supporting the welfare of people means more than making sure they have the bare minimum needed to survive, but actually meeting their need to live in fulfilling and creative ways. The Welfare State, in the context of a capitalist economy, has built a social safety net that can support people through hard times—such as unemployment insurance and welfare programs that provide unemployed people with often paltry levels of monetary assistance to help them survive while they find themselves in between jobs. These programs, however, are an attempt at stabilizing an unjust and functionally unstable system, and even the inadequate level of protection that they do provide is under attack. The Welfare State emerged out of a history of consolidation of capitalist and state interest across much of the western world, but within the current historical moment capitalist and state actors currently see many taxpayer-funded programs as extraneous and unnecessary. Worse, many members of the working class, swayed by the common-sense rhetoric of belt-tightening so prevalent under the current international regime of austerity, seem to agree.

We will not attempt, given its scale, a comprehensive analysis of all elements of the Welfare State. Instead, this article will focus mainly on the monetary assistance features of the Welfare State, as these social assistance programs—such as Ontario Works (OW), Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), and their counterparts in other provinces and countries—present some of the most visible and obvious examples of how the Welfare State interacts with poor and marginalized populations. Anarchists often paradoxically find themselves struggling to defend the existence of a welfare system that is currently integral for the survival of so many people; in Ontario, anarchists have a long history of participating in groups like the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP), whose fights against

social assistance cuts have produced varied success. Though anarchist criticisms of the Welfare State are numerous, and based on an anti-capitalist and anti-state analysis, an enduring defence of social assistance programs is also fairly common. This contradiction means that very little is practically accomplished in addressing state-delivered social assistance as a faceless, dehumanizing bureaucracy that starves the autonomy of individuals and communities. It is hoped that with this article, we might begin to look at the long-term strategies that might rectify this contradiction.

The advent of state-administered social assistance programs has destroyed pre-existing community support networks, and has instead placed the welfare of people in the hands of professionals. These social assistance programs manage poverty, while ensuring the continued existence of a cheap and dispensable pool of labour for Capital. As anarchists, we must struggle for alternatives to the Welfare State, using strategies that are guided by the principles of self-help, mutual aid and community autonomy. History shows that working class people have the potential to organize our own support systems, which can exist alongside the those administered by the State and don't require us to wait for the dawning of a post-revolutionary utopia. These emergent systems of dual power have revolutionary potential in the struggle to build a better world—a world where the welfare of individuals is the shared responsibility of the communities that they are a part of.

I. Tracing The Roots

The modern Welfare State was constructed, during the post-World War II era, in a similar manner across the western world. Its roots, however, go further back in history—to the consolidation of state power in the sixteenth century. As the Middle Age commons system broke down in England, accelerated with the Enclosure Acts, feudal peasants found themselves thrust into poverty and destitution. In response to the resulting social turmoil that this shift produced, the Church and State intervened with a mix of charity and laws intended to control the social and political lives of the lower classes and unemployed. For example,

an early version of the Poor Law in England, enacted in 1572, simultaneously authorized local parishes to raise money for the poor, while banning begging and vagrancy—which were punishable by whipping. By 1610, English law made it mandatory that each county build a workhouse to put to work "rogues, vagabonds, sturdy beggars, and other idle and disorderly persons."

With the Industrial Revolution, and the entrenchment of capitalism in the nineteenth century in Europe, state legislation began to play a more prominent role in people's private lives. Legislation establishing public healthcare, education, and social assistance was drawn up—not for philanthropic reasons, but as a means to firm up the power of the the new bourgeois elite, while allowing for the expansion of capitalism. The Poor Laws in Britain were developed further. Now, in order to qualify for social assistance, one had to be willing to labour in a workhouse. This created two sections of the poor in relation to the early Welfare State: the deserving, who were favoured with social assistance in exchange for hard labour, and the undeserving, who were denied social assistance because they were suspected of fraud or other deviant behaviour. The Poor Laws stigmatized poor people and helped to sustain the idea that people were impoverished because of their individual character and lack of work ethic. The unemployed, faced with the spectre of the extremely harsh conditions of the poor houses, often reluctantly took jobs where they faced horrendous conditions and obscene levels of exploitation.

As more and more people migrated from rural areas to the growing urban centres, they found themselves living in crowded conditions, forced to work under horrible conditions in order to support themselves. Working class organizations began to spring up, and their members waged intense battles for increased wages, shorter hours, the enforcement of safer working conditions, and a decrease and eventual end to child labour. While these reforms were substantial gains for the working class, capitalism adjusted and continued to develop.

In addition to these early struggles to reform capitalism, workers engaged in building and managing their own organizations to support one another. Colin Ward, in *The Welfare Road We Failed to*

Take writes that "in the nineteenth century the newly-created British working class built up from nothing a vast network of social and economic initiatives based on self-help and mutual aid." These included "friendly societies, building societies, sick clubs, coffin clubs, clothing clubs, up to enormous federated enterprises like the trade union movement and the co-operative movement." In other words, workers built up their own institutions to support one another and their families without the need to depend on the State. Without going into the various anarchist critiques of trade unions and co-ops, in terms of their lack of viable support for the unemployed, friendly societies demonstrate a potentially useful tool for building solidarity within our class outside of state institutions.

These friendly societies were self-governing mutual aid associations, formed by working class people with the intention of taking care of one another in times of sickness, accident, old age, death, and to support widows and orphans. They were not charities, in that a benevolent few who were well off weren't supporting an underclass, it was instead understood that at any given time a person might need support, or might have to give support to those suffering the cruel beatings perpetuated by capitalism. Over time, as the number of these societies grew, they began to federate. It is thought that by the beginning of the twentieth century, 75% of the British working class belonged to these societies. Beginning at around the same time, the Liberal government undertook a reform of social assistance programs, passing legislation such as the 1911 National Insurance Act. By 1913, almost 2.5 million workers had unemployment coverage from National Insurance, and 15 million were insured for sickness. This nationalization of insurance in Britain undermined the friendly societies, and they soon fell apart.

Between the two World Wars, struggles for improvements in working and living conditions reached a fever pitch. In Canada, militant unions of the unemployed grew to such large proportions that Prime Minister R.B. Bennet attempted to restrain their growing numbers by segregating them in rural work camps. This was predicated on social policies derived directly from the Poor Laws and workhouses of Britain. Work camps were a response to the dangerous

levels of unemployment brought about by the Great Depression, and were seen as a means of transporting the increasingly agitated and organized unemployed out of urban centres and into isolated camps, where they could then be forced to labour for scraps of food. Undeterred, these unemployed workers formed the Relief Camp Workers Union, and other similar organizations that operated under the umbrella of the Association of Unemployed Workers.

In British Columbia, unemployed people escaped from these camps *en masse*, riding the rails to Vancouver, where they often acted as armed muscle for striking workers. Unfortunately, this movement soon changed tactics, coalescing around the On-To-Ottawa-Trek, which was then brutally crushed in Regina. This tactical shift demonstrated a decided deference to the State. The government of the day, despite its violent suppression of this movement, is credited with forcing the adoption of new widespread unemployment insurance changes and greater government funding for work programs in the early 1940s. Speaking about the US, but relevant as well to the Canadian movements of the time, Rhonda F. Levine argues, in *Class Struggle and the New Deal*, that governments and capitalists alike saw in the organizing efforts of the working class a truly revolutionary potential that posed an existential threat to their continued dominance. They responded with concessions to keep worker militancy in check, and, states Levine, what followed "by the end of the decade [was] a general consensus in support of the existing political and economic order." In the pre-World War II period, workers, in league with the masses of unemployed, had real power that governments and capitalists were compelled to listen to—but this power was recuperated through the shift towards reform and promise of increased social assistance programs.

This new arrangement persisted for the next two decades, and was further enshrined in 1966, with the passage of the Canada Assistance Plan Act. This legislation developed the notion of social assistance as a right of citizenship, rather than a privilege, and was connected to rhetoric around the "war on poverty" launched by Prime Minister Lester Pearson. This was a golden age of Keynesian economics, and social assistance in Canada took on the elements of an

entitlement. This lessened, but did not erase the punitive morality that previously steered the system. As a new cycle of recession hit Canada during the energy crisis of 1973-74, however, the sense of social assistance as entitlement began to diminish over concerns of too much government spending.

Amidst the global capitalist restructuring that heralded the shift towards neoliberalism, governments began to address budget deficits by slashing social assistance programs. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, various governments fashioned together a social assistance system we are familiar with today—the workfare program. Instead of the idea of unemployed and poor people being automatically entitled to social assistance, workfare programs harken back to the Poor Laws of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. Once again, the poor are judged as either deserving or undeserving of assistance. Modern social assistance programs are centred on coercing people to engage in waged labour—no matter how inadequate the pay, or how brutal the conditions. Despite their impressive scope, the militant reformists within unemployed movements were only able to achieve temporary concessions from the State. The reforms that they fought so hard for were eventually raked away, as soon as the broader cycles of economic decline made it politically tenable to do so.

II. Where To Go From Here?

Since the days of politicians like Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, and more recently Mike Harris and successive Liberal provincial governments in Ontario, anarchists have sometimes found themselves in the awkward position of fighting to maintain state-administered welfare services. But if we don't want to participate in actions that give politicians campaign leverage, and if we are not interested in efforts that ultimately serve to increase people's vested interest in the State we must do more. We cannot allow the state to further consolidate its grip on everyday life. While we might join with others to struggle for increases to social assistance rates, or against the closure of homeless shelters, anarchists must work as well to construct preferable alternatives.

However, we question the notion that long-term strategy is a serious consideration for many anarchists today. In addressing welfare programs or unemployment—especially in North America—defensive struggles still remain at the forefront. Though varying slightly from group to group, calls for action like that put forward by the Workers Solidarity Movement are common: "[w]hat is needed is not token protests but a mass militant campaign which is opposed to all cuts and attacks on services." Similarly, in Ontario many anarchists remain active within organizations like the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP)—which disrupts Liberal Party fundraisers, protest in front of the provincial government at Queens Park, and demands the end of cuts and increases to existing social assistance rates. Though the tactics employed by these forms of organizations are often disruptive and intense, they do not focus on building long term alternatives to state-administered welfare.

These alternatives are absolutely essential, as no Keynesian economic model can overcome the hardwired contradictions of capitalist development. Strong state intervention, fuelled by progressive taxation and stronger welfare provisions—including better labour or minimum wage laws and greater social assistance rates—contribute to a falling rate of profit, capital flight, and economic stagnation over time. This is especially true in our current age of greater economic globalization, but was also true in earlier periods of recession, as evidenced by the slowing rates of growth leading up to the eventual global recession in 1972-74 that gave rise to neoliberal capitalist restructuring as a proposed fix. Without this fix, rates of profit would have continued to decline, and stagnation and inflation (stagflation) would have continued—with higher rates of unemployment to follow. Anarchists and other anti-capitalist militants must realize that unemployment and recession are always a necessary outcome within any liberal-democratic capitalist state—no matter how robust its welfare provisions might be. Given this inescapable reality, we cannot rely on the State to fix inequality by providing better services for the very underclass that capitalism will always inevitably produce. Ultimately we must find ways of directing our efforts that stress the need for the fundamental structural realignment that only a

revolution can achieve.

Moving away from the authoritarian, punitive and dehumanizing state-administered welfare system, and prefiguring alternatives means moving towards communities where resources are shared. As author Steve Millet, in *Neither State nor Market: An Anarchist Perspective on Social Welfare* (1997) articulately states

> [W]hat anarchism calls for is the re-absorption of the provision of welfare into the daily lives of the citizens of the community. Welfare thus becomes not simply a function—something provided by a system or workers in a system—but part of the everyday life of the community and its citizens.

Of What We Are Composed

Who makes up our community, neighbourhood, or even our class—and who should we be organizing with? Answering this question accurately will involve a major change in common perceptions of—and for—working class people. Under capitalism, the workers produce surplus value and the bosses, in turn, produce surplus workers. This surplus labour force is then policed, dehumanized, and thrown scraps from the table of the economy, in what the Welfare State would have us believe is an act of good will. Managing the lives and general perceptions of the unemployed is key to the capitalist strategy of breaking solidarity within the working class, reinforcing the capitalist myth of meritocracy while disciplining us through the ever-present spectre of unemployment. Among the working class, those in extreme poverty are stigmatized as being imbued with "deficiencies"—such as mental illness, laziness, addictions, and other criminalized behaviours—that are somehow foreign to their more stable peers. Those doubly stigmatized by poverty and unemployment become viewed as a threat to generalized prosperity—as cheats, fraudsters, thieves, and parasites. We have to work to rid ourselves and others of these ideas and to replace them with an understanding that capitalism oppresses every member of the working class, whether they currently receiving a wage or not, and that the delusional bigotry so common among our communities only serves only the interests of the

capitalists.

To the capitalist, the ranks of the unemployed are merely a useful pool of surplus labour. The management of this pool of labour is essential to the management of dissent, from both the ranks of the unemployed and employed alike. The popular construction of the poor as a parasitic malignancy distinct from the working class only blinds us to the realization that poverty and unemployment is an essential part of the capitalist economy. The isolation and control of unemployed workers, and the petty monetization of their "needs" binds them in an exclusive and dependant relationship with the State. We must realize that as a class we are all subject to the vacillations of this irrational system, and that we must collectively build alternatives within our ongoing organizing—both to meet immediate needs and new ones that upcoming crises are bound to produce.

The inevitability of unemployment under capitalism is not borne of the personal shortcomings of an individual worker, or particular policies of the "economy" or "government," it is a bred in the bone condition of capitalism and the State. Anarchism would put an end to unemployment, by sharing the necessary work between all those able, rather than by casting some into unemployment and forcing the rest to work harder to make up for that lost labour. Simply put, anarchism eliminates unemployment through the elimination of employment. This is something that systems predicated on private or state ownership simply cannot do. We don't need state managers, or capitalists, telling us who is valuable, and how our labour—and the products of our labour—should be distributed. We only need ourselves and our collective talents, organized from the ground up, to meet our true potential.

The Demise Of Competent Communities

Competent communities are localities where residents exercise joint control over matters that impact their lives. In competent communities, people look after each other and help each other. They do this because they feel confident doing so directly. They know that they have the skills and the common sense to deal with issues that they face collectively. However, when we think about communities, it's often a

rather hazy and ill-defined term. What do we mean by community? A community of the Left? Of science fiction fans? Of anarchists? In order to be a strategically useful term that can elucidate potential organizing efforts, we need something clearer. The community that we feel is most strategically relevant is the neighbourhood, where working people spend much of our lives, and where those who access and depend on services actually live.

It should come as no surprise that our heavily commodified culture of consumerism and service provision hinders our collective competence. On the official City of Toronto web site, one will read that the city, "aims to deliver exceptional, equitable and accessible customer service." Customers are generally passive recipients in this arrangement. The city provides, via our taxes, hundreds of services that deal with a myriad of issues, including many that deal with the needs of the unemployed—whether homeless, precariously housed or otherwise. While "regular" working and unemployed people often do not feel properly equipped to respond to help each other, state-administered services for people in extreme poverty are also being cut. The 2013 Toronto municipal budget, for example, called for 41,172 bed nights to be cut from the city's shelter system. In other words, our communities are failing people, at the same time that services provided by the State are also failing to meet even the most fundamental of needs. As anarchists, how should we respond to this? Should we struggle against cuts and for more state-administered services, or should we struggle to build competent neighbourhoods that can take care of people? And how do the two relate?

Northwestern University social policy and urban affairs researcher John McKnight writes about how competent communities are undermined by a process of "colonization" carried out by professionalized social service providers. Through this process, instead of acting jointly on issues impacting them, neighbourhood residents will defer this responsibility to a professional class of experts. Of course, this is not to say that professionals, or particular sets of specialized knowledge, are not crucial in many fields—certainly, the very particular and complex skills of doctors and nurses can't be easily replicated in the absence of extensive training. Instead, anarchists must

contend with those professionals who seek to draw neighbourhood residents into service models that are often blind alleys—models that offer no long-term or useful solutions to the problems of the working class. Welfare workers, social workers, and various city services manage poverty, by individualizing its causes and effects, and by channelling our grievances into the legal framework of the State.

This process of colonization of competent neighbourhoods by the extraneous professional class was highlighted recently at a public meeting in Toronto, in which approximately sixty people spent an hour discussing the need to work together, and to apply their collective knowledge and skills towards solving the shared problems they faced as neighbours. Toward the end of the meeting, a staff member from a tenant's rights agency stood and suggested to the assembled group that his organization could take care of their problems. This individual stumbled a bit, as he tried to make his pitch for clients seem congruent with a meeting about collective neighbourhood organizing. This was eventually accomplished with a fleeting nod to the importance of organizing from below. The pitch then resumed, with reminders of the agency's professional staff and knowledge of tenant law. It seemed for a brief moment as if the meeting had taken a 180-degree turn. A colonizer's claim was staked. No flag was planted, but business cards were left on the table in a reminder to the dominance of experts.

Competent Communities & Incompetent Economies

Competent communities are ones that can, and do, take care of their own—whether they are in crisis or not. This is a concept that the authors of this article find intriguing, promising, and wholly unfamiliar. The descriptions of competent communities are far removed from our experience. Sure, we may remember neighbours in which loyalty, trust, concern, and assistance was assured. But a whole neighbourhood? We realize that our lack of experience with this was deliberately put in motion long ago. We also realize that the re-building of these competent communities will not only assist our neighbours, but our movements. Building committees engaged in landlord-tenant struggles cannot, in themselves, re-skill us or re-build competent communities. The struggles of neighbours against their

landlord are only ever successful if united. The construction and maintenance of this unity hinges on breaking the isolating and divisive management of working people's lives by the State and capitalism. This is the point at which loyalty and trust can replace isolation and division. Note, though, the term is competent communities, and not caring communities. The dismantling of the friendly societies and competent communities of days passed was accomplished not only by supplanting those efforts with the control of the State, but also a protracted period of de-skilling, both in labour and community structures, was instrumental in not only limiting our ability to meet one another's needs, but also the ability to identify what those needs even are. Charity replaces mutual aid, alms replace solidarity, and the State replaces community. Re-skilling, to us seems to be of crucial importance to any prospect for re-building the capacities for mutual aid that once characterized working class neighbourhoods and communities. But it's essential to remember that the building of mutual aid networks to support one another in a capitalist world is not an end in itself. Capitalism enforces an artificial scarcity and poverty of existence on the majority of humanity, and so mutual aid, within the context of capitalism, can only amount to the sharing of scarce resources. What anarchists want—what humanity needs—is mutual aid within the context of anarchism. In an anarchist society, the world's resources are the common property of all, owned by no one and available to everyone. Mutual aid can then be a sharing of abundance, working together to provide each other with an ever higher quality of life.

Towards Dual Power

Dual power is a characterization of liberatory working class power that contrasts the authoritarian and punitive power of the State, while also engaging in public resistance to the oppressive and authoritarian structures that function in the State, economy, and society. These liberatory community organizations are directly controlled by community members, not agencies. Workers and neighbours join together in local community organizations that practice direct democracy, cooperation, and mutual aid. These organizations,

however, should not only look inwards, but should exist as part of a broader network of community groups. By building fighting organizations within our neighbourhoods, based on anti-state, anti-capitalist principles and connected to a foundation of mutual aid and autonomy, anarchists move closer to building dual power—which is an essential element for social revolution.

When direction, or even just inspiration for dual power is sought, many anarchists mine the histories of actually-existing dual power. Some look to Russia in 1917, some to Barcelona in 1936, and others to Chiapas after the rise of the EZLN. Inspiring examples, but seriously lacking in applicability for us. Instead we may be better served to look closer to home at less complete examples of working class power and struggle that, if deliberately acted upon, could give rise to dual power. It is both the accomplishments, and the as-yet-unrealized potential that we see in the following examples that push us to consider our own potential.

Residents of the Sunset Park neighbourhood in Brooklyn, facing off against gentrifying landlords, have been on active rent strike for over two years. As tenants hold off evictions, while still under threat, an increasing disillusionment with city services and political hacks has meant continued and expanding solidarity with other buildings in the neighbourhood. This growing solidarity necessarily connects to the needs of the unemployed, and those on social assistance, as many of the buildings in the neighbourhood are Section-8 (government subsidized units), which often house not just low wage workers, but the unemployed.

On an even larger scale, similar projects against gentrification which involve the creation of ground up building committees have already federated across large sections of the El Barrio region in East Harlem. With seven hundred members and predicated on "self-determination, autonomy and participatory democracy" the Movement for Justice in El Barrio has enormous potential in meeting the needs of the unemployed, beyond rent and housing repairs. Major assemblies in the region, which already happen regularly, could start by committing to reviving institutions of mutual aid, such as friendship societies, set up to handle the many needs, outside of housing, faced

by residents of the neighbourhood.

In the Parkdale neighbourhood of Toronto, tenants in apartment buildings have begun to organize in response to what they realize is a neighbourhood-wide, concerted effort of multiple landlords to drive out many of the existing residents. While individual units go poorly maintained and un-repaired, the common areas and exterior of many buildings are being "upgraded"—with the costs being covered by rent increases. As each tenant is pushed out—either through harassment, rent increases, or the health impacts from living in a construction site for months on end—management renovates the vacant unit and then leases it at a rent that can sometimes amount to double that of the previous tenant. Members of Common Cause who live in the neighbourhood have joined in this organizing, and have helped in the early stages of forming building committees. These committees will be independent bodies for tenants to organize around their interests—and not those of the landlord, lawyer, or social worker. It is hoped that in the future, these building committees will then network with other buildings on their street, and then in turn build a larger network within the neighbourhood. Connections are being made and relationships are growing. The immediate issues for the committees are the defence of tenants unduly threatened with eviction, rent increases, and the general lack of repair in many of the longstanding tenants' homes. The unemployed, the marginally employed, and those on social assistance are, of course, the most vulnerable to these attacks.

Colin Ward reminds us that ordinary working people built for themselves a huge welfare network, all by themselves. He wonders if perhaps these networks will be rebuilt. It is possible that tenant organizing in Parkdale has the potential to break down the ways in which the State manages struggle, through services that isolate and individuate. If the unemployed residents of Parkdale are properly included in the larger neighbourhood definition, defence, and struggles, then perhaps these direct welfare networks can be re-imagined and reborn. It is imperative that we see ourselves as a united working class once again, with a scope that includes the poorest segments of society. With the unemployed and those on social

assistance included as vital members of these organizations, we hope to begin to break down stigmas and develop and share skills that support our collective and growing movements.

While moving away from appeals to municipal or provincial politicians and the various legal/social services of the State, the organizing in Parkdale is in the earliest of stages. Though we've already begun fighting for well-maintained and affordable units, and defending tenants against constant harassment from gentrifying landlords, this is only a first step. The project is about building a competent community that can meet the various and unbalanced needs of all those living under capitalism. This might include fighting for free, or heavily subsidized units for those on social assistance, childcare collectives, medical assistance funds, tenant-organized unit repairs, followed by tenant-decided rent reduction, etc. These and other initiatives will require a deliberate re-skilling of our neighbourhood. Popularizing skills and knowledge currently held by individual neighbours, in the explicit interest of the neighbourhood, seems to us a potent way to enhance existing organizing, create new organizing opportunities, strengthen our neighbours and neighbourhood, and break with a capitalist conception and value of employment—but also of welfare. This is not conceived of as a gruelling voluntarist martyrdom, in which those with skills—be they parental, trades based, linguistic, physical, nutritional, scientific or technical—provide those skills free of charge, to their neighbourhood. Though on a neighbour-to-neighbour basis this would be heartwarming and validating, on a neighbourhood-wide basis it would be terrifying. No, we teach one another the skills we have gained, free of charge. We do this in conjunction with movements of struggle, such as building committees or other combative neighbourhood organizations. Not out of charity, but out of solidarity, not as an act of mutual aid, but to prepare for mutual aid and the creation of dual power.

Though those on state-administered assistance may have more material needs than others, fighting to meet these needs should be carried out with deeds that embolden us to see the possibilities of an organized and collective class. This requires a conception of both

unemployment and welfare that breaks with those of the capitalists. Deference to, defence of, and dependence on social assistance is often at the core of anarchist's "organizing" around welfare. What has been lost is a long-term strategy to challenge the State and the capitalist system that produces unemployment, and keeps the entire working class in a condition of artificial scarcity. As anarchists we must retain the long view if social revolution is truly our goal. The work ahead is daunting, but if we stay focused, patient, and do the work, we can succeed.
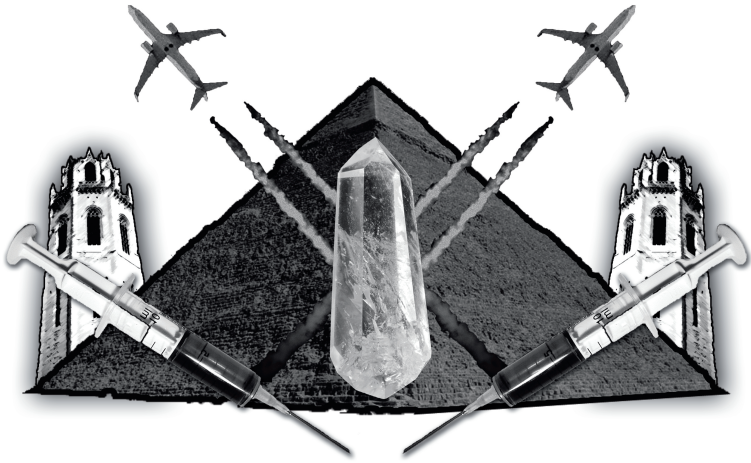
BOURGEOIS INFLUENCE ON ANARCHISM
Redux

1 Hamilton member, 1 Toronto member, 1 former Toronto member

Reading Luigi Fabbri today, an anarchist of the revolutionary communist bent in Canada may feel a sense of smug satisfaction coupled with a dash of arrogant resentment. The way he set his sights on the debasement of our political tradition might have us thinking we're reading the words of a kindred spirit. How very accurate and tragically humorous his polemic feels to us. All the more because it was penned over a century ago. However, have we really earned the self-satisfied head nodding and chuckles that accompany our reading of *Bourgeois Influence on Anarchism*? Fabbri took to task the growing sentiment within the anarchist tradition that glorified the outlaws, bombers, and assassins of his day. We read on with our own anarcho-rogues gallery of anti-organizationalists, black bloc puritans, and deep green resisters playing in our head. But are these really the contemporary correlatives of bougiefied anarchism?

Luigi Fabbri is among the ranks of dead anarchist communists

of years passed. With his comrade Ericco Malatesta, Fabbri not only shared Italian birth and revolutionary zeal, but also a remarkable talent for political analysis and the turnings of phrase. The following passage from his above mentioned 1917 essay should suffice as testament to his ability and a brief explanation of its content.

> The minds of men, especially of the young, thirsting for the mysterious and extraordinary, allow themselves to be easily dragged by the passion for the new toward that which, when coolly examined in the calm which follows initial enthusiasm, is absolutely and definitively repudiated. This fever for new things, this audacious spirit, this zeal for the extraordinary has brought to the anarchist ranks the most exaggeratedly impressionable types, and at the same time, the most empty headed and frivolous types, persons who are not repelled by the absurd, but who, on the contrary, engage in it. They are attracted to projects and ideas precisely because they are absurd, and so anarchism comes to be known precisely for the illogical character and ridiculousness which ignorance and bourgeois calumny have attributed to anarchist doctrines.

Never a truer word translated.

Though, unlike that of Fabbri's early twentieth century Europe, our anarchism's ranks in the twenty-first century are not swelled by wild-eyed assassin-poets or clandestine bombers alienating the proletariat with their audacity and violence. Today, anarchism drags in its wake all manner of snake oil peddlers and Chicken Littles that to our neighbours and co-workers are more irritating than they are frightening. We might even, in our more sentimental moments, wistfully imagine ourselves being associated with some bygone invisible conspiracy of revolution because it beats the harsh realization that we are entangled now with an irritatingly visible brood of idiots.

Today, the wild eyed terror and rage of the conspiracy theorists, the health and welfare prescriptions of the pseudo-scientific or anti-scientific mystics, and the abstract theoretical innovations of the academic obscurantists leave their respective mark on many of the

movements we organize for and struggle within as revolutionaries. Our intention with this article is that these marks not be permitted to become indelible, but instead be erased.

Anecdotally, we can say that members of the Toronto branch of Common Cause were witness to the hot mess produced when the above mentioned three tendencies pooled together in St. James Park to Occupy Toronto. Herein was a space in which 9/11 truthers and those employing meditation as resistance were free to bang on buckets as they discussed their mutual hatred for, and fear of, flouride and vaccination for weeks on end, with graduate students observing, more than participating as they crafted their commentary on the promise and failings of Occupy as it related to their academic work. All this was laid bare for the average Torontonian to interpret as what resistance to economic inequality and corruption looks like, leaving them little more than confused upon entering the camp.

Anarchists involved in Occupy Toronto didn't fare much better. Our orientation was typical of how we often engage when confronted by these particular conditions. We oscillate between disgust and mockery, and a vague idea of promise. Somewhat convinced of a radical trajectory, we chose to view the camp as an opportunity and felt a responsibility to engage. Nevertheless, ambivalence was the order of the day, due to the difficulty in identifying the underlying ideas in a camp we found to produce troubling conduct and arguments. As is often the case, it becomes difficult to draw clear lines between which ideas are irredeemable and which might be worth engaging with. Conspiracy theories often address real issues of economic exploitation, war, and environmental issues; health mysticism is right to criticize and question the collusion between the State and Capital that controls much of the world's "mainstream" health science; and the supposed intellectual complexity and rigour that leftist academics ascribe to themselves is important for all revolutionaries to actually strive for. Despite their deceiving promise, we posit that the above three tendencies offer only dead ends.

As disconcerting as our experiences within Occupy were, it is even more disconcerting that we generally have ourselves to blame. Whereas Fabbri's polemic was aimed at what he saw to be the

intellectual and strategic depredations of bourgeois thought visited upon his beloved proletarian anarchism, today what troubles us are internal conditions. In many respects, we court these troublesome notions directly. In other respects, the problem at hand is less directly evident. We could make a blood oath–swearing off tinfoil hats, obnoxious verbiage, and magic–only to remain in the midst of a political gyre that continues to slowly drag bourgeois flotsam toward us. That is to say our task is not to identify symptoms of our ailment (of which conspiracies, obscurantism, and mysticism are three), but to identify the pathogen. We don't only find ourselves in the middle of the outcome of an historical disagreement on the definition of anarchism. Nor are we just being pressed upon and diluted by external forces. We've furnished an environment with our own proclivities that is suited to those that give us pause. We find ourselves surrounded by those we may object to, but share attributes with. Our incredulity on this matter will prevent us from being able to extricate ourselves from it.

So, let's speak plainly: how the fuck do we keep ending up here?

I. Of Which We Speak

In order to shed ourselves of ineffectual ambivalence, we need to first give form to our concerns. We've identified conspiratorial, obscurantist, and mystical thought as those that concern us here. But using these as catch-all characterizations does us no productive service. If our approach can lead to understanding, we need to take the matter seriously, thus, we have based our assessments less on appearance and more on content. With academic obscurantism as a single example, we do not mean higher education or intellectualism. Obscurantist works can be authored by those who've not stepped foot in a post-secondary institution. Accomplished academics like Noam Chomsky and Ian Hacking have made strong points on this exact topic. Our assessments of arguments should have less to do with who is making them and more with what is being argued and what thought is behind it. Some of the key features we feel the trio of proper

conspiracists, obscurantists, and mystics share are: the rejection of rationality, belief that their ideas are of primary importance and that spreading them is the most important action they can take, beliefs that are both all-encompassing and endlessly flexible, viewing those who don't share their views as stupid or conformist "sheep," and a veneer of intellectualism that quickly falls back on emotional and moral manipulation. If an idea, and the way it is expressed, carries these characteristics we include in the camp— regardless of its source.

Intelligent Design

Conspiracy theories seek to offer all encompassing explanations of specific world events and the general social order. Refusing the existence of coincidence or even dynamic historical conditions, every event or significant development has its origin in an intentional strategy of those in power. While common features in conspiracy theorists' wildly different interpretations of historical events often rely on pseudoscientific data that supports supernatural or alien elements, an element that is equally common and more troubling—for its often racist implications—is data that corroborates bloodline and national or religious pedigree as the conspiracy's root. The conspiracy theory is both all encompassing and endlessly flexible. By definition, it can grow larger and more complex to explain virtually any natural, economic, or cultural event the conspiracist puts their mind to.

Conspiracy theories flourish in a world in which working class people are confronted with rampant exploitation, war, sexual violence, brutality within the legal system, environmental destruction, displacement, and corruption. The vast scope of the supposed conspiracy taps in to the equally broad fear and hatred much of the working class feels toward the order they live under. However, even those conspiracy theories that seem to oppose the State and capitalism do so in ways that we should see to be fundamentally different from, and even opposed to, anarchism. Conspiracy theorists tend to focus on individuals as actors, rather than on broader social structures. So, for example, rather than all bosses benefiting from capitalism and all workers losing out, the nefarious secret agreements between specific family lineages are the culprit and of primary importance.

The totality of conspiracy theories, and their tendency toward personification, is not a trivial matter. Conspiracy theories, at their very beginnings can corrupt any further action regarding those very conspiracies. Converts to the conspiracist flock tend to believe this newly acquired secret knowledge is of primary importance. Thereafter, the spreading of it is the most important action they can take. With the inescapability of the elite's reach, coupled with their direct control of all previously existing struggle (especially communism), the only recourse for the conspiracist is to awaken the "sheeple" by promoting the truth of the conspiracy. This fixation on conspiracy is not only often factually incorrect, but destroys potential for real organizing and leaves only proselytizing. It shifts the focus from material and social conditions—such as poverty, the prison industrial complex, etc—to an entirely ideological struggle in which proving the conspiracy itself is far more important than any of its effects. The conspiracy theorists may start off with questioning real conditions, but rather than setting off a trajectory of struggle, they become trapped, endlessly promoting the increasingly complex conspiracy theory.

The True Believers

The focus on alternative health choices as a form of activism has gained much popularity among the anti-authoritarian Left. Our healthcare system is far from perfect. Doctors at times have, and continue to, harm more than heal—sometimes from lack of resources, sometimes from lack of knowledge, and sometimes from arrogance. The pressure and control exerted on the healthcare system by its economic and political structuring is frequently the crucial component of that harm. The poisoning and disfiguring of newborn children caused by the prescribing of Thalidomide for the treatment of morning sickness that began in the 1950s and the infection of blood transfusion recipients by Blood Services Canada are just two of many examples. Challenging medical science's relationship to the State and Capital is of great importance to our class. But like conspiracy theories, the conclusions health mysticism draws are dangerous. The methods they use to reach their conclusions are deeply flawed, and the ways in which they propagate them can be incredibly damaging.

Health and care mysticism involves three distinct, though often overlapping, modes of thought. The first is a sort of a pure mysticism, that these crystals, stones or stars work in ways that are unrelated to science. Often, this is sort of a fringe religious belief. The second is pseudo-scientific: ideas that present themselves as scientific, but offer limited and shaky proof. The last is anti-scientific, which rejects science totally on philosophical, religious or political grounds. Clearly there is overlap—someone who supports anti-scientific ideas is more likely to invest themselves in alternative health practices as well—but they are separate, and believing one does not imply belief in the other. As individual choices, these may be unsound, but when they are pushed on people in a mass way, they can be dangerous.

Among the more unsettling, but effective tactics employed by these "true believers" is the emotional and moral manipulation they engage in when attempting to bring others to their side. Conspiracy theorists tend to speak of those who don't know about or believe in the conspiracy as sheep, sheeple, stupid, etc. Health and care mystics follow much of the same rhetoric, but their focus on personal and socially-pressured choices makes it all the worse. Their orientation towards motherhood and children is fraught with examples of this, as many of the choices mothers make are viewed as inherently imbued with positive or negative politics. This puts incredible and unnecessary pressure on working class mothers, who while exploited in their reproductive labour and socially marginalized in their role, now have their very worth as caregivers called into question. When developmentally debatable acts such as breastfeeding and "natural" child birth become moral imperatives, the morality of those mothers unable to engage in those acts become suspect. Guilt and shame become coercions employed by mystics to expand their influence, and choices become laden with moral meanings mothers have no need to carry.

Anti-vaccination campaigns provide a strong example of the devastating effect that this can have on working class communities. According to a 2007 UK study, radical anti-vaccination groups tend to be composed of and led by people already involved or interested in activism around issues such as gentetically modified organisisms

(GMOs), big pharma, and alternative health. This is in contrast to more reform-focused groups, which tend to be composed of parents who believe their children have been adversely affected by vaccinations. Radical anti-vaccine groups tend to construct choosing to vaccinate as unquestioningly following doctors and the government—trusting blindly, not taking responsibility for one's children, being "sheep." Refusing vaccination is constructed as a form of empowerment, and of resisting and questioning authority. This dichotomy between the "sheep" and the "free thinkers" echoes that of conspiracy theorists closely and, though they might say it differently, that of academics with regards to the uneducated regular people who can't possibly comprehend their supposedly high-level thoughts. Radical anti-vaccine groups view germ theory negatively, and opt instead for a "holistic" view of health.

The effect of this has, of course, been holistically unhealthy. Vaccination rates have dropped in many parts of Europe and North America, leading to outbreaks of deadly diseases such as whooping cough and measles. Even more terrifying, the fact that these diseases are now once again active poses a risk that vaccine-resistant strands will mutate, putting the entire population at risk. The damage that anti-vaccination movements do is very real and very material, while their cause is entirely immaterial and entirely moral. The same is true for many alternative health practices, which have killed people either directly, or indirectly—as they were chosen over proven conventional treatments.

Poverty and class are the most significant determinants of health. It would stand to reason, then, that anti-authoritarian Left activists would focus our efforts there. To increase access for refugees, migrant workers, and undocumented workers, to promote access to evidence-based health care, such as trained midwives who can improve women's safety, and experiences of birth and motherhood, and to make dental care and physiotherapy free. Instead, we see anarchists interested in health taking a starkly different, and somewhat frightening turn, into practising acupuncture and midwifery in small collectives that avoid regulation. Into replicating the judgemental and paternalistic attitudes that pass judgement on those whose personal

healthcare is not natural, not alternative, and as it has somehow come to indicate, not revolutionary.

The Loquacious Types

Obscurantism refers to deliberately preventing the facts of a matter from becoming known, either by restricting knowledge or presenting things in a way that is deliberately vague. This conduct is common in Left academia, and it is against this that we are arguing. To be clear, when we critique academia, we do not mean to argue against the pursuit of higher knowledge. We do not mean intellectually rigorous attempts to understand the conditions of the working class. Our argument is not even against the use of complex, often inaccessible language found in academia—technical language is needed in many fields, and if it's what it takes to express an idea, so be it. To paraphrase Chomsky, we are not against theory, but against posturing. Our opposition is to theories that present themselves as having revolutionary content, but which often have very little content at all.

Many aspects of academic obscurantism have been debated in different academic fields themselves. Post-modernism, in its promotion of the relativism of all ideas, has a strong role in this. Academic obscurantism essentially promotes the idea that the discourse, the expression of ideas, is of such greater importance than the material reality these ideas relate to that the ideas need not relate to anything at all. This is the significance of the word obscurantism—that these ideas are expressed in ways that make their content almost unintelligible. Science too has had debates—known at times as "the science wars" —around the relativism of scientific theories. In his book *The Social Construction of What,* Ian Hacking explores how the idea of a social construct, which has potential value in helping oppressed people realize that their conditions of oppression are not natural, has been applied so broadly in both humanities and sciences that it has lost much of its use and meaning. Rather than an conceptual framework used to broaden our politics, "x is a social construct" is now a phrase used to shut down debate, and the meaning of "x being a social construct" is rarely challenged.

Academic obscurantists rely so heavily on their specialized

language and ideas that they are often unable to explain them to those that don't share their academic background. Advancement and notoriety in particular academic streams through the use of bizarre or inflammatory arguments has become a tried and true method of satisfying the competitive impulse encultured within academia. Often this is presented as rigour, but that claim is shaky. Academics claim to have high standards in their work, and approach things from a more intellectual framework in their writing and presentations, but tend to quickly resort to emotional manipulation when their ideas are challenged outside formal institutional spaces.

Put simply, the scaffolding their ideas are built on is unsound. When their ideas are challenged, they have nothing to fall back on. And their ideas are challenged often. A good example is when Left academics enter organizing spaces. For all the complexity of their ideas, they simply don't resonate with people. They are unable to explain their ideas to someone who doesn't share their background, not because the other is stupid, but because without being fully indoctrinated into academia, the ideas make no sense. So, quickly, they call others racist or sexist, try to manipulate them into thinking they are incapable of understanding, or retreat back to purely academic spaces.

The First Step...

Is admitting we have a problem. Not just that there is a problem but that we have a problem. We may not see kindred spirits in those that cower from "chem-trails", parents that organize measles, mumps and rubella "infection parties" for their children as alternatives to vaccination, or the authors of Marxian examinations of the reproduction of labour power on *Jersey Shore*–but they certainly see co-travellers in us. Neither coincidence or conspiracy can explain this concerning phenomena. Our conduct and orientations need to be brought into question if they are apparently engendering familiarity in those that repulse us.

In Extremis

Can we honestly say that our organizing isn't at times compelled toward the most severe or "radical" posturing? Our historically correct

rejection of class struggle that collaborates with Capital and the State seems to have bred in us a suspicion of any action that doesn't feel as though we are going far enough. This concern can even become primary. Irrespective of the task at hand or the plausibility of success we can resort to tactical assessment through a "radical-enough" litmus test or prefigurative-over-contemporary quotient. Forms of extremism not only animate our actions, but our arguments as well. When faced with denunciation or verbal attack by any number of torpid socialist hacks, we can be guilty of resorting to an ultra-left position if only to make certain no one misunderstands the irreconcilable differences at play between their "Left" and ours. Thereby giving credibility to "ultra-left" as a pejorative describing some manner of adolescent reactionary orientation. Our politics become radical for radicalism's sake and fail to present radical arguments in service to appropriate conclusions. Our slogans take on the posture of the very farthest one could possibly take an idea in word. With our tactics then, in kind, attempting that in act. When our independence from labour bureaucracies or the use of physical force, for example, are compulsions and not conclusions, we tread into the intellectually backward realm of the fanatic. And, true to form: like attracts like.

Virtue & Villainy

Aren't we so very virtuous, as well? With our adherence to sets of actions being indicative of valour, our class position, identity, and revolutionary tradition then become demarcations of virtue. The ways in which we scrape friend from foe are rarely as subtle as we might think, and arguably not as political as we might assert. Often, feeling torn between having to make a choice between too radical and not radical enough, we fail to consider what is reasoned. What is honest. What is correct. We then lose sight of anarchism as a conclusion we have come to and treat it as a virtue we need adhere to. The void between the sophist and the zealot is where an anarchist revolutionary should plant their flag. This requires respect, deep thought, unerring honesty, and principled collaboration on our part–within our organizations, the Left and, perhaps most important of all, our class generally.

That's difficult conduct to maintain, at times even exhausting. When matters feel urgent or severe, a moralistic zero-sum game is a tempting one to play. Playing that game, though, is an open invitation for all those who trade in moral manipulation as politics, and sanctimonious shaming as struggle to join in. That, comrades, is not a team that will field well.

Needlessly Reductive. Endlessly Adaptive

Can it not also be said that we hold to a purified form of our anarchism as necessarily sufficient for all manner of our classes concerns? As "class-struggle anarchists" we can often be guilty of holding a posture meant only to defend those unassailable virtues of, and all encompassing applications for, our "class struggle". A politics that is often accurately charged with persistent reductive qualities. Colonialism? Class Struggle. Unemployment? Class Struggle. Gendered violence? Class Struggle. Not sufficient an answer? You're talking to a lifestylist–move on.

Our rigidity only then gives way to innovation in a most surface way and generally only necessitated by the argument at hand. We may espouse intersectionality as the sophistication of our class politics, but in effect it can act for us (though we aren't alone in this) as window dressing for the continuation of simplicity in class analysis. This is not an easy balance to strike and not reveal itself as fraud. It requires skill sets that incorporate *ad hominems*, the occasional rhetorical flourish, sentimental appeal, strawmen, and a lot of slippery slopes in order to conceal its shallowness. These skills are neither sophisticated nor intellectual. They're parlour tricks. They'll earn us an inapplicable conversation that troubles the complexity of *The Wire* over pints with a Cultural Studies student. But little else. When we accustom ourselves to the wares of the academic carpet-bagger, we lay the groundwork for a movement that amounts to little more than a concern of hucksters.

Real sophistication and intelligence produces conclusions. Perhaps complicated conclusions—but conclusions nonetheless. Our analysis should be actionable. Much of what passes for revolutionary theory today aspires not to what we can put our hand to but what can

be intellectually dissected, endlessly in service to winning the point through confusion—a pointless orientation that we should rightly see as backward and deliberately shed ourselves of.

II. Of Whom We Should Speak

These forms of thought do not come out of a vacuum. And their traction is that they identify real concerns, such as war, economic inequality, political corruption, environmental crises, policing and prisons, culture, and health. Furthermore, they correctly identify that there is a relationship between these issues and how they play out over time and across the globe. The problem is often not necessarily with the scope or with the issues identified, but with the nature of the relationships they identify. Conspiracy theorists tend to focus on individual, personalized connections that make the conspiracy theory that much more tantalizing. They also tend to ascribe evil intent to those individuals. A structural analysis, by comparison, looks more at the systemic factors that cause things to affect each other and play out as they do. It looks for the logic in it, not the malicious intent.

We often ignore examples of struggles waged by our class that directly contested the conditions conspiracy theorists claim to address—among them environmental racism, reproductive justice, and the prison industrial complex. In all three examples, there is a complex set of state and corporate actors involved. In all three the social construction of race, gender, sexuality, and disability are crucial factors. These organizing successes have always been achieved by those directly affected—with an understanding of the complexities of their situation, but also its materiality—and organized directly against their target.

The 2012 Quebec student movement—which organized university students around their material conditions—offers an example of how to engage in organizing in academic spaces. HIV/AIDS activism in the 1980s and 1990s shows how, despite being beset by conspiracy theories, health mysticism, collaboration between drug companies and governments, stigma, and an actual devastating disease, some activists were able to cut through with strong analysis

and strategy, and win important gains.

The Classroom of Class Struggle

People's experience with university is formative in terms of their political conceptions and analysis of their reality, as well as their future activism. We should therefore concern ourselves with the impact it is having on the Left, especially now that 34% of working class youth go to university, according to a 2009 study from Queen's University. It is formative in many ways, both in terms of its role in shaping ideas and the overall experience itself—which often includes part-time jobs, mountains of debt, and poor job prospects upon graduation. Academic obscurantists often play a particular role here; students in Humanities and Social Sciences are taught political concepts that question capitalism and oppression, but in the abstract. The version of radicalism taught by obscurantists focuses on making the best argument, not on real life politics. The obscurantist version of radicalization is appropriate only to education, and irrelevant to the experiences of working class adults who graduate and leave that space.

The Quebec student strike of 2012 was a great example of how people can be radicalized through struggles that affect them directly—that have an actual material impact on their lives. We do not believe in the notion that you can convince people to be revolutionaries purely through discourse. The Quebec student strike was launched in response to a tuition increase that the Liberal provincial government wanted to impose on them. Students in universities and in Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel (CEGEPs, General and Vocational Colleges) voted to go on strike through directly democratic structures, and remained on strike for eight months—until the same Liberal government was forced to call an election, which they then lost. Electoral politics aside, students learned more about direct democracy, empowerment, solidarity, and revolutionary ideas through this struggle than they could ever learn from a textbook.

While many academics made ambiguous and abstract arguments when criticizing the Quebec student movement for supposedly not addressing white supremacy and patriarchy within

their strike, they lacked specific examples or suggestions on how to better address those issues. The Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (ASSÉ, Association for a Syndicalist Student Solidarity) deliberately formed Coalition large de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (CLASSE, broad coalition of ASSÉ) in anticipation of future tuition increases, having been structured to contend primarily with a broad economic imposition that would materially impact all current and future students in Quebec. The course of that struggle would see CLASSE become the standard bearer for not only a democratic student movement engaged in direct struggle but also struggles against violent repression of all movements more generally. CLASSE wasn't structured to engage in a discursive struggle with privilege. If it had been, it would likely amount to something more akin to the student organizations we're familiar with in Ontario today—groups that bandy around vague principles, rather than an intention to struggle in earnest. Arguably, participants in either formation would be radicalized by going through those struggles, it would radicalize their political notions of what's appropriate in future struggles as well. The former, we would argue, is an approach that educates participants in struggles of radical impact. The latter is one that educates participants in radical pretence.

Class Heroes Club
At a time in which fear of a "gay plague" was at a fever pitch in the United States, a three hundred person meeting in New York city responded with the founding of AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP). In the years that followed the direct action organization's membership swelled, as it unleashed waves of militant mobilizations, occupations, media stunts, and educational campaigns. Amidst a culture of hatred, fear, and ignorance directed squarely against them, while also reeling from the ravages of HIV and AIDS, people with AIDS (PWAs) and allies (primarily from the LGBT community) responded collectively with a struggle directed against a phalanx of governmental bodies, financial powerhouses, and religious institutions. A struggle for medical treatment and prevention resources, and housing and against the hetero-sexist, misogynistic, and white

supremacist underpinnings of a capitalist society more than willing to stand by, or profit from the spectacular mass death of queers, people of colour, the poor, and incarcerated.

As well as political action, PWAs across the continent organized networks of mutual aid to directly ameliorate the devastating health and economic impacts of the AIDS pandemic. Food shares, housing and squat assistance, and home health assistance collectives were quietly at work in many neighbourhoods across the United States and Canada. The recently popularized "Buyers Clubs" of the time were precisely these sorts of networks. While the Hollywood depiction in *The Dallas Buyers Club* is one of a straight man initially enriching himself through the sale of AIDS treatments that were out of the reach of most PWAs, only to bloom into a not-so-bad ally, the reality was, unsurprisingly, very different. In major urban centres, PWAs formed institutions of mutual aid and solidarity in which they exchanged prescriptions, shared and investigated new treatment methods, pooled financial resources to acquire ludicrously expensive medication in bulk, and volunteered medical and health expertise. These are the "Buyers Clubs" IRL.

Faced with societal hatred, capitalist profiteering, medical ignorance, and the spectre of extermination, PWAs responded with militant direct action, mutual aid, and a bottomless reservoir of courage and solidarity. Their struggle demanded and forced through scientifically sound treatment regimes, education to protect against sexually transmitted infection (STI) transmission, housing assistance for PWAs, a huge reduction in cost for AIDS treatments, and the understanding that HIV and AIDS are not merely a "Gay Plague", but a viral threat to all of us. This is what struggles around health look like.

III. For Lack of a Better Word: Conclusion

The world of the conspiracist is a terrifying one. Planes drop death from the sky, food rots away our health, the police state listens to our every word, while tracking our every movement, sprawling prison camps loom on the horizon, the media distorts reality and conceals the truth to the benefit of the ruling class, the collusion of political,

religious, and corporate institutions rendered them irredeemably corrupt long ago, wars fought on a lie lead to the slaughter of countless innocents to the enrichment of the few, and on, and on. All of which is true. It's the truth of those accounts that garner conspiracy theories what purchase they do have. But those truths haven't been uncovered by the conspiracists. Their so-called conspiracy—with its blood ties, sadistic plots, and inescapable reach—obscures not only the cause of those horrific truths, but their remedy as well. So well, in fact, that one might believe it to be a conspiracy itself—though it's best to avoid that sort of rabbit hole.

Conspiracy theories are not defined by the threats and attacks they point to, but what they claim to be their cause. That the multinational agribusiness giant Monsanto poisons water tables, displaces entire populations, destroys local crops, and forces unsafe foodstuffs on to our plates are facts—not a conspiracy theory. That this is carried out with depopulation, genetic manipulation, and/or thought control of humanity as its design, or due simply to generalized sadism—this is the conspiracy theory. The above facts were exposed by the struggles of Indigenous people, farmers, Monsanto workers, and scientists. Chicken Little bloggers, conspiracist authors, unaccredited "experts", and locavore organic diet advocates then devised the conspiracy for their own ends. Struggles mounted against Monsanto can point to a communism that is scientifically ecological as their solution. The conspiracy theories about Monsanto cannot.

If we misidentify conspiracy theories as emerging from the struggles of those under attack by such forces within capitalism as agribusiness, the pharmaceutical industry, the prison industrial complex, and the arms industry we enable that parasitic backwardness of thought. If we enable those conspiracy theories, we risk the deforming of collective struggles that offer so much promise to our class into an isolated and amorphous fear of, or anger with, "the system". It isn't that conspiracy theories are narratives that compete with "ours" regarding the threats to humanity. Nor is it the case that conspiracy theories are a good starting point of departure from capitalistic thought. Conspiracy theories are landmines laying in front of already existing struggles' path. Any remedy we might be capable

of as revolutionaries requires us to be in the midst of those struggles, while identifying the dangers of missteps while we move forward.

Capitalism destroys the health and well-being of the working class. It brutalizes and poisons us, individually and collectively. It commodifies our health and limits what healthcare is available. Health is a fundamental site of class struggle. Our health has been the site of principled struggle by those that we should characterize as no less than class heroes. Their struggles have not been for the chakra, humours, or subconscious but for the blood, bone, and organs of the body. The working class has collectively lined up, time and again, in struggle against Capital, the State, medical establishments, and the Church in service of our health. Struggles have been, and continue to be, waged against the profiteering of pharmaceutical companies, environmental racism, mental-health institutionalization, and misogynistic, racist, and heteronormative medical regimes. Struggles for publicly available treatment. Struggles for access to scientifically verified treatments. Struggles for access to reproductive control. These and others are the struggles that our class have fought for our health. We forget them to our physical peril.

HIV and AIDS militants have occupied the New York Stock Exchange and taken over live national news broadcasts to combat corporate profiteering on death. The Black Panthers organized free breakfast and sickle cell screening programs. Feminists across the United States and Canada educated women on contraceptive and reproductive health. Feminists that followed after established underground abortion services. The struggles of the working class as it relates to our health are storied, heroic, and collective. That today a substantial section of the Left's conception of struggles over health have been debased to those of establishing acupuncture storefronts, refusing vaccination, and eating organic is almost too pathetic for words. That we and they might claim our pedigree from those historic struggles while not contributing to them is repugnant.

Hepatitis, cervical cancer, diabetes, and HIV—to name but a few examples—are real and present dangers to our class. Access to abortion and contraception, local medical resources, health services for the undocumented, harm reduction in prisons and on the street are all

under attack. All are being resisted by those most affected. The absence of a broad class-based and explicitly anti-capitalist contribution to this organizing is not a missed opportunity, but a betrayal of what our politics and history prescribe for us. Our task as revolutionaries in this regard should be primarily that of investing ourselves in the actual health struggles of our class—not the abstract and fanciful interests of the progressive healthcare boutiques.

For many in the Left, post-secondary education is a politicizing experience. Students come into their own as adults, adjusting their view of themselves and their position in the world. As they are drawn into their studies and the struggles waged around them, they begin to draw conclusions about what it is they will do with these new understandings and skills. This can be a politically upending period, but also a conditioning one. The politics and methods learned on their campuses today will be similar to those employed in their streets and workplaces tomorrow. As revolutionaries, we need take stock of what those struggles are and how those lessons are learned.

It is no assistance to our class' struggle to have our radicals apprentice in an environment that teaches them that the struggles of others are primary, solutions to most problems are abstract, and that language should obscure thought directly and will amount to action eventually. If in fact the university can be termed a factory, then the struggles within it need to be direct, democratic, and mass in form while material and enlightening in content. This is what some student organizers strove for in Quebec, to great success. It's what countless other student organizers across the country do not—to a correlative degree of failure. A struggle that organizes in the actual interests of students through truly democratic structures is necessary for both a productive student movement, and a truly politicizing and positively formative experience for those that participate in it.

Further to this, enlisting in a revolutionary organization should be a continually enlightening experience. We should find ourselves challenged intellectually to come to an understanding of the conditions we are in, and ways to move forward. Our organizations should be places in which we educate ourselves and each other. Our organizations also need to learn how best to communicate and

implement those conclusions. A reasoned and actionable revolutionary politics that peddles in neither abstract idealism nor conservatising pragmatism is what we should strive for intellectually. "Political development" within our organizations should be an invigorating process for both members and the organization as a whole. With revolutionary theory being collective in its discussion and production—to as much a degree as possible. We need to refuse to emulate the academic obscurantist, but not resort to a reductive anti-intellectualism—and we need to do this together. This is one of the many tasks Common Cause hopes to accomplish. It's why we do this journal at all, but also why we do it the way that we do. Not perfectly, but collectively, responsively, and we hope—productively.

TAKING ACCOUNT OF OUR POLITICS:
An Anarchist Perspective on Contending with Sexual Violence

1 Hamilton member, 1 Toronto member, 1 former Toronto member

In the fall of 2010, several female members of Common Cause took on the task of developing a sexual violence policy for the organization. At the time, and as far as we were aware, there had never been an instance of sexual violence in Common Cause. Our drive to write the policy came from some members' past experiences of being sexually assaulted while participating in other organizations, from a desire to do better, and from our own readings on sexual violence and accountability processes generally. Since then, we have, unfortunately, had to make use of the policy to address issues of sexual violence as an organization. There have been situations in which our members have been sexually assaulted, situations where members have been aggressors, and situations outside our organization where we have been asked or felt compelled to offer our perspective.

We strive to develop our politics through a process of trying things, analyzing our successes and failures, and using our conclusions to make a better attempt in the future. There are few situations we encounter with as high stakes as sexual violence. Failures have been devastating, both to individuals and organizations. For this reason, our analysis must be thorough and considered. It is often easy to attribute failures of accountability processes to factors specific to the situation—this aggressor was too manipulative, this support committee couldn't get its shit together, this or that person flaked out on their assigned tasks. Specifics do need to be considered, but our analysis needs to come from our politics. As anarchists, we are seeking to develop a strong foundation from which to address issues of sexual assault and sexism seriously and genuinely, and we seem to be struggling.

Common Cause has struggled as much as any other organization in this regard. When dealing with sexual violence, we have found that we are at our worst when we worry too much about what others think, when we equivocate, apologize, or try to control or guess at others' behaviour. We have found that we are at our best when we let our politics lead. For us this means that people who sexually assault others should be thought of less as "community members" and more as class traitors. They take advantage of the divisions in society (and particularly of the oppressed members) for their personal gain, and in doing so actively prevent organizing to overcome them. In Common Cause, we have found that reorienting ourselves away from "community accountability" and toward "political accountability" has been a positive step in addressing sexual violence and sexism more broadly.

The first section of this article will outline the ways in which we saw the development of accountability processes, some of the major critiques, and our views on them. It will also introduce the concept of political accountability. The second section will take on the important question: what are our politics? Common Cause certainly made the mistake of putting the cart before the horse—that is, trying to figure out how we would deal with sexual assault before working out our politics around patriarchy. This section will examine how the

power dynamics at play within issues of wage inequality, the gendered division of labour, colonialism, and broader issues of sexism affect and play out in sexual violence and community accountability processes. The final section looks for ways of countering the emerging Men's Rights Activist (MRA) movement in Canada, particularly on university campuses.

MRA movements may seem like a departure in an article primarily focused on sexual assault, but we see a link. Not only do MRAs directly address sexual assault, but they are a social movement organizing around sexism. In order to combat sexism and sexual violence, we need to be active both in dealing with direct instances of sexual assault, and in countering broader social movements, such as MRAs and anti-abortion activists, who actively oppose women's liberation. As with accountability processes, we have struggled to understand how best to counter these groups. What can we do beyond the counter-demonstration? How do we address groups that form in response to perceived declines in male privilege? How do we apply our understanding of the current terrain of patriarchy in ways that can lead to meaningful actions?

The overall goal of this article is to link our actions around sexual violence, our political, social, and economic understanding of gender oppression, and possibilities for activism against patriarchy into a coherent whole. This does not spell an end to our mistakes. Unfortunately, fuck-ups are likely to continue. Rather, this is an attempt to understand our experiences of the past four years—hammered out in boring procedural discussions, emotional outbursts, and some clear, collective discussion—politically. It is an attempt to learn from our mistakes and our successes, to make better attempts, better failures, and better analysis in the future.

I. Development and Critiques of Accountability Processes

Development
In this article, the term "accountability process" will refer to the ideas and principles around sexual violence and community accountability

developed on the activist Left in the past ten to fifteen years. Of course, the activist Left of the past ten to fifteen years has no monopoly on responding in informal, community based ways around sexual violence. It happens in many contexts: among high school friends, coworkers, people who share cultural ties, etc., often spontaneously and in response to the situation and, like more formalized accountability processes, with varying degrees of success. However, for this article, we will use a more specific definition of accountability processes as the formal and politically motivated processes that have developed by Left activists in North America. A caveat to add is that this account is skewed by how we experienced the development of these ideas as anarchists in southern Ontario who generally became involved at the tail end of the anti-globalization movement. So it will be reflective of what gained traction in the circles we run in, and works that may have had important impact elsewhere may be left out. In the interest of not ignoring our context, this section will also describe some of Common Cause's own experiences with developing and working with accountability processes.

The first real test of Common Cause's ability to navigate an accountability process guided by our sexual violence policy came in the fall of 2011. Earlier in the year, a Toronto member was called out for sexually assaulting a female friend in a club. He had been intoxicated and had repeatedly touched her without her consent, despite what should have been obvious non-verbal cues to stop. After receiving an email detailing the assault, he informed several fellow members of Common Cause as to what had happened, and indicated his understanding that the woman in question would be preparing an accountability process. He responded to the email thanking the woman for calling him out, and indicating his willingness to engage in a process, saying this was not the first time something like this had happened, and it needed to be addressed. Hearing this, the woman responded by indicating that she would be speaking to other women about his behaviour, and requesting that he not bring the issue up with any of them unless asked about it directly. Another member of Common Cause was tasked with communicating with her in order to help coordinate an organizational response, and was told to wait until

they had decided how they wanted to approach it. Over the next several months, she got in touch with another individual who was interested in participating in a process of holding the male member accountable, and the two of them met to discuss what they felt would be a proper response. While this was going on, the male Common Cause member continued to participate in a number of other activist organizations in the city. When the news that he had committed sexual assault reached the attention of members of one of these organizations, he was asked to leave the three organizations he was then active in, and questions were raised as to why this information had not been shared earlier. This turn of events took place shortly after the Ontario Conference in the summer of 2011, where Common Cause had officially passed our sexual violence policy, and so this policy was used to draft a process of holding the member of Common Cause accountable for his behaviour. The Toronto branch met to discuss the terms of this process, and it was agreed that the male member would abstain from drinking in public for six months (and abstain from drinking to excess at all times), during which time he would participate in the research and presentations of two internal workshops dealing with proactive consent practises. He was also to draft a letter to the three organizations he had been a part of, informing their members of his actions. This plan was shared with the woman who had originally initiated the process, and she and others working with her agreed it was an appropriate response, while maintaining their option to initiate a separate process in the future, should they decide to. The following summer, Common Cause added a section to our sexual violence policy that attempted to balance the desire for privacy and confidentiality on the part of the survivor with the need of people in the community to be properly informed, so that they can make decisions about who they want to be around, and work with.

Other incidents, whose examination deserve their own article, have resulted in similar policy changes. For example, one such incident necessitated the drafting and implementation of a member expulsion policy. These processes were significantly more complex than a brief and sterile summation allows. They represent hundreds of hours of work and conversation on the part of our members and those

involved. Both were emotionally challenging and far from perfect, but allowed for many opportunities to reflect on the efficacy of our efforts.

Often times we find organizations (including our own) engage with these processes in a manner that is lacking in political clarity, and consequently disingenuous. We endeavour to treat these processes as politically necessary and not tokenistically, as if they're just another box to check off to prove we made an attempt. In the spirit of those who have shown commitment to creating processes of accountability, we must be committed to re-evaluating the results of our efforts and learning from our mistakes. In order to do this, it's appropriate to examine their nascent form.

Some of the first discussion of accountability processes we saw came from the Incite! Women of Colour Against Violence collective, particularly in the zine (and later book) *The Revolution Starts at Home*. While zines and Internet accounts about consent and the problems of responding to sexual assault in activist spaces were not uncommon, Incite! clearly outlined a framework for responding to sexual assault in a formalized, community-based, and politically principled way. Some of the principles they proposed, and which other accountability processes tend to hold in common were:

1. Being survivor-centric: this means that the survivor is in control of the process. Often, this is cast as a sharp contrast to police and social services interventions that disempower and re-traumatize the survivor. In practice, this means that the survivor often has a specific support group or set of people who take direction on how the process should go. It also means that survivor's accounts of incidents and definitions of violence are to be believed, and that groups are not to take action that is counter to the survivor's wishes.

2. Processes that do not involve police and/or formal social services: virtually all groups that work on accountability processes are critical of police. Incite! particularly emphasizes the violence of police toward people of colour of all genders, whereas other groups emphasize the above mentioned poor treatment of survivors. Many groups are also critical of the mainstream domestic violence sector,

and its collaboration with police and treatment of survivors. There is some variation here, with some groups working with, or being okay with, at least some sectors of the mainstream domestic violence sector—for example, supporting survivors going to counselling provided by not-for-profit organizations.

3. That the aggressor/perpetrator be held to account: this one appears basic, but is worth addressing. Essentially, that something can and should be done that would make the aggressor/perpetrator accountable for his actions.

4. But, that the broader community is also responsible: this principle emphasizes the importance of context that an act of sexual violence is not the sole responsibility of the aggressor, but may also be allowed or supported by the broader community—for example, by failing to challenge aggressive behaviours displayed in a public setting. The community also has a stake in holding the aggressor to account, as once the violent nature of the aggressor is revealed it is only reasonable that others will be concerned for their own safety. So, the "community" plays an interesting role, in both holding the aggressor to account, and being itself held to account.

5. That broader social context of gender, race, sexuality, and class also play a role: again, there is typically an emphasis on the impact of social context that we would generally find lacking in mainstream services. The other side of this argument is that successful accountability processes can be themselves a form of activism against patriarchy.

The development of accountability processes was promising to many people. Sexual assault has always been common in activist organizations, as well as in broader society, and many people felt powerless to address it when they or their friends were affected. The idea that, through hard work and good communication, we could not only heal, but improve our communities and prevent sexual assault was a very invigorating one. As mentioned, in Common Cause, a small group of women got together in 2010 to work on our own

accountability process framework. It was a long, detailed document that laid out in specific terms how a process would start and be carried out, with considerations made for many different situations that we imagined could arise. It is worth emphasizing that, at this point, there had not been a known sexual assault involving Common Cause—although some of the women involved had been sexually assaulted previously, some while in activist groups. But we all felt motivated by the idea we could address this productively, by making it part of our political work—rather than an isolating personal experience.

Critique

In the past ten years, many accounts of attempted accountability processes, and critiques—both practical and political—of accountability processes in general have been written, too much to provide a decent account of all the contributions on this topic. For this section of the article, we will focus on three major critiques: 1) the efficacy of community accountability processes, 2) the definition/role of "community," and 3) the limitations of accountability processes in linking with and advancing anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal struggles.

So to the first critique—"do these processes work?"—the first step would be to define what we mean by work. A working definition might be: that they support the survivor in continuing their life and activism in the ways they want it, that they overall strengthen and improve the community more than they harm it (or, if they do break it down, it is in the right ways), and that the aggressor is held to either learn and change, or face consequences for his actions.

A common conclusion seems to be that these processes are much longer, more complicated, more exhausting, and more triggering than we ever expect, for everyone involved. As to survivors, *The Broken Teapot* makes an especially salient point that accountability processes can harm survivors by essentially tying their healing to their aggressor, so that his failure to take account of his behaviour continues to impact on them. This zine and others have also argued that the exclusive categories of "aggressor" and "survivor" often fail to account

for the often complex dynamics of interpersonal conflict and volatile relationships. But despite all the hardship and the low success rate, it is probably better than not having any process at all. It is certainly better than victims of sexual assault feeling that they have no other choice other than to quietly leave. But a serious tweaking of our goals and expectations from these processes is very needed.

The question of community is an important one. One critique that has been made is that the activist/anarchist/Left "community" is not really a community in any proper sense of the word. That is, communities are groups of people linked by something that promotes or even necessitates long-term interaction, such as shared language, culture, geographic location, workplace, or social identity. The activist community is porous, sprawling, and tends to attract short-term participants who quickly move on to other things. Essentially, the activist community lacks precisely the qualities that would allow a community to deal effectively with a problem like sexual violence. Another important critique is that these processes can come to promote a sort of fishbowl effect—once a sexual assault becomes widely known, those closely involved with the process are scrutinized by those who aren't directly involved. These individuals and groups may know some of the relevant details, but may miss other important information or nuances. The broader community can thereby overtake the survivor in asserting demands. Another critique is around the limits of community culpability. For sure, we all carry some responsibility for the actions of those around us, at the same time, we do not grow our friends and comrades from test tubes. We are not involved in every aspect of their relationships. Setting reasonable limits based on context seems to be a good idea. And the role of the "community" as both judge and judged needs to be re-examined.

The final question, what is the broader political value of these processes? Community accountability infers that the anarchist/activist "community" implicitly holds good standards to which someone can be held accountable. This is often untrue. Often, the anarchists/activists in question assume that their politics around sexual assault are good, but have not done the work of understanding sexual assault in the context of patriarchy and capitalism. The shaky terrain of our

assumptions plays our over and over again, with confusing, unclear, unsatisfying attempts at accountability. This is where the question of political accountability comes in.

Political Accountability

Political accountability means that our politics form the basis of the decisions we make when dealing with an instance of sexual assault, that rather than the "community". Our politics tell us that an activist who commits sexual assault is acting as a class traitor. He is continuing to participate in the long-term cross-class alliance between working class and employing class men, resulting in devastating levels of violence—most often aimed toward working class women. This cross-class alliance provides men with unpaid reproductive labour, much greater status in social/public life, and an outlet for aggression that, until very recently, was not even considered a crime. Men who sexually assault women reproduce this cross-class alliance in the interest of Capital. Furthermore, an aggressor who claims commitment to anarchist politics is acting directly against his own held politics, against his comrades, against 50% of his class, and in misogynistic solidarity with Capital. So, what kind of accountability do we hold these people to?

Of course, many situations are complex and often less than clear cut. Sometimes, simply focusing on the politics and trying to ignore the interpersonal issues is enough. Other times, situations are legitimately complex, and require careful handling. The call here is not simply to turn the hatred and vitriol and violence up, but to collectively develop a shared view of what sexual assault really is, and let that lead our decisions. In our view, this also helps take the pressure off the survivor to constantly have to hold their aggressor to account. If we hold strong collective positions on patriarchy, sexual assault, and the relationships between them, hopefully our decisions in an accountability process will be led less by our personal connections and more by what our analysis tells us. The way to get better at responding to sexual assault is not to develop better processes, but to develop better politics.

II: Developing our Politics on Sexual Violence

When confronting an incident of sexual assault, we strive for clear and definitive answers and direction, both in terms of how to best deal with the particular situation and how to work more broadly toward confronting sexual assault politically. Too often feminists have looked for fundamental or reductionist truths to guide their response, mistaking hard lines for clarity. Political accountability, instead, looks to complexity in order to find direction. There is a complex interplay of economic factors, such as the gendered division of labour and the oppression of women who are forced to take on the vast majority of unpaid and low-paid reproductive labour. More sociological factors also play a role, such as the extreme objectification of women's bodies in media and mainstream culture. There is a long history of men claiming ownership and entitlement to women's bodies, and this is seen clearly in the way marriage is treated in relatively recent laws around rape. Race, colonalism, heterosexism, and ableism all interact with sexual assault. And reproductive justice, in its broadest sense, has strong links with sexual assault—women of colour, poor women, and disabled women being forcibly sterilized by the State seems like one of the very clearest examples of sexual violence.

Political accountability seeks to look at how these factors impact on issues of sexual violence honestly and complexly, without drawing forced equivalencies. That is to say that, while patterns of sexual violence are influenced by gendered divisions of labour and wealth, they also occur in great numbers in cases where there is no economic relationship between parties. The forced simplicity of both liberal feminists and MRAs—for example, MRAs' focus on gender imbalances in prisons, without any consideration of other factors or broader issues—is a type of gender reductionism that we hope to avoid. But being nuanced should not be confused with being soft: a perpetrator of assault is a class traitor, like a white supremacist, carrying out a devastating form of intra-class violence against those he holds privilege and power over. We should be harsh, but we should be clear why we're doing it. False claims of community are no justification. In this section, we consider some of the factors at play.

Capitalism and Patriarchy

Patriarchal gender relations and patterns of sexual violence existed prior to the development of capitalism and have manifested in many forms throughout history. However, given that capitalism is the dominant social order of the day, and a system that structures all of our lives, focus will be given here to Capital and patriarchy. Throughout capitalism, working class men have held a cross-class allegiance with ruling class men. They have claimed ownership of, power over, and benefits from women's bodies and labour, as well as more access to property ownership and higher wages. This is evident in many ways. One is that women have historically taken on huge amounts of unpaid reproductive labour, such as childcare, cooking, and housekeeping. This has meant that, no matter how exploited a male worker may be, he has still had the ability to further exploit and oppress in his own home. This has also meant that, historically, working class men who married possessed a right to the body and sexuality of his wife.

It is important to note that while this may be an example of intra-class violence, in the sense that both the man and woman in this example belong to the working class, it is not horizontal violence—because men nonetheless hold structural economic and political power over women. Working class men are faced with a choice—to ally themselves with working class women and fight for gender equality and class struggle, or to continue to reproduce the gender imbalance and gender violence that they have historically benefited from. Too often, even men who called themselves revolutionaries have chosen the latter.

The concept of social reproduction is central to an understanding of how the functioning of capitalism has served to reinforce and perpetuate patriarchy as a system of male dominance. Social reproduction, in this case, refers to work required in order to reproduce workers—things like cooking, raising children, and keeping a clean home. These tasks are as necessary to capitalism as wage labour, but they are often unpaid and hidden away within the private realm of the household. However, in contemporary North American society, we often see this work being carried out by low-paid workers, who are almost all women, mostly women of colour, and often

migrant workers. A key example in Ontario is the Live-In Caregiver Program, in which women workers live in employers' homes and work for long hours, for low wages, and in vulnerable situations.

The material and ideological undervaluing and subordination of women under capitalism is the basis for the reproduction of male dominance and patriarchal relations. Women are, as a group, paid less than men, take on more unpaid reproductive labour, and make up a large part of the most precarious and low-paid workers. For this reason, a political understanding of accountability must also be an anti-capitalist struggle. This means both that instances of sexual assault must be seen in the context of gendered class relations, and that we as anarchists must engage in feminist struggle in workplaces and neighbourhoods around issues of unpaid and low-paid reproductive labour.

Struggling Against Sexual Assault and For Reproductive Justice

While social reproduction plays a central role in capitalism and has been a focal point for the collusion of capitalism and patriarchy, it cannot entirely explain the complexities of patriarchy and sexual assault. Women's bodies and reproductive decisions are under constant scrutiny and control. Here, we see a link between struggles against sexual violence and struggles for greater access to reproductive control for women. We see reproductive rights broadly, as encompassing not only access to birth control and abortion, but the right to have and raise children as well. Poor women, women of colour, and disabled women have been targets of sterilization and other eugenic practices for many years, in the U.S. and in Canada. For example, in the 1990s, state legislators within the United States joined hands with the private pharmaceutical interests in a campaign to manage the reproductive activities of poor women of colour through the coercive and manipulative spread of long-term birth control medication.

In the midst of 1990s neoliberal expenditure cutbacks, state funding was poured into the accessible distribution amongst poor women of an implanted long-term contraceptive known as Norplant. Reminiscent of the racist pseudo-science of eugenics, which once justified targeted sterilization on the basis of supposed biological

predispositions toward various social ills, distribution of Norplant was deliberately concentrated in urban centres with a higher proportion of women of colour on welfare. In some states, Norplant was even implanted as a condition for these women to receive social assistance benefits. In addition to such coercive methods, many states used manipulation—through the promise of additional benefits to those women who complied with the implantation procedure.

In her book *Conquest* (2005), Andrea Smith also outlines how sexual violence has played a role in colonialism in North America. This has taken many forms—from sexual assault to eugenics practices, from war and weapons testing to environmental racism. Destructive environmental practices, carried out by corporations in cooperation with the State, seriously impact the ability of women to have children, in addition to posing other extreme health risks. Undeniably, these effects have most impact on women of colour, Indigenous women, and poor women.

Political accountability must also take into consideration the complex realities of reproductive justice, and the ways in which capitalist states exert control over women's bodies—particularly those of otherwise marginalized women. State institutions—such as residential schools and institutions for individuals with intellectual disabilities—have perpetuated extremely high rates of sexual violence as part of their broader eugenics projects. So, our confrontations against instances of sexual assault must also account for the dynamics of state control and power over women's bodies—and especially those of women who are also oppressed on the basis of race, poverty, sexuality, and disability. Perhaps more importantly, our struggle against sexual assault is woefully inadequate without a struggle against those institutions of the State that continue to perpetuate abuse and control of women's sexuality and reproduction.

III: Politics to the Front – Participating in Feminist Struggle

"The point is not for women simply to take power out of men's hands, since that wouldn't change anything about the world. It's

a question precisely of destroying that notion of power."
-Simone de Beauvoir

The struggle against sexual violence and patriarchy must manifest in our daily lives and organizing efforts. As we develop our politics around these issues, it is imperative that we find ways to test our ideas in practice. As we have seen, a key problem with emphasizing accountability processes is that, by doing so, we are slipping away from addressing the structural roots of sexual violence. By side-stepping an analysis of the wider systems of power that are at play, we risk containing our politics within inward-looking activist scenes. Of course, we absolutely must contend with individual instances of sexual violence, as they will continue to occur. In this regard, an attempt has been made above to underscore how we feel that an approach that stresses political accountability can potentially address some of the short-comings of the community accountability model. However, we must also deal with movements that are actively and publicly organizing to perpetuate patriarchal social relations more broadly. MRAs comprise one such movement. As we endeavor to spread feminist ideas, we can expect to contend with reactionary elements in society that see these ideas as a threat to their relatively privileged existence.

By developing and putting into practice an anarchist political analysis of sexual violence and patriarchy, we are better poised to critique and build upon the failings of current feminist challenges to MRAs. More specifically, as will be explored below, the same absence of structural analysis which seems to plague accountability processes can be detected within the more liberal feminist responses to MRA organizing thus far.

The MRA movement is a growing force in North America, appearing most prominently on university campuses as student clubs that purport to address and raise awareness about "men's issues". By manipulating the anxieties men face under the regime of neoliberal austerity, "men's issues" groups choose to scapegoat feminism, thereby obscuring the underlying social relations of Capital and patriarchy that both men and women must navigate in order to survive.

Men's rights groups have existed in various forms since the 1850s, and more concretely since the 1970s. Historically, this movement has been framed as a critical response to the advancement of women's rights. More than offering a mere critical response, MRAs represent a patriarchal reactionary politics. It is no coincidence that their solidification in the 1970s took place against the backdrop of an influx of women into the paid labour force, and the increasing material gains won through women's rights struggles as part of the expansion of the post-World War II Welfare State. Over the decades, the movement's rhetoric has been finessed to include pleasant words like "equality" and "inclusivity" and phrases that attempt to highlight a commitment to "achieving equality for all Canadians, regardless of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, family status, race, ethnicity, creed, age or disability." Rhetoric like this almost seems to betray the core message, which has remained consistent. The message being that feminists represent a special interest group that place themselves in direct competition with men for access to finite societal resources, and should therefore be opposed.

MRAs claims that men endure hardships in society, such as lack of access to mental healthcare, problems in the judicial and prison systems, and unsafe working conditions are partly legitimate. However, like the anti-choice activist interested in fetal rights, it's clear that much of the interest MRAs have in these issues, and the debates they lead to, are occurring in bad faith. For instance, discussion of unsafe working conditions amongst MRAs does not lend focus to the operation of Capital as a force of exploitation that does harm to working class bodies through its consumption of labour power. Further, of little surprise, MRA discourse lacks any analysis regarding the gendered division of labour that has historically exposed women to uniquely unsafe working conditions. One contemporary example of such exposure is the disproportionate threat of sexual violence faced by female workers in the retail, service and hospitality industries, or the threat of workplace injury to predominantly female personal support workers in understaffed care facilities. Clearly, any attempt to genuinely contend with unsafe working conditions on the job necessarily requires an understanding of work in the context of

capitalism. An understanding that lends itself to a strategy that is only enhanced, not threatened, by a knowledge of women's unique exploitation under capitalism.

Nevertheless, the surface utilization of partially legitimate issues by MRAs—coupled with their reliance on liberal concepts such as "gender blindness" and "equality" as a cover for their anti-feminism—make them a difficult group to engage with using rational discourse. In the absence of a feminist movement that could posit a revolutionary explanation as to why these problems are necessarily perpetuated in a patriarchal, capitalist society, MRAs are able to use this void as an opportunity for their further development. This has taken the form of challenging the very idea that women are structurally oppressed in society.

Men gravitate towards the anti-feminism of the MRAs, not simply because they have experienced hardship in their lives, but because of the significant material benefits they receive under patriarchy. MRAs defend a system that entitles men to the unwaged domestic work of women, as well as higher paid employment with greater social status. Ironically, MRAs consistently raise the rigid definition of masculinity, which men often adhere to (i.e. sexist behaviour) in order to maintain these privileges, as unfair to men. In this vein, the challenge to male dominance that feminism promotes manifests itself sexually as a challenge to male entitlement to female bodies. Female sexual agency is therefore viewed as a threat by many MRAs who, motivated by anger at potential rejection, and uncritical of the role masculine socialization has played in forming their views around consent and choice, like to whip up hysteria regarding so called "false" rape accusations, thereby contributing to their defense of rape culture more broadly. It's likely that female sexual agency is the primary reason men participate in MRA groups, since it seems the bulk of MRAs are in their early twenties—too young to have first-hand experience of some of the other talking points that they rally around. Their unwavering dedication to misogyny should implore us to strengthen our efforts to build an organized response to MRAs. Part of that effort must be a persistence in exposing "men's issues" for what they are—running the gamut from legitimate but misguided, to

completely fraudulent.

In Toronto, MRAs are attempting to become a more permanent feature of the city's political landscape. They have established a student group, which they call the Canadian Association for Equality (CAFE), on the University of Toronto campus, where they have hosted lectures by anti-feminist academics such as Warren Farrell and Janice Fiamengo. CAFE has also set up men's rights groups at Ryerson University (also in Toronto), and several other university campuses in Ottawa, Montreal, Peterborough, and Guelph, as well as two off-campus groups in Ottawa and Vancouver. Currently CAFE is trying to establish a "Centre for Men and Families" in Toronto, and claim to have already received nearly half of the $50,000 start-up funds required—mainly from private donations. The proposed centre would operate as a support hub for men who claim to experience gender-based violence or discrimination, but, unfortunately, will most likely act as an echo-chamber in which "women's issues" are assumed to undermine and eclipse the disproportionate amount of hardships that men are perceived to face in society.

Feminists in Toronto have combated MRA activity in a couple of ways. Rallies have been organized on campus to correspond with the timing of MRA events, in an attempt to engage attendees in dialogue about their issues of concern. Printed materials have been distributed that attempt to re-frame the issues raised by the MRAs as broader social problems perpetuated by patriarchy, and which contain lists of resources for men who are facing domestic abuse or depression. The goal here is to catch the fair-weather MRA before he falls into the abyss of misogyny and victimhood, while still operating within the territory of liberalism.

Much like the rise of accountability processes as a means of addressing instances of sexual violence, these attempts at dealing with the reactionary sexism of MRAs ought to be encouraged and celebrated insofar as they reflect an active undertaking to combat concrete manifestations of male supremacy. Unfortunately, this more liberal brand of combating MRAs also shares with accountability processes a shallow level of political development concerning the

systemic roots of the issues they attempt to confront. Whether it is in the context of holding a presence at MRA events or through debates on social media, a re-framing approach has been coupled with the tendency to engage in a mere statistics war waged against MRA information campaigns. In this context, both sides of the debate seek to present and explain statistics concerning gendered trends surrounding issues such as homelessness, suicide, and industrial accidents, while neither group takes on a deeper analysis of the interlocking systems of power that underlie such trends. To engage genuinely, perhaps we should resist the temptation to retort MRA claims with the standard "but women have it worse". Perhaps a more effective strategy would be an acknowledgment, "yes, men do commit suicide at a higher rate than women—so what are we going to do about it, besides standing around blaming feminists?"

Granted, some feminist approaches to MRA activity have gone beyond the realm of a statistics war, and have crossed into the realm of more confrontational tactics. These have included vocal condemnation of MRA events, as well as actively blocking entrances. This has resulted in significant controversy, as well as the involvement of police. We must be aware that these tactics often dovetail with the MRA narrative that feminists oppose free speech, and stifle debate, because it threatens to undermine their position as most oppressed gender—with all the sweet perks that entails. Given MRAs tendency to innocently claim that men's issues are being brushed aside as unsubstantiated, and that the discrimination men face in society is ignored due to the influence of feminism, this approach must certainly make them feel like modern day civil rights activists. It is important to note, however, that MRAs often film these events as a method of intimidation. The recordings are then often posted on the US-based hate site *A Voice for Men*, where anonymous men dox female protesters, making them the targets of rape and death threats.

While it is worthwhile to oppose these events as they happen, using any of the above tactics as context dictates, we must ask: how can we seek to organize in ways that move past a superficial liberal politics? How can our efforts come to truly reflect the development of a revolutionary politics? What can we do to expand the presence of

revolutionary feminism to a movement that exists beyond protesting one-off MRA events? How can revolutionary feminism evolve to eclipse MRA activity and retake space from groups like CAFE?

This challenging question obviously necessitates an expanded critique of patriarchy that defends feminism, and includes an analysis of capitalism, racism, and colonialism, while being able to provide a competing narrative to the real problems highlighted by MRAs. We need to introduce and strengthen strategies that promote the self-organization of women, on campuses and beyond, to take on these issues and our own. We should also propose tactics to deal with MRAs beyond the counter-demonstration. One possibility would be to go after particularly egregious MRA organizers, employing similar tactics as the Anti-Racist Action (ARA) network has used to such great effect in their efforts to dismantle white supremacist organizations. This could begin by pointing out the roles that white supremacy and patriarchy play in dividing the working class, by providing one group with a set of material benefits that come at the expense of the other. Finally, as Amanda Marcott suggests in her article titled *Confirmed: "Men's Rights Activism" Is For Misogynists Without God*, it may be worth considering the possibility that, since MRAs are overwhelmingly young, many will drift from their redditt atheist roots, "maturing" into the comfort of vaguely Christian conservatism. This route provides a stronger and more effective opportunity to punish women, while still reaping the benefits of female labour. This possibility necessitates a long-term strategy that shouldn't be at odds with our current efforts. Whatever tactics we propose, we need to stress that we cannot limit ourselves to solely taking on MRA groups, and must instead always be working toward broader based revolutionary feminist organizing, tested in practice.

Conclusion

For the past few years, members of Common Cause have struggled to develop the organization's politics around sexual violence. This work has been led mainly by women members, who come to it with a variety of experience in dealing with sexual violence in their own lives and within Left activist organizations. The policy of our organization

is to deal collectively with instances of sexual violence perpetrated by or against our members, with provisions dealing with support for survivors, holding aggressors to account, and relating to other affected individuals and organizations. Moving forward, we believe Common Cause must continue to develop our politics around sexual violence. We need to let our politics lead both in dealing with instances of sexual violence and in determining our organizing strategy against sexual violence in broader society.

While it is clear that dealing with individual instances of sexual violence within our circles is crucial, we see that accountability processes as taken up within the activist Left are often flawed, and in some instances, potentially counterproductive. Where accountability processes have tended to tie up the well-being of the survivor with the transformative processes of the aggressor, we believe an aggressor-as-class traitor orientation is in order. Confrontational approaches to dealing with aggressors, which hold no false pretences of rehabilitation, should be on the table. And because we are dealing with entrenched ideological and institutional systems of power, we recognize that putting all one's eggs into the basket of accountability is not always a survivor's best means to fighting back and healing.

Strengthening our politics around sexual violence requires that we examine the operation of patriarchy, racism, and colonialism in capitalist society. The gendered division of labour in this period of capitalism provides material privileges for male members of the working class, while forcing many female members of the class into unpaid reproductive labour and putting them at high risk of violence within the patriarchal nuclear family. Racialized women are further attacked by state policies seeking to manage their bodies and ability to have children. Colonialism has intensified and re-structured patriarchal relations in the interests of Capital and the State amongst Indigenous populations. Orienting against sexual violence with a better understanding of how patriarchy, racism, and colonialism institutionalize it needs to underlie our strategies for dealing with instances of sexual violence and our broader organizing efforts.

In our current context, confronting the reactionary and fundamentally misogynistic MRA movement presents one possible

strategic avenue for militant feminist organizing. Pushing this work beyond organizing the occasional counter-protests will mean developing our critique of MRAs to include a critique of capitalism, racism, and colonialism that puts forward a competing narrative to the social issues they highlight. It may also require targeting key MRA organizers, employing tactics used by groups like the ARA in their battles against white supremacist organizations.

Anarchists doing the work of aligning ourselves politically to the myriad realities of sexual violence helps to fill in holes that riddle the activist Left's generally weak framework of understanding when it comes to confronting horizontal violence. This work can also help us develop strategies to contend with misogynistic social movements which shore up support for the patriarchal social relations we aim to overthrow. While dealing with instances of sexual violence remains as important as ever, we need to demonstrate that challenging aggressors of sexual violence can tie in to a wider revolutionary politics. We believe the way forward is by letting the politics lead, and by committing to the ongoing development of our ideas to be tested in practice.

WITH ALLIES LIKE THESE:

Reflections on Privilege Reductionism

2 Hamilton members, 1 Toronto member

Over the course of the last several decades, anti-oppression politics have risen to a position of immense influence on activist discourse in North America. Anti-oppression workshops and reading groups, privilege and oppression checklists and guidelines, and countless books, online blogs and articles make regular appearances in anarchist organizing and discussion. Enjoying a relatively hegemonic position in Left conversation, anti-oppression politics have come to occupy the position of a sacred object — something that expresses and reinforces particular values, but does not easily lend itself to critical reflection. Indeed, it is common for those who question the operating and implications of anti-oppression politics to be accused of refusing to seriously address oppression in general. A political framework should be constantly reflected upon and evaluated — it is a tool that should serve our struggles and not vice versa.

Against this backdrop, this article aims to critically engage with the dominant ideas and practices of anti-oppression politics. We

define anti-oppression politics as a related group of analyses and practices that seeks to address inequalities that materially, psychologically, and socially exist in society through education and personal transformation. While there is value in some aspects of anti-oppression politics, they are not without severe limitations. Anti-oppression politics obfuscates the structural operations of power and promotes a liberal project of inclusion that is necessarily at odds with the struggle to build a collective force capable of fundamentally transforming society. It is our contention that anti-oppression furthers a politics of inclusion as a poor substitute for a politics of revolution. The dominant practices of anti-oppression further an approach to struggle whose logical conclusion is the absorption of those deemed oppressed into the dominant order, but not to the eradication and transformation of the institutional foundations of oppression.

I. Historical Context

The Defeat of Liberation and the Rise of Anti-Oppression

In the Global North, the 1960s and 1970s marked a high point in social movement struggle. Today, when revolution can seem impossible, it is difficult to imagine a time when militants spoke of "the revolution" not cynically, but as something that was happening, or would happen in the near future. Subdued using old-fashioned strategies of incarceration, murder, sexual assault, espionage and surveillance, blacklisting, and other forms of direct physical, economical, and emotional violence, beginning in the 1980s, the Left found itself entombed in a sophisticated system of control and co-option. In describing this, our goal is to illustrate how anti-oppression politics are neither radical, nor revolutionary. In fact, the prominence of anti-oppression in activist circles is both a symptom of, and contributing factor to, the ongoing victory of the ruling elite over our movements.

Dylan Rodriguez (2007), in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, elaborates this reality:

Indeed, the US state learned from its encounters with the crest of radical and revolutionary liberationist movements of the

1960s and early 1970s that endless, spectacular exercises of military and police repression against activists of colour on the domestic front could potentially provoke broader local and global support for such struggles — it was in part because they were so dramatically subjected to violent and racist US state repression that Black, Native American, Puerto Rican, and other domestic liberationists were seen by significant sectors of the US and the international public as legitimate freedom fighters, whose survival of the racist State pivoted on the mobilization of a global political solidarity. On the other hand, the US state has found in its coalition with the Non-Profit Industrial Complex a far less spectacular, generally demilitarized, and still highly effective apparatus of political discipline and repression that (to this point) has not provoked a significant critical mass of opposition or political outrage.

Strategies previously employed by State-Capital interests to dispose of a fighting trade union movement were modified and extended to control the heterogeneous New Left movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Rather than being crushed by outright military force, elements of the resistance movements are subsumed into the inner workings of State and Capital, and ultimately come to reinforce the overarching structures of exploitation and oppression. In the 1950s in Canada, what is known as 'labour peace' was declared by a subsection of the labour movement, Capital and the State. The process of establishing labour peace involved some key elements which could be seen as analogous to the pacification of other movements.

The process begins with legitimizing a section of the antagonistic movement, and propping them up as leaders or representatives of the whole. This representation requires funding and a bureaucracy to maintain itself. In the case of labour peace, funding was guaranteed by the Rand Formula, a policy which requires employers whose workers are unionized to collect dues and hand them over to the union, which serves to put the union in a dependent position to the legislative framework, and therefore the State. The maintenance of power and outside legitimacy by those placed on the

top of the hierarchy is contingent on their discipline of the rank and file.

Finally, other systems of domination are mobilized to keep everyone in check—for example, white union workers enforcing a racial hierarchy among their co-workers.

The One-Two Punch: Destroy and Replace

While the co-option of revolutionary movements was no new insight on the part of the ruling class, the scale of this project was novel. Understanding that every new generation would bring with it a "new" awareness that revolutionary change is desirable, the ruling class sought to create infrastructure not just to contain existing movements, but to redirect the energies of future ones. Destroy existing movements by way of violence, infiltration, etc., and replace all aspects of people's movements with institutions that are in line with the interests of the ruling class. For our purposes, it is on this latter point that we focus.

In the 1980s, substantial inroads were made for new areas where people's organizations previously enjoyed a monopoly: the creation of revolutionary theory, the internal movement and popular education by which that theory is shared and elaborated upon, the provision of services to marginalized people and the creation of progressive social spaces. In these four areas, liberalism posturing as an emancipatory politics has thoroughly washed the revolutionary potential away.

Development of Analysis and Theory

While analysis and theory were historically produced by radicals in the context of struggle, this task has largely been shifted into the realm of academia. Over the course of the last several decades, entire bodies of literature and corresponding vocabularies have been developed, turning radical theory and analysis into a highly specialized undertaking. Coming out of the 1970s, many liberation movements sought to create homes for themselves within the university through the creation of 'Progressive Studies' departments (eg. Gender Studies, Critical Race Studies, Disability Studies, Queer Studies, Labour Studies, etc.).

At the time, some activists thought that obtaining space within universities was an important goal because of its potential to organize collectively, and because of the large amount of resources within the university. However, in hindsight, the channelling of resistance into the universities facilitated the destruction of the grassroots movements, and created a space in which people could build careers off of the backs of past struggles. Despite ostensibly radical beginnings, Progressive Studies function to hinder (rather than further) the interests of revolutionary movements.

The gravitation of would-be revolutionaries to the university for an "education", where radical theory is subject to bourgeois pressures more than an accountability to humanity, harnesses our radical traditions and erases collective memory of struggle.

There exists a fundamental misunderstanding (to be generous regarding motivation) of a radical education: that the classroom can serve as a foundation for transformative politics, rather than an adjunct to learning and development focused on real-world struggle.

"Research" conducted by students on marginalized constituencies, which is the closest thing to grassroots work that may be seen, is often based on such exploitative assumptions and power relationships that value may only occasionally be derived from it. The demobilizing effects of the alienation of theory from action cannot here be overstated.

In the creation of Progressive Studies, the passing of stories, information, theory, and practice was very smartly removed from organizations where work was happening. The blossoming of the historical study of people's movements by academia in the past thirty years has had some key effects. Those with the best access to university have the best access to people's history. Simply having access to university, being competent working within it, and having an interest in people's history, is enough to facilitate access to the history.

Therefore, there is no correlation between access to history, the framing and development of that history, and being engaged in struggle oneself. Lacking intimate knowledge of the context of organizing, students of people's history are rarely capable of understanding the material they study. Therefore, we have noticed that

historians who consider themselves "radicals" because they have an interest in liberation stories are often stumped when it comes to extracting the value from their work.

While people's history was a people's pursuit in the 1960s and 1970s, its movement into the university effectively removed people's access and contributions to it. In this sense, history is back to being written by the victors – the liberal bourgeoisie, and those who are able to adapt their studies to their criteria for inclusion. Despite this, it manages to maintain a veneer of subversiveness, which is misleading and unhelpful.

Popular and movement education

Popular education has been almost entirely abandoned by the Left, from radical to reformist. Here we focus on internal movement education, and how it is done.

Movement education continues in the form of mentoring, book-fairs, workshops, literature, online forums, and formal training programs. This stands in contrast to the pedagogy employed by successful movements in the past and contemporarily: education of individual militants is best done in the midst of work, struggle, and action.

James P Garrett worked extensively on the creation of Black Studies at San Francisco State University, a program which was exemplary in the creation of Progressive Studies departments around North America. Interviewed by Ibram Rogers (2009) in *Remembering the Black Campus Movement: An Oral History Interview with James P. Garrett*, he recounts his own political education, beginning when he "got involved in the sit-in movements. We demonstrated and I was arrested seven times that summer and I was hooked. My life changed... by the time I got to [San Francisco] State I was ready. I was trained and prepared. I came there as a veteran of the movement."

Here we contrast the militant who arrives at university "trained" (not in manners, but in the manipulation of power for radical ends) and then proceeds to organize, instead of arriving hoping to be educated.

Describing the goals of the creation of Black Studies as the

redirection of university resources "to benefit or ameliorate the Black community," he is critical of modern careerists "who consolidated the attire of Black consciousness" and "owe a tremendous amount—they don't pay—but they owe a tremendous amount to the sacrifices of people who lost their hands their fingers, their eyes, people who spent time in prison who were killed—students." Pragmatically, Garret is not wedded to the continuation of the institution he helped to create, but hopes younger militants will "develop a worldview about what education should be in the twenty-first century for young Blacks and then move to organize around that."

Even in forms of movement education which were later depicted as individualized, such as Consciousness Raising (CR), people actually emphasized the collective creation and distribution of knowledge by those affected. CR, borrowed by the Women's Movement from Chinese revolutionaries, was a self-education process in groups of women who articulated the truthful realities of their lives to one another, thereby creating a new knowledge of their collective situation.

Of course, the term consciousness raising is now used more to describe awareness of issues faced by oneself or others. The original meaning of the term was not an individual intellectual exercise or imposition. Instead, CR was a deliberate tactic whose goal was to provide a tool with which people could raise themselves from the destitutions in which they found themselves to become militants with agency, by fostering a class-consciousness, based on their experiences (in this example) as women.

The development of class-consciousness, history and identity by a vast collective, in contrast to representatives of given groups who are seen as having authority to speak is perhaps subtle, but important. We see most often in anti-oppression an emphasis on the latter.

In researching this article, we found *The Combahee River Collective Statement* (1978) to be one of the most frequently cited documents in the origin stories of anti-oppression. Often mentioned in the first paragraphs of modern writing and workshop outlines, it was not obvious to us that this document had in fact been read by most authors.

The Combahee Collective takes great pains to describe a process by which its members, all Black Lesbians, educated themselves, and got them to the conclusion that they should continue the creation of a Black Lesbian consciousness and analysis, rather than individualizing insights regarding their condition, as is done contemporarily. The Collective describes the effect that the group-based generation of knowledge had on their development:

> There is also undeniably a personal genesis for Black Feminism, that is, the political realization that comes from the seemingly personal experiences of individual Black women's lives. Black feminists and many more Black women who do not define themselves as feminists have all experienced sexual oppression as a constant factor in our day-to-day existence … Black feminists often talk about their feelings of craziness before becoming conscious of the concepts of sexual politics, patriarchal rule, and most importantly, feminism, the political analysis and practice that we women use to struggle against our oppression.

Practitioners of anti-oppression have been heard to say, "a white person cannot be an expert on racism." In practice, especially in combination with the Non-Profit Industrial Complex (NPIC), where paid jobs increasingly demand a university education, a degree in any Progressive Study functions to make viable the prominence/importance/leadership of individuals within movements where they would otherwise not be central. Using academic credentials, an "ally" can obtain employment at an agency, where services are provided to a constituency in which the worker may or (more often) may not have "lived experience." This helps to propagate systems of domination within marginalized communities by entitling non-members to important roles in their maintenance. Alisa Bierria (2007), in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*,a gives the following example of the progression in the ways education is viewed:

Organizers often understood themselves as belonging to a

mutual community of women who had suffered from patriarchal violence. Seattle Rape Relief, for example, began from a speakout, a mutual sharing of stories about the experience of abuse. As the movement developed and became increasingly professionalized, workers were expected to be not "battered women" but experts with a master's degree in social work.

The Provision of Services

In the past, many revolutionary groups provided services to those who were unable to obtain them elsewhere due to their marginalization. Examples of this would be the development of shelters by radical feminists for women being subjected to violence, and the Black Panther Party's free breakfast program. These services, provided by grassroots organizers, posed important political questions: Why do women need shelters? Why do Black children need breakfast? Then they proposed responses: patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism.

Service provision was a valuable method for the recruitment, training, and retention of militants. It served as a form of 'prefigurative practice' via direct action, as a way to develop organizing skills, and a venue to sharpen revolutionary analysis. Also, every action taken by an organization or social movement is also a form of outreach and recruitment. Different forms of action attract people with different goals. Symbolic action may attract those interested in representation. Lobbying attracts those who are invested in the power of the State. The direct service provision served to attract high quality new recruits who were interested in immediate results, but as they were constructed with revolutionary goals in mind, served as a way to demonstrate the viability of alternative economic and social arrangements.

Social interactions

In recent years we have seen an emphasis placed on the role of anti-oppressive practice in regulating social interactions on the left. As manners go, anti-oppression is not a bad try at a moral code that seeks not to brutalize and disempower each other. Perhaps this is the best that can be said about it. However, it does not in and of itself constitute

anything other than a bare minimum standard of behavior, certainly not a politics.

Decades ago, in yet another work that has been left un-read by those who invoke it, the value of such interventions were questioned by Carol Hanisch (1970) in *The Personal is Political*. Discussing CR she states, "personal problems are political problems. There are no personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution." Soon after, Hanisch dismisses lifestylism as without political merit:

> The groups that I have been in have also not gotten into "alternative life-styles" or what it means to be a "liberated" woman. We came early to the conclusion that all alternatives are bad under present conditions... There is no "more liberated" way; there are only bad alternatives.

Reading and Waiting for the Anti-Globalization Movement

When the Anti-Globalization Movement saw a groundswell of activism, action and organizing, the capacities of the NPIC and Progressive Studies to contain potential revolutionary forces were put to the test.

Hungry to learn more about the world and how to change it, fresh activists turned to the remnants of the last generation of high struggle. Only instead of finding the history in their neighbourhoods, grandparents, political organizations and prisons, they found them in books written by university-educated people, themselves overwhelmingly disengaged from struggle, published in academic journals and university-affiliated presses.

Infused in this purportedly radical press was the ideology of anti-oppression. Explicitly claiming heritage in the 1960s and 1970s liberation movements on the one hand, anti-oppression theory on the other hand discourages direct connection with these movements. Referencing and critiquing works of past generations while not making those works directly available to new activists, academics and their allies on the one hand stood on the backs of (often still-living) organizers of decades gone, while dismissing their work as a whole as

"problematic."

Black Power can be dismissed as anti-feminist and homophobic. Labour struggles are racist, colonialist, and patriarchal. Radical feminism is anti-trans*, anti-sex, and sometimes homophobic. Other feminisms are pro-capitalist, and white-centred. Gay liberation was dominated by white, affluent men. Components of all movements sought to integrate themselves in political power structures and Capital. In order for an idea to be worth considering, the generator of the idea must be politically pure. And since the purity has to do with strict adherence to a code of speech and conduct which was developed and is learned primarily through universities in the past twenty years, which are accessible only to a portion of workers (and in departments which are desirable to far, far fewer than even have access) the pool of people who are able to speak with any authority is quite small. Interestingly, it does not include many on-the-ground organizers, past and present, but is dominated by those who have access or desire to pursue a formal education in Progressive Studies.

The Anti-Globalization Movement, as it became known, thus came to serve as the means by which anti-oppression politics would come to imbed itself in the theory and activity of the Left, the activist milieu, etc. Now, a decade and a half later it is held as the hegemonic, almost innate, orientation of most of the Left—radical, progressive, reformist, or otherwise. We now will look at what this entails in day-to-day practice, and what we understand the implications of this to be.

II. Practices

In order to situate our critique, it is useful to consider some of the common practices associated with anti-oppression politics. Although a homogenous grouping of practices does not exist, there are dominant trends that can be observed. There are common customs and rules that constitute the lived practices of anti-oppression politics. The descriptions we provide here are not exhaustive but representative.

Workshops, Workshops & More Workshops!
Workshops are a foundational component of anti-oppression politics.

Anti-oppression workshops are mandatory in many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and activist groups. Workshops attempt to provide an overview of the ways in which power operates in society, outline different forms of oppression, and encourage participants to reflect on the ways in which they experience privilege. Group exercises such as "Step Forward, Step Back" and "Mainstream/Margin" are used to draw on personal experiences to highlight the different ways in which oppression and privilege affect participants.

In Pursuit of Safe(r) Spaces

Safe or "safer" space policies are a standard outcome of anti-oppression politics. Organizations and groups incorporate into their mission statements or basis of unity documents a policy that expresses their commitment to anti-oppression via the construction of safe spaces. These statements present a laundry list of oppressions (racism, sexism, homophobia, "classism," ableism, ageism, etc.), and cover guidelines for appropriate behaviour. Common features of these policies include using inclusive language (i.e. avoid gendered language), being respectful towards others, and the provision of "active" listeners.

Callout Culture & "Working on Your Shit"

The "checking of privilege" is a fundamental component of anti-oppression practice.

The analogy of "unpacking the knapsack" first used by McIntosch in *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* has been widely adopted by anti-oppression advocates, who centralize recognizing and thinking about privilege. Part of this practice includes the use of the qualifier—people preface statements with an acknowledgement of the ways in which they are privileged (i.e. "As a white-able-bodied settler who is university educated…"). If someone is not adequately "checking their privilege," the retaliation is "the callout"—an individual or group is informed (often publicly) that they need to "work on their shit" in order to realize the ways in which they benefit, and are complicit in x oppression.

The "Good Ally"
The identity of ally (as someone who primarily identifies as engaging in struggle in support of others) is another cornerstone of anti-oppression politics. According to a popular anti-oppression guide, an ally is "…a person who supports marginalized, silenced, or less privileged groups." The fundamental pursuit of someone with privilege is the quest to become a "good ally." It is considered fundamental to take leadership (usually unquestionable) from representatives of oppressed groups and act as an ally to their struggles. Innumerable lists, guides, and workshops have been produced to outline the steps and necessary requirements for being an ally. The individual focus of the idea of "ally" in contrast to the collective response of "solidarity" which used to occupy a similar place is symptomatic of the general denigration of collective action by anti-oppression politics.

III. Implications

Championing Individual Over Collective Action
While anti-oppression theory acknowledges that power relations operate at both the micro and macro level, it places a disproportionate focus on the level of individual interactions. Emphasis is placed on individual conduct and personal improvement, with little attention given to challenging oppression at a structural level. Widely used by activist groups and NGOs, the document *Principles and Practices of Anti-Oppression* is a telling example of this trend. The statement describes the operation of oppression and outlines steps for challenging the unequal distribution of power solely in terms of individual behaviour. It puts forth the following suggestions for confronting oppression: "Keep space open for anti-oppression discussion… Be conscious of how your language may perpetuate oppression…promote anti-oppression in everything you do…don't feel guilty, feel motivated."

In a similar vein, the popular blog *Black Girl Dangerous* in a recent post *4 Ways to Push Back Against Your Privilege* offers a simple four-step model. The first step is to make the choice to relinquish

power—if you are in a position of power, relinquish this position. Step two is "just don't go"—"If you have access to something and you recognize that you have it partly because of privilege, opt out of it". The third step is to shut up—if you are an individual of privilege who is committed to anti-oppression you will "…sit the hell down and shut up." And finally, step four is to be careful with the identities that you claim. The strategy for ending oppression is articulated as a matter of addressing power dynamics between individuals in a group context, but within the confines of the State and Capitalism.

For the privileged subject, struggle is presented as a matter of personal growth and development—the act of striving to be the best non-oppressive person that you can be. An entire industry is built on providing resources, guides, and trainings to help people learn to challenge oppression by means of "checking their privilege." The underlining premise of this approach is the idea that privilege can be willed away. At best this orientation is ineffective, and at worst it can actually work to re-center those who occupy positions of privilege at the expense of wider political struggle. Andrea Smith reflecting on her experiences with anti-oppression workshops, describes this issue:

> These workshops had a bit of a self-help orientation to them: "I am so and so, and I have x privilege." It was never quite clear what the point of these confessions were…It did not appear that these individual confessions actually led to any political projects to dismantle the structures of domination that enabled their privilege. Rather, the confession became the political project themselves.

Resulting in what Smith terms the "ally industrial complex," the approach of challenging oppression via the confession of one's privilege leads to a valorization of the individual actions of a "confessing subject". Acknowledging the ways in which structures of oppression constitute who we are and how we experience the world through the allocation of privilege is a potentially worthwhile endeavor. However, it is not in and of itself politically productive or transformative.

Privilege is a matter of power. It equates benefits, including access to resources and positions of influence, and can be considered in terms of both psychological or emotional benefits, as well as economic or material benefits. It is much more than personal behaviours, interactions, and language, and can neither be wished, nor confessed away. The social division of wealth and the conditions under which we live and work shape our existence, and cannot be transformed through individual actions. We must organize together to challenge the material infrastructure that accumulates power (one result of which is privilege). Anything less leads to privilege reductionism—the reduction of complex systems of oppression whose structural basis is material and institutional to a mere matter of individual interactions and personal behaviours.

Relentless Articulation of Difference

As a component of anti-oppression politics, intersectionality accounts for the complexity of domination by outlining the various ways in which different forms of oppression intersect and reproduce each other. Rooted in feminist discussions of the 1970s and 1980s that sought to problematize the notion of universal "womanhood," intersectionality provides a framework for conceptualizing the ways in which different "positionalities" (eg. gender, sexuality, race, class, ability, etc.) shape people's subjective experiences, as well as material realities. Patricia Hill Collins describes intersectionality as an "…analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization." In sum, intersectionality provides a lens through which we can view people's social locations as mutually constitutive and tied to systemic inequalities.

Intersectionality is often evoked in a manner that isolates and reifies social categories without adequately drawing attention to common ground. Crucial to its analysis is an emphasis on a politics of difference—it is asserted that our identities and social locations necessarily differentiate us from those who do not share those identities and social locations. So, for example, a working class queer woman will not have the same experiences and by extension, the same

interests as an affluent woman who is straight. Similarly, a cis-man of colour will not have the same experiences and by extension the same interests as a trans* man of colour, and so on and so forth. Within this framework, difference is the fundamental unit of analysis and that which proceeds and defines identity. This practice works to isolate and sever connections between people in that it places all of its emphasis on differentiation.

There are seemingly endless combinations of identities that can be articulated. However, these articulations of difference do not necessarily get at the root of the problem. As Collins argues: "…Quite simply, difference is less a problem for me than racism, class exploitation and gender oppression. Conceptualizing these systems of oppression as difference obfuscates the power relations and material inequalities that constitute oppression."

It is absolutely true that our social locations shape our experiences, and may influence our politics. Acknowledging difference is important, but it is not enough. It can obscure the functioning of oppression, and act as a barrier to collective struggle. The experiences of a female migrant who works as a live-in caregiver will not be the same as a male worker who has citizenship and works in a unionized office. These differences are substantial and should not be ignored. However, in focusing only on difference we lose sight of the fact that both are exploited under capitalism, and have a shared interest in organizing to challenge Capital. To be clear, this is not to say that divisions can be put aside and dealt with "after the revolution", but to highlight the importance of finding common ground as a basis to bridge difference and organize collectively to challenge oppression. In the words of Sherene Razack: "speaking about difference…is not going to start the revolution." Moving beyond a politics of difference, we need an oppositional politics that seeks to transform structural relations of power.

The Subcultural Ghetto and Lifestylism

The culture of anti-oppression politics lends itself to the creation and maintenance of insular activist circles. A so-called "radical community"—consisting of collective houses, activist spaces,

bookfairs, etc.—premised on anti-oppression politics fashions itself as a refuge from the oppressive relations and interactions of the outside world. This notion of "community", along with anti-oppression politics' intense focus on individual and micro personal interactions, disciplined by "call-outs" and privilege checking, allows for the politicization of a range of trivial lifestyle choices. This leads to a bizarre process in which everything from bicycles to gardens to knitting are accepted as radical activity.

Callout culture and the fallacy of community accountability creates a disciplinary atmosphere in which people must adhere to a specific etiquette. Spaces then become accessible only to those who are familiar with, and able to express themselves with the proper language and adhere to the dominant customs. Participation in the discourse which shapes and directs this language and customs is mostly up to those who are able to spend too much time debating on activist blogs, or who are academics or professionals well versed in the dialect. As mentioned previously, the containment of radical discourse to the university further insulates the "activist bubble" and subcultural ghetto.

In addition to creating spaces that are alienating to those outside of our milieu, anti-oppression discourse, callout culture, and the related "communities" leads activists to perceive themselves as an "enlightened" section of the class (largely composed of academics, students, professionals, etc. who have worked on their shit and checked their privilege) who are tasked with acting as missionaries to the ignorant and unclean masses. This anarchist seperatist orientation is problematic for any who believe in the possibility of mass liberatory social movements that are capable of actually transforming society.

One example of this orientation is a recent tumblr blog maintained by Toronto activists entitled *Colonialism Ain't Fashionable*. The blog encourages activists to use their smart phones to snap photos of people wearing Hudson Bay jackets in public and submit them. Hudson Bay is a Canadian retailer which played a historically significant role in colonialism, and the jacket in particular is seen by activists as an example of cultural appropriation. Photos are then published in a strange act of attempted public shaming, justified

with some high-minded language about "challenging colonialism at a cultural level," or "sparking discussion." What we actually see on display here is the arrogant glee with which those within the activist bubble shake their finger at those outside it.

The retreat to subcultural bohemian enclaves and activist bubbles acknowledges that revolutionary change is impossible, and as a substitute offers a counterfeit new society in the here and now. We understand that such a proposition is appealing given the day-to-day indignity and suffering that is life under our current conditions, but time and time again we have seen these experiments implode on themselves. Capitalism simply does not offer a way out and we must face this reality as the rest of the class that we are a part of faces it everyday. No amount of call-outs or privilege checking will make us into individuals untainted by the violent social relationships that permeate our reality.

Privilege, Militancy & Implicit Pacifism

As a pacifying feature of anti-oppression politics, the assertion is frequently made that militancy is a luxury for the privileged. In the context of a meeting in which a militant action is proposed, proponents of anti-oppression politics will often critique the proposal on the basis that only those with x or y privilege can participate in such an action. Due to the increased risks associated with militant action, it is argued that confrontational politics are largely the domain of those who occupy a social location of privilege, mainly cis-men. This line of argument is then used to criticize confrontational actions as exclusionary and to gender such actions as masculine (i.e. the framing of a tactic as "manarchist"). For example, the Autonomous Workers' Group notes that black bloc actions in their city of Portland are often critiqued on the basis of furthering a "…mentality of masculine, white-privilege." In a similar vein, another article critiques property destruction and illegal strike action, stating:

> There are many problems with this. Some people cannot get arrested (immigration status or compromise of professional licensing)…Other issues that warrant consideration are people

who may have had traumatic experiences around violence or the police (or both). People with health issues (mental or physical) may also not be able to participate in these kind actions…

Noting that it is not feasible for everyone to participate in high-risk actions, the article concludes that peaceful protest provides an opportunity for anyone, regardless of privilege, to participate. The end result of this logic is an aversion to risk that breads an implicit pacifism.

The avoidance of risk is a logical impossibility. To engage in revolutionary struggle is necessarily to put yourself at risk. To be against Capital, the State, colonialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, etc., is to declare yourself an enemy of these systems. Risk, discomfort, conflict are unavoidable. The history and ongoing reality of resistance movements is radically unsafe. Furthermore, for a lot of people simply going through their daily life is not safe. Marginalized communities aren't safe going about their daily lives because of institutions of oppression—police, prisons, individual, and systemic violence, etc. To ignore this reality is to abandon revolutionary organizing. Jackie Wang notes: "…removing all elements of risk and danger reinforces a politics of reformism that just reproduces the existing social order."

If we accept that a) confrontation is relegated to privileged social positions, and that b) inclusivity is an uncompromising imperative, it follows that pacifism is the only acceptable approach to struggle. There exists an essential contradiction. Within the framework of anti-oppression politics it is only the most oppressed who are considered to be legitimate actors in struggle (the role of the privileged is the ally). Yet, it is argued that militancy is for the privileged alone. Thus, the only option available is passive resistance. The framing of confrontational forms of resistance as belonging to the realm of privilege acts to relegate necessary tools—actions, tactics, strategies, etc.—to a domain that is inaccessible. It re-inscribes, rather than challenges the unequal distribution of power in society, acts to erase militant histories in which oppressed peoples have engaged in violent

resistance, and further thrusts a role of hapless victim onto those who are oppressed. There is nothing liberatory about this.

IV. Moving Forward

We have identified the current regime of anti-oppression politics as inadequate in providing a way forward in the task of developing a revolutionary movement capable of meaningfully challenging systems of oppression and exploitation. Not only are these politics inadequate, but ultimately regressive and counter productive. Attempts to address the inadequacies of anti-oppression are often met with accusations of class reductionism. While we acknowledge that class reductionism exists as an incorrect political orientation, the accusation of such can be used as a straw-man attack on those who transgress the dominant discourse within anarchist/radical circles.

Reducing the Class

As an actual political orientation, class reductionism can be largely described as a tendency on the Left which prioritizes the economic struggle in the workplace as the primary terrain of revolutionary or progressive action. Often this will go further to fetishize a particular segment of workplace struggle, namely that of blue collar, industrial workers. Whether or not it is implicitly stated, the belief is held that the struggle against other oppressions—white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, ableism, etc.—are incidental to the class struggle, to be engaged in as secondary, or that they are simply prejudices concocted by the ruling class to be dealt with "after the revolution."

On the other hand, we have the proponents of anti-oppression politics attempting to amalgamate "class" as another oppression alongside the rest, which "intersect" with one another at various times and places in a persons life. Here we are presented with the grotesque notion of "classism"—the result of an attempt by anti-oppression theory to reconcile inadequate politics with the entirety of capitalist social relations. The *School Of the Americas Watch* Anti-Oppression toolkit section on classism offers a prime example:

> The stereotype is that poor and working class people are unintelligent, inarticulate, and "overly emotional." A good ally (a non-working-class committed supporter) will contradict these messages by soliciting the knowledge and histories of poor working class people, being a thoughtful listener, trying to understand what is being said…

Putting aside for a second the conflation of "poor" and "working class" which indicates this writer's lack of insight into the matter they seek to educate about, there is truth in the descriptions of the "stereotype".

We are reminded of the 2010 movie, *Made in Daginham*, where Eddie O'Grady attempts to ingratiate himself to his wife by pointing out that he does not beat her or their children. Frustrated by her husband's lack of consideration of her struggle, Rita replies, "That is as it should be…You don't go on the drink, do ya? You don't gamble, you join in with the kids, you don't knock us about. Oh, lucky me. For Christ's sake, Eddie, that's as it should be! You try and understand that. Rights, not privileges. It's that easy. It really bloody is."

Similarly, for all the back-patting going on with regards to "allies" most of what is advised and done constitutes nothing more than a minimal standard of behaviour. We do not feel respected when someone in a position of power "consults" us before making a decision regarding our lives, no matter how attentive and probing they may be. We see this emphasis on listening to rather than creating with as uncomradely and tokenizing.

In their essay *Insurrections at the Intersections* anarchists Jen Rogue and Abbey Volcano address so-called classism by writing:

> Since everyone experiences these identities differently, many theorists writing on intersectionality have referred to something called "classism" to complement racism and sexism. This can lead to the gravely confused notion that class oppression needs to be rectified by rich people treating poor people "nicer" while still maintaining class society. This analysis treats class differences as though they are simply cultural differences. In

turn, this leads toward the limited strategy of "respecting diversity" […] This argument precludes a class struggle analysis which views capitalism and class society as institutions and enemies of freedom. We don't wish to "get along" under capitalism by abolishing snobbery and class elitism.

Both of these instances of reductionism point to a fundamental misunderstanding of class and class struggle, as well as to the limits of intersectionality in understanding social relationships under capitalism. The class reductionism we should be critical of is that which attempts to reduce the class to a mere section of it (whether it is simply the poorest, or the most blue collar), and that which attempts to hold up the interests of that section as that of the entire class. The reality is that the majority of the planet is working class, and we must recognize that the material obstacles within our class, and the manner by which they reproduce themselves must be attacked as a matter of necessity. Not because we are good allies or because we want to check privileges or because we want to reduce everything to "class first!" but because we are fucking revolutionaries and we have to.

The (Re)production of Division
If our intention is not strictly limited to maintaining activist enclaves, we are required to look for the means to understand the development of identity and division under capitalism. In *Caliban and the Witch*, Silvia Federici examines the position of women throughout the rise of capitalism. With an emphasis on the incredibly violent subjugation necessary, witch burnings being an especially stark example, Federici outlines the historical process that fostered the patriarchal social relationships which uphold, and define capitalism.

This process is one which ran alongside the period of primitive accumulation in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The enclosure of the commons by a fledgling bourgeoisie and the imposition of private property was the material basis for the proletarianization of populations—without the land base necessary for subsistence, peasants became workers who must sell their labour for a wage in order to survive. Primitive accumulation is the subsumption of

life into the rubric of Capital—land into property, time into wages, things into commodities—and by extension the transformation of social relationships necessary to maintain and reproduce these categories. The subjugation of women to patriarchal capitalism was a crucial element of this process. The construction of the nuclear family, the assignment of domestic and reproductive labour as "women's work", and the subsequent devaluation and erasure of that labour, were historic tasks achieved through the development of capitalism. Attempting to understand patriarchy as limited to individual attitudes or actions, or somehow isolated from capitalism (regardless of patriarchal or gendered divisions of labour in pre-capitalist history) is therefore impossible. Speaking to the accomplishment of the implementation of these new social relationships, Federici writes:

> … in the new organization of work every woman (other than those privatized by bourgeois men) became a communal good, for once women's activities were defined as non-work, women's labor began to appear as a natural resource, available to all, no less than the air we breathe or the water we drink.

The social, economic, and political position of women was thus defined under capitalism. This new reality meant that the class struggle, that is the struggle for the emancipation of the working class, takes on a particular character whether or not this is recognized by its would-be partisans. Federici further explains:

> With their expulsion from the crafts and the devaluation of reproductive labor, a new patriarchal order was constructed, reducing women to a double dependence: on employers and on men

This "double dependence" thus implies that the oppression of women under capitalism is not something that is incidental, nor something that can be addressed in isolation. As having particular features and the product of (ongoing) historic development, attacking patriarchy demands that we attack the conditions which allow the perpetuation of

the social relationships by which it is constituted. As class struggle anarchists then we identify the class struggle as one against this "double dependence" as we struggle against the conditions which are necessary for capitalism to reproduce itself.

Struggling at the Barricades, Struggling at Home

In 2006, the Mexican state of Oaxaca became engulfed in a popular uprising that lasted several months. What began as an annual teachers strike developed into a popular conflict. Barucha Calamity Peller's *Women in Uprising: The Oaxaca Commune, the State, and Reproductive Labour* looks at the revolt and the particular role women played. The essay shows us both what the disruption of the reproduction of patriarchal social relations can look like and how the reinforcement of those relations from within the movement ultimately contributed to its limitation and defeat.

On April 1st, 2006, a march of the Cacerolas (later imitated in Quebec and across Canada) consisting of over ten thousand women, initiated the takeover of TV station Canal Neuve. Several hundred women from the march occupied the building which was repurposed as a communication hub and resource to the ongoing struggle. Peller writes:

> Besides transmitting, producing daily programming, and holding workshops, long hours were spent during nightly patrols of the transmitter and defensive barricades in which the women of Canal Nueve spoke to each other while huddled around small fires drinking coffee to stay awake. The dialogue and solidarity that emerged between the women was perhaps one of the most potent results of the takeover. What was before "private" and "personal" became a site for resistance. It was during these conversations that women for the first time experienced a space not dominated by men, in the absence of the market, in which they could organize freely and relate experiences, and talk to other women. This is where the idea of women's autonomy emerged in Oaxaca, and it was to this formation of women, where there was no exploitation of their

labor, no dominance of the market or the family, that the women would refer throughout the struggle.

What we find important here is the implication that the creation of new, anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal relations requires the creation of the material basis to do so. The creation of such a basis requires the negation and disruption of the conditions that produce the old ways of interacting. Here, the occupation of the Canal Neuve could be understood as what a revolutionary women's movement in embryo might look like—where the conditions were created for the creation of a new subjectivity and the destruction of the former identity.

In the case of Oaxaca, patriarchy still persisted within the movement. Women who attempted to challenge traditional gender roles were subjected to domestic abuse and/or forced to continue to take on the full burden of reproductive labour.

Rather than rely on limited class reductionist understandings, either limiting itself to the factory floor or sociological definitions of "proles," we must strive for a class struggle which directs us towards the abolition of the division within our class which are necessary to uphold capitalism. We find the example of the Oaxaca uprising useful insofar as it provides us with a glimpse of both the undoing of oppressive social relationships, and the defense of those relationships in a period of intensified struggle.

While this section has focused primarily on gendered division and oppression under capitalism, our intention is to emphasize that these categories and identities are historically constructed, and have a material basis to their continued reproduction. We see the process of their destruction as one that is necessarily part of the class struggle. To paraphrase Marx, this is the process of moving towards a class that is conscious of itself, and able to act in its own interest—a class for itself.

V. Conclusion

It is our belief that the ways in which humans are exploited, assaulted, pitted against one another, and robbed of individual and collective agency must (and furthermore, can) be overcome and replaced with a

liberatory existence. While some see anti-oppression politics as contributing to this endeavor, we see these politics as a substantial hindrance to revolutionary organizing. We would like to challenge our comrades and fellow travellers to do better than this half-hearted liberal project that facilitates the reduction of complex social and economic problems to interpersonal dynamics and individual privileges. Our struggle is collective, and so too must be our tools and analysis.

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