

# ORGANISE!

...for revolutionary anarchism



## Smash the Prison Industrial Complex

- **An in-depth look at how to get involved with the modern prison abolition movement**
- **Cuban anarchists working towards the next revolution**
- **Tactics to take a campaign from inception to victory**

# 88

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# Organise!

## Issue 88 – Summer 2017

Organise! is the magazine of the Anarchist Federation (AF). As anarchist communists we fight for a world without leaders, where power is shared equally amongst communities, and people are free to reach their full potential. We do this by supporting working class resistance to exploitation and oppression, organise alongside our neighbours and workmates, host informative events, and produce publications that help make sense of the world around us.

Organise! is published twice per year with the aim to provide a clear anarchist viewpoint on contemporary issues and to initiate debate on ideas not normally covered in agitational papers. To meet this target, we positively solicit contributions from our readers. We will try to print any article that furthers the objectives of anarchist communism. If you'd like to write something for us, but are unsure whether to do so, then feel free to contact us through any of the details below.

The articles in this issue do not represent the collective viewpoint of the AF unless stated as such. Revolutionary ideas develop from debate, they do not merely drop out of the air! We hope that this publication will help that debate to take place.

For the next issue of Organise! articles can be submitted to the editors directly at:

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# Editorial: Smash the Prison Industrial Complex

Even to some within the anarchist movement, prison abolition can sound like an unrealistic demand. However, one of the main principles that sets anarchism apart from other strands of political thought is that we create the world we hope for tomorrow by mirroring it in the actions we take today. Looking at the criminal justice system with this in mind we see a vital component of the state that ensures people are kept dispossessed. It is designed so that anyone who attempts to fight back through strikes and protest will be punished. Its prisons are full of people who would not have needed to break any laws if the lawmakers hadn't denied them their dignity in the first place. With this in mind, the only truly anarchist response to the criminal justice system can be total opposition. Thus our theme this issue is to look at prison abolition.

With 'Brick by Brick' we are given an in-depth look at what is meant when people talk about the Prison Industrial Complex, as well as the strong arguments in favor of a practical prison abolition movement. We also have several pieces detailing that movement: 'The Empty Cages Collective' give their perspective on opposing the British prison system, 'Care Not Cages' was written for the International Day of Solidarity with Trans Prisoners by a member of Action for Trans Health, and we have an update on the work of the Anarchist Black Cross in Belarus as they deal with the fallout to mass civil unrest in 'Opposing the 'Social Parasite' Tax'. Finally, we have a short directory of groups and campaigns that are active today that we hope you feel inspired to get involved with.

Given the theme, many of the articles in this issue will deal with prisons, policing and systemic oppression of specific groups. Sources will include references to violence including police brutality, racism, incarceration, prison deaths, self harm, suicide, poverty, assault and sexual violence.

Going beyond the theme we have LOTS more, including an amazing selection of reviews, a piece written by anarchist comrades in Cuba on the death of Castro, and a culture piece thinking on the ways in which the State and capitalism have effected the production of beer throughout the years. Also, if you have anything that you would like to submit to for our Autumn/Winter issue then our inbox is open for contributions.

# Brick by Brick Creating a World Without Prisons

This essay by Layne Mullett originally appeared in the current issue of *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory*, N. 28, on the topic of Justice. The full issue is available from AK Press, while the essay can be accessed online via the Institute for Anarchist Studies: <https://anarchiststudies.org/2016/02/24/brick-by-brick-creating-a-world-without-prisons-by-layne-mullett/>

Since the publication of Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* in 2012, there has been much talk about the need to end mass incarceration. More and more people are speaking publicly about the moral and financial implications of maintaining the world's largest prison system. However, what it means to end mass incarceration, and what it would take to end it, is less clear.

Mass incarceration plays a central role in maintaining state and capitalist power in the United States, and abolishing the prison system must play a central role in movements for radical change. Mass incarceration allows the state to perpetuate unpopular economic policies that would not be possible in the face of strong resistance movements. While reform efforts might cause the structures of mass incarceration to shift, and lead to decreases in the prison population (as is already happening in some places), a more fundamental transformation is necessary if we hope to see an actual rather than cosmetic shift in the meaning and practice of "justice."

Our efforts to end mass incarceration cannot be rooted in reform, but must instead address the structural roots that have given rise to the world's largest prison system. We must create movements that thrive on our differences and build on our strengths. The prison system sits at the nexus of multiple forms of oppression, so we must generate analysis and resistance that is intersectional. Supporting political prisoners, developing the capacity to withstand state repression, and embracing meaningful forms of justice and

healing, horizontal models of sharing power, and feminist and queer ways of understanding the multitude of possible futures are all part of this struggle.

Many of the ideas put forward here come from people organizing against mass incarceration, and these movements are on the rise. Unfortunately, so is state repression. For example, in 2013, the FBI announced that they had added Assata Shakur to the FBI's "Most Wanted Terrorist" list, along with a \$2 million reward. A former Black Panther and member of the Black Liberation Army, Assata escaped from prison in 1979 and has lived as an exile in Cuba ever since. Assata's placement on the list, while certainly bad news, also tells us something about the power, or potential power, of radical and revolutionary movements. Does the FBI think Assata Shakur is about to launch an attack against the United States? No. But she is worth \$2 million to the state, dead or alive, because of what she represents. Assata is a global symbol of the Black Liberation movement. The FBI is targeting her because they know that the legacy she represents is powerful enough that it is worth \$2 million to try and destroy it.

We need to recognise the power of our movements too. Not just because history is important, though of course it is, but because we need this power to chart a different future. The persecution of political prisoners, the rise of the surveillance state, and the mass imprisonment of poor people and people of color are all part of a system designed to prevent exactly the kind of revolution Assata and so many others have fought for.



*"My words, my soul, I share with you all. I offer myself in solidarity with your struggle as you have offered yourself to mine. I cannot march alongside with you, but know that my spirit is there – as yours is here. I hope to comfort you, as my brothers and I are comforted by your presence and commitment. If the abolition of slave manacles began as a vision of hands without manacles, then this is the year! ... Let this be the year that hunger is met with the Bread of Angels, ignorance is confronted by the understanding hands of love, and greed is overcome by the will of The People who believe that investments should be made in the liberation of people rather than their confinement."*

Eduardo's words remind us to take seriously that every day we must not just "hold the vision of hands without manacles," but take the necessary risks – big and small – to make this a reality.

The last few years have seen small steps forward, with massive strikes within state and federal prisons and detention centers, as well as the release of political prisoners Lynn Stewart, Marshall Eddie Conway, Eric McDavid, Sekou Odinga, and Herman Wallace (just days before his death). Grassroots campaigns targeting sentencing and parole practices have won reforms in states across the country, and protests against austerity and authoritarianism continue to erupt across the globe.

In the same month that Assata was placed on the "Most Wanted" list, in my own small corner of the world, I was embarking on a 100-mile march with Decarcerate PA, a grassroots campaign working to end mass incarceration in Pennsylvania. We were marching from Philadelphia to the Capitol in Harrisburg to protest the \$400 million expansion of Pennsylvania's prison system and demand that resources instead be directed towards community needs.

As part of the march, we tried to create many avenues for people to participate, and to unite many different visions of a future without prisons. We worked with people across the state, children and adults, people inside and outside of prisons, to make hundreds of flags with visual representations of what we would build instead of prisons. Responses included schools, mental health treatment, teaching real history, transformative justice, freedom, swimming pools, and "family dinners with no one missing." We brought these flags to Harrisburg with us to present as our "people's budget." Although not everyone could physically march with us, their ideas and visions walked alongside us.

Many Decarcerate supporters inside of Pennsylvania's prisons also sent statements to be read at rallies, brought to the governor's office, or shared with marchers on our breaks to help motivate us to keep going. Many people wrote to us to say they were marching with us, in spirit if not in body. They eloquently and fiercely expressed the problems with the system as it is, and offered visions for the world as it could be. This is just part of one of these statements, from Eduardo Ramirez:

### **The Rise of Mass Incarceration**

In the US there are over 2.4 million people in state and federal prisons, jails, and detention centers; millions more are on probation or parole, house arrest, or some form of supervised release. And all of us are subject to an ever-increasing amount of data tracking and scrutiny under the vast and sophisticated surveillance state. This system of surveillance and punishment is designed both to keep people down and to give us a sense of inevitability about the state's omnipresence, dampening ideas about a different set of possibilities, redistribution of resources, or more equal social relations. At the same time as the repressive apparatuses of the state have grown, a politics of austerity in response to real and manufactured crises has stripped away many of the remaining vestiges of the welfare state.

Incarceration rates began their dramatic increase in the late 1970s, in the wake of the Black Liberation movement and the other social movements. From the 1950s onward, revolutionary movements across the globe were rising. From 1957 to 1975 alone, independence movements had toppled colonial governments in 15 countries in the Global South.<sup>[2]</sup> These waves of revolution shook the foundations of the capitalist, imperialist system, and helped spawn similar movements in the US. The Black Panthers, the American Indian Movement, the Chicano movement, the Puerto Rican independence movement, and the movement against the war in Vietnam, all put forward a radical critique of the way things were, and painted a vision of what a different kind of world could be.

These movements were deeply threatening to the US government and generated a repressive crackdown. In 1956, the FBI launched the Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) to infiltrate, disrupt, and destroy radical and progressive movements and their leaders.<sup>[3]</sup> Between 1968 and 1971, the FBI was implicated in forty murders of Black Panthers.<sup>[4]</sup> Even more brutal repression was directed at the American Indian Movement and its supporters. Between 1973 and 1976, the government had a hand in sixty-nine murders on the Pine Ridge reservation alone.<sup>[5]</sup> And thousands of people

across the country were subjected to lower level forms of repression – harassment, surveillance, incarceration, threats, and general disruption of movement activities. Many remain in prison as a result.

This overt repression went hand in hand with a buildup of policing and prisons generally. State and corporate interests saw revolutionary movements, and Black Liberation in particular, as a direct and immediate threat to their power. In addition to (and often in conjunction with) the direct targeting of revolutionaries, they built up militarised police forces and expanded prisons and jails across the nation. The first SWAT teams were designed to target the Los Angeles Panthers,<sup>[6]</sup> and the early supermax prisons and control units were built to house political prisoners.<sup>[7]</sup> But these tools of repression were quickly deployed on a mass scale as a way to deter future organising efforts in oppressed communities. Mass incarceration was, in part, a direct response to radical and revolutionary movements, specifically because those movements were powerful. The purpose of this was not just to repress existing movements, but also to prevent future movements from emerging.

## From Welfare State to Carceral State

As the prison industrial complex was expanding, major shifts were also taking place in the structure of the global economy. These occurrences were not unrelated. Anti-colonial struggles and victories across the globe and an increasingly militant working class at home made old ways of extracting profit untenable. Simultaneously, technological innovation meant production could happen in a dispersed way that made it easier to control workers and harder for workers themselves to seize the means of production. US-based manufacturing industries moved overseas in search of cheap, exploitable labor. Union power was undermined and union membership in the US declined from almost 35 percent to 11 percent.<sup>[8]</sup> Deregulation and privatisation were promoted as the answers to economic growth, and social services, while always unevenly distributed and often used as tools of social control themselves, were stripped away. The shift to neoliberalism meant that employment prospects and the social safety net were more precarious.<sup>[9]</sup> Wealth was redistributed upwards.

In order to consolidate and maintain these gains for the ruling class, a certain amount of buy-in was needed from the population at large – and the white middle class in particular – even if their economic self-interest was not being served. The right wing, and later neoliberal politicians across the political spectrum, began to mobilize around “tough on crime” politics. These politics were designed to generate racist fears amongst white people, mobilizing a political base to vote for increasing domestic militarization and expansion of the carceral state that dovetailed with expansions of economic policies benefitting wealthy elites.<sup>[10]</sup> This also had the dual function of incarcerating those most likely to resist this economic and political restructuring in the first place – poor and working class people of color.

Poet and anti-prison activist Emily Abendroth comments on

the pervasiveness of the prison state, writing that:

*“It is an element so grotesquely enlarged that at this point it has a hand in shaping nearly every dynamic of our social, cultural, and physical environments with or without our recognition of its doing so ... In the face of this reality, one goal of our contemporary poetics must, of necessity, be to sound out the catastrophic and debilitating reverberations of living in a society that has effectively criminalized our most basic characteristics of livelihood and requirements for existence (our youth, our old age, our poverty, our needs for housing or a doctor’s appointment, our hunger) and instead fed them back to us as dangerous behavior and/or unsustainable, unassuageable demands.”<sup>[11]</sup>*

If we cannot yet unmake this landscape, we can at least illuminate its existence and call its inevitability into question. The carceral consequences of unmet needs loom large for those who lack resources, and the examples of these consequences at times feel endless and insurmountable.

Even for people with relative degrees of race and class privilege, the saturation of prisons, police, and surveillance encroach on many aspects of life, from the media to the streets. As incarceration rates increase and the war on drugs continues, even the white middle class is not unaffected. Statistically one out of every 17 white men will be imprisoned at some point (compared to one in three Black men and one in six Latino men).<sup>[12]</sup> The criminalisation of drug use, mental illness, and sex work all play a role in the system’s long reach.

The surveillance state shapes this landscape. The revelations by Edward Snowden, which confirmed that the National Security Agency’s PRISM program <sup>[13]</sup> had almost unlimited access to data from Apple, Google, Facebook, and others, merely confirmed what many already suspected: we are being closely watched, and transgressions, real or imagined, have dire consequences. The combination of austerity and precarity, along with the physical infrastructure and psychic weight of the surveillance state, condition our response (or lack of response) to injustice.

## What Drives Mass Incarceration?

If repression and the consolidation of power is why the carceral state was so dramatically expanded, there is also the question of how. Mass incarceration is constructed by a series of policies and practices, from systematic divestment in public education to legislation, sentencing, and law enforcement tactics. The major drivers of mass incarceration have been thoroughly documented elsewhere,<sup>[14]</sup> so I will just touch on them briefly.

- The War on Drugs: The Drug War was officially launched by Ronald Reagan in 1982 at a time when drug use was actually decreasing, and has led to massive imprisonment of people of color and, to a lesser extent, poor whites.<sup>[15]</sup> The Drug War has been funded in part through a series of federal programs that reward police departments for



making drug related arrests. This has also resulted in highly militarised police forces that employ high-volume arrest strategies, such as stop-and-frisk,<sup>[16]</sup> to harass and terrify Black and Latino communities in particular. The war on drugs is a clear effort to mobilise racist backlash against people of color and to criminalise economies of survival.

- Mandatory minimums, “three strikes,” and lengthy sentences: The explosion of mandatory minimums and three strikes <sup>[17]</sup> laws means people are getting longer sentences and judges are not able to consider any mitigating factors. Since elderly people released after serving long sentences for serious felonies have an incredibly low recidivism rate (1.3 percent),<sup>[18]</sup> it is abundantly clear that these policies are purely punitive and have no relationship to stated goals either about rehabilitation or public safety.
- Erosion of rights, conditions, and programs inside of prisons: In the last few decades, people in prison have seen their rights eroded at a judicial level and have also experienced diminished access to programming, educational opportunities, and mental and physical health services.

## Why Fight Prisons?

If we are interested in creating radical movements that become the messy and generative process that we could understand as revolution, challenging the prison system is a good starting point. Prisons are a symptom of the capitalist state’s desire to consolidate wealth and power. They provide a way for the state to continue functioning effectively and are one phase in a lineage of slavery, dispossession, and genocide. To abolish capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy, we must work to end mass incarceration. To get at the roots of mass incarceration, we must take on the broader system that produces the logic of keeping millions of people in cages.

Prisons are a specific response to a moment of instability and crisis in the capitalist system. The destabilisation and containment caused by the prison industrial complex allows the state to perpetuate unpopular economic reforms that would not be possible in the face of strong resistance movements. Activist and scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore

explains how the prison industrial complex helped save the state from an economic and social crisis: *“The expansion of prison constitutes a geographical solution to socio-economic problems, politically organised by the state which itself is in the process of radical restructuring.”*<sup>[19]</sup> She goes on to say that the state’s *“modus operandi for solving crises has been the relentless identification, coercive control, and violent elimination of foreign and domestic enemies.”* “Enemies” in this context are anyone who has an investment in subverting these systems of domination.

Prisons are not alone in the state’s arsenal of responses to such crises. But unlike military “intervention” globally, prisons are inwardly focused, domestic solutions to domestic “problems.” And the comprehensiveness of these responses dramatically curtail the capacity of homegrown resistance to this kind of violence and militarism both within and outside of the US. Whether we address it or not, prison is where we may end up if we are successful in mounting a real challenge to state power. Such a challenge inevitably provokes a repressive response from the state, and the targeting and imprisonment of activists is a likely result.

Prisons are an example of where systems of power become most legible, brutal, and concrete. They sit at the nexus of so many oppressive systems of power: white supremacy, class exploitation, patriarchy, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, the criminalisation of poverty, of difference, of survival. The racial disparity (to use a woefully inadequate term) in the legal system is well documented, with Black people incarcerated at a rate almost six times higher than whites.<sup>[20]</sup> Incarceration rates for women are on the rise, and women in prison face specific hardships – like being forced to give birth in shackles – that are often left out of narratives about incarceration.<sup>[21]</sup> Queer and trans people are incarcerated at higher rates than heterosexuals, and are more likely both to be abused in prison and to be held in solitary confinement.<sup>[22]</sup> People struggling with mental health issues are funneled into the prison system instead of being given access to treatment. According to the National Association for Mental Health, between 44 percent and 64 percent of prisoners have a documented mental health diagnosis.<sup>[23]</sup> And the vast majority of people in prison are poor.

Clearly the prison system is targeting already marginalised people, and particularly people who live at the intersections of multiple forms of oppression. So if prisons are an example of “bad intersectionality,” a place where marginalised people are funnelled together, then we have in our resistance to the prison system the opportunity to build movements that embrace a positive and powerful intersectionality. According to activist and author Dean Spade, who writes extensively about trans people and the criminal legal system, *“[s]eeking to understand the specific arrangements that cause certain communities to face particular types of violence at the hands of police and in detention can allow us to develop solidarity around shared and different experiences with these forces and build effective resistance that gets to the roots of these problems.”*<sup>[24]</sup> This sort of solidarity thrives on our differences and build on our strengths, and responds to the prison system’s rigid policing and categorisation with a refusal to



be defined by the very systems that try to box us in. Fighting back against the prison industrial complex can be one site where we build new forms of alliance (and build on old ones) to mount a broader challenge to the forces that create and benefit from oppressive systems.

## Bringing Down the Prison Industrial Complex

Building a movement strong enough to bring down these systems won't happen overnight. The US state is very strong, and movements, especially on the radical Left, are very weak. One approach that has been gaining some traction in recent years is a strategy of "decarceration." Decarceration involves chipping away at the policies and practices that build up the criminal legal system. Efforts to roll back mandatory minimums, rewrite sentencing policy, decriminalise drug use and reform parole practices all fall in this category. At their best, decarceration strategies win real victories that bring people home from prison or keep people from going to prison, while building a bigger and more powerful movement that can mount larger challenges to the prison system itself.

Decarceration as a strategy is used both by prison abolitionists and those that believe in reform. It can be challenging, as someone who believes in a world without prisons, to figure out how to create decarceration strategies that can lead to that world, rather than just building a kinder, gentler prison state. What follows are some possible stepping stones toward structural change.

## Practical Abolition

There is often tension between prison abolition and reform. It makes sense that these tensions exist, as the goal of getting rid of prisons all together has vastly different implications than, for example, the goal of getting shorter sentences for non-violent drug offenses. Reform movements can be so focused on short term goals that they fail to consider (or don't care about) the broader implications of their demands. Many anti-death penalty organisations are supporters of Life Without Parole (LWOP) sentencing, based on the idea that people will only accept an end to the death penalty if LWOP is a sentencing option. While this might seem pragmatic in the short term, in the long run it actually reinforces the idea that people in prison are irredeemably "bad," and that the harshest punishment is an appropriate response. On the other hand, abolitionists are often critiqued for being out of touch, and too caught up in a utopian vision to deal with peoples' actual immediate needs or engage in reforms that, while far from perfect, mean that some people get out of prison.

While we shouldn't gloss over major political differences, these things don't have to be diametrically opposed, and we can sometimes pursue reform goals in the short term in order to build radical movements in the long term. After all, there are really only two ways to get people out of prison. We can

break them out ourselves or we can convince, pressure, or force the state to let them out. If we lack the capacity to do the first, we should do the second. And in reality there are many anti-death penalty activists who don't support LWOP, and many abolitionists engaged in messy on-the-ground reform struggles.

At the same time, we cannot be so caught up in the short-term goals (for example, repealing specific policies that lead to mass imprisonment) that we allow our struggles to be coopted. In Decarcerate PA, we talk a lot about using language that is "abolition compatible." That is, we may all have different ideas of what ending mass incarceration looks like and how to get there, but we never want to use language or messaging that reinforces the idea that some people deserve to be in prison. Many prison reform groups make arguments that basically say that prisons should only be reserved for "violent criminals" and that people with low-level offenses should be released. This kind of language accepts as a given that prisons play an important social role, and merely critiques the way that is applied. It dehumanises people convicted of violent crimes and erases the racist structures that dictate who gets charged with and convicted of those crimes and what kind of time they serve.

We also have to work to decrease the weight of the prison walls, even if we are not yet capable of destroying them physically. This means undermining the alienation of imprisonment and "social death," doing the work of eroding both the legal and psychic barriers that separate those in prison from the tenuous rest of us. It means forging real and collaborative relationships and political, social, artistic and cultural projects with people in prison. It means creating networks of support that undermine isolation and alienation. It means spending a lot of time writing letters. It means developing real relationships with people behind the walls.

It is also worth taking a moment to think about what abolition means. In some academic and activist circles, abolition is talked about as a given, as something that we hold as part of a collective politics. This is a sign of progress, of the hard work that groups like Critical Resistance<sup>[25]</sup> have done to popularise the radical idea that a world without prisons is not just possible, but desirable. But with the idea's popularity comes the risk that our understanding of abolition becomes superficial. We must take seriously what abolition asks of us. Because of course there are many, many injustices, harms, and acts of violence that must be dealt with, in one way or another. These harms happen interpersonally, and also systemically.

What is a reasonable response to the taking of a life, the violation of a body? How do we create structures capable of holding people accountable and also leave room for transformation and healing? How do we understand interpersonal harm within the bigger context of centuries of white supremacy and patriarchy that have imbued every corner of our histories with violence and unimaginable loss? Of course there is no reasonable response. There is no reasonable response to the harms of capitalism, the trauma of slavery, dispossession, and displacement. What

does accountability look like in the face of countless wrongs, both at an individual and a systemic level? These are the questions we should be grappling with if we are serious about abolition.

What we do know is that the current system is not working, or that it is working very effectively at destroying communities, but not at creating justice and healing. Astronomical rates of violence, from interpersonal partner violence, to gun violence, to the violence of militarism and war, present an urgent problem that, by almost every possible lens of analysis, incarceration has abjectly failed to address. Philadelphia has one of the highest incarceration rates of anywhere in the world, yet some years we average more than one homicide a day. Studies show that rates of imprisonment do not correlate to crime rates, and in fact states that have reduced their prison populations over the last several years have also seen a drop in crime.<sup>[26]</sup> Locking people up in oppressive, violent institutions with limited access to education and treatment, and restricted communication with the outside world further traumatizes people. Incarceration perpetuates, rather than breaks, cycles of harm. In the face of this reality, it becomes more possible to imagine abolition as a realistic alternative. But abolition will only become popular on a mass scale when we are able not just to point out how prisons don't keep us safe, but also to point to real alternatives that do.

## State Repression, Surveillance, Solidarity

Broadly speaking, the prison system serves two main functions. The first is actual containment: the physical act of removing people from their communities and locking them in cages. The second is to create an omnipresent threat of containment. The fear of containment can prevent us from taking the very risks that might be necessary for systemic change. Grappling with this fear means demanding that the prison system relinquish its hold on our minds.

Non-cooperation can make the price of repression much higher for the state. Non-cooperation can mean a lot of things – for example, refusing to cooperate in a police investigation, not testifying at a grand jury, or any of the myriad ways we can withdraw our consent from an unjust system. Many political prisoners and dissidents have been exemplary in this regard, and show us why non-cooperation can be effective in the long term even if it does not get individual people shorter sentences. The seeds of non-cooperation exist in our communities, but collective solidarity doesn't necessarily emerge organically. It must be cultivated and nurtured by the work that we do.

For example, in the early 1970s, as police repression against radical activists intensified and many leftists engaged in militant actions that carried the weight of lengthy prison sentences, some people made the decision to change their identities and go underground. As a result, the communities around them were often subject to increased FBI surveillance and police harassment. Rather than give in to this pressure,

an untold number of people refused to cooperate with law enforcement and as a result, the fugitives were able to spend years beyond the grasp of the state.<sup>[27]</sup>

In 1970, after participating in a bank robbery that resulted in the death of a police officer, radical activist Susan Saxe was put on the FBI's "Ten Most Wanted" list. In the ensuing years, Saxe lived underground, coming out as a lesbian and taking refuge in lesbian feminist communities throughout the country. Late one night in 1974, lesbians in Philadelphia got word that the FBI would be coming into Philly's lesbian community looking for information about Saxe.<sup>[28]</sup> Grand juries related to Saxe had already been convened, sewing disruption and distrust in lesbian communities. A group of radical lesbians in Philly wanted to make sure the same thing didn't happen in their community. They quickly put together a leaflet outlining why you should never talk to the FBI even if you believe you have nothing to hide. The leaflets stressed that the FBI was not just gathering information about Saxe, but was trying to map the whole network of people with whom Saxe might associate, and once this information was collected there was no knowing what law enforcement might do.

The women then fanned out across the neighborhood, going door to door to distribute information. Working all night to ensure they reached as many people as possible before the FBI's arrival, they encouraged people to protect their community and stand in solidarity with Saxe by not providing any information. Although Saxe was a controversial figure within the lesbian community, and many did not support her actions, no one cooperated with the FBI's investigation. Though the late night leafleting did not prevent Saxe from eventually being apprehended, this proactive approach to anticipated state repression did help inoculate Philadelphia's lesbian community against the possibilities of intensified surveillance and future indictments. In fact, resistance to the FBI went well beyond Philly, and several women went to jail rather than testify in a grand jury that was seeking information about Saxe's whereabouts.

This action helped foster a sense of solidarity that was able to outweigh fear of the consequences of noncooperation. Solidarity in the face of repression (and in the context of internal ideological disagreements) is all the more important in the contemporary moment. Though surveillance cameras track our movements and the NSA reads our emails, law enforcement still needs actual qualitative information to do its job effectively. Now more than ever police departments and intelligence agencies across the country and military operatives across the world are relying on network mapping, community policing, and door-to-door information gathering to prevent "insurgent" movements from taking root.<sup>[29]</sup>

And sometimes state repression backfires. Sometimes we can use moments where the state is coming down on us or our allies to build something bigger than we had before. An example is the story of Angela Davis, a lifelong revolutionary activist and scholar who was arrested in 1970 because of her involvement in the campaign to free George Jackson and her role as a prominent Black radical intellectual. She was

charged with murder, kidnapping, and criminal conspiracy. The state's blatantly racist persecution of Davis touched a nerve and galvanised people to join the movement for her release. Within a year of her arrest there were 200 committees to free Angela Davis in the United States and sixty-seven in other countries across the world. She was eventually acquitted of all charges. Today, Davis is a leading voice in the movement to abolish prisons.<sup>[30]</sup>

Many people were politicised, radicalised and brought into the movement during the international campaign to free Angela Davis. Similarly, many got involved because of the international effort to free Mumia Abu Jamal<sup>[31]</sup> or had their eyes opened by the Attica uprising.<sup>[32]</sup> State repression is never positive, but when it happens we can respond in a way that unveils deep injustices and contradictions within the state and bolsters our movements' ability to resist. Repression illuminates the role of the U.S. government, and when that role becomes more visible, it is possible for us to build on that consciousness.

In these moments, the scales are tipped so that repression and imprisonment breed resistance rather than complicity, despite fear of the consequences. How do we replicate the conditions where such fears can be countered? Some of the answers are simple, though none of them are easy. We build strong, supportive communities, both inside and outside of prison. We foster a spirit of noncooperation with the state, withholding vital information, refusing to collaborate with government in all of the creative, brave, big, and small ways that we can think of. We can look to models of resistance inside of prisons for inspiration. We fight the ideas and practices that uphold the prison system and the forces that dehumanise people within its grasp.

## What We Can Learn from Political Prisoners

*"If we take the Bell no lies approach to organizing, then we take the time to build the foundation for a movement that is destined to bring us the victory we say we're fighting for. Then there would be no need to organize separate programs to educate the community to the existence of political prisoners. No. Because while we were working to organize rent strikes and take control of abandoned buildings – to create decent housing in our community through our sweat equity – we would be talking about how Abdul Majid and others organized tenant associations such as the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Tenants Association in Brooklyn. While we're organizing around the issue of quality education that teaches our true history and role in this society, we would be talking about Herman Bell and Albert Nuh Washington and their work with the liberation schools. While we're organizing food co-ops and other survival programs, we'd be talking about Geronimo Pratt, Sundiata Acoli, Robert Seth Hayes, and all the other political prisoners and prisoners of*



*war who worked in the free health clinics and day care centers – and who went to prison as a result of their active participation in organizing efforts around issues that directly affected the Black and oppressed communities” – Saffiya Bukhari<sup>[33]</sup>*

Political prisoners are not just part of our movement's history, they are part of our present. The actions, words, and thoughts of our political prisoners can help ground us in a revolutionary politics even in reactionary times, because fighting for freedom of political prisoners is also an avenue to talk about actions and ideas that are more radical or militant than most social movements in the US today. Showing strong support for political prisoners is an important part of creating movements that do not cooperate with the state, because people who end up facing politically motivated repression and criminal charges know that the movement will have their back, not just at the outset but for the duration of their potential prison sentence.

There are almost 100 political prisoners serving time in US prisons, many from the Black Liberation Struggle. Here in Pennsylvania, Russell Maroon Shoatz<sup>[34]</sup> has served forty-two years, mostly in solitary confinement, for his participation in the Black Panther Party. And Mumia Abu Jamal, perhaps one of the world's most famous political prisoners, was recently released from death row but remains in prison despite ample evidence of his innocence and a global movement for his release. Across the country there are political prisoners from other liberation struggles, like Oscar Lopez Rivera, who has been in prison since 1981 for participating in the Puerto Rican Independence Movement;<sup>[35]</sup> American Indian Movement leader Leonard Peltier, who has been incarcerated since 1976 based on evidence fabricated by the FBI;<sup>[36]</sup> David Gilbert, a white anti-imperialist serving a seventy-five year sentence for supporting the Black Liberation Army;<sup>[37]</sup> Marius Mason, serving twenty-two years for fighting for environmental justice;<sup>[38]</sup> Chelsea Manning, serving thirty-five years for passing on classified military documents about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>[39]</sup> And there are so many others.

As the movement against mass incarceration grows, the issue of political prisoners can sometimes get pushed to the side as being too specific or too radical. And on the other hand, movements in support of political prisoners have sometimes exceptionalized political prisoners at the expense of talking about mass incarceration as a whole.

Movements in support of political prisoners and movements working to end mass incarceration have everything to gain from working together. Political prisoner support is essential to creating the context where militant resistance is possible. Political prisoners are often people who took huge risks to advance the work of the movement. While we may not agree with every tactic or strategic decision they made, we stand on the shoulders of movements that came before and owe it to the people who made up those movements to honor their legacies. In our efforts to create large scale social change in the US, we know we are up against incredibly long odds, and that we challenge this system at great risk to ourselves and our communities. Fostering movements that are up to this task means creating the context where people feel that they can stand up in the face of repression. When people take risks, it is important that they can do so knowing they have support regardless of the consequences.

Supporting political prisoners can help us learn about and from the history of the movements that came before us. In the words of former political prisoner Ashanti Alston, *“When you connect with the political prisoner, you’re saying you are honoring the dreamers of the past, whose dreams you’ve taken on now, and you’re honoring the future, because you’re saying that we can’t move with real integrity unless we’re working for their freedom.”*<sup>[40]</sup>

Mobilising around political prisoners can also be an important part of bringing pressing issues and radical ideas to the forefront, even at a time when movements are far from achieving broader goals. The Puerto Rican independence movement’s work to free their political prisoners is a good example. In 1999, eleven former members of the FALN (Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional, or Armed Forces of National Liberation) were released from prison after spending almost twenty years behind bars. The FALN was a clandestine organisation fighting for the independence of Puerto Rico. They claimed responsibility for over one hundred armed actions within the US that targeted symbols of US military, police, and corporate power. By the early 1980s, many of them had been arrested and charged with “seditious conspiracy” to overthrow the US government. During their trials, the majority of the defendants took a Prisoner of War position, refusing to recognize the authority of the US government or participate in their own defense. They received sentences ranging from thirty-five years to life. However, in his final days in office, President Bill Clinton commuted their sentences.<sup>[41]</sup>

Their freedom came because the independence movement refused to accept life sentences for their political prisoners, and worked for two decades to bring the prisoners home. They worked on multiple fronts, gaining the support of Nobel Laureates and religious and political leaders,<sup>[42]</sup> staging protests and acts of civil disobedience, and building alternative institutions like clinics and schools that taught the history of anti-colonial struggle. It was these years of hard work – both by people on the outside and the steadfast non-collaboration of the prisoners themselves – that secured their release.

The campaign served (and still serves, as Oscar Lopez Rivera

remains in prison) multiple functions. The first was the liberation of the prisoners themselves. But the campaign also provided a vehicle to raise issues of repression and independence in ways that might not otherwise be possible. The Puerto Rican political prisoners, imprisoned in the US, became symbols of colonialism itself and kept the issue of independence alive even as the broader movement was set back by the waves of repression initiated by counterintelligence operations and by the shifting context created by neoliberalism and globalisation.

Political prisoner movements can also benefit from working closely with movements to end mass incarceration. While organisations like the Jericho Movement, Anarchist Black Cross, National Boricua Human Rights Network, and many others have done a good job of steadfastly maintaining support for political prisoners over many years, a huge shift in public consciousness and political will on a national level is needed to bring political prisoners home en masse. Movements against mass incarceration are gaining momentum in ways that might make that shift possible.

## Prefiguring a World Without Prisons

Prefigurative politics means, in the words of the Industrial Workers of the World, “building a new world in the shell of the old,” embracing the idea that we not only need to topple the current system, but need to create the practices, projects, and institutions that would allow for more equitable relationships and distribution of resources. Artist and former political prisoner Elizam Escobar explains:

“we cannot wait for the day when the majority will rule in order to bring forward the structures needed for building a free, just, egalitarian, and non-classist society. We must build within the ruins and the hostilities of present conditions by creating transitional alternatives now. We must build socioeconomic, political, and cultural structures that are controlled by those struggling for change and the communities they serve. These structures, ‘schools’ for discussing all these problems, will put into practice the notion that only by confronting the reality of subjection can we begin to be free to create an art of liberation that frees people from the illusions perpetrated by dominant culture.”<sup>[43]</sup>

At their best, prefigurative efforts allow us to model what a post-revolutionary society might look like. Prefiguration can meet the needs that people have right now and can also help withdraw power from the state, thereby undermining its ability to control our lives. Prefiguring different kinds of relationships, different modes of survival, different points of access to our basic needs can also create resilient communities and increase our control over our bodies, minds and lives. This kind of self-determination is always a threat to the state. Prefigurative politics allows us to imagine becoming ungovernable.



This is why the state responded so brutally to the Black Panthers' Breakfast Program and other programs for "survival pending revolution." Starting in 1969, the Panthers provided free breakfast to thousands of children across the country. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover went so far as to say that the Breakfast Program "represents the best and most influential activity going for the BPP and, as such, is potentially the greatest threat to efforts by authorities to neutralize the BPP and destroy what it stands for."<sup>[44]</sup> By September of 1969, armed police raided the Breakfast Program in Oakland. Similar raids followed in Chicago. This repression coincided with the Federal Government launching its own subsidised breakfast programs.<sup>[45]</sup> The state needed both to repress radical autonomous activities designed to meet community needs and to coopt radical service models into institutions that were controlled by the state. These actions are a clear acknowledgement that community self-determination and autonomy undermines state power, and the state will disrupt such programs by whatever means.

Of course, it can be somewhat difficult to figure out how one might prefigure a world without prisons when the prison system is so (literally) concrete and ubiquitous, and so often forces us to engage it. Three things come to mind in terms of what it means to engage in prefigurative anti-prison politics. The first is creating the structures and values within our movements that combat the forces that pit oppressed people against one another. The second is building transformative forms of justice that address the root causes of violence and harm in our communities. And the third, which exists in part at the intersection of the two, is leaving space in our minds, hearts, and movements for transformative possibilities that we cannot yet imagine.

## Intersectionality and Horizontalism

Prisons are institutions that thrive on categorisation and division, on violence and the threat of violence, as means of social control. The prison system is both an instrument of oppression and an aggregator of it. It is an instrument of oppression because prisons play an important role in "managing" potentially rebellious people by taking large numbers and locking them up. But it is also an aggregator

of oppression, both in the sense that the experience and collateral consequences of incarceration further marginalise people, and because the prison itself becomes a specific location where oppressed people are criminalised and pushed together.

At the same time, these constraints can make prisons a source of creativity and ingenuity. Surveillance and lack of access to everyday materials mean that people in prison find new ways to make art, to learn, to make food, to help each other, and to resist. This does not mean that prisons are doing anything good, only that there is something to learn from the creativity that comes with everyday survival and resistance. And just as prisons can be places where intense divisions are enforced, they can also be places where people come together across differences to fight for justice.

For example, during the Pelican Bay hunger strikes in California prisons in 2012, a group of strike leaders released an agreement ending racial hostilities in the prisons. The statement read, in part,

*"If we really want to bring about substantive meaningful changes to the [California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation] system in a manner beneficial to all solid individuals, who have never been broken by CDCR's torture tactics intended to coerce one to become a state informant via debriefing, that now is the time for us to collectively seize this moment in time, and put an end to more than 20-30 years of hostilities between our racial groups... we must all hold strong to our mutual agreement from this point on and focus our time, attention, and energy on mutual causes beneficial to all of us [i.e., prisoners], and our best interests. We can no longer allow CDCR to use us against each other for their benefit!! Because the reality is that collectively, we are an empowered, mighty force, that can positively change this entire corrupt system into a system that actually benefits prisoners, and thereby, the public as a whole..."<sup>[46]</sup>*

It is this spirit of unity that we must intentionally foster in our organising, both inside and outside prisons. This means building movements where people's different experiences can be recognised and where people's specific identities are honored rather than pushed aside.

For victory against these systems of oppression to prevail, there must be more of "us," those who recognise the harms perpetuated by the white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy and who are willing to stand up to that system, than there are of "them," those who benefit, or believe they benefit from the system. Many of us simultaneously benefit from certain privileges while being oppressed by others. The trick is to understand that although oppression impacts people in different ways, we all have something to gain by working together to overturn it. This means creating an expansive understanding of who "us" is. The system depends on divisiveness. We should not, and cannot, do the work of the system. We must acknowledge and value difference, confront racism, sexism, class privilege, xenophobia, homophobia,



and transphobia in ourselves and in our movements, so we can build a united front against a system that would destroy us all.

We cannot escape by being less bad, less gay, less racialised, less radical, less brave. And if we try, what are we left with? Who are we left with? There is no appeasing the white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy. In the words of Audre Lorde, *“the machine will try to grind us into dust anyway, whether or not we speak. We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and ourselves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned, we can sit in our safe corners as mute as bottles, and still we will be no less afraid.”*<sup>[47]</sup>

As we work to counteract the ways that powerful interests create divisiveness, we can also build movements that do not replicate the structures of the state. One way to do this is to build organisations/campaigns/collectives that counteract the hierarchical models of the prison state with horizontal structures that share power. There are a few advantages to this. One is that creating horizontal modes of sharing power make movements harder to control or coopt. Diffuse forms of power are replicable and do not depend on individual leaders to drive them forward. Developing models of collective decision making can also be an important part in establishing more collective, non-punitive forms of justice and healing.

Nonhierarchical organising allows for multiple and diverse opinions, generates consensus building, and creates many avenues for participation. Anarchist movements in the US and elsewhere have helped create models for organisations that share power collectively rather than consolidating it in the hands of a few leaders. Not coincidentally, anarchists have also been vocal critics of the prison system for at least the past hundred years, identifying prison as a system designed to contain dissidents and generate profit rather than addressing problems.<sup>[48]</sup> Because anarchists and other anti-authoritarians are critical of the state, and because the prison system is a major part of consolidating state power, many anti-authoritarians have identified struggles against the prison system as of key importance.

Part of building this movement is creating participatory structures that give people the opportunity to participate in decisions that impact their lives. According to anarchist writer and former Black Panther and Black Liberation Army member

Ashanti Alston, *“Either you respect people’s capacities to think for themselves, to govern themselves, to creatively devise their own best ways to make decisions, to be accountable, to relate, problem-solve, break-down isolation and commune in a thousand different ways ... OR: you dis-respect them. You dis-respect ALL of us.”*<sup>[49]</sup> The prison system functions by upholding isolation, and our resistance to that system must break it down. Building movements that combat, rather than reinforce, the oppressive and hierarchical structures of the prison system is part of undermining the logic that allow for such a system to exist. Creating nonhierarchical structures and participatory forms of decision-making can be part of this process.

## Transformative Justice

In the movement against mass incarceration, the question that invariably comes up is, “If we don’t have prisons, how do we respond to harm and violence in our communities?” That question has many answers, but one that is particularly useful is the idea of transformative justice. According to Philly Stands Up, a collective that works with people who have perpetrated sexual assault, transformative justice

Developing transformative practices is challenging, especially in the context of existing punitive systems. But there are organisations doing the work of re-envisioning what community responses to harm and violence look like. One organisation frames their mission in this way:

*“[This] is a way of practicing alternative justice which acknowledges individual experiences and identities and works to actively resist the state’s criminal injustice system. Transformative Justice recognizes that oppression is at the root of all forms of harm, abuse and assault. As a practice it therefore aims to address and confront those oppressions on all levels and treats this concept as an integral part to accountability and healing.”*<sup>[50]</sup>

Unlike the legal system, which focuses on punishment rather than healing for the people involved, transformative justice offers ways to deal with harm that opens up space for things to actually change.

*“Creative Interventions assumes that the relationships, families and communities in which violence occurs are also the very locations for long-term change and transformation. It assumes that those most impacted by violence are the most motivated to challenge violence. It assumes that friends, family, and community know most intimately the conditions that lead to violence as well as the values and strengths which can lead to its transformation.”*<sup>[51]</sup>

Rather than “justice” imposed by an outside arbiter, a response to violence should be developed within communities who have the most knowledge and stake in creating a lasting change.

This thinking and work is happening within the prisons as well. As part of a project with the goal of ending mandatory life sentencing in Pennsylvania, I have been conducting written and audio interviews with people serving Life Without Parole sentences. Many of the people on the inside who are collaborating with us on this project have been part of the movement against mass incarceration for years. One of the men I have been writing with, among other forms of political engagement, leads workshops inside the prison on restorative justice practices. When I asked him how he would respond to people who argue that highlighting the voices of those convicted of crimes harms victims, he responded, “I’d say that it could also have the effect of liberating people who’ve been victimised from the prison of fear. Because of how prisons banish and isolate, victimised people usually live with a frozen-in-time image of the person or people who harmed them. Learning that people do change could bring about feelings of safety and can lessen worries about someone continuing to harm.” This points to the huge benefits of transformative justice, which take as a given something we intuitively know – transformation is possible.

Transformative justice recognises that real harm, violence, and trauma happen and deserve a meaningful and serious response, but that prisons and cops do not offer a sustainable solution. This must be at the heart of abolitionist practice. Every time we deal with problems of violence and harm in new ways that don’t involve the state (or at least minimise the state’s involvement) we are building toward what a world without prisons can look like.

## Beyond the Quagmire of the Present

*“Prisoners are dreamers, and what they dream about most is ‘freedom.’”*<sup>[52]</sup> – Elizam Escobar

The ubiquity of the prison system and the repressive state make it difficult to imagine existence without them. Part of our work is to make that imagination possible, even though we cannot yet fully know the set of possibilities that will be opened up by overturning the current system. To quote Dean Spade:

*“What would it mean to embrace, rather than shy away from, the impossibility of our ways of living as well as our political visions? What would it mean to desire a future that we can’t even imagine but that we are told couldn’t ever exist? We see the abolition of policing, prisons, jails, and detention not strictly as a narrow answer to ‘imprisonment’ and the abuses that occur within prisons, but also as a challenge to the rule of poverty, violence, racism, alienation, and disconnection that we face every day. ... Abolition is the practice of transformation in the here and now and the ever after.”*<sup>[53]</sup>

This echoes the work of queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz, who writes:

*“Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now’s totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a then and there. Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds.”*<sup>[54]</sup>

It is not a coincidence that Muñoz uses the language of “prison house” to describe the present. Indeed, a rigid adherence to what is possible in the present will always lead us back to the stagnant kinds of reforms that bolster, rather than challenge, the status quo. For abolition, much more is required.

I have tried to lay out some ideas about what mass incarceration is and what can be done about it. Mass incarceration, and the existence of prisons as the response to social problems, is neither inevitable nor indestructible. It is a planned set of policies designed to stifle radical movements and suppress marginalised communities. To combat this we need to build movements that foster multiplicity – multiple strategies, multiple identities, multiple modes of participation – and honor and fight for the political and politicised prisoners who have built these movements from within the walls as we have struggled to build them on the outside. We need to stand strong in the face of repression and know that we are stronger when we stand up for each other and recognise the stake we all have in this fight. And as we stay rooted in the practical concerns of our urgent daily struggles, we must remember to vision, dream, and imagine what new worlds can grow from our work.

To end on the final lines of the Martín Espada poem that Eduardo references in his words to the Decarcerate PA marchers:

*“If the abolition of slave-manacles  
began as a vision of hands without manacles,  
then this is the year;  
if the shutdown of extermination camps  
began as imagination of a land  
without barbed wire or the crematorium,  
then this is the year;  
if every rebellion begins with the idea  
that conquerors on horseback  
are not many-legged gods, that they too drown  
if plunged in the river,  
then this is the year.*

*So may every humiliated mouth,  
teeth like desecrated headstones,  
fill with the angels of bread.”*



## Postscript

For two years I worked as a legal assistant at a prisoners' rights law project. During that time I read thousands of letters from incarcerated people across the state, detailing what were often brutal and grievous abuses against them. People were assaulted by guards, intentionally or carelessly put in dangerous situations, denied life sustaining medical treatment, stripped naked and put in solitary confinement as punishment, confined for days or even weeks in restraints, denied medication and mental health treatment, adequate food, and access to water. I read graphic descriptions of sexual assaults, and on one occasion a letter which described in vivid detail a time when the guards intentionally put an old man in a cell with someone who was having serious mental health issues and who had repeated that he was going to kill whoever was celled with him. The letter's author, along with everyone else on the cell block, had to watch – locked in their own cells – as one man killed the other.

These stories, which I experienced only as the most distant witness to someone else's trauma, come back to me at strange intervals, as waves of anger and despair. But there are other words that stay with me too.

I was opening the mail one day and received a letter from someone I had been corresponding with. The letter was to notify me that he had been transferred from one prison to another. When describing the new prison, he wrote, *"the mountains are so close I can almost touch them."* I don't know if the line had any particular significance to him, or if it was just a passing comment, a conversational aside in a business letter to a legal services organisation. But something about the phrase stayed with me.

Mountains so close I could almost touch them.

So much in such a short phrase. The mountains, the mountaintop, a perpetual symbol of struggle.

In his last public speech, Martin Luther King Jr. said:

*"We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land."*

We are familiar with the metaphor of the mountain. And sometimes the mountain is not a metaphor at all, like the mountains of Chiapas, where the Zapatistas spent ten years building their movement and their army before they emerged in 1994 to protest the signing of NAFTA and reclaim land that had been stolen from them. In that sense, the mountains are a refuge and a stronghold, contested, but still standing.

So close I could almost touch them.

But more than the mountains is the "almost." The multitudes of possibility and geographies and failures and hopes that make that "almost" possible.

But in that almost too is the promise of what could be, how things could be different. For "very nearly" is really, by definition, not that far. For the vastness of the distance, the chasm of history that separates one reality from the next, there is also another set of possibilities, another set of futures, that is very nearly here. Because if it can be imagined, it can be created. Because prisons both are and are not more than the sum of their parts, of razor wire that can be cut, of concrete that can be chipped, of steel that can be reformed. Because prison walls are not the beginning and the end of anyone's reality, much less their dreams. Because containment cannot exist without threats of expansiveness, of freedom. And because we are building, slowly, unevenly, imperfectly, to close the distance occupied by the not quite, the very nearly.

That is why the political prisoners are so inspiring, and the hunger strikers, the people who have taken the risks, put their bodies on the line, marched, sang, spent hours upon hours in long meetings. These actions say we have faith that at the end of the day we will be somewhere different than we started. Faith that we can transform ourselves and each other, that we can against all the odds tear down this destructive system and build something new. Faith that we can embody in our actions, our relationships, ourselves, the seeds of something else, something we can very nearly imagine.

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# **BELARUS ANARCHIST BLACK CROSS: OPPOSING THE 'SOCIAL PARASITE' TAX**

In Britain, successive governments have introduced various forms of work-for-benefits, starting with the post-war Labour Party's work camps and national service, then in recent memory with the Conservative's 'Project Work', Labour's 'New Deal for the Unemployed' at the end of the 1990s, and various schemes (such as Workfare) since. In Germany the 'ein-euro-job' was another state initiative to punish the unemployed by forcing them to take successive low-paid compulsory jobs with the illusion that one of these might turn into stable employment.

A couple of years ago, another European state, Belarus, under the despotic leader Alexander Lukashenko, went one stage further by introducing the idea of a 'social parasite' tax, where an unemployed person has to pay an annual fee for not-working, or risk detention or other sanctions. The Presidential Decree #3 (2015) "decree against social parasites" imposed this unemployment tax on people who work (according to official record) fewer than 183 days a year and so do not take part in the "financing of the state". The tax is the equivalent of US\$250.

Now in 2017 there has been large scale mobilisation against two particularly nasty developments with this law. First, the suggestion to include 'housewives' with children under 7 years old if they are at nursery as 'social parasites'. Second, 470,000 unemployment tax notices were sent out in January, including to people working abroad, with a deadline of February 20 to pay or face arrest, forced labour, withdrawal of driving license, or withdrawal of permission to work abroad. Perhaps not surprisingly non-payment however was close to 90%, something similar to the non-payment of the Poll Tax in Britain.

Belarus Anarchist Black Cross is gathering funds to help those arrested (lawyers, food parcels and if possible some money to help people get back on feet after being detained). You can transfer money them via:

**Paypal**

belarus\_abc@riseup.net

**Bitcoin**

1CcxWEswKjXZgXQCds5KcHfemzrAASVbuv

**Bank details for direct payments (German bank)**

Account holder's name: VpKK e.V.

IBAN/International Bank Account Number: DE 40850205 0000 0361 5700

BIC/SWIFT sort code: BFSWDE33DRE

Name of Bank: Bank für Sozialwirtschaft

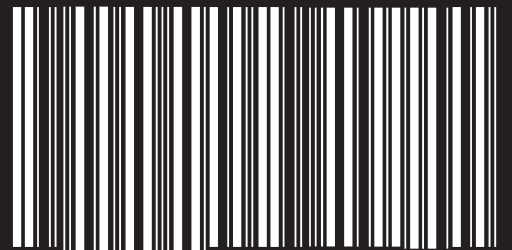
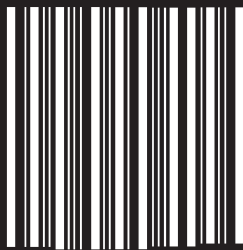
Reference: Donation ABC-Belarus

The first protest march this year in the capital Minsk on 17th of February was followed by similar massive protests and gatherings all across Belarus against the tax, and there was a growing feeling that it might even be possible to overthrow Lukashenko. The protests against the decree and discontent with the current regime has not been taken up by the official opposition and it is clear that people previously not involved in politics have been self-organising together. Anarchists have been strongly involved in the protests in some areas of the country.

The state response to the protests has been intense repression.

A big march was planned for Saturday 25th March in Minsk, including anarchists from different groups who made a call-out to join the demonstration. This resulted in mass pre-emptive arrests of anarchists and others. 113 (including around 30 anarchists) people were put in prison for 12-15 days and around 17 were kept in custody charged with preparing and training to organise mass riots (mostly nationalists and some liberals). The 25th of May demonstration resulted in the biggest police mobilisation in years bringing thousands of riot cops to Minsk, detaining hundreds of people before and during the demonstration. According to a Belarus ABC article, "This Saturday, the capital of Belarus looked like a war zone created by the police."





# THE EMPTY CAGES COLLECTIVE

The Empty Cages Collective is a small anarchist collective that aims to propagate and multiply resistance to the prison industrial complex in England, Wales and Scotland. We actually started with a small grant from AFed to tour the UK back in January 2014. Since then, local groups have emerged across the country, actions, gatherings and a lot of community organising have taken place and this struggle continues to build and gain strength.

Our foresight that the UK would face a new wave of prison expansion came to a head last winter when the State announced plans to build nine new mega-prisons across the UK. After some cabinet reshuffling, Liz Truss, the now Justice Secretary, is following through with six new mega-prisons being announced, as well as five new “community prisons” for women as part of a £1.3 billion building programme.<sup>[1]</sup>

The mega-prisons locations include Leicester and Wellingborough in the East Midlands, Port Talbot in South Wales, Rochester in Kent, Wigan in Greater Manchester, and Full Sutton in East Yorkshire. The new mega-prisons will cage more than 1600 people, putting them in the ranks of the largest in Europe. HMP Berwyn, the new prison in Wrexham, North Wales is designed to warehouse more than 2100 people, making it the second biggest prison in Europe.

The centre-piece of these prisons are massive workshops. HMP Berwyn’s workshops involve space to “employ” 800 prisoners. The £23m per year in ‘local economic benefits’ sold to the community was extrapolated from how much money companies could make from exploiting prisoner labour<sup>[2]</sup> Make no mistake, the State are building the infrastructure to dramatically escalate the exploitation of prisoners. New ‘reform prisons’ enable Governors to act as business managers optimising their commercial relationships.

Prisoners that work in prisons have no rights to organise, no minimum wage, and no health and safety legislation applies. If they refuse to work they are punished via the IEP (Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme) and can have visits, association time (time outside in a courtyard or out of cell) and other ‘privileges’ taken away from them. They are the ultimate captive workforce.

Prison labour has long been a tool for conquest and domination, from using convict labour to colonise countries, to putting prisoners to work to make goods for armies and war. Now the state are also planning on exploiting them for key infrastructural projects, such as CrossRail, once they are released, as well as recently signing contracts with the British Armed Forces. The Incarcerated Workers Organising Committee WISE-RA, part of the Industrial Workers of the World, was started in 2016 to specifically support prisoner

resistance and organisation<sup>[3]</sup>. We have been inspired by comrades in North America who have been supporting prisoner resistance culminating in the biggest prisoner strike in history last September on the anniversary of the Attica Rebellion. Estimates are that more than 57,000 prisoners participated in a work-stoppage across 46 prisons in 22 states. The strikes also led to other riots and uprisings and waves of international solidarity.<sup>[4]</sup>

We don’t like to play into the “crisis” discourse that is used by politicians to push through reforms. Prisons have always been a crisis for the working class. They have always been places of suffering and death. They are inherently violent, by design, and no reforms will change this. Right now, the UK has the highest prisoner suicide rate in the world. A prisoner self-harms every fifteen minutes and every four hours a prisoner tries to take their own life.<sup>[5]</sup> Thousands of children are in care, thousands of families are affected and thousands of people are subject to this institutionally structured violence.

This harm is not felt evenly. Over a quarter of prisoners are people of colour, one in ten prisoners is black and the number of Muslims in prison has more than doubled over the last 13 years. 12% of the prison population are also currently ‘foreign nationals’ facing deportation. Over 80% of prisoners have mental health problems, two-thirds have issues with addiction, alcoholism and drug use and 36% are also estimated to have a physical or mental disability. More than a fifth have a learning disability that affects their ability to cope with the criminal justice system.

Nearly half of the children in prison had been on the child protection register, and for adults in jail, more than half had been emotionally, physically or sexually abused as children. 46% of women in prison also reported a history of domestic abuse.<sup>[6]</sup> Author Karlene Faith writes how prisons are a place “where all the injustices converge”.<sup>[7]</sup>

While painting the prison population as vulnerable could be accurate, it is not a revolutionary discourse. In a recent article about the Vaughn Uprising in the United States, Jess Krug writes:

*“We have voices. We have knowledge. We are not symbols through which others may build their careers, construct their rhetoric. We do not need to be saved, we are not awaiting the right new hire from the right NGO to devise the right programming. We are, we have always been, the revolution.”<sup>[8]</sup>*

We believe organising with prisoners and prisoner families is a real opportunity to build working class power in the UK. We know that prisons are but one head of the many-headed

hydra that is the capitalist system but the role they play in maintaining this brutal system is a powerful one.

Layne Mullet writes that *“Prisons are a symptom of the capitalist state’s desire to consolidate wealth and power. They provide a way for the state to continue functioning effectively and are one phase in a lineage of slavery, dispossession, and genocide. To abolish capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy, we must work to end mass incarceration. To get at the roots of mass incarceration, we must take on the broader system that produces the logic of keeping millions of people in cages.*

*Prisons are a specific response to a moment of instability and crisis in the capitalist system. The destabilization and containment caused by the prison industrial complex allows the state to perpetuate unpopular economic reforms that would not be possible in the face of strong resistance movements.”*<sup>[9]</sup>

When doing workshops about prison abolition, we try to dismantle the ideas that prisons are natural, normal and necessary. People believe abolishing prisons is an unobtainable dream, yet to us this work is in the now - it is challenging concepts of punishment and social domination in every day life, it is radical educational alternatives, it is building stronger relationships through community gardens, it is squatting and occupying buildings to try and defend domestic violence services, it is bringing up kids and trying to learn to love people without abusing them.

Stefano Harney and Fred Moten ask, *“What is, so to speak, the object of abolition? Not so much the abolition of prisons but the abolition of a society that could have prisons, that could have slavery, that could have the wage, and therefore not abolition as the elimination of anything but abolition as the founding of a new society.”*<sup>[10]</sup> This for us is anarchism. A new society that makes prisons obsolete. The struggles are not separate, they are inseparable.

Common questions and uncertainties arise in all of our organising work. What about the rapists? But don’t some people deserve to be in prison? As a collective, we are not blind to the fact that acts committed by many people who end up in prison can and do harm other people. We would never downplay the trauma of being raped, the feeling of violation when robbed or the life-long memory of an assault. The fact remains, though, that it’s often the same communities being

criminalised that are most likely to experience these forms of harm. Prison offers no solution to violence or damage and is in fact only part of perpetuating more of the same.

We fight for abolition, some of us as survivors of abuse because the state cannot meet our needs for safety. Interacting with the police and courts is well recognised to be disempowering and ineffective at meeting survivors’ needs because the law doesn’t place the survivor or victim at the centre of the process but rather seeks punishment for or restitution from the perpetrator on behalf of the state. Our power to articulate our needs and determine our own lives is taken away from us.

Our work as abolitionists and anarchists is not just fighting prison expansion or doing prisoner support work, it is also the painstaking work of healing and finding more nourishing ways of being in the world with each other. We know that many accountability processes and other models fail, but this should act as a calling for the greater necessity to do this work. There are no one-size-fits-all solutions to responding to harm and we need to invest all our creative energy in doing this work, because prisons will never solve these problems.

We end with Jess Krug:

*“A soft left/center consensus around prison reform for “non-violent offenders” allows everyone to ignore the social and political means through which violence is produced. It allows for the midwives of murder to determine, in the end, the defining boundaries of the human. It makes that humanity, that belonging, conditional upon performing a holographic life free of threat – of even the shadow of threat – to a system laser-cut to our peril.*

*If your political imagination and the borders of your sense of community stop before you, personally, have anything at stake, and you still believe that the murderous state is the best party to deal with those whose violence it has itself produced, then what are you calling justice? Why do your calls for justice, time and time again, rely on this same white supremacist state as its mechanism? If you are offended by the notion of fighting for freedom beside a rapist, a murderer, and an armed assailant – by this argument being put to you by someone whose earliest memories are of assault, sexual and otherwise – then what are you calling freedom, and what are its limits?”*<sup>[8]</sup>

If you feel inspired to organise with us please email [info@prisonabolition.org](mailto:info@prisonabolition.org)



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# Care Not Cages

*EDITORS NOTE: The following article was written by a member of Action for Trans Health to mark the International Day of Solidarity with Trans Prisoners.*

*“The prison industrial complex (PIC) is a term we use to describe the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems.”*

– Critical Resistance

The first week of 2017 brought the tragic news that Jenny Swift had lost her life to suicide in HMP Doncaster, making a total of 4 known deaths of trans women prisoners in 14 months.<sup>[1]</sup> Three of these – Jenny Swift, Joanne Latham and Vikki Thompson – were in men’s prisons, whilst Nicola Cope died at Foston Hall women’s prison in Derbyshire last November. Jenny Swift and Vikki Thompson both had their requests to be placed in women’s prisons denied – Vikki had warned that she would kill herself if sent to a men’s prison.<sup>[2]</sup> Jenny entered prison naked rather than being forced to wear male clothing, was called “mister” by guards and refused hormone medication she had been taking for three years.<sup>[3]</sup> Both were on remand, Jenny awaiting trial and Vikki awaiting sentencing. Joanne Latham had expressed distress over HMP Woodhill withholding make-up brushes from her in the lead-up to her death.<sup>[4]</sup>

Whilst there are clear aspects of transmisogynist discrimination in the above cases, they must be placed within the wider context of record numbers of suicides in prison, with self-inflicted deaths and incidents of self-harm both rising by almost a third over last year;<sup>[5]</sup> a disproportionate level of deaths and self-harm incidents were by women.<sup>[6]</sup> Prison suicides over the last year amount to one every three days.<sup>[7]</sup> The UK’s largest private healthcare provider, Care UK, were criticised for promoting self-harm incidents as part of the “*exciting life of prison medical staff*” in one of their staff recruitment videos.<sup>[8]</sup>

When looking at solutions to these harms, we must be wary of reforms which seek to expand the prison industrial complex rather than reduce the suffering and number of people incarcerated. The £1bn government plans to build nine new mega-prisons, capable of caging a total of 10,000 people, are cause for concern.<sup>[9]</sup> A better response to overcrowding would be to reduce numbers of people in and sent to prison – a good start would be releasing all IPP prisoners who have served their sentences as well as those held under faulty joint enterprise convictions, remanding less people into custody and lowering probation licence conditions.<sup>[10]</sup> A penal reform charity revealed that £230m was spent needlessly caging people on remand, with remand prisoners also being at the greatest risk of self-harm and suicide.<sup>[11]</sup> This money could be more productively spent on the NHS to fund mental healthcare and benefits to help people stay fed and housed without resorting to survival crimes. The current government

policy of slashing NHS budgets and sanctioning vulnerable people whilst sinking billions into locking people up is cruel and blinkered to the reasons that people end up in prison.

*“As queers we know the terror of scrutiny, disgust, and isolation; for trans people in prison, those problems are doubled by the physical and emotional restraints of a literal cage” – Marius Mason*

This is equally relevant when looking into the case of transgender prisoners. Following the deaths of Joanne Latham and Vikki Thompson in November 2015, calls were made to create specialist transgender or LGBT prisons.<sup>[12]</sup> Given the history of transgender internment, this is a worrying suggestion, particularly when the UK has the most privatised prison system in Europe and there are profit motives for imprisoning people. Transgender and other LGBTQ people already have disproportionate rates of incarceration, exacerbated by a cycle of parental, education, employment and housing discrimination which leads to LGBTQ people being criminalised for surviving through sex work, drug use, petty theft and self-defence. Police profiling and racism also play a part, particularly for black people – 10% of the British prison population are black, compared to 2.8% of the general population.<sup>[13]</sup> As Cece McDonald, a black trans woman who was imprisoned in the US for defending herself from neo-Nazi attackers, said, *“Prisons aren’t safe for anyone, and that’s the key issue.”*<sup>[14]</sup>

The existence of prisons is traditionally justified for offender reform and public safety, but with around half of prisoners reoffending within a year of release it’s clear that this is not accurate. Rather than being better adjusted to society, isolation in these fundamentally violent institutions leaves many prisoners with poor mental health and drug addictions, lacking financial support or job prospects once outside.

That’s for those who make it out – high suicide rates in prison essentially mean an unofficial death sentence for many: 113 in the last year alone.<sup>[15]</sup> It’s hard to see how that’s justifiable.

The cruelty and vastness of the prison industrial complex can seem insurmountable, but it’s important to celebrate our hard-won victories and the hope that they bring. This week came the incredible news that Chelsea Manning had her sentence commuted to time served and will finally be free in May, following seven years of hard campaigning from her supporters and her own successful protests including hunger strikes to gain medical treatment for her gender dysphoria.<sup>[16]</sup> In 2015 Tara Hudson was successfully transferred to a women’s prison after media pressure including a petition signed by 150,000 supporters.<sup>[17]</sup> We must also salute important long-term work by organisations such as Bent Bars, who dismantle the isolation of prison through letter-writing projects.<sup>[18]</sup>

Last year, along with delivering workshops and talks to engage with communities around the effects of the prison industrial complex on LGBTQ people, members of Action for Trans Health, the IWW Incarcerated Workers Committee, and No Prisons Manchester took part in an action at Manchester Pride where a dozen of us blocked over 230 police from marching, calling for justice for trans prisoners and an end to prison expansion.<sup>[19]</sup> We gained international media coverage, successfully raising the profile of trans prisoners, making sure police presence is not normalised and our criminalised siblings are not forgotten.<sup>[20]</sup> Since then Action for Trans Health and No Prisons Manchester have occupied the offices of Lend Lease, the company who have been building and profiting from new mega-prisons.<sup>[21]</sup>

We hope you will join us in actions across the country to call for stronger communities, an end to systems which keep us in poverty, and the abolition of gender police. You can contact us via <http://actionfortranshealth.org.uk/>

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# LET'S TEAR DOWN THE WALLS!

## PRISON ABOLITION GROUPS AND CAMPAIGNS IN BRITAIN

*"There is only one answer to the question "What can be done to better the penal system?" Nothing. A prison cannot be improved. With the exception of a few unimportant little improvements, there is absolutely nothing to do but demolish it." - Peter Kropotkin*

What follows is a brief and incomplete list of groups and campaigns in Britain that are taking action to abolish the Prison Industrial Complex or that are acting in solidarity with those trapped within it. Even if there isn't a group close to you, those listed will be able to provide you with resources, information and support to get involved. You can also contact ourselves in the Anarchist Federation for additional advice or support.

### **ACTION FOR TRANS HEALTH**

<http://actionfortranshealth.org.uk/>

Action for Trans Health is a grassroots organisation fighting for democratic trans healthcare and trans liberation. To this end they see the Prison Industrial Complex completely incomparable with their goals and organise practical solidarity with trans prisoners. This includes working to extend their Trans Solidarity Fund to help those inside.

### **ANARCHIST BLACK CROSS**

*Various (see below)*

The Anarchist Black Cross originated in Tsarist Russia to organise aid for political prisoners. In the late 1960s the organisation resurfaced in Britain, where it first worked to aid prisoners of the Spanish resistance fighting the dictator Franco's police. Now it has expanded and groups are found in many countries around the world. They support class struggle prisoners, fund-raise on behalf of prisoners in need of funds, and organise demonstrations of solidarity with imprisoned anarchists and other prisoners.

**Brighton** <https://www.brightonabc.org.uk/>  
**Bristol** <https://bristolabc.wordpress.com/>  
**Cardiff** <https://abccardiff.wordpress.com/>  
**Leeds** <http://leedsabc.org/>  
**London** <https://network23.org/londonabc/about/>

### **ANIMAL LIBERATION FRONT SUPPORTERS GROUP**

<http://www.alfsg.org.uk/>

The ALFSG exists to support animal rights activists unfortunate enough to end up behind bars. They also promote

an understanding of the reasons why decent, caring people feel forced to break the law. They are separate to the ALF and operate legally and above ground.

### **BENT BARS PROJECT**

<http://www.bentbarsproject.org/>

The Bent Bars Project is a letter-writing project for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, gender-variant, intersex, and queer prisoners in Britain. The project was founded in 2009, responding to a clear need to develop stronger connections and build solidarity between LGBTQ communities inside and outside prison walls.

### **COMMUNITY ACTION ON PRISON EXPANSION**

<http://www.cape-campaign.org/>

The Community Action on Prison Expansion Campaign was launched in Autumn 2014. It is a grassroots coalition of groups fighting prison expansion in our own communities and in solidarity with others. The intention is to practically, economically and ethically halt prison expansion in the UK before thousands more people are harmed. The campaign has activity taking place in Manchester, Rochester, Wellingborough, London, Bristol, Birmingham, Liverpool, Leicester, Hull, and South Wales.





### **EMPTY CAGES COLLECTIVE**

<http://www.prisonabolition.org/>

The Empty Cages Collective is a project aimed at building a movement in England, Wales and Scotland that resists the prison industrial complex and organises towards a prison-free world. Their resource page has a wealth of information on prison abolition.

### **GREEN & BLACK CROSS**

<https://greenandblackcross.org/>

The Green & Black Cross is an independent grassroots project. We are set up in the spirit of mutual aid and solidarity to support autonomous social struggles within the UK. Today, their main focus is legal support, including support for defendants, though they sometimes also still mobilise street medics for larger protests. Initially starting out in London, there are now active Green and Black Cross groups across the country.

### **HAVEN DISTRIBUTION**

<http://www.havendistribution.org.uk/>

Haven Distribution has been assisting prisoners since 1996 by purchasing educational books for those who wish to use their time in custody effectively, through the pursuit of lifelong learning. We seek to encourage self-worth and raise self-esteem in inmates in the UK prison population, providing a structured service, which will assist in the resettlement of the offender back into his or her community.

### **IWW INCARCERATED WORKERS ORGANISING COMMITTEE**

<http://incarceratedworkers.noflag.org.uk/>

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) are a revolutionary union founded in 1905 that has a rich and proud history, organising workers into revolutionary 'industrial unions' along the supply chain of their industry. The IWW recognises that prisoners are on the frontline of wage/prison slavery, capitalist exploitation and the State's war on the working class. This is why they have started IWOC – the Incarcerated Workers Organising Committee – to support prisoners to organise & fight back against prison slavery and the prison system itself. IWOC is made up of ex-prisoners and those who have supported loved ones and comrades in prison for over a decade, as well as other fellow workers that simply recognise the injustices of the "criminal justice" system.

### **PRISONERS' ADVICE SERVICE**

<http://www.prisonersadvice.org.uk/>

The Prisoners' Advice Service is the only independent registered charity offering free legal advice and support to adult prisoners in England and Wales. They do this through their telephone advice line, letters clinic and legal outreach sessions, as well as providing information within the sector.



### **SMASH IPP**

<http://smashipp.noflag.org.uk/>

More than 3989 people are serving IPP (Imprisonment for Public Protection) sentences in British prisons. Five years since the sentence was legally abolished, thousands still languish in jails with no release date. Parole board delays, prison overcrowding and sheer neglect is leading to unprecedented rates of prisoner suicides. IPPs have one of the highest rates of self harm in the prison system in its entirety. 80% are over tariff and desperate to be free. Join the campaign to bring them to an end.

### **THESE WALLS MUST FALL**

<http://detention.org.uk/>

People are being taken from our communities and locked up in prison-like detention centres, without time limit, with no idea of when they might be released. Not for having committed a crime. They just don't have the correct immigration papers. In response, Right to Remain have set up this campaign to dismantle the detention system. Also check out <http://www.righttoremain.org.uk/resources/detention.html>

### **WE WILL RISE**

<http://shutdownungavel.weebly.com/>

We Will Rise is a group of refugees, asylum seekers and their allies based in and around Glasgow. Their aim is to offer solidarity to those in detention, and to end the detention, in Scotland and across the world. They are a grassroots movement, which is horizontally organised. They believe in the free movement of people and the dismantling of borders wherever they find them.

**LET'S TEAR DOWN THE WALLS!**



# Things do not change unless people cause trouble!

Analysing 'How to Win! Successful procedures and mechanism for radical groups.' by Roger Hallam of the Radical Think Tank.

This pamphlet, produced by a Ph.D. researcher who is clearly also an experienced activist, brings together some excellent ideas for how to win campaigns. In addition, he explains how these campaigns can contribute to a much larger transformation of society. He immediately struck a chord - articulating many things I have already thought but hadn't put together in a coherent analysis.

Anarchists, certainly in the AF, are very good at analysing what is wrong with current society and also at imagining what a different society might look like. However, a weakness is having a strategy to get from now to the future. We recognise the importance of being involved in grassroots campaigns in the community and the workplace but often it feels that we are getting nowhere. Hallam's pamphlet is an important

contribution in helping us get from where we are now to the future.

He identifies the key challenge: how to actually win a campaign/struggle. Winning is the key to mobilising more and more people in the fight for a new society. At the moment, there are very few people actually involved in politics in the sense of being directly involved in a campaign for change. Understandably, people just want to get on with their lives. They may not be at all happy with the current set up but don't know what to do to change it. So our task, according to Hallam, is to make them realise that they can do something, as long as they organise collectively with others.

So, what kind of actions will win? And how do we create the situation where we are doing these actions?

## **“In blunt terms, things do not change unless people cause trouble”.**

We have to do actions that break out of the conventional mode of politics, eg A to B demos, rallies where leaders get up and give their views, lobbying of politicians. These are getting us nowhere. Instead we need to challenge or actually break the law in some way. The trick is to do these actions without bringing down repression or putting people off. He offers advice on how to do this.

Firstly we need to get people on our side by engaging in direct conversations and letting people air their concerns and grievances. He uses the term ‘Open Space’. Rather than leaders preaching at people and telling them what is wrong, we need to let people speak for themselves. This could be first done by interacting with people on stalls or by doing petitions and later by having these ‘open space’ public meetings. However, at the same time, to raise awareness of the issues and the campaign, some small-scale direct action is useful. At the beginning it needs to be something that a few people can do without major repercussions. The aim is to design an act that “transgresses the opponent’s power”. This would be a non-violent direct action that is illegal or close to illegal, such as occupations. He is not ideologically opposed to violence but argues that in most of the campaign situations we find ourselves in an act that physically harms someone would put off many would-be supporters and also create a backlash that would make it more difficult to organise.

One way of getting people to commit to something that might get them arrested is to ask for a conditional commitment - so you say you will do X if Y number of people are also willing to do it. So the action has to be chosen on the basis of what people are willing to do.

The pamphlet goes into considerable detail about how to create a strategy based on two kinds of activity - what he calls ‘vertical’ activity which is direct action and potentially more risky in terms of getting arrested and ‘horizontal’ activity which involves more and more people connecting together and doing less risky activity such as petitions or e-mail and telephone campaigns. So gradually as more and more people come on board, the scale of activity can be increased.

## **Heroin short-cuts**

Hallam identifies three ‘short-cuts’ that are often used because people think they will get results quicker: violence against people, leaders, and celebrities. All three of these end up giving power and agency to a small group of people. Those who engage in small group violence end up being increasingly isolated from the rest of the movement. They start acting in their own bubble. Leaders can galvanise support but having a leadership takes away agency and ownership of the campaign from everyone else. Celebrities offer a quick way of getting publicity but soon the media ends up being more concerned with the celebrity than the issue.

One of the main weaknesses of these ‘short-cuts’ is their reliance on the mass media. Hallam is also very critical of campaigns that focus on getting media attention. The campaign should not be concerned with getting attention for its own sake, but in reaching out to those people who will be interested in joining the struggle in some way. This

means relying on more direct communication with people - not just social media but getting out on the streets and talking to people. The only effective way of winning and creating a situation where we are moving to more fundamental change must come from below, as more and more people get involved and organise themselves.

One thing Hallam doesn’t stress is the importance of hard copy resources. How do we raise awareness of campaigns, victories, ideas that can win, if we don’t have the resources to reach a wide range of people? We cannot rely on the mainstream media, nor our own social media as it reaches a limited range of people. This is why in the AF we publish a range of material. Papers such as *Resistance* or *Rebel City* in London, help make connections between different struggles as well as publicising victories and effective strategies.

## **We can win!**

His overall message is extremely optimistic. He argues that the system at the moment is very vulnerable, especially medium-size institutions. At the moment, he doesn’t recommend taking on the big targets like central government and creating a campaign that expects them to back down: “*So the strategy has to pick institutions small enough to win against and make demands that they can realistically be forced to give into*”. Such targets could be a single workplace or company or a local council. Once some victories have been had then the campaign will have more resources with which to go for bigger targets.

It is also important to design actions that will lead to something bigger. For example, he uses the American Civil Rights movement as an example. Rosa Park’s refusal to give up her seat at the front of the bus was planned by the campaign. It created sympathy with the Black community as well as encourage more people to take similar action. This is a start then of a bigger movement for social change.

Achieving major change in society will also require that there are ‘structural opportunities’, some kind of weakness in the system. So we need to ‘map’ the political territory to see what the situation is and where our opportunities lie. Hallam refers to the collapse of East Germany as a case in point. The system was under stress so when an effective protest was gradually built up in the city of Leipzig, the government resigned.

## **Britain today**

He doesn’t explicitly say so, but the implication of the pamphlet is that if we thought carefully about our strategy we are in a position to make major changes, despite the Conservative government. The housing movement is one example, where there have been key victories and there is an acknowledged crisis that the government, both national and local, is doing nothing about. Black Lives Matter and recent pro-migrant actions are also signs of the strengthening of an anti-racist movement. Brexit and the turmoil created, divisions in the Labour Party, the fragility of the economy, are all weaknesses in a system that we could topple if we mobilised effectively.

**You can get a copy of How to Win! here:**  
<https://radicalthinktank.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/how-to-win-10-15.pdf>

# Midlands Anarchists Get Organised!



Over the past year, we have been pleased to witness a resurgence of interest in anarchism in the Midlands. AF members along with recent contacts in the region have been involved with organising a number of meetings in Leicester and Birmingham to bring people together and welcome newcomers to anarchist organisation. Leicester AF have also launched a Spring 2017 issue of their Leicestershire Resistance bulletin covering "Neo-liberalism, Corbyn and left-wing capitalist illusions of grandeur", the monthly Leicester libertarian socialist open discussion series, Leics IWW and Leicester Social Forum. Copies are free and can be picked up from Tin Drum Books, 68 Narborough Road LE3 0BR. For details and dates of discussion meetings visit the Leicester AF website (see below).

On Saturday 13th May 'Nottingham's First Radical Bookfair' will be held during the Bread and Roses annual mini-festival (May 11-14th) organised by Five Leaves Bookshop. Stallholders include Five Leaves, Verso, Pluto Press, AK Distribution, Active Distribution, PM Press, Anarchist Federation, Russell Press (printer), second hand sellers Ex-Libris, Northern Herald Books & Oxfam, The Sparrows' Nest Library and Archive, People's Histreh (radical history group), Jepps Books (new book emporium in Sheffield), Red Alternative Books, Spokesman Books and Veggies/Sumac Centre with more to be added. Time and venue is 11.00am-4.30pm at Nottingham Mechanics.

Most excitingly, a new anarchist group is in the process of forming in Birmingham. Revolutionary Anarchist Group (RAG) has been operating for just under a month, since March. It has 7 to 8 participants involved overall with weekly meeting sizes around 5 to 6. The group is "Focusing on class struggle, with the intention to strongly promote the idea of revolution and to challenge and expose the flaws and inhumanity of capitalism through our direct action and propaganda." As well as the local contacts and AF, they have contacts with Anonymous Birmingham. RAG is considering their first initiative around direct action with the homeless, with a "focus on empowerment and collaboration, rather than servicing and/or purely representative action." We wish them well and will continue to support the initiative.

Anyone in the area who wants to know more or find out about forthcoming events can contact [midlands@afed.org.uk](mailto:midlands@afed.org.uk) or follow [@afedmids](https://twitter.com/afedmids) on Twitter.

Leicester and Nottingham have local websites  
<http://leicesteraf.blogspot.co.uk/> and <https://nottsblackarrow.wordpress.com/>

RAG is planning to launch their website very soon, however you can email them on [info@ragbirmingham.co.uk](mailto:info@ragbirmingham.co.uk)

Details of the 13th May bookfair in Nottingham can be found here:  
<http://fiveleavesbookshop.co.uk/events/bread-and-roses-bookfair/>

See also: Sheffield Anarchist Bookfair, Saturday 20th May 2017 10am – 6pm. Showroom Workstation 15 Paternoster Row, Sheffield S1 2BX. <https://sheffieldbookfair.org.uk/>

# News from the Sparrows' Nest

We are pleased to report on recent developments in the Sparrows' Nest library and archive based in Nottingham, which was founded by AF members and others over 8 years ago.

The Sparrows' Nest collects and preserves thousands of books, journals, pamphlets, zines, leaflets, posters and other archival materials. It focusses on the history of anarchist groups and individuals in the UK and worldwide, plus material about other social movements, protests and radicalism in Nottingham & Nottinghamshire and the wider regions of East Midlands & South Yorkshire.

The collection is added to regularly with the latest editions from AK Press, Freedom Press and other publishers. The archive and Digital Library, which is continually growing thanks to donations of material from groups and individuals, is being systematically catalogued and many documents are already available to download in high quality digital format.

The latest development is that the catalogue is now available online with an advanced search facility. Two-term keyword search and filters can be used to find material quickly. As more material is catalogued and digitised the breadth of the material in the archive will become even more accessible. The Nest is open for visits and many researchers have already used its collections. Details about visiting can be found on the website.

The Nest also has a nice poem to encourage cash donations!

For more details, visit the website:  
<http://thesparrowsnest.org.uk>



The Sparrows' Nest  
Library and Archive

## Spare a Twig

*Please give a twig for The Sparrows' Nest,  
while memories are fresh, support the quest;*

*Before the moths destroy it all,  
answer the Sparrows' heralding call;*

*To house an archive, rich and full,  
with treasured texts, to read and mull;*

*To keep our history alive and well,  
before time tolls its mildewed bell;*

*Your twig shall revive, restore, conserve,  
our struggle reborn, our fight preserved;*

*For new eyes wakened by struggles past,  
to make our movement's future last;*

*So please give a twig to The Sparrows' Nest,  
its wallet is small but its beak is big!*



# Repression of Anarchists in Turkey

## – Solidarity with Huseyin Civan, Meydan and DAF

The wave of repression unleashed by the Erdogan regime in Turkey has resulted in thousands losing their jobs and thousands imprisoned. Recently Huseyin Civan, managing editor of Meydan, a paper that represented the views of the DAF (Devrimci Anarsist Faaliyet / Anarchist Revolutionary Action), received a prison sentence of one year and three months.

This was the result of the action of the chief public prosecutor who pursued Meydan over articles published in issue 30, December 2015. The charge against our comrade was “making propaganda for the methods of a terrorist organization constituting coercion, violence or threats through legitimizing or praising or encouraging the use of these methods”.

Meydan was closed down after Erdogan began a campaign of repression after the recent failed coup. The imprisonment of Civan is another heavy blow against the anarchist movement operating within Turkey.

Advocating a system based on mutual aid and equality, defending workers’ struggles, arguing for gender equality

and the freedom of the individual , against nationalism and fascism are seen as terrorist crimes by the Erdogan regime.

Representing Meydan and Civan, lawyer Davut Erkan stated that the decision was illegal and would be appealed, if necessary, all the way to the Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights.

The Anarchist Federation sends a message of solidarity to Huseyin Civan, Meydan and the DAF.

**Follow Meydan at:**  
<http://meydangazetesi.org>  
[@MeydanGazetesi](https://twitter.com/MeydanGazetesi)

**Messages of solidarity can be sent to:**  
<https://www.facebook.com/meydangazetesi/>

**See also:**  
[https://www.reddit.com/r/Anarchism/comments/5k3q31/prison\\_sentence\\_to\\_managing\\_editor\\_of\\_anarchist/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Anarchism/comments/5k3q31/prison_sentence_to_managing_editor_of_anarchist/)



# 'a box of ashes, the state and the next cuban revolution'

article by a cuban anarchist following castro's demise





Cuba without Fidel Castro. The thought that has been simmering alike in the minds of his supporters and enemies for many years has become a reality. Requiring little effort to sense it, the fact was perceived in public silence against the imposing state machinery of national grief. Official spokespersons have been insisting that this silence is an expression of mass dismay. The opposition have emphasised that the silence is but another sign of fear of repression of those who would otherwise celebrate the death of Fidel Castro during the official mourning.

But dismay or repressed joy were the not the only things that have been felt in Cuba in this moment. Chatting with neighbours, friends, family members and random people on the street we were certain that the death of Fidel Castro could be transcendent for Cuba, for the world, and even for so-called 'universal history', but at the same time that this news would have little practical consequence on the oppression of daily life without hope that, like everywhere, we live in dependant on the extent of wage slavery.

Also there was not much to celebrate, considering the unstable panorama that Fidel Castro leaves behind, with a brother whose 10 years of government is merited on relaxing the authoritarian tensions that Fidel Castro left behind, whilst the essence of the system stays undisturbed, creating a general condition similar to the reasoning of that other well-known historical president-general Holguin [of Colombia]:

*"[...] There are two types of socialism. One is anarchism and the other functioning under the discipline of government. We must be realistic [...] We want to teach the people that workers and capital are both necessary and must cooperate. We want to get rid of utopian ideas that do not work, but that our people believe in."*<sup>[1]</sup>

Implementation of this type of socialism in Cuba has had a longer story than the one the Castro family have been telling us. The previous dictator, Fulgencio Batista, made a fundamental contribution to the authoritarian socialism of The Island, as clearly expressed in the paragraph above, which if we continue to ignore, we cannot have a precise idea of the historical function of Fidel Castro in the history of Cuba.

On 20th November 2017 it will be 80 years since the date of the first political event aimed at the people, summoned and organised by Colonel-Sergeant Fulgencio Batista, where the Secretary of Work ordered mandatory service from all public employees from Havana and the army was allowed to confiscate trains, lorries, trams, cars, etc. to gather 60-80,000 people in La Tropical Stadium, used as propaganda to promote the then triennial plan of the previous dictator <sup>[2]</sup>. That was the first act in Cuba that would become a technology of permanent mass mobilisation for the exclusive interest of the Cuban state, which would then be managed for more than half a century with such skill by Fidel Castro. What in 1937 was a meaningless small authoritarian initiative in

1959 became an everyday tool and presently involves all institutions and millions of people around the country. The government procedures initiated by Batista then inherited and developed to perfection by Fidel Castro leaves, in his death, the gates wide open for candidate successors to rediscover, with surprise, that the most authentic political thinking of Batista and the contribution of his commandant were shared by both governments in order to gain control of Cuba through the machinery of the nation state.

If Fulgencio Batista did not have the courage, ambition or opportunity to break relations with the predominant Yankee empire and to make the national state a reality, Fidel Castro had the boldness and historical circumstances in his favour to defy the direct dominance of the U.S. over Cuba. Under the sublime effect of that colossal purpose, added to a Machiavellian arrogance, he managed to convert the state into a system. The simple phrase of Batista "*socialism under the discipline of a government*" survived the disaster of the last half century to be converted into a Cuban state of such imposing machinery that it had no reservation in declaring on the 1st May 2008 that, "socialism is the national sovereignty, meaning national socialism".

Not only was Fidel Castro the great architect of "the revolution", but, and this is something that his millions of acolytes cannot define with precision yet, his is most obviously the Stalinist version of welfare state in Cuba, a model of governmental works that emerged from the particular setting of the Island in the Cold war scene, as a privileged ally of the Soviet Union in Latin America, which allowed the Cuban state to use exceptional resources to launch emblematic programs of integrated education from pre-school up to higher education level, free universal healthcare system, employment, great urbanisation and fundamental civil improvement for the millions of people excluded by the neo-colonial capitalism that has distinguished Cuba with the rest of the countries of the region.

As in all places where this type of policy was implemented, it allowed a substantial improvement of the level of the population's quality of life, but with it and at the same time a strategic intention, a strengthening of state institutions, that have conducted a true grand finale of the welfare of the Cuban state. But Fidel Castro did more than the use of quantitative resources that were acquired from the privileged relation with the Soviet Union. He converted the Cuban state into an influential actor on international politics – including the decolonization of Africa and Asia and the expansion of the anti-imperialist movements in Latin America – making Cuba an activist epicentre for those with socialist tendencies who were not alienated to Soviet predominance. After the fall of the Soviet empire, Fidel Castro and his immense international prestige resurrected a new anti-neoliberal movement in Latin America, some of which became governments in important countries of the region, and along with this the realisation of a Cuban State health services programme for the excluded of the world which took a lot of Cuban medics to remote places such as the Pakistani Himalayas or places nearer to Cuba like Haiti.

Nevertheless, we have to consider that all these anti-colonial and anti-neoliberal movements that Fidel Castro sponsored from Cuba have found themselves, in the past 15 years, to be in a deep political, moral and epistemological crisis: from South Africa, Angola, Algeria to Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina and on the road to that crisis Nicaragua, Ecuador, Bolivia, El Salvador and Vietnam. And today, for third world countries, that unprecedented and admirable program of Cuban medical services is a major source of income of the Fidelist bourgeoisie that controls the Cuban state.



The death of the Maximum Leader occurs at a time when the Cuban state machinery that was resurrected in 1959-60 is entering in another crisis of material reproduction, sunken in investment expenses and social control that makes it unsustainable, but with a popular legitimacy that maintains popularity in spite of all the desertions. The political elites are taking advantage of this peculiar and beneficial situation to dismantle the Cuban welfare state that has existed during the time of Fidel Castro and through the Cold war; *"No rush, but without pause"*, as General-President Raul Castro said. For this, it seems that they are going to sell the country in pieces in order to sustain the state, preferring to become allies with the big financial groups of the world so they can refinance the debts, moving towards a socialisation of decision-making and control of individual and groups over their lives, that embodies concrete reality rather than an abstraction of propaganda, modest but concrete steps towards collectivisation of daily life and the extinction of the bureaucratic and parasitic state.

In the interest of perfection and rationalisation of the capitalist state in Cuba, the heirs of Fidel Castro have two fundamental tools which are also a legacy of Fulgencio Batista. La Central de Trabajadores de Cuba (Workers' Central Union of Cuba) is a trade union organisation that was born on January of 1939 as a product of the alliance of Batista's political-military apparatus and the Cuban Stalinists, that today guarantees total control of the workers' movement by the state. In 1939 a member of the communist party Lazaro Peña later known as "The captain of the working class", was selected by Batista to lead the organising of the alliance. This was the very same person, commissioned by Fidel Castro in 1960, who used his time in office to create a school of opportunists and parasites that yielded a bunch of characters similar to Lazaro Peña such as Pedro Rosas Leal and Salvador Valdez Mesa, who have dedicated their lives to maintain and continue the legacy of Fulgencio Batista and Fidel Castro to make a socialism under the discipline of government.

The Codigo de Defensa Social (Social Defense Code) of April 1939, the key element that portrays the fascist spirit of Batista supporters, is yet another instrument inherited from the Colonel-Sergeant Batista that has been ratified with different names and upheld until the end of Fidel Castro's rule. Having been put into effect to regulate the death penalty for political crimes and repressive injustice in general, it is a legal element that is interestingly forgotten by all political

tendencies whether pro-democratic or pro-dictatorial. The Social Defense Code was not formally annulled by the constitution of 1940, neither in 1976 nor in 1992, and has been maintained because of its usefulness in dealing with social conflicts that will be generated by the dismantling of the Stalinist Cuban welfare state in the coming years.

After so many lives were destroyed, in the middle of this alleged antagonism, after so many diabolic tortures that caused dementia and demoralisation, after so many mass executions, bitter exiles, long sentences in horrendous prisons, after so many fiery and sublime speeches, after so much arrogance and intolerance, that it will become more visible with a cynical silence that a refined and unfinished "batistano" spirit will now contribute to what statemen are calling an update of the economic model of Cuban socialism.



Earlier, in 10th January 1959, El Libertario newspaper had emerged out of the rigid censorship that was imposed by the Batista political police. Soon after, it published a text by the now forgotten anarchist militant Antonio Landrian who originally joined the dots with his insights:

*"The Fidelist revolution of July 26th has triumphed. Will their ideology succeed? What is their ideology? Mainly freedom, or as they stress: liberation. From what? From Batista's yoke? Batista's yoke was violence, imposition, embezzlement, despotism, torture, blindness, authoritarianism and subjugation. It was centralism, bribery, unconditional servility. As long as any pillar of the overthrown regime of Batista remains standing, the revolution led by Fidel Castro will not have secured its victory."*

With the exception of violence and police brutality, that in recent years ago has temporarily become less public and visible in Cuba, all the other factors identified by Landrian from the prior dictatorship remained intact after 1959, reinforced and developed from then until the present day. And Landrian and his comrades who wrote for El Libertario were not able to enjoy the freedom of the Fidelist revolution much after May 1960 because they were censored, imprisoned, exiled or forbidden by the new 'revolutionary' political police.

Repression, embezzlement, tyranny, submission to slavery, centralism, bribery and unconditional servility to the state machinery continued to exist in Cuba after the defeated tyranny of Fulgencio Batista. The personal insights of our comrade Antonio Landrian, that were lost in the tornado of history, became the structural basis of Cuba's daily functioning right up to the funeral of Fidel Castro.

Some of my friends that were in the central park in the city of Artemisa [Havana Province] were kicked out by the police and the agents of State Security after Fidel Castro's death because *"it was not the appropriate time to be in the park chatting"*. Students at Havana university, had their rooms

closed in the afternoon of 28th of November after undercover police swarmed in, because “*you have to go to Plaza de la Revolución [Revolution Square] or stay on the street until the ceremony finishes*”, State public transport in the capital was paralysed on 29th of November from midday to ensure that the public were on the street to be pushed into the mass event at 7.00pm. Sports activities in green areas close to any main avenue were forbidden and fines up to 1500 pesos (3 months of salary) were given to anyone caught consuming alcoholic beverages in public on the days of mourning. These are just a tiny sample of the daily procedures of our state defenders of supposed socialism in Cuba.

Fidel Castro left a country with one of the highest levels of education, health and quality of life in America, but everything is pierced by the strategic interest of the stable functioning of their state machinery, in the name of the fight against Yankee imperialism and their local lackeys. Accomplishing this purpose has given rise to a society that is on the verge of permanent migratory crisis and demographic collapse on the horizon. In this the imperial Yankee politics have had a decisive role, but not least determining that the dictatorship over the Cuban proletariat run by Fidel Castro has converted Cuba into a territory populated with “[...] *an enormous flock of wage slaves [...] asking to be slaves so they can improve their life conditions*”. In any part of the world, this makes a reality of most painful nightmares of the Cuban ex-anarchist Carlos Baliño in 1897 in his text *Profecía Falsa* [False Prophecy]. This enormous flock of wage slaves, erstwhile revolutionaries, were already living under greater moral and material deprivation when Fidel Castro delivered his speech of 1st May 2000 on his latest concept of revolution, saved from oblivion during the time of his funeral, where he assured that, “*Revolution means changing everything that must be changed*”. Looking back 50 years ago it is pragmatically clear that the omitted subject of that sentence is without any doubt the revolutionary population that once existed; in the year 2000 the omitted subject of that sentence is none other than Fidel Castro himself, with his capacity to manoeuvre and with his imposing ideological-police apparatus. In that year he had shown no shame whatsoever in omitting revolutionary people from the concept of revolution, aware that they had already been castrated of their capacity for reflection and self-determination and, therefore, no longer able to be the subject of a speech, much less to be the subject of their own history.

During the long days of official mourning that we are living in, in Cuba, it was becoming increasingly obvious that new expressions were emerging, “*I am Fidel!*”, expressing very well the condition of collective amputation. And in between that enormous sea of flags, pictures and posters that appeared on TV, from Santiago de Cuba [Eastern City] there was one poster carried by a woman saying, “*I am Fidel!! To Order!!*”. Such grammatical and existential imbalances will be increasingly frequent in the public's shock realisation that the arrogant incarnation of power in the history of Cuba has been converted into a single box of ashes, a country that will have to learn to live without the orders of its Commander in Chief. And perhaps to learn along the way that they need neither more commanders nor further orders, but rather



more fraternity, more self-organisation, less vile and moral misery between those at the bottom, more responsibility for our own lives, more social imagination to defeat the spirit and the representatives of the new Fidelist parasitical and bureaucratic bourgeoisie, who today are restoring capitalism and its old horrors in Cuba right in front of our noses and pretend to be crying when really they are partying.

Everything that facilitates this learning will be a direct contribution to the next revolution in Cuba. Anything that hinders its discovery by the people will be the most precise and updated expression of anti-revolution. The proportion by which Fidelism succeeds as a ideological current in the future, inside and outside of Cuba, will be an exact expression of how much the moral bankruptcy of authoritarian, statist and progressive leftism in the world has advanced, and to what extent they will continue to put on the table the need to keep it going, “*how to lay the foundations of the social order of Today, and make others safer, without the house coming down?*”, as José Martí wrote in 1890, reflecting about that tender and radiant Bakunin.<sup>[3]</sup>

## notes

[1] Thanks to a researcher from the U.S., Robert Whitney, we have access to this document that is to be found in the book 'Estado y revolución en Cuba' published by the Editorial Ciencias Sociales (Social Sciences Editorial), Havana in 2010, p.230.

[2] All the press of the time covered this news and the researcher Robert Whitney, in the same book mentioned above, page 283, talks about this event using U.S. governmental sources. See: U.S. congress archive Mr to Mr Eden, Havana, 2 December 1937 PRO/FO/A/9019/65/14, no.171.

[3] José Martí complete works, Volume 12, En los estados Unidos. page. 378, Chapter 34 Desde el Hudson, in Editorial Ciencias Sociales, Havana, 1982. [Citing letter from José Martí published in La Nación, Buenos Aires, 20 February 1890, written from New York U.S.A. (Nueva York), 9th January 1890]

# The Two Octobers

*This article is a translation of Piotr Arshinov's article from the French. Arshinov took an active part as an anarchist in both the 1905 and the 1917 Russian Revolutions and fought with the Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine. He wrote this article in 1927, on the 10th anniversary of the Revolution, and contrasts the action of the workers and peasants to that of the Bolsheviks. We republish this now, 100 years after the Russian Revolution.*

The victorious revolution of the workers and peasants in 1917 was legally established in the Bolshevik calendar as the October Revolution. There is some truth in this, but it is not entirely exact. In October 1917 the workers and peasants of Russia surmounted a colossal obstacle to the development of their Revolution. They abolished the nominal power of the capitalist class, but even before that they achieved something of equal revolutionary importance and perhaps even more fundamental. By taking the economic power from the capitalist class, and the land from the large owners in the countryside, they achieved the right to free and uncontrolled work in the towns, if not the total control of the factories. Consequently, it was well before October that the revolutionary workers destroyed the base of capitalism. All that was left was the superstructure. If there had not been this general expropriation of the capitalists by the workers, the destruction of the bourgeois state machine — the political revolution — would not have succeeded in any way. The resistance of the owners would have been much stronger. On the other hand, the objectives of the social revolution in October were not limited to the overthrow of capitalist power. A long period of practical development in social self-management was before the workers, but it was to fail in the following years.

Therefore, in considering the evolution of the Russian socialist Revolution as a whole, October appears only as a stage — a powerful and decisive stage, it is true. That is why October does not by itself represent the whole social revolution. In thinking of the victorious October days, one must consider that historical circumstance as determined by the Russian social revolution.

Another no less important peculiarity is that October has two meanings — that which the working' masses who participated in the social revolution gave it, and with them the Anarchist-Communists, and that which was given it by the political party that captured power from this aspiration to social revolution, and which betrayed and stifled all further development. An enormous gulf exists between these two interpretations of October. The October of the workers and peasants is the suppression of the power of the parasite classes in the name of equality and self-management. The Bolshevik October is the conquest of power by the party of the revolutionary intelligentsia, the installation of its 'State Socialism' and of its 'socialist' methods of governing the masses.

## The Workers October

The February Revolution caught the different revolutionary parties in complete disarray and without any doubt they were considerably surprised by the profound social character of the dawning revolution. At first, no one except the anarchists wanted to believe it. The Bolshevik Party, which made out it always expressed the most radical aspirations of the working-class, could not go beyond the limits of the bourgeois revolution in its aims. It was only at the April conference that they asked themselves what was really happening in Russia. Was it only the overthrow of Tsarism. or was the revolution going further — as far as the overthrow of capitalism? This last eventually posed to the Bolsheviks the question of what tactics to employ. Lenin became conscious before the other Bolsheviks of the social character of the revolution, and emphasised the necessity of seizing power. He saw a decisive advance in the workers' and peasants' movement which was undermining the industrial and rural bourgeoisie foundations more and more. A unanimous agreement on these questions could not be reached even up to the October days. The Party manoeuvred all this time in between the social slogans of the masses and the conception of a social-democratic revolution, from where they were created and developed. Not opposing the slogan of petit- and grand-bourgeoisie for a Constituent Assembly, the Party did its best to control the masses, striving to keep up with their ever-increasing pace.

During this time, the workers marched impetuously forward, relentlessly running their enemies of left and right into the ground. The big rural landowners began everywhere to evacuate the countryside, fleeing from the insurgent peasantry and seeking protection for their possessions and their persons in the towns. Meanwhile, the peasantry proceeded to a direct re-distribution of land, and did not want to hear of peaceful co-existence with the landlords. In the towns as well a sudden change took place between the workers and the owners of enterprises. Thanks to the efforts of the collective genius of the masses, workers' committees sprang up in every industry, intervening directly in production, putting aside the admonishments of the owners and concentrating on eliminating them from production. Thus in different parts of the country, the workers got down to the socialisation of industry.

Simultaneously, all of revolutionary Russia was covered with a vast network of workers' and peasant soviets, which began

to function as organs of self-management. They developed, prolonged, and defended the Revolution. Capitalist rule and order still existed nominally in the country, but a vast system of social and economic workers' self-management was being created alongside it. This regime of soviets and factory committees, by the very fact of its appearance, menaced the state system with death. It must be made clear that the birth and development of the soviets and factory committees had nothing to do with authoritarian principles. On the contrary, they were in the full sense of the term organs of social and economic self-management of the masses, and in no case the organs of state power. They were opposed to the state machine which sought to direct the masses, and they prepared for a decisive battle against it. "The factories to the workers, the land to the peasants" — these were the slogans by which the revolutionary masses of town and country participated in the defeat of the State machine of the possessing classes in the name of a new social system which was founded on the basic cells of the factory committees and the economic and social soviets. These catch-words circulated from one end of workers' Russia to the other, deeply affecting the direct action against the socialist-bourgeois coalition government.

As was explained above, the workers and peasants had already worked towards the entire reconstruction of the industrial and agrarian system of Russia before October 1917. The agrarian question was virtually solved by the poor peasants as early as June — September 1917. The urban workers, for their part, put into operation organs of social and economic self-management, having seized from the State and the owners the organisational functions of production. The October Revolution of the workers overthrew the last and the greatest obstacle to their revolution the state power of the owning classes, already defeated and disorganised. This last evolution opened a vast horizon for the achievement of the social revolution putting it onto the creative road to socialist reconstruction of society, already pointed at by the workers in the preceding months. That is the October of the workers and the peasants. It meant a powerful attempt by the exploited manual workers to destroy totally the foundations of capitalist society, and to build a workers' society based on the principles of equality, independence, and self-management by the proletariat of the towns and the countryside. This October did not reach its natural conclusion. It was violently interrupted by the October of the Bolsheviks, who progressively extended their dictatorship throughout the country.

## The Bolshevik October

All the statist parties, including the Bolsheviks, limited the boundaries of the Russian Revolution to the installation of a social-democratic regime. It was only when the workers and peasants of all Russia began to shake the agraro-bourgeois order, when the social revolution was proved to be an irreversible historical fact, that the Bolsheviks began discussing the social character of the Revolution, and the consequent necessity of modifying its tactics. There was no unanimity in the Party on questions of the character and orientation of the events which had taken place, even up to October. Furthermore, the October Revolution as well as the

events which followed developed while the Central Committee of the Party was divided into two tendencies. Whilst a part of the Central Committee, Lenin at its head, foresaw the inevitable social revolution and proposed preparation for the seizure of power, the other tendency, led by Zinoviev and Kamenev, denounced as adventurist the attempt at social revolution, and went no further than calling for a Constituent Assembly in which the Bolsheviks occupied the seats furthest to the Left. Lenin's point of view prevailed, and the Party began to mobilise its forces in case of a decisive struggle by the masses against the Provisional Government.

The party threw itself into infiltrating the factory committees and the soviets of workers' deputies, doing its best to obtain in these organs of self-management the most mandates possible in order to control their actions. Nevertheless, the Bolshevik conception of, and approach to, the soviets and the factory committees was fundamentally different from that of the masses. While the mass of workers considered them to be the organs of social and economic self-management, the Bolshevik Party looked on them as a means by which it was possible to snatch the power of the sinking bourgeoisie and afterwards to use this power to serve the interests of the Party. Thus an enormous difference was revealed between the revolutionary masses and the Bolshevik Party in their conceptions and perspectives of October. In the first case, it was the question of the defeat of power with the view of reinforcing and enlarging the already constituted organs of workers and peasants self-management. In the second case, it was the question of leaning on these organs in order to seize power and to subordinate all the revolutionary forces to the Party. This divergence played a fatal role in determining the future course of the Russian Revolution.

The success of the Bolsheviks in the October Revolution — that is to say, the fact that they found themselves in power and from there subordinated the whole Revolution to their Party is explained by their ability to substitute the idea of a Soviet power for the social revolution and the social emancipation of the masses. A priori, these two ideas appear as non-contradictory for it was possible to understand Soviet power as the power of the soviets, and this facilitated the substitution of the idea of Soviet power for that of the Revolution. Nevertheless, in their realisation and consequences these ideas were in violent contraction to each other. The conception of Soviet Power incarnated in the Bolshevik state, was transformed into an entirely traditional bourgeois power concentrated in a handful of individuals who subjected to their authority all that



was fundamental and most powerful in the life of the people — in this particular case, the social revolution. Therefore, with the help of the “power of the soviets” — in which the Bolsheviks monopolised most of the posts — they effectively attained a total power and could proclaim their dictatorship throughout the revolutionary territory. This furnished them with the possibility of strangling all the revolutionary currents of the workers in disagreement with their doctrine of altering the whole course of the Russian Revolution and of making it adopt a multitude of measures contrary to its essence. One of these measures was the militarisation of labour during the years of War Communism — militarisation of the workers so that millions of swindlers and parasites could live in peace, luxury and idleness. Another measure was the war between town and country, provoked by the policy of the Party in considering peasants as elements unreliable and foreign to the Revolution. There was, finally, the strangling of libertarian thought and of the Anarchist movement whose social ideas and catchwords were the force of the Russian Revolution and orientated towards a social revolution. Other measures consisted of the proscription of the independent workers movement, the smothering of the freedom of speech of workers in general. All was reduced to a single centre, from where all instructions emanated concerning the way of life, of thought, of action of the working masses.

That is the October of the Bolsheviks. In it was incarnated the ideal followed by decades by the revolutionary intelligentsia, initially realised now by the wholesale dictatorship of the All-Russian Communist Party. This ideal satisfies the ruling intelligentsia, despite the catastrophic consequences for the workers; now they can celebrate with pomp the anniversary of ten years of power.

## The Anarchists

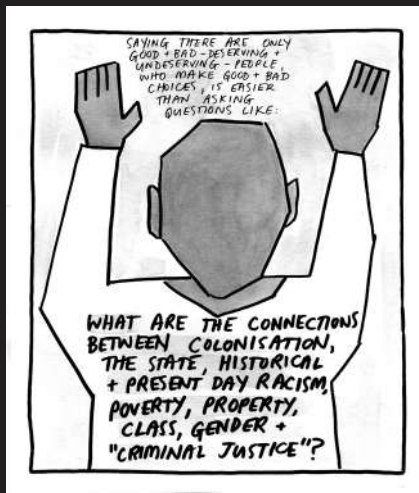
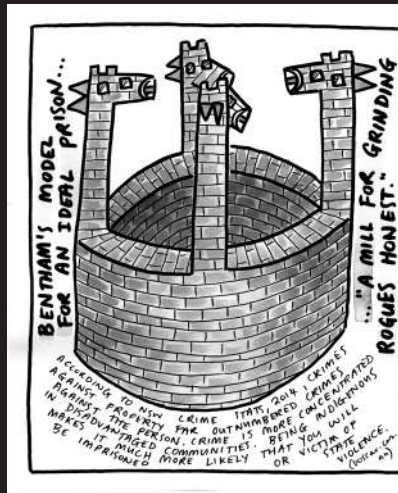
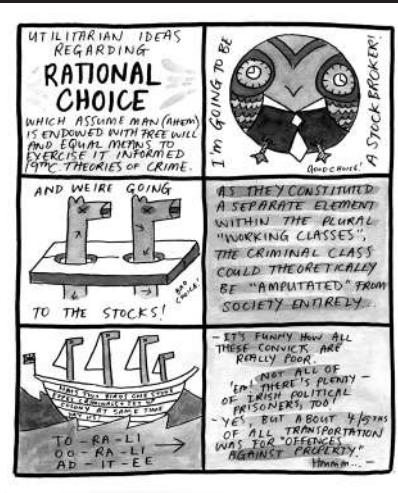
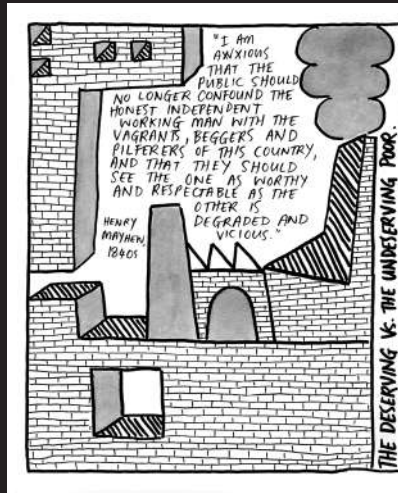
Revolutionary Anarchism was the only politico social-current to extol the idea of a social revolution by the workers and peasants, as much during the 1905 Revolution as from the first days of the October Revolution. In fact, the role they could have played would have been colossal, and so could have been the means of struggle employed by the masses themselves. Likewise, no politico-social theory could have blended so harmoniously with the spirit and orientation of the Revolution. The interventions of the Anarchist orators in 1917 were listened to with a rare trust and attention by the workers. One could have said that the revolutionary potential of the workers and peasants, together with the ideological and tactical power of Anarchism could have represented a force to which nothing could be opposed. Unhappily, this fusion did not take place. Some isolated anarchists occasionally led intense revolutionary activity among the workers, but there was not an Anarchist organisation of great size to lead more continuous and co-ordinated actions, (outside of the Nabat Confederation and the Makhnovchtina in the Ukraine). Only such an organisation could have united the Anarchists and the millions of workers. During such an important and advantageous revolutionary period, the Anarchists limited themselves to the restricted activities of small groups instead of orientating themselves to mass political action. They

preferred to drown themselves in the sea of their internal quarrels, not attempting to pose the problem of a common policy and tactic of Anarchism. By this deficiency, they condemned themselves to inaction and sterility during the most important moments of the Revolution.

The causes of this catastrophic state of the Anarchist movement resided in the dispersion, the disorganisation and the absence of a collective tactic — things which have nearly always been raised as principles among Anarchists, preventing them making a single organisational step so that they could orientate the social revolution in a decisive fashion. There is no actual advantage in denouncing those who, by their demagoguery, their thoughtlessness, and their irresponsibility, contributed to create this situation. But the tragic experience: which led the working masses to defeat, and Anarchism to the edge of the abyss, should be assimilated as from now. We must combat and pitilessly stigmatise those who in one way or another, continue to perpetuate the chaos and confusion in Anarchism, all those who obstruct its re-establishment or organisation. In other words, those whose actions go against those efforts of the movement for the emancipation of labour and the realisation of the Anarchist-Communist society. The working masses appreciate and are instinctively attracted by Anarchism, but will not work with the Anarchist movement until they are convinced of its theoretical and organisational coherence. It is necessary for everyone of us to try to the maximum to attain this coherence.

## Conclusions and Perspectives

The Bolshevik practice of the last ten years shows clearly the counter-revolutionary [role] of their dictatorship of the Party. Every year it restrains a little more the social-and political rights of the workers, and takes their revolutionary conquests away. There is no doubt that the ‘historic mission’ of the Bolshevik Party is emptied of all meaning and that it will attempt to bring the Russian Revolution to its final objective : State Capitalism of the enslaving salariat, that is to say, of the reinforced power of the exploiters and at the increasing misery of the exploited. In speaking of the Bolshevik Party as part of the socialist intelligentsia, exercising its power over the working masses of town and country, we have in view its central directing nucleus which, by its origins, its formation, and its life-style has nothing in common with the working class, and despite that, rules all the details of life of the Party and of the people. That nucleus will attempt to stay above the proletariat, who have nothing to expect from it. The possibilities for rank and file Party militants, including the Communist youth, appear different. This mass has passively participated in the negative and counter-revolutionary policies of the Party, but having come from the working-class, it is capable of becoming aware of the authentic October of the workers and peasants and of coming towards it. We do not doubt that from this mass will come many fighters for the workers’ October. Let us hope that they rapidly assimilate the Anarchist character of this October, and that they come to its aid. On our side, let us indicate this character as much as possible, and help the masses to reconquer and conserve the great revolutionary achievements.



# Culture FEATURE

## BEER IN A BAD STATE

Throughout history the ruling class have placed restrictions, controls and taxes on alcoholic beverages and their consumption. As with all things, this has not happened without resistance but to this day the twin evils of capitalism and the state have a huge influence on what, where and when we drink.

The Code of Hammurabi, one of the earliest recorded laws (circa 1754 BC), includes rules on drinks measures, punishment for tavern-keepers not apprehending subversives meeting there, and rules on where priestesses can drink. Though records of laws on beer in Britain don't go back that far they can certainly be traced to at least the time of William the Conqueror, with controls on ale price and quality. A tax was levied on property, including beer, to pay for a crusade as early as 1188, and business owners sought to control the trade in brewing by forming a guild in London in 1292.

Tracing how modern beer and pub culture in England developed I will start with the relatively more recent malt tax of 1697, brought in to pay for William of Orange's war with France. War is the health of the state, but it's certainly not good for beer or drinkers.

Beer is a fermented alcohol beverage made from malted cereal grains. Barley, wheat, oats, rye and others have all been used historically and are in use today. With a tax placed on malt though it restricted commercial beer production to the use of malted barley, and so restricted the types of beer that could be made. Wheat beers used to be produced in

England, but this was made illegal and so production ceased, killing off part of the English brewing tradition. The malt tax was not imposed on Scotland until 1725, where it was met with riots and illegal strikes by brewers. Troops had to be called in to end this *"dangerous challenge to the union state"* and eight people died.

Taxing malt made it more economical for maltsters if they continued the malting process for longer, which led to British and European malting and brewing practices diverging. Simple single temperature infusion mashing predominated in British breweries, whereas using less modified malts the more complicated stepped temperature decoction mashing was the norm in continental Europe.

In Germany the *"reinheitsgebot"* law has been in force since 1906, though it originated in Bavaria in 1516. This places strict controls on which ingredients on which ingredients can be used, and is usually described today as the *"beer purity law"*. In fact it was brought in to help keep bread prices down by stopping brewers using grains other than barley, and again this restriction led to a loss of beer diversity.

Hops, which had become commonly used in British beer from the sixteenth century, were also taxed from 1710 up until 1862, during which time other herbs were prevented from being used as flavourings. Again, this limited the types of beer that could be made. As well as taxing the raw materials beer itself was also taxed, with of course, higher tax for stronger beer





The malt tax was slightly relaxed to allow sugar use in 1847, but major change came with the “Free Mash Tun” act of 1880, at which point tax was moved to the strength of unfermented beer (wort) and the ingredients used became de-restricted. Brewers quickly moved to using a proportion of sugar and unmalted cereals as ingredients, except on the Isle of Man where the Free Mash Tun act was not adopted, and to this day beer ingredients are restricted to water, malted barley, sugar, hops and yeast.

Taxing beer based on its strength has always tempted brewers to cut their costs by making weaker beer, and Britain's beers are often weak by international standards. Other countries systems may be based on volume irrespective of strength, so there is not such a financial pressure to make beer weaker. This perhaps partly explains why craft brewers in the USA generally make stronger beers than their counterparts in Britain.

To go back to William of Orange it was also under his reign that gin became hugely popular in England. It was promoted as an alternative to French brandy and a number of laws were passed restricting brandy imports and encouraging gin production. Cheap and widely available, the “gin craze” ensued which persisted for decades, despite numerous attempts to restrict it. One method used to reduce gin consumption was to promote the drinking of beer, and Hogarth's famous “Gin Lane” and “Beer Street” engravings were propaganda promoting beer and denigrating gin. Regulations and rising prices brought an end to the first gin craze but when consumption rose again in the 1800s the authorities again promoted the consumption of beer. The Beer House Act of 1830 made it easy to open pubs which sold beer but not spirits, and pub numbers rocketed. Predictably, this relaxation of control was only temporary with licensing powers being returned to magistrates in 1869, and it became much harder to open pubs.

The state has not always been keen to promote pubs though, and religion has also played a role in having restrictions on drinking imposed. Pressure from the temperance movement, and particularly nonconformist chapels in Wales, led to the passing of the Sunday Closing (Wales) Act of 1881 which required the closing of all pubs in Wales on Sundays. A similar act failed to be passed in England, and its effect in Wales was minimised by the opening of a large number of clubs. However, it remained in force until 1961 when local authorities started holding polls on retaining the ban, with the last area not lifting it until 1996.

Mostly Britain escaped prohibition, but many other countries suffered from this extreme state control, including the USA and Russia, and indeed some do so today, usually for religious reasons as mythical beings often have an antipathy to alcohol.

The events that most shaped modern British beer were the restrictions brought in during the First World War. The Defence of the Realm Act, brought in four days after the outbreak of war, imposed the first of a wide range of authoritarian controls, including on alcohol sales. The hours in which pubs were open were cut from up to 19 and half hours a day to just five and a half. Once states have taken power to themselves they are loath to let it go and the ridiculous requirement for



pubs to close in the afternoon persisted until 1988. Buying rounds or “treating” was also prohibited, and punishable by six months in prison.

Alcohol taxes rose massively during the war, up 600%, and strict controls on the strength and volume of beer produced were imposed leading to both being halved. Some beers became as low as 1% alcohol by volume. Workers threatened to strike if more beer, and good beer at that, was not made available. Restrictions were eased slightly and “Government Ale” was brought in, at a controlled strength and price, though it's low strength (around 3.6% ABV) did not make it popular and it was ridiculed in a music hall song:

*We shall win the war, we shall win the war,  
As I said before, we shall win the war.  
The Kaiser's in a dreadful fury,  
Now he knows we're making it at every brewery.  
Have you read of it, seen what's said of it,  
In the Mirror and the Mail.  
It's a substitute, and a substitute,  
And it's known as Government Ale (or otherwise).  
Lloyd George's Beer, Lloyd George's Beer.  
At the brewery, there's nothing doing,  
All the water works are brewing,  
Lloyd George's Beer, it isn't dear.  
Oh they say it's a terrible war, oh law,  
And there never was a war like this before,  
But the worst thing that ever happened in this war  
Is Lloyd George's Beer.  
Buy a lot of it, all they've got of it.  
Dip your bread in it, shove your head in it  
From January to October,  
And I'll bet a penny that you'll still be sober.  
Get your cloth in it, make some broth in it,  
With a pair of mutton chops.  
Drown your dogs in it, pop your clogs in it,  
And you'll see some wonderful sights (in that lovely stuff).  
Lloyd George's Beer, Lloyd George's Beer.  
At the brewery, there's nothing doing,  
All the water works are brewing,  
Lloyd George's Beer, it isn't dear.  
With Haig and Joffre when affairs look black,  
And you can't get at Jerry with his gas attack.  
Just get your squinters out and we'll squirt the buggers back,  
With Lloyd George's Beer.*

The government reacted to this by banning brewers from using the term Government Ale.

In some areas pubs and breweries were taken under state control, and the government continued to own breweries up until 1974. By the end of the war the average strength of beer had dropped from around 5.5% ABV down to 3%, and it never returned to its pre-war level. When restrictions were relaxed it increased slightly to around 3.8% ABV, and it has hovered around there ever since. Beer suffered less during the Second World War, the notorious piss artist Churchill refusing to emulate the teetotal Lloyd George.

State intervention didn't end though and to this day the authorities continue to meddle. The beer orders of 1989 resulted in the large national brewers being separated from their tied pub estates. This did nothing to lessen the concentration of ownership, as huge pub companies were immediately formed, and the national breweries all came to be owned by multinationals. A clause that was inserted after pressure from the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) led to the rise of guest cask ales in pubs, and local monopolies, of cask beer at least, are now a lot less common.

Further pressure from CAMRA and the Society of Independent Brewers led to Progressive Beer Duty being brought in by Gordon Brown in 2002. This means that smaller breweries pay less tax on beer, and this has undoubtedly helped bring about the boom in microbreweries. What he gave with one hand, he later took away with the other though, as he was also responsible for the Beer Duty Escalator, which made tax on beer automatically rise above the level of inflation, a situation that persisted from 2008-2013.

Though the Beer Duty Escalator has now been stopped, High Strength Beer Duty has been introduced, so extra tax is paid on beers above 7.5% ABV, resulting in many strong beers dropping in strength to avoid this.

It is difficult to know what beer we might be drinking in a free society, but perhaps we can glimpse what it might be like. The Spanish anarchists collectivised the Damm and Moritz breweries in Barcelona during the civil war, but I have been unable to find any details of the beers they made then. The pressures of war and their enemies from the left and right wings of capitalism did not make it an ideal opportunity to express their creativity anyway.

We know that state controls greatly reduced the ingredients used in beer, and when these controls are lifted the variety of ingredients grows. One area of brewing less affected by state controls and the financial pressures of capitalism is home brewing (though a licence was required in Britain until 1963). In the appropriately named "Radical Brewing" home brewing author Randy Mosher details the astonishingly wide range of beers that can be made when creativity is unrestrained. Strong, weak, bitter, sweet, traditional, novel, the possibilities are endless. The influence of home brewers on the growing "Craft Beer" scene has led to much greater variety in the range of beers being available, but in only for those that can afford them. When beer is freely available on the basis of need it will likely show greater diversity and make more use of local ingredients than is the case in contemporary society.

## Book REVIEW

# Living Anarchism: José Peirats and the Spanish Anarcho- Syndicalist Movement

Chris Ealham

AK Press  
314 pages  
£15.00

*"I've done almost everything in the CNT: I've organised strikes, organised workers, spoken in assemblies, meetings, and given conferences, written articles, attended congresses, used pistols, and sometimes, explosives; I've been in jail and collected lawsuits... I*



Living Anarchism

★

José Peirats and the  
Spanish Anarcho-syndicalist Movement

Chris Ealham

*know what it means to be naked and take a beating in a police station. I was the only secretary of the CNT in exile to enter Spain clandestinely when they were still shooting people.” - Peirats in a letter, 1970.*

This book is a biography of Jose Peirats, a lifelong Spanish anarchist, but it's also about the movement he was part of, the anarcho-syndicalist mass union, the Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo (CNT), the Federacion Anarquista Iberica (FAI) and various anarchist affinity groups, the ateneos where working class people educated themselves, and a whole range of other political and cultural groups. It's about living as an anarchist but it's also about the idea of anarchism translated into practice, into everyday life.

The book is superbly written and gives a warts and all portrayal of Peirats and of the Spanish libertarian movement. This movement was not monolithic, it contained various different currents and tendencies that co-existed, sometimes fairly peacefully, other times at complete loggerheads.

It is very clear from reading the book that the anarchist movement in Spain had a pervasive influence in certain parts of Spain, where it was easily encountered in the workplaces, the cafés, and the streets. Peirats was introduced at a young age to anarchist ideas by his uncle Nelo, and later at the age of twelve his mentor became his cousin Vicente.

Peirats stood against the individualist anarchism of the Urales family, Federico Urales (Juan Montseny) and his daughter Federica Montseny. He regarded Urales as an 'old anarchist converted into a petit bourgeois of libertarian publishing' and he was to clash regularly with Federica Montseny in the course of his life.

Whilst he was a 'man of action', involved in the CNT's squads that dealt with strike-breakers, and using firearms in the course of his activity for the CNT, he was opposed to the Nosotros anarchist affinity group, which included Durruti, Ascaso and Garcia Oliver. This group believed that armed uprisings were necessary to stop the Spanish working class becoming tame and that would be 'revolutionary gymnastics' to prepare workers for the forthcoming revolution. He was equally opposed to the 'moderate' wing of the CNT, the treintistas, named after 30 (treinta) signatories of an anti-insurrectionary manifesto who believed that the Spanish Republic offered opportunities to consolidate the CNT. As Ealham remarks:

*“Whilst Peirats was an anarchist in the streets and in the athenaeum, he was very much an anarcho-syndicalist in the workplace, and this convinced him that the revolution would come through a combination of cultural awareness and revolutionary strikes as opposed to simply firing pistols, like the radicals appeared to believe.”*

He was against ideological purity within the CNT, believing that the treintistas appreciated the need for revolutionary organisation whilst exaggerating republican freedoms.

As a partisan of cultural education, was a founder of the Rationalist Athenaeum in the La Torrassa district of L'Hospitalet. This organised evening classes, theatre productions, musical recitals, public talks and debates and housed a library. It also took part in struggles in the local community. Peirats continued this intense cultural activity throughout his life. He was always an opponent of populist demagogic language and insisted that *“there are enough imbeciles in the world. We mustn't make more”*, perhaps something some contemporary anarchists could take note of.

Peirats was opposed to the turn the CNT and FAI leadership took when Federica Montseny and co. became ministers, and equally opposed to militarisation. He took part in the May Days of 1937 but failed to identify with the Friends of Durruti, even though he knew Balius and Santana Calero. In Ealham's words:

*“This reluctance to align with the most radical alternative to the CNT-FAI bureaucracy illustrates the limits of Peirats's opposition to the higher committees, as well as his inability to follow through his critique of the anarchist movement to a more consistent rejection of the leadership.”*

Peirats continued his opposition to the bureaucratising tendency within the exiled libertarian movement, based around Montseny and her partner Germinal Esglesas, until he was expelled from the CNT by this action in 1969. He remained a critical voice until his death in 1989.

As was noted earlier, this is a warts and all account of Peirats life, and Ealham rightly criticises Peirats for his disturbing sexism and homophobia.

*“Whilst in no way wishing to excuse these opinions, they were, nevertheless, not uncommon within what was a very masculine, even if anarcho-syndicalist, trade union movement. At the same time, the anarchist movement internationally has been criticised for its anachronistic/sexist leanings and for reproducing in its ranks the very power dynamics it seeks to oppose... Still less excusable is Peirats's inability to modify and revise his views in the different circumstances immediately before and after May 1968.”*

Peirats lived a hard life. He suffered from Perthes disease from an early age which caused him excruciating pain in his legs throughout his life. He nearly died on the front during the Civil War, he had a tough and bitter existence in the French concentration camps after the collapse of the Spanish Republic, and an equally bleak time whilst in exile in the tropics of the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela. He was sickened by the internal disputes within the Spanish libertarian movement. Despite all of this he maintained his anarchist convictions to the end.

# Book REVIEW

## Kropotkin: Reviewing the Classical Anarchist Tradition

Ruth Kinna

Edinburgh University Press  
272 pages  
£24.64

As one of the most widely read, recognisable and influential thinkers in anarchist history, what more is there to say about Peter Kropotkin? Well apparently, quite a lot. Ruth Kinna's

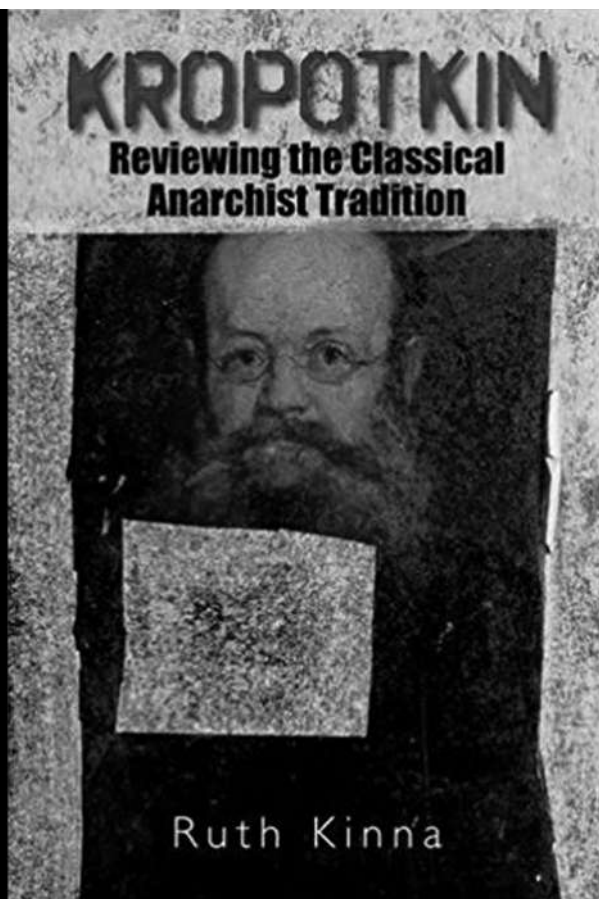
latest book *Kropotkin: Reviewing the Classical Anarchist Tradition*, is a conscientious and rigorous work in which the most seasoned student of anarchism can discover something they didn't know about their favourite Prince. More importantly, they may also discover that something they *thought* they knew about him doesn't quite stand up to scrutiny.

The book's unassuming title masks a more radical purpose; Kinna does not so much *review* the "classical anarchist tradition" as challenge the very concept of "classical anarchism" itself, and its utility as a category of analysis. As she sets out in the conclusion to part one:

*The tag 'classical anarchism' is not only an obstacle to the study of Kropotkin's ideas; it is a distorting lens for movement histories. Classical anarchism introduces a set of ideological and philosophical markers into a complex history (...) I want to suggest that the classical stereotypes do not stand up to scrutiny and that the ideas of classical anarchism's leading representative diverge both in content and form from those that have been attributed to him.*

In this challenge Kinna joins others such as Brian Morris, Alan Antliff, Jesse Cohn, Shawn Wilbur and Nathan Jun who have criticised the "postanarchist" position, formulated and championed by theorists like Lewis Call, Todd May and Saul Newman. In this conceptualisation, "classical anarchism" is used as a way to describe anarchist orthodoxy (unhelpfully narrowed down to a few exemplary figures eg Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin) as a form of enlightenment positivism, concerned with "good" human "essences", and a conception of power as operating in an exclusively 'top down' manner.

Engaging with postanarchist texts as an anarchist communist has always been a frustrating business, not because there aren't productive insights to be gained from postmodern philosophy – there are – but because of the woefully superficial and inadequate treatment of the canonical texts and thinkers. Say what you like about post-Marxist philosophy, at least its exponents seem to have engaged seriously and in good faith with the work of Marx. It is always quite obvious whether a writer has approached a large body of work like that of Kropotkin with the intention of engaging with it on its own terms, or simply looking for evidence that will support a preconceived conclusion. Kinna's book is a welcome and overdue example of the former, and it quickly becomes clear that the "classical anarchism" conceived and criticised by postanarchists bears little relation to Kropotkin's actual thought. Her discussion of the influence of nihilism on his ethics, particularly his admiration for the resistance of



Russian nihilist women on the terrain of everyday life, is a particularly illuminating facet of this argument.

To be fair to the postanarchists, they are hardly alone in giving Kropotkin an inadequate reading. As the opening chapters of *Kropotkin* illustrate, Kropotkin has been slotted into boxes he doesn't quite fit into for a very long time, with a cumulative effect of multiplied misunderstandings as each generation picks up the scholarship of the last. To cite just one example, Kinna shows how George Woodcock's idea of a clean ideological break between Bakunin and Kropotkin was taken up by "new" anarchists in the 1960s to help them claim Kropotkin for an 'evolutionary', pacifist anarchism, in turn prompting class struggle anarchists from Brian Morris to Lucien Van der Walt to claim him back. Kinna suggests that what is lost in this ideological push and pull is a clear understanding of Kropotkin's thought in the context of the engagements, debates and influences of his time. When it comes to anarchist intellectual history, perhaps there has been a little too much 'deferring to the authority of the bootmaker' and not enough honest engagement with the source material.

While Kinna's effort to pull Kropotkin out of the dustbin of history marked 'classical anarchism' will come as music to the ears of contemporary anarchist-communists, the second purpose of her book will not go down as easy. This is her explanation of Kropotkin's support for the Entente powers in World War One, and her assertion that this position was not a lapse or deviation but actually in keeping with his anarchism generally. I have to admit that my immediate reaction was one of resistance, how could such (what I consider to be) an anti-anarchist position possibly be consistent with the thought of one of the defining figures of anarchist communism? Nevertheless, Kinna supports her claim with numerous examples from Kropotkin's writing and the testimony of his contemporaries which suggest that his position derived from long standing and deeply held ideas about nationality, autonomy, the potential for revolution in Russia and the nature of the Prussian state. At times, the political reasoning ascribed to Kropotkin is uncomfortably reminiscent of the 'lesser of two evils' variety of anti-imperialism we now associate more with Marxism-Leninism than anarchism:

*As an anti-militarist Kropotkin was anti-imperialist and anticapitalist but he supported the right of self-defence to resist imperialism and colonisation (...) When confronted with the reality of war and the failure of revolutionary direct action to resist it, he supported the campaign against Germany as an anti-militarist and anti-coloniser.*

While we may have a hard time figuring out how it is that one can support the military endeavours of the British and French empires as an "anti-coloniser", Kinna's point was that Kropotkin believed it, and didn't abandon his previously stated positions when he said so. Anarchists familiar with Kropotkin's exchange with Malatesta at the time will find Kinna's discussion of it interesting on this point. I have to admit that the title of Malatesta's piece, "*Anarchists have abandoned their principles*" had always struck me as self-evidently true in this case, now I wonder whether the truth may be a little more complex. Anarchists who are happy to see Kinna skilfully dispose of the dismissive, pejorative category of "classical anarchism", may at this point wonder if we aren't guilty of composing something similar when we attribute Kropotkin's position on WWI to his old age or a moment of madness. Kinna writes:

*Kropotkin's vilification sweeps his inconvenient deviation from anarchist norms under the carpet and also conceals the divergent ways in which concepts of internationalism and militarism, class, capitalism and solidarity were understood.*

And I think she has a point; there is nothing to be gained from simplifying and sanitising this or any other aspect of anarchism's long and diverse history. Kropotkin's position was a break with the overwhelming majority of anarchists both then and now, it doesn't reflect badly on the movement itself, so why do we need the betrayal narrative? To be honest, I'd like to go back to the Kropotkin I've read and check that it isn't a *reversal* of his previous positions, having been primed by this book not to accept the assertions of his interpreters – an impulse I'm sure Ruth Kinna would heartily support. If it is the case though, I'd like to understand why I and many other anarchists have maintained an idea of Kropotkin as an exemplary anarchist who had a momentary lapse of judgement in his old age. He was a towering figure of the movement from whom we continue to draw insight and inspiration (in the emerging field of anarchist geography for example), but perhaps we best honour his memory by stripping him of his sainthood.

In *Kropotkin: Reviewing the Classical Anarchist Tradition*, we have a faithful and respectful explanation of Kropotkin's ideas in context, carefully disentangled from the many twists and turns they have taken on their way to us over the last century. It is a major contribution to anarchist scholarship, and will be of interest to all anarchists, regardless of their previous knowledge of the subject.

**Editors Note:** This review was submitted by Dave Tulley. Dave can be reached on his twitter handle of @DieFreieStrasse

# Book REVIEW

## The Fifth Season

**N.K. Jemisin**

**Orbit**  
**521 pages**  
**£8.99**

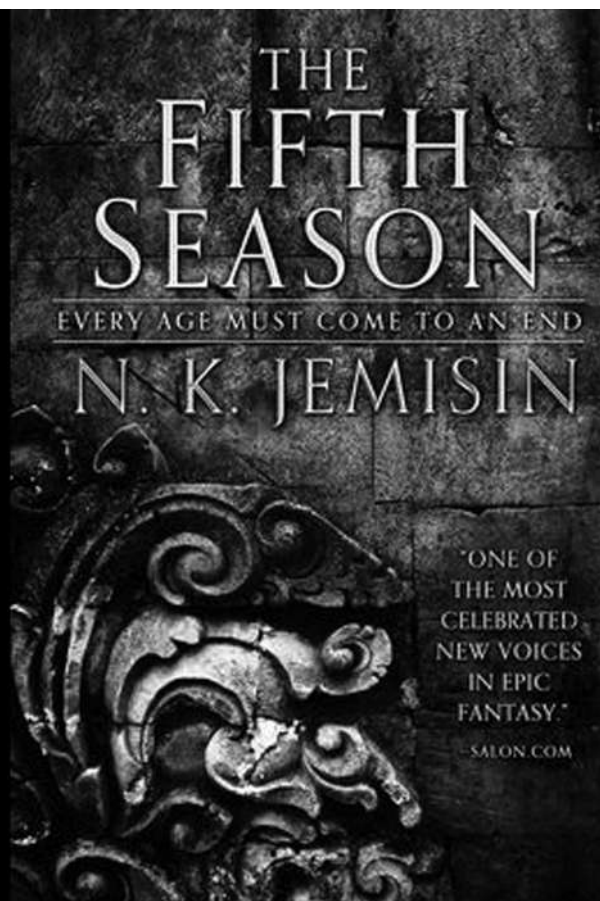
The first novel in N. K. Jemisin's Broken Earth Trilogy is an electric speculative fiction statement that political radicals of all stripes, as well as sci-fi fans, should seek out and relish at the first opportunity. Set in The Stillness, a planet plagued by an extremely active geological system, *The Fifth Season* introduces us to orogenes, people who have the ability to sense and control geological activity but who live alongside humans who, like us, don't have that ability. It plunges us in straight at the event that is going to end the world. Jemisin plays with several different narrative strands, jumping back

and forth in time, addressing you, the reader, personally, asking you constantly to put yourself into the shoes of Damaya, the central character. The new vocabulary she creates to describe the Stillness is enjoyable to figure out, if occasionally frustrating before you have cracked it. That said, it isn't as extreme as *A Clockwork Orange* and there's a glossary at the end if you need it.

Jemisin centres feminine voices, voices of colour, and queer voices in her novel, without being too strictly tied to the same identities we create on Earth. She plays with interesting ideas about free association in the way society on The Stillness constitutes and reconstitutes itself. The story is intense, and deals with many different forms of violence - state violence, abusive relationships, self-defence. It sets up a society that has dealt with scarcity and existential threat by becoming oppressive in ways that unfold as the story does, often shockingly. Jemisin excels at a slow reveal.

The characters are slippery and complex. We think we have someone figured out and then we don't. There are no angels, no easy, pure sympathies. It is also, crucially, not a dystopian sob story. This is a novel with steel at its core, the kind of strength needed to sustain oneself against oppression. Jemisin leaves us hungry for *The Obelisk Gate*, the second in the Broken Earth Trilogy (with the concluding novel yet to be published).

If you're looking for speculative fiction that isn't about macho space dudes, please read this novel and then write to or tweet at us and let us know you liked it!



# AF PUBLICATIONS

## OUT NOW

### BASIC BAKUNIN

"We are convinced that freedom without Socialism is privilege and injustice, and that Socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality." This pamphlet will examine the anarchist ideas of Mikhail Bakunin. These ideas were a huge influence upon the 19th century socialist movement. We hope that it will become apparent that Bakunin has a lot to offer us today, that his ideas make up a coherent and well-argued body of thought, and show that there is good reason for him to be described as the grandfather of modern anarchism.

A5 - £2 (+p&p)

### REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN

The compatibility of anarchism and women's liberation is clear: opposition to all hierarchy is a requirement of any movement demanding emancipation and equality. Despite this, everywhere that women joined the early anarchist movement they were forced to fight against the prejudices of their male comrades. Not only did they fight, they prevailed, becoming the spearhead of many revolutionary situations. This pamphlet provides a biographical account of some lesser-known revolutionary women of the past.

A5 - £2 (+p&p)

### A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO ANARCHIST COMMUNISM

The Anarchist Federation is an organisation of revolutionary class struggle anarchists. We aim for the abolition of all hierarchy, and work for the creation of a world-wide classless society: anarchist communism. This abridged version of our key pamphlet sets out to introduce what all this means and how we think we can do it.

A6 - Free / Donation (+p&p)

### THE ROLE OF REVOLUTIONARY ORGANISATION

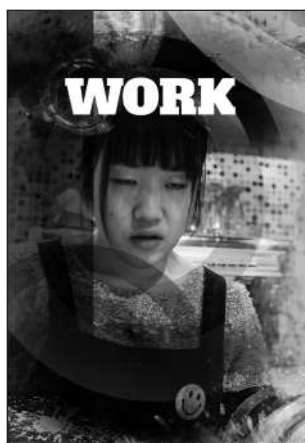
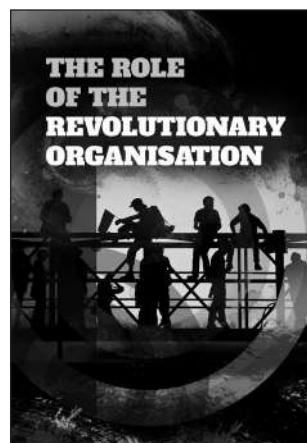
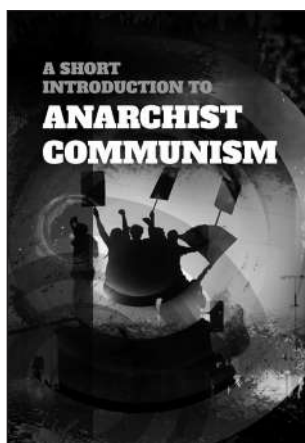
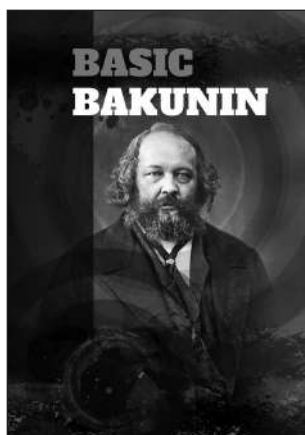
We in the Anarchist Federation seek the abolition of capitalism and state in favour of bringing about a society based on the guiding principle 'From each according to their ability, to each according to their need.' This is anarchist communism. In order to achieve this we need a revolutionary organisation to undertake a certain role as part of the working class. This pamphlet will explain why.

A6 - £1 (+p&p)

### WORK

We live in a society where the activities we engage in for most of our life are not based on being useful to society or fulfilling to ourselves, but are based upon getting money to have our needs met. Our work is the driving force behind capitalism. The activities we're required to perform are either detrimental to society or have their full worth undermined by the drive for profits. This pamphlet will explain why we must abolish work.

A6 - £1 (+p&p)



## FORTHCOMING

RESISTANCE TO NAZISM

INTRODUCTION TO ANARCHIST COMMUNISM

AGAINST NATIONALISM

ECOLOGY & CLASS

We also publish **Resistance**, our agitational news sheet. It can be viewed on our website or you can order individual copies or bundles for distribution from [publications@afed.org.uk](mailto:publications@afed.org.uk).

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All publications can also be purchased from AFed stalls / events as well as direct from Active Distribution and AK Press & Distribution.

# THE AIMS & PRINCIPLES

## of the ANARCHIST FEDERATION

**1** The Anarchist Federation is an organisation of revolutionary class struggle anarchists. We aim for the abolition of all hierarchy, and work for the creation of a world-wide classless society: anarchist communism.

**2** Capitalism is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling class. But inequality and exploitation are also expressed in terms of race, gender, sexuality, health, ability and age, and in these ways one section of the working class oppresses another. This divides us, causing a lack of class unity in struggle that benefits the ruling class. Oppressed groups are strengthened by autonomous action which challenges social and economic power relationships. To achieve our goal we must relinquish power over each other on a personal as well as a political level.

**3** We believe that fighting systems of oppression that divide the working class, such as racism and sexism, is essential to class struggle. Anarchist communism cannot be achieved while these inequalities still exist. In order to be effective in our various struggles against oppression, both within society and within the working class, we at times need to organise independently as people who are oppressed according to gender, sexuality, ethnicity or ability. We do this as working class people, as cross-class movements hide real class differences and achieve little for us. Full emancipation cannot be achieved without the abolition of capitalism.

**4** We are opposed to the ideology of national liberation movements which claims that there is some common interest between native bosses and the working class in face of foreign domination. We do support working class struggles against racism, genocide, ethnocide and political and economic colonialism. We oppose the creation of any new ruling class. We reject all forms of nationalism, as this only serves to redefine divisions in the international working class. The working class has no country and national boundaries must be eliminated. We seek to build an anarchist international to work with other libertarian revolutionaries throughout the world.

**5** As well as exploiting and oppressing the majority of people, Capitalism threatens the world through war and the destruction of the environment.

**6** It is not possible to abolish Capitalism without a revolution, which will arise out of class conflict. The ruling class must be completely overthrown to achieve anarchist communism. Because the ruling class will not relinquish power without their use of armed force, this revolution will be a time of violence as well as liberation.

**7** Unions by their very nature cannot become vehicles for the revolutionary transformation of society. They have to be accepted by capitalism in order to function and so cannot play a part in its overthrow. Trades unions divide the working class (between employed and unemployed, trade and craft, skilled and unskilled, etc). Even syndicalist unions are constrained by the fundamental nature of unionism. The union has to be able to control its membership in order to make deals with management. Their aim, through negotiation, is to achieve a fairer form of exploitation of the workforce. The interests of leaders and representatives will always be different from ours. The boss class is our enemy, and while we must fight for better conditions from it, we have to realise that reforms we may achieve today may be taken away tomorrow. Our ultimate aim must be the complete abolition of wage slavery. Working within the unions can never achieve this. However, we do not argue for people to leave unions until they are made irrelevant by the revolutionary event. The union is a common point of departure for many workers. Rank and file initiatives may strengthen us in the battle for anarchist communism. What's important is that we organise ourselves collectively, arguing for workers to control struggles themselves.

**8** Genuine liberation can only come about through the revolutionary self activity of the working class on a mass scale. An anarchist communist society means not only co-operation between equals, but active involvement in the shaping and creating of that society during and after the revolution. In times of upheaval and struggle, people will need to create their own revolutionary organisations controlled by everyone in them. These autonomous organisations will be outside the control of political parties, and within them we will learn many important lessons of self-activity.

**9** As anarchists we organise in all areas of life to try to advance the revolutionary process. We believe a strong anarchist organisation is necessary to help us to this end. Unlike other so-called socialists or communists we do not want power or control for our organisation. We recognise that the revolution can only be carried out directly by the working class. However, the revolution must be preceded by organisations able to convince people of the anarchist communist alternative and method. We participate in struggle as anarchist communists, and organise on a federative basis. We reject sectarianism and work for a united revolutionary anarchist movement.

**10** We have a materialist analysis of capitalist society. The working class can only change society through our own efforts. We reject arguments for either a unity between classes or for liberation that is based upon religious or spiritual beliefs or a supernatural or divine force. We work towards a world where religion holds no attraction.