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SHIFT

#2

Heathrow ?

Gatwick ?

Which camp are you in?

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editorial

Another airport, another camp. Many of the marquees and tents were the same, and most faces were familiar too. Yet the atmosphere at the No Borders camp last September was very different form the Climate Camp that had happened a month earlier. For a start, there were no police, journalists or livestock on site! Out were the dreadlocks; black hoodies were back in fashion. New airport, new camp, new politics? The No Borders camp had set up at Gatwick airport. Not to protest the flying habits of the middle classes but to demonstrate against the building of Brook House, a new detention centre at Gatwick airport.

We spent time at both camps and so did many others. But an obscure article in the Guardian newspaper proclaimed "You are either in the Gatwick camp or in the Heathrow camp. Make your choice." Such was the conclusion by Brendan O'Neill of the ex-Marxist ultra-liberal website spiked-online. He had just given one of his infamous rants at British environmentalists. Only (as Merrick shows on page 9) this time he got his facts wrong.

Sure enough, O'Neill praised the No Borders campers for their protest "against the British government's penchant for building prison-like detention centres for 'illegal' and 'paperless' immigrants, including one inside the grounds of Gatwick airport". On the other hand, he accused the Climate Campers of being "interested only in their freedom to lecture the rest of us about our planet-killing holidays" and "calling for less choice, less freedom of movement, and for tougher taxes and restrictions on people's ability to fly". That might have been true for some of the liberal and conservative green pressure groups that have jumped onto the Climate Camp band-wagon. Many of the camp organisers, anarchists and socialists at Heathrow, however, condemned the calls for restrictive government-action.

There was some real support and co-operation between the two camps; and that is recognised from both No Borders (see page 4) and Climate Camp (see page 9) perspectives. We were also somewhat bemused by O'Neill's remarks: One of the marquees at the No Borders camp had "from Drax to Heathrow" visibly written on the side of it, pointing out that the marquee (together with lots of the people) had come straight from the Climate Camp. There was no need to choose, we had just moved from one camp to the next!

On second thought, however, it is more complex than that. It should have trickled through to the radical green movement too that some of its traditions and contemporary manifestations have a markedly conservative edge to them. And increasingly today, green discourses are being used to justify migration controls. Isn't it morally unjustifiable to allow unrestricted migration and freedom of movement when air and road travel and unsustainable consumption levels are destroying the planet? As we have argued in our last issue, there is clearly a level of austerity politics at work in the green movement. And the climate campers should guard themselves against attempts to use it as a platform to argue for more government and less travel (see page 14).

The intermingling of blood and soil ideology and conservative greens is well known. The thread can be picked up at various points throughout European history. For instance with the rise of Romanticism in the late eighteenth century came the close association between a romantic idealisation of the natural world and a desire to preserve and keep sacred this world – a romantic nationalism. The fascist conceptions of nation, blood and soil have green undertones. They evoke a connection between race and homeland and between nation and nature. For the German Nazis, it was the Volk (the 'people') alone that could live in harmony with the natural surroundings of Europe. With National Socialism sometimes came an inherent anti-modernism and romantic vision of the 'natural' as opposed to the destructive forces of the international financial elite.

This romantic idealism has sometimes been transported into 'radical' green movements. Proponents of 'deep ecology' and of 'primitivism' have especially been flirting with anti-immigration ideologies, though more so in the US than over here. Sometimes, the complex social reasons behind systematic ecological degradation are reduced to a mere problem of scarcity and 'overpopulation'. Apparently there are too many people in the world and in Britain. Such arguments go hand-in-hand with calls for migration controls and border regimes to protect the European and North American eco-systems from 'unsustainable' population levels.

To be sure, none of this thinking was evident at the Climate Camp or could characterise the environmental direct action movement in Britain. But we have come across such arguments and it is important to refute them. Partly because they are missing the fundamental point: Trying to find an ethical or sustainable way of living in this current mode of social organisation invariably leads into a dead end. Capitalism is based upon contradictions and we won't be able to break out of them if we hide behind pure ethical-environmental or moral-humanitarian positions without challenging the entirety of the system. The connection between No Borders and Climate Camp needs to go beyond infrastructure to a genuine exchange of politics and ideas.

L.W. & R.S.

By Alice, with contributions from Rob (Bristol No Borders)

interview with alice from no borders about the gatwick camp

Last September, some 300 people gathered a few miles from Gatwick airport for the No Borders camp. What was the idea behind the camp? What were its aims?

The camp was part of the campaign against a new detention centre, Brook House, that is being built at Gatwick Airport. It was also a conscious attempt to strengthen the UK No Borders network, to gather ideas for how to build up the fight against the system of migration controls with other groups working on this issue in the UK, Europe and beyond. There were loads of workshops, talks, films, networking and skill sharing at the camp. Another aim was 'outreach' and raising the profile of the campaign against the new detention centre and displaying our opposition to various parts of the immigration infrastructure in the Gatwick area, (reporting centre, detention centre, companies involved in removals flights etc.) As the original call out explained, "Gatwick is a border in the middle of Britain. People arrive there everyday. People are forcibly deported from there everyday. It is a place where people are imprisoned for unlimited lengths of time without trial, where people are forced to hide underground and be invisible, where people are treated as criminals for the 'crime' of crossing the border… We demand the end of the border regime for everyone, including ourselves, to enable us to live another way, without fear, racism and nationalism." The UK context has arguably become much harsher under recent legislation and a cranking up of the No Borders network was certainly needed.

How was the camp organised and why did it come so quickly after the Climate Camp at Heathrow airport?

There have been discussions about a UK No Border camp for many years. This camp was continuing the tradition of the No Borders camps across the world since the late 1990s, and like the camps that took place last year in the Ukraine in August and on the US/Mexican border in November. The original idea, in March 2007, was to have a smaller action camp to disrupt the building of the new detention centre but the idea developed and publicity was taken to the G8 in Germany, early June. This meant that the camp grew in size and became much more ambitious. We have all certainly learned lessons from this experience.

Although there were monthly, open meetings, the majority of logistical organising, networking and fund-raising was done by a (too) small group of existing No Borders activists based mainly in London, Brighton but also from around the UK. The short time frame over a busy period meant that it was difficult to get more people involved. In our debrief, we discussed that perhaps from some places there was pressure to pull off something of similar scale to the climate camp, but this was not by any means an explicit aim of the camp. The main reason that the camp was planned for the late summer was not to clash with other camps/events but also we felt it was essential for the campaign against the new detention centre that it was this summer, building work has already begun! In fact the detention centre is due for completion in 2008.

A conscious decision was made to rent, rather than squat, the land on which the camp was held. Also, instead of mass direct action, the main event was an authorised demonstration to Tinsley House detention centre. Were there (dis)advantages to working within the law?

Squatting was certainly always there as a fall back option, to my knowledge there was certainly no conscious decision made not to squat. Saying that, there was a strong argument to make the camp a place where people with insecure legal status could come without putting themselves at risk. It's hard to say exactly how asylum seekers and migrants are treated by the criminal justice system, but its certainly unpredictable and often small offences can risk detention and deportation. Of course with squatting, defending the site could well end up being the action in itself and we were not sure about how many people we would be. Ultimately though, we found a really good location and sound farmer for an amount of money that we could afford so we went for that. Due to police pressure, we then lost this site, 48 hours before set up was due to start! We were pretty close to not having a camp at all when we lost the land. This is one big disadvantage of working with rented land, ultimately the police harassed the family on this farm to allow them full access, they denied it, the police continued to harass them and eventually they pulled out of the contract. This has happened before, at the G8 camp in Stirling for example, and this shows that the police are prepared to try hard to stop these events happening.

Because at the last minute the location of the camp was forced to change we were much further from intended targets and so smaller affinity group actions were much harder to do, although there were some, (including an occupation of Virgin Airlines offices and a blockade of Group 4.) This was a real shame as all along the idea had been to have both legal demos and provision for direct action, but it was way out of our control. After the decision was made to get a temporary events notice to make the camp a legal and safe space, from that point on there was a need for negotiation with the authorities. In the end there was no license because our actual location fell in a different council and it was too late.

One thing that was advantageous of having a main, pre-organised legal demo, was that the time actually at the camp, (only 4 days long rather than 8 days at the climate camp,) was not spent deciding what to do and people could easily come just for the day. There was a clear programme of events and of course, autonomy, (although maybe not enough time), for groups wanting to organise direct action alongside that. It did seem strange to be organising a legal demo and it was for sure an uneasy political choice for many. But in reality the aim of the demo was to march through Crawley town centre on a busy Saturday afternoon, show our opposition to the new detention centre and to get to Tinsley House to show our solidarity and communicate with the detainees inside. Our negotiation of a route and a legal demo meant that we did this successfully. Not all the events were negotiated in this way, at Lunar House in East Croydon we gathered outside to give out food and information to the people queuing and the police tried to stop us by using kettles to contain small groups.

Although I took part, I would question whether what happened at the climate camp was a mass direct action. Despite the many many hours spent looking for consensus on the plan, there were many people who felt the whole thing was manipu-

lated and sabotaged. The action on the Sunday at BAA was essentially a blockade at a building which was not open for business. Whether this was fundamentally more effective/empowering than the demo in Crawley is a question for each individual involved to answer. But the point is that each case needs to be thought about on its own merits about what it is trying to achieve and be planned accordingly. To really get a mass of people I think that at least partly open, pre-planned events can really help. I think also that we should learn about how much energy and time can be spent on reaching consensus with very large, diverse groups which then can sometimes result in decisions which very few people are happy with.

Many of the people at the camp had also been at the Climate Camp. Was there an overlap of effort?

There was certainly a great deal of co-operation between the people organising the infrastructure. The No Borders camp was able to borrow and store structures and a lot of necessary bits and pieces from individuals, groups, neighbourhoods and 'central' climate camp tat. This made the No Borders camp able to happen and was a great example of how effort from one thing can carry on to the next. There are plans afoot to make this process more easy - formalised in some way in the future. In all other ways, networking and the campaigns involved, overlap wasn't really an issue. But I was definitely glad to see that quite a few people did cross over, and that the two issues are seen as interrelated. For example XL airways were targeted during the climate camp for their involvement in deportation flights to the Democratic Republic of Congo. This airline then made a public statement that they were stopping their involvement in deportation flights just before the No Borders camp.

Some commentators have remarked that the Climate Camp stood for 'austerity', while the No Borders camp stood for 'freedom of mobility'. Aren't these irreconcilable politics? Was this an issue at the camp?

Was it an issue? Not one that was discussed that I was aware of. For me it's an interesting comment, because there is very little that seems to link the two issues together in the public eye. Social justice arguments related to climate change are often down played or ignored whereas I see migration and climate change as totally connected. I was involved in both events, and saw no clash between them but of course I can only speak for myself. For me, climate camp was about many things, I don't think it is possible to reduce these things to one position. Climate change is perhaps the starkest symptom of the economic system which promotes endless economic growth over all else. Finding ways of living with more autonomy from a fossil fuel- oppressive- climate changing system is one of those, learning skills for self reliance is another. Challenging the idea that the well-off have some inalienable right to fly away to Paris for shopping trips is also important. This year's camp was also about highlighting BAA's Heathrow expansion plans and making the argument that this is madness in light of climate change. Perhaps most importantly to me, it was also about opposing the idea that the people whose homes, schools and communities would be destroyed by the expansion of Heathrow, and all the others who will feel the less direct impacts, are the unfortunate victims of necessary progress. The people in Sipson village are one of thousands of communities around the world who are threatened by the pressure for expansion and profit. The climate camp was also about standing in solidarity with those people, but also with the many millions of people whose lives are directly or indirectly affected by the environmental and social ravages of an oil-addicted consumer culture. So yes, climate camp is about challenging unjust and unsustainable consumption, which isn't the same as being for austerity which has negative connotations. Spiralling debt, work related stress and mental illness, obesity, depleted sense of community are all symptoms of this illness and localised community responses to climate change can also have many other benefits.

«I would question whether what happened at the climate camp was a mass direct action»

Open borders and the freedom of movement for all is also an anti-capitalist position. From slavery through to modern day neo-liberal free trade agreements, the position of wealth and privilege in the global north is, to a large extent, the result of the exploitation of land, people and resources of the two thirds world. The immigration system and fortress europe is designed to preserve this division. Flows of people are managed and controlled in the national interest, and for economic benefit. To speak out against migration controls also challenges the huge injustice which exploits people and resources around the world for the benefit of few. Freedom of movement is the preserve of the relatively rich. People who question the principle of freedom of movement, should consider their huge privilege if they have an EU passport.

In summary, both camps call for social change, a desire for a redistribution of wealth which is both a call for reigning in of western decadence and an opening up of that same wealth to those affected historically and also right now. The climate camp offers a radical critique of responses to climate chaos offered by governments. Many of the options offered by the state such as carbon rationing, would de-facto lead us blindfold into a police state. No Borders has at its core this same resistance to encroachment on our liberties and sees that government systems of control are often trialled on asylum seekers, but they can and will affect us all.

The Climate Camp aimed to build a movement against the causes of climate change. Can you see an ermeging no borders movement?

On the one hand yes, the number of active No Border groups in the UK has certainly grown since the camp and there are projects and actions going on, which link these groups into a network. There are big questions which we will be discussing at an up-coming national gathering, about how any No Borders network could be strengthened and made more effective. As well as challenging the construction of new immigration prisons and deportations to possible death and torture, a No Borders movement would have to build widespread agreement that such things are morally unacceptable. Each case that is highlighted by anti-deportation campaigns, every action against a forced removal is part of building towards that point. There may well be a growing movement against the companies that carry out deportation flights for example or the detention estate, run by private companies for profit. Educating ourselves about the immigration system, the harsh reality of 'illegal' economic migrants, challenging racist officials and laws and acting in solidarity with all the struggles against these things I see as part of an emerging No Borders movement.

But what exactly do we mean by a movement? There is no such thing as a blueprint for a movement but I understand it to be an informal group action for social change which aims to influence the wider political agenda with its message.

The Climate Camp aimed to include as many people as possible, brought together to dramatically cut greenhouse gas emissions through education, sustainable living and direct action. An enormous amount of energy was spent bringing a non-hierarchical model of organising to a wide group of people, recognising that we need radical action on a mass scale. The result of this long planning process was two flawed, but fantastic, week-long events. This process was made possible because ultimately there was already a general feeling that "something must be done about climate change" within the mainstream consciousness that could be tapped into and developed. Although many people involved with the camp place this message within a much wider critique, in itself, doing something about climate change is far from a radical message. Indeed everyone including American presidential candidates to fossil fuel companies such as Beyond Petroleum finally seem to agree.

After two years of climate camps, a direct action movement is being drawn together and strengthened against the fossil fuel empire, one of the root causes of climate change. Since the high profile, audacious events, some climate campers have become spokespeople for more radical arguments within the broad, public climate change debate which involves NGOs, politicians and the mainstream media. The Climate Camp was, in short, less about the message conveyed and more about how to get there. It also successfully brought arguments about economic growth lying at the root cause of climate change in to the public spectrum.

I wonder if this approach to movement building is possible, appropriate or even desirable for No Borders. The No Borders network has existed since 1999 and is a loose association of autonomous groups and individuals who work within a political spectrum of direct actions, anti-deportation campaigns and demonstrations which challenge migration controls. The No Borders position is certainly far from having popular currency. It is explicitly anti-state and pro-freedom of movement for all people. It argues that immigration controls are inherently racist and so acts out of solidarity with economic migrants as well as asylum seekers and refugees. In a global economy, where goods are transported and monies flow irrespective of borders, nation states are a way of controlling access to wealth and privilege and dividing the haves and the have-nots both between and inside countries.

This political position is currently on the very fringes of debate about migration, which is dominated by right wing, anti-immigrant scape-goating and human

rights based reform. A huge amount of important work is done by groups to support those suffering immigration detention and destitution and supporters will hold someone's hand all the way to the plane. However, many of these groups do not or can not challenge the immigration system as a whole and are unlikely to ever become part of any No Borders movement. Although there will be some cross-over there are different underlying aims, (reform of vs. abolition of immigration controls). No Borders has a vital role therefore in articulating the anti-capitalist/anti-state position within this debate and taking direct action to prevent things when we can. We are, however, a very long way from making the fight against borders part of the mainstream in this country although there are emerging links between struggles of undocumented workers, detainees and those struggling against immigration controls around the world.

It seems we are perhaps, finally a little nearer to seeing radical action on climate change, (if only the eco-radicals of the 60s, 70s, 80s or 90s had been listened to!) But it is important to remember that both are essentially part of the same struggle to destroy our current economic, capitalist system and are equally far away from achieving this aim! Both emerging movements will encounter similar resistance by those who will fight to maintain their power and privilege and this remains the most challenging struggle of all.

The No Borders camp got little media interest in the mainstream press. Do you still think it was a success?

It all depends on how you measure success; I sometimes thought it was a miracle that we pulled off the camp at all! I also enjoyed not having a paparazzi or fit team camera pointed at us the entire duration of the camp. We were there for many reasons, getting mainstream media interest was not a high priority for many of us though there were some very positive reports in the local media.

It was a success for us as a local group, it was an exciting beginning to a rejuvenated No Border network. There were some very powerful, informative and useful workshops; one I went to about the impact of migration on the autonomous, indigenous communities in Oaxaca for example. There were some really important exchanges between people, both at the camp and outside, when we were at Lunar House reporting centre in Croydon and talking to people inside Tinsley House for example. I had never been on such a big demo at a detention centre and I don't think Crawley had ever seen anything like it. There were also invaluable opportunities for lessons to be shared with No Border activists and other people struggling in other places around the world.

In retrospect I think everyone involved would have done things differently. But, whether the camp was a success or not will only become clear as we see how the actions, campaigns and network develop over the coming months and years. Any camp needs to be measured on so many different levels, its atmosphere, its logistical organisation, its political impact etc. I for one have had enough of camping for a while and think that I will put energy in to other things, but it was a great experience. The campaign against the new detention centre continues, see www.noborders.org.uk for updates.

Alice is involved with a No Borders group in Brighton. She is part of Trapese, a popular education collective who recently published, Do It Yourself: A handbook for changing our world. See www.handbookforchange.org

By Merrick

a foot in both camps

It's always something of a fish/barrel/firearms combo going for Spiked and their writers. But given the scandalous denial of the facts and complete absence of research in one particular piece, I'll do it anyway.

Just so you know who we're dealing with, Spiked rose from the ashes of Living Marxism, the magazine of the Revolutionary Communist Party. They had the traditional fanatical far-left party allegiance and devotion to allies right or wrong. This cost them dear when their love of Bosnian Serbs during the Balkan wars led them to fabricating a libellous story about ITN's coverage, and LM was sued out of existence.

The party folded, the communist ideas evaporated, but that fixation with making the story fit your beliefs has endured. They always had a strong anti-environmental stance, seeing humans - and especially their technology - as capable of fixing everything with industrialisation. (Quite where the energy sources and raw materials are coming from, well, let's just keep seeing further industrialisation as the only progress worth having and have faith it'll all come out alright.)

This has led them to their present position of being fervently 'pro-science' (ie pro-corporate science) and extremely critical of environmentalism. The team donned suits and formed a number of front groups (am I the only one who always wonders why a person is presented as a plausible pundit just because they're from something that can be called a think-tank?) with names like Global Futures and London International Research Exchange.

Living Marxism and Spiked folks were climate change deniers for as long as it was tenable and quite some distance beyond. Indeed, Martin Durkin, maker of denialist documentaries The Great Global Warming Swindle and Against Nature, as well as ones 'proving' that silicone breast implants are good for womens' health and that genetic engineering is more or less the best thing ever, has strong links with the personnel and ideology of LM and Spiked.

Brendan O'Neill is Spiked's editor. So we can expect anything he writes to be in the Durkin tradition of highly selective fact-mincing.

He'd already used his keen political intellect to lay into this summer's Camp for Climate Action for being 'made up of painful miserabilists, who wouldn't know what fun was if it stamped its eco-footprint on their faces'.

But after the Climate Camp he wrote this other piece, comparing the Heathrow Climate Camp with the No Borders camp at Gatwick a month later. No Borders is an international network who work with and for migrants and asylum seekers on the issues of freedom of movement and for the freedom for people to stay in the place which they have chosen.

O'Neill talks of the contrast between the ideals of the two camps, concluding

"You're either in the Gatwick camp or the Heathrow camp. Make your choice."

All the hallmarks of LM journalism, there. Challenging, bullish, ideologically driven, and completely at odds with the facts.

The Camp for Climate Action and No Borders openly supported one another. Their websites link to one another. As well as the day of mass action, there were several smaller bits of direct action from the Climate Camp. One was an occupation of the offices of budget airline XL. The target was chosen not only because of their cheap flights but also for their contract to deport refugees from the UK. The action was explicitly in solidarity with the No Borders camp. In the press release one of the protesters, Allannah Currie, explained:

"environmental refugees outnumber all other kinds combined, and climate change will make that get a lot worse. We in the wealthy countries have welfare to protect us from climate chaos, but the world's poorest have nothing to help them except us taking responsibility. Our carbon emissions threaten to take the essentials of life from the poor of the world, it makes a mockery of our concern about aid and debt relief."

The press release went on to plug the No Borders camp and had the No Borders URL at the bottom. When protesters (except one who'd locked on to a stairwell) were removed from the building they continued outside, holding a banner saying 'CHEAP FLIGHTS... CHEAP LIVES?!!'. This action upped the ante considerably and led to XL pulling out of deportations within weeks.

The Climate Camp's programme of workshops included 'No Borders and the Harmondsworth Detention Centre' and 'Climate Change: Making Poverty Permanent?'. Additionally, there was one from anti-Shell campaigners in Ireland who've forged links with indigenous groups fighting Shell in Nigeria, and several from anti-biofuels campaigns that are largely based on the fact that oil plantations are destroying forests which is an attack not only on the ecosystems but also displacing the people that live there.

The final action from the Climate Camp was a protest at Harmondsworth Detention Centre where asylum seekers are kept in prison-like conditions. The report on Indymedia describes the protesters as being 'from the Climate Camp, including many from No Borders' and explains:

"The link between the Climate Camp and detention centres is in no way convoluted. Climate change is already producing millions of environmental refugees. These millions will become hundreds of millions in a business as usual scenario. Many of those refugees managing to flee to this country, along with many fleeing torture and war, are met not with compassion and asylum, but brutal repression and detention. The policies of UK plc with regard to climate change are hurting these people, but instead of helping them, UK plc locks them up.

If he'd, ooh I dunno, checked what the Climate Camp actually did then O'Neill would have known this. Knowing any of it - all of it easily found in obvious places - would have totally undermined his case.

If he'd gone one further and actually made contact with anyone from either camp he would have discovered all that and more too. O'Neill says of the No Borders camp 'this time freedom-loving greens are nowhere to be seen,' yet at No Borders many of the organisers and attendees were the very same people as the Climate Camp. They also shared infrastructure; the same marquees were used, the same bike library available for borrowing, the same vehicles delivering stuff and taking it away, you name it.

O'Neill talks about his imagined lack of solidarity between climate activism and No Borders as illuminating:

"the deeply anti-humanist strain in the politics of environmentalism. Because environmentalism is built on ideas about scarcity and shortage, it tends towards misanthropic solutions: demands for smaller families, harsher living conditions and restrictions on migration. Strip away the trendy gloss, and environmentalism increasingly looks like an expression of middle-class outrage against the masses and our dirty habits."

I love that, calling himself 'the masses'.

As a rule of thumb, the richer you are the greater your personal consumption and carbon emissions, so environmentalism is pretty much an attack on people's habits in direct proportion to the size of their income. It's an attack on the rich and their dirty habits.

If we are to talk of global migration and global climate, we have to look at humanity globally. In those terms, the masses do not have dirty habits. Most people will never fly or own a car, indeed barely half the world's ever made a phone call. To do any of these things says you're actually in the rich elite.

Why do the likes of O'Neill always use 'middle class' as the criticism? Don't the upper class ever offend their beliefs? But the term is not used in a strict socio-economic sense. It has other connotations, it implies a woolliness of thinking, a kind of personal and intellectual inauthenticity as a human being. It's a nice handy catch-all dismissal, vague enough to not have to be defended.

He says that it is 'inhumane' to restrict immigration if climate change is going to force vast numbers of people to leave their homeland. Quite so. Indeed, at both the Climate Camp and the No Borders camp this point was made repeatedly. But might it be more humane to let people stay on their land amongst their culture rather than deprive them of the basics of life and force their migration just so the rich can jet off for weekends in Barcelona?

Such an idea as espoused by the climate campaigners left O'Neill incredulous:

"They were effectively calling for less choice, less freedom of movement, and for tougher taxes and restrictions on people's ability to fly. Their argument with BAA can be summed up as follows: "We demand the freedom to protest against freedom!""

Absolutely. There are limits to freedom. Your freedom to swing your fist ends where my nose begins. When climate change is already killing people in their thousands every week, the freedom to increase emissions is the freedom to throw ever more punches.

The whole principle of Contraction & Convergence is that we find the safe level of total human emissions - so nobody's fist is hitting anyone's nose - then we share those out equally. As opposed to the idea that whoever has money can do what they want and if it inflicts suffering and deprivation on the poor and those yet to come, well, tough shit.

In talking about the 'masses' yet just meaning those in the rich nations, and in talking about 'freedom' meaning the freedom to do what your money allows, O'Neill and Spiked reveal a deeply held sense of superiority over and contempt for those they exclude; those who do, in actuality, constitute the mass of people.

For the vision that joins up its thinking and acts responsibly out of concern for humanity at large, you need a foot in both camps.

Merrick is a writer and activist on environmental and other issues. Whilst keeping a hand in as part of the Godhaven Ink publishing collective, in these cybertimes not much of his writing comes out on actual paper things. Nowadays it's most frequently done on his Bristling Badger blog (www.bristlingbadger.blogspot.com)

DISCLAIMER: This article was first published online at www.thesharpener.net.


I met a guy from the anti-nuke group in town, and we had a bit of a chat. I said I've been eyeing up buildings - I'm bored with issue politics, and a squat might be fun.
"So you wanna do more community activism?" Uh oh! There's that word! 'Community' meaning the losers and freaks. Like at the hospital we have Community Dentals, which all the nurses call Mental Dentals.
He warned me to be careful. Open a squat and people might come who really need a safe haven, not just a playhouse or a place to show their paintings.
Watch out for people who aren't doing this as a hobby - like skiing, only safer!
Why! - In one squat he met a girl with CUTS all up her arms. That's the kind of person who fights on the terrain of everyday life: the unspeakably damaged. The ones who just can't cope.
At the moment I have maybe a dozen cuts and scratches on me. Across my stomach, back, shoulders and legs (places my uniform hides). If he knew - if the others in the group knew - would they still trust me? Respect me? Would they be willing to share a cell with me?


Once, after some sabotage, I noticed my accomplice's hands shaking as he lit a cigarette. I felt calm, and I smirked at him. This after I've complained so often that people who admit they're scared are told it's ok if they JUST GO HOME.
We all want our resistance to be sexy and fun. Pink + silver or red + black, it's got to be thrilling. We all want to tell adventure stories with us as the heroes.
Thing is, capitalism feels bad; it's violent. Work has fucked up my friend's back the worst her physio's ever seen. Lots of the claw marks on me were made in the staff toilet. Am I making my weaknesses into an identity?
Living an unliveable life is harmful. Breaking the habit is frightening. Anything meaningful is dangerous.
When we place ourselves above and outside this, as experts, we reinforce the creation of 'activist' as another specialist role within capitalism. Electricians know how to avoid shocks; activists don't get alienated... Our stubborn bravery and sanity conceal the workings of capitalism and power in and through our lives and efforts to be free, happy, whole-hearted.
Oh, but I'm still ashamed of my stupid scars.

By Little Red Wagon and Pedro Rocha

marching to oblivion

What if they had a march and nobody came?

The word 'demonstration' comes from demonstrating your force (of numbers) to your adversary. Given that the December 2007 Campaign Against Climate Change demonstration in London had, on a generous estimate, less than half the feet on the street of 2006, then our adversary - dubbed the 'pollutocracy' by George Monbiot - are hardly likely to be scrapping their high-carbon futures.

In the three years that the march has been running, the media's coverage (and public concern?) of climate change has gone - pardon the pun - stratospheric. After all, 2007 saw a pull-few-punches IPCC report, the Stern Report's aftershocks and the Draft Climate Bill. The Arctic melt was unprecedented and terrifying. So, this was supposed to be the day that the long-awaited mass movement against climate changed reared its multifaceted head and bit the government, hard, on the arse.

In our humble opinion, the green 'movement' is not significantly bigger or less crushingly white and middle-class than, say, 2004. There are reasons for it, and there are efforts to change it, but it's an inconvenient truth of our very own.

In our opinion the 2007 Camp for Climate Action amounted to a mass-lobby for higher aviation taxes. That wasn't the intention, but it was the result. Often the radicals are distinguished from the mainstream only by more dramatic demands for emission reduction, and willingness to tiptoe into the realms of tactical illegality once in a while. All feeds principally into state-led solutions within the current system.

Any changes one could point to in the green movement are dwarfed by the massive greenwash effort undertaken by the government, business community and a compliant media over this same period. It has been an act of political ju-jitsu on their behalf, taking the force of their assailants attack, and using it to their own advantage: the environmental movement has made loud calls for someone, anyone, to take action, to which they have made louder responses saying they are just the people to take it: "don't worry, it's all in hand". Should have seen it coming!

So why was the march so small?

The miserable weather may have shaved off a few thousand who lacked a developed sense of irony. Perhaps some people have turned in desperation or inspiration away from marching and towards non-violent direct action. Perhaps it was poorly promoted - certainly there wasn't the newspaper ads and razorlight poppiness that 'Stop Climate Chaos', in lieu of any sensible analysis, brought to the table last year.

The sums still don't add up. People obviously stay at home if it appears that the government has everything in hand and need not be challenged, just nagged a little.

The principle demand of the march was for a "strong climate bill" - one with caps on emissions (only explanation provided). So why not just write a strongly worded letter to your MP? Or easier still vote Tory at the next election?

The majority of the march consisted of Friends of the Earth, the Green Party and CACC with its Socialist Worker Party-backers. Each seeks the attention (or rather, direct debit details) of the elusive common people. The banal simplicity of their messages was infantile and infantilising. The most common banner of the day was "George Bush no.1 climate criminal".

So what about the radical end, the ones who didn't want to sign up to the demands of the march but come along anyway to

cause nuisance? A call-out for an autonomous bloc had been made on Indymedia. Only a handful turned up, and trudged along with everyone else, red and black flags sagging in the icy rain. No wonder, there was as much sense in the proposal as calling an autonomous bloc for a ramblers association outing in the Cotswolds.

The Climate Camp planned to have a presence, and announced that campers would participate in an 'aviation bloc' with NO-TRAG. This happened not. Instead, campers dispersed to hand out flyers (far hipper than newspapers, you understand); not to make a radical intervention in the day's proceedings, but to self-promote. Premonitions that the choice of location for the camp would constrain the political space for manoeuvre seem to have come true: aviation remains no.1 on the agenda for 'radical' greens; moving away now would be treachery!

Leading the charge in this direction are Plane Stupid. They provided what was apparently the only direct action of the day in London, gluing the doors shut on the travel agents that lined the route of the march. Autonomous actions in Manchester also targeted travel agents. On the issue of over-consumption, striking at the demand side through direct-interference with the consumer's activity, remains the order of the day. Interestingly, a banner drop in Manchester the day before employed the same 'the tide is rising' slogan as was projected onto the side of Battersea power station in a stunt sponsored by the Daily Mail & General Trust owned Metro. A serious concern with radical change means continually reviewing tactics and discourses; something's not quite right if both of these coalesce with the nation's largest corporate media entity.

Striking also was the sharp hike in vegans on the march. They must have realised that climate change is a great platform for their cause: inciting fear of Armageddon is a good way to get people thinking about a change in their diet. However, it means sacrificing the principle message of their campaign: end cruelty to animals.

Right-wing commentator Dominic Lawson fulminated a while back that environmentalism was the anti-capitalists' new vehicle of choice following the fall of communism. He might be right (even broken clocks are right twice a day). In comparison to previous years, the shortcomings of our system of production was much higher on the agenda, getting a mention in most of the rally speeches. Vegans and socialists in increased numbers - no harm there as long as there's also a lot of 'normal' people.

«aviation remains no.1 on the agenda for 'radical' greens, moving away now would be treachery!»

The SWP and other anti-capitalists hitching a ride on the green bandwagon face a similar problem to the vegans; whilst capitalism's excesses are there for all to see in the climate change story, campaigning on this terrain means side-lining the cause of ending cruelty to people. The matter of exploitation and that of destruction of the earth's ecosystems may be part of a common core problem, but here they are separated, the former sidelined.

Speech, speech! Oh, on second thoughts, no thanks.

The post-march speakers almost invariably critiqued economic growth, not the diffuse structure of exploitation. This green capitalism it seems is also a capitalism with a name and address, controlled by a small number of human subjects. This was exemplified in the unchallenged choice to situate the rally outside the US embassy, all those images of George Bush, and the attacks on greedy corporate giants and wealthy individuals portrayed as gleefully destroying the planet while counting their gold. Sadly it was left to Monbiot to address more clearly the hints that the problem might be linked to a system with its own dynamic. Interesting to see the complete turnaround from his talk at the climate camp a few months back. There he apologised "to all the anarchists in the room" that state-led solutions are the only way forward. Here he was talking about the fundamental illegitimacy of the government, how climate change could never be solved without scrapping capitalism, how we needed direct action every week. He soon returned to prior form and started talking about a 'revolution of the spirit'.

Capitalism was also muddled together with industrialism and technology, particularly in the speech made by the Climate Camp representative, who asserted that capitalism, climate change and industrialism were born in the same period in history (which is dubious), and that we should turn our back on 'techno-fixes'. Whilst expectant faith in future technological breakthroughs can distract from making emissions reductions today, surely the problem isn't industry and technology per se, just the use it's put too, the form it takes? Cheaper, better renewable energy technology is being kept under wraps due to the owners' necessity for profit; might this not have been a better point to make? Instead of demonising technology why not discuss more healthy ways of using and developing it for the common good? At times it's hard not to join in with those saying "these folks will only be happy when we're all living in yurts eating acorns".

It's also hard to see how the potential 'mass' of people alluded to by most of the groups' spokespeople would be attracted to a movement that simultaneously calls for austerity and expensive lifestyle changes.

Listening to all the speakers talk about how we were all wonderful, and part of a powerful climate justice movement that was definitely going to save the world, one senses that it's times like these that turn people off any form of dissenting politics. All the embarrassingly self-congratulatory

'done-my-bit' discourse, the attempts to portray failure as success and weakness as strength, were extremely disempowering.

Because these marches measure 'success' principally in terms of how many people turn up, all forms of disobedience and confrontation are purged in favour of a placid stroll. Nonetheless radical activists in the UK should not abandon marches altogether; small group NVDA and community building is vital, but to punch above its weight, grow and inspire, an aspiring movement must get together frequently. Einstein defined insanity as "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results". We need to reclaim marches as a radical form of protest. The mass action at BAA in the summer showed what was possible: lower numbers but higher impact.

Little Red Wagon is an activist skillshare group based in Manchester, concerned mainly with issues of movement-building. Pedro is a research fellow at the University of Manchester.

interview with a spacehijacker

In September 2007, you proclaimed "the spacehijackers own a tank and plan to use it". What was the target?

The plan with the tank was to drive it into DSEi (a bi-annual arms fair which happens in the docklands in East London), we then intended to sell off the tank to the highest bidder regardless of morals. If an angry 14 year old ASBO yoof or black block warrior decided to take it on a rampage, then we took no responsibility.

Naturally the police were pretty keen on not letting us follow this plan through, even though the fair itself is well known for having even less moral fibre, with stalls routinely turning up selling illegal weapons and torture equipment.

Our plan mainly was to put the arms fair back on the map of London's consciousness, and in the pages of the papers, to try and build up support for the arms fair protests.

So, did you use it?

Yes and No. Unfortunately the police managed to find our secret hiding place for the tank a few days before the fair. We then spend 24 hours a day under police watch, with our phones being listened to and agents being followed around.

However in a cunning move, planned on pay as you go phones, we managed to hire a second tank (the bird) for the fair after emptying out everyone's overdrafts. The plan for the fair went as normal, and our agents met at tank number one (Fredom) then attempted to drive it out to the fair through the 150 odd police that had turned up to block our way. In a beautiful turn of the tables, the police ended up having to form a human shield around the protester vehicles to stop us driving down the road.

They then demanded to perform a roadside MOT check on our tank, which was 100% road legal, we had insurance certificates, DVLA numberplate certificates etc etc etc. Speaking to the traffic policeman on the day, basically they had been informed to find something wrong with the vehicle so as not to let us drive. Lo and behold, after about an hour of faffing, they claimed that a split piece of rubber on one of the axles made the vehicle un-roadworthy and wouldn't let us drive.

I climbed up onto the turret of the tank and had to make an announcement to the crowd and police. "Ladies and Gentlemen, we are really sorry to say, that after wasting everyone's time, the police have decided not to let our tank onto the roads today. However I have just had word that our SECOND TANK has just arrived at Canning Town round-about next to the arms fair!"

Cue panic amongst the police ranks who had no idea a second tank was on the cards, and cheers from the protesters, who then hopped on the bikes we had provided to rush down to the fair and the tank. The Second tank made it right up to the front doors of the fair, and our auction took place, surrounded by more police as the arms dealers drove in and out of the fair.

In terms of our aims, it gained a lot of negative coverage for the arms fair, with editorial in the London Paper, London Light, Times and Time Out amongst others, we even had a Hijacker Spokesperson pretending to be from the arms fair on the BBC news.

How much did the tank cost you? Was it money well spent?

Tank number one FREDOM, cost us around £6000 including low loader hire

and parts etc, the second one cost about £2000 to hire for the day. To be honest, the look on the police's faces when we announced we had tricked them and that the first tank was a decoy, was worth every penny. We managed to raise a fair chunk of the money running stalls around east London promoting the arms fair protests, and had a number of bands etc selling t-shirts at gigs. The King Mob Blues even promoted the plan at their Reading set. Since the fair we have been holding a load of fundraiser parties to pay everyone back who lent the project money.

Some people accuse you of being a bunch of middle-class art students. How would you respond to this?

Some of us are. Some of us are middle class ex-art students who work in media, some of us are computer programmers, some of us sign on, some of us are barristers, some of us are professional knitters, some of us are nurses, some of us are lingerie models, some of us run independent cinemas, some of us work in schools, some of us build bicycles, some of us are secretaries, some of us make instruments for a living, and one of our group is a porn star and motivational speaker.

As spacehijackers you intend to claim back lost public spaces. What do you say to those who feel that all you do is hijacking anti-capitalist demonstrations and actions?

I think that's rubbish, with DSEi we have been actively campaigning against it for 6 years, this time there were Space Hijacker agents at every one of the Disarm DSEi planning meetings, our tank fund raiser stalls handed out information and flyers for everyone else's part of the protests. Fair enough we often get accused of courting the media, but to be honest, sometimes as with DSEi that is our intention. We're not trying to steal other people's glory, or hijack their parade, often quite the opposite.

I guess the main thing we get grief over is Mayday (which also happens to be my birthday), when we arrange events that are not part of the A-B marches, and not part of the autonomous bloc. To be honest, I hate marching from A-B and certainly have no intention of doing it on my birthday. If we arrange an event for after the marches, then surely it's an addition as opposed to a hijack of the march?

At the end of the day, I think the more people doing more things the better, it's not like there is a fixed percentage of the population who the activist groups have to split between themselves, and our actions are taking people away from others. The more stuff that's going on then the more people get involved and it helps everyone.

Your stunts remind us of the writings of the situationists. Who are your influences?

Well the S.I. certainly, also people like the Yes Men, The Toy Shop Collective, Etoy, ®™ARK, Reverend Billy, The Vacuum Cleaner, The KLF, Dada, CrimethInc, and loads loads more.

Do you still own the tank and what do you plan to do with it?

Yes we do still own it, and have many plans up our sleeves. Ones which come to mind include borrowing one of our agents' children and doing the School Run in it, amongst the SUV's, we may be turning it into a Starbucks and also painting it up in UN colours and tackling vulture fund managers. I guess watch this space.

The Space Hijackers are a disorganisation of troublemakers who have been active since 1999. Our projects aim to level the playing field between owners and users of space, actively campaigning against corporate encroachment onto public space, urban planners, dull bureaucrats and other nasties. Projects have ranged from holding parties on the London underground for up to 2000 people, through to challenging the government to a cricket match in Parliament Square and replacing public benches removed by councils to move on the homeless. We have around 200 active members, who organise online and at our monthly meetings/drinking sessions.

international call for decentralised days of action for squats and autonomous spaces

in defence of free spaces...

On Friday the 11th and Saturday the 12th of April 2008, we call for two days of demonstration, direct action, public information, street-party, squatting... in defence of free spaces and for an anti-capitalist popular culture.

Through these two days, we want to help create more visibility of autonomous spaces and squats as a european/global political movement. We want to develop interconnections and solidarity between squats and autonomous spaces. We want to keep linking our spaces with new people and new struggles, and support the creation of autonomous spaces in places where there has not been a history of this kind of action. We want to build, step by step, our ability to overcome the wave of repression falling on us.

We call for decentralised and autonomous actions of all kinds, depending on what people feel to be the most appropriate to their local context. You'll find below the political content we wish to give to these two days.

We are everywhere...

For centuries, people have used squats and autonomous spaces, either urban or rural, to take control of their own lives. They are a tool, a tactic, a practice, and a way for people to live out their struggles. For decades, squat movements across Europe and beyond have fought capitalist development, contributing to local struggles against destruction; providing alternatives to profit-making and consumer culture; running social centres and participatory activities outside of the mainstream economy. Demonstrating the possibilities for self-organising without hierarchy; creating international networks of exchange and solidarity. These networks have changed many lives, breaking out of social control and providing free spaces where people can live outside the norm.

Among other things, these places provide bases for meetings and projects, for the creation and distribution of subversive culture, for the non-monetary based exchange of goods, resources and knowledge, for experimentating with new ways of living, for collective debates, for recycling and construction, for agricultural activities, for the production of independant media.

Whether we speak of urban squats or of purchased land, of negotiated or re-appropriated rural land, of restored factories or self-built buildings, these spaces are refuges for rebels and outlaws, poor and homeless people, radical activists, illegal immigrants. Social centres are crucial to us as part of a movement for social change.

All over Europe, repressive agendas are being pushed by governments

They are attacking long-standing autonomous spaces such as the Ungdomshuset in Copenhagen, Koepi and Rigaer Straße in Berlin, EKH in Vienna and Les Tanneries in Dijon, squatted social centres in London and Amsterdam, Ifanet in Thessaloniki, etc. In France, squats have become a priority target for the police after the anti-CPE movement and the wave of actions and riots that happened during the presidential elections period. In Germany, many autonomous spaces have been searched and attacked before the G8 summit. In Geneva and Barcelona, two old and big squatting "fortresses", the authorities have decided to try to put an end to the movement. Whereas it is still possible to occupy empty buildings in some countries, it has already become a crime in some others. In the countryside, access to land is becoming harder and communes face increasing problems from legislation on hygiene, security and gentrification by the bourgeoisie and tourists. All over Europe, independent cultures are being threatened.

Several months ago we saw running battles in the streets of Copenhagen and actions everywhere in Europe in an explosion of anger at the eviction of the Ungdomshuset social centre. Since then, and with a few other big resistance stories that happened over the last months, we've managed to renew the meaning of international solidarity.

We are motivated by the same passions, we feel the same determination, face a common enemy in repression, and are united across borders by our desire to build a world of equality and self-determination. As unaligned and ungovernable islands of uncontrolled freedom we want to continue to act in solidarity, and strengthen our international links, no matter how many kilometres there are between us.

What follows is a short synthesis of the decisions and projects coming out of the april2008 coordination meeting that took place in 'Les Tanneries', Dijon, on November 24-25th. The meeting was attended by some 120 people from 25 different countries.

mailing-lists and forums

The main discussion list is called april2008-coordination@squat.net, and there's a number of other lists for working groups, all of which are mirrored on the april2008 forums: http://april2008.squat.net/forum/. If you want to join and take part, please do! Just send an introduction mail to april2008@squat.net.

agenda of public april2008 events

April2008 will be a mix of both surprise "not-announced" actions and public "announced-beforehand" events. There will be paper and digital versions of a program, so that people can join actions and activities in places where participation is welcomed and/or forces needed. The schedule will be edited early March, and available as a PDF. We invite you to send all your announcements to april2008@squat.net, so they can be published on the website and then summarized on the agenda.

Two possibilities for new meetings were proposed:

- May 2008, Berlin: it was proposed to meet some days ahead of Koepi's days of action, so that people could stay for the actions if they wanted to. Various people were really enthousiastic about it, but some others were a lot more skeptical, given that having a meeting in Berlin in such context might not allow quiet in-depth debates, and the energy of the meetings might be swallowed by action dynamics or police pressure. This debate will be brought back to people in Berlin, who will decide if they wish to call for this meeting or not.

- October 2008, Barcelona: the proposal will be made at the Asamblea de Okupas de Barcelona (city-wide squatters' assembly). Encounters might be followed by days of action or not, depending on the local context, the organizers' choice, and the experience of the Berlin gathering.

ideas for action

A lot of examples of possible actions have been mentioned as well as quite obvious possible common targets linked with speculation and private property management. Let's make it clear, though, that there will be no april2008 official action guideline. Everything is possible. Join actions in other cities where forces will be needed if nothing happens at home! Though there is no worry about everyone's local creativity, it can't harm to state some of the tactics people have been mentioning, related to their recent local experiences: squatting something crazy and huge right in the town centre, organizing a mass action to occupy a building with the location announced in advance (as during the Copenhagen's G13), targetting real estate agencies, blocking or removing their offices, locking bailifs inside their doors, squatting politician's houses, organizing Reclaim The Streets parties against gentrification, creating fake newspapers about autonomous spaces and housing politics to distribute massively in bus/suburbs stations and around town, squatting land in the countryside, finding strength and people to open and keep squats in places where it never happened or where it became really difficult, to organize tourist visits of the cities showing all the houses evicted and the evil of contemporary urbanism, organizing solidarity actions (on consulates or targetted country companies...) for squats threatened of eviction in other countries, proposing open doors and open activities in an autonomous space, bringing the activities of an autonomous space outside in town (workshops, freezone, hacklab, infoshop, gigs...), choosing a common enemy in various towns (as it was done by french squatters in 2005, with 17 decentralised actions on Socialist Party's city councils and headquarters), following the dutch example of a white book of squatting, with stories of squats in every cities, electing the "bad landlord of the week", occupying shops and supermarkets, disturbing official political debates and organizing your own discussion about the need for autonomous spaces, etc., etc.

what next?

If you would like to contribute an article, or if you would like to help with distributing or funding the next issue please visit our website or contact us directly.

Issue 3 of Shift magazine will be published in May 2008. To get hold of a copy (or copies) of this issue, or back issues, please visit the website.

Thank you,

Shift Editors.

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