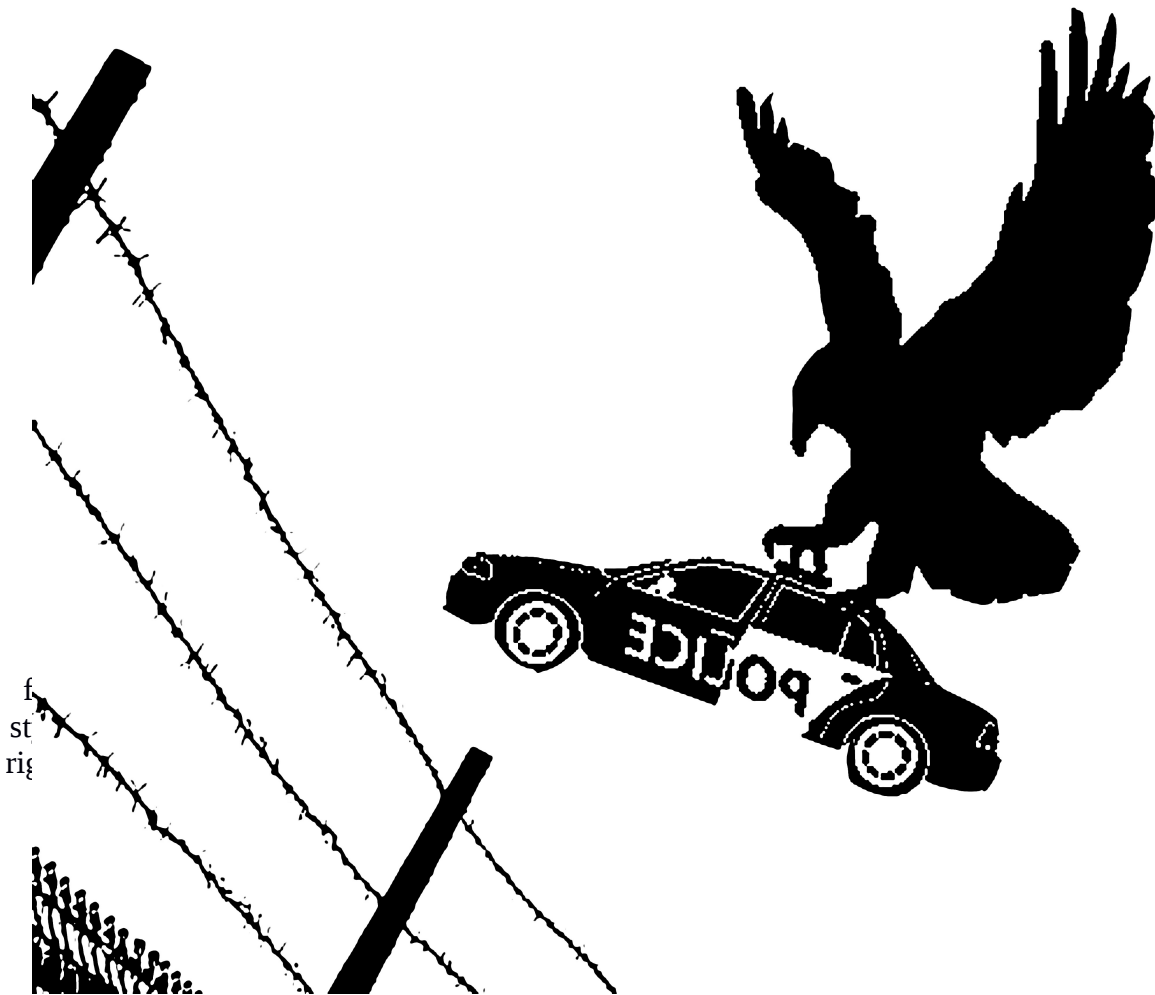




ANARCHIST ANIMAL LIBERATION



A Collective Project
Based on Outcomes & Conversations From
Animal Liberation Gatherings

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This article has been written as a collective project based on the Bristol Liberation gathering in June 2017. It is intended to give people who weren't there an idea of some of the conversations we had. We hope that it is written in an accessible way and that it is clear and of interest to both those who are familiar with the idea of animal liberation and those who are new to it. When we use the term "animals" during this article we are referring to non-human animals. It isn't that we see ourselves as in a different category to other species, it's just a quicker way of referring to them. These are just our views – when we are critical, it is only of ideas, not of individuals. We do not wish to disrespect or undermine the hard work of other animal activists whose views differ from ours. We are hoping that there will be more liberation gatherings in the future – if you are interested in being involved then please get in touch.

Time to move on from animal rights?

There is a lot of talk nowadays about animal rights versus animal liberation. Is it just semantics, or is it an important distinction and is animal liberation a necessary way forward for effective resistance to all oppression?



The concept of 'rights' legitimises the state by putting the responsibility of change onto the state. In this process people make demands of the state, putting pressure on them to give us and others rights. The concept of liberation, and especially anarchist animal liberation, is that the very idea of a

state ultimately leads to oppression. For that state to continue it needs to have the means to protect itself against anyone trying to effect significant change. Capitalist economies have a vested interest in animal exploitation and the continued existence of domesticated animals, and for this reason it is fundamental that capitalism and the state are destroyed in order for animal liberation to be will somehow save animals. But animals are not bred to order, so whether or not we buy their bodies makes little difference economically. This is not about what you buy, it's about how you value other species and the relationship we have with them.

Veganism is sold to people as an individual, lifestyle choice. There is clearly a lot of money to be made through so-called "ethical consumerism". We are often told about how many animals we can save by going vegan, and the underlying

belief is that we can change capitalism and human civilisation through the exercise of one's privileges as a consumer. So animal liberation is reduced to a choice of products to make us feel like we're "doing our bit". Capitalism has very quickly and effectively adapted to and profited from the increasingly fashionable search for a guilt-free lifestyle. It's so much easier to be a vegan these days if you're well off enough to afford overpriced vegan products. What's hard to accept for many is that vegan/ethical consumerism and all the companies cashing in play a big role in greening capitalism and making it easier to swallow.

Changing your diet is a good first step?



Yes, changing to a plant-based diet will inevitably be a fundamental part of rethinking our relationships with other species, but diet will ideally change as a consequence rather than as the first step and certainly not as an end in itself. Clearly many people have gone from going vegan as a consumer boycott to

becoming animal liberationists so it would be nonsense to suggest this cannot happen. But it is useful to remember that it is diet-based activism which has led to the simplistic movement we now have. To continue to embrace veganism as a 'useful first step' can in the long term be detrimental to our movement. The growth in vegan activism is partly a result of state repression of animal liberation and animal rights activists. Activism which is more tolerated by the state has understandably become more popular than the fear of arrest and/or prison. The discourse of mainstream animal rights organisations is to focus on a very simple message with the view that a more radical ideology will not be understood by many people. This is not only patronising, but is also damaging to our movement and has left it lacking a strong total liberation message.

Intersectional animal liberation

Animal rights activists are often accused of being single-issue, but this is sometimes unfair as many AR activists are concerned with and involved in a range of other issues. Being involved in more than one single-issue movement doesn't make you intersectional. Being truly intersectional means recognising oppression in all its many forms. This oppression will probably exist within your movement, which is hardly surprising as we are all socialised in a patriarchal, racist society.

Our campaigns are becoming centralised on a national basis which is leaving local collectives with far less power. National networks that function as a point of contact for people and groups are a valuable part of the movement but national groups that decide what campaigns local groups will 'help out' with and distribute single issue literature promoting themselves are centralised and reinforce hierarchical models of organising. Liberation can only occur for everyone or for no-one. An animal rights campaign that tolerates classist, racist, sexist, ableist or homophobic attitudes or doesn't challenge hierarchies that are developing within the group, even if they are subtle, is a barrier to liberation. Crucially, the fact that they do 'good work' does not change this and all forms of discrimination, however subtle, need challenging.



There can be a tendency to distance ourselves from oppression we are indirectly connected to. By seeing ourselves as animal saviours and workers in slaughterhouses, meat packing factories etc as the oppressors we are failing to recognise the complex layers of oppression and exploitation within our own species as a result of capitalism. Issues such as class and access to resources dictate the choices we can make. People living in parts of the world that have suffered as a result of greater access to power and resources often have less choice and are easy to demonise. That is not to say that we shouldn't all be responsible for our individual involvement in animal exploitation industries including working or profiting from them, just that we should be aware of the different levels of power and privilege that we have. It is vital to have a critical analysis of capitalism that includes anti-speciesism alongside a rejection of all other oppressive dominant ideologies.

Do animal liberationists contribute to the objectification of animals?

Images of graphic and extreme suffering of non-human animals are commonly used in animal activism. The point of death being captured on camera is often seen as particularly effective. The concern with these images is that the animals lose their individual personality, becoming lost amongst the many other similar looking animals. They often become objects of suffering because it is difficult to see past the pain to the individual at the heart of the image. But someone's point of death is a personal and private moment, and choosing to share it with

the rest of the world is not a decision we should take lightly, even if we are doing it for a 'greater good'. Turning animals (including humans) into objects or commodities makes it easier for us to accept their exploitation. We are socialised to see them as food, clothing, entertainment or companions, rather than as complex individuals with their own needs and desires. If we accept that a fundamental factor in exploitation of animals is their objectification then it seems clear that we should be careful not to contribute to this.

Positive reactions to graphic suffering?



We have all heard the arguments that sometimes people go vegan because they have seen brutal images of animal farming, but what does this really mean? As anarchist animal liberationists we are not interested in pursuing consumer boycotts. If you show someone a graphic image, and they have a reaction to that suffering and decide they are going to 'save' animals by stopping buying animal products, what has actually been achieved? The model of non-humans as the dis-empowered victims, and us as the saviours, is a barrier to animal liberation. Other animals are individuals with intrinsic value and a need for autonomy and respect. We are not their saviours, we are their oppressors and while there are still domesticated animals and we maintain our privilege over them that will remain the case. If people are encouraged to see animals as anonymous victims that we should 'save' then we are just reinforcing existing hierarchies, with us positioned above all other species. As animal liberationists we are trying to change how people view other species, and encourage them to reject a system which is dependent on their suffering.

But surely 'cute' images make people love animals?

By adding to the endless stream of cute animal pictures online and elsewhere, are animal liberationists reinforcing and justifying their domestication? Why do we feel the need to share images of our domesticated animals so freely on social media? Is it fulfilling a role for us? Is it in a way of expressing how caring we are? It has become so much part of our society that probably most of us don't even think about why we do it. When most of us see these cute images we are unlikely to think about how domestication has led to animals having so little autonomy, and their dependence on humans. Sharing images of domesticated animals publicly promotes



domestication. Allowing ourselves the indulgence of portraying ourselves as their saviours is egotistical and a barrier to their liberation. An obstacle to animal liberation is the enjoyment that many people, including animal liberationists, have in keeping animals captive in their homes. Yes, of course, we need to offer homes to those that need them, but re-homing can only be a transition phase towards the end of domestication not an ongoing response to exploitation. If we are honest with ourselves are we really ready to give up domesticated animals? Our relationships can never be non-hierarchical as we have to make decisions for them. There will always be power imbalances created by our technical ability to build fences and cages around others, and take control of their reproductive systems.

Mainstream animal rights campaigns have used images such as puppies on plates, and compared images of puppies with piglets to try and highlight the inconsistency between one which we will eat and one which we won't, but is there really an inconsistency? Both the puppy and the piglet have been objectified and exploited. Both serve a purpose and a function for humans: one for food and the other for unconditional love and companionship. Neither have any choice in the life chosen for them, both have little control over their lives, and many puppies and piglets will ultimately die at a young age because within a capitalist system the production of any commodity will always produce a surplus.

So how can animal liberationists use imagery?

This is not to say that graphic images should never be used, but to emphasise the need for the thoughtful and careful portrayal of other species, and be clear about what messages we are trying to communicate. We need to be clear that our images are not promoting reformist or welfarist changes. An image of extreme suffering without a clear animal liberation message can easily lead to a desire



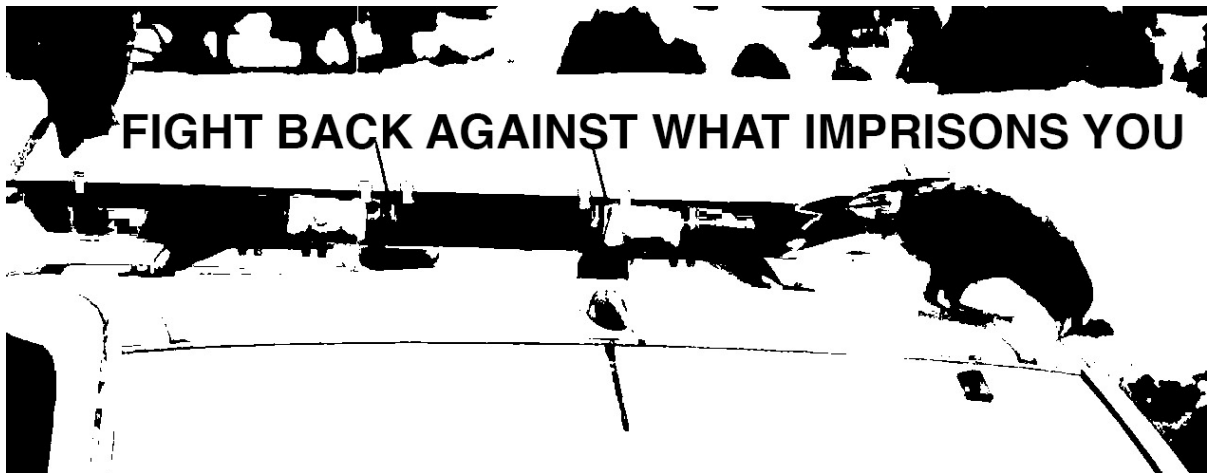
for animals to be exploited in a more palatable way. Consideration needs to be given to the fact that people respond differently to images. For some, a graphic image will make them feel anger and motivation to respond proactively; for others, their need to protect themselves will make them shut down and be unable to engage with it.

Obviously objectification cannot be avoided and non-human animals cannot give consent for their images to be used, but we should still be mindful of the privilege we have over them and the importance of the context of the image and how we use it. Thinking about the context can be the difference between reinforcing a 'victim and saviour' model or instead promoting an anarchist, animal liberation message which acknowledges and seeks to challenge the hierarchical position we have over non-humans. Carefully considered presentations and investigations with a clear liberation message can be effective in getting people to challenge and resist the idea of human superiority over other species.

What's next?

The discussions in this zine have been theoretical, but the next steps are practical – and that is up to you. Here's some possibilities for taking things further. We're sure you can find more of your own...

- ★ Think more about the ideas here, learn and talk about anti speciesism and total liberation with friends and comrades.
- ★ Explore how animal liberation and anarchism are intrinsically linked.
- ★ Create new animal liberation focused propaganda (being thoughtful and respectful in our use of images) and distribute widely.
- ★ Help build radical and resilient national and international networks of animal liberationists.
- ★ Challenge speciesist thinking, words and behaviour in our everyday lives and groups that we are involved with.
- ★ Take action against perpetrators of non human animal abuse and exploitation.



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