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WORKING WITH THE STATE?

Cochabamba Conference

'Climate Refugees'

MENTAL HEALTH

Towards a radical framework

6 YEARS ON

European Social Forum in London

INTERVIEW

What is carbon fetishism?

Friend or Foe?

May '10 - September '10

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editorial

At the end of March, the Daily Mail published a story intended to discredit the Climate Camp. It 'revealed' the identity of one of the Camp's two delegates flying to Bolivia to attend the 'World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth', called for by president Evo Morales. The story got re-published on Indymedia, later hidden by the site admins, attracting a storm of furious responses, with many registering their disgust at Climate Campers going to Bolivia.

Objections, however, were not based on the political decision to engage with state representatives and NGOs but rather upon the method of travel these delegates had chosen, flying the 6,000 miles across the Atlantic Ocean! Some repeated the Daily Mail's claims of hypocrisy, remembering the 2007 occupation of a site near Heathrow and Plane Stupid's arguments against 'unnecessary' flights.

In SHIFT, we have always explored the problems of the 'don't fly' argument, trying to show that fighting against individual lifestyle choices falls shorts of anti-capitalist politics. The resurfacing of the aviation debate again demonstrates this tension, as it misses the key political questions surrounding the Bolivian conference in Cochabamba.

Our interview with The Cornerhouse in this issue highlights the fact that fetishising CO2 leads many climate activists into the same impasse as UN negotiators and carbon traders. An analysis which puts the focus on carbon, and not on the flows of capital which produces it, will ignore questions whose solutions are vital for the creation of a truly radical movement. In this case, debate about methods of transport stifled discussions about the purpose of the conference and the broader question of alliances with state actors in general.

In this issue of SHIFT we thus seek to ask the question of alliances. The COP15 counter-summit saw the emergence of arguments for diagonalism; that is, a critical engagement with specific states and other organisations and institutions within them. But are these likely to reproduce the tensions and problems seen within both the World and European Social forums? Do the specificities of climate change, the issue around which new movements are emerging, provide new answers to the old question of political alliances? In times like these, just who can we rely on?

The carbon-centric focus of the debate that emerged around the sending of Climate Camp delegates to Cochabamba is, for us, a good example of how climate activists have a tendency to set up barriers to their aim of movement building through their 'political' focus (state intervention, lifestyle changes that are only realistic or desirable for the already wealthy). As we have argued before, calls for change that are motivated only by the desire to reduce carbon emissions often result in the perceived necessity of austerity measures or state-sanctioned controls. Working with the state or more mainstream organisations on environmental issues may then seem like an attractive solution.

But if we understand climate change as a social problem, as a by-product, no doubt, of the capitalist system, the appeal of joining forces with the state, or with its liberal apologists, becomes absurd. Conceptualising climate change as part of a broader system of environmental and social injustice does, however, points us in the direction of new allies; those who are disenfranchised and disempowered by capitalism, those who have lost control of their lives and of their relationship to their environments.

So, for us, the question of friend and foe is not first and foremost one of strategy or organisation, but of politics.

L.W., B.L. & R.S.

Dariush Sokolov

cochabamba

beyond the complex - anarcho pride

We saw the hole in the heart of the anti-capitalist movement gape more clearly than ever last December in Copenhagen, when the "Reclaim Power" demo gave up its assault on the Bella Centre after twenty minutes and sat down in a windswept road outside to hold a "Peoples' Assembly". So this was what non-violent mass direct action came to in practice. Inside the conference centre the "representatives" of the worlds' nations chattered and stalled. Outside we duplicated their representative politics on a budget. Flown in tourist class from Bangladesh and Bolivia, "community leaders" and NGO apparatchiks, some elected by someone, some by no one, self-appointed, salaried or sponsored or who was asking, made their righteous demands as spokespeople for the "Global South", to the applause of the white European activists.

That day's events leave a bunch of wilting questions. One being: what is this uneasy relationship between privileged European activists and the representatives of the "Global South"? What kind of magic does it have to trump the usual commitments, dazzle away prized anti-hierarchical safeguards? So, following up on this Copenhagen pattern, Climate Camp approved its two "delegates" to the "Peoples Climate Summit" in Cochabamba called by Evo Morales, president of the "plurinational republic of Bolivia" -- cue Daily Mail long haul flight outrage. And a similar proposal was even raised (though rejected) at the last No Borders network gathering. Could it be that an Aymara indigenous president in a stripy jumper is something other than a president; that a "plurinational" state is something other than a state; that a top-down NGO run by brown people from the South is something other than a top-down NGO; or that the politics of representation stops being a problem across the equator?

Doesn't Bolivia still have borders, an army, and prisons -- prisons where our comrades still rot behind bars?

I can't help feeling this relationship indeed fingers a hole in the heart of this movement -- or to put it less dramatically, a lack of confidence in our beliefs, a lack of feeling in our principles. In Copenhagen it was as if we were saying: we privileged European activists, we're not able to act and fight for ourselves, in our own names, with our own anger, for our own desires -- so we have to represent, you could even say colonise, the demands of others more needy, more worthy. Of course, we wouldn't ever claim to speak for the South ... but we can make alliances with those who all so happily make those claims, politicians, "community leaders". So the symbiosis of the white activists and the brown activists, united in our representation of the teeming unknown multitude below, bound together in careerism and middle class guilt.

Pink tide

It could also be that some people are genuinely excited about what's going on down in South America. There is a real shift in power taking place in the continent, a real movement away from the existing pattern of domination. Morales' election victory in December 2005 may not, as he claimed, end 500 years of colonial power, but it may be one in a number of steps away from a century of Yankee power in the South.

Other tidemarks in the Latin American "Pink tide": Hugo Chavez, ex-military coupster, elected president of Venezuela since 1999, survived a US-backed coup in 2002, and now with a second constitutional change in 2009 entitled to keep on running indefinitely, using the revenue from

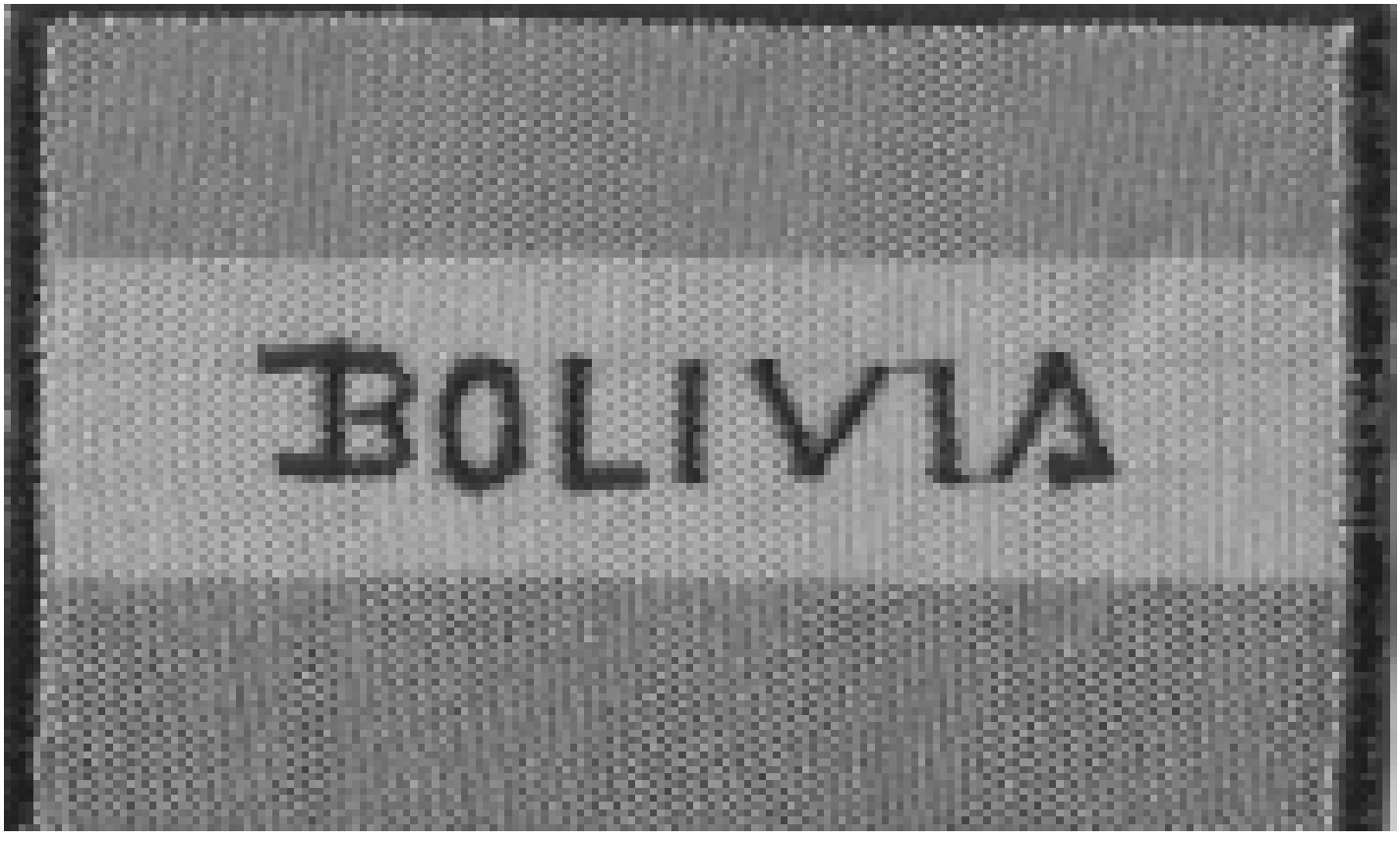
nationalised oil company PDVSA for aid "missions" in Cuba and Bolivia as well as the slums of Caracas. After the Argentinian crisis in 2001-2 effectively destroyed the hold of the IMF and the "Washington Consensus" on regional economics, Nestor Kirchner's government, elected in 2003, defaulted on international debt and ran a cheap peso policy to rebuild export industry. Brazil, the biggest, richest and most powerful South American state by far, fell into the centre left with Lula's victory in 2002: orthodox market economics, a booming consumer economy, together with anti-Yankee rhetoric and the beginnings of a welfare safety net. Bolivia and Ecuador -- where Rafael Correa was elected in 2006 – newer and smaller members of the pink club, have gone fastest along the road of "21st century socialism".

Nationalisations, growing independence from global financial markets, indigenous rights, basic welfare policies – as well as plenty of gloating and fist-waving at the US. Social democratic governments are moving South America towards some of the welfarist rights European workers squeezed out of capital after WWII. Behind the scenes are global economic shifts: on the one hand the boom in commodities (oil in Venezuela and Brazil, Bolivian gas, industrial Soya plantations in Argentina and Brazil, etc.) fuelling China's rapid industrial expansion; on the other, the bubble bursting in the decrepit debt and service economies of US and Europe. The power of global capital shifts to the East and South, wealth is being redistributed, and some crumbs are really finding their way to the "people" – though plenty more, for sure, to the elites in Sao Paulo and Caracas.

This redistribution is taking place well within the state/capital system. The new Bolivian constitution of 2009 recognises the rights of la pachamama, mother earth – alongside the army, the courts, a beefed-up Senate, and all the usual institutions of a republic. The new pink Latin states are more popular, more inclusive, that is -- stronger states. Populist economies are better distributed, more stable, that is - stronger market economies. Economies based on the same model of petroleum, industrial agriculture, extraction, and growth before everything. This is the message behind the rhetoric that doesn't make it to hopeful English-speaking radicals. When Evo Morales announces in Copenhagen that capitalism is "the worst enemy of humanity" Anglophone media of both left and right hype up the rebel pronouncements. But there's minimal coverage, left or right, when vice-president Álvaro García Linera quietly repeats that Bolivia is building "Andean-Amazonian capitalism" (albeit as a Marxist "intermediary stage"); or when Morales, back at home, praises "nationalist military" and "patriotic entrepreneurs". This truth, which doesn't key into the hopes or fears of either side, isn't news. Though he certainly got more coverage for his ideas, in the Cochabamba summit opening speech, about a link between homosexuality and hormones in chicken feed.

Of course anarchists on the ground know what's going on. In January 2006 anarchist organisations from across Latin America published the "Caracas Libertarian Declaration". They wrote: "it seems that a new historical cycle is opening up in Latin America in which the people deposit their anguish and hopes in social-democratic and populist governments ... Consequently we reaffirm, with the backing of rich historical experience, that there are no statist or vanguard paths towards a socialist libertarian society. To be credible, such a society must be based on the direct participation of grassroots social movements and their non-negotiable self-managed ascent."

While "Northern" radicals look away from Chavez' militarist posturing, the anarchist



publication El Libertario keeps on denouncing the army murderers in safe government positions, and "Venezuela of the multinationals". Or in La Paz, anarchofeminists Mujeres Creando are sticking up murals of Evo wanking over the Miss Universe pageant he's hosting in Santa Cruz. Even in South America states are still states, and anarchists are still anarchists.

Incorporation

Of course the point of activists going to Cochabamba wasn't to work with the state, or to help draw up yet more demands, wishlists, fantasy bodies -- UN covenants, peoples' commissions, climate justice courts, new human rights treaties, global economic funds, ... Rather, it was about hooking up with the radical groups of all kinds hanging around at the fringes. And no doubt it was a great networking opportunity. But what opportunity did Cochabamba represent for the government organisers? What were we doing for them?

The advances of the 21st century Latin pink tide resemble the 20th century gains of European social democracy. There are strong parallels in means as well as ends. Chavismo in Venezuela is closely tied to the military, but the forces behind Lula or Morales are more genuinely popular, newly created left parties built out of alliances of labour and "social movements". See the history of the UK Labour party, which built a political play out of the power of trade unions and the co-operative movement plus Fabian left intellectual leadership. The story is old but it goes on: when weak popular movements challenge the state, they get crushed; when they get too strong, the state invites them in. Anyone who's ever been involved in workplace or community organising knows how it goes, and the rules are just the same in Britain and Brazil.

According to the philosopher Spinoza, when a body encounters another body with which it agrees "in nature", they can join together in a "joyful meeting", forming a more powerful joint body. In an anarchist relation built from affinity, individuals or groups come freely together to mutually advance each other's work. But if the two bodies are of opposing natures, the weaker may simply be destroyed or decomposed by the stronger. When a grassroots body meets up with a fully functioning State Leviathan, the best result we can hope for is incorporation or assimilation. Only the State comes off with increased power, because whenever we recognise its terms we legitimise it, and the basis of every State is the acceptance of its legitimacy, its right to rule.

"doesn't Bolivia still have borders, an army, and prisons - prisons where our comrades still rot behind bars?"

This is the other side of the political pink tide. Whatever happened to the Brazilian MST, the world's biggest landless movement? With over a million members, a 20 year history of mass direct action for real, of grassroots organisation and popular education, the movement's demands for land reform are stalled for good, caught by its friends in government in a double bind of officialisation and continuing repression.

What happened to the Argentinian piqueteros and factory occupiers, great revolutionary hope of the new millenium? Spontaneous movements of the dispossessed were soon channelled into political dead-ends, the Trotskyist movement which peaked and dwindled, or official Peronism behind Kirchner. The tested populist mix of national capitalism, protectionist industry mixed with soup kitchens and noisy demos, did the trick once again.

Minority, without the complex

As Uruguayan anarchist Daniel Barret (Rafael Sposito, passed away last August) writes in 2008: "it's not news to anyone that anarchists are a tiny minority in Bolivia, just like everywhere else on the planet ... and as, except for a few countries in the prime of anarchosyndicalism, we always have been." But what does this minority status imply? If anything, rather than abandoning our principles, it means holding even tighter to them. "To be an anarchist, without 'minority complex', is an act of savage self-orphanage, of proud conviction, adopted by those who individually and/or collectively refuse to be followers of processes controlled by others, and whose basic disposition is to give life to self-owned and genuinely emancipatory practices."

Anarchists are freaks. Do we seriously believe in a world without the state, without capital, without property, god, the family, borders, without all these time-honoured rules and norms and institutions that hold society together? In living self-organised lives, in free associations of affinity, creating new types of relationships as yet undreamt of, challenging domination and hierarchy on every level? Crazy or not, what's undeniable is that as anarchists our desires and beliefs are largely out of step with those of just about everyone else we ever meet. How do we work with others without being assimilated, without compromising our freakish ideas?

Rather than pining for some imaginary multitude -- because we're not going to build a mass movement, not any time soon - we celebrate what we are, what we have, what we can become. There are minoritarian joys and powers - freedom of movement, spontaneity, creativity, flexibility, invisibility, daring. We can create, provoke, irritate, inspire, and above all, infect those around us with new desires and practices. When we position ourselves in the thick of grassroots struggles -- rather than in sticky liasons with their leaders and assimilators -- we can have effects well beyond our numbers. And we speak, and more importantly act, for ourselves, anarchists without apology.

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LA AGONIA DEL AGUA


Charka

Steph Davies

climate justice? climate refugee?

capitalism, nationalism and migration

These days, everyone from Coca Cola to the BNP has a position on climate change. Since COP15 there has been a general shift to the right across Europe with politicians invoking fear through alarming statistics seemingly connected to migration and the rhetoric of precarity and emergency that surrounds climate change discourse prospering through the recession. Migration has become the scapegoat for a myriad of problems, thus legitimising increasing levels of repression against "illegals". Whilst an analysis of capitalism in connection to climate change is becoming more common (although at times tokenistic), its' relationship to nationalism, especially in connection to climate change issues, is often overlooked. The development of the "climate refugee" further perpetuates this model, where nation states are called upon to manage migration and control populations.

The "climate justice" movement is a direct response to the failings of international democracy to deal with the threat of climate change, and is gaining momentum, as expressed through the mobilisations around COP15 and the World Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth Rights in Cochabamba, Bolivia. But what are the limits of this it's new vocabulary?

COP15 and Migration

In Copenhagen about 2,000 people participated in the "Climate No Borders" demonstration, targeting the Ministry of Defence. The demonstration aimed to highlight the complexity of issues surrounding migration and climate change. The Danish Prime Minister -now leader of NATO- was responsible for promoting a reinforcement of Fortress Europe through the expansion of organisations such as Frontex, the controversial armed border agency, and "UADs" ("unmanned autonomous drones) as a response to the perceived threat of increased migration.

The "International Campaign for Climate Refugees" (ICCR) was launched at the Klimaforum during COP15. Delegates from Sudan and Bangladesh were among those calling for "a new legal framework for climate refugees to realise their social, political, cultural and economic rights." This "framework" would result in an opening up of the Geneva Convention and is supported by NGOs such as the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) and the Forced Migration Organisation (FMO). But what would a climate refugee look like? Without wishing to undermine or belittle those who are currently displaced or endangered due to environmental factors, can such a category ever be implemented? Does it not add further legitimacy to the racist methodology employed by the border regime? A regime that relies on the concept of "good" and "bad" migrants, where "victims" and "opportunists", "economic", "political" (and now maybe "environmental") are segregated and forced to prove their worthiness, need and threat?

False Solutions and "Post-Politics"?

During COP15 the CJA ("Climate Justice Action") and CJN ("Climate Justice Now") networks demanded an analysis of concepts such as "climate colonialism" (or "CO2lonialism") and "ecological debt" in an attempt to understand climate change as a systemic problem, the result of capitalist expansion and colonialist systems of domination. In a reader analysing the "post-politics" of climate change, it was argued that the CJA and CJN are "pushing the tension between the liberal carbon consensus and a properly anti-capitalist analysis to its limits."

The Climate Camp model is also situated somewhere within this problematic maze. However, whilst the CCA has also high-

lighted "market-driven approaches" as a red herring, it has failed to out population control as a "false solution". The CCA is currently dealing with some difficult tensions, briefly considering a rebrand to become "Climate Justice UK". The discussion paper published after the Bristol gathering asked "whether CCA is first and foremost a movement against climate change, or a movement against capitalism"?

Another discussion paper reveals further attempts to confront these complex issues. After the Amsterdam meeting the CJA cited: "Climate justice means recognising that the capitalist growth paradigm, which leads to over extraction, overproduction and overconsumption stands in deep contrast to the biophysical limits of the planet and the struggle for social justice."

Both the CCA and the CJA are engaging in a discussion around what the CJA terms "colonising capitalism", and the "logic of profit". Now is the time to engage with the difficult issue of capitalism's bed fellow: nationalism. In order to acknowledge issues connected with what the CCA terms "socially just solutions", it is essential that the dogma of nationalism and its methodology of authoritarianism are confronted as an essential component of the capitalist growth paradigm. The issues surrounding climate induced migration are inextricably linked to this. State sanctioned definitions such as the proposed "climate refugee" category will always reinforce these issues.

Re-Examining the Geneva Convention

The term "climate refugee" was coined is the 1970s and has been in a process of constant appraisal ever since. In 2006 the Maldives called for a re-opening of the Geneva Convention to include "climate refugees", but this was scrapped by the UNHCR (United Nations Human Rights Commission), who "noted that most receiving States actually want to restrict the refugee regime further, rather than extend it in the current form". During the COP15 summit, the IOM (International Organisation for Migration) and the UNHCR, failed once again to engage with the debate surrounding issues connected with climate refugees. In their joint platform towards the end of the conference they questioned the appropriateness of the summit for these types of discussions. Questions posed by the Bangladeshi and Sudanese delegates were left unanswered.

it is essential that the dogma of nationalism and its methodology of authoritarianism are confronted as an essential component of the capitalist growth paradigm. The issues surrounding climate induced migration are inextricably linked to this

NGOs such as the EJF and FMO call for a greater level of dignity for those entrapped in the asylum system. However, their demands for a new category of "climate refugee" further segregates and fail to acknowledge practically the complexities of causes that lead to migration. It is important to acknowledge and act in solidarity with those already displaced by climate change, but any prescriptive attempts to create a category of climate refugee by opening the 1949 Geneva convention can never be sufficient, and endanger the already shaky foundations on which it stands. Already asylum seekers with so-called "good" cases are frequently deported on the grounds of a lack of "proof". How can we ever really adapt this system which shows so little regard for the basic human "rights" it supposedly enshrines to include such a disparate category as climate refugee?

Members of the BNP and the far right attempt to use the Geneva convention as a tool to legitimise their hysterical claims. In an open letter to the Independent Police Complaints Commission, some members argued: "The Geneva Convention clearly states that displacement by immigration is a crime against humanity. Thus any displacement would be Ethnocide." The EDL also use this rhetoric, calling for all nations, from Israeli, to Hindi, to stand up against the threat of Sharia law, commonly citing the transformation of churches into mosques as a further example of this "ethnocide".

Overpopulation

The BNP, the nation's "true green party" argues that: "Unlike the fake 'Greens'…the BNP is the only party to recognise that overpopulation – whose primary driver is immigration, as revealed by the government's own figures – is the cause of the destruction of our environment." Organisations such as the Optimum Population Trust develop this argument through various campaigns such as "PopOffsets", which aims to make its supporters "carbon neutral" by funding contraceptive programmes across the globe. James Lovelock and David Attenborough use the logic of the Gaia Hypothesis as a reason for tougher immigration policies in order to aid the planet in "self-regulation".

The demands for limits on population are not only the remit of the right, as the Permaculture Association's recently revised ethics demonstrate. The much discussed "third ethic" previously entitled "fair shares" (in conjunction with "earth care" and "people care") has been replaced with:

"setting limits to population and consumption". An explanatory text acknowledges that "setting limits to population is not about limiting people's free movement, tight border controls and a one child policy." However, it fails to outline practically what a "limit to population" would involve. Who would set these limits? How would they be enforced? Once again, authoritarianism is not only unchallenged, but inferred.

Liberal Nationalism

The concept of "climate justice" necessitates an analysis of the displacement caused by climate change and the "solutions" proposed by nation states. In order to truly bring about climate justice we must acknowledge the myriad of reasons that lead to migration, not through the perpetuation of systems encouraging a victim mentality but in opening the borders, enabling free movement and stopping practices which make it impossible for people to stay in their homes. As the Anarchist Federation observed: "Nationalism can be liberal, cosmopolitan and tolerant, defining the 'common interest' of the people in ways which do not require a single race". This liberal application of nationalism will only increase as "climate refugees" are enshrined in law, with those excluded further disempowered.

Migration and globalisation have disrupted fixed notions of class, with the conditions of individuals changing greatly through their precarious relationships to nation states. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that the "UN must take proper measures to realize people's rights to the freedom of movement within and between state borders." The ICCR calls for "a separate Safeguard Protocol (SP) that should be framed to address climate victims under a rights and justice framework…as victims of global injustice caused by unequal and undemocratic global architecture." This "global architecture" is incapable of redressing any kind of balance or creating justice. In order to move beyond the dogma of victim and perpetrator it is essential to end all forms of migrations management which divide and categorise.

Reinforcing the Borders

Contrary to the picture painted by "populationists" climate change will not result in millions of people seeking asylum in Europe. The majority of those displaced through the impacts of climate change in Africa move within that continent. In January 2010 Israel began work on a second wall, stretching between Rafah and Eliat, in an attempt to secure the nation from the "surge" of migrants from Africa. A combination of a lack of resources required to embark on a journey to the EU, the increased militarisation of the borders of Europe, and the desire to stay closer to countries of origins means that many migrants will not travel to the UK.

"Fortress India" is being constructed along the Assam-Bangladesh border, inspired by Israel's wall in the West Bank. On completion, the fence will be as long as America's 2,000-mile border with Mexico, which is currently being reinforced using several different technologies employed by the US "Fence Lab" including concrete, razor wire, electric shocks and increased patrols and surveillance. 80,000 Indian soldiers of the Border Security Force "defend" the border, which has been legitimised by the impending threat of increased migration from Bangladesh. But the death toll is rising on both sides, with people being shot indiscriminately in order to ensure "national security". Climate change is the perfect framework through which nation states can rationalise and reinforce their borders, from Bangladesh, to Calais, where migrant camps are routinely cleared by order of the Mayor who promotes "sustainable development" and a "preserved environment, a city pleasant to be in".

In Bolivia the People's Conference asked some difficult questions: "What means should be adopted to confront climate change migration? Why talk about migrants and not climate change refugees? How can the human rights of climate change migrants be guaranteed? How can developed countries compensate climate change migrants?"

Definitions emerging from the forum included "climate refugees", "forced migrants" and the "climate displaced". These concepts are useful in unpacking some of the main issues in relation to climate change and migration, especially in acknowledging the im-

pacts of the freedom of capital and resources in contrast with people. However, the demands of the people's assembly still call for legally enshrined definitions and aid funds, rather than challenging the border regime.

It is important to act in solidarity now to ensure that those displaced by climate change can be supported. Nation states will not provide the framework within which to do this. Neither will arbitrary definitions which further divide and rule, and fail to account for the unforeseen impacts of climate change. An anti-authoritarian response, including an opening of the borders, is the only possible methodology through which to confront the issue of climate change and migration. Any response to the threat of climate change seeking to acknowledge the "rights" of a specific group will fail to usurp the authoritarianism that protects economic expansion. Capitalism must be analysed in relation to the nationalism which ensures its continuation and this cannot happen within the framework of the "climate refugee".

Steph Davies is part of the No Borders network, and has helped with several Climate Camps. She hopes that this year will see a greater engagement with issues connected to climate change and migration from networks fighting for social change..

an interview with larry lohmann

You are a member of The Cornerhouse which had a presence on the big 'economics panel' during the Blackheath Climate Camp in 2009. Yet, few climate activists will know much about your organisation. Could you introduce it, and the work you do, to us?

We are three people, three activists – all with different experiences. My colleague Nick [Hildyard], who you heard speak [at Blackheath], he's been an environmentalist since he was a teenager and then became an expert on dams and dam struggles several years ago – and he's still on call for this kind of thing. He also works on a range of other issues now, like finance and trade, the BAE corruption case, the Balfour Beatty corruption…

My colleague Sarah [Sexton], like me, had experiences as an activist in Thailand in the late 80s and early 90s. She works on issues of public health, pensions, the intersection of finance and pension issues, genetic engineering, both human genetic technologies and also agricultural.

My background is as an activist in Thailand for a number of years during the 1980s. I came to Britain after that and worked with Nick and Sarah almost from the beginning. In Thailand I was working on dam issues and land right issues, forestry and rights to nature kind of issues. I continued that when I was working in the UK. I got dragged into climate issues through this because of the intersection between climate politics and land rights politics when it became clear in the 1990s that under the guise of this techno-ecological approach to climate there was a way of annexing land and resources in the Global South in particular. So the more I got involved in climate politics the more I became aware that there was a gap certainly in the mainstream green-environmentalist approach to climate in Europe – and the more I looked into it the worse it seemed.

At some stage you also worked for The Ecologist magazine but then left. Was this also because you felt that there was a gap in mainstream green thinking?

Yes, that awareness was always there, but it sort of became unbridgeable in the mid 1990s. I originally came over to work with Nick who was working on The Ecologist, and Sarah also did for a couple of years when she arrived from Thailand. In a way of course we wanted to hang on to The Ecologist because we were a bridgehead that was respected by the mainstream green movement, which allowed us to approach social and political issues more. For us that was the value of The Ecologist magazine.

The founder of the magazine, Teddy Goldsmith, decided for some reason that he wanted to come back to the magazine which he had basically left for many years. I think he was egged on by his friends saying 'these crazy lefties are taking over this august magazine' and Teddy should do something about it. It was something like that. So it became an intolerable situation and we all had to leave.

The contentious issue there wasn't climate change though?

No, the issue was basically racism and alliances with the far Right among the environmental movement, which remains a serious tendency in amongst certain sections of the green movement.

Was that related to arguments for population control?

Population certainly played a role, but it went beyond that. It was partly a question of viewpoints on population and so forth, where our view was completely antithetical to the view of Teddy or to that of the mainstream greens. But it was also a question of alliances and loyalties. For a lot of people in the green movement, the idea was that they were green, neither right nor left.

This is still the case today, for example George Monbiot at a Climate Camp saying that we should make alliances with people from right across the spectrum to push the climate stuff through as it is so important.

In the abstract I can certainly understand the need to be strategic and tactical about these things, but you have to look at it on a case by case basis. In Teddy's case, he accepted an invitation by this extremely far right-wing intellectual think tank in Europe called GRECE to speak at one of their anniversary celebrations. That was a bridge too far for me, because it undermined our work. If people know that somebody connected with us was actually speaking at a meeting of these kind of intellectual racists in Europe, then we can't do our work, we can't make any alliances and we can't be trusted. This was a question of practical politics. And we still have problems with this. Most of the mainstream green movement does not understand this issue at all, so we try to avoid the issue because whenever it comes up we always get faced with people saying 'oh, you just had a personal disagreement with Teddy Goldsmith' or 'you didn't like his politics' or something, but it's deeper than that. It is a question of alliance building and whether you build alliances or not with crackpots and racists.

As you say, you have moved on. Now the focus of your work is based around this concept of 'carbon fetishism', which for us is an important concept that the green movement, whether it is mainstream or radical, hasn't really grasped yet. Could you start describing what you mean by 'fetishism'?

This goes back to the elementary point that climate change is not a technical or purely physical-scientific issue. It's not a question of teaching people in power about science. It's a deeply political issue connected with questions such as 'who has used the atmosphere in the past; who is using it now; for what purpose'. It's connected with the whole history of fossil fuel exploitation in all respects, not just the climate respect. All these issues are unavoidable; equality, distribution and exploitation – the climate issue is all about that. It's all about health, it's all about anti-militarism, about connecting with the movement against militarisation of society. You can't really deal with that kind of issue without looking at it in this way, without building alliances without that perspective in mind. I don't believe a climate movement will be effective unless it does recognise that the issue is a political and social issue in that way.

And I think this continues in some sense to divide what we conventionally think of as the green movement. As you were implying, we have to think about which kind of alliances will be most effective in the climate debate, and this is not necessarily going to be with the a-political wing of the green movement. We have to recognise that sometimes our biggest problems are

with our green colleagues, who sometimes are big fans of carbon trading. Because of their political analysis they think this is possible and say 'you guys just wait around for the revolution and the revolution will never come', this kind of familiar rhetoric. I think, for years we tried to see if this situation could be improved and if alliances could be built with people who don't have our political analysis. But now, without rejecting this entirely out of hand, it is more important spending our time building alliances with labour unions, with indigenous peoples who are seeing the effects both of climate change and of the mainstream solutions to climate change impacting on their daily lives; building alliances with small farmers and with the world majority in the Global South.

These are the alliances which are most important in the long term. Also making alliances across issues, across national boundaries as much as possible, but recognising that a lot of the issues are pretty much buried intensely within certain local or national boundaries, but trying to work with that and working people whose issue is not necessarily climate change. I think the case of Ecuador is fairly clear: the local activists, a lot of the indigenous people, the municipal governments and so forth in the area, they are not climate change activists; they are concerned with the effects of the oil industry on their land and on society, and if this intersects with the climate issue and we can help make it intersect all to the good, but we have to recognise that it's connected not in a purely theoretical way but in a way that you have to take into consideration in building alliances and in recognising the deeper nature of the climate issue.

I want to come back to the term 'fetishism'. You seem to borrow it from Volume 1 of Capital. Even in the progressive climate movement, Marxism plays a minor role. So could you justify the use of that term and explain how it helps us understand these issues?

I like to experiment and learn, so I'm always looking for new ways of understanding things that I haven't quite come to grips with. And I've known for a long time that I haven't really come to grips with Chapter 1 of Volume 1 of Capital in a proper way because, although it is probably one of the most analysed passages in academic history, it is still very difficult to get a grip on the depth of Marx's thinking in terms of this very complex process of fetishism. It is not a voluntaristic thing , it is not an ideology, it's something which is embedded in everyday practice. Understanding fetishism helps us understand that climate change politics is not a question of calling all the world's leaders into a science classroom and giving them a lesson about science. Commodity fetishism goes much deeper than that into practice.

"understanding fetishism helps us understand that climate change politics is not a question of calling all the world's leaders into a science classroom and giving them a lesson about science"

It's useful to explore partly because fetishism not only characterises the carbon market approach to climate in which you have a complex process of commodification but also deeply affects green politics in a way by which the fetish distracts your attention from the central relations that you need to talk about when talking about the climate issue; instead you focus on numbers and on things which begin to have dominion over you.

It seems to us that the central tenet of the notion of fetishism is to create equivalence; the idea that you compare different gases, different places and locality through an idea of carbon equivalence. That has led to solutions such as carbon trading which is mostly opposed by the green movement, yet mostly opposed because of an understanding of the ineffectiveness of the market rather than because it is seen as fundamentally a wrong principle.

Yes, fetishism is not recognised as part of the problem, but I think it is part of the problem. If you expend all this effort to create all these magical objects like emissions reduction units, or AAUs [Assigned Amount Unit cap], or 350 parts per million CO2 and start treating these in your everyday practices as magical objects which somehow will guard you against everything then you are prevented from dealing with the political and social relations that really matter.

We are reminded of the Climate Camp's day of mass action – the Swoop – last year which was preceded by an online vote to decide its target based on 'this one emits this much yearly' and 'this one emits that much over its lifetime'.

You can understand this, but yes it's a problem and a good example of this fetishistic approach.

What kind of strategy would you suggest instead?

The strategy has to centre around building alliances with rather different social movements that are intent on structural change away from fossil fuels and away from the structure that fossil fuels represent in terms of being one of the central tools in the exploitation of labour and so forth.

You can't just talk about emissions as if it were a matter of molecules. You have to bring in these social relations. What are emissions in the context of a 'commons regime'? What are emissions in the context of a regime of unlimited capital accumulation benefitting a small minority? That's different emissions, different carbon, the molecules are different in their social and political meaning. This is not a formula; we have to be open to different kinds of languages that express such points in a way that lead to structural issues.

Alfie

entering the crisis

is the (re)invigoration of a global movement our only answer to the present?

NB Dear Reader, the footnotes to this article serve partly as a subtext.

Naomi Klein wrote before the protests in Copenhagen last December that we "will witness a new maturity for the movement that ignited a decade ago". Turbulence magazine, a visible theoretical force in the run up to and during the mobilisations in Copenhagen, identifies climate, or the bio-crisis, as having the potential to be the common ground for a movement that can replace the 'one no many yeses' of the Seattle era. Thus last winter in Denmark we may have witnessed the slightly quiet birth of the 'climate justice movement'. This article will critique the conceivable trajectory of this movement and briefly present another (perhaps non-mutually exclusive) call to the present (1).

From COP15 to COPInfinity

The transition from one summit to another, along the shifting frontiers of a global project for capital, provides the activist a series of platforms to assert her objections. The shut down of the World Trade Organisation in 1999 and the events in the run up to and after it challenged the legitimacy of neo-liberalism. Our movements brought together voices from communities in India who fought for water that had been privatised by Coca-Cola, landless peasants in Mexico who had been robbed of their past by way of the present due to IMF laws, to cheated South Africans who had been sold out by a corrupt government to foreign business. Everywhere the stories carried the same narrative: the path being cleared for the neo-liberal project. Neo-liberalism told us it was motivated by progress, but through this global movement we found a way to say, no, it was profit.

December 2009 and things have changed. Significantly the crisis of neo-liberalism has made even its architects question its sustainability and the rumbles of the bio-crisis are heard from Alberta (2) to Blackheath (3) to New Orleans. In Copenhagen our mobilisation brought - or aimed to bring - attention to the flawed (unproductive, non-democratic) UN process. Like many of the meeting points in the alter-globalisation movement, this mobilisation was predominantly organised by activists in the global north, often inspired by indigenous cultures and struggles of the global south. Activists took the opportunity for a counter summit, our "best practice" (Turbulence), to present the world the existing or threatening manifestations of capital's destructive project and at the same time put forward the solutions articulated through a set of demands (4).

Yet in the coming together for counter summits we create opposition consistent with the spectacle of the summit itself. If and when it was possible to put the legitimacy of COP15 at risk we did so by the use of a counter spectacle.

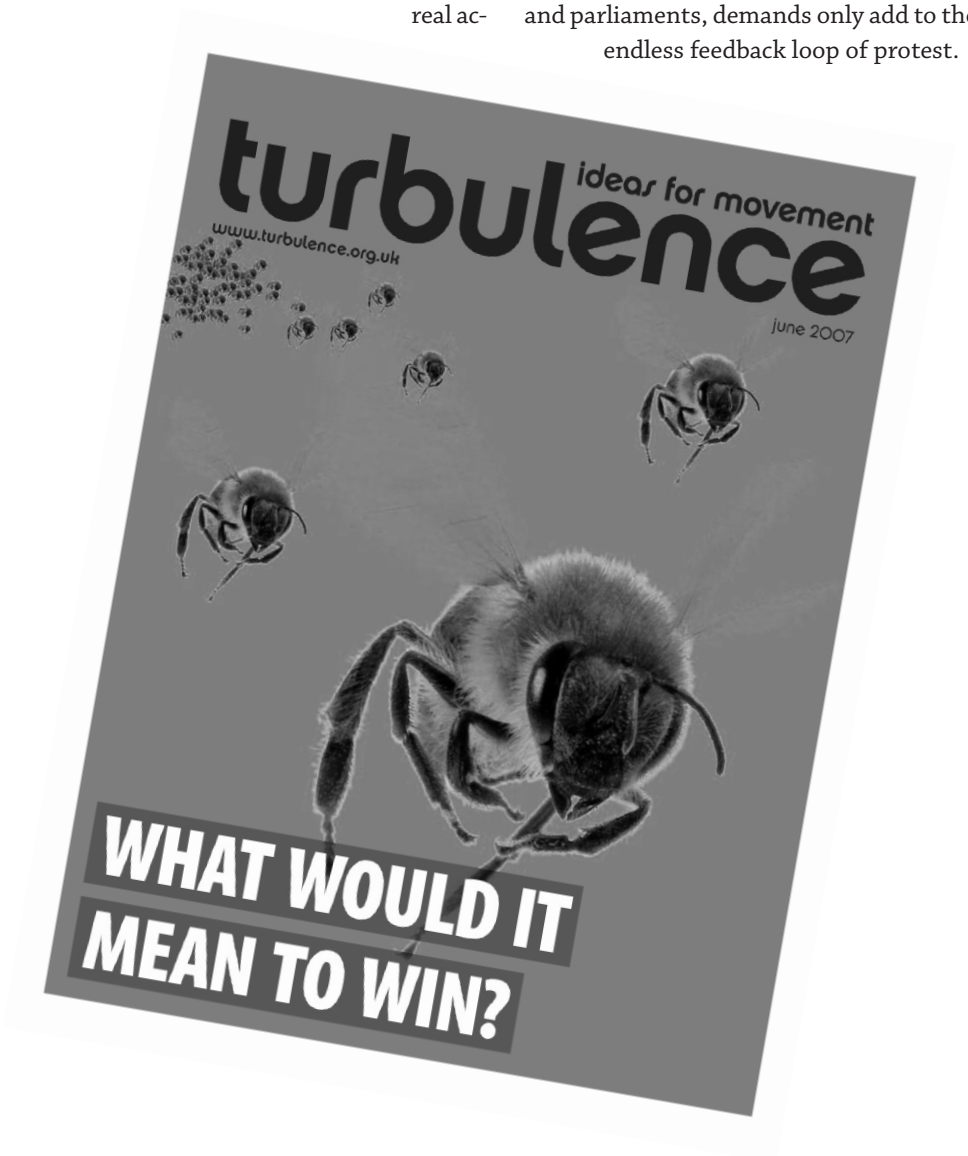
During COP15 we adopted the People's Assembly, an indigenous practice taken from South America, as a form by which we asserted oppositional messaging to the UN process. The result becomes a counter spectacle providing a valuable platform for

repressed voices, much less than it put into practice our own People's Assembly amongst the tear gas, the cameras and activists in the Bella centre car park.

Leave fossil fuels in the ground. The solutions articulated by the demands of the protest are clear and make sense to human life. Yet who were we talking to? The non-product of the meeting, the Copenhagen Accord, shows that it is evident those behind the fences and police can not respond to reality.

Essentially the counter spectacle can only aid us by legitimising real action. 'A global movement' is not an end in itself. This form of objection alone can be as thin as the paper carrying the images of protest. It becomes a reflection without existing.

How many activist people's assemblies will it take before we realise we need to become people, first? Either by necessity or desire the demands in Copenhagen produce a common trajectory for a social movement. However they can only remain baseless until we build the means to put them in place. Without gaining a future shaped by many hands and minds far beyond conference centres, board rooms and parliaments, demands only add to the endless feedback loop of protest.



But what if, as happened at the WTO summit in Seattle, our counter spectacle overwhelmed the hegemony in Copenhagen? Where would we be now if we had crossed the heavily guarded or flimsy bridges (5) into the Bella centre as a much hyped flood of a people's opposition? That we lacked the numbers may have been due to the limited resources we have to articulate the significance of the COP15, both in terms of the social-bio-crisis itself and the event as part of a movement strategy. Or it may be that the common sense amongst active anti-capitalists does not replicate the idea of our history existing in cycles, i.e. that another ten years of anti-capitalist politics planned to be similar to the last is our only way forward.

Not every opposition surfaces in the form of a spectacle (6).

Diagnolism

This is not to say that a global climate movement will assume the identical form of the Seattle era. The concept of diagnolism has perhaps been one of the more interesting developments in the emerging tactics of this emerging movement.

During the COP, diagnolism was perhaps expressed by 'the inside outside strategy'. The idea being mobilising protesters outside to enter while at the same time mobilising representatives inside to walk out in disgust and solidarity. We could see this as a the potential for new alliances with frustrated NGOs and representatives from states with little power in the (imperialist) process. However it was also systematic of the rock and hard place position between the general awareness of climate change as an intense global problem demanding a 'quick resolve' by state power and the politics of organisers and participants of the counter spectacle. Essentially this strategy was a result of the debate by activists in the run up to the mobilisations whether to 'shut them down or lock them in'.

Yet not communicating directly to the heads of power structures (vertical) nor purely through non-hierarchical alliances (horizontal), may persist in this movement. As Turbulence outlines "The coun-

Notes

(1) Prelude – from a village in France

Anne-Marie visits and I tell her about the unearthing of pipes in the garden. She looks at the tracks of a digger and spots something. "Here" she says, bending over "the flower that comes from this bulb is very beautiful. Here is another also." We find several more bulbs laying on the surface of the torn up grass. "Take these and find the rest. When the digger returns they will die. They become beautiful flowers" she says. I thank her and place the bulbs in old news paper and put them in the shed. Before she leaves I ask "how long do they take to bloom?" "If you plant them today" she tells me "then at least two years".

(2) Home to ingenuous communities and the second biggest source of oil after Saudi Arabia in the form of tar sands. The removal of the tar sand is completed by trucks as big as two story houses leaving vast gaps in the forest visible from space.

(3) The site of the last UK Climate Camp.

(4) Leaving fossil fuels in the ground; Socialising and decentralising energy; Relocalising our food production; Recognising and repaying ecological and climate debt; Respecting indigenous peoples' rights; Regenerating our eco-systems

(5) An inflatable bridge to power. The days were counting down to the protest set to be the biggie and I had already been feeling a disappointment and disempowerment towards our counter spectacle. Somehow through knowing some imaginative people in the UK scene I had become involved in a plan to make a bridge over the moat that separated us from the conference by 5 foot deep and 20 foot wide absolutely freezing water. Ten points for our ability to organise anything like this under pressure but the plan to link up 8 inflatable mattresses with rope brought home to me the position of our confrontation that week. On the day, to my deepest surprise we managed to set up the bridge and on the other side a line of giant cops with dogs and mace had formed. A girl called out on a megaphone "who's excited about crossing the bridge?!" No one. Myself and a couple of comrades ended up going over armed with some sausages for the pooches strapped to our waist. We had taken parts in the counter spectacle. After being bitten and pepper sprayed we made it to the car park where the People's Assembly was originally planned to be held. "What happened to the people?" my mate asked me as we sat back to back in handcuffs.

(6) Well Amsterdam was under occupation by the Nazis, Jacoba Maria was made to repair SS uniforms. Each week Jacoba was careful to wrap her work in ordinary brown paper and string and place it in a pile amongst others at the offices. Inside her packages were the socks of several SS men, all with the foot holes sown shut.

(7) Last year, once a month, the local Mayor, shop owners and people in the village came together for a meeting with the water agency. A proposal was put forward by a young man named Theo that if the village installed its own rain water collection and purification resources there would be a constant supply all year round. The idea was met with opposition from the agency. However money was collected amongst the community and a non-interest loan was set up from a sympathetic rich individual. In January the village disconnected its taps from the water board and plugged into their own supply. The meetings continue but without the agency representative.

ter-globalisation movement was suspicious of-often even opposed to-institutions per se, constituted forms of power [...] But when the crisis of neoliberalism irrupted, it became apparent that this mistrust of institutions had translated into an inability to consistently shape politics and the economy."

Diagnolism, if the term refers to a shift in our ideas towards power structures, can only be useful from this point on, i.e. with the understanding that the COP process has failed. The Copenhagen Accord was another product from a series of spectacles by the collaboration of imperialist and corporate power aiming to retain a legitimacy of management. If proof was needed, it is clear these collaborations offer nothing despite any length of diagonal engagement. There is now no dichotomy between climate change demanding state led solutions and climate change demanding social action.

However, diagnolism is useful if it means leaving behind the purity of our activism in order to take up entry points available to us to deconstruct power (7).

The urgency of the situation demands time. The vastness of the dessert demands that we condense.

We turn now to a different call to the present. A call for the real, for the body that stands before the mirror giving us the basis by which to exist. Introducing the Invisible Committee.

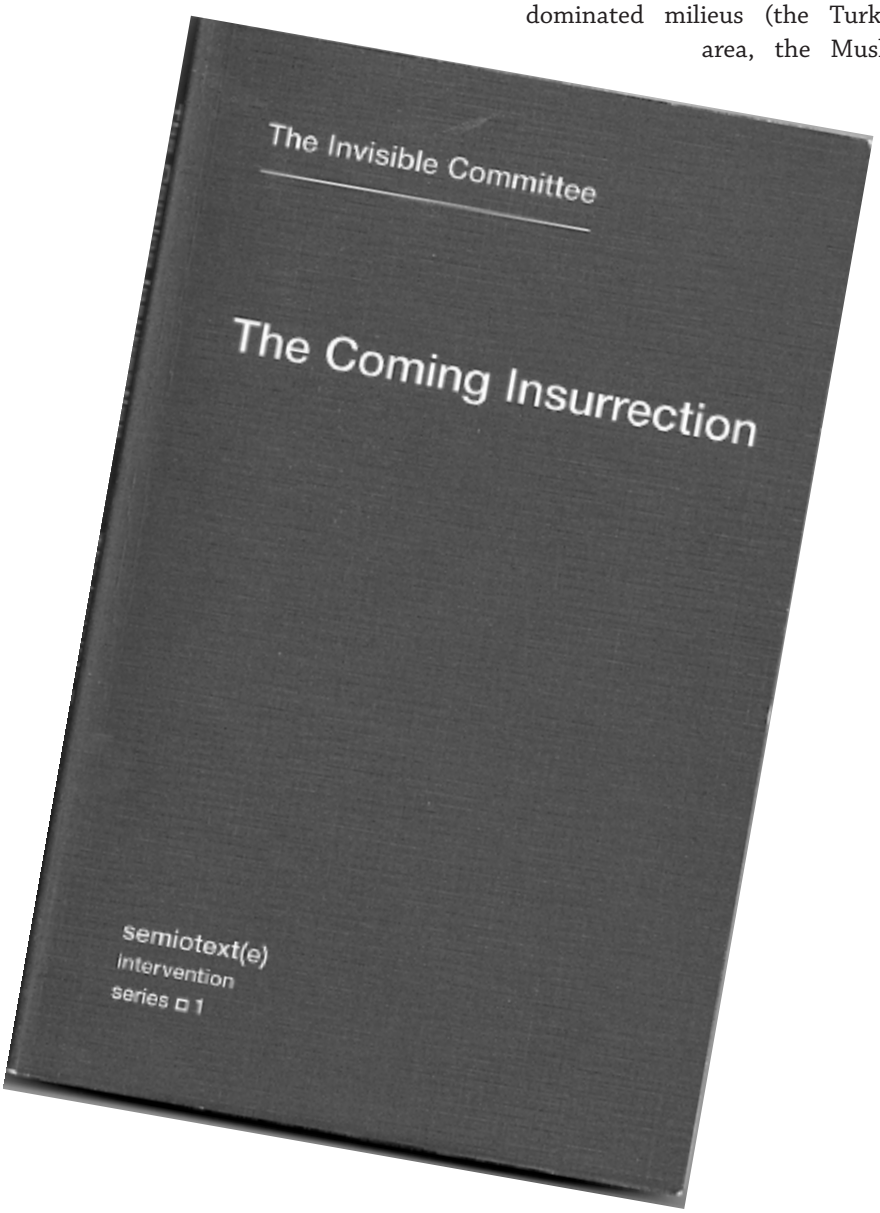
The Invisible Committee have become known for an alleged connection to events in Tarnac, a small village in France, where a preventative raid and 9 arrests were made for terrorist conspiracy charges in November 2008. Also known are their well crafted and emotive texts one of which, The Coming Insurrection, was reviewed on Fox News by Glen Beck who called it "the book of anti-common sense" and that "as world economies go down the tank, the disenfranchised people are set to explode".

Briefly here I am outlining my own interpretation of what I see as four themes (with much cross over) to their theoretical and lived proposals (8).

"Faced with the evidence of the catastrophe, there are those who get indignant and those who take note, those who denounce and those who get organised. We are among those who get organised." (9)

- Invisibility and Milieus

The activist allows the potential of her courage to be contained by the definition as an activist. With this label she will consistently follow power structures around without ever constituting a force by which to present actual challenge. Subculture becomes a product of our alienation and offers little potential to enter the fabrics of society. This can be seen clearly if we take the example of French revolutionaries moving into a country village where they broaden a social base including helping with the running of the local bar, shop and food deliveries. It becomes hard to say who is and who isn't a comrade and the environment as a whole shifts to one of autonomy and, perhaps, antagonism. A different approach may be needed in cities where there is a lack of space and lack of 'neutral space'. We find in cities whole areas are dominated milieus (the Turkish area, the Muslim district, the middle class neighbourhood, the gay part of town). Invisibility is both a way to grow in the shadows and expand without need for the dead weight in forming organisations. When we understand what is evident in the world around us we do not need to be told what to do, we shall know it without saying a word.



- The Party and Cohesion

For us the question is how do we take power without concentrating it? To the Invisible Committee it is how it is to be done rather than what.

The Party is invisible. It is every wild cat strike, it is every anonymous blockade to the network, every hacked and destroyed database, every pound stolen from every bank and fed underground, it is Sarkozy's 'Scum' and every car in flames.

The Party is any force that realises itself against the organised power structures of the desert only to disappear once the damage has been made, reforming as and when necessary. Through the damage caused by The Party we are allowed to see a social war take shape without ever having to know who is on our side. Perhaps The Party fulfils similar needs to the ones that led Turbulence to call for climate as the 'common ground'.

- An Autonomous Material Force (10)

A sinking future for neo-liberalism and its vision of progress brings down with it the institutional left, who, during the emergence of the neo-liberal project took up its position as one of distribution for the gains made by capital. Now as capital finds less frontiers for expansion this contract is cut. The left has no basis to life any longer. It has neglected the very premise of its project – a method of living. Without any other basis for life, behind society's empty stage creep in new and old forms of fascism as seen in the rising popularity of right and far right parties in Europe.

The future the activist fights for must be built, from small, in the present. Only the expansion of a lived reality can oppose the desert and offers an alternative to anthropologies of dominance.

Notes continued

(8) For a much more in depth (and to me slightly intimidating) theoretical approach to the long list references and influences in the Invisibility Committee's work see http://www.metamute.org/node/12806

(9) The following quotes are taken from The Call and The Coming Insurrection – free to download at zinelibrary.info

(10) In front of the mirror is the commune. "Communes come into being when people find each other, get on with each other, and decide on a common path." Through the collective, resources are shared and acquired, skills are developed and actions planed. A social base is found. The collective can approach a new environment with the basis to communise it. Friendship becomes the language of our politics.

- Crisis and Insurrection

For the Invisible Committee revolutionary insurrection depends upon the expansion of the communes. As our independence from the metropolis grows so can the strength and confidence of our offence.

Crisis is the meeting point in which insurrection becomes inevitable. The Invisible Committee wish to show to us a system in collapse where mainstream politics has been reduced to the management of dysfunction. It is here where we are invited into another world. One where we depend on our selves and the people we know by face and voice to produce our lives, one where the world is no longer an exterior place - 'the environment', one where community becomes political infrastructure, where friendship and solidarity become currency, where the basis of our needs, social and material, are shared in a world where it is possible to live and fight from. This world, in which humans are social beings with motivations beyond fear and personal gain, is waiting for our move.

"We have begun".

To Conclude

A global climate movement can talk in the stillness of a photo but a future waits for us to grow in the shadows; it's entry points are gathering on the horizon. We shall meet you there.

This article is dedicated to the Birds of the Coming Storm.

The author wrote this piece well in france. it came about through reflections on experiences of climate and anticapitalist activism in the UK and many illuminating discussions with friends on 'ways forward'.

Jane Stratton and Lauren Wroe

possessed or dispossessed?

Neither of us are experts in mental health, nor do we have a long history of involvement in radical or democratic health activism. We don't claim to know everything about these issues. We weren't around in the 60's/70's when movements around democratic mental health really took off in the UK, the States and other areas of Europe, particularly Italy. One of us bought Deleuze and Guattari's 'Anti-Oedipus' four years ago- it's been a good door stop so far.

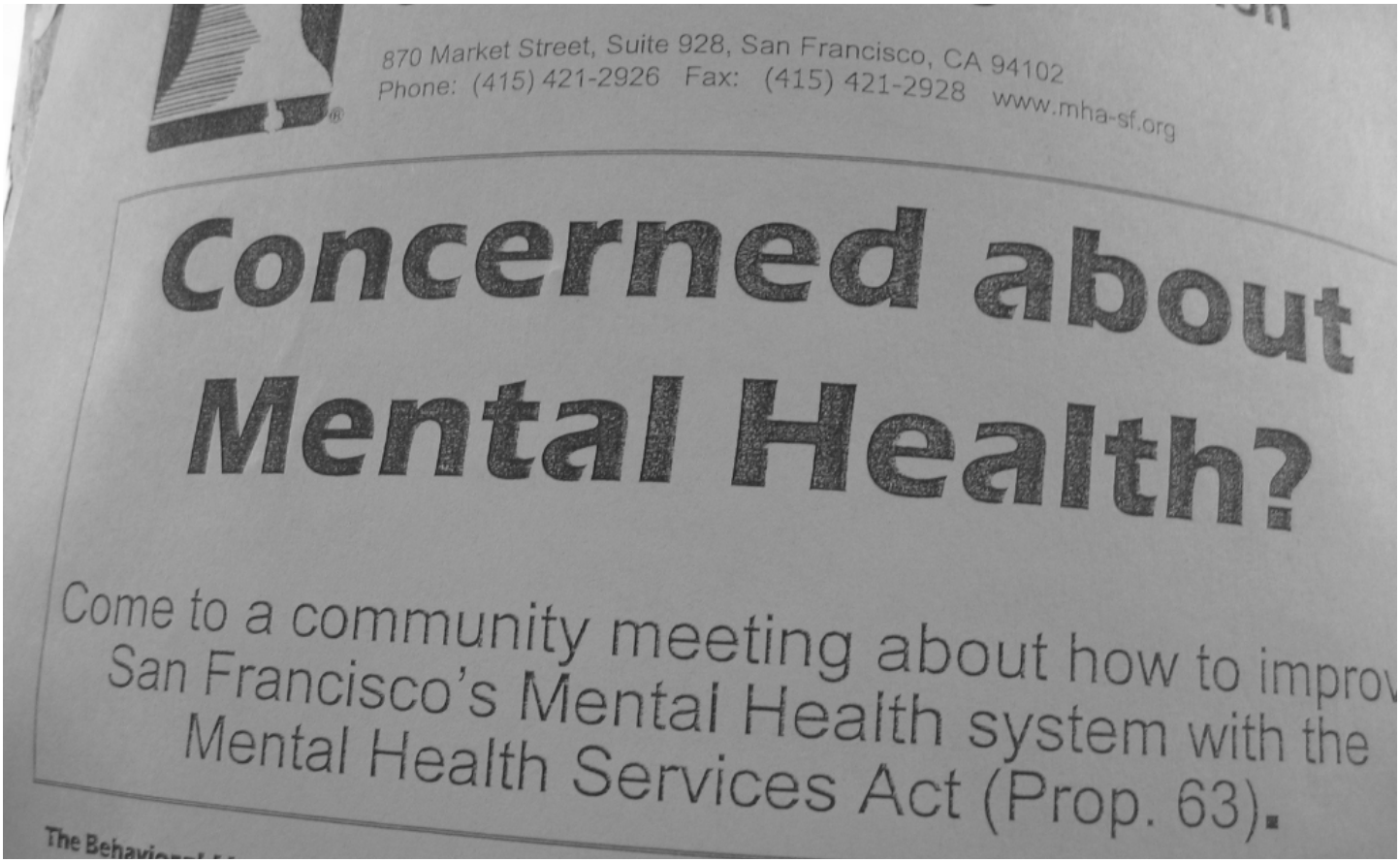
However, what we have seen through our initial encounters with mental health activism and mental health organisations and services is a lack of analysis and critique that we have come to expect where our friends and colleagues have engaged in other political, social and environmental issues. Our gut instinct is that mental health, and in fact most kinds of health care, are seen as personal issues that are either best dealt with by professionals or through personal choices such as alternative healthcare, healing or therapeutic communities or alternative self-help groups. In this article we are not pushing for another single issue campaign, or for the exploration of alternatives to mainstream psychology (although we recognise the importance of these). What we are asking is why isn't health, and especially mental health an issue that we more regularly see as part of our anti-capitalist politics?

Here we want to talk about our own experiences and why we think mental health, when looked at with the same level of analysis as many of the other issues we engage in, should be an ongoing point of conversation for anti-capitalists. We hope to feed into a conversation that we rarely hear in our networks and to find those people who are already talking about these issues politically.

Our experience

The 'anti-capitalist movement' we have been a part of in the UK (we offer this definition very broadly and with caution!) constantly strives to create its own infrastructure, whether this is motivated by apocalyptic visions of the future or autonomy from capitalist social relations (or both) everyone's at it. Squats, housing co-ops and social centres. We build our networks to consist of people who can do accounting, plumbing, squat defending and cooking. We like doing things together and creating our own spaces, and we know how to do it. But for the past too many years we've arrived in fields around the UK and Europe, put up some tents, made the running water happen, fought the cops and then… invited a group of 'action medics' to set up a tent where we'll later go to them with our splinters. On the one hand we strive for autonomy and on the other we treat some of our individual and social needs as services to be provided by others. The effect of this is not only that we hand over responsibility and control of our physical and mental health to others, but that we fail to engage with health as a political issue.

For example, in another time and place, some people are starting a transition town group in their local area. In transition town collectives working groups for all the vital aspects of life are set up. This time we remember that health needs addressing. At our first transition town meeting, we attended the health brainstorm. We listened to people discuss the morally deplorable manner with which the NHS disposes of its waste, and casually (probably under-) estimate the amount of plastic that the NHS uses so irresponsibly, "How can we go about persuading them to return to sterilising metal equipment?" Beside provid-



ing another example of our obsession with carbon emissions at the expense of social issues, we again failed to identify health as political.

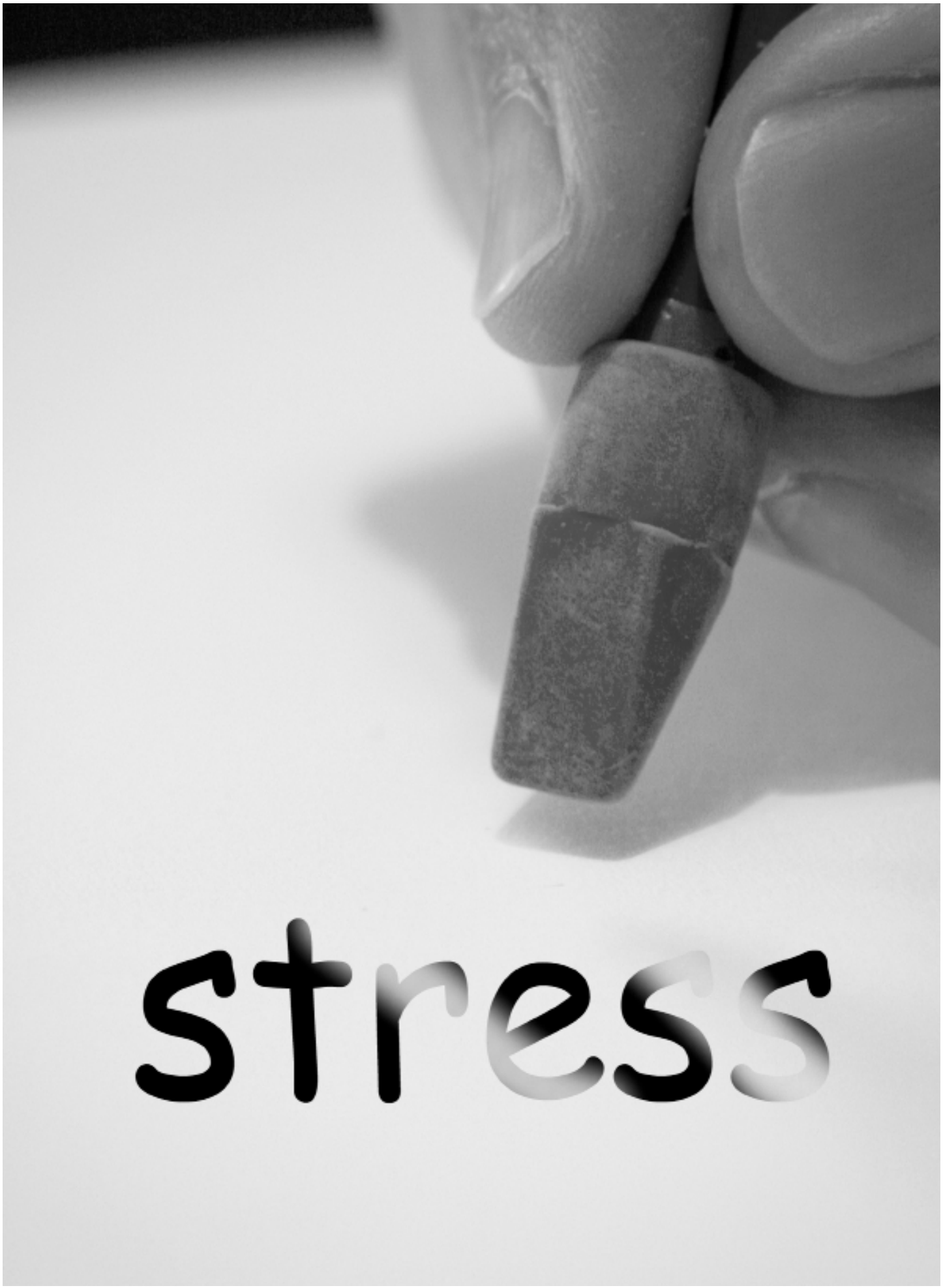
We always seem to forget about health. We talk about authoritarian immigration laws, ID cards infringing on our civil liberties, incarceration of political prisoners (etc. etc.) but a quick look at the health section of Indymedia shows a fine example of the lack of debate there is in our movements around healthcare. There are hardly any posts under the health section of the web page and the ones that are there are mostly concerned with animal rights and incinerators. Why don't we talk about how capitalism creates mental and physical health problems on both a global and individual level? Or health inequality? Or arbitrary diagnostic criteria that attempt to pathologise the personal burdens we carry from living in such a demanding society?

Mental health and anti-capitalism

When attempts are made to tackle issues surrounding mental health we seem more than happy to tolerate a conspiratorial understanding of society and power that we deplore elsewhere (psychiatrists controlling the masses etc. etc.). The authors believe it makes more sense to understand mental health discourses and practices as largely economically contingent, rather than as the result of some reactionary ideology peddled by a brain washing elite. Mental health practitioners are bound by the same economic limitations and requirements as everyone else, drugs are always the first port of call because they're cheap, and, as we all know, medical science and research is dominated by pharmaceutical companies because the research just couldn't happen without their money (significantly the majority of randomised clinical trials undertaken to evaluate the efficacy of drugs versus other forms of therapy are sponsored by the very same companies who manufacture the drugs). But the problem runs deeper than this, historically the industrial revolution facilitated new attitude to 'madness' and health, the transformation of nature through manufacture opened the way for ideas about the transformation of people, through transformative therapies and rehabilitation. We saw a move away from the view that madness was an incurable affliction and a move toward therapies intended to 'cure' what were now understood as mental illnesses with the view of rehabilitating people back into cooperative and productive members of society. Capitalism requires us to be productive and thus mental health practices and discourses are oriented towards this necessity.

Attempts at reforming mental health services without addressing capitalism inevitably fail. Moves to community care were seen as a great success for the democratic mental health movement in Italy where psychiatric institutions were abolished and all psychiatric and mental health services were outsourced into the community. The eighties and nineties saw a similar move in the UK. Victorian asylums were closed and psychiatric and psychological services were moved into the community. Whereas there is no doubt that psychiatric services are now 'better' than they were in the sixties, the failure to challenge the entirety of the system within which mental health services are situated led to what has been described as the mere outsourcing of psychiatric services into peoples homes. The asylums may have gone but the institution hadn't and couldn't change.

On a more grass roots level we also limit


stress

our potential for change when we revert to DIY life-stylism rather than radically critiquing the health service and the economic system and social processes that produce it. Anarcha-feminists are generally better at politicising health, it was feminists who focused the idea of autonomous health by starting to check their own breasts for lumps. But they also fall into a trap of lifestylism often talking about how to deal with 'so called' PMT or how to make your own sanitary towels (we hope never to sit through one of these again) rather than how political and economic forces negatively affect people's everyday experience of healthcare. Why do we never have a radical position on why most health resources are used treating the results of excessive food, alcohol and drug consumption? It's not enough to encourage healthy, green, organic and active lifestyles or tell people to stop watching telly and get an allotment. In practice this is what doctors try to do everyday in order to lower peoples' cholesterol and blood pressure, but after years of experience, they know they will always revert to drugs. Similarly it's one thing to tell someone with high blood pressure to do a bit more exercise and quite another to tell someone suicidal who probably has inadequate housing and may be unemployed to radically change their lifestyle. That just doesn't cut it for the majority of people. Instead let's talk about society and what makes it that way.

Consumer and individual choices alone do not carry the antagonistic element that would have the potential to realise change in our society. Whilst this reduction of social problems to the individual diverts attention it also places undue pressure on people who already live in a highly pressurised and externally managed environment. Many attempts at linking Marxist theory and mental health have identified alienation as having psychological or individual origins, but alienation originates from social organisation. Capitalism and the State require us to be active and productive citizens, to embrace our 'rights' and responsibilities and to participate equally in liberal democracy. We are dispossessed by society and labelled mad or unfit not then, because we are seen as being 'possessed' (as was once the case), but because we are no longer useful. Our focus therefore has to be on this form of social organisation that requires us to participate in limited and pre-determined ways.

"rather than shouting down antidepressants we should talk about why capitalist economics make antidepressants the best and most 'effective' treatment for every person experiencing depression"

This leads us to one other concern, and that is the anti-medical, anti-corporate or anti-progressive streak that dominates some areas of mental health activism. A progressive socially critical position recognises that capitalism manifests in the ways we relate to each other in our everyday activities and not just in the big corporate monster or your local super-market. Rather than throwing the baby out with the bath water we feel that certain technological and social advances, whether that's drug treatments, medical science or professionalised health services, should be embraced as the product of human creativity and innovation with a valuable and necessary role in society rather than purely as the product of an exploitative capitalist economy. For example rather than shouting down anti-depressants, we should talk about why capitalist economics make antidepressants the best and most 'effective' treatment for every person experiencing depression? Instead of criticising health and social care workers, we should recognise the time pressures on their work, the necessary corporate funding that keeps training courses, institutions and research centres afloat and the knock on effect this has on how health services are delivered.

Finally, we feel it's worth saying here that we are not denying the truly debilitating impact of some emotional and psychological experiences on people's lives. By saying that mental health has a social and economic dimension we do not intend to belittle the experience of the individual, rather we are asking that our understanding of and activism on health issues has an antagonistic element and a social orientation.

Continuing the conversation

Like we said earlier we're not pushing for another single issue campaign, rather we're asking that when we are confronted with issues regarding mental and physical health we see them as political and as part of our struggle as anti-capitalists. Alternative approaches to a range of psychological 'illnesses' and experiences exist all over the country, the Hearing Voices Network works with people on an individual and collective level toward finding new ways of understanding and living with experiences of voice hearing. Mad pride and 'bed pushes' through city centres are examples of attempts to highlight the injustices experienced in the mental health system and to offer a voice for the 'dispossessed' to shout back. But rather than focusing too much on solutions and protest we want to continue exploring how 'madness' and health are embedded in social and political processes. We believe that the movement towards a truly democratic 'mental health' must be an anti-capitalist movement.

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Ex-Wombles

remember, remember... the wombles and the european social forum

The relationship between the WOMBLES and the ESF process has been complex. Our involvement in the social forum discourse started when we were invited to participate in the first London Social Forum (LSF) in October 2003. The LSF had taken a critical position towards the various leftist parties (like the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and their front group (Globalise Resistance), who had sought to dominate the ESF mobilising process while actively opposing local social forums. It was clear to us that there were progressive attempts to go beyond the hierarchical characteristics of traditional left politics and engage with the rise of anti-capitalism and its subsequent radicalisation on a grassroots level.

Despite our continued scepticism over the origins of the WSF and ESF leadership dynamic, we saw it as a positive step forward, it at least meant that we were engaging with other parts of the political spectrum we had previously been wary of. During this initiative we came into contact with many people who had a passion to organise using consensus and collective decision-making, something in the past that had only existed as a reality within anarchist/anti-authoritarian direct action movements. Though their methodology was different, the experience educated both sides.

Initially enthused by the political openness and direction of the LSF we [as individuals from the WOMBLES] fought hard within the London ESF organising assembly for an inclusive, accountable & transparent process. We had argued in Paris (ESF 2003) that the UK had no grassroots support for a European social forum in 2004 and would be dominated by the retarded political agenda and reactionary forces of the UK Left. This turned out to be prophetic & ultimately true.

We officially left the London organising process when the position of compulsory affiliation fees was imposed from above by the ESF leadership. We have never sought the approval or recognition of the ESF as a body and we make no apologies for our continued critical assessment of the role and function of the ESF as a whole.

The WSF/ESF did not advocate anti-systemic change. It merely asked for "capitalism with a human face", "a new social contract for global justice". So, we can see the WSF, and also the ESF, as a new "reformist International", as "extra-institutional social democracy" which has adjusted itself to the new internationalised politics of capital (and the simultaneous decline of parliamentary politics at the level of the nation state).

Practically, the ESF, as an extra-governmental agent which tries to influence EU policies, must present itself as "a legitimate negotiator". Therefore, it acts within the limits of present institutions without challenging them at all. Its co-operation with institutions of the status quo, such as national governments and parties, and its condemnation of any anti-systemic movement that radically breaks the imposed limits of social control are manifestations of its compliance.

The synthesis of the ESF is quite problematic. Its main characteristic is "plurality/diversity", as it results from a drive for inclusivity. This plurality/diversity helps the circulation of different experiences, ideas, struggles. Moreover, it manages to attract people who are starting out in their political activity. So, it seems to have positive aspects. Yet, it unavoidably displays a lack of a comprehensive, common social analysis and common action of participating

ESF groups, which in turn drives the ESF, as a body of power, towards minimalist objectives.

Let's take this point further, differences in analysis suggest different goals in the social struggle. Very briefly, as anarchists/anti-authoritarians, we conceptualise capitalism as a system which develops through two dynamic streams - the first one has to do with "capitalists' competition"; the competition between capitalist institutions (such as companies), which is grounded on the market economy and leads to "economic development", to the commodification of every aspect of our lives (vertical expansion) and to the marketisation of every part of the planet (horizontal expansion). The second trend, and more important for us, is "social competition", the competition between capital and society, related to the historical development of the state (i.e. from the liberal state and its crises to the welfare state/social-democracy and now to the "security networks"/neo-liberal state; from the society of discipline to the society of control etc.).

The lack of such analysis by the WSF-ESF as a whole leads it to the inclusion of organisations i.e. non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which are a-critical and indirectly facilitate capital's expansion, both in terms of commodification and marketisation (NGOs speak about "underdevelopment" in North Korea and then Nike comes in) and social control (Amnesty International throws the "bombs of ethics" in Yugoslavia and then NATO intervenes). In other words, it leads it to the inclusion of groups and organisations whose actions are not against capitalism at all.

This is to me what we are faced with, an ideological perspective that goes beyond theory, that reaches right within the mindset of the mainstream majority and holds it therefore fearful for change - this is the issue, that change, the idea of change may give us reason to exist, to feel like we are going places, but reconciled with the fear that the security we have and the process of change will ultimately change the familiarity of the power structures we profess to despise. This is the Left, this is our involvement and connection with institutions - from horizontalism to diagonalism, the academic terminology machine launching a thousand PhDs, arguing that power is too complex to solely be classed a binary relationship, them and us- at this point we can only look at our own experiences, we can only know what is right and wrong, not from an analysis that has more to do with who is presenting it rather than what

recent discussions on diagonalism represent nothing more than what the WSF/ESF were attempting to initialise from 2002, and therefore what the Leftist apologists of the state try to justify as progressive

is presented, its neither Callinicos or Negri. When we reach the final hurdle, and are in the last straight, the superficiality of our movement, the subcultures, the terminology, the representation of who are allies and who are our enemies, the movement of movement slowly unravels. Through the facade of solidarity and 'unity through diversity' emerge the core deciding factor which dictates and enforces all others - the division between those who deem it necessary to use state and capitalist constituted power and those that seek to destroy it.

The energy and anger and momentum of this 'movement' came from the streets of Genoa, Prague, Nice, Evian, Gothenburg, where state forces were happy to teargas us, happy to break our bones as we slept in school buildings, happy to shoot us in the back as we ran away, happy to murder us in cold blood, the very same forces we now go to for funding to hold these Forums, the same forces that "welcome the anti-capitalists" (Jacques Chirac, Paris ESF). The same forces we allow to arrest and beat fellow ESF participants before our very eyes as we make political speeches from the stage under the watchful eye of government employees. The 'movement of movements' unravels itself and reveals an empty space.

If government leaders failed to stem the tide of mass anti-globalisation protest on the streets of Europe on a practical level, then it had to be contained by other means. The ESF can be seen as one of those means. In these terms it retains no political legitimacy. Indeed the 'English exception' becomes the blueprint.

We took a critical stance against the ESF/WSF not because of the way it was developing but because its central premise was flawed at its inception, incapable, or unwilling, of generating outwards beyond the contradictions that hold it together. When the façade slipped, like it did during those days of the ESF in London, it clumsily revealed the true nature and intentions of the ESF - a party political conference in a safe, controlled environment from which the ESF (through its leadership) could declare itself a credible negotiating partner, not the enemy, of both capital and governments.

The recent discussions on diagonalism represent nothing more than what the WSF/ESF were attempting to initialise from 2002, and therefore what the Leftist apologists of the state try to justify as progressive. Post-modern capitalism has existed due to these discussions of radicality being incorporated into an extensive network of reformist and assimilatory processes, as a mechanism which absorbs discontent rather than radiates it. Diagonalism continues this "proud" history of oppositional recuperation, when pushed hard enough the mask slips and we realise that instead of being a new transcendental force, its interests lie in the maintenance of hierarchically constituted power and the maintenance of the capitalist value system. Our struggle is difficult and risky, it's best that if we are to risk everything then we should at least do so for everything rather than for nothing.

We leave you with a quotation from another black ski-mask wearing renegade: "I shit on all the revolutionary vanguards of this planet"

The WOMBLES group was started in the autumn of 2000 by a group of anarchists who were inspired and radicalised by a series of serious mass direct action demonstrations in London and around the world at that time. The WOMBLES promoted anarchist ideas, libertarian solidarity, autonomous self-organisation and humour. In 2004 the Wombles were involved with critiquing and organising against the European Social Forum conference held in London. Members were involved with organising an alternative space and occupying the main stage before Mayor of London Ken Livingstone could give a keynote speech. Whilst the Wombles are no longer active, a website is still regularly updated, http://www.wombles.org.uk.

what next?

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Do you want to write for Shift? If you have ideas for an article, or want to reply to one, get in touch.

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Thank you,

Shift Editors.

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