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...for revolutionary anarchism



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89

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ORGANISE!

Organise! - Issue 89 Autumn/Winter 2017

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

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

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

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

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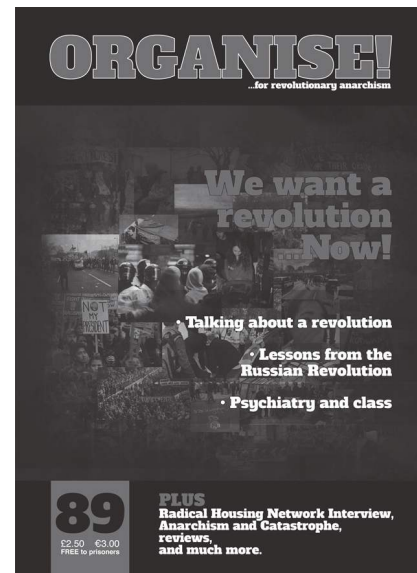
...for revolutionary communism

ORGANISE!

Contents

Editorial: We want a revolution ... Now!	3
Talking about a Revolution	5
Anarchism and History	11
The Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Role of the Anarchists	12
The May Days in Spain 1937 and the Friends of Durruti	16
Free Women against Libertarian Machismo	19
The Working Class Response to Catastrophes: Mutual Aid, Self-organisation and Solidarity	21
Radical Housing Network: Putting the Housing Crisis on the Public Agenda	23
Psychiatry and Social Class	27
Loneliness: (Much More) than a Drag	31
Venezuela: Know your enemies	33
Extract from: Anarchists of the Caribbean and Central America	36
International Anarchist Meeting in Brazil 2017	37
Book Review – Rebellion in Patagonia	39
Book Review – The Dossier of Subject No.1218: a Bulgarian anarchist's story	41
AF publications	42

**ISSUE
89**



Anarchist Federation - Organise! back issues:

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Editorial:

We want a revolution ... Now!

The current society is clearly a mess. Many people do not have the basic necessities, let alone a good quality of life. Throughout the world, there are wars and conflicts that cause immense suffering. We are exploited at work and oppressed by patriarchy, racism, homophobia and transphobia. Both work and leisure time are alienating and unsatisfying. Apart from those with wealth and power, it would be hard to find anyone who didn't think it would be better if things were different. Some of us would call this a revolution.

We talk of revolution as a key moment – one where masses of people are taking to the streets and taking control of workplaces and communities, leading to the overthrow of capitalism and the State. By focusing on the big moments, we downplay all the activity and work that has gone before – as if the insurrection came from nowhere. And, unfortunately, that big moment usually leads to another state/authority replacing the one that was overthrown, often one that is worse than the previous one. So when talking about revolution, we need to consider two things: what needs to be done to get to the point where we can get rid of the current system; and how we can ensure that we actually create a new society.

This issue of *Organise!* will look at the question of revolution. It includes articles on what we mean by revolution and what we need to do, as well as on revolutions of the past and lessons to be learned. We include an interview from members of the Radical Housing Network, an example of what people are doing now to fight for a better world. We consider the international dimension with an article on events in Venezuela and a report from the international conference in Brazil last summer. We cannot ignore the reasons for wanting a revolution. Two articles discuss the misery of living under capitalism: one on psychiatry and class, and the other on loneliness.

We hope this issue will get you thinking about revolution and, most importantly, start doing things to make it happen!



WE ARE
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Talking about a Revolution



What is a revolution?

- Social revolution is nothing short of the expropriation of the ruling class by an organised and revolutionary working class, the seizing of the means of production and the creation and development of new social and economic forms: free communism.
- Overthrowing the status quo by the majority, but the point where we see the overthrow of the system is not the end point.
- A complete change in the way we relate to each other.
- Revolution is what happens before you get to the point of uprising and overthrowing.
- The revolution is a change in the mind of the masses over a period of time; the revolution is in your mind.

Say the word 'revolution' and we all get a picture in our heads. We see an uprising or insurrection with masses of people in the street, clashes with the police and military, barricades, statues toppled, government buildings occupied and in the end the current rulers resigning or fleeing. A recent example could be the Arab Spring. There are other revolutions that are important moments in anarchist history: the Spanish and Russian revolutions. We have also seen rebellions that are also significant moments, with an outpouring of anger that can lead to some changes. The reaction to Grenfell was in some ways a localised rebellion, with angry people taking to the streets, occupying the town hall and in the end forcing the resignation of council leaders.

However, these very visible moments are only the tip of the iceberg. Such a significant event cannot have happened without a number of causes, stretching back decades, many of which seem insignificant or are unseen. And, the end result of these revolutions and rebellions has always been a new order that is not what the people actually hoped for, and often worse than what they had before. The Grenfell fire has spurred many to demand not only justice for the survivors but housing justice for all and an end to Tory rule. But many could be sorely disappointed if they think a Labour government under Corbyn will be much different. The Arab Spring was short-lived and ended with the ascendancy of Islamists in many places. The Spanish and Russian revolutions ended in dictatorship.

If we are going to overthrow the system then we need to understand the processes that lead to a revolution and the role of individual and group actions in those processes. And, most importantly, what do we need to do to ensure as part of our struggles that we create the conditions for the kind of society that does meet our dreams and aspirations. In order to investigate these questions, I talked to many AF members as well as other anarchists. I asked three questions: What is a revolution, why do you want one, and what do we need to do to in order to make it happen?

The above quotes give an idea of how the anarchists I spoke to see a revolution. Despite recognising that the revolution will involve the overthrow of capitalism and the State, many see the revolution as much more than the 'big moment'. For example:

"I believe that though the dramatic revolutionary events are the key, they are the symptoms and not the cause. If we place too much emphasis on 'the revolution' it leaves the masses drawing a deep breath and waiting for the vanguard to kick off the show off".

Instead, the stress is on both what comes before and what comes after- a process rather than an event.

In terms of what comes before, the revolutionary process is about a changing consciousness. However, this is not just a minor change but involves a fundamental shift in how people view themselves and society. This could take years of struggle and organising. One person recalled a conversation with a Spanish anarchist in the CNT.

"It was something along the lines of the revolution didn't happen just one day in 1936. There were years and years of organising: giving out leaflets, defending the streets, building networks, organising workers, factories and farms, speaking and organising a load of comrades. People always see pictures of comrades with guns on the streets of Barcelona and think that's all the revolution was. They never see all the hard work beforehand that has to happen before we can get to that point."

And, speaking about the events in Egypt: *"There was a lot of pre-organisation amongst neighbourhoods and in workplaces. Many people were arrested and tortured (and some disappeared) months and years before the first person stepped into the square"*.



Why do we want a revolution?

- Economic: provide the basics to everyone- clean air and water, food and housing.
- Social: no hierarchy and authority stopping people from being who they want to be.
- Freedom from centralised control, religion and mass media influence on how you think.
- Get rid of the constraints of wage slavery, more time to do what you want such as travel.
- Save the planet- without the overthrow of capitalism it will be impossible to deal with climate change.
- Better quality of human relations.
- Getting rid of gender binary ways of placing ourselves in society and in relations with others.

Others stressed what comes afterwards: *“There is no end point in a truly revolutionary society- there will be a constant struggle to deal with issues of the environment, racism and patriarchy.”* However, the revolution should overthrow the existing power structures that stop people from creating their own society. But aspects of hierarchical thinking and behaviours will still exist that will require constant vigilance.

“It needs to be a complete break with the power structures- a social revolution, not just a change in government. It is a change in how we do everything, personal relations, work, community.”

One person summarised what many said about what they would hope the revolution would lead to:

“For me, the revolution we talk of is a complete change in the way in which we relate to one another. Currently we live in a society based on our alienation from the land and from our labour. One in which we principally relate to one another as buyers and sellers of commodities. This leaves us primarily thinking of ourselves and our needs in individual or possibly familial terms. A revolution must seek to change this fundamental. It must seek to create a society in which the way we produce all that we need is done collectively and consciously and in full knowledge that the individual can only realise themselves and their needs collectively, and that everyone’s freedom and happiness is contingent on that of humanity as a whole.

The working class struggle against capital provides the possibility for a revolutionary movement, aiming at such a change, to develop and grow. If the working class becomes more aware of its own power, and more conscious of its own needs, we could reach a point of open insurrection against capitalism and the state. Such insurrections have happened in various places across the globe and throughout the late 19th and 20th centuries. These are often called revolutions, but for me a revolution is more than that insurrectionary moment or moments. Before that moment and long after, a revolution must be the continual expansion of libertarian and communist ideals and relations, and the continual subversion of capitalist and authoritarian ones. It may take many generations following any far-reaching insurrection (and the revolution must ultimately be global to succeed) to finally achieve the society we want and eradicate the remnants and scars of capitalism.”

Human beings have always imagined a better world. Those who commit themselves to the long struggle for the creation of a better world do so because they can imagine that things can be better. People may stress different aspects of what they want for an anarchist communist society but everyone hopes that it will be one in which people are free from coercion- both physical and mental, and in which the quality of social and personal relations is based on mutual respect and solidarity. One person’s vision summarises some of the key points:

“Look around us. The reasons are everywhere, both large and small, personal and geo-political. “Concentration camps are the hell of a world where heaven is a supermarket.” War, famine, genocide, and environmental destruction are not mere mishaps or the result of ‘evil’. They exist as a necessary consequence of capitalism. Humanity is sick, and the socio-economic system we have created is the cancer. The alienation at the heart of it all breeds our disregard for each other and our environment. The profit motive and its competition drives us into a war of all against all, requiring the repressive and oppressive means of the state, nationalism, family, and religion to stop society tearing itself apart. It’s unsustainable, it’s miserable, and it’s completely unnecessary. Because even as capitalism tears us apart, it pushes us together; as it destroys us, it provides opportunity. We can see glimpses in the many examples, both contemporary and historical, of what the working class is capable of when it acts in its collective self-interest. We see in countless everyday acts of solidarity and mutual aid the kind of humanity we could be. We believe we understand why things are the way they are and how they might be better. And if a better world is possible, why would we not want it? If we can see how it might be made, why would we not try to make it?”

What we need to do to make a revolution happen?

- Create alternative ways of doing things so that we can support ourselves outside the power structures, ie the State and capitalist economy.
- Use strategies that can win, eg direct action.
- The forces against us are huge. It is not just the power of the bosses, the military etc but the fact that so many people have bought into the system, eg consumerism.
- One way not to do it is through government or leaders. You end up recreating the same power structures.
- We need to increase confidence of working class people, encourage and facilitate self-organisation.
- People need to think for themselves.
- Years of working will be necessary before we get to the 'big moment'.
- A lot of what needs to be done is unglamorous, eg standing on street corners, going to meetings, typing up minutes.
- Learn from revolutions that have gone before, keep working class memory.
- Revolution needs to be international.

Getting out there

All the people I talked to are well-aware of the obstacles to a revolution, especially to a revolution which leads to the kind of society we want to live in. All agree that it is important to resist what is happening to us now and to win victories within the current system. This is important not just to make our lives better now but to create the confidence and raise expectations of the working class for new struggles. This means involving ourselves in actual struggles and campaigns, not as political activists parachuting in to take over the leadership but as people who have a genuine interest in making those struggles successful. We use the term 'leadership of ideas' to indicate that we will argue for anarchist ideas and practices but never take over. As we want a revolution that not only overthrows capitalism but also all hierarchies and oppressions and saves the planet as well, it is important to be involved in a wide range of struggles, seeking to link them up as much as possible.

In addition, we need to get our ideas, about the kind of society we would like, why the current one is so crap and what we need to do, out to a wider audience. A revolution is made by the masses, the vast majority who we call the working class

(all those who have to sell their labour to live). Therefore, we have to convince people that they want to join us, both to assist the revolutionary process and to develop a vision of what kind of society we want. Social media is of course important but often people forget that the majority of people are not following our social media and that the mainstream press is a key source of ideas for many. Therefore we need to make sure that we produce and widely distribute our own hard copy media: newspapers, magazines, pamphlets as well as stickers and posters. However, we have to be imaginative and consider other methods such as videos, zines etc.

Direct Action

Direct action is a term used to describe the kind of strategies and tactics we advocate- ones we think will win. So what is it? One person's definition: direct effect on target, for ourselves, by ourselves, disruptive, not lobbying or asking others to do it for us. Direct action includes wildcat strikes, occupations, rent strikes, solidarity networks and direct action casework, and militant protests. However, it could be argued that doing stalls and getting out on the streets and talking to people is a form of direct action.

Some examples of effective direct action have been organised by environmental campaigners. The environmental movement began to use direct action when it became apparent that the traditional methods were not enough. Thatcher's 'biggest road building programme since the Romans' was contested at Twyford Down with the campaign to stop the M3 extension which would destroy an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, two Sites of Scientific Interest and two Ancient Monuments. By 1992, the Twyford Down Association had spent years, with the help of Friends of the Earth, lobbying politicians and fighting court cases. But when the diggers began to move in, they realised that unless they did something drastic, they had lost their fight. Some of the residents, not your usual activists but often Conservative voters, decided to join forces with the Dongas, a group of young people living an alternative lifestyle near the site of the motorway development, and with Earth First! activists. It was not a question of people 'parachuting in' from outside but instead was an alliance of all who cared about the environment. They lost this fight but the result was that Thatcher's massive road building programme that she had launched in 1989 was in shreds. According to Earth First! this huge road building programme, was slashed three times by a third and countless places were saved from the onward march of car culture.

We could equally give examples from other areas of struggle, eg housing or workplace (see article on the Radical Housing Network in this issue). However, direct action and focus on resisting current attacks is only part of the revolutionary process. It can be summarised by the phrase: 'building the new world in the shell of the old'. I quote at length an extract from an article published in *Whirlwind* (Winter 2016- 2017) produced by Earth First!



“Whether it’s Earth First! or Occupy or an anarchist bookfair, the truth that our culture is woefully uninspiring and under-active when it comes to the building of a new world, and conversely, consistently portrays direct action in terms of acts of resistance. Is this is problem? I think it is very much a problem. To start with, let’s ask ourselves this: if we’re not building alternatives, how do we hope to change the world? If we manage to stop the odd road being built here, the odd drilling platform there....we know all too well they’ll be somewhere else eventually and the trend towards ever increasing expansion and destruction will continue. The only way to stop all this, using current tactics of resistance, would be to mobilise a movement of truly epic scale, such as the power of the state and its corporate allies were unable to stop us. But if we got to that stage- and it’s a very big if-then what? We may not want to develop a point-by-point, five year plan, but surely we need some sense of how we expect to eventually change the world? And it’s surely obvious that without an adequate infrastructural and cultural shift having at least begun, we’ll either find it impossible to convince people to close down power stations etc or find ourselves utterly fucked if we did manage to do that.”

So what kinds of things do we need to do in order to begin this process of building the new world in the shell of the old? It is difficult to answer this as people are wary of the possibilities of creating something new within the current system. For example, setting up a workplace co-operative is difficult because you are in a way exploiting yourself. Nevertheless there are many steps that can be taken. Here are some ideas taken from the interviews.

Creating ‘autonomous communities’ and self-organisation

This is defined as alternatives to the state-approved communities. These could be housing co-operatives, social centres, healthcare collectives or free schools. Other examples would be community gardens and even hairdressers (<http://openbarbers.co.uk/>). If we begin to develop these alternatives based on the anarchist principles of mutual aid, self-organisation and sharing, then we will be in a better position to create the kind of society we want. This is because people will have gained confidence and experience in doing things for themselves and will therefore start thinking

that we could actually do things differently, in other words, have a revolution. These things may appear small but as more and more initiatives are taken, more links are made, things begin to snowball. It is like one cog turning begins to turn other cogs which then turns more cogs until you have a hell of a lot happening!

Cultures of Resistance and the Commune

Due to the difficulty of establishing truly autonomous communities within capitalism, we may find that the structures we create are primarily about resistance. These could include workers organising in alternative unions such as the Industrial Workers of the World, campaigning groups such as the Radical Housing Network, renters unions, land occupations, solidarity networks (taking direct action against landlords who refuse to give back a deposit or against bosses who withhold wages) or residents associations. These assist the revolutionary process in the same way as other initiatives: gain confidence in doing things for ourselves and showing that we can effectively challenge the current system. However, bringing the various structures together in some way, rather than remaining as single campaigns or struggles, would greatly strengthen our movement.

“It is difficult to find ways of bringing people together. People are so busy with their own campaigns and struggles that it is hard to find time to join with others. One idea for doing this is to come together as part of a Commune- a collective space in which we share information, find common ground for actions and begin to create alternative decision-making structures in a locality. The advantage of this is that people would begin to get a feel for our collective strength as well as create opportunities to challenge much more fundamental aspects of capitalism”.

Alternative Decision-making structures and safer spaces

One of the biggest questions about an anarchist communist society concerns how we will make decisions and ensure that hierarchies don’t develop. We know that representative democracy is not the answer even if it was carried out in a non-capitalist context. This is because it involves other people making decisions on your behalf with a pyramid hierarchy of information and power at the top and rare opportunities for engagement. Instead, anarchists have sometimes used the term ‘direct democracy’ though some are not sure about whether the concept is not too contaminated by current meanings. But whatever you call it, we need to start exploring alternative ways of making decisions now in our organisations. These would include: aiming for consensus so there is no tyranny of the majority, federalism and autonomy, recallable and rotation of delegates and tasks, direct engagement of

people in decision-making in a community/workplace. In order to make this work, it is important that everyone feels confident and is able to contribute. Often there is a 'tyranny of structurelessness' when in theory there are no official leaders but instead there are informal hierarchies, often formed by people with more experience or more confidence. Often those organisations and campaigns which appear to be the least hierarchical because they have no clear principles and allow anyone who comes along can make decisions are the most hierarchical because the real decisions, the preparations for the meetings etc are made behind the scenes.

Another key part of creating a revolutionary environment is to make sure that everyone feels safe, valued and able to contribute. This often comes under the term 'safer spaces'. This does not mean that there will not be arguments and debates but that everyone feels that they can express their views and that conflicts are resolved with respect. We need to ensure that no one will be oppressed as a result of patriarchy, homophobia or racism, not easy to achieve in the current society but something to continual strive for.

The revolution is 60% admin

One thing that is often forgot about as we are busy with our direct actions, protests, demonstrations and meetings is that there is a lot that has to go on behind the scenes. One comment about the events in Egypt during the Arab Spring: *"Loads of people were in the square and that was really important but there was at least as many people, if not more, doing things like logistics, security, food distribution, medics etc."*

People who just come to a meeting or go on an action often have no idea of what goes on in order to get to that point. Let us just take organising a conference or meeting. First of all there has to be a person or persons to call the event. They have to decide what the topic is, how it is going to be organised, whether to invite speakers etc. They will have to decide a date and time, find a venue, maybe raise money for the venue and for publicity. Then it has to be advertised so there are e-mail lists to deal with, responding for requests for information, putting things on social media and maybe produce a leaflet or poster. If it is a big meeting that goes on all day there may be food to organise and accommodation to organise if people are coming from outside. Once the event happens then there are minutes to type up and send out and action points that will need chasing. I could go on and on! And this is only for organising a one-off event! Imagine the work needed to maintain a campaign or network or political organisation! (see article on Radical Housing Network)

Conclusion?

This article is not the definitive answer to what a revolution is or how we get there. However, it does show that we need to think about these issues together. There will be no easy answer or even one answer. Some put forward one idea as the key to a strategy. But creating a revolutionary process and establishing the conditions for a true anarchist communist society will entail a combination of different tactics, strategies and actions. The main thing to keep in mind as that we need to do this as part of the working class, fully embedded in struggles and campaigns. And, don't forget the admin!



ANARCHISM AND HISTORY

We cannot think about making a revolution without learning from what has gone before. However, 'official history' would only have us think that revolutions are an impossible dream. We need to reclaim our history. Below is a series of views on the importance of working class history.

ALBERT MELTZER

The histories of whole peoples were wiped out for precisely the same reason that the history of the working class movement in recent times is wiped out: it does not suit the conquerors for it to be known, because traditions keep alive the spirit of revolt.

THE FIGHT FOR HISTORY: A MANIFESTO

Historical memory is a theatre of the class struggle. The bourgeois institutions of the State's cultural apparatus will always attempt to control and exploit the historical record for their own benefit, covering up, ignoring or misrepresenting facts that place a question over or cast doubts upon the class rule which academics and professional historians, with but a few rare and honourable exceptions, accept with alacrity!... There is a blatant contradiction between the calling of recuperating historical memory and the profession of servants to Official History which needs to forget and block out the past existence and thus future potential for a frightening revolutionary mass workers' movement. This contradiction between trade and profession is resolved by ignoring that which they know or ought to know; and this makes them fools. For which very reason Official History is characterised by an absolute incapacity for rigour, objectivity and comprehensiveness. It is, of necessity, partisan and incapable of espousing any perspective but the bourgeoisie's class perspective. It is, of necessity, exclusive and excludes the working class from the past, future and present.

Official Sociology is hell bent upon persuading us that there is no working class and no class struggle anymore; it falls to Official History to persuade us that they never did. A perpetual, complacent, a-critical present renders the past banal and destroys historical awareness... Whoever controls the present, controls the past and whoever controls the past decides the future. Official History is the bourgeoisie's history and its mission today is to wreath nationalism, liberal democracy and the market economy in myth so as to have us believe that these are eternal, immutable and immovable.

FROM THE INTRODUCTION TO SHAY'S REBELLION. CHICAGO: SOLIDARITY, OCTOBER 1973

For an anarchist, the real history of any country is the history of those people who find themselves in conflict with the government, a conflict which is often unexpressed except in the acts of those who are fed up to the point of rebellion. There is no period in the history of any land when many of the people haven't found their interests different from those of the state. There is no period in the history of any country where some of the people are not in outright revolt for the right to control their own lives. It is true that sometimes it seems to be only a trickle, but at other times it reaches flood-tide proportions.

United States history, as presented in textbooks, is aimed at government-funded high schools and universities. In the history they present, full accounts of those who have opposed the government are generally repressed. Many incidents of real peoples' history are omitted. Others are treated briefly and summarily dismissed. Those involved in genuine protest or rebellion are often referred to as misled, misfits, or madmen.

In most history books, there is an elitist bias which romanticizes leaders, kings, generals, politicians, and dramatizes their role without mentioning the struggles of the common people for the necessities of life and control over their own existence. Most history books, whether of a liberal bourgeois or "Marxist" bent, ignore the real struggles of the people and instead glorify this or that government and its leaders.

There is a great need for good anti-establishment history, for the return of that which has been repressed. This is not to say we need to view history as spectacle for our entertainment, or as an escape from reality into the glories of the past.

If history has any use it is for the living, for examples and encouragement, to show us what is possible. In history can be found models of the way things might be done to change the future, and models of what has failed, and errors not to be repeated. The resurgence of the repressed in history can give strength to the anarchist, the radical and those who would struggle for control of their day to day lives. If we learn well from history, we know we are not alone, we have never been alone, and the future is ours if we make it so. It is for the living generation to fulfil the repressed and forgotten attempts at rebellion, at revolution, at taking possession of our own lives.

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION OF 1917



AND THE ROLE OF THE ANARCHISTS



The Russian Revolution of 1917 was the first successful revolution in which the working class and the peasantry overthrew an autocratic regime. At the same time it was a failed revolution because it brought about the rise of the Bolsheviks and a return to harsh rule over those who had brought about that revolution, the workers and peasants.

WHAT HAPPENED: EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE REVOLUTION

The disastrous war carried out by Tsar Alexander ended up with the collapse of the regime and widespread unrest among the armed forces. This resulted in the provisional government led by the moderate socialist Kerensky and what became known as the February Revolution. Kerensky wished to continue the war but met opposition within the armed forces, worn out by three years of carnage. The Kerensky government was supported by both modernising elements of the bourgeoisie and of progressive aristocrats. Meanwhile the socialist intelligentsia created the Petrograd Soviet of Soldiers and Workers Deputies, and called for support from the factories and barracks. The interests of the Provisional government and the Petrograd Soviet were not opposed, the intelligentsia merely wished to channel the energies of workers and soldiers. Both wanted to put an end to revolution. The Petrograd Soviet was controlled by the Mensheviks, moderate wing of the Social Democrats, and by the right wing of the Socialist Revolutionaries, a populist socialist group. They called for reconciliation and respect for the property of the landowners and factory owners.

Kerensky introduced some measures that were welcomed by the mass of the Russian people: an amnesty for all political prisoners, the ending of the death penalty, the establishment of the 8 hour day, freedom of press, speech and assembly, and recognition of the rights of the different nationalities within the Russian Empire, and the establishment of a republic.

At the same time a revolution took place at the grassroots. There was the emergence of the soviets, workers councils modelled on previous ones that had appeared during the Russian Revolution of 1905. The trade unions developed, and more importantly, factory committees looking to the

running of industry were set up in many workplaces. Some of these soviets were modelled on the Petrograd Soviet, whilst others had a far more radical nature, in particular the Kronstadt Soviet. The failure of the Kerensky government to negotiate an adequate peace treaty coupled with a collapse of the military fronts, and problems of supplying food and other basic materials, increased dissatisfaction among both the armed forces and the urban masses.

ANARCHIST INFLUENCE DESPITE SMALL NUMBERS

The anarchist movement had been influential during the 1905 Revolution but had been decimated in the revolutionary events and the subsequent mass executions, not to mention forced into exile or suffering long prison sentences. When the Revolution of 1917 came there were only about 3,000 anarchists throughout the Russian Empire. Nevertheless they had a certain influence in the factories and the countryside and within the Russian Fleet, above all at the naval base of Kronstadt.

The anarchists advanced radical slogans like 'Expropriate the Expropriators' in relation to the landlords and factory owners, 'The land to the peasants, the factories to the workers', 'Immediate peace', and 'All power to the Soviets'. These popular slogans were taken up by Lenin and his Bolshevik faction within the Russian Social Democratic Party. They enthused many young workers and soldiers who had recently joined the Bolsheviks. Thanks to the adoption of these slogans and the rapid growth of the Bolsheviks, Lenin was able to carry out a coup against the moderate Kerensky government, supported by the Kronstadt sailors, the garrison of Petrograd, not to mention the anarchists and a minority of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, who had been opposed to the war.

OCTOBER REVOLUTION

This became known as the October Revolution. The new Soviet government passed a series of decrees, in particular about the land in order to please the peasantry. The reactionary press was banned. Some Bolsheviks, including Zinoviev and Kamenev, declared that a new socialist government should be formed with the participation of all the revolutionary groups. However Lenin outmanoeuvred them, and despite their objections, reintegrated them into his government, along with the Left SRs. A 'worker and peasant' government was established, despite the working class being only two and a half million in a population of 160 million.

The Left SRS insisted on elections to the Constituent Assembly, the Parliament that had emerged with the February Revolution. These took place three months after the overthrow of the Kerensky government and resulted in a majority vote of 60% for the Right Socialist Revolutionaries and the more moderate faction of the Social Democratic Party, the Mensheviks, with the Bolsheviks only gaining 25%

of the vote. In response, Lenin closed down the Constituent Assembly.

The anarchists began to grow and have influence. Petrograd Anarchist Communist Federation was created and the mansion of Durnovo, which had been the property of a Tsarist minister, was occupied. The mansion was opened to the workers of the neighbourhood, proving a garden, a meeting place and library.

Outside of Petrograd, the anarchist movement began to develop. It was particularly powerful in Moscow where an Anarchist Communist Federation was set up. As at Petrograd, the anarchists occupied several large mansions. Anarchist activity also took place in Odessa, Tula, Ekaterinoslav and Kharkov. The anarchists derided the Constituent Assembly and called for a social revolution, and for immediate peace. The Petrograd Anarchist Communist Federation issued a leaflet saying:

"We must show the people the uselessness and the absurdity of the tactic 'push the bourgeoisie to the left'. Our historic task is to push the proletariat to the left so that it can push the bourgeoisie into the precipice... Despite its revolutionary appearance, the Soviet of Workers and Soldiers Deputies will not liberate the workers if, in deeds, it does not realise an effectively maximalist anti-capitalist programme. The liberation of the workers can only be accomplished by a social revolution, and its realisation constitutes the most urgent task for the Russian workers... All Russia must be constituted into a network of revolutionary sovereign communes, which, in occupying the land and the factories, will expropriate the bourgeoisie, and thus suppress private property".

The anarchists hoped to ally with the radical base of the Bolsheviks and involve them in insurrectionary action. But they were hindered by their relative numerical weakness and lack of effective organisational structures. They had attempted this during the July Days when they attempted with the help of Bolshevik rank and filers, to topple the Provisional Government. However, the authorities responded by attacking the Durnovo mansion and closing down both anarchist and Bolshevik offices. The anarchists had only been able to initiate but not complete these revolutionary attempts, and the Bolshevik leadership refused to move.

NEW LEASE OF LIFE

Now with the October Revolution, Bolsheviks, anarchists and the Left SRS overthrew Kerensky. This gave the anarchist a new lease of life. By 1918 there were anarchist groups active in 150 towns with 55 newspapers. The anarcho-syndicalist newspaper *Golos Truda* (The Voice of Labour) became a daily, with a print run of 25,000, whilst other anarchist papers also had large print runs. There were 15 publishing houses, as well as, just to cite Petrograd, 17 workers clubs run by anarchists. The number of anarchist militants rose to 40,000.

However this had to be compared to the 400,000 members of the Bolshevik Party. The anarchists began to warn about the increasingly dictatorial government of Lenin. They contrasted the federation of free soviets to the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) which was the Bolshevik government. They talked about a Third Revolution which would accomplish the complete overthrow of the ruling class.

A peace treaty was signed between Russia and Austria, Germany and Turkey on 15th December 1917. However, the Austrians and Germans continued their incursions on Russian territory. The anarchists, Left SRS and the Left Communist faction of the Bolsheviks rejected this peace treaty and talked about popular resistance to the Austro-German armies. They believed that revolutions in Austria and Germany would put a stop to the offensive. However this failed to happen and the Austro-German forces advanced to within 150 kilometres from Moscow. The Bolsheviks capitulated and signed the Brest-Litovsk treaty on 3rd March 1918 which surrendered Ukraine. The anarchists called for: "the immediate and active organisation of a resistance of partisan forces". In the Ukraine this materialised with many armed detachments, including those of the anarchist Nestor Makhno, fighting the forces of the Austrians and Germans.

In April 1918, the Bolsheviks moved against the forces of the anarchists and their armed detachments, the Black Guards, in Moscow, Petrograd and other towns and cities. They were aware of popular contempt for the Brest-Litovsk treaty, and similarly aware that the radical politics of the anarchists posed a threat at the base to their new regime. Anarchist militants were shot down or imprisoned, the Black Guards were disarmed, newspapers closed down.

DEATH OF THE REVOLUTION

In face of this, the anarchist movement split three different ways. Some accepted collaboration with the Bolshevik regime, others sought to carry on despite the repression with open propaganda and activity, whilst others began to organise an underground movement. The first option was supported by some anarcho-syndicalists, some anarchist communists and the Anarchist Universalists of the Gordin brothers. This group felt that the Bolsheviks had greater organisational clout



in defending the Revolution, whilst still wishing to criticise its Statism. In spite of this, they too were repressed in 1921. Those who followed the second option quickly collapsed with mass arrests, confiscation of propaganda, closing down of meetings. Those who followed the third option suffered a similar fate.

Only in the Ukraine was the anarchist movement able to operate effectively, allied as it was to the insurrectional movement around Makhno.

In March 1921, strikes against the regime broke out in Petrograd and the sailors and soldiers rose at Kronstadt against the repressive measures being introduced by the Bolsheviks against socialists and workers. The watchwords of the Kronstaders were for freely elected soviets, freedom of press and of the revolutionary groups and for a free socialism. This was crushed militarily but a regime that was already bureaucratic and corrupt. The crushing of Kronstadt signified the death of the Revolution.

WHY THE REVOLUTION FAILED

As the anarchist Arshinov noted in his History of The Makhnovist Movement:

“The vague political aspirations of the Russian intelligentsia in 1825 took shape during the course of half a century in a perfected socialistic Statist system, and this intelligentsia itself, in a well-defined social-economic group: the socialist democracy. The relations between this intelligentsia and the people were definitively established: the people moved toward civic and economic self-determination; the democrats aspired to power over them. The connection between them could be maintained only by means of cunning, trickery and violence, but in no way as the natural result of a community of interests. They are hostile toward each other.

The doctrine of the State itself, the idea of managing the masses by force, was always an attribute of individuals who lacked the sentiment of equality and in whom the instinct of egoism was dominant; individuals for whom the human masses are a raw material lacking will, initiative and intelligence, incapable of directing themselves.

This idea was always held by dominant privileged groups who stood outside the working population — the aristocracy, military castes, nobility, clergy, industrial and commercial bourgeoisie, etc.

It is not by chance that contemporary socialism shows itself to be the zealous servant of this idea: it is the ideology of the new ruling caste. If we attentively observe the carriers and apostles of state socialism, we will see that every one of them is full of centralist urges, that everyone sees himself, above all, as a directing and commanding centre around which the masses gravitate. This psychological trait of state socialism and its carriers is a direct outgrowth of the psychology of former groups of rulers which are extinct or in the process of dying.

The second fundamental fact of our revolution is that the workers and the peasant labourers remained within the earlier situation of ‘working classes’ — producers managed by authority from above.

All the present day so-called socialist construction carried out in Russia, the entire State apparatus and management of the country, the creation of new social-political relations — all this is largely nothing other than the construction of a new class domination over the producers, the establishment of a new socialist power over them. The plan for this construction and this domination was elaborated and prepared during several decades by the leaders of the socialist democracy and was known before the Russian revolution by the name of collectivism. Today it calls itself the soviet system.”

The failure of anarchism in Russia cannot be assigned just to the murderous Bolshevik repression. The anarchist movement was divided and organisationally weak. Its internal divisions stopped it creating an effective revolutionary organisation. If it had been capable of creating such a movement, the results of the Russian Revolution might well have been different.

According to Makhno in *Our Organisation*:

“Those of our comrades who played an active part in the Russian revolution and who have kept faith with their anarchist positions will be sensitive to the harmfulness that the absence of solid organization has brought to our anarchist movement. Those comrades are well-placed to play a particularly useful role in our current quest for union. It has not gone unnoticed by those comrades, I imagine, that anarchism was a factor for insurrection among the revolutionary working masses in Russia and Ukraine. It incited them to join in the struggle everywhere; but the absence of an organization, capable of marshalling its resources against the revolution's enemies, left it powerless to assume any organisational role.

The cause of anarchism in the Revolution suffered the dire consequences of that.

If they now realize this, the Russian and Ukrainian anarchists must not allow this to happen again in the future. The lesson of the past is too painful and, bearing that in mind, they must be the first to teach by example through the cohesiveness of their forces, by setting up an anarchist organization that can carry out anarchism's tasks, not just during the preparations for the Social Revolution, but also in its early days. Such an organization must unite all of anarchism's revolutionary forces and unhesitatingly set about preparing the masses for the social revolution and the struggle to achieve the anarchist society.”

THE MAY DAYS IN SPAIN 1937



AND THE FRIENDS OF DURRUTI



This year marks the 80th anniversary of the May Days in Spain. These were tragic events that marked the definitive crushing of the social revolution that had started in 1936. As we noted in the pamphlet *In The Tradition*: “The state of ‘dual power’ which existed following the early part of the Civil War between the revolutionary working class and peasantry and the Popular Front government in the Republic zone, inevitably gave way to the domination of the Republican-Stalinist-Social Democrat bourgeoisie. The opportunity to crush the republican and nationalist bourgeoisie was a real one for armed workers and peasants but the power of the State remained intact, the initiatives of the anarchists rapidly undermined. The last attempt to re-assert the interests of the working masses took place during the May Days of 1937. The CNT and the FAI, with its ‘anarchist’ ministers to the fore, called off the escalating class war and the Spanish revolution was dead. The dissident CNT-FAI militants, the Friends of Durruti, summed it up by saying: ‘democracy defeated the Spanish people, not fascism’.”

The following article *Don't Abandon the Streets* seeks to counter the many lies and misrepresentations about the Friends, and shows how they saw clearly that collectivisation on its own was not enough, the State itself had to be smashed.

‘DON’T ABANDON THE STREETS!’: THE FRIENDS OF DURRUTI AND THE EVENTS OF MAY 1937 IN BARCELONA

“Over the Telephone exchange the Anarchist Flag had been hauled down and only the Catalan flag was flying. That meant that the workers were definitely beaten.” George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*

The events of May 1937 in Barcelona during the Spanish revolution were sparked off by an attack on the central telephone exchange in the town, controlled by a joint committee of the CNT (the Anarcho-syndicalist union) and the UGT (the Socialist union). The attack was led by the Communist police commissioners at the head of the Assault Guards. The reason given for the attack was that the CNT listened in on conversations between the Catalan regional government, the Catalan Generalitat, and abroad. In response, barricades went up, and rank and file members of the POUM (the anti-Stalinist communists who had split with Trotsky in

1934) fought alongside anarchist workers against the forces of the PSUC (Catalan Communists) and the Generalitat. The CNT-FAI leadership, far from supporting resistance to what appeared to Catalan workers to be a provocation, called for a laying down of arms. The Friends of Durruti group called for resistance to the provocation, and for the setting up of revolutionary councils. Five hundred dead and a thousand wounded resulted from the five days of fighting. It has been seen as the beginning of the end for the social revolution developing in Catalonia and Aragon.

In works detailing the events of May 1937 the Friends of Durruti appear again and again. Yet very often little description of their numbers, influence or political platform is given.

SO WHAT WAS THE ROLE OF THE FRIENDS OF DURRUTI?

A translation of a Friends of Durruti manifesto reveals the aims of the group. This manifesto was published clandestinely in mid-1938, a year after the May Days.

It identifies itself as the authentic voice of the CNT rank and file and counters allegations of provocation: “They labelled us agents provocateurs because we demanded that provocateurs be shot, that the armed forces be disbanded, that political parties who had armed the provocation be suppressed, and also that a revolutionary Junta be established, to press on with the socialisation of the economy and to claim all economic power for the unions.” It called for a further revolution that: “will bring the workers of town and country complete satisfaction.” It talks of the death of Nin – the POUM leader – believed murdered by the communist secret police, at a time of general silence on the subject.

The Friends of Durruti seem to have been made of predominantly younger members of the CNT and the FAI (Iberian Anarchist Federation, formed to defend anarchism within the CNT and numbering 30,000 members in 1936). One leading light was an editor of *El Amigo Del Pueblo*, Jaime Balius, who had come into the libertarian movement during the Primo de Rivera dictatorship. Others were the Libertarian Youth militant Santana Calero, Carreno, and Ruiz, close collaborators of the dead anarchist militant Durruti and Ponciano Alonso, a writer of the ‘novels of the idea’ popular in CNT-FAI circles before 1936.

Many of the Friends were militants from the Durruti Column. This is backed up by a statement by Balius to Fraser (a British Communist historian) in 1976, where he says that the group was formed of members of the Durruti Column who had returned to Barcelona – with their arms – to protest against the militarisation decrees.

One other major allegation – that the group was small and had little effect – has been examined. Balius himself claimed that the group had the support of the CNT-FAI grassroots and of many of the anarchist militias on the Aragon front. Another allegation makes out the Friends of Durruti to be a

small group. Balius estimates membership at between 4,000-5,000. This is the only solid figure that we have. Definitions of small may vary, but if the figure is to be believed, such a number of militants concentrated mainly in Barcelona could have a decisive effect on events. The POUM member Wilebaldo Solano admits that it was the Friends of Durruti who had: “mobilised the people when the Telefonica was attacked, it was they who had the arms and were first to man the barricades”.

OPPOSITION

It can be seen from the many statements in their leaflets and paper, that the Friends saw themselves as an oppositional current within the CNT-FAI, loyal to the organisations, but hostile to the vacillations and compromises of leading members. For example in Number 3 of the paper:

“The Friends of Durruti association is made up of militants of the CNT and FAI. Only the union assemblies can expel us from the confederal organisation. The meetings of delegates of local and cantonal organisation do not have the power to exclude a comrade. We demand that the committees pose the question of the Friends of Durruti in the assemblies, there, where lies the sovereignty of the organisation.”

What the Friends are saying, in fact, is that bourgeois power must be smashed. They talk of the “crushing” of “social democratic centralism” in Number 5 of their paper, and in number of the abolition of hierarchies, and finally, in Number 7 we can find the statement that:

“The state machine suffocates and ends up by creating new promotions of the privileged...”

Balius clarifies the position of the Friends. He uses ‘political’ to mean parliamentarian and statist – a common anarchist understanding of the word.:

“We did not support the formation of the Soviets: there were no grounds in Spain for calling for such. We stood for ‘all power to the trade unions’. In no way were we politically oriented. The junta was simply a way out, a revolutionary formula to save the revolutionary conquests of July 1936. We were unable to exercise great influence because the Stalinists, helped by the CNT and FAI reformists, undertook their counter-revolutionary aggression so rapidly. Ours was solely an attempt to save the revolution; an historical level it can be compared to Kronstadt because if there the sailors called for ‘all power to the Soviets’, we were calling for ‘all power to the unions’.”

The Friends, it would appear, were authentic rank and file militants of the CNT-FAI seeking a way out of the dilemmas posed by militarisation and the attacks of the Communists and bourgeois Republicans. They appear to have had a significant role in mobilising workers during the May Days, though their influence was far from strong enough to counter that of the CNT-FAI leadership. They were willing to accept

the POUM rank and file as allies, as the result of practical solidarity on the barricades.

The charges that they were marginal, too closely tied to the POUM, were Stalinist or fascist provocateurs, were Leninists or Marxists, are either the result of lack of information or a wilful misinterpretation by Trotskyists or Stalinists or those who seek to defend the reformist CNT leadership. The Friends of Durruti were a brave attempt to reassert and defend the gains made by the Spanish revolution, and represent an important episode in the history of revolutionary anarchism.

The Spanish libertarian movement, faithful to certain aspects of Bakuninism, but infiltrated by moral and cultural notions closer to liberal humanism than revolutionary analysis, had not totally ignored anarchism outside Spain. But fixed on its traditional anarchist credo, it hardly took account of ideas developing in the international movement. In this context, the Friends, from the first day caught up in the revolutionary struggle, made a bold attempt to break with the dead weight of the past.

But it was too late, and the development of their ideas was to end with the crushing of the Spanish revolution. They had not broken with the revolutionary romanticism that gripped the Spanish movement, or with a hero-cult towards Durruti. They had a pronounced taste for simplification common in the Spanish movement. Though they talked about the setting up of revolutionary councils, this was too often confused with the anarcho-syndicalist unions, and they were unable to go beyond the extreme left of anarcho-syndicalism.

Even as regards the construction of a specific anarchist organisation they stuck to the old conspiratorial and romantic ideas of the FAI of 1927, and though they rejected the new FAI structures of 1937 – which led to the dilution of the anarchist organisation – they were only able to offer the small ‘affinity group’ as an alternative.

On the other hand, they saw that the war could not be won without the strengthening of the revolution, unlike the CNT-FAI leadership who put the war before the revolution.

They saw the immediate need to destroy the state apparatus and replace it with working class organisation. They defended the importance of class analysis, and denounced the theoretical confusion and improvisation that was also common in the Spanish movement.



FREE WOMEN AGAINST



LIBERTARIAN MACHISMO

Translated from the French from the monthly magazine Alternative Libertaire (January 2017)

A feminist organisation founded just before the Spanish Civil War, the Mujeres Libres contributed to the libertarian struggle, but also put forward the struggle for the place of women in society and in the world of political activism. A fight still relevant today.

We know certain things about the Mujeres Libres. This organisation demanded the freedom for women in a revolutionary context and civil war in Spain between 1936 and 1939. It was self-managed and federalist. Its militants were numerous: 20,000 in July 1937. They addressed themselves to the working class and often came from it. They spoke on topics as diverse as working conditions and wages, pregnancy, female pleasure, family structure. They refused to ally themselves with Communist feminists, but equally found little support among libertarians. They considered the education of women as an indispensable tool for their emancipation. They provided technical, general and militant training for women. Above all, they had the will to articulate class and gender to counter the bourgeois feminists of the time.

They also stood up against their own libertarian organization, the CNT. In particular, it because of the practices of some activists, they wanted to create a militant space reserved for women (it would today be considered as non-mixed). The CNT advocated gender equality, and of many women joining the union. Some even had responsibilities. The ideas of Proudhon, who wanted to leave women in the kitchen, were rejected. But the gap between the theory and the practices of the militants was too great.

Thus, an activist, Pepita Carpena, reports:

"There was then a lot of machismo among men in general. The buddies of the CNT willingly accepted a woman coming to the union.... The problem of the feminists of the CNT was raised by contact with militancy: they realised that these men who were libertarians were a little less when they were in their homes. They did not do it on purpose. They had been raised like that and were not aware of it."

According to this testimony, it was not so much a problem of integration into the militant milieu as the relationship the militants had with the women of their entourage.

The difference between the militant willingly accepted and the comrade left to her traditional role is explained in this testimony:

"The friends were very happy to have a comrade who understands them as militants, but not that she be a militant herself. They always thought that women were not able to do this, except for a few. (...) Men thought they did not understand economic and social problems. Most, moreover, had no militant partners. Those who did... well, they were there to receive all the friends who visited, to make the food and be hostesses."

This gap denies the existence of a cause common to all

working-class women, militant or not: the need for a double emancipation. The resistance of many militants to feminist practices, despite a progressive discourse (especially in relation to context) can be explained in two ways. Some activists remained locked in a traditional view of the family in which the man worked and the woman looked after the home, while others focused on the idea that what is now called patriarchy would disappear with capitalism.

Lucia Sanchez-Saornil the future cofounder of Mujeres Libres fought these two conceptions. As a militant of the CNT since the early 1920s, in 1935 she published several articles called "The question of women in our circles" in the newspaper *Solidaridad Obrera*, which must be re-read today. In reply to her comrade Mariano Vazquez, who had written on the 'feminine question', she notes:

"The anarchist who asks his wife for collaboration in the task of social subversion must begin by recognizing her as an equal, with all the prerogatives of individuality."

There is thus no question of waiting for the end of capitalism to grant women the same rights: they must be able to take them right now. In fact, while some activists wanted women to join their struggle in order to increase the strength of the organisation, Lucia Sanchez-Saornil demands the education of women. She goes on to say:

"I have proposed to open to women the prospects of our revolution by offering her the elements to form a free mentality capable of discerning for herself the false from the true, the political from the social. For I believe that before organizing in the unions – without disdaining this work – it is more urgent to create the conditions to understand the need for this organization."

This debate was difficult because resistance was often present, but it should not be overlooked that many activists simply considered these issues to be secondary. It is perhaps for this reason that Sanchez-Saornil concludes her series of articles by announcing the creation of an "independent organisation". The Mujeres Libres thus formed an exclusively feminine group not only to be able to construct a specific reflection on what was called the "feminine condition" and to carry out a real work of education for women, but also because feminist questions had no space for expression sufficient to allow them to pose them urgently in the libertarian milieu.

The Mujeres Libres had thus exposed the fundamental idea that, since one cannot build a libertarian society within an authoritarian organization, one cannot build a society where gender equality is the norm within a macho organization.

Lucia Sanchez Saornil expressed in 1935 the responsibility of militants against sexism:

"Outside our circles... it is very understandable, very excusable and even very human if, just as the bourgeois defends his position and his privilege of command, man desires to retain his hegemony and feels satisfied to have a slave. But I (...), I spoke exclusively to the anarchists, to the conscious man, to him who, being an enemy of all tyrannies, is obliged to extirpate from himself every remnant of despotism."

THE WORKING CLASS RESPONSE TO CATASTROPHES:

Mutual Aid, Self-organisation and Solidarity



Let me be absolutely clear: the support for the families on the ground in the initial hours was not good enough. People were left without belongings, without roofs over their heads, without even basic information about what had happened, what they should do and where they should go to seek help. That was a failure of the state, local and national, to help people when they needed it most." *Theresa May*

It's not often we quote politicians but on the Grenfell blaze, Theresa May was right. It was a complete failure of both the national state and government and the local state. Kensington and Chelsea Council failed to provide anything like adequate provision to the Grenfell survivors, not just in the initial hours but for days to come. And the situation four months later is not any better. Survivors are still trying to get even the most basic help from the council and other government agencies. But it went beyond that. Both the national and local state

were deeply implicated in the fire itself, with the cutting of fire services, the ignoring of repeated warnings by residents about the likelihood of a fire and in general the running down of social housing and institutional neglect of the working class.

On the other hand, we had a great upsurge of grassroots solidarity, with volunteers from across London and as far away as Birmingham, bringing support and supplies, linking up with survivors and local community groups. They provided food, drink, clothes, bedding, toys and toiletries in vast amounts. When Camden Council ineptly moved tenants out of council blocks after panicking about fire risks, they again, like Kensington and Chelsea Council, treated them appallingly, failing to provide them with adequate information, and alternative housing, and generally treated them with the same contempt as Kensington and Chelsea Council. Local

councils, whether Tory or Labour, have utter contempt or social housing tenants and for the working class in general. Camden Council failed to even provide water to the now homeless tenants, and this was left up to Grenfell volunteers who arrived to provide water. There is a stark contrast between the response of the national and local state, and the emergence of grassroots voluntary organisation based on the principles of mutual aid and solidarity.

This is not the first time this has happened after catastrophes, whether natural or caused by capitalism and those in power. It illustrates the capacity of ordinary working class people to organise support networks. Another example is the creation of grassroots health centres in Greece with the collapse of the State health services. This is anarchism in action. We must look more and more to this kind of grassroots organisation in the future as capitalism seeks to strip away social services in line with its strategy of austerity. According to Jeff Shantz:

“Living examples of the anarchist perspectives on order emerging ‘spontaneously’ out of social circumstances are perhaps most readily or regularly observed under conditions of immediate need or emergency as in times of natural disaster and/or economic crisis, during periods of revolutionary upheaval or during mass events such as festivals. Anarchists try to extend mutual aid relations until they make up the bulk of social life. Constructive anarchy is about developing ways in which people enable themselves to take control of their lives and participate meaningfully in the decision-making processes that affect them, whether education, housing, work or food.” (<http://voidnetwork.gr/2013/06/23/an-anarchy-of-every-day-life-by-jeff-shantz-from-philosophers-for-change/>)

DISASTER ANARCHISM

John Clark, in his book *The Impossible Community* (2013), talks about different responses to crises and disasters in modern society, categorising them as disaster capitalism, disaster fascism and disaster anarchism. For him, disaster anarchism is the explosion of cooperation, mutual aid and solidarity that can be a building block for radical change post-disaster.

Rebecca Solnit’s *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster* (2010) discusses how individuals and communities after disasters, far from turning on each other in a war of all against all, often in fact create networks of mutual aid and solidarity. “Citizens themselves in these moments constitute the government — the acting decision-making body — as democracy has always promised and rarely delivered. Thus disasters often unfold as though a revolution has already taken place.... In disasters, the hierarchies, administrations and institutions — the social structures — tend to fall apart, but what result tends to be anarchy in Kropotkin’s sense of people coming together in freely chosen cooperation rather than the media’s sense of disorderly savagery.” She cites the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 where volunteers rapidly formed water brigades, with many fires being put out. Subsequently professional fire

brigades and the police moved the volunteers out of the way and used dynamite to make fire breaks, blowing up buildings which unknown to them contained explosives, and actually caused more fires!

After Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf coast in 2005 the State responded by concentrating on restoring ‘law and order’ rather than on rescue and providing relief. The Red Cross was also shown as inadequate in providing relief. Activists involved in groups like Food Not Bombs, Homes Not Jails, street medics, etc. began to set up relief networks. One of these was the Common Ground Collective, formed shortly after the hurricane hit New Orleans. Common Ground believed in mutual aid and solidarity expressed in the slogan ‘Solidarity Not Charity’.

“Volunteers engaged with individuals and neighbourhoods on varied projects from armed community Defense against white racist militias, gardens, neighbourhood assemblies, and trash clean-up to free schools, house gutting and eviction Defense. What made Common Ground different than most other relief models was that mutual aid and resistance to authority were consciously woven into its analysis and most of its practice in building collective liberation. Over 28,000 volunteers came through the project in the first three years to support these communities that had been devastated, neglected and ignored even before Katrina ever hit. It was a mutual aid after crisis for the 21st century. The Common Ground Collective was a manifestation of these ideas, but it was to have a reverberating impact outside of the Gulf Coast, both through the stories of organization and because tens of thousands of people had participated in the project over the years.”

(Mutual Aid in Times of Crisis: Ecological, Economic, and Political. Scott Crow: Fifth Estate magazine)

After Hurricane Sandy devastated the U.S. east coast in 2012 these forms of organisation were repeated. Again the State and the Red Cross reacted in a wholly inadequate way. It was left to the Occupy Sandy relief network to provide relief. Post Hurricane Sandy many within Occupy Sandy continued with work in communities for self-organisation and mutual aid.

As Scott Crow says: “For those of us engaged in anarchist organizing, the long histories of mutual aid and solidarity around disasters should consciously be added to how we view collective liberation. Sadly, these disasters glaringly and painfully reveal the state’s failures and often affect communities more than any single issue. But, they also open a crack for people to see themselves and their own power by rebuilding small pieces of their communities differently than before through mutual aid. In direct and meaningful ways, people learn that they do not have to wait on those in power to make their lives better. They begin to realize that they can do it for themselves, with support; even in the worst times. These concepts, which are as old as life on this planet—that anarchists politically name as mutual aid—will continue to be needed for the survival and health of all of us in our day-to-day lives as we face uncertain futures; whether it’s disasters, crises, or just living.”

Radical Housing Network : Putting the Housing Crisis on the Public Agenda

The Radical Housing Network (RHN) has been at the centre of housing struggles in London since 2014. It consists of a number of affiliated groups and campaigns, each fighting on some aspect of the housing crisis: private renters, social housing and against demolition of estates, eviction resistance, squatting and housing casework. Recently, it received considerable media attention due to its close links with the Grenfell Action Group. However, the roots of the network go much further back than 2014 and it has not always been easy keeping such a network going. This article is based on an interview with two members of the RHN: one a founding member and the other active since early 2015.

In the beginning...

C: Around 2011-2012, new housing groups, such as Hackney private renters group Digs and Housing Action Southwark and Lambeth, were emerging from the woodwork around London, and longer-standing groups, such as Haringey Housing Action Group and SQUASH (Squatters Action for Secure Homes), were being revitalised. Rents were going through the ceiling due to what was happening in the wider housing market. Despite the high-profile campaign against the newly-introduced bedroom tax affecting social tenants, far more cuts in housing benefit hit private renters. Private renters' groups, set up independently in different areas of London as a result of the common problems, began to coalesce. It happened organically; soon all these groups were meeting as London Renters.

Meanwhile, other housing struggles were going on. For example, it was the tail-end of the campaign to save the 1,200-home Heygate council housing estate in Elephant and Castle from a notorious 'redevelopment' project, which is still on-going. As well as campaigning against the criminalisation of squatters, activists involved in SQUASH were interested in linking up with other struggles, and saw the potential to link campaigns that were growing against different aspects of the housing crisis. In late 2012, there was a housing session at a squatted social centre called Cuts Café in central London, which brought together a number of individuals and groups – some who had been involved in the private renters groups, others challenging their councils on the sell-off of social

housing and some from the squatting movement, including some who had come to housing struggles through climate action.

A key stage in the history of the RHN came with a week-long event organised at Elephant and Castle in 2013: Open House. It was organised by small group of individuals who saw it as a means to try and co-ordinate the different housing groups and campaigns that were springing up. It was well planned and executed, with a range of workshops, discussions with speakers, such as progressive geographer Danny Dorling, and films and music in the evenings. The organisers set up two meetings at either end of the week and invited all the housing groups they could think of – mainly grassroots groups, but also more mainstream organisations, such as Shelter. By the second meeting, at the end of the week, there was agreement to create a housing network, initially inward-facing to coordinate information, resources and support between groups, but also with potential to develop outward-facing joint actions and campaigns in future.

Not all the individuals involved in organising Open House event continued to be involved in the new network. Some were knackered after organising the Open House event. As the RHN was to be a network of groups, people who weren't in a group felt they didn't have a place. But some, including me, stayed on.

Nothing definite was decided, but representatives from a range of groups attended follow-up meetings, and a few individuals took on the work to develop the network during the summer of 2013. It took time to build up trust. One small working group developed a set of principles, which were then amended and finally agreed by the groups initially involved and others invited to join. It was mainly what we are against and what we are for in broad terms only, to try and establish shared ground. But we had a basis for a London-wide network. This succeeded and the Radical Housing Network was born.

By the end of 2013, RHN was up and running. The impetus for setting up the network ultimately came from the impact of Conservative coalition government policies on housing, including the bedroom tax, cuts in housing benefit, and wider welfare reforms as well as the impact of the financial crisis



which led to a log jam in the private rented sector as would-be first-time buyers were unable to get mortgages and so continued renting. In response, landlords put up rents. They realised that they could evict tenants and then get new ones in who would pay more. There were problems in the social housing sector already, with demolition of estates and no new council housing builds.

It was a relatively small group who started the RHN, sometimes jammed into a small community centre, other times (including when we decided on the name) only six of us in a draughty trades hall.

RHN takes off

C: Then MIPIM came along. In late 2013, we got an invitation to attend a meeting of European housing activists. They wanted to organise joint actions around MIPIM, an international property developers' fair, which is held in Cannes every year. This meant we suddenly had something shared and concrete to organise around! While French activists held an action in Cannes in March 2014, we organised a demo outside City Hall, demanding that the London mayor, Boris Johnson, shouldn't attend since this would effectively be to sell off our homes and communities.

The anti-MIPIM campaign provided a useful narrative through 2014: MIPIM is the epitome of everything we are against. It made a good target that could unite us all and it was tangible – there was a day and time when developers, financiers and politicians were coming together to discuss the deals that lead to the housing problems we were fighting.

MIPIM also came to London for the first time in October of that year, and there was loads of energy around this. Around 30 European activists came over to join the protest, which we'd organised for the first morning of the conference. The police weren't expecting us, and with lots of angry people we managed to force them to close the doors.

We also organised a counter-conference, which was jam-packed and energetic, and a spoof newspaper, which we handed out to thousands of Londoners to raise awareness.

This week was a real high point for the network, which had barely existed for a year at that stage. It was a big moment, and lots of people were involved, but a lot of the legwork was done by a small crew. My task was logistics – unglamorous and often thankless – essentially acting as an unpaid travel agent for the 30 European activists who we brought over. Other people led on organising the conference, which was found a venue at the last minute: a squat in an empty former nurses' house at Great Ormond Street hospital in central London – which somewhat illustrated our point about privatisation and the housing crisis.

After MIPIM, even more people started coming along to get involved in the network. We already had many groups affiliated to the network – ones that had been to the original Open House event, and others that had joined in the intervening year. We had a website and an e-mail list, efficiently set up straight away by one of the organisers after the Open House event. But with more people, we needed more of an infrastructure – sorting out finance, systems for answering e-mails, etc. The network had a momentum of its own – which isn't surprising given that in London, pretty much everyone under about 40 has a housing problem, unless they're very well off. We hoped that with so many people involved, there would be lots of people to do the work and no one would get burned out.

Post-MIPIM

B: I had heard about the RHN from friends in Haringey who had been involved in the MIPIM event and preparation. It sounded so exciting – all these people coming together and organising such effective actions and events, even co-ordinating with people in other countries. I was involved in a small local community action group called *Action East End*. I went along to a meeting to see if we should get involved. I was very impressed by the way the meeting was run, non-hierarchical and well-organised, with loads of people and energy. We decided to affiliate and I attended meetings regularly.

A week of action was organised around the theme of 'We love council housing', in February 2015. Many groups took



actions. In Tower Hamlets, we linked up with Tower Hamlets Private Renters and some people in Balfron Towers to organise focused protests on Balfron Towers and the housing association Poplar Harca, who was busy privatising their housing stock. This alliance continued into the Save Chrisp St campaign. Focus E15, a campaign started by a group of young mums in east London who were facing eviction from their hostel, had got going around the same time and also affiliated to the RHN. They both supported and got support from other RHN members. This linking up and reinforcing of housing campaigns would not have happened if it hadn't been for the RHN which brought people together.

Keeping going

C: Like many initiatives, it did rely on a few people to keep it going. New people did come along and stay with it, and more recently the network has organised a well-attended conference and very successful workshops on migrant support, estate demolition campaigns (led by activists from the successful Butterfield Estate campaign), and doing housing casework. However, action has generally been more low-key, and recent action against MIPIM in London has been smaller (not least because the police are now expecting us).

RHN kept going since 2014 thanks to the hard work of a core who maintained the network's basic infrastructure. The recent Grenfell fire has inevitably shaken up the network – Grenfell Action Group were a member of RHN, and many of us did what we could to provide support in the aftermath, as well as fielding a barrage of media enquiries that followed the disaster as it unfolded. And while groups across the network have been organising in their local communities to try and ensure that tenants are no longer ignored and marginalised in the way that the Grenfell residents were, the organising and media work has still been done by a small core of activists. In some ways, this is inevitable: reactive media work is, by its nature, near-impossible to do effectively by a large group. But this can be a recipe for burnout.

It has been difficult to maintain the momentum of the network. At times, the RHN has been an umbrella for projects, which people supported in principle but didn't get involved in organising. For example, an event was organised in early 2014, which the network agreed to do but then one person ended up doing the majority of the logistical work to make it happen.

To some extent, this is the nature of a network comprising group: people are busy doing work for their own groups, plus having paid work, caring and/or other commitments, so it is hard to find time to 'organise for the network'. I found that I put so much time into organising for the RHN that I ended up stepping back from my local housing groups, which was the way I'd got involved in the network to start with. So a core group of people can keep the RHN going, but they tend not to have much time to be involved locally as well. It is a tension and a trade-off: keeping the basis of the network going – the local groups – and making sure the structure which binds the groups together exists and is doing things and doesn't become detached from its membership.

The RHN has been different things to different people. For some, it is about sharing information about what is going on and asking for solidarity: "I want to tell you about my struggle and I might learn something by listening to others". Other people want to get on with work for the network, organising events or campaigns that involved the RHN as a whole.

Now there a paid co-ordinator who works two days per week, thanks to work put into grant funding applications. This relieves the pressure on the few people who previously did the bulk of the admin work, such as answering emails and keeping social media up-to-date. Prior to this, we tried to get more people involved and this worked to some extent, but sometimes people would volunteer and then not do it.

Energy and capacity

C: A key issue is whether or not the network has energy as well as capacity. By having a co-ordinator, it helped create more capacity – time to do the tasks of organising. But this doesn't necessarily help create the energy needed to build and sustain a vibrant movement. Energy comes from an idea that builds, a sense of excitement that we could build something that wins real victories. The co-ordinator can do the legwork, but cannot create the energy on their own. Energy is the sense of 'yes – we all want to do this'. It's been hard to replicate the energy that we had after the first MIPIM protests in 2014, though there have been some moments. For example, the work around the housing bill in 2016 was an energetic time: another spoof paper was produced and distributed, an occupation of a shopfront in Knightsbridge to act as a hub, and we worked hard to build a huge march that had been called to resist the legislation.

So what causes people to drop out, to lose energy? In the NGO sector, where I worked for a number of years, campaigns were typically expected to run for three or four years. After that time, it was felt that it was unlikely to get much further

and that it might be better to direct time and resources towards another issue. And the NGOs have resources at their disposal to keep going. As activists donating our time and running on a shoestring, we have to choose our battles; look at where there is a window of political opportunity. But also, a movement can be cyclical: activists put a lot of effort in, the campaign is won or lost and then ceases to exist, or at least re-groups. For example, the Butterfields campaign won their campaign against the sell-off of their estate to a private company so is no longer active.

There have been some victories. At the end of 2016, we had a 'winter winning party' to celebrate the roll-back on parts of the Housing Bill, the government's announcement that they would abolish letting agent fees for tenants, and some local victories as well. But though we make progress, there's always a sense that there's so much more to do.

RHN makes a difference

C: With any campaign, there are two battles: first to get people to recognise that there is a problem – and with housing, I think that now, pretty much everyone acknowledges this. The second battle is to make real change to address the problem. I think that over the past few years, the first battle has been won, and RHN played a role in this. How effective are we in fighting the second battle? I'm not sure. But sometimes it can be hard to see where the successes are. For example, in the aftermath of the Grenfell fire, the public understood that it was the result of a preventable political tragedy without this needing to be argued for, and the discussion was not about tearing down social housing blocks. This could have been the response, particularly in the right-wing media, but it wasn't, and I think at least to some extent that's because of groups like the RHN have been making the case for social housing for years. The tide is turning – people want decent, affordable housing, not just for themselves, but for their children, and have seen for themselves that a marketised housing system can't deliver that.

Other places in the UK have also taken inspiration from RHN – for example, in Manchester there is a new housing network that has drawn on what we've done in London. Speaking to activists in other cities, I think people see RHN as an example of how to link disparate local groups around a common struggle. It has been exhausting at times, but if people think we are doing a good job and it inspires them to act, then that is useful in itself, even if sometimes we don't feel like we're making much progress.

Also, a network can exist in a number of ways: e-mail lists where people post about their respective campaigns, high profile actions, even people just knowing each other exist and they can get in touch if they need information, advice or support. But it is most effective with some focus to keep it united as a network. And we do need to see some tangible change. The question is: How can we create a situation where the movement grows in both energy and capacity? Can we be pro-active in reinvigorating the movement, or do we have to wait for the next big thing to come along?

B: The September RHN meeting, with 30 plus people and three new groups asking to affiliate, was a good sign for the future of the network. Obviously, the fire at Grenfell and the RHN highlighting the wider social and political issues have played a key role in attracting people to the network. This was in marked contrast to June's meeting, before the Grenfell disaster, which had just a few people in attendance. The energy levels are high and a number of actions are planned. One member pointed out, however, that it is also important to get the structure right – to ensure that doing basic admin and other organisational roles are not left to a few people. People are hoping that we are at a turning point – a point where we can really push the much wider political and social agenda for radical changes in housing.

Organise!

The RHN is made up of a range of people, most non-affiliated to any political group, who share a common aim of achieving housing justice through direct action and outreach, without relying on politicians. The structure is based on what I would call anarchist principles: non-hierarchical decision-making, rotating roles and participatory meetings. It also has achieved something that most single issue campaigns have not: succeeded in bringing together a range of different groups, and also making links to other struggles. For example, it has had a housing block at the Yarl's Wood protests and had meetings on migrant struggles and housing. It has also supported broader initiatives, such as joining together with food growers and community spaces campaigners to organise the *Land for What?* conference in November, and then to launch the Land Justice Network (www.landjustice.uk). Its experience of organising, as discussed in this interview, shows the importance of behind-the-scenes admin work that make it possible to do the 'bigger' things.

So, though it is not a revolutionary anarchist organisation, it is an excellent example of the kind of initiative that can help create the conditions for radical social change. Long may it live!



PSYCHIATRY

AND

CLASS

This article is based on a talk given to Psychologists against Austerity in Feb 2017

The diagnosis and treatments given to people of different social classes by psychiatrists is a big subject and has been a continuing area of interest to mental health professionals and researchers. However, this talk will explore some of the

issues around class and psychiatry from a working class perspective, often raising more questions than answers, but that is not a bad thing.

Psychiatry is defined as: the study and treatment of mental illness, emotional disturbance, and abnormal behaviour. I have become increasingly anti psychiatry over the years

both from my own experience and from learning more about it generally. It is a redundant profession; it is not medical or science based. It is primarily based around subjective judgement on what is considered to be normal or disordered thought and behaviour. The psychiatrist is not particularly concerned with the experience or the context of the person's distress but in diagnosing and medicating with often very dangerous drugs they know very little about. The history of psychiatry is one that has actually changed, and also achieved, very little in either understanding human distress or alleviating it. Other people, including psychiatrists, are also increasingly recognising this:

"Mental illness' is terribly misleading because the 'mental disorders' we diagnose are no more than descriptions of what clinicians observe people do or say, not at all well-established diseases" (Statement of Allen Frances, Psychiatrist and former DSM-IV Task Force Chairman, 2015).

Psychiatry is increasingly being accused of imposing upper middle class values on their patients and calling them scientific diagnosis. And certainly the staff hierarchy reflects the class structure of society, with well paid, high status doctors at the top and low paid, low status cleaners at the bottom.

For this talk I started by looking at research available online. The access to knowledge is not as democratic as people may think even with the internet, not being an academic or a student you have to pay for papers. I didn't plan to rely on research nor do I necessarily trust it but I do find it interesting and helpful even just to see the process of how research is undertaken. I didn't realise until a few days ago, when I was looking over my notes, that the source material I am quoting from actually spans a period of over 50 years and the reason why this wasn't more obvious is that, sadly, nothing has really changed in that time and the main changes seem to have been due to certain practices in psychiatry, such as lobotomies and care in the community falling out of favour. I also spoke to people I know who are working class and have experience of the psychiatric system and/or research around class. We ended up with some questions which I have used to form this talk.

There is a lot more research available from the US or at least it is easier to access, this research often acknowledges a difference in the way people from different classes present and are treated. However, it is important to keep in mind that researchers in the UK do not use a standardised method to define social class.

RESEARCH FINDINGS ON SOCIAL CLASS DIFFERENCES

From:

<http://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/article-abstract/487864>

"Comparison of 90 upper class women with 110 lower class women at time of admission shows a significantly higher number of upper class women came for help because of psychic suffering and a significantly higher number of lower

class women came because of physical suffering. Upper class women were more anxious and lower class women were more likely to hallucinate.

Once hospitalized, the psychiatrist reacted quite differently to the groups, being more likely to rely on drugs or having a transfer to a state hospital arranged for the lower class group, whereas he used psychotherapy more often with the upper class women. The upper classes at discharge had a greater chance of being improved.

However, the crucial variable that determines the psychiatrist's reaction seems to be the patient's attitude toward the nature of her illness (psychological compared to physical or social). Comparing these attitudes, unrelated to social class, demonstrates those with a psychological view of their illness were more likely treated with psychotherapy and more likely to improve. Thus, the significance of social class to the psychiatrist seems to be primarily as it influences the patient's view of her illness.

The psychiatrist places great emphasis on the patient's willingness to see her illness as the psychiatrist sees it. The patient from the same social class as the psychiatrist sees her illness as he does and thus is more effectively treated by him. This demonstrates how necessary it is for psychiatrists to be more familiar with the attitudes of lower class patients toward mental illness and psychiatric treatment, if more effective treatment is to be made available."

Researchers from the US reason that these differences can be due to the private healthcare system and speculate that if the financial barrier was removed all classes of people would benefit from the same range of treatments on offer.

However, in the UK, private health care is not all that's it's cracked up to be: poor reviews from patients who may spend £6000 a week for several weeks stay, overworked and underpaid staff who are using it as a stepping stone to an NHS position, and patients who are left to their own devices on mixed wards in an unsafe environment. However quite a lot of the negative feedback was also due to the unrealistic expectations of the patients who expected, not totally unreasonably, 5 star accommodation, Michelin starred food, a gym and round the clock access to therapeutic care and what they got was a run-for-profit psychiatric hospital.

In the UK research often states that there is no difference in the way people of different social classes are treated due to the NHS being the 'great equalizer'. However this may also be a result of a lack of awareness and investigation into class differences due to the researchers themselves being from a higher social class and that's certainly what I have heard from friends who are working class and have been involved in research and is also represented in the literature.

"Influential research, clinical writings and teaching most often come from persons and institutions with predominately upper and middle class orientations, while a large number of patients are lower class and unemployed" (Schizophrenia.: John S. Strauss, William T. Carpenter Jr. 1982).

DIFFERENCES IN DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENTS

There is a difference in diagnosis and treatments in both the US and the UK. From Lucy Johnstone (2000): *Users and abusers of Psychiatry*:

“A number of studies have found that severer diagnoses are given to working-than to middle-class patients, regardless of symptoms; that the former are seen as having a poorer prognosis; and that professionals are less interested in treating them. Working-class patients are, like black and ethnic minority patients, more likely to be prescribed physical treatments such as drugs and ECT, to spend longer periods in hospital regardless of diagnosis, and to be readmitted, and correspondingly less likely to be referred for the more ‘attractive’ treatments such as psychotherapy and group therapy. These referral patterns have been justified by the assertion that working-class patients are less articulate and therefore less able to benefit from verbal therapies, although this may simply reflect the difficulty that predominantly middle-class doctors and therapists have in understanding and communicating with people from very different cultural backgrounds, and their inability to adapt their therapeutic approaches to take these differences into account. In any case, the end result is that those members of society who are least powerful and suffer most from the social and economic hardship are most likely to receive the ‘disabling’ rather than the ‘empowering’ psychiatric treatments, which will tend to deprive them further of whatever degree of independence and autonomy they still retain”.

In other words, working class people are seen as less able to cope; they are told and middle class people are asked

DIFFERENT REALITIES

The difference between psychiatrists’ lives and those of their patients is major factor in treatments. The one big reason is that the medical model ignores structural inequality. It is a well-established fact that most instances of mental ill health exist in poor areas and working class people are over represented in the mental illness statistics as well.

To demonstrate this gap, I have a letter to my GP from a psychiatrist that I saw for five minutes in July of 2015. During the appointment, I was asked if I had any hobbies and I explained very carefully, so she would understand this was based on information I had been given, that a welfare rights worker advised that if I had a hobby, it could jeopardise my benefits and that I was in a good situation and shouldn’t do anything to mess that up. Claiming as someone with mental health problems would demonstrate that I could concentrate on a task and therefore ‘fit for work’.

In the letter the psychiatrist wrote:

“At present she is on benefits. She says that this is a cause of great stress for her as she feels unable to explore her hobbies and activities for fear that her benefits may be taken off her.

*These appear to be **overvalued ideas** which could benefit from some psychological exploration and challenging.”*

The definition of an ‘overvalued idea’ refers to an abnormal or false belief that is maintained despite strong evidence that it is untrue.

When I first read this it blew my mind! How can they be so out of touch with people’s realities? Mine is not a unique experience. How many people are having their experiences invalidated?

I used to see a psychologist a few years ago who told me in one session I needed to “have more fun, y’know, go to the cinema or something”. I then had to explain to him that I only had £28 a week to live on and going to the cinema was out of the question. He didn’t mean any harm but hadn’t considered that something so accessible to him might not be to someone else.

Interestingly a Royal College of Psychiatrists leaflet states that a UK psychiatrist will learn how to: “use the “biopsychosocial” model of understanding. This emphasises the importance of a person’s past experiences, family, culture, surroundings and work as well as any medical features.’

PSYCHIATRY AS A FORM OF SOCIAL CONTROL

From *John’s Story: How Racism and Classism Operate within the Mental Health Care System*. Eric Greene, PhD (Clinical Psychologist) October 27, 2014

Greene uses a case study of an 8 year old boy called John who is African American. His father has just started a long prison sentence and his mother has to work several jobs to support the family. The boy has multiple diagnosis; his mother was busy working and struggling herself. The intersection between class and race cannot be overlooked.

“Psychiatrists, psychologists and other mental health workers are complicit in further oppressing disenfranchised populations by making patients think their illness is a result of a biological or genetic dysfunction (i.e., the medical model). This turns their patients’ attention away from their oppressive environment and creates stigma.

During my meetings with the psychiatrist, we would discuss John’s case. Often he would describe John’s situation as hopeless, and the only help that John could get was the miracle of medicine. Further, racist and classist statements flew around the room, the worst of which was from one white, male psychiatrist: ‘We should just drop a bomb on this whole community and end their suffering. They are evil and broken, they can’t help themselves, all they do is act like wild animals, and there is no way to help them’.

Protesting such racist statements was not effective. No matter how I approached the staff or the administration regarding many of the racist and classist statements and attitudes, nothing changed.

A sense of hopelessness set in me. It was a very dark period in my training as a psychologist. I realized that structural racism has led to a mental health care system that has both given up on and antagonized the poor and the marginalized. Structural racism and classism require structural change. Focusing on the multiculturalism, empathy, understanding the 'other', identifying micro-aggressions, and empowerment are all helpful to create greater awareness and consciousness of the problems we face. However, ideological changes are more likely to happen by means of a radical confrontation with a racist and classist system. For example, many mental health workers are joining forces with public policy initiatives to help create structural change."

CULTURAL CAPITAL

Another issue is that doctors also have more cultural capital which they use more over working class people. The term 'cultural capital' refers to non-financial social assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means. Examples can include education, intellect, style of speech, dress, or physical appearance.

So what does this mean for people of a higher social class? Traditionally if you come from a higher social class, the psychiatric system as we now call it, was a handy way to get rid of someone especially a woman. Maybe you are a man and in a marriage that is beneficial to you but you want to be with your mistress, you could put your wife in an asylum. A case from the 1950s involved Rosemary Kennedy who was lobotomised at the age of 23 and spent the rest of her life in an institution with the mental capacity of a 2 year old because she was seen as a threat to her father's career in politics.

But how does this work now if you are middle or upper class and in need of mental health services? It is difficult to answer this question for lack of data but there has been some discussion. What has come up is the idea that middle class people should have the briefest contact with psychiatry as possible, partly as they "don't belong there" (in hospital) and as part of an awareness that they are more likely and able to make a complaint about their experience. Also middle class patients have been told that 'you are too nice and don't belong here' that they don't deserve such nasty experience. In reports online is the warning of a growing crisis in middle class mental health, mainly attributed to anxious risk averse parents and young people who feel pressured to achieve with a growing generation who are lacking in emotional resilience.

A FINAL POINT

I want to end this by saying that if you have gaps in your understanding, be it of socio economic factors, race, asylum seekers, benefits, disability etc, fill in those gaps and don't fall into the habit of getting the people who are experiencing those things to do it for you because that gets tiresome really fast, especially if it's presented as some kind of exercise in empowerment. The information is out there and the time is now. There is a habit of people talking as though things are going to happen in the future 'winter is coming', but winter is **here** and it always has been. All the evidence shows that things are going to get much harder for people and they will need people on their side; we need to help each other through it.



LONELINESS: (MUCH MORE) THAN A DRAG

What is loneliness? For Jimi Hendrix, it was 'such a drag'. The dictionary definition is: "without companions, isolated [and therefore] sad". Loneliness is something that does not only impact on a small minority of individuals. It is now a widespread social condition, affecting millions of people. It is a paradox of modern capitalist society that this is happening when, for the first time in human history, the majority of humanity (52%) lives in cities. This means that many live in high density housing, work in crowded workplaces, and commute en masse to and from work five or six days a week, in a mass society.

Why should it concern us as revolutionaries? Because humans are social animals; we need other people for friendship, support, love, solidarity and sharing, as well as to provide the material things that we need: food, shelter etc. The latest neuroscience suggests that social and physical pain are processed by the same neural circuits in the brain. In humans, and other social animals, such as apes and dolphins, social contact reduces physical pain. Survival amongst social animals is much better when they are strongly bonded with the rest of their group. Isolated and marginalised animals are targeted by predators, or starve. Emotional pain protects people from social injury by driving people to connect to others. Many find this near impossible in contemporary capitalism. Social isolation is strongly associated with depression, suicide, anxiety, insomnia, danger, fear and the perception of threat. It also causes or exacerbates a range of physical illnesses: dementia, high blood pressure, heart disease, strokes, lowered resistance to viruses. Loneliness is an obstacle to a successful revolution, and unnecessary human suffering. I am not suggesting that people will not feel lonely in the future anarchist society. We cannot get rid of ill health, old age and death. But a society based on equality, sharing and co-operation, that is, true community, will not ignore or exclude those who are suffering and will go some way to make the suffering easier to bear.

Our vision of anarchist communism is of community: from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs. Loneliness is the antithesis of this. Capitalism and the State

are based on the historic destruction of community. It has its negation in the present when attempts by people to create community, often in the context of social struggles, such as strikes and campaigns against fracking and gentrification, are squashed. The Welfare State exists in response to working class struggles, and as a means of control, ameliorating in part the poverty, deprivation and ill health caused by capitalism. The aim of this is to counter the danger of the collective resistance of class struggle.

CAUSES

Loneliness has social and economic causes. Capitalism alienates workers from what they produce, and from each other. The neo-liberal government policies of the last 40 years were based on four principles: full employment was replaced by inflation targeting, globalisation increased the flows of people, capital and trade, shareholders' pay-outs were maximised at the expense of reinvestment and growth, and 'flexible labour markets' pursued at the expense of trade unions, workplace organising and minimum wages.

In the twentieth century, the State had nationalised the railways, coal industry, water, and health provision (the National Health Service) to ensure the necessary large scale investment and to maintain the national infrastructure for industry, and as part of a social contract. This was a concession to workers: you work and fight for us, we ensure an infrastructure and safety net, benefits, NHS etc. Neo-liberalism meant that everything should be privatised, though state subsidies for business continued. As Thatcher said: "there is no, such thing as Society" (if you're a worker, you're on your own).

Economic and technological changes, backed up by the ideologies of competitive self-interest and individualism, promote loneliness and other mental problems. Education, rather than being about maximising the potential of every child, is about educating the elite; discipline and knowing your place are paramount. Children must compete against

each other. Only a few can succeed and reach the highest grades, so the majority 'fail'. There is controversy if 'too many' of any one category succeeds. It is girls against boys, Asian children over African Caribbean children, with the goal posts moved if the statistics don't show what they want. Schools are constantly assessed and rated by Ofsted, the government inspectors, increasing the pressure and stress on both teachers and students. Instead of working together and sharing the experience of learning, students are isolated and alone.

The same monitoring goes on in all the other parts of the public and private sector in the name of providing a good consumer service, but the real agenda is increased exploitation of employees, and privatisation because schools/hospitals/GPs are 'failing'. The talk is of 'value-for-money' aka 'delivering more (work) with less' (resources) through greater 'efficiency' -that's greater exploitation for you and me. Waged work becomes ever more oppressive with increased monitoring of individuals work rate and application through open plan offices, computers that monitor keystrokes, electronic tagging of workers, monitoring of toilet breaks, zero hours contracts, 'self-employment' for companies, such as Uber, Deliveroo etc. Working from home, usually by computer, is also subject to surveillance, without the counterbalance of interaction with your workmates. There is no time to chat, to socialise and to make friends. Social interaction is an obstacle to profits and efficiency, thus creating more loneliness.

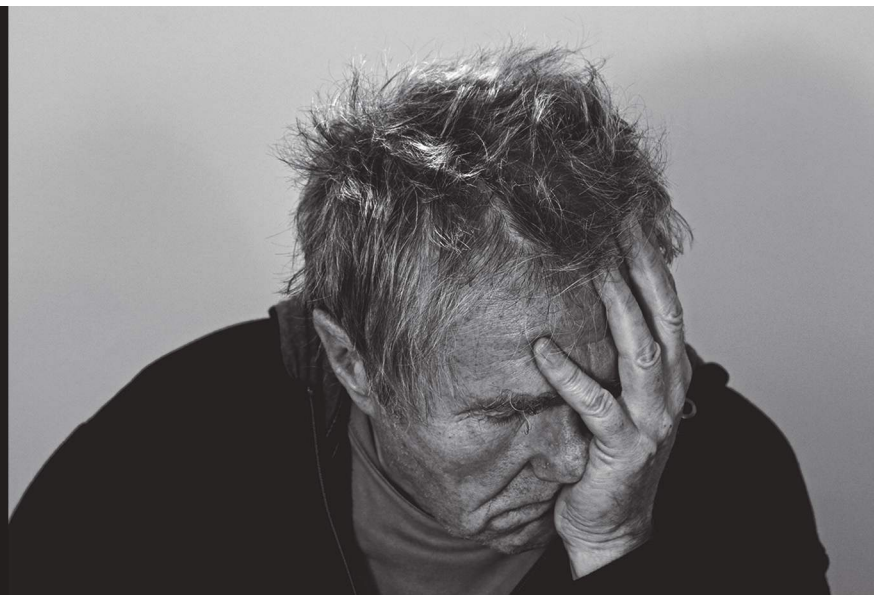
Consumerism claims to fill the social void, but cannot, because social needs, such as friendship and support are not met by comfort eating or going down to the mall to buy the latest 'must-have'. It also intensifies social comparison as other people, especially the celebrities, always have more and 'look better'. Social comparison can intensify to the point where people prey on themselves: self-harm, anorexia, bulimia. It is no coincidence that women suffer disproportionately from these. Social media brings people together and simultaneously drives them apart, enabling them to quantify their social standing, to see that others have more 'friends' (real or virtual) and followers than they

do. Celebrity is 'the smiling face of the corporate machine'. Celebrity culture is cultivated by advertisers, marketers and the media. Its function is to give distant and impersonal corporations a human face to connect to their customers. Celebrities are a mask, a virtual neighbour. Celebrity takes the place of things that people value, such as community feeling and benevolence, substituting fame, achievement, image, popularity and financial success. Celebrities are not friends and 'likes' on Facebook cannot replace meeting up with people who like and value you.

COMMUNITY

Loneliness also has implications for politics (e.g. Brexit, Trump/populism etc.). When people are atomised and afraid they tend to defend their individual interests against other peoples, ignoring their own intrinsic human social values of empathy, connectedness and kindness, and favouring the extrinsic values of power, fame and status.

We overcome loneliness through joint struggle with our neighbours and workmates to improve our living and working conditions. We pool our skills and abilities, learn new skills and start to recognise and realise the power and ability we have to create and run a new society. Traditionally as class struggle anarchists we view community as being created in workplace struggles, such as strikes, occupations etc., and in community struggles, such as the women-led fight against fracking in Lancashire, rent strikes, the mass resistance to the Poll tax etc. These particular struggles are necessarily short-term, succeeding or failing, then subsiding until there is another flashpoint or upsurge in class struggle. There are also grassroots projects that foster solidarity and co-operation that can be part of building the revolution and part of a culture of resistance. A partial list might include food assemblies where communities buy food directly from producers, free universities where people exchange knowledge and skills in social spaces, schemes where streets are turned into temporary playgrounds, 'Men's Sheds' where older men swap skills.





VENEZUELA: KNOW YOUR ENEMIES

There is much talk on the news about Venezuela but little information. We are easily persuaded to take the side of sections of the opposition, without recognising who they are. They are the old oligarchies who sold Latin America to the USA. But isn't Maduro's government just another set of 'military' oligarchies? And, the opposition is not just the old oligarchies, but genuine popular resistance to an authoritarian regime (see statement in box from the Caribbean and Central American Anarchist Federation).

Ask anyone in South America and they will tell you how much their lives improved during the years of Rafael Morales, Mujica, Lula or Chávez. And yet, when the US agenda returns to strike Latin America, the left-wing movements have no solution or way to fight back, because all they did was to support and focus on one man or a group of a few people. The hope in just one man is the damnation of the popular movements in Latin America. Even when the people can elect someone of their own, the elites will react. We never learn the lesson. Now in the UK we have a new saviour, Jeremy Corbyn. What happens if, somehow, they prevent his election? Even if he gets elected, just like Chávez was in Venezuela, how can we maintain radical political measures? These left-wing parties, when in power, increase the power of the state so as to attend the needs of the population. In many cases, like the one in Venezuela, all that power starts to be used to attack the opposition. As a result, they maintain their seats but at the cost of the needs of the population.

To understand the crisis in Venezuela we must have a notion of how things were before the 'Bolivarian Revolution', when 70% of its population were under the poverty line, 40% were in extreme poverty and 21% were undernourished.

Under Venezuela are the biggest oil reserves in the world (17, 5% of all the world's oil). Venezuela started to export its oil under the government of Juan Vicente Gómez (1908-1935). That money funded the construction of roads and ports infrastructure and the formation of a centralised state. But all of this was made in favour of Venezuela's biggest client, the USA.

In 1957 the Punto Fijo Pact was established, orchestrated by the USA, where only the biggest and oldest two parties would alternate in power. This 'formal democracy' guaranteed some political stability so as to maintain the oil business. The first direct elections of mayors and regional governors was in 1989, before that they were nominated by the president. There were many riots and demonstrations during this time, many were heavily repressed, resulting in the deaths of thousands of protesters.

The election of Hugo Chávez in 1989 was the end of the Punto Fijo Pact. The economy remained dependent on the export of petrol, but the old social and political structures were broken up to an extent, and a welfare state was implemented. By 2010, the amount of people under the poverty line dropped to 21%, extreme poverty dropped to 7% and the number of undernourished people dropped 5%. There were also huge investments in education and social housing. Venezuela ceased to be a USA puppet and started to be like its Latin

Americans neighbours, joining the Mercosul (Mercosul or Mercosur, Southern Common Market, whose main members are Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay) and establishing close relations with Caribbean countries.

In 2002, the right-wing tried an unsuccessful coup d'état and suspended the activities of the PDVSA (the company responsible for the production and exploration of the oil reserves), which was until then controlled by the oligarchies, so as to induce an economic crisis. As a result, Gross Domestic Product fell by 18% and, in the country with the biggest oil reserve, the population lacked petrol for their cars. Other countries had to send petrol to Venezuela. After resisting these two attacks from the oligarchies, Chávez took control over the PDVSA and over the army. Any commander opposed to him was expelled and replaced by others loyal to him. Also, many state functions started to be run by the army.

COMEBACK OF THE OLD OLIGARCHIES

After the death of Chávez, the oligarchies tried to make a comeback by rallying their old allies. These people have absolutely no interest in democracy or human rights. It's in their interest to maintain the crisis, so as to destabilise the government. For them, young people dying in protests are just a good picture, a good piece of propaganda for their agenda.

The private sector has no interest in the 'common good'. There's the lack of many essential products, but we must have in mind that the total amount spent on food imports was US\$7,7 billion and on medicines US\$2,4 billion in 2014, while they were US\$2,1 billion on food and US\$608 millions on medicines in 2004. A lot of money is being spent, but the population is suffering more and more every year. Meanwhile, the dollar deposits of Venezuelan companies outside the country rose 233% in just five years. The oligarchies protect themselves against the crisis that they induce and complain about. They use the misery of the people for their political games.

In 2015, the opposition got over 2/3 of the seats, which would give them control of the government. Of course Maduro wouldn't easily allow that, so the judiciary (which is, like the army, completely controlled by the government) blocked the election of three deputies of the opposition, so that they wouldn't have the 2/3 majority. The opposition refused that and started a boycott. On August of 2016, the judiciary started to take over some of the legislative functions, but even before that the Supreme Court was rejecting any law approved by parliament.

A national constituent assembly was convoked, promptly rejected by the opposition. The election of the 545 members for that national constituent assembly was two months ago and had the participation of over half of the electorate. Now they're going to produce a new constitution which will have to pass through a national referendum. Half of the members of that assembly are composed according to the region and the

other half according to different sectors, such as peasants, businessmen and students.

After the coup d'état in Brazil, the election of Macri in Argentina and the progression of the US agenda in South America, Venezuela is getting more isolated and it was suspended from the Mercosul.

How is Venezuela, since Chávez, resisting the attacks? By maintaining the Maduro government through the control of the judiciary and, especially, of the army. The military perform many of the state functions, such as delivering essential goods to the poorest people. They are also being used to repress the demonstrations and many trials are being held by military courts.

PROTESTS

In the last four months over a 100 people have been killed during the protests. People from both sides are getting killed. Since April, about 3000 protesters were arrested. Over 200 are still imprisoned. The majority of the deaths are caused by the police, which not only kill but also generate fake proofs of crimes to arrest protesters. But maybe the most shocking of the deaths was of a young man who was lynched, stabbed and burnt alive by protestors in the Altamira square, on May 20th, after being accused of trying to rob someone.

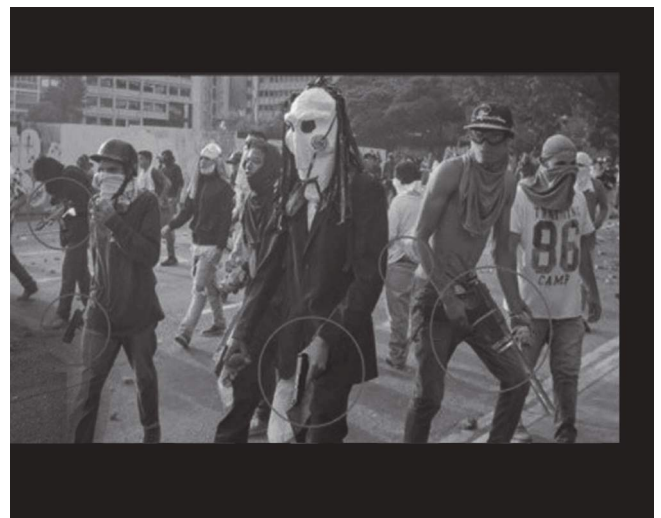
Both sides make fake news. Take a look at the image below: in the left it's the original picture (EFE/Miguel Gutiérrez); in the right, it's the edited picture with guns, utilised by the government media.

Of the 32 ministers of Maduro's government, 11 are military; and 11 of the 23 regional governors are former military. Eight companies created by the government to reanimate the economy belong to the army. They include a bank, a farming

company, a television channel, a building company and one company of water supply. The Caminpeg, which would be the equivalent of the PDVA in the production and exploration of minerals, is controlled by the army. Some military have connections with offshore companies, and the corruption denunciations only grow. There are many tales of people buying supplies illegally from the military. In August, the government distributed guns to the population. This is part of making them more aligned to the army. Slowly, the PSUV (United Socialist Party of Venezuela) is becoming a branch of the army.

Maduro isn't so different from Chávez. Chávez used the military as his power base. He relied on the army as a way to resist the attacks from the right. Typical of authoritarian socialists. But the problems of the past, such as famine, returned. They didn't return as bad as it used to be, but there is no hope that Maduro's government will be able to thrive. And, if the old oligarchs return to power, they will easily and quickly undo all the progressive measures passed by the Chávez government. When it isn't the working class who conquer it, through riots and strikes, then it's just a weak and temporary victory.

Venezuela's problems are ours too. The same way years ago the people there put all their hope in one man, we're seeing it now in UK, with people cheering that Jeremy Corbin manage to gain a few more seats for the Labour Party. If we consider that as a victory, it means that the working class is suffering from myopia. The question that remains is why, after all the lessons from history and contemporary cases, we still keep believing that things will really change through the election of a leftist party? Why do we keep believing we can win playing their games? We can win, as we did many times in history. But we must recognise that our battlefield is in the factories and farms, schools and prisons. We must focus our efforts on these places.



Extract from: Anarchists of the Caribbean and Central America on the Neo-Liberal and Militaristic “Madurisation” of Chavismo

June 13, 2017

Federación Anarquista de Centro América y el Caribe, (Anarchist Federation of Central America and the Caribbean) Communications Committee

(full text: <https://libcom.org/tags/anarchist-federation-central-america-caribbean>)

We are with those who play a main role in the protests in popular neighbourhoods such as El Valle, Coche, 23 de Enero, Baruta, and 5 de Julio in Petare, Caracas; with the general uprising carried out in the southern area of popular and working-class Valencia. Our hearts are in the occupations and recovery attempts in supermarkets, in the violent confrontations with the police in La Isabelica, San Blas, Los Cedros, los Guayos, Tocuyito, Estado Carabobo, which have been replicated in the States of Táchira, Mérida, Maracaibo, Barquisimeto, Falcón, testified by Venezuelan comrades related to our perspective of struggle.

We stand against the Bolivarian National Police, the Bolivarian National Guard, and the Bolivarian Service of Military Intelligence, which, even though they add the adjective “Bolivarian” to their names, remain an essential support for the authoritarian and murderous state. We stand against the paramilitary “collectives,” created through the Zamora Plan, fed by the degradation of the authentic popular movements of the 90’s through the hand of bureaucracy and Chavista militarism. We stand against the violence of the media belonging to the opposition politicians, which only seek to agitate the polarization among the political machines in order to force a simple replacement of oppressors as an alleged way out of the current crisis.

We stand with the thousands of prisoners with no legal protection who are sent as terrorists to military courts and overcrowded jails. The Bolivarian Constitution of 1999 stipulates that military justice is confined to crimes of military nature, but as we can see, it’s just words on paper, just like all legal regulations if we talk about sustaining dominant interests.

We stand with the families of the dozens of deceased, most of them young people and more than a thousand injured. We stand with the student youth and the popular neighbourhoods

who have developed their own self-defence groups in the avenues and streets of the different barrios. We stand with those young people who, in Maracay, raised a sign which read “Neither MUD nor PSUV— we are the ones from below who come for the ones above,” because the situation cannot be solved with a change of government.

Chavismo’s Anti-Imperialist Fig Leaf

The anti-imperialism used by the Chavista media machine is a clumsy fig leaf that pretends to hide very concrete facts: Big vultures of the energetic and mega mining sectors (Chevron, Schlumberger, Halliburton, and Barrick Gold) already received juicy concessions for 40 years in Venezuela, which will grant them a crucial leading role in the design of the new Constitution. President Nicolás Maduro gave instructions to his mass media to avoid criticism of US president-elect Donald Trump, who he said was a “friend” and a “comrade.” Through the state corporation Citgo, Maduro granted half a million dollars to build a bridge for dialogue with the new Yankee administration. The Venezuelan government has been paying, as a priority, the huge external debt of the country to international finance capital, and it remains a loyal member of the so-called National Council of Economic Productivity, whose ultimate expression is the intimate relation with the media oligopoly of the Cisneros Group, which in turn represents a warranty of support by most of the private mass media. This is a government that fits the Wall Street interests better every day, but does not want to stop being labelled as “Bolivarian,” “left wing,” and “anti-imperialist.”

This is, once again, about the frustrating limits of revolutions considered to be “national liberation,” “socialist,” “participatory,” “anti-imperialist,” etc., based on the fluctuations of the international prices of raw materials. This is again the crisis of “Saudi Venezuela,” now with a Bolivarian face, around which a sinister trail of hunger, community disintegration, the inability to develop autonomous livelihoods, existential chaos for millions of people, and violence among the ones below emerge again. And all of this is fostered by a combination of an oil-related nationalist obsession (“Venezuela as a power”), political clientelism, messianic warlordism, and a chauvinist cult of strong males, capable of doing magic from the top of the power pyramid and which has always inhibited popular solidarity, coexistence, fraternal work, and the celebration among those from below.

INTERNATIONAL ANARCHIST MEETING IN BRAZIL 2017

On the 14th and 15th of June, a meeting of the Commission of Relations of the International of Anarchist Federations (CRIFA) took place at a neighbourhood association centre in Jardim Novo, Campos Eliseos in the city of Campinas, Sao Paulo. This was an important event as it was the first CRIFA meeting held in South America since the International of Anarchist Federations was founded in 1968. The following member federations of the International of Anarchist Federations (IAF) were present: France, Germany, Slovenia and Croatia, Spain, Mexico, Argentina, Chile and, of course, the hosts, the Federal Anarchist Initiative of Brazil, not to mention ourselves, the Anarchist Federation in the UK.

The discussions were focused on the current events and situation of each country in Latin America that is affiliated to the IAF, the current situation in Venezuela and the improvement of the relationship and communication between Latin America and the IAF. At the end, it was agreed to make a solidarity statement with the Venezuelan anarchists and people. Three languages were used to communicate: English, Portuguese and Spanish, with the help of a few comrades that were translating back and forth. The meetings took place in an excellent comradely atmosphere.

There were also specific meetings of Latin American federations to improve their work together, to strengthen their relations and to plan common projects and campaigns on issues that particularly affect their region, as well as to overcome the complex problems arising from the enormous distances that separate them geographically.

After the CRIFA, the 3rd General Anarchist Forum took place over the next three days, which was open to the public. Individuals and collectives from all over Brazil came to participate in the series of debates and conferences of different topics that took place. All of them were in Portuguese, which was a bit hard to follow. There was space for children, a hall for large events, a kitchen, and showers. Some international visitors participated in the work of the commissions, a lesson in how to do practical solidarity. Members of the neighbourhood association and other locals participated in various debates and shared leisure moments, pleasantly surprised that the behaviour of anarchists did not match up with that portrayed in the media.

Rene Berthier, from the French-speaking Federation Anarchist, gave a meeting on the centenary of the Russian revolution, Pablo Perez from the FLA of Argentina gave a conference about the free school, Escuela Libre de Constitucion, and Mario Rui from Portugal talked about the anarchist movement in Portugal.

There was a joint debate, entitled "America Latin America and Europe: nationalism, the crisis of globalisation and criminalisation of social struggles". In another forum, Erika, of the Fenikso Nigra local group of the IFA-Brazil, introduced a debate on family, gender and anarchism. There were other simultaneous debates and conferences, such as "40 years of The Enemy of the King", an interesting Brazilian anarchist newspaper by one of its last members, Carlos Baqueiro, "anarchism and syndicalism today", which introduced the Fenikso Nigra and the Liga Anarquista of Rio de Janeiro. There were also meetings on "Anarchism: ethnic-racial resistance and struggle in Latin America", "Anarchism as a practice in communities" presented by Fenikso Nigra and the Aurora Nigra Collective, "One hundred years of the general strike of 1917 in Brazil", "Free love: gender and sexuality today", "Anarchist federalism in the 21st century: challenges, projects and practices" and "Cooperative self-management".

All of this, along with music events and food. The events were organised together with musicians and dancers of the neighborhood association.

At the end of the week, we were invited by Johnny, from the Aurora Negra Collective, to visit the cultural space in Sao Paulo, "Centro de Cultura Social da Fila Dalva", an occupation of an empty house in the favela (shanty town) of Fila Dalva that is used by the community. After the Forum, some of us went to Sao Paulo and some of our comrades continued their trip with the locals to Rio de Janeiro and Salvador da Bahia.

On a personal note: Regarding the issue of the language barrier, it was suggested to use Esperanto as the official language of the International of Anarchist Federations. In my opinion, instead of one, we should have three official languages: English, Portuguese and Spanish. They are the languages that the majority speak and if one person does not understand in one language, it could be backed up by the other two. This was happening in the CRIFA and it went well. Given the different levels of knowledge of the three languages from individuals, the fact that federations from Europe were able to communicate in English and the federations from the Hispanic countries main languages are Spanish and Portuguese. These two languages and Italian are similar, which could be understandable at certain points. This is my personal opinion and I would like to share it.

E, AF Member attending the meeting



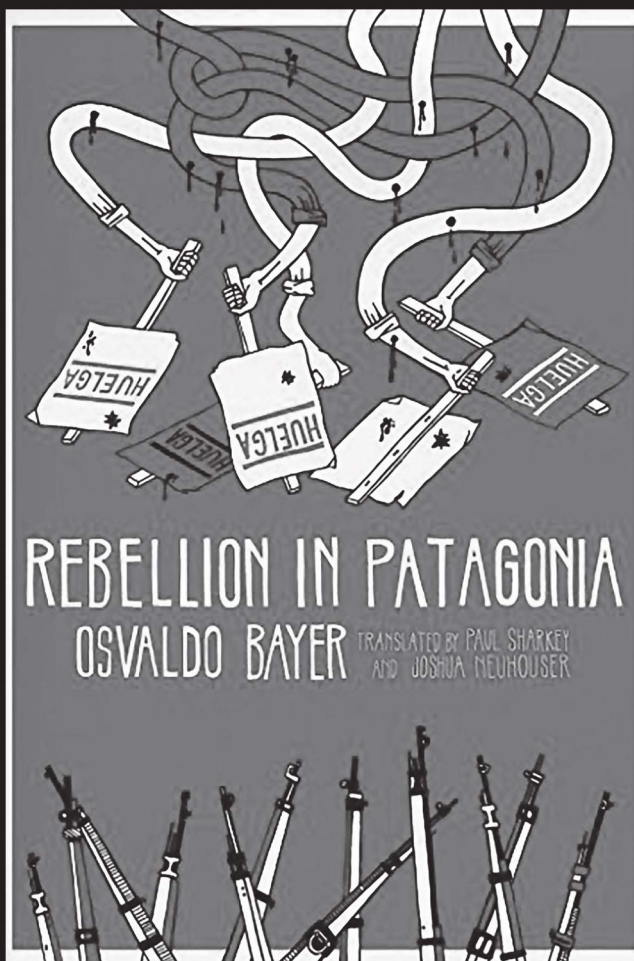
Book REVIEW

Rebellion in Patagonia

Oswaldo Bayer

AK Press
506 pages
£17.00

Rebellion in Patagonia details the extraordinary anarchist rebellion in southern tip of South America, Patagonia in Argentina. Very little about this rebellion has been written in English, the most noticeable mention being in the travel book *In Patagonia* by the late Bruce Chatwin.



The history of the anarchism in Argentina was that of a mass social movement. However, by the time Oswaldo Bayer published the novel *Los Vengadores de la Patagonia Trágica* ("The Avengers of Tragic Patagonia"), this history had largely been forgotten by the general public. A film was made based on the book but when Juan Peron returned to power in 1973 he immediately clamped down on it. His wife Isabel Peron (of Don't Cry For Me Argentina fame) had the film censored in 1974 and Bayer's name now appeared on the blacklist of a Peronist paramilitary group. Bayer fled to West Germany, whilst one of the stars of the film had to leave for Mexico.

When Peron was ousted the government continued to dish out harsh treatment to Bayer's works. One of the military leaders ordered all copies of the book to be burned "so that this material cannot keep deceiving our youth as to the true good represented by our national symbols, our family, our Church, and, in sum, our most traditional spiritual heritage, as synthesised by the motto, 'God, Fatherland, Family'".

It was in light of this history that the author condensed the 4-volumes of *Avengers* into this shorter volume.

One of the leading characters in the book is Antonio Soto from Galicia in northern Spain. When he was thirteen years old, his family moved to Argentina. Antonio had problems adapting to his new country and returned to Galicia.

At the outbreak of the First World War Antonio was 17. He read Leo Tolstoy's denunciation of military service and decided to flee to Buenos Aires. The city was seething with agitation, strikes and the mass circulation of anarchist papers. Antonio made contact with the anarchist movement there.

Antonio was an archetypal Gallego (Galician), tall, with red hair and blue eyes, hinting at the Celtic blood in his veins. At the age of 22 Antonio joined the Serrano-Mendoza Theatre Company which started touring the Patagonian ports in 1919. At that time, the region was suffering from a wool slump, with resulting wage cuts and sharpened antagonism between the mainly British sheep farmers and their workforce. The Workers Society was starting organising opposition to the employers in Rio Gallegos. One of its leading members, the Basque journalist José María Borrero, saw in Soto a dynamic organiser, and persuaded him to leave the Company and to stay to help the Workers Society. He described to Soto the plight of the Chilean migrants, Chilotes, of native Indian stock, who were treated with less respect than the sheep by the farmers. Soto got work as a docker in the port.

In a few months, on 24th May 1920, the general assembly of the Workers Society of Rio Gallegos decided to affiliate to the Argentine anarchist union the FORA, electing him its General Secretary. The workers listened to Soto and other anarchist orators, and that included the Chilotes.

He managed to get the workforce of Rio Gallegos together for a strike and March to celebrate the 11th anniversary of the execution of the Spanish anarchist educationalist, Francisco Ferrer. An attempt was made on his life, when someone jumped out of the shadows one night. The watch in his pocket deflected the blow.

Soto stepped up the action, calling for a general strike. He was supported by the Red Council, led by Italians. They had 500 horsemen. They attacked the rich farmers and looted money, food and drink. President Yrigoyen sent a cavalry force from Buenos Aires in January 1921 to put down the uprising. This was led by Lieutenant Colonel Varela, who handed out free pardons to all strikers who gave up their arms. The leading activists were arrested, except Soto. He was hidden on the outskirts of Rio Gallegos, by Dona Carmen, "Dona Maxima Lista" (a play on the word maximalist in Spanish) as she was humorously nicknamed by the anarchists. This woman of almost 80 ran a small restaurant for employees, was a dedicated anarchist, and supported the workers movement.

By now the Red Council had perished in an ambush. Unrest continued throughout the winter, with strikes in the ports. The group around Soto planned a spring offensive, with land seizures from the farmers.

This time Varela was sent again. This time he had orders not to negotiate and pacify, but to unleash a blood bath. He smashed the workers' movements in the towns. Soto determined to continue the struggle in the countryside and started spreading propaganda among the gauchos and labourers. Varela's forces began a campaign against the revolutionaries on the pampas. On five different occasions, they surrounded strikers, promised their lives if they surrendered, and then gunned down hundreds.

Eventually Varela's forces caught up with Soto and his group at a ranch. Soto had no illusions about what would happen and urged the strikers, in the main Chilotes, to break up into small groups, disperse and continue the struggle. The German anarchist Pablo Schulz urged the strikers to make a heroic stand. Neither point of view impressed the Chilotes who believed that if they surrendered they would be treated well. Soto was outvoted. He failed to convince the others of the foolishness of their actions. He then said that he was not prepared to remain, and with ten others, escaped on horseback.

Those who remained were surrounded and rounded up. They were then humiliated, tortured and shot. Up to 120 were murdered there, on December 8, 1921 and the total figure for murdered workers in the repression may have been as high as 1,500, the majority shot and then incinerated on bonfires.

In reaction to these appalling massacres Wilckens, an anarchist from Germany, shot Varela dead in 1923. In return Wilckens was shot dead in prison by an aristocrat and member of the right wing Patriotic League. This itself triggered a general strike that spread throughout the country. A mass demonstration in Buenos Aires was fired on by the police with many dead and wounded.

All of this is covered in the book, which sometimes seems to take on the aspects of some Western film epic. The international nature of the anarchist movement is illustrated with characters from Spain, Italy, Germany, Russia and elsewhere.

The taboo has been broken in Argentina with Bayer's books on display in stores and special showings of the film. As Bayer remarks at the end of this book: *"Time always tears down the curtain that tries to hide the truth. A crime can never be covered up forever."*

Book REVIEW

The Dossier of Subject No.1218: a Bulgarian anarchist's story

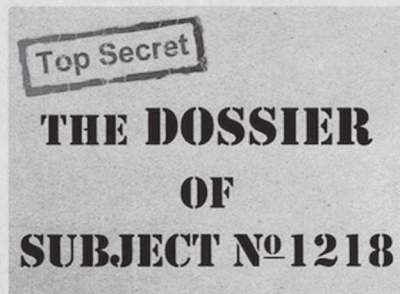
Alexander Nakov

Black Cat Press

150 pages

£12.00

The Dossier of Subject No.1218, is written by the Subject himself, Alexander Nakov, a Bulgarian anarchist veteran.



A Bulgarian Anarchist's Story

by

ALEXANDER NAKOV



As the dossier from the Bulgarian secret police file reads:

“Alexander Metodiev Nakov was born on 1st August 1919 in the village of Kosacha, Pernik department, a Bulgarian, resident in the town of Pernik ...Works in the ‘republic’ mine as a locomotive fitter. Educated to 7th grade. Descended from a poor family....As early as 1937, he entered the ranks of the anarchist movement and embarked upon militant activity: he helped launch an anarchist group among the workers of the erstwhile machine department of what is now the ‘Machinostroitel’ plant. In 1941, the subject and five other anarchists were arrested by the police and sentenced to 6-8 years in close custody. He served 3 years in prison. After release from prison, he stayed in his native village, carrying on with his anarchist activity....the subject was thw Southwest Bulgarian Anarchist Union’s organizing officer for the town of Stanke Dimitrov. After the anarchist movement was outlawed (by the incoming Stalinist regime-reviewer), the subject carried on with his activity as a militant, taking part in an illegal anarchist conference, distributing mutual aid stamps and collecting funds for anarchists hit by reprisals. As a result of this activity he was sent in 1948 to the Belene Labour and Re-Education Camp, where he behaved very badly, being punished several times as a result. He was freed from the camp on 10th August 1953.”

What the secret police report shows is that Alexander Nakov suffered under the fascist regime in Bulgaria and then under the Stalinists. What the report doesn’t say is that Belene was a concentration camp, and when Nakov came out of a punishment cell there: “The comrades greeted me with food, but when we went to hoe the sunflowers, I was unable to keep hold of the hoe. I survived thanks solely to the mutual aid among us anarchists, which has always been not only a simple human principle but a well-organized practice. One comrade stood on my right side, another stood on my left, and as they hoed their lines, they hoed mine too.”

This is Alexander’s story in his own words. Always modest, he downplays his own role in the Bulgarian anarchist movement. As the historical introduction notes: “the history of the anarchist movement in Bulgaria is one marked by great heroism, fevered propaganda and activity, often under very difficult circumstances. Bulgaria was one of the countries where anarchism developed outside of small groupings to become a large movement. It deserves far more attention than it has received in the past. The publication of this book on the life of the exemplary anarchist militant, Alexander Nakov, is hopefully the beginning of a re-evaluation of that movement”.

Writing wryly about his life, Alexander Nakov remarked: “Secondary education in fascist prisons...higher education in Bolshevik prisons”.

AF PUBLICATIONS

OUT NOW

BASIC BAKUNIN

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

A5 - £2 (+p&p)

REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN

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

A5 - £2 (+p&p)

A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO ANARCHIST COMMUNISM

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

A6 - Free / Donation (+p&p)

THE ROLE OF REVOLUTIONARY ORGANISATION

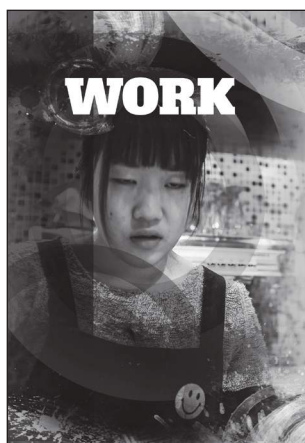
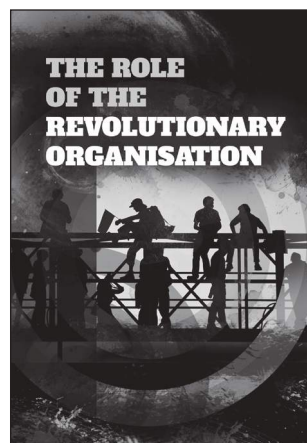
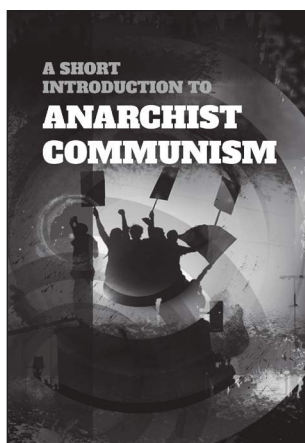
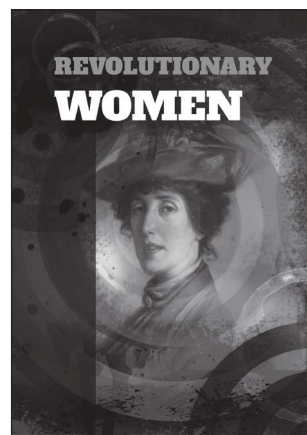
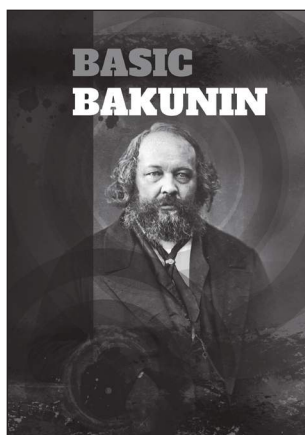
We in the Anarchist Federation seek the abolition of capitalism and state in favour of bringing about a society based on the guiding principle 'From each according to their ability, to each according to their need.' This is anarchist communism. In order to achieve this we need a revolutionary organisation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

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WORK

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

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Out of print pamphlets available to download on afed.org.uk.

Resistance to Nazism

Introduction to Anarchist Communism

Against Nationalism

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

Anarchist Federation pamphlets and other publications available from:

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please contact us for p+p costs

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

THE AIMS & PRINCIPLES

of the ANARCHIST FEDERATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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