

ANARCHY AND
ORGANISATION
ISSUE ONE

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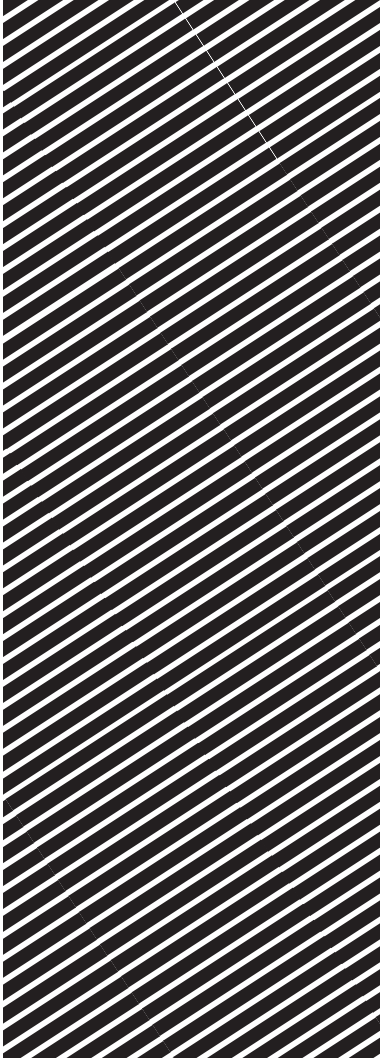
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EDITORIAL



HELLO AND WELCOME TO THIS, the first – or possibly second – issue of Black Light, the zine of the Melbourne Anarchist Club (MAC). This issue, like the previous, has been produced on stolen land sometime prior to WWII; MAC is not to be confused with the Melbourne (Capitalist) Club, though we are happy to squat their premises should they become available. To add to the confusion, the first issue of Black Light was actually published back in March 2011, and launched at a party to celebrate the 140th anniversary of the Paris Commune. But because we're anarchist and tricky, we decided to name that issue zero... As a test. (You can read Issue Zero on the MAC website.)

As for us, MAC has been around for a couple of years now, but only really came to the public's attention when in 2008 we purchased a building in Northcote at 62 St Georges Road. At first, this building was named the Melbourne Anarchist Resource Centre (MARC); more recently, it's simply been termed MAC. Currently, the building houses the offices of the Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation, a library, and is the site of a new infoshop to be launched (with a party!) on Saturday, August 11. Between September 2008 and October 2009 MARC (MAC) housed the Barricade

anarchist infoshop (est. 1995): at the end of 2009 Barricade departed MAC for Loophole community centre, opening in early 2010. Sadly, Loophole's lease recently (August 2012) terminated, but we understand Barricade will be re-constructing itself elsewhere and (hopefully) celebrating its 18th birthday early next year.

Further afield, both the Black Rose infoshop in Sydney and Organise! collective in Adelaide have recently also announced their – perhaps temporary, perhaps not – dissolution. Black Rose was established way back in 1982, and has undergone various permutations in its 30-year history: it may even be resurrected at some stage. For its part, Organise! was one of a small number of anarchist collectives that have formed in Adelaide over the last decade or two (cf. Wildcat), none of which seem able to form a lasting presence. In any event, Organise!, along with Jura and MAC, helped to produce *Sedition*, a joint published in February. The launch for *Sedition* featured a special theatre performance on the subject of Occupy; in October, the same troupe will be presenting an opera, *1938*, as part of the Melbourne Fringe Festival: we hope to feature some writings on revolutionary theatre in our next issue.

The theme for this issue of Black Light is 'anarchy and organisation', with contributions from Anonymouse on social work versus radical politics and Kieran Bennett on the prospects for anarchist organising in the current political climate; Evelyn Enduata contributes some thoughts on Aboriginal autonomy.

We also publish an extract from Tim Briedis' recently-completed thesis on the 'Self-Management Group' of 1970s Brisbane, and some further historical considerations by Brendan Libertad. Note that in the previous Black Light we published an article on Voina/Война, the Russian art group; a film about the group is screening at this year's Melbourne International Film Festival.

If you'd like to get in touch with MAC you can do so via email, by writing to our PO box, attending one of our events, or dropping by the space during its regular weekend opening hours. We hope you enjoy the Bookfair and we look forward to producing another issue of Black Light before the year's end. If you'd like to contribute or want to comment on any of the articles within, drop us a line at blacklightzine@gmail.com.

RADICAL

BRISBANE:

THE SELF-MANAGEMENT

GROUP (1971–1977)

BY TIM BRIEDIS

IN 2008, A FRIEND MENTIONED THE Self-Management Group (SMG), which he knew was a large revolutionary grouping from Brisbane that no one had researched. I became fascinated by them. I learnt that, like Mutiny, SMG's politics were left-libertarian, highly critical of vanguardist models of change that require building a party of professional revolutionaries. According to its political programme, SMG was:

«...unified around the essential demand of workers' councils as the basis of a real democracy. In these councils people will have equal

decision-making and be paid an equal wage. The Group does not see itself as yet another leadership, merely as people in socialist struggle where they live and work.

Its members experienced police repression too. Brian Laver, a prominent SMG activist, recalls that he was arrested around a dozen times during the period of its existence. Greg George, another member, was put on trial for drug charges when police planted pethidine in his car. Of particular interest to me was the SMG's large numbers, dwarfing the small ultra-left networks that I had personally encountered in Australia.

It was a product of the global upsurge of radicalism in the late sixties and early seventies, and was active from 1971–1977. Even compared to ideologically similar groups that existed around Australasia in that period, the SMG's size and level of organisation was unique. It had a 'two-tier structure', with two -three hundred activists in cells at places of study or work and sixty – seventy full members. It was 'the pre-eminent far left group' in Brisbane. Three former members argued that the SMG was as influential as the Brisbane section of the Communist Party (CPA) in the period.

Reclaiming its hidden history is a useful task in itself. For contemporary anarchists, there is sometimes a sense that such level of organisation is only possible in far-off places like Spain or Greece. A 'cultural cringe' can pervade activists' memory of Australian radicalism, limiting possibilities and understanding of local conditions. In the British context, where modern anarchist groups are comparatively marginal, John Quail describes how:

«I had wondered why left-wing politics always had to do with foreign parts, though I had found much disputational mileage in the events in Barcelona in 1936 and Kronstadt in 1921... There was too much dreaming in our transference of the heady days of past revolutions in other places to the sooty backstreets and Arndale centres of Leeds. It was our own place and time we should have been talking about.»

The SMG's practice ran counter to this fetishisation of revolutions in distant places. They emphasised the local, agitating against experiences of alienation and hierarchy in daily life. Despite the reputation of Brisbane, even within Australia, as being an especially boring and conservative place, they saw revolutionary potential in the mundane routine of everyday existence. Their aspirations were utopian, seeing self-management as a total transformation of society, which would radically expand democracy. Drew Hutton, a former member, argues:

«There are two types of anarchists in the world. You can be a monastic anarchist and hope for the change you want to happen, or you can try and make it (revolution) happen. We tried to make it happen.»

The Self-Management Group emerged [in 1971] out of the New Left's shift to revolutionary politics. Although activists like Brian Laver had a substantial presence in public discourse, their role in shaping revolutionary subjectivity was much less significant than factors such as the emergence of a non-Leninist, libertarian culture in Brisbane and the circulation of international struggles. Activists' lived experiences of state repression, direct action and collective organisation also played a pivotal part in this transformation. Although this revolutionary shift was a common development for New Left groupings across the world, the SMG's politics were unique, reflecting the features of the protest movement distinctive to Brisbane. SMG took [Society for

Democratic Actions'] search for 'grassroots forms of politics' a step further, and saw autonomous rebellions by students and workers as constantly going on, and as capable of radically changing society. They attempted to go beyond the 'modesty' of some of the Brisbane New Left's demands, and expressed a utopian politics centred around the concept of self-management.

From today's vantage point, self-management may seem like an unusual concept with which to define a grouping from the revolutionary left. A plethora of business literature discusses techniques for developing a corporate culture of 'self-management' – more about encouraging people to better manage their own exploitation, or the exploitation of others. However, radicals of the late sixties and seventies understood self-management very differently. For George Katsiaficas it was a central aspiration of the 'global New Left', shared by movements against racism, patriarchy and bureaucracy. In contemporary neoliberal discourse self-management is framed in terms of individuals improving their workplace 'productivity', but it was then seen as a democratisation of social institutions, creating a new world in which 'hierarchical authority' was abolished. Self-management was contrasted with both the bureaucratic class in the West and the state-run managerial apparatus of the Soviet Union.

The SMG promulgated this optimism about such utopian possibilities. Members were 'drawn to its democratic message'. Ian Rintoul explained that

the SMG was all about 'socialism from below' and recollected how in his first student election he crossed out the official options and scrawled 'For Workers' Councils'. Through arguing for self-management in all areas of society, SMG critiqued capitalism systemically.

Nevertheless, revolutions are not simply the product of action by revolutionary groups. St Petersburg 1917, Spain 1936 and May 1968 all surprised organised revolutionaries. These 'orgasms of history' were the products of vast social dynamics, beyond the control of any one organisation or milieu. It would therefore be wrong to judge SMG by their success or failure at sparking revolution. However, revolutionaries can complement processes of struggle. They can argue for greater democracy and militancy. They can foster a culture of radical thought, and connect everyday antagonisms to politics. In a 1979 essay, Greg George and Brian Laver argued similarly that their task was not 'to make revolutions' but to help people become revolutionaries. They believed that broader social forces posed a 'multiform challenge' to authority. Without the existence of these forces, their task would be absurd.



A POVERTY OF RADICAL THOUGHT

CAN SOCIAL WORK PROMOTE REVOLUTION?

BY ANONYMOUS

EVERY RADICAL KNOWS THE rhetoric: social workers are agents of the state, maintaining the status quo. But as a radical and a social worker working as a case manager in area mental health, I work with the ambivalence of being a cog in

the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA)¹ while at the same time attempting to engender in the clients I work with a sense of the social injustice, one that informs their circumstances, promotes the hope for a better society and the capacity to do something about it. Within the limits of this brief article,

¹ Yes, I've used Wikipedia, yes, I'm referring to a concept espoused by a Marxist/Structuralist: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Althusser (accessed on the 11th of July 2012).

I want to trace how the organisation of social work in a contemporary Australian context ensures the maintenance of the current socio-political landscape, whilst acknowledging the potential value in the work we do as social workers to foster a radical consciousness in those we work with.

My analysis is immanent because it assumes structural considerations (such as the need for a society predicated on anarchist principles and attendant critiques based on the current state of affairs) and focuses on actual conditions. My point is to attempt to show how social work fails to think and act radically in the first place – a “poverty of (radical) thought” that is partly caused by how social work is currently organised by its professional association, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), and in the field – and the extent to which social work interventions can work towards radical ends in an adverse context. That is, my vision is of an anarchist society, my analysis is how current social work organisation hampers the potential for this society to be realised, and my query is: how we can further the development of an anarchist future in our practice as social workers, despite the inherent and contingent factors militating against this?²

THE ORGANISATION OF SOCIAL WORK TODAY

It's an oft-repeated account³ that social work as a profession arose out of early charity and welfare organisations in

the 1800s and, in the early twentieth century, marked its place in the world through the advent of casework: the process of so-called professionals making assessments of the wants and needs of individual clients and assisting them to attain these. Clearly, focusing on intervening on social issues on an individual-by-individual basis de-emphasises the social and structural origins of individuals' concerns and possible collective actions that could arise if these people were enabled to band together. That is, social work pacifies and quells potentially radical collective actions if it attends solely to the individuals affected by structural disadvantages of various kinds (all of which are grounded in the existence of a class society).

The focus of social work as a therapeutic and individual-focused practice that assists survivors to ameliorate their adverse circumstances is reinforced by educational institutions and programs qualified by the AASW. This practice of vague reformism continues in the field via employers seeking skilled professionals who, in effect, leech off the working and underclass by “case managing” them; thus, inserting a layer of professionals who may, on occasion, speak on behalf of the perceived and usually individual interests of those they work for, rather than assisting their “clients” to work together to resolve their concerns.

² I don't expect this article to be of much interest to the average Black Light enthusiast by the way.

³ For example, in: Bailey, Roy and Mike Brake (1975). 'Introduction: Social work in the welfare state' in *Radical Social Work*, Edwin Arnold Press: London, p.6.

THE CONSEQUENT PRACTICE OF SOCIAL WORK IN CLINICAL MENTAL HEALTH TODAY

It should be clear by now that I understand that social work, as a part of the RSA, coerces, pacifies and otherwise disempowers its clients. The fact that there are social work “clients” highlights this (unequal) power relationship – and by “clients” I’m usually referring to the working class, the underclass, women, various ethnicities including indigenous people and refugees, disabled and young people, among others, for whom social workers work with and/or for.

In my line of work, people with mental illness invariably have a Fordist or

police intervention and hospitalisation. On occasion, I am called upon to speak on their behalf, as if I really understand what it means to be a mentally ill underclass person living in the City of Yarra today.

There exists social work literature⁴ that points to the experiences of some of our society’s most vulnerable people, the mentally ill for example, as being subject to cultural and structural operations of oppression, where oppression refers to the processes of domination of one group of people by another on the basis of particular characteristics. But any analysis of oppression needs to acknowledge the significant role the state

THE BEST I CAN COME UP WITH SO FAR IS THE OFT-REPEATED APPROACH OF A PAULO FREIRE STYLE OF CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING OF THE OPPRESSED...

Hobson’s Choice form of “treatment”: being voluntarily or involuntarily medicated. I am more or less directly paid by the state to ensure clients are able to continue with their medication treatment by minimising the extent to which other aspects of their lives that result from structural disadvantage can negatively ramify on their treatment. Very rarely am I able to assist clients to seek other forms of treatment or enable them to rail against the social structures that disadvantage them and play no small role in their experience of mental illness. At best, I help them advocate for themselves for the kind of treatments they would like to receive or terminate their (involuntary) community treatment orders – the latter of which is subject to state legislation and enforced by the threat of, and actual,

and capitalism play; class-belonging being the principal factor here. Granted, a mentally ill, homeless, drug-addicted underclass person experiences their class position differently to a homeless, unemployed, indigenous teenage mother. Challenging the oppressions these people experience needs to acknowledge the forces of state and capital while being sensitive to more local aspects. Sadly, only the local component is acted upon in my practice and that of any other social worker I know and, as such, there is a dearth of anti-oppressive, let alone radical, social work practice in the contemporary mental health context.

⁴ Bishop, Anne (2002). *Becoming an ally: breaking the cycle of oppression*, Allen & Unwin: Sydney; Mullaly, Bob (2002). *Challenging Oppression: A Critical Social Work Approach*, Oxford: Melbourne

In any meaningful or significant manner, my social work practice barely recognises any of the structural causes relating to my clients' circumstances. The ideology of the state, capital and, indeed, psychiatry, remain unaffected by the work I do. Instead, I case manage clients and assist them with their treatment and some of their more pressing issues, without linking them to collectives or social change movements that seek an end to their difficulties – further, my role hampers them from seeking these themselves. Meanwhile, internationally, there is a growing number of mental health law, abolitionist and peer-led movements that seek an end to the unequal, discriminatory suspension of rights of people with a mental illness, but I am unaware of the extent to which these link the struggle against mental health oppression to social disadvantage born of class, capital and the state⁵.

THE POTENTIAL FOR TRULY RADICAL SOCIAL WORK TODAY

The question I pose is: how are social workers in area mental health services in Australia assisting mentally ill people to overcome their oppression by the state – assisting them to cease having their lives governed by legislation that denies their rights and accepts attendant state violence? If, as an anarchist, I want to see an end to the state and capital and instead people granted the freedom to live their lives as best they see fit, regardless of their mental states, how

5 Minkowitz, Tina (2010). 'The unfinished business of liberation' in *New Paradigm*, Summer 2010 (accessed on the 8th of July 2012): <http://www.vicserv.org.au/uploads/newparadigm/VICSERV%20NewParadigm%20Summer2010.pdf>

See also *The Icarus Project*, an online mental health community with links to radical groups: <http://theicarusproject.net>

do I bring this about in my practice – especially when social work has become a conservative force in the so-called welfare or human services?

The best I can come up with so far is the oft-repeated approach of a Paulo Freire style of consciousness-raising of the oppressed, whereby the oppressed are enabled to give voice to their individual and local experiences of oppression while these are linked to broader, social/structural/political aspects and activities geared towards changing and ending this oppression⁶. Group work and community development-style interventions would work best here. The cohort of mentally ill people I currently work with do not have a sense of collective action (this seems to be slipping from popular vernacular, Occupy movements aside), even though they quite often have a sense of the disadvantage and inequity of their circumstances. It behooves me to make opportunities to work on facilitating group work and collective actions towards radical ends but there's definitely no guarantee my employer will grant me such opportunities... yet.

I believe social workers need to focus on the interests and needs of our clients and less on our own incomes if we truly want to see the advent of a just society. We need to be bold and devious and provide the space for our clients to band together towards potentially radical ends under the guise of therapeutic interventions. If our clients can speak to and learn from each others' experiences

6 Ife, Jim (1999). *Community Development; creating community alternatives – vision, analysis and practice*. Longman: Melbourne, p.96.

and if we can assist them to link their individual difficulties to structural origins, they may be inspired to work collectively to reclaim the power and rights they have lost through oppressive legislation and link with other sites of resistance against the state and capital. If social workers promote such an analysis in our own co-workers and if we re-organise our workplaces to engage with structural considerations, we may be able to effect meaningful social change. If our education becomes one of actual social work that seeks to redress social disadvantage at the structural level and our “professional” peak body organises with a vision for a truly egalitarian society predicated on socialist principles, we might see social work exist as a dispersed and radical force in our communities rather than the conservative, collaborationist “profession” it is today.



ORGANISING

ANARCHY

IN CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIA

BY KIERAN BENNETT

THE FIRST TASK OF ANY SMALL political group is to understand the situation in which they seek to operate. Understanding the economic, political and social situation in a given society shows a political group the way forward; it allows us to identify what opportunities exist, what challenges we are likely to encounter, and what our capacity is likely to be in responding to these.

In issue one of *Sedition*¹, Jeremy² of the Jura collective presented an extremely optimistic picture of the current situation in Australia. In 'Organising in

Australia', Jeremy correctly identified that the Australian context presents significant challenges for revolutionary anarchists; we face a "political culture steeped in passivity and representative disempowerment". Persistent corporate propaganda informs us that "life in Australia is as good as it gets – or will be as long as we keep shopping". Reformism offers no realistic hope for achieving the radical change our society needs, and it is delusional to think that "the entire population will wake up one day, realise they're insurrectionists and spontaneously and instantly create the anarchist society". Any realistic assessment of what will be needed to achieve libertarian socialism directs us towards the task of organising: "we need to build a sustained revolutionary movement".

1 February 2012, pp. 2–4. *Sedition* is a new joint publication of Anarchist groups in Australia.

2 Disappointingly, each article in Issue 1 of *Sedition* is attributed to a pseudonym or to a first name only. A rather unnecessary step for a movement that is not underground.

Jeremy's initial argument for organised anarchism is absolutely correct, but his assessment of the organising situation in Australia is utterly wrong. Jeremy writes:

« There is widespread discontent and resistance among millions of people in Australia. They talk to each other and build networks and take a variety of political actions.

The available evidence on the organising situation in Australia suggests the opposite.

APATHY AND PARTIAL DISCONTENT

In June *The Australian* breathlessly reported that strike days in Australia had reached a seven year high of 257,600³, but when you step outside the ideological bubble of the Murdoch media talk of renewed industrial militancy seems farfetched. In 1996, Australia recorded 928,500 strike days, in 1986 it was 1,390,000, in 1976 it was 3,799,400⁴. In 1987 there were 223 strike days per thousand workers, in 2008 it was 21, and in 2007 at the height of 'WorkChoices', it fell to an all-time low of five⁵.

The decline in strike activity is mirrored by the decline in union membership:

« From August 1992 to August 2011, the proportion of those who were trade union members in their main

job has fallen from 43% to 18% for employees who were males and 35% to 18% for females.⁶ »

Australia's working class remains in the trough of a thirty-year low in resistance, as measured through strike activity and union membership. These measures are particularly relevant as Jeremy argues for anarchist engagement with those unions pursuing the 'organiser' model.

The discontent that does exist in Australia is expressed either as total apathy, or as discontent with the present head of government. Compulsory voting is still working for the Australian state. Voter turn-out in federal elections remains at or around 94%⁷, and the informal vote in federal elections hovers at around 4%.⁸

There is no evidence of millions of discontented Australians engaging in network-building or political action in statistics on civic participation. At the 2006 census⁹:

« 19% of adults reported that they had actively participated in civic and political groups in the previous 12 months. This level of involvement varied with age, peaking at around 24% for people aged 45-64 years. The civic or political groups that people were most likely to be active

3 <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/industrial-relations/call-to-curb-strike-powers-as-days-lost-hit-s-7-year-high/story-fn59n003-1226388159288>
4 ILO, <http://laborsta.ilo.org/>, 9C Days not worked, by economic activity
5 ILO, <http://laborsta.ilo.org/>, 9D Rates of days not worked, by economic activity

6 ABS, 'Decline in Trade Union Membership', <http://j.mp/NKZJlt>
7 ABS, 'Democracy, Governance and Citizenship: Voter Turnout', <http://j.mp/LkQfsk>
8 ABS, 'Democracy, Governance and Citizenship: Informal Votes', <http://j.mp/Olvp1j>
9 It will be interesting to see the most recent census results, taken in the post-GFC world. The 2006 results are probably still a reasonable reflection of civic participation in Australia; anecdotally there does not appear to have been a sudden shift.

in were trade union, professional and technical associations (7%), environmental or animal welfare groups (5%), followed by body corporate or tenants' associations (4%). Only 1% reported active participation in a political party.¹⁰ >>

ANARCHY & FOMENTING RESISTANCE

All of this paints a grim picture for anarchists seeking to build a revolutionary movement in the current Australian context. There remain, however, some limited opportunities for advancing anarchism.

The 'Arab Spring' and the 'Occupy' movement of 2011 resonated with a small subsection of Australian society. For a short time 'Occupy' camps in major Australian cities provided an opportunity to advance anarchist ideas to those small groups of people who were inspired to emulate the actions of the Occupy movement in the United States.

Indigenous discontent with the Northern Territory Intervention continues, and the spread of welfare quarantining to the rest of Australia will affect Australians in major population centres for the first time.

The 40th anniversary of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra became the launching point for a renewed Embassy campaign by indigenous activists. The indigenous sovereignty movement argues that land rights are a poor substitute for indigenous sovereignty, a sovereignty that was never ceded.

Note that limited space may exist for anarchists to make the links between land rights, reconciliation and capitalism: land rights are about integrating indigenous communities more fully into Australian capitalism, co-opting indigenous resistance and further opening up indigenous-controlled lands for exploitation. Anarchists may feel uneasy about the statist-sounding language of sovereignty, but we are surely for indigenous self-determination, and there is no self-determination under capitalism. In order to advance such a dialogue, anarchists will need to actively engage in solidarity with the indigenous sovereignty movement, including the defence of the tent embassies that have been established in cities around Australia.¹¹

A minority of Australians continue to be disgusted with the treatment of refugees, and resistance inside the system of immigration detention centres continues. Anarchists in Australia are engaged in the campaign for refugee rights and against mandatory detention, but more could be made of the space this campaign presents were anarchists more consistently organised. Trotskyist groups use Refugee Action Collectives like Lenin-branded soap boxes, yet the nature of this issue lends itself to an anarchist critique. Anarchists should not be shy in arguing against state borders as a general principle. The Cross Border Collective in Sydney is producing some interesting work along these lines.¹²

Australians continue to express concern about the state of the environment, and

¹⁰ ABS, 'Democracy, Governance and Citizenship: Civic Participation', <http://j.mp/LrKms5>

¹¹ See www.treatyrepublic.net

¹² 'We Don't Cross Borders; Borders Cross Us', crossbordersydney.tumblr.com

climate change in particular. Outside the union movement, environmental politics are one of the largest areas of civic participation in Australia:

« Over 5 million people (34%) aged 15 years and over took some form of environmental action in 2007–08. People most commonly signed a petition (17%) or donated money to help protect the environment (14%), while attending a demonstration for an environmental cause was relatively rare (2%). Some people expressed their concern about the environment through a letter, email or by talking to responsible authorities (10%), or by volunteering, or becoming involved in environmentally related concerns (9%).¹³ »

As frustration with the capacity of mainstream political processes to address environmental issues increases, the space opens for anarchists to make the case that capitalism is responsible for ecological catastrophe, and that the capitalist state is incapable of an adequate response. Within the environmental movement, then, there is a two-fold task for anarchists: to argue for real mass organisation (and not GetUp style tokenism); to argue for tactics that actually confront polluters, the state and capitalism.

The election of conservative governments at the state level in the most populous Australian states has led to a renewed attack on public sector and construction workers. The trade union movement has

been militant in its response especially now that their supposed allies in the Labor party are in opposition. While supporting the campaigns of teachers, nurses and construction workers, anarchists within these sectors must be ready to argue for more militant tactics. We need to be ready to make the case that industrial ‘umpires’ should be ignored, that early compromise by union bureaucracy must be guarded against, and that continued disruptive industrial action delivers the goods. Again, these tasks would be easier if anarchists were a more organised tendency.

In general, the storm clouds of global financial crisis continue to grow on the horizon. While Australia has thus far been isolated from most of its effects, the situation continues to cause a sense of unease. Were a deepening of the global crisis to significantly affect Australia, the situation for Australian workers could change rapidly, and resistance could develop or falter in any number of ways.

It is likely that next year Australia will have a conservative federal government, intent on pushing politically-motivated austerity, attacking the union movement, and pushing a conservative social agenda. The task before us will be to argue for resistance. In his article in *Sedition*, Jeremy argues that “if we actually want to make change, we need to do the hard work of building accessible, long-term formal organisations, linked to larger networks”. In that, I whole-heartedly agree.



¹³ ABS, 'Democracy, Governance and Citizenship: Environmental Citizenship', <http://j.mp/NvC02K>

AFFLUENCE & AUTONOMY

BY EVELYN ENDUATTA

« If economics is the dismal science, the study of hunting and gathering economies must be its most advanced branch. Almost universally committed to the proposition that life was hard in the paleolithic, our textbooks compete to convey a sense of impending doom, leaving one to wonder not only how hunters managed to live, but whether, after all, this was living? The specter of starvation stalks the stalker through these pages. His technical incompetence is said to enjoin continuous work just to survive, affording him neither respite nor surplus, hence not even the “leisure” to “build culture.” Even so, for all his efforts, the hunter pulls the lowest grades in thermodynamics-less energy/capita/year than any other mode of production. And in treatises on economic development he is condemned to play the role of bad example: the so-called “subsistence economy”.¹»

FIELD-NOTEBOOK, MONDAY 3RD OF DECEMBER 2007

Yesterday was a day of quietude and rest. We all drove out to [our Mother's country], where we spent the day fishing and talking story. It was so nice to see the white sand again.

As is usual upon arrival, we [the women] laid out bed-sheets under the barrukal ('paper-bark') and djomula' ('coastal Casuarina') trees, down by the water. We gathered dharpa' ('tree, wood, sticks') for the fire, which we assembled a stone's throw from where we were seated, put a large pot of tea on the boil and then lay down to rest – scattered like knuckle-bones in the shade, half waiting for the tide to go out, half talking story about this and that, combing through one another's hair for djuku ('louse, small head lice') with a splint of sharpened bone. Meanwhile, the men and yawirrin' ('unmarried, initiated young men') had set the fishing-net up, just down from where we were seated within view of

¹ Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, Tavistock, London, 1974

ourselves and the fire. They preferred to gather farther down by the water to tend the fishing net.

The day moved on. Every half an hour or so we'd hear movement in the water and glimpse a sharp flash of light, reflecting silver in the net. Guthurra, Rarj and dhuway waded out each time, untangled the fish, and threw it in the ashes of our fire as they walked past. And so the hours passed. We caught more fish than we could eat; just enough to take back and share with those who'd stayed behind down at bottom camp. Come milmitjpa ('late afternoon just before dusk') we moved to pack up and return to camp. No one bothered to shower as it wasn't particularly hot. We sat under the 'street light' near the fire, rrambarji ('close, together, level, at one'), drinking tea and sharing qarali ('tobacco, cigarettes') before we each and the other disappeared from the fire-lit area... and everyone went to sleep.

« The traditional wisdom is always refractory. One is forced to oppose it polemically, to phrase the necessary revisions dialectically: in fact this was, when you come to examine it, the original affluent society. Paradoxical, that phrasing leads to another useful and unexpected conclusion. By the common understanding, an affluent society is one in which all the people's material wants are easily satisfied. To assert that the hunters are affluent is to deny then that the human condition is an ordained tragedy, with man the prisoner at hard labor of a perpetual disparity

between his unlimited wants and his insufficient means.

For there are two possible courses to affluence. Wants may be "easily satisfied" either by producing much or desiring little. The familiar conception, the Galbraithian way, makes assumptions peculiarly appropriate to market economies: that man's wants are great, not to say infinite, whereas his means are limited, although improvable: thus, the gap between means and ends can be narrowed by industrial productivity, at least to the point that "urgent goods" become plentiful. But there is also a Zen road to affluence, departing from premises somewhat different from our own: that human material wants are finite and few, and technical means unchanging but on the whole adequate. Adopting the Zen strategy, a people can enjoy an unparalleled material plenty-with a low standard of living.

That, I think, describes the hunters. And it helps explain some of their more curious economic behavior: their "prodigality" for example—the inclination to consume at once all stocks on hand, as if they had it made. Free from market obsessions of scarcity, hunters' economic propensities may be more consistently predicated on abundance than our own. Destutt de Tracy, "fish-blooded bourgeois doctrinaire" though he might have been, at least compelled Marx's agreement on the observation that "in poor nations the people are comfortable," whereas in rich nations "they are generally poor".² »

² Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, Tavistock, London, 1974

This, I suggest, is the reason state and federal governments feel so threatened by Indigenous people living on Country on Indigenous-owned land in the Northern Territory: because they have their own economic base. It has for this reason been historically 'difficult' for successive governments to shepherd or coerce Traditional Owners into situations and relations of wage-labour. As long as they have or retain their own economic base – their own collective means and mode of production... Traditional Owners will never be 'easy' to proletarianise.

The Northern Territory of Australia covers an area of approximately 1,349,129 km². Approximately 52% of this total area is Indigenous-owned land. Not only is this an extremely large estate it also happens to be very rich in mineral deposits. It is not a coincidence that successive policy measures designed to erode the property rights (among other rights) of Indigenous people have predominantly if not exclusively applied to the Northern Territory.



OCCUPY:

FROM THE STREETS TO

THE FACTORIES

BY BRENDAN LIBERTAD

Elements of this essay are taken from the authors' honours thesis on an occupation that occurred in 1979 in Altona at the Union Carbide factory within the Altona Petrochemical Complex. Another, slightly different version of this article was published in the Winter 2012 edition of the Australian IWW publication *Direct Action*.

IN THE CONTEMPORARY ERA OF corporate collapse the notion of 'occupation' has been reinvigorated, and produced a new wave. Historically speaking, these waves correspond, overwhelmingly, to an increased desperation and determination to struggle on behalf of the masses, and a recognition that their piece of the economic, social and political pie is small and being increasingly eroded. In this sense, occupation – arguably more than any other form of direct action – is people power in its purest form, one which demonstrates a collective willingness to use what is often the only weapon people possess – their bodies – against the might of the capitalist machine...

Some argue that the factory occupation was born in 1906, at the General Electric plant in Schenectady, New York, when 3000 workers occupied the factory in support of three Wobblies that had been targeted by management; IWW historian Fred Thompson has suggested that Cincinnati brewery workers occupied their factory in an industrial dispute in the 1880s. Where and when the first factory (or workplace) occupation took place is of less importance than why, how, and to what advantage.

As the terms “occupy” and “occupation” have rejoined contemporary parlance, and in a fashion even the corporate media cannot ignore, the notion of occupation – its rationale, aims,

historical tendencies and prevailing distinctions – are worth revisiting, particularly if the contemporary ‘occupy’ movement is to be extended beyond city squares and parks. Thus one of the key problems for the movement is its lack of a detailed and specific method of moving forward, of furthering and expanding the occupations, and thereby genuinely challenging the status quo. History, as is often the case, provides some clarification as to one possible way this can be achieved.

In 1968, Parisian students occupied their universities, and issued multiple declarations to their counterparts in the factories: occupy, as we are. Across the country occupations proliferated in workplaces, universities and public spaces, and the general spirit of revolt left the bourgeoisie shaking. In France, the end result was a near but failed revolution. Nonetheless, these events provide us with valuable lessons.

Occupations, by their very nature, are radical acts. We should understand occupations, generally, as an act of the property-less against the propertied, and of the power-less against the powerful. It is a fundamental challenge to property itself. Real power, however, lies in the workplace: the economy is where the main battle is fought. This is evident in the reaction to workplace and that to other, public occupations: those in positions of power and privilege can tolerate a public occupation until it becomes a nuisance; a factory or workplace occupation, on the other hand, requires immediate and hostile attention. One of the main reasons for

this is that a factory occupation forces workers to self-organise. To defend the occupation, and to organise all kinds of administrative requirements, workers must create councils or workers’ bodies to delegate various tasks, and in every historic occasion these councils have been established and organised democratically – from the bottom-up. If we accept that the natural form of political and economic organisation in a workers’ society is the workers’ council, as anarchists and syndicalists do, then factory occupations are, by default, revolutionary in form and function. This leads us to another important distinction.

Workplace occupations can also be divided into two broad categories: reformist occupations and revolutionary occupations. The first aims solely for a resolution in the dispute, usually in relation to wages and conditions. The second perceives the factory occupation as a transitory stage from capitalist society towards a social revolution, one which will completely overturn the established order. However, the transition from reformist aims to revolutionary ones is a minute one, particularly if workers are radicalised by their newfound power and capabilities, as is often the case. So occupations can begin with reformist intentions, and move towards revolutionary ones. The capitalist class, ever more class-conscious – as is often unfortunately the case – than the working class, recognises this fact, and it is for this reason that factory occupations are deemed dangerous, and often conflagratory, to their ends.

The President of General Motors, Alfred P. Sloan, identified the dangers inherent to the propertied through occupation, saying that the sit-down strike “denies the right of duly constituted branches of government to interfere... it is revolutionary in its dangers and implications.” Remarkably incisive, without a doubt. Between 1936 and 1939, 583 separate sit-down strikes (of at least a day’s duration) were initiated by US workers, with the auto-industry being at the forefront. In Flint, Michigan, a town where GM controlled all aspects of life – including the only radio station and the local paper, and where company spies employed lip-readers to prevent workers and their union organising – arguably the greatest US occupation

of intervention, the women of Flint – both those that worked in the plant and male workers’ spouses – created the Women’s Auxiliary Brigade and the Emergency Brigade, for which they donned red berets and armbands. These organisations were created to defend the strike from company thugs, Pinkerton agents and other prominent forms of state-terrorism. Brandishing clubs and a new, conscious, workers’ militancy, these organisations were just one of many established for all the various requirements an occupation produces.

Prior to the occupation, the women that worked at GM suffered conditions that could only be described as barbaric, with a Senate committee established

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occurred, beginning in December 1936 and ending in 1937. The workers in Flint occupied their factories for a period of 44 days, eventually winning recognition of the United Auto Workers (UAW), and in the process defeating one of the most ruthless and unscrupulous corporations in the country.

The Flint Sit-Down Strike was remarkable on many fronts, and has been described as the most “significant labor conflict of the twentieth century” by labour historian Sidney Fine. As noted, a factory occupation forces workers to self-manage, and this took on a profound nature during the Flint occupation. In response to the ever-present threat

after the strike finding that multiple women from one particular plant had to be treated for venereal disease traced back to one particular foreman. This was in no sense unusual or abnormal; indeed, it is indicative of the power relations engendered by the corporation’s totalitarian control over their employees, their families and the whole town. As far as wages were concerned, at the time the men were being paid 45c an hour; the women receiving only 12.5c – neither figure compensating for the crippling nature of the work, from which many men would return home (particularly after the “speed-ups”) unable to move, bruised and bloodied.

In his study of the Flint Sit-Down Strike, Walter Linder describes the beneficial aspects of factory occupations, as opposed to standard strikes, and these apply equally across time and place. Linder notes that multiple advantages are gained for the workers by occupying

workers' morale, as mentioned, can be lifted by the notion of occupation. Occupations are far more democratic, due to workers' self-organisation. Labour spies, a significant threat especially for the American labour movement, are less effective and numerous, according to

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the factory: firstly, the most immediate and obvious factor is the prevention of strikebreakers from continuing production. This also has significant ramifications for morale, in that the workers involved in the strike know – rather than presume or hope – that production has fully ceased. Similarly, as the basis of a strike is to prevent the employers from continuing production, an occupation is far more difficult to remove than is simply breaking through a picket line. So a factory occupation possesses important tactical advantages related to defence.

In a similar sense, as workers are inside the factory, rather than blocking entrances, bosses are less likely to violently break the strike, particularly as their expensive machinery is in the firing line – so all the usual suspects, “machine guns, tear gas and gangsters” are less likely to be deployed. Finally, from a public relations perspective, it is less easy to depict the strikers as the antagonists if they are inside the factory or workplace.¹ On another note,

Linder, due to occupation.

Arguably the most effective aspect of the factory occupation is related to the closer causal relationship that the occupation creates between reform and revolution: an employer will more likely feel pressured to grant the workers' demands if their entire property and social standing, and that of others in their class, are under threat. Wages and conditions are minor when compared with wholesale proletarian revolt. In that sense, revolutionaries are the best reformers.

The greatest era of factory occupations occurred following the First World War, where workers in Russia, Germany and Italy – among others – occupied their factories and post-war workers' militancy reached its peak. In Italy, in particular, the occupations were moving increasingly towards revolution, with the syndicalist *Unione Sindicale Italiana*, led by anarchist Armando Borghi, boasting 800,000 members by 1920 and complete control of the occupations in the industrial north, particularly in Turin and Milan. In what

¹ Walter Linder, p.3.

became known as the Biennio Rossi, the Two Red Years, the metalworkers of the north occupied their factories and created the workers' councils which would act as the embryonic components of a future socialist order, operating upon principles of mutual aid and federally-organised networks of producers and community organisations. It should be added that the anarchist influence and indeed domination of the Biennio Rossi have been frequently and rather conveniently airbrushed from the pages of history; nonetheless, some historians have recognised such facts. In Gwyn Williams' *Proletarian Order: Antonio Gramsci, Factory Councils and the Origins of Communism in Italy, 1911–1921*, the author chastises Gramsci for not fulfilling his own axiom – “to tell the truth is a communist and revolutionary act” – when he claimed anarchists “had no influence on the masses.” Williams' gently reminds the reader that “these actions were either directly led or indirectly inspired by anarcho-syndicalists” and that the “anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists were the most consistently and totally revolutionary group on the left.”

Unfortunately, the Italian revolution of 1919–1920 was not to be. As Malatesta had warned – “if we let this favourable moment pass... we shall later pay with tears of blood for the fear we have instilled in the bourgeoisie” – within a couple of years Mussolini's blackshirted thugs and the State began heaping violence upon the labour movement, as fascism soon would across the whole of Europe. If only the anarchists had not rallied “against party discipline and the

dictatorship of the proletariat” and had instead utilised “the clear and precise language of the Marxist communists”, maybe all would have turned out differently...



A list of projects around Melbourne. See anarchy.org.au/directory for contact info.

DIRECTORY

3CR

Community radio. Hosts a couple of anarchist-flavoured shows and many of general interest to anarchists.

ANARCHIST BLACK CROSS

Prisoner support group. Seemingly inactive – no website update since early 2010. There is still anti-prison activism in Victoria, though, as well as a general sentiment.

ANARCHO-SYNDICALIST FEDERATION (ASF) – MELBOURNE

The Anarcho-syndicalist Federation, affiliated with the IWA, has a Melbourne branch. You don't have to be an anarchist to join; the ASF is open to all workers.

ANARRES

An anarchist book-selling project of the Melbourne Anarchist Club.

BLACK STAR PA COLLECTIVE

Black Star PA Collective has been providing live sound to the activist, anarchist, and underground music scene since 1995. Sound for S11 protest at Crown Casino, Woomera 2002, Such is Life punk festival, anti-war rallies and countless other benefits and causes are a part of Black Star's proud history.

FOOD NOT BOMBS MELBOURNE

Free vegan food since 1995.

GECO (GOONGERAH ENVIRONMENT CENTRE)

"GECO is an independent grassroots environmental organisation based in East Gippsland. We are dedicated to protecting the remaining old growth forests of the region."

IWW MELBOURNE GMB

Melbourne branch of the Industrial Workers of the World.

MELBOURNE ANARCHIST CLUB

Melbourne's largest – and some would say Australia's greatest – anarchist club. MAC owns and runs a space located at 62 St Georges Road, Northcote. MAC was established in the mid-1980s. In 2010, MAC renamed its space from Melbourne Anarchist Resource Centre to Melbourne Anarchist Club. MAC is the meeting place for MAC, ASF, Fantin Reading Group, Anarres, anarchist propaganda projects, a radical theatre and regularly hosts social events. It is open on Saturdays from 11am(ish) and will open an infoshop on Saturdays from 18 August 2012.

MELBOURNE ANARCHIST-COMMUNIST GROUP

Sadly, no web presence for these anarchist-communists.

