

The Occupied Times

◇ OF LONDON ◇

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MAY 2012



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US/UK

OCCUPY FOR ALL OF MAY

Seven months after the beginning of the occupation of Zuccotti Park, the birthplace of the Occupy movement is welcoming the spring season with a new round of gatherings and direct actions. Since mid-March, organisers in New York have been carrying the Occupy spirit into the streets of Manhattan and online in anticipation of May Day and the Global Spring of protests. The message: We're here to change the world. And we're committed to staying.

To mark the six-month anniversary of Occupy Wall Street, protesters re-occupied Zuccotti Park on March 17th. Over 70 people were arrested as New York police cleared out the park, and at least one protester was seriously injured after having his head slammed into a glass door by a police officer. Occupy responded // PAGE 04 >>

Editorial

Celebration of the international labour movement across the globe has taken on many different moods depending upon the political context of the time, sometimes celebratory, at other times volatile. Today, the stakes are high, and the struggle is of vital importance.

May Day originated as a commemoration of the Haymarket Massacre of 1886, which took place in Chicago during a general strike for the eight hour day. As the police marched on the demonstration in order to disperse it, an unknown person threw dynamite at them. The police opened fire in return, killing several demonstrators as well as some police in 'friendly fire'.

Since then, the 1st of May has seen many significant historical events and attempts by right-wing governments to subvert or silence the message of worker solidarity. One such move last year was the current government's proposal to scrap the bank holiday.

This year, May Day takes on a different dimension, with the Occupy movement and groups like UK Uncut joining the workers, students and more traditional bodies. The need for international solidarity is greater than ever. Fiscal cleansing, ruthlessly imposed on the Greek people by leaders with no democratic mandate, has slashed wages by 30 - 45% for government employees. Spain, Italy, Ireland and Portugal are deep in crisis, while youth unemployment and recession continue to blight the UK.

The past month has seen some interesting developments across western Europe. The Dutch coalition government collapsed after the far-right minority party withdrew its support for austerity measures. In France, Nicolas Sarkozy lost the first round of voting to François Hollande, who opposes Germany's austerity agenda for the Eurozone. Here in the UK, George Galloway pulled off a stunning victory in the Bradford by-election, also running on an anti-austerity, anti-establishment ticket. Could it be that after four years of failure since the crash in 2008, leftist politicians are finally articulating alternatives to austerity?

As encouraging as it is to see shifts away from the Ponzi-scheme economics that have dominated Europe for several years, the devil, as ever, is in the detail. The results of the French vote showed a worrying increase for the Front National candidate Marine Le Pen - and Hollande's victory came partly at the expense of the genuine leftist candidate, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who was soundly beaten by Le Pen on an anti-immigration platform, despite encouraging pre-election polls. Hollande might yet turn out to be France's answer to Nick Clegg.

Voting trends away from a colourless, technocratic centre imply growing disquiet with economic globalisation. If properly channelled, this discontent could be directed towards building a radically progressive and more equal social contract throughout Europe. The danger, however, today as in the past, is when people are drawn instead to populist and reactionary voices capitalising on uncertainty, using the politics of demonisation, nationalism and militarism.

Periods of crisis always offer an opportunity to a range of ideologues and demagogues. We've already witnessed the scapegoating of students, the disabled and OAPS. As austerity measures deepen, will British politicians increasingly point the finger at immigrants, as they are doing across the channel in continental Europe?

The global Occupy and Indignados movements point to a left wing resurgence, often rich in numbers but, according to some, lacking in direction. May Day offers an opportunity to deepen our ties with the worker movements, building an alliance between unionised and non-unionised people. Indeed, over the last 30 years, huge increases in service sector jobs (often replacing public service and manufacturing jobs) have led to a large



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PRINT RUN/ 2000 Copies

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO/

Aldgate Press, E1 7RQ

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non-unionised working population. While many occupiers are also unionised, the movement offers a vessel for many without representation, which could significantly change the state of play if brought into together with established antagonistic means. In Spain, Greece and the US, occupiers, students and young dissenters have formed close ties with unions and other activist organisations. If the Occupy movement is to be sustained, these kinds of alliances will be fundamental.

That doesn't mean, however, that we should be uncritical of union leadership, or exchange revolutionary energy for reformist compromise. Since Thatcher not only crushed the unions but also set about destroying the environment within which they could operate, union leaderships have largely come to resemble the classic out of touch managerial class of neoliberal capitalism. Times are changing, and unions must change with them.

Union leaders should be bold enough to move beyond defensively protecting their members' rights within a power dynamic where they cannot win. They should seize the opportunity a crumbling status quo presents them to advocate alternatives to reshape society as a whole, rather than just getting the best deals for their members. Solidarity among unions demands that there be no unilateral deals with governments, selling out other unions and reinforcing the defeatist narrative of the left. Unions should open their doors to the fast-growing and increasingly radical sections of society, namely, the growing number of unemployed people, particularly inner-city youth. Their justified anger could be a powerful catalyst for change.

If union leaders prefer to wait for the Labour Party to become a force for change while workers continue to foot the bill, then those who desire radical change must regain control of their unions from the bottom up. For too long now, the neoliberal paradigm has successfully pitted worker against worker and "native" against immigrant, whilst hiding a simple reality: the answer to the problems of society lies not in out-competing one's peers for a piece of the pie, but in confronting the parasitic policies of the 1%, and besieging the tower which dominates the economic and political system. The solution is not the pursuit of special interests but the politics of the common good. Neoliberalism is bleeding society dry, feeding upon the worst instincts of human nature and destroying the best - the qualities of solidarity, altruism, interrelationship with nature, meaningful work, and respectful coexistence within our families and communities. As austerity further drains the country, and we sink into a double-dip recession, the question remains: how much blood does the patient have left? Let's make sure that May provides the first of many transfusions.

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For the past six months, The Occupied Times has provided a high quality alternative to corporate sponsored mainstream media, featuring articles by activists, thinkers and academic experts from the UK and around the world. The OT has published over 250 pages of critical analysis, opinion, features, news and poetry, without printing a single advert. The paper is totally non-profit and sustained by the voluntary efforts and enthusiasm of its writers and editors.

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LEYTON MARSH: COMMUNITY RIGHTS VS THE CORPORATE STATE

MELANIE STRICKLAND

In recent weeks the local residents' battle to save Leyton Marsh has shifted from trying to stop the development altogether through peaceful resistance, to defending apparently escalating actions in the courts under a system of laws which subordinate communities to corporate rights and the state.

By way of background, the "Save the Leyton Marsh" community group has been organising and meeting weekly since January, when planning permission was granted by Waltham Forest Council to the Olympic Development Authority (ODA) for Leyton Marsh to be turned into a private three storey basketball training facility for Olympic athletes. The marsh is Metropolitan Open Land - which has the same status as Green Belt land and may only be developed in exceptional circumstances. Waltham Forest has designated the Olympics as such an exceptional case.

There have been various 'irregularities' in the planning process - including the consultation process taking place over the Christmas holiday period (which gave locals hardly any time to lodge objections), flagrant breaches of the planning conditions (including the removal of soil up to 50cm deep, according to the ODA, when planning permission was granted for 15cm only), and the omission of an Environmental Impact Assessment which would have revealed the extent of the contamination of the soil (the area has previously been used as a landfill site, contains high quantities of lead and asbestos, and an unexploded WW2 bomb was found at the site just a few weeks ago). Matters are further complicated by the numerous public authorities implicated in the case: Waltham Forest Council as the planning authority, the ODA as lessee of the land and Lee Valley Regional Park Authority which has a responsibility to manage the land and protect the ecology of the area.

Several brave Occupy London supporters who camped at the site in solidarity with the local Save the Marsh campaign found themselves prosecuted in recent weeks under the Public Order Act for obstructing the cement-carrying lorries and preventing the development. This is another example of the criminalisation of civil resistance. People are not free to assert their democratic rights, and defend the rights of nature to exist and flourish. Since their arrests, lorries have been rolling in to dump vast amounts of concrete into the site that was once the marsh, home to various rare species and a green haven for local residents and their children.

In a further worrying development, a local resident (Rowena Johnson)

who was not arrested was added as a Defendant in separate civil proceedings, having been identified by the Evening Standard as a protester. Her crime was to spend a few minutes with her young son under a lorry. The ODA is pursuing her for costs of £335,000. The ODA's aim is to put people off peaceful dissent. It has the financial resources to do so, by employing city law firms like Berwin Leighton Paisner on taxpayers' money, and by threatening people with bankruptcy if they continue to speak out about activities harmful to their community. By contrast, the community group has to rely largely on pro bono legal support and is constantly on the back-foot by having to respond to strict timeframes and an endlessly complicated legal situation.

The legal system is not designed to give power to the people. It's structured so as to subordinate communities and to be adversarial, pitting communities against the corporate state and against each other. The legal process is stressful, saps time, is potentially financially devastating and fosters 'you should have run this argument differently' in-fighting. Fortunately, this has not happened with the "Save the Leyton Marsh" group.

A better system of governance is possible. Communities need to assert their rights. A Community Bill of Rights might have given the locality more power in a situation like this. Community Bills of Rights have been adopted in the US and are successful in preventing unwanted developments and activities harmful to the community. They elevate communities vis-à-vis the rights of companies and the state. In the case of Leyton Marsh the community could, with a Community Bill of Rights, assert their inherent rights to determine the future of their neighbourhood and could act on behalf of the rights of nature (including rare bird and insect species) whose habitats are being destroyed by this development.

If our present government was genuinely concerned about creating a 'Big Society' and was committed to the localism agenda, it would support the concept of a Community Bill of Rights. Unfortunately, this government is taking strides in exactly the opposite direction. The Olympics and ever-present threat of terrorism provide a useful cloak for the authorities to clamp down on dissent and designate peaceful protesters as 'domestic extremists' or worse. We need to continue to build a movement of people willing to step outside of the legal framework and to help build a better one. occupylawuk.wordpress.com

OCCUPY RE-EMERGES IN LONDON

While the hype is all for a Global Spring resurgence of Occupy and allied movements in May, a few hardy refugees from the St Paul's camp have been quietly occupying in East London for the past month.

Nomadic Occupy broke away from the overcrowded and sometimes hostile environment of Finsbury Square one midnight in March. Pulling a hand-built handcart laden with tents, kitchen gear, solar panels and a 12-volt battery, they were stopped by police in the wee hours somewhere along their four mile route. Having inspected the wiring and rear lights, the police waved them on their way and they continued to a little patch of grass near Limehouse Station. Here they pitched tents, introduced themselves to the locals, engaged walkers and cyclists on the adjacent heavily-used footpath and cycleway, and built their nomadic community. They stayed at Limehouse for two weeks.

On their last day at the Limehouse site the Nomads hosted a Teetotal Tea Party (of the Alice in Wonderland rather than American right wing variety). Visitors to the camp were impressed, one commenting that "This community feels like a family. The camp members protect each other." After the tea party and overnight, in the hours before they were due to be evicted, the Nomads packed up their encampment, loaded up the handcart, and moved to Mile End, a place of considerable historical significance, and a very appropriate location for an Occupy camp.

In 1381 a Peasants' Revolt was underway. The uprising was triggered by taxes deemed unfair by the peasants. Led by men with names still familiar today - Jack Straw and Wat Tyler - the

rebels marched on London. On 12 June, 60,000 rebels camped at Mile End. Two days later the king capitulated and signed their charter. As one Occupy Nomad said: "If only we had 60,000 activists camping now..."

Unfortunately, the subsequent behaviour of the rebels was used by the king to have the leaders and many rebels executed. Fortunately, having learned lessons at the St Paul's camp and Finsbury Square, the Nomads of Occupy require all campers to adhere to a code of behaviour that excludes intoxication and aggression. Decisions are made at a 'morning council', a less formal variation of the General Assemblies held at larger Occupy camps. A 'talking stick' and an 'answering feather' are sometimes employed to ensure discussions happen in a measured and respectful fashion; the Nomads say they are experimenting with traditional Native American practices.

Travellers have long been distrusted, and only time will tell whether Nomadic Occupy can carve itself a reputation for decency and come to be seen as a bonus when the tribe trundles into a neighbourhood. Relations between residents and Nomads at Shadwell in Wapping were less than satisfactory after a small group of occupiers set up camp in King Edward's Memorial Park (KEMP) as a contingency measure, when the main site was under threat of imminent eviction under bylaws. They did not realise that a local campaign to save the park might be jeopardised by their presence.

The Nomads are quick on their feet, enjoy exploring new environments, and are keen to experiment with alternative modes of communal living. They are also big on linking up with local communities in order to listen to and learn from

residents about neighbourhood concerns. The last thing they want is conflict and so, less than a week after it arrived, the Occupy camp was gone from Shadwell. On a positive note, what they found there was a strong community busy fighting for its rights on local issues, who might want to link up on something bigger one day. The protectors of KEMP weren't anti-Occupy, in fact some of them had visited the camp at St Paul's and were natural allies; they just didn't want or need tents in their park.

At nearby Mile End, Nomadic Occupy recently negotiated a time-limited stay with the local authorities. Relations with nearby residents have been good, although not without hiccups. 'Locals' are not, of course, a homogeneous group, and while one gives permission for dead wood to be taken from a cemetery, another worries that doing so may jeopardise biodiversity. Similarly, the old caretaker of the Mile End park comments that self-seeded baby sycamores are weeds that should be pulled up; subsequently the new manager of the park is aghast to see the occupiers helpfully uprooting 'live trees'. The old caretaker is happy that the nomads have offered to help him fix his windows. Others are suspicious and see the presence of an Occupy camp in the area as an imposition.

Despite inevitable wariness, the trajectory is looking good. Some of the Occupy Nomads are themselves underprivileged and homeless, but they are self-reliant, dynamic and politically motivated. One resident of the Mile End camp, Obi, explained that "We are becoming a stabilising factor in the area. We have stopped a few fights in the park and are gaining respect from local people. We have told some younger residents of the camp they must behave themselves, because we want this respect to grow."

Nomadic Occupy is about gathering information as well as disseminating it. It's about flagging up the big picture - the corporatisation of our world, global injustice, the horror of war on other continents, the accountability of the super-rich and their tax havens - and about discovering the details, finding out how world events filter through and affect everyday lives in the form of redundancies, child poverty, library closures and lack of community amenities. Those amazing conversations that happened all the time around St Paul's, between campers, tourists and city workers, are happening on a smaller scale around the edges of the Nomad camps now. If the occasional passerby shouts "Get a job!", occupiers use that as an opportunity to engage.



BEN CAVANNA

WALKING THE BOUNDARIES

EMMA FORDHAM

On April 15th, to mark the six month anniversary of the beginning of Occupy London, occupiers from Finsbury Square and the Nomadic Occupy camps reunited with those who camped for four long winter months in the shadow of St Paul's. With chalk and tape, as dusk fell, occupiers marked the areas where the Tent City library, university, kitchen and other structures stood until the camp was evicted in late February.

A return to the churchyard and the walk around the boundaries of the now imaginary encampment was felt by many to be a poignant and emotional journey. So much passion and energy went into creating and maintaining the camp and much of that still lingers. The wide, open space rustles with ghosts like an old battlefield, a stone circle, a ruined castle. In minds and in hearts, the tents remain.

Tammy, who was displaced by the eviction of the St Paul's camp, is now spending her days outside the cathedral again. She has reclaimed a patch of ground where the Information Tent of the camp used to be. With children in tow and home-baked cakes to share, she has begun connecting with the streams of tourists and city workers who pass by every day. Some say they have been

missing the camp. Two shook Tammy's hand, one hugged her and one said something rude. Grittily optimistic as ever, Tammy pointed out that "That's a 75% approval rating. We're more popular than the government!"

Who knows? Soon people might start preparing and sharing food on the pavement beside the cathedral, in the very spot where the kitchen tent stood. Perhaps workshops and lectures will run in the space formerly known as Tent City University and people will read books in the library, converse in huddles on the cobbles, make art and music in the colonnade, sweep the church steps and breathe life back into the sterile swathe of grey this area has become since the Occupy shanty town was shovelled into a bin lorry.

Almost anything could happen. As long as rights of way are not seriously impeded, the understanding of most of the 'defendants unknown' of Occupy the London Stock Exchange is that they'd be within their rights to begin living there again - just without what the judge described as 'sleeping apparatus'.

"Roll on summer" said a man in an anonymous mask. He might have been grinning.



BEN CAVANNA

US. UK. OCCUPY FOR ALL OF MAY.

>> to the police headquarters a few days later, staging a series of "Let Freedom Spring" events to highlight the police brutality that protesters from New York to Oakland have experienced over the past six months. In early April a group of activists established occupy.com, aiming to provide a central platform for the aggregation and dissemination of articles, images, videos, and art from and about the Occupy movement. On April 11th, protesters made use of their court-granted right to protest on sidewalks by occupying the public space around the New York Stock Exchange (in 2000, a US court had affirmed the right to "public sleeping as a means of symbolic expression").

As one occupier said, "We're still sick of Wall Street. We can handle it in small doses, but now we're back on Wall Street. This time we're not committing any form of civil disobedience, we're in full compliance with the law, we're not disorderly in any way, we're just providing silent messages. And it's a really interesting phenomenon. We'll eventually spread out to all of Wall Street. I kind of think of it like we're a tumor and we're going to keep growing and growing, in a cancerous sense... Of course, capitalism's the real cancer."

Within days, their ranks had swelled to 70 overnight-campers before police forcibly removed the demonstrators so

that, according to New York mayor Michael Bloomberg, the sidewalk could be cleaned.

Since the eviction of the camp from Zuccotti Park, activists have experimented with new tactics and spawned campaigns that have addressed issues as far-ranging as corporate malpractice, tax injustice, evictions of poor and marginalised families, and the upcoming US presidential election. Instead of maintaining the centralised structure of the camp, the movement has decentralised and diversified, often resembling temporary autonomous zones from which individual actions and campaigns can develop.

As the occupiers have stated, "The corporate media claims that Occupy's strength is waning, but they are merely in denial. During the coldest months of this year, the United States has already seen more revolutionary momentum than it has in decades."

Organisers hope that the momentum that has been sustained over the cold winter months can blossom again as the world celebrates May Day, the International Workers' Day and a remembrance of the 1886 Haymarket Massacre in Chicago - where police fired live bullets on workers who went on strike for the eight-hour workday.

Since March 16th protesters have held weekly marches originating at

Zuccotti Park and heading through Manhattan. On April 14th hundreds descended on Central Park for the peaceful celebration of the Occupy spirit under the banner of "Spring Awakening 2012" and to exchange ideas and skills in anticipation of May Day.

In the words of one attendee, "Spring is a time of renewal and re-growth, which is what the Spring Awakening is hoping to bring to the movement. [...] We also can't forget the Arab Spring that has changed the landscape of the Middle East, and which helped inspire OWS in its early days."

On April 25th Occupy teamed up with ACT UP to celebrate the group's 25th anniversary of AIDS activism and direct action. And for May 1st, Occupy Wall Street is ringing in the American variant of the "Global Spring" by calling for a general strike in support of economic justice and true democracy: "No Work, No School, No Housework, No Shopping, No Banking - and most importantly, TAKE THE STREETS!" The day of protest will feature rallies, concerts and workshops. Similar strikes are planned in 115 American cities and are supported by a broad coalition of activists, student groups and unions. The "Global Spring" demonstrations on May 12th will be the culmination of public dissent, as protesters around the world take to the streets once more.



JESSICA LEHRMAN

DARK MATTERS

MARK KAURI



gravity, they say, is a natural consequence of the presence of matter. What mattered, at first, was occupying the London Stock

Exchange; and gravitate towards it we did. With society cast adrift on the rising tides of austerity, a dialogue born of civil disobedience would counter the current. What began as a protest of expression against economic injustice soon took physical manifestation in the camps and in the spaces we occupied, with an emerging point of definitional reference, both from within and outside of the movement, as 'Occupy London'.

In the early days and dialogue of occupation, the articulations of Occupy London were outward-looking; towards what mattered in the first. The initial statement of Occupy London called for structural change, a shift toward authentic global equality and democratic alternatives to the current system. Subsequent demands for transparency of the activities of the City of London Corporation would add further depth to the outward-looking nature of the movement and refine its definition in tune with causes and aims. In so doing, these statements shed light on the inattentive 'blind spot' of mainstream media in its failure to articulate a purpose, mainstay, or suitable description of

what many easily grasped as poetic dissonance between the City's major financial hub and its merry band of would-be occupiers.

Perhaps it was inevitable that amid the oft-negative, politicaneering and profit-oriented statements about 'Occupy London', the currents of the camps' own dialogue would become caught in the wake, turning inward. The commentary that initially circled the injustices encapsulated by the symbol of the stock exchange transformed over time into something multi-faceted, with distinct streams and currents focusing solely on the movement itself (not merely of camp-management, process and best practice, but expressions of internal definition and structure). To extend the metaphor of our physics lesson, we could say that with the camp outside the gates of the stock exchange showing no signs of retreat in the face of winter, the gravity of the situation was with us; we had become the thing that mattered.

With the roots of the movement tied down by guy ropes, an internal domain to 'Occupy London' was established that would play a role in forming the continuing, wider dialogue - its currents now shaped from within as much as from without.

In recent weeks, since the eviction of the camp at St. Paul's, those with an ear to the ground will have noticed the emerging murmur of surplus discussion gravitating towards internal issues including: profiling of occupiers; the definition and scope of the movement; brand management; financial affairs; the nature and remit of autonomous participation, etc. While these are undoubtedly important matters, the stuck-in-the-mud impasse within which their seemingly unattainable resolve resides - with consensus and forward-progression proving so elusive - perhaps relates to



TONY J LEWIS

what has become a predominance of inward-looking dialogue.

This ever-burrowing semantic life-form has gone so far as to throw up suggestions for a prolonged period of collective contemplation (complete with weekend seminars and supplemented motivational audio-tapes, perhaps) and further articulation to solve this so-called 'problem of definition' of the movement itself, from within the streams of its own internal dialogue and structural paradigms.

But perhaps herein lies the "Big Whoop" misnomer of a non-problem!

Perhaps a solution to this apparent 'problem of definition' will not emerge through the proposed articulation of the, as yet unseen, 'dark matter' at the heart of the movement. Perhaps, instead, the problem itself will dissipate if we make efforts to vacate this internal domain and the ripples of centralised and structured elements which there reside as our 'matters'. In so doing, we may look once more beyond ourselves, to the elements, causes and tokens of the wider global movement. These offer far

more in the way of definition than the amassed treasure-trove of our established kernel. In short: to disperse these dark matters to find our defining unity in what mattered in the first - and what matters still: our common causes.

The prospects for such a re-imagining of definitional treatment would seem to hinge not upon a reshuffle of the established structures of our whirring, internal commentary, or upon efforts to establish the articulation of a structured internal domain, but upon renewed efforts for all aspects of our dialogue to realign to the gravity of the causes of the movement, above and beyond the gravity of internal dynamics. All matters of unity and definition regarding the efforts emerging from Occupy London to challenge social, economic and environmental injustices - whether purely in discussion or actively expressive - could, in this sense, be perceived and measured in terms of their harmony (or disharmony) with the causes of the movement and our shared sense of gravity, process, best practice and the commons.



THAT THINE ALMS MAY BE IN SECRET ...

THE IRREVERENT
REVEREND NEMU



Making another charitable assumption, that this was not economic warfare but good-intentions gone bad, it illustrates the complexities of humanitarian intervention, even in noble causes. In 1955 the World Health Organisation began its Global Malaria Eradication Programme, using the recently developed chloroquine and DDT, nearly wiping out malaria in Sri Lanka, but not quite. As any GCSE science student could have predicted, a generation grew up without developing immunity, and the resulting resurgence claims 10,000 victims per year today. The programme has, however, helped wipe out half of the Nepalese jungle and 20% of the Amazon, along with various creatures great and small. Previous attempts to develop the rainforests had been doomed to feverish failure, but "charity" rendered this defense impotent.

Whilst admitting that eradication is impossible, WHOocrats launched another \$2bn per year campaign in 2008. Until they abandon it, your taxes will fund the spraying of toxic insecticides throughout the tropics, killing all manner of insects along with mosquitoes, and starving and poisoning the animals above them in the food chain.

As well as disastrously stupid do-goodery amongst aid organisations, there is also Machiavellian scheming: "When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Matthew 6:3)

Before the invention of the toilet roll, ancient cultures differentiated between a private and a public hand, a right hand for giving and a left hand for taking. While the dexterous right hand gives aid, what does the sinister left hand take?

70% of US aid is tied to US goods and services. Most of the \$3bn given to Israel is military credits, and African AIDS relief funds stipulate that the drugs be US-made, rather than generic alternatives. Then there is the diplomatic game. In 2003 various UN member states including Guinea and Angola were threatened with losing aid if they opposed the Iraq War. Pacific nations receiving aid from China do not recognise Taiwan; those funded by Taiwan do.

Aid often ends up with the rich, beyond that simply stolen by corrupt politicians. Half of EU aid to Latin America goes to the biggest 17% of farms. A quarter of the £3m British package to Malawi in 2005 went on hotel bills and meals for US operatives. More seriously uncharitable, in the biblical sense, is using aid to force neoliberal policies upon developing nations. "And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him... Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee." (Leviticus 25:35-36)

When poor countries were unable to service their debts, the IMF directors, not being suitably God-fearing, negotiated debt relief and aid agreements in return for structural adjustment programs (SAPs). Traditional lands went on the market in Zambia and Sierra Leone; communities and ecosystems were bought up by investors and replaced by monoculture farmlands. Land, water and labour were diverted away from small

"For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face... And now abideth faith, hope, charity... but the greatest of these is charity." (I Corinthians 13:12-13)

Through the dark glass of international politics, witness a curious spectacle. Indian politicians are calling for India to refuse British aid, whilst Britain is pleading with them to continue accepting it. Dissenting voices were also heard in the UK in February, when India chose 126 French fighter jets over British, despite our International Development Secretary making it clear during a diplomatic visit that this was just not cricket. Referring to the £1.2-billion project, he said "The focus is also [sic] about seeking to sell Typhoon."

Of course, anyone visiting the world's 13th fastest growing economy must be prepared to haggle, but whilst this looks for all the world like the cynical machinations of arms dealers and morally bankrupt politicians, let us consider a more charitable explanation. The whole problem, brothers and sisters in revolt and rapture, arises from a mistranslation of scripture.

Charity is the "bond of perfectness" (Colossians 3:14), the "end of the commandment" (I Timothy 1:5) and the final saintly virtue (II Peter 1:5-7), but the Greek word *agape* does not refer to coins in a can. It means selfless love, and more specifically tolerance for other perspectives. In English also, 'uncharitable' can mean narrow-minded rather than stingy, and 'charity begins at home' is not about sponsoring your

sister's parachute jump, but respecting the opinions of those around you. On the international scale, it might mean respecting the right of other countries to decide their fiscal policies.

The distribution of alms (not arms, brother Cameron, alms) is a more delicate affair: "Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men." (Matthew 6:2)

Hark the herald bureaucrats sing, and how the UN trumpet blasted out to the tune of \$10 billion from member states in the wake of the Haitian earthquake. After six months, however, only 2% had been spent on relief, and not a penny of the \$1.5bn from the US arrived before the anniversary of the disaster. Until today, less than 1% has been channelled through the Haitian government, and only 23 out of 1,490 reconstruction contracts have gone to Haitian companies.

Compare this tardiness with the 13 months it took for the US Agency for International Development to completely exterminate the Haitian creole pig when African swine fever hit the Dominican Republic (not Haiti). Charitable pig-killers even went onto isolated islands, not to test, but to kill these hardy and humble little pigs, which were the basis of the barter economy. The fat, frail American pigs sent in their stead died, unsuited to life outside of agro-business, and Haiti has never recovered.



farms towards export crops, and free grain programmes were dismantled. Currencies were devalued and grain stocks sold off to service debt, leading to serious food shortages. Farming subsidies were cut (except for export crops) whilst the US, Europe and Japan continue to spend seven times the total global aid budget on farm subsidies, meaning that their produce outcompetes locally grown food. Not surprisingly, the statistics reveal that "when a Sub-Saharan African nation is under a World Bank structural adjustment loan, then it tends to have higher levels of child mortality."

Somalia's nomadic herdsman were self-sufficient in the 1970s, but the privatisation of both the veterinary and the water service meant that medicine became expensive and uncompetitive boreholes fell into disrepair. Cheap grain imports and a 15-fold increase in food aid shifted farming and eating habits. Currency devaluation was imposed in 1981, fuel prices rose and infrastructure collapsed. Today it is considered a failed state and pirate haven.

Now as in the days of Sir. Frances Drake, the real pirates are backed by imperial powers. Aid is a bargaining chip in a game of political favours, and this is only the tip of the iceberg – who knows what politicians get up to when they gather in their covens and raise their demons.

Virtues are fraught in the New Testament, but commandments are simple, and boil down to two. The second is: "Love thy neighbour as thyself." (Mark 12:31)

In today's multicultural Benetton ad of a world, you might be forgiven for thinking that your neighbour lives in Kathmandu, but hark ye: Your neighbour lives in your neighbourhood, and that is where you should raise a stink! If your government robs local pensioners and closes your local library whilst funding war, ecocide and land-grabs on other continents, it is neither charity, nor alms, nor love. It is nothing more noble than greed.

More wrath and righteousness from Rev. Nemu at www.nemusend.co.uk



THE EUROPE-WIDE ASSAULT ON UNIVERSAL HEALTHCARE

DAVID FERREIRA

It wasn't more than a few years ago that proponents of healthcare reform would point out that the United States was the only developed nation without a universal healthcare system. Right-wing electoral victories and several IMF interventions later, a number of European nations have joined the United States on the list of developed nations that base healthcare access on ability to pay rather than need.

The most unforgiving attack on universal healthcare has been felt in Greece, where democratic norms have been suspended to accommodate the demands of international creditors. Current healthcare spending in Greece is down 25% from what it was in 2009. As the austerity program shuts public hospital wards and clinics, Greek citizens in need of medical assistance only have the private healthcare system to turn to. With pensions slashed and a staggering unemployment rate of 21%, this simply isn't an option, and families are left seeking out charity health services that would otherwise be assisting those in need in the developing world.

This story of decimated healthcare services is being repeated with varying degrees of severity across Europe. In Portugal, the IMF and European Union have demanded increased fees for public healthcare, which has priced an increasing number of Portuguese out of those services, especially considering the widespread wage cuts. In Spain and the UK, right-wing governments have taken upon themselves the task of gutting their healthcare systems. The Spanish People's Party is initiating a nationwide program to cut healthcare spending and subsidies for the elderly while here in Britain the Tories are slashing NHS staff numbers.

This assault on public healthcare places Europe on a trajectory toward the model currently maintained by the United States. Whether it's the UK, Portugal, Greece or Spain, weakening public healthcare sets the stage for such services to be filled by the private sector. With

significant NHS staff cuts, users will rightfully complain about its reduced quality. To this, the free-market fundamentalists in British government will provide a false cure in the form of privatisations.

The sad irony is that in this age of austerity and proverbial belt-tightening, Europe is in the process of shedding the relatively inexpensive public healthcare model for the overpriced American model. The US spends nearly 40% more on health care than its GDP would predict, with 85% of this linked to the private insurance system the country employs. This figure should be no surprise. Private insurance companies post profits in the billions, while civil servants in Europe merely demand a living wage and a respectable pension.

But this profit extracted from America's failing healthcare system is the very motivation to slowly advance the U.S. model in Europe. With functional public healthcare systems in Europe, these crucial social services are closed to market exploitation. Dismantle them and suddenly a public good is a commodity ripe for market speculation. But it's difficult for right-wing politicians in Europe to dismantle healthcare systems that have serviced the public for decades. These systems must first be attacked at their foundation, reducing quality of service before the whole edifice can be brought down in favour of a for-profit model.

Those who cherish their public healthcare systems in Europe must not be reduced to inaction by claims that the reforms are modest. True reform would entail the improvement of service, a feat hardly achieved with fewer nurses, doctors and facilities. Instead, the drive in Europe is to leave public healthcare mutilated and deformed. At this moment, public healthcare is in the emergency room. It has already suffered repeated wounds from austerity-wielding politicians; left any longer in their hands, there is little chance universal healthcare can avoid the morgue.

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CHRISTIN E LOZANO

SPAIN'S GENERAL STRIKE & THE BLEAK PROSPECTS FOR SPANISH WORKERS

CHUS RIVAS BOTE

The numbers are known. In January 2012 unemployment figures in Spain passed the five million mark, which points to an incredibly high and growing number of families without any source of income. Civil servants' salaries were frozen, and have now been cut. Such measures are being sold to many active workers as a solution to keep their jobs. Wages, already below the European average, continue to drop. The "mileurismo" - salaries of a thousand euros - long ago fell to 800 euros for hundreds of thousands of workers, especially the young. If they want keep their jobs, people are expected to accept longer hours in poor conditions, without overtime compensation.

It is against this backdrop, and as a "long term solution" to the crisis hitting all Western economies, that Royal Decree-Law 3/2012 for Labour Reform (Spain) was approved. This move will satisfy only the aspirations of employers, by further liberalising working conditions, scuppering collective negotiation in favour of redundancy, and making everything cheaper for the bosses. In some of the new contracts, employee dismissal will come at no cost to the employer. Another postulate beyond belief is that nine days of sick leave in two months can justify a dismissal, if the employer wishes to enforce it. It is not difficult to see that none of these measures have anything to do with improvement in economic activity, nor will they lead to any growth in employment.

Thus the Labour Reform Decree has turned into the main focus of a General Strike contextualised by the

frustration and rage these measures provoke in workers and throughout society. The measures being taken to mitigate the effects of the economic crisis will be disproportionately directed towards reducing all kinds of benefits, including those services considered essential for the protection of the most disadvantaged. These measures have already had a direct impact on public education and healthcare, as well as other services that could be considered of strategic importance, such as research. Meanwhile, the budget for culture has been cut so severely that it is now almost non-existent.

Nothing beyond rhetoric has been forthcoming, no effective measures have been implemented to curb extremely high rates of tax fraud in the country (there is a verified shadow economy of around 20%). A reform of the Spanish taxation system is well overdue, as it is intolerable that average employees, including the self employed, are taxed at a rate almost twice that of businesses.

The national budget proposes further cuts which will add 630,000 to the current unemployed figures, according to experts. This reveals that there is indeed a link between the proposed plans and labour reform: it was necessary to facilitate the dismissals of even more workers to meet the planned budget.

The general strike on the 29th of March did not have the widespread impact that organisers had hoped for, although it did affect whole sections of the chain of production. Key to understanding the success or failure of the strike is how employers strategised

against it, and the role of the media, which is mostly pro-government, and discouraged potential strikers. Many workers were threatened with the sack if they participated. Equally, the response from trade unions lacked the force necessary to mobilise effectively and en masse, with the urgency this untenable situation calls for.

Although participation in the strike was less robust than had been hoped for, this was compensated for by a great number of demonstrations by workers (strikers and non-strikers), the unemployed (who can't effectively strike), parents and carers, young people, students and indignados of all kinds, whose participation exceeded all forecasts. The shock reached government officials, whose parliamentary majority does not grant rule without consent. Many different social sectors and their representatives are now calling the politicians to account.

Despite this, there is no interest from the government, which acts predominantly in favour of employers, to modify what has already been approved. It is thus very likely that conflict will increase and demonstrations will grow. The greater the injustice, the more radical the workers' responses will be.

Profound reflection is needed; an acknowledgement of the inadequacy of the latest measures, the reestablishment of balance between workers and employers, and an agreement to face the crisis with fair and proportionate measures. Right now, exactly the opposite is being proposed. (translated by Clara Rivas)



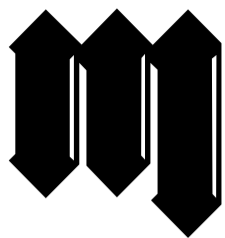
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GO GLOBAL (AND BEWARE OF WAR)

MARY
KALDOR



oney is an expression of power relations. The current financial crisis reflects a much deeper crisis, which

has to do with the exhaustion of the late twentieth century model of development. By model of development I mean a combination of technology, patterns of production, consumption, communication, infrastructure, and a specific set of political institutions. The twentieth century model of development, often known as Fordism, was based on the intensive use of oil. It is characterised by mass production, high levels of consumption and military spending, the spread of the automobile and the aeroplane, as well as radio and television, the growth of suburbs and a consensus on state intervention. This period also crucially saw the emergence of American hegemony, which has underpinned the role of the dollar as the world's reserve currency. Capitalism has evolved through several models of development; starting with the introduction of the factory system and the production of textiles led by Britain, then the increasing role of coal, iron and railways, followed by the introduction of steel, electricity, colonialism, and the rise of Germany and America.

At some point, the model of development is institutionalised and it becomes increasingly difficult to innovate and also to increase productivity and therefore profits. This began to happen with the Fordist model in the 1970s;

productivity growth slowed down, oil became more expensive, the US started running trade deficits, and so on. At the time, neoliberalism was seen as the answer to sluggish economic growth. Liberalisation and deregulation did free up capital to invest in a future model of largely IT based development. The so-called new economy spawned huge new companies like Apple, Microsoft, Google and Facebook, but the full diffusion of the new technologies was blocked by the political institutions and patterns of consumption typical of Fordism. Because of the difficulty in continuing to make profits in the productive sector, finance switched to investment in assets and developed new speculative tools – hence the rise in private debt and asset inflation that was bound to collapse at some point. It is important to understand, therefore, that this is an economic, social, environmental and political crisis, not just a financial crisis.

In moments of transition from one model of development to another, the role of social movements is critical. The labour movement was crucial in creating the conditions for the Fordist model of development by pushing for a greater role for the state in welfare provision and pressing for higher wages, so that workers could then buy consumer goods. By the 1960s disaffection with the paternalistic male dominated 'old left' as well as the inflexibility of the state led to the rise of new movements both on the right (the neoliberals) and of a more emancipatory kind (peace, green, human rights, feminist). The 1980s and the 1990s were the highpoint of neoliberalism, but these

were also decades associated with the spread of ideas about freedom, human rights, and greater tolerance towards minorities. A new set of movements began to develop in the late 1990s renewing ideas about social justice, the anti-globalisation movement, the movement for climate change action, and protests against the 'War on Terror'. These were the precursors to the current wave of mobilisation, of which Occupy is such an important part.

So can the new social movements offer a way out of the crisis? What is needed is a shift away from finance and a move towards massive public investment in green technologies and in a range of public goods like education, health, or poverty reduction. Under Fordism productivity gains were labour-saving. The IT revolution offers the possibility for resource-saving innovations. In other words, we need a new green economic paradigm not only because of the risk of climate change and resource depletion, but also to solve current economic problems. To achieve this, I believe we will need a greater role for local (municipal or sub-regional), regional (European) and global governance because of the institutional blockage at national levels. We will need a shift away from American dominance to a more cooperative world system. Above all, we need to reinvent democracy on a multi-scalar basis.

The big concern is the risk of war. In previous transitions, war played a crucial role (for example, the Napoleonic wars, or the wars of the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries). War was both a response to crisis situations and a way of crushing protest. This period is much



like the period before World War I when syndicalists, suffragettes and others were campaigning for more democracy, more rights and more social justice. They were sidelined by the wars and their demands were only finally and partially fulfilled after the most terrible slaughter the world has ever witnessed. I worry about growing conflict in the Middle East and about the rise of populist and xenophobic movements. While increased awareness as a result of the new forms

of communication may make us less vulnerable to violence on the scale of the twentieth century, everyone who is currently politically active both at the top and at the bottom has a big responsibility to find ways to steer a peaceful and democratic transition to a green, socially just global economy.

Mary Kaldor is a former peace activist and professor at LSE, where she directs the research group on global civil society and human security.

THE QUEBEC SPRING

MARK BERGFELD

Striking students in the Canadian province of Quebec are vowing to escalate their fight against an increase in tuition fees after police used tear gas, shock grenades and arrested dozens of protesters this Friday.

For more than ten weeks now, 170,000 students from approximately 180 local unions have been on an open-ended student strike which has shut down the Port of Montreal, ministerial meetings and nearly all classes in post-secondary education across the province.

Quebec students who pay the lowest tuition fees across Canada are faced with a 75% tuition fee increase. Currently, the average annual cost to attend a Quebec university is \$2,519. Even if the planned increase were to go ahead, Quebec students still would pay less than in any other Canadian province.

But student protesters are highlighting the fact that Finance Minister Raymond Bachand's provincial budget of 2011-2012 will cut public and accessible healthcare, hydroelectricity and education. Ironically, Bachand labelled these 'sacred cows of Quebecoise society'.

Over the last nine years in power the Liberals have pursued to restructure society in the interest of the rich. Tax cuts for corporations have gone hand in hand with increasing the retirement age to 67. After trade unions suffered a blow in 2005 it was announced that student fees were to increase.

Over the course of five weeks, students have engaged in a 'general strike', causing significant economic damage to the provincial government. Yet the majority of the student unions and associations cut a deal with a

severely weakened government which had been scarred by two years of continuous opposition by trade unions.

Although 110,000 out of a total of 185,000 striking students rejected the agreement in their general assemblies, the strike was put to an end. But with full privatisation looming, students do not want to see a repeat of 2005, which saw them go back to class empty-handed.

Students have learnt some important lessons. They are organising on a departmental basis, which has strengthened the overall organisation of the strike. This has also helped them to hold the centralised unions to account.

The high point of the 'Quebec Spring' has been the 200,000-strong demonstration in Montreal on March 22. On the day, students successfully blocked the Port of Montreal for several hours, a tactic recently used at the Oakland General Strike in November.

More importantly, the two largest public sector unions called their membership on to the streets for the mobilisation. Following the biggest student demonstration ever, students called for a week of economic disruptions, bringing inner cities' traffic to a standstill while also mobilising 30,000 parents in support of the students' demands.

While the mainstream media claims that the liberal government has "extended a hand" by offering students an "increased bursary and loan programs", the government is intent on breaking the movement once again. Premier Jean Charest said: "The decision has been made and we will not



back down". This has only strengthened the determination of student strikers, and led them to forge new alliances. Students are organising solidarity with locked-out Rio Tinto Alcan workers and with hundreds of Aveos employees who recently lost their jobs.

Friday's protests saw environmentalists and students come out together. They stormed the top floor of a conference centre in which Charest was to unveil further details of his 'Plan Nord', a mining plan which will see a 1.2-million-square kilometre stretch of indigenous land be sold off to big business.

At the same time, other students stormed a meeting of the federal

Immigration minister Jason Kenney, best known for his anti-gay and anti-immigration stances.

While the display of resistance has inspired activists far beyond the provincial borders of Quebec, the movement is confronted with difficult questions. The strike's success has meant that the return to courses will be at least delayed until mid-June, at which point professors will be taking time off from regular teaching. Despite the fact that this means that students will have to retake the academic year and might not be able to graduate, students are clear about one thing: "If the strike continues, students are certain to win the fight."



IN SEARCH OF A NEW ECONOMIC MODEL

JAYATI GHOSH



t a discussion on "the future of capitalism" at the Guardian Open Weekend on 24 March, a case was made by one of the panelists -

Will Hutton - for what he called "good capitalism". This is one that encourages private entrepreneurship but subordinates the market to the broader needs of society. It is focussed on more equality of opportunity, and enables and facilitates small businesses. It also recognises and addresses the constraints posed by the environment, and reduces ecological waste and damage. It was pointed out by another panelist (myself, as it happens) that what he was describing could as easily be called socialism.

The problem is, of course, that when the world "socialism" is used, too many people immediately think of the centralised planning, authoritarian tendencies and bureaucratic control of the former Soviet state, and reject the notion immediately. Unfortunately, we have over-used and distorted too many words, especially the "isms". Therefore it is harder and harder to describe in shorthand the alternative that must be promoted, without getting stuck with all the baggage of the past. Yet thinking about and formulating the alternative is not only essential but increasingly inevitable. The current model of profit-led deregulated capitalism has failed on so many fronts and created so much dysfunctional inequality that it obviously must be transcended.

So, for want of a better word (maybe someone will think of one soon?) let me call this alternative socialism. It

is based on the idea that society and economy should be so constructed as to give everyone equal opportunities; that each person should be granted freedom, dignity, a political voice and the minimum material conditions for a decent life; that plurality should be respected without encroaching on fundamental human rights.

It is immediately evident that this requires a move beyond tired ideas of all kinds, not just those prevalent in the mainstream. Thus, the traditional socialist paradigm, with its emphasis on centralised government control over an undifferentiated mass of workers, cannot still be the desirable ideal. Rather, the new vision of socialism must incorporate more explicit emphasis on the rights and concerns of women, ethnic minorities, indigenous and local communities and other marginalised groups, as well as recognition of ecological constraints and the social necessity to respect nature.

The distributive element of this is clearly important. The Occupy Movement has made the huge contribution of putting the issue of inequality at centre stage. Yet the system cannot be changed only by restraining the one percent, or seeking to reduce their obscenely inordinate share of assets and incomes, although this is obviously essential. In addition to this, we need to think of new and genuinely progressive ways of organising the economy that recognize the varied needs of all citizens.

This requires, to start with, moving beyond GDP as the basic index of well-being, and developing new means of measuring genuine progress, well-being and quality of life. Quantitative GDP growth targets, that still dominate the thinking of policy makers and the

media, are not simply distracting from more important goals, but can even be counterproductive. For example, a chaotic, polluting and unpleasant system of privatised urban transport involving many private vehicles and over-congested roads actually generates more GDP than a safe, efficient and affordable system of public transport that reduces vehicular congestion and provides a pleasant living and working environment. So it is not enough to talk about "cleaner, greener technologies" to produce goods that are based on current (increasingly discredited) patterns of consumption. Instead, we must think creatively about consumption itself, work out which goods and services are more necessary and desirable for our societies, and think of how best to create the material incentives that will encourage such activity.

The good news is that this is not just an idealistic hope for an impossible utopia. In fact people across the world are thinking along these lines and developing alternative paradigms for constructing very different relationships between society and economy. For example, in Ecuador and Bolivia, new constitutions emphasise the rights of all citizens to work with dignity and decent conditions, to have access to food, water and health care. Simultaneously, the state is required to respect the rights of nature, and so environmental conservation, biodiversity, the prevention of environmental damage and recovery of degraded natural spaces are declared matters of public interest. The economic structures built around these broad aims do not involve the complete negation of the market; rather, the necessity is seen for encouraging and developing market



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activities, but within regulations and fiscal and other economic policies that create incentives for generating more decent work opportunities, as well as more time for leisure and what is seen as "relational time" to engage in fulfilling social relations. In Ecuador, the five-year economic plan of the government is explicitly focussed on "El buen vivir" or "good living", though the literal translation of the original Quechua term is perhaps more apt: "life to the fullest".

This is just one example - but in many countries more and more people are not just thinking about but also attempting to put into place new institutions, rules and practices that do not just challenge the existing power structures but also suggest creative new ways of dealing with the economy. We need to know much more about these experiments, and to have more confidence in ourselves and in our capacity not just to imagine but to implement alternatives. For that, we have to shed the fears, insecurities

and pessimism that are so actively instigated by the mainstream media. Of course the path will not be easy, and opposition will be fierce. But if we do not open our minds to a more positive approach that seeks to transcend the current system, we will continue to be helpless pawns in an increasingly cynical game in which financial elites and large capital are destructive of both human and natural life.

The slogan of the World Social Forum, which for a brief time had become one form of articulation of global people's resistance to the current oppressive system, is "another world is possible". The writing on the wall is now clear: another world is not just possible but inevitable, as this system cannot survive in its current form. Shaping it in more desirable directions, towards socialism in its original sense, is therefore the task.

Jayati Ghosh is Professor of Economics at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi.



TONY J LEWIS



SHADOW BANKING 101

JOHN AZIZ

Everything you wanted to know about the terrifying shadow banking system but were afraid to ask. By John Aziz, an independent financial writer from England.

MEET JAMES...

James bought a house. It cost him £150,000, of which £30,000 had come from his own savings, leaving him with a £120,000 30-year fixed-rate mortgage from the WTF Bank, with a final cost (after 30 years of interest) of £200,000. Now, up until the '80s, a mortgage was just a mortgage. Banks would lend the funds and profit from interest as the mortgage is paid back.

Not so today. James's £200,000 mortgage was packaged up with 1,000 other mortgages into a £180 million MBS, (mortgage backed security), and sold for an immediate gain by WTF Bank to Privet Asset Management, a hedge fund. Privet then placed this MBS with Sacks of Gold, an investment bank, in return for a £18 billion short-term collateralised ("hypothecated") loan. Two days later Sacks of Gold faced a margin call, and so re-hypothecated this collateral for another short-term collateralised £18 billion loan with J.P. Morecocaine, another investment bank. Three weeks later, a huge stock market crash resulted in a liquidity panic, resulting in more margin calls, more forced selling, which left Privet Asset Management — who had already lost a lot of money betting stocks would go up — completely insolvent.



CONFUSED?

You should be. This is of course a fictitious story. But the really freaky thing is that this kind of scenario — the packaging up of fairly ordinary debt into exotic financial products, which are then traded by hundreds or even thousands of different parties, has occurred millions and millions of times. And it is extremely dangerous. When everybody is in debt to everybody else through a complex web of debt one small shock could break the entire system. The £18 billion debt that Privet owed to Sacks of Gold could be the difference between Sacks of Gold having enough money to survive, or not survive. And if they didn't survive, then all the money that they owed to other parties, like J.P. Morecocaine, would go unpaid, thus threatening those parties with insolvency, and so on. This is called systemic risk, and shadow banking has done for systemic risk what did the Beatles did for rock & roll: blow it up, and spread it everywhere.

DEREGULATION

The banking system has blown up multiple times in history, when depositors have panicked and withdrawn funds en masse in what is known as a bank run. So traditional banks have become party to a lot of regulations. For example, banks must keep on hand 10% of deposits as a reserve. This reserve is a buffer, so that if depositors choose to withdraw their money they can do so without the bank having to call in loans. Of course, banks can still suffer from a liquidity panic if a large proportion of their depositors choose to withdraw their money. Under those circumstances, traditional banks have access to central bank liquidity — short term loans from the central bank to guarantee that they can pay depositors.

Shadow banking arose out of bankers' desire to not be bound by these restrictions, and so to create more and more and more financial products, and debt, without the interference or oversight of regulators. Of course, this meant that they did not have access to central bank liquidity, either.

Essentially, shadow banking is still banking. It is a funnel through which money travels, from those who have an excess of it and wish to deposit it and receive interest payments, to those who want to borrow money. Shadow banking institutions are intermediaries between investors and borrowers. They can have many names: hedge funds, special investment vehicles, money market funds, pension funds. Sometimes investment banks, retail banks and even

paper, tender option bonds, variable rate demand obligations, re-hypothecation, and hundreds more exotic variants. (Hypothecation is where the borrower pledges collateral to secure a debt — i.e. a mortgage, and re-hypothecation is where that collateral is passed on and someone else borrows against it, even though it remains in the original debtors hands). The function of these assets are essentially the same; securitisation is a way of creating products with an exchange value, and bringing money into the shadow banking system; so much money that the shadow banking system in 2008 was much larger than the traditional banking system:

PLUMMETING JUNK

So securitisation — as well as its siblings hypothecation and re-hypothecation, allowed for pre-existing securities to be re-posted again and again as collateral, sucking more and more money into the system — became a pretty significant way of funding lending. The problem in the financial crisis beginning in 2007 was that a lot of the assets securitised to bring money into the shadow banking system turned out to be junk.

Think back to the MBS bundle containing James's mortgage: if 90% of the mortgages in the MBS were defaulted upon, that MBS would yield a huge loss for whoever was currently holding it. If that MBS had been posted as collateral against further lending, those debts would be called in. For shadow banking institutions that were highly leveraged this turned out to be a huge problem. To raise capital, they started selling just about anything that wasn't bolted down. This meant that prices — even of securities that weren't fundamentally weak — plummeted. And because of the problems with a lot of existing securities, the funding source for a huge part of global lending completely dried up, worsening the economic contraction.

The risk — that debtors would default upon their loans — rather than being confined to a single bank, came to be spread about the entire economy, with bad debts that had been securitised, hypothecated and re-hypothecated coming to sit on the balance sheets of tens or even hundreds of financial institutions.

PSEUDO-MONEY

This entire system creates another problem. Securities came to be a kind of pseudo-money. In other words, they became a unit of exchange and a means for payment between banking institutions. With the 2008 shadow banking implosion, this meant that many prices, including prices of products like equities that were superficially disconnected from the



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shadow banking system, fell precipitously simply because there was less money floating around in the system.

Friedrich Hayek wrote about this problem long before anyone coined the term shadow banking:

There can be no doubt that besides the regular types of the circulating medium, such as coin, notes and bank deposits, which are generally recognised to be money or currency, and the quantity of which is regulated by some central authority or can at least be imagined to be so regulated, there exist still other forms of media of exchange which occasionally or permanently do the service of money. Now while for certain practical purposes we are accustomed to distinguish these forms of media of exchange from money proper as being mere substitutes for money, it is clear that, other things equal, any increase or decrease of these money substitutes will have exactly the same effects as an increase or decrease of the quantity of money proper, and should therefore, for the purposes of theoretical analysis, be counted as money.

Thus, as the shadow banking system expanded, it caused inflation, and as it imploded it caused deflation. It was a big toxic bubble waiting to burst.

THE FUTURE

Ultimately, markets are a little crazy. People will do all manner of wacky

things trying to turn a profit. All kinds of weird and wonderful systems will emerge. Some systems work better than others. And — as might be sensibly expected — the shadow banking system's wacky idea of financing banking operations through the securitisation of debt failed. But because of the wider implications for the financial system, central banks began throwing money around in order to save these broken institutions and systems.

The Federal Reserve's first quantitative easing program bought up tranches of defunct MBS. This stabilised markets to the extent that while securitisation virtually ground to a halt in 2009, by 2011 the shadow banking system was growing again. But this is surely just a temporary measure. Simply, there is no reason whatever to doubt that the same problem — of bad debt coming to be spread around the entire financial system through securitisation and re-hypothecation — will take root once again, causing similar turmoil in the future.

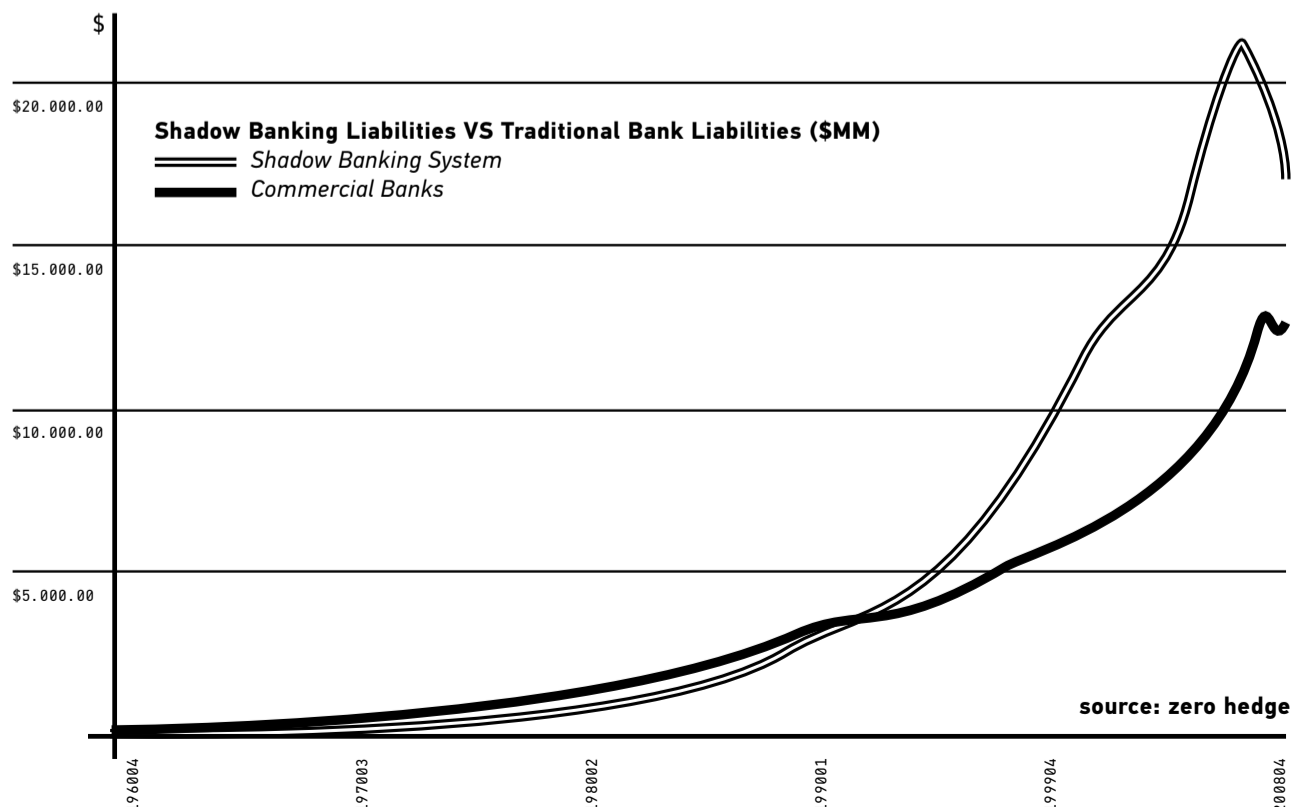
The status quo is that we have a broken and dangerous system that doesn't really work, surviving on government subsidies. Sure, a full collapse of shadow banking in 2008 would have been painful. But we may have created a bigger and more painful collapse further down the road.

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central banks. The difference is that in the new galaxy of shadow banking, these chains of intermediation are often extremely complex, the shadow bank does not have to keep reserves on hand, and shadow banking institutions raise money through securitisation, rather than through accepting deposits.

SECURITISATION

With securitisation, the financial industry creates the products which populate the shadow banking ecosystem, and act as collateral. Rather than accepting deposits (and thus accepting regulation as traditional banks) shadow banking gets access to money through borrowing against assets. These assets could be anything — mortgages, credit card debt, commodities, car loans. These kinds of products are packaged up into shares, sold and traded. There are various forms: collateralised debt obligations, collateralised fund obligations, asset-backed securities, mortgage-backed securities, asset back commercial



PREOCCUPYING: PAUL MASON

“THE OLD WORLD IS ON LIFE SUPPORT”

PAUL MASON IS ECONOMICS EDITOR OF BBC NEWSNIGHT AND THE AUTHOR OF SEVERAL BOOKS INCLUDING MELTDOWN AND WHY IT'S KICKING OFF EVERYWHERE. THE OT CAUGHT UP WITH PAUL TO GET HIS VIEWS ON THE TRAJECTORY OF THE FINANCIAL CRISIS AND THE UNREST IT HAS HELPED SPAWN, THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT'S SUCCESSES AND FAILURES - AND THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN SOCIETY.

THE OCCUPIED TIMES: The Occupy movement saw protestors initially gather, en masse, at significant financial centres across the globe, but the movement received heavy criticism - with claims that protestors failed to present an alternative to what the Financial Times later conceded was “capitalism in crisis”. Undaunted by this criticism, many thousands will be mobilising throughout May to further challenge economic injustice. Do you believe that movements such as Occupy bear the seeds for a sustained overthrow of the economic status quo?

PAUL MASON: No. For the simple reason that Occupy doesn't yet have either the means or the intention to “overthrow” the economic order. It's striking that while the present system - free market unregulated capitalism - is facing a crisis of sustainability and belief, the so called anti-capitalist movement still can't answer the questions: what do you want, what would you do if you could decide things?

It looks a lot like a new form of utopian socialism, or utopian anarchism.

I do not belittle that, of course - my job is to study these movements in real time: but as far as I can see it remains a critique of capitalism “within capitalism”, destined to create small islands of alternative lifestyle or alternative economics, not a systemic overthrow.

At the same time I do believe Occupy has created a new zeitgeist, and that it reflects a wider discontent, and that it's a product of something that is going on objectively, which is a new inter-personal and psychological revolution, and a revolution in

human expectations combined with a rejection of the old economic order and the old power elite.

This year is the 200th anniversary of Luddism, which prefigured other, more successful organised labour battles. Somebody inside the movement said to me: “Maybe we're like the Luddites, we're a prefigurative movement for something else”.

In America you can already see Occupy melding with other more local and deep-rooted movements: with the Trayvon Martin protests, with protests around abortion and contraception rights.

Whatever else happens, Occupy is now a meme that won't go away and I would expect it to influence subsequent waves of struggle and resistance.

OT: You recently told the Guardian's Comment is Free site that the global revolts of 2011 have signaled the end of Mark Fisher's concept of Capitalist Realism, whereby it seemed easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. These revolts could be seen as a global rejection of long-standing neoliberal economics. So if we are to believe that “the old is dying and the new cannot be born” are we now in Gramsci's “interregnum” - experiencing “a great variety of morbid symptoms”?

PM: Well that Gramsci quote gets rolled out a lot. I would see it as having a lot of relevance in Britain: old newspapers and media business models dying; the media obsessed with an agenda dreamed up in the unreal bubbles we call political parties; the voice of the gentleman's club and the public school still ubiquitous;

our “alternative” culture dominated by ageing standup comedians and millionaire concept artists.

I think Lehman was the moment where the fatalism the capitalist realism concept describes did die; but I also think you have to admit there is quite a lot of “the new” actually being born. The iPhone has conquered the world since Lehman; six out of seven Arab Facebook users joined after the revolution started. There is rapid uptake of technological change going on, and the rapid creation of alternative forms of media. Likewise if you look at the Rio+20 summit, the UN has suddenly become obsessed with “transition” projects.

So I would rephrase Gramsci: the old world is on life support because too few people want the chaos that an attempt to create a new world might bring. Instead of “morbid symptoms” you've got zombified symptoms.

OT: There seems to be an inability on the part of both those in the financial industry and among many financial journalists to fully understand the complexities of the economic system. It sometimes feels like we're speeding along in a driverless car and when you ask around what's wrong, everyone shrugs their shoulders. What does this situation mean for the potential success of policy responses - and can we even seek to comprehend what is going wrong before the shit really hits the fan?

PM: I dispute this: there are many journalists and economists who get what's gone wrong: at least 12 significant academic economists



predicted one or another aspect of the credit crunch.

Increasingly there's a default counter-crisis policy coalescing: you saw it in Berlin in April at George Soros's INET [Institute for New Economic Thinking] conference: it's basically repress finance, rebalance western economies towards production and hi-tech through state intervention, and upskill the western workforce. But it's actually very hard to implement: once the answer to every question is not “the market” you need experts, strategists, planners; “competitiveness” becomes not about “getting fit” but “winning the race by putting your spikes into the knee of your opponent”.

I've said before that the big unspoken question is protectionism: how much of the rebalancing can you hope to achieve without protecting your domestic market and restricting the supply of unorganised cheap labour. I think it's coming back - in both left and right wing forms.

If you look at the French elections, it's the candidates to the left and right - Le Pen and Melenchon - who've been prepared to break these taboos. The challenge for people around Occupy, which tends to shy away from “demands”, still less harsh demands that actually inflict pain on one section of society by wielding political power on behalf of another, is that we might be entering a decade of demand-based radical politics. So what are you going to do if politics and economics enters a world of class vs class, nation vs nation?

OT: A look back at the lead-up to the current global economic crisis reveals that a number of marginalised voices were accurately forecasting a crash well ahead of the collapse of Lehman Brothers. What changes can we hope to make to economic reportage in order to accommodate input from the likes of critical commentators such as Steve Keen, Nouriel Roubini, David Harvey and Nicholas Taleb?

PM: Each of the figures you mention are big figures who pick and choose their interventions carefully. I've hosted most of them on BBC outlets.

For me, economics reporting is not about theory anyway: it's about bringing in the granular and unexpected details of real life into the world of theory. It's about reporting before it's about economics - such as when I got in a car and drove across most of the

southern USA, looking at poverty and displacement. It taught me a lot more about effective demand, and real labour market, than the monthly stats could.

OT: You write in your new book, Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere (WIKOE), of an “almost mystical determination by protestors to occupy a symbolic space and create within it an experimental, shared community”. You also mention that this creation of “instant liberated spaces” is the most important theme linking the global revolt. Does this mean that you wouldn't subscribe to the meme that is popular with some in the Occupy movement that you “can't evict an idea”? Is holding onto a Tahrir, a Zuccotti Park or a St. Paul's crucial to the success of the movement?

PM: I was reporting in Zuccotti myself two weeks ago and got physically evicted, despite my BBC press pass. Then the place got swamped with cops and tourists in equal numbers. Then one slightly deranged guy started to meander through the space shouting “Occupy Wall Street”, which echoed off the office blocks and completely defined the situation.

So I suppose that's a good illustration of the idea being impossible to evict. However, if you look back at the history of opposition movements in, say, France, you would say ideas, eventually, can get evicted. Entire generations of radical French workers clung to the idea of the social republic, despite it being



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“evicted” physically twice, in 1851 and in 1871. Eventually they gave up on it: the character of opposition politics transformed as a result.

After a while then, an idea gets ground to pieces by repeated failure. How to avoid failure? Social history tells us it's numbers and relevance.

If you contrast Zuccotti to Tahrir: in Tahrir there are still tens of thousands of ordinary people prepared to risk life, injury and careers to be in Tahrir, even more than a year on, to expand the democratic rights they won in February 2011. I think it's an open question whether Occupy in the USA and UK will revive as the weather gets better, or whether it dissolves into whatever is coming next. Certainly, if you look at Spain and Greece, the indignado movements have now moved on to a more worker and politics oriented agenda, as you've moved into general strikes and election campaigns.

OT: In WIKOE you're keen to draw historical parallels between our times and the Edwardian Age or “Belle Epoque” at the turn of the 20th century rather than the more common comparisons most people make with the economic turmoil of the 1930s or the youthful protests of the 1960s. Why is this?

PM: We're not yet in a 1930s situation because the main economies in the world chose to bail out the banks instead of letting them go bust. Students are poor; young workers are low paid. But go into any bar or shopping mall where students and young workers hang out and you will see them still spending money: that money they are spending is some of the trillions of dollars, euros and pounds that's been created to stave off crisis. By contrast my grandad's generation literally spent their last penny and then starved. And even then it took the threat of fascism to rouse them from

sporadic strikes and protests to really transformative mass action.

The 1960s do have a resonance: but as I say in the book, back then the revolution in individual lifestyles and freedom ran into very powerful forces linked to the Cold War, to the resilience of the economic system, which could still deliver life improvements to ordinary people.

The parallel with the pre-1914 days for me comes from the fact that you've had this revolution in individual lifestyles that is congruent with a technological revolution and, until 2008, growth - but it's a cultural parallel I am drawing. And I do so to raise a question I don't know the answer to: if it all gets really ugly, economically and socially, could the powers that be really roll back all the personal freedom we've gained? We have to remember that Berlin went from the gay nightclub capital of the world to a Wagnerian cultural desert in the space of two or three years. It happened then.

OT: We're interested in the ability of mainstream media outlets to be a check on political and corporate power. Are organisations like the BBC doing their job properly? Or have we reached a situation where the real speaking of truth to power comes out of movements like Occupy, UK Uncut or from independent sources?

PM: I think all the mass and mainstream media knows it's facing a huge challenge as social media empowers ordinary people. And I don't see the first job of the media as “speaking truth to power”: it is much simpler - it is telling the truth. Finding it, uncovering it, testing out claims, creating a coherent picture of what's going on and then publishing it. What I say to people who get irate at reporting they don't like in the mainstream media is: in the end of

the day it's not as important as it was. If you don't like it; do your own reporting and disseminate it yourself. What unites activists and bloggers on the right and left - in the USA and increasingly here - is how little they trust or care about what the mainstream media says.

OT: Given that the PR industry has grown at an almost directly proportional rate to which newsrooms have shrunk in recent decades, how do you feel this has changed reporting, and is it causing serious problems?

PM: No. The only serious problem it causes me is RSI [Repetitive Strain

Injury] as I methodically delete press releases from my email in-box. I cannot say it has really changed my reporting. More of a problem is the relentless legal guerilla warfare corporations engage in with the media; and their endless complaints and lobbying efforts outsourced to the public affairs industry. But my philosophy is: if you are straight, and play fairly with everybody, most of it is like water off a duck's back.

OT: A lack of representation of working-class people in politics is obviously problematic for democracy, but what is the impact on society of a Fourth Estate disproportionately

populated by people from white, privileged backgrounds? What advice would you give to young working-class people keen to become journalists?

PM: Marry somebody who owns a ski-lodge in Verbier and a 60ft yacht! Seriously you put your finger on a problem. In the media in general wages for the producers, young reporters, internet writers etc are so low they're impossible to live on unless your dad is rich. I regularly look at adverts for research fellowships in Higher Education, or entry level school teaching, and think, heck, that's way more than people earn in TV and newspapers. So a lot of working class would-be journalists simply give up, or can't survive in the “prestige jobs” - so they move to the more lucrative edges of the media - which tend to be less altruistic, or they go into PR. Going back to the advice: I would say start a blog now; start producing video now; start posting your pictures on Tumblr or somewhere now. Start reporting, even if its only for an audience of a few hundred. You may already be out-performing your local newspaper in terms of readership! And get a specialism. I started on a magazine covering “heavy plant” - ie digging machines. But this problem of low wages, and too few entry level jobs that pay, also reflects the rise of social media and the crisis of mainstream business models.

OT: A hero of yours, George Orwell, masterfully depicted tyranny and hierarchy in 1984 and the nature of power in Animal Farm but he wasn't to know how new technology would herald the explosion of networks now connecting people across the globe; networks that you say will invariably defeat hierarchies. We think the important question is: would George have been a keen Tweeter or more of a Facebook fan?

PM: Orwell would have closed his Facebook account the moment they started messing around with the privacy options. He would have been tweeting Anglo-Saxon epithets but getting trolled by a combination of right wingers and Stalinists, as he was in 1937 when he wrote *Homage to Catalonia*. Also, maybe, he would have sold more books by self-publishing on Kindle than he ever did with Victor Gollancz. Also he would have ripped the **** mercilessly out of Occupy. Read his description of two ILP [Independent Labour Party] members getting onto a bus in Letchworth dressed for a socialist summer camp to see why.



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PREOCCUPYING: MARK FISHER

“THESE ARE THE SIGNS OF A SYSTEM VERGING ON COLLAPSE”

MARK FISHER IS AN AUTHOR, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL THEORIST AND A VISITING FELLOW AT GOLDSMITHS. THE OT ASKED MARK ABOUT THE CONCEPT BEHIND HIS BOOK ‘CAPITALIST REALISM’, HIS THOUGHTS ON THE CULTURE OF NEOLIBERALISM AND HIS ASSESSMENT OF THE GLOBAL UNREST THAT HAS SPRUNG UP OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS.

THE OCCUPIED TIMES: Paul Mason recently commented that the uprisings of 2011-12 have brought the curtain down on capitalist realism. Can you briefly outline what you mean by the term ‘capitalist realism’? And do you believe that the financial crisis and the subsequent popular fightback have signaled a new beginning?

MARK FISHER: Capitalist realism can be seen as a belief - that there's no alternative to capitalism, that, as Fredric Jameson put it, it's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. Other systems might be preferable to capitalism, but capitalism is the only one that is realistic. Or it can be seen as an attitude of resignation and fatalism in the face of this - a sense that all we can do is accommodate ourselves to the dominance of capitalism, and limit our hopes to contain its worst excesses. Fundamentally, then, it's a pathology of the left, nowhere better exemplified than in the case of New Labour. Ultimately, what capitalist realism amounts to is the elimination of left wing politics and the naturalisation of neoliberalism. I think it's too quick to talk about the end of capitalist realism, though what we have been seeing for the past couple of years is a challenge to this naturalisation of neoliberal concepts. In some ways, the austerity measures that have been implemented have constituted an intensification of capitalist realism. Those measures couldn't have been introduced unless there was still a widespread sense that there is no alternative to neoliberal capitalism. The various struggles that have blown up since the financial crisis show a growing discontent with the panic neoliberalism that has been put in place since 2008, but they have yet to propose any concrete alternative to the dominant economic model. Capitalist realism is about a corrosion of social imagination, and in some ways, that remains the problem: after thirty years of neoliberal domination, we are only just beginning to be able to imagine alternatives to capitalism. But at least now we can imagine imagining such alternatives.

OT: What have you made of the global Occupy movement's role as part of the mass mobilisation against the politics and economics of austerity and neoliberalism? From what you've seen can Occupy and other movements mount a sustained opposition to the ruling status quo, continuing with the global actions planned throughout May?

MF: The short answer is that this remains to be seen. There's no doubt the Occupy movement has played a major role in the shifting of ideological atmosphere that has happened in the last year or so. You're right that the question of sustainability is crucial. In *Capitalist Realism*, I argued that the anti-capitalist movement had become background noise to capitalist business as usual - something that it was by and large easy for capitalism

to ignore. The question is, can Occupy provide the basis for a sustainable antagonism? The broad problem we're facing here is, how can this antagonism be sustained now that the Communist Party has disappeared and trade unions have for the most part become quiescent? The party and the union structure provided sustainability, continuity and institutional memory. Now, it's not that these are the only institutions that could provide such things, or that those older institutions would be fit for purpose, even if they had survived into the 21st century. But a genuinely new force that is capable of struggling against 21st century capitalism must be able to fulfil those functions. I think we also need to recognise the importance of building hegemony - and this means stepping outside the activist universe. There's a danger of the activist's world become very self-contained. We need to reach beyond those intensely engaged with politics to those who don't look to politics at all to explain the misery of their lives. It's those people who have been most affected by capitalist realism, and who could be mobilised against it, if they could be reached.

OT: What was your reading of the riots last August? The epitome of neoliberal materialism or further evidence of a system built on greed breaking down?

MF: I think those involved in the riots were largely exactly the kind of people I was just talking about - those for whom 'politics' means absolutely nothing. I'm not saying that the riots weren't 'political', that they were an inexplicable upsurge of criminality, as the right did. The riots were political, but in a negative sense - they were a massive symptom of a failure of politics, an expression of discontent which lacked political goals or strategy. These are the signs of a system verging on collapse; people took part because they felt radically excluded. The invisible wall that prevents people from acting like this had collapsed - there was so little on offer that there was almost no incentive not to riot. It's to be hoped that the discontent that exploded so powerfully, and, in many cases so tragically, in the riots, can be harnessed. Shortly after the riots, I went to a screening of the Black Audio Film Collective's 1986 film *Handsworth Songs*, an essay-film about the 1980s riots. The film's director, John Akomfrah, said that, if these rioters can bring the British state to its knees for three days, they will also be able to organise themselves. That is my hope.

OT: In the sections of the book where you cover the culture of work, you describe the combination of marketisation and maddening bureaucracy as “Market Stalinism.” This evokes the excellent US television series *The Wire* where the police, the politicians, the teachers, etc. are all shown to be focused, above all else, on “joking the stats.” Can you describe how Market Stalinism works and how we can hope to get rid of it?

MF: I hadn't actually seen *The Wire* at the time I wrote *Capitalist Realism*, which is why there's no mention of it in the book. But you're right, *The Wire* exemplifies so much of what I wanted to say in *Capitalist Realism*. In fact, if you want to know what capitalist realism is, watch *The Wire*! Market Stalinism was my term for the kind of bureaucracy which was typical of Blairism, but which, as *The Wire* demonstrates, was by no means confined to Blairism, or to Britain. The neoliberal claim was that marketization obviates the need for the state and for bureaucracy. But the result of imposing 'marketization' on public services is always a crazed proliferation of bureaucracy, via target setting, league tables, performance reviews etc. Just as under Stalinism, everything becomes geared towards the production of appearance. In these conditions, gaming the system is inevitable. How to get rid of Market Stalinism? We need to expose one of the biggest lies in neoliberalism: the idea that it is an anti-bureaucratic force. This will involve a struggle against managerialism, and towards a workplace based on the collective autonomy of workers.

OT: You write in *Capitalist Realism* “This battery of bureaucratic procedures is by no means confined to universities, nor to education: other public services, such as the NHS and the police, find themselves enmeshed in similar bureaucratic metastases.” Now that the police want to strike, do you think they should be seen as just another public service, or does their role of enforcing the government's agenda mean we shouldn't oppose cuts to the police force in the same way we do the NHS, education or welfare?

MF: It's a difficult question, but one that should be answered pragmatically and strategically. If we are involved in fighting the



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police - either literally or at some other level - then the police are playing their role as ideological enforcers. Which isn't to say, I must emphasise, that we should ignore police brutality and corruption. What happened to Alfie Meadows and others is appalling, and needs to be exposed. But we have to remember that the police aren't the enemy, they are the servants of the enemy, and if all of our energy is taken up struggling against them, then they are doing their job for their masters very effectively. Ultimately, it must be far better if the servants are turned against their masters.

OT: A lot of what you write in the book comes from your experiences of working as a further education teacher. Where do you believe the Coalition, and New Labour before them, are going wrong with their education policies?

MF: The broader agenda here is the imposition of what I have called business ontology: the idea that only outcomes recognised by business count. It's gradually become accepted that the principal - if not the only - role of education is to turn out the kind of compliant individuals which 'business' wants. As systems from the private sector are increasingly introduced into education, the influence of managerialism grows, and the status of the teacher is downgraded. The pretext for the battery of bureaucratic and self-surveillance techniques that have been implemented by successive governments is that they 'increase efficiency', but their effect is to spread anxiety and erode the autonomy of the teacher. This isn't an accident: it's the real aim of these measures. Education has been corralled into naturalising and intensifying capitalist competition;

it's easy to forget, for example, that league tables were only introduced relatively recently. League tables produce the kind of Market Stalinist distortions I was talking about earlier. Teaching becomes a matter of training students for examinations; anything else is a luxury. Contrast this with the much-praised education system in Finland, which is fully comprehensive, has no league tables or inspectorate, and is based on trust in teachers.

OT: A predominant theme of the book is the issue of mental illness in capitalist societies. You write, "what is needed now is a politicisation of much more common disorders. Indeed, it is their very commonness which is the issue: in Britain, depression is now the condition that is most treated by the NHS." It seems that with mental illness scarring the lives of so many sufferers and their loved ones in the UK, it should be towards the top of the political agenda. How can we begin to reduce the stigma, isolation and shame that our society still attaches to the issue of mental illness? How can we convince people that its cause has roots in the collective, not just the individual?

MF: This is a crucial question. The way in which social and political problems are converted into individual pathologies, to be explained via chemical imbalances or family history, neatly sums up so much of what has happened under capitalist realism. It's what I've called the privatisation of stress. Depression has been described as a pathology of responsibility: you feel intensely responsible for the state that you're in. The excruciating paradox is that, while you feel that only you can get yourself out of depression, the condition consists precisely in your inability to act. There's more than an analogy with the political hopelessness and fatalism that have characterised capitalist realism. Depression, after all, is a pathology which centrally involves a sense of realism (indeed, there's a phenomenon called depressive realism): the depressive thinks that they are being realistic, that they have perceived the real state of things, denuded of illusion. This describes the post-utopian tenor of capitalist realism perfectly: other societies had their illusions, their dreams of something beyond capitalism, but we have come to terms with the inevitability of competition and precariousness. Yet depression shows the extent to which people - even during the boom years - could not come to terms with this. With precarity increasing and welfare programmes eroding, it's not surprising that there should be an increase in depression and anxiety. But this increase in distress has been pathologised, neuroticised and commoditised over the past thirty years. Instead of looking to unions when our workload becomes unbearable, we're invited to look for a medical solution. Stressed by too many working hours? Take this medication, which will restore the balance of your brain chemistry. Worried about losing your job? Tell me about your mother. This is a major example of the naturalisation process I talked of earlier. What we need is a denaturalisation (and consequent politicisation) of mental illness. I think the formation of a dedicated pressure group could work towards this. We need something like a revival of the Anti-Psychiatry movement of the 60s and 70s. Well, not so much a revival as a re-occupation of the terrain that Anti-Psychiatry fought on; you could argue that the receding of Anti-Psychiatry correlates very closely with the rise of capitalist realism.

OT: With neoliberal economics being so globalised, so strongly enforced by powerful entities on a national, international and supranational level, does this not make it that much harder for any one nation-state to adopt a new economic paradigm? Would there not be credit-rating downgrades from the 'objective' agencies who missed the Enron and sub-prime scandals, a hysterical frenzy among the corporate media, veiled threats from the IMF and OECD and, quite possibly, stampeding capital flight? Couldn't there even, depending on the extent of the country's departure from the consensus, be hostility from the other neoliberal countries?

MF: Of course, that would happen, and this kind of threat plays a large part in the current mode of capitalist realism. In fact, this is pretty much a statement of what capitalist realism is at this time. But it presupposes that capital is the most powerful force on earth, and it's this presupposition which needs to be undermined. How? By constituting a counter-force capable of disciplining capital. We've become used to a world in which workers fear

capital, never the reverse. Capitalist realism has never been about direct ideological persuasion - is not that the population of the UK were ever convinced of the merits of neoliberal ideas. But what people have been convinced of is the idea that neoliberalism is the dominant force in the world, and that, consequently, there is little point resisting it. (I'm not suggesting that most people recognise neoliberalism by name, but they do recognise the policies and the ideological narrative which neoliberalism has so successfully disseminated.) This perception has arisen because capital has subdued the forces acting against it - most obviously, it has crushed unions, or forced them into being consumer/ service institutions within capitalism. But you're right - the situation has changed since the heyday of social democracy, and one of the principal ways in which it has changed is the globalization of capital. Indeed, this is one way that unions were outmanoeuvred: if your members won't work for these rates, we'll go to a place where workers will. One of the strengths of Occupy is that it is a transnational movement. But the challenge for Occupy is whether it can constitute a force capable of inducing fear into capital. My suspicion is that it won't be able to do that on its own, and that it will need other institutions and groups - probably including unions - if it is to succeed in being a counter-force to capital. Capital isn't actually global, but it is sufficiently global, and therefore any effective opposition to it needs to be sufficiently global also. The concrete question - somewhat obfuscated by many of the debates about centralization versus networks - concerns co-ordination. How are disparate groups to be co-ordinated? We can learn lessons from neoliberalism here: its success was based on building a patchwork of heterogeneous groups, often with different, even conflicting agendas.

OT: The book ends very optimistically, saying that there is a sense that anything was possible again. That was two or three years ago now. Still optimistic? More or less than before?

MF: Well, I think that the optimism has somewhat been borne out by what's happened since I wrote the book. As I said, I think it's going too far to say that capitalist realism is over, but the fact that Paul Mason could make such a claim shows how much has changed over the past couple of years. Just before the student militancy blew up in the UK at the end of 2010, I spoke at a conference, making the - in retrospect - mild claim that there would be shows of public anger against austerity, and I was accused of "revolutionary nostalgia". The point is, that it was my accuser that seemed to have the most (hah!) realistic handle on things then. But surely there's not anyone now who thinks that public discontent in the UK is at an end. Things have got better and worse since 2009: worse, in that panic neoliberalism has further attacked the welfare state, NHS, education etc; better in that opposition is coalescing, and the ideological climate has shifted.

OT: You've written a lot about how popular culture has reinforced Capitalist Realism. You show how commercial pop and hip hop music and films like Children of Men and Wall-E, even when purporting to critique authority and the system, in fact leave only a message of its inevitable perpetuation. Do you feel that there is much in the way of popular culture that does successfully subvert Capitalist Realism? What subversive music, films and books can you recommend to OT readers?

MF: I'm not saying that there are no political potentials at all in the popular culture I discuss in Capitalist Realism. What I was pointing to, though, was the fact that anti-capitalism at the level of a film's message does nothing in itself to disrupt the super-hegemony of capital. Anti-capitalism - or at least anti-corporatism - is utterly standard within Hollywood films: consider something like Avatar, for instance. This is the objective irony of capital: nothing sells better than anti-capitalism. Or, even more bleakly, late capitalism's culture is anti-capitalist. There is an asymmetry: we struggle against capital, but part of capital's defeat of us is that it can sell our books. This isn't a completely closed circle, though. The issue is how culture connects up with struggles, and you can't second guess that. It's possible that any of the films I talked about could contribute to the development of class consciousness or inspire people to engage in struggles. Conversely, it's possible that even those films or television programs which inventory the features of capitalist realism end up reinforcing it. Take something like The Wire: yes, it exemplifies practically everything I say about capitalist realism, but, for that very reason, you could say that it supports, rather than subverts, capitalist realism. You could very easily take away the message that struggling to change things is pointless; the system wins in the end. But one film I would recommend to people, if they haven't seen it, is Mike Judge's Office Space, which I briefly discuss in Capitalist Realism: I've seen no film which better captures the bureaucratic immiseration of late capitalist managerialism labour.



MONEY TALKS

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND: NIGEL LAWSON AND THE '80S ROOTS OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

OCCUPIED TIMES: If you were to pick one event from recent history to help make sense of the current crisis, what would it be?

ROBIN RAMSAY: One is hard. Here's a couple of starting points. The budget of 1980 (the real intellectual author of which was Nigel Lawson) set the bankers free to move money and lend as much as they wanted to. It tends to be forgotten that this move happened in the UK before it did in America. In a very real sense, the present shambles is Maggie's great legacy. Not that she had any idea of what was going on; but she was in charge, at least formally.

A second event would be the decision by those around Neil Kinnock in 1988 to give up on their anti-banker economic policy and begin kissing butt in the City; that was the moment when personal careers overrode intellect and concern about this country.

THE OT IS GIVEN A TOUR OF BRITAIN'S POLITICAL RUINS BY ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR AND PUBLISHER OF LOBSTER MAGAZINE AND AUTHOR OF THE RISE OF NEW LABOUR.

OT: These days, Nigel Lawson has been calling for a new Glass-Steagall Act, "a complete separation between classic commercial banking and investment banking." He says the crucial "discipline of the marketplace" is being eroded by too-big-to-fail institutions...

RR: He's an old man and has probably (and conveniently) forgotten that he's the primary creator of the present mess. He should stick to writing about dieting. However, yes, he's basically right in part – in his account of the problem – and wrong in his prescription that the free market can solve the problem itself. As soon as someone writes or talks about "the discipline of the market place" you are hearing ideology taking the place of thought.

OT: Back in 1999, you wrote: "The City of London has had complete control over British economic policy, and most British economic thinking, for over twenty years." Is the City's control as strong today?

RR: Even stronger, if anything. The events of 2008/9 demonstrated that politicians of all the British parties, with the possible exception of Vince Cable, knew nothing about economics, and were simply waiting to be told what to do by the money men. The bailout was theft, enacted by ignorant politicians who were stampeded by the bankers.

OT: Can democracy find its way back from this?

RR: Truthfully, I don't know. Did we ever have democracy? The range of

things tolerated by the powers-that-be has shrunk since 1980s, as the money-men established intellectual hegemony. I am thinking of civil liberties, basically: the right to protest and the response of the state to protests. These days, go on a demo and you might get 'kettled' by the police for six hours for your trouble. Even worse if you are trade unionist: months of notice and ballots before it is possible to strike. And GCHQ and the NSA are recording and analysing every form of electronic emission from baby monitors upwards.

OT: This is boom time for the surveillance industry, for the privatized demolition of privacy. What would you say to someone working in this sector?

RR: To an ordinary Joe making a living with a mortgage to pay, I would say nothing. To managers, tech innovators, I would paraphrase the bit of the Bill Hicks sketch where he asks if there is anyone in the audience who works in advertising. And when he hears a "Yes" from the audience, he says "Kill yourself. I mean it. Kill yourself." Seriously though, businessmen and women will always take opportunities offered them by society. Not their fault. This stuff comes from the top.

OT: Who is your political hero?

RR: In Labour Party terms, I supported the views of Bryan Gould MP, who stood against John Smith in 1992 for the leadership of the party and lost. Gould saw very clearly that the EU was



rubbish, and that the City was the enemy of the British people. More recently, the Conservative David Davis is an interesting figure and might do something one day.

OT: In 2009, Bryan Gould wrote:

"There have been no more enthusiastic cheerleaders for the culture of greed and excess than New Labour ministers", in a government which "celebrated the excesses of the City". Do you agree?

RR: Absolutely. And I would say: "no more enthusiastic and ignorant cheerleaders". The Parliamentary Labour Party knew nothing; its leaders knew nothing. All they saw was big buildings filled with clever people making money, in the new 'knowledge economy'. Funny how 'knowledge economy' has disappeared from the political discourse of today...

OT: You once described the rhetoric of the City as: "Leave everything to us; we know what we are doing. We are the success story of the British economy." Nowadays, in Europe, we are leaving it to the technocrats, trusting the bankers to save us...

RR: It's clear that all over Europe (i.e. EU Europe), bar the Czech Republic, the ideology of pre-WW2 classical liberalism is the prevailing view; and quite a few ex-members of Goldman Sachs have been parachuted into positions at or close to the top of EU members governments – Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Italy, France and Greece – to make sure there is no default on Goldman Sachs loans.

The really striking thing is that none of Europe's left-wing terror groups – e.g. those in Spain, Ireland and Greece – have started knocking-off the bankers and Eurocrats. The cynic in me says that this may suggest that such groups were being run by their states.

OT: What does it mean to be a cynic? Is it a mode of constant questioning?

RR: Good question and very difficult to answer. I guess it's something like this: I expect things to go wrong, and I expect it to be revealed that the motives people profess and those they really have are not the same.

OT: What's the biggest lie Britain's been sold?

RR: In my lifetime there have been several. Obviously WMDs in Iraq is on the list. But I would add: (a) public bad, private good; (b) the unions were to blame for the inflation of the 1970s; (c) there is no alternative (TINA) – a phrase often used by Thatcher to justify her economic liberalism. In other words, the entire edifice of Thatcherism / Blairism was built on lies.

OT: Do you think the anti-war lobby will ever recover from being so ignored over Iraq and the WMDs?

RR: The anti-war lobby is always ignored. But, as I say: you have to proceed without hope. If you need hope to continue, you are screwed. If people believed that big marches against the Iraq war were going to persuade Tony Blair to go against American foreign policy, they knew nothing about the British political system or our post-war history.

OT: The west seems intent on fighting, in Larkin's words, "the savage wars of peace".

RR: Giving Obama the Nobel Peace Prize was nearly as funny as giving it to Henry Kissinger. (Indeed, I have forgotten why Obama did get it). Obama was bought-and-paid-for long before his election. Anyone who didn't know this wasn't paying attention, or didn't want to know.

OT: Are we humans are too believing for our own good?

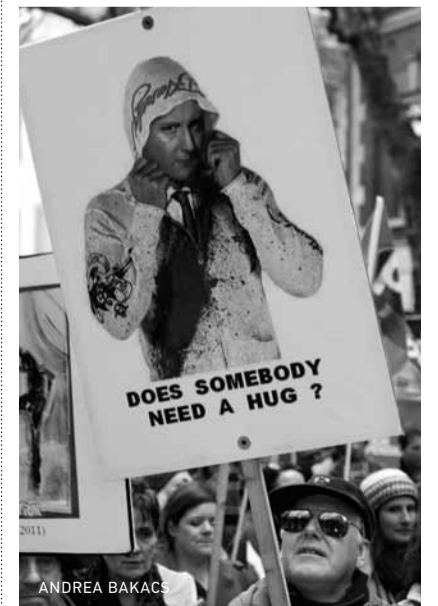
RR: Do we really believe? Turnout at elections keeps falling; party memberships keeps falling. We are stuck: the state is too powerful to organise against; many of us are too comfortable to be bothered doing anything; huge swathes of those under thirty are merely consumers who still think stuff is more important than anything else. The internet is rewiring our brains, diminishing our attention spans, addicting many of us.

If globalisation has failed, then we return to the nation state. Do you see anyone on the left thinking about this? I don't. And no wonder: nation segues into nationalism, and this is the territory of the right and far right. So there's the big necessary project: how to detoxify the notion of the nation state and make it acceptable to the left.

Robin Ramsay is the editor and publisher of Lobster Magazine (lobster-magazine.co.uk).



ANDREA BAKACS



ANDREA BAKACS



VALUE: THE REALITY

Three sources of value exist: 1) Location – i.e. three dimensional space; 2) Energy – in material or static and immaterial or dynamic forms; and 3) Intellect – in subjective form (knowhow) and objective form (knowledge). While the factors of location and non-renewable energy are finite, and subject to enclosure and dominance by elites, the emerging factor of intellectual value is subject to the direct instant connectivity of the Internet.

"The Internet" as John Gilmore has said, "interprets censorship as damage and routes around it" and it's already routing around governments and rent-seekers to prevent them from capturing and enclosing knowledge and knowhow. The great theme of the 21st Century will be the exchange of intellectual value – firstly for the value of infinite renewable energy (MegaWatts); and secondly for the value of non-renewable energy saved (Negawatts and Negabarrels – units of unused energy).

CO-OPERATIVE ADVANTAGE

I believe we will see – probably more rapidly than many will believe possible – a transition from a profit-centred dollar economy to a people-centred energy economy. The adoption of a networked collaborative model has a 'co-operative advantage' – the freedom from paying something for nothing to rent-seekers. Networked financial systems spread the risk and are more resilient – from enclosure, for example.

There is a useful tool of credit which I call a 'nondominium' agreement: a consensual framework agreement between stakeholders such as asset users, managers, and investors which brings them together collectively and individually in such a way that none has a dominant right over another, but each has negative rights to protect their interests. In this new economy, absolute rights of ownership would be replaced by rights of 'stewardship'.

COLLABORATIVE INVESTMENT

By finding consensual solutions through the formation of community partnerships we shall see a viral spread of networked community projects. So collaboration to a common purpose and the equitable sharing of value will eventually out-compete profit-based economics. As a research fellow at the Institute for Security and Resilience Studies at UCL, I am engaged in action-based research to simplify and localise the way in which people may interact creatively using unconventional legal entities and agreements. This enables stakeholders to participate in mutual agreements to a common purpose of creating productive assets of all kinds.

Within such reality-based projects participants come together without

VALUE: THE MYTHS

This time, the violent conflict and disruption which has historically resolved such wealth imbalances – at least since debt jubilees went out of fashion – will not take place, despite the gloomy view of many. To understand why not, we have to understand what "value" is – because underpinning every school of economics, implicitly or explicitly, are certain foundational assumptions as to the basis of value.

Almost invariably there is an anthropocentric assumption that it is the individual's labour which is the source of all value, and that the use of other factors of production – lumped together as 'capital' – simply makes labour more 'productive'. So a nurse in public service is an unproductive burden on the taxpayer, but in the private sector she magically becomes 'productive'. Or when a factory is automated, the person who switches it on and off is almost infinitely productive, while the capital embedded in the factory is not.

This is pure ideology – but it is of course convenient, since it justifies the imposition of taxes only on individuals, rather than upon the productive assets they may own.

There are two additional myths we need to leave behind us for good: firstly, the banking myth, which is that banks take in deposits and lend them out again; and secondly the 'tax and spend' myth – that Treasuries collect taxes and then spend the proceeds.

The truth is very different: banks and treasuries are simply credit middlemen who provide a framework of trust for the credit they create out of nothing as money. The value which underpins this credit is in fact only in small part that of the bank, but is actually based upon the capacity of productive people to meet their obligations, and it is usually backed by the value of productive assets, particularly land.

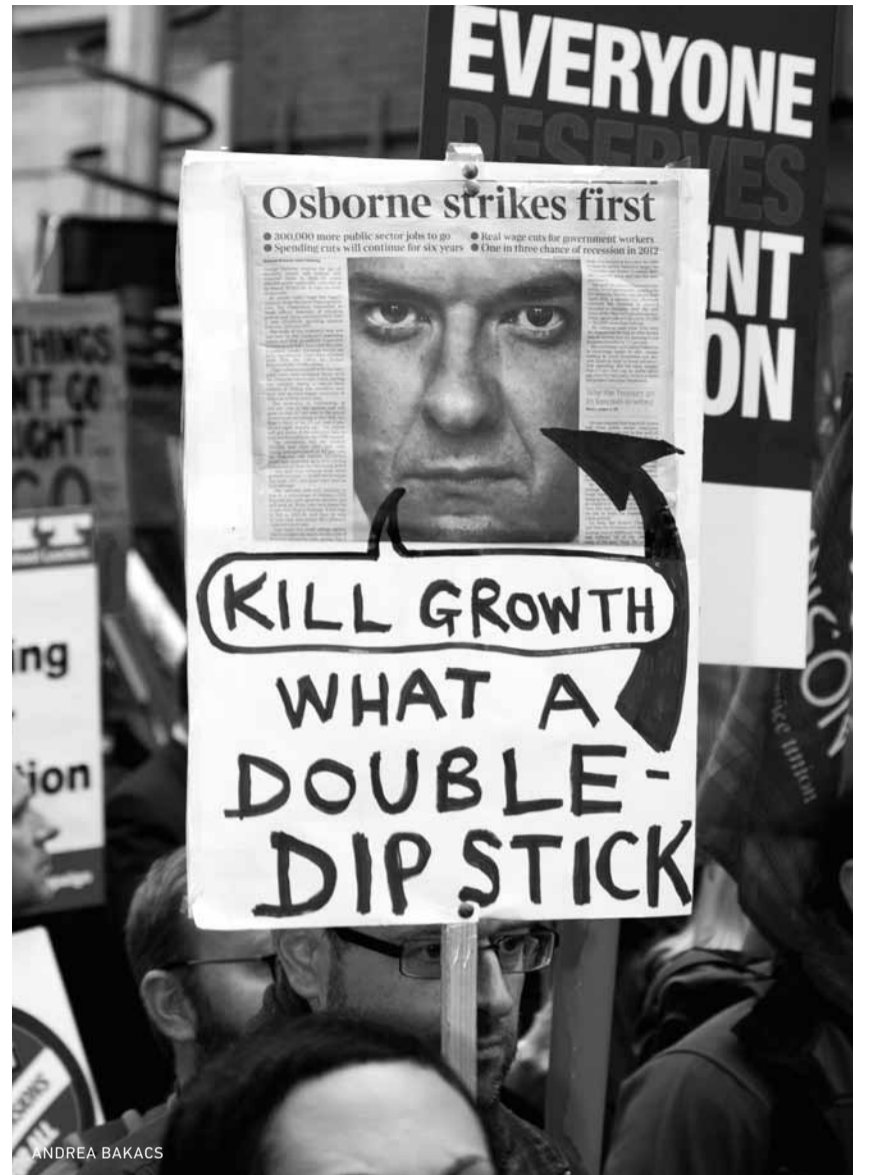
CHRIS COOK EXPLORES HOW REALITY BASED ACTION CAN LEAD TO A RESILIENCE ECONOMY

For thousands of years the toxic combination of the inexorable mathematics of compound interest on debt and private ownership of the commons (particularly land) have led to the unsustainable concentration of wealth in the hands of the few to the exclusion of the many. This has invariably led to booms and busts at best, and revolutions and wars at worst. How can we address the systemic imbalance in ownership of real wealth – particularly land – and the financial claims by the 1% over the indebted 99%?

THE END OF THE DOLLAR ECONOMY

Our current system is unsustainable. There was even a near seizure of money transmission services in 2008 when we were a few hours from cash machines running out. A sequence of defaults and breakdowns in trust on a global scale all but destroyed the banking system, which has been on life support ever since, being flooded with money by central banks, like transfusions of blood being pumped into an accident victim. The visible wounds of the system, the banks, have been stitched up and have largely healed. The problem is that the patient continues to bleed internally, and worse than that, quack Austerity-crazed doctors are intent upon applying leeches or even lopping off healthy limbs.

Hundreds of years from now historians will look back at the meltdown of Lehman Brothers in October 2008 as the moment which marked the onset of the transition. The US economy had already reached a point of Peak Credit – the point at which the monetary claims created by banks had become greater than the capacity of the population to meet them. And then, the crash.



value-extracting banks and other middlemen, but possibly alongside value-adding individuals with professional and banking experience of risk management and project appraisal who have a stake in the outcome.

One example of such a project was 'The Art of Flirting' LLP (Limited Liability Partnership), a film project in which actors became members with percentage shares in the partnership (as opposed to £1.00 shares in a company), and 'capital partners' invested cash for a 20% equity share. Although, as with most films, it was not a financial success, the actors acted in a film; the producer produced a film; I carried out very useful action-based legal and financial research, and even the investors had a completely legitimate tax loss.

In Edinburgh, waterfront land is the subject of a proposed land partnership involving the local council, architects and others within an LLP framework. Another proposal was prepared for the Albion Trust, which created Norton Park in Edinburgh – a converted school which offers affordable offices for charities and social enterprises. The key lesson here was that the affordability of rents – there were no vacancies in 15 years due to a long waiting list for tenants – gives certainty of investment return.

NEW ETHICS OF BUSINESS

These new participatory models share risk and reward whilst circumventing the current banking model, in which you pay money for the use of money. The Limited Company structure is often toxic – particularly in its public limited company (Plc) form – and instead we need cooperatives of cooperatives and to remove 'money for nothing rent seekers' from the equation.

We need to understand that deficit-based modern money has come to the end of the road. Instead of allowing banks to issue our credit for us based on nothing, we could base credit on productive assets such as Land and energy. A currency unit based upon land rentals could be instrumental in resolving unsustainable property debt; while energy-based currency units could be instrumental in the transition to a low carbon economy.

In doing so perhaps the most essential safeguard against corruption and abuse is transparency. For example, in Norway, Finland and Sweden all tax returns are accessible to the public. In fact, under cooperative-based finance, it is in everyone's own interest to be transparent: sunshine is the best disinfectant! In other words: Ethical is Optimal.

Chris Cook is a former director of the International Petroleum Exchange. He is now a strategic market consultant, entrepreneur and commentator.





'PAY UP'

WHY WE NEED TO START TALKING ABOUT POVERTY PAY

DANIEL GARVIN

THE ONLY THING GETTING BIGGER IN THIS SOCIETY IS INEQUALITY

TIM MATTHEWS
OF UK UNCUT

Before George Osborne's 2012 budget address, Nick Clegg informed the country that it would be a 'Robin Hood' budget, whereby the rich would be taxed to help the poor. If the government were sincere about this pledge and truly wanted to support those who are suffering at this time of austerity, they would have done all they could to reclaim the £25 bn lost annually through tax avoidance and to make sure such abuses could not be repeated. This is an example of one obvious and genuine alternative to the cuts. Greg Philo, director of the Glasgow University Media Unit, pointed out another back in 2010 in an article for the "Guardian": a wealth tax to raise £800 bn from the £4 trillion held by the richest in our society, something which had strong support amongst the public according to a YouGov poll his team commissioned, showing 74% in favour.

Instead, the budget was a case of Robin Hood in reverse, with the Chancellor encouraging tax avoidance by big business and further lowering corporation tax while implementing even deeper cuts to public spending. The UK was robbed of the income it needs to fund its precious public services while the rich were given more hand outs.

A budget for the poor, jobless and dispossessed is now needed more than ever in this country. The coalition partners know that one million 16 to 24-year-olds are out of work - the highest for 10 years, and higher than the EU average. They know that Britain's female unemployment rate has hit a 25-year high. And if they listened to the Institute for Fiscal Studies they would know that the biggest losers from the public spending cuts are the poorest 10% of families with children. What they don't seem to know is the plain truth: austerity may be working for the bosses and the banks, but it isn't working for Britain.

In the budget, Osborne showed that his true priority is giving succour to multinationals, helping them reduce their tax bills dramatically by enabling their profits from offshore finance company subsidiaries to be tax exempt.

According to Felicity Lawrence, "If a UK-based multinational sets up a treasury company in Switzerland and puts equity into it from the UK, which is then passed on in loans to its other subsidiaries to run its operations, with interest on the loans flowing back in profits to the tax haven. The tax rates on these profits will be a maximum of just one-quarter of the current UK rate."

The Chancellor's announcement of these new policies will make tax avoidance much easier for multinational companies and banks. The Treasury itself has admitted these measures will lose the public purse £1 bn each year. Tax expert Richard Murphy described these new measures as a "deliberate promotion of tax haven abuse".

Enabling tax haven abuse is another anti-democratic measure by this government and one which we can add to a long and growing list. The recent lobbying scandal highlighted how wealthy Tory donors buy power and influence. Now we see how Britain's tax rules are being written by tax-dodging big businesses and banks like Vodafone and Barclays, who sit on exclusive corporate working groups at the heart of government, crafting policies entirely for their own benefit.

In a pitiable attempt to appease the wave of public anger over tax avoidance by mega-rich individuals and opulent corporations, George Osborne announced that the government would take steps to implement a General Anti-Avoidance Rule, including a consultation document to be issued this summer. However, this amounts to very little given the scale of the problem, which the government only seems intent on worsening.

The government's much-derided and parodied slogan "we're all in this together" sounds all the more absurd if you consider how levels of inequality have grown over recent years. In the UK, the thousand richest people have accumulated fortunes that are collectively worth £250 bn more than a decade ago with giant corporations sitting on near-record levels of cash. For example, in the UK, as Stewart Lansley has pointed out, "corporate surpluses stand at over £60 bn, around 5% of the size of the economy". This is money which could be used to kickstart the economy yet is instead mostly standing idle, resulting, for Lansley, in 'paralysis'. The regressive reductions in the top rate of income tax (to 45%) and in corporation tax (to 24%) show that this government is extremely comfortable with the wealthy getting wealthier whilst the dole queues grow.

All this means we should not be fooled for a moment into thinking that George Osborne is Robin Hood when we all know that he is really the Sheriff of Nottingham. This country is not broke, and there are clear alternatives to austerity, alternatives which are being purposely ignored by the political elite. We only have to look at the profits and bonuses of banks and big business to know that.

Take Amazon.co.uk for example. Last month the Guardian revealed that Amazon's British operation made £3.3 bn in sales last year but paid not a penny in corporation tax on any of the profits from that income. The company is now under investigation by the tax authorities, according to media reports.

What is broken, and destructive, is a political and economic system which claims to promote the 'big society' but where the only things getting bigger are unemployment, inequality and anger.

Activists involved with UK Uncut, Occupy, community organisations and trade unions are about to launch a nationwide campaign - called PAY UP - against highly profitable UK companies that pay some of their staff only the bare minimum. CEO pay, and the focus on the top 1% gained a lot of traction in 2011, but 2012 needs to focus on the 99%, or rather about the low and stagnating pay for the bottom 10-20%. Here are some reasons why:

WAGE TRENDS: 1945 - 1979

Let's take ourselves back to 1978. In the 30-odd years since the end of the Second World War Britain saw an unprecedented decline in inequality. This didn't simply come about because that period saw the modern day welfare state created; it also saw the labour movement take home a steadily increasing proportion of national income. In 1910, the richest 0.1% of the population took home a whopping 10% of all national income. By 1978, that figure had dropped to a more modest 1%.

A year later, in 1979, Margaret Thatcher rose to power and began her radical programme of neoliberal market deregulation that came to define global economic policy for the next 30 years. The financial markets were freed up, tax rates for the richest plummeted, stringent anti-union laws were put in place, and business was shed of a variety of 'red tape' regulation. Thatcher believed that Britain's economic problems were in part down to the increasing strength of the labour movement. The fightback by those at the top was on.

WAGE TRENDS: 1980 - 2012

Now fast forward to 2012. Over the past 30 years, top wages in the UK, as well as other major European and North American economies, have rocketed skyward. Last year the High Pay Commission detailed examples of how some FTSE 100 CEOs' pay and bonuses have risen by 4,000%. Even in 2010, the average CEO pay in the FTSE100 went up by 49%.

Wages as a proportion of GDP, 1955 to 2008, percentages



At the same time, the UK and the majority of other Western economies have seen gross wage stagnation for those at the bottom end of the pay scale. The situation is most acute in the United States, but as the accompanying graph shows, the steady fall in income share that the UK labour force has been handed since 1979. In relative terms, millions of people in the UK have been getting gradually poorer, while those at the top have seen their pay packets and profits boom. The introduction of the National Minimum Wage in 1998 certainly improved pay for the lowest paid, but some figures show that over the past 10 years, wages have decreased in real terms by around 10% for those on the minimum wage, as inflation has outstripped growth in pay.

THE RISE OF CREDIT, DEBT AND GOVERNMENT WAGE SUBSIDIES

The real crisis in the UK is at the bottom end of the pay scale. When the Tories stand up and say 'work must pay' they are criticising a system where some households can receive more in benefits than in wages. The scandal is not an over generous welfare state, it is that work itself does not pay. People are going to work and not even earning enough just to feed their children, to pay the rent and the bills, let alone having a disposable income. The Joseph

Rowntree Foundation has shown how the number of children living in 'in work poverty' has risen to 2 million.

While wages have been stagnant, we've seen energy and food prices soar, as well as the decline of social housing provision, and the rise of market rates in the private sector.

The past 30 years has seen wage rises replaced with credit cards, loans and rising household debt. Some economists have analysed how the US housing crash in 2007 rested on the issue of low wages which creates the need for workers to borrow money to make ends meet or to maintain living standards. The banks then turned these debt packages into complex "sub-prime" financial debt packages to trade and make a tidy profit off. In 2007/08 that debt bubble went pop.

A flagship New Labour policy was the Working Tax Credit (WTC). This is money given to those in work, on low pay, to top-up their wages in order to make ends meet. Some figures suggest that £15bn a year is currently spent on WTC. WTC has provided a vital lifeline to millions of people on low pay, but in the cases where individuals work for a private company, WTC mean the government is subsidising the profits of the private sector. Ironically it is actually the failure of the market to provide a living for people that creates the need for a strong welfare state.

PAY UP

A lot has been said over the past four years since Northern Rock collapsed about the unfairness, greed and inequality of financial capitalism. This anger should not just be reserved for the banks, but extended into the wider economy and back towards a more fundamental discussion about the relationship between labour and capital, workers and bosses.

At the end of 2011 a light was shone onto the bumper pay packets of FTSE100 bosses, and the disgust about bankers' pay and bonuses is well known. However, an even sharper light now needs to be shone onto low, poverty wages. If a CEO receives a million pounds less this year this will not actually result in any benefit for most people.

Big business in particular can afford high wages. Profits are booming, and some economists estimate that the cash reserves that have been built up by the private sector stands at an eye watering £700bn.

Pay rises should be one of the many steps towards fighting the inequality of capitalism. We hope to build an effective alliance between social movements and workplace organisations that can achieve some concrete action on pay. And we want to popularise wages as an issue, alongside casino banking and tax avoidance in the post-2008 critique of capitalism.



HOW TO DEAL WITH THE FIT

FITWATCH

The police snoop on protests and protesters in many ways. They call it 'intelligence gathering'. Some of this is done by murky methods, with undercover police and informants, but a lot of it is open, obvious and in-your-face.

The Forward Intelligence Teams (FIT) and their methods of intelligence gathering should not be tolerated by anyone who genuinely wants to see any form of social change. FIT's function is to gather data, and then use this information to disrupt, intimidate and harass those involved in political dissent.

There are some key things which everyone should know: for starters, how to recognise the FIT. Don't make it easy for them to take your photograph. Look away, keep your head down (literally!), block the cameras, wear a mask, do whatever you need to do, but try to keep your picture out of their image database.

Don't give them your name and address. They can insist on it if you have committed an offence, caused harassment, alarm or distress, or are driving a car, but can't otherwise. Don't give it. Say no.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

"Why should I stop them taking my picture or having my name and address? I have nothing to hide."

FIT does not just collect details of people who have done something wrong. If you are an organiser of protests, a member of a specific group, or simply someone they see about a lot, you have become a person 'of interest'. Your description, name and details (if they have them), and your photo will be put on a database. You will have your own police file and may even be designated as a 'domestic extremist'.

Many people think that 'masking up' is just for people who are intending to commit crime. It should be for all of us at any time that we are engaged in political protest and the FIT teams are out.

"I'm on a database, should I be afraid to attend protests?"

Fear of being on a police database definitely shouldn't stop you from being active and participating in the politics you believe in. But being 'known' can present some challenges. Cops you've never met before may call you by name. You might find your car gets stopped on the way to protests, or that you become the target of more intrusive surveillance methods. You may be more likely to be arrested. It's not as if you are going to be 'disappeared' - but it is unpleasant, intimidating, and best avoided.

It's also unclear as to what happens to these details once they are on the database. The police operate a policy of sharing information with anyone, if it is for 'policing purposes'. Blacklists emanating from the police have been known to find their way to employers. It probably won't happen to you, but there are only two ways to avoid the risk altogether: a) give up politics or b) stop the FIT taking your details!

"I'm already on a database, so why should it matter anymore?"

Yes and no. The police do not just compile lists of activists. They also constantly watch to see who is involved with what, and how networks change and develop. They then use this information to organise further surveillance and 'disruption', which could be anything from sending in undercover cops to making it more difficult for you to get a space to meet in.

If you are already on a database, it is still very much in your interests - in all our interests - that you don't give them any more information than they already have. They don't want to just know who you are, they want to know how involved you are, how well networked you are, how committed you are. If you are 'of interest' they will be interested in who you know, who you hang around with, and what protests you've been on.

Resisting the FIT is not an optional extra - it's an essential part of building a social movement that can bring about change. Don't talk to them, don't let them take photos of you, and keep your name for your friends.

<http://www.fitwatch.org.uk/>



FAITH IN A BETTER WORLD

TIM HARDY

The Christian anarchists Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin founded the Catholic Worker movement in the midst of the Great Depression in 1933. They rejected war and pledged support for workers and the dispossessed, maintaining these views even in the face of growing persecution from a state that wanted to destroy what it perceived as a red menace. The Catholic Workers branded the profit motive immoral. They condemned capitalism because it led to grotesque inequality. They worked directly to help those in need, providing food and shelter.

Over 150 of the soup kitchens the Catholic Workers founded throughout the world are still operational. Each site is autonomous. There is no central authority. Each refuses to accept grants or to pay taxes or to accept any of the bureaucratic restrictions imposed by the state, such as the need to apply for permits or for non-profit status. The food they provide to the homeless is donated by people in the

neighbourhood - not the government.

I am comfortable in my atheism. I should have no problem with other people believing whatever they like, but at times I do. Like many ex-Catholics, I have a problem with faith.

I am genderqueer and not exclusively heterosexual. In an ideal world that should concern nobody but me and those with whom I am intimate. Unfortunately I grew up in the era of the homophobic legislation Section 28 that had a chilling effect on discussions of sexuality. Gay-bashing tabloids and Christian bigots were unchallenged in their abuse of anyone who was not straight or cis-gendered and young queer people were left alone, sweating in the dark.

These days the Conservatives pretend they have changed, while the tabloids have switched to baiting Muslims and the disabled. The Catholic Church still stands unrepentant, gladly allying itself with tyrants to block measures in the UN to make discrimination on the grounds of sexual or gender identity a crime and condemning hundreds of thousands to abuse as a result; abuse that can escalate to serious violence and murder.

My support for a woman's right to choose to have an abortion is another issue that frequently puts me at odds with some faith groups.

Sadly there are many religious bodies that promote intolerance and harmful attitudes. I am ashamed, however, that my instinctive reaction when faced with such religious intolerance is to respond in a way that is not that different to the behaviour of the racist who generalises to make judgements about all members of an ethnic group or nation.

Many Christians, like Day, would likely agree with Gandhi's judgement, "I like your Christ. I do not like your

Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."

When you listen to Prime Minister David Cameron justifying selling arms to tyrants or former Scotland Yard Assistant Commissioner John Yates making excuses for a regime that tortures and murders dissidents, it is worth recalling that, for these men and for many others, "It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism." Men without morals, they capitulate to the false necessities of a brutal world view that warns if they don't do it, someone else will and that one can only get ahead by getting one over on someone else. So we sell weapons that will be used to kill innocents in order to stop other nations doing it and profiting from the same deal. That's what moral, responsible capitalism demands.

For religious people, on the other hand, "That's how things are" just doesn't wash. They have a faith at odds with the blind faith of capitalist realism.

For this reason alone, however challenging, those of us who wish to build a better world should embrace people of faith in solidarity and resist the divide and conquer tactics of those who do not want change because they profit from the way things are.

Since the coalition took power, the bigots have been crawling out of the woodwork. The right-wing papers, apologists for the rich and powerful, are lining up articles attacking gay rights and women's rights then under cover of this artillery barrage of bigotry complain that Christians are being persecuted in the UK. Such an invitation to attack is hard to resist.

We have to acknowledge that there are strong anti-clerical and anti-religious tendencies on the left, but the desire to eradicate religion is futile. As the Soviet minister of education Anatolii Lunacharskii realised as early as 1928,



"Religion is like a nail; the harder you hit it, the deeper it goes into the wood." But it is not just a matter of being pragmatic. Those of us who reject a faith in the spiritual realm need to recognise the value of the human desires and dreams expressed through religious faith.

We commonly describe acts of cruelty by others as inhumane because we find it hard to accept that humanity includes the capacity for such malevolence. Likewise some ascribe forgiveness and unconditional love to divine powers because they cannot accept humanity is capable of such greatness of spirit.

The Catholic Worker movement, like all progressive movements, is growing weaker in a society that is increasingly atomised and lacks the structures of organised labour and strong local communities. The right is on the ascendant around the world. The reaction to the greatest crisis in capitalism since the Depression has been for the rich and powerful to systematically roll back the hard-won

progress of over a hundred years of struggle and to attempt to bring about an order closer to feudalism than to the ideals of democracy; a world where the elite are given special dispensation from the law and from responsibilities to others and the most vulnerable are made to pay for the mistakes of their new masters.

Those who believe in a better world have a potential ally in those of faith. For Day, spirituality and the moral life were founded in the constant fight for justice and in compassion for those in need. Whether or not we believe in the gospels from which she derived her faith, these values and a refusal to accept a system that condemns some to suffer so that others may live lives of luxury are the values we need. Only this will carry us through the growing darkness of a world where those in charge seem unable or unwilling to steer the machine of civilisation away from its headlong passage down the path to total self-destruction.

BeyondClicktivism.com



BATTLE LINES & PIPELINES IN CANADA

STEPHEN COLLIS

After the (so far) successful opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline, attention has shifted to the proposed Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline, which would carry over 500,000 barrels of tar sands crude per day across hundreds of British Columbia rivers to the pristine coast. Getting less attention is the already operational Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain pipeline that has been carrying 300,000 barrels of tar sands oil per day to Vancouver's harbour for many years now.

The campaign to keep oil flowing and contain environmentalists is in full swing, labelling them as fringe "radicals" and "foreign interests" hell-bent on ruining Canada's economy. Consider the following:

First, the federal government is presently reviewing the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, supposedly to "modernise" the assessment process and "speed up approvals of projects," as reported in *The Vancouver Sun*. The article goes on to cite Michelle Rempel, a Calgary-based Conservative MP, suggesting that revisions to the process "could help the country avoid losing economic opportunities to lengthy reviews that need to be more 'efficient' and 'effective.'"

Nothing too surprising here for a government that steadfastly denies global warming and recently pulled out of the Kyoto Accord.

Second, noted commentator and CBC regular Rex Murphy recently suggested in *The National Post* that those who criticize tar sands "bite the hand that feeds us."

"Environment' has become a narrow, bitterly focused word turning exclusively on hurts or despoliations [sic] of nature, magnifying the slightest alteration or disturbance of 'the natural' as an unspeakable sin.

There is another wider, larger, humane dimension to the environment — larger and more vital than any reference to landscape. That is the human and social element.... In my view, this is the first and deepest justification for... the oil industry. Jobs are essential for the human environment"

The title of Murphy's article says it all: "Oil sands are a Triumph for the Human 'Environment.'" It's hard to believe that anyone, let alone a respected journalist, could be so stupid as to call tar sands development "the slightest alteration."

Finally, consider the recent Globe 2012 Conference and Trade Fair in Vancouver. One has to wonder about a conference which invites Canadian politicians and avowed tar sands supporters including the federal Environment Minister, Peter Kent, and BC Premier Christy Clark, to help representatives of such corporate environmental luminaries as Dow Chemical (responsible for the Bhopal disaster), Suncor (a major tar sands developer), and the Canadian Oil Sands Network to discuss "sustainability" and find "solutions to the world's environmental problems." Irony, anyone?

But this is only one side of the battle. On the "optimism" side of the ledger, we have, first off, the fact that 4,500 British Columbians signed up to address the Environmental Review Commission as it travels around the Province, some 4000 more than any prior review process. This is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to public and popular opposition to the pipelines.

There is more or less united opposition from indigenous communities, many of whom have signed the "Save the Fraser" declaration (<http://www.savethefraser.ca/>). The Fraser River is the largest river in the province and is crossed or due to be crossed by all existing and proposed pipelines. These "First Nations" never signed treaties with colonial invaders, so their lands are still in legal limbo.

Finally, there is Occupy. Occupy brings a holistic approach to this issue, seeing the environmental, economic, and political crises as integral parts of one total crisis of capitalism. Our demand is for "system change not climate change." Occupy Vancouver Environmental Justice Working Group hosted a meeting on March 26 (just before an anti-Enbridge rally in Vancouver) with more than a dozen environmental groups, including Greenpeace and Bill McKibben of 350.org. Occupy is working with these groups to coordinate resistance to the pipelines, and to tar sands more generally. We are also allying ourselves with indigenous communities.

It is not a question of 'efficiency' or 'jobs'. It is not a question to be solved by so-called "corporate social responsibility." It is a question about the future of humanity and all the species on this planet. Will it be "game over," as NASA climate scientist James Hansen has said of tar sands development, or game on. It is a question Occupy has risen to address. And it is a question we will answer with our words and actions in the coming months.

Here's what you can do: organize, join or participate in an Earth Day event and / or the May 5 International Stop the Tar Sands Day events (<http://stoptarsands.yolasite.com/>) in your local community.



WHY I TOLD BP TO COME CLEAN ABOUT THEIR INTERPLANETARY ESCAPE POD

DANNY CHIVERS

I sat nervously near the end of an aisle, somewhere in the middle of the hall. It was BP's Annual General Meeting (AGM) in London's Excel Centre, on 12 April 2012. The room contained several hundred shareholders, and I was waiting for my turn to address the board of directors. As the holder of a (single) BP share I had every right to be there, but to avoid undue attention I was wearing an uncharacteristically sharp suit and had grown a neat little beard for the occasion. It seemed to have worked so far — the security guards were all ignoring me.

After a range of questions from shareholders and campaigners, my turn came at last, and I stepped up to the microphone. Despite my nervousness, my voice sounded calm as I addressed the board:

"Mr Chairman, we've already heard that, according to your annual report, you believe that fossil fuels will still make up 80% of global energy use in 2030, leading to a 28% rise in CO2 emissions. This will lock us into disastrous runaway climate change. So my question is: what's the escape plan? I mean, the really scary stuff will start to kick in over the next 20 to 30

years, and a lot of people in this room will still be around then. So I can only assume that there's some kind of interplanetary escape pod being built in a secret BP bunker, to carry the board, executives and senior shareholders away as society collapses around us."

Laughter began to ripple around the room as I continued: "I'd like to know how many spaces are available on the ship, and where the board is planning to escape to — Mars? The moon? Somewhere deep below the Earth's surface, or another solar system altogether? Also, are tickets available to shareholders, and how do we book our places onboard?"

The board refused to answer the question, which means that they definitely have an escape pod, and just don't want to share it. On hearing this, I gave a cry of "BP are leaving us all to die! We're all going to be killed by climate change!" and tumbled to the floor, dead. This was the cue for eight more people around the room to collapse, groaning, into the aisles.

There was a moment of confusion as security guards came running over, and then someone helpfully shouted

out, "They're not dead, they're just demonstrating!", prompting more laughter. I decided to stay dead and let security carry me bodily out of the hall, while others in the group were dragged, escorted, or explained that they'd be happy to move of their own free will as soon as BP pulled out of tar sands extraction. I tried cheerfully explaining to shareholders as I passed that numerous studies have shown that it would be perfectly possible for everyone on the planet to have a good quality of life without the use of fossil fuels. I'm not sure if their grins were in response to this statement, the stunt we'd just pulled, or the fact that one of our group was still loudly refusing to move until he got his ticket to the space pod.

We're so used to having to deal with corporations as though they're huge, formless beasts. The The AGM is one of the rare opportunities we get to put some human faces on the corporate monster and look them in the eyes. Before our sudden attack of climate death, the Board had faced challenging questions from representatives of Gulf Coast communities whose health and livelihoods had been wrecked by

BP's 2010 Deepwater Horizon drilling disaster, which has still not been cleaned up. Their statements were followed by a challenge from Clayton Thomas-Muller of the Indigenous Environmental Network, about the dubious legality of BP's tar sands leases on First Nations territory in Canada. In response, the Board just reeled out some prepared statements that completely ignored the questions.

This isn't really surprising. They don't have answers to these questions. All pretence at being a "sustainable" oil company and going "Beyond Petroleum" has now been dropped, and their entire focus is on short-term profitability. That's why we might as well ask them about their interplanetary escape plans — we're just as likely to get a sensible answer to that as to anything else.

The combination of all of this — the questions from frontline communities and campaigners, our die-in and dramatic ejection, plus shareholder uproar about the CEO's over-generous multi-million pay bonus — led to blanket press coverage the next day, from the Guardian to the

New York Times to the Financial Times and even the Sun.

These kinds of actions won't bring down the fossil fuel industry by themselves, but they help to chip away at the veneer of social responsibility these companies hide behind to expose the brutal profit-driven reality beneath. They're also an important reminder of just how powerful we can be. When "ordinary people" are organised, determined and with right on their side, they can beat the corporate PR machines. Plus, I was in the Wall Street Journal asking BP about a spaceship, so that's another personal life goal achieved.

The BP AGM action was coordinated by the UK Tar Sands Network (www.no-tar-sands.org). We'll be doing it all again for the Shell AGM on May 22nd, which is happening simultaneously in London and the Hague. Why not join us? Contact info@no-tar-sands.org for more information and to get involved.

A longer version of this article was first published with images by New Internationalist, at www.newint.org

GENETICALLY MODIFIED PROFITS

EMMA FORDHAM & KATE GREEN

Remember "Frankenstein foods"? From time to time the Daily Mail veers erratically onto the side of environmentalists and hippies to rail against Genetically Modified Organisms and their appearance on our dinner plates.

Tony Blair tried to woo the bio-tech companies behind GMOs despite widespread distaste for eating tomatoes with fish anti-freeze genes in them. He failed, because the public and the tabloids were against him. Activists destroyed GM crop trials, consumers left GM produce on the supermarket shelves and journalists of all persuasions (and one royal) shrieked about the imprudence of tampering with nature.

While the Tories were in opposition they were largely anti-GM, so the Mail's stance made sense. However, in 2010 Caroline Spelman became Conservative environment minister. Despite what some might consider a blatant conflict of interest (recently worked as a bio-tech lobbyist), she decided to turn the Tories around and get into bed with Monsanto.

Monsanto is a multinational biotech company; one of the largest producers of genetically engineered seed and of the herbicide glyphosate (marketed as "Roundup"). If we believe their PR rhetoric, it would seem that GM foods are about to save humanity from starvation and the ravages of climate change. By inventing drought-resistant crops, they think they can cheat their way out of the mess that profit-driven mega-corporations (like Monsanto) have gotten us into. By producing herbicide-resistant crops, they will enable entire fields, hectares and hectares of them, to be sprayed with chemicals that would kill conventional crops, but which will in turn increase the efficiency of food production.

The bio-tech companies claim that their GM super-crops will be good for us; they will be better for the environment, better for our health, better for delivering nutrition to the hungry. There is little evidence to back these claims and rather a lot of evidence to suggest the opposite. In which case, why are they spending billions inventing and patenting these things? Could it be an attempt to reap even more profits than they are doing already?

Drought-resistant crops are still in the trial stages. Trials show that they are not very good in variable climates, which is likely what we'll have more of, as global warming and various associated feedback loops accelerate. Rather than rely on techno-fixes, researchers not associated with large corporations looked into natural methods of combating crop failure due to drought. They found that simple measures such as applying organic mulch material massively improves water retention in the soil whilst also improving the quality of the soil and locking in carbon. A triple bonus and no expensive contracts with multinationals for the farmers.

Bio-tech companies have tried to woo poorer nations with promises to increase yields and so end hunger and poverty. Some farmers responded positively only to find themselves locked into a nightmare. They entered contracts to buy seed and chemicals from Monsanto and the like, the seeds producing crops that could withstand the chemicals. The idea was to blast weeds out of existence, but in fact weeds have developed resistance to herbicides, requiring farmers to use more and more of these chemicals. Yields in many cases were far lower than farmers had been led to believe and they became caught in a spiral of poverty and despair, driving hundreds in India to suicide. Meanwhile in Argentina, where GM soya was adopted on a large scale and there has been massive exposure to glyphosate as a result, instances of health problems and toxicity have been recorded, despite this being a relatively 'safe' herbicide.

GM crops lend themselves to monoculture and large-scale farming. Soil is degraded and local communities are no longer growing the variety of foods they need to feed themselves. Independence is stripped away and multinational corporations reap the profits. As this realisation has dawned, fewer farmers in Asia, Africa and South America are prepared to act as pawns for these companies. As early as 1998, all African delegates (excepting South Africa) at an international Food and Agriculture forum stated that:

"We strongly object to the image of poor and hungry from our countries being used by giant multinational corporations to push a technology that is neither safe, environmentally friendly, nor economically beneficial to us... it will destroy the diversity, the local knowledge and the sustainable agricultural systems that our farmers have developed for millennia, and will thus undermine our capacity to feed ourselves."

In India, massive grass-roots campaigns to keep agriculture GM-free have, through sustained levels of dedication and outrage, had some success at holding back the PR machines of the corporations. Hunger strikes, rallies of up to 50,000 farmers, a 4000-kilometre march through five states and intense petitioning of politicians has stemmed the rapid growth of GM farming in the country for now.

Health problems, dismissed by proponents of GM, have already been reported in India and helped to fuel the reaction against the bio-tech companies. Allergic reactions to genetically modified 'bt' cotton plants, in those who'd shown no such reactions to conventional cotton, have been documented. No one knows what the long-term effects of eating GM foods will be but research indicates that antibiotic resistant 'marker' genes can survive the digestive tract. As antibiotic resistance is already a problem that medical science struggles to keep up with, such indications are cause for concern.



One huge problem with GM crops which is consistently underplayed by the bio-tech companies is the risk of cross-pollination with conventional plants. Accidental spread of GM seed to neighbouring fields and contamination of non-GM foodstuffs within the food supply chain are all too common. A US trial of GM rice contaminated the global supply chain in 2006, destroying export markets for years. In 2009, GM flax from Canada contaminated supplies worldwide. GM crops are genes and the bottle-stoppers are nowhere near tight enough. They can't be. And, just maybe, Monsanto and Co don't care. Once the genie is everywhere, there'll be no point in us complaining and trying to thwart their plans.

For now, there is reason to complain. GM crops have the potential to cause massive social, economic and environmental damage worldwide, yet they are poorly tested and regulations are weak. Loss of biodiversity, soil degradation, health problems and poverty traps are just some of the reasons to resist the pressure to switch to GM agriculture. Research suggests that organic methods are best suited to solving many of the problems that bio-tech apparently seeks to address. The research and cash being poured into techno-fixes could be well spent trialling low-tech agricultural solutions and helping to introduce them appropriately to growers worldwide.

As yet, GM is not rampant. In Britain, strong consumer distaste combined with well-organised 'decontamination' actions at trial sites have largely kept GM crops out of our fields and GM foods off our shelves. The fightback against profiteering agro-chemical companies is going on around the world - but they are persistent. In some kind of back-scratching exercise disguised as philanthropy, organisations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have been pouring funding into agriculture projects in Africa with one hand while acquiring shares in Monsanto - which is aggressively trying to capture the seed market in Africa with corporate-owned seeds and pesticides - with the other hand.

In September 2011, the UK Government ignored public and scientific objections by approving an application from Rothamsted Research to conduct a GM wheat trial in Hertfordshire. The GM wheat emits a chemical that it is hoped will drive aphids off the crop. Why this should be necessary, when encouraging natural aphid parasites and predators - like ladybirds - already works, is unclear. Research suggests that aphids may become accustomed to the alarm chemical and ignore it. Perhaps, by then, the ladybirds will have starved and wheat farmers will have to buy more and more, stronger and stronger, chemicals from the bio-tech firms.

Saving humanity from food shortages and climate change? Not likely. Profit motive? Certainly.



TONY J LEWIS

OUR WORLD IS OUR BIGGEST CANVAS

SARAH COWAN

Sitting about three miles apart, on opposite banks of the Thames, Tate Britain and Tate Modern sprang from humble beginnings as Millbank's Panopticon Prison and Bankside Power Station respectively. Until 1890, Tate Britain's location facilitated the movement of those destined for transportation to Australia, whilst Tate Modern's imposing structure was an inefficient power station (60% burnt was wasted), closed in 1981 and re-opening as Tate Modern almost 20 years later in May 2000. Since then more than 40 million people have passed through Tate Modern's doors, with an annual average of five million. This has proved to be a very successful use of derelict buildings, providing worthwhile tourist attractions in the UK. It is also a marketing manager's dream.

In an arts and activism workshop commissioned by Tate itself, participants were told they would be censored from making interventions against Tate sponsors, despite no plans to do so at the time. Incensed by the audacity of this censorship, Liberate Tate was formed to protest in new and inventive ways against unethical sponsorship and the ramifications of BP's contributions. Their most recent creations are three audio tours. One for Tate Britain, another for the boat crossing, and a third at Tate Modern.

One Tuesday afternoon, a friend and I begin at the Tate Britain with 'Panaudicon.' Over somewhat distracting background music and a computerised vocal interlude, gentle voices narrate the story of how oil drilling began, and the origins of the building in which we stood. The information gleaned was relevant, interesting and in some places poetic, though it was easy for one's mind to wander. The 45 minute tour lacked a physical connection with the art or the building around us, and was awkward at times.

We were accompanied by 'This is not an Oil Tanker,' on the boat to Tate Modern. The second audio tour focuses on British Columbia and the desperate attempts of BP to get at the crude oil in the tar sands, which ultimately resulted in the devastating oil spill of 2010. A family narrates an informative piece, highlighting the

human and animal habitats destroyed and polluted as BP endlessly endeavours to hollow out the earth. The endearing children 'pray every night' to stop the oil still leaking into the sea today, and are accompanied by a beautifully melodic anti-BP song, giving a palpable connection to the repercussions of deep water drilling.

At the Tate Modern, 'Drilling the Dirt (a temporary difficulty),' is the most devastating indictment of BP's sponsorship. It is the most informative of the three tours, with upsetting statistics and revelations pumped into our ears throughout. Designed to hammer home the worldwide destruction caused by BP, the tour tells us about the countries they are draining, such as Iraq and Azerbaijan. Established authors cite proof of meetings attended by BP and UK government representatives in which they planned to exploit recent wars. There is a heartfelt speech by the mother of a young man killed when the Deepwater Horizon rig erupted, with a plea to acknowledge the obvious risks of oil drilling. Of all the tours, it is the third that moves me the most, leaving me in no doubt that BP's sponsorship needs to be challenged.

BP is desperate for good publicity following the oil spill which damaged businesses, killed wildlife, and left many with respiratory problems and what has now been dubbed 'The BP Cough,' after cleaning agents used after the explosion caused oil particles to become airborne and stick in the lungs of nearby residents. If BP is simply donating to the arts in order to share their wealth, why then does their logo so prominently adorn the signs of the institutions they support?

A logo which will soon be beamed around the world as they play sustainable partner to the greenest Olympics ever. Among the other anti-BP campaigns is Greenwash Gold, who are conducting a vote for the worst Olympic sponsorship 2012 on their website www.greenwashgold.org. It's important that money does not continue to drown out the growing number of voices speaking out.

These tours are downloadable at tateatate.org and for those further afield, can be enjoyed from the comfort of your own home.



ANDREA BAKACS

THE GREAT DEBATE

SHOULD REAL DEMOCRACY MOVEMENTS STICK TO CONSENSUS IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESS?

Political movements around the world seem to agree that our current democratic model is broken. In using alternative modes of decision-making, consensus has become an integral element of process. However, critics have said seeking full consensus prevents progress, particularly in the second stage of a movement. Do these downsides outweigh the positive aspects and visual appeal of the model? Should we stick to consensus, use a modified version, or adopt alternative or even more traditional decision-making processes?

CON/ DANIEL SCHWEIGHÖFER

When encountering the consensus model for the first time, most participants leave with a very positive impression. Many members of social movements are seeking the maximum degree of freedom and are used to anarchistic ideas and groups, so at first glance, the consensus approach seems to offer an ideal alternative to traditional forms of decision-making. By seeking consensus that works for everybody, everybody should feel good about the group's decisions.

I would argue that this point of view is dangerous, as it ignores important aspects of decision-making, namely: social power, tactics and time. I will briefly explain these points and their role in the consensus process. Naturally, they are all intertwined.

Even in groups without defined structures, there will always be people with a better standing than others. Some reasons for this can be found in our socialization, but I'm not an expert in social hierarchies and power relationships. Nevertheless, it might be the case that proposals which generate consent are often proposed or suggested by very few people. Another problem is that these proposals often lack real discussion and ideas about possible alternatives, as this would be too time-consuming. A minority could still use their better standing in contentious debates to strengthen weak arguments, which leads us to consensus discussion tactics.

From my point of view, the main argument against consensus-based decision-making is that the ending of a discussion is not clearly defined. Arguments can be repeated over and over in various combinations, and

stubborn or ambitious people can bring up strange arguments to support positions that do not necessarily relate to the topic of the debate - the so-called "chewbacca defense". The aim of this strategy is to insist for so long that a "consensus" is finally reached, though actually only one person wanted it.

Processes like this are likely to consume an immense amount of time and energy for all participants. It is not only necessary to explain a proposal and its arguments, proposers are also forced to dissolve every single objection that might evolve during the debate. This not only discriminates against those who do not want or are not able to invest into these resources. It also excludes their input from the sphere of accessible ideas of the movement. Moreover, it empowers those with good rhetorical skills and/or strategy, and disempowers others. At the end of the day, decisions are produced which are propagated by a few key players, a process which is essentially undemocratic (and I hope you, dear reader, share this point of view with me).

Another key argument against consensus-based decision-making is its conservative outcome. Groups should judge their results in the same way as people have to, but important and progressive choices tend to be divisive ones. If real democracy movements stick to the consensus model, they sacrifice their agility and speed of movement for these formal processes. I believe it is better to try alternative concepts of direct democracy, like liquid democracy for example, to enable social movements come to decisions.

PRO/ LINDA M.

Whether a movement should use consensus-based decision-making depends on its goals and common values. Whilst non-hierarchical consensus models work well in coordinating political actions like local assemblies and single direct actions, they might be less useful for decisions on a more international level or for more heterogeneous groups. Having said that, consensus definitely works in a setting where people share motivations and values, as an alternative to top-down, non-collaborative processes, which usually enhance group relationship dynamics and reduce problems in decision implementation. A cooperative group atmosphere that respects all parties, generating as much agreement as possible, can also foster connections between individuals and strengthen solidarity within a movement. If these connections are strong, the model can even work for globally spread out groups.

Interestingly, the word has its origin in the Latin word "consentire", meaning "feel together". When people joined Occupy in October last year, many were under the impression that the consensus practice, in particular how it was visually expressed at General Assemblies, was intrinsic to what this movement stood for. For many people, it was their first contact with an alternative democratic model, their first experience of being actually heard, and fascinating to watch and participate in.

Nowadays, most people use modified consensus. Most of the time this is not much of a departure from the initial concept. As a specific ritual of activist culture, the consensus model has always been a way of spreading practices and diffusing a directly democratic model of organizing. Like within the global justice movement, advocating such activities can be a way of mobilizing without actually trying to convert people to a specific belief system. This is not a new concept. Thousands of groups, networks and organizations, from the Quakers to the US anti-nuclear movement to the Climate Camp movement, have been successfully employing consensus since around the 1970s.

As much as it is important to understand why certain groups should stick to consensus, it is important to understand how, and under which conditions, it can fail. Consensus does not do away with power relations. It seeks to provide an alternative to the pressure of majority-decisions, and very often, these relations emerge when process is slow and exhausting. Sometimes we put so much energy into reinventing internal processes, just to get a rudimentary idea of what direct democracy could look like. However, by adopting the model, we seek to ensure group cohesion, to create horizontal networks, and to enhance the quality of our work together on the basis of agreement about our activities. These new forms of organization can reinvent our daily lives, as many full-term activists have experienced.

There are many different forms of modified consensus systems. We need to discuss what they actually mean in which context, why a particular version was chosen, and how we can challenge individualistic behaviour or all too slow process in favour of genuine principles. Although we might disagree more than in the early stages of the movement (it is sometimes easier to define a common enemy than a common goal), using modified consensus and elements of direct democracy is not impossible, and alternative elements can be integrated. Discussion of these modifications and variations is important, but will - as the consensus model itself - require respect for each other, time, and a common goal to outweigh the disadvantages.

PROPOSAL: PROPOSING STORIES

BACKGROUND

If the World is a book, it is written by power. If the political movements of the poor are so far incoherent, it is because they are responding to an incoherent world. If the world has become incoherent, it is because the kind of power that rules tends to corrupt, and the kind of power that rules still holds sway. Even so, the story of writing a coherent world has already begun: a coherent world can be written by proposing stories that others may take up; there is a different kind of power in merely proposing stories.

Still, pages are missing, chapters are botched. Of course, "We object!" Such objections are becoming increasingly common. All that is needed for the world to become coherent is for the poor to become increasingly capable of authoring the world. Fictions narrate virtual worlds of the past, present, and future. Non-fictions recount real worlds gone by. Between fact and fiction, a different kind of story can be found: a story of the future written by poor; stories for life the poor will play out; an endless script whose narrative threads include continuing to write the book of world.

Too many stories have been declared with an expectation that others will take them up as their habits, too many orders have been given. Rather than pushing stories on to others, new stories can instead be merely proposed. Some stories may be familiar because they refresh old stories, other stories may also appear strange and apparently from nowhere because they arise during acts of pure invention. Stories that work may be retold and remembered, stories that fail may be put aside and forgotten. By distillation and invention, through trial and error, in memory and forgetting, the World can be filled with stories that work.

But without knowing which outcomes a story was desired to obtain, a story cannot easily be replaced with a better story. And rather than believing in stories without knowing what they are for, the desired outcomes of a story can instead be made known. Stories that are proposed with outcomes that are known can be improved through constructive objection. Desires are transient, habits can take time to be changed, and when desired outcomes are recorded as tests, today's desires can put both today's and tomorrow's habits to the test. Even the story of proposing a story can be proposed in this way, so that desirable stories can be put forward in an increasingly desirable way.

(Opinions are quickly negated and opposing opinions cancel each other out. Without a context, statements appear as opinions. When a statement is made in the context of desires for another world, it appears as a proposal. Proposals can also be negated by objection, but objections tend to improve proposals. At any rate, there are always desires for another world. And so everything is a proposal. Opinions are just empty proposals. Never mind the people who immediately say the opposite is true!)

OUTCOME

Proposals for stories can be tested by asking the following questions:

1. Does the proposal have a name, a background, an outcome, and a story?
2. Does the name indicate the activity of the story?
3. Does the background contain objections that the outcomes resolve?
4. Do the outcomes contain tests for the story?
5. Does the story describe how to obtain the outcomes that are desired?
6. Does the story proposal make the

collection of story proposals more coherent?

7. Is the proposal published openly?

STORY

Method One

Create a blank document and add three headings: background, outcome, story.

Write the background as a situation that is objectionable.

Write down the tests that have led to the objectionable situation.

Write down a more desirable outcome with a series of tests.

Write down the simplest story that could possibly make the tests pass.

Think of a name for the story and use it as the title of the document.

Mention other stories which follow or precede or are refined by the story proposal, so that the overall coherence of the web of story proposals is improved.

Publish the proposal openly.

Method Two

What concerns you? What is objectionable? Vacillate, and notice your objections. What might actually work instead? Vacillate, and think of some tests. Ask how could things actually work instead? Vacillate again, and fashion a story. Vacillate again, and name your concern. Take a break. Take it to others? Ask them to consider your concerns. Resolve their objections. Try to repeat?

Take yourself for a walk. Be merely objective. Write it all down. Rearrange the words until they make more sense. Call it a diagram? Call it whatever seems best. Call it a script, or call it a story? Run it past somebody, or run others through it. Does it work, how can you tell? Do it over again, how does it feel? Does it pull you along, will they remember? Call it a joy, or call it a day. Perhaps make it available sometime tomorrow.

Publish proposals openly. Others can try them, they can tell you what's wrong. Play with proposals, keep them in play. The name, the background of objections, the tests for the outcome, the diagram of the story, and the practised habit can be forever in process. Proposals are only ever tried out. Proposals can remain open for objections, it's how we resolve the objections that counts.

By Various Occupiers

This proposal is being developed with a view to improving the processes of both Occupy London's General Assembly and the wider world. While the processes surrounding the GA were originally recorded as a list of activities*, this proposal seeks to rewrite and then continuously improve these activities as a collection of story proposals. The GA Planning WG is continuing to develop these ideas at meetings held each Saturday at 4pm on the steps of St Paul's.



BEN CAVANNA



THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING

TIM GEE



ANDREA BAKACS

SOME THOUGHTS ON ACTIVISM

DONGRIA KONDH

Now that the tents are (mostly) gone, what do we find? Yet another millionaire's budget, with tax cuts for the rich paid for by the poor. Widening gender inequality. Creeping corporatisation of health, education and welfare. Crony donors and lobbyists pulling all the strings.

My activist journey began with the Walk for the Earth, travelling on foot from Manchester to London in the run-up to the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. We were campaigning for government money to be channelled into renewable energy and socially beneficial projects instead of nuclear weapons and subsidies to the arms trade. There was optimism in those far-off days. People power had brought down the Berlin Wall, and the Montreal Protocol had been agreed, limiting Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) in the atmosphere. Naively, we thought that faced with the global threat of climate change, key governments might be persuaded to cooperate to tackle the planetary crisis. We were wrong.

So does the above mean that activism is a waste of time? Not a bit of it!

To begin with, speaking out is important in its own right. I wasn't part of Occupy myself* but was delighted to see it happening. I don't want to live in some sort of crazy neoliberal North Korea, where truth is taboo and everyone conforms to celebrity-obsessed consumer culture. By articulating non-hierarchical politics with the aims of social justice and ecological sustainability at its core, Occupy continues a noble historical tradition of dissent.

Secondly, whilst we have to give up any hope of short-term systemic change, activism can "tip the balance" on specific issues. Tax avoidance would not be on the political agenda without Occupy and UK Uncut. Swathes of Britain would now be under tarmac if it wasn't for the anti-roads movement in the 90s. Sipson village would now be bulldozed if it wasn't for the 2007 Heathrow Climate Camp (though the third runway is again being pushed for by lobbyists). And - for what it's worth! - women would not have the vote without the often extremely direct actions of the Suffragettes.

Thirdly, we have a responsibility to act in solidarity with grassroots struggles in other parts of the world. Here in Britain activists may be spied upon, maligned in the media, lied to by the police, kettled, locked up, fined, given community sentences, and tear-gassed, punched or coshed. Elsewhere, however, activists face torture, and are routinely "disappeared".

At this point, I should mention the Dongria Kondh, who are anxiously awaiting an Indian High Court ruling on bauxite mining in their tribal land. The tribe has vowed to fight on, whatever the result, and will need international support. I became involved in the campaign at the 2010 climate camp, and changed my name as part of an action highlighting the role of taxpayer-owned Royal Bank of Scotland in investing in Vedanta, the mining company involved.

Finally, activism may not change the whole world, but it changes our whole world. Once we step outside the hegemonic control of the so-called "elite", we are faced with the everyday challenge of "living the future we want to see". Close your newspapers and open your eyes, and you'll see things happening all over the place: transition town initiatives, radical routes housing co-ops, community supported agriculture projects, refugee and homelessness support, permaculture plots, social centres, anti-supermarket campaigns and much, much more. Engaging in this work is just as much part of the struggle for the common good as mass actions and camps. It may be less visible, but it's still the frontline.

Whilst working to sum up this article, I spoke to a friend who was at St Paul's. The image she gave me was dandelions; the big bright flower (ie. Occupy at St Paul's) dwindles to grey fluff, so insubstantial that it breaks up and floats away with a gust of wind... but a year later, tenacious radicals take root all over the place, with little yellow flowers budding...

** While the Occupy camp stood outside the London Stock Exchange, Dongria Kondh was busy fundraising for an ecological restoration project at the source of the River Calder in West Yorkshire: see www.treesponsibility.com for details and to register interest for tree-planting events this Autumn.*

I haven't seen a lot of my house recently. For most of the last four months I've been on the road (or rather the rails) visiting different towns and cities to run workshops and seminars looking at the methods adopted by movements for change. I tend to begin by asking people to shout out the tactics they see as central in ousting Mubarak in Egypt. The differences in responses have been remarkable.

For a group of students in Manchester, social media was the deciding factor. At a national conference of community organisers the first suggestion was that the relationships between different social groups was most important. A sociologist in Leeds cited the economic conditions that helped determine the shape of the struggle, while a group of trade unionists in London named the threat of a general strike. Every Occupy Camp I visited quickly named the occupation of Tahrir Square before any other tactic. A number of activists in Bristol suggested the importance of physical resistance to the police on the streets, while a Quaker in Hastings pointed to the role of spiritual consciousness for a number of activists.

They are all, of course, right. It is also only natural for us to identify with people in other contexts with whom we share something in common. I am no different. As an activist trainer, I am fascinated by the preparation that preceded the revolt in Egypt that led to all of those tactics being deployed - by some reports, as many as 15,000 people received mass action training in the three years before the uprising.

But what time is right for what support? There are countless stages models of social movements to give guidance, but the one that applies best to the cases I have studied isn't really a model at all, it is the maxim usually attributed to Gandhi: "First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win." Despite its

applicability, it is not without its flaws. For a start, not all movements win. But more importantly, it is somewhat passive - what about the actions of the movement when the power elite are ignoring, laughing at, and fighting against the movement?

Yet insert the logical actions of the movement between the predictable succession of actions by power elites, and an order begins to emerge. When they ignore you, the movement must work to raise the consciousness of the masses. When they laugh at you, the movement must coordinate to show its strength. When they fight you, the movement must confront likewise, while still coordinating and raising consciousness. And when you win, the movement must consolidate gains and start the cycle again.

When populations actively withdraw their consent from oppressive systems in sufficient numbers to have an effect, it rarely comes from nowhere. It represents the third act of a longer narrative. It is the stage at which the government is fighting the people, and the movement is faced with the decision to make or break, fight or flee. Central to success at this stage is the recognition that any regime is propped up only by the power of ideas, finance and physical force. If these pillars can be seriously challenged, concessions can be won, or on occasion, regimes can collapse altogether.

The story of the struggle in Egypt fits these stages well. Consciousness-raising began in the 2000s against a backdrop of rising prices and protests against Mubarak's perceived unaccountability on matters of foreign policy. On the blogosphere, in cafes, in slums, universities and nascent political organisations, dissent began to be felt. The coordination stage began with new anti-war groups and independent trade unions being formed. And it was following the pre-emptive confrontation

of a brutally repressed strike in 2008 that the April 6 Youth Movement was formed and engaged in their project of training and preparation. The story of the confrontation stage that began in earnest on 25 January 2011 has been told many times, and claimed the scalp of a president once thought to be unshakable. The consolidation stage will be the most difficult, as the movement struggles to keep its gains and prevent new unaccountable elites from taking hold.

So where are we in our global movement against the 1%? My view is that the struggle is still at the early stages. Both the financial crisis of 2008 and the present austerity crisis are making people question the status quo which once lay unquestioned. Mass marches, new organisations and occasional strikes are all in evidence. In the shape of the Occupy movement - and the debate it has set off - a new process of co-learning and discussion has emerged. And so the time has arrived to move to the second stage - to build the networked infrastructure that a mass movement will need to if it is to reach the third stage of seriously challenging the interests of the power elite. It can be done. But only in the most naive reports is it quick or easy.

But there is reason for hope. As the responses given to my opening question show, the ingredients that fuelled the Egyptian rebellion are not exclusive to the Middle East. Thanks to our globalized economy, they are present across the world. In Britain the escalation began in 2010 when students occupied the ruling Conservative Party's offices. And the first line of the first text of the first person to reach the roof remains true today: this is just the beginning.

Tim Gee is the author of 'Counterpower: Making Change Happen', New Internationalist, 2011 [www.newint.org/counterpower].



ANDREA BAKACS

TALES FROM THE GRIND

JEREMY ALLEN

“IF THE MAN WAS STICKING IT TO ME, WELL THEN I’D STICK IT TO THE MAN”

H

Health is everywhere right now. With the Olympics on the horizon, for good or bad (and let’s face it – that sponsorship rollcall is a who’s who of rotters), every man, woman, child and dog is being encouraged to shape up or ship out. For those not opting for (or unable to afford) that cruise around the South Pacific, chances are you’ll be forced to endure a London where the infrastructure is stretched to full capacity. Sometimes the vigorous pursuit of fitness can be bad for your health.

This I discovered to my cost some years ago. While it’s now commonplace for glossy, professional, private outfits like Bupa to cater to all a person’s needs, corporate firms taking an interest in your wellbeing to squeeze every last drop out of you before you die was, in those days, only a burgeoning idea. Health wasn’t as slick or sexy; the gym and spa were for gymnasts and Spartans, and the rest of us sneered derisively from the comfort of a smoky pub, saying ‘that’ll never be us’. How wrong we were.

The charity I came to work for was forward-thinking. The upkeep of mind, soul and body was its ethos,

an attainable holy trinity, and so a company famed for putting up the Village People saw fit to get people running, jumping and generally palpitating for a fixed-monthly fee. And through the doors they came, lycra-clad and some looking like Mark Knopfler in the ‘Walk of Life’ video. Like I say, not sexy.

I’ll be honest here, working as a receptionist in a Christian health club wasn’t my idea of a vocation. I’d not been in London long and previously worked a reasonably exciting job flying around Europe photocopying VAT receipts for £4 an hour. Flying back at weekends, I hoarded a veritable duty free treasure-trove of the Greek tippie Ouzo that I grew partial to over the space of the six months I worked there, and the experience of visiting different parts of the continent had been eye-opening and sodden. Young, naive and believing London was full of jobs flying to European destinations to photocopy, I threw it all in to spend the next month in my underpants drinking Ouzo and watching the World Cup.

England’s elimination in the second round to Argentina was a wake-up call. We weren’t going to win the World Cup, the rent was due and the Ouzo was running low. I’d have to get a new job.

I bought Loot and scoured it, but jobs failed to materialise. It was with some relief then that the health people eventually called, and I made the long trek from Wood Green to Ealing. They liked me. I could tell: they phoned me back that day and told me the job was mine. Whoo! £11,000 a year! I’d hit paydirt!

Astonishingly I was paid handsomely my first month. I thought I’d hit the big time. Unbeknown to me, £11,000 a year isn’t a significant amount of money. It’s a pittance, but I wasn’t into square ideas like calculating how much I’d actually get per annum after tax. It would appear nor were the people in the accounting department. Come my second month it became clear the first month’s pay had been an anomaly.

The wage reduction I could just about cope with, but the officious manager who told me to take out my earring, despite my protestations about sexual discrimination, was getting on my nerves. Then there were the Sunday 6.30am starts. Was I really being paid so little to travel all the way from North London to open up the club without a soul around? One morning I cooked up a story that I’d been “attacked by a gang who intimidated I was a homosexual” (I used those very words), in order to get out of going in with a booze-



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induced thumper. My flatmates were impressed by my outlandish lie, but suggested my bosses might suspect something when I turn up without a mark on me. You know your job isn’t right for you when you have to punch yourself in the face.

When I thought things couldn’t get any worse, month five arrived, and opening the envelope to look at my wage-slip was like a kick to the throat. As it turned out, the anomaly had never been addressed, and so with a jolt, I discovered I’d been paid barely £300 for the entire month. That barely covered the rent. What was I to do?

Starve. Jump trains. And drink Ouzo during working hours. If the Man was sticking it to me, well then I’d stick

it to the Man. I resigned in protest at the ineptitude of the accountants, but things would get worse. Way behind on the rent, I had to move out of my flat. I was homeless.

As my landlady gave me the marching orders, the words of the Village People filled my brain:

“Young man, there’s a place you can go, I said, young man, when you’re short on your dough,

You can stay there, and I’m sure you will find many ways to have a good time... It’s fun to stay at the YMCA”

The irony wasn’t lost on me.

Do you have a tale from your ‘Daily Grind’? Email us at occupietimes@gmail.com with your absurd and hilarious stories from the world of working life.

ON THE SOAPBOX

NEIL IBERAL WANTS OCCUPY TO BE OVER

I am writing to you from the luxurious couch at Starbucks in the courtyard of St. Paul’s Cathedral. I work just down Ludgate Hill at a well known Spanish financial institution (let’s just say the name sounds like ‘panderer’) as a personal finance manager and have been coming here for years until you lot showed up back in October. This was always the nice Starbucks; only the mentally deranged went to the one just 400 metres away in Paternoster Square. Well it was the nice one at least, until the toilets were “temporarily closed” the entire six months St. Paul’s was “occupied”, whatever the hell that means. I looked forward every day to strolling unencumbered through Paternoster Square for authentic Asian food from Itsu during lunch, but that simple pleasure was taken away from me too. Thankfully those dreadful barricades are gone and no longer is there an omnipresent yellow-jacketed security staff meandering about.

These are hardly the only reasons I’m glad the tents are out of St. Paul’s and why I can’t wait for Occupy to be over. A few months back I was taking a train out of Euston to visit family in Manchester and lo and behold Occupy

was having a “roving general assembly” right on the main concourse. One of them even had the nerve to offer me half of a brownie as I stood looking at the display for the status of my train. Do I look like the type of person who would accept a half-eaten brownie? I would certainly hope not! Truth be told I actually would have quite liked a brownie at that moment, but that’s besides the point. Luckily the train had a fully stocked snack cart and I got my brownie after all, hand delivered no less, for the reasonable price of four pounds.

Just last week I had some paperwork to drop off at the British Banking Authority (or ‘Mecca’ as we like to say around the office) and again I suffered from the tyranny of the “roving general assembly”. My mate Niall works there and he’d been concocting a reason for me to come by for months so he could show me around and hopefully land me a new job. I know the readers of this crumbly paper would never appreciate it but have you seen the inside of that building? I took an introductory architecture course at uni and I should know, it’s a real stunner. So there you go, another opportunity ruined by Occupy since I couldn’t get in while they were outside waving their hands all about.



BEN CAVANNA

And for the record, I’m so sick of all this banker bashing. Nearly all my mates are bankers and the most generous people I know. I do my part and buy Big Issue every week when it’s ‘up’. That’s a philosophy I can get behind: tough love; help you help yourself. None of this pissing and moaning about cuts and handouts. Frankly, I can’t see what the issue is. It seems like you are all jealous because bankers get paid big bonuses, but aren’t all jobs the same? If you work in a restaurant don’t they give you

lunch? All this talk of the credit crunch and financial crisis is blown all out of proportion. It can’t be that bad, I’ve got even richer over the last few years!

While we’re at it, if you have a problem with shops like Primark or Tesco, don’t shop there! It’s really that simple! That way everyone wins: Primark and Tesco can keep making their amazing and affordable products and you can sit there all smug paying double elsewhere for the same stuff I just bought. Why should I care if the jumper I’m wearing is made by Vietnamese

children? And don’t go and get in your little heads to occupy a Primark, at least not on the last Thursday of the month when I go and restock my sock drawer.

Like I said I’ll be just thrilled when Occupy is over and I can get on with my life. You lot sure haven’t helped me one bit and are a constant pain in my ass. And I know I’m not the only one. I can’t help but think of the poor workers that had to clean up Zuccotti Park in New York or Zynge square in Athens. Unlike all of you they have real jobs. And I’m sure they get lunch breaks, just like me.

THE OT HOROSCOPE

OPPRESSORS



COP
Recent events could have you yearning to join those you've stood in the way of for so long. Rather than denying yourself or feeling guilty, use it as an opportunity to grow. You often feel empowered, but are you really as strong as you think? The summer will see your services in great demand, but are you serving society, or are you getting served?



BANKER
Toward the start of the month past actions might come back to haunt you. Luckily, your clout with people in positions of authority means help will be at hand. Remember though, don't take risks with other people's livelihood if you wouldn't do it with your own. The end of the month will see a huge bonus come your way, but to atone for your past, look after your futures.



NATIONALIST
In times of crisis you tend to play the blame game, but you need to look up to find those really keeping you down. To achieve happiness, learn the value of variety and overcome your fear of all things different and new. Despite your hard exterior, you're a sentimentalist at heart. Were things really so good back in the day?

PROTESTERS



ANONYMOUS
Your mischievous personality is at its height this month but an external barrier hides the true you within. You are the epitome of contradictions - private and attention-seeking by turns - and this can disguise your truly profound contours. Try leaving the house to brighten your mood, and remember, people in glass houses... The letter V brings luck.



PACIFIST
Violent rhetoric in the media is an unwelcome melody, but do not let this recent cacophony become the soundtrack of May - for this month's music is your own. As the song goes "there may be trouble ahead," but look not outward to moonlight for the answers; illumination comes from within. This insight will find you in solitude when *that* song gets stuck in your head.



ANARCHIST
Misunderstood? Poorly represented? Infiltrated? Let not these paranoid musings dominate the month ahead, for a clear mind is needed. When the "authorities" attempt to quell mid-month rebellion, let this clarity guide your response. Be ready to testify and poeticise the response, but should eyes then turn to you for leadership, remember: anarchy is a one-letter word (beginning with "I").

POLITICIANS



NEOLIBERAL
After a long period of feeling satisfied, things have recently taken a turn for the worse - for the rest of society, that is. Let not the 'voices of the 99%' slow your fine progress towards the liberation of new markets. There are plenty more 'moochers' to catch the blessing of the old-time 'trickle down' trick! If romance is your thing, just remember: everyone has a price.

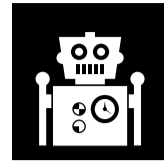


CHAMPAGNE SOCIALIST
Do not shed all of this month's tears on the gruelling portrayal of Dickensian poverty in the theatre - there are, after all, reasons to be cheerful too. Are you sure you don't have to suffer with those truly worse off to be their guardian? You have a good eye for where others are going wrong, but don't always hold yourself to the same lofty standards - do that, and you will gain respect.



LIBERAL
Don't be surprised if you do a lot of soul-searching this month, but chastising yourself for being gullible will mean nothing without action. Liberty is important to you, so don't get suckered into a deal that promises riches for all involved but delivers for only a few. Remember: having strong principles isn't a fault, and tolerating intolerance only renders you impotent.

CITIZENS



WORKER
You may still have a job, and after your efforts you deserve it, but that means that your taxes are funding bombs and bailouts. If you have any salary left after paying your exorbitant rent, fuel and energy bills as well as for food and clothing then treat yourself to a few well-earned beverages at a local hostelry. Remember: work is the curse of the drinking classes!



STUDENT
The degree to which you let this month's planetary alignment affect your studies may result in a large debt being incurred. Plan on using May's actions as prime-time study sessions. Kettled at King's Cross? Better bring Marx's Das Kapital. Pepper sprayed in Piccadilly? Plan ahead and load up your mp3 player with audiobooks. You'll be scoring distinctions in no time!



PENSIONER
An unexpected letter informs you that long-awaited rewards aren't yours after all. You may have felt taken advantage of recently, and it's possible you've been made the scapegoat in someone else's agenda, but don't feel too sorry for yourself. The privileges you took for granted are soon to be resigned to history. You may not have much future left, but at least you once had one.

DEMO DATES

- 1st: Worldwide General Strike** - all day
- 1st: Against Workfare** - 11am
March by Occupy / Solidarity Federation Assemble at Clerkenwell Green EC1
- 3rd: The Big Six Energy Bash** - 11am
Mass actions by Climate Justice Collective Undisclosed locations in Central London TBA online
- 5th: Giant Twister Game & Fun Day** - 11am
Mass messing about with Occupy London St Paul's
- 6th: The Big Six Energy Bash** - 11am
Mass actions by Climate Justice Collective The Grange Hotel
- 9th: Solidarity With South Korea** - 2pm
Protest U.S. Base in Gangjeong Outside Korean Embassy, SW1
- 10th: Let's Kettle the Bastards** - 10.30am
Show your love for the boys in blue Follow and see!
- 12th: Meet the 1% / Global Spring** - 2pm
Antics by Occupy London Location TBA online
- 12th: Protest Against Ethnic Cleansing in Palestine** - 1pm
Opposite Downing St, SW1
- 12th - 25th: Caravan for Climate Jobs**
Traveling around the country, arrives in London on 25th
- 13th: Protest for Vietnamese Prisoners of Conscience** - 11am
By Amnesty. Vietnamese Embassy, W8
- 15th: Global Strike** - all day
- 15th: Drought of Democracy: Flood the British Bankers' Association!** - 10.30am.
Central London then the British Bankers Association
- 16th: Anti Academies Alliance Protest** - 9am.
Protest against fat cats in our schools. Outside "The Academies Show" Conference at Olympia 2, W14 8UX
- 18th: Get the Shell Out!** - 7.30pm
Meeting in advance of Shell AGM, by UK Tar Sands Network, Greenpeace and others. Toynbee Hall, Commercial Street, E1
- 19th: Stop the War Coalition** - 1pm
Protest coinciding with Chicago protests Outside US Embassy, W1
- 23rd: People's History of London (ideas & struggle)** - 7.30pm
Talk by Stop the War speakers Bishopsgate Institute, EC2
- 25th: Don't Attack Iran Cultural Event** - 7.30pm.
Actors & Musicians against War St. James's Church, W1
- 26th: UK Uncut's Great British Street Party** - 11:00. Celebrate resistance All over London

DIRECT ACTION CROSSWORD

THE OT

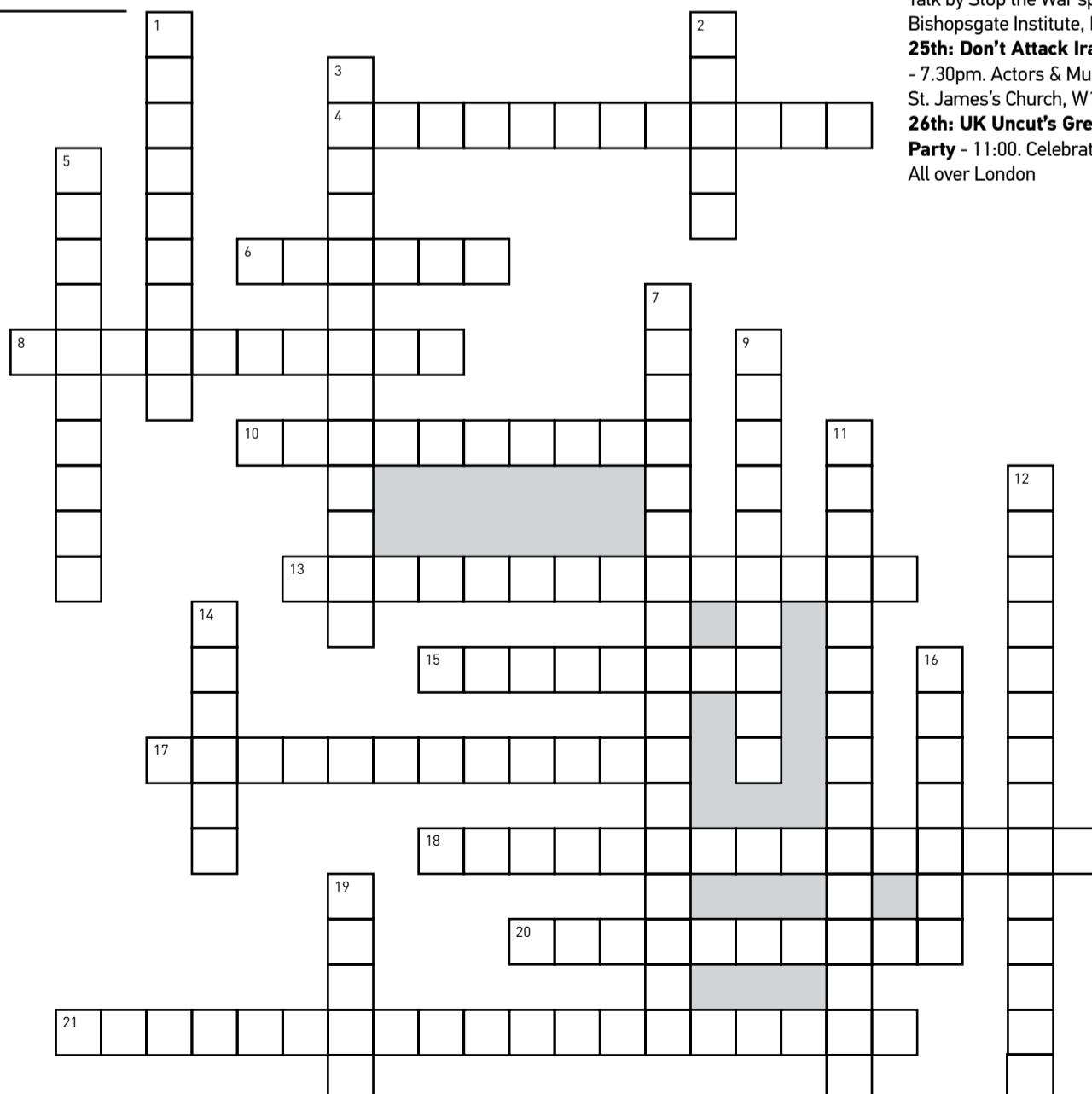
ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN HERDS

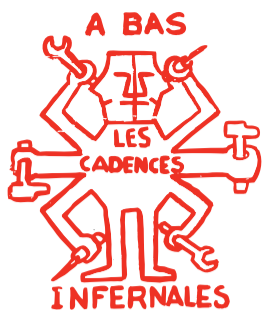
ACROSS

4. It is conveniently forgotten by people in the present day who reject any effective forms of protest, that some of these women engaged in window-breaking, hunger strikes and one famously threw herself in front of the King's horse. (12) **6.** Also known as 'delay and annoy.' (2,4) **8.** The preferred tactic of Anonymous which doesn't involve masks. (10) **10.** Tommie Smith and John Carlos went shoeless to collect their medals at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. When standing on the podium both men performed this form of salute during the American national anthem to protest the historical and continuing oppression of African American people in the US. (5, 5) **13.** The single largest waste of perfectly good tea in American History. (6,3,5) **15.** Bansky isn't the only one who does this you know? (8) **17.** Tactic used by Bobby Sands and other IRA prisoners. Tended to get messy. (5,7) **18.** Was having a nice, relaxing swim, minding his own business, when two great big boats tried to kill him. (7,8) **20.** Longtime enviro-activists, often found 'offshore.' (10) **21.** Sometimes you've just got to break stuff. Penury to direct sport. (anagram) (8,11)

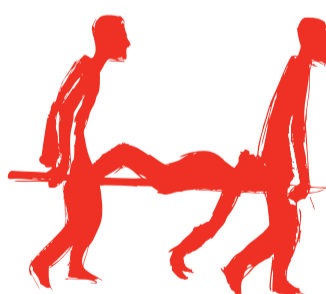
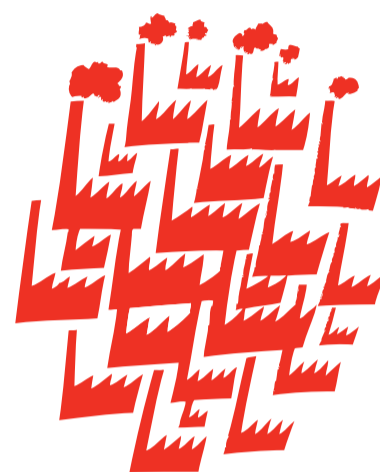
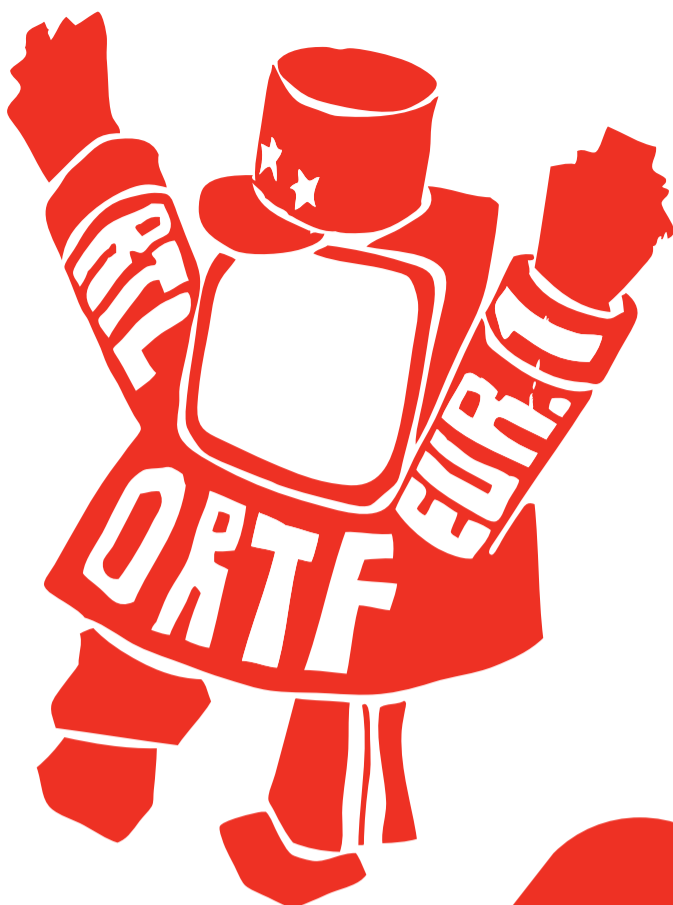
DOWN

1. Refused to give up her seat to a white man, sparking the Montgomery Bus Boycotts. (4,5) **2.** 1960s name for 'occupation.' (3,2) **3.** A rather extreme form of DA. A sin is so Satan. (anagram) (11) **5.** The Symbionese Liberation Army did this to Patty Hearst and she ended up joining their cause. (5) **7.** American philosopher who wrote "Civil Disobedience" and was himself imprisoned for his refusal to pay his taxes. (5,5,7) **9.** Modern name for a Sit In. (10) **11.** Pricely department store which UK Uncut sat down in, in an "intimidating" fashion. (7,3,5) **12.** Shocking form of protest used by Buddhist monks during the Vietnam War and by Mohamed Bouazizi and others during the "Arab Spring." (4,10) **14.** Hit out by withdrawing labour. (6) **16.** Sick name still used to describe some people who have murdered doctors in the US who perform abortions. Better known as 'anti-choice'. (3,4) **19.** As Jello Biafra said, "the unbeatable high". Or as David Cameron described some recent ones, "criminality, pure and simple."





RENAULT NA PAS ABDIQUE
1 COMBAT = 1 VICTOIRE
CONTINUONS LA LUTTE



◆ BE REALISTIC / ASK THE IMPOSSIBLE ◆