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BLACK ANARCHISM



BLM 10 LORENZO KOM'BOA ERVIN IN PRAISE OF SUSU

EDITORIAL

I am sat here, in north-eastern Brazil, in a State called Bahia, in a city known as Salvador, writing this editorial for the second time. In several weeks of trying times, (including the apparent disappearance of the first go-round of this editorial) I have my coffee, a glass of water, a cigarette and my word document open once again. It is a fitting example of what the content of this journal is going to entail.

In Brazil, particularly in this region, there is a figure known as the “Malandro”, which roughly translates in English to a “hustler”. A figure, who after endless disappointment, trial and testing periods, gets himself up, dusts himself off and with his own skills, makes a world that he can navigate in, despite the harshness and frank indifference by the world around him. This has been my experience for the last few weeks and I have to say, it has made me come to appreciate the term. In the west, the hustler has negative connotations, but in a country

with the second largest Black population and the largest African diaspora in the world, it is a term that carries significant resonance. Black people across the world have been the subjects of unending human indignity, cruelty and injustice. Yet, they do what I have done after every disappointment in the last few weeks. They get up, dust themselves off and use their skills to make the world navigable for them.

It is telling then, that in cultures of African descent, the “Malandro”, the “hustler”, the “trickster” is revered. In Nigeria, there is Ajapa the Tortoise, not the strongest or the swiftest of animals, but one who has had to use his smarts to defeat the Lion and the Leopard and sometimes, even outwit the deities. There is Eshu, an Orisha that is associated with cunning and trickery, for better or for worse, of the humans who deify him. And this culture has carried over into the West, as the unwilling transportations of Africans did. Br’er Rabbit is Bugs Bunny. The undisputed king of the hip-hop archetypes, outliving the Mobster, the Gangster, the Pimp, and the Wise Brother, is the Hustler. There is something in the African and Diasporic cultural consciousness that acknowledges that physical strength or force of arms is not the final arbiter of a man’s worth. And while the “Malandro” is not the richest, or the most powerful in any of these cultural outputs, while he does not always succeed and often does things that are seen as morally reprehensible or questionable, there is a level of respect and honour that is due to him. So much so that the archetype is incarnated into primordial forces or spread across indestructible cultural outputs.

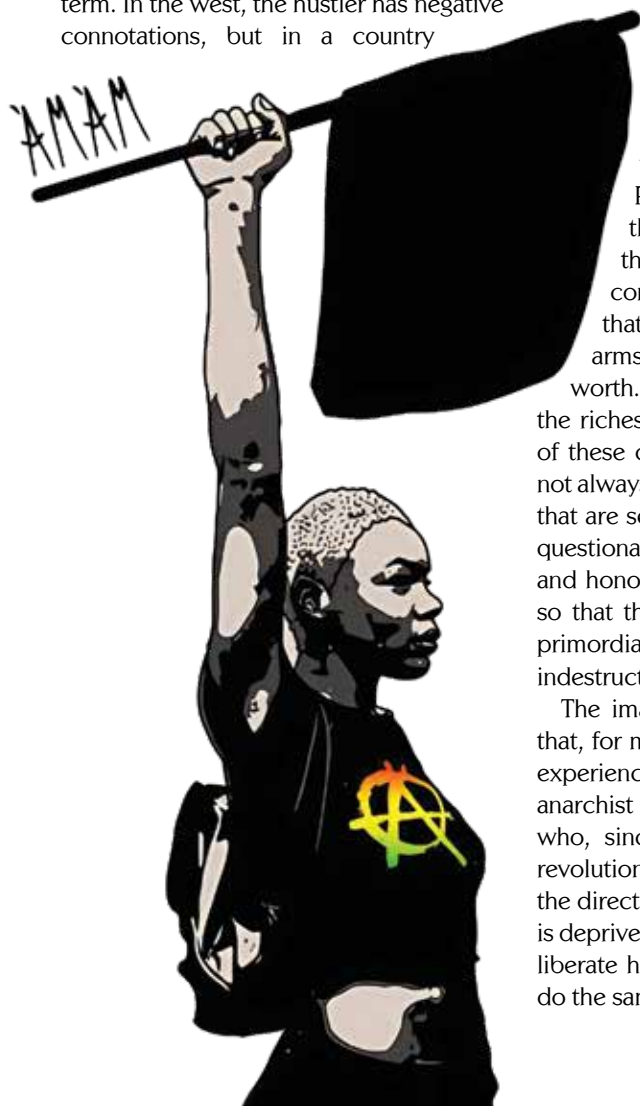
The image of the hustler is an image that, for me, resonates with the anarchist experience. Frankly unpopular, the anarchist is a threat to his enemies, those who, since the age of the agricultural revolution, have by force of arms, decided the direction humankind was to go in. He is deprived of the tools needed to fight, to liberate himself and work with others to do the same. The odds are stacked.

Yet to give up this fight would make the world unnavigable, would crush his spirit and eventually the spirit of liberty and communion that he believes lies in everyone. So he fights. He has his bag of tricks, mutual aid, direct action, means and ends. He has his philosophy, the liberty and autonomy of the individual, the necessity of other free human beings to associate and disassociate with, the inherent corruption of all illegitimate authority, and with these he fights.

This is a fitting example of why all Black people (notice the capital ‘B’), those racialised as Black (people of African descent) and those politicised as Black (third world peoples suffering under domination) have come to anarchism, slowly, fitfully, in whatever language or guise it may come under, and at its attempted destruction everywhere across the globe. It is fitting that this European interpretation of a philosophy of autonomy and community has transmuted itself around the globe, into the hearts of prisoners in the Radical New Left in the United States, to the sufferers of colonialism and fascist Imperialism in China and Korea, to the burgeoning movements of dictatorship overthrow in North Sudan. Market capitalists and State capitalists thought the movement had been snuffed out in the 20th century with the End of the Makhnovshchina and collapse of Republican Spain. But hope is like a weed, and weeds have a tenacious way of spreading exactly where you don’t want them.

In this, special, May Day edition of Freedom, you will be hearing from the first (and original) types of Black people. They have stories, articles and information about the Black anarchist experience, the synthesis of the “Malandro” figure in the fight against oppression and domination of all stripes. We hope you’ll learn, enjoy and most importantly, be inspired to action.

~ Daniel Adediran



We can work with others, but we must be able to speak for ourselves

US anarchist **Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin** on Black autonomy in revolution

I have identified myself as an anarchist since 1969 when I met Martin Sostre, a well-known Black political prisoner and "jailhouse lawyer" in the New York state prison system. He was in the Federal House of Detention, I had been chased down and arrested in Eastern Europe (Czechoslovakia and East Germany) when I was on the run from American authorities for hijacking a plane to Cuba, thrown in there too.

After being brought back to the US from Europe, I received legal help and anarchist political education from Brother Martin, who had become an anarchist during his time in New York state prison. That political education only lasted a few months, but it was life-changing. Like Martin, I became a long-term political prisoner and a jailhouse lawyer, but most importantly, I became an anarchist communist and syndicalist. Many of my anarchist contacts and supporters came from my time in prison during the 1970s and 1980s. The struggle for prisoners' rights and the brutal repression of Black activists in the Black Power movement of the 1960s occurred in the US, the UK, and other parts of the Black world.

I became part of the Anarchist Black Cross, re-founded by Albert Meltzer and Stuart Christie in the UK. This London ABC was reorganised in 1967-68 from the original ABC of the Russian Revolution (1905-1917). This group, and the "Help A Prisoner Oppose Torture Committee" in Amsterdam, Holland, were the primary

international support groups involved in my defence and put tremendous pressure on US authorities. Ultimately, this resulted in my release and the release of other prisoners.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the various prisoners' support groups in North America, and the Prisoners' Liberation Movement were the most important and energetic movements of the time, organising thousands of prisoners and their supporters outside into a mass movement.

My ideas of Black anarchism occurred while I was in prison, coupled with my recognition that the Black working class was an oppressed people, not just exploited workers. I understood Blacks in the US were subjected to internal colonialism, not just racial discrimination. In time, many Black prisoners accepted this political position as well. The idea that just the mere passage of civil rights legislation from the government would actually free us was proven to be untrue. Only the Black masses themselves can

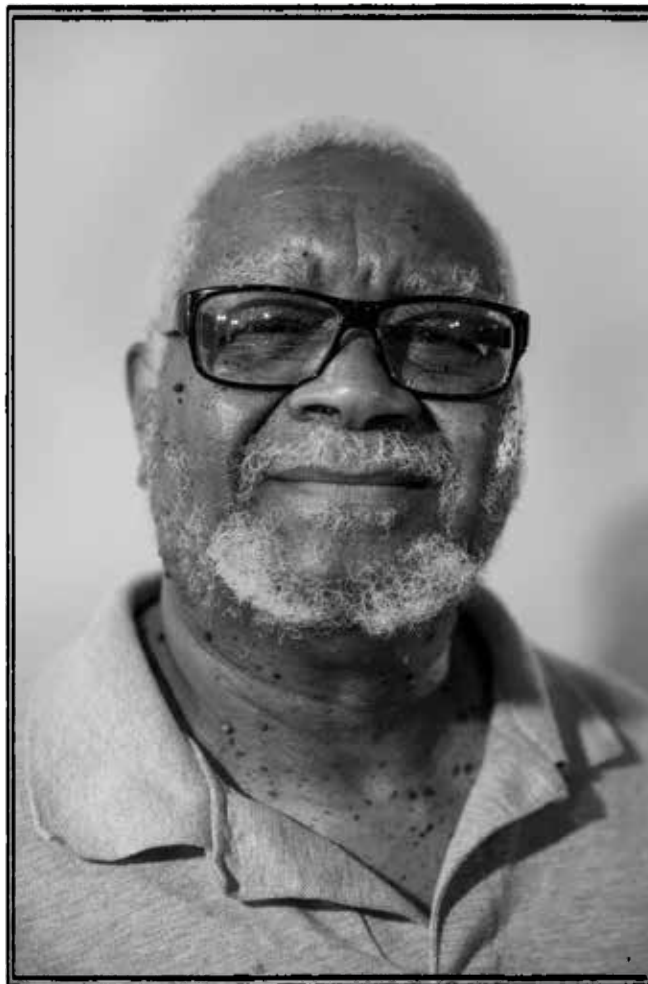
ensure our liberation. We can work with others, but we must be able to speak for ourselves. Prisons are concentration camps for the Blacks and the poor, regardless of how much propaganda or lip service the government gives to "rehabilitation" or "law and order." It's all a lie, a fig-leaf for the brutal repression of millions in the American prison system.

Black anti-fascism

Black Power and the Black Panther Party, in particular, were anti-fascist movements, almost from inception, they practiced armed self defense, were anti-cop, and anti-government. They were part of a movement for Black liberation and against all forms of white supremacy.

The truth is that there has always been an anti-fascist tendency in the Black freedom struggle, against lynchings by white racists in the 1920s in the Southern states, where racists murdered thousands of Black people, and where Black civil rights and Black ...

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from page 3 >> communists led the struggle against the Ku Klux Klan, a fascist, terrorist white supremacist movement. Although founded between 1868-1870, the KKK had grown to millions of members by the 1920s. Ida B Wells, a Black Southern activist, arose at this time to lead a mass movement against lynching.

Besides Wells's anti-lynching campaign, Black anti-fascist groups of all types appeared during this period as civil rights, Black nationalist, communists and other movements to create a mass anti-Klan tendency by the 1920s-30s.

By the 1960s, Black protests against racism, systemic police murder, and mass imprisonment in the US went abroad and united with the anti-colonialist movement.

So, any consideration of the 1960s Black anti-fascist movement must recognise the impact of the Black Power movement, which radicalised the Third World liberation movements. The radical anti-colonial teachings of Frantz Fanon in his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, published in 1961, touched Black activists all over the world. It was required reading for members of the Black Panther Party. The Black Power movement was strong in those countries like the UK, which had significant Black populations, as well as in Africa, where the Black Consciousness movement was influenced by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). SNCC birthed Black Power as a cultural, activist, and anti-colonial movement, especially the movements in the Caribbean, Africa, and the Black diaspora worldwide.

The separate experiences of Black and African people are what necessitated an autonomous Black movement, instead of Black people just joining white radical groups. Nobody was able to or could speak for oppressed Black peoples, like they could for themselves. Europeans who had never experienced racism, slavery, or colonialism had no frame of reference.

The best book by far on Black anti-fascist politics and its history is *The Black Antifascist Tradition: Fighting Back from Anti-Lynching to Abolition*. This book is the most in-depth work of its kind, and came out in 2024, in time to cover Black Lives Matter over the contemporary period, as well as the rise of Black anarchism. It gives a long history of American racial oppression. It also lays out the theories of US State fascism and imperialism, internal colonialism, mass



murder by agents of the State, and is the primary source to understand the Black anti-fascist tradition.

I have written and given speeches for years directed to the primarily white anarchist movement, to the effect that they should support the rising of the Black anarchist movement. I have always talked about why anarchists should create an international solidarity movement to help Black anarchist movements move forward, but why they should allow the Black movement to be autonomous as well.

I have always said that Black anarchists must be free to organise their own movements, based on their histories of oppression, ideological beliefs, and independent programs. I wrote my book *Anarchism and the Black Revolution* way back in 1979 to make this point, and co-founded a Black anarchist federation (Black Autonomy Federation) way back in 1994, the first of its kind, while I lived in Atlanta, GA. I got tired of struggling with white radicals, who were forever telling me and other Black activists that we have no right to organise as anarchists, just because they were offended or confused by what we had to say.

For years, however, I have seen white radicals, including anarchists, continue to criticise or harass Black anarchists for creating their own programs and movements. I experienced this for years in various anarchist and socialist groups. This is a terrible mistake on the part of white radicals.

In 2026, we are now forced to deal with a fascist state and a presidential dictatorship in the US, which is threatening a world war and nuclear terror. As Black people, we may all be facing genocide and state terrorism. We can die one by one, or fight for one another. We must fight for our lives and freedom. Donald Trump and his "MAGAots" represent a dangerous mass fascist tendency, organised and supported by the government. This government-supported fascist movement is a more dangerous threat than the 1920s Ku Klux Klan, which had millions of members in the US and dominated the national government in the 1920s, but was not in actual power.

Black Lives Matter (BLM) has been an important, and perhaps the best

organised Black protest movement in this period, founded in 2013 following the lynching-style murder of Trayvon Martin. In fact, BLM has been the most important Black protest movement in all that time, opposing racism, systemic police terror, and government repression of the Black community. But it is not a revolutionary movement, attempting to transform the whole of society. It wants reforms to stop State violence, not to destroy capitalism.

To this point, BLM has not felt it necessary to directly oppose Trump and MAGA, and seems to accept the limits placed on them, contrary to the original Black Panther Party.

As has historically been the case, however, Black people have had to build their own movements and cannot depend entirely upon white radicals. What whites have to do is build white solidarity movements to render material aid and support against Black repression. If they do not intend to give uncritical support, then they should get out of the way.

Sadly, white anarchists have not united with Black anarchists or Black activists for years up to now. In order to build trust now, white anarchists must put their asses on the line, if they are asked to partake at all. This must be the case, instead of telling Black people they must join white groups.

ICE Is Not The Answer

Think about this. There is a reasonable amount of righteous anger against ICE, but Black people have been systematically



murdered by the FBI, state police, and city cops for decades, and most white people in the US have not said anything. The outrage is warranted, but ICE is just the latest instrument of police terror, and not even the most deadly. When whites are killed, only then do more whites realise that ICE and the police generally, are a terror to us all.

There needs to be a united front of anti-fascist groups against all forms of statist police terror, not just against ICE alone. Don't wait until it happens to white people, or fascist mass murder will be a routine for us all.

Finally, what I would say to Black anarchists is that fascism is here, and it is real. We need to organise before we are crushed or wiped out completely by the state.

A Few Words to Black Anarchists

Black anarchists must draw on our long history of anti-fascist struggle to build something new in this period, not joining white groups who have long rejected us. We can only work with others when we have built autonomous collectives and programs of our own. We must lead ourselves, even as we accept solidarity from others.

Black activists must build a Black anarchist tendency to bring a fightback inside the belly of the beast, against crimes of the state: war, mass imprisonment, deaths by police, unforced poverty, the racial apartheid economy in the US, and so much more.

As I have said before, Black anarchism does not stem from European anarchism alone, but from a Black radical tradition. Black anarchism is not only anti-authoritarian, but anti-colonial, pan-Africanist, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anarchist communism and other Black radical ideals. That is why we call it Black Autonomy, and claim the Black radical tradition.

Black anarchists must be revolutionary community organisers, and not just idle intellectuals. We have to build living projects in our Black communities.

Black anarchists must understand that although they are part of a distinct people, who may have been historically oppressed and colonised in the US or UK, but that they must also understand the need to unite other with other Black people all over the world.

~ Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin

The Frankensteinian efforts to control us have failed

Hybachi LeMar, recently released from prison, is an organiser with the Black Autonomy Federation and author of several books and zines including *The Ghetto-bred Anarchist*, *The Anarchybalion*, and *The Deprived and Depraved*.

It's no coincidence so many of us on the fringes of society find ourselves as fragments of what we formerly were.

The struggle to make ends meet, to keep it together – ICE tearing families apart. The feeling – the knowing – that we don't fit in, in the system here to exploit and alienate us.

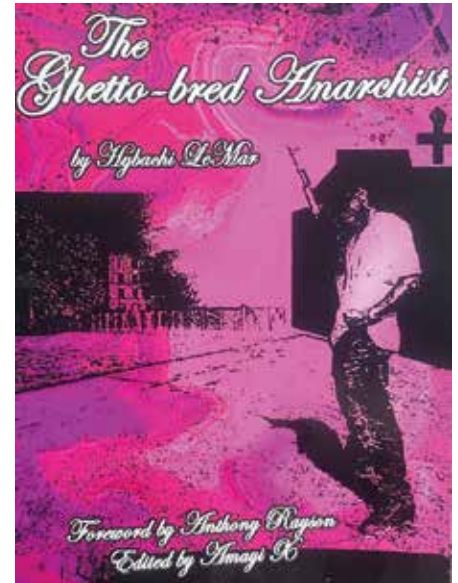
From these alienated margins, we see the government operating to manipulate the ways that we move, and to control us with its contradictions. The same system tanker-jacking cargo from Venezuela is the same that labels us criminals for life for holding up a gas station for 70 bucks. That's like the grease calling the oil slick!

The fight to control us doesn't stop in the streets. When we're thrown in prison, extreme measures are taken to disarm us from every sense of autonomy. Radical literature, relevant literature – banned. The colourfully drawn letter – photocopied, portions of them amputated. Kiosks and tablets – void of imagery, are screwed in place, mechanising emotions.

Completing groups – like "Cage Your Rage" – is required for making parole. The brain that rebels against confining conditions is locked away in the behaviour modification program. With fascist precision, reform regulates all movement in lockstep with ideals that have only led to where we find ourselves now.

But the Frankensteinian efforts to control us have failed! Isolating our bodies in fluorescent lit cells 24/7 has proven unable to desensitize us.

The programs used to scientifically modify our behavior has been rebelliously breached. Instead of caging the rage, the radical within is autonomously being tapped into; to transform that rage or



redirect it to rip apart the false logic that caging people with caging ideas could ever free us from caging conditions.

No door closed in the mind is unable to be unlatched. Every attempt to divide us only strengthens mutual aid. The more the idea is repressed, the more zines like *Fire Ant* are found dangerously crawling in circulation.

The dignity the DOC aims to strip from us by digitally scanning our correspondence gives rise to Mothers Activating Movements for Abolition and Solidarity.

In the face of those who try to ideologically disarm us, our outreach has become dangerously extended. Every volt from their tasers appear to only electrify us, disobedient to their orders, uncontrolled by commands. The ripped-off, the broken-down, the torn-apart can be seen repositioning ourselves as parts of each other, with alarming recognition that their Frankensteinian efforts to control us have failed!



SUSU: A SOURCE OF RESILIENCE

I wanted to highlight the instances of horizontal, anarchist, anti-domination movements in Africa when I started writing this article. But this has been amply covered by Sam Mbah (pictured below) in his book *African Anarchism*, and would only be an exercise in flaunting my super-cool-look-how-much-of-a-black-anarchist-this-guy-is credentials, etc. etc. There are enough column inches for that another time, because believe, Africa's past is as vast and as varied as everyone else all over the world and I am known as a treasure trove.

What I would like to get into in this article, is the idea that autonomy and community are practiced at every level in society, from the individual to the global and it is the extent we let these attributes flourish or flounder, that dictates where the world goes. I would like to elucidate this idea with a very common West African and Afro-Caribbean concept, which has analogous types all over the world. This concept is known as Sou-Sou, or Susu.

In the traditional African manner, someone will Google this concept, or has heard of it called by a different name and bark! It's called "X"! It's called "Y"! That is beside the point. The "Plantain"- "Plantin" wars are highly amusing, but not the subject of enquiry here. Whether you call it "Sou-sou", "Padna", "Box Hand", "Sol", or the hundreds of other names it has gained across the continent or in the diaspora through cultural translation, it is in essence: A micro-transactional, micro-insurance policy, built by members of the local community for hard times.

Now, I'm not one to sugar coat it, the African continent is beset with the trappings of domination. Some imports of colonialism like gender-binaries and sexual proclivities, some endogamous to the continent like polygamy and state formation. Some with the advent of capitalism, like commodity fetishism and the lionising of the rich, and some preceding capitalism, like the numerous subservient roles played in age-grade systems. These are all things that can be read about elsewhere. As mentioned earlier, while



Pic: C. Robinson/CIMMYT

domination is rife, communalism is also endemic within the African community, with group discussion on pressing issues, whether by elders or a community at large, group work sessions on farms and in the arts, women's guilds, market associations, and societies, secret or otherwise, which put the powers and issues of marginalised groups front and center in community life. The tradition of the people of the Congo Basin is to have children as the arbiters and exactors of retribution when community harmony has fallen out of balance.

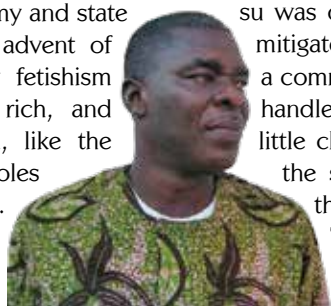
I'd like to focus on Susu as it is a communal experience that has survived the harsh realities of the middle passage, and the global transportation of people of the African diaspora to the 'mother country' after the first and second World Wars. It has had transformative effects on the lives of people that have lived in the center of global capitalism or suffered from its ill-effects.

Many cultures have developed money as a means of exchange, with good or ill effects on the way life is organised. Susu was developed as a means to mitigate some of the aspects that a community felt were not to be handled with money, but had little choice but to do so given the structural proliferation of this method of exchange. These microinsurance policies tend to come from communities that

still have agriculture at its base because, as any farmer will tell you, the vagaries of mother nature cannot be delayed and or denied, only be prepared for. It only takes one bad crop, one instance of blight, or one famine, for an extended family starve, having nothing to bring to market in places where farms are connected to massive social constructs.

With this in mind, it makes perfect sense that a tradition like Susu has evolved. An "Aza" is a pidgin English word for bank and also the Edo word for the storehouse of grain. And in all cultures there are aspects of the sacred and the profane which the exchange of goods does not supersede.

The susu made it to the United Kingdom in its Jamaican variant, known as "Pardna". There are some Guyanese susu communities, because of Britain's presence in Guyana and there are Trinidadian variants that call it Susu because of Trinidad's extensive Yoruba diaspora. People put into a pot, once a month, or sometimes when there is an imminent problem they intend to plan for, once a week, regardless of whatever situation they may be going through at the time. In some variants of susu, the pot goes round in order of joining the club. In others, when a disaster strikes, someone's grandmother has died, or someone needs to bring a cousin over for work in the "mother country"! or to look after their children, the collective pot is then given over to them to do as they wish, no questions asked.



IN AFRICA AND THE DISAPORA

The system has minor variations here and there, but this is essentially how it works. What differentiates it from formal savings and insurance structures, is that it is based wholly on trust and the clubs' sense of fairness. If you are the last to join the susu, you know by the rules laid down by tradition that you may be the last to get what is in the pot. There are no points for being of high or low standing in the community, the deacon is just as entitled to join a susu club as the reformed ex-prisoner, as long as they pay their dues. If there is an expense that people feel particularly passionate about but is not covered by the particular club's tradition, as they did when the first instances of Notting Hill Carnival took place, people come together and discuss the benefits and the pitfalls of donating to such a cause. Often there is an element of sacrifice. The person whose turn it is to collect will, with the knowledge of the club, donate to a certain cause and miss out on the personal benefits that the pot of money would bring.

The idea of lending to someone who will pay you back because of his or her



reputation, or because they have money, which then became the technology and data-driven insurance and lending 'credit scores', do not exist within this traditional method. It is non-hierarchical, based on trust; there are no expectations of what the money is going to be spent on, and as long as you stay a part of the club, the money will come to you. This is not usury, money-lending, insurance or even charity by any of the western standards, it is a traditional method of mutual aid and solidarity. And while it has not 'revolutionised money' or 'disrupted and industry', it has quietly made a difference to the lives of people all over the world, who have found themselves in sudden hardship, or realise that the intrinsic human notions of the death and dignified burial of a loved one go beyond what can be assigned a pound sign.

In an anarchist group I was a part of in London, we practiced a similar tradition, though they had no way of knowing about Susu. I was often the beneficiary of this tradition, though because of the secrecy that was permitted when doling out the funds, I do not know who got what when. I have also been the recipient of insurance, and charity and state benefits. I know which ones have made me feel empowered and which have made me feel wretched.

Anarchism is often displayed in grand terms, social revolutions, overthrowing the dominating classes, righting all wrongs with the State and capital, often in our fever dreams, in one fell swoop. But people practice forms of autonomy and solidarity every day, in small ways and big, just as people practice forms of domination.

While people can talk of the faults of community and swiss-cheese aspects of it that do not fit the modern world, spare a thought for the humble susu, from medieval Africa to London in the 21st century, making life liveable..

~ Daniel Adediran



Notting Hill Carnival, 2015

Pic: Iludovic/CC

REFLECTIONS ON A DECADE

Black Lives Matter UK was founded by activists who had worked together on previous deaths in police custody, both in the US and Britain.

In the US, it had started as a love letter to Black people in the aftermath of George Zimmerman's acquittal – who killed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in 2012 for the crime of carrying Skittles while Black in a gated community.

In Britain our martyr was Mark Duggan, killed by the Met in 2011. We not only remember the anti-Black propaganda about his criminality, how even some radical leftists argued he needed to die, how the army needed to be brought in to control rioters. We remember the public disregard of his and Black life in general. We live with the reality of State harassment and violence in terms of stop and search, legal sexual assault in terms of strip searches. State racist violence is not only structural, it structures the British economy and State legitimacy.

Today, which is worse than in 2011, almost one in two Black children do not get three meals a day. Ethnically Black African children do better than white British children in GCSEs, but are less likely to get a paid job. All of this motivates us because it is our lived reality.

"I can't breathe" was said 11 times by Eric Garner, a father of four, who was strangled to death, on camera, by a New York cop in 2014. His death sparked the second iteration of Black Lives Matter protests across the US, and in Britain that became the 2014 Westfield protest.

Sean Rigg, who died in police custody at Brixton Station in 2008, Roger Sylvester in Tottenham in 1999. Jimmy Mubenga in 2010. Those names were with us as we decided to form Black Lives Matter UK.

The US has always been used as a way to paint Britain as moderate, because "we're not like America." British policing is seen as sensible. We don't have guns.

So part of the struggle was not only to continue the fight for accountability, but also about how to make these struggles more visible. How do we honour the lives that have been lost, which continue to be discarded by the State? The thing about Mark Duggan's death wasn't just that the police were seen as heroic, they were seen

as doing what needed to be done. What that says is when you are stopped and searched, or your home is raided on spurious grounds, when children are asked to be undressed in front of police officials, this is for the public good. You deserve this.

And we wanted a politics of refusal.

We came from different traditions. We weren't all from one Trotskyist group, some were more liberal, I'm from a more anarchist strand. These tensions played out in asking who do we appeal to? In 2016, all of us came to a conclusion on the day after the Brexit referendum, when we saw on the front page of *The Sun* newspaper, actual neo-Nazis wearing Vote Leave T-shirts celebrating their victory. For us that was indicative of what was to come. A new revived form of White supremacy. Ten years on, you can judge for yourselves if that's accurate.

So we agreed to protest on the fifth anniversary of the police killing of Mark Duggan. On Friday August 5th 2016, to the soundtrack of Skepta's *Shutdown*, we were going to shut down Heathrow Airport, Birmingham Airport, Nottingham Central. With the motivation of Brexit and police

State violence. The impunity with which the police could kill and be told it's good.

We did disrupt these things. We had people ready to go to the media to explain Britain is not innocent. That Britain's imperial legacy is framed to perpetuate its present, where Black people are systematically discriminated against. Not only in the criminal punishment system but in education, employment, housing, health outcomes. Every facet of life.

The liberal framework

The liberal arguments that we normally hear are around unconscious bias, unintended consequences, the lag of the State to modernise in a multi-racial democracy and as a result, that policies designed to benefit all people have a disproportionate effect on minoritised groups who live mostly in deprived areas – i.e. State violence towards the working class is normal, it just happens to particularly affect Black and Asian people.

We reject this. While it is true that Black and Asian people live in more deprived areas. It's not happenstance. The way the economy is structured means there



Pics: G. Mies/ICC

OF BLACK LIVES MATTER



are people classified as disposable. This is how the global economy works. The capitalist economy demands child slaves in DR Congo to dig radioactive coltan with their bare hands, which is then used to power our mobile phones. That violence is absolutely normal.

And the global imperial white supremacist perspective is also how Britain governs internal populations, “naturally”, according to that logic.

But it is not just the outflow of racial capitalism into Britain, these are active decisions by policy makers to remake race, and racism, in new forms. We see this in the Prevent program. A lot of Black people are Muslim, and the racialising logic of Prevent trains NHS workers, teachers, social workers etc to see racialised Muslims as a threat. Which means six-year-old Muslim kids in the north of England misspell the word “cucumber”, and it’s read as “cook bomb”.

This racist violence we experience and tolerate is not a legacy of the past or unintended consequence. It is an active race-making project serving the interests of capital, but more broadly it offers a psychic wage. It’s a way of buying off the white working class with small benefits.

The 2020s

Today BLM UK is made up of radical leftists from social democrats to Black anarchists. We do not have very strong political lines, other than that we organise towards Black liberation. And that we believe Black liberation is bound up with that of the working class as a whole. We don’t think you can create a Black, liberated island in a sea of white supremacy, or a world of racial capitalism. These things go together, and have to be destroyed together. But we believe Black autonomy is crucial.

So, that sets the stage of how we’ve operated and organised.

In 2020, unexpectedly, BLM UK raised £1.2 million through a crowdfunder. We had no expectation we would be anywhere near that – previously we’d raised about £8,000. It was raised by 36,000 small donations, primarily individuals and small groups.

When we received it, we decided that it wasn’t ours. That we had, surprisingly, been entrusted with this large amount of money, and we needed to actually redistribute 50% to organisations that were fighting oppression, racism, and so on. We funded organisations that had a large Black presence, but weren’t always Black-led, like the UVW and IWGB unions. We actually also funded organisations that were Black-led, and we thought that was where the majority of the funds should go, like the United Families and Friends Coalition Against Deaths in Custody (UFFC), who we worked with at the Westfield shutdown.

So we’ve redistributed more than half a million pounds to lots of groups that were working towards Black liberation in a multitude of ways, not just trade unions, but domestic violence support, groups that actually were just organising Black people to ramble in the countryside without fear of racist harassment.

Onward strategy

Once we’d redistributed half of the money, the second task was that we not only needed to redistribute funds, we needed to create an organisation that would actually defend Black people.

We were mindful that there wasn’t an organisation with the single focus of Black liberation. And we thought it was incumbent on us to try. Not to be the sole repository of that struggle, but to work with communities in a non-hierarchical way.

So BLM started to be an organisation that was more focused on building power. Not State power, but class power – to regularly disrupt the flow of capital. Power to not only force concessions, but build a greater form of full autonomy and build up people’s ability to develop liberation wherever we are. And again, seeing that as being linked with the liberation for our class more generally.

What we’ve done is build campaigns, work with communities from Roma resisting State racism, to the Windrush scandal, which is a form of citizenship stripping, but also, more perniciously, an aspect of the hostile environment. We want to identify that the violence the State reserves for undocumented migrants is not illegitimate because it targets the wrong people, but because the State does not and should not have the right to impose such violence.

We are trying to build up support and allies, but we’re also conducting political education on the State, and the illegitimacy of its violence. We run Project Timbuktu where we are really wanting to understand the nature of the State. Our concern is this pushing or orienting of it towards racist violence. The fear of dawn raids, of people being snatched away. What we’ve seen with ICE raids and confrontations in the US has happened on smaller scales across Britain. Under Reform we will see that renewed, in fact we’ve already seen this under Starmer’s Labour, it has deported more children than any other administration on record. We organise not only to interrupt and disrupt their ability to do that, but to build power to ensure it can never happen again.

~ Kojo

find out more atukblm.org



THE MUCH-MISSED

Benjamin Zephaniah was one of the best-known creative writers of his generation. An outspoken radical, he was a hugely important advocate of anarchism, animal rights and anti-racism, and a great loss when he died in 2023. Here we reproduce one of his key essays and an accompanying poem, with the kind permission of Qian.

why I am an anarchist

I got political after I suffered my first racist attack at the age of seven. I didn't understand any political theory, I just knew that I had been wronged, and I knew there was another way. A few years later, when I was 15 a marked police car pulled up to me as I walked in Birmingham in the early hours of the morning, three cops got out of the car, they pushed me into a shop doorway, then they beat me up. They got back into their car, and drove off as if nothing had happened. I had read nothing about policing policy, or anything on so-called law and order, I just knew I had been wronged. When I got my first job as a painter, I had read nothing on the theory of working class struggles or how the rich exploited the poor, but when my boss turned up every other day in a different supercar, and we were risking our lives up ladders and breathing in toxic fumes, I just knew I had been wronged.

I grew up (like most people around me) believing anarchism meant everyone just going crazy, and the end of everything. I am very dyslexic so I often have to use a spellchecker or a dictionary to make sure I've written words correctly. I was hearing words like socialism and communism all the time, but even the socialists and communists that I came across tended to dismiss anarchists as either a fringe group, who they always blamed if there was trouble on demonstrations, or dreamers. Even now, I just checked a spellchecker and it describes anarchism as chaos, lawlessness, mayhem, and disorder. I like the disorder thing, but for the "average" person, disorder does mean chaos,

lawlessness, and mayhem. The very things they're told to fear the most.

The greatest thing I've ever done for myself is to learn how to think for myself. I began to do that at an early age, but it's really difficult to do that when there are things around you all the time telling you how to think. Capitalism is seductive. It limits your imagination, and then tells you that you should feel free because you have choices, but your choices are limited to the products they put before you, or the limits of your now limited imagination. I remember visiting São Paulo many years ago when it introduced its Clean City Law. The mayor didn't suddenly become an anarchist, but he did realise that the continuous and ubiquitous marketing people were subjected to was not just ugly, but distracting people from themselves. So more than 15,000 marketing billboards were taken down. Buses, taxis, neon and paper poster advertisements were all banned. At first it looked a little odd, but instead of either looking at, or trying not to look at advertising boards, I walked, and as I walked I looked around me. I found that I only purchased what I really needed, not what I was told I needed, and what was most noticeable was that I met and talked to new people every day. These conversations tended to be relevant, political, and meaningful. Capitalism keeps us in competition with each other, and the people who run capitalism don't really want us to talk to each other, not in a meaningful way.

I'm not going to go on about capitalism, socialism, or communism, but it is clear that one thing they all have in common is their need for power. Then to back up their drive for power they all have theories, theories about taking power and what they want to do with power, but therein lies the problem. Theories and power. I became an anarchist when I decided to drop the theories and stop seeking power. When I stopped concerning myself with those things I realised that true Anarchy is my nature. It is our nature. It is what we were doing before the theories arrived, it is what we were doing before we were encouraged to be in competition with



each other. There have been some great things written about anarchism, and I guess that's anarchist theory, but when I try to get my friends to read these things (I'm talking about big books with big words), they get headaches and turn away. So, then I turn off the advertising (the TV etc.) and sit with them, and remind them of what they can do for themselves. I give them examples of people who live without governments,

POET OF ANARCHY



capitalistic slavery. The story of Carne Ross is inspiring, not because he wrote something, but because he lived it. I love the work of Noam Chomsky and I love the way that Stuart Christie's granny made him an anarchist, but I'm here because I understand that the racist police who beat me have the state behind them, and the state itself is racist. I'm here because I now understand that the boss-man who exploited me to make himself rich didn't care about me. I'm here because I know how the Marrons in Jamaica freed themselves and took to the hills and proved to all enslaved people that they (the Marrons), could manage themselves. Don't get me wrong, I love books (I'm a writer, by the way), and I know we need people who think deeply – we should all think deeply. But my biggest inspirations come from everyday people who stop seeking power for themselves, or seeking the powerful to rescue them, and they do life for themselves. I have met people who live anarchism in India, Kenya, Jamaica, Ethiopia, and in Papua New Guinea, but when I tell them they are anarchists most will tell me they have not heard of such a word, and what they are doing is natural and uncomplicated. I'm an anarchist because I've been wronged, and I've seen everything else fail.

I spent the late '70s and the '80s living in London with many exiled ANC activists – after a long struggle Nelson Mandela was freed and the exiles returned home. I remember looking at a photo of the first democratically elected government in South Africa and realising that I knew two thirds of them. I also remember seeing a photo of the newly elected Blair (New Labour) government and realising that I knew a quarter of them, and on both occasions I remember how I was filled with hope. But in both cases it didn't take long to see how power corrupted so many members of those governments. These were people I would call and say, "Hey, what are you doing?", and the reply was always something along the lines of, "Benjamin, you don't understand how having power works". Well I do. Fuck power, and let's just take care of each other.

people who organise themselves, people who have taken back their own spiritual identity – and then it all makes sense.

If we keep talking about theories then we can only talk to people who are aware of those theories, or have theories of their own, and if we keep talking in the round about theories we exclude a lot of people. The very people we need to reach, the very people who need to rid themselves of the shackles of modern,

Most people know that politics is failing. That's not a theory or my point of view. They can see it, they can feel it. The problem is they just can't imagine an alternative. They lack confidence. I simply blanked out all the advertising, I turned off the "tell-lie-vision", and I started to think for myself. Then I really started to meet people – and, trust me, there is nothing as great as meeting people who are getting on with their lives, running farms, schools, shops, and even economies, in communities where no one has power.

That's why I'm an anarchist.

the race industry

*The coconuts have got the jobs.
The race industry is a growth industry.
We despairing, they careering.
We want more peace they want more police.
The Uncle Toms are getting paid.
The race industry is a growth industry.
We say sisters and brothers don't fear.
They will do anything for the Mayor.
The coconuts have got the jobs.
The race industry is a growth industry.
They're looking for victims and poets to rent.
They represent me without my consent.
The Uncle Toms are getting paid.
The race industry is a growth industry.
In suits they dither in fear of anarchy.
They take our sufferings and earn a salary.
Steal our souls and make their documentaries.
Inform daily on our community.
Without Black suffering they'd have no jobs.
Without our dead they'd have no office.
Without our tears they'd have no drink.
If they stopped sucking we could get justice.
The coconuts are getting paid.
Men, women and Brixton are being betrayed.*



On the periphery of globalisation, media interest and academic attention, the people of West Papua inhabit the western side of the world's largest tropical island.

As detailed by the early European explorers, Papuan communities have been independent sovereign nations for tens of thousands of years. Adapting to a myriad of habitats, they developed unique languages, cultures and physiologies. Living with kin in decentralised villages surrounded by customary gardens and forests, Papuan women and men shared equal status, educated their offspring and practiced mutual aid, giving freely without the need of reciprocity. Respecting their ancestors and nature, they lived without government nor state.

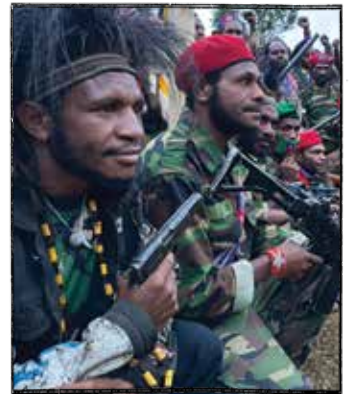
Mussat details how Papuans practised agroforestry dating back to their arrival and are the oldest horticulturalists in the world. Bananas, taro, yams, sago and sugar cane were first domesticated in Papua before becoming international staple crops. Research by Sutarno et al document how the Hatam tribe of West Papua utilise at least 55 animal species. No over-harvesting or over-hunting occurs and, like other Melanesian peoples, they do not recognise individual land ownership.

From the Age of Discovery in the 1600s, Papuans rebelled against all attempts at subjugation. Under occupation by the Dutch, the people formed millenarian movements seeking independence. During World War Two under Japanese occupation, Papuans supported the Allies forming guerrilla liberation units which were instrumental in preventing Australia and New Zealand from falling to Imperial Japanese-styled fascism (pictured, top left).

In 1957 the Dutch government, having colonised the western side, and the Australian government on the eastern side, began coordinating towards independence. In 1962 this was derailed when the territory was transferred first to the United Nations and then Indonesia, via a covert programme of malfeasance orchestrated by Washington. Since then the Indonesian military has been conducting systematic, slow-motion genocide according to reports by legal scholars, intelligence agencies and the UN. In the Star Mountains, for example, aerial bombing using helicopters and drones continues to the present day (pictured, bottom left).

Since 1965, the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM) or Free Papua Movement

Papuan traditions and empire's mess



has been waging a low-level war of liberation. Initially establishing a Western-styled system of centralised governance upon the advice of their diaspora in the Netherlands, this led to bitter infighting, killings and an exodus that continued for more than two decades.

As detailed by former OPM representative Otto Ondawame, the group abandoned the colonial system of centralised government in 1992, establishing a decentralised system comprising 881 village councils, 116 district councils, 14 regional councils and a national council. Under the OPM's New Order, village councils are autonomous, reflecting the indigenous fabric of the Papuan tribes that have lived in harmony with nature for tens of thousands of years. This decentralisation greatly facilitated the creation of new military commands across the Territory. Armed mostly with traditional bows and arrows, old firearms from the colonial period and a few modern weapons captured from the enemy, 36 regional commands now extend across the Territory.

While mostly confined to guerrilla warfare in the jungle, the OPM is increasingly taking on the Indonesian police and military in towns and cities with battles often lasting several days and even weeks whilst preparing for a territory-wide mass uprising.

Upon independence, the OPM plans to maintain this decentralised system, based upon their 1971 Declaration of Independence. It enshrines:

- mass participation democracy;
- a people's armed forces;
- equal distribution of national wealth;
- decentralised power rejecting the imperial, centrally-controlled economic and government political system;
- equal rights and freedom of expression;
- programmes to advance people's natural talents with schools, facilities and cultural institutions;
- protection of resources and ecology and confiscating lands from imperialists; and
- world peace by supporting other oppressed and colonised peoples.

Without police, state or government, living in decentralised communities, embracing gender equality, mutual-aid, respecting ancestors and nature, the people live under a political paradigm of indigenous anarchism.

~ Julian McKinlay King



Ben Cowles talks to the band's lead singer Kyaw Kyaw about his discovery of punk music, political evolution and experiences of political upheaval in Myanmar.

Watching The Rebel Riot, at the Manchester Punk Festival earlier this year was a chaotically cathartic experience.

Kyaw Kyaw screamed this throat out during the band's thrashy, three-minute blasts, railing against Myanmar's military junta, the Gaza and Rohingya genocides, rise of fascism, and latest Middle East war.

The band is made up of Kyaw Kyaw on vocals, fellow Burmese punks Shane and Si Soe on bass and drums, with Lukas, from Croatia, on guitar.

"We started in 2007 during the Saffron Revolution," Kyaw Kyaw says.

Burma/Myanmar's history since it gained independence from the British in 1948 is bloody and complicated. The military ruled from 1962-2011, when reforms eventually brought liberal cause celebre Aung San Suu Kyi to power in 2016.

It was during the Nobel Peace Prize winner's tenure that the Rohingya genocide began in 2017. Villages were burned, thousands killed, and hundreds of thousands more forced to flee the country. No-one has been held accountable or faced anything like (what states consider to be) justice.

Then, in November 2020, the military faction lost to Suu Kyi's party in a general election. Ever the sore losers, they launched another coup in February 2021.

The various peoples of Burma have not taken this oppression lying down. They have rebelled countless times. The Saffron Revolution being just one case.

"A lot of Buddhist monks demonstrated against the military junta at that time," Kyaw Kyaw says.

"Everybody believed the junta respected the monks because they promoted Buddhism. 'They won't kill the monks'."

This was Kyaw Kyaw's first protest. He was in his early 20s and "didn't know anything about politics," he says.

"I only knew one thing: the military system is not good, lots of people are getting poor, and we cannot speak freely.

"After two days of protests, the military started shooting people, even the monks.

"Lots of people were killed in front of me. I was so scared, I ran away.

"After this, me and my friends said, 'Hey, what can we do? I hate them. We should do something'. So, we created a band."



The band changed its members a few times, but Kyaw Kyaw remained. Between 2011 and 2024 he also helped organise Yangon's DIY punk scene, ran a community food project and became a social activist.

"I didn't know anything about anarchy," Kyaw Kyaw says. "But, I learnt about it through punk music. The lyrics were my education. I thought anarchy was just about chaos, that it meant we do whatever we want, 'fuck the police', stuff like that."

Crass, perhaps anarcho-punk's most illustrious band, opened his eyes to what anarchism is really about.

"I also had some activist friends, and I learnt from them. We based Food Not Bombs on anarchist principles."

Buddhism also played a pivotal role in his worldview. It taught him to meditate and seek inner peace. He says he tries to mix anarchist, punk and buddhist philosophies in his daily life.

"Authoritarianism and fascism are not only outside of us," he tells me. "They are also inside us, you know. You have to fight your own police," he says, tapping the side of his head.

Everything changed after the 2021 coup.

"Our drummer went to the jungle to fight the junta, like Che Guevara. Our bassist, he didn't feel safe anymore, and

he moved to Thailand. Then our guitarist passed away from a heart condition."

Kyaw Kyaw managed to find new band members, but in time, they too were forced to flee, as was he.

"In 2024, the military started arresting people every day. I was lucky. I was not on their radar yet. But after three-and-a-half years, my mental health had deteriorated. Some of my friends were in prison, some fled the country, some were dead.

"Every night, the military were going house to house, knocking on doors and arresting young people."

Kyaw Kyaw's luck held. He managed to fly out hassle free, more or less.

"I left early in the morning, because I knew the police at the airport would be sleepy. I got to the airport and the police, they looked at me a little weirdly. 'Ah, you're a punk' they said, and they wanted to take selfies with me. I was put on the police's list two months after I left."

I ask Kyaw Kyaw what's next?

As for the band, he says it's kind of up in the air, with some summer gigs in Europe.

As for future, "I feel a little negative," he says. "But I stay hopeful. Hope is the answer. Otherwise, we can't do anything.

"We should practice what they don't have. They don't have love, kindness or mutual aid. They don't have the compassion."

Ben runs The Civil Fleet newsblog and podcast at civilfleet.com.



LAMENTING BRITAIN'S

THE GENERAL STRIKE, 100 YEARS ON

In the opening week of May 1926, Britain had its first, last, and only General Strike. Three million workers walked out of their workplaces, in a colossal effort to defend mineworkers facing both pay cuts and increases in their hours. As the popular slogan of the miners put it, 'not a penny off the pay, and not a minute on the day'.

The strike has been almost erased from mainstream history in Britain. Insofar as it is remembered, it is as a failure, as living proof that British society has never possessed revolutionary potential, as a nine-day wonder that demonstrated unequivocally the impotence of extra-parliamentary action and the necessity of the electoral route.

There's a good reason for that of course, and it isn't just down to the right. The Labour Party never really backed the strike, with Ramsay MacDonald pulling out all the stops to prevent it. Lest we forget, Labour didn't back the miners in 1984-85 either, and in 1926 the strike was driven, in parts of the country, by the thing the party most feared – a spontaneous organisation of workers and the commitment of the rank and file. Just as the anarchists' role in the Spanish revolution had to be erased by the historiography which followed, so too did the potential of the strike of 1926 have to be forgotten.

The high-water mark of syndicalism in Britain had already passed by 1926, reaching its zenith in the pre-war period known as the Great Unrest (1911-1914) when miners in Wales published *The Miners' Next Step* and anarchists were present both in the Durham coalfield (as Lewis Mates has shown us) and the Liverpool Transport Strike. But the General Strike similarly bypassed bureaucrats and officials, being an avalanche of resistance to persecution begun directly by workers.

The miners were victims of both employers' greed and government arrogance. Employers were unwilling to countenance any decline in profits as the economic outlook worsened due to Germany's return to the coal export market, having been frozen out following



the First World War. Meanwhile the government's economic incompetence – exemplified by Churchill's decision to put Britain back on the gold standard (immediately making coal exports unattractive to many potential purchasers) – reflected hubris and a lack of concern for the fates of millions.

Churchill's fondness for using the military in the pursuit of a particular approach to "industrial relations" is well-known, and would recur during the 1926 strike. In 1910 he had been Home Secretary as part of a Liberal government, when the military had been deployed to repress miners in Tonypandy; in 1911 the army and the navy were deployed to Liverpool at Churchill's behest in the face of the Liverpool Transport Strike. In 1926 Churchill was the Tory Chancellor of the Exchequer, and his anti-union bona fides were undimmed.

A general strike had been narrowly averted a year prior. On what became known as "Red Friday" – 31st July 1925 – the government apparently backed down and agreed to subsidise the coal industry for a period of months until, supposedly, a solution could be found. The issues relating to the economic position of the coal industry were kicked into a committee.

But here was another precedent. The government was not idle in those months, and instead prepared for conflict with the trade unions through the development of a scab army and a flying squad of special constables, as Tom Brown remembered in *War Commentary* (the wartime incarnation of *Freedom*) in 1942. The hiatus after July 1925 was an 'interlude in battle' according to Brown: "It was obvious to all that the nine months' grace was merely a time of preparation for the ruling class."

LOST REVOLUTION

This was a devious scheme that would echo through history. The Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies, as the “scab army” was called, was a precursor to Margaret Thatcher’s strategy in 1984-85 to defeat Arthur Scargill’s NUM. Following Thatcher’s defeat in the 1981 miners’ dispute, a secret government committee was convened to prepare for the next dispute, and wasted no time in implementing measures discussed by the Ridley Plan in the late 1970s, including stockpiling coal at power stations.

Six decades earlier, Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin’s own false truce fractured in March 1926 when the committee reported and proposed significant wage cuts for miners. Union umbrella body the Trades Union Congress (TUC) fought hard to frustrate the strikers’ ambitions, as Brown remembered bitterly in *War Commentary*. On May 4th, 1926, battle commenced between government and workers – with the former’s organisation of scabs and special constables unleashed to fend off the threat of a meaningful labour victory. The violence of 1926, too, would be echoed in 1984-85; civilians batoned and police vehicles driven through crowds in foreshadowing the carnage of Orgreave in August 1984.

Students from ancient universities, so the legend goes, drove lorries under police escort. The military was deployed to a number of sites, with warships sent to confront the workers of the ports. The government had forgotten nothing, and learned nothing, from the approach taken to the Great Unrest.

That the strike failed is axiomatic when it comes to the story of British industrial relations – reminiscent of many actions which have had considerable involvement on the part of the TUC. It lasted for nine, or ten, days depending on which action you take as definitive. Retaliatory action against the miners was often extremely punitive, with many miners being blacklisted in the aftermath.

The great strike of 1926 has, over the century since, not just by anarchists, been seen as a parable for the failures of the British trade union movement. When the journalist Anne Perkins penned her

history of it at the height of Blairism (the title *A Very British Strike* was a reheat of *A Very Overused Formulation*), it had – as the scholars Charles Ferrall and Dougal McNeill have reflected, a neoliberal sneer to it. British industrial action was, put simply, half-arsed and doomed to fail as long as it had revolutionary pretensions. Couldn’t we all just get along?

The anarchist critique, by contrast, rested on a very different foundation. The realities of the strike, what it represented, and what it meant were better understood at the time than they have been since. Brown in 1942 argued that the strike was both a victory and a defeat. It was a victory insofar as it was real, “spontaneous,” often self-organised, action. It showed definitively that workers would, and could, collaborate across sectors on a grand scale and that the consciousness of what was at stake was widespread. In language of our time, rather than theirs, workers had agency through action, and they knew it.

It was a defeat insofar as the TUC’s leadership undermined their cause from the outset. And as such it represented a case study par excellence of the validity of the anarcho-sindicalist case against the craft union. Whilst real action might take place in such a setting, it would be against the will of the union’s leaders, who would always find themselves compromised by their closeness to the bosses and their need to maintain control. So it proved.

But what of the memory of this ‘lost’ revolution and its meaning for us today, in a society which is no longer organised around heavy industry where, for all its faults, a trade union movement does not have a membership cutting across private and public sectors and where spaces are not easily available for many workers to communicate, let alone organise? After four decades of turbocharged neoliberalism, with capitalist individualism as the sovereign creed of all major parties, a mental health pandemic the result, and an atomised citizenry addicted to smartphones, what can we use from this?

Firstly, the recovery of historical memory is never a fruitless exercise. The art of the

possible in the present is constrained by the vocabularies allowed from elites’ reconstruction of the past. Asserting a different story, one which gives meaning to a struggle which demonstrated the willingness and commitment of diverse people across Britain to take on their government, is a revolutionary act. As historian E P Thompson once put, the task of the historian is to “rescue the past from the enormous condescension of posterity.” That matters both for the dignity of those who went before us, and because it allows us fundamentally to think differently about ourselves.

Secondly, more bluntly, the General Strike of 1926 was a time when the government feared the people, poured huge resources into defeating them, and went beyond that to salt the earth to kill the memory of what had happened. To paraphrase a popular speech from a recent television series, what we have been told to believe is natural is unnatural, and in order to make that be the case enormous energy must be put into the fabrication of their narrative on an everyday basis.

To return to more firmly anarcho territory, strike action and mutual aid are related concepts. Though we no longer have the confidence today that Peter Kropotkin once had in science, his view of mutual aid as a factor of evolution by which organisms cooperated against their environment to survive has a clear resonance in workplace militancy and the strike.

Britain’s, and the world’s, economy has not remained the same. Industries have changed. But whilst platform capitalism offers new challenges, exploitation by the boss remains the fundamental dynamic of lived experience for many under capitalism. Every day is a war. Our forebears understood that. So do we. And just as they believed in their capacity to self-organise against all odds, we can too.

~ punk academic



RADICALS IN CONVERSATION

Black Anarchist Legacies/ Black Anarchist Futures

Various authors

Active Distribution (2026)

100/72 pages

ISBN: 9781914567711 and 9781914567698

£2.50 each

This is a review of two (A6) pocketbooks regarding Black anarchism in America, which go hand in hand. They both feature collaborative discussion (and questions from audience members), with conversations that took place at the same event last year, both under the theme: "All power to the people: social ecology and the Black radical tradition in today's revolutionary movements". They are both published by Active Distribution (2025).

Black Anarchist Legacies is a transcription of a discussion between Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, JoNina Abron-Ervin, and Modibo Kadalie, reflecting on their personal histories of the Black Power movement and how their experiences in hierarchical and statist revolutionary movements led them to anarchist and anti-authoritarian politics. The book serves as both a historical retrospective and a contemporary understanding of how they currently find Black anarchism. Much of the discussion is a fascinating picture of anarchism in America in general which in many ways, echoes my own personal reasons as to why I favour the libertarian socialism of anarchism and why anarchist critiques of the state, authoritarianism and capitalism are the only honest and down to earth explanation of the world around us.

The authors share their personal narratives on how they transitioned from other radical movements to anarchism, and how this happened despite the lack of other Black anarchists around them and despite an initially poor understanding of what anarchism actually is. It was at one point pointed out that they felt anarchism, when they first encountered it, to be the politics of pranksters and therefore not to be taken seriously.

Each participant gives us their own history and personal journey explaining how this changed and what led them away from, for example, Marxist-Leninism. Much of the discussion involves how

leaders and organisations in Black political movements were often hierarchical or had authoritarian tendencies. They specifically centre on the shortcomings of the Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army, and how top-down structures contributed to their decline. Attitudes to gender also feature here in their critique, despite women playing a huge role in these movements.

But they also do not hold back on addressing the perception of Black revolutionaries by their white comrades and they are brutally honest about the systematic racism of white-dominated anarchist spaces, even from organisations such as the IWW. In this part of the discussion they talk about how their anarchism should not be viewed in terms of that which comes from European traditions, but rather from Pan-Africanism, grassroots struggles in America, and the Black radical tradition.

Black Anarchist Futures is also a transcribed conversation at the same event, this time between Ashanti Alston, a former Black Panther and Black Liberation Army member, and William C Anderson, author of *The Nation on No Map*. *Futures* goes into more detail around the evolution and practical application of Black anarchism. They talk about anarchism being a tool for liberation, not an end itself. That it shouldn't become a new dogma or religion, with William saying he asked himself: "Am I fighting for liberation or am I fighting for anarchism? There's a difference between trying to achieve a different condition that is actually liberatory for people and fighting to preserve an ideology ... and I have realised that there are a lot of people

fighting for an ideology but not necessarily fighting for a better world."

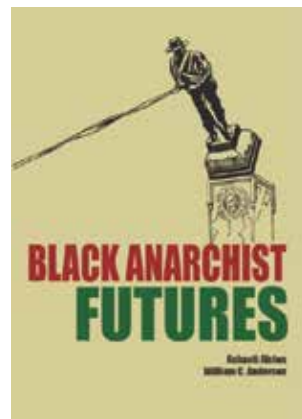
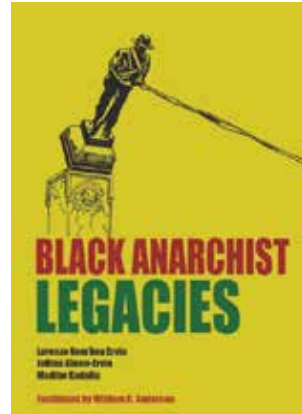
Again both comrades share personal accounts of how they moved toward anarchism as a tool for liberation and they address the recurring failures of rigid, hierarchical organisational forms of socialism, and also how they know first hand that the State will never wither away of its own accord. They state how the future of anarchism involves being innovative and creative, because the world changes and those in control are good at manipulating us into believing we already have it all figured out. *Futures* ends, before taking questions from the audience, with discussing mental health and trying to find some happiness and self care, and how to

do so (despite the struggle and terrible world we all have to witness and live in), and also why.

"... We have to actually be a lot more forgiving and compassionate to ourselves to be able to function our best ... starting with some internal work that isn't us being so hard on ourselves in a way that can damage the things that we're trying to accomplish together".

To conclude, both of these books have been a very inspirational read. The seriousness and thoughtfulness of these amazing human beings, and what they have had to endure in their lives, has been incredibly liberating and reminded me so much of why I found a home in anarchist thought and practice. There's actually a lot more to take from both books and ultimately I enjoyed how a conversation between comrades can get straight to the heart of things and be so wide ranging and detailed. I'm so glad I had the chance to read them and I recommend we all do.

~ Phil



Amistad: graphic and compelling

The Black Schooner

By David Lester and Marcus Rediker

Beacon Press (2026)

130 pages

ISBN: 9780807016923

£16.99

Since the rulers of class societies began to impose themselves on cultures without classes, there have been rebellions. And whether peasant or slave revolts, they have been almost exclusively chronicled by those whose power was being challenged, rather than the people who challenged that power.

Despite individual outliers who might have become learned surreptitiously throughout history, slaves and peasants have generally been forced to remain illiterate. Naturally enough, then, what readers learn from official chronicles is lopsided, exaggerated, scurrilous, sneering, and negative – however based on dispassionate facts they might be.

Most European radicals know about the Spartacist uprising in Berlin in 1918-19, and many know about the Munich Council Republic that arose months later, which included the participation of many anarchists (see *All Power to the Councils*, by Gabriel Kuhn), but how much do they know about the former Thracian gladiator Spartacus, who led a slave revolt against the Roman Empire? Even the official name of the revolt is Roman: The Third Servile War. Neither revolt was anarchist in any meaningful way, as is to be expected; the Berliners who rose up against the nascent government of the Social Democratic Party did so because it was insufficiently anti-capitalist, while the escaped slaves who flocked to Spartacus were never in a position to defeat the Empire.

Escaped slaves in the modern era have created maroon communities, mostly in the Western Hemisphere. There's an anthology of maroonage, *Gone to Croatan* (Sakolsky & Koehnline) that was

published back in 1993 that's a must-read for those interested in geographical and philosophical refusal and withdrawal.

The most spectacular and successful maroon community in South America, with an estimated population of 30,000 at its height, was the quilombo of Palmares, which lasted almost 100 years. Its last and greatest leader was Zumbi, who eventually became known as the King of Palmares; his defeat effectively ended its existence.

The Black Schooner tells the story of the rebellion aboard slave ship *La Amistad*, made famous by a Spielberg film in 1997.

Typically, the film focused not on the rebellion itself or those who fought for their freedom, but on the White Saviour, former US president John Adams, who successfully argued the case before the US Supreme Court. Cinque is featured, of course, but his story has no narrative arc, no inner conflict that must be overcome for some personal or collective redemption ... just a relentless fight for freedom. The graphic novel, deliberately

choosing history over cinema, tells much of the story through contemporary interviews as well as journal entries of the rebels. The choice of a graphic novel is deliberate, since most of the published interviews were accompanied by portraits.

An interesting aspect is what might today be called code switching, as when they are interacting with the Christian missionary Abolitionists – whose desires were theological as well as political – who rush to their defence the Africans didn't wish to alienate or offend them, and so learned to communicate in English and spend time in Bible study, despite not really finding much utility in either.

While the Abolitionists were eager to bring a legal case that would challenge the institution of chattel slavery in the US, the rebels just wanted to go home. Unlike the more famous Nat Turner rebellion

of the previous decade (which similarly horrified slaveholders, and which ended with very different results), eventually the US Supreme Court ruled that in this particular case the rebels who rose against their captors and killed most of them were justified, since they had clearly been kidnapped from Africa. Chattel slavery endured another 25 years. Does that mean that one particular slave revolt's legal victory that didn't affect the entire institution of slavery was unimportant in the history of slave revolts?

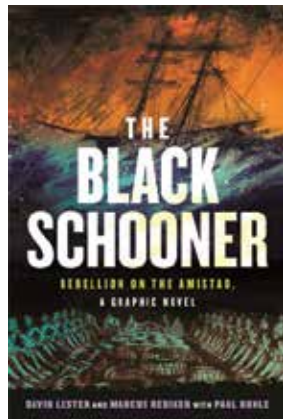
The Spartacus insurrection lasted only two years, and didn't have the abolition of slavery throughout the Roman Empire as a goal. Does that mean it was not important? Quilombos and maroon communities were not direct attacks on slaveholders, but defensive withdrawals from slavery. They provided refuge and respite, and while they were occasionally centers of guerrilla actions, their residents did not usually engage in open warfare. Does that mean they are less important in the history of slave revolts? What anarchist can fail to be inspired by the desire of oppressed people to be free?

Still, what are anarchists supposed to do with rebellions where the state isn't attacked, where hierarchies are not rejected, where one or a few rebels attain the status of a new leadership? In the near absence of heroic anarchist rebellions, it is understandable that anarchists would look elsewhere for inspiration.

The point of learning about the history of rebellions isn't to re-enact them, but to apply the lessons to future improvements. While it is certainly a mistake to claim them as anarchist, anarchists can – and should – look to the experiences of the neo-Zapatistas in Chiapas, revolutionary Kurds in Rojava, piqueteros in Argentina, occupiers of the Arab Spring, the Landless Workers' Movement in Brazil, and countless other smaller and more local self-organised projects that challenge the economic and political status quo.

The Black Schooner tells one such important story, in a way that's both accessible and engaging.

~ Jay Arachnid



Our comrade – thirty years on

Albert Meltzer joined the anarchist movement, aged 15, in 1935. Veterans like Mat Kavanagh and Leah Feldman connected him to the movement's past. He linked up with anarchists in India and China, but he was particularly inspired by the Spanish revolution of 1936. He also supported the anarchist resistance in the long, grim years of Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975). That solidarity mushroomed when Albert and his comrade Stuart Christie revived the Anarchist Black Cross, and grew again when resistance veteran Miguel Garcia moved to London.

Albert's long commitment to anarcho-syndicalism aimed to connect the Spanish example of revolutionary unions, affinity groups and armed revolt to British working class history and experiences. At times Albert stepped back from the anarchist movement to focus on freethought propaganda, or simply to get on with his life. But his anarchism remained focussed on working class self-emancipation and well-being for all. This led to a certain amount of conflict with those around the anarchist movement, uninterested in the working class or revolutionary social change, that he saw as liberals. Such conflicts, and the assault on the working class before, during and after Thatcherism made Albert more critical, and more concerned with anarchism's internal disputes.

It's been fascinating to critically examine several of those disputes like Albert's response to George Woodcock slandering the Spanish Anarchists, or Donald Rooum's myth-making about the failure of the Wooden Shoe Bookshop as a trigger for Albert's critique of Freedom Press. That made us appreciate the complexity of his life (and how easy it is to underestimate). Albert's autobiography *I Couldn't Paint Golden Angels* is, as the subtitle promises, an account of "60 years of commonplace life and anarchist agitation" but it's also a record of Albert coming to terms with his past. He found something positive to say about figures that he had criticised earlier like Guy Aldred and Tom Brown. Albert lamented 'I'd have kept everything if I'd known I would be the last one.'



This concern with history was key to the creation of the Kate Sharpley Library.

In 2021 Phil Ruff described Albert as "a perfect example of a working-class intellectual who had never been to



university". That's true, but Albert was amused by people declaring themselves intellectuals: "A woman Left Wing writer of children's stories who called herself, modestly, an intellectual was furious when I asked her if Enid Blyton was one". Albert paid attention to academic writing on anarchist and working class history – he was pleased when German secret police files showed that the movement there was not made up solely of "a few intellectuals". Yet he put much more faith in the tales of his comrades. It's always a challenge to distinguish history from stories of what should have happened (a universal problem).

Let's give an example. In 1966 Albert quoted Spanish novelist Pio Baroja: "Not all Army officers are heroes – least of all in Spain where 'in war-time they run; in peace-time they shoot the people'." After some digging we traced this back to the 1906 novel *Paradox Rey*. The 1931 translation reads "The soldiers, in peace time, steal what they can lay hands on. – And in time of war? – In time of war they run away." Albert's memory made the quote more pointed. This was not a simple error but, consciously or not, treated Baroja's text as an inheritance: "Ours by right of birth alone".

Albert was and still is our comrade. Thirty years on from his death he still influences how we think about anarchism and history, and what the Kate Sharpley Library does.

We have been tracking down and reading his articles for more than a decade now. Reading and critically examining what he wrote has given us an insight into what he felt, thought and did across his life, and into the history of the anarchist movement.

Albert was against racism, nationalism and war, an opponent of the state and capitalism and a critic of half-measures in getting rid of them. It suits some to exaggerate Albert's sectarianism, but he also spent much of his time explaining to people what anarchism was and could be. We think his writings are of more than historical interest.

~ KSL Collective

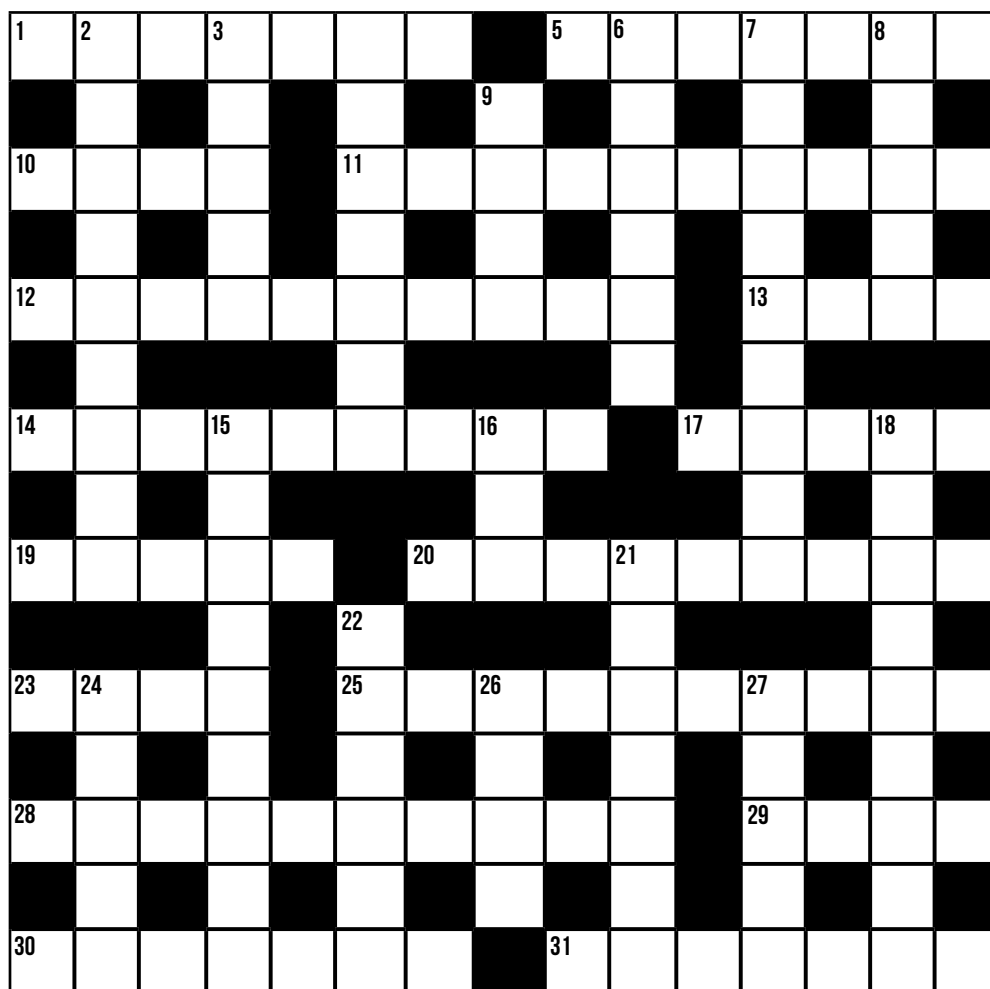
Read articles by and about Albert at:
katesharpleylibrary.net/0rxwm0

Crossword

by Leonard Williams

ACROSS

- 1 Anthem principally offers coverage amounting to nothing in Mexico (1,6)
 5 Occupant heralds home for a big cat (7)
 10 Yearn for extended time, say (4)
 11 Drink, gulp a short pause, gain release (10)
 12 Public opinion tracks problematic rise of opposition (10)
 13 Currency back in safe place (4)
 14 Beards say "anarchic boldness" (9)
 17 Florida horizon straddles a different state (5)
 19 Flower known as Joyce's Leopold (5)
 20 Wipe out North American termite enclaves (9)
 23 Melted dial found in "The Persistence of Memory," e.g. (4)
 25 Self-Direction in Spinoza's Philosophy mistakenly left at rear of car (10)
 28 Deist read a baroque list of basic necessities (10)
 29 Time to hug a yob? (4)
 30 Sincere musician's gift found by a cozy retreat (7)
 31 Backline furnished substandard barrier, we hear (7)



DOWN

- 2 Nearby phone provided a narrow escape (5,4)
 3 Classic cocktail exudes nothing new to a political theorist (5)
 4 Del summers in France, then cuts out (7)
 6 Concur with Democrat? Yes (6)

- 7 No delt tat? In retrospect, who grassed? (7,2)
 8 Angsty dance almost seen in a digital image (5)
 9 Raven's part of marriage bond (4)
 15 Oblation I blessed sought an end to oppressive institutions (9)
 16 Row, we're told, to get fish eggs (3)
 18 Fashionable baggage or controversial

matters? (3,6)

- 21 Support for a policy agenda? Perhaps a Grindr outcome? (7)
 22 Small parts of engraved jewelry (6)
 24 Turnover time! Dad prefers a filled flatbread (5)
 26 Steak without salt tastes like wood (4)
 27 SI unit of poetic rhythm (5)

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CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS

27 metre.
 Down: 2 close call, 3 negri, 4 deletes, 6 agreed, 7 tattled on, 8 emoji, 9 ebon, 15 abolition, 16 roe, 18 hot issues, 21 mandate, 22 cameos, 24 arepa, 26 teak, 28 desirata, 29 thug, 30 earnest, 31 defense.

Across: 9 across: 1 o canada, 5 panther, 10 long, 11 liberation, 12 resistance, 13 lair, 14 badassery, 17 idaho, 19 bloom, 20 terminate, 23 dall, 25 autonomism, 28 desirata, 29 thug, 30 earnest, 31 defense.

UP NEXT...

Alongside appointing a new building manager to catch up with building works (with many thanks to our old one) and appointing a treasurer, we have a new website in the offing! Keep an eye out for that.

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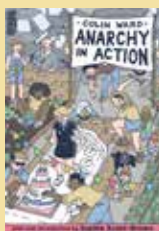


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ABOUT ANARCHISM

There are many misconceptions about what anarchism is and what anarchists want in the media. Some of the myths are accidental, some spread deliberately – but the most famous is that we're all about chaos.

Little could be further from the truth, the famous circled A for example is historically a symbolic acronym. Anarchy is Order.

While we have our share of chaotic adherents and experiences, and sometimes comrades' methods are very direct, we have no desire to simply break the system. We also want to replace it with something better, known as the beautiful idea.

What that idea represents in its specifics differs from person to person, as with every broad creed (capitalism included), but for the last 150 years, from individualism to mutualism, to anarcho-communism, anarcho-syndicalism and libertarian municipalism, the irony is that we are often obsessed with organisation. Which will happen when you're trying to frame a whole alternative society to the one we have now.

This paper is itself produced by an organised non-hierarchical collective and covers some of the broad range of topics where you will find anarchists fighting for a better future.

Every member has an equal say in how Freedom Press runs, and no-one is unaccountable for their actions.

Some resources:

freedomnews.org.uk: Our very own newswire

libcom.org: Huge repository of history and theory on every aspect of anarchism

channelzeronetwork.com: Collection of podcasts and anarchist-aligned radio shows from across the globe

[Activist Court Aid Brigade](#): Legal support for when the action goes a bit wrong

anarchiststudiesnetwork.org for academic writing on all aspects of anarchism

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Front page and page 8-9 images by G. Miessi/CC, from
the Black Lives Matter march of July 9th-10th 2016
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Dingbats from 1910 issues of Emma Goldman's *Mother Earth*

We are socialists, disbelievers in property, advocates of the equal claims of all to work for the community as seems good – calling no-one master, and of the equal claim to each to satisfy as seems good to them, their natural needs from the stock of social wealth they have laboured to produce ... we are anarchists, disbelievers in the government of the many by the few in any shape and under any pretext.

Freedom, a Journal of Anarchist Socialism, Vol 1, No. 1, October 1886