

The Occupied Times

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BLOCK THE BILL

PROTESTERS RALLY TO REVIVE THE NHS

NHS staff were joined last Saturday by members of the public and activists including contingents from Occupy London and Anonymous UK in a demonstration over the government's proposed health service reforms. Around 200 people gathered outside the Department of Health building in Whitehall, where speakers addressed the crowd.

As the crowd grew, only a minimal police presence could be seen as people discussed the impending Health and Social Care bill in a subdued atmosphere. A small group then moved into the road and sat down with arms linked, blocking traffic and prompting more protesters to join in solidarity. Within minutes the majority of people who had gathered for the demo - including elderly and disabled people, as well as parents with small children - were obstructing the road, chanting defiantly as surgical hats, masks and gloves were passed around.

A proposal was then heard from the crowd of protesters for mobilisation towards the Virgin Healthcare offices. Consenting to the proposal, the crowd began to move towards Trafalgar Square, bearing placards with calls to keep the health service in the hands of the public. Two blocks ahead, officers from the Territorial Support Group emerged from a side street to block the road, forming the first of what was to be a series of loose kettles broken by protesters.

Upon reaching the busy roundabout at Trafalgar Square protesters scattered, some encountering a police unit armed with automatic weapons. These officers, thought to be from the SO6 Diplomatic Protection Group, seemingly stumbled upon the protest by chance, but still decided to leave their vehicle and patrol the area on foot, weapons in hand.

As the crowd advanced police officers made repeated attempts to prevent the procession, succeeding only in separating protesters, but failing to stop them. Eventually, after turning onto Chancery Lane, the last few protesters still advancing were kettled by police using force. One man was tripped from behind while running and another had his head smashed into a window.

Officers initially informed the kettled demonstrators they would either be arrested under a Section 12 order or could give their personal details and be escorted out - but several activists demanded clarification as to whether these were the only two options open to them. Police eventually escorted them out one-by-one, without taking information, but past Forward Intelligence Officers filming the incident.

Despite the historical importance of the government's unmandated reforms, the small but spirited public defiance went totally unreported in the mainstream media, with some commentators describing it as a "blackout".

For comment on the NHS privatisation see page three.



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Picking up a copy of Rupert Murdoch's jingoistic tabloid newspaper last Wednesday, you could be forgiven for running to a mirror to check that you aren't, in fact, Bill Murray's character in Groundhog Day. Since The Sun drafted its infamous "45 Minutes From Doom" headline to scare the UK population into supporting the war in Iraq, most of us have come to agree that the war was illegal, instigated on false terms, and a total failure. Yet here we go again, with a Prime Minister utilising a popular tabloid to engineer consent. In spectacular PR fashion, David Cameron bluntly asserted that Iran was building a missile capable of striking the UK. The intention seems clear: while the US and the UK governments claim that diplomacy is the way forward, they simultaneously engage in dangerously militant rhetoric. "All options are on the table" as the pressure continues to rise.

The rhetoric of our elected leaders is eerily reminiscent of the delusional monologues of General Turgidson, the commanding US general in the Cold War movie "Dr. Strangelove". Seated at a sterile-looking round table in an underground command bunker, amid flashing telephones and before a large map that charts the diminishing prospects for averting a nuclear crisis, Turgidson outlines the choices that remain available to the president: "We are rapidly approaching a moment of truth both for ourselves as human beings and for the life of our nation. Now, truth is not always a pleasant thing. But it is necessary now to make a choice, to choose between two admittedly regrettable, but nevertheless distinguishable, postwar environments: one where you got twenty million people killed, and the other where you got a hundred and fifty million people killed."

Granted, we do not appear to face the prospect of nuclear annihilation just yet, but the logic of militarism appears to have long outlived the fall of the Iron Curtain and the chaos in Iraq and Afghanistan. Faced with a volatile, unpredictable and complex situation in the Middle East, our first reaction is to flex our muscles, threaten military action, and sign new arms deals with Israel or Saudi-Arabia. If we accept the perverse logic of military planners and hawkish politicians, the choice appears to be primarily about the timing of war. Is Iran going to attack us (or Israel), or are we going to strike preemptively? The prospect of a peaceful solution seems to be losing ground every day.

The easy alternative? Don't mobilise the troops. Don't launch the fighter jets. Don't deploy the warships. If peace through diplomacy seems difficult to achieve, will a war make it any easier? Why throw a match into a puddle of petroleum?

Something has changed, however, since the spring of 2003. A brief look at the comments following Cameron's assertions reveals a scepticism perhaps unexpected in a publication like 'The Sun'. If the spectacular failure of Western "nation-building" in Iraq wasn't sufficient, the events in Libya, Bahrain, and now Syria have convinced many that violence cannot be stamped out with more violence. Solidarity with the Syrian revolutionaries does not imply that we support arms shipments to rebels or a full-scale Western invasion. Look at Libya: the only beneficiaries of the NATO campaign are the CEOs of Western corporations now cashing

in on reconstruction and unfair trade agreements. After a few photo ops with Sarkozy, the people of Libya were quickly forgotten. As Human Rights Watch points out, Gaddafi's system persists in many places. Only the names on the business cards have been changed.

In addition, the past twelve months have highlighted the hypocrisy of Western foreign policy. In 2011, while preaching the gospel of democracy, Great Britain signed arms deals with Middle Eastern countries that totalled around 3.3 billion pounds. Half of that sum came from Saudi Arabia, with its dismal human rights record, and around 80 million pounds worth of weapons went to the very country now building a nuclear bomb that could threaten the West. Much of the technology sold - surveillance gear, decoding devices, small arms and telecommunications equipment - have been used in the past to suppress domestic dissent. Egyptian and Bahraini protesters hit with Western tear gas will have woken up in hospital to see William Hague or Hillary Clinton condemning

the violence on Al Jazeera. Western governments consistently sided with autocratic leaders until demonstrators were literally storming their palaces. The argument that diplomacy worked "behind the scenes" is unlikely to comfort the people who stepped in front of riot police and military units to demand change. Anyone can claim to be a hero "behind the scenes".

While politicians demand austerity at home, they are still willing to spend lavishly on their imperial adventures abroad. If history can be a guide, we have reason for concern: When debt mounted in medieval Europe, the crusades established a fragile alliance between the Church and monarchs, with the promise of unsurpassed riches to be taken in the name of God. The Great Depression led to political turmoil in the 1930s, and ultimately became fertile ground for nationalism and fascism to flourish. The oil crisis of the 1970s led to tensions that eventually re-shaped much of the Middle East. Consciously or not, foreign aggression has always been a convenient release valve when domestic dissatisfaction threatens

to unseat kings and powerful elites- just look at Thatcher's poll bounce following the Falklands War.

But 2012 is not 1929. Bradley Manning still sits in a cell, but the video he leaked is out and doing the rounds, and war doesn't look so attractive up close and streaming. New media technologies can bring activists together across continents and traditional divides. When the eviction order for St. Paul's was granted and Syrian protesters showed solidarity with a bonfire, it revealed a connection deeper than the divisions, something more solid than the fighting talk and wheeling and dealing between our respective tragi-comic leaders.

Many citizens are tired of the jingoist rhetoric, the squandering of public resources for neo-colonial crusades, and the hypocrisy of political discourse. The field is wide open - not just for domestic reforms but also in relation to foreign policy. At a time when supposed political and economic "truths" have been exposed as folly, the politics of peace can be seized anew.



NEW BATTLES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

MARK BERGFELD

Last week more than seven hundred students demonstrated in defiance against Universities Minister David Willetts and his plans to further privatise the University sector. The march called by the Education Activist Network, ULU and various Students' Unions across London coincided with the day of walkouts called by the National Union of Students.

Under the banner of 'Willetts must go!' students marched from ULU to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the Ministry responsible for Higher Education.

Under pressure from students, a 20,000-strong petition by the UCU and his own cabinet, Willetts withdrew the Higher Education Bill from the Commons. However, he is preparing universities for privatisation in similarly shamboic fashion as Andrew Lansley is for our hospitals. His measures are now being implemented without any debate.

En route, students staged a sit-down protest in front of 10 Downing Street. Their placards read 'Our education not your business' and 'Education for the 99%'. The attacks on higher education are not the only ones students face. Over the last year and a half students have suffered other blows at the hands of the state and the police.

One banner at the march read 'We are all Alfie Meadows'. Alfie is a Middlesex Philosophy student who was so severely beaten by police on the day the government trebled tuition fees that he had to undergo emergency brain surgery. Ironically, he is the one who faces trial later this month. He is being charged with violent disorder whereas no police officer to date has been held to account for the attack on Alfie. Yesterday, students made it clear that Alfie is not alone.

Time and time again the police have issued threats to make use of rubber bullets and water cannon against student protesters. Police intimidation, horse charges, kettling and heavy sentencing

of students have left a mark on the movement. Arguably it has peeled off a softer outer layer of protesters and supporters from demonstrating.

As students held their sit-down they chanted 'Who protects the 1%?', the police protects the 1%. Anyone who had been on previous student demonstrations could only agree: the police are not part of the 99%.

There are arguments amongst activists. Some believe we should wait until the next general election and make higher education the number one issue. Others believe that we should move on to other political issues. However, new battles lines have been drawn.

Students already have fewer courses to choose from and will now be obliged to take out huge loans from the government to meet spiralling costs. These loans have been 'sold' to prospective students as income-contingent, but in truth they are government policy-contingent since the repayment threshold and interest rates can be changed at will and with retrospective effect.

At a local level, students are already experiencing the disastrous effects of Willetts' so-called reforms. At the University of East London, the academic year has been shortened by nearly a month in order to free their campus up for the US Olympic team. Under the pretence of the Olympics, University management has also privatised all security and catering staff.

Students at the University of East London are not the only ones subjugated to such a "Shock Doctrine". At London Metropolitan University, 70% of all courses have already been cut while redundancies are being implemented.

But there are also a number of local disputes on the horizon. Queen Mary London UCU has now officially entered a dispute with management over departmental restructuring. At Goldsmiths College, the announcement to close down the PACE department which offers quality

education to students from widening participation background has been met with opposition by students and staff alike.

Importantly, the UCU lecturers in Further Education and post-1992 institutions also voted overwhelmingly for strike action. The government wants to drive down costs to make it easier for private companies to feed off public education - this is why staff are fighting to defend their pensions.

The terrain that students, academics and university workers are fighting on is very different to that of November and December 2010 when the government announced that it would treble tuition fees. Activists inside of the movement are fighting to build a unified movement which can start challenging the government at every twist and turn, locally as well as nationally.

Local disputes, massive student debt, harsh sentencing of student protesters and the introduction of £9,000 pounds in fees next academic year can provide major focuses for a movement which is growing up the hard way. As Rosa Luxemburg once said: 'The path to revolution is paved with defeats'.

Importantly, activists are starting to develop the kind of links that have the social power to win. At Goldsmiths College, students and staff have started to organise themselves into student and staff departmental committees which were formed for the N30 strikes. These can now be used in defence of the PACE department and argue for strikes and occupations.

And the strike by lecturers, civil servants and teachers on March 28 can provide the necessary social and economic power that we will need to derail Willetts' austerity agenda for education. As one student said to me on the demonstration: 'Today we mobilised a couple of hundred so that we can mobilise the thousands tomorrow'. Spring is coming...

Mark Bergfeld is a member of the Education Activist Network.

WHOSE NHS?

NATALIA SANCHEZ-BELL & MICHAEL RICHMOND

In spite of widespread public outrage, nearly every Royal College opposing it and a coalition ranging from the Conservative Home blog on the right to Leftist activists at the opposite end of the political spectrum who have demanded that the government drop the Health and Social Care Bill, the coalition government have adopted the novel approach of sticking their fingers in their ears and forcing it through regardless.

Motions from both the Labour benches and the few dissenting Liberal Democrats were voted down by a government majority of 314 to 258 and 314 to 260, respectively. The only parliamentary recourse left to halt this privatising bill is in the House of Lords where David Owen is attempting to force the government to publish the findings of the risk register, thought to expose the dangers that will come were the bill to be passed. Outside of parliament, however, the fight goes on as people who really care about their health service will continue to make their voices heard. Multiple actions took place this past weekend across the country, including outside the Department of Health on Saturday and Parliament on Sunday.

An e-petition, a device encouraged by the government to supposedly improve their public engagement and democratic legitimacy, which demanded the withdrawal of the bill had reached over 174,000 signatures this week. The fact that it has been so casually jettisoned is further proof, as if it were needed, that the political class see the British public as not much more than a nuisance, impeding their efforts to enrich themselves and their friends in the private sector. Because, let's not quibble on this, those with expert knowledge of the National Health Service have been in unprecedented consensus that this bill will lead to a dangerous fragmentation and de-Nationalisation of the English health service. That means further drift towards an American-type insurance system which has led to the richest nation in the history of this planet having a worse

average life expectancy than Cuba and Chile, whilst around 30million of its citizens are still without healthcare coverage. What's more there is absolutely no mandate for this. It was never explicitly set out in manifestos nor in the coalition agreement and it is widely known that the British people strongly support a public health service. For clues as to how we have come to this point, it is worth turning to the extensive research done by the Social Investigations blog. They have found that well over 100 MPs and Lords of all three major parties have direct financial interests with or have received donations from private healthcare companies or affiliated businesses as either advisors, consultants, shareholders or directors. This list includes the prime minister, the current health secretary as well as several senior former New Labour cabinet ministers. This must be acknowledged for what it is: not even just conflicts of interest but blatant

corruption. It doesn't matter if they've "followed the rules" (a forlorn refrain reminiscent of the expenses scandal) and registered their interest- the problem is that they have got an interest and how painfully obvious it is that this affects the direction of legislation.

Private healthcare firms and their lobbyists have been salivating at the very thought of the Health and Social Care bill. The Private Hospitals Alliance (or H5), a lobby group launched specifically to coincide with this bill to represent the five largest private hospital firms in the UK, have spoken openly within their industry of "opportunities" afforded by this bill for "public service outsourcing on a massive scale." There is even mention of how the UK private medical insurance industry has suffered since the global financial crash but that this government's health policy will provide a kiss of life to what is a leeching industry.

For all those who still like to characterise the Liberal Democrats as hapless fools and naive fall guys, it is worth bearing in mind that it was a former Lib Dem Speechwriter and candidate for Islington Council, Mihir Magudia, who until recently handled the public relations for H5. Similarly, Mark Littlewood was a former chief media spokesman for the Liberal Democrats and is now a rabidly Thatcherite director general of the Institute for Economic Affairs thinktank. The Lib Dems are not locked in the boot, they are enthusiastic back-seat drivers.

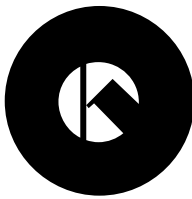
This bill signals the almost complete financialisation of our public services, the completion of a thirty-year, cross-party project to make sure that this country puts balance sheets before human beings in every area of society. Tax-Payers' money will yet again be funneled into the pockets of directors and shareholders of private companies as services are cut and cherry-picked by the swooping vultures of Aviva, Bupa, Southern Cross and Care UK (who've bankrolled Health Secretary Andrew Lansley's constituency office.)

It's been particularly galling to see Labour people posing as guardians of the NHS and looking down their noses at their Lib Dem counterparts. Let's none of us forget that New Labour have paved the way for this bill. It has followed the same path of Blairite 'reforms' fetishising fictitious and unwanted 'choice'. The UK private healthcare sector grew hugely during Labour's time in government so that it now amounts to a £5.5billion global industry. And through Labour's own complicity they have crippled any credible platform for parliamentary opposition leaving the government with an easy get-out under the weight of their own contradictions. If this bill passes it will be a political bloodbath for all involved but politics should be about the people, not a dance between politicians and media. No one wins from this bill apart from faceless chief executives, the rest of us will all lose one of the few things left, despite its flaws, which we can be proud of in this country. This political class appear hell-bent on making our lives unliveable, in return we must make the path they've chosen unprofitable and unworkable. The fight should not stop at the point at which legislation is forced through. It is our NHS, not theirs. Don't let them take it from us.



NOTES ON THE CRISIS FROM GREECE

DIMITRIS DALAKOGLU



n February 12, 2012, just days before the eviction of Occupy London, Athens was in flames. The majority of over 40 buildings that were set ablaze by angry crowds were banks, government offices and branches of commercial chains – but not only. Similar scenes were seen across the country.

Why so much anger? That Sunday the Greek parliament was to vote for another austerity package which will, amongst other things, further cut pensions and make it possible to reduce the minimum monthly salary to €400. The 600-page document was given to MPs with 24-hour notice with the recommendation to start and end the parliamentary "discussion" and voting before Monday morning, when the European stock markets would open. The 199 Greek MPs who obeyed and voted for the austerity package slept safely within the walls of their guarded villas. That Monday, stock markets around the world reacted positively and profits were recorded, especially in the banking sector. Meanwhile, homelessness has seen at least a 25% rise in Greece in the last few months, and – according to Eurostat – 27.7% of Greeks live with the risk of poverty.

That same Sunday, 12th of February 2012, police were waiting in front of homes of known activists, and detained them before even reaching the rally in Syntagma Square. Police blockaded most roads leading to the city centre and ordered metro stations around central Athens to shut, so demonstrators would not be able to reach the place of the protest. Riot police were waiting from the early

morning in front of parliament, and attacked in the early afternoon, aiming to disperse the demonstration before the scheduled time of the rally. This led to full scale clashes all around Athens, as hundreds of thousands tried to make their way to Syntagma square to protest, whilst those present refused to leave despite unprovoked and extreme police violence.

But people in Greece do not resist the new capitalist regime on the streets only. At the moment of writing, several buildings that used to house public or state organisations are occupied by anti-austerity protesters. Town halls, local prefectural buildings, the hospital of Kilkis, the building of the Social Housing Organisation and the ground-floor of the Ministry of Health are just a few of the buildings occupied by people who are trying to create the material infrastructures of a world of solidarity, mutual aid and freedom, in the opposite direction of the social cannibalism that the government, IMF, EU and ECB are pushing.

The social struggle in Greece raises many questions. First of all, why do people rise up and fight? It is because the rapid impoverishment is felt by almost everyone in the country. But even before the crisis, things were not that good; extreme inequality, police brutality, and exploitation were already firmly established, prioritising capital and state at the expense of the freedom and wellbeing for the majority. However, never before have so many people been so much and so rapidly affected by this regime. The slogan "we are the 99%" makes absolute sense in Greece today. But this proverbial 99% extends well beyond Greece and gradually includes people in Britain and other

"privileged" countries. Admittedly, if a substantial proportion of Western Europe's residents could claim in the recent past that poverty and suffering is something that stays abroad and does not reach them, this is no longer the case.

The Greek case has its own particularity, but is indicative of what is coming. The local version of Occupy: the Syntagma Square movement started in summer 2011, after more than a year of an experiment in capitalism. This started in May 2010, when the Greek government arranged for a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the EU and the European Central Bank (ECB). The loan was accompanied by a dismantling of public social provisions and dramatic decrease of wages, combined with over-taxation of people and under-taxation of big business. The Greek example became paradigmatic when the joint IMF/EU/ECB enterprise went on to contaminate Portugal and Ireland. The established model that emphasises the wellbeing of financial institutions at the expense of human health and happiness goes further and faster than ever before. Its violence is too explicit to be ignored; this system kills. The Lancet – a medical journal – recently published two research articles confirming links between the new loan-related policies, a rapid decay of general health in the population, and an enormous increase in suicide rates.

However, this is not the first time that such a version of extreme capitalism has been applied. The majority of global inequalities arising in the last decades are based on interventions by the likes of IMF, World Bank, WTO and collaborative governments, which in the name of so-called post-crisis economic



THANASSIS STAVRAKIS

recovery, growth, development or competitiveness of a country's economy, decrease the value of human life and dignity to degrees that may shock even the most fanatic fans of neoliberalism. This very same recipe of extreme austerity with respect to wages and social public provisions, combined with generosity to big corporations, was first applied to so-called developing countries, and later to former socialist countries in Europe. Gradually it expanded to the global West, dismantling slowly a series of gains achieved through revolts, protests and revolutions over the last 150 years. Today the pace of this dismantling has been stepped up.

So the reason that occupied squares in Egypt, Spain and Greece were followed by Occupy movements in the UK or the US is because economic and political elites – elected like some European governments or unelected like Mubarak of Egypt – repress people in substantial parts of the world in increasingly similar ways. This similarity is achieved through pushing down the historically more privileged parts of the world

population. After everyone else has been squeezed to the limits of human existence, the great majority of people living in the peripheral Euro-zone countries are next to join the global poor and repressed. Very soon the majority of Western and Northern Europeans will follow. It is worth noting that the main reason for the situation, is because that privileged part of the world population did not react against that condition, or when it did, usually the demand was to reform the established system towards a more fair deal. The deal never came, because justice does not go together with the predominant economic system. So the question posed as a slogan in Athens applies very explicitly to all of us: "if not now, then when, and if not us then who" is going to rise up and overthrow such a system?

Dimitris Dalakoglou is a Lecturer in Anthropology at Sussex University and co-editor of the book 'Revolt and Crisis in Greece', he is member of the collective Occupied London that maintains the web-blog 'From the Greek Streets'.



THANASSIS STAVRAKIS



BEN CAVANNA

JONATHAN SOCRATES

OCCUPY BUFFER ZONE

Within Nicosia's Venetian walls, Ledra Street, with its chain stores and cafés, is in many ways similar to other high streets around the world. However, something quite unique is happening here.

As you walk, the shops fade away and the street narrows with the diagonal encroachment of temporary wire fencing. But with all the construction taking place around the island, nothing seems amiss. Perhaps you notice a police pavilion to your right. Perhaps you see the people coming towards you preparing their passports. Perhaps you catch sight of the placard above the pavilion bearing the lament: 'Lefkosia: The last divided capital'.

The fencing gradually intrudes some more until Ledra is no longer a high street but a lane. You are funnelled out into a space where several people are warming their hands around a fire burning in a metal barrel between two rows of tents and beneath a banner that reads 'Welcome to Cyprus' in a combination of Greek and Turkish. You ask what is going on. 'We're occupying the buffer zone,' comes the reply. Indeed, without realising, you have passed over into no-man's land, the buffer zone between the Republic of Cyprus and Northern Cyprus. And a space which has become the site of Occupy Buffer Zone.

The Occupy camp in Nicosia differs from every other one around the world in that it is taking place not in a jurisdiction of a particular state but in UN-controlled no-man's land. Following a coup by the ultra-nationalist guerrilla group EOKA-B in 1974, Turkey invaded Cyprus and the territory it gained control of – roughly the northern third of the island – still remains under Turkish occupation today. It is now known that Britain and the United States encouraged the division of the island. Between the north and the south runs a stretch of UN-controlled land known as the Green Line, and it is here that activists from both sides of the divide have set up camp.

The history of the camp can be traced to 15th October, the day of global protests inspired, in part, by the Spanish indignado movement. 'We gathered at Eleftheria Square. It just happened from the sensation going on all around the world,' says Rahme, a twenty-seven-year-old Turkish Cypriot sociologist and a member of the camp's media team. There, we sat down and talked, initially about the capitalist system and then eventually it led us to the Cyprus Problem because we have to get over this problem first before we can deal with the other issues.'

The protesters then marched down Ledra Street to the buffer zone. They returned there to demonstrate every Saturday until, in mid-November, they decided to stay for one night. 'Waking up the next day was such an incredible feeling,' says Rahme with a smile. 'We said, ok, we're going to stay here and this is going to be permanent until we change something.'

For the activists, the division of their island is a domestic manifestation of international capitalism, the local symptom of a global problem.

'There's no country that has a reality like this: a buffer zone to occupy in this way,' says Michalis, a twenty-six-year-old linguist. Down one of the two alleys running perpendicular to Ledra Street which are now filled with tents and roofed with tarpaulin, Michalis, against a backdrop of barbed wire and broken bricks, continues to talk. 'The Cyprus Problem [is] not a head-on clash between two peoples. [Cyprus is] an island that was divided to be used as a military base for resource monopolisation happening in the Middle East.'

He describes a handbook for British service personnel stationed on the island entitled 'Why We Are in Cyprus' which provides a particularly colonial definition of the island: 'We can call Cyprus an unsinkable aircraft carrier anchored off the shores of the Levant.' 'So within this context,' continues Michalis, 'you see that [the Cyprus Problem] is one of the many symptoms of an unhealthy social-economic paradigm which promotes competition and robbing and dishonesty.'

The Occupy activists plan to stay indefinitely. But one concrete date is fixed in their minds: 1 July 2012, when Cyprus assumes the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The hope is that they will be able to raise awareness of their plight when Europe's eyes are upon them. Being in no-man's land, the protesters are untouchable for both the Greek and Turkish Cypriot authorities. It is the UN which controls the Green Line. Michalis describes the UN reaction after the group's first night in the buffer zone: 'The UN came in the morning and they were really rude and really aggressive. They were trying to threaten me personally. One guy took me and said, 'You step one metre this way and that guy over there is going to arrest you.'

However, the UN's attitude soon changed. '[The UN] obviously had decided that the public rhetoric will be that [they] have the same aim [as the protesters]. Since then they've been really polite.'

Michel Bonnardeaux, official spokesperson for UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), speaks with a diplomatic mix of firmness and understanding:

HAITI: THE REAL CANARY IN THE MINE

ISABEAU DOUCET

After spending over a year in post-earthquake Haiti, writing about the abysmal tent camp living conditions and the often violent evictions of internally displaced quake victims, I found myself at a planning meeting in New York for Occupy Wall Street in Tompkins Square Park the day before the 10th anniversary of 9/11. One week later I was huddled with over 500 others in Zuccotti Park that chilly night of September 17th, and a month later woke up in a tent with frozen toes and a full bladder in London's ostentatious financial district with nowhere but Starbucks to relieve myself.

It occurred to me watching Occupy evictions throughout the US via livestream and seeing the St Paul's camp get cleared and sanitised, that the connection between tent camp evictions in post earthquake Haiti and the Occupy protests is not as tenuous as it might seem. After all, Haiti is one of the countries in the world where the disparity between the tiny elite and the rest of the population most starkly represents the 1% versus the 99%.

True, it was a natural disaster that caused the Caribbean fault lines to rip apart one of the poorest and most densely populated cities in the world, but the devastation of the earthquake was very much the disastrous culmination of decades of reckless man-made economic policies. This has included the familiar cocktail of structural adjustment, debt peonage, liberalising of trade protections and tariffs, slashing agricultural subsidies, and flooding the country with heavily subsidised American produce, not to mention deliberate political meddling and destabilisation. This forced Haitian peasants to abandon rural agriculture in exchange for subsistence wage sweatshop jobs in assembly plants owned by the country's tiny elite. The mass exodus from the countryside to the over-crowded urban shanties of Port-au-Prince meant that living in precariously built and insalubrious dwellings became the rule for the majority of Haitians in the capital, while adherence to seismically resistant building codes was very much the exception. Even before the earthquake two years ago made 1.5 million people homeless, Haitian homes in the capital's slums were not a huge step up from the frayed tarpaulin under which half a million people still take shelter to this day.

This isn't just true of Haiti. In fact for the first time in history the proportion of us living in cities is outnumbering the world's rural population, and as Mike Davis puts it in his book Planet of Slums, this "rapid urban growth in the context of structural adjustment, currency devaluation and state retrenchment has been an inevitable recipe for the mass production of slums." At precisely the same time as rural populations migrate en masse to urban centers, governments are slashing public spending and social services, straining city infrastructure and housing for the jobless and working poor.

'So far we have tolerated their presence. We have served them with conditions. They have not complied. However, they've been very cooperative in terms of the work that we need to do in that area.'

Asked if there are any plans to remove the protesters, Bonnardeaux's answer echoes Michalis' analysis: 'Not at the moment. The reasons for their protest are essentially the same reasons why we are in the country in the first place. They advocate reunification of the island which is what we advocate as well. And they ask for a departure of UN troops which we would certainly be happy to do once the island is reunified.'

Not all Cypriots share the activists' hope for reunification however. One reason for the difference seems to be generational, those with memories of 1974 being reluctant to place trust in the 'other side'. On the Turkish Cypriot side of Ledra Street, after showing your passport and receiving a visa, you meet Sevgül Doktorolu, a shopkeeper. At fifty-one, she remembers the height of the hostilities.

She asks to stop being recorded as she tearfully recounts atrocities perpetrated by EOKA-B. Parallel stories of violence and sorrow are remembered and retold by Greek Cypriots in the south. Throughout the island, large sections of both communities have been affected too deeply by these events to ever permit themselves to consider the possibility of a peaceful coexistence.

Some have the luxury of viewing the Cyprus Problem more pragmatically. For those who aren't burdened by issues of identity, security or mistrust, the

A landmark survey by UN-Habitat estimated that the world population inhabiting postmodern slums is over a billion and states that the "main single cause of increases in poverty and inequality during 1980s and 1990s was the retreat of the state."

It's high time we abandon this lie that's been peddled which says that democracy and neoliberal capitalism can co-exist symbiotically. The latter is fundamentally antagonistic and parasitic to the former and Haiti is a kind of avant-garde testament to that: decades of neoliberal "structural adjustment" and neo-imperial intervention have bankrupted the government by atrophying state institutions and using their failure as proof of the need for fire sales to the private sector. Governance has been outsourced to the United Nations and security to its multilateral peacekeepers in order to contain "populist and anti-market economic political forces," as Wiki-leaked diplomatic cables reveal.

After overthrowing their dictator Haitians foiled the U.S. "democracy promotion" plan by voting overwhelmingly for a parish priest who promised to resist the economic agenda prescribed by Washington and the IMF. After being ousted from office for the second time in a US-backed coup d'état, Naomi Klein asked Jean-Bertrand Aristide what was behind his falling out with Washington and he offered her three explanations: 'privatisation, privatisation and privatisation.'

Though the Occupy movement's tents were inspired by Tahrir Square more than the growing world population of those who are internally displaced, the encampments did become a political meme whose colourful shabbiness, in the midst of financial districts, symbolises a global demand for economic justice. They are a visible reminder of what the bursting of the sub-prime mortgage bubble looks like for families across the US and elsewhere. In many occupations, the tent camps have become the natural dwellings of the first world urban homeless, and they've taught a generation of protesters what it's like to be homeless, frozen, sleeping in a park and criminalized for being poor or part of a permanent protest.

The tent camp eviction, be it from capitalism's junkyard in Port-au-Prince, or its lower frontal lobe in Wall Street and the City of London's Square Mile, is what the end of the race to the bottom looks like: 21st century disaster-catalysed primitive accumulation.

Yes, as the British government sets its economic policy on the autotop of neoliberalism's holy trinity (privatisation, deregulation and cuts to social services), it might be worth looking to Haiti, a country where this was carried out to such a perfection that, as veteran political activist Patrick Elie points out, 'Haiti is the most privatised country in the world' and as such we ought to listen to it as "it is the canary in the world's mine."

Isabeau Doucet is a freelance journalist who tweets as @dizzyshambles

question can be one of pure economics. In a café next to Sevgül's shop, Raj works as a waiter. Born in Saudi Arabia to Pakistani parents and raised in Dubai, he has just graduated with a degree in Hospitality Management.

'The hotel industry here is badly affected because we have no international access,' he says, referring to a consequence of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus not being recognised by any country other than Turkey. 'Also if you look at the restaurants, on the north side there is no authority which can open any franchise business.'

What hopes does he have for reunification? 'The people from the south come here and those from the north go to the south side. They're peaceful, they sit together, they talk, they have fun. So it's just political issues which are keeping this border alive.'

The activists in the Occupy camp are not the only ones striving for reunification. In the Ottoman courtyard of the Büyük Han cultural centre, eight Turkish and Greek Cypriots are having coffee together. They meet up on the north side every Saturday in an informal effort to foster inter-communal relations. 'I have friends from the Greek side who are very active in getting in contact with Cypriots from the Turkish side,' says Yiannis Michaelides, 68. 'They try to find people in the same profession on the other side to do things together.'

Dusk descends upon the divided capital and you're back on the south side. Further along the Green Line, east of Ledra Street, down disorientating backstreets

whose walls, jaundiced by street lamps, know how to pull off a good, mysterious shadow. Phanos, 20, sits in a quiet bar. Like all men his age, he's doing his national military service, although he's off duty now.

When he gets the time, he attends the Occupy camp. 'The whole movement's [purpose] is to draw awareness to the fact that the problem is not Turkish Cypriots [against] Greek Cypriots.' His words are considered but spoken with a confidence that belies his youth. 'It's a joint community. We are one. Cyprus is Cyprus. The [Occupy] cause is really genuine. It's not politically driven. It's just a cry to break the walls apart.'

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WASI DANIZU

AFRICA'S HIDDEN HUNGER

FOLLOWING A NEW REPORT FROM SAVE THE CHILDREN, STEFAN SIMANOWITZ ASSESSES THE STATE OF MALNUTRITON ACROSS AFRICA

"When you arrive in a village, everything may seem normal at first but then you start to notice things", explains Kenyan, Assumpta Ndumi. "It is lunchtime but there is no food on the fire. There are children in the village but no laughter or play. These are some signs of chronic malnutrition." For Assumpta, Save the Children's nutrition adviser for East Africa, chronic malnutrition is a problem every bit as serious as acute malnutrition, even if it seldom captures the headlines. "In Kenya last year, the acute malnutrition that followed the drought was widely reported but even before the rains failed there was a hidden hunger and children were dying because of it" she explains.

Through her work, Assumpta has witnessed firsthand the situation faced by children in Ethiopia, South Sudan, Darfur, and Kenya. "Many families eat just one meal a day, but it is often the quality rather than the quantity of the food that they eat that leaves them dangerously weak" she says, pointing to reliance on staples such as maize and cassava which have a low nutritional value, as well as the lack of fresh fruit and vegetables.

But she has also seen how simple, low-cost interventions can have a significant positive impact, transforming lives and preventing unnecessary deaths. According to 'A Life Free From Hunger', a new report by Save the Children, nearly two in five children in Africa – 60 million in total – are chronically malnourished. The report argues that malnutrition is the underlying cause of one third of the children's deaths worldwide although it may not appear on their death certificates. Secondary illnesses such as diarrhoea, pneumonia and malaria rather than chronic hunger are usually put down as the cause of death.

As well as causing fatalities, chronic malnutrition is having a devastating impact on children's development. Without the necessary protein, vitamins and minerals, children's bodies and brains do not develop properly. In Niger, for example, recent World Health Organisation research shows the average two-and-a-half-year-old will be more than eight centimetres shorter than a well-nourished child, and a 2011 UNICEF study found that one in three children in Zimbabwe suffers from chronic malnutrition. Malnourished children often suffer from diminished IQs, and if they survive to adulthood are more likely to suffer from heart disease, diabetes and renal damage, as well as being far less productive members of society.

Despite a significant global reduction in child deaths, progress on chronic malnutrition has been painfully slow. While the past twenty years has seen the number of deaths from tuberculosis fall 40% globally and deaths from malaria fall by over 30% in Africa, levels of stunting across the continent have dropped by just 1% over the same period. There are now growing fears that a combination of trends including rising food prices, climate change, and demographic shifts could reverse even this modest gain.

In a recent survey, also by Save the Children, half of families polled in Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, India and Bangladesh said they were forced to cut back on food last year. The poll also found that one in six parents asked their children to skip school in order to work to help pay for their family's food. In Nigeria, a quarter of all parents surveyed said their children sometimes or often go without food for an entire day, and 94% pointed to rising food

prices as their most pressing concern.

According to Assumpta, tackling chronic malnutrition is neither difficult nor expensive. "I have seen how encouraging breastfeeding and fortifying basic foods with essential minerals or vitamins can have an immediate and dramatic impact on children's health" she says. Back in 2008, The Lancet medical journal indentified an affordable package of thirteen direct interventions – including vitamin A and zinc supplements, iodised salt, and the promotion of healthy behaviour such as breastfeeding – that were proven to have an impact on the nutrition and health of children and mothers. It is estimated that it would cost little more than \$10 billion per year to implement this package and help protect 90% of the world's most vulnerable children from hunger.

According to a 2011 FAO report three quarters of Africa's malnourished children live on small farms and 43% of agricultural work is carried out by women. Key to improving nutrition is therefore improving agriculture among small holders, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers, particularly women, by ensuring increased access to vital inputs such as land, tools, fertilisers and seeds, credit, agricultural services, markets and water. But agriculture alone will not be enough where infant and young child feeding practices are poor, and access to safe drinking water and sanitation are limited. The impact of agriculture on nutrition needs to be measured as an indicator of success rather than focussing purely on agricultural production and growth, which has been shown to not necessarily translate into reductions in malnutrition. Integrating strategies on health, nutrition and agriculture have been shown to produce positive effects. In Mozambique, for example, where the Food Security and Nutrition Strategy is overseen by the Ministry of Agriculture, a significant decline in malnutrition has been achieved.

But despite some limited successes, nutrition-focused agricultural interventions are not able to address the underlying causes of malnutrition, such as chronic poverty and maternal health. In Rwanda, despite efforts to promote balanced diets and the introduction of specific structural anti-poverty interventions including the provision of school milk and kitchen garden projects, rates of malnutrition remain stubbornly high. "The roots of malnutrition are anchored in poverty and behaviour" explained Rwandan health minister Agnes Binawahlo this week. "Only sustainable development based on education and economic growth can beat it."



STEFAN SIMANOWITZ



WAST DANTJU

LIFE UNDER OCCUPATION

STEVE HYND

Speaking recently on BBC 5 Live, Occupied Times editor Michael Richmond was debating the Occupy movement when one of his opponents shrilly suggested, "no one suffers in this country, we have a welfare state". I felt like I had just run into a brick wall. This sort of view could only come from someone who has never spent time with the homeless, the destitute or the desperate. The comment oozed a certain complacency that is replicated across middle England. I passionately believe that the challenge for us is to help people understand issues that are alien to their existence. Issues that they have not, and possibly never will, personally experience. This is no easy task.

I am currently pondering the same conundrum regarding a very different type of occupation. I am living in Jayyus, a small farming village in the West Bank which has been living under occupation for over 45 years. Every aspect of life here is controlled, restricted and made unreliable. Whether we are talking about access to water, employment or education, it can all be taken away at a snap of the fingers.

I passionately believe that a contributing factor enabling this occupation to continue is European and Israeli citizens' inability to imagine what life is really like for Palestinians here. Part of the reason I am here is to try and tell the stories of those living under occupation to those who can affect change - you!

We face a similar challenge within the Occupy movement. Most people cannot feel what it is like to be on the negative end of our unfair, unequal and deeply discriminatory economic and social system. When we try to reach out to suburbia and tell them the system is falling apart around their ears, they look through their double glazed windows and wonder what on earth we are talking about. This means we have no choice; it is time to get personal.

It is in light of this that I want to share a recent experience with you, in the hope that I can illustrate the devastating effect that the occupation here in the West Bank is having on ordinary people's lives throughout the occupied territories.

I hope to get you to open up your European double glazed windows and to see the occupation for what it is.

I met with Haney Ameer just a few days ago. Mr. Ameer lives on the outskirts of Mas-ha just outside Qalqilya in the West Bank. Back in 2003, his house was situated on the path of the proposed separation barrier, 80% of which is built on Palestinian land. When he refused to leave his house, the Israeli government decided to build the barrier around him. His house is now surrounded on all four sides by walls, fences and the separation barrier. He lives in what looks like a high security prison.

On one side of his house is the eight metre high concrete separation barrier which scars the landscape for as far as the eye can see. On the other side of his house there is an illegal Israeli settlement which is cut off from him by a barbed wire fence. Flanking each end of his property are locked security gates leading to the military road that track the separation barrier. He is hemmed into his small plot of land.

Between 2003 and 2006 he lived here but did not own the keys to access his own property. For three years he relied on the IDF to let him through the security gate each day. It was not uncommon in those days for friends to throw food parcels over the wall so he could feed his wife and children.

I sat outside his broken and bruised property in the fading evening sun just a few days ago. He explained to me that he cannot fix any of the broken windows, crumbling walls or holes in the roof as he cannot get a permit from the Israelis to 'build' on his own land.

The Israelis offered him a lot of money and a chance to rebuild a bigger and better house on more land wherever he wanted in return for his land. He refused. He refused because of a connection to the family home and due to a slightly harsher reality: The Palestinians who lived nearby warned him that if he sold out to the Israelis he would no longer be considered a 'Palestinian', he would be isolated. An ironic threat given his circumstances.

When the meeting comes to a close, Haney Ameer walks us back to the rusted metal gate in the wall, the one small gate that provides access to his property to which he now has a key. Unlocking the padlock he looks up at the separation barrier and then at the floor. Deep in thought, his body forgets what he is doing but his hands are still unlocking the door that they have unlocked everyday for the last six years.

Mr Ameer lives in the most unimaginable conditions. And this is precisely the point: They are unimaginable. The Occupy movement now faces the challenge to expose the unimaginable as real. We have to make those who sit in their double glazed homes understand that there are people across the UK who are suffering unimaginably because of the gross inequalities in our society. Just as most of you dear readers will struggle to give two hoots about Haney, so most of suburbia will struggle to give two hoots about you. This is our challenge - we have to make people care. The challenge is not related to the degree to which people are suffering, but to our ability to enable people to empathise with those who are experiencing the suffering.

OCCUPY YOUR MIND

KESTER BREWIN

A short walk away from St Paul's Cathedral, from the stained glass bank buildings and the streets where London's Occupy

movement made its mark, there's another temple. Just across the river that divides our city stands the Tate Modern, a veritable place of worship, where the faithful gather to revere sacred objects and hear from the high priests of culture what their tastes should, and should not, be. In one of the vast galleries thousands gather, wander and reflect on huge installations - all thanks to the generous provision of Unilever, the chemical giant which sponsors the Turbine Hall series. Other exhibitions take regular sponsorship - and heavy branding - from UBS. Barclays has dipped its toe in, and, for £10,000 per year, you could also become a 'Platinum Patron' - earning the right to dine with Tate directors, and invitations to exclusive trips abroad to Sao Paulo, LA or Dubai.

The Tate may be on the South Bank of the Thames - since time immemorial the more creative and edgy cousin of the old city on the far shore - but it doesn't mean that the money from the other side hasn't seeped through, and, opening this April, the man who has defined the capitalist approach to art more than any other gets his first mid-life retrospective.

It didn't begin this way for Damien Hirst. The son of an absent mechanic father and Citizens' Advice Bureau working mother, he shoplifted, failed miserably at school and was graded 'E' in A-Level art. Moving to London he laboured on building sites, eventually getting in to Goldsmith's art college where, by curating in disused industrial spaces a series of exhibitions of his and his friends' work, he gained the

attention of the money men who would patronise and commodify his art. The new Tate show will, of course, show two of Hirst's most notorious works: The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living (1991) - his shark-in-formaldehyde - and For The Love of God - a human skull cast in platinum and encrusted with £15,000,000 worth of diamonds.

Sharks. Death. Love. God. Money. If Hirst is anything, he is the brash Goldman Sachs of the art world. He has a vast personal fortune of over £200m, accumulated through an alchemy that would leave even the most brash bankers in awe: stock medicine cabinets, spots of paint, flies, butterflies and severed cows heads transformed into pieces that sell for millions.

This transubstantiation is, of course, the mystery that all art holds, and highlights the paradox which every artist must wrestle with: what they create has very little monetary value, and yet can occasionally become enormously valuable. The material costs - vanity works like For The Love of God aside - are usually low, although the personal labour involved in painting and training may be costly. Moreover, no artist worth their salt would ever consider money to be at the heart of their work. No one goes into fine art as a career, as a way of making a living. Artists pursue a vision, a deeply personal exploration of the world and our perception of it. Artists do not create in order to create wealth. And yet, every artist needs to eat, and to eat they must - all of them - 'sell out'.

The American writer Lewis Hyde has examined this dilemma in his seminal work The Gift. He makes it clear: artists are only truly engaged and exhilarated by their work when it comes to them 'from elsewhere,' when they receive some inspiration, some gift for them to mould, represent and pass on. We might pay to enter an exhibition to see works of art, but the

price of entry is irrelevant: we go there not for some commodity exchange, but to open ourselves to the possibility of receiving some greater gift that is far beyond the material experience.

Yet artists cannot feed or find shelter through gift alone. And so they are required, if they are to remain able to be open to the time and space required for more gifts to be given them, to sell the works they have made. Their gifts must, for a time, become commodities, objects in a market economy, available to the highest bidder.

The question that we might ask then, as this major retrospective of Hirst's work opens, is where the gift may still remain in his art. Most of what is on show is not his own labour. He sub-contracted out the actual making of many of his works - the spot paintings, the spin paintings, the medicine cabinets - to a team of employees. These people worked for a fixed wage to create production line pieces from stock components that now sell for vast sums. Sums which they, of course, despite their labour, were excluded from sharing. Hirst held his own sale of huge numbers of these works in 2007, cannily liquidating his 'gifts' into hard cash millions just before the current economic crisis hit. He has also been accused of continuing his early shop-lifting: stealing many of his ideas from other artists or craftspeople. With his clout he can get away with it, and copyright the results. Hirst thus comes to us as the perfect artist for our times: a capitalist who exploits labour for vast gain, and pulls up the drawbridge just as the shit begins to fly.

Germaine Greer is clear: 'Damien Hirst is a brand, because the art form of the 21st century is marketing. To develop so strong a brand on so conspicuously threadbare a rationale is hugely creative - revolutionary even.' She is applying a clever double twist:

Hirst isn't an artist, but a manufacturer of objects who has developed a careful brand. And yet our delight at his doing this - for the forthcoming exhibition is expected to be vastly popular - reflects on us as branded consumers, thus opening up the possibility of returning Hirst to the place of an artist performing social critique.

Personally, I think Hirst's artistic vision has become utterly corrupted, and though he cannot necessarily be blamed for his own popularity. That is a question we need to ask ourselves. So perhaps this is the best we can do if we go to the exhibition: use the pieces not to be amazed at who he is as a visual artist, but to reflect more carefully on who we are as observers - and consumers - of that art.

Indeed, I believe that acts of careful self-reflection must be at the heart of the journey of all involved in the Occupy movement now that 'the beginning has ended'. The physical occupation of certain physical places has come to a close for a while, but this is not necessarily a bad thing (see my previous piece on Occupation as TAZ) because it allows us to think about the personal foundations on which we are building once again, away from the day-to-day running of a particular site.

In his book on the banking crisis First as Tragedy, Then as Farce, Slavoj Zizek encourages this move beyond some of the more obvious targets of capitalist protest, and on to deeper levels of action:

'The enclosure of the commons is a process of proletarianisation of those who are excluded from their own substance... The present conjuncture compels us to radicalise it on an existential level well beyond Marx's imagination. We need a more radical notion of the proletarian subject.' [1]

Bankers have been the focus of ire for some time now, but their values and morals are lived out in so many others who exist in many other

fields. What Zizek is suggesting is that we need to think beyond bankers, beyond front-line economics, right to the heart of who we are as individual subjects. The church used to be the place where this process of self-analysis occurred; the grand aisles of our modern galleries have now taken that role for many.

In our reaction to art we can find a reflection of our true values, and for this reason I hope people go to see Hirst's show - for free if they can - and become angered and fired up for action by the corrupt moral and economic vision he presents. Yet I also hope that we allow these works to ask tough questions of ourselves too: are we people of the 'gift'? How enraptured are we to brands? To what do we ascribe beauty and meaning? Michael Franti once said that 'the hardest part in any revolution is the personal revolution,' and it is in our responses to what we find at the Tate, as much as The Royal Exchange, that we will find that battle beginning to be won.

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BEN CAVANNA

QUAKERS’ EPISTLE

On March 5th, the OLSX Quaker Meeting for Worship sent a letter to Friends, supporters and occupiers. It brought a tear to the eye of one occupier, who suggested that the Quakers are like wise elders to the stropky teenagers of Occupy; they don’t attempt to preach or instruct their younger comrades, even though they have long experience with consensus decision-making and horizontal organisation, because they understand that Occupy needs to find its own way. Without judgement, the Quakers have been sitting quietly beside us throughout the occupation of St Paul’s Churchyard and have pledged to continue their support. Given their history as radical activists for peace and justice, it’s likely that some Quakers will do more than sit quietly in the future.

“For the past nineteen weeks Quakers have met on Sunday at 3pm on the steps of St Paul’s Cathedral by the Occupy London camp for a Meeting for Worship. Friends of all ages from London have been welcomed as equals, as well as friends visiting from across the country and the globe. We have discovered a remarkable stillness and depth of worship amidst the clanging of the bells and the din of the city.

For a long time many of us have felt unease about existing financial systems and the consequences of the capitalist system we live in. The Occupy movement resonates with our Quaker testimonies, and above all shouts that there is a problem.

The quick and supportive response by so many in our Yearly Meeting, from the Recording Clerk to local Friends, has been amazing. We rejoice in the way our sometimes lengthy Quaker process managed to produce a Quaker statement about Occupy in a timely fashion. Joining with other denominations and faiths has been inspiring, and the “Sermon on the Steps” was a powerful example of this.

Members of the public who see us in worship have joined with us, and also we have been photographed, videoed and interviewed many times. We see similarities between the Occupy movement and early Friends, in that both speak their truth to power, and both are not afraid to engage in positive

conflict, something Quakers today find more challenging. We were delighted to learn that the Quaker involvement in the Occupy movement has resulted in an increased number of enquirers.

We observe that Occupy has struggled to deal with many of the problems caused by the social and economic system which they seek to change; alcohol and drug abuse, male domination of meetings, homelessness, those suffering from mental illnesses and other broken people living in a broken world. We uphold their efforts to deal with these problems in good faith and with compassion. Their use of consensus decision making is close to our Quaker methods, and has empowered many in the community. Occupy is an important forum, and we are grateful for its existence, with all its flaws and imperfections.

During the eviction of the St.Paul’s site occupiers conducted themselves in a dignified and peaceful way, testimony to the progressive nature of the movement. In contrast, we believe the authorities of St.Paul’s Cathedral were absent and complicit in the police operation to clear the camp, including the steps to their building, which were not covered by the eviction order. We are saddened by their choice to stand closer to the City of London authorities, those who in Jesus’ time were the moneychangers, and the wealthy 1%. We believe Jesus would have chosen differently.

Now that Occupy has been evicted from outside the stock exchange and St Paul’s, we will continue to meet on the steps of St Paul’s at 1.00pm for Meeting for Worship every Saturday, to be followed by Meeting for Worship for Business at 1.30pm prior to the Occupy General Assembly. We hope in this way to begin to broaden our witness and will continue to seek new ways to speak our truth to power.

As Quakers we have found it important to gather like this on the front lines of change for a more just and equitable world. Friends take so much action as individuals, but our worship can and should be brought out of our meeting houses and into the world where it is relevant. As our fellow seekers at Occupy would say: Occupy the Light! And let the light occupy you.”

ANARCHY INSIDE

THE IRREVERENT
REVEREND NEMU

“In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” – (Jdg 21:25)

The School of Ideas returns to dust, and our tents to ashes or landfill, but the seeds of resistance have been planted in the hearts of the tent-dwellers, who ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Eviction. What will emerge from those seeds, what runners and creepers, climbers and stingers are sending out shoots beyond the square mile, and what flowers will bloom in the coming seasons?

All sorts of philosophies came together on the cathedral steps, including the unabashedly messianic, and each Messiah bore his burden bravely. One hung his head and explained in grave tones how the blocking of his proposal at the GA left him no choice but to unleash a tidal wave against the eastern seaboard of the US.

Then there were the more deeply deluded, revolutionary communists and sellers of retro-sounding journals. Indeed comrades, the world has never seen a genuine communist state, but neither has it seen a genuine Father Christmas, and I still don’t want your dirty red fingers poking around in my stockings.

“From each according to his means, to each according to his needs” is the decent way to behave amongst associates, but bring-a-bottle cannot be imposed by jails and standing armies, not in my book anyway, and my book is very old. I also argued with figures closer to my own persuasions. Baying Christians were never in short supply, insisting this or that. Go in peace, my brother, forthwith, Godspeed, and quick as you can. Another man of God, who I had not seen during the entire occupation, came down to pray earnestly, on his knees with Bible in hand, to be peeled off the steps by the police.

I was accused of being an anarchist by a Christian, and a Christian by an anarchist. The latter let fly a stream of venom heated by the word “Reverend” on the spine of a book. I denied believing in flying zombies and any missionary intentions, but he was enraged into a kind of religious ecstasy. In an effort to find some common ground, I asked what he was into. After a long pause to think (if thinking it may be called), he leant in and growled “drink” and two other pastimes, one involving the constabulary, both too indecent to print.

Anarchy, being the free association of autonomous individuals, is nothing without decency. Associations forged in craving and hatred are not free, and if you define yourself by what you hate, you are not autonomous of it but dependent upon it.

The first western philosopher to argue that we would be better off without a government was William Godwin, and his rejection of authority stretched beyond politics to the heavens. He described his...

“...utmost repugnance of understanding for the idea of an intelligent Creator and Governor of the universe, which strikes my mind



WEST DANIJU

as the most irrational and ridiculous anthropomorphism. My theism, if such I may be permitted to call it, consists in a reverent and soothing contemplation of all that is beautiful, grand, or mysterious in the system of the universe.”

This echoes the sentiments of some sects two thousand years ago, before the Roman church was established. Some Gnostics considered the Lord of the Old Testament as jealous, ignorant, or downright evil. Law and the law-giver are certainly complex:

“Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live; And I polluted them in their own gifts, in that they caused to pass through the fire all that openeth the womb, that I might make them desolate, to the end that they might know that I am the Lord.” (Eze 20:25)

Gnostics (‘those who know’) rejected bishops, or “dry canals” as they were called, coming together under the direction of something described as invisible but instantly recognisable. The resurrection in spirit was through intuitions, dreams and visions. Resurrection in the flesh (the flying-zombie) is a different doctrine.

It is almost impossible to control a group of enthusiasts who take instructions directly from characters in their dreams or their wild and wicked imaginations. Gnostic sentiments, like “Do not lay down any

guerrilla gardening, protesting naked in the streets, and sometimes torching buildings. None but the quietest survived very long. Go in disguise to do your actions, subvert and slip away, but “give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you”.

The fact that a genuine anarchist state is not forthcoming is not a lament but a point of pride. As Gustav Landauer put it:

“The state is not something which can be destroyed by a revolution, but it is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour; we destroy it by contracting different relationships, by behaving differently.”

Law ‘n’ order need not be joined at the contraction. Order is intrinsic to nature, arising spontaneously in the waves of the sea, in the rhythms of nature. Fibonacci numbers map out snail shells and galaxies, harmonic fractions hum between planets and octaves, chaos maths governs coastlines and crystals, birdsong and city size, rivers, roots, and the rhythms of the heart. None of this requires coercion.

Farmers plant in spring and harvest in autumn, heedless of the law. When the Kremlin enforced a common agricultural policy, millions of the proletariat had to choose between starving to death or cannibalism. There is no evidence



BEN CAVANNA

rules beyond what I appointed you, and do not give a law like the lawgiver lest you be constrained by it” were not conducive to the ambitions of empire. Like anarchists of the French, Mexican, Russian, and nearly every revolution in history, they were persecuted as the cement dried on the new order. Gnostic sects were wiped out, Gnostic gospels struck from the canon and burned, only to be rediscovered in a cave in the decade of the space rocket, the computer, the mobile phone, the final solution, the nuclear chain reaction, and LSD.

Pious and celibate fathers pressed dogmas like resurrection “in the flesh”, on pain of eternal pain. Rules which had fallen away were replaced, women who had gained various freedoms were put back in their place, as befits “the devil’s gateway”. The Holy Spirit was bound and gagged, and the faithful fell in line behind their pastors as flocks of sheep, and occasionally battering rams.

Later sects with a Gnostic approach, such as Ranters, Quakers, Levellers, Diggers and Anabaptists, embodied the full spectrum of anarchist direct action, refusing to join armies or use titles, ignoring property rights,

that jail reduces crime, that prohibition reduces drug abuse. As Godwin put it, “laws which are made to restrain our vices, irritate and multiply them”. Law fractures order. When imposed, it is an imposition, laid down by an impostor. Godwin’s daughter, the author of Frankenstein, put the conundrum succinctly in the mouth of the man-made monster who damaged whatever he touched: “You are my creator, but I am your master. Obey!”

According to the father of anarchism, the ideal man has “a certain confidence in the unseen hand that sustains the whole. He is glad that there is something greater than himself, in the presence of which he feels his soul penetrated with a sacred awe”. That hand organises without compulsion, creates what can sustain itself, and lets crumble that which is obsolete. It governs gently and disciplines locally, but to feel it you need to pay attention. As the father of anarchism wrote, in one of his most gnostic moments “truth can scarcely be acquired in crowded halls and amidst noisy debates... Truth dwells in contemplation.” www.nemusend.co.uk

IS INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY STILL WORTH CELEBRATING?

Women’s rights have come a long way since the first International Women’s Day in 1900. Talks of gender equality have come to dominate the agenda of politicians of all credos leaving many wondering if there is still a need for a feminist struggle – especially within Western democratic societies. On the 101st anniversary of International Women’s Day Flaminia Giambalvo spoke to Houzan Mohamoud – the Kurdish women’s rights and anti-war activist and co-founder of the Organisation of Women’s Freedom in Iraq – regarding the relevance of this event in Britain and the Middle East.



BRIAN LELI

Flaminia Giambalvo: Do you believe Western governments and media have created stereotypes of Middle Eastern women? If so what is the purpose of such misrepresentations?
Houzan Mohamoud: The history of colonialism and intervention in this region require such stereotypes of an entire population as inferior, uncivilised savages with all women being submissive, passive recipients of male violence. These misrepresentations help the Western imperialist powers to keep an upper hand, asserting their hegemony and supremacy culturally, economically and politically over this region.



FG: Has the idea of having to liberate these women contributed to Western intervention in the region? If so, how so?

HM: In the case of Afghanistan women were repeatedly used as media propaganda for the war and occupation of Afghanistan. However helping women, saving them from violence or liberating them from inferior positions is never the agenda of these war mongers. One should ask do women need imperialists and foreign intervention to be liberated and have equality with men? If so what is the task of women themselves in these countries who are fighting for women’s rights? Can women’s rights and equality be achieved through war mongering, invasion and occupations? I really doubt it very much and I think it is very naïve for anyone to think so.

FG: The UK and U.S. governments have described the current Iraqi government as a more democratic one and the new constitution as an important stepping stone towards a freer Iraq. Over the past 10 years how has policy towards women – and their social and economic status – changed in Iraq?

HM: U.S. and UK have no choice but to say that this current Iraqi government is “democratic” because it’s their puppet and it’s their own creature. The very first steps of this so-called democracy were Islamic Sharia law and a Shiite-Sunni divide in Iraqi society. Having an ethno-sectarian, tribalist and religious government in Iraq will only double the suffering of women, causing them to be treated as second class citizens in society. Most policies so far have been anti-women; take the recent directive of the so called women’s minister whereby she wanted to impose “modest” clothing on women employees as another step of Islamisation of Iraq.

FG: Do you believe there are some commonalities between the issues brought forward by the Occupy movement and those facing women’s liberationist organisations around the world?

HM: I think the whole world including men, women, workers, children, unemployed, youth and the entire population have been hit hard by the neo-liberal policies of privatisation and creation of wealth beyond imagination for a small elite i.e. one per cent of the population. Women of course suffer double in these economic crises and they would be first to lose their jobs, and status.

FG: IWD is a global celebration of female strength and achievement. What’s the importance of this event globally? Is it still relevant in the so called “Western democracies”?

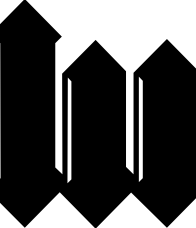
HM: IWD is more than ever relevant for women everywhere on this planet. In none of the so-called Western democracies have women achieved their full rights, freedoms and equalities with men in many spheres. The fight for full equality and an end to violence, exploitation and suppression of women still has a long way to go.



WASI DANIJU

BEYOND WORK

NINA
POWER



What does ‘work’ mean today? Anyone looking for work, anyone in low-paid or non-permanent work, or being pressured into

one of the five kinds of workfare that Boycott Workfare identify (Mandatory Work Activity, The Work Programme, Community Action Programme, Sector-based Work Academies and Work Experience) will have firsthand experience of the relentless anxiety generated by an uncertain relation to employment. Ministers recite endless variations of the Thatcherite ‘on yer bike’ attitude, while conveniently overlooking the fact that in parts of the country (Hull and Stoke-on-Trent, for example) there are 70-80 people chasing every job. If you can’t find employment, the message goes, the fault lies with you: if you’re depressed, jobcentres will bypass doctors to refer you for Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). If you don’t look, speak or act the part of a perky jobseeker, there are TV shows to boss you around and reinforce class stereotypes (like The Fairy Jobmother).

Work, despite being an omnipresent imperative, is strangely obscure. As Kathi Weeks, author of 2011’s The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries puts it, “the privatisation of work” means that we often “experience and imagine the employment relation ... not as a social institution but as a unique relationship.” Work, whether we’re in it or out of it, is ubiquitous yet oddly personal. The significance of recent successful campaigns against workfare, where pressure from campaigners led to several companies pulling out of the scheme and others suspending their involvement, is a victory in many ways (though there is much still to be done of course): the battle against workfare is a battle against the more general brutal and speedy devaluing of human life and labour. If employment is increasingly characterised by low pay, insecurity, lack of pensions, long hours, dull content, invasive surveillance, and unemployment (or as the rebranding of time would have it, “jobseeking”) is characterised by vanishing

benefits, endless jobcentre meetings, unpaid placements, anxiety, and the threat of government-sanctioned psychological ‘help’, there is little that separates one situation from the other. Campaigns against workfare, low wages and precariousness, and for security, pensions and a living wage, reveal the structural dimension of labour. This must be our starting point, if we are ever to think beyond work under capitalism.

On one level, everybody knows that the vast majority of people have to work in order to pay rent and eat; those able to live off inherited or self-made wealth and/or the money they make from renting property are a tiny minority. Yet the idea that one must work to “earn a living” is taken as part of the natural order rather than as a social convention”, as Weeks put it. ‘Work’ in practice is an ideological mess: part moral-imperative, part religious-overhang, part psychological ‘responsibility’. Its brutal economic necessity for the majority of people is something all-too-rarely mentioned.

But it is relatively easy to imagine a situation ever-so-slightly tweaked that would be quite different: full employment, pushed by several governments since World War II is now a distant memory (current unemployment in the UK stands at around 3 million); or a guaranteed basic income where people can work more if they want to; or even a world where what we understand by ‘work’ now has completely vanished. Today we find ourselves compelled to work longer for ever less, and mass unemployment is a structural feature. Competition for jobs allows ministers, employers and newspapers to draw ever-deeper divisions between people. What we need now more than ever is championed by many groups protesting against workfare and everything the scheme reveals about the de-valuing of human labour – a combination of resistance against being reduced to nothing, with a rethink of the alternatives to work as such. We need better conditions now, but completely different conditions in the future, a world where work is no longer a form of economic exploitation, the site of depression and false competition, but something one does because one wants to, not because one must.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE MONEY SUPPLY...

TWO EXPERTS EXPLORE THE MURKY WORLD OF MONEY CREATION

REVOLUTION OR EVOLUTION?

CLIVE MENZIES

CLIVE MENZIES, WHO'S BEEN INVOLVED IN THE INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT INDUSTRY FOR OVER 30 YEARS, ARGUES THAT MONETARY REFORM IS INEVITABLE IF WE WANT TO SURVIVE.

The Corporation of London may be quaffing champagne having evicted OccupyLSX, but they, and the rest of the 1%, need to recognise the growing threat of revolution rolling across the globe.

Jared Diamond's 'Collapse' shows past civilisations that collapsed were ruled by rarified elites which adopted selfish, short term policies for their own ends. Meanwhile their people suffered hardship, famine, and repression. Sound familiar?

We all need to understand the fundamental root cause of economic turmoil and other global problems – a key part of which is the global banking and monetary system. Its increasing dysfunction is provoking growing civil unrest, but a concerted effort to radically reform money and banking could avoid revolution and consequent bloodshed. **THE MECHANICS OF THE GLOBAL BANKING AND MONETARY SYSTEM**

Fractional reserve lending allows banks to generate exceptional returns on capital by lending many times their reserves. In addition, loans are spent and paid into the closed loop banking system as customer deposits. These deposits are reduced by the reserve fraction but are then added to the reserves against which even more money is lent. The mechanics of this process are comprehensively addressed in Murray N Rothbard's 'Mystery of Banking' and the 45 minute video, 'Money as Debt'.

Central banks are managed for the benefit of banks - which are privately owned and controlled by narrow interests. For example, the US Federal Reserve Board (Fed) is owned by banks and so government appointees to the Fed are typically bankers or their proxies. This model is replicated across the globe and, although the Bank of England was nationalised in 1946, it remains firmly under banking control and influence. That bankers have control of the money supply, and our economic system, grants banking interests influence in politics, media and public institutions.

In the corporate world, discovering 'who owns what' is difficult because ownership is obscured by nominee holdings and trusts. However, a recent study in New Scientist analysed over 40,000 transnational corporations and discovered that 40% of their economic

activity is controlled by 147 'super entities' on the basis of publicly available information. 45 of the top 50 are financial companies, many of which are banks. In his book, 'Treasure Islands', Nicholas Shaxson describes how tax havens are exploited to hide ownership and add to banks' wealth and power.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE GLOBAL, DEBT-BASED, MONETARY SYSTEM

The dire consequences of the banking and monetary system become clear as debt accelerates beyond the ability to pay. Margrit Kennedy identified major flaws back in 1995 in 'Interest and Inflation Free Money' and discovered, during the period from 1968 to 1989 while government income and wages in Germany rose 'only' 400%, the interest paid by the government rose 1360%.

Everyone pays for interest – even if they haven't borrowed any money. Kennedy analysed German data from over 20 years ago and found 50% of prices paid, on average, for goods and services went to pay off interest and compound interest. She also found that this monetary system automatically transfers wealth from those with too little money to those who have more than enough. The poorest 80% of the population paid far more in interest than they received in government services, and what they paid went to the top 10% of society - with the top 0.01% getting the lion's share.

GROWING MARKETS, GROWING DEBT

The overriding obsession of politicians and commentators in the West is a return to economic growth - however, few of them understand the consequences of such growth. GDP growth of 3% per annum is considered desirable for developed economies. This is exponential growth - at 3%, our economy would have to double every 24 years which means cutting down twice as many trees, extracting finite resources at double the rate today and throwing twice as much away. Clearly this is unsustainable.

In nature, animals and plants enjoy rapid initial growth until maturity but then growth becomes qualitative. A child grows rapidly to around the age of 20, when physical growth ceases and intellect, wisdom and experience develop thereafter. Exponential growth in nature is otherwise evident in viruses and disease such as cancer. Our debt-based monetary and banking system is the cancer at the heart of our civilisation - manifesting itself in greed, inequality, conflict, suppression of individual freedom, fear and poverty. The current debt spiral is out

CONTAGION? ARMAGEDDON? WHY?

Asks Dr Michael Reiss of fullreservebanking.com and author of 'What Went Wrong With Economics'. Why are politicians so frightened to let any major banks go under? Is there a difference between a bank failure and the failure of any other kind of business? The answer is yes, and the reason the situation is so precarious is down to our crazy and unstable monetary system.

Big companies go bust every now and then, and in the process some of their smaller suppliers may go bust too. But this cascade of bankruptcies is usually pretty limited. You never hear of politicians desperately trying to prop-up the company on the grounds that contagion is going to trash the world economy. But with the banks, it's different.

Most people imagine that money works as a system of tokens (either paper or electronic) that get passed from person to person as trade is carried out. They imagine that the total amount of money would be constant, were it not for occasional money printing by governments. Indeed money could work this way if governments had chosen such a system - known as 'full reserve banking' - but our current monetary system works in a surprisingly different way.

Under the current system, money has a life cycle - it is continuously being created and destroyed. Money comes into existence when private banks make loans, and money disappears back out of existence when the loans are paid back (OK, I am simplifying here, but this is the gist of it). In order for the total amount of money in the economy to be held approximately constant, the rate of new money creation via loans needs to be approximately the same as the rate of money destruction through loan repayments. If there were a pause, or slowdown, in the rate of money creation, then there would naturally lead to a decline in the total money supply as existing loans were paid back.

A significant contraction in the money supply is a dismal prospect. A shrinking money supply makes the repayment of loans harder and generally creates a bad economic environment, as anyone who lived through the great depression would testify. So now we need to consider the following question: Is there any reason why banks should suddenly be prevented from making new loans?

Sadly, and frighteningly, the answer is yes. It all boils down to the rules governing how much money banks are allowed to lend - the so called 'Basel accords'. The rule-makers decreed that banks should only be allowed to lend out, at most, a fixed multiple of the current value of their capital. The ratio of loans that are made, to the value of a bank's capital is known as the 'capital adequacy ratio'. The system is all well and good so long as there are no sudden changes in the value of those assets... and herein lies the problem. Under certain circumstances, assets can lose value precipitously. One particularly awkward example is government bonds. The Basel committee decided that government bonds should be valued, for the purpose of assessing capital adequacy, as if there was zero chance of default. We shall see why this is dangerous in a moment...

Banks are deemed as bust when their capital adequacy falls below the prescribed limits. Currently, Greek government bonds are held by assorted banks as part of their capital and (according to the regulations) valued at 100% of their face value. If Greek bonds are defaulted on, then the banks that hold them

as a significant part of their capital, are instantaneously bust. Any attempt to restart the bank - perhaps under new ownership, or government ownership - will involve a choice between using taxpayer's money to make up the capital shortfall (which is becoming increasingly difficult for governments to do), or a shrinkage of the money supply by an amount far greater than the value of the bonds. For example if the capital adequacy ratio was 5%, then a default of 10 billion Euros would lead to a reduction in lending ability of the bank, in the region of 200 billion Euros (and hence a shrinking money supply). A smaller money supply makes loans generally harder to repay and increases the likelihood of further defaults, hence the contagion effect.

Government bonds are not the only form of capital tied up in the Armageddon scenario - a shrinking money supply necessarily leads to a reduction in the price of assets in general (deflation), including share prices. So a bonds' default may be the trigger, but the cascade can be carried on by falling prices of almost any asset.

The rules of our current monetary system directly lead to a multiplier effect on defaults. This is what makes defaults in the banking sector so different to the collapse of ordinary businesses. The Armageddon scenario is a cascade of loan defaults, each one leading to ever larger reductions in a bank's ability to make loans and hence each leading to further reductions in the money supply. Another way of looking at this issue is to consider the better-known phenomena of monetary expansion, where a small increase in the value of a bank's capital leads to a large increase in the amount of money a bank is allowed to lend out. All I am doing here is pointing out the corollary to this, i.e. a small amount of capital loss causes a large amount of money loss.

If we instead had a monetary system most of think we have - in which money was indeed simply tokens that got passed from person to person as trade was carried out (known as full reserve banking), then there would be no default-multiplier-effect, no contagion and no Armageddon scenario. It doesn't seem too hard a choice does it? I think it's time to move to full reserve banking.



of control and collapse of the economic system is imminent, threatening to take our civilisation with it.

As debt is money, the money supply also expands exponentially, albeit with occasional credit squeezes which precipitate recession or depression - we've got that in the pipeline, but on a much wider and deeper scale than the great depression of 1929. Expansion of the money supply beyond that required for trade, investment and consumption, is inflationary. Double the money supply and over time, irrespective of other factors, the price of goods and services will double. And of course, the hardest hit by inflation are invariably the poor.

So we face conflicting choices. Either we reduce debt, to avoid being punished by the markets and to lower interest costs, or we increase debt to bail-out weaker countries which threaten the economic stability of the rest. We could also issue more debt on top of this to stimulate growth. However as is becoming increasingly obvious the debt is already unaffordable - and will become more so as interest rates rise.

THE ROAD TO EVOLUTION

If there is no salvation within the current monetary and economic paradigm, how can societal breakdown and revolution be avoided? We clearly

need an alternative, interest free monetary system. We must abandon all our preconceptions and think from first principles. What is money? It is a convenient medium of exchange which provides many advantages over barter. Money in itself has no value. It should be a representation of the value of goods and services between parties to a transaction. Holding money should not benefit those who have a surplus unless it is spent productively in the economy. Interest free money will ensure this and avoid exploitation by banking interests.

We urgently need a national monetary authority to issue and regulate the money supply, independent of banks and democratically accountable, but not to the government of the day - too much temptation to inflate the money supply to achieve a 'feel good' factor in advance of an election. Only sufficient money would be created to service the real economy. Shortages would be rectified by addition to the money supply, surpluses removed by way of taxation.

I won't pretend the transition to interest and inflation free money would be simple or painless, but in time it would rectify many problems. And yes, I mean total abolition of interest - because interest will always allow those with more money than they need to exploit those

MICHAEL REISS

MONEY TALKS

Occupied Times: Tell us about the situation in Greece - are we seeing a corporate takeover?

Harry Shutt: In Greece, the global financial 'syndicate' (including Goldman Sachs and the IMF) is effectively dictating government policy. I'd argue this is nothing very new; it's just become more blatant in the present crisis. It's a delusion that Greece, or any other Western country, is a democracy, in that our governments have long been in the pockets of the syndicate - or big business in some other guise. This structure has no democratic legitimacy, and has demonstrated its willingness to subvert any lingering democratic tendencies - as when it moved quickly to quash the Papandreu government's attempt to put the bail-out package to a referendum in December, by replacing it with an unelected government led by an ex-Goldman Sachs technocrat.

VISIONARY ECONOMIST HARRY SHUTT, AUTHOR OF 'BEYOND THE PROFITS SYSTEM: POSSIBILITIES FOR A POST-CAPITALIST ERA', TELLS IT HOW HE SEES IT TO THE OCCUPIED TIMES.

OT: Whose interests is the EU representing here?

HS: As for the EU, its democratic credentials have long been discredited. Following the massive rejection of the proposed 'constitution' by the voters of France and the Netherlands in 2005, the European Council simply reframed it in the form of the Lisbon Treaty - a document designed by or on behalf of corporate interests - and implemented without referenda in most member states.

OT: You said once that we are living in a totalitarian state - the only difference between us and North Korea being that we can say what we like as long as we don't mind being ignored...

HS: What I mean is that we are subject to a single dominant ideology (neo-liberalism) from which no mainstream political party is allowed to deviate in any

meaningful sense; a position which is reinforced by an equally monolithic stance on the part of both the mass media and academia. 30 years ago, much greater pluralism was allowed, particularly in universities. Dissenting voices may from time to time be heard, but they are never given enough time or space to make significant impact on public consciousness. Consider the performance of more 'liberal' media such as the Guardian or the BBC during the current crisis: despite the manifest disintegration of the system, their much-hyped efforts to make a critical reappraisal of 'capitalism' invariably reach the conclusion that there is no viable alternative to the status quo. There are, however, signs the internet may be breaking down these barriers, particularly as it saps the financial viability of the mainstream corporate media.

OT: Mussolini once defined fascism as the merging of corporate interests with the state - isn't that what we've got now?

HS: It very precisely describes what we've got now. However, I personally wouldn't consider this constitutes, by itself, an adequate definition of Fascism (with due respect to Mussolini) as I think Fascism also encompasses the promotion of bigotry and sectarianism (whether ethnic or religious). However, there are signs our leaders are resorting to this too.

OT: What solutions do you think will lead to permanent and lasting change? Presumably nothing will happen until we root out corruption in politics...

HS: The point about ending (or severely curtailing) political corruption is crucial. I think the no.1 priority for Occupy in the British context should be to demand the full implementation of the latest proposals of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (November 2011) on party political funding, which goes a long way to substituting state funds (but at negligible cost to the taxpayer) for private contributions. This is not because I think the proposals are ideal (the upper limit of £10,000 on personal contributions still seems too high and would leave scope for abuse) but it would establish the principle of the primacy of state funding and thus be a huge step in the right direction.

OT: What other reforms would you like to see?

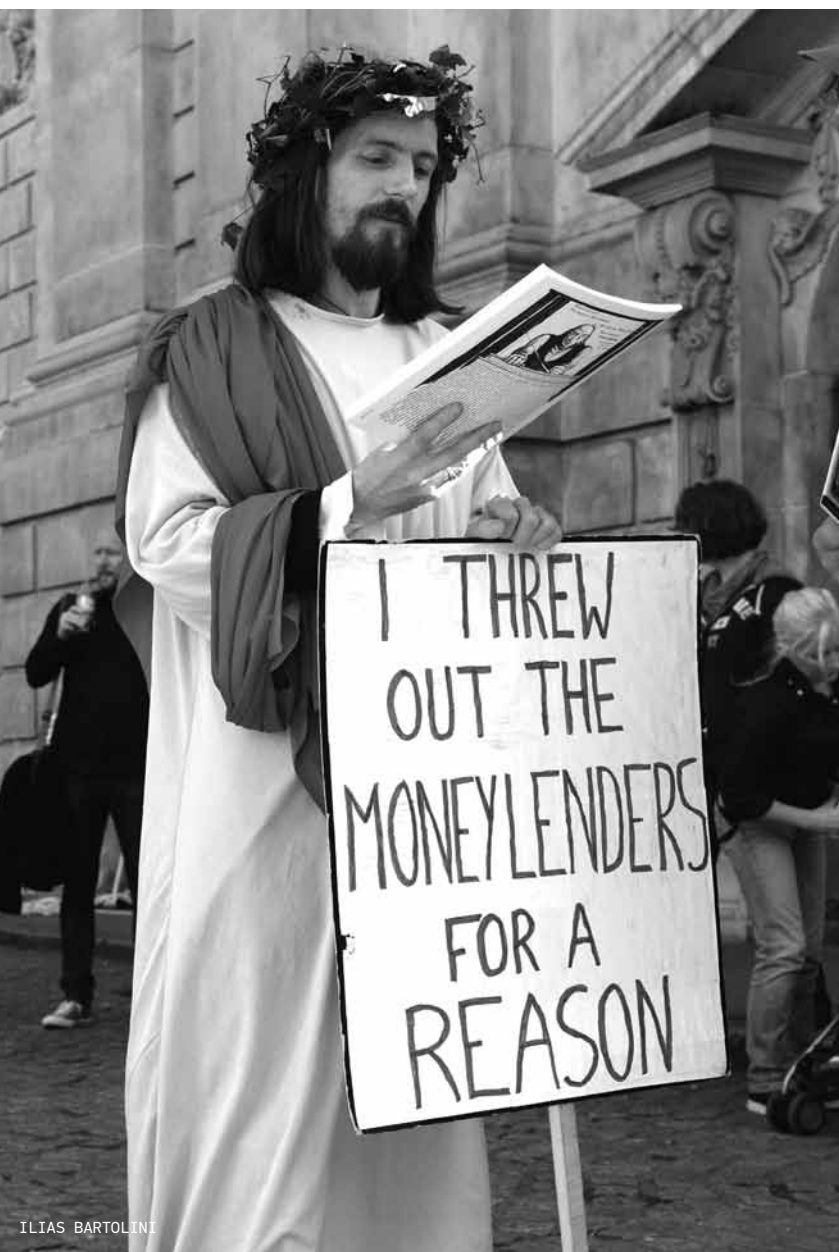
HS: Company law amended so as to make the enterprise sector more responsive to the public interest.

'People before profit' is a popular slogan from the Left, but those who chant it seem to have little idea how to bring about this change of priorities except by public takeover of existing enterprises, which is arguably a discredited model. A far more effective way of achieving the goal of a responsible corporate sector would be a) to make a company's right to limited liability conditional on its accepting public representation on the board - whether at national or local community level - and even give the public a right of veto over certain decisions (e.g. executive pay, redundancies, capital investment); and b) to make any other public subsidy or privilege to companies - whether private or public - subject to specific conditions designed to ensure that the incentive does achieve the specific end(s) intended in the public interest. **OT:** Basically ensuring that corporations fulfil their obligations to the public as well as shareholders?

HS: Yes, but equally it would remove the presumption - currently implicit in company law - that maximising private profit is a public good, which results from requiring company boards to put the interests of shareholders above all others. It would still allow private ownership to operate where no public subsidies or privileges are sought (which should suit small businesses). And besides enabling more rational allocation of resources in the public interest, such a change would help to remedy another defect of the capitalist model: the compulsive need of companies to accumulate more and more profits as shareholders' funds, on which they are obliged to try to achieve a market rate of return. As Marxist analysis has shown, this not only tends to concentrate wealth and income in fewer hands over time but makes inevitable the catastrophic business cycle (boom and bust), of which the current crisis is an extreme example.

OT: You are also a big supporter of a citizen's income. How might this work?

HS: A citizen's income is a flat-rate benefit paid to all adult citizens or qualifying residents designed to be sufficient for one person to live on - i.e. in principle equivalent to the poverty line in the country concerned. It is payable out of general taxation unconditionally (regardless of other



sources of income) and does not affect entitlement to health-care or education. It will replace benefits and guarantee that everyone's basic needs are covered by a non-means-tested weekly payment, as of right - raising everyone's levels of dignity and freedom and allowing people to engage in socially useful and creative activities or take entrepreneurial risks they might otherwise avoid.

This is an idea that has been around for centuries and has been espoused by eminent economists and thinkers from John Stuart Mill onwards. The main reason why it's time has now come is that technological change has rendered labour increasingly redundant and banished the 20th century dream of 'full employment' - always a fantasy, particularly in the developing world - for ever: there's a more detailed discussion on my website, Harryshutt.com. **OT:** Has a citizen's income ever been put into practice successfully before, and if so, where?

HS: To date, no country has implemented a comprehensive, unconditional citizen's income, although a number have conditional programmes such as a negative income tax. However, the pressures for more equitable and cost-effective income distribution are building - to the point

where some countries have enacted the necessary legislation for a citizen's income - notably Brazil (2004) and Iran (2010) - and are in process of trying to mobilise the necessary funds to fully implement it. This should suggest that, if such relatively poor countries can contemplate affording it, for developed (OECD) countries it should be much easier given the political will to distribute income more rationally.

OT: You said recently: "Athens is burning today, Rome will be burning next week and London next month". Do you see the protests increasing and is this just the beginning?

HS: Yes, there is a possibility that the crisis could intensify - either because of renewed financial collapse or social explosion, or both. Hence, while as a group we do need to inform ourselves of how the financial system works - something which, as I've written, is made more fiendishly difficult by the deliberate obfuscation of the banksters and economists - we also need to be prepared for events spinning further out of control and consider how Occupy might react. I cannot predict the timing of any particular new outbreak of trouble (such as another Lehmans-type collapse) - but what is certain is that the crisis is nowhere near resolution, and our rulers remain as deeply in denial as ever. www.harryshutt.com.



SCARE STORIES:
SCARCE STORIES

JEREMY
TILL

THE IDEOLOGY OF AUSTERITY

We live in an age of austerity. No, that is wrong. We are continually told that we need to live in an age of austerity. Better.

The difference between these two statements is crucial. The first message is the one that is repeated so often that we have come to believe it. It positions austerity as an inevitable, unavoidable, condition that we passively accept. The latter statement, which is the more accurate, begins to suggest that far from inevitable, austerity is a condition that is imposed on us as a necessary evil which will eventually lead us out of the present global instability and on to firmer ground. We all have to make sacrifices, our political masters tell us (while conveniently overlooking that the packages of austerity are far from evenly spread, and affect the poor more than any other group).

This latter sense of austerity – that it is imposed under the guise of extreme necessity – is continuously used as the justification for government policies throughout the world, with left and right alike colluding in the policies of cuts. But scratch the surface, and it is easy to see that in many cases the programmes of austerity are not only unnecessary, but act as a mask for the playing out of deeply ideological policies.

Take my field, that of higher education. The introduction of higher fees is ‘explained’ by the fact that we can no longer afford to fund Universities out of the public purse, and so the burden should shift to students, who will eventually benefit. This is the common sense argument so favoured by the populist right. The assumption is that this new system will save public money. However, this is far from the truth: buried in an annex of a letter from Vince Cable to HEFCE (the higher education funding body) is the startling admission that the cost next year will actually rise from £8.9m to £9.1m. Far from the tripling of fees being part of the government’s austerity programme, it now, astoundingly, adds extra cost to the exchequer, but we are so conditioned by the rhetoric of austerity that the new fee regime has now been passively accepted as necessary by most people. Insult is heaped upon

insult with the added policy that for the first time students going to private universities will have access to student loans, so that taxpayers will effectively be subsidising and fuelling the private sector; hardly a money-saving initiative for the age of austerity.

This is just one example of the way that austerity is used as the cover for the rolling out of an ideological position (in this case the effective marketisation of the university sector). Another example is the Free School programme – an ideological programme if ever there was one. As the building of new schools in the public sector is slashed on grounds of austerity, somehow money is found to establish a range of schools which are all but private – except for the fact that the public is paying for them.

What we need to learn from these examples – and the many more like them – is that austerity is not inevitable, but is too often imposed for other political reasons which all too often ramp up social inequality. The justification for these programmes is framed by the dominance of the neo-liberal economic model that subscribes blindly to the twin gods of growth and market freedom, as if the so-called ‘logic of the market’ will lead us out of the woods. It continues to amaze that the same medicine is being prescribed to treat the very illness that the medicine initially caused.

Austerity is justified because of a wider scarcity – of money – and the only solution proposed is to limit the endless supply of money in order to re-establish economic equilibrium. In this sense, austerity, as an imposed condition, is the bastard child of scarcity. Scarcity has been used as a scare tactic ever since the invention of neo-classical economics. It was the Reverend Malthus who first wielded the axe of scarcity in his Essay on the Principle of Population of 1798. Malthus’ argument is straightforward: population grows at geometric rate, food supply at an arithmetic rate; at a certain moment (the Malthusian point), population demand will exceed supply; scarcity will lead to famine; population growth must therefore be restricted in the face of the spectre of scarcity. What we find behind



ELIAS BARTOLINI

the veil of logic and so-called objectivity is a deeply ideological text, which was to have direct political consequences. Malthus’ rationalisation in favour of population restraint brings with it some unedifying arguments in relation to the poor. If one attempts to alleviate poverty, as was being proposed in the contemporaneous Poor Laws, then (he argued) population growth will follow, which in turn will lead to scarcities. Instead, let scarcity regulate poverty, he argues; it is both the origin of poverty and the effective instrument against any population growth that might arise out of the alleviation of poverty. This laissez-faire attitude to the poor, worrying enough in its own way, is also a lever for the exploitation of the poor because, as Malthus recognised, the poverty arising out of scarcity made the working class more willing to submit to wage labour. The immediate political consequences of Malthus’ essay were very direct. The Poor Laws, which he had argued contributed to ‘carelessness’ among the poor, and a ‘want of frugality’, were repealed under the Malthusian spectre of the population growth of a rutting proletariat.

Is it too much to equate Malthus’ attack on the poor with this coalition government’s attack on the disabled, the homeless, the migrants and other dispossessed elements of society? I think not, because in each case scarcity is being used as the justification and cover for a deeply ideological programme.

The only way to escape the apparent hold of scarcity is to understand it not as a naturalised or inevitable condition, but as a constructed one. The most obvious example of constructed scarcity is food: there is enough food in the world to feed the global population, it is just in the wrong place and subjected to the distortions of the free market. Hunger in one part of the world is mirrored with appalling waste in another. On top of this, the intervention of multinationals such as Monsanto has exacerbated food scarcity. Using the scar(c)e story that without industrialised and genetically modified food production we face global food scarcity, Monsanto has been allowed to roll out a form of agricultural monopoly that has not only destroyed local livelihoods and practices, but done so, as so clearly shown by Vandana Shiva, with

no sustained increase in yields on which the initial bargain was based.

Constructed scarcities affect every aspect of our lives. We are told that there is a housing crisis, but everywhere we look there are empty properties; scarcity here is constructed through the machinations of tenure and ownership. As soon as one understands scarcity as a constructed condition and not an inevitable one, then it makes it possible to creatively intervene in the processes that construct a particular scarcity. A good example is the Renew Newcastle project in New South Wales, Australia, where a team lead by Marcus Westbury have unlocked the empty spaces of the city through interrupting and playing with planning and legal regulations (which had constructed a scarcity of use), allowing short-term uses to take over and revitalise the previously decaying city centre.

In taking apart the various constructions of scarcity, one is resisting the scare stories that are associated with it. But this does not mean that all scarcities are constructed. There are real limits and resources really are running out as mankind endlessly exploits the biosphere. This aspect of scarcity is all too often either denied or forgotten, because at heart it presents a threat to the neoliberal dream of endless growth and demands that we look at alternative paradigms. It is here that the occupy movement is so important. What I learn from the occupiers is the resilience and brilliance of their organisational structures, and their overall critique of the structures of power. What the occupiers teach us, through their spaces, their behaviour and their critique, is that other forms of social organisation are not only necessary but also possible. If, as I believe, we are moving into an era overseen by issues of scarcity (but not necessarily scary scarcity) rather than by the false hope of abundance that we’ve been promised for too long, then we need to rethink our understanding of scarcity and its implications. The Occupy Movement is a good place to start.

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WASI DANIJU

THE POLITICS
OF COMMON SENSE

DAN HIND

In

Tom Paine, called for the end of British rule, on the grounds that kings were ridiculous and crooked: ‘of more worth is one honest man to society and in the sight of God, than all the crowned ruffians that ever lived’.

When Common Sense first appeared it was by no means clear that the Americans favoured independence. Many felt a residual loyalty to crown and to the country they or their ancestors had left. Others were frightened that a society without kings would descend into anarchy. Perhaps most importantly, the existing order was familiar. Most people had grown up with it. As Paine noted, ‘a long habit of not thinking a thing wrong, gives it a superficial appearance of being right’.

We are at a strikingly similar moment now, on both sides of the Atlantic and throughout much of the world. For centuries two kinds of claim have stood in for kings as justifications for the existing order. On the one hand, we were told that market forces were the best way of distributing goods in society. When that proved too obviously useless, we were told that only a minority of specially qualified experts could understand the complexity of modern society. So, either markets should rule or experts should. For much of our history, these two cults have excluded the majority from active citizenship, every bit as effectively as the mystique of royalty.

Sometimes experts want to regulate markets in the public interest, as in the New Deal in the United States or the post-war Welfare State in Britain. When they do, the fans of the free market say rude things about out-of-touch experts. But for the most part, the relationship has been pretty harmonious. Over the last generation or so, experts became

experts because they argued in favour of the things that rich people wanted. Rich people wanted more freedom to make money and they wanted to be called wealth creators, rather than capitalists or rentiers. Experts were happy to oblige. And why not? They got a reputation for being smart and they became quite rich at the same time.

For thirty years an intimidating mob of these experts was quick to dismiss any suggestion that the common good should take precedence over the desires of the very wealthy. Centre-left politicians like Bill Clinton and Ed Balls sounded very much like business lobbyists when they talked about how the economy worked. Central bankers like Mervyn King and Ben Bernanke told us that financial innovations were making the financial markets more stable by distributing risk. Credit agencies like Standard and Poor’s were convinced that worthless bonds deserved the highest possible rating.

By 2007 this alliance of experts and free market economics had drowned out almost all dissenting voices. It was able to decide what was and what wasn’t controversial. Support for free markets was common sense. Almost everyone who was allowed to join the version of public life staged in the major media was caught up in the prevailing delirium. When the unregulated financial markets collapsed and the Western world suffered a severe recession, that should have been the end for the market and the expert alike. Free market economics leads directly to massive public subsidies for irresponsible banks. Experts hadn’t been able to say so, for obviously self-interested reasons.

But for the moment the market and the expert remain on their thrones, clinging on to each other for support. Ed Balls, one of the architects of the current shambles, is the Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer. He has taken to citing the credit rating agencies as authoritative guides to economic policy; ‘As Standard & Poor’s has said, austerity alone is self-defeating’, he tells us. Standard & Poor’s has said lots of things, as has Ed Balls. The same plausible chancers who created the problem are busy deciding what to do about it.

The occupations and demonstrations of the last year are a sign that all this is about to change. People are meeting and discussing matters of shared concern and they are finding that they are quite capable of understanding what has been happening and what needs to happen. It is up to us to learn from the occupations, and from the occupiers. So what do we take from the occupations and assemblies, if we want



BEN CAVANNA



to break at last the power of market and of expert and replace it with the power of freely deliberating citizens?

In 1776 the beliefs of a few radical republicans became a new common sense in a matter of months. By July the Continental Congress – a group with about as much representative legitimacy as Occupy Wall Street, by the way – published its now-famous Declaration of Independence. The days of monarchy in the thirteen colonies were numbered.

The pretexts used to keep us from the guts of administration are no more or less ridiculous than the idea that a British king should rule

America. Unsupervised markets do not deliver prosperity. Unsupervised experts cannot be trusted. The inexpert public is capable of governing itself and of shaping the state in ways that are just and reasonable. There can be no principled opposition to the steady expansion of popular power.

Can we make these obviously true claims into a new common sense in the months ahead? Can we do to the market and the expert what Tom Paine did to the rule of kings? If we learn the right lessons from the occupations, then yes, we can.

Dan Hind’s ‘Common Sense: An Essay on Liberty’ is published on March 15th.



BRIAN LEE

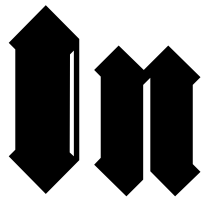


WASI DANIJU

BIOFUELS POWER STATIONS

GREENWASH AT OUR EXPENSE

ZENITH MILNER
& MATTIA F.



an era of austerity it takes a far-sighted and responsible government to invest in green energy. Despite the rhetoric, however, the ‘greenest government ever’ is doing quite the opposite. Not only is it dragging its feet on climate action, it is also squandering taxpayers’ money to keep alive a dangerous corporate hoax: biofuels.

Biofuels include bioliquid and biomass combustibles derived from plants and animals. They are sold to the public as a quick fix solution to climate change - a renewable energy that only releases the same amount of carbon that plants had absorbed while growing. They have started to be used to power cars, and now the Government plans to subsidise biofuel power stations to produce electricity.

Biofuels may sound all right at first glance, and some are environmentally friendly: reusing old chip fat, for example, and perhaps using trimmings from forestry isn’t too bad. But large scale biofuels are another matter. Palm oil, from palm plants (not to be confused with coconut palms) is the most popular, as it is cheap for the biofuels companies, but not for the environment. Jatropha, which is grown in developing countries, uses vast amounts of water. Rapeseed plants and biofuel wheat plantations compete with other crops for land. Some companies say they will use algae to produce electricity, but the technology for this is not expected within the next decade. Biomass wood chips are also problematic.

THE REAL COST OF BIOFUELS

Four independent scientific reports commissioned by the European Union showed that biofuels are neither climate-friendly nor human-friendly: they are just friendly to the 1%.

If current trends continue, biofuels will generate additional land requirements of between 0.5 and 1.1 million hectares annually. Production is mostly concentrated in tropical regions, such as Brazil and Indonesia, where credible sustainability criteria are not applied and deforestation is pushing endangered animals even closer to extinction (experts expect the orang utan to become extinct by 2018, and there are only around 500 Sumatran tigers left).

When biofuels are grown on forestlands, indigenous peoples are often violently displaced. Ten million people in Indonesia would be affected as they are dependent on the rainforest. With plantations outside forests, farmers are often forcibly evicted or end up in forced servitude.

Increasing demand for farmland with biofuel plants raises land prices and competes with food crops, which in turn brings up global food prices. As the 2008 price spike shows, higher food prices disproportionately hit the poorest nations, becoming a threat to global food security. UN figures show that the number of hungry people has increased globally from 780 million in 1997 to 925 million in 2010, in part because of competing demands from biofuels.

Ironically, biofuels have a worse carbon footprint than most fossil fuels. Not only does their production rely on fossil fuels (for fertilisers, pesticides and international transport), but it also drives deforestation, which causes

more emission than all cars, ships and planes combined. It is no coincidence that Brazil and Indonesia, the highest carbon emitters from deforestation, are also two of the three top producers of biofuels. When peatlands are cleared, large amounts of methane are released - an even more potent climate change gas than CO2.

BIOFUELS IN THE UK: CORPORATE GREENWASH

After the reckless EU decision to heavily subsidise transport biofuels as part of the renewable energy strategy, the UK Government is now planning to go further and subsidise a number of biofuel power stations around the country. They would be using palm oil imported from Indonesia, Borneo and Malaysia. Governments erroneously view palm oil as sustainable, citing the RSPO (the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil) as proof, but this has been widely discredited. Two hundred and fifty groups worldwide have signed the ‘Declaration of Greenwashing of Palm oil by the RSPO’ (available on Google) but the government ignores this. The demand for palm oil - which is already in many foods, soaps and washing products - is already expanding greatly, and tracts of rainforest are cleared for each new plantation.

Biomass power stations would be using wood from forests in the UK, Scandinavia, South America and Canada - where campaigners are already protesting against this use of the forest. Furthermore, the use of wood from temperate forest for biomass can have a knock-on effect, meaning that huge amounts of tropical rainforest are cleared to feed the increased demand for wood.



POLLUTION AROUND POWER STATIONS

Around power stations, there would also be unhealthy air pollution, including nitrous oxides and tiny particulate matter (PM 10s and PM2.5s), which cause cardiac and respiratory problems, eczema, and reduce lifespan. These problems are overrepresented in areas that are already polluted. In Southall, GPs were most concerned about any further deterioration of air quality that a power station would cause.

SUBSIDISING DESTRUCTION

These new biofuel power stations would only be viable because of huge government subsidies. These subsidies, called Renewable Obligation Certificates (ROCS) are massive, to the tune of 39 million pounds per year for just one proposed plant in Bristol. And guess where the money comes from? From our electricity bills.

At present, however, there is a Government consultation taking place. Given enough pressure, they may change their misguided policies.

SUCCESSFUL BIOFUELS CAMPAIGNS

Protesters against biofuels have already campaigned at the local, national, European and international levels (in and outside of orang utan suits!), but are fighting against outdated laws, the government’s current energy policy, and widespread lack of knowledge about the subject even amongst many environmentalists and decision makers.

Some power stations have been stopped through local campaigns, including in Southall in West London and Newport, South Wales, but others have received planning permission. In Bristol, city councillors initially refused planning permission for a power station, but the company appealed. The final ruling forced the local council to give planning permission, against the express wishes of the public, as under current outdated planning law, only local environmental factors can be taken into account, not widespread issues. At the Bristol site, for example, the fate of some local slowworms (a rare type of newt) were considered, but not all the multitude of animals and people effected by clearing rainforest to grow palm plants. So much for ‘Think globally, act locally!’ These laws must be changed to stop our country continuing to condone human rights violations, violence and ecocide. The biofuels company in Bristol and Portland is now waiting to see what the outcome of the current subsidies consultation will

be. Without the huge subsidies, these stations are simply not viable.

So, corporations are doing it again: they rip the taxpayer off in order to get incentives and government subsidies at the expense of the people and the planet. This time they are even winning the PR battle. Occupying the biofuels industry means fighting the powerful biofuel lobby and pressuring the government to remove subsidies for large scale biofuels and biomass plants, supporting instead true renewables: appropriately sited, offshore and onshore wind (remembering that a turbine looks better than a power station!), tidal and solar power, and imported hydroelectricity. Consumption and waste are also problems, and insulation needs to expand. The government would do well to look at the pamphlet ‘A Million Climate Jobs’ to remedy climate change and unemployment, rather than clutching at counterproductive violent solutions. Furthermore, it should be ascertained why the government has stopped increasing the flow of Norwegian hydroelectricity. This green energy, with an excess supply of several terrawattours, should be exploited.

HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Each of us can make a difference by getting our MP to oppose the subsidies in the current consultation. Plans by the Department of Energy and Climate Change to subsidise biofuels can be voted out by our MPs, so let’s make sure that biofuel power stations get the thumbs down from the government; save the planet and save your money! At present, only 34 MPs have signed an early day motion against the proposed subsidies, which is a disgraceful number. Make sure your MP knows that you think these subsidies must be stopped and truly renewable energy supported.

ACT NOW!

1. Write to your MP, saying you want subsidies to be removed from biofuels and given to true renewables
2. Write similiarly to Ed Davey, the new minister for the Department of Energy and Climate Change.
3. Avoid palm oil in foods, soaps etc. Writing in to manufacturers also works.

Your own letters are best of course. For draft letters and further information of how to help see www.lifewithoutpalmoil.org

For more information see www.greenthefilm.com, www.biofuelwatch.org.uk, Friends of the Earth http://www.foe.org/. Additional information on palm oil in household products can be found at www.saynotopalmoil.com.

THE COMMUNITY BILL OF RIGHTS

TURNING OCCUPATION INTO LASTING CHANGE

MELANIE STRICKLAND

The legal system is part of the ‘system’ which Occupy London rightly identifies in its initial statement as both undemocratic and unjust. To remedy this, we must radically reorient our legal structures everywhere, so that they foster meaningful human relationships and the flourishing of life on this planet. At the moment the legal system, taken as whole, delivers the opposite – it maintains the status quo, which in turn keeps corporations in power and ensures that communities are subordinate.

The Community Bill of Rights (or CBoR for short) is an excellent example of a law that genuinely does give power back to the people and would help foster those meaningful relationships for people and planet. CBoRs have been adopted by dozens of towns (and a city, Pittsburgh) in the US – they work. They are pioneered by the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, a US non-profit law firm. Cicero said ‘the more laws, the less justice,’ so appropriately the CBoR is only a few pages long.

The CBoR is structured into three main parts. The first part sets out the purpose of the law – this states: “[citizens]... recognise that environmental and economic sustainability cannot be achieved if the rights of the municipal majorities are routinely overridden by corporate minorities claiming certain legal powers...” The second main part sets out the rights of communities. Some of the most important rights include the right to a locally based economy (which would strengthen communities and encourage local job creation); the right of natural communities and ecosystems to exist and flourish – this is in recognition of the fact that healthy human communities are dependent on healthy non-human communities, and recognises that nature has intrinsic value); the right to water for people and ecosystems and the right to a sustainable food system – both in recognition of the fundamental importance of these for survival. The right to a sustainable food system also includes the right to food free from genetically modified organisms – there are many reasons to support this, just one being that any ‘benefits’ of GM would accrue to a corporate few in the form of profit.

Other important rights include the right to free and fair elections, free from corporate interference; and the right to clean government (including the right to a legislative process free from corporate lobbying and involvement) – both of these rights are particularly apt in light of Occupy London’s focus on the undemocratic and unaccountable local authority, the Corporation of London. If it wasn’t for Occupy London, many people across the capital and

the country would not know that corporations vote in the City of London Corporation elections – it is unique in the UK for this.

There are other valuable rights expressed in the CBoR including the right to affordable and renewable energy, right to determine the future of neighbourhoods and more. The overall effect of these rights is to genuinely empower communities. The rights are expressed in the positive.

By contrast, the third main part of the CBoR sets out prohibitions on corporate legal privileges. The effect of these provisions is to take power away from the corporations that are responsible for damaging communities and so these provisions are expressed negatively. To illustrate, the first provision in this section reads: “Corporations and other business entities which violate the rights secured by this Community Bill of Rights shall not be deemed to be ‘persons’... nor possess any other legal rights, privileges, powers, or protections which would interfere with the enforcement of rights enumerated by this Charter.”

If you’re not familiar with legal jargon, this provision may not seem to be saying much. In fact it is radical. A corporation is a legal fiction. It exists as a piece of paper only and yet it has extensive rights including the protection of the European Convention on Human Rights. As Professor Conor Gearty pointed out in the Occupy Law event at Tent City University on 20 February, the most important right in our society is the right to property, which favours corporations, and corporations use their rights both as a sword and a shield against communities and the State. They use their rights as a sword to defeat attempts by the community to prevent them from carrying out harmful activities in the community (as you’ll appreciate if you’ve ever tried to object to that third Tesco on your High Street) and they use their rights as a shield against the State to defeat attempts to regulate them in the public interest. A good example of this is legislation designed to curb greenhouse gas emissions. At international, European and national level this has been ineffective because governments capitulate to corporate demands. Lawyers for the corporations, on salaries not much less than bankers, end up writing the legislation which they hand over to civil servants, who more or less end up rubber-stamping the draft, which gets passed into law. The government then say that they have ‘consulted’ because they canvassed the business community. So, the CBoR stating that corporations will not be recognised as persons if they violate the rights set out in the CBoR is potentially a game changer. To paraphrase George Monbiot in his book Captive State – corporations are inventions

originally designed to serve us – they have now enslaved us. We need to re-examine the role of the corporation from its foundations (is it ever a good idea to confer personhood on corporations?) and have a mechanism revoking personhood, and for exposing the persons behind the corporation, who are generally protected by the law for all their acts of impunity.

I want to progress the idea of the Community Bill of Rights with the support of working groups at Occupy, and others. We can identify a local London authority which may be sympathetic and potentially campaign for the adoption of the CBoR. In doing so, we will highlight the democratic deficit, and more positively, doing this may facilitate democratic renewal. Various people have also expressed an interest in using the CBoR to engage communities during the Occupy London walk beginning in May. This would be fantastic and I encourage people to get in touch if they would like to support this initiative.



FOR THE SAKE OF MOTHER EARTH

THE RIO+20 EARTH SUMMIT

PHIL ENGLAND

We are living through a particularly ugly period in world history. As Naomi Klein explained in her book “Shock Doctrine”, in late stage capitalism deregulated corporations and financiers don’t just seek to maximise profit at the expense of both people and the planet, they actively exploit disaster.

We can see it in the way the partial collapse of the financial system has been used to force national economies to march in lockstep to the neoliberal drum beat. Cuts to public expenditures and public services open the way for private investors and corporations to profit from services that were previously off-limits to the private sector, such as healthcare and policing.

And we can see it in the way that Klein’s “disaster capitalism” wants to cash in on the environmental crisis. The market approach – pushed by the likes of BP and investment banks – that has failed to solve the problem of climate change is now being pushed as the solution to deforestation and the escalating destruction of the natural world. In UN conference-speak, the privatisation of the atmosphere is known as carbon trading, the privatisation of the world’s forests is known as REDD (“Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation”) and the privatisation of everything else known as “payment for ecosystem services”.

An event with tremendous symbolism is now upon us. The Rio+20 Earth Summit in June has to be seen as a testimony to the failure of national governments – captured by corporate interests – to address the environmental problems that prompted the first Earth Summit 20 years ago. Climate changing greenhouse gases are rising at unprecedented, unforeseen rates, and so are rates of biodiversity loss.

The draft declaration for the conference itself recognises this failure. It reads: “Unsustainable development has increased the stress on earth’s limited natural resources, and on the carrying capacity of ecosystems [...] Food insecurity, climate change and biodiversity loss have adversely affected developmental gains. We are deeply concerned that around 1.4 billion people still live in extreme poverty and one sixth of the world’s population is undernourished, pandemics are omnipresent threats.”

The whole thing is such an embarrassment to the global community that it has been reduced to a three-day event where heads of government – such as our own David Cameron – aren’t even expected to turn up. The draft declaration that world “leaders” are being asked to sign up to is just twenty pages long and has virtually no substantive content.

This “Zero Draft”, as it has come to be known in the NGO world, was summed up as by a statement of “Zero Ambition” that a few organisations published recently to criticize the preparatory work for the summit: “The whole text breathes only the voluntary approach, which countries can accept or just leave. It is all up to nice and interesting partnerships, good intentions and promoting green consumption. When you read in detail you can

find some good ideas, but most are not really new: other indicators, stop harmful subsidies, civil society participation; all said and agreed on a decade or two ago.”

This is the same failed voluntary approach that came out of the original Earth Summit 20 years ago. That summit produced the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – which has been the basis of the UN climate talks ever since – and the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Rio+20 agenda in its current form has nothing to offer except more of the same failed medicine. The agenda is full of voluntary pledges and empty goals with no means of fulfilling them.

As part of the agenda-drafting process, dozens of civil society groups from around the globe have submitted their ideas and proposals alongside those of national governments. Some of these initiatives have been discussed in the Occupy London working groups focussed on Energy, Equity & Environment and Environment & Economics, and we think deserve the serious consideration of Occupy London as a whole.

First, is the proposal to recognise planetary boundaries. A heavyweight paper in the scientific journal “Nature” in 2009 drew together what we know about Earth’s natural systems and how far we can push them. The paper identified nine boundaries (more may be identified as our knowledge develops). Three of these boundaries have already been exceeded (atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations, rate of biodiversity loss and the nitrogen cycle). A group of public interest lawyers have started a campaign to have these boundaries recognised and respected by international law.

Second, is the proposal to make ecocide the fifth international crime against peace. This would make CEOs, board members, government ministers and heads of banks personally liable for large-scale damage to ecosystems such as the Gulf of Mexico oil spill and the production of oil from the Canadian tar sands.

Third, is the proposal to recognise the rights of nature. This draws on the work of Bolivia – which drafted a proposed Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth in 2010 – and also on the philosophical tradition of such thinkers as Thomas Berry and the Wild Law community, who propose that the Earth (rather than humans or corporations) should be at the centre of our legal system. This is echoed in the words of Rowan Williams, who said that “the economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment”, and in the writings of progressive thinkers such as Susan George, who argued that inverting our current priorities so that the environment comes before humans and the economy is the great task of our age.

There are other proposals for an International Court for the Environment, and an Ombudsman for Future Generations, for example, which we should also consider supporting. And none of these approaches can take hold unless we focus on the other half of the equation: the capture and effective derailment of the UN process by corporate and financial interests.



BRIAN LELI



JUAN MANUEL PEÑA

OCCUPY, CONSTITUTIONAL LAW & SOCIAL CHANGE

SARA CAMERON

In the mid 19th century, Henry Thoreau coined the term ‘civil disobedience’ when fighting against the American government’s state poll tax - the money from which would be used to enforce the Fugitive Slave Law. He broadly used this concept to denote individual resistance to civil government in moral opposition to an unjust state.

Since the 1840s, civil disobedience has been nurtured and harnessed through various crucial stages in our evolution as a conscious society, influencing the political thoughts and actions of historical figures and movements which have used the notion of civil disobedience. To name but a few, we had the Boston Tea Party, the suffragette movement, resistance to colonial rule in India courtesy of Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr’s fight to promote civil rights in the United States and students protesting the war in Vietnam. More recently, other acts of civil disobedience have been used to highlight the need to reassess society’s norms in terms of how we think about and act on environmental issues, equality issues, welfare issues, corporatism, religion, wealth, property and wars in the Middle East.

So what is the role of civil disobedience in promoting social change? Well, it is about making what could be conceived of as ‘absurd’, normal. No one took the movement for woman’s suffrage seriously in the early 1900s. Society possessed a different value system where woman signified passive, quiet creatures without any say in the man’s world of politics. However... is working within the law the way to push boundaries?

There is a belief that progressive people should always work to promote progressive values through the mechanism of the law; working to get one’s message into the public media to change the ‘hearts and minds’ of those residing in the public sphere. But how can one deal in and grapple

with the law, when the law is made by politicians and senior judges who are, in the majority, from privileged and elitist backgrounds which teach maintenance of the status quo?

When I attended law school with the hope of becoming a barrister to fight the injustices and inequities in the UK, I was struck by how many of my peers had had a private education, went to Oxford or Cambridge and generally hadn’t lived a life in which left-wing politics played any role. As someone who leans to the left, I felt very isolated during the time I spent at law school. My peers are the future of the legal profession, our future judges and upholders of the Rule of Law, that is to say, ‘a government of laws and not of men’ as John Adams so eloquently put it.

I would argue that those who exercise a governmental function have been using their power arbitrarily for quite some time. This is perhaps more noticeable now that the raft of post-2001 terrorist legislation has had tangible effects on our domestic policing law, from the extension of police detention to the banning of legitimate and peaceful protest in the run up to the Queen’s jubilee and the Olympics, and the attack on our national health service in order to serve the interests of the corporate world. Where is the equality? Why is our state placing other interests above the rights of people? The government has interfered with our rights; the antithesis of the doctrine of the Rule of Law.

From a lawyer’s perspective, the Rule of Law is a vitally important constitutional theory and I hope Occupy, as a powerful force for social change, can promote its underlying principles to society. At the same time it is crucial that we re-evaluate our legal system and the sources of our unwritten constitution in this country, such as how our statutes are created, by whom and in whose

interest; how legislation and common law are interpreted in our courts – and whether these decisions are for the benefit of society at large or mere ephemeral decisions to fit the parochial facts of one particular case.

The ‘for what purpose’ and ‘by whom’ points are paramount if we want to have a system that is ‘just’; these issues have been long debated by constitutional theorists who advocate the separation of powers. The doctrine of the separation of powers was first conceived of by Aristotle and has been gradually explained and perpetuated by the French jurist Montesquieu. Montesquieu argued that the three functions of government (the legislature, executive and judiciary) should vest in distinct bodies so that excessive power is curtailed through a system of checks and balances by one on the other. Not surprisingly, our courts have ruled that the British constitution features the doctrine (R v SoS for the Home Office v ex parte Fire Brigades Union). However, similar to the notion that we are ‘free’ beings during this current era of capitalism – in which we are led to believe that we have ‘rights’ and ‘equality’ - I would suggest that the court’s ruling is erroneous.

Parliament holds itself out as being sovereign as it is elected by the voters, but increasingly the courts are treading on parliament’s toes as a result of the need to interpret legislation ‘so far as is possible’ to reflect the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR). The courts also have the power to make declarations of incompatibility should a piece of legislation not reflect the rights given to UK citizens under the ECHR by virtue of the Human Rights Act 1998. From a different angle, the executive and powerful people, be they companies and/or individuals with vested interests, can hold a great



CARMEN VALINO

deal of power over the legislators through lobbying campaigns and the more covert ‘wining and dining’ activities that permeate our system of government. You simply have to look at an MP’s past, present and future employment status to figure this out.

Occupy makes a strong stand against such incestuous relationships between politicians, business and power - ‘corporatocracy’. And yet our legal system is so entrenched in this form of governance - ‘written by them, for them’, as an ideological and repressive state apparatus - that it is increasingly difficult (although not impossible, thanks to the European Union) for social movements to use the law to achieve their objectives.

Take one example which has been a vital issue for Occupy - the privatization of public spaces. How can public property be owned by a local authority which can then discriminate and exclude those who pay taxes? Take the Ministry of Defence – which owns land which operates as a firing range. The exclusion of the public must be justified; the justification here is public safety and national security. What about less clear cut areas such as the snapping up of public space, from public highways to parks and commons, by private developers who promise luxury shopping malls, apartments and other things we just don’t need?

Easements, prescriptions, rights to roam, human rights arguments and so on exist, but the problem is that corporate entities can use human rights laws as a shield. Take the example of the infamous US Supreme Court case Citizens United. In this controversial case the right to freedom of speech prohibited the government from restricting political expenditures by corporations and unions who wanted to dish out their wealth to support their political interests.

Despite the growing power of corporate interests in our political system and our law, some still argue that corporations can be controlled; after all, they are legal fictions and

the government can intervene. This may be true. However, until we have a system of politics which works for the majority of the people rather than a dominant few, with natural laws that are shaped from the bottom up (and not under the guise of ‘democracy’ or ‘equality’), progressive movements will struggle to use the legal system which stands against their core values. What makes us free is equal access to shared resources, without conventions of society demarcating between different sections of society.

Our legal system is failing us, legal aid is disappearing, litigants in person are increasingly becoming a reality of court life, creating delays whilst also being unable to access the justice they require because of legalese and court-etiquette barriers. Our legal system is inaccessible to most. Justice is a confused principle which has led people to believe that the legal system is worth something. We try to fight using laws and precedent which have not been decided by the people. There may be times when we need to break the law in the name of morality, to create social change which we can all abide by. Above all, right now, we need to keep focused and remain strong, while changing public perception by making our message and principles known.



TZ

OCCUPY & THE LAW: THE TRIAL CONTINUES

JOHN COOPER



This article is not meant to be a political consideration of the aims and objectives of ‘Occupy’, there are many others who are far more qualified than I am to enter into this arena, and, in my view, for what it is worth, have positively pushed the cause of public debate and appreciation of the issues facing 21st century society into an exciting new dimension.

But enough, for now, of that. Where are we with the law post the Occupy litigation in the High Court just before Christmas and more recently before one of the most influential courts in the land, the Master of the Rolls Court earlier this year?

It is right to observe straight away, that whatever the preconceptions that some had before this process, the vast majority of those supporting and representing the Occupy case came out of both the High Court and the Court of Appeal with the feeling that they had, within the constraints of the law, been given a fair and open hearing. The Judges, like the lawyers, are constrained to work within the confines of the law and in the case of the Occupy case, much of that law had been enacted by Parliament, significantly, the Highways Act back in the early days of the Thatcher government in 1980. However much some might be frustrated by this, those are the rules by which the courts work, they are not courts of morals or political debating chambers. Had they been so, I am in no doubt that Occupy would have prevailed.

In my view, given all these constraints, I think that the courts, the legal system if you will, came out of this well. Do not misunderstand me, that is not to say the existing law should be similarly commended, but the genuine appreciation shown by Occupy to courts, the judges, the court staff and the lawyers reflected well not only upon them, but on Occupy, as a mature, rational and thoughtful entity.

Really, that, for me, was the most gratifying feature of the case. Before the trial started in the High Court on the 19th December last year sections of the media, the

public and politicians were attempting to portray Occupy as reprehensible, irresponsible time wasters, it was, perhaps, the usual response by those who feel threatened to any new and challenging idea. Indeed, it is not new. During my 16 years as Chair of the League Against Cruel Sports and now as their President, those who continue to be opposed to the cruel practice of hunting with hounds are periodically labelled as ‘lefty oiks’, one of the more sanitised insults. It is in fact, a sign of weakness, both of argument and personality, when any debate descends into insults and infantile and simplistic labeling, and should consequently be dismissed or even be taken as flattering, but it is occasionally nice to have it completely dismantled before a court of law.

That is what we did in the Occupy hearings. I cannot say that those with closed minds will not wheel out the old insults, but I can predict with confidence that Occupy now has a wealth of judicial and legal comment attesting to the integrity and authority of the movement. If we achieved nothing else, that will prove invaluable in the time to come.

But, in my opinion, the hard letter of the law has also been challenged during these cases. Just what bodies such as the City, supported by the Church, and other powerful public and private bodies can do to frustrate and curtail a citizen’s right of public protest, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly has now, as a result of litigation like this, become one of the most exciting and developing areas of law in the first part of the 21st century.

The law says that, in extreme circumstances, these important human rights can be curtailed, but the vital and continuing legal question is how and at what stage?

Occupy thought that the courts have intervened too drachonically at the request of the City and, in reality, the Church. The courts, in effect, gave the applicants everything that they wanted when all rights, on both sides, could have been proportionately protected. This is the legal question which will continue, I predict, to trouble the courts for some time to come.

At the time of writing this, I received a call from my client, Tammy Samede. She wanted to confirm our case conference upon future Occupy legal approaches. I was happy to confirm that conference.

John Cooper QC is a barrister specialising in human rights and criminal law. He was engaged as a legal advisor by Occupy London on day one of the occupation.



TZ



“FREEMEN” FAVOUR FICTION OVER FACTS

SCRAPPER DUNCAN

Law is like life. It begins small and simple and then evolves. The Darwinian struggles to occupy new existential spaces and overcome challenges create new species. Much like ecosystems, young jurisdictions enjoy relatively simple relationships between their constituent parts but more established legal systems are populated with so many sets of rules, that experts in one area scarcely need know the others. Whether these evolutionary facts are morally good or bad is a philosophical issue. Advanced capitalist countries are routinely perceived as being governed by the practitioners of this ancient craft. Their specialist knowledge is the preserve of the few willing and financially able to obtain the learning required. Specialists are a feature of all complex societies.

Tackling the entrenched inequality in our society is a task requiring all hands on deck. Distinguishing between methods which help and those which hinder us is a key skill in this struggle.

Enter the Legal Woo Brigade. They’d prefer to be known as “Freemen on the land” performing “lawful rebellion” but their creed is a counterproductive mix of denying both most law and the veracity of all lawyers. They erroneously claim that law does not evolve, that England

is still subject to an ancient contract called the Magna Carta. Having blinded themselves to the basic democratic principles which have overcome medieval values, the Woo Brigade insist that no modern law has equal force to the Magna Carta. This is an obvious nonsense. The medieval world was very different from ours, and most the of the Magna Carta is meaningless today. Conveniently, they overlook the evils of that bygone age: the lack of rights for women, serfdom, politics being controlled by religious supremacists to name but three. They proselytise for an imaginary version of the law in the same manner as a fundamentalist preacher promises an unobtainable heaven, by misinterpreting their preferred texts, refusing fair debates and misreporting their numerous failures. Woo forums avoid these awkward truths, preferring fiction to facing down a critical analysis of their belief system.

A common refrain in their comments on critical blogs is “[the woo] makes sense to me!” They prefer to hear what they like rather than accept anyone else may possibly know better. Their attempts to muster recruits in Occupy London met with sustained deconstructions of their bizarre and pseudo-religious beliefs. Although this intellectual conflict was inevitable, they reacted badly to it, resorting to personal attacks on people in Occupy’s legal team and attempts to undermine our efforts to mount a viable legal defence. Whilst I was personally unconcerned about puerile descriptions of me as a “corporate shill”, their campaign to dissuade people from signing witness statements was altogether more serious. Without statements we’d have had no evidence. Without evidence to rebut the City’s eviction case, OccupyLSX wouldn’t even have been granted a trial in the High Court – we’d have been evicted much more swiftly. Whilst OccupyLSX’s indecision on its own longevity didn’t help develop the common law on protest camps, it bought considerable time by taking the actual rules of civil litigation seriously. Curiously, the one woo man who penetrated into the appeal process was rubbishised by the Court of Appeal, which described his case as “simply wrong”.

Bizarrely - and in much contrast to Occupy - the Woo Brigade make no case for law reform. Accepting that law has developed does not equate with political submission to the impact of the laws which value proprietary rights over communities. Failing to propose changes reveals the regressive nature of the woo. If only it ended there! Much of the woo preys on vulnerable people. A particular worry is their promise of a cure for chronic debts by giving misconceived legal advice. Faced with increasing exposure, these charlatans have fought back with personal slurs on Occupy’s most committed activists, whilst contributing nothing to the movement. Ignoring this antisocial behaviour has been a costly mistake. Welcoming everyone to Occupy was an early tactical triumph but also a hostage to fortune. The time has come to expose these reactionaries. blog.scrapperduncan.com



MASI DANJU



STALWARTS OF OCCUPY: ARTHUR

EMMA FORDHAM

OCCUPIER AND OT REPORTER EMMA FORDHAM GETS THE LOW DOWN FROM ANOTHER OF OCCUPY LONDON'S FAMILIAR FACES

EM: When did you get involved in Occupy?

ARTHUR: One week after the OLSX camp set up.

EM: What took you there?

ARTHUR: I was following preparations on Facebook. I wanted to be part of the earlier Tower Bridge protest but I couldn't afford to get there. When Occupy London Stock Exchange happened and settled at St Paul's I watched on Livestream then asked my dad to look after my dogs so I could visit and see what it was about first hand.

EM: What were you doing before you went to St Paul's?

ARTHUR: I was a free range chicken farmer until 18 months ago then I had a crazy awakening, a major life change. I sold off my stuff and began researching everything – religions, history, politics, economics... ending up in the Occupy camp was part of that journey.

EM: How did you spend your time in the camp?

ARTHUR: Learning and making myself useful. I made tea, looked after tents and spent a lot of time chatting to members of the public and other occupiers, swapping and sharing knowledge and experiences. I listened to speakers and teachers in Tent City University and I talked to Quakers. I learnt a lot and fitted together little bits of the jigsaw... it was a complete immersion in education.

EM: Did you expect to stay at the camp for four months?

ARTHUR: Not really. I turned up for a day, spent a month in the same clothes, then went home for a week to get clean and pick up some warm clothes so I could stay for the long haul.

EM: Was camping in the city a hardship or a joy?

ARTHUR: A joy, for many reasons.

St Paul's is a high-energy area; there were great people in the camp, it was a bubbling hub of information with a really connected, community feeling. Also, although I've always been poor I've never had absolutely nothing before and that's been a valuable experience.

EM: Of all the issues Occupy aims to address, what are the most important for you?

ARTHUR: Changing the banking system is at the heart of things but everything people bring up is important. I've learnt about issues I didn't know about before that are really important, like homelessness.

EM: Tell me three things about the current system that you'd most like to change...

ARTHUR: The way we use money – ideally, I'd like to get rid of it. The government – in an ideal world, I think we'd have one world government and online direct democracy. We also need to urgently sort out environmental issues. And – can I have four? – reduce working hours so there aren't some people bored and jobless while others work 18 hours a day.

EM: What do you think Occupy has achieved so far?

ARTHUR: We've increased awareness everywhere, from pubs to boardrooms. We've given people hope.

EM: What do you think Occupy should do next?

ARTHUR: Carry on with its educational role and encourage better use of public spaces.

EM: Where will you personally go from here?

ARTHUR: Onwards and upwards!

THE GREAT DEBATE

SHOULD OCCUPY A SINGLE ISSUE MOVEMENT?

Occupy began in the wake of the financial crash, bank bailouts and austerity measures, as a movement opposed to economic injustice. Since then, many other issues have been incorporated into Occupy's aims and rhetoric. This edition we ask: should Occupy remain focussed on financial questions, or should we broaden the debate and take a more holistic approach?

FOR/ DANIEL JELLER

With a view to the stage Occupy is currently in, my answer is 'yes': we should definitely focus on economic issues within the movement, but also within our society. Vague and all-encompassing goals and debates are less likely to attract people who would be willing to spend their time and energy working towards specific ends, and we certainly need to reach more people. Whilst it might, at first glance, seem a bit odd to attract new members by limiting our focus, we need to see that most people need a clear understanding of what they are fighting for (and what they aren't). The feeling of sharing a few fundamental things with your comrades is a huge motivating factor for participating in a social movement.

Whilst there are certainly other important topics that need to be discussed publicly, financial inequality and injustice is what started the movement in the first place. People did not occupy the White House in Washington (which, in my opinion, would have been a good and visible place to occupy) but the Stock Exchange and Wall Street in New York. Clearly, the vision of an alternative economy is the common denominator of the Occupy movement. At the same time, this doesn't have to limit our focus forever, but for the time being we should try to create a much sharper profile, especially since Occupy will always be measured by what the media and the 99% perceive as our goals.

There are various historic examples we can learn from. One is the rise of the so-called Green movement in European politics, which started as a movement with specific goals and a clear environmental focus (for example, opposing nuclear power plants). In this first phase, those groups with the most precise goals attracted the most followers, and were actually able to change things. After a few decades of participation in mainstream politics, however, and adopting the broader focus essential to attract as many voters as possible, they sometimes seem to lack the original verve, and some even claim that it is difficult to distinguish the Greens from other parties.

Another example is the Pirate Party, which succeeded in gaining publicity and a significant number of followers in a very short time. It faces similar problems to the Occupy movement. In Germany, for instance, they are now under pressure to provide solutions to a broad range of social problems, just like every other political party, and the media has already been questioning whether they will be able to provoke real change.

Right now, Occupy does not have to compete for votes. We can see this as an opportunity to focus on a single important matter, to enlarge the movement and to attract people who are willing to commit themselves to a specific goal, as opposed to those who want change but don't really know what or how to start. If we work hard enough, this is an area we might genuinely be able to influence.

AGAINST/ PETER COVILLE

I'm talking about the big business interests that own this country. Forget the politicians, the politicians are put there to give you the idea you have freedom of choice. You don't. You have owners, they own you, they own everything, they own all the important land, they own and control the corporations, they've long since bought and paid for the Senate, the Congress, the State houses, the City Halls. They've got the judges in their back pocket, and they own all the big media companies, so they control just about all of the news and information you get to hear...they've got you by the balls. (George Carlin)

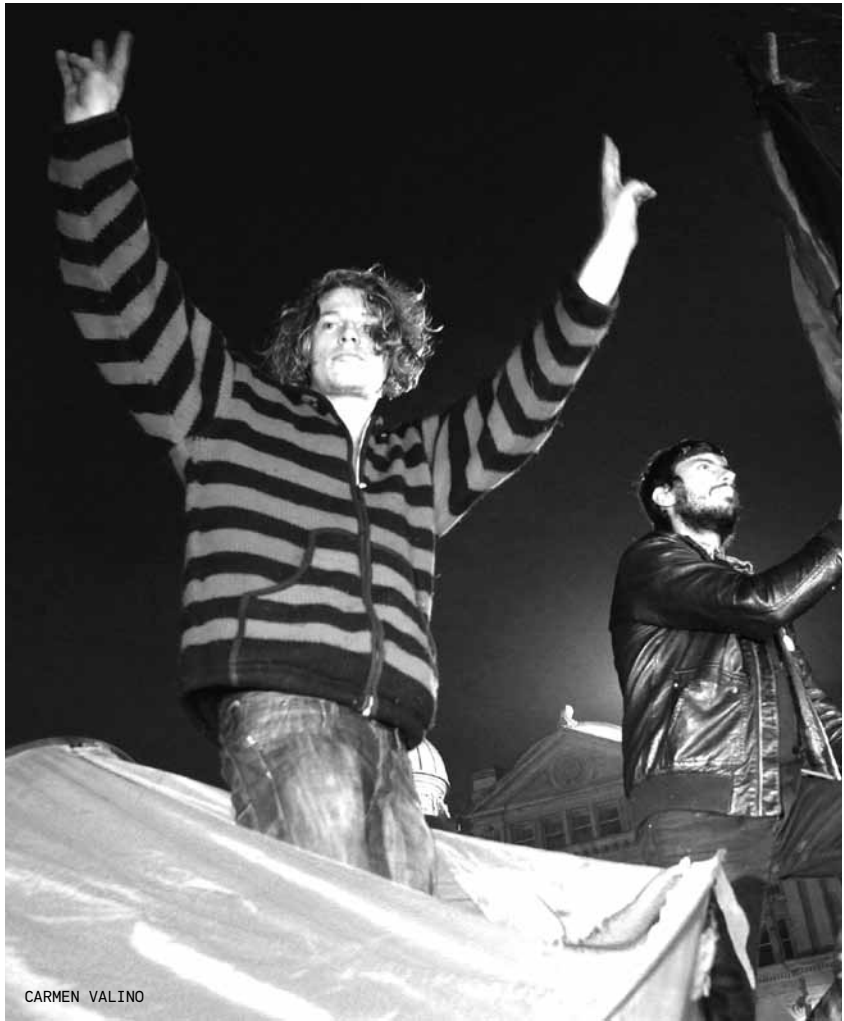
Anger can be a powerful force in politics. It was anger at gross economic inequality that brought thousands of people onto the global street during 2011, and may well bring many more out in 2012, as further cuts and austerity measures begin to bite all over the world. A feeling of gross injustice transforms passive subjects into active citizens and genuine democrats. So it may seem obvious that Occupy's strategy should follow the people, relaying and amplifying this feeling of anger at inequality. But there is an inherent risk of Occupy focusing on inequality alone. Any government worth its expense claims will simply act at the margins to remove the causes of the anger, as the Coalition government has indeed done, by stripping Fred Goodwin of his knighthood, and trimming those few bonuses which are most visible to the public. The public perception will then be that the injustice – at least the worst of it – has been removed, and the anger will subside.



Even if, say, a reinvigorated Labour government surfs to power at the next election on a tsunami of anger at economic injustice, bringing in higher taxes on corporations and the wealthy for the benefit of the less well-off, this will only be tinkering with a rotten system. Such superficial measures will be reversed when the Tories return to power. Like George Carlin, we ought to continue to widen our vision, reminding people that they have far more to be angry about than economic inequality or cuts to services, which are only the symptoms of far deeper problems.

We might add to Carlin's list of complaints that these "big business interests" – now more powerful than many nation states – are presently enjoying virtual impunity to institute a new form of imperialism abroad, displacing indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands without any meaningful form of process, creating huge opencast mines or establishing massive soya or palm oil plantations. 'Our companies are getting away with social and environmental crimes that would never be tolerated at home. The fundamental and underlying cause of economic inequality, and many other problems, is that there is no genuine democratic control of society and economy, neither at home and abroad.

Government no longer acts for the benefit of the people, despite the charade of democracy. Occupy should continue to highlight this fact, and bring its wider vision to the debate, in an age where vision is a scarce commodity in politics. If we do this in the right way, and show clearly that there are alternatives, the public will respond with a much deeper, broader and more resilient anger, which can really change things.



DISGUIISING, MYTHOLOGISING & PROTEST

MICHAEL RICHMOND

I was a little disconcerted on my first couple of visits to OccupyLSX by the number of people walking around with their faces entirely covered. There is a healthy contingent of Anonymous UK occupiers who wear the iconic Guy Fawkes mask from the V for Vendetta film but they can all be seen unmasked at various times- how else are they supposed to have a drink and a smoke? There is also Anon, who is a mainstay of the camp, often greeting visitors in the Info tent. To my knowledge Anon's face is always covered by his headscarf and his signature ski goggles.

I did, as most people do when they meet anyone, judge Anon by his appearance on first impression. I wondered why he dressed as he did. I have often in the past made similar judgements about Muslim women who fully cover their faces with the burqa or leave only their eyes showing with the niqab. I feel quite strongly that seeing another person's eyes and face is quite fundamental to being able to relate to them and make a connection. Once I spoke to Anon, and heard him speak at meetings, it was clear that he was full of personality, ideas and sharp one-liners, and other considerations began to matter less.

The ubiquity of masks and disguises at Occupy protests worldwide has made me think about the wider importance of the mythical and the disguise in protest movements historically. When we wear a disguise, even if it's just make-up or some of the clothes we choose to wear, it's usually both to hide or alter a part of our own identity as well as sending a message out to others. The same is probably true in the context of protest.

For example, at the Boston Tea Party in 1773 when a group of colonial Americans boarded a British ship in the middle of the night and threw tonnes of its valuable tea into the Boston Harbour in protest at a new tax imposed from London, these men dressed as Mohawk Native Americans. Their choice of dress has gone down in American History. The latest interpretations as to why they chose to dress this way are, on the one hand, to conceal their identities to guard them from the draconian punishments sure to be meted out on them were the British authorities to catch up with them. And on the other hand, to send out a more symbolic message, namely, "we are American now," like the American Indian (a bitter irony for the indigenous American community) and like Britain no longer.

There are a couple of fascinating tales of subversive disguise and mythmaking in the 19th century. In the late 1820s and early 1830s in southwest France, in the forest region near the Pyrenees, there was a bizarre confrontation brewing between the remote peasant villages of the forests and the modernising central authorities wanting to systematize what was to the locals, sacred land. Bands of local men, who became known as the Demoiselles, dressed up in full drag and formed into small guerrilla units attacking any forest rangers or royal authorities who encroached onto their land. It is still something of a mystery as to why these men turned to transvestism in their hour of need but there are suggestions that the use of such disguise drew heavily on both folkloric traditions and the hedonistic celebrations of the carnival. Nevertheless, there's no doubting that it emboldened them in their fight as they held off a much larger enemy for far longer than anyone expected.

A working class movement in Britain called the Luddites took a slightly different approach to the steady march of capitalism. A phenomenon of the towns and cities of a rapidly industrialising early 19th century Britain Luddism, in

simple terms, involved thousands of working men destroying and sabotaging the newly invented machines that were putting them out of a job. Much the same as the Demoiselle of the Arieges, the Luddites were left in fear for their way of life and they fought back in what we can see in hindsight were both losing battles.

Where the Luddites interest me is their name. Named after Ned Ludd, a man who may or may not have existed but was rumoured to have angrily destroyed a machine a generation earlier, the name took on a mythical significance. Ned Ludd became General Ludd or King Ludd, the personification of the cause, a heroic leader who was said to live in Sherwood Forest, that old stomping ground of another mythical talisman, Robin Hood. It's like that famous line in The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance: "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." Essentially it didn't matter who Ned Ludd was or Robin Hood or William Wallace or even Jesus, it's what and who they come to represent. At its height the Luddite Rebellion was engaging more of the British Army than the concurrent War with Napoleon in the Iberian Peninsula. But as dozens of the leaders were captured and either executed or sent to penal exile in Australia, the movement died out.

Enter the rural reprise of the movement and a new mythical embodiment of anti-capitalist rebellion. As new threshing machines looked like spelling the end for many agricultural workers they took a leaf out of the Luddites' book and began to destroy the new machinery. The Swing Riots of the 1830s, as the widespread agricultural uprising became known, was named after the invented figure of Captain Swing. Adopted as the figurehead of the rebellion, the impressively named Captain Swing's signature appeared at the bottom of hundreds of letters and pamphlets through the South, East and South-East of England threatening that if they failed to stop the haemorrhaging of rural manual labour then Swing and his followers would continue to take matters into their own hands.

And this is where we can return to Anonymous because I see a striking resemblance between the way that anyone could sign the name Captain Swing and their message would take on the might of a wave. And now, anyone can post a comment or hack under the name of Anonymous, or set up a camp or Tweet under the name of Occupy, or on the flipside commit violence under the banner of Al Qaeda, Al Shabab, etc. What we're talking about here are cells, loosely affiliated networks with

no central command or control but thousands of low level interactions every hour of every day, online and in real life, linked only by a vague set of principles and techniques. This is a paradigm the lumbering hierarchies of the last century struggle to keep pace with in the same way that the US army has struggled with guerrilla warfare (or "insurgencies") ever since Vietnam.

For me, the masks of Anonymous say more about the culture that neoliberalism creates than they do about the people who wear them. The mask means more than just anonymity, it is strength in numbers. In one of their calling card phrases Anonymous say: "We are Anonymous, We are Legion." It answers a human need to sometimes be one of many, not just a 'self.' In anonymity, people can hope to escape the exhausting egoism of our age, the atomising force of late capitalism where the pressure is all on the self and particularly the self-image. Retreating into the crowd can feel like a relief.

But within the theme of disguise there also exists a paranoia and suspicion not just within the Occupy camps but within all direct action movements at the moment. I have been accused of being both undercover police and also an Evening Standard reporter! (I don't know which is worse?) But this paranoia is hardly misplaced because we all know very well that they are out to get us, even in harmless environmentalist groups like the one PC Mark Kennedy disgustingly infiltrated. The establishment are usually guilty of the most deceitful disguise and right now they're more rattled and paranoid than ever. For this Government, and the New Labour one before it, 'protesters' are an enemy but as the current system increasingly stumbles around like a dazed prizefighter ready to drop they are throwing punches more haphazardly than ever. How else can you explain the City of London Police listing Occupy London as a domestic terror threat on the same page as Al Qaeda and the FARC? Protesters are already an 'other,' painted as something to be disdained or mocked, but with a sick and paranoid establishment anyone with a different ideology now becomes a threat to be kettled, intimidated and beaten into submission. The malign intent of the elite and the police can no longer be disguised, because the swarm is too adaptable and the networks of information too fast that today's activists and "networked individuals" are always one step ahead. We are not all Anonymous but We are Legion.



ON THE SOAPBOX

CLAUDE MELVILLE SAYS FINSBURY SQUARE SHOULD GO IT ALONE

I joined Occupy to oppose the unjust economic system which caused the financial crisis of 2008, and the wider neoliberal consensus which allowed it to manifest.

I arrived at St Paul's on the 15th of October ready to make personal sacrifices, to stand up to oppressive policing if necessary, camp out, work hard, and generally do whatever I could to offer some sort of opposition to this pernicious government in the absence of any parliamentary representation of the left.

As well as being angry about the economic crisis and punishing austerity measures, I'm passionate about environmental issues and, especially, homelessness. I didn't, however, come to Occupy to set up an eco-village or to home rough sleepers.

On one level you could say I did come for those reasons: I would like to see a society free of homelessness in harmony with the environment, but to have any chance of achieving these mammoth goals I believe we must address the root causes of them. We can't just plug holes in the dam, we need to change the course of the river.

What I certainly did not join Occupy for was to turn a blind eye to the abuse of fellow activists, abuse I'm afraid to say I have witnessed both at St Paul's and now Finsbury Square.

I am fully aware that individuals with substance abuse and mental

health problems have become entwined with Occupy – or the camps at least, if not so much the politics – and I have huge sympathy for those people. But I do not think we are doing them any great favours, or ourselves, by pretending Occupy can, or should, help them.

If Finsbury Square is to survive, let's call it what it now is: an eco-village and homeless shelter, and run it as such with that specific remit. Rather than it being an Occupy London site, let it be independent, liberated from the burden of having to fight for economic justice and freed to do some tangible, achievable good with the support of the Occupy movement. If people are passionate about homelessness, environmental issues or camping out, then they can be part of the Finsbury project, but people who came to Occupy London with a macro perspective or to protest over economic injustice ought not to be bound to the site.

Physical occupations are a tactic, one that worked superbly for the first few months in providing a platform for outreach and grabbing media attention to help push issues onto the political agenda. But once a tactic ceases to be useful, we should cease to use it until a time when it becomes useful again. Other tactics are available. Occupation is just the beginning, and should never be seen as the end.



3 DIMENSIONS OF OCCUPY

ANINDYA BHATTACHARYYA

The Occupy movement seemed to spring out of nowhere in the autumn of last year. First we saw the Occupy Wall Street camp in New York's Zuccotti Park - which was swiftly renamed Liberty Square in homage to Cairo's Tahrir Square. Here in Britain, we saw a series of Occupy camps set up on October 15th, most notably the Occupy LSX site on the steps of St Paul's cathedral in London.

I had the privilege of visiting Occupy Wall Street in October. I was sent to report on it by the newspaper "Socialist Worker". This trip didn't quite go as planned - I

ended up arrested along with several other activists and spent 30 hours in jail. We were protesting against student debt in the lobby of a Citibank outlet, and the New York Police Department considered this to be trespass. Once I got back to London, I visited the St Paul's camp on a few occasions to take part in general assemblies.

Of course both camps have now been forcibly cleared by the authorities. Occupy is at a crossroads, and we are presented with the opportunity to step back and critically assess the past four months. What follows is an attempt at that kind of political analysis. I should stress that it is in no sense an "insider account". It comes rather from the position of a sympathetic fellow

traveller with the movement, and should be taken in that spirit.

I want to look at three dimensions of the Occupy movement. The first is the physical dimension - the politics of occupying a public space, the repression such actions encounter, the history and relevance of such tactics. The second is the ideological dimension - what Occupy said and meant, in particular the focus on capitalism's systematic inequality captured by the "We are the 99%" slogan. The third dimension is more speculative - I'm provisionally calling it the insurrectionary dimension: a distillation and synthesis of the first two perspectives. I'll end with some brief words on where we are now here in Britain, and where we could go next.



WASI DANTU

Let's start with the most striking aspect of Occupy: its physical occupation of space. The mainstream media like to present this as a new tactic. But such a view involves a certain historical blindness. Occupations have a history in working class and radical movements. The Occupy camps had immediate antecedents and inspirations in the form of Spain's indignados movement and the student occupations of 2010.

I was studying for an MA in philosophy at Middlesex University that year. Management decided to shut the department down and we ended up occupying the mansion house in Trent Park in protest at this move. At the time, we considered it to be a one-off event. But a few months later, a wave of student occupations arose in response to tuition fee hikes and the abolishment of the Education Maintenance Allowance.

Look back further, and we can see other examples of occupations. Several universities had occupations in protest to Israel's attack on Gaza in late 2009. After the Seattle demonstrations in 1999, social centres associated with the anti-capitalist movement were established. They, in turn, were linked to radical squatting movements and aspects of the 1990s rave scene. Evidently, Occupy had many precursors.

There is also a history of occupations in the workers' movement, although it has often received less attention. In 2009, workers occupied the Visteon factory in north London and forced Ford into paying them redundancy money that it had been withholding. Similar factory occupations in the past have won notable victories. In 1981, many women workers at Lee Jeans in Greenock occupied their plant and saved it from closure.

Occupation is a tactic with a history and a pedigree. Of course each occupation arises out of unique circumstances and has its own unique dynamic. But there are certain general points that can be elaborated. The first is that occupation poses an immediate question about public and private space. We live our lives surrounded by a field of invisible regulations that tell us where we can or must go, and what we are and aren't allowed to do there. Occupation makes these regulations of bodies in space visible. Anyone involved in an occupation rapidly confronts police officers or security guards. The forces of 'law and order' seek to restore 'normality', and are more than willing to use violent means to do so.

Indeed, the levels of force used by the authorities are shocking. We've seen kettles, mass arrests, truncheons, and police horses. The



MARCUS BOYLE

student protest on December 9th 2010 deviated from its official route and occupied Parliament Square. My friend Alfie Meadows - who had been centrally involved in the Middlesex philosophy occupation - ended up getting truncheoned by police and underwent emergency brain surgery. Of course no police officer has been brought to account for this action. Instead Alfie has been charged with violent disorder and faces the courts on 26 March.

Again, history is important. When the police attack an occupation, this is not an aberration. The police force was set up in the 19th century partially in order to break up mass demonstrations. Police work has never been limited to solving crimes or catching villains - it has always been about controlling the masses as well. The attacks on occupations and demonstrations represent a return to the police's core purpose, not a deviation from it.

The violence of the state has ambivalent effects. On the one hand, it was the police repression of Occupy Wall Street activists that brought the camp to the attention of the mainstream media. At least initially the repression was counterproductive from the perspective of the authorities - it fuelled solidarity on an unprecedented scale for the activists involved.

But on the other hand, one cannot ignore the overwhelming superiority of the state's ability to use force against occupations. Politically, solidarity can stave off the ending of an occupation only for a certain amount of time. Occupations are by nature temporary affairs, as we have seen in both New York and London. Activists must carefully balance the energy directed inwards to sustain the occupation against the energy directed outwards to garner support and solidarity from the wider public. In New York activists responded to the eviction of Liberty Square with the



This leads us on to the second dimension of Occupy - its ideological aspects. One of the most fascinating elements of Occupy is the way it combined old and new media. The movement took full advantage of internet technologies and social media such as emails, Twitter and Facebook. But it also deployed age-old tactics such as placards and slogans. People wrote out demands and polemics on pieces of cardboard, and then photographed themselves and posted digital images online. Occupy took on the traditional task of speaking truth to power in new and creative ways.

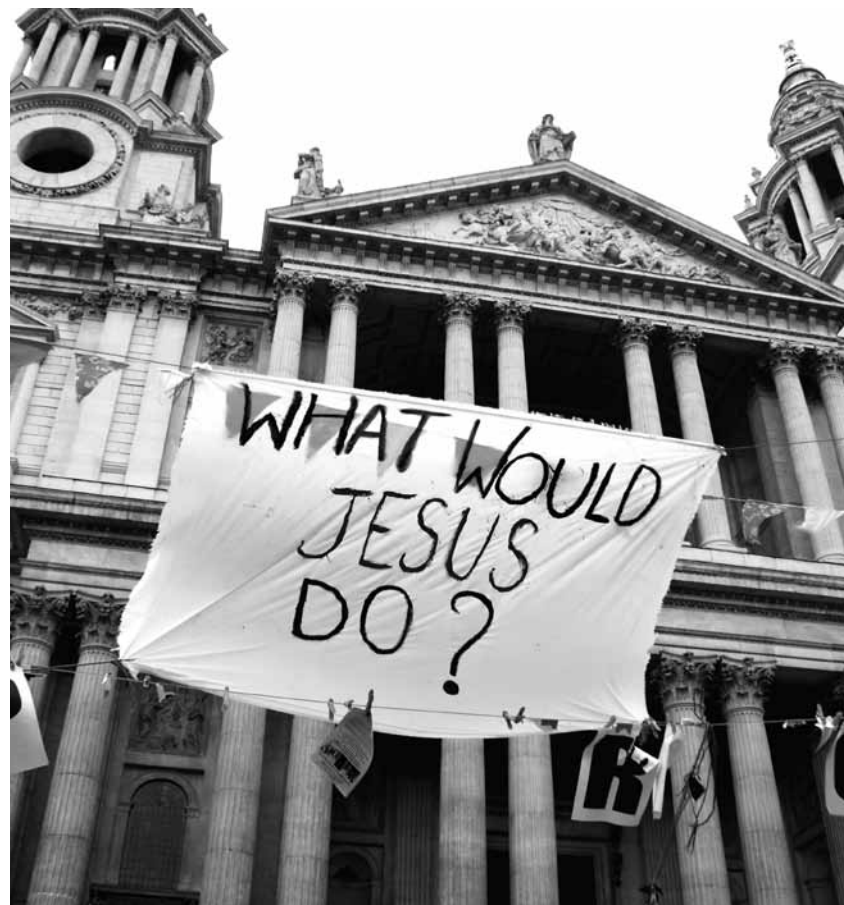
Of all the various slogans and phrases one striking metaphor stood out: the theme of the 99% versus the 1%. At a basic level, the slogan was simply a factual description of the world, and of the grotesque inequality of power and wealth. Of course, this inequality has been with us ever since the rise of "civilisation" (or class society, as Marxists call it). But it has accelerated exponentially in recent years, under both the "neoliberal" phase of capitalism and the "austerity" phase that is now dawning in the wake of the 2007 global financial meltdown.

But the 99% slogan is about more than a bald statement of fact. First, it is an antagonistic statement: the 99% versus the 1%. At Occupy Wall Street I saw several homemade placards bearing statements like "The 1% is my enemy". This naming of an enemy set Occupy apart from more general populist rhetoric about how "we the people" are "all in it together". It explicitly drew a battle line - and implicitly pointed to the idea of class struggle.

Second, the 99% slogans had what philosophers call a "performative" dimension. Occupiers didn't just say something, they also did something. Occupy Wall Street activists organised marches through working class areas chanting "We are the 99%". This was a call to arms and an invitation to people to join them. It was also a chant that raised questions. Demonstrators typically chanted it over the heads of cops. So were the police part of the 99% or not? This was a common question discussed among activists. My answer would be that while average police officers are not part of the 1%, they certainly work for the 1% and do their bidding. They do not and never will side with the 99%.

Occupy's slogans did more than propagandise about inequality. They also instilled a political discipline on the movement. At the centre of this was the confrontational nature of the slogan. For despite the omnipresence of inequality under capitalism, it remains the system's dirty little secret. We aren't meant to talk about it.

But the act of talking about it involved taking on not just the police but also ruling class ideology - the "policeman in our heads" as the 1968 students once called it (though this metaphor can be misleading: ideology isn't really "in our heads" but "out there" in the world). Eric Fretz, a New York-based socialist, wrote a story that illustrated this point. He recounts the story of filmmaker Michael Moore's speech at last year's union rights protests in Wisconsin. Moore pointed out that just 400 Americans hold more wealth than half of all Americans combined. But it was only after Occupy Wall Street that these statistics received a wider airing. Occupy forced the issue of systematic inequality out of the radical ghetto onto the agenda of the mainstream media. That alone is an achievement worth applauding.



JUAN MANUEL PEÑA

What do these two dimensions of Occupy - the physical and the ideological - have in common? An insurrectionary character, a refusal to play by the rules of "normal" society, a revelation of the 1%'s power combined with a defiance of that power, and a rallying call for others to join the insurrection. That is the spirit at work both in the physical occupation of privatised space and in the ideological focus on questions about inequality, poverty, and political power under capitalism.

Occupy is strongest when it seizes that insurrectionary spirit and moves it forward. We see this in Occupy Wall Street's success in linking up with trade union struggles, anti-racism campaigns and a host of other radical causes. It has bound together the 99% and mutually strengthened all those struggles. And it has continued to play that role even after the physical dissolution of the camp at Liberty Square.

We can see similar dynamics in Britain. One of Occupy LSX's first pledges was to support the 30 November public sector strike that saw 2.6 million workers walk out against cuts to pensions and public services. Another example is the

solidarity delivered by Occupy activists to the recent electricians' dispute. It's no coincidence that the police went out of their way to prevent the electricians from marching to join Occupy LSX and student protesters during their frequent skirmishes with the authorities. The 1% know how dangerous it can be when radical movements fuse with workers in struggle. We should draw that lesson, too.

The question for Occupy is how to harness that insurrectionary dimension, and where to take it. The answers are far from straightforward. History is peppered with inspiring examples of radical activism and ideas crossing over into mass working class struggle, but there are also too many examples of failure. The success of that alliance is not something that occurs automatically or without conscious intention.

Moreover, knitting together the physical and ideological insurrections also involves bridging theory and practice. Again, this is hard and requires effort. It's all too easy to lapse into producing overarching critiques of the system while getting lost in the minutiae of internal organisation and process. This gap needs to be closed: Successful activism requires a theory that guides our practice and a practice that informs our theory.

The overwhelming power of the 1% also needs to be addressed. They have laws, judges, media, police and armies on their side. All we have is numbers and organisation. The question is how to build those popular resources into something that can effectively challenge the status quo. One of Marx's key insights was about the role of workers. Organising in the workplace means organising at the point where our labour generates their profits. It means organising where we are strongest. Agitating for mass strikes - a generalised insurrection of labour - draws the largest amount of people into struggle as well as deploying our power most effectively against that of the 1%.

We are currently seeing austerity programmes being rolled out by governments across Europe. This is most evident in Greece, which has seen wave after wave of strikes and demonstrations involving huge numbers of people. Protest is even spilling over into direct workers' control. Hospitals and newspapers have been occupied by their workforces and organised by them rather than by a discredited and powerless management. Similar processes are underway in Egypt, where the movement against Mubarak has deepened into more radical struggle over the very nature of society.

There are glimpses of this in Britain already. The electricians won their battle to prevent construction bosses from imposing new and vastly inferior contracts upon them. They did this through rank-and-file organisation and militant tactics, crucially including unofficial strikes that pushed their union into action. We also saw it with the November 30th strike, which was less militant but involved far greater numbers of people defying their managers, walking out, organising pickets and linking up with other workers in struggle. As I write, that dispute looks set to flare up again with another major strike scheduled for March 28th.

And the spirit of insurrection is spreading. We've seen the astonishing spectacle of company after company dropping out of the government's noxious workfare scheme in the face of militant protests backed by a tidal wave of public anger and disgust at those who would force the unemployed to work for free. The government is increasingly under siege over its plans to dismantle the National Health Service. Almost everyone who works to deliver healthcare has united against the government and in defence of basic NHS principles. The mutinous spirit is spreading, and Occupy is a part of it. We can and must mobilise the 99% against the 1%. Or as Percy Bysshe Shelley put it two centuries ago: "We are many, they are few."

Anindya Bhattacharyya is a journalist on Socialist Worker. You can follow him on Twitter at @bat020 and read his article on Occupy Wall Street at bit.ly/bat020ows. This article is based on his contribution to a seminar on Occupy earlier this month at the Oxford Radical Forum. Other participants included Conor Tomás Reed from Occupy Wall Street and Tanya Paton from Occupy LSX.



MARC FAIRHURST

BEYOND THE HEADLINES:

AN INTERVIEW WITH MEDIA LENS

THE MEDIA LENS MEDIA ANALYSIS SERVICE WAS ESTABLISHED IN 2001 BY POLITICAL WRITERS DAVID CROMWELL AND DAVID EDWARDS. THE SERVICE AIMS TO RAISE AWARENESS OF THE SYSTEMIC FAILURE OF THE CORPORATE MEDIA TO REPORT THE WORLD HONESTLY AND ACCURATELY, AND TO INCREASE RATIONAL AWARENESS,

CRITICAL THOUGHT AND COMPASSION. ITS OUTPUT INCLUDES NEWS ANALYSES IN THE FORM OF MEDIA ALERTS. IN 2007, MEDIA LENS RECEIVED THE GANDHI FOUNDATION INTERNATIONAL PEACE PRIZE. MARK KAURI SPOKE WITH MEDIA LENS ON ITS WORK, PHILOSOPHY AND PERSPECTIVE ON THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE...

OCCUPIED TIMES: For more than a decade, the Media Lens project has been working to analyse media bias. How, if at all, has your perception of mainstream and corporate media changed since the start of this project?

MEDIA LENS: Just to begin with a point of clarification: we also sometimes use the expression 'mainstream' media but it's a bit misleading. The dominant news media are corporate news organisations; they do not represent mainstream interests, if by that we mean the concerns and priorities of the general population.

If our perception has changed, it has been a deepening awareness of just how entrenched are state-corporate interests in determining news agendas. We have observed, for example, that corporate news coverage of climate change has actually got worse: both in terms of quantity of coverage (which has been documented; see our alert) and also the actual content. If



OT: The founding philosophy of Media Lens stems from concerns of propaganda within the media. Has your experience of monitoring the media ratified, challenged or debunked these founding concerns?

ML: This question really overlaps with the first one. It's not so much that we had, or still have, 'concerns of propaganda within the media'. The corporate media is essentially a system of propaganda and thought control: an old and well-established notion, predating even Orwell, but put on a thorough footing by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky in their 1988 classic book, *Manufacturing Consent*. Talking of 'propaganda within the media' suggests that it might be possible to significantly weed it out. But the important point is that the corporate media is structurally biased towards the channelling and amplification of 'news' that boosts the interests of state power and big business. Propaganda is an endemic feature of a corporate media system that is made up of corporations linked to even bigger conglomerates with ties to the arms trade and planet-devouring businesses, heavy reliance on corporate advertising, close ties to powerful political interests, and so on.

OT: Drawing on your findings, in what sense can we say that the media landscape is 'occupied'?

ML: The media 'landscape' is almost

totally dominated by elite state and corporate interests. It is not monolithic: there are little chinks of light here and there that can be exploited for marginal gains that may, in themselves, be worthwhile. But we should also be alert to the 'fig leaf' effect – the regular or sporadic appearance of a tiny handful of dissidents who provide the illusion of wide-ranging debate. Jonathan Cook, formerly a reporter for both the Guardian and the Observer, puts it this way:

"The Guardian, like other mainstream media, is heavily invested – both financially and ideologically – in supporting the current global order. It was once able to exclude and now, in the internet age, must vilify those elements of the left whose ideas risk questioning a system of corporate power and control of which the Guardian is a key institution.

"The paper's role, like that of its rightwing cousins, is to limit the imaginative horizons of readers. While there is just enough leftwing debate to make readers believe their paper is pluralistic, the kind of radical perspectives needed to question the very foundations on which the system of Western dominance rests is either unavailable or is ridiculed."

OT: How have mainstream and corporate media platforms responded to your Media Alerts?

ML: There has been a variety of responses tending towards the negative:

ranging from silence through to irritation or condescension, and very occasionally outright abuse (Roger Alton, then editor of the Observer, being a notable source). In 2008, we were even threatened with police and legal action by News International after we'd critically appraised The Times' warmongering on Iran (see our media alert on this). More positively, we have anecdotal evidence from media insiders that we have been a 'rallying point for dissent' in organisations like the BBC and the Observer. There are a surprising number who strongly, if covertly, support what we're doing.

OT: Developments in social media seem to promise the means to bypass a corporate 'middleman' in reportage, such as through direct citizen journalism. Do you believe social media could offer the means for communication to subvert or bypass propaganda in the media?

ML: Direct citizen journalism does have a role, and could have a major role, to play in subverting or bypassing propaganda. There are strong indications that social media played an important role in the so-called 'Arab Spring'. The use of Twitter and Facebook, for example, enabled people at grassroots level to challenge the propaganda of their own governments and to organise resistance to these – typically, Western-supported – authoritarian regimes. Of



course, there will always be a vital role for insightful, specialist reporting and commentary on foreign affairs, the economy, climate change, human rights and so on. But these experts are citizens too, yes? So 'citizen' journalism needs to incorporate these perspectives and work closely with them. The internet offers an excellent means for establishing and boosting responsible journalism that truly challenges power – something we address in our answer to your related question later on.

OT: What are the potential pitfalls to reportage through citizen journalism? Is there a base of journalistic expertise that cannot be found outside of mainstream media platforms such as broadsheets and broadcasting networks?

ML: Essentially there need to be open, publicly-supported networks linking people with the skills and insight to comment knowledgeably on current affairs. 'Journalistic expertise' within current corporate news organisations all too often means limiting news frameworks to what powerful interests are saying. There is plenty of expertise outside those constricting frameworks – voices of rationality and humanity – that are all too often marginalised or excluded by current news media. So there is no dearth of alternative, non-corporate expertise for honest journalism to draw upon.

OT: How can activists hope to 'occupy' the media as part of their drive towards social, economic and environmental justice?

ML: We believe that as long as the internet remains relatively open, there is a tremendous opportunity for activists and journalists not to 'occupy' the corporate media, but to bypass the corporate media, and to set up networks of honest, responsible journalism supported by the public. We are inspired by the examples of Jonathan Cook and Glenn Greenwald, for example. Surely there is scope for insightful writers like these to be funded to work as independent journalists?

In his book, 'The Return of the Public', Dan Hind proposes that a new system of state-sponsored public commissioning of journalism should be introduced which would 'replace the power of owners and superiors with the power of citizens at crucial points of decision'. Hind suggests that:

"Journalists working to public commissions can hope to build careers by addressing matters of common concern; they can specialize, they can develop a deep understanding of their subject and build stable networks of sources; they will not be subject to simple veto or more subtle forms of coercion from their employers; they will be more directly answerable to the audiences they serve."

As Hind notes, the BBC currently sets aside 3.5% of the £3.4bn raised

annually from the licence fee to pay for the switch from terrestrial (analogue) to digital provision of TV channels this year. He proposes that at least some of this money thereafter 'should be controlled by the population as a whole, through a system of participatory commissioning.' He sees this funding 3,000 journalists and researchers at a basic annual salary of £24,000 'to work full time on matters of interest and concern to the general population.' There would undoubtedly be many details to be worked out in practice; but it seems an idea that is worth exploring.

OT: In *Guardians of Power: The Myth of the Liberal Media*, you suggest that a revolution in media towards a more compassionate foundation is in the hands of both the public and journalists. In what sense can the public help to revolutionise media?

ML: The internet really has broken the corporate media monopoly on global outreach. You no longer have to be a major corporation, or a member of the 1%, to instantly communicate with a global audience. More honest, non-corporate voices can now reach a massive audience at low cost – a very positive development. If people understood just how positive, we suspect they would be far less willing to pay for corporate media and much more willing to support non-corporate alternatives like The Real News Network and Democracy Now! It's a truly historic opportunity.

We need to work hard to challenge corporate media, to promote marginal improvements. But the real hope lies in public-supported, non-corporate media freed from the structural constraints of elite ownership and control. That may be achievable; it's up to us. We need media driven by an authentic interest in understanding and solving human problems. Currently, we are stuck with a greed-driven media that actually benefit from obscuring the causes of, and exacerbating the extent of, problems. The corporate system, including the media, has no interest in our understanding that Western state-corporate power uses its monopoly in high-tech violence to exploit Third World peoples and resources beneath a veneer of 'security concerns' and 'humanitarian intervention'. Compassionate journalism can only emerge out of media that are not profit-driven and not beholden to interests overwhelmingly motivated by greed.

OT: What do you believe would be the properties of a healthy, socially beneficial media?

ML: One driven by concern for human and animal suffering, rather than one structurally (indeed legally) obliged to subordinate people and planet to profit.

FINANCIAL CRISES CROSSWORD:

MICHAEL RICHMOND

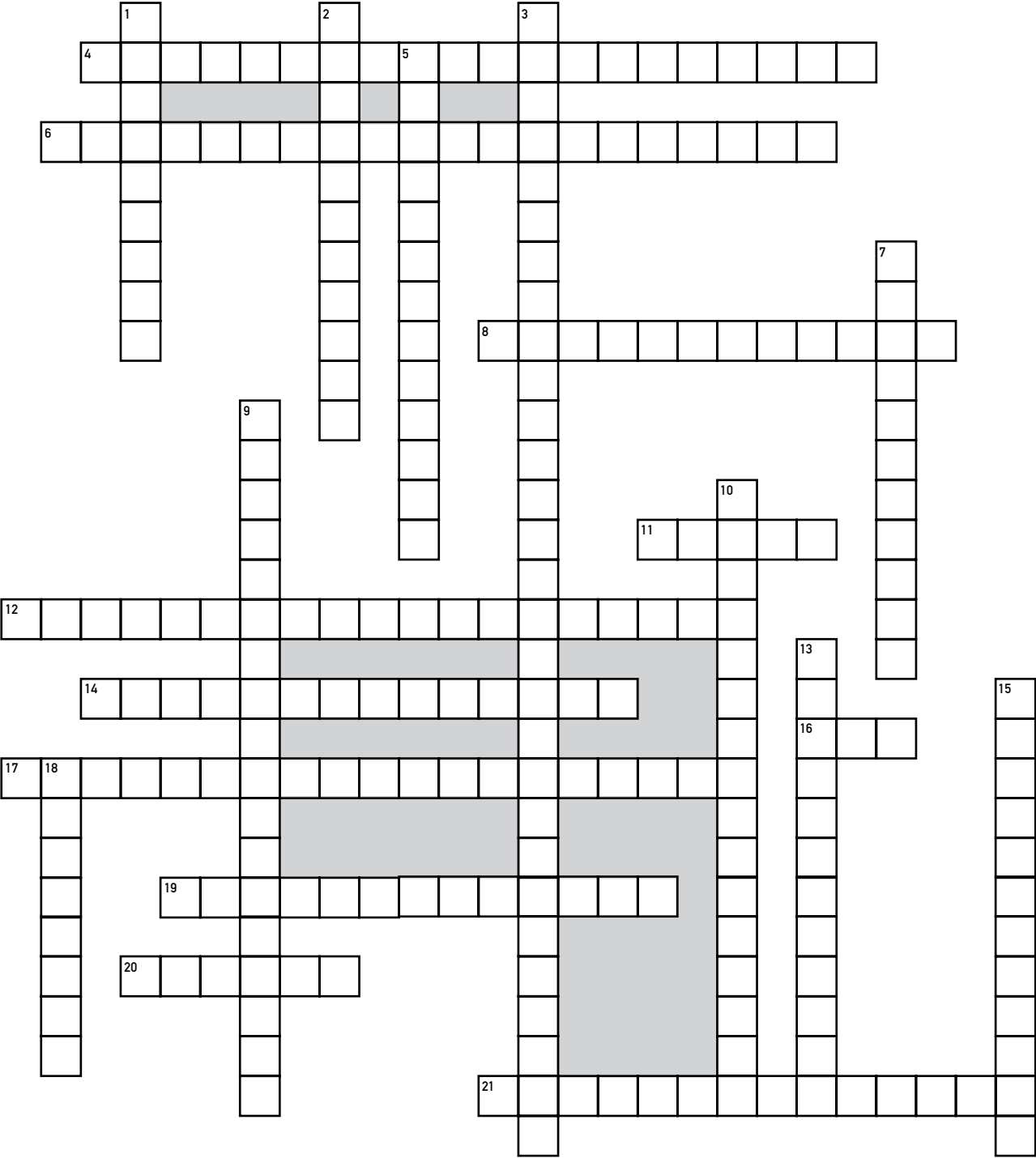
FIRST AS TRAGEDY, THEN AS FARCE BUT NOW IT'S JUST GETTING SILLY.

ACROSS

4. A phrase, coined by Alan Greenspan, to describe a state of hysteria experienced by seemingly everyone during the height of an economic boom. Aberrational Exec Ruin (anagram) (10,10) 6. Those bastions of objectivity who assess financial products and institutions (and make their money from said financial institutions.) Sub-Prime Mortgages AAA? Everyone makes mistakes. (6,6,8) 8. A price worth paying, according to some. (12) 11. A speculative bubble in the market for this flower led the 17th century Dutch Empire's economy to crash once the bubble burst. (5) 12. Suddenly everyone decided this was the biggest problem, nothing related to the private sector...funny that. It's all Greek to me. (9,4,6) 14. Sounds like a lewd act, in fact refers to when the government boosts economic growth through a rise in public spending or tax cuts. (6,8) 16. The number of Canadian bank failures since 1923. In the same period of time, the U.S has had 17,000. (3) 17. A mass psychological state whereby a group committed to an ideology (for the sake of argument we'll call the group: bankers, politicians and media, and the ideology: neoliberalism) fails to adjust that ideology to changing events. Acting Icons Nosedive (anagram) (9,10) 19. Seminal work of economic history by J.K Galbraith. (3,5,5) 20. Economist, Hyman _____, who is best known for his extensive works on the nature of financial crises and the role accumulated debt plays in them. (6) 21. Theory named after Russian economist who believed that capitalist economies operated according to approximately fifty-year cycles spanning expansion, stagnation and recession. (10,4)

DOWN

1. After their economy collapsed in 2001 sparking massive capital flight, the people of this country began to hold community general assemblies, take over their own workplaces and run their own social services. (9) 2. A tendency present throughout the financial sector whereby people take undue risks, safe in the knowledge that they will not have to personally face any consequences. Cos we'll all bail them out again, won't we? (5,6) 3. Deluded theory held by George Osborne that a sharp reduction in public spending would magically be replaced by private sector growth. Scenic Nontoxic Rastafarian Ploy (anagram) (12,6,11) 5. Phrase coined by John Maynard Keynes to describe the instinctive emotions that fuel human and economic behaviour, confidence and trust. (6,7) 7. Large financial crises often reveal this kind of fraudulent financial malpractice similar to pyramid selling. This financial crisis, however, has shown the entire global financial system to resemble one of these. (5,6) 9. Sounds like something one does in the bathroom but in essence means creating money out of nothing and giving it to privately-owned banks in the ludicrous hope that they won't mess it all up again. Agitate Vain Inquest (anagram) (12,6) 10. U.S Depression-era legislation which separated high-street from investment bank functions. Named after the Senator and Congressman who sponsored the bill. (5,8,3) 13. Irrational amounts of investment in the nascent internet market led to this inflating in the late 1990s/early 2000s. (6,6) 15. Tent-cities that sprung up around the United States after the Wall Street Crash. Named after the President blamed by many for the Great Depression. (12) 18. A drop of this can sink economies, start wars and end political careers. (3,5)



NIP

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