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# Editorial

Four million Britons have financed their Christmas using payday loans. This is not a statistic about greed or a lack of ‘personal responsibility’. On average, people have spent less on festivities this year. Instead, the figures point to an economy built upon debt. Unsecured loans with staggeringly high interest rates are becoming for many an increasingly normalised means of meeting basic social needs.

Against a backdrop of stagnating wages, the last few decades have seen a steady increase in living costs with disposable income gobbled up by housing, food, energy bills, and more and more by things which were once free: education and medical costs. In the context of a shrinking manufacturing sector, immaterial goods have spawned a precarious, non-unionised workforce with higher demand on their gradually diminishing earnings.

And so here we have Britain’s success story of the 2008 crash, with growth rates to make all other sectors envious: the personal debt industry. The last five years have seen a 25% increase in payday loan outlets, pawnshops and bookies, all of which now dominate the high streets of impoverished communities. Parasitic in nature, the influx of these poverty vultures is often the harbinger of an area’s decline, as debt levels spin out of control courtesy of exorbitant interest rates, in some cases reaching up to 4000% APR. Between 2006-11 the payday loans industry alone quadrupled. Those who live in these hollowed out communities are well aware of the effect the industry has had - it’s no coincidence that payday loan shops were targeted during the riots.

The ubiquity of the debt economy cuts through class, though its utility still pushes itself onto the poor: an economy that fails the majority forces people to take risks to maintain or aspire to an improved standard of living, which capital tells us we must covet. Debt was not used to improve the lives of the majority; it was used to inflate bubbles and to accumulate fictitious capital for the financial elite, creating the mirage of growth where in reality there was none. Like the money created by the central banks of the world, it does not have a material counterpart. This virtual economic growth doesn’t show up on the balance sheets as debt, but that’s essentially what it is, as it increases the amount of money circulating within the economy without providing clear evidence that value is increasing proportionally as well. Indeed, the vast increase in money within the financial sector is merely the tip of the iceberg. Arguably, the accrued debt laced into the processes of immaterial production around the world is many times greater.

In the quest for infinite expansion of value, coupled with a more immaterial mode of production exemplified in the service sector, we see an increasing exploitation of multiple aspects of human labour: our creative capacity, and our relationships with each other. The boundaries between work and life have blurred. Ask yourselves this, how often do people check their work emails at home these days? Hardt & Negri elaborate on the systemic realignment that has occurred because of this new dynamic when they refer to the indebted as a key subjective figure of the 2008 crash:

“In order to survive the indebted must sell his or her entire time of life. Those subject to debt in this way thus appear, even to themselves, primarily as consumers not producers. Yes, of course



they produce, but they work to pay their debts, for which they are responsible because they consume.”

Under a laissez-faire economic system, we are told to consume because it is good for the economy: the ‘wealth creators’” benevolence will allow money to trickle down. But trickle down economies do not work. What trickles down isn’t money, but debt, and its associated conditions of shame, guilt and isolation - central to the history of debt in human society, and made worse by the hyper-individualisation and precarity of a post-Fordist existence.

Our debt is also directly linked to the LIBOR scandal – the biggest financial fraud in human history – when the world’s major banks manipulated the key inter-bank lending rate governing over \$300 trillion worth of transactions. It has become increasingly obvious that the system and its institutions are illegitimate, and that debtors have entered into a relationship on false pretenses. If the debt is illegitimate, why must we couch the removal of indebtedness in the language of forgiveness and sin? If a debt is illegitimate, it must be repudiated, refused, and denied. If a system is exposed and tactics are clear, collective refusal can drive a wedge into the wheels of our own destruction.

Although the financial sector is a big part of the economy it cannot survive in isolation. It sustains itself by extracting

value from the labours of the majority and the debts they are forced to take on, transforming them into commodities to be gambled with. Most of us, the people who actually do all the productive jobs, don’t work in this intangible economy, but when it stuttered and collapsed, the debt the finance sector incurred was cancelled, with us paying for it, and yet, all our debt – which we now know has been rigged all along – remains.

Until we fully engage in the understanding that debt is a common and historical form of bondage, which must be confronted and collectively organised against, we shall forever be caught in the cycle of self-propelling financial circulation that promises freedom whilst linking us in chains. Many, no longer wishing to be caught in the thrall of exploitation, are already taking action around debt and engaging with how its moral and economic illegitimacy can be challenged. Later in this issue, we cover some of the different methods of resistance and collectivisation which are developing, from the Rolling Jubilee campaign and Strike Debt movement in the US to calls for citizen debt audits in some European countries. People are gathering to discuss their debt stories and plan coherent and radical strategies to fight against debt bondage. As David Harvey said recently: “You retire the debt, you end capital.”

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Photo: Andrea Bakacs

## UK radical co-ops reach milestone

Last week the Radical Routes (RR) federation loaned £60,000 to Rose Howey Housing Co-operative in Liverpool, and reached the milestone of £1/2m on loan to member co-operatives, which has enabled the leveraging of over £920,000 worth of investment in common ownership this year.

Al Jack of Rootstock, the finance-raising arm of Radical Routes, said, "Our investors come from a wide range of backgrounds, but are united in seeking a socially conscious place to put their money. We are proud of how our small organisation has continued to grow and thrive; the half-million mark is an important symbol of that."

Radical Routes is a UK-wide network of housing and workers' co-operatives and radical social centres. Principles of mutual aid and solidarity amongst members are strongly encouraged, and members use their co-operatives as secure bases in which to live or work while challenging dominant social structures and social and ecological injustices. Through activism and education, RR members encourage others to join them in working towards radical social change.

In existence for nearly 25 years, RR has helped establish many co-operative projects and provides a strong support network. Some of the established RR co-ops provide direct finance to fledgling co-ops, and mature communities foster the growth of workers' co-ops and social centres in their surrounding areas.

Radical Routes has, so far, never lost money on a loan.

For information on Radical Routes: <http://www.radicalroutes.org.uk/>

For information on investing in Rootstock: [www.rootstock.org.uk](http://www.rootstock.org.uk)

## London's Battle for Housing

A radical housing coalition has come together to fight for people's right to a home in the face of the government's continued assaultment of its most vulnerable citizens.

A number of publicly owned estates in London, including Carpenters, Heygate and Aylesbury have been resisting an ongoing urban gentrification process, which would forcefully oust many current residents from these areas. CARP, the Carpenters residents' group opposing the demolition of the estate, describes this process as "the planned eradication of the working class people of Newham", taking place against a backdrop of a decrease in traveller sites, chronic shortage of genuinely affordable housing, skyrocketing private rents and the passing of a bill aimed at further criminalising squatting of unused residential buildings. These measures combined with crippling austerity cuts have already resulted in an 18% rise in homelessness over the past year, according to Shelter,

disproportionately affecting families and young people.

Against this bleak picture, a broad range of housing groups has come together to form the London Radical Housing Coalition - joining the forces of private tenants, social housing tenants, travellers and squatters. It aims to provide a directly democratic forum and horizontal platform by which housing groups can share resources, coordinate their campaigns and collaborate between themselves. It does not seek to establish a separate group or organisation, but to find ways for existing groups or organisations to mutually empower each other.

The group has so far held two very successful meetings, on 24 November and 15 December, and has plans for more. You can find more info you can visit the eviction resistance blogspot at <http://evictionresistance.blogspot.co.uk/>. You can also visit CARP's Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/carpvoice>

## Up the Anti –

### An important first step, but just a step

The Up The Anti (UTA) conference on 1 December aimed to budge the entrenched positions of 'the Left'. Activists from a broad range of political backgrounds attended and engaged in healthy debates during panel discussions, Q&A sessions and in breakout groups, and united around a number of specific issues, such as debt and the housing crisis.

But the conference also illustrated that the Left has a long way to go. The gender imbalance at the conference was repeatedly raised and criticised. The Left often side-steps gender with little more than a tokenistic gesture. But lip-service is insufficient - what needs to change is the methodology itself. Feminism (or something like a femme perspective) should pervade activism. Partly due to post-UTA reflections, the OT collective is now working more consciously on challenging the oppressions and hierarchies of gender relations.

Real effort is also needed to include those at the sharp end of the current crisis in any future event which aims to 'reclaim the future'. Having an anarchist, a Trotskyite and a Leninist sitting around a table does not amount to genuine diversity. More grounded, practical and experientially-based discussions would be welcome and would reduce opportunities for obscure and theoretical soapbox rants, of which there were a few at UTA. Ironically, in the closing session, one of the speakers pondered on how can we stop middle-aged white males (such as himself) dominating, without noticing that he was the only one addressing the crowd while standing up.

A hypothetical future event of this ilk could include sessions on imagining a radical alternative to the welfare state, urban politics, stories from youth, et cetera. The event should be held not in a formal or grandiose setting but, perhaps, in one of the many London estates struggling to hold out against 'regeneration'.

Some of the critics at UTA could have made more of their experience by eschewing talks with the 'big names', concentrating instead on subjects they were interested in. In a refreshing session on housing, young people exchanged their personal experiences about housing precariousness, squatting and debt; a discussion about the situation in Greece was animated yet constructive; and a debate on 'lessons from the global south' was extremely informative.

Criticism should not detract from the efforts made by the organising group (of which the OT was a small part), but will hopefully encourage everyone involved to radically rethink how similar events might be approached in the future. It would be heartening to see a conference where audience, organisers and speakers were not hierarchically separated but were working together while challenging each other to create "a world where many worlds fit".

## International Workers' Association 90th Anniversary

The International Workers' Association 90th anniversary conference will take place at SOAS the first weekend of January (5th & 6th) and will have speakers from across the world. Check [solfed.org.uk](http://solfed.org.uk) for more details.



# THE 2 FACES OF GREEK NEOLIBERALISM

Yiannis Baboulias

The time was July 2012, almost a month after a second round of elections in Greece produced the Frankenstein-like coalition government, comprised of conservative right-wing New Democracy, faux-socialists PASOK and “left-wing” Democratic Left that was now running the crisis-stricken country. An hour outside Athens, in the town of Loutraki, strikers had blocked the road leading up to the local casino, an important part of the local economy providing hundreds with employment. Locked in a dispute over proposed wage cuts with the owners, the strikers felt cheated and believed their employers were using the crisis as an excuse to attack their already severely strained income.

What they didn’t expect was a visit from a newly elected MP. Accompanied by ten bouncers, the new MP Efsthios Boukouras threatened the strikers under the thin pretext that “we won’t allow the communists to do as they please”. Boukouras belongs to a group calling itself “Golden Dawn”. Riding the wagon of “dissent”, this neo-nazi party won 7% of the popular vote in June. They boasted of “clean hands” and an “anti-systemic” character. They claimed they would defend Greeks from the “dark centres of power” who sought to enslave them.

Is this an isolated incident of a Golden Dawn MP backing local “Big Money”? The party’s track record suggests the exact opposite. The party has voted for indebted football clubs to have their debt cancelled (clubs owned by some of the richest of Greeks, such as the ship and media owner Yiannis Alafouzios), and has supported Piraeus Bank (which is under investigation for shady business deals) in its attempt to acquire Agrotiki, a state-owned bank, for almost nothing, using state-provided money acquired through expensive aid packages. It should not come as a surprise that Golden Dawn disagreed with a proposed tax hike to earnings from shipping activities. Ship owners in Greece are a traditionally powerful body of businessmen that is notoriously untouched by taxation.

Why is this supposedly “pro-people” party lining up behind capitalist interests, and why do the businessmen allow this to happen? The two groups are interlinked in several different ways. Through this symbiosis, the desire of factory and ship owners like Nikolas Manesis of the Halyvourgiki steel plant to get their own way, strengthens the neo-nazi party. By opposing strikes and Unions, the party is doing exactly what “big business” has been dreaming of for decades on a global scale.

The Greek elite has been enjoying a lavish lifestyle even now, when 27.7% of Greek citizens are at risk of poverty, as a report by Eurostat showed in February. A very revealing piece by the German magazine Der Spiegel tells us: “The Greek government can no longer pay its bills and owes private-sector companies some €9 billion. But even now, three years into the crisis, it continues to exempt commercial shipping companies, which make up its most successful industrial sector, from all taxes. This relief for the rich just puts more of a burden on the poor.”

Since the publication of the article, the Greek government has taken steps to correct this injustice: in 2013, the government plans to collect as much as 80 million euros from taxing ship-owners. This figure, after many months of protest, has gone up to 140 million now, but for an industry enjoying billions in earnings every year, and which controls more than 20% of global sea trade, this is nothing but “spare change”. To give a sense of proportion, within the same year, 82 million will be cut from disability benefits alone. Isn’t this the kind of behavior the Greek government should be steering away from if they really want to disarm the Golden Dawn’s populist rhetoric?

In reality, very little is done to battle the Greek elite’s tax-dodging. As was demonstrated recently with the state’s reaction over the publication of the now infamous Lagarde list, this government is unwilling to clash with the Greek elite, of which its members are an integral part. It is becoming more and more apparent, as months go by, that the Greek elite tolerates (and even supports the neo-nazi party in order to promote its agenda. Reading between the lines of Golden Dawn’s manifesto, one can see their promises for flat-tax rates, fast-track investments and how, through “charity” work, they intend

to replace immigrant workers - who are paid nothing for their work - with Greeks who will only suffer the same fate. Their neoliberal aspirations, hidden behind immigrant-bashing populism and nationalistic sentiment, ought to be exposed.

“Resist the selling-off of our country!” reads the party’s website. And it may in fact be time to do so. But keep in mind that it is going to be a fight on two fronts: on the one hand, against an elite that refuses to take responsibility for its shortcomings or to share the burden of the crisis it caused; and on the other, against a gang which has now been granted immunity from prosecution, and which jumps at every chance it gets to support its real bosses.

As the Greek elite’s impunity and cynicism drives an angry and confused people into the arms of these false saviors, who are in fact only the other face of the elite’s neo-feudal aspirations, the game needs to change. For as long as we do not expose and stress the connection between corrupt, long-established capitalist interests and fascism in Greece, we are doomed to keep on fighting the symptom and not the disease that eats away at the country’s morale.

By Yiannis Baboulias, a Greek investigative journalist writing on finance and politics. @yiannisbab

Photo: Feong Wei

## Dangerous Myths about Israel & Palestine

Hilary Aked

‘Operation Pillar of Defense’, the latest sustained Israeli assault on Gaza with a headline-hitting name, lasted for eight days. The bombing from land, sea and air lasted from 14-21 November and killed 158 Palestinians, of which 103 were civilians (including 30 children). Meanwhile, six Israelis were killed by Palestinian factions. Israel has been killing Gazans quietly for years, and two days after Egypt brokered a ceasefire they started killing again, shooting dead twenty-year-old Anwar Qdeih. This highlights the absurdity of the situation, which leaves the siege intact and the collective punishment of Gazans undisturbed, albeit without an all-out onslaught. The UK continues to give diplomatic support to Israel as well as selling arms and co-operating militarily and economically.

Eight key myths - and many more misconceptions - perpetuated by Israel and its supporters, which are used as a smokescreen on the current situation and hinder justice for Israelis and Palestinians.

### 1. Hamas uses human shields, but Israel does everything it can to avoid civilian casualties

Both of these messages were repeatedly pumped out by pro-Israel PR units during ‘Operation Pillar of Defense’, just as they were during ‘Operation Cast Lead’ four years ago. In both onslaughts an extremely high number of civilians were killed, despite Israel claiming that its ‘targeted missiles’ would be capable of executing the desired extra-judicial killings with pinpoint precision. When innocent civilians were killed, their deaths were dismissed by Israel’s supporters with the claim that “Hamas is using human shields” at the same time as assurances were provided that Israel was “doing everything possible to avoid civilian casualties”.

Both of these claims are untrue. Despite the lack of evidence, let’s assume that the claim about Hamas using human shields is true. If it is, then the second statement - that ‘Israel does everything it can to avoid civilian casualties’ - cannot be. If it knows so well that the targeted militants are surrounded by civilians, why does it proceed to bomb them anyway? Military command must simply have decided that these people were ‘collateral damage’. If it is not true that Hamas uses human shields, the possibility is raised that civilian casualties are so high because Israel is deliberately targeting civilians. Ariel Sharon’s son stated: “We need to flatten entire neighbourhoods in Gaza... The Americans didn’t stop with Hiroshima - the Japanese weren’t surrendering fast enough, so they hit Nagasaki, too”.

### 2. There are fewer Israeli casualties because ‘Israelis place greater emphasis on the value of life’

This shockingly racist statement was spelled out explicitly in one article on the Independent’s ‘Independent Voices’ comment blog (Joanna Lowy, Israel, Hamas, and why the idea that journalists pretend it’s an even battle in Gaza is nonsense, 22 November 2012). It is also often insinuated by many of Israel’s propagandists. Yet this emphasis on Israel’s life-affirming values is contradicted by the billions (7% of GDP) that Israel spends on its army, navy and air forces, by the massive levels of US military aid, and by the conscription of its population. It’s an absurd lie.

### 3. Hamas broke the ceasefire

This is just factually inaccurate. While it was not widely reported, Reuters did note that on 4 November the Israeli army killed a mentally ill man in the buffer zone, the first casualty in the recent episode of violence. On 8 November Israeli soldiers shot and killed a 13 year old boy, Ahmad Abu Daqqa, who had been playing football near Khan Yunis. Palestinian fighters retaliated two days later and the situation escalated.

### 4. Hamas is the main problem

Hamas has been in power in Gaza since June 2007. But Israel has been occupying the West Bank and East Jerusalem since 1967 and a high proportion of all Palestinian refugees have been waiting to return to their

homes since 1948. Israeli discourse has promptly embraced Hamas as a scapegoat for most things to try to avoid the questions it can’t answer about its historic human rights abuses and about violations of international law in other areas such as the West Bank, Lebanon and the Golan Heights. Hamas is a symptom, not the cause of the problem.

### 5. Supporters of Israel and Palestine all complain about BBC coverage, so it’s probably fair

A common pronouncement from people who consider themselves ‘sensible centrists’ and prefer to dismiss the serious problem of media bias by concluding that when opinions on an issue are so polarised, a journalist is doing their job as long as both sides are unhappy. Actually, the fact that large numbers of supporters of both ‘sides’ complain means only that they are all aware how vital media narratives are to public perception and action - or lack of it - and that they are constructed in a contested space which can be shaped and influenced by outside pressure. It bears no reflection on the extent to which those narrative outcomes actually reflect reality. Scholarly research has demonstrated the pro-Israel bias at the BBC and its failure to tell the Palestinian truth.

### 6. International law is up for debate

News reports, especially from the BBC, frequently finish with a crucial contextual fact followed by a swift undermining suffix. It typically goes like this: “Almost half a million Israelis live in West Bank settlements which are illegal under international law, although Israel disputes this.” The frequency with which this formula is trotted out by the BBC suggests it’s included in their ‘How to report the Middle East’ guidelines for journalists. Yet in no other circumstances in which one party has contravened international law would a rejection of that law be treated with such credibility. When a war criminal

in the dock refuses to recognise the court (as Slobodan Milosevic, for example, did) their dismissal is treated with the contempt and ridicule it deserves.

### 7. Most people are apathetic

Apathy means showing a lack of interest, especially about something important. But most people are confused, not uninterested; or they don’t know enough, especially about Britain’s historic role. Partly this is because of the problems with media coverage. Generally, the more people learn, the more moral outrage they feel, especially because the horrific truth was previously hidden from them. Apathy is manufactured, not inherent.

### 8. There’s nothing we can do

This is the most pernicious and paralysing myth of all. We can educate ourselves, visit Palestine and participate in campaigns. By far the most useful form of international solidarity is to heed the 2005 Palestinian civil society call for BDS (boycott, divestment, sanctions) and to get involved with this dynamic, effective and global grassroots movement for justice wherever you are.







# THE GREAT DEBATE

## IS THE BDS CAMPAIGN AN EFFECTIVE TACTIC TO ACHIEVE THE LIBERATION OF PALESTINE?

As a response to Israel's incessant expansionism, attacks on the Palestinian people and violations of international human rights agreements, Palestinian civil society issued a call for a campaign of boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS) until Israel complies with international law and Palestinian rights. This call, made in 2005, was endorsed by more than 172 non-governmental and civil society organisations in Palestine, and was later endorsed by all national and Islamic Palestinian political factions. Despite this, a number of supporters of campaigns in solidarity with the liberation of Palestine have questioned the effectiveness of cultural boycott. The OT attempts to tease out the data from the inaccuracy and myth.

### NO / Daniel Cooper

Since Israel's brutal invasion of Gaza in January 2009, calls for international boycotts of various aspects of Israeli society - whether academic, cultural, sporting, economic or simply thoroughgoing, root-and-branch boycotts "of Israel" - have gained prominence.

At present, unfortunately, the dominant opposing voices are supporters of the Israeli government and those who believe that student or trade unions should have nothing to do with big political issues. I am not of that political persuasion.

I have a long record of campaigning in support of the Palestinians - from demonstrating and taking part in occupations against "Operation Cast Lead" to organising a series of pro-Palestinian meetings at my former university, Royal Holloway. I have also taken policy in support of the Palestinians to my Students Union. I have continued this record into my post as University of London Union Vice President: supporting London students' actions in solidarity with the people of Gaza (and I shall be attempting to pass policy at ULU's democratic forums) in response to the brutal bombing by the Israeli army and continued occupation of Palestinian territories.

However, I do not believe that boycotting Israel is a positive or effective way to help the Palestinians, and I am in favour of a different kind of solidarity with the Palestinians and the Israeli left. This is for the following reasons:

Boycotts are generally not very effective. Even in the case of South Africa (where I would have supported the boycott) it was not the boycott campaign but the growing strength and organisation of black workers and poor in the townships, which brought the regime to its knees. Positive solidarity with the Palestinians and with the left-wing, and anti-occupation movement in Israel is much better. One of the tragedies

of the current situation is that some British trade unions have adopted the boycott - and then proceeded to do nothing else.

Insofar as it is effective, a boycott will strengthen the siege mentality on which the Israeli right and ruling class rely, and weaken the Israeli radical left and anti-occupation movement. By this I mean that it is likely to hurt Israeli workers and drive them into the arms of the Israeli rulers. Thus it will hurt the Palestinian cause.

Boycotts of Israeli academics and trade unions are even worse. There are good reasons why we do not boycott American, Russian or Chinese academics, even though these states also engage in terrible crimes at home and abroad. Nor do we boycott British or American trade unions, despite their long history of collaboration with British imperialism. Rather than boycotting Israeli students, academics and workers, we should be linking up with Israeli left wing movements, to help support the Palestinians.

Ultimately, this is a disagreement about the nature of Israel. I oppose the Israeli ruling class and its government and its imperialism, but I do not write off all Israelis as irredeemable enemies. I understand why many Palestinian activists and organisations support a boycott, and I sympathise with them, but I also respectfully disagree that it is a positive way to help their cause.



### YES / Mohammed Abuabdou

In 2004 the International Court of Justice in The Hague declared that the building of the wall separating the West Bank from Israel was in breach of international law. It demanded that Israel immediately cease construction on the wall, begin its removal and compensate those harmed by its effects. Despite the importance of this international ruling, Israel didn't pay any attention to it. It has continued to build without facing any moral or political deterrent. As a result of ongoing Israeli aggression and atrocities, expansionist practices, and inhumane treatment of the Palestinian people, the Palestinian Campaign for the Boycott of Israel declared its intent to hold Israel accountable. To this end, the campaigners formed local and international pressure tools aimed at de-legitimising the occupation, and at resisting Israel's racist relationship with the Palestinian people.

In South Africa, the cultural boycott effectively contributed to isolating the apartheid regime and making it shameful. In Palestine, the situation is very similar, with Palestinian civil society organisations calling on artists, singers and cultural workers to refrain from taking part in any event in Israel, regarding participation in such events as a form of normalisation of the colonial attitude, apartheid policies and ongoing military occupation. The boycott's power lies in its alternative to armed resistance. When Israeli artists respect and endorse the

boycott campaigns, they support their Palestinian artist friends in Palestine. Israel is facing a wave of delegitimisation by the international community for its lack of respect for basic human rights and international law. Non-violent punitive measures should be maintained until Israel meets its obligations to recognise the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination, and until it fully complies with the precepts of international law.

Since the Gaza massacre in December 2008, in which Israel killed 1400 Palestinians - mostly children and women - and after the flotilla massacre in May 2010, many international artists, intellectuals, academics, and cultural workers have refused to take part in any Israeli cultural, academic or artistic work which could lead to a whitewash of the crimes of Israel. Among those who have endorsed the global BDS movement are Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Adrienne Rich, John Berger, Ken Loach, Alice Walker, Arundhati Roy and Naomi Klein.

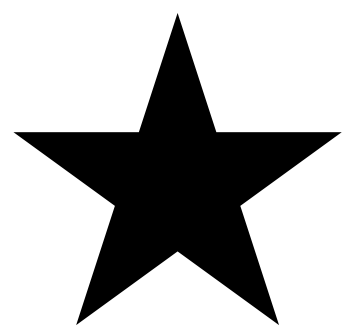
In a pitiful attempt to show the world how modern and civilised it is, the Israeli government regularly attempts to invite renowned artists and singers to perform in Israel, often to entertain Israeli soldiers and audiences. After every assault and massacre Israel commits, the government provides the military a chance to celebrate the crimes committed against the Palestinian people.

I would argue that the BDS should be the future collective, representative body for Palestinians in their struggle with Israel. Some people claim that the cultural boycott of Israel may infringe on freedom of expression and cultural exchange, but these are exactly the same claims made against the initial proposed boycott of South Africa under apartheid, a boycott which eventually contributed to forcing South Africa to recognise its oppressed people and their equal right to exist alongside the white South African population.



Photo: Ashraf Amra





NEW

# ZAPATISTA COMMUNITIES UNDER ATTACK

Flaminia  
Giambalvo

In 1994 the rallying cry for land and freedom that sparked the Zapatista rebellion echoed across the globe and landed on the front page of the The New York Times, which hailed it as the “first postmodern Latin American revolution”. 19 years down the line the corporate media seems to have forgotten about that “spark that lit up the world”. On 17 November 2012 the EZLN - the movement’s political military organisation - celebrated its 29th anniversary. It was a time not only to celebrate almost two decades of struggle for justice, dignity and democracy, but also an opportunity to build solidarity with those communities currently under attack by the Mexican state.

The rebellion itself began on New Year’s Day 1994, when some 3,000 poorly armed indigenous rebels seized six towns in Chiapas, Mexico’s southernmost state. Few disputed their right to be angry. Poverty in the area, defined as the percentage of the population that lives on less than a dollar per day, hovered around 56% when the rebellion began, with many families lacking access to basic healthcare and education, while a small elite controlled much of the arable land and held the farming population in near-feudal conditions. In rural communities, an estimated 20% of children died before the age of five.

Since then, members of the Zapatista communities, known as bases of support (BAZ), have been constructing their own autonomous systems of education, healthcare, co-operative working, justice, grassroots democracy, community organisation, feminist values, agro-ecology, appropriate technology, and other social and economic projects, without any involvement from the government. They wish to live according to their own indigenous ways of being, and have created a living example of a (or another) possible world, an example which gives inspiration and hope to people all over the world.

In response to the ‘threat’ posed by these communities, the Mexican state has deployed financial blockades and dispatched armed paramilitary-style attack groups to carry out alarmingly violent assaults on some of the Zapatista communities. An example of this is “Plan Chiapas 94”. The plan prescribes “a forced displacement of communities under zapatista influence including a warranted refugee area, annihilation of the Dioceses of San Cristobal (zapatista stronghold), capture of any Mexican identified as EZLN, expulsion of pernicious foreigners, slaughter or control of the communities’ livestock; destruction of their harvest; and deployment of the ‘civil defense’ to break the relationship of mutual aid that exists between the population and the outlaws”.

One of the most serious recent attacks carried out under “Plan Chiapas 94” was an invasion by the paramilitary group known as ‘Peace and Justice’ into the Zapatista communities of Comandante Abel and Unión Hidalgo in September 2012, during which the community was forcefully displaced. Recalling those tragic moments, a BAZ member recounts: “They chased us with bullets, and when we arrived in a new place place we were already sick.” He adds: “I felt like there was a jaguar after me, I was lost and terrified, I felt as if I was no longer in the world.”

The communities remain displaced and the Zapatistas’ land is still occupied by the aggressors, who are currently building their own houses as a way to secure occupation. The efforts are actively supported by the local police. A BAZ spokesperson said: “Through a loudspeaker the paramilitaries are announcing, day and night, that they are going to ‘eat’ us, because we are outlaws, we are beyond the reach of justice and the law.” She adds: “The government buys people, and then persuades them to take our land. It is their policy of war and attrition to make us surrender. We will not stop our struggle and we are not going to give up.”

In 2010, the BAZ of San Marcos Avilés opened its own autonomous school. Since then, the community has become the target of constant attempts to enforce displacement, and of destruction and theft of crops, livestock, property and food. A member of the San Marcos Avilés said: “They think we are worthless. They treat us badly, like animals. They do what they want with us. When we sow our maize, we cannot take it home. They come to steal our beans, sugar cane, bananas, they steal everything. All we do is sow and work and there is nothing. We cannot enjoy the fruits of our labour with our children, because members of the political parties are eating it on the orders of the bad government.”

However, in a tone of defiance the BAZ adds, “they should not think that provocation, threats, assaults and persecution will stop the Zapatista struggle for the construction of our autonomy and for national liberation. Because whatever the cost, and whatever happens, we will continue to go forward, as is our right.” In response to these violent acts of aggression and displacement, an International Solidarity Campaign called “Worldwide Echo in Support of the Zapatistas” has been organised by supporters of the Zapatistas, demanding “an immediate and absolute end to the war against the Zapatistas”.

The campaign states: “The government and its people have their strategies, their violence, their terror. But we state here that we also have an option in the face of so much repression: we have the option to organise ourselves and to fight for justice, dignity, and autonomy.” As Hugo Blanco, a renowned Peruvian activist, argues in a newly-released statement of support to the campaign, “it is therefore both an obligation and in the direct interests of all of us who are seeking a new world, of all who want a horizontal society in solidarity, of all who understand that the 1% is leading us to the extinction of the human species and who are committed to its survival; we must organise with all our strength and collective intelligence in the defence of this island of freedom and democracy in Chiapas, which shows us that building another world, a world where there is room for many worlds, is truly possible.”

To learn more about the Zapatistas’ struggle, visit [sanmarcosavilesen.wordpress.com](http://sanmarcosavilesen.wordpress.com)

# BODY-HAIR ACTIVISM & ANTI-CAPITALISM

Tasha Skerman-Gray

Over the past year there has been a resurgence in body-hair activism and discussion within the feminist community. From the appearance of Those Pesky Dames - a video-blogging collective - on Cherry Healey's 'How to Get a Life' on BBC3, to Emer O'Toole's spot on This Morning, to the Armpits4August campaign launched by Polycystic Ovary Syndrome charity Verity, the image of the unapologetic, hairy-legged, bushy-pitted feminist has returned.

However, it is still the case that whenever an unshaven woman (this term includes both cis and trans women as well as non-binary people) 'dares' to show her body hair in public, she is met with a barrage of criticism regarding her appearance. See, for example, Pixie Lott's 'fashion faux pas' of attending a film premiere this summer without first having waxed her armpits. Amidst these hysterical cries which denounce body hair on women as dirty, unhygienic, 'unnatural' or 'unfeminine', there are two recurring themes, both of which centre around the notion of 'free choice': firstly, the claim that a woman is free to stop shaving her arms/legs/pubic area so long as she 'accepts' the fact that no man will ever find her sexually attractive again; secondly, the statement made by some women who say 'but I choose to continue shaving as it just looks and feels better!'

The first is perhaps easier to refute, in that it is patently untrue: I know plenty of women who are hairy and have successful relationships with men. Furthermore, it is likely that not all of these women are attracted to men and so couldn't care less whether they are attractive to them or not. Finally - and most importantly - the act of choosing to stop shaving is and should be made, first and foremost, for the woman herself. Of course, no individual exists in a vacuum, and we are all subject to structures of oppression such as patriarchy, capitalism, racism, homophobia and transphobia, ableism and so on; these structures manifest themselves not only via state apparatuses and institutions such as the media but also crop up in our interpersonal relationships and influence our individual choices. Nevertheless, there remains space for resistance and autonomy.

Secondly, many women 'choose' to continue removing their body hair, but to what extent can this be considered a free choice within a patriarchal, capitalist society? When every single media image we see of women is hairless and shaved, waxed or photo-shopped to perfection? When hairy women are derided both online and offline for the state of their body? When waxing salons offer their services to pre-teens, and firms such as Gillette spend millions of pounds every year on marketing?

My intention is not to shame women who continue to shave, and I am aware that when it comes to embracing one's body hair the stakes are different for all of us; it is probably much easier for me as a white, middle-class person to do this than it might be for a trans woman, a working-class woman or a woman of colour. Even so, I think it is still useful for us to question why it is that many people believe that hairless women are inherently more desirable.

Body hair removal did not become a widespread practice in modern Europe until the 1920s, when hemlines rose and sleeveless dresses came into fashion. Razor manufacturers at the time saw this as an opportunity to create a new market, and soon started putting out adverts to stimulate demand for hair-removal products. Patriarchy and capitalism worked (and continue to work) together in order to foster insecurities in women and thus encourage them to buy more products. And because the idealised image of a hairless woman is impossible to maintain, women are encouraged not only to perpetually spend money on depilatory practices but also to participate in a never-ending, time-consuming cycle of hair removal: just one aspect of what Naomi Wolf has termed 'beauty work', or the extra labour that women are expected to perform in order to look even half-way respectable.

It is clear, then, that the act of hair removal is not simply influenced by patriarchy but also by capitalism and its imperative to consume endlessly. This is why for women throwing away the razor is still a radical act of both feminism and anti-capitalism. If the personal is political then the act of not shaving can be seen as an example of direct action. Refusing to depilate is a step towards body positivity and self-love whilst sticking two fingers up to the ad-man. It is a fuck-you to gender-policing homophobes and transphobes and a rejection of the anxiety-inducing, body-shaming messages of the beauty and fashion industries. Until every woman has the real choice to leave her house hairy and unshaven and not be subjected to harassment and criticism, there is a need for body-hair activism. As Janet Fraser once said, "all that time I save in body hair removal, I devote to revolution."

*Written by Tasha Skerman-Gray. Tasha is a co-founder of the Armpits4August campaign and an activist. They blog at <http://thefactduck.blogspot.co.uk/> and can be found on Twitter @thefactduck*

Photo: Dimitris Alexakis

## THE LAW OF THE LAND

Against a backdrop of increasing poverty and environmental chaos, now more than ever there is a need for sustainable communities. The land-use planning system in England is becoming one of the biggest obstacles for those wanting to live in low-impact sustainable communities.

'Land-use planning' is an ambiguous term, but it is hugely important to the way we live. It determines our living environments. It dictates access to green spaces and what happens in them. It decides whether or not we will live next door to a nuclear power station or to an international airport. In extreme cases, it is the deciding factor in whether we will have a roof over our heads or be dispossessed.

In the foreword of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Greg Clark, Minister for Planning, writes: "The purpose of planning is to help achieve sustainable development." But what exactly is 'sustainable development'? Clark explains: "Sustainable means ensuring that better lives for ourselves don't mean worse lives for future generations. Development means growth. We must accommodate the new ways by which we will earn our living in a competitive world." It seems that Clark believes we can have both sustainability and economic growth - but are the two compatible?

Dwindling rainforests and the increasing scarcity of fossil fuels, minerals and drinking water all point to the increasing scarcity of the world's natural resources. This is the greatest problem with the land-use planning system, it tries to combine

environmentally friendly, sustainable development with endless economic growth. Is this possible on a planet with finite resources? Whether we can answer this question or not, what is indisputable is that the current planning system allows use of the land for nuclear power generation, fracking for shale gas, the construction of new runways for airports and intensive development of cities, all of which are environmentally devastating and unsustainable. At the same time, the system is preventing genuine attempts at sustainability by individuals and groups.

For those of us wanting to live 'the good life' in the countryside, the official planning law is not just inadequate, it is prohibitive. The only piece of guidance in the NPPF in relation to the building of homes on rural land is stark: "Local planning authorities should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances such as: the essential need for a rural worker to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside".

This guidance limits the scope of the decision making process as to whether houses can be built on rural land. It focuses exclusively on 'rural workers', who are defined as those employed in economic activity in a rural area; no provision is made for individuals who seek to live self-sufficiently on the land, unless they are generating a financial income by doing so.

By prioritising the generation of economic growth, the planning framework excludes a whole group of people who are ready

to create genuinely sustainable living environments at a time when, arguably, our very survival as a species could depend on developing such forms of living. Mike Hannis argues that policy in this area is influenced by the idea, deeply embedded in planning policy, "that human presence in the landscape is necessarily destructive."

The harsh reality of the current planning law is not lost on those who have fallen foul of it while attempting to live a low-impact life. Stig and Dinah Mason were evicted from four acres of land they purchased in Willand, Devon last year. The Masons had begun to cultivate the site, they were growing vegetables and were living in a renovated horsebox with their children with the aim of becoming self-sufficient. Yet the Mid-Devon District Council refused them permission to live on the site, partly because it was not convinced the couple could earn a "sustainable livelihood" from their smallholding. Dinah Mason expressed her feelings publicly to the planning minister: "We feel there is a big lean towards economic sustainability but our project is about environmental sustainability."

The Masons' case illustrates serious flaws in a planning system which penalises people who are attempting to live in a genuinely sustainable way. A planning system centred on the needs of people and planet is urgently needed. The current system is proving to be a serious obstruction to a vast, untapped potential which, if it were released, could see the English countryside literally spring to life.

Simon Moore



# MAY THE SOURCE BE WITH YOU

John Bywater

## COMMUNITY

The digital commons is about freedom, sharing, and creating community. Since the advent of the Internet, the concept of community has been less geographical: people gather to share common concerns regardless of physical location, although geographical concerns are certainly one reason why people come together. The word “community” is derived from the Latin ‘communitas’, a broad term for fellowship or organized society. The digital commons is about a fellowship of information, about organising society around informational concerns.

Proceeding with other commoning concerns in the information age without founding things explicitly and decisively in the digital commons, is inherently self-limiting. Anyone who cares about community and commoning should make a special effort to base what they are doing on the digital commons.

## ECONOMICS

Information is naturally a public good, and non-rivalrous in its consumption (my consumption does not diminish your consumption). The key distinction between informational goods and conventional commodities is that the aggregation function changes from the sum of the set to the max of the set. So if you have six identical chairs, then you have six chairs’ worth of goods. But if you have six identical copies of some information, then you have one copy’s worth. This means that the way to make more value is to do something new, which isn’t necessarily easy when the web is world wide. The hard core of the digital commons is the free software community, which is about making software source codes that are freely

available. When information is organised as a public good, the surplus value of code (to use a phrase from Deleuze and Guattari’s book, Anti-Oedipus) is realised for the common good.

However, even though information is naturally a public good, it is often organised as a private good, with end-user license agreements, digital rights management, and a whole broken and despotic world of secrets. Free software engineers are the rebel army in the information revolution. They are battling against the Dark Side: corporations such as Apple, Microsoft, Facebook and many others who are attempting to capture the surplus value of code for private gain and social control. In their bid for world domination, these corporations are happy to destroy 90% of the value in order to monopolise the remaining 10%. In George Lucas’s Star Wars films, Luke Skywalker is encouraged to use the Force (“It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together.”) Likewise, the free software community encourages you to use the Source.

## ENGINEERING

Because free software codes are shared, people are looking to use other people’s codes in their own work, so that they only have to code directly for the concerns they are addressing, rather than having to make all the pieces themselves. This leads to much better designs. And because the source codes are available, the opportunity exists to make enhancements and fix errors in other people’s codes. This has driven a much more community-minded practice, compared to the often miserable situations and terrible software that can be found in corporations such as banks.

## LAW

The digital commons is based on a legal hack to convert copyright law into something called copyleft. The movement started with free software, in particular the GNU General Public License (GPL). Originally written by Richard Stallman and released in 1982, the GPL is the first and the most widely used copyleft license. According to the copyleft philosophy, the GPL grants the recipients of a computer program the rights described in the free software definition and ensures certain freedoms are preserved, even when the work is changed or added to. GPL provides four freedoms: to use, to study, to change, to distribute. GPL has been tested in court and is an enforceable and binding license. This corresponds to some extent with Elinor Ostrom’s principles for managing a commons: if you use free software to make something and distribute your work without making everything available then your license is revoked.

In summary the digital commons is about making an ethical imperative of freedom, promoting social solidarity and sharing, making ever-expanding community where technically superior solutions are available to all and forever, often without a charge. This approach has been promoted as “open source”, and the principles of freedom and of sharing have been adopted for other kinds of works, most notably with the Creative Commons licenses, and by the open data movement. Everybody involved with commoning is encouraged to familiarise with, and base their other work upon the digital commons.

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# A Right Wing Perspective on Copyright

Michele Boldrin

& David K. Levine

*From a right-wing perspective, copyright is an unnecessary and unwarranted intrusion of government power on individual liberty. According to the US constitution, the ostensible power for Congress to issue laws on copyright is “to promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries.” We agree with this as a goal. But as economists, we know from theory and evidence that copyright does not “promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts”. Hence Congress (and the Supreme Court) should ensure that the limited time during which exclusive rights are available is very close to zero.*

*First the evidence: We believe that promoting “the Progress of Science and useful Arts” means increasing either the quantity or quality of the types of works - books, music, movies - that are subject to copyright. In our 2008 book Against Intellectual Monopoly, we showed that music sharing on the internet has provided us with a simple test case. The ability of copyright holders to prevent copying has effectively been nullified by internet piracy. If indeed copyright is useful in increasing either the quantity or quality of music, then less or lower quality music should have been produced after the advent of Napster in June 1999. The fact is that neither has happened. A reasonable economic measure of the output of music is the number of musicians. If we examine data from the Survey of Current Population we find that in the five years leading up to the widespread use of peer-to-peer file sharing (1996-2000) the ratio of the employed population working as musicians was 0.13%, while in 2006-2010 the ratio was... still 0.13%.*

*Despite the rhetoric of intellectual property, copyright is not about the right to own, to buy, or to sell books, music or movies. We are strongly in favor of private property and the right to own, buy and sell things including books, music and movies. However copyright isn’t about that - it is about a government-enforced monopoly over a particular book, song or movie. That is, copyright gives the copyright holder the right to tell people who have legitimately obtained copies what they can and cannot do with them. This includes making copies, but also creating new works based on the old. Regardless of claims that copyright is merely a monopoly over a particular expression of an idea, in fact copyright is very broad - it covers sequels to existing works, and in the case of music as few as four notes can be subject to copyright. Indeed, a great deal of litigation over copyright is not about copying, but about making derivative*

*use of the ideas (not the expression of ideas) from a copyrighted work. A good case in point is the successful lawsuit by J. K. Rowling against a librarian, Vander Ark, who released a lexicon of Harry Potter (Rowling had initially given her blessing before taking Mr Ark to court).*

*What copyright does represent is an effort of special interests like the Disney Corporation and other large music, movie and publishing companies to use the authority of the government to profit at the much greater expense of the rest of us. It is instructive to ask what we have to give up so that government action can sustain these monopolies. Let us start first with the American Digital Millennium Copyright Act - the DMCA. One component of the DMCA is the so-called “take-down notice”. Anybody who objects to content on the internet can claim that they hold copyright to the material and send a takedown notice to the Internet Provider (ISP) that hosts the material. To avoid legal liability, ISPs remove the material without further question. The threat to free speech should be self-evident. One surreal example: Footage of the Democratic National Convention filmed by and posted by the Democratic Party to YouTube was removed because news agencies covering the convention claimed that they held the copyright for the material.*

*Perhaps most egregious of all is the claim by the government that the content you upload on the internet does not belong to you (although apparently it may belong to big media companies). The case in point is that of Kim Dotcom and his web hosting site Megauploads, a site that provided ad-supported storage for files. The U.S. Government - doing the bidding of the big movie companies, and in violation of several laws - had Kim Dotcom arrested in New Zealand. They also seized the Megauploads domain, effectively blocking access to all files on that site. This occurred on January 19, 2012. As we write, nearly a year later, none of the people with files stored on the site have been permitted access to their files, and the U.S. Government asserts that it is under no obligation to provide it. It is probably true - although not proven in any court of law - that there were files on Megaupload that violated copyright. It is certainly true that many files did not. It is as if you parked your car in a parking garage and the U.S. Government seized all the cars in the garage on the grounds that some of them had been stolen, and nearly a year later asserted that because the garage is located on the internet your car doesn’t actually belong to you and so they are under no obligation to return it. Such is the absurdity to which we have been reduced by copyright law.*



# IP & CENSORSHIP

Jim Killock

Intellectual Property laws are immensely controversial in their effects, which range from everyday restriction of free expression through abuse of copyright, to the abuse of patent law, rigged mobile phone markets and the denial of medicines to people in the majority world.

The term Intellectual Property was deliberately chosen and promoted by lobbyists to portray trademarks, copyrights and patents as a kind of inalienable property: to make people feel that the control over ideas and expressions created by these laws is both natural and absolute. The term is now written into international law, a tribute to the power of publishing, pharmaceutical and chemical industry lobby groups, and their vision of the global south being forced to pay long term rent to the US and Europe for utilising our intellectual creations.

Trademarks and copyright are used to protect internationally recognisable brands. They also control iconic aspects of our culture. Whether a pop song like Thriller, or franchises like Star Wars, important shared references in our collective experience are commercially controlled and restricted. There is an obvious tension between restrictions on publication and our free expression. While copyright and trademark laws are meant to avoid these problems, by allowing 'exceptions' with regard to comment and news reporting for instance, these do not work as well as they should. There are deep problems with two broad areas of copyright.

Firstly, artists can find that innovative use of 'copy and paste' culture is restricted by copyright. In music, copyright has been used to restrict tiny two second long samples. Artists like Danger Mouse or Girl Talk have built careers on copyright infringing mash ups, but few are willing to take commercial risks. Even individuals can be caught, as happened to one mum whose video of her baby

dancing to a Prince song was pulled for infringing copyright. The Electronic Frontier Foundation in the USA are still fighting this case.

At the very least, these losses are a kind of digital cultural tragedy, where the power of expression given to us by the immensely powerful tools of digital creativity is dissipated by copyright law.

The second kind of restriction on free expression created by copyright comes through 'take-downs' and threats that are often completely unjustified by copyright law. For instance, if a company's documents are leaked, it might be claimed that there is copyright in the documents (probably true) which means they cannot be distributed (probably not true if it is in the public interest).

Restrictions on creative expression and political speech collide in the field of parodies. Creating a parody or pastiche of a film, song or book is extremely likely to infringe copyright in the UK. If you publish on the Internet, perhaps on Youtube, the result is that you are very likely to have your video or song taken down at the request of the person you are trying to make fun of. I am writing, of course, in the Occupied Times, itself a parody that may be open to claims of copyright infringement.

Parodies are extremely powerful: they turn the experience of the original work against itself, and question the ideas and values of whatever is being parodied. Parodies are perhaps a vital tool in a world of brands, in that they use the recognition people have of that brand to communicate what it is wrong with the company or culture behind the brand. For example, Greenpeace ran a Star Wars parody on Youtube, criticising Volkswagen's original Darth Vader advert. This was a response to Volkswagen's lobbying against climate change legislation, and it turned the good and evil meme

against the company. Lucasfilm (responsible for the Star Wars franchise) demanded that the video be withdrawn. The battle benefited Greenpeace in that they gained publicity for their campaign, but they lost some of the momentum behind the spread of the video at a critical time. Unlike many who attempt to subvert brands in this way, Greenpeace has the organisational power to stand up to big business.

We need to ask: is it right for a copyright owner to be able to use copyright law to restrict criticism? Some people will simply decide not to take the risk of court action and so will not produce parodies, while others will withdraw them when threatened. We saw this kind of reaction in the UK a couple of years ago when the Radical Media Conference (RMC) was threatened with trademark infringement by an advertising company who had speculatively trademarked the name, in case they decided to run marketing conferences using it. The RMC in that case chose not to take the risk and renamed themselves the Rebellious Media Conference.

In summer 2012, the Olympic organising committee used copyright to suppress a video by Mothers' Best Child. The video featured Olympic mascots Wenlock and Mandeville joining a riot, in order to highlight the contrast between austerity and the huge expense of the games. It was a straightforward parody, and would have been defensible under US or French copyright law, but was deemed to infringe copyright in the UK.

There are many other extreme examples of copyright being abused to restrict free speech. In the UK we are in an especially weak position, with particularly restrictive copyright laws. These laws need dragging into a digital age which has huge potential for networking and spreading ideas - but which is currently being unduly restricted.

Copyright may be a good thing, that can protect artists, but it is also open to abuse, which we need to be vigilant against. Given the huge commercial interests involved, resisting vested interests is a difficult task, but the last ten years have created several movements looking for change. From the Open Rights Group to academia, libraries, official government reviews, 'pirate parties' and Anonymous, there are a growing number of voices asking for fairer laws.

Brian Martin

## UNLEASHING CREATIVITY

Scientific research is a dynamic system for creating new ideas. Researchers develop ideas, test them and publish the results, allowing others to build on them. Now imagine that scientists could claim ownership to formulas, such as  $E=mc^2$ , requiring future researchers to pay royalties to use them. This would put a serious dampener on research. Scientists would always be worried about being sued for using someone else's formulas.

Luckily for researchers, scientific formulas cannot be copyrighted or patented. But science is an exception. In many fields, creativity is being stifled due to so-called intellectual property - which is better described as monopoly restraint.

Consider copyright, in some ways the worst of all the restrictions on creativity. It is too easy to acquire and too long-lasting. As soon as you write a few words, they are automatically copyrighted, without any registration process. The idea behind

this is to stimulate greater productivity by giving an exclusive licence, enforced by the government, to commercial use of those words. But the exclusive licence lasts too long: It remains in effect decades after you die. Are you inspired to be more productive and creative because your words will be copyrighted for 50 years after your death?

The prime beneficiaries of excessively long copyright periods are big companies. The Disney Corporation holds the copyright to Mickey Mouse, and the US Congress periodically extends copyright so Mickey Mouse won't enter the public domain. Perpetual copyright on the instalment plan is a way of protecting Disney's profits by imposing restraints on trade. The key side effect is limiting creativity today.

Another problem is that few of the returns from copyright protection are ever seen by creators. Instead, most of the benefits go to the companies that acquire ownership rights. Copyright has become a system for big companies to make huge profits through controlling rights over other people's creative work. One example: When scientists send their research papers to journals, they have to sign away copyright

to the journal owners. Libraries then have to pay exorbitant sums for access to e-versions of the published research papers. This operates as a brake on research, because not everyone has timely access to the published body of research findings. The monopoly rights granted to companies through copyright or patents have a toxic effect in several fields, including pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, software, music and film. Creators have to tread carefully to avoid infringements. Only those with deep pockets can afford to challenge ambit claims by other owners.

But when you think about it, controlling the expression of ideas doesn't make a lot of sense. If you have a pair of shoes, and someone takes them, you can't wear them any longer. But if you write a poem, and thousands of others read it, you still can read and enjoy it yourself. Ideas should be in the public domain, and creators paid for production, rather than the use of their work - as scientists are.

The absurdities of copyright are becoming ever more obvious in the digital age, and they are prompting people to challenge the powerful groups that run the copyright system.. In the open access movement, scientists are advocating having articles available for free online from the time of publication or shortly afterwards. Some options are to publish in open-access journals, to boycott the big publishers, to post e-versions of articles on institutional websites, and for funding agencies to mandate open access.

Software is one of the biggest areas hamstrung by copyright controls. The major challenge to current monopolies is the movement for free and open source software. Programmers voluntarily offer their expertise and effort in a collective process to produce software that, through a creative method of harnessing existing copyright laws - similar to Creative Commons licenses - allows others to use and build on the code while preventing them from exercising control over it. Free software is widely known as more reliable and error-free than proprietary software. It is a living demonstration of the benefits of allowing creativity to flourish without the dead hand of ownership.

More and more people are refusing to respect the monopoly systems that control the expression of ideas. Those who openly challenge the system are undertaking a form of civil disobedience. Their struggles are crucial to the future of creativity and social welfare.

Brian Martin is professor of social sciences at the University of Wollongong, Australia and vice president of Whistleblowers Australia.

# To Destroy Is To Build: Occupy Sandy & Mutual Aid

Ryan Hickey

## Hope in the Face of Disaster

The OT talked to Rebecca Solnit, author of 'A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster', about Hurricane Sandy and the Occupy Sandy response.

As I brought supplies to Hermana's car from Occupy Sandy's Free Store on Staten Island, she seemed abashed to ask for anything more. "What else can we get you?" I asked. "Do you need cleaning supplies? Food? Batteries? Take anything you need." She smiled and mumbled amiably. I was immediately struck by her apparent shame, her reticence, and her confusion about Occupy Sandy's approach, as if she expected some ulterior motive. After explaining that yes, everything is free and she really could take anything she needed, we were soon filling her car with supplies until we could barely close the doors.

Occupy Sandy was set up a few days after Hurricane Sandy hit the East Coast. The monetary damage has been catastrophic, numbering in the billions of dollars. The emotional damage is incalculable. Hermana's house on Staten Island was left relatively unscathed after Hurricane Sandy, but her daughter's house was severely damaged. Three weeks after the storm, many houses still had no power and large social housing projects were relying on gasoline generators that spewed harmful fumes into the air.

The Free Store and Community Centre Occupy Sandy set up in Staten Island's Midland Beach neighborhood aims to provide some remedies. It serves many purposes. Whether it's providing food, supplies, or a friendly person to talk to, people undoubtedly come to the Free Store to regain some traction in their lives.

Occupy Sandy operates on the same guidelines as Occupy Wall Street: non-hierarchical, horizontal organising structures and an acute awareness of privilege and inequality. Volunteers get involved by approaching one of the many 'hubs', which act as driver and volunteer dispatch centres as well as collection centres. People from across the country have donated goods (via a 'gift registry' scheme); at times vast stocks of supplies have overwhelmed the volunteers and the space in the hubs.

Immediately upon entering the hub at 520 Clinton Avenue in Brooklyn, one is greeted by a banner reading "Mutual Aid, Not Charity." Mutual Aid is a term the left employs to make a distinction from the oft-discouraged 'liberal charity', even when the differences appear blurred.

The term "mutual aid" is sometimes used as if it's something that one can turn on and off, something that can be practised one day and discarded the next. Many thus say they are "going to practice mutual aid". Where Occupy Sandy differs from charitable organisations is in its pledge to use community centres as long-term organising hubs (what to organise around remains up in the air) that are imbued with an ethos of mutual aid and that empower residents to gain control of their communities.

The beauty of Occupy Sandy, like OWS, is that it channels people's efforts and talents in constructive ways. Workshops, skill-shares, and all kinds of other teachings happen daily. They range from sensitivity training - being aware of the devastated communities you are entering - to anti-oppression training. Carpenters, construction workers and social workers have all been able to volunteer through Occupy Sandy. Meanwhile, people who do not consider themselves activists are learning about radical approaches to basic human interaction, which is crucial to both understanding and undermining an essential component of neoliberalism: atomisation.

Hermana's caution underscored the importance of transforming social relationships under neoliberalism. Alienation from our neighbors is perhaps neoliberalism's lifeline, its insurance policy that reproduces a dormant, apolitical population. People feel disconnected from others and rely on themselves, even going so far as to deprive themselves of needs that others could fulfil. Occupy Sandy's practice of mutual aid and building community seeks to erase the assumption that human relations exist upon predation and exploitation. Instead, it formalises and sustains relations that run counter to the very existence of predatory capitalism.

A leaflet published by the New York City anarchist group In Our Hearts states that mutual aid is "not about assuaging guilt." Rather, it's about addressing privilege while threatening the status quo. It is about "sharing amongst equals in different positions of need" rather than sharing with those "beneath you". Most importantly, it is a social relationship. On the other hand, charity, as the Liverpool Solidarity Federation writes, is "a veil for predatory capitalism to hide behind as it attacks the working class." The Salvation Army, The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the American Red Cross are, and have always been, knee-jerk reactions to storm devastation. They do nothing to address the class relations that pre-empted the scope of this crisis. Where Occupy Sandy succeeds, and must continue to succeed, is in its ability to bridge the effects of neoliberal capitalism and Sandy's destruction.

Occupy Sandy must form more coherent and accessible critiques of capitalism than its predecessor, focusing less on ameliorative solutions than on transformational ones. It must not only provide supplies and social services, but also explain Sandy's exacerbation of social ills, radically changing the foundations of social relationships in the process.

**The Occupied Times:** After Hurricane Sandy, Occupy activists have been amongst the first to rush in with aid and support - it is almost as if they had been waiting for this moment. Why do you think this is?

**Rebecca Solnit:** Occupy can be seen as a response to disaster from its beginnings: the economic disaster was creating homelessness, hunger, debt peonage, broken lives and a widening class divide. Occupy operated very much like a community plunged into disaster- aftermath - the reaction to the crisis was to build a tented community, complete with kitchen and clinic. Post- Hurricane Sandy, Occupy activists were, again, amongst the first to rush in with aid and support.

Radical organisations are in a sense always disaster-preparedness groups.

They create networks of public-minded individuals, have the ability to converge and marshal resources, and maintain an attitude of disaffection, or autonomy, from mainstream institutions. When disaster struck in New Orleans, Veterans for Peace was one of the first organisations to provide relief, while volunteer groups associated with the Rainbow Family ran long-lasting community kitchens and related projects.

**OT:** What similarities do you see between contemporary environmental disasters such as Katrina and Sandy, and the San Francisco earthquake in 1906?

**RS:** Well Sandy did not have much in the way of media hysteria, pernicious rumors, and social divides being acted upon, while Katrina and the 1906 earthquake did, in spades. After the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the US Army marched in to prevent the civil disorder they presumed ordinary citizens would create. Reputedly the largest peacetime military presence in an American city to date, this was essentially a hostile occupation. The assumption was that human nature is selfish, chaotic and bestial, and that only state-sanctioned violence could prevent this nature from bursting forth. After Katrina, the governor of Louisiana deployed National Guard troops 'armed and ready to shoot and kill' to New Orleans - not exactly an expression of solidarity or a description of humanitarian relief. Meanwhile, international media, the city's mayor and its police chief, spread rumours about orgies of killing, raping and pillaging that turned the afflicted into the enemy and a relief effort into a military assault in which many people were shot by police, often in the back. The response to the disaster, in both cases, was a disaster.

In New York in 2012, the people most affected by Hurricane Sandy were diverse, including both middle-class coastal

dwellers and public housing occupants.

There wasn't a single group to demonise.

Some sections of the media ran stories about looting but they didn't get much traction as there was meaningful pushback from people who knew better.

**OT:** Would you say that natural disasters bring out the anarchist in us, or perhaps reawaken a form of social obligation to other human beings that our individualistic societies have expelled us from?

**RS:** The version of human nature seen in disaster is far more generous, communitarian and even utopian than Social Darwinists and Hobbesians would allow. Our behaviour in these situations suggests not only what we are capable of, but what we yearn for. In a disaster the status quo ceases to exist, as the usual people and institutions are no longer in charge, and this allows for collective improvisation. The situation

is literally anarchic, in that there is not much authority. There are too many shattered, flooded, destroyed houses and neighborhoods, and too many desperately needy people for the emergency workers to respond to.

There are too many decisions to be made, in too many places, for them to be made by centralised authority; it is impossible to send word of the ten thousand emergencies up the chain of command for decisions. Often there isn't even much of a chain of command, since communication equipment, electricity, and even roads may have failed. The immediate aftermath of a disaster is very much like the throes of a revolution: no one is in charge, anything is possible, and everyone is immersed in the moment in uncertainty and anxiety, but also in solidarity and a kind of role liberation.

Of course, disasters are terrible, but still the potent generosity, creativity, empathy and collaborative genius of the response can be celebrated.

**OT:** How can the cooperation that emerges in these situations be kept going? Will we inevitably fall back to old habits?

**RS:** Nothing is inevitable, and not everyone goes back after these extraordinary moments, but what can they go forward toward? There is a vigour in carnivals, revolutions, uprisings and disaster responses that is hard to sustain, but maybe we should not ask it to be sustained; while falling in love is great, growing from infatuation to a long-term relationship often means trading fizzy for solid. Like carnivals, revolutions and disasters generate a rupture, and in that breach is space to rethink, reorganise and renew our relations to each other; but that energy also subsides. How to make the transition, building on the beauty of the initial moments? Occupy, despite its problems, generated an amazing shift where we saw how many people hate inequality and corruption and dream of something better. The question isn't why the spring doesn't last but how it heads into summer and autumn; and what the harvest is.





Patrick Nicholson

# A SECOND BATTLE OF HASTINGS

Will Wooten

## Keystone Pipeline

In a quiet corner of southern England a fight is brewing. Almost a thousand years after the Norman invasion, the prospect of a second battle of Hastings looms as protesters face off the government and East Sussex County Council over plans to build the 5km, £100m Bexhill-Hastings Link Road (BHLR).

The environmentally disastrous BHLR is one of over forty 'zombie roads' that were declared dead years ago but have now been resuscitated as part of Britain's largest road-building programme in 20 years. This programme, trumpeted by George Osborne and the Treasury as the economic jump-start that the country needs, comprises 191 road projects conservatively estimated to cost £30bn.

The BHLR is the first and the worst of these proposed new roads: the worst in terms of carbon emissions of the 45 transport schemes approved in the 2012 budget; and near the bottom in terms of value for money. If it goes ahead, it will destroy the beautiful Combe Haven Valley, part of the 'theatre' of the Battle of Hastings, and a haven of accessible tranquillity for the 150,000 people who live within walking distance.

In a recent report by the Campaign for Better Transport analysing the government's new road building plans, Steven Norris - Tory Minister for Transport in London in 1992 - writes that "Experience tells us clearly that a massive programme of road building won't solve [the problems of economic inertia, congested roads and housing shortages] ... Investing in effective, affordable and easy to use public transport is part of the solution. So is planning new developments so that they do not rely on cars. Most of all, now is the time for brave and creative decision-making, not a return to the past."

Despite a public enquiry and numerous legal challenges by stalwart local campaigners from the Hastings Alliance, those in power have chosen not to make such "brave and creative" decisions. The BHLR appears on track for building work to commence early in 2013, and preparations have already started.

Against this background, in July 2012 local people decided to form a new group, Combe Haven Defenders, believing that the exhaustion of the legal process and the imminent prospect of bulldozers in the valley argued for fresh energy and tactics. Members of the group all live locally and many have been involved in activism, principally in the environmental and peace movements. The Defenders have organised walks, exhibitions, street stalls, local press work, an online pledge of resistance, training and strategy sessions, a weekend camp, and both local and national demos. An aim from the outset was to celebrate and promote non-violent direct action (NVDA) as a legitimate campaigning tactic, and to build up the capacity, both locally and nationally, to take effective action when required. In coming weeks, more site walks, public meetings and NVDA training sessions will be taking place; all are welcome.

In the 1990s, a road protest movement exploded across the UK, with key campaigns fought at Twyford Down, the M11 link road, Solsbury Hill and Newbury. Although it failed to win all its battles, this movement succeeded in winning the bigger arguments and ended up derailing the Tories' Roads to Prosperity programme with the cancellation of over 300 road schemes in November 1995. But it did even more: It spawned a new culture of protest, epitomised by Reclaim the Streets, that helped shape the anti-globalisation, anti-capitalist, radical environmental and Occupy movements of the last 20 years.

The Bexhill-Hastings Link Road, as the spearhead of Osborne's plans to tarmac our way out of recession, is the clarion call for a new generation of road protests. Opposing this folly is vitally important: strong resistance to the new road programme at Hastings may save a unique valley, but, more than that, it will be a demonstration of popular opposition that may protect countless other special places from destruction, and a line in the sand against the pathological trajectory of 21st century capitalism.

Sign the Pledge to resist the BHLR, follow the campaign and get involved at:

[www.combehavendefenders.wordpress.com](http://www.combehavendefenders.wordpress.com)

Early morning in Nacogdoches, Texas on November 19. Protesters with the Tar Sands Blockade, dressed head-to-toe in camouflage gear, build wooden platforms 50ft up in pine trees. Three people will attempt to block construction of the controversial Keystone XL pipeline today. A few miles away, four more protesters lock themselves to construction equipment. Later, 120 people rally in a small East Texas town - confronting pepper spray, lawsuits and felony charges - to demand that the Keystone XL pipeline never be built.

This pipeline is planned to run from Alberta, Canada to the Gulf Coast of Texas and will pump diluted bitumen, or tar sands, nearly 2,000 miles to Texan oil refineries. If built, an area the size of New York state will be surface-mined and completely destroyed to extract clay-like raw bitumen. This must then be heated up and diluted with liquefied natural gas and an undisclosed chemical cocktail before it can be pumped, via the pipeline, to those oil refineries. In 2010, the largest onshore oil spill in US history occurred in Michigan when tar sands gushed into the Kalamazoo river. Two years later, that spill is still not cleaned up.

Extraction of tar sands is one of the most environmentally damaging processes in the fossil fuel industry. The process is also costly in terms of carbon emissions. According to Oil Change International, our ability to keep climate change at two degrees Celsius depends on tar sands' exploitation being kept under 3.3 million barrels a day. Current projects and approved future projects are expecting to put out between 7.1 and 9 million barrels per day. For the future of the planet, we must slow down.

In July, Tar Sands Blockade held a series of regional actions at construction sites to show the world that building had begun on the Keystone XL pipeline. August saw a series of lock-ons that shut down construction sites. Action was ramped up in September with the Winnsboro Tree Village, a fortified tree blockade which blocks the proposed path of the pipeline and includes a 100 foot wall and several tree houses 80 feet high in which protesters have been residing for over two months.

The Tar Sands Blockade has gained support from over 35 major environmental and progressive organisations. More than 40 solidarity actions were held across the continent in conjunction with the Nacogdoches tree protest, lock-on and rally, targeting banks that fund tar sands, regulators in Texas, and the Canadian Consulate in Washington, DC.

TransCanada, the company behind the Keystone XL project, has responded to the campaign by cracking down on dissent. They now pay a private security force comprised of local off-duty police officers \$30 per hour to patrol

the pipeline route with orders to illegally arrest anyone they see. Two journalists from the New York Times were detained for reporting on the Blockade. Green Party Presidential Candidate Jill Stein was arrested for trespassing when she successfully resupplied the Winnsboro Tree Village. In total, 42 protesters have been arrested, most of them for trespassing.

Pain compliance tactics have also been used, putting protesters' lives in danger on several occasions. At several lockdowns police have used pepper spray to force protesters to unlock, even spraying it into cuts to cause maximum pain. On one occasion, two protesters were shot with a taser gun until they unlocked themselves. TransCanada also operated heavy machinery around the Tree Village for weeks dangerously close to support lines.

The sustained nonviolent direct action campaign in Texas has forced the Keystone XL, tar sands and climate change issues into the public consciousness, keeping the focus on those most impacted by the pipeline. Indigenous communities, local landowners, and people living next to refineries have all begun organising with the Blockade.

President Obama will make a decision about the northern segment of the pipeline early next year, but resistance has already begun in Texas. The November 19 mass action shut down construction at two sites around Nacogdoches and resulted in 11 arrests. As police tried to extract the tree-sitters, a few dozen protesters stood in the road to stop the cherry-picker from getting close enough to the trees. Immediately police started pepper-spraying the protesters, including a local 75-year-old women and a 21-year-old student. Despite these tactics, supporters across the country raised \$20,000 for bail in less than 48 hours and all arrestees have been released.



# DEBT IS POWER

Sahil Dutta

Every single one of us holds the key to power - debt. Just as coal miners in England used their access to coal to flip the balance of power, so debtors can use their access to credit by declaring a 'debt strike', to force a revaluation of the bank stranglehold on the economy.

Forget petitions. Forget protests. Forget parliamentary inquiries. If people really want to stop being 'bankered', there's a better way: debt.

In the finance-first economy built over the last 30 years, our debt has become the weapon over elites that our labour once was. To understand why, we have to rewind 130 years to the insight discovered by coal miners striking in Manchester.

"The possibility of a gigantic and ruinous labour conflict is open before us," screamed the New York Times about their unrest. Why? Because the miners realised their product - coal - was the key to Britain's economic fortunes. The industries clustered around the mines were the country's economic powerhouses and, by cutting off the supply of coal, the miners could close down the economy overnight. Swiftly, concessions were granted.

Their action sparked a wider labour movement along the canals, railways, and docks that linked the country's industries together. These choke points were an outcome of the flourishing economic model of the time - manufacturing - and the primary energy source of the age - coal. Together, they created the conditions that the strikers used to deliver the democratic rights that the majority of people now enjoy.

Today, it's difficult to see where labour strikers could find such sources of power. The

big manufacturers have died and the main energy source - oil - flows well out of the reach of labour disturbance. The result is that we are left sacrificing our livelihoods to keep champagne flowing in the City. We're told upsetting the City risks wreaking interest-rate hell on our economy. The reason? Because, in our post-industrial wasteland, Britons don't make things; we buy them. And the fuel that keeps the consumer engine running is credit.

This financialised model that began with Thatcher and flourished under Labour has, however, created a new choke point. As the bankers found, much like those miners many years before, control over the economy's fuel gives you power. That's why banks can rig the market, ignore the government, and pay themselves huge bonuses in the midst of a recession.

However, this is only half the story. For every creditor there must be a debtor and both are necessary. While the creditors - the banks - have realised their power, the debtors - everyone else - haven't. A glance at the level of private debt reveals just how much potential there is.

Student debt now stands at an estimated £40.3bn, while a combination of stagnant pay and high living costs has left Britain's average family with unsecured loans worth £7944 each - a staggering total of £210bn of unsecured debt. It is

a severe drag on an already knackered economy. Suppose, though, if people refused to repay.

Rather than channelling falling incomes back to the banks that scripted the recession, they simply reject repayment. Immediately, there would be a union of debtors capable of clawing power away from financiers. The old cliché would kick in: 'Owe the bank £10,000 and the bank owns you. Owe the bank £10,000,000 and you own the bank'. Like those canals and railways of industrial Britain, the credit cards and student loans of financialised Britain give people leverage over elites. The difference is that it now takes debt strikes, and not labour strikes, to harness this power.

The idea of debt write-offs is not even that unfamiliar. In David Graeber's history Debt: The first 5000 years, he shows how debt jubilees have been common since the debt slates were wiped clean in ancient Mesopotamia. More recently, we've had debt cancellation for developing countries and, right now, the Jubilee Debt Campaign is calling for a similar solution for countries like Greece. Yet, unless they are forced to listen, today's bankers will ignore all pleas for 'forgiveness'. A debtors' strike is about using the power that debt gives to people to demand concessions.

There are, however, obvious difficulties. To begin with, the stigma that debt holds must be overcome. The idea of refusing to repay a loan seems offensive.

If you sign a contract, it's your moral - not to mention legal - duty to pay it back. However, this misses the fact that debt is a political, and not a personal, issue.

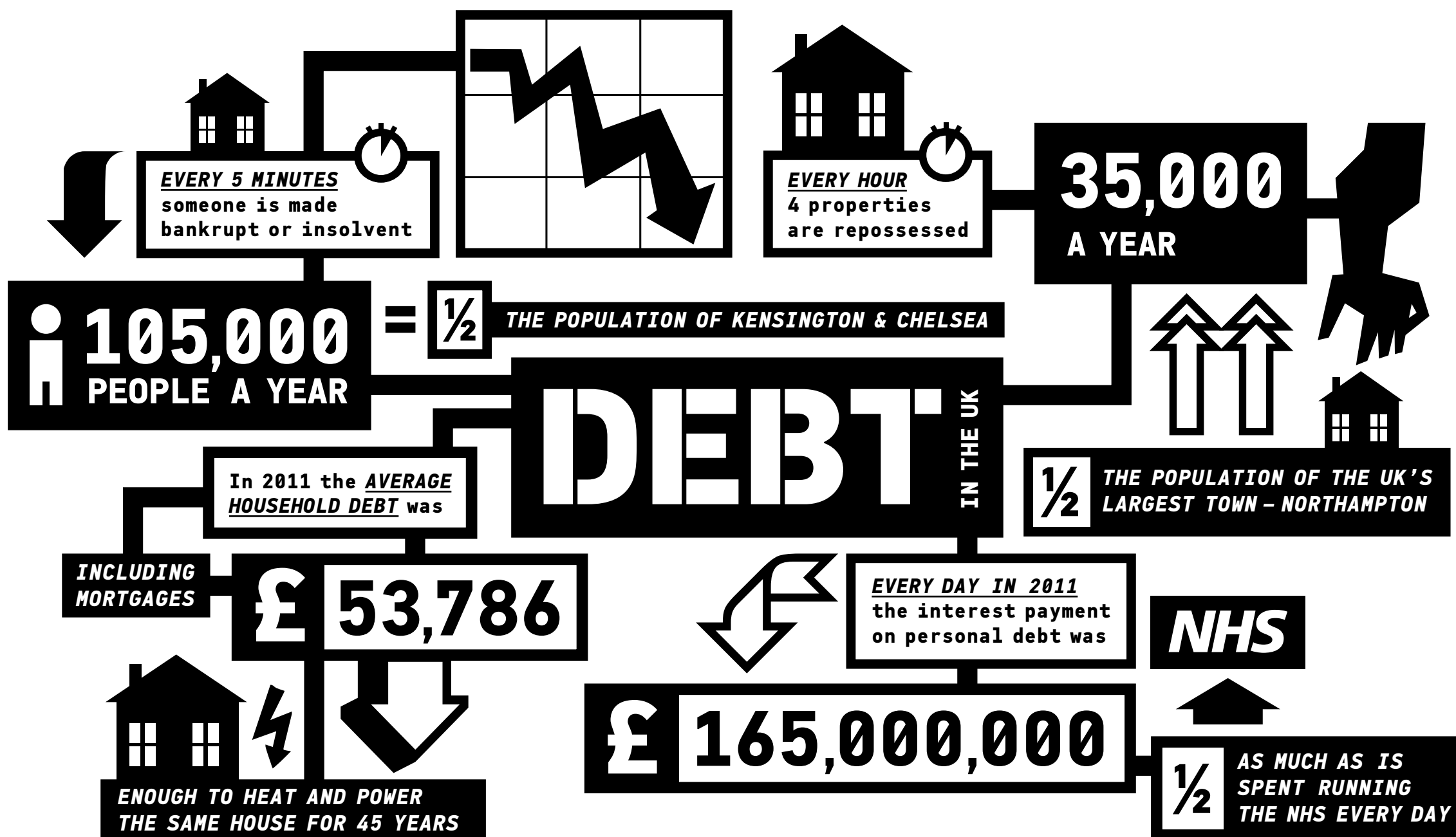
Climbing private indebtedness is the outcome of a deliberate strategy on the part of banks and a wilful impotence on the part of government. Banks developed, sold, and lobbied against the regulation of corrosive debt instruments. They cannot, then, demand that the rest of the population bleed so they can maintain their practises. When the creditor-debtor relation is seen properly, as a socio-economic arrangement, negotiation becomes a fact, as well as an economic necessity.

The next problem is building a movement big enough. A one-man debt strike is as useless as a one-man labour strike, but the quest for a mass debt strike may actually be more plausible. Britain's service economy has fragmented the workforce as powerfully as the manufacturing economy once harnessed it; it's only across public sector unions where there is any coherence. Debtors, however, are much more concentrated. Personal finance is dominated by the five big high-street banks, and student loans even belong to a single company.

The most significant issue, though, is that in the era of securitised finance, the debts of one bank are the assets of another. Because of that, forcing a debt write-down could well throw a pension fund into trouble. Yet that need not be a bad thing. It would shine a torch on the murky behaviour of institutional investors who serve themselves far more effectively than they do their savers. It would also force governments into a position where they have to bail people out before banks. Successive governments have used Quantitative Easing to gift cash to the banks; the same strategy could be used for restoring people's pensions instead.

Ultimately, the political economic reform Britain desperately needs is less a question of policy and more one of power. No amount of moral outrage will change that. If people really want change, they are going to have to find ways of taking power - and debt strikes are one way.

*This piece was first published on Open Democracy.*







# *Debt Resistance at Up the Anti*

The first signs of a UK movement focusing on debt emerged during a session organised by the OT at the Up the Anti conference on 1 December 2012. Titled 'Are "debt strikes" the future of anticapitalist resistance?', the session utilised a more participatory format than others during the day. Following an introduction from Michael Richmond of the OT and comments from David Graeber (Strike Debt), Nick Mirzoeff (Strike Debt) and Jonathan Stevenson (Jubilee Debt Campaign), the session broke into a number of discussion groups involving the speakers and their audience.

Graeber spoke to the nature of debt, its prevalence and impact on so many people's lives, its stigmatisation and its place in the prevailing system of financial capitalism. Why are debt promises deemed as more sacred than other promises? How can we mobilise and bring people together around a subject which many consider shameful? How can we turn a 'poor person's movement' into something which commands attention?

Ten million people in the UK are struggling with debt, living in the fear of the threat or real consequence of bailiff action and home repossession, those who can least afford it are paying back grossly inflated sums.

Nick Mirzoeff described how Strike Debt grew in America. Realising that debt could be a powerful tool of resistance to the status-quo, a small group formed out of public assemblies after May Day 2012. The US network developed 'debt assemblies' where people gathered to tell their personal debt stories and hear the debt experiences of others, encouraging the motif 'You Are Not A Loan!'. Those involved in developing the Strike Debt US movement worked hard, collaborating on the Debt Resisters' Operations Manual. We in the UK, with our different laws and regulations, perhaps need to mobilise around and draw up something similar.

Jonathan Stevenson highlighted the relevance of sovereign debt explaining the situation in Argentina which accumulated debt after purchasing weapons - from the UK - during the Falklands War. Argentina is still paying off this debt, opening itself up to debt restructuring in 2004, after defaulting. One vulture fund with an estimated holding worth \$1.3 billion belongs to Paul Singer, a prominent sponsor of George W. Bush and Mitt Romney's presidential campaigns. Singer, a hedge fund CEO, has aggressively pursued Argentina in courts across the world, allowing no opportunity for re-negotiation.

The discussion groups were asked to focus on a variety of topics: debt and its context in the political economy, debt awareness, debt resistance and other tactics to resist the injustices of a system which continually extracts more than we can give.

In the 'debt and political economy' group, Strike Debt, as a concept, was praised for its anarchic practice and approach. Marxists taking part saw value in the movement and its potential in mobilising the identity of the debtor as a new subjectivity, folding in ideas of wage stagnation and reliance on debt. There was some debate around this point relating to work and debt being the only two ideological tools that the ruling classes retain.

Different forms of debt were examined, sovereign and consumer debt, debt as credit, and how debt, in some sense,

may be necessary. Credit unions were raised as an example. These types of financial institutions may resemble banks, but the manner in which they are run and organised are profoundly different. As credit unions are local financial co-operatives working on the common bonds of their account holder members, interest rates can be significantly lower (the law sets an APR no higher than 26.8%) than high street banks.

The nature of the Rolling Jubilee in the US - that is, fundraising for money to purchase debts from the secondary market and terminate the debt at a fraction of the cost - was also raised. There was a lengthy discussion about the capacity of the Jubilee to provide mutual aid and to build something larger, something with momentum and concrete effects. The limitations of the Jubilee were highlighted by many in the group since, by its very nature, a Rolling Jubilee is unable to change the debt system from the bottom up and is ineffective against market forces.

In the breakout group exploring actions around debt, participants expressed different ways of creating spectacle whilst scoping out the long term effectiveness and longevity of direct actions. Nick Mirzoeff spoke of how Strike Debt in the US launched soon after the May Day protests, when public angst, and sentiment, was at its most compelling.

People focused on the significant increase of payday loan stores now scattered along our high streets, the abusive practices of the companies behind them, and the absence of proper regulation by the Office of Fair Trading, the Ministry of Justice and the Financial Services Authority in relation to rampant interest rates and pre-loan checks. Wonga's recent bad press exposing its manipulative and misleading advertisements, which the Advertising Standards Authority is responsible for investigating, was also raised as an interesting case study.

Several people in the group elaborated on possible action around sport. A number of football clubs and competitions have sponsorship arrangements with payday loan and other debt based companies. The class-based nature of this sponsorship was made clear: a payday loan company's logo would not be splashed across a Formula One car. The imminent G8 summit in Northern Ireland was also noted as a possible event to highlight mobilising around debt. For this to happen, a great deal of careful advance planning and mobilisation of different groups would be necessary.

Turning to more practical aspects of Strike Debt UK, the group explored the technicalities of building a Strike Debt here. Can we, for example, buy discounted debt on the secondary debt market? Do we want to do this? What is the procedure? What are the relevant laws in England and Wales? Do we need a Debt Resisters' Operations Manual here? Many of the questions raised in the group highlighted the need for people to come together, do the research, and share their findings in an accessible way. It also became very apparent that debt is becoming a popular tool in the resistance of capitalism, and as defaulting becomes more commonplace, we need to establish processes which will protect people, rather than financial institutions.

*Strike Debt UK is a recent initiative. It can be found at [www.strikedebtuk.com](http://www.strikedebtuk.com) and [@strikedebtuk](https://twitter.com/strikedebtuk). If you are interested in getting involved, please contact [strikedebtuk@gmail.com](mailto:strikedebtuk@gmail.com).*



# STATE IDOLATRY

Reverend Nemu

## TALES FROM THE GRIND

Nat Lentell



One fine morning in the 90s, I awoke to the noise of a chainsaw outside, felling the trio of plum trees which stood taller than the council flats around them. The toilets needed replacing, explained a man in overalls. The masonry needed storing, there, in the only suitable space in the borough, so they needed to clear it. Their work was the final link in a chain of necessity that began, apparently, in my toilet (which did its job to my satisfaction, but I make modest demands on my plumbing).

The trees were weeks away from ripening, but he wouldn't personally miss the fruit raining down every autumn. His dreadlocks wrong-footed me; surely a reggae-fiend couldn't be responsible, but then who was? Does a councillor consider how common wealth binds a community together? Does a town planner reflect on the value of a jar of homemade jam, given by a widow to her neighbour?

"It is a sin to cut down fruit-bearing trees," I explained. "Even in times of war."

Sadly he did not down tools at the word of the Almighty. The trees were chipped, porta-cabins went up, then fences and "no-climbing" signs. When they finally came down, saplings were planted, and continue to be planted, because some poor soul unschooled in Judeo-Christian lore always snaps them. Kids round here climb fences where they once climbed trees, and wherever they explore they trespass. The sweet things to eat are the fruits of commerce, and picking them is shoplifting.

Fifteen years on and my own children are more inspired by daisies on the treeless lawn than the upgraded toilet, so imagine my horror when I heard the buzz of the chainsaw again. The estate's final square metres of wilderness were being cut to knee height.

"What the hell are you doing?" I shouted.

"What about the poor birds?" came the labourer's lamentation,

and again I was wrong-footed. The Saxons called this place Fullenham, meaning "habitation of birds", and Fulham council was evicting some of its last birds, to neaten it up a touch, or maybe to justify its budget.

"They told me to do it!" protested the conflicted bailiff.

"Didn't cut any ice at Nuremberg!" I shouted, knowing that he too was bound a chain of necessity, of bills to pay and mouths to feed. And who was I to point a finger? To my eternal shame, and to the eternal detriment of my environment, I wasn't prepared to sack off work that day and D-lock myself to a tree. And I confess the idolatry in my decision. The weakness of my bended knee empowers a vampiric master, which feeds on the happiness of my children. My taxes are an offering I willingly give. As it is written, regarding idolatry:

*"Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me."* (Exd 20:5)

I bow down. The labourer serves, knowing his sin as he does. Our children are impoverished, and our children's children. Generations of trees gave countless tons of fruit as the commons shrank to a thicket, and will give no more. Infinities of poverty or wealth stretch out from every decision concerning life.

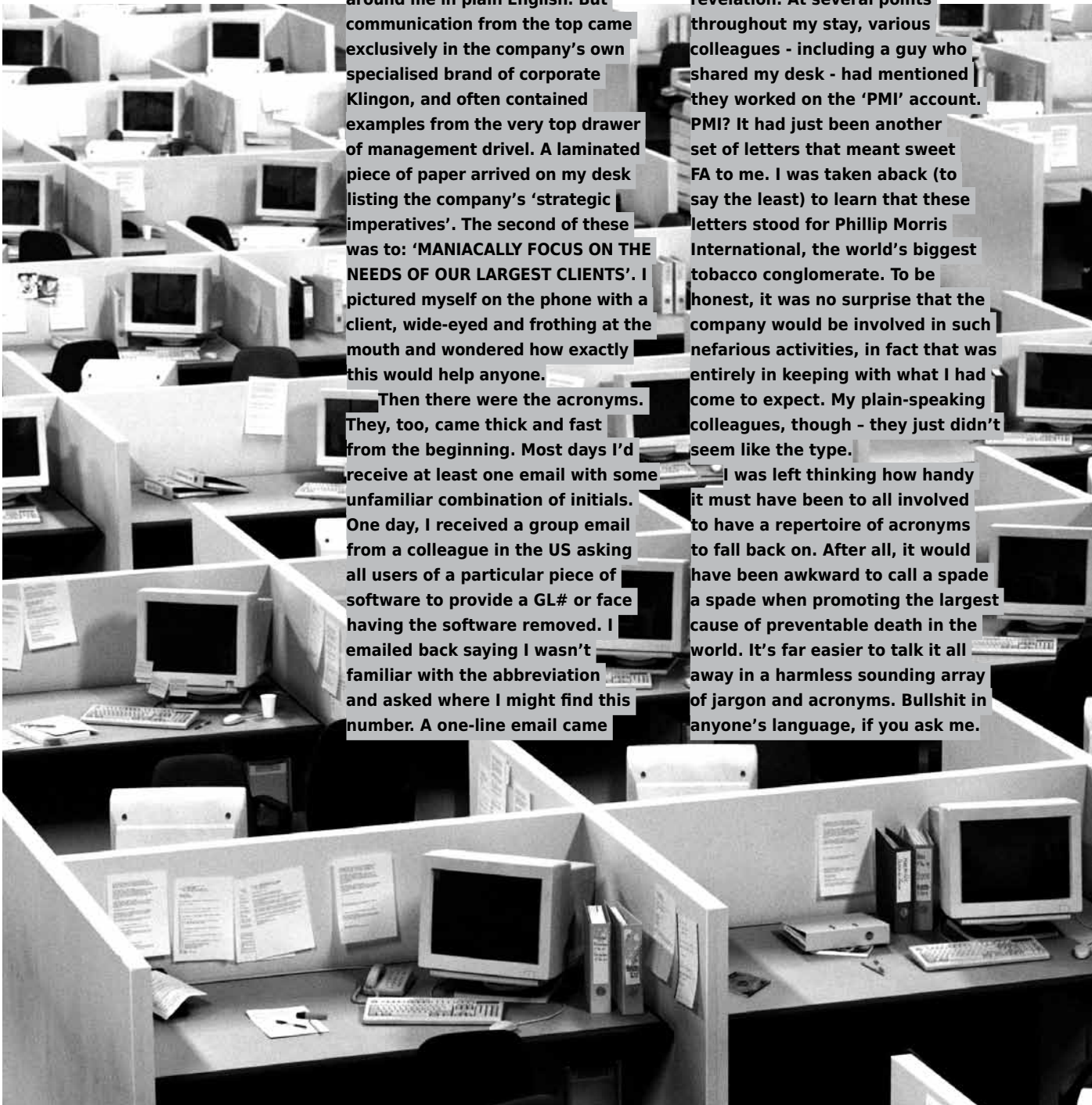
With infinity weighing on my mind I returned to scripture, hoping to find some profound ecology amidst the fruit trees, but this line falls in one of the most brutal passages of *Deuteronomy*, glorifying empire and massacre. The omnipresent encompasses all experience and morality, and is candid about it: *"I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil"* (Isa 45:7). We who are made in God's image call upon His full range, but even in the throes of their most bloodthirsty urges, the Israelites knew not to do something so stupid as to destroy a fruit tree.

That same day, the bombs began to fall on Gaza, splintering worlds into infinities of hell, burning into flesh the potential for endless retribution. IDF bulldozers have felled hundreds of thousands of olive trees in the occupied territories, but Zionism was never a religious philosophy. Its architects were atheists, though their writings equal *Deuteronomy* in their casual racism. The Talmud forbids Jews from forming a state, and in the Bible the land of Israel is given after the Messiah comes, not before. Zionism was opposed at its inception, as today, by many orthodox Jews. Despite the fact that Jews were far more persecuted in Christendom

than in Muslim lands, the only place they are killed today is in Israel itself, despite its US-backed war machine and nuclear arsenal.

The Lord gives *"statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live"* (Exd 20:25). Every single prophet stood up to Him when His wrath went too far, *"and the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do"* (Exd 32:14). The exception is Noah, whose weakness resulted in a global cataclysm. If common wealth is ours to enjoy, it is ours to defend, whether a tree or a peace. We are all bound by chains of necessity, but if you and I do not throw them off, then who will? And what world will remain if we delay?

Morality, in the final analysis, is what we decide, and if God can be held to account, so can the state. If it will be unaccountable, let us be ungovernable. Let us not rest until this idol is smashed and ground into dust, and let our legacy be a gift of freedom, not an infinity of hell for the generations to follow.



It started with a call from the temp agency. I had a telephone interview the next day and the recruiter recommended I do some research about the company beforehand. However, looking at the firm's website left me puzzled. I found familiar words, twisted into vague and baffling new combinations. The company professed to provide services including 'single customer view and customer segmentation'. There were sections dedicated to 'Industry Solutions' and the somewhat sinister sounding 'Thought Leadership'. Bewildered by the unfamiliar dialect, I resolved to try and bluff it out. Happily I wasn't found out and headed in on my first day less than certain what to expect.

As it turned out, the firm was one of the world's biggest marketing companies, with its fingers stuck in a variety of data-related pies. My role in this vast global machinery was to be managing email campaigns for an academic publisher. Day-to-day, I found I was able to communicate more than adequately with those around me in plain English. But communication from the top came exclusively in the company's own specialised brand of corporate Klingon, and often contained examples from the very top drawer of management drivel. A laminated piece of paper arrived on my desk listing the company's 'strategic imperatives'. The second of these was to: 'MANIACALLY FOCUS ON THE NEEDS OF OUR LARGEST CLIENTS'. I pictured myself on the phone with a client, wide-eyed and frothing at the mouth and wondered how exactly this would help anyone.

Then there were the acronyms. They, too, came thick and fast from the beginning. Most days I'd receive at least one email with some unfamiliar combination of initials. One day, I received a group email from a colleague in the US asking all users of a particular piece of software to provide a GL# or face having the software removed. I emailed back saying I wasn't familiar with the abbreviation and asked where I might find this number. A one-line email came

back: "Ask your UL." I quizzed those around me, eliciting an array of shrugs. I tracked down the most experienced person I could find, a company veteran of 13 years. He contemplated the question for a moment, before answering: "A GL number? It's a ...well...It's a GL number. Ask someone in accounts."

After some more unsuccessful enquiries, I made a discovery that would change everything. Trawling deep in the company's online archive, I came across an in-house acronym dictionary. Combined with the knowledge I had picked up over my stay, I began to feel like I had gained membership to some exclusive sect. I went back and deciphered the old correspondence (General Ledger Number & Unit Leader, in case you were wondering) and passed my Rosetta Stone on to grateful colleagues. Now that I spoke their language, the top brass aura of bureaucratic mysticism receded. I was on their level.

But with all this newly found knowledge came a less savoury revelation. At several points throughout my stay, various colleagues - including a guy who shared my desk - had mentioned they worked on the 'PMI' account. PMI? It had just been another set of letters that meant sweet FA to me. I was taken aback (to say the least) to learn that these letters stood for Phillip Morris International, the world's biggest tobacco conglomerate. To be honest, it was no surprise that the company would be involved in such nefarious activities, in fact that was entirely in keeping with what I had come to expect. My plain-speaking colleagues, though - they just didn't seem like the type.

I was left thinking how handy it must have been to all involved to have a repertoire of acronyms to fall back on. After all, it would have been awkward to call a spade a spade when promoting the largest cause of preventable death in the world. It's far easier to talk it all away in a harmless sounding array of jargon and acronyms. Bullshit in anyone's language, if you ask me.



BURNING WISHES.

# The 12 days of Crisis

On the twelfth day of crisis,

The system gave to me,

Twelve councils cutting,

Eleven bubbles bursting,

Ten states a-failing,

Nine markets crashing,

Eight corps a-voiding,

Seven seas a-rising,

Six hacks a-hacking,

Five racist cops,

Four bailed out banks,

Three student loans,

Two part time jobs,

And a vote in a democracy!

HO!

HO!

HO!

The Revolutionary Nemu

## NADSYUK report on intangibles

Sunlight has dropped three points since the autumnal equinox, and conservative analysts predict a steady fall until the beginning of the next financial year. Prana and orgone have increased steadily in the same period, whilst chi continues to fall with the exception of kidney chi, which remained static.

The sharp fall in the market value of mojo shows no sign of abating. Most experts blame this on the outsourcing of talent to the intangible commodities firm Barlow, Cowell & Cole, which continues with its aggressive takeover of popular culture. Meanwhile traders have linked umph, chutzpah, pizzazz and verve into a commodity bundle to prevent similar devaluations across the spectrum of zeal derivatives.

Traders around the British Isles and its tax havens dumped their stock of hooray and wow after the Olympics, as expected. The conservatives among them have tended to favour meh, which is expected to rise slowly for at least the next three quarters, whilst more daring investors looking for quicker returns are opting for whoops, OMG, and bejeeezus.

The annual spike in heebie-jeebies came and went at the end of October, and futures traders have already dominated the market on goodwill, cheer, and festive spirit in the run-up to Christmas.



INDIVIDUALS



STRIKE DEBT — WE OWE IT TO EACH OTHER!