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, immoral goods have spawned a precarious, non-unions workforce with higher demand on them and 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 spiral out of control courtesy of exorbitant interest rates, in some cases reaching up to 4500% 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 cover. 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 wealth gaps 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: it means more 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 across the world is many times greater.

In the quest for infinite expansion of value, coupled with a more intangible 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 & Negreti elaborate on the systemic realignment that has occurred: ‘Capital no longer defines itself in terms of the supply it refers to the indebted as a key subjective feature of the 2008 crash.

“In order to survive the indebted must sell off his or her entire time of life. Those subject to this 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’’’ bennevolence 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 history, 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 pretences. If the debt is illegitimate, why must we cough 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 refusals 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 preys on freedoms 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 Jubilees 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 retore the debt, you end capital.”

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Print run / 2006 Copies
With special thanks to / Alligate Press, ET 78Q
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All information in this paper is free for non-profit distribution

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You can also contribute writing and photography to the OT by visiting us online.
An important first step, but just a step

The Up The Anti (UTA) conference on 1 December aimed to judge 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; 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”.

UK radical co-ops reach milestone

Last week the Radical Routes (RR) federation loaned £60,000 to Hosey Housing Co-operative in Liverpool, and reached the milestone of £1.5m 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 among 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 network 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 more information please visit the web sites:

Radical Routes: http://www.radicalroutes.org.uk/

For information on investing in Rootstock: www.rootstock.org.uk
Hamas uses human shields, but Israel does everything it can to avoid civilian casualties

Hamas has 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 strikes’ 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, it’s unclear how many from Hamas using human shields is true. It is, if it’s then the second statement - that ‘Israel does everything it can to avoid civilian casualties’ cannot be, if it’s known so well that the targeted civilians 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 Israeli arms are so high because Israel is deliberately targeting civilians.

Ariel Sharon’s son stated: “We need to do things this year 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 of its troubles 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. homes for Palestinians, 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 sell-off of our country!” reads the party’s website. And it may in fact be time for Greeks 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 symptoms and not the disease that eats away at the country’s morale. As the Greek investigative journalist Yannis Baboukas, a Greek investigative journalist writing on finance and politics, says:

Dangerous Myths about Israel & Palestine

Hilaire Aked

‘Operation Pillar of Defence’, 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 ago the New York Times ran a story about 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 - perpetrated by Israel and its supporters, which are used as a smoke screen on the current situation and hinder justice for Israelis and Palestinians.

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

Both sides of this statement was spilled out explicitly in one article on the Independent’s ‘Independent Voices’ comment blog (Joanna Lowy, Israel, Hamas, and 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 constriction of its population. It’s an absurd lie.

2 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, Ahmed Abu Daqqa, who had been playing football near Khan Yunis. Palestinian fighters retaliated two days later and the situation escalated.

3 Hamas has caused the main problem

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 most of the global sea trade, this is nothing but “spare change”. To give a sense of proportion, within the same year, 52 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? As was demonstrated recently with the state’s reaction over the publication of the now infamous Lapidateo, this government is unwilling to clash with the Golden Dawn, of which its members are an integral part. It is becoming more and more apparent, as months go by, that the Greek elite tolerated, and even supported the neo-nazi party in order to promote its agenda. Reading between the lines of Golden Dawn’s manifestos, 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 sell-off of our country!” reads the party’s website. And it may in fact be time for Greeks 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 symptoms and not the disease that eats away at the country’s morale. As the Greek investigative journalist Yannis Baboukas, a Greek investigative journalist writing on finance and politics, says:

Most people are apathetic

Apathy means showing a lack of interest, especially about something important. But most people are confused, not uninterested, especially about Britain’s historic role. This party is because of the problems with media coverage. Generally, the more people learn, the more morbid outrage they feel, especially because the horrific truth was previously hidden from them. Apathy is manufactured, not inherent.

There’s nothing we can do

This is the most pernicious and paralyzing myth of all. We can educate ourselves, visit Palestine and participate in campaigns. Far be it for the 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, both as supporter 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 forum) 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, 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. Then 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 suppose 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 in breach of international law. It met 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, Arunghati 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.
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 New York Times, which hailed it as the "first postmodern Latin American revolution." 19 years down the track, 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 beat the farming population in near-fatal conditions. In rural communities, an estimated 20% of children died before the age of five.

In response to the 'threat' posed by these communities, the Mexican state has deployed 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 Union Hidalgo in September 2012, during which the community was forcibly displaced. Recalling those tragic moments, a BAZ member recounts: "They chased us with bullets, and when we arrived in a new 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
BODY–HAIR ACTIVISM & ANTI-CAPITALISM

Tasha Skeriman-Grey

Over the past year there has been a resurgence in body-hair activism and discussions around femininity. 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 Polyctystic Ovary Syndrome charity Verity, the image of the unapologetic, hair-youched, 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. 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 denouncing 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 supposed to 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 waiting salons offer their services to pre-teens, and soon start 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 subjected to harassment and criticism, there is a need for 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 Skeriman-Grey, 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

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 environment, our access to green spaces and what happens to 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 population growth and improve our quality of life, both in the UK and 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 have been described as the ‘canaries in the coalmine’ 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 unsustain- able. Activists are working genuinely at- tempt to resist development within the planning system. 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 proc- ess and makes it effectively impossible to obtain planning permission in the countryside. This guidance is an insult to the planning minister: “We feel there is a big lean towards economic sustainability but our project is about environ- mental 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

To create genuinely sustainable living environments at a time when, arguably, our very survival as a species could depend on develop- ing such forms of living, Mike Harris notes 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 been trying 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, but the Mid-Dex 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 environ- mental 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.
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 organizing society around informational concerns.

Proceeding with other commoning concerns in the information age without finding 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 (i.e., 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. This means that the way you have six chairs’ worth of goods, compared to the often miserable much more community-minded practice, of claims that copyright is merely a property, copyright is not about the right to own, to buy, or to sell books, music and 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 publisher 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 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 against the driver of a car feeding 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 with the American Digital Millennium Copyright Act - the DMCA. One component of the DMCA is the so-called “take-down notice”. Nobody who objects to content on the internet can claim that they hold copyright to the material and send a take-down notice to the Internet Service Provider (ISP) that hosts the material. To avoid legal liability, ISPs remove the material without further question. The absence of a simple test 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 that the government by the government’s own law, has the right to take your name. 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 only 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.
Intellectual Property laws are immensely powerful tools of digital creativity are dissipated against the company. Lucasfilm (responsible for the Star Wars franchise) claimed 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 when threatened. We saw this kind of reaction in the UK a couple of years ago when the Rebellious 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 protest of the Olympic committee used copyright to suppress a video by Mothers’ Best Child. The video featured Olympic mascots Wenlock and Mandeville joining a riot, in protest of the Olympic committee using copyright to suppress the use of the words ‘Wenlock’ and ‘Mandeville’. The protest was quickly suppressed, and the video taken down. The absurdities of copyright are becoming ever more obvious.

Restrictions on creative expression and political speech collide in the field of parodies. Parodies are a form of free speech that dipicts the original in order to criticise it. The protection of parody is important as it allows 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.

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Copyright is now written into international law, a tribute to powerful groups that run the copyright system. In the open access movement, scientists are advocating having articles available 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 ownership 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

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 in the furtive way a person who feels unworthy of aid, who is 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 yet, 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 untouched 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 relationships in the process.

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 anti-racist, 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: atomization.

Hermana’s caution underscored the importance of transforming social relationships under neoliberalism. Alienation from our neighbors is perhaps neoliberalism’s most important, knee-jerk reactions to storm devastation. (FEMA), and the American Red Cross are, and have always been, a veil for predatory capitalism to hide privilege while threatening the status quo. It is about assuaging guilt. Rather, it’s about addressing the immediately shared space to rethink, reorganize, and renew our relationships to each other, to that energy. It also subsides. How to make the transition, building on the beauty of the initial moments? Occupy, despite its problems, was able to create an amazing shift where we saw how many people hate inequality and corruption and dream of something better.

RS: The version of human nature that emerged in these situations 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 desperate people, to see the emergency workers respond to.

There are too many decisions to be made, in too many places, for them to be made by central 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 to fall back on. 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, “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.

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A SECOND BATTLE OF HASTINGS

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 Skan, £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 listen to the people who do not rely on cars. Most of all, now is the time for brave and creative decision-making, not a return to the past.

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 M31 Link road, Solihull 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 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.

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.

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 5 and 8 million barrels per day. For the future of the planet, we must slow down.

In July, Tar Sands Blockade held a series of local 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 projects 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 lock downs 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 tasers gun until they unlocked themselves. TransCanada also operated heavy machinery around the Tree Village for weeks dangerously close to support lines.

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Debt: Power

Sahil Dutta

Every single one of us holds the key to power. Debts, 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 stronghold on the economy.

Perpetual petition. Perpetual protests. Perpetual parliamentary inquiries. If people really want to stop being ‘banked’, 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 that linked the country’s industries together. These 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 upending 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 £211bn of unsecured debt. It is a severe drag on an already knackered economy. Suppose, though, if people refused to repay.

Rather than channeling falling incomes back to the banks that scripted the recession, they simply reject repayment. Immediately, there would be a union of debtors capable of closing 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 5,000 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 practices. 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 restructuring people’s pensions instead.

Ultimately, the political economic reform Britain desperately needs lies less in 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.
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 Campaigns), 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 motto “You Are Not A Loan”. Those involved in developing the Strike Debt US movement worked hard, collaborating on the Debt Resistors’ 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 injustices of a system which continually extracts more than of topics: debt and its context in the political economy, debt allowing no opportunity for re-negotiation.

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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 practicalities 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 Resistors’ 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 on www.strikedebtuk.com and @strikedebtuk. If you are interested in getting involved, please contact strikedebtuk@gmail.com.
One fine morning in the 90s, I awoke to the noise of a chainsaw outside, filling the trio of plum trees which stood taller than the council flats around them. The toilets outside, felling the trio of plum trees. The estate's final daisies on the treeless lawn than children are more inspired by climb fences where they once climbed being cut to knee height. Come the labourer's lamentation, Fifteen years on and my own came the labourer's lamentation, Fifteen years on and my own.

I found myself in the throes of their most being cut to knee height. Come the labourer's lamentation, Fifteen years on and my own came the labourer's lamentation, Fifteen years on and my own.

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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!

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 rise in the market value of mojo shows no signs 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 heezeezas.

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.
STRIKE DEBT — WE OWE IT TO EACH OTHER!