SYDNEY ANARCHO-COMMUNISTS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge that the land that we have been meeting on, organising on, and living on is stolen land. It belongs to the traditional custodians who never ceded their sovereignty to the colonial forces of Britain who, with brutal force and malicious cunning, invaded over 200 years ago. First Nations people have been engaged in a war of resistance ever since, and settlers must acknowledge their complicity in the structures of hierarchy which have facilitated their domination, and strive to be genuine allies in this de-colonial resistance. Colonialism is the product of the illegitimate hegemony of capitalism as facilitated by the state, whose falsified national borders justify the racism and oppression which continues to affect Indigenous people, refugees, and ethnic minorities globally today. This is why de-colonial struggle does not exist in isolation; it is at the heart of our resistance to capitalism, the state, and interacts with all illegitimate hierarchies which foster oppression and exploitation in these names.

We acknowledge the sovereignty of the Dharug, the Kuring-Gai, the Dharawal, the Comma, the Cammeraigal, the Borogegal, the Garigal, the Cadigal, the Wangal, the Wllumattagal, the Bidjigal, the Boorooberongal, the Cabrogal, and the Gweagal people, and any other nations on whose land we reside in the so-called Sydney region. We pay our respects to elders past, present, and emerging on each of these lands. We acknowledge that the ally-ship of settlers in our spaces will more often than not be inadequate and require a constant state of re-learning, however, we hope that that we can put into practice the principles of de-colonisation to the best of our ability, and remain committed to the enactment of these principles.

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ON ANARCHY

The ideas of the ruling class have always been the ruling ideas. Much like under monarchies the idea of a republic was synonymous with disorder and confusion, anarchy is misunderstood as a system of unruly chaos under today's so-called representative democracy. Anarchy strives for the abolition of government or of the State, not that of society.

The ruling capitalist class relies on ideologues, educators and the media to assure us that the State is a neutral entity whose purpose is to maintain "law and order". This is a façade. In a pamphlet published in 1891, Errico Malatesta defines the State not as one organisation, but a "collection of institutions, political, legislative, judicial, military, financial, etc." that infringe upon an individual's right to self-governance and serve as the instrument by which the capitalist class exploits the labour of the workers.

The State is a top-down hierarchy, possessing the authority to create and enforce laws applicable to the whole of society with the individual having little to no say in the policies dictating their own affairs. Elected officials are not incorruptible bastions of brilliance and morality, able to divine the best interests of individuals better than they themselves can and so it makes no sense to perceive them as such. Under anarchy, decisions will be made by those affected by them for those affected by them.

COLLECTIVISM AND COMMUNISM

In traditional communism, ownership of the means of production meant ownership by the State. Collectivists, who argued that the social product was to be distributed "from each according to their ability to each according to his work", disavowed communism on the grounds that communism was fated to end with the centralisation of property at the hands of the State as opposed to the workers', who were entitled to it.

Calcifero and Malatesta argued that differences in land fertility between different locations and differences in "intellectual and physical endowment" between individuals made it impossible to determine each individual's precise contribution to production. The argument was that collectivism was bound therefore to result in competition and inequality, and so in 1876 congress of the Italian branch of the International passed a resolution that replaced the collectivist programme with the communist program that stated the social product was to be distributed

“from each according to his ability to each according to his need”.

PLATFORMISM AND POINTS OF UNITY

“The Platform” is a pamphlet co-written by Nestor Makhno that stresses the importance of discipline, co-operation, shared theory and shared goals within an anarchist organisation. Today, platformist groups aim to act on a common programme, to be organised and non-sectarian. The four core ideas/points of unity platformist groups seek to develop are:

1. Theoretical Unity: members of a political group must generally have ideological unity/ fundamental points of agreement (e.g. communist or collectivist?), otherwise irreconcilable disagreements between members will make organising and strategizing extremely difficult

2. Tactical Unity: members of the group should democratically agree upon a strategy and then all members should work towards that strategy’s success

3. Collective Action & Discipline: individual members have a responsibility to fulfill the minimum expected commitment to the group and have a right to take part in and abide by the collective decision-making process

4. Federalism: balance betweven independence and coherence - decisions made by those affected by them for those affected by them, as opposed to centralism

AN ANARCHIST INTRODUCTION TO FEDERALISM

Daniel al-Rachid

The concept of federalism is one that appears time and time again in anarchist literature and in anarchist activity, yet in the present day, it is rarely elaborated upon – at least in English. You're more likely to hear people talk about "direct democracy", "decentralisation", "horizontalism" and other slightly different concepts instead of "federalism" plain and simple. This article is intended to give a decent introduction to that federalism, plain and simple, whilst also elaborating a bit more on its significance.

WHAT IS FEDERALISM?

Federalism is an organisational doctrine which holds that society should be structured from the bottom-up. Momentum moves upward, from the periphery to the centre – the higher-order units are simply the direct expression of the lower-order units combining, and delegating out certain tasks like administration and co-ordination for practical reasons.

In a federation, the constituent groups are autonomous and self-determining. This means that they can associate or disassociate as they like, without any restrictions placed upon them beyond the principles and aims they all agreed to upon federating. There is no central unit that issues orders from above, as with governments or capitalist enterprises; the direction of the organisation is determined by the constituent units collaborating with each other freely. There may be higher-order committees and councils, but these have no power to direct the organisation itself, and are composed of delegates with strict, revocable mandates. Units have full freedom to secede if they wish, knowing of course that in doing so they would cease to have the benefits that federating brought them.

There is no specified decision-making method that is to be carried out internally within the constituent units or in negotiations with each other. Exactly how groups make decisions is left to the groups, figuring out what methods work best in each of their particular circumstances. The crucial element is that the right to free association is respected. For instance, some groups operate according to total consensus; decisions aren't made until everyone agrees. Others work via a modified consensus system, where members strive to reach unanimity, but are able to reach a resolution if one or two members hold out regardless. Others may use simple majority vote, with "losing" voters not being compelled to carry out a decision they disagree with.

Finding the solution to these problems comes in finding the right combination of solidarity and

autonomy – of group commitment and free association. It is silly to expect the same approach that works for an affinity group of five militants to work for a union of tens of thousands of members, so precise decisions on these matters are left to the people who know how to decide best – the relevant groups and individuals themselves.

This sort of free association is not something alien to society, and it was not developed by anarchists out of nothing; to a large extent it was a matter of libertarians discovering these methods of organisations in unions, clubs, and cultural associations, and then expanding on their significance, and pushing for their adoption in politics and in the economy.

FEDERALISM: THEIRS AND OURS

Though we have our own particular understanding of the concept, we don't have a monopoly over it, as should be obvious to anyone familiar with Australia's political system. Though anarchists use federalism to refer to a means of organising society in a manner that is totally bottom-up, it has a wider, more common meaning among mainstream ideologues to refer to a system of organising states.

In this mainline understanding, federalism means the devolution of the majority of the state's powers to more local units. For instance, the state government of New South Wales is responsible for policing, healthcare, transport, education, and other functions within the territory of New South Wales – not the federal government. It sets its own laws, provided they do not conflict with the constitution, and other functions like rubbish collection and park management are conceived of as local and are delegated out accordingly to municipal councils.

More obvious federalist systems are in place in countries like the U.S.A., with its notoriously strange federal voting system; Switzerland, with its famous cantonal "direct democracy"; and India, whose constituent states have their own official languages.

Anarchists criticise this republican federalism for essentially being federalism in name only, and for restricting federalism to the field of politics, keeping it away from the immense, authoritarian centralisation that is capitalism. James Guillaume, one of Bakunin's close comrades, put it succinctly: a country like Switzerland is "simply a federative state, and that word alone expresses all the differences between these two systems".[1]

Guillaume notes that Swiss cantons have a certain ability to manage their own affairs, but they are not considered as "distinct individualities and absolute sovereigns"; instead, they are considered simply fractions of a whole called the Swiss nation. The autonomy of the cantons

1 "Federalism" by James Guillaume, published in Solidarité (1871), translated by Shawn Wilbur, available at: https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/bakunin-library/james-guillaume-federalism-1871/.

is limited legislatively by the federal constitution, which is itself not a free contract, but an imposition. The canton does not have any right to secede, and thus such a federalism is attacked as a federalism "only in the words".

In addition, anarchists dispute the idea that federalism can exist if the individuals of each federal units are not themselves free. Writing about the United States of America pre-Civil War, Proudhon notes that it seems impossible for a slave-holding state to belong to a confederation; it seems no more sensible than the idea of an absolutist state joining: "the enslaving of one part of the nation is the very negation of the federative principle".[2]

In effect, republican federalism means delegating the repressive functions of government to more local-level elites. The most basic function of government, protecting the institution of private property, the subordination of workers to capitalists, is preserved. When workers head out on an "unauthorised" strike, it's the state-level police that move in to harass and assault them instead of the federal police; never mind the fact that the federal forces are always free to move in if things get truly out of hand. The effect is the same as a typical centralised state; it becomes simply another form of authoritarianism, and we oppose it just as we oppose any other form of government.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FEDERALISM

Guillaume's article is interesting not simply because it distinguishes our federalism from theirs, but because he expresses some crucial concepts and a clear influence from an old master. He states that federalism in the meaning that the Paris commune gave to it, and in the meaning Proudhon gave to it is, "above all, the negation of the nation and the state". The nation ceases to exist, and in its place is a federation of communes. The determining principle of this federation is not national unity or territorial sovereignty, but simply the mutual interest of the relevant parties which has "no regard for the questions of nationalism and territory".

Once the state ceases to exist, there is no longer any central power that is "superior" to the groups of the federation that imposes upon them its authority.

All that remains is "the collective force".

This little known concept is crucial to a full understanding of anarchism, at least as it was put forward by Proudhon. This concept was first elaborated on in Proudhon's first major work, the famous What is Property?, and it may well be his most important intellectual contribution. Collective force refers to the effect produced by individuals joining their efforts together, pro-

2 "The Federative Principle and the Necessity of Reconstituting the Party of the Revolution" by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, as published in Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology (2011), edited by Iain McKay, by AK Press.

ducing a force greater than the simple sum of their parts. In Proudhon's words, it refers to "that immense power which results from the union and harmony of workers, and the convergence and simultaneousness of their efforts".[3]

Collective force is deployed first in What is Property? as part of a critique of private property and wage-labour. Even supposing individual workers in a firm are fairly compensated for their work via wages, the collective force resulting from the workers labouring together is not paid; there is always a debt that remains. He uses the following example:

> ***"A force of one thousand men working twenty days has been paid the same wages that one would be paid for working fifty-five years; but this force of one thousand has done in twenty days what a single man could not have accomplished, though he had laboured for a million centuries."***

Elsewhere, he uses the example of two hundred men putting an obelisk on its base in two hours, noting that one man could not have done the same thing in two hundred days.

Proudhon later put the collective force concept into different contexts, expanding its meaning. He used it to refer to collective reason, the result of combined intellectual labour; social power, the constitution of society based on the actions of the individuals and groups that constitute it; collective being, the way in which individual freedom can only be real in light of the individual's social relationships; and as a kind of theory of alienation whereby people mistake "effects for causes" – such as seeing a leader as a source of power instead of the people that obey him, or seeing money as a source of value in of itself instead of the collective agreement that gives money its worth.[4]

As Guillaume outlines, collective force is the result of the federation of the groups and it acts to maintain and guarantee the federal contract. It doesn't become something superior to the federated communes, akin to what the state is, a force over existing society. Government dissolves, and we truly enter a state of "an-archy, absence of central authority".

This is a crucial rebuttal of the persisting myth that federalism, as in libertarian organisation, is simply the realisation of individualism and disarray. This myth is kept alive by detractors of anarchism – usually Marxists, who insist that centralisation is necessary for effective co-ordination and co-operation – but also by some supporters of anarchism: namely, the individualists that regard any organisation beyond the level of simple informal affinity groups, as an infringement on their liberties.

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3 "What is Property? – Or, an inquiry into the principle of right and of government", as published in above and by the same author.

4 From Iain McKay's glossary, also in the book cited above.

Federalism is a recognition that the individual can only become free through their social relationships with others. It is on this basis alone that a meaningful socialism can be constructed. The various constituent units bond themselves together autonomously through contracts, motivated by solidarity and mutual self-interest. Liberty is not sacrificed in this process – it is assured.

FEDERALISM: AN IMPEDIMENT TO UNITY?

The identification of federalism with disunity, chaos and disarray is a valuable propaganda tool for centralists of all stripes, and the accusation reveals possibly the most significant fault line that separates anarchists from other socialists. For us, the most important thing to stress is that unity must be distinguished from uniformity.

The charge that a consistent federalism would lead to a number of differences of opinion and strategy is one that is wholeheartedly accepted by anarchists. In fact, this constitutes one of the most significant reasons we support it. The circumstances in our lives vary so widely, and shift so rapidly, that mandating one fixed model of an organisation upon society would itself lead only to chaos. The dissidence that emerges naturally from different people and different groups working together for a common cause is essential for keeping organisations alive.

Libertarian socialism manifests itself as not simply a revolt against authoritarian political and economic structures, but a revolt against the absolutism that lies at their root. In justifying the right of the units of a federation to secede even after they agreed to federate, Bakunin states that "no perpetual obligation can be countenanced by human justice, which is the only one that can claim any authority among us", and that without the right to free assembly and free secession, "confederation would be nothing more than centralisation in disguise".[5]

The diversity that results from a federation is not considered to be a flaw, but a feature. Again, we return to Bakunin for an eloquent justification:

> ***"I will never tire of repeating it: Uniformity is death. Diversity is life. The disciplinary unity that can only be established in any social milieu to the detriment of spontaneous creativity and life, kills nations. The living, truly powerful unity, the unity we all want, is that which liberty creates in the very***

5 "An Internationalist Federalism" by Mikhail Bakunin, as published in No Gods No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism (2005), edited by Daniel Guérin, translated by Paul Sharkey and published by AK Press. This text, which originates as an address to the League of Peace of Freedom, is significant in Bakunin's history as it marks a key stage in the development of his thought. The League, a liberal-humanitarian group, was not receptive to his attempt to merge pacifist concerns with the concerns of workers. The failure of his project within the league signalled his shift to believing that only the proletariat acting as an independent force could bring about the required radical social changes. Accordingly, he spent the rest of his active life dedicated to the International Workingmen's Association, abandoning bourgeois politics for good.

heart of the free and diverse manifestations of life, expressing itself through struggle: it is the balancing and harmonisation of all living forces."[6]

Elsewhere, he makes a similar point: "Uniformity is not unity at all; it is the abstraction of it, its ***caput mortuum***,[7] its death.

Unity is only real and living amid the greatest diversity"[8]. For Bakunin in particular, the imposition of a particular doctrine or form by a higher council on a federation would turn that federation into a unitary church and that council into a "collective Pope", who would speak ex cathedra, its commands becoming law.[9]

For a final blast, we can call upon Proudhon:

"You, who cannot conceive of unity without a whole apparatus of legislators, prosecutors, attorneys-general, custom house officers, policemen, you have never known what real unity is! What you call unity and centralisation is nothing but perpetual chaos, serving as a basis for endless tyranny; it is the advancing of the chaotic condition of social forces as an argument for despotism – a despotism which is really the cause of the chaos."[10]

FROM CITIZENS TO PRODUCERS

Federalism is the most crucial component in the cohesion of the workers' movement that will abolish private property and government, and construct a free socialism in its place. Whereas the past society organises itself by divisions of nations according to the needs of politics, the new society will organise itself by federations of industrial groups according to the needs of production.[11] In the words of Émile Pouget: "from now on, the producer looms before the existing society which recognises only the citizen".[12]

I will end this article with another quote from Proudhon. In my view, it accurately summarises

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6 From Bakunin's letter to Ceretti, dated 13-27 March 1871, translated by Shawn Wilbur and accessible here: https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/bakunin-library/bakunin-on-life-harmony-and-struggle-1872/

7 Latin for "dead head", meaning "worthless remains".

8 From Bakunin's letter to the newspaper Gazzettino Rosa, dated 23 December 1871, as cited on pg. 140 of Wolfgang Eckhardt's The First Socialist Schism: Bakunin vs. Marx in the International Workingmen's Association, published in 2016 by PM Press.

9 It is difficult to underestimate the significance of opposition to religion in the development of anarchism.

10 From "The General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century", found in MacKay's anthology cited above.

11 From part two, section 'I' of "The Principles and Organisation of the International Revolutionary Society", authored by Bakunin, published in 1866, translated by Shawn Wilbur and accessible at:

https://web.archive.org/web/20160707152937/http://library.libertarian-labyrinth.org/items/show/2671

12 From "Direct Action" by Émile Pouget, published 1910, translated and published by the Kate Sharpley Library, accessible at: https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/vhhngg

the mission of anarchism, and the crucial role of federalism within it:

"It is industrial organisation that we will put in place of government.
In place of laws, we will put contracts.—No more laws voted by a majority, nor even unanimously; each citizen, each commune or corporation, makes its own.
In place of political powers, we will put economic forces.
In place of the ancient classes of nobles, burghers, and peasants, or of bourgeoisie and proletariat, we will put the general titles and special departments of industry: Agriculture, Manufacture, Commerce, etc.
In place of public force, we will put collective force.
In place of standing armies, we will put industrial associations.
In place of police, we will put identity of interests.
In place of political centralisation, we will put economic centralisation."[13]

Thanks to Tommy Lawson and René Berthier for comments on earlier drafts.

HOW SHOULD ANARCHISTS UNDERSTAND THE "ACCORD 2.0?"

Toby Violet Walmsley

From the outset of the Covid-19 crisis, capitalists have been looking for a way to make workers pay for it. Across the Pacific in the United States, despite massive unemployment, billionaires are raking in more profit than ever. This is no different in Australia, where businesses are being provided tax breaks, rental assistance, and many having the paychecks of their workforce covered, whilst many see a windfall in profit. Although workers have been protected by government assistance in the immediate aftermath of the first wave of Covid-19, we are now faced with the prospect of a massive counter attack by business and their government allies to pay for these corporate bailouts, with unions under pressure to concede workers' pay and conditions under the guise of saving jobs.

The last two months have already seen the few first volleys. The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) attempted to set up a 'national framework' that would cut pay and conditions industry wide under the false pretence of saving jobs, failing only because of intense worker resistance to the union bureaucracy. Successful court action by the Shopkeepers and Distributors Association (SDA) in conjunction with McDonalds and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) have seen massive condition cuts to part time workers in the fast food industry, undermining the rights of hundreds of thousands of workers.

These are the first steps in a broader industrial assault. Scott Morrison recently announced that a key component of his economic strategy is changes to industrial relations through courting an "accord 2.0" between business, government, and unions, which would seek to find a common agreement on Australia-wide changes to wages, conditions, union action, and workers rights.

We can learn a lot about how insidious Morrison's accord strategy is by examining the last time unions were courted into a deal with governments and business. The original accord was an agreement brokered in 1983 between the Hawke government and labour leaders that attempted to institute 'labour peace' in exchange for social welfare programs for workers. This was, as Liz Humpreys points out, a result of unions accepting the capitalist logic that their successes in pushing wages up had led to social division and price inflations, meaning that collaboration with the state was a necessary to defeat the common enemy of inflation.

This strategy to combat inflation required unions to collaborate with the state and businesses to collectively manage the economic situation, necessarily requiring compromises from the union movement. The content of this deal was an agreement to forgo wage rises and militant

action in exchange for social welfare programs and wages indexed to inflation. However, not only was the content of the deal a radical break from the workplace militancy that dominated many critical industries in Australia across the 60s and 70s, but the style of the deal - politically brokered from the top down without the consent of workers - lay the foundations for the state-oriented, bureaucratic union bodies that we see today.

This political deal was, unsurprisingly, an unmitigated disaster for the average rank and file unionist, whose resistance was cracked down on not only by the government and business, but the labour bureaucracy as well. This most notably resulted in the ACTU supporting the deregistration of the radical and rank-and-file run Builders Labourers Union (BLF) in NSW, the use of legal action to fine manufacturing workers who struck 'outside the accord' in the late 1980s, and abandoning support for airline pilots during a massive strike in 1989-90, leading to more than a thousand pilots leaving the industry after the military was called in to strikebreak, among others. These actions were deliberate assaults that aimed to demoralise rank-and-file union activity, and empower the labour bureaucracy to make deals on behalf of the workers. Although there are many other factors that have led to the decline of the union movement in Australia it is no surprise that when the union leaders sold out workers' autonomy and let business ravage radical unions, the enthusiasm to fight for power on the shop floor was subsumed by pithy electoral demands.

The original accord highlights the broader contradictory position of the union bureaucracy, as opposed to rank and file unionists. Union bureaucracies (habitually elected officials, organisers, union lawyers, etc.) are both bound to win wages and conditions for the workers that put them in their position, but are also dependant on the preservation of the current capitalist system, which will seek profit at the expense of workers at any cost. The way to resolve this contradiction in their favour is to strike deals that undermine worker autonomy to their own benefit - this move was in effect the original accord on a massive scale.

We can see parallels in the approach of unions to this current crisis to the economic turmoil preceding the original accord. With union density at record lows, unions have a far weaker bargaining position to make deals with the capitalists for workers rights. Instead of the carrot, which in the case of the first accord were social welfare programs, the Morrison government will be looking to use the stick to strong arm the union movement to accept changes to industrial relations, which will undoubtedly seek to legally contain workers' autonomy to win wages and conditions. This will give immense power to bosses for them to cut wages and conditions, which will allow them to either externalise the costs of this economic crisis or exploit it for their own benefit.With this analysis in mind, how can anarchists respond to this crisis effectively? If we are to remain true to our principles - that the revolution against capitalism will come when the mass of workers revolt and take ownership of their destiny - our answer cannot lie in abstention, but must be, using our analysis, forming the appropriate mode of struggle within the

labour movement for our current moment. Given the anarchist principles of building rank-and-file power, and denying bureaucracy and hierarchy, we can perhaps more accurately reframe the question: in what ways can anarchists engage with unions, in a way that builds revolutionary power, and in a way that doesn't concede to the reformist tendencies of the union bureaucracy? This question will be interrogated in depth in the next bulletin.

THE ABSOLUTE STATE OF ART UNDER CAPITALISM

Charlotte Murphy

In Paris in 1851, the artist Gustave Courbet provoked fury in the upper classes merely by displaying paintings that featured the French peasantry as subjects. In the midst of intense class struggle, Courbet's work came at a time where his art reflected an affront to the upper classes' political power, and that art was treated as dangerous and scandalous accordingly. Twenty years later, having been a pioneer of this genre that came to be known as social realism, Courbet was one of the leading artists of the Paris Commune.

Today, the power of a good critique to shake the ruling class and petty bourgeoisie is not dead, thank God, just observe the moral panic around Joker. A film clearly showing economic alienation and austerity as the sources of deadly social pathologies and triggers for revolution sent the media class into such a tailspin that they leaped at any alternate explanation. It was Arthur Fleck's dreaded inceldom, or his sexism, or his racism: all purely self-inflicted states, eliminating any possibility of sympathising with the character, or understanding how to change the forces that sent him down these paths.

While we all enjoy the schadenfreude of watching pundits cry over a movie about a clown who hates Batman, does art with the working class as subjects today really inspire revolution? Although Joker does make allusions to the 2011 London Riots and Occupy Wall Street, perhaps it is not comparable to having the 1848 Revolutions fresh in its mind like Courbet would have. Art can no doubt contribute to a feedback loop of action and reflection if revolutionary conditions are strong in the air. But today, do we really expect that from art - especially art that comes from the guy who directed The Hangover and the writer of 8 Mile? One complication that stands in the way in contemporary media is the Hollywood machine, which moulds these products to be sellable; tying them up in advertising, awards, star performers, publicity and media cycles. While the studios are the ones that control the content and form of the art, the media class are the section of the ruling class that police acceptable cultural criticism and interpretation of it. This machine intervenes in what art is and how it is understood. Art's transformation into entertainment is completed in all these ways by what we call the culture industry.

The culture industry is a behemoth, and one that cannot be simply dealt with by subverting the system from inside. All media, advertising and art, is flattened to its affects and made exchangeable in the culture industry. Even dissent does not escape it. From Kendall Jenner handing a Pepsi to a cop, to Banksy, anticapitalist critique is preemptively incorporated into the system of the culture industry and profit comes out the other side.

You can imagine the pain piggies at Sootheby's squeal with excitement when Banksy shredded his Girl with Balloon in front of them. They beg for daddy Banksy to spit on them and tell them how disgusting it is that they've reduced art to a dollar figure, as long as he never actually challenges their power and inadvertently doubles the asset value of his critique he sold them. As the culture industry relies primarily on affect as a consumable unit, the artists must produce work that provokes critical imagination. This can be by extreme metaphor, analogy, or the imagination of a completely different society, as well as the artist always remaining a critical distance, never allowing work that perfectly fits an audience's preconceptions or moral worldview. When art merely satisfies as didactic, or affirms an audience's present feelings, the audience has nothing to hold onto from there: their experience begins and ends with the work, and remains entirely passive. Pure art propaganda directed towards already radicalised leftists under the culture industry makes a subset of consumers out of radicals. Under the culture industry, the artist's challenge is to give the viewer a world outside their experience: outside capitalism, and outside of themselves.

Now, when we talk about the culture industry, the impulse may be to think about mass production, the desire to simply entertain, and therefore only associate the culture industry to the "low-arts", popular film, television, music, or anything pop culture. But alas, in a neoliberal, fully privatised world, not much escapes its grasps. Elitist "high-arts" institutions are not exempt from the trappings of capitalism and while they are usually skilled at avoiding the more garish elements of consumerism, it catches up with them eventually. An excellent, hilarious, only-in-late-capitalism example of this was the public stoush over whether promotion for the Everest Horse Racing cup should be projected onto the sails of Sydney Opera House in 2018. All sorts of enlightened takes abounded. Reactionary media made it a battleground in the culture war, decrying the elitism of those who didn't want to see the pastime of the working class on their precious Opera House: as if it was the decision of the working class to pool their money for this advertisement so they could see themselves on the big white sails, rather than a bloodless exchange between two institutions controlling capital. Left-liberal demonstrators took to Circular Quay on the night to disrupt the advertisement's lighting, shouting that the Opera House was 'not for sale', as if this was the first time that the Opera House served some private interest. This encapsulates exactly why left-liberals fail to understand the endemic problem of stratification in the arts: they are only concerned that to them, those institutions don't do anything "gauche". The worst approach to the arts is one that is purely aesthetic.

Such stratification occurs with the aid of the state, with most arts funding flowing to these types of high art institutions like the Opera House. Year-on-year, Create NSW tends to have a smaller number of recipients in total, leaving only a small handful of elite organisations (although, it must be mentioned, that these institutions make a huge amount of private revenue as well). Perhaps the state makes these interventions to ensure that a high-art/low-art distinction is not completely demolished by the market, leaving the ruling class to enjoy some difference between themselves and who they see as the uncultured swine.

But, surprise! Coronavirus has decimated the economy of the arts, revealing its incredibly deep fault lines. Carriageworks went into administration only to be saved by a number of private philanthropists. While admittedly better than developers sinking their teeth into the property and triggering yet another public sell-off, how is this essentially different from the arts institutions that have been privileged through funding? Whether state rescue packages or philanthropists, the outcome is just another concentration at the top when this privilege is only afforded to few elite institutions.

It is very difficult for us to imagine a communist ordering of the entirety of the arts with so few examples in the recent past. Piracy gives us a good insight into disrupting copyright, but only intervenes in the cycle of consumption and not of production. Anarchists have a proud history of how they organise the arts, for and by the working class. These examples should be foundational to how we think about reforming the arts today. The bourses du travail of the CGT in France were all-in-one job centres, educational facilities and included theatres and libraries, all operating independently of state and private ownership. The artists of the Paris Commune produced a manifesto outlining how councils of arts administrations would be appointed democratically by communities of artists themselves, as well as overseeing public art schools and the creation of public higher education buildings for the arts. Although the dreams of the Paris Commune did not materialise, these examples are an inspiring far cry from the capital-hungry or bureaucratic forces that control the arts today.

The conditions for artistry under communism must come about through class struggle, and art will always play a role in the culture of class struggle, from Courbet to today. When those conditions arise, with digital innovations and collectively owned art spaces like theatres, film studios, and art collections, think about how much more accessible art online and in person could be made. It would be art that is rewarded not through a tech corporation's algorithm, money, or ruling class preference, but by the will of liberated people.

ANARCHIST COMMUNIST POLITICAL ECONOMY AND THE SPANISH REVOLUTION

Percy Hill

Political economy is the study of production and distribution of the material means necessary for society to function. Anarchist Communism specifically advocates for a stateless, classless society featuring democratic control of the means of production, where goods are distributed by the principle "from each according to ability to each according to need." The key organisational structures are community controlled industries and communes with decentralised planning of production and distribution. Furthermore when larger scale coordination is required these organisations form federations. Federations are controlled from below with democratically elected, recallable delegates.

Social anarchism (as opposed to individualist tendencies) is a political philosophy that has historically been considered a form of anti-state libertarian socialism. Due to its primary development during the first international[1], the major concerns are the connection between the state and the capitalist class and the state's role in reproducing private property norms. "Today the government is composed of proprietors, or people of their class so entirely under their influence that the richest do not find it necessary to take an active part themselves." - (Anarchy by Errico Malatesta, 1891). However, economic exploitation isn't the only form of domination that anarchists are interested in overcoming. Over time wider social forms of domination have been incorporated into the general anarchist rejection of hierarchy. As anarchist communists we consider ourselves as part of this project in rejecting both exploitation and domination as well as the systems of power which reproduce them wherever they may be found.

Given social anarchism's primary development during the first international by figures like Mikhail Bakunin, it's twin themes of anti-capitalism and anti-statism emerged, inspired partially by both Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Karl Marx. Just like the labour theory of value so central to marxism can be traced earlier to economists such as David Richardo, it's no surprise that some anarchists support this theory as well. So too can other notions utilised by many marxists such as the concept of scientific socialism be found earliest in Proudhon (What Is Property - by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, 1840), the first person to call themselves an Anarchist.

"And just as the right of force and the right of artifice retreat before the steady advance of justice, and must finally be extinguished in equality, so the sovereignty of the will yields to the sovereignty of the reason, and must at last be lost in scientific socialism."

1 Lucien van der Walt, 2016, "Global Anarchism and Syndicalism: Theory, History, Resistance", Anarchist Studies 24.1, .91-9

The point is that all radical theory developed from this period shares an interconnected history. Therefore it follows that any conception of social anarchist political economy must be found in its development alongside other contemporary radical tendencies.

Anarchist communists can look to the above period and practical examples to derive a concrete analysis of political economy. The role of anarchism within Spain is a useful case study as it's one of the largest attempts at libertarian socialism in history. Starting as a working class response to the Francoist fascists attempt to take state power, anarchism was finally attempted through organisations such as the syndicalist CNT in this period. Large parts of the industrial base and agrarian regions were collectivised in a short amount of time. Whilst precise statistics on collectivisation are difficult to come by, all major industry and transportation were collectivised within Catalonia and over 400 agrarian collectives existed within Aragon for example.[2] Women entered the workforce and trams in Barcelona operated more frequently compared to the previous economic order.[3]

Despite the general success of the program, significant problems arose. Due to the financial system not being collectivised and the inability to abolish money in all areas of the revolution, competition persisted between different factories in the area of distribution. This led to a general lack of coordination in distribution and a decline in solidarity within the working class. "To this effect increasing efforts were made by the collectives not to compete with each other for profits but instead to share the surpluses across whole industries."(Deirdre Hogan, n.d.). Furthermore, less efficient factories were often centralised to improve efficiencies. These efforts were based on the principle of economic rationalism, which lead to improvements to output, reduction in energy use and better provisions for health in the workplace.

WHAT CAN ANARCHO-COMMUNISTS LEARN FROM THE SPANISH REVOLUTION AND HOW DOES THAT APPLY TODAY?

Much has been written about cooperatives and their transformative potential, the obvious benefit being workplace democracy. There's also some evidence of lower failure rates compared to general capitalist enterprise.[4] However by functioning within a market, distributional competition remains and can lead to the reproduction of an owner, non-owner dialectic within the cooperative. As market pressure forces the creation of non-owner positions through outsourcing. "Mondragon outsourced production to affiliated subsidiary companies in China, Mexico, Poland, Brazil or the Czech Republic in order to profit from cheap unskilled or

2 Statistical information on socialisation in the Spanish Revolution, 2006, https://libcom.org/library/statistical-information-on-socialisation-in-the-spanish-revolution
3 Deirdre Hogan, Industrial collectivisation during the Spanish revolution, P.6 https://libcom.org/files/Industrial%20collectivisation%20during%20the%20Spanish%20revolution.pdf
4 Richard D. Wolff, Worker Cooperatives and WSDEs, https://www.rdwolff.com/faq_worker_coops_wdes

semi-skilled labour, while many of the 120 linked enterprises are not organised as cooperatives".[5]This is a modern variant of what happened in Spain as internal and external solidarity is eroded within the working class. Whilst cooperatives are certainly preferable to hierarchical property relations, they are insufficient for the kind of transformation within society that anarcho-communists want. Distribution must be organised around need, not market competition.

Another potential weakness was the tendency for economic rationalism to centralise production. Whilst as demonstrated above this leads to efficiencies of production and health outcomes in industries - very beneficial during a time of conflict - centralisation of economic power in the base of society raises serious troubles for any anarchist society. Anarchist communism as a stateless form of society is profoundly sceptical of any tendency towards centralisation as a potential threat to re-emerging statism. Whether this trend would have continued in a hypothetical situation where the radical forces had been victorious is impossible to know, but outside pressure from other statist systems and a lack of resources shows the limits to such localised revolution and points to the need for international struggle.

The introduction of women into the workplace during the revolution was a necessary and welcome development, however in practice this led to a larger amount of work for women as women were still often required to do the majority of labour at home. Childcare was provided by some collectives to ameliorate this, though not broadly enough. Any modern anarchist strategy - if it's to be emancipatory - requires a dismantling of norms and economic relations that reproduce patriarchal domination. It cannot rely on a naive, purely economic strategy. The same goes for any other form of domination whether it be racism, ableism, transphobia, homophobia, or any hierarchical system that oppresses and limits people's liberation.

Finally the CNT made the mistake of collaborating with the remnants of the state, although it was in the name of anti-fascist unity. This led to a situation of dual-power between the collectivised industries and the state. Over time the state was able to slowly regain control, to the anarchists' detriment. They should have abolished the state when they had the chance, as there can never be unity between anarchists and the state. This came to a head when the government attacked the CNT controlled telephone exchange in Barcelona, leading to street violence. So much for anti-fascist unity.

The Spanish revolution does however demonstrate decisively that a mass anarchist society is possible. Working people are able to control industry efficiently, improve working conditions all the while fighting a war against fascism. It's an example of what is concretely possible and any anarchist communist analysis of political economy needs to take seriously both the successes and failures of the revolution.

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5 Angela Wigger, 2014, A critical appraisal of what could be an anarchist political economy; Management, Business, Anarchism Volume 14, Number 4, Ephemera Journal

ON PASSIVITY: WHY THE STRATEGY OF NONVIOLENCE WILL NEVER SEE THE REVOLUTION

Anonymous

The police's use of pepper spray on protesters after a Sydney Black Lives Matter rally in early June this year sparked a wave of discourse across all spectrums of the media, fervently speculating on whether the situation would escalate to the wild scenes of rioting we had been witnessing internationally in the preceding months.

The reclamation of territory in Seattle's autonomous zone paid testament to the possibility and vitality of such a phenomenon, as did the tearing down of colonial statues in Bristol. However, the political climate of Australia speaks to a hesitation and potential fear of radical militancy. Even the far left have been seen to internalise the fetishization of peaceful protest- with one Greenleft article[1] vastly underplaying the anger and militancy demonstrated by a number of protestors who refused to go home once the "official" protests were over. Indeed, police violence is always underhand and illegitimate, however we should be celebrating the persistence and courage shown by protestors who display their anger openly and confidently. This is not an incitement of violence, but a collective display of passionate resistance; we should not have to "leave the park and head home" in order to be morally outraged at the state's use of pepper spray.

Mainstream liberal and conservative media can forever be relied upon to expound a near-endless stream of pacifying, apologist propaganda which will urge against "violence" more often than not incited by "experienced anarchists"[2] accompanied by a picture of a mysterious black bloc figure which has come to represent the faceless threat of mindless disorder. To be preferred is the peaceful crowd of concerned citizens who march with signs and chants, obeying directions to go home once the rally has come to its pre-determined end, anxiously reading the news the next day to see if the elites have started listening.

We can learn much about bourgeois capacity for wielding pacification and de-escalation from Malcolm X's militant reflections on the proceedings of the 1963 March on Washington, although we should remain wary of his highly discriminatory views of women and Jewish people. He writes in his autobiography of the original conception of the 1963 uprising as "national bitterness… defiant of whatever might be the consequences, sick and tired of the black man's neck under the white man's heel". The threat of such a boiling over entailed that "The white man had plenty of good reasons for nervous worry", and the system sought to nip it in the bud. Thus emerged the White House's official endorsement of the march in collaboration with

1 https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/after-peaceful-protests-nsw-police-take-their-violent-revenge
2 https://www.smh.com.au/national/censoring-history-makes-the-past-impossible-to-grasp-20200615p552pn.html

civil rights “leaders”, donations to civil rights organisations from a white philanthropic agency, and the subsequent elite co-option of what had once been a militant grassroots uprising. Malcolm X writes that:

> ***“The morning of the march, any rickety carloads of angry, dusty, sweating small-town Negroes would have gotten lost among the chartered jet planes, railroad cars, and air-conditioned buses. What originally was planned to be an angry riptide, one English newspaper aptly described now as “the gentle flood”.***

According to this account of the 1963 uprising then, the discourse of “non-violence” was used as a rhetorical tool by the elites to pacify and bring under control what had begun as a fiery conviction of the oppressed working class African American people to wrest power from the state on the streets.

Our contemporary popular media perpetuates this discourse consistently; with protestor “violence” in the US implicitly or explicitly portrayed as property damage and looting whose dramatic depictions are repeatedly flashed across our screens as if we have just tuned into an action movie. What this intends to propagate is a system of fundamental respect for the legal sanctity of corporate and state property (something which anarchists should wholly reject); dividing and conservatising left-wing movements.

Writing in response to the 1966 Watts rebellion by mostly black workers in the United States, Guy Debord recognised the irreconcilability between black liberation, and this submission to state-sanctioned institutions, saying:

> ***“It is obvious that the crude and glaring illegality from which blacks still suffer in many American states has its roots in a socioeconomic contradiction that is not within the scope of existing laws, and that no future judicial law will be able to get rid of this contradiction in the face of the more fundamental laws of this society.”***

He concludes that riotous acts of looting and re-distribution of goods facilitate a rediscovery “that immediately refutes the oppressive rationality of the commodity, revealing its relations and even its production to be arbitrary and unnecessary”.

Bookchin also writes about the revolutionary utility of the re-appropriation of legally sanctified property (“looting”). This, he says, serves the dual purposes of radicalising disenfranchised protestors, but also facilitating the reclamation of the streets “where daily life is endured, suffered and eroded, and where power is confronted and fought”.

To bring it back to the Australian context, the anti-Vietnam war moratorium as well as the

BLF's green bans in the 1970s stand amongst the more famous radical and militant struggles which achieved sweeping changes in this country. They are testament to the capacity for our political landscape to mobilise, fight and win. As anarchists, it is our duty to build principled political organisations, simultaneously influencing union movements for a politically rigorous rank and file workers' movement. We must stand with those who engage in struggle against various forms of oppression and recall always the ways in which these intersect. However, all of this organising will be useless unless we resolutely stand with and attempt to shift the discursive framework towards a holistic conception of subversive tactics which includes a rigorous conception of the illegitimacy of state and corporate monopolies on both violence and property.

There remains the glaring question however, of how settlers might perpetuate this discourse in an anti-colonial struggle which is, and should undoubtedly remain, Indigenous-led. Questions of hierarchy and violence will remain a source of division in resistance here just as they did in the time of Malcolm X. We must stand with the most militant and anti-hierarchical wings of First Nations struggle, while respecting leadership and our relationship to these concepts given our privileged positionality. A respectful ally-ship will turn on our ability to have conversations and relationships with anti-colonial resistance in all its plurality.

In light of this, we must remember what history has taught us; that we cannot be satisfied with liberal calls for change through institutional reform. Change comes from struggle and revolution. The very existence of a police force in the first place, tells us that the state will not hesitate to forcefully protect its interests as well as that of capital. Our call for revolution must be accompanied with an understanding that we must prepare for such confrontations, and know how to navigate them. That is not to say that we should engage in violence for violence's sake, nor even that we should engage with it favourably or casually. However, when we take to the streets in a proclamation of the anger of the oppressed, we should do so with an understanding that the state will retaliate; and, given sufficient popular support and political conviction, we should be looking towards a future where we may defend ourselves and hold our ground.

FURTHER READINGS

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF ANARCHO-COMMUNISM

Basic Anarchism - Workers Solidarity Movement: http://www.wsm.ie/basic-anarchism

HOW SHOULD ANARCHISTS UNDERSTAND THE "ACCORD 2.0?"

Elizabeth Humphrys, How labour built neoliberalism : Australia's accord, the labour movement and the neoliberal project, 2018.

ANARCHIST COMMUNIST POLITICAL ECONOMY AND THE SPANISH REVOLUTION

Deirdre Hogan, Industrial collectivisation during the Spanish revolution.

Angela Wigger, 2014, A critical appraisal of what could be an anarchist political economy; Management, Business, Anarchism Volume 14, Number 4, Ephemera Journal

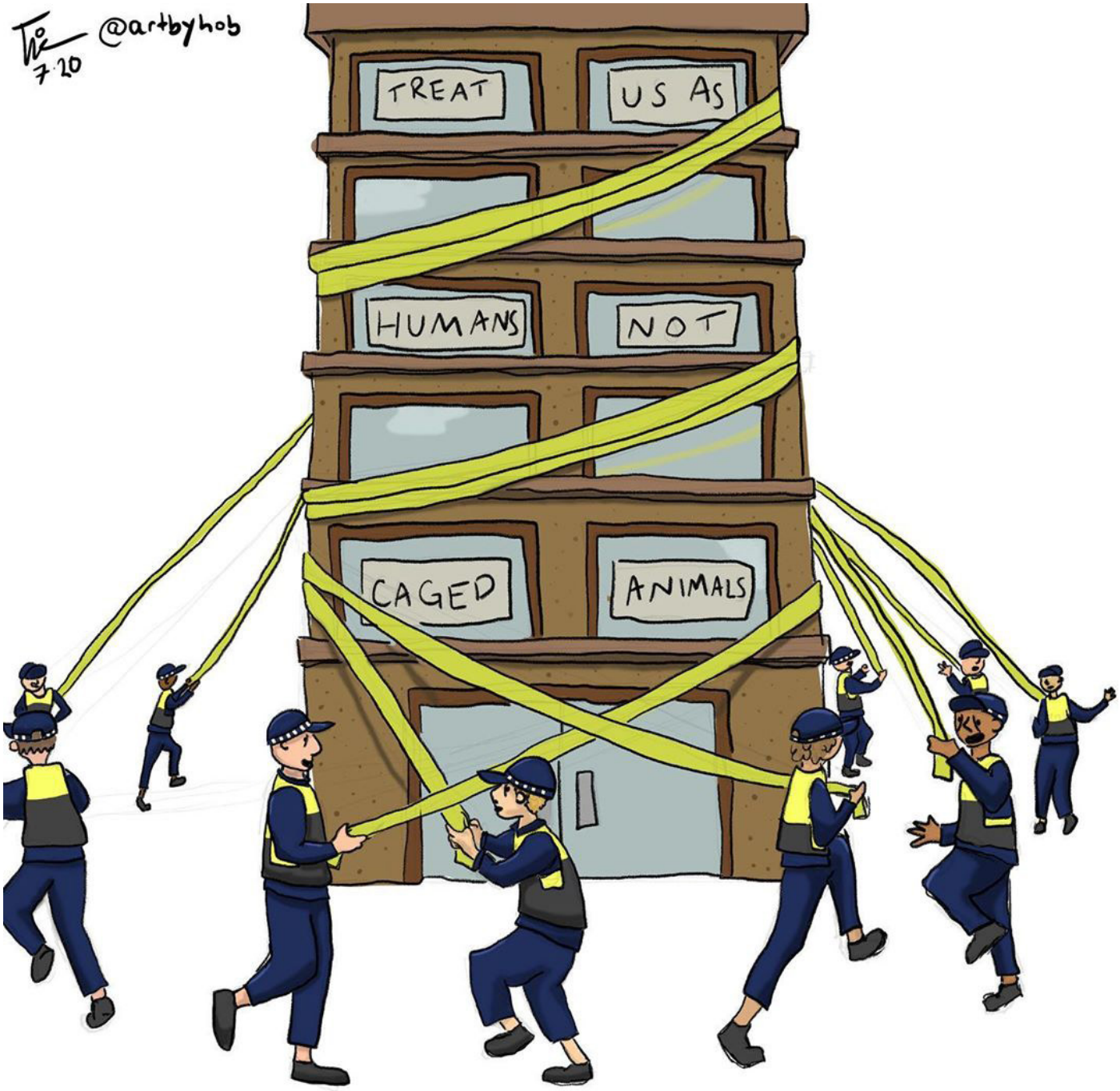
Statistical information on socialisation in the Spanish Revolution, 2006, https://libcom.org/library/statistical-information-on-socialisation-in-the-spanish-revolution

ON PASSIVITY: WHY THE STRATEGY OF NONVIOLENCE WILL NEVER SEE THE REVOLUTION

The Autobiography of Malcolm X

The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy- by Guy Debord

Post-Scarcity Anarchism- by Murray Bookchin



Artwork by Tilly Hobkirk @artbyhob

This bulletin was written, designed, and produced by the Sydney Anarcho-Communists from our weekly reading group. We are a libertarian socialist group formed along a shared affinity for the tendencies of anarchism: the organised struggle for a society coordinated on the basis of solidarity and without the interference of the state or capitalist bosses, and communism: that this society will be organised around each according to their ability and human need rather than profit and exploitation. This world will only be possible when working people take the reins of society from the state and the capitalists and run it for themselves.

Everyone interested in the ideas of anarcho-communism is warmly welcomed to attend our weekly reading group from 6pm-8pm at Monster Mouse Studios, 9 Gerald St Marrickville.
For updates on the reading groups, its readings and topics and general information, request to join our Melbourne/Sydney Facebook Group “Ancom Reading Group”: https://www.facebook.com/groups/838449613333624 and our Facebook Page “Sydney Anarcho-Communists“: https://www.facebook.com/Sydney-Anarcho-Communists-106535081162644

May we always carry a new world in our hearts!

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