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Happy in the ghetto?

Anarcho

December 10, 2010

I attended the last of the student demos against the tuition fees increase on the 9th of December. It was a well attended march, with students and workers across the country protesting their anger. Many of the student marchers came straight from their occupations. These were people protesting against austerity using direct action, something every anarchist advocates.

Yet, sad to say, I seemed to be the only anarchist actually trying to spread anarchist ideas by selling our publications (namely, the new **Black Flag**). It was a big demo, so perhaps I missed the other anarchists handing out leaflets, selling **Freedom**, and otherwise trying to get our ideas across to those in struggle, those both questioning the system (to some degree) in both thought and action. However, I do not think so.

Do not get me wrong – there *were* anarchists there. Numerous libertarian flags were being waved (there was even a little bloc of them in the march). However, they seemed to be making absolutely no attempt to get our *ideas* across to our fellow protestors. What a wasted opportunity!

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We could have been discussing our ideas on direct action, on the need to spread the actions and occupations; our ideas on mandating and recalling delegates as a practical alternative to picking rulers every 4 or 5 years who break their pledges and patronise us; how the state exists to maintain minority rule and the class system; how austerity was not required but a means to further capitalist interests; how crisis was an inherent part of capitalism; how there is an alternative to this rotten system, anarchism.

Instead, well, who knows what the other protestors think of anarchists and anarchism.

Oh, I know. Anarchists do not like to seem to be too much like “the Trots.” So selling papers and leafleting are out. Yet trots do other things – they leave the house, breathe, eat, watch TV, read books, have sex (even if only with themselves) and a host of other activities which no anarchist refuses to do just because “the Trots” do them. Why stop at trying to influence our fellow workers and students? Why produce papers like **Freedom** and **Black Flag** at all in that case? Why produce books? Websites? Pamphlets? “The Trots” do that as well.

Ironically, for all the contempt about “the Trots,” the sad fact is that many anarchists are letting *them* define what they do.

Yet there is a reason why “the Trots” act as they do, they reach people. And that is the big question. Do we want to get anarchist ideas more widely known, understood, accepted and acted upon? Or do we do what we do for our own little ghetto? Are we happy to be a small minority, being able to wallow in our little circles, secretly happy to be big fish in a small pond and not have the problems of justifying our nice little theories in the battle of ideas?

After all, we are working class people who happen to be anarchists. We have as much right to put our ideas across as another person in a protest, occupation, union meeting, strike and march. To refuse to do so is to implicitly embrace vanguardist ideology, to implicitly think we are “different” from

“ordinary working class people.” That this results in many of us self-ghettoising ourselves rather than, as the Leninists, treating the class struggle as purely an area of recruitment does not change the fundamental logic. It is not the rejection of vanguardism, it is the other side of the same coin.

I have, a long time ago, suggested that the anarchist movement should co-operate more. Produce local free-sheets, write for and sell **Freedom**, have one excellent quarterly class-struggle magazines rather than three bi-annual ones (two okay, one good one) and an annual theoretical journal. We can do that – *some* progress has been made on achieving this very common-sense suggestion.

We can also, I think, be more active about forthcoming demos and ensure people have stalls at them, sell papers, produce relevant leaflets, and so on. I suggested this, and helped do it, for the 15th February 2003 huge anti-war demo, so it is possible.

In short, we need to look outwards.

(Obviously this article does **not** address the events of the demo itself, the riot and so forth. Nor does it mention the many anarchists, and anarchist groups, which **do** spread their ideas in their workplaces, communities, struggles and protests. It is not meant to be a full account of the state of the movement, more a comment on a specific issue raised by a specific event. Nor does it discuss how to go from riot to revolution, an issue addressed in this article on the Argentine revolt against neo-liberalism.)