

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

Anti-Copyright



Dining with Vultures

Bristol Anarchists & the UK Media

Anonymous

2015, February

Anonymous
Dining with Vultures
Bristol Anarchists & the UK Media
2015, February

Retrieved on July 13, 2024 from
<https://darknights.noblogs.org/post/2024/07/13/dining-with-vultures-bristol-anarchists-the-uk-media/>

usa.anarchistlibraries.net

The purpose of this piece is to better understanding of mass media's relationship to rebels (including anarchists of all stripes), in general as well as in the context of a repressive atmosphere in Bristol. As well as raising local specifics, it hopes to encourage stronger awareness around wider issues of representation and counter-insurgency.

It will speak critically, even harshly when deemed necessary, of some self-professed radicals' interactions with the establishment – but not out of an impulse for character-assassination. Contrary to the assumptions and knee-jerk reactions of some, it does not try to lock individuals onto their current place on a 'civil-to-subversive' spectrum and then close the door, but to combat illusions and sharpen critique all round. The challenge of anyone in struggle is to remain aware and active in situations as they unfold around or are created by them. And while it's presumptuous to forever write off any individual for mistakes they have made and may yet learn from, there's an urgent need to put an end to the conduct of a few and the politics (in the most miserable sense of the word) that their tendencies see as viable.

Specifically, it's the matter of giving friendly interviews to journalists. This has been going on for little under a year now in relation to the escalated series of high-profile destructive actions that have been claimed by some anarchist groups, and the police targeting of the public anarchist/activist space locally over the last four years. (Some detail of those events up until autumn 2014 are compiled in the booklet *Since The Bristol Riots*, freely available to read online, for anyone unfamiliar. Since this New Year's Eve, the anarchist Emma Sheppard has been held in custody and at the end of February was sentenced to two years for being caught spiking an access road to the South Gloucestershire police headquarters and damaging three squad cars – all other attacks in the Bristol region remain 'unsolved'.)

So far the interviews have included newspaper, radio, television and an online magazine. In some cases the press were even welcomed into the Kebele social centre to stage their manipulation on the activists' home turf. At no point have action groups themselves had any dialogue with the press, as seems consistent with their conflictual practices and antagonism to mass media representation – newspaper, radio, TV and internet outlets have in fact been their previous targets among others.

After all, what is the mass media?

It could be said that a large part of 'the anarchist tension' for many is a desire to communicate (whether on a mass scale or not). Right. But the mass media is not a forum for communication. It is a filter through which a section of the ruling class claim near-total representation of how they would like 'reality' to seem. (Note that this is completely aside from the finer details of which company owns which media outlet.) Fredy Perlman once wrote; "The person who specializes in informing others about the "news" is a usurper. The newspaper establishes a reality which is common to all but alien to each, a reality expressed by all which is the self-expression of none. By letting "the news" be defined for us, we allow our definition of reality

awareness around wider issues of representation and counter-insurgency...

... even in the best-case scenario, on the level of sheer pragmatism, the mass media cannot be made to serve liberatory purposes. It works by systematically removing events, ideas or proposals from their context, to then re-package and re-serve them as fragments so we can consume them while never actually living them. What sense can critiques with the depth of anarchist ones make when presented as a 60-second jumble sandwiched between ten others in contradiction, how can anything meaningful take root in an environment dedicated to keeping everything restricted to surface level only?

to be imposed on us from outside ourselves and we lose our ability to define, express or project ourselves; we lose precisely those faculties that makes us communicative and communal animals, the faculties that make us human beings.” (And, elsewhere; “If communication has the same root as common and community, the radio is an instrument for uprooting all three.”)

One-sided broadcasts sounding out across a sea of passive consumers, reduced to receptacles for mere ‘information’ – this is the very opposite of potential communication between likes. To be exact, ‘communication’ would be overcoming this spectacle, engaging in person with all the complexities and nuances of interaction which cannot be captured by the screen, as multi-dimensional individuals ridding themselves of images, sound-bytes and headlines (or social media profiles) to regain their own sociality. It is here that real dialogue can begin.

This is exactly why, even in the best-case scenario, on the level of sheer pragmatism, the mass media cannot be made to serve liberatory purposes. It works by systematically removing events, ideas or proposals from their context, to then re-package and re-serve them as fragments so we can consume them while never actually living them. What sense can critiques with the depth of anarchist ones make when presented as a 60-second jumble sandwiched between ten others in contradiction, how can anything meaningful take root in an environment dedicated to keeping everything restricted to surface level only?

To summarise, the mass media causes relationships among people to be mediated by images. It encourages people to eat up pre-fabricated ‘opinions’ to then espouse to each other, making it a very direct weapon for establishing the consensus desired by the powerful. As such it invites destruction; it’s either its own or ours. Anyone who believes mass media to be a tool they can control by participating is either mis-informed or manipulative. Surely we can all think of examples in our daily life of how the media itself defines the limits of the debate; in the

case this article will explore, one of ‘good anarchists’ versus ‘bad anarchists’.

Let’s look at the televised interview that members of Bristol’s branch of the UK Anarchist Federation (Bristol AFed from now on), presumably with the approval or at least consent of the rest of the branch, conducted with Channel 4 for their recent documentary *Who Are Bristol’s Anarchist Arsonists?*. In the words of Bristol AFed, they approached the invitation feeling “optimistic about the chances of some good coverage after a relatively successful summer interview with BBC Radio Bristol” and the “shout-out” they bizarrely talk of receiving in the Guardian newspaper (who in fact had simply listed Bristol AFed in passing as one signatory to a joint statement about repression). Whether this maneuver was cynically opportunistic or just hopelessly naïve can be left to individual interpretation.

Predictably, the program editors distilled their 45-minute conversation with the Bristol AFed delegation into a cozy soundbyte where one of their representatives condemns the aspect in question of an incendiary attack the month earlier by an informal affinity group against private security, techno-industrial firm and luxury vehicles. The local paper could then comfortably carry the headline as “Bristol anarchist group distances itself from attack” and by extension also from the over-100 other attacks currently being linked and investigated by a dedicated police team. Incidentally, both the program and the article served to re-broadcast a police ‘wanted’ notice and photograph.

Now, it’s clear that there are not and have never been harmonious relations between all anarchists. The dream of some revolutionary ‘community for everyone’ (“unity”, as Bristol AFed would say, who in the past have stretched the concept to include such avowed anti-anarchists as the Socialist Workers Party) is just that, a dream, a fiction, because it would need the debasement of the peculiarities that are inherent in any meaningful community of likes. Preferable to some

It’s not easy – the fear runs deep, the police seem present and for so long it had been treated as out of the question to even mention that such actions exist in public. However that’s necessary if one chooses to counter the machinations of the capitalist media and discredit the narrative of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ anarchists. Incidents such as Bristol AFed on Channel 4 have helped not at all with this, and neither have the others who’ve met with the press. But that’s how it is, not everyone will agree and neither need they – it’s not a search for consensus or majority. This text is simply addressed to the thoughtful and reflective of whatever tendency, who care about the dynamics that our activities, deeds and words impact on the struggle and each other. It’s a question of coherence, affinity, or, at the very least, tact. To find those with whom to proceed, without reproducing the repressive machinery that tries to crush us all.

Let’s fight on our own terrain.

This statement is finally a means of offering solidarity to the comrades of Radioazione, Radioazione Croatia, and The Anarchist Library web archive: counter-information projects receiving harassment by secret services in ‘their’ respective countries.

In case of any confusion, fortitude to those targeted by Operation Pandora and their close ones, the dignified rebels holding strong in the Belarussian gulags, Emma Sheppard, all those across the world facing down repression head on and all those forced underground.

No disrespect intended to the actual, non-human vultures by the title.

February, 2015

The purpose of this piece is to better understanding of mass media’s relationship to rebels (including anarchists of all stripes), in general as well as in the context of a repressive atmosphere in Bristol. As well as raising local specifics, it hopes to encourage stronger

as much as ever and must be sharp and precise. Sadly, the victimhood machine is rolling on instead; already after the sentencing of Emma Sheppard, the same picture comes into view on the Bristol AFed blog. “A well known & liked activist... a stand-alone case... no previous convictions... numerous good character references...” How one conducts themselves while before the judge is one thing and perhaps another conversation, but must anarchists keep recreating this horrible script even after the hammer has fallen?

Closing, it would have been preferable not to have had to write these words, but better to look at the circumstances in Bristol as a chance to learn, develop ideas and an understanding of the institutions which radicals come up against – and most of all to hone our tactics.

It is significant that Bristol is facing the repression which it is (although comrades abroad should be clear that it is not at all comparable to the crack-downs of Italy or Greece and so on, nor to the State “anti-terror” assault on Islamic social groups in the UK like much of Europe). It is because Bristol is one of the few places in Britain which kept a destructive practice alive as part of an explicitly radical thrust since the dearth of confrontational action following the collapse of the “anti-globalisation movement” and the liberalisation of radical environmentalism. A thrust that started to shed the limitations of issue-based-everything and the conceptual frameworks of the Left. The presence of an unapologetic anti-system attack in the midst of a major city on this prison-like surveillance island cannot be denied any longer, and many possibilities for insurgency have been made clear to whoever doubted it.

It is vital that such a flame not be extinguished as soon as it takes hold, and whoever doesn’t want to play firefighter could encourage conversations that leave aside paralysis and paranoia to openly ask: are those taking action part of my own struggle?

instead are more autonomous workings of separate groups held together by preference and affinity (in both tactics and goals), capable of maybe moving together but not homogeneous, away from mass organisation and political rackets. Naturally many disagreements about the desired means and even overall perception of struggle emerge; this is not what is in question here. The question is the responsibility of any minimally anti-authoritarian project worthy of the name to be conscious of being turned into a political and repressive tool; if not for the sake of the differing rebels then for their own integrity at base and relevance as any kind of rebellious force in the social surroundings. And so as the police make raids, hassle many and circulate ‘wanted’ notices, faithfully echoed in the national press, baying for blood, Bristol AFed meekly present themselves to show that theirs is a better way...

After the program aired, Bristol AFed promptly put up a post on their blog, veering between claiming their promotion of “Anarchism” as a triumph (which would amuse anyone who saw the final cut – was their “relative success” on the BBC also of a similar calibre?) and decrying that, as they confessed with apparent surprise, “there wasn’t much focus on the political policing and harassment of activists”... None, in fact. The question must be asked, in case it eluded Bristol AFed in their preparations – exactly what did these anarchists expect Channel 4 to make out of them if not tools, means to an end? If they honestly believed that reactionary journalists had developed an intense desire to accurately portray AFed’s own brand of anarchist-communism, coincidentally right in the middle of media furore over anarchist-insurrectionary activity, more fool them. Were they genuinely shocked to have to admit that “sadly we didn’t get as much on air time as DCI Andy Bevan”, the head of the police operation, as if this were simply a tragic oversight on behalf of the broadcasters?

A cursory glance back over the years at previous reporting on anarchist direct actions carried by the very same media en-

tities that Bristol activists are now collaborating with shows that, as one would expect, the press repeatedly fabricates and/or misrepresents details of the attacks and their communiques. (Although this is assuming that Bristol AFed actually read the communiques before pleading ignorance to their motives and distancing themselves from them.) For example, it is not only luxury vehicles that were torched in Long Ashton. It is not only to protest the World Cup opening in Brazil that transmission infrastructures were sabotaged last June, nor only to protest the London Olympics that rail traffic was disrupted. It is not an Informal Anarchist Federation group who were the anarchists to claim the destruction of the police firearms centre. It is not a mystery why the Lord Mayor of Bristol and a second Conservative Party councillor awoke to flames before their homes. And so on. But this is precisely the entirely anticipated media strategy towards this and also any other form of subversion: what isn't invisibilised is reframed, and what isn't ridiculed is demonized.

It's worth repeating that this is no aberration: leaving aside the mass media's obvious disdain for both anti-capitalist 'mass organising' a la AFed and offensive strikes by informal groups, falsification is both the form and the content of the press in operation. Every representation is necessarily a reduction at best, and more likely an outright distortion. Such a basis analysis seems painfully lacking in Bristol AFed's conduct. (Perhaps this is partly explainable by the fact that for AFed, representation appears compatible with "Anarchism" and comprises their formal model of federalism and delegation; however the consequences of their flirtations with organs of contemporary spectacular society are wider-reaching than obscure anarchist congresses.) Considering this pattern, did they expect clouds of (willful) ignorance as regards their project to part before the reporter's eyes when they found someone they could converse with, politely, civilly, in a language they could both understand? Instead the arrogant newsman played the anarchists

this case, i.e. during the August 2011 uprising? Can they place the situation of the non-cooperative person in question within an ongoing struggle between authority and the unruly, regardless of who said/did/thought what?

It's here where we'll see if our solidarity can be found, if there's anything to 'stay solid' with. So far these questions do not seem to be informing the latest statements being made in Bristol, and those statements are in any case directed to a totally inappropriate forum, the press. But in our own groups, by counter-information, or with those we encounter when communication can flourish more freely, we can reference any words that a fugitive comrade has chosen to openly put forward about their situation; we can discreetly offer support to those who were close and are feeling the loss; and we have the content of the action of which they are accused to keep alive and extend by discussing (even critically) - although necessarily separated from any presumption of 'who did what' or any notions of 'innocence/guilt'. And thus the struggle in question continues despite and/or in direct opposition to the repression (in Bristol's case, the birthday demo at the Evening Post, the disruption at the Serious Crime Squad headquarters, the solidarity statement by Person(s) Unknown and by some former band-mates, the repeated attacks on police property and on the bank as well as the additional times when specifying which (other) outlaws the solidarity extended to was deemed unnecessary - see Since The Bristol Riots).

Criticism regarding the coverage of this (possibly international) police hunt must also be extended to the producer of Submedia in the Coast Salish Territories occupied by Canada, for reproducing the police file photograph in their anarchist video podcast. The same goes for all the people who thoughtlessly circulated the original mass media 'wanted' articles through social media as if it were a simple curiosity.

These points are extremely important to take into account in the current time, when interventions in the struggle are needed

On the topic of words best left unsaid, there is one last part of the Bristol anarchist/activist collaboration with the media that needs addressing: people discussing the activity and personality of anyone specifically being pursued by the police. When it comes to those in clandestinity, they themselves should be the ones to decide if and what of these details to make public, not anyone loose-lipped and slack-brained enough to fall into conversation with a reporter. Instead interviewees have hastened to tell who is “nice” but would “involve” themselves in “quite a few things” (Bristol AFed to Channel 4), “lovely... but committed to the cause” (an anonymous “friend” to the Guardian), and around the time that the warrant was first issued an article was even put up online by one activist listing an alleged resume of activity areas over the years!

The theoretical well-meaning probably behind these declarations isn't being brought into question here. But what does it help? Quite aside from whether such talk unnecessarily adds an image of credence to the police's propaganda or not (who have been described as attributing a so-called “centre” to an in reality de-centralised point of reference – the Informal Anarchist Federation), this is another totally weak base for one's solidarity. What about when a comrade is arrested or persecuted who is not ‘pleasant’ to hang out with, who we are not on friendly terms with or who is ‘unknown’? In fact these are the least important facts to bear in consideration if we value solidarity over popularity, if we don't want to create a minor celebrity and their onlookers but instead describe a comrade amongst others who is facing repression that could target anyone who the State decides upon. Rather, if solidarity is considered from the point of view of continuation, of complicity, the more pertinent questions might be: does one support the decision that was made? Do they denounce the repression regardless? Do they recognise a part of themselves in any aspect of the disorder which formed the context of that repression, in

like a fiddle, extracted the statement they'd come for like a sore tooth, snipped away the excess and went on their way.

Last year, a collection of south west UK activist projects and musicians released a text about the rising repression, which at the time Bristol AFed saw fit to add their name to. It included the following; “These home visits, searches and requests to snitch are not just about information and evidence gathering. They have as much to do with a concerted effort to intimidate and divide us all.” It continues; “None of us will ever cooperate with those whose job it is, all in the name of “security” and “safety”, to defend the rich and powerful while keeping us down.” In what way is the capitalist media not an apparatus the job of which is precisely to defend the rich and powerful (such as themselves) while keeping us down, intimidating the population and dividing the radicals?

The most insightful words in the documentary came not from Bristol AFed but from the reporter, when he asserted that in a democratic society the freedom to “play with ideas” is an important attribute (by way of trivializing Bristol AFed's ideas, evidently). And that's exactly the insidious nature of democracy and its media: all kinds of ideas, stories and even objections are allowed so long as they remain at the sterile level of ‘opinion’, toothless and pacified. That's part of what makes democracy more resilient and able to re-absorb dissent compared to classically dictatorial regimes, and thus a more efficient totalitarianism. It need only be a scant few seconds (as was Bristol AFed's ‘victorious’ definition of “what Anarchism is”) to be enough for the illusion of fairness, of equal participation, ‘both sides of the story’.

But the police operation that the activists in Bristol are feeling (above the routine surveillance and infiltration typical in Britain) is not the result of their so-called “alternative ideas”, but because some rebels put their own insurrectionary ideas to the test by action. The projected social peace was threatened, materially. And faced with this, it's immensely useful for

the system to be able to hold up a counter-part that offers a more agreeable course. In this scenario, whether Bristol AFed approached the interview actively intending to play along in order to gain political capital or not is irrelevant. If not then they seriously over-estimated their readiness for an improbable task – to control the narrative on the screen. It positively lends ‘legitimacy’ to the program, with all its calls for repression, to have anarchists participate in this democratic spectacle. This is classic divide-and-rule counter-insurgency, with caricatures of the irrational extremists on the one hand and harmless dreamers on the other, aiding and promoting the State’s repressive task. And it’s even more in the State’s interest to foment this atmosphere when it seems to be so far clueless as to apprehending the action groups.

It wouldn’t be the first time that Bristol AFed have contributed to this game, with the stakes equally as high. If you look at their statements, the language they use to reference the actual attacks (while quick to crow about their own “resistance”) is straight from the lawbooks: “vandalism”, or “some broken windows”, “a recent arson”, as events presumably without any radical intent and certainly nothing to do with anarchy. Once again, no-one but an idiot or an ideologue expects everyone to agree on what forms of rebellion or agitation are desirable for themselves. But while AFed’s ‘organising’ approach is recognisably an anarchist project (even if one alien to some other anarchists), the same is not extended by them to the more autonomous “criminality”.

To expand on this mentality, it’s been informative to see these anarchists’ response to a December wave of raids and arrests in the Spanish State, dubbed Operation Pandora. Bristol AFed were quick to assert that the seven comrades imprisoned (and since bailed) were “accused not of committing crimes but of being active anarchists and of spreading ideas and information”. While it’s great to see that they announced support for (some) antagonist prisoners, a few facts stand between this

the pre-election media scrum, one can find “Anarchism” on the shelf just like another faction.

“One turns one’s ideas over to the masters of “communication” to be masticated into more opinions in the ideological marketplace. One gives the reality of one’s life over to these experts in separation to be turned into 60-second images of isolated events. One turns the activity of communication over to those whose specialty is the one way “communication” of devitalized, pre-digested non-ideas and non-events that create social consensus. And then one claims about how badly one was represented in the media. Why did one choose to be represented at all? The choice to accept media representation is no less an acceptance of delegation than voting or unionism. The rejection of delegation, so central to an anarchist and insurrectional perspective, includes the refusal to deal with the media on its own terms.” - *Caught In The Web Of Deception*

Of course it would be misleading to portray all individuals within the anarchist-communist trend in the UK, however questionable their ideas remain to some, as willing to deploy the same backhanded approach as a few in Bristol AFed chose regarding attacks. An alternative perspective was outlined not long ago in *Confessions Of A Civil Anarchist*, hosted by the comrades of RabbleLND, to use one example. Another approach exists for who disagrees, one which doesn’t publicly feed the mediapolice strategy nor gloss over real differences – silence. There are plenty of pressing social questions and anarchic approaches which can be communicated and explored in their own right without need of explicit comparison to ‘bad anarchists’ (the Bristol action groups seem to have tried exactly this unless someone can point to a case otherwise), that are both more dignified and more sensible when repression is heavy in the air again. By ‘communicated’, is meant exactly that – opening human interaction, addressed directly to one another and not via representation in the capitalist press.

the blogroll was tellingly silent. (Indeed a proposal was raised in a post-riots activist circle by a 'syndicalist comrade' to send a letter denouncing the disorder to the Bristol Evening Post newspaper headquarters – which itself had been extensively damaged by anarchists days before in the uprising, shortly after printing photos of wanted riot suspects.) Regardless of their desire for a mass which can be whipped up and “organised” into a patient and disciplined revolutionary body, it maybe surprises some anarchists that many exploited (yes, including quite a few Bristol AFed would consider “working class”) obviously feel little need for “legitimacy” granted from on high by a paternalistic, external patron.

It's all very well for Bristol AFed to dutifully testify in their post-mortem blog post on the interview that “Anarchism is a movement of the working class and the oppressed, not of experts and politicians.” Well, through their choice of medium and timing they take the mantle of both experts and politicians – this was even noted online on a page of their fellow “libertarian communists”. Apparently Channel 4 have released an amount more of the interview online following their television broadcast, as a clip entitled What Do Anarchists Actually Believe In? – seems like you were mistaken if you thought anarchy was precisely the absence of a 'party line'.

A person's practice is anarchistic (anti-political, if you like) not only due to the words they articulate their ideas through, but more importantly due to the methods by which they express them, as theory-in-practice above hollow propaganda – or rather, as propaganda of the deed. Hence in the past while some filled the BBC airwaves with political chatter as the accepted voice of Anarchism, others knocked out the corporation's radio towers by cover of night in Bedminster Down, Dundry Hill and Bathampton – in the last case also taking down Channel 4 and other television in the area (all above also documented in Since The Bristol Riots). And yet now in

statement and what we know of the case. To quote some of the arrestees themselves, the actual charges include “destruction”, “possession of explosive and incendiary devices”, and apparently relate to around nine specific actions carried out in the Catalan province and Madrid against banks, multinational businesses and the church. Namely, “crimes”, to hear some speak. Yet Bristol AFed throw up the shield of ‘innocence’ (quite uninvited, as anarchists in solidarity in Barcelona have gone to lengths to emphasise that this is not their frame of reference when someone is arrested). For this, the actions themselves were disappeared and with them the contributions at great risk of their authors – and whether those people are among the arrested or not should only interest judges and prosecutors. It cheapens solidarity to hinge it around the State's categories of ‘innocence’ and ‘guilt’, ‘criminal’ and ‘legal’.

Another example could be the anarchists and socialists who were convicted for a string of direct attacks (on financial, diplomatic, military, prison and bureaucratic targets) in Belarus some years ago now. They denied responsibility, and the anarchists responsible released a statement confirming this and have since continued their actions. The case has received attention from mainstream human rights NGOs (unthinkable were they not ‘innocent’), tut-tutting that Belarus is the last in Europe to not move from dictatorship to democracy; and one could find some Western anarchist voices in unison. Theirs is the only other case that

Bristol AFed (or for that matter other UK formal anarchist organisations) have responded to – while scores of comrades in Europe and the world are held prisoner by democracies, either accused or sentenced for strikingly similar attacks; quite a few of whom took responsibility for the actions in question and many more who refuse the ‘guilt-innocence’ dichotomy. It is very hard to see Bristol AFed's support (even in gesture) as anything but contingent on ‘innocence’, ‘injustice’, ‘victimhood’ etc.

By stretch of the imagination, let's conceive that Bristol AFed going on TV simply wanted to provoke a tactical discussion among rebels (which should always be welcome), if through extremely indirect means, rather than imprint their own ideology at the expense of those unwilling to play the media's game. Very well, let's imagine one response.

Having toned down from the "terrorism" accusation levelled against insurrectionaries by the wider UK Anarchist Federation following two attacks on a nuclear energy executive and national tax agency director in Italy, in their post-interview blog post Bristol AFed generously concede that "routine daily violence of capitalism and the state is infinitely worse than any act of criminal damage". This seems like retrospective justification for their screened answer, as they simultaneously complain about "the journalist's attempts to pin us down on the subject" (and in what way did he fail?), perhaps cryptically recognising what the session was always going to have been about. Surely if they didn't want to be drawn into a comparison with the 'bad' insurrectionaries, non-participation was the only option? Yet the anarchists walked star-struck into the spectacle's honey-trap.

When pressed as to whether attacks on, for instance, the police were even hypothetically "legitimate", they replied: "It is hard to describe it as legitimate or illegitimate... It would depend really on circumstances." Of course, what circumstances they would really depend on are fleshed out elsewhere in the interview: in "a period of mass uprising where people were taking control of their communities and workplaces" (really, all that without anyone having first raised a hand in anger or faced in cops?), then one may rise up. If you, dear reader, who feels this existence fraught with alienation and dominance to the unbearable any longer, maybe were even taken in by the images posted by Bristol AFed of cartoon molotov cocktails, "toast the rich", "fire to the bosses"... then stay your "illegitimate" attack! As these anarchists will kindly explain, when

rebels actually fire on the bosses before the whistle formally blows (like happened in Italy and not only), one must run a mile to clear themselves of association. But who will these future masses who will rise up consist of, exactly? Why, individuals just like ourselves of course! And how would we hold our own against a militarised elite and their loyal guards, without having even attempted to develop our force beforehand, without learning to kick out the recuperators when they come with their membership lists or their camera crews? Comrade, when The Revolution begins in earnest then all that will fall into place – meanwhile, enlist in the official organisations wherein the class struggle is contained (in more ways than one...)...

Irony aside, this 'magical thinking' is the heritage of an Anarchism which failed to outgrow the Marxist dogma of historically (pre-)determined 'ripe conditions' which are supposedly both recognisable and necessary before any meaningful insurgency can commence, if at all. Whoever acts before 'their' time must be isolated and denounced. Tomorrow's revolutionary activity is today's "criminal damage". And just like for pro-industrial Marx, come that "mass uprising" you'd better be "taking control" of whatever means of production you're already chained to rather than wreck it! In other words, this is the disembodied ghost of Anarchism against the living spirit of anarchy.

That there is no "quick and simple answer" to whether destructive attack on the State or capitalist system here and now is "legitimate", according to Bristol AFed's retrospective musings, is all the more ludicrous in the context of their online chronicle of (symbolic) backing for violent but safely distant struggles going on overseas. From Turkey to Ferguson, the streets are burning and Bristol AFed are ready to shake a banner in support. However when the mass rioting erupted in England, August 2011, in circumstances not dissimilar to the latest well-known police killings in the US and igniting – imagine that! - even parts of Bristol for the third time that year,