

Eric Laursen Owes Me a Lamp

An anarchist review and critique of *The Operating System: An Anarchist Theory of the Modern State*, by Eric Laursen

Anonymous

2021

[ed. – A timely response, through the means of this review, to (among its other topics) the accusations that our actions – or even entire uprisings of diverse social groups – are merely ‘false flag’ operations or playing into the enemy’s hands. While this focuses on the other side of the northern Atlantic from here, in the UK too this was a pretty stock response from certain Leftist commentators during a wave of anarchist attacks in the south-west of England (see Return Fire vol.3 pg51) until around 2014. In the Chilean revolt of 2019–2020 (see Rebels Behind Bars; ‘This Latest Chapter of This Story’), the same widespread paranoia lead to one protester being beaten by others and hung from a bridge as a suspected ‘provocateur’. Unless noted otherwise, the photos we’ve included throughout this review are from significant damages caused during a complex and ingenious raid this February on the construction site preparing to drill under Wedzin Kwa sacred river for a Coastal GasLink (CGL) pipeline imposed by the Canadian State, in the context of the decade-long indigenous resistance to multiple of such projects in their territories (see Return Fire vol.2 pg42). It followed a blockade and 59-day occupation of the same work-site.

Around 20 masked people in camouflage used grinders to cut locks, accessed the site and drove away the Forsythe guards (former cops and military) with axes, smashing their vehicles and shooting flare-guns after them. The fighters disabled lighting and surveillance systems on-site, downed trees and placed caltrops (see The Fight in Catalunya), wires, lit fires, an old school bus and other obstructions on the only access-road to slow down police response by hours, then destroyed vehicles and portable buildings comprising the site (using its own heavy machinery for it, then also trashed) while cutting hydraulic and fuel lines. When police arrived to clear the first access-road barricades they were attacked from the woods with smoke bombs and flaming branches; “When the police gave chase,” mourns the Chief Superintendent, “it appears as though they might have lulled us into a trap”... No arrests.

Needless to say, damage ran into the millions. Conspiracy theories immediately began to circulate social media that it was an ‘inside job’ by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), or by the pipeline company, or by people with foreign funding (in the words of the Canadian Premier of Alberta), or, or... Anything except what some “anarchist individuals living in the North who are supportive of struggles in defence of the land and against ongoing colonization” pointed out as obvious: that “After years of trespassing and violating consent, after three militarized RCMP raids at the ser-

vice of CGL, after years of harassment and intimidation of land defenders by CGL's Forsythe security and after more peaceful methods had failed to stop CGL's continuing violence against the land and indigenous relationships and laws some unknown individuals struck back with an impressive act of sabotage and destruction against corporate property."

Wet'suwet'en land defenders: neither despair nor hesitate.]

An anarchist review and critique of The Operating System: An Anarchist Theory of the Modern State, by Eric Laursen.

It feels safe to say that contemporary anarchists have a pretty poor understanding of the State. We are not alone in this: some part of this leviathan-monster is implied a thousand times a minute in "public" discourse, but the State is rarely named *as such*. This opacity filters down to everyday conversations in our daily lives, making opposition to this or that State policy or program easy, but opposition to the form itself particularly difficult. It can be hard to name the forest for the trees.

It's alarming that this opacity persists even in anarchist-involved struggles. Yet here we are, able to describe why we are opposed to this or that institution by citing this or that specific example of oppression, but often struggling to declare and describe a thoroughly anti-State perspective and trajectory with our words and actions. Compared to many of our revolutionary ancestors, we've lost the confidence of our desire, to even be able to describe our desperate hunger for a stateless world as a justifiable end in and of itself.

This inability opens doors for others who are more than willing to impose their own visions. Nowhere is this more frustrating than in the constant patterns of co-optation and recuperation of anti-State movements by the Left. Most recently, an uprising that continued a revolutionary tradition gesturing towards the actual abolition of slavery, white supremacy, police, and prisons, was continuously translated by self-imposed leaders into Abolitionism™ [*ed. – see 'Everything is Sanitised, But We are Constantly Wringing Our Tired Hands'*], a "radical" non-profit-sponsored redirection into the world of politics and the (colonial) State form. The possibility of revolution one day becomes gradualist "defunding" the next. They transcribe our dreams onto paper and read them back to us as nightmares.

This is my take, anyway. And it feels like one way for revolutionaries to guard against this inevitable tendency of the Left to impose the State-form on our imagination, alongside a proper rationing of ammunition, bricks, and a restlessly communal and creative spirit, might be to educate ourselves a little more clearly on exactly what the State is and how it got here.

So, for this reason, I was particularly excited to get a copy of Eric Laursen's new book, *The Operating System: An Anarchist Theory of the Modern State*, in the mail a couple of weeks ago [*ed. – in 2021*], which attempts to help solve this very problem.

The book begins with a concise, accessible, and introductory summary of different classical definitions of the State, from [*Max*] Weber's emphasis on the monopoly on violence and Marx's primary determining emphasis on economic interests [*ed. – see Return Fire vol.5 pg9*], to [*Gustav*] Landauer and [*Michel*] Foucault's emphases on power relations and the need for the State to always reproduce itself. (Laursen also provides a helpful summary of six different versions of the modern State that have existed over the last 500 or so years, from the monarchical and commercial to the social-democratic and neoliberal.)

This all works as a kind of jumping off point for the author's own defining of the modern State above all as an "operating system." The term is used figuratively but approaches the literal:

Like a computer operating system, the State manages relationships between government, capital, nonprofits, and other entities to make them work together easily and efficiently, many parts operating at the same time. Like an operating system, it lets us do things – make computations, write, communicate, learn play, create art, make a living – but always within boundaries that it prescribes and manipulates.

I appreciate this as a metaphor, and, if you have about the remarkably scant level of computer skill that I have, you might particularly note the way a well-designed operating system almost recedes into the background, happy to exist behind the veil of ignorance of its user. Again, it is difficult to name the forest for the trees, even while it is nigh-impossible to imagine using your computer without its OS. Unfortunately, Laursen offers this framework but spends relatively little time defending it in contrast with other writers' theoretical propositions; a pretty strange fact given that it provides the title of the book.

Beyond this brief conceptual offering, the rest of the book goes on mainly to assign a series of characteristics to the modern State: a kind of "if you see this dangerous animal in the wild, here's how to identify it!" This is again short and accessible: things like, "the State is an instrument of violence and war," "the State is male," "the State is above the law," "the [modern] State is European in origin, and remains so culturally," "the State claims the right to determine who is a person," et. al. Most of these sections are useful but remarkably short; some are reinforced with a barebones historical discussion or anecdote, but mostly they exist as a very rough sketch across an incredibly wide range of time and geography. I found his way of illustrating the blurriness of the lines between State and capital, which in many ways are virtually indistinguishable, to be a particularly useful offering of clarity in a world whose political science mythologies so heavily insist on treating the two like foreign adversaries.

Few of these descriptions will ruffle many feathers though. Unfortunately, few of Laursen's descriptions of the modern State make it clear why his "operating system" metaphor is particularly needed or useful (though I do think it could be). I like the metaphor, but I'm left wondering, what is specific about this metaphor for the State that goes beyond the basic summary of its parts?

One of the characteristics of the State that Laursen identifies is the tendency of all individual states to establish and reproduce cultural hegemony in the territory under their control [*ed. – see Return Fire vol.5 pg123*], by propping up a "Core Identity Group", as the book terms it, in a privileged position of access and power:

In the United States, it's people of European stock and Judeo-Christian religious background; in China, Han Chinese; in Indonesia, Javanese; in the Russian Federation, ethnic Russians; in India, Hindus....The closer one conforms to these groups, the more easily one can access education, opportunities, and, above all, the trust of the regime.

True enough. And perhaps it's a worthwhile reminder that this aspect of State formation plays out in different, localized ways across the globe under different individual states – a corrective to

the way that American radicals often end up mimicking American exceptionalism in an “inverted” form, by projecting our own familiar racial and ethnic hierarchies onto social struggles elsewhere.

But there is a giant problem here, which is specific to this section, but nevertheless belies a problem of the book as a whole in its somewhat surface-level and ahistorical approach. Given that the book’s focus is not really on the formation or aspects of individual states *per se* but on the nature of (and global order of) the modern State form as a whole, it’s strange to suggest that all of these examples of Core Identity Group hegemony exist in more or less equivalency. It is true that the formation of Indonesia as a State relied on establishing the cultural hegemony of the Javanese, as early modern France privileged white Roman Catholicism, but none of these processes were particularly or uniquely responsible for the making of the modern State and capitalist system on a *global* scale.

That role lies with the Atlantic Slave Trade, a process that was *uniquely* responsible for the formation of numerous individual states and, more relevant to the book, the entire modern State system, including the trade and banking networks that helped that system come into being. The book’s 200 pages makes scant mention of the Atlantic Slave Trade in its specificity, and when it does so it is in a passing way that at times pairs it merely with the role of serfdom, at other times as another example of cultural hegemony. In no place is this process given a specific and adequate historical discussion.

I am not arguing that there aren’t a myriad of other factors and processes that allowed the modern State to emerge and continue to reproduce itself, and that those don’t also need attention and scrutiny. However, the slave trade and accompanying forms of bondage crucially helped erect states from the southern tip of South America all the way to Canada, which provided the corresponding wealth that solidified the economies and banking networks which funded the nation-states of Europe, which then proceeded to impose their version of the State upon the world at large. This process of genocide and social death eventually *recreated the entire modern world on a global scale*, in a way that is fundamentally unique. It probably deserves more than a couple passing mentions in a book about...the modern State.

A generous reading here might suggest this oversight is just the result of the minimalist and bare approach that the book takes – there just wasn’t space! But that just means the approach is wrong. A book can be brief and accessible – the best ones often are – but a book like this has to find a way to use history in a way that is both general *and* specific. Understanding the modern State in its specificity requires more than a sprinkling of historical anecdotes from across the globe. It needs to be able to access and propose narrative.

In particular, there is a tremendous and ever-increasing amount of scholarship that’s relevant to the global role of the slave trade’s unique role in the formation of the modern state system, often from an explicitly anti-State perspective: from Saidiya Hartman’s *Scenes of Subjection* and Frank Wilderson’s writing on civil society and prison, to Edward Baptist’s *The Half Has Never Been Told* and Eduardo Galeano’s classic *The Open Veins of Latin America*, among dozens and dozens more. It is a huge missed opportunity for an anarchist text like this to not absorb and digest the wisdom in this scholarship and explicitly incorporate it into his concept of the State “operating system.” This failure stands out all the more so, given that we all just went through a multiracial, nationwide uprising led by Black youth against the modern-day slave patrol of the police [*ed. – see The Siege of the Third Precinct in Minneapolis*].

But that merely leads to the most damning, or at least embarrassing, observation. In his closing section titled “Why We Are Against the State,” Laursen finally sees fit to mention the uprising

which took place last year. He does so in the context of discussing how the State instrumentalizes right-wing non-State violence, but his words are telling far beyond this:

The violence that took place at many of the demonstrations and marches, the vast majority of which was instigated or provoked by police or far-right counter-protesters, would be used as another excuse to spy on leftists and anarchists, violating their privacy and further criminalizing dissent. One of the few major arrests following the marches in late May, ironically, was of “three alleged members of a militarized far-right movement” who were accused of “plotting to bomb government property and to stoke violence at a Black Lives Matter protest using Molotov cocktails,” according to the Wall Street Journal.

“Populist” violence may bubble up from below, but seldom without encouragement from the State.

I’m sorry. What?! I can’t lie – when I first read this paragraph I threw the book across the room, knocking a lamp off the table. Eric, if you’re reading this: you owe me a lamp. I liked that lamp.

Now, I’d like to give him the benefit of the doubt here and believe that while he was away from his computer making coffee, some CNN journalist broke into his place and slid into his seat to interject this piece of center-left denialist garbage, and that it somehow managed to slide past the editors at AK [*Press*]. Better yet, because I really like the work that the editors do at AK, maybe a Russian hacker cracked into the computers at the printer and changed the manuscript ten minutes before printing.

But that doesn’t seem to be the case. And there’s so much to unpack here, so many CNN style hot-take falsehoods packed in one small insignificant paragraph, that I’m almost not surprised that this has gone unnoticed in anarchist media featuring Laursen in the last month or so.

So let’s start here by quoting the preface of Shemon Salam and Arturo Castillon’s excellent book *The Revolutionary Meaning of the George Floyd Uprising*:

At least 28 people died in the wave of social unrest that rocked the United States from late May until July in 2020. In this 10-week period, there were 574 riots; 624 arsons; 2,382 incidents of looting; 97 police vehicles set on fire; and 12,241 people arrested for protest-related activities. In addition, at least 13 police were shot, 9 were hit by cars and 2,037 were reported injured in the riots, mostly because of the tossing of rocks, bricks, and other projectiles.

This uprising caused at least \$2 billion in property damage, the “highest recorded damage from social unrest in US history,” and forced more than 200 cities to impose curfews and mobilize 96,000 national guard troops in 34 states. These stats are not a Fox News pundit trying to fear-monger a right-wing audience with hyperbole, but rather come from an authentic attempt on the part of a State and capitalist funded think tank to internally study what happened for reasons of its own self-preservation. They are undoubtedly a low estimate.

Thousands of hours of video footage, mountains of arrest data, and hundreds of personal stories and narratives all demonstrate conclusively that this attack on capitalist and State infrastructure was proactive, massive, widespread, popular in nature, and done by large crowds of

oppressed peoples acting in coordinated and intentional rage. So yeah, literally every element of Laursen's paragraph is dead wrong.

For Laursen to say that there were "few major arrests" is objectively absurd and deliberately misleading – there were thousands upon thousands of documented arrests, many with very serious felonies.¹ Those of us who were arrested, or are still doing legal and prison support, or are the families and friends of these folks, all know this. To invisibilize these arrests is a disgusting spit in the face to all of us who fought back, but particularly to the Black teens and 20- somethings who risked so much and made up a large portion of the early arrests. These youth were not tricked into doing so, which is pure racist paternalism, and their arrests were not the unwitting collateral damage of outside agitators hell bent on adventurist destruction. That so many of these brave people are still behind bars or facing time just makes Laursen's statements that much worse.

It's also just cringe-worthy for Laursen to center repression against "leftists and anarchists" in his (rare) mention of the uprising. It's absolutely true that we have faced repression, and that anarchists have been used as a kind of scapegoat or "boogeyman" by the political establishment, to then also justify repression of everyone else. And it's worth saying that anarchists were relevant in this rebellion well beyond our small numbers. But the uprising was not some State-contrived scheme to justify spying on a tiny fringe minority of ideological radicals, and to center this minority in Laursen's briefest of discussions about the uprising does a huge disservice to the popular, Black-led, and revolutionary character of the rebellion. We were part of all this, *but it wasn't about us*. (I'd also like to point out that, at least in my town, the average charges and sentencing of your typical lefty/activist type, even when they're Black, has been far less severe than that faced by the majority of the less "politically connected" Black folks, who led the efforts in both the rioting and holding of space against police aggression. There's a lesson here to be drawn about modern strategies for counter-insurgency and the weaponization of political capital, especially in liberal controlled cities, but Laursen's position renders him unable to do so.)

In the words of the martyr Willem von Spronsen [*ed. – see 'Freedom For All'*], "don't overthink it." The State does not need such a complicated conspiratorial scheme to carry out mass violence on a routine basis upon Black people, and certainly not upon Black revolutionaries; rather, it relies on the kind of liberal, everyday good protester vs. bad protester respectability politics that Laursen himself has fallen prey to perpetuating.

Idris Robinson already addressed the line of thinking that Laursen suggests many months ago and much better than I can, in his piece *How It Might Should be Done*, so I'll quote it at length:

A militant nationwide uprising did in fact occur. The progressive wing of the counter-insurgency seeks the denial and disarticulation of this event. The obvious is not always so obvious.

We all saw it. We all saw what happened after the murder of George Floyd. What occurred was an extremely violent and destructive rebellion. It was a phenomenon the likes of which we have not seen in America in 40 or 50 years. Very few of us have experienced anything of this magnitude: a precinct was immediately torched in Minneapolis, after which entire cities went up in flames – New York, Atlanta, Oakland, Seattle... Despite all of this, the reformers have had the audacity to claim

¹ ed. – see UprisingSupport.org

that all of this never actually happened. They are trying to make the burning cop cars disappear, to extinguish from memory the police stations on fire, as if it didn't happen. Again and again, I hear the same script: someone comes on the news, a political activist gives a talk, and we hear them say something like, "the protests were peaceful and non-violent, they stayed within the bounds of law and order." No: cops being shot at in St. Louis is not within the bounds of law and order. They're doing their best to make the event disappear. One has to wonder what planet they are on that a torched police station appears within the bounds of civility.

This delusion is something that we need to think about. Ultimately, it's more than a delusion. It unites veritably all the progressive liberals who chatter on about what's been going on over the past summer. From the Biden democrats to virtually all of the mainstream media not affiliated with Fox News, to the Black Lives Matter™ people, the agenda pushed by all these groups is the claim that the insurrection did not take place...What is at issue is more than just a momentary lapse of sanity: it is a strategy of denial, a counter-insurgent strategy of reform *par excellence*.

Unconsciously, liberals do recognize that an insurrection occurred. They can't ignore the shattered glass that occurred in the streets of Seattle yesterday. But what they want is to downplay the significance of these events that mean so much to us, and that we are continually trying to push forward.

The progressive Left is stuck between a rock and a hard place: it obviously cannot outright condemn the uprising as does the far-Right, but is also tasked with disciplining the uprising's more militant participants out of any kind of power that doesn't fall within the realm of non-profits, elections, and non-disruptive protest. Laursen claiming that the (massive, proactive, organized, proletarian) violence of the uprising was primarily just "instigated" by police or right-wing actors is another form of denial, a way to disarticulate the event while locking us into a trap of pure, powerless victimhood.

It's worth tracing the chronology of this general line of thinking, much of which relied on a re-hash of the old racist "outside agitator" trope. It was initially pioneered by Democratic governors in states like Minnesota, who were grasping at straws in their attempts to slow down and divide the unified ferocity of poor people in their city streets, and thought blaming white radicals and antifa might do the trick. It was then taken up by mainstream media and also liberals and radical activist-types on Twitter and Instagram, who were all too eager to spread absurd conspiracy theories about a struggle that went beyond their comprehension. Anyone remember the idea that police departments were leaving out piles of bricks to "trick" unwitting protesters into committing crimes, thus "undermining the respectability" of "our" movement? Lol – nope, that was (obviously) just standard road construction, some fact-checkers admitted months later. (But thanks for the bricks J). Pretty soon, Trump joined in on the outside agitator trope, *also* blaming it all on "antifa," which forced liberals to pivot to pinning it all on right-wing boogaloo boys instead, who are in fact real, but so disorganized and insignificant that they have about as much as chance as meaningfully influencing a rebellion with millions of participants as I do of running a four minute mile.

The chronological evolution of this conspiratorial denialism was a key part, in fact maybe the *only* successful part, of the State's counter insurgency strategy in the early weeks of June.

Long before the National Guard regained the streets, we were drowning in a sea of lefty social media conspiracies and CNN articles about white outside agitators, false flag ops, and boogaloo boy trickery. We were often able to overcome this nonsense with authentic conversations in the streets, but at times the confusion it introduced was a serious challenge to the internal unity and trust of multi-racial crowds already struggling to find common language and desire in our hatred of the police. There were myriad moments last summer, all across the country, where the mistrust introduced by these narratives directly prevented us from defending ourselves, from forming new relationships, or from pushing the rebellion further. These narratives preyed on our perception of ourselves as weak and the State as invincible – the idea that if we pushed the police back or destroyed their tools of violence, it must somehow be because they wanted it that way all along. How could we be anything but pawns?

And now that the windows have been (mostly) boarded up, the glass and ashes brushed away, CNN reminds us on a weekly basis that “93% of the protests were peaceful”, a deceptive piece of spin that erases the *nature* of the rebellion. The translation of “uprising” into “series of protests” is a discursive sleight of hand that brings everything back into the realm of performative politics and speaking truth to power. We’re no longer doing and creating – now, we are asking.

So why is Laursen, an anarchist, parroting this narrative, and, above all, what does it have to do with the larger project of his text? The book takes such little serious consideration of the uprising that it is difficult to say, but I suspect the key to understanding his bananas-ass garbage take on last summer has something to do with this line: “‘Populist’ violence may bubble up from below, but seldom without encouragement from the State.”

Again, what are you smoking Eric? What history are you (not) reading? The State did not “encourage” the uprising. It was not “happy” that this violent uprising happened, and the internal discussions between police departments, military generals, National Guard centers, and think-tanks – which an analyst of the modern State should be reading! – make this abundantly clear. Police did not intentionally provoke 2 billion dollars worth of destruction on crucial capitalist infrastructure, they did not relish the prospect of losing their legitimacy, and the technocratic, neoliberal sector of America’s ruling class was not itching to be brought to the precipice of a second civil war that it could not control. The State was desperate, scrambling, at a loss. None of this was accomplished through a series of “peaceful protests,” which themselves would not even have happened were it not for the fires of Minneapolis and dozens of other cities.

Laursen’s line here locks us into a perpetual victim cage of his own making: either a conflictual and violent rebellion did happen, but was the pawn of an all-knowing State’s devious plans, or it was really just a bunch of peaceful protests made out to be violent by those mean talking heads on Fox News. Either way, we’re forever hapless innocent victims, righteous but toothless.

None of this goes to say that every individual act of violence in the uprising was liberatory, that every act of escalation serves a strategic purpose, or that had the uprising gone further it would necessarily have resulted in “anarchist” ends. A “civil war” very well could have happened – and still may – and such a conflict could go in numerous directions and would have at least three sides. One possible outcome of such a conflict is abolitionist and anti-State in nature, but there are other fascist and neoliberal outcomes as well. This can be said though: *to achieve even the possibility of emancipation [ed. – of US chattel slaves] a century ago required a civil war*. There is no determined historical process, no inevitable freedom if we walk through that door to the outside air. But the house is on fire, and we are suffocating.

Simply stated, Laursen is wrong. Violence by the oppressed against their masters is a constant fact of history, ever since the dawn of the modern State (and, for that matter, well before its emergence). Indeed, there is not a single instance in which the oppressed have obtained even the tiniest sinew of freedom or relief without violence, or, at least the threat thereof. It is true that on occasion the State will seek to entrap young militants with violent schemes, or instigate a “false flag operation” of one kind or another, but these are relatively targeted and rare, and certainly cannot explain mass uprisings by millions of people who do not know each other.

A far more effective and broad form of modern-day counter-insurgency has been the kind of respectability politics championed by radicals like Lisa Fithian, who Laursen praises – a persona whose domineering, riot-shaming, and pacifism-championing presence all of us anarchists from the anti-globalization years learned to resent. There are a number of great texts on how this ideological promotion of the harmony of civil society continues to work in the service of counter-insurgency [*ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg5*], but why not just draw on our own experience this past summer? Let’s just remember the self-deputized do-gooder leftists who saw fit to put their hands on young kids to protect capitalist and State property and thereby save the “optics” of (what they think) the movement should look like. This is the “cultural hegemony” of activism that the democratic State imposes upon its dissidents, and not only does Laursen not identify this as an important characteristic of the State for his readers, he appears to be all too willing to join in. He may not actually say he is opposed to rioting or popular violent rebellion when it occurs long ago in a galaxy far far away, but he certainly makes an extraordinary leap to deny its existence or legitimacy as soon as it appears too close for comfort.

This denialism-as-counter-insurgency works because it goes beyond the political: it resonates with those who suffer a *spiritual* deficit. That is to say, those who turn away from these moments of cathartic rebellion do so out of spiritual poverty. Or perhaps, more generously, we might attribute this abhorrent lack to a fear response that has been conditioned by deep trauma. The uprising calls us to live up to the historical task of our generation, but we turn away out of fear of repression, violence, prison, losing our friends or family. And then we deny the rebellion happened at all, or we deny it had any “legitimacy,” to avoid the shame of our own failure.

It is ok to be afraid, and it is ok to fail, and it is ok not to throw the brick, and it is necessary to make *strategic* critiques of specific actions and choices as we proceed. A social revolution needs all kinds of souls and all kinds of participation, and it even needs failure. But to not at least rejoice when the brick is finally, finally thrown, after so much pain and fear and silence, is to announce one’s own spiritual death. “Our fears don’t stop death, they stop life,” my old coach used to say. And in turning away out of fear, we rob ourselves of the opportunity for life: the joy of participating in, influencing, and, perhaps most importantly, being changed by these moments, *of losing the baggage of terror that we all carry throughout our normal quotidian lives.*

What’s more, we lose the opportunity to learn from the experiments that engender the ever-evolving wisdom of the dispossessed-in-motion. For there is a deep ancestral wisdom contained in the ingenious ways that a crowd assembles a barricade, dispatches a team of medics, finds fuel to spread the fires, and distributes looted goods, as each of these collective activities amount to the most hallowed of spiritual offerings.

The fact that Laursen does not recognize or consider these lessons of the most broadly effective and affective anti-State rebellion in the United States since the late 1960’s, if not the 1860’s, and then goes on to (ever so briefly) perpetuate some of the same tropes that the State and its media wielded against us, is profoundly disappointing. It deeply undermines what, in other sections,

could be a helpful text for anyone trying to better understand the modern State. Personally, I'd just suggest folks do their best impression of Robin Williams in the *Dead Poet Society* with regards to the last chapter of his book and keep the rest. "Excrement. That's what I think of Mr. J. Evans Pritchard."

In the meantime, I'd love it if he reimbursed me for the lamp he made me break, or better yet throw that amount of money (it was \$14.99 plus tax) onto the commissary fund of one of the hundreds of real people who will get real time for doing some beautiful real shit that *really did happen*.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



Anonymous
Eric Laursen Owes Me a Lamp
An anarchist review and critique of *The Operating System: An Anarchist Theory of the Modern State*, by Eric Laursen
2021

Printed in Return Fire vol.6 chap.4 (summer 2022). To read the articles referenced throughout this text in [square brackets], PDFs of Return Fire and related publications can be read, downloaded and printed by visiting returnfire.noblogs.org or emailing returnfire@riseup.net

usa.anarchistlibraries.net