

North East Anarchist Group | Little Writings

#1

A collection of articles from North East Anarchist Group (NEAG), an anarchist-communist group based in the North-East of England

North East Anarchist Group

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The end of Corbynism and the re-emergence of the worker's movement?, by A

As with virtually everyone on 'the left', I am disappointed with the results of the general election. I did not vote but I could appreciate that the most recent iteration the Labour Party, arguably the most progressive for a generation, could have potentially offered some respite to those who have suffered the most, not only from the last 9 years of Tory austerity which has claimed the lives of over 100,000 people but from the neoliberal agenda set into motion by Margaret Thatcher and perpetuated by all subsequent governments since, including Labour.

But I cannot say that the result wasn't completely unexpected. Recent times have been notoriously difficult for social democratic parties as they try to revive a bygone era of perceived prosperity which it saw post-WW2, looking back towards the Keynesian mixed economy, which was ultimately a specific economic configuration, linked to a specific historical period under capitalism, that we will never be able to return too nor should we want too¹. Even if some did not expect Labour to fall at the first hurdle, I believe that we only have to look to the historical failures of the parliamentary left movements, from the German SPD of the Second International² to the Greek Syriza³, to see that Corbynism was destined for failure. Many of the working class understand the reality of it, that the ruling class, regardless of their promises and favourable rhetoric, are still the ruling class. It doesn't matter to them if they wear blue ties or red ties. They distrust politicians and rightly so.

Anarchists have long known that electoralism cannot be an emancipatory vehicle for the working-class and that the State and the party form are not the sites for a revolutionary socialist movement. The political party is fundamentally restricted by its own position in the system (one of numerous parties, each twisted between a number of competing factions, all with different intentions), by the mechanism that grants it authority (the ballot box, fundamentally separating itself from and alienating those it says it represents), and by the borders it enforces (the working class has no country and socialism will only be possible if it is international).

Since Labour's loss in the general election, the finger-pointing from many on the left on who is to blame for the failure of Corbynism has been incessant and appears to ignore the elephant in the room, reformism. The mainstream left doesn't want to talk about the limitations of its own movement and inherently counter-revolutionary features of electoralism and modern democracy for that means it needs to confront the prospect that they may have never stood a chance.

Corbynism, like all left electoral projects, wasn't equipped to deal with the contradictions inherent within party politics and representative democracy, with the bourgeois media and with the imperatives and manifestations of capital and the power that it, and its facilitators, hold over all of us. Even if Labour had managed to obtain power, I suspect we would have seen it struggle to enact the vast majority of its policies it promised, compromising with capitalists, and retaining

¹ <https://economicsofimperialism.blogspot.com/2015/10/origins-of-uk-welfarestate.html> See also [4]

² The voting of war credits to send the working class to their death, the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht and subsequent crushing of the German revolution, putting down of striking workers etc. etc. etc.

³ <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/syriza-greece-election-tsipras-newdemocracy-troika-austerity-varoufakis-a8993811.html>

its position as the 'left-wing of capital'. We must not underestimate or ignore the mechanisms of government finance that rely on the neo-colonialist globalisation of capital and financialisation, which burdens the working class elsewhere, predominantly in the global South. The State's role is as an instrument for the control and mediation of the antagonisms between capital and labour and consequently, has no capacity to challenge capitalism or to bring about its abolition. This is consistent with former Labour governments (including the 'socialist' poster boy Clement Atlee's 1945 government⁴) and something we see no more vividly than with the recent failures and subsequent collapse of European social democracy (Syriza, Podemos⁵, Partito Democratico), which has not only laid bare the inadequacies of social democracy and the parliamentary route but has facilitated (along with the centrists) the resurgence of the far-right on the continent. Even in existing social democracies, we can see that capitalism has eroded any last pretence that it is for the working people, as they continue to attack workers rights⁶. We must contend with the fact that becoming the 'left-wing of capital' is the goal of electoralism and that with the destruction of the last strongholds of the worker's movements since the 1970s, that social democracy is no longer needed by the ruling class in order to control labour. The ruling class have never had it so good.

For the last 4 years, the British left has been dominated by Corbynism. Committed socialists, anarchists and communists have provided boundless energy and countless hours of unpaid labour for the ruling class. This, I feel, is time and energy that could have been spent building a worker-led anti-capitalist movement that would be in a stronger position now to fight NHS privatisation, climate change, disability cuts, and food poverty and that would have had the ability to empower individuals and allow them to forge new bonds in their workplaces and communities. It could have been time spent educating people on the fundamentals of capitalism and on our relationship to work, not just regurgitating useless rhetoric about billionaires, pandering to liberals and/or attempting to develop a media career or the hippest aesthetic (Acid Corbynism!?). If the revolutionary socialist movement had had even a fraction of the people, infrastructure and technology that the left deployed in pushing and supporting Corbynism particularly in the periods of a general election, I believe the anarchist movement, as well as the wider workers movement, could have been revitalised.

It isn't enough to continue with the Labour party. It isn't enough for our goals to be simply stopping the Tories or stopping 'Blue Labour'. That is the darkest future timeline and one that we should not embrace. The worker's movements have been fighting on the back foot for too long, trying to simply regain what concessions have been taken away. We must go on the offensive. We must demand more than what the Labour party could ever have offered, and certainly much more than the Tories will ever give us. Are we going to be condemned to repeat the same failures, to treading water for another century?

I don't believe we have the time.

It is time for us to break free from the constraints of electoralism once and for all, we must no longer hand over our power to others, we must not be contented to work in the shadow oppor-

⁴ <https://libcom.org/history/how-labour-governed-1945-1951>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/feb/19/podemos-spanishpolitics>

⁶ <https://www.counterpunch.org/2019/01/04/class-war-in-sweden>

tunistic politicians and media personalities or to pursuing dead-end reforms that are taken away much easier than they are ever granted, to fighting for scraps under a corrupt and undemocratic system of governance.

We must work to build a revolutionary socialist project founded on the self-activity of the working-class itself, on increasing militancy in our workplaces and in our communities, towards the real empowerment of individuals and of our class, and a rejection of the alienation that is imposed on us by liberal democracy and capitalist social relations. The working-class is currently at its weakest point. Our organisations, unions and connections to each other have been completely obliterated but we must rebuild and we will win.

Thoughts on climate and communism, by A

We are in a unique and challenging period within the history of humanity, as well as within the epoch of capitalism. With the increased production capacity brought on by human ingenuity, innovation and science, fuelled by capitalism's constant drive towards reconfiguring the production process, we have been able to produce enough to globally meet everyone's needs for the last 150 years but our production capacities, not freeing us from toil, work and suffering, have only served to make the ruling class richer and more powerful. Not only have we been able to ensure that everyone is housed, fed and clothed but we have had the capacity to dramatically alter the way we labour and fulfil that fundamental human need for leisure, play and free time. Time that we could spend more with our loved ones, to develop ourselves as creative and passionate human beings and to innovate freely. The progression of our industrial capacities since the industrial revolution however has not only subjugated people to misery and exploitation it has also been an immense burden on our environment and the animals and ecosystems that we share this world with. We are now faced with irreversible climate change caused predominantly by the wasteful and unrelenting aggression of the capitalist socio-economic system.

One thing is certain, our current system is unsustainable. Anton Pannekoek, a Dutch Marxist, in 1909 described capitalism as a 'headless economy which cannot regulate its acts by an understanding of their consequences' and that 'society under capitalism can be compared to a gigantic unintelligent body; while capitalism develops its power without limit, it is at the same time senselessly devastating more and more the environment from which it lives'.⁷

This was 112 years ago. That unintelligent body is essentially the market, with its metabolic price signals, its considerations for Thoughts on climate and communism (November 2021) by A production and exchange being purely based on valorisation – the turning of money into more money. It only cares for capital accumulation, growth, and the increases in labour productivity that enable that goal, all else is ultimately expendable. It's this internal movement, capitalism's central tenet, which means it cannot adequately address the climate crisis but will only serve to further exacerbate it. By its very essence capitalism's social and economic considerations are too limited. Commodities do not appear out of thin air. They are built from the products of nature and by the labour of the masses who interact with it. The pursuit of endless growth and profit within the capitalist system relies on the ever expanding exploitation of the natural world and those who inhabit it. In the extraction of raw materials, in the waste (agricultural runoff, transportation and

⁷ <https://libcom.org/library/destruction-nature-anton-pannekoek>

production fumes, disposable and short-lived commodities) produced and in the production of our energy, where the continuing reliance on fossil fuels, backed and violently protected by the State, contributes not only to the destruction of the planet via its extraction and processing but also to imperialist wars that are fought and communities that are dispossessed for control of these evermore valuable resources.

Green capitalism is considered a realistic possibility by many, even those on the Left. And while us anarchists and libertarians are regularly denounced as the utopians by most, green capitalism appears to be the most utopian demand of them all. Green capitalism, like industrial capitalism, must not only abide by capitalism's central tenet but at its core, relies on the technological reconfiguration of the production process. It believes if it is able to produce clean energy, refine the production process to reduce waste and create commodities with a lessened footprint that it will brute force a solution into place without addressing the underlying social and economic conditions. It expects nation-states and companies to willingly move from fossil fuel consumption to more expensive forms of energy despite the structural incentives of the system to create ever cheaper commodities, in ever greater quantities, that allows them to undercut their competitors and turn money into more money. When fossil fuels are so cheap there is virtually no chance in a commodity producing society to see companies or nation-states accept a mandate that will essentially decrease their power and we can see this in the reluctance to transition away from fossil fuels. Money after all, is power. COP26 has shown the inadequacy of the current strata of political, economic and social leaders to formulate long lasting and sustainable solutions. The competitiveness of the market and the drive for valorisation and accumulation limits the available (and correct) responses from even being considered. The bankruptcy of a potential green capitalism is now on show as many face the realities of the prevailing system. Australia has vowed to continue exporting coal as long as demand exists, Volkswagen (of emissions scandal fame) and Toyota, the world's largest car manufacturers haven't pledged to anything regarding zero carbon transportation and nation states are to continue their fossil fuel subsidies along with a host of other pointless greenwashing pledges that are nothing but smoke. All solutions are not only stuck within the paradigm of commodity production but uncreatively so.

There has been a dramatic and welcome shift in the use of renewable energy sources globally and renewed efforts to increase energy efficiency and conservation but new technology and methods is not enough. Any potential gains made by science, as always, will be lost when put to the dictates of capital (a similar story to our potential shorter working week that was predicted by the arrival of automation). Cheaper (in a monetary sense) energy inputs will always be welcome to the capitalist, as noted above, but even when efficiency gains are made and we have begun to see parity in the costs between green and fossil energy this will only allow companies and States to continue to make more commodities and for cheaper, ultimately expanding the absolute mass of products (and waste, and energy) available counteracting any gains made (see Jevons Paradox). The essential process of capitalist innovation for capital accumulation continues unabated.

It is clear that capitalism cannot coexist peacefully with the natural world. Without the subordination of nature, as without the subordination of workers, to constantly revolutionise the production process, to constantly produce ever more commodities for sale, to turn money into more money, capitalism will falter and crash. The same drive that forces it to constantly impoverish workers, to suck dry our natural resources and pollute the earth is the same processes at the heart of its fundamental movements. Without growth you will be eaten up, swallowed by those that do. The body cannot be wrestled into submission.

Politicians, industrialists and the new leftist politico-pundit vanguard appear incapable of looking at the problem objectively and addressing the root cause of the problem. To do so would upturn their lives and uproot their power. Many continue to believe in the Keynesian myth (even if they won't admit it) that the State can mitigate the destructive and alienating effects of capitalism and control class antagonisms. During the 20th century British economist John Maynard Keynes, and the subsequent governments all over the world who followed his advice (one-nation conservatism, old Labour here in the UK), believed that fiscal and monetary policy changes, nationalisation of failing or 'rogue' industry and the rule of law would hold back these effects. The goal was to save capitalism from its own inevitable internal crises, crises that continue to have devastating effects on individuals, both capitalist and worker alike, that ricochet through society in uncontrollable and unforeseeable directions. This did not work for long and its partial successes, which were based on undesirable conditions such as the domination of the 'developing' world and of course, our natural environment, began to crack. The death knell of the mixed economy sounded with the oil crisis of 1973 and the house of cards tumbled. We are now expected to believe that State intervention and safeguards on capital will be able to handle the external crisis of runaway climate change? Even if there was a political will, which there isn't, capital is power. It seems to me that there is an ulterior motive here beyond ensuring the wellbeing of all and the safeguarding of the planet. That of securing privileged positions.

The death of Keynesianism brought us an entirely different but familiar beast in the attempted renewal of liberalism and a pseudo-laissez-faire capitalism (pseudo because state intervention never left. We will never return to the pre-war period of unchecked capitalism. Capital crises must be tamed else class struggle be renewed to greater intensity. The ruling class has learnt its lessons from history. See 2008 bank bailouts, Covid-19 response, the nationalisation on the East Coast mainline etc.). The neoliberal era, initiated in the West by Thatcher and Reagan, which saw increasing privatisation, social atomisation and degradation/abolition of regulations on capitals' worst excesses, suffice to say, has been an unmitigated disaster in terms of natural destruction, inequality and workers' rights.

The neoliberal period has added over half the extra human carbon dioxide to the atmosphere.

Extending the consumerism and social atomisation caused by what Cornelius Castoriadis calls 'the crisis of socialisation' that began during the 1950s and 1960s as part of capitalism's golden age, the neoliberal period has had profound effects on the natural world, on our social relations and in the way, we as humans perceive and interact with the world. We've become defined as humans, not by our actions but increasingly by the things we own and that now mediate our relations. As Castoriadis explained in the 1960s,

*"At the personal level the crisis manifests itself as a sort of radical crisis in the meaning of life and of human motives... There is practically no community life, ties become extremely disrupted and so on. .. But socialization in the more general sense, that is the feeling that what is going on at large is, after all, our own affair, that we do have to do something about it, that we ought to be responsible, all this, is deeply disrupted. This disruption contributes to a vicious circle. It increases apathy and multiplies its effects."*⁸

Community has been effectively destroyed and an abstract individual reigns supreme (naturally within the confines of modern industrial capitalism and the modern State and its 'rights',

⁸ <http://libcom.org/library/crisis-modern-society>

that inherently absolve us of any responsibility), which leads us to the other side of the dichotomy. One which proposes atomistic, individuated solutions to the holistic problems that we encounter in the modern world in particular that of climate change. We see it in the useless journalism and pointscore campaigns that want to show the foibles of individuals whose existence is less than eco-perfect and in the State and corporations telling us that we must sacrifice this and that, that we must use less water, we must recycle more etc. It creates a holier than thou scenario which significantly favours the middle class and the rich and induces guilt within the working class who are increasingly burdened. This focus on abstract individuals, as consumers and it being our 'choice', seeks to hide the structural issues and incentives inherent within capitalism that is the driving motor of climate change and shift the blame from those who are primarily responsible. It seeks to hide that our built world (towns, cities, homes, road networks and other public infrastructure – that were built to sell us cars, individual properties), our social relations relations to one another and our relationship with the natural world are fundamentally antagonistic to climate renewal, sustainable stewardship and interaction and foster an illusion that our consumer actions are in any way meaningful. It's an ideology that has undermined community, collective solidarity and has put in its place privatisation (in both a social and economic sense). The solutions it puts forward now are unsurprising. Things such as electric cars (which when considered over the full life cycle, from production to end of life, have only been shown to be marginally better than combustion engine cars) instead of free and revitalised public transport, the replacement of individual gas boilers with individual electric boilers rather than combined district heating, demands we take the bike to work without grasping at the geography of work and that many are unable to get there without a car due to suburbanisation and poor local job opportunities, that asks us... to use paper straws. It's too perfect for them.

It is not that our choices in consumption don't matter. They do and they will matter much more in the future. It's that they aren't the choices of our own making. They've been manipulated and continue to be manipulated by historical forces.

As Karl Marx said

*'Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.'*⁹

Our choices are shaped by our social, geographical and economic positions and by individualising and 'flattening' the problem we can't expect to tackle a problem as totalising as ecological destruction.

We should be increasingly concerned as internationalists of this 'flattening'. We must understand that the West is disproportionately responsible for this climate catastrophe so far. The excessive consumption of the vast majority of people in the global North, as part of the historically Western consumerist drive to secure accumulation, has been at the cost of the people, animals and ecosystems of the global South. While we appear to have 'deindustrialised', a process our communities certainly felt the brunt of as capital was exported overseas, when we look globally, holistically and not on a nation-by-nation basis, that is far from the truth. We have just exported the worst excesses of industrial capitalism to the global South and it's our excessive consumption that drives global warming and, in the process, deprives those in the global south of their

⁹ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm>

own resources and of developing their own independence, putting them at the whims of western capitalist interests, and increasingly their own regional bourgeoisie. Through the wholesale destruction, theft and exploitation of their land, resources and communities, they are subject to the devastating consequences of climate change first hand, whose results are often disastrous and fatal. As this area of the world becomes increasingly uninhabitable, we will begin to see an increase in capitalist crises as industrial production begins to stagnate. Climate refugees will be forced to flee their homes and move to safer, less devastated areas of the world and we must be ready to act in the interest of all individuals across the world.

So what is to be done? It's a big question and none of us has all the answers. The future movements of society will dictate how and when we should react but we need to understand that we must react, that it is our responsibility. We cannot vote and delegate this responsibility away for the fate of the world to be debated in back rooms by oligarchs, industrialists and conservatives. As we've seen time and again those who hold power are beholden to their own interests and to the interests of capital. We must lift the veil that has been pulled over our eyes that has concealed our power as a class. That is the first step. Nature will fight back. As the other component in the capitalist death machine, we must too. As anarchists and communists, we believe the answer lies in direct democracy in the community, decentralisation and selfmanagement in the workplace. In a word, communism. It is only outside of the confines of the bureaucratic State that seeks to decree from above and within our communities and workplaces where each individual can regain and enact their power.

German anarchist Gustav Landauer called communism 'the immediate communication of true interests' and I believe this is the first and foremost condition if we are to tackle the crisis ahead of us.¹⁰ Class society, due to its hierarchical nature, isn't very good at communication, at least not true and transparent communication. We need that transparent communication. A concerted and demystified social effort. It will only be when we, as individuals, have all the facts, are in control and have power over our own lives, that we can make the best and, most importantly, informed decisions.

There is no one road to obtaining that power. It will be difficult. Capitalism constantly creates and recreates the sites of class struggle and we believe that it is through this struggle that the power can be wrested away from those who continue to dominate individuals and the environment and who are unwilling to take action against climate change, inequality and oppression. It is through this struggle that we can enact the positive socialisation¹¹ required not only to combat climate change but to create a truly human community.

"Since human nature is the true community of men, by manifesting their nature men create, produce the human community, the social entity, which is no abstract universal power opposed to the particular individual, but is the essential nature of each individual, his own activity, his own life, his own spirit, his own wealth." Marx [12]

¹⁰ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/james-mill/>

¹¹ More on the crisis of socialisation and positive socialisation can be found in the essay Modern capitalism and revolution by Paul Cardan (Cornelius Castoriadis). Particularly the section 'The Crisis of Socialisation' <https://libcom.org/library/moderncapitalism-revolution-paul-cardan>

[12] <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/gustav-landauer-weak-statesmen-weakerpeople>

It is through this creation of the human community, communism, in the class struggle, where we can begin to undermine existing and create new social realities and lay the seeds for a more sustainable world. Through co-ops, grassroots unions, wildcat strikes, factory occupations, radical education, protest and socialist cultural events, mutual aid organisations, and the multitude of other forms that the struggle takes outside and against the State.

We need to fundamentally change our social, economic and political system by increasing localism and autonomy within production, working towards economic independence and political freedom for the workers in the global south and addressing our current crises of social alienation and our culture of mass consumption and waste. We can implement sustainable automation to massively reduce the working week, use the technological gains to improve our lives without the feedback loop of capital accumulation. We can decide as communities not to pollute our rivers and our seas, to not manufacture cancer causing materials, or poison our air and create full accountability for those who seek to harm others and the environment. We can ensure that the human cost of the coming crisis is mitigated by extending our space and resources in solidarity with the refugees whose lives will be turned upside down by rising sea levels and extreme weather.

The responsibilities that we were absolved of under modern industrial capitalism becomes each and everyone's responsibility, and it'll essentially boil down to what you, me and everyone else decide to make of it. The State and the capitalists they serve have continuously shown themselves to be incapable of acting in a responsible and unbiased manner and why would they?

Another world is possible. A world of expanded considerations. No longer will it be about growth and profit. We will redefine what it means to live, to love, what it means to be wealthy as well as our relationship to each other, to the animals we share this world with and the ecosystems that support us.

Political Parties: A thorn in the side of change, by Don

When looking at modern political life from the mainstream view, everything from the news to how 'change' is made is linked to that of the political party. Whilst there may seem like there is a plurality of change available from being able to select a political party, their presence is almost always a barrier to actually changing our destructive authoritarian capitalist system. This essay will discuss the fundamental problems of political parties, looking specifically at the UK and the issue of immigration detention, before elaborating into how we can ensure real change can come from movements outside of the State apparatus.

"If voting changed anything, they'd make it illegal" ~ Emma Goldman

This classic quote by Goldman, whilst being seen by many as overly cliché, strikes at the heart of the fundamental issues present in the current political systems of representative democracy. As the world slowly moved away from the authoritarianism of feudal lords and monarchs (except the UK apparently), a new type of oppressive power rose. The party political system is a new form of tyranny, for it hides its true authoritarian nature behind the guise of democratic decision making. As Bakunin famously wrote in his 1873 work *Statism and Anarchy*,

"When the people are being beaten with a stick, they are not much happier if it is called 'the People's Stick'"

Whilst it is clear that we have made developments towards a society in which people can actually have the freedom to govern themselves, it is also clear to those in anarchist movements that this system is unsustainable, dangerous, and still has many of the oppressive tendencies their for-founding systems possessed.

The problem is simple, the political party's aim is not that of values, it is that of power.

The origin of political parties' dates back to the writings of Plato and Aristotle from Ancient Greece. Furthermore, whilst free associations of people for political aims have long been recorded¹² political parties as we know it in the modern sense have only begun to develop in the 18th centuries. They have since developed into sophisticated and well organised groups of sometimes millions of people, and are present in almost every nation-state on Earth. It would be difficult to argue against the point that the most prominent form of political organising in the modern world, outside of perhaps trade unions, is that of the political party. The structure of political parties is of familiarity to many, they structure themselves in ways which allow for an incredibly top down approach to organising and strategising, with few exceptions perhaps in the more left wing groups. Their dominance in our political life is unquestioned, and this breeds more problems than is first obvious.

The biggest problems are fairly obvious once the façade of the parties is pulled back even slightly. Whilst it is clear that 'ticking a box' every five years does not make us free regardless of choice, it is obvious too that the choices are not that different as they appear. They serve not the people, but themselves. Without falling into the pitfall of overgeneralisation, it is worrying how similar political parties become when left to fight inside the Overton window that is modern political discourse.¹³ Ideas shift towards the centre, they become less radical, they change less problems, they keep more people in poverty, and they ensure the system as a whole endures every storm. The very idea of coalitions, compromise, and inter-party bargaining (usually under the guise of 'cooperation') leads perfectly to the conclusion that the aim of their game is staying in power, not improving the world we live in. The phrase elected dictatorship is an overstatement. Examples of this range from coalitions that span the political spectrum (such as the recent memory of the 'Grand Coalition' in Germany between the centre-left left and centre-right), the complete inaction of the global community towards climate change,¹⁴ or that of the persistent global policies spanning the EU (via Frontex the EU's brutal border force police)¹⁵ and the Americas against refugees and migrants. The list is endless. This includes not only countries with multi-party systems, but also countries where one party holds dominant power by design, such as China, as well.

It stems from an overall limitation of our political system and that of nation-states in general. The rise of the modern nation-state, particularly in the west, has led to a perceived belief that they are the bastion of human rights, freedom, and that of the 'Government of the people.' This is a

¹² For more information on this, see Mutual Aid by Peter Kropotkin for a history of mutual aid and free association groups through history.

¹³ For more on this, see The Common Good (1998) by Noam Chomsky.

¹⁴ I refer you to this article by AAA in the NEAG for more on this topic: <<https://northeastanarchistgroup.org/2021/11/14/thoughts-on-climate-andcommunism/>>.

¹⁵ For more information about Frontex and their crimes, see here: <<https://abolishfrontex.org/>>.

fabrication. These states are responsible for the supposed ‘war on drugs’, ‘war on terror’, and the multitude of other wars and dangerous military interventions, from Afghanistan to Iraq, across the Pacific and South America. They have consistently been opposed to (sometimes in the most violent ways possible) to trade union and socialist movements¹⁶ and ensure a maintenance of the global system of capital, with them consistently bailing out private capital during capitalism’s crisis’, creating legislation with loopholes for big businesses, and allowing for incessant lobbying by those who can offer the most money.¹⁷ All the while, the people suffer. This disastrous record is shared by almost every state on Earth, and has been inflicted when they are ruled by every type of political party, from the far-left to the far-right.

Parliamentary democracy is advertised as the ultimate freedom for the people, the ability to vote for your representative. However, they do not truly represent us. It has been well documented (especially in the UK) that we are electing people to make decisions for us, not informed by us.¹⁸ The time-span between elections, as well as the absolute power for these politicians to make decisions for us, means we actually have almost no say in day-to-day political decision making. As stated in the introduction, ticking a box every three-five years hardly makes any meaningful change to the lives of those in our communities. It leads us into a false sense of security, a political apathy that we are helping to create change when in reality the status quo of the state and capitalism is maintained.

The issue appears to span ideology, and it is because it concerns power and the state. The state will weather every political party, every change, and ultimately be the downfall of free associations and true liberation if it is not overthrown alongside capitalism, and it is why we must criticise political issues, and fight to change them, from a truly anti-capitalist, anti-state, and grassroots perspective.

Furthermore, the political party has also encroached into a much more worrying position within the context of political change, especially on the left. Their widespread support and power, vast funds from private capital off the backs of wage slavery, and their ideological hold over the populace by virtue of their position has led to a view that change only comes from a change in the law, or via change in the party. Obviously, there is some nuance to this debate. Certain parties can be seen as ‘better’ than others. Certain parties may provide much more relief to the abject poverty of many than others, and a left-wing government can do a lot more for the ‘common-person’ than a right-wing government. We are by no means trying to justify the election of right-wing parties, or trying to argue that the presence of left-wing parties is worse than the presence of right-wing ones. The reality can often be that these parties can provide great relief to those in poverty and distress. To loosely apply Bakunin:

“...the most imperfect republic is a thousand times better than the most enlightened monarchy.”

¹⁶ <<https://libcom.org/news/report-workers-rights-120606>>

¹⁷ I refer to this brief list detailing bailouts by the US Government as an example: <<https://www.investopedia.com/articles/economics/08/government-financialbailout.asp>>.

¹⁸ Edmund Burke, often seen as one of the founders of modern-day Conservatism in the UK, made repeated references to the idea of representatives acting on their own judgement and not their electors: “Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgement; and he betrays instead of serving you if he sacrifices it to your opinion.”

But in the grand scheme of our future aims and goals, this is an unstable and dangerous way of thinking, because the narrowing of change into that only via the establishment and political parties means that real, meaningful change can never occur, the disease's roots remain.

It has become a view across a lot of the political spectrum that change can only come via two channels: the political party, or by changing the political party. This way of thinking is a particularly worrying one, not only because it is dangerous to believe that meaningful change can only come through the state, but also because it can act as a way to guilt grassroots movements into cooperating with parties to the point that we become subordinate to them. The guise of cross-ideological support, especially in movements/causes that can span the political spectrum (such as immigration, see below), are particularly vulnerable to this guilt-tripping. This can lead to censorship of radical ideas and once again, the state survives and the balance of power remains, with real meaningful change never actually occurring, since the overarching oppression remains. We must not be made to feel guilty for wanting change outside of their system, and getting to the root of the real problems.

The shift from this thinking must first be an ideological and an internal one. We must break free from the hold political parties have on daily life, and begin organising from a grassroots level. Whilst it may seem like the gains are smaller, or less meaningful in the short term, these small changes in the context of our end goal of the complete overthrow of the state and capitalism will have more meaning than anything they can give us. Almost all meaningful change comes from below and we must not forget this. To further illustrate the deep-rooted problems of political parties and how their vision is only that of state power and control, we will look more closely at a perfect example of this issue, the United Kingdom, and that of immigration detention.

"I believe that democracy has so far disappeared... that no "two evils" exist. There is but one evil party with two names, and it will be elected despite all I can do or say" ~ W.E.B. DuBois

It is of no shock to anyone that the Conservative party in the United Kingdom ('tories') is no friend to the working class, despite their best attempts at convincing them so. Their long standing cooperation with the far-right, support of the monarchy, long standing opposition against the poor and vulnerable, and more examples of racism, misogyny, and attacks against migrants than I can list in this essay demonstrate their inherent opposition to real social change and the working class. They are not on our side, but what about the Labour party? The Labour party positions itself as the party of the working class, and is meant to be ideologically opposed to that of the tories and their policies. Considering the nature of the UK's voting system and how our Parliamentary debates are conducted, it would also appear to imply this. However, this is not the case. The blood on Labour's hands is almost as red as the rose that is their logo, and they certainly have a similarly poor record that they can share with their supposed worse enemies.¹⁹

Once again it shows a disconnect between supposed values and the actual actions of these parties. It is likely that the parties do hate each other, but not for the reasons we suspect. I cannot count the times where I have heard people who I would personally consider die-hard socialists praise the centrist and horrible actions of the Labour party under the guise of 'we need to get in power' or 'the Tories are worse.' Perhaps the latter has some meaning, but both points are baseless

¹⁹ For more details of Labour's poor record, please see this well sourced thread: <<https://twitter.com/libcomorg/status/808791965496180741>>, I also recommend checking out the book "The Starmer Project" by Oliver Eagleton - which details how Starmer (the current Labour leader as of 2022) has a shocking past, page 53 for example details his brutalising sentencing guidelines relating to the riots that occurred whilst we was DPP.

when the history is compared. Power is the desire, not fundamental change, unfortunately it appears that the ideological power of these parties has helped to separate them from the State and capitalism, but they are not their enemies, they are their partners in crime.

The oppression by the State takes many forms, but the context we are looking at is how fundamental change does not occur regardless of which party is in power.

This is a concept felt around the world, especially in the United States as an example.²⁰ However, in the UK, we can look closely at the immigration policies put forward by both the Labour and the Conservative governments. It is clear where the Conservative government has failed regarding immigration. Their blatant antiimmigration rhetoric, alongside their absence of action when people are drowning in the English channel, plus their introducing of new immigration legislation which has opened new detention centres (such as Hassockfield in County Durham) and created a new points based system making it even harder to enter the UK. This is in addition to the new Nationality and Borders bill which introduces draconian powers regarding citizenship and asylum (such as taking away citizenship without notice). Their cruelty is beyond belief, but Labour are not free from blame.

Labour have built the privately run prison HMP Oakwood, built the immigration detention centre Yarl's Wood, which mirrors that of Hassockfield in its purpose and use. Several other prisons and detention centres across the country, from London to Scotland, were built and maintained thanks to the Labour party. Recent history seems to also indicate that the Labour party under Keir Starmer hopes to make similar arrangements, with some ambiguity over whether or not they actually oppose the cruel method of offshore detention.²¹ Furthermore, the recent Ukrainian refugee crisis has shown their further willingness to cooperate with the Tories, in that they refuse to back an open-door policy for refugees, a decision that will undoubtedly cause real pain and suffering.²²

It is for reasons like this that opposition to immigration detention must come from an anti-state perspective. The hardships of immigration detention stem from, in my view, two primary factors: the existence of states and the interests of private capital. The existence of nationstates implies, by design, the existence of borders. Borders, enforced by states, are the reason immigration is even a concept we can understand. It leads to sickening ideologies such as nationalism, has led to countless world conflicts, and turns people who simply want the freedom to travel for a better life, criminal in the eyes of those in power. They are detained because they 'do not belong here' in their eyes. This mentality is also accompanied, as it so often is under capitalism, by racism. The best example is the most recent one, the Ukrainian refugee crisis has shown us that when white people face refugee struggles, they are welcomed with open arms, but when those who are not white face the same fate, they are banned for a variety of equally awful and false reasons. An example of this is Poland, who have recently militarised their borders for Afghans and Syrians, but have opened their borders for Ukrainians fleeing violence. This is not meant to be a

²⁰ For an illustrated example of this, please refer to "No Wall they can Build" by CrimethInc, which discusses how both the Democrats and the Republicans help to maintain the brutal conditions on the US-Mexico border.

²¹ I refer to these two articles written on the subject: <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/07/labour-politics-ofcruelty-elections>> and <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/nov/23/labour-migrationopposition-tories-new-labour>>.

²² <<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/labour-ukraine-refugees-welcomestarmer-b2026527.html>>

discussion of who deserves more help, they all deserve help, and once again the racist capitalist state ensures people will die. Furthermore, these detention centres are an incredibly profitable business. Everything from border force to the construction and maintenance of prisons and detention centres helps the capitalist class profit from the misery of those who are detained. ICE in the United States is a good example of this, but these private security firms exist globally,²³ and they help drive the policy decisions that lead to immigration detention being as brutal as it is.

Consequently, the only position that truly supports the abolishment of immigration detention and ensuring those who are detained can be free is that of anti-state, anti-capitalist and internationalist movements. Opposing immigration detention without these values unfortunately leads to the core problems being maintained. Whilst there are borders and states there will be immigration detention, and even if every State on Earth followed every international law obligation possible to ensure the 'humane' treatment of immigrants, immigration detention will remain and it will always be inhumane for as long as it exists. Not recognising the influence of private capital also misses one of the main motivators for these detention centres existing. The establishment, and political parties, can never truly have these aims at heart. Their existence and power rely upon (with some parties relying on them more than others) the above-mentioned issues that are directly causing the brutality of immigration detention, and as such, they cannot be relied upon to make meaningful change. Movements that are internationalist, that oppose capitalism and the state in all its forms have the necessary values to actually oppose the root problems of immigration detention (and most problems in our modern world for that fact). Outside of this, the problems will remain, regardless of how well the symptoms are treated.

If you want to criticise immigration detention, and the brutal conditions the people who are caught in this system face, you are forced to recognise the truth that all of those involved in the party system are responsible. As discussed above, they are a victim of their own design, they are trapped in a system that they cannot change without destroying themselves. Our end goals can never be their end goals, and whilst some of their short-term goals can provide an ounce of relief to those who are living through what can only be described as a living hell, they never come close to the real change we need and desire. We know they are to blame, and it is difficult to distinguish them from one another when all that seems to separate them is a name, a colour, and the occasionally lesser evil political position.

"We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings." - Ursula K. Le Guin.

This quote I believe encapsulates the struggle faced by many on the radical left. Wanting to make long lasting change in a society so tightly grasped by oppressive forces can feel overwhelming at best, and completely impossible at worst. Whilst this quote applies to capitalism, it can apply to all the problems mentioned above, from poverty to detention. We must not lose sight of the fact that change is possible, and that it is possible outside of these 'official' channels that are presented to us. There is some nuance to this debate, and as mentioned above, it is an obvious statement that a left-wing government is better than a right-wing one. It can also be said to be true that the abject pain of poverty that many people across the world feel could be alleviated by a kinder, more progressive and left-wing welfare state. These observations are not something

²³ For a brief list of some of the private companies that maintain prisons in the UK, see here: <<https://www.justice.gov.uk/about/hmps/contracted-out>>.

we should ignore, but something we should see as a temporary fix to a deadly problem. In the same way that paracetamol can only relieve chronic pain for so long, those in power, regardless of their affiliation, can only provide temporary relief. They cannot fix the real problems. As such, the question we ask is simple, what can we do?

A few important things should be kept in mind.²⁴ A reminder that short term gains are nothing to be upset about, especially since our short-term gains are created from our long-term aspirations of the complete change of society. The need for movements against evils such as immigration detention and racist, destructive borders needs to come from grassroots movements. Whilst we should not be scared to branch out to others to help create a broad movement of solidarity, too much influence from those heavily rooted in the establishment can never lead to meaningful change, and usually leads to over bureaucratic control and a tight control on radical viewpoints, in keeping with the immortal party line, which is ultimately what they serve when it comes down to choosing a side.

Only when movements are built from the bottom up can they serve to make real change, and whilst it may be harder, or take longer, or run into more barriers, history shows us that this is the best way to strive for real, long-lasting change. We can look at movements such as the antiraiders movement across the UK (especially considering a recent event that occurred in Glasgow)²⁵, the numerous mutual aid campaigns and solidarity funds that have occurred both during and prior to the pandemic, the multitude of campaigns that are raising awareness about the horrors of prisons and immigration detention,²⁶ anti-fox hunting movements²⁷ taking direct action against this cruel practice, the solidarity campaigns occurring on some of the most dangerous borders in the world,²⁸ and of course the thousands of protests that occur almost daily across the world against all sorts of issues.

The list of grassroots, people led movements is astounding. They are not charity, and they are not simply political tools for the political elite, they are actions that help people now, that aim for real change now, they have the will and drive to make a difference now, and anarchists have been a part of these movements every step of the way. Our values and long term goals must influence our short term goals, and short term goals should not be compromised for those who lose their values in the corrupted system that is the State.

We can change the world, one grassroots movement and one immigration detention centre at a time, from the bottom to the very top.

²⁴ I also refer to Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the next) by Dean Spade, which is an instructive guide to successful mutual aid.

²⁵ <<https://freedomnews.org.uk/2021/05/17/fighting-an-alligator-in-the-waterreflections-on-the-kenmure-road-ice-resistance/>>.

²⁶ Specifically regarding the North East, I refer to: <<https://newcastlecovid19.com/arthurs-hill/>>; <https://wome-nagainstrape.net/abolish_detention_notohassockfield/> - However, campaigns such as these exist across the UK and beyond.

²⁷ <<https://www.facebook.com/NEhuntmonitors/>>; <<https://www.huntsabs.org.uk/>>.

²⁸ <<https://nomoredeaths.org/en/>>; <<https://freedomnews.org.uk/2022/01/04/poland-belarus-lithuania-a-border-crisishell/>>.

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