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**watched,
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yet to be
controlled**

SURVEILLANCE

EDITORIAL

Anarchism in its essence is a lived philosophy of freedom. It is also a recognition that freedom, as Mikhail Bakunin knew, depends on equality. Only when we are equal can we be truly free from domination; free not just in mind but in body, to realise all the possibilities of life in a society forged through mutual aid and solidarity.

But in a capitalist society guaranteed by the power of the state, we anarchists are engaged in an everyday war to preserve, protect, and expand freedom. If, as Freedom's own Colin Ward claimed, anarchism remains a seed beneath the snow, ready to blossom if the conditions are right, then the fight to secure those conditions has seldom been more desperate.

In this issue, we explore the challenges and possibilities of anarchist freedom in a time when supposedly 'democratic' states – aided and abetted by digital firepower – are seeking to constrain and refuse freedom in ways that would make some authoritarian regimes blush.

In Ukraine, war itself is the testing ground for the technologies that seek to reduce freedom to a memory, with AI targeting systems demonstrating in the sharpest relief the power concentrated in the hands of right-wing tech barons such as Peter Thiel. These technologies fuel killing on the battlefield and the analysis of health data here in the UK, with the desperate Labour government also betting big on the magic beans of AI to somehow deliver 'growth', at any cost.

How to fight in a situation where the implications of totalitarian technologies are – to paraphrase one of our writers in this issue – simply ignored with a shrug is a critical question for we anarchists.

A return to more traditional forms of communication and the resurrection of



zines and hardcopy media represents a partial way out, but it requires us to fundamentally reorient our audience – addicted as they are to the instant hits of easily-surveilled social media platforms.

Also in the UK, the ongoing Spycops inquiry – in which Freedom is a core participant – is a constant reminder that the state's ambitions to constrain and refuse freedom are in its very nature. The state's aims today are unchanged from the era in which police officers lied to women and fathered children with them; indeed as our author notes, what is being investigated by the inquiry has actually been made legal for future state agents.

But there remains cause for hope. From the Twin Cities in Minnesota where abolitionist initiatives are contesting the authority of the Trump regime, to Greece where anarchist groups are mobilising actively around the cause of prisoners arrested for protest, battles are being won.

The German police's lack of appetite for scrutiny comes up too, but while

the police may not be comfortable with being watched, the security apparatus is perfectly delighted to watch us. So much so that we at Freedom recently learned that two separate US Department of Homeland Security accounts were subscribed to our newsletter.

Meanwhile, despite civil liberties being up for grabs on a daily basis in the form of a Labour government who thinks an eternal right-wing drift is the cheat code for success, the popular response to the government's heavy-handed attacks on those protesting genocide implies very strongly that Reform voters are not, nor should they be, the centre of gravity for UK politics.

The veteran Spanish anarchist Jose Peirats once said 'the state is a virus, it can exist in all of us'. The key question in the coming weeks and months will be how can an anarchist immune system effectively fight it? Some of the ideas are in these pages. The rest are in our communities.

Together we have everything we need.

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UP NEXT...

With the roof and damp proofing secured by the kind and very generous efforts of a certain supportive German, next up on our list will be a bit of winter proofing, including works on the windows and heating system.

BIG BROTHER IN A WARZONE

As the first bullets fly and shells explode, we begin to learn the names of the war machines and the companies that manufacture them. We learn which weapons are the most lethal and cause the most harm.

However, during this learning process, the other side of the war often slips from our sight. The smaller companies, which work with information, are overlooked. From processing your personal data to AI that assists with bomb strikes, invasive technologies have a hard time passing through civil society in times of peace. However, when violence erupts, and we all look to the sky, hoping for no more drone strikes in our neighborhood, we are happy about the eyes looking in all directions, trying to find an enemy.

The conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza have been among the most technologically advanced on this planet. But outside the traditional scope of war – where tanks and firearms kill and destroy – these technological wars push surveillance to new heights.

Four months after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine began, Palantir Technologies CEO Alex Karp personally visited the country to offer his services to the Zelensky government. For free.

Most activists following the surveillance sector are familiar with Palantir, a data-mining giant that law enforcement in many countries dream about. In Ukraine, the company has found a zone outside of regulations where it can test its software on the live data of millions of people. According to *Time* magazine, “Palantir’s software uses AI to analyse satellite imagery, open-source data, drone footage, and reports from the ground to present commanders with military options. It is responsible for most of the targeting in Ukraine.”

And not only targeting. *Time* also noted that Palantir was working with half a dozen ministries in the country, including the ministry of finance and education.

Palantir itself doesn’t produce the data. It doesn’t manage surveillance satellites or street-level CCTV cameras – those are handled by different companies. Palantir accumulates and processes data, assisting humans in decision-making. In a country



like Ukraine, Palantir can operate with little oversight. While Ukrainian society struggles against the Russian invasion, help is accepted from any direction. The Palantir CEO understands this, as does most of the Western military-industrial complex.

Another role in processing data for the war was given to controversial American face-recognition technology (FRT) company Clearview AI. Officially its software is used to identify the bodies of combatants, and possible spies crossing into Ukraine. Police forces also use it to identify war criminals and those responsible for kidnapping Ukrainian children – a very wide scope of operations.

A Ukrainian digital security laboratory commented on Clearview AI’s usage in the country:

“Initially developed for law enforcement purposes, Clearview’s technology matches the images against the database of publicly stored images scraped from websites, including social media platforms. Notably, despite not having unified legislation on the usage of such data, Ukraine still resorts to digital measures without legal framework and safeguards ... arbitrary usage of FRTs

by authorities may negatively influence citizen’s privacy, by continuing to be applied even when the emergency ceases to exist.”

While Clearview AI faces legal challenges in the US and EU, Ukraine provides space for its work without any serious challenges. From personal conversations, only some Ukrainian anti-authoritarian activist circles were aware of the facial recognition systems in their cities. This is mostly due to the fact that groups which would usually fight against a surveillance state are currently occupied with resisting the Russian invasion, while State repression is still very low compared to the rest of the region.

Both Palantir and Clearview AI are companies built around the extreme-right tech movement mobilised by billionaire fascist Peter Thiel. It is hard to imagine the role of these companies, as well as many smaller ones trying to enforce strong government control, fading away in the event of a ceasefire or peace agreement. The infrastructure is in place, and the State’s security forces have seen its effectiveness.

It is more likely that Thiel’s allies will continue to assist certain government branches. In a country with a growing far-right movement, this could pose a serious threat not only to anarchists but also to moderate leftists and liberals.

While we know little about surveillance processes in Russia, even before the invasion, Putin’s regime tried to create a network to control any opposition activity. It was used in 2022 to detain or force into exile many political opponents. In recent days, control, especially in occupied territories, has reached a new level, fueled by a fear of saboteurs.

With the global ecological crisis only getting worse and the possibility of a full-scale war across Europe, we are looking at a very dire future of rapid surveillance expansion and automated data processing. Algorithms will make decisions about repressions against certain parts of society. This will certainly be a challenging future, but we must fight to stop fascism today, as tomorrow will be too late.



Funeral of David Chichkan in August, by @polidavydenko

GO FILM THE POLICE



At the end of summer I found myself on the floor surrounded by 15 German police officers. I was presented with an ultimatum, either I would give my phone to the police willingly or they would call a “lawyer or a judge” to see if they could take it from me forcibly. I was not detained for any crime, I was told, but I had potentially witnessed one.

Which was true. For the past hour I had been filming the controlling of one man by five police officers on the accusation of holding a political meeting. He was holding a Palestinian flag and was riding an e-scooter at the time of his arrest. I started filming because it was understood that this was the pretext for racial harassment. I watched as the officers surrounded and provoked him.

“We don’t try to be violent in any way,” a police officer tells me, “but if he ... we are checking if we are right ... if there is a problem. OK, what’s the law in Germany? He is not allowed. We get the info, we tell him and we are standing for the law at this moment. If a person still says no, I am in the right then we have a problem.”

“And then maybe,” the police officer continues, “if a person still says no, I am not doing anything ... we have to do it with, how do you call it? With force. And grabbing him by the arm ... do you understand why we do it?” he asks.

“No,” I reply.

“No, OK. Then we have a problem,” the police officer says to me.

I continued filming when I was repeatedly told to move away. I watched through the lens of my phone as the man was put in handcuffs and slammed against the wall. I watched him collapse to the ground and continued to film as he was held up by both arms for a ‘medical examination.’ It was at this point that the police approached me.

“So the point is, he is detained now because of resisting against the law and

just because you are filming it, so you could help him. With the video ...”

“Sure, he has requested the video?” I ask. “So I give the video to this man here?”

“No the video you will send it to us, so we can look is it true or not,” the police officer says. “It’s evidence so we have to do it for him and also against him, you know?”

As you can guess the police were lying to me. What they were demanding was that I surrender my mobile phone. I had filmed the interaction and instead of footage of the man resisting, I have footage of racial harassment by a police force who clearly did not know the law before enforcing it.

Realising that it takes at least two people to form a political assembly, they appeared to retroactively arrest him on resisting his own arrest.

My reasons for filming his arrest are simple. For the past two years, there has

been an escalation of State-sanctioned violence towards the Palestine solidarity movement in Germany that supports the repressive silencing of academia, arts and culture, public speaking and the criminalisation of social media posts by successive ministers in Germany’s changing political system.

This violence is exposed by activists, journalists, film-makers, and photographers on a daily basis.

Yet there is a deadly silence across German society and its mainstream media outlets. One of the reasons for photographing and filming at protests is to document police brutality when it predictably comes, as a record that goes against what always comes next: direct reporting from police sources, followed by zero fact checking and an almost religious suspicion of an account or source from the protests themselves.



Following the 77th Nakba commemoration protests in Berlin, the media were doomed to repeat the testimony of one Berlin police officer who claimed he was “dragged into the crowd,” “deliberately attacked,” “knocked to the ground” and “repeatedly kicked” by protesters. Due to the large number of cameras present at the protest, it was possible to see that in fact he enters the crowd voluntarily and repeatedly punches protesters in the head before pinning another protester to the ground.

Groups such as Counter Investigations and Forensis / Forensic Architecture have pulled together multiple sources within the demonstration to prove the crimes of this police officer, supporting the European Legal Support Centre (ELSC) with filing a criminal complaint on the basis of police violence and false testimony. The damage was done, however, as five people found their apartments searched following the Nakba protests in May. None of those involved were alleged to have assaulted the officer.

Forensic Architecture has also been involved in a trial of six Syrian youth asylum seekers who were accused of setting fire to the Moria refugee camp in Greece. Due to their vulnerabilities with age, asylum status, legal support, and language, it seemed to be an easy case for the Greek State to bring against these six youths. Through videos captured on the night of the fire, researchers were able to piece together the movement and scale of the fire, heavily contradicting

the one witness statement that had led to their arrest.

And yet! This little computer in my pocket is a Judas for any two-bit law enforcement outfit or teenage hacker who wants to intercept my personal data. The technological advantages of being able to film the police on the fly comes with the added problems of having a device that can be used to manipulate video, audio, communications and location for the purposes of political repression.

The European Council is debating the expansion of protocols that would lead to service providers of encrypted end-to-end messaging like Signal and Telegram scanning all text, photos and videos for ‘abusive material’ through what is known as client-side scanning. Known as “chat control”, the protocol functions primarily by having access to all material through the indiscriminate monitoring of communications.

This widespread surveillance network has only one exception. In a letter to the law enforcement working group, the European Council has made it clear that “detection does not apply to accounts used by the State for national security purposes, maintaining law and order or military,” according to Article 7 of the document. Yet such widespread surveillance through scanning has its ultimate cost: the error rate of a ‘false positive’ is 50-75%.

The UK government is also attempting to break meaningful end-to-end encryption through the Technical Capability Notice (TCN) of the Investigatory Powers Act, which demands that Apple, in this case, create a backdoor to its encrypted backup services. This comes with further surveillance proposed by the Labour government to create a digital ID card scheme under the guise of preventing what they call ‘illegal migration’, that has been noted to contribute to coercive behavior, domestic violence and the marginalisation of elderly, disabled or vulnerable people.

Why does this matter? Once I have filmed police racial harassment or brutality – for everyone’s safety – communication with lawyers, journalists and activists must be protected and private.

In Germany, there is a law that protects police officers from accountability while being filmed. It is called Verletzung der vertraulichkeit des wortes, or “privately spoken words” and can be extended to filming an interaction between police

officers. The law does not concern filming, rather the publication of conversations between the police. The only exception to this is whether the footage is in the public interest.

Of course, you never know if unaccountable police violence in the pursuit of political repression and racial harassment would be in the public interest. This is largely due to an atmosphere of fear within German society and the media over the acknowledgment of Germany’s active role in Israel’s genocide of the Palestinian people. Reading the news, you would be mistaken for believing that the most violent aspect of German society is the Palestinian people themselves, and by extension any migrant group.

German police have a proven track record of systemic racial harassment, obscene levels of brutality and a long record of deaths in custody, with 287 documented deaths in police custody of racially oppressed individuals since 1990. Recently, hundreds of police officers raided squatted social centre Rigear94 in preparation for an upcoming court case. Officers violently attacked residents and destroyed their homes for their stated purpose of identifying those living within the housing project.

It is with open eyes that we confront the State and those within our own communities who have chosen to represent its repressive structures against their own neighbours. So, against all advice to make it easy on myself, I published an account of my interaction with the police as the violence predictably turned against me. I was detained as a witness, my health was used against me as an act of torture and my seizures were triggered as punishment for not handing over my phone.

Unpublished is a project that helps to ‘fill the void’ of a silence left by the mainstream media on police violence and Palestine solidarity. The project also exposed the police assault on Kitty, an Irish activist who was demanding an end to the targeted killing of Palestinian journalists in Gaza. The Berlin police punched her three times in the face and broke her wrist.

Through the work of committed activists and journalists, we are able to expose the systematic violence and protect those in our own communities from this abuse of power.

“You don’t fucking scare us!” Kitty screamed back at police.

~ Josie Ó Súilleabháin



SPYCOPS INQUIRY: TRANCHE 3

The Undercover Policing Inquiry (UCPI) started tranche three of its hearings in the autumn, looking at undercover policing in London from 1992-2007. The very first day of live evidence was cancelled, while behind the scenes participants looked on in bewilderment as the Inquiry struggled with basic activities.

The Inquiry has been looking at three aspects. The Metropolitan Police's Special Demonstration Squad (SDS), which operated out of London from 1968 to 2007, the National Public Order Intelligence Unit (NPOIU) from 1999 to 2010, and then other miscellaneous issues. These are divided into tranches. It took from 2020 to July this year to hear about the SDS from 1968 to

HN81 'Dave Hagan', an infiltrator of campaigns around the murder: he was not called, to the horror of everyone involved. Apparently he was too ill.

Finally there is Mark Jenner ('Mark Cassidy') who targeted the Colin Roach Centre and Anti-Fascist Action, and deceived 'Alison' into a relationship.

Absent from this tranche was 'Christina Green' who infiltrated London Animal Action and took part in mink liberations. She left the police after starting up a relationship with an activist. Apparently she is not cooperating with the Inquiry. 'Jackie Anderson,' who targeted Reclaim the Streets and the WOMBLES, is also missing, apparently untraceable.

second recently announced he will be retiring, and we still have to learn who will succeed him. It's unprecedented to have two chairs, but three is next level. He's not the only one leaving, with key staff changeovers now a regular occurrence and people being shifted around in order to cover the shortfall.

All this is having knock-on effects. With an onerous security checking process, the release of material is being delayed. A good proportion of the tranche two material was yet to be made public at the time of writing. Meanwhile, lawyers trying to make opening statements for tranche three were drip-fed the material they needed right to the last minute. As so often in this inquiry, the needs of those who suffered at the hands of the undercovers are left standing last in line.

Unrealistic timetables continue to be applied to core participants' lawyers, to make up for the Inquiry's own delays. Unfairly, some people who waited a decade have been denied the basic right to make opening statements, based on arbitrary decisions. Core participant Dave Smith, of the Blacklist Support Group, has had to force a judicial review as the Inquiry had decided he should not give evidence on blacklisting – part of its terms of reference.

Illness of officers is also a recurring theme. The opening day of evidence for this tranche was due to take place on October 16th, but former Special Branch chief Peter Phelan was too ill. Behind the scenes, as the current chair, Sir John Mitting, wanted to keep the name of Mark Kennedy's handler, an officer known only as EN31, secret – because the poor guy was having a hard time of it. This also caused outrage, as EN31 was the one who provided cover for the entirety of Kennedy's abuses and clearly knew about the undercover's many sexual relationships.

The Inquiry speaks of taking a trauma-based approach, but its actions are constantly squeezing the victims, while undercovers remain treated with kid gloves. As has been pointed out repeatedly, the undercovers are demanding the sort of respect and anonymity that they denied all those they targeted.

~ Donal O'Driscoll



Clockwise from left, 'Jackie Anderson', 'Mark Jenner', 'David Hagan' and 'James Staven' were among the relevant spycops in tranche 3

1992 – tranches one and two. Phase one of tranche three started in October, looking at the SDS from 1992 to the closure of the unit in 2007, continuing until December.

The UCPI orders evidence by hearing from those who were affected first, then the undercover officers. This phase hears about James Thomson ('James Straven') who targeted animal rights groups and had multiple relationships. Following that is Peter Francis, who targeted anti-fascists, Youth Against Racism in Europe, and Militant. There has been considerable focus on the spying against family, friends, and justice campaign of black teenager Stephen Lawrence, who was killed in a racist attack in 1992, and whose murder led to the Macpherson Inquiry. Amazingly, the Inquiry gave a pass to key spycop

Phase two, covering other tranche three undercovers from the SDS, will come in February 2026, when we can expect to hear from the likes of Reclaim the Streets and learn more about undercovers 'Jason Bishop' and 'Rob Harrison'.

Tranche four, which looks at the NPOIU including the likes of Mark Kennedy, 'Lynn Watson', Rod Richardson, and 'Marco Jacobs', will take place later in 2026. Perhaps.

The Undercover Policing Inquiry was announced in 2014. Originally due to report to Parliament in 2018, it's increasingly looking like it will be 2028 at the earliest. The first chair died, the



Watching the far right

anti-fascist update with **Alex Robert**

What can you tell us about activist monitoring of the far right? Are people being exposed as fascists?

There isn't so much of that going on, at least outside of more liberal research organisations who have always seen the State as part of their antifascism. We live in a time in which there has been a crumbling of the barriers between the 'mainstream' and far right. The Tories and Reform compete to present the most cruel immigration regime they can muster. Labour chases Reform by doing much of the same.

And we have far right commentators and social media influencers accessing large platforms and generating huge audiences because the disciplinary role old Twitter had on bigoted speech has been swept away by Elon Musk. Influencers no longer have to be careful to avoid being banned from the platform. GB News is another platform for far-right arguments to proliferate. As a result, being outed as a far-right activist no longer holds the same fear it once did. It is possible to be a public fascist in a way it hasn't been for decades.

That said, monitoring still has its uses, information can be made available to movements, to activist groups and the like. Having accurate information about what is actually happening, who is growing, how groups function and who leaders are is vital.

How (if at all) do current modes of gathering info on the far right feed into the community-grounded side of anti-fascist opposition?

At the moment not much, this needs to change. People have wildly wrong assumptions about the political landscape on the right. It's not good enough to call everyone on the far right a fascist, however useful a pejorative that is or was. Like any movement, the far right is a contradictory mess of feuds, alliances and splits. There are different politics within it. To defeat the political project you have to understand



how it can break apart, where to apply pressure and who holds it together and which parts are likely to be co-opted by the liberal mainstream.

From your general monitoring, how much benefit do you think Tommy Robinson's wing is seeing in the aftermath of Unite The Kingdom?

The man is in an ascendancy. He has built his power over many years and Unite the Kingdom is just the latest peak in his career. However, while he can draw a crowd, he has still yet to prove capable of building a coherent political organisation. His connections to Musk, who he has said is paying his legal fees, are going to benefit him hugely. His Zionism is a liability for some sections of the far right and fascist movements though. He's attached himself to Ben Habib's Advance UK. They claim to have 40,000 members but in reality their reach will be patchy and they'll be drowned out by Reform, at least for the short term.

More broadly, do you think the undoubtedly successful summer the far-right had is coalescing into sustained activity for the longer term?

If there isn't a coherent political alternative put forward by the left then we'll certainly see the kind of far right movements we have not seen for

decades. Although unlike in the past there isn't going to be one hegemonic force. That could be a strength if each part of the movement finds its own niche, and alliances, either explicit or tacit, can be forged between the different sections. Mark Collett has spoken about using Reform as a vehicle for his white nationalist politics for example.

Is there much evidence of a hostile turn towards surveillance and street action against the left?

A new phenomenon has been the emergence of right wing streamers who flock to protests in the hopes of catching disorder/ aggro/ arrests on camera. There's a financial motive for it too of course, the more people they have watching the more they make. Other than that, there has been a really concerning surge in violence against people taking down flags, with incidents across the country. This is something we need to take very seriously.

~ Alex is an anti-fascist researcher and host of 12 Rules For WHAT



A WALL OF ELECTRONIC EYES

A couple of friends of mine, hailing from an end of the anarchist scene where skipping and shoplifting are more common, were telling me about their experiences from this venerable part of the rebel lifestyle recently.

It's a time-honoured part of hunting dinner in the bowels of big supermarkets that the greatest flaw in even the best security systems is bored minimum wage night staff whose class consciousness extends, at the very least, to not giving a single solitary wossit about some snacks and a tinny galloping out the door.

As with so much of our daily lives now, however, the rollout of not just CCTV but facial recognition technology is making itself known. Usually using the excuse of a 'devastating wave of shoplifting' that's 'driving supermarkets out of the area'.

This un pitying, inhuman eye simply reports directly up the chain, to someone whose actual class (worker) is blurred by their designation (manager). An unpaid, ever-vigilant quisling following the poor round the store.

We're filmed through almost every aspect of our public lives now, with both the State and private business converting the results into databases which, as the recent unpopular move towards a centralised ID system suggests, are only a stone's throw from being amalgamated. For law and order purposes, naturally.

As a result of this techno-stool pigeon's spread, my friends were finding, a ban from one major store had become more easily enforced across all related properties. They were automatically flagged. Another few pounds saved for the bottom line of the billionaire class.

Later, away in another wing of the movement, I was reminded of this observation while listening to a talk by reps of Campaign Against Police Surveillance (COPS) and Police Spies Out of Lives. They were explaining their experiences dealing with spycops who had infiltrated so many of the left's political movements throughout the 20th and early 21st century.

For anarchists, particularly those active in the environmental movement of the 1990s and 2000s, the officers

who infiltrated their communities were a particular horror. They started relationships with women and even had kids with them, purely as cover for forms of petty snooping which, as the inquiry has revealed, amounted to little more than coppers pathetically cosplaying the spy game. Donal explains more on page six.

Infamously, while the inquiry ground on over the years, legislation was brought in not to restrain, but to enable, similar behaviour in future. After seven years of slowly leaking revelations and a mountain of evidence that it couldn't be trusted to follow basic ethical standards, the Met was gifted the Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct) Act 2021.

It allows any police force, security service branch and every other major agency up to and including the Food Standards Authority to break laws if it brings in 'intelligence'.

What this should tell any reasonably-minded person is that the State is not a responsible body. It does not care about the safety of the public, but instead is quite happy to endanger it for the sake of knowing what non-violent dissenters are up to.

And the irony? They may not even need it, for the most part. Because similar to skipping and shoplifting, it is technology, rather than sex-offending liars, which now provides their primary method of surveillance. Handing spycops impunity to exploit the families of the bereaved, like Stephen Lawrence, is a bastard's bonanza enacted just on the off-chance, in case they ever feel the need to rape their way to some extra data.

In-person spying is in many ways less powerful and a lot more expensive than getting yourself added to a messaging group and feeding the whole thing into a database for later sorting. You can discover an organisation's support networks simply by filtering through social media followers. Cameras and mics no longer need to be laboriously installed in likely places, they're everywhere, being



sorted and catalogued by increasingly clever large language models.

Which isn't to say it won't happen, especially if dealing with a savvy group, but technology has made watching us, every step and finger swipe, every day, in many ways trivial.

What's remarkable is how weak opposition to it really is. NGOs do the usual liberal thing, lefties have been quite slow on the uptake outside of the everyday grind of protest, and of course, no parliamentary party has shown any interest in making the law less onerous. In fact the grouping which has been most vocal about civil liberties in the media is probably the far-right, which, for all its huffing and puffing about free speech, has little to no quarrel with the core functionality of government intrusion.

What victory is it to secure Graham Linehan's right to be an obsessive, self-destructive bully when the State is busily drawing to itself all the apparatus of a surveillance state in the sort of granular detail Orwell could never have foreseen?

REPLACING HUMAN FEELING



They have had nothing to say about – or been joyously in favour of – the extension of repressive legislation and policy against left-wing targets. Most notable is Palestine Action, but prior laws and policing priorities aiming to take out the non-violent climate actionists of XR and JSO met with a similar shrug/jeer response.

It's only when their own are threatened, or in service of a rhetorical *bete noir* (universities) where they suddenly discover a freedom-loving backbone.

The truth of where Reform and its fellow travellers are going with this can be seen in the US, where it took mere months for the far-right to utilise all power to purge the public sector, academia, and media of perceived enemies.

The social media presences of everyone from judges to teachers to generals has been pored over for years by the Maga grassroots, more efficiently by the likes of the Heritage Foundation and its allies, and in bulk by data barons such as Zuckerberg, Musk and Thiel.

And now, with Trump at the helm, these once relatively latent forces, augmented by the tools of the State, have been used as a giant shopping list of people to be hounded out of key roles and replaced with loyalists. Visitors and students who show solidarity with Palestine are not just censored, but jailed and deported. Migrants are tracked and deported.

Where supermarkets and activist surveillance go today in Britain, so broad civil society goes tomorrow via the landslide-in-the-making of Reform UK, or perhaps slightly more slowly through the grinding decay of technocrats.

We have several difficulties dealing with this, especially in the event that the far-right gain power and feel emboldened enough to volte face completely on their 'principles'.

To start, much of the damage is already done. Few of us are entirely without footprint giving our opinions on social media – and indeed if we were we'd be caught the other way. Because despite all their carping, the far-right have very

few real barriers to saying exactly what they want any more – egregious racists are actively welcomed for serious roles in major parties – and we already have problems countering their reach. A wholesale ignoring of social media would abandon of its hostage public to algorithmic pipelines that lead straight to Andrew Tate or worse, Robert Jenrick.

But in presenting our own cases in the era of TikTok and Instagram, we are expected to show faces, in public. To record voices. To not do so by wearing masks or Anon-styled faceless screens usually restricts the audience. Which rather defeats the purpose of outreach, except as a recruitment tool for the already-interested.

So we're caught in a lose-lose situation. Refusal lessens our reach, engaging sets us up as targets.

What is to be done? What strategies can we work with? If engagement is necessary, how do we protect ourselves? Present ourselves? There is AI which can throw a realistic virtual mask over recorded videos. Deepfaking behind a VPN on a throwaway account? Grim, but plausible.

And then the task of building our own media is always there, more important than ever as a means of locking identities away from the snoopers. *Freedom* is just one of several media projects which are all understaffed and in need of help – not just the odd bit here or there, but joining up with an understanding that the project is going to be long and difficult, and will be fighting to get heard over the noise.

Finally there is the offline. Away from cameras. The communities we live in. The analogue way may be the most important of all, the only one they won't have access to, the hardest to infiltrate. The future of resistance, using the oldest methods.

Much of the resilience we need to build has to happen in short order. If Trump's ascension is any sort of guide to the ambitions of Reform, we will not simply be needing a better, more joined-up form of prisoner support but mechanisms to fight purges of progressive voices from every walk of life, or at least to help such Official Cancellations with support, and an entryway into effective resistance.

~ Rob Ray

ANARCHIST PANIC AND THE

In the 2010s 'terror' was an excuse to repress

The continuous expansion and ever more ridiculous implementation of anti-terrorist laws is a shared reality across many countries. We have reached a point where anyone who protests or campaigns for a better world knows that anti-terrorist laws could be brought into play at any moment. The question of how to respond is then more pressing than ever.

Here we will look at how the anarchist movement responded during one of 21st century Europe's key moments of tension, Greece's decade at the centre of the capitalist crisis. During the crisis years dozens of anarchists and anti-authoritarians were charged, and often convicted, under anti-terrorist laws. While this could not be directly combated, the movement in Greece managed to turn this repression back on the State by rallying around the prisoners. Due to the actions of the movement an attempt by the State to assert control actually undermined it and increased tensions.

Anti-terrorist laws came relatively late to Greece with a specific article not added to the penal code until 2001. This was the soon-to-be-infamous Article 187A which defined terrorism as an aggravating circumstance to any crime which potentially undermined public order. The definition, from the State's point of view, is helpfully vague, creating the possibility that any action deemed threatening to the State, or even any international organisation, can be covered by additional penalties and police powers.

The potential to abuse that vagueness has been amply demonstrated. Not only have the principal target, anarchist guerilla groups, been impacted but the threat has hung over environmental activists campaigning against gold mining in Skouries, and members of the anarchist collective Rouvikonas for a social media post. Further enhancing the usefulness of anti-terrorism to the State are activities potentially covered by Article 187A. Far from just covering especially violent acts, both felonies and lower level



Anarchist students march in Athens on December 6th, 2013, to mark the police killing of Alexis Grigoropoulos

misdeemeanours can be considered acts of terrorism. The incitement of such acts is also covered, as is the provision of any support to people said to be in a terrorist group, with further laws on 'terrorist financing' brought in during the crisis. Anarchist cases often involved the question of whether it was possible to label individuals the directors of a terrorist organisation which would add extra penalties.

Anti-terrorism also brings additional police powers and media coverage. The police are allowed to use anonymous witnesses and frequently did so in cases against anarchists. Pre-trial detention for terrorism suspects was pushed up to and beyond the legal limit of 18 months,

a practice that was often justified by the fortuitous appearance of additional charges as a period of detention reached its limit. As cases against anarchists mounted over the decade many found themselves involved in multiple cases with overlapping charges simultaneously. It was even possible to charge someone for actions that occurred outside of prison while they were already locked up inside. People were condemned on extremely thin evidence. Tasos Theofilou was wrongfully imprisoned for years on the basis of faulty DNA, while Irianna was convicted due to disputed DNA and her relationship to an anarchist who had already been tried, but declared innocent.

When the political crisis began in

GREEK STATE

Greece following the December 2008 revolt there was an upsurge in activity by anarchist and anti-authoritarian guerilla groups targeting financial infrastructure, police, and state institutions. The State's response was a legal campaign which began with the first arrests in 2009 and in some instances continues today. At its height in the mid-to late 2010s dozens of suspected and self-declared guerillas were tried and imprisoned. The ambition of the State was not just to target those who had, or were believed to have, taken up arms against it, but to target as much of the anarchist and anti-authoritarian space as possible. The vagueness of anti-terrorist articles allowed for the targeting of the family, acquaintances, and comrades of suspected guerillas.

There was no appetite for challenging the anti-terrorist laws in parliament. Left-wing parties did question right-wing governments about the treatment of prisoners and raise issues over the most obvious abuses of power, but there was no hope for more than this. Even though the socialist governments of the 1980s did repeal previous anti-terrorist laws amidst a high level of public sympathy for Marxist guerilla groups, parliamentary attitudes have since changed. Anarchists and anti-authoritarians did include the repeal of the laws in lists of demands but few expected any movement.

What the anarchists and anti-authoritarians were able to do was turn some of the pressure from the State back on it by rallying around the prisoners. In Greece this took the form of the movement on the street supporting prisoners' hunger strike campaigns. The hunger strike is a frequent tactic in Greece and the movement outside would support it through an intensifying series of protests, riots, and direct actions. At times these campaigns reached significant peaks, with the largest campaigns during the

crisis coming in summer 2013, November/December 2014, and spring 2015. Each of these campaigns gained a significance beyond the anarchist movement as they played a role in the period of social unrest.

The summer 2013 campaign to support Kostas Sakkas, whose pre-trial detention was being extended beyond the maximum limit of 18 months, contributed to a wave of protests. The government of the time was trying to spin a success story narrative of the crisis coming to an early end. Another wave of anti-austerity protests and solidarity for Sakkas ruined that narrative.

The late 2014 campaign in solidarity with Nikos Romanos and his request for his right to educational leave brought an end to a period of stagnation on the streets and briefly re-energised the movement at a time when the government was in a slow-motion collapse.

The spring 2015 campaign had a number of different motivations. For some it was a response to the arrest and potential charge of family members of imprisoned guerillas. For a group of prisoners it was an attempt to capitalise on the momentum of the previous autumn, and motivate the movement outside to mobilise against the negotiations of the new, left-led government for further austerity. Of the three examples, those of 2013 and 2014 achieved their objectives and threatened wider unrest. The campaign of 2015 was only partly successful, and unfortunately exposed divisions within the movement as there was a fall in the level of participation.

The anarchists were never able to directly challenge the anti-terrorist laws, but they were able to push back against aspects of their implementation and turn a method of social control into a potential spark for unrest. During times when social movements struggle to respond, the State will always seek to advance the scope of its control, with anti-terrorism being the sword. However, when it is possible to mount a sustained and strong response, that sword can be double-edged.

~ Neil Middleton

Everything Continues: A History of the Crisis in Greece 2008-2018

PLACES ...

Aberdeen Social Centre	Aberdeen
BRIG Warehouse Cafe	Birmingham
B@A: Another World is Possible	is due to be released soon
1in12 Club	Bradford
Cowley Club	Brighton
The Query	
East Bristol Books	Bristol
BASE	
The Lock-on	Cambridge
Coventry Peace House	Coventry
Bentley Urban Farm	Doncaster
People's Bookshop	Durham
Greenhouse Records	Edinburgh
Lighthouse Books	
Rubicund Books	Falmouth
Facs	
Calton Books	Glasgow
Glasow Autonomous Space	
Glasgow Zine Library	
Colossal Youth	Great Yarmouth
Ground Centre	Hull
Printed Matter Bookshop	Hastings
Wharf Chambers	Leeds
News From Nowhere	Liverpool
Casa/Initiative Factory	
Partisan	Manchester
Star and Shadow	Newcastle
Blackcurrent	Northampton
Five Leaves	Nottingham
Sumac Centre	
Gut Level	Sheffield
Drop City Books	Stoke-on-Trent
October Books	Southampton
Rockaway Park	Temple Cloud

LONDON

May Day Rooms	EC4
London Action Resource Centre	E1
House of Annetta	E1
Decenter/Freedom Press	E1
Pelican House	E1
Well Space	E9
Housmans Bookshop	N1
Solidarity Hub	N7
Wolves Lane Centre	N22
London LGBTQ+ Centre	SE1
The Piehouse Co-op	SE8
Feminist Library	SE15
56a Infoshop	SE17



🔴 This is what they fear: not what we are today, but what we could become tomorrow.

Blade Runner talks to Greek anarchists **Rouvikonas**

When was Rouvikonas founded, and what events triggered its creation?

Rouvikonas was founded in 2014. At that time, Greece had been going through social and political turmoil. Following the death of the young anarchist Alexis Grigoropoulos, an insurrection broke out in 2008 and a whole generation was radicalised. From 2010 to 2014 a big part of the social base took to the streets to fight against austerity measures, but the movement died out and the unrest was channeled back into parliamentary politics and the State.

The comrades who founded Rouvikonas thought that anarchists had lost a great and rare revolutionary opportunity in those years. They were not able to offer a credible alternative to the State for the people of the social base. So they started reflecting on the mistakes and dead ends of the anarchist movement, and how to fix them. This is the context that triggered Rouvikonas' creation: to bridge the gap that existed between anarchists and the social base.

Are workplace solidarity interventions still central to your activity, and why were they effective in Greece?

We do many actions around housing issues and in workplaces. Sometimes it's more militant – for example, entering the office of a debt collection agency and smashing up the place. Other times we go to the personal house of someone in charge, spray a message on the walls outside, and leave leaflets in the area. These are ways to put pressure directly on those responsible. Sometimes they back down. They say, 'no, no, we didn't mean it,' and then the person can keep their house. We have also managed to force agreements between the parties, so that debts were cancelled and the person could keep their home.

These things don't require anything crazy – we can do them because we have organisational mechanisms that are efficient. This approach has developed over the years, based on experience. In every assembly we discuss the actions of the week – what went well, what mistakes were made, what lessons were learned. In this way, we are constantly updating and improving how we act.

Our decisions are based mainly on two things: the action has to be relevant for the social base, and it has to be done quickly. If a worker dies at work today and we act a month later, everybody has already forgotten. Our job is to act in a way that people say, 'Finally, someone is doing something about this.' In Greece, political parties mostly talk but don't actually help anyone. Something happens, and they make a statement. Our statement is the action itself.

Why do you film and distribute actions – safety, outreach, or to control the narrative?

Our political choice is to publicly claim responsibility for everything we do. Every action is followed by a statement with video and photo material, and a text explaining what we did and why. This serves several goals. By documenting our actions, we prevent the enemy from making false accusations. We can demonstrate exactly what we did, so it's harder for a judge to condemn us on false charges.

At the same time, video footage is a powerful tool of communication: people can see with their own eyes what we did, and it can be inspiring. We show our actions to break the state of fear in which the social base is kept by the State and its propaganda mechanisms. The aim is to break paralysis and apathy, and to encourage people to join the struggle.

How has state repression evolved, and how have you adapted?

Patterns of repression have changed over the years, depending on the government. Under the Syriza government there was very heavy physical surveillance and many trials for single actions. Undercover cops were outside our houses and workplaces, following our movements and trying to prevent actions. Despite all the resources they spent, we were always able to act.

When New Democracy came to power, they chose a different approach. They saw they couldn't stop us, so they shifted to surveillance cameras and big trials grouping many actions together to present us as a criminal organisation. In 2018 there was a first big trial – we were acquitted. Later they tried to put two



of our members away for life for the murder of a drug dealer. It was absurd: all the witnesses were drug dealers, some pulled out of jail in exchange for testimony. In court it collapsed, but of course when the police accuse you of murder, it's never a joke.

Now there's an open investigation trying to classify us as a criminal organisation, using changes in the penal code. This is serious – penalties are harsher, and it's harder to avoid prison by paying fines. But we continue to fight. We can't stop actions. Many people support us, and this gives us hope and strength to continue. Despite arrests, trials, and harassment, we must continue. Rouvikonas took its name from the Rubicon river – to cross the Rubicon means to make a choice and never look back. If we stopped because of repression, we would betray who we are. Many people count on us now. We cannot let them down.

What really scares them is that we keep bringing in new people. In their own investigation they admit this: every time they identify members after an action, they see faces they didn't know before. People without history in other groups or demonstrations, of all ages, genders, lifestyles. Not the usual suspects. Ordinary people who had never been political, joining Rouvikonas and taking action.



This is what they fear: not what we are today, but what we could become tomorrow. We're not yet a revolutionary mass organisation, though we'd like to be – that is our goal. But the potential is there, and the state recognises it. That's why they invest so much to repress us.

How are you expanding beyond Athens?

About a year ago we made public our decision to expand and become a nationwide organisation. Since then, we've been working towards this goal. At the moment we have a solid group in Thessaloniki, the second biggest city, fully operative and carrying out weekly actions. We also have a network of associated members throughout most regions of Greece: groups of people carrying out modest actions, public events, solidarity initiatives, and joining local mobilisations.

How have you engaged in firefighting and disaster relief, and what have you learned?

Following decades of state cuts to the fire department, every year vast regions of Greece are destroyed by fires. People watch their houses burn, firefighters do what they can but with limited resources they cannot do much. When they protest, they get beaten by riot police. This is why three years ago we created a Volunteer Firefighters Sector for forest firefighting.

We now have three vehicles and a well-trained crew of volunteers. All summer they patrol the countryside and intervene when wildfires break out. In the last two years they saved people, houses, and wild animals. The logic is that of self-organisation: not to depend on the State, but to count on our own forces. As we say in Greece, 'only the people can save the people'.

How do you integrate feminist and queer struggles, and is class struggle still male-dominated?

As Rouvikonas we have a Feminist Sector that is very active against discrimination and inequalities based on gender and sexuality. We target sexist or discriminatory bosses, we take action against rapists or people in power who reproduce patriarchy, and we offer solidarity and material support to victims of abuse.

But the fight against patriarchy permeates the whole organisation, it's not limited to the Feminist Sector. A recent example: in Athens there is a dermatologist who is a convicted pedophile rapist. He never went to jail thanks to his powerful friends, and he still practices medicine. We took responsibility to close his clinic to prevent future victims. We visited him several times, including two sledgehammer attacks that left his clinic in ruins. We effectively shut it down.

With the far right resurging globally, was Golden Dawn really defeated, and what lessons remain?

Golden Dawn was defeated. It was defeated in the streets first, and then declared a criminal organisation and outlawed. By then it had already become useless to the ruling class. Militant anti-fascism is essential, but not the whole story. There will always be small fascist groups, and you keep them in check in the streets.

But the real question is: how do we prevent them from gaining ground among the social base? The reason they gained influence was the political void we left. If you're absent from social and political struggles, people turn elsewhere. If you don't represent a credible alternative to parties and the State, people look elsewhere for solutions. We must be on the front line of the social and class war every day. To the degree we succeed, people will turn to us and ignore them.

How do you practice solidarity with struggles in Palestine, Rojava and beyond?

In Rouvikonas we hold internationalism in high regard. Over the years we've carried out many actions against embassies and other targets as gestures of solidarity with struggles abroad.

On Palestine specifically, Greece is a partner in genocide with Israel. The Greek bourgeoisie has historic and existential ties with the Israeli ruling class. Here we have companies collaborating with the Israeli military, and Israeli investors buying property and hotels. As long as such targets exist, there will be ways to hit the Zionist State and its genocidal policies.

~ find Rouvikonas online at rouvikonas.gr and [instagram.com/rouvikonas](https://www.instagram.com/rouvikonas)

THIS IS MADNESS: Surveillance and Mutual Care

I was deprived of my liberty at the hands of the State. Taken from my home and placed into a secure building, searched, assessed, cameras clinging to the corners of each room, recording, reporting. Privacy while pissing became a privilege, rubber-stamped depending on how much harm an individual can cause.

Risk is the language many institutions use to justify the say they have over our freedoms.

Anyone familiar with 'involuntary' psychiatric inpatient admission knows exactly what that means: full body searches, locked doors, hourly observation, no privacy, and various other invasive forms of monitoring. They will also be familiar with the narrative of preventing risk, not promoting safety, and how it's often packaged alongside gratitude to, not accountability from, services.

"You are not safe without us watching you."

"You should be thankful that we take care of you."

"We are saving you, by watching you."

When the Establishment can package control as care, a necessary preventative measure, it legitimatises the restrictions it aims to place.

This isn't new. Vulnerable and marginalised communities have long known that Big Brother is always watching. What's changed is the speed, the reach, and the efficiency of technology, while complacency only grows.

There is an obvious parallel between the hangover of the asylum and activist movements today. From surveillance 'for safety' to the dismissal of distress, the language has shifted but the structure remains.

So what lessons can we take?

When I was sectioned, for the first time in my life I found a sense of community in the chaos. Mental illness is supposed to be isolating; self-destruction is supposed to be a private implosion. But inside those

walls, amid the alarms and paperwork and locked doors, I met people who changed my life. They were acutely unwell, remarkably unhinged, entirely bonkers, but they were also the most compassionate people I've ever known.

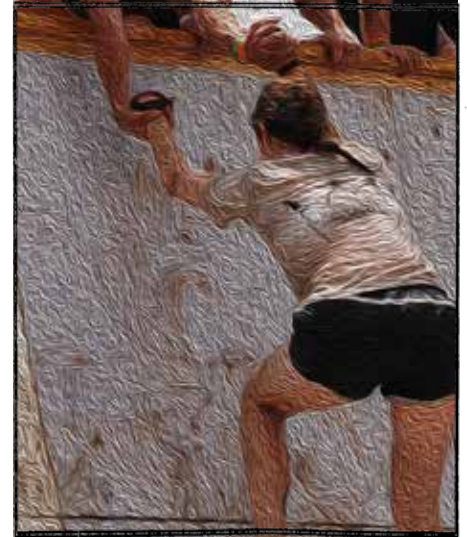
Never will you meet a group more convinced that your life is worth living, no matter who you are or where you come from. Hypocrites, of course. They believed I would make it, while quietly rehearsing their own exit strategies. But even in that contradiction there was a kind of love.

Inside those walls I found a humanity that official systems couldn't replicate. A humanity that would sit with your pain without needing to pathologise it. It laughed like it might be the last time. It had no power, no capacity, but still raised a middle finger to stuffy psychiatrists and handfuls of pills. It was scrawling anger and art across the walls. It was cockily saying "Call the police, what's the worst you can do? Send me here?" It was doing all this while also holding someone's shoelaces, because the reality of not intervening might mean the other person wouldn't see tomorrow, but simultaneously not snitching to staff so if they made it to tomorrow they could keep their home leave.

People on the outside like to believe in a false sense of security. It's easy to think it's not happening to you, that cameras in every corner will keep everyone safe, you're not doing anything wrong so they're not watching you. But my experience taught me something different: The best people to help are the ones in the trenches with you.

That's the lesson the mad hold for movements on the outside. Real safety isn't manufactured by surveillance or managed by risk assessments. It's built, messily, by people who have nothing but each other.

This is the kind of madness we need now: to sit with pain without turning it into pathology, never accepting we need to tone down our outrage, to build bonds that can withstand despair, to smuggle in hope like contraband, to hold each



other's shoelaces. Because in the end, that's where survival starts.

The systems built to protect us won't. They never have. So we must find ways to protect each other. We can't wait for permission to care.

I've seen people vault unscalable fences just to pet a cat. I've been the base of a human tower so we could smash a camera, all so a friend could watch *Pointless* without the voices in his head drowning it out. I've pilfered keys from nurses who showed me no dignity or kindness as a reminder that authority is only as absolute as the tools it holds. I've shared the toothpaste trick so clinical walls become murals of colour and photographs. Moments fuelled by madness to prove the obstacles around us can always be overcome.

We can counter power and create our own forms of community by:

Challenging the narrative that collective safety depends on increased surveillance.

Cultivating communities through everyday acts of care, resistance, and support.

Embracing more madness: radical imagination, joyful resistance, and creative disruption. Sanity, as defined by oppressive systems, often means compliance. Madness is about celebrating self so unapologetically the whole system shakes.

Long Live Anarchy!

~ Jim The Jester (they/them)



FILES ON THE FIFTH ESTATE

“To be GOVERNED is to be watched, inspected, spied upon ...”

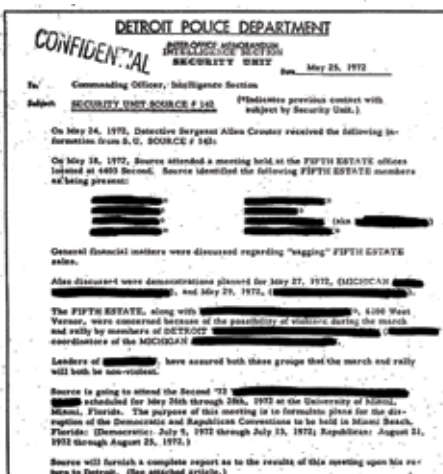
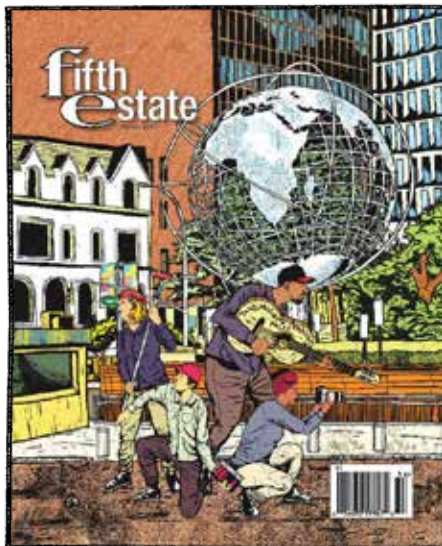
Thus begins Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s famous quote defining the function of the political state. The surveillance states already in formation in Britain and the US are nothing new. Only their technology and capacity for totality. But this is a key consideration. No more escaping across the county line or hiding out in the hills. Everywhere and anywhere today is a social panopticon.

In earlier times of political opposition to the rulers, the names of rebels would be written in ink in a large ledger and later, on 3x5 cards, following reports from observers, undercover agents, and provocateurs. This was often sufficient to keep track of those who threatened the rule of capital and the state.

From almost the beginning of publishing a radical newspaper in 1965, the *Fifth Estate* in Detroit, the police apparatuses of the city, state, and secret police (the FBI) created files for the fledgling publication. The staff had no idea their paper had come under scrutiny because of its advocacy of civil rights, opposition to the Vietnam war, and legalisation of marijuana. And it was a voice not without power.

The Detroit tabloid was one of 500 so-called underground radical publications that began between 1965 and 1970 condemning the American system, its wars, and its empire. These regularly appearing publications had a combined circulation of four million weekly readers.

In the mid-1970s, lawsuits were brought against the Michigan state and local police forces as well as the FBI by civil liberties groups demanding that the accumulated files, many harkening back to the 1920s, be distributed to groups and individuals who were spied upon, and that the surveillance be ended. The *Fifth Estate* received files from the Michigan State Police, the Detroit Police, and the FBI. One astute infiltrator from the federal police reported that “the *Fifth Estate* supports the cause of revolution everywhere.” Neither the staff then, nor the current one objected to the description, to the point where the sentence often appears on appeals for subscriptions.



In 1968, persons unknown (actually, I know, but ain’t telling) bombed a secret CIA office in the college town of Ann Arbor, Michigan. Suspicion fell on activists of the anti-racist White Panther Party headquartered in Detroit, directly above the *Fifth Estate* offices. Warrantless wiretaps were set up by the FBI on both the Panthers and the newspaper office’s phone with the hope of overhearing incriminating evidence.

They indicted three White Panthers, including counter-cultural activist John Sinclair, on charges of conspiracy to destroy government property, including one of the three specifically for the CIA bombing. In pre-trial motions, the defence asked for the disclosure of all electronic

surveillance by the government. The case eventually wound up in the United States Supreme Court, which ruled unanimously in 1974 that the taps were illegal. The indictments were quashed as the government refused to reveal the extent of its spying.

The court decision led to the dismissal of dozens of other cases the government had brought against activists, but its most dramatic result was the unraveling of US President Richard M Nixon, ending in his resignation in 1974. Fearing that the court would rule against the government’s warrantless wiretaps, members of Nixon’s re-election campaign, two days before the final court ruling, were instructed to secretly remove listening devices they had installed in the headquarters of the Democratic Party at the Watergate Complex, in the nation’s capital. The burglars were apprehended and the act traced back to Nixon, which began the process whereby he willingly left office. He was granted a pardon by his predecessor before charges could be laid against him.

Many cities and state governments disbanded their so-called Red Squads that had harassed radicals for decades, in a seeming victory for civil liberties and the rule of law. Are the days of infiltrators, provocateurs, and secret surveillance just history from half a century ago? It’s hard to believe that the cops have given up keeping tabs on radicals in Britain and its former colonies. In a world of electronic communication and ubiquitous cameras, spying is that much easier for the authorities and much less traceable.

A Big Brotherish atmosphere in which radical work for change is constantly under government scrutiny is perhaps no different than it was 100 or more years ago. We continue on as we have, being vigilant, extending solidarity, and having confidence that as the generations before us have, maintain our struggle even in the face of ruthless governments.

~ Peter Werbe

Peter is a long-time member of Fifth Estate (fifthestate.org). He is also the author of Summer on Fire: A Detroit Novel and a collection of essays, Eat the Rich and Other Interesting Ideas. peterwerbe.com

EVERYDAY ABOLITION IN THE

We are living in a time of increased authoritarianism around the globe, propped up by police and other forms of law enforcement.

In the United States we see the deployment of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the National Guard, with police cooperation on various levels. Masked agents, refusing to provide names or identification, appear in workplaces, homes, roads, and businesses, snatching up neighbours. Fear abounds, as does resistance. As we fight this new onslaught and rollback of personal civil liberties, it is important to not only focus on what we are fighting against, but what we are fighting for. Police abolitionist organisers provide wisdom for this moment.

Abolitionists are not only fighting against the police state, we are building alternative practices and institutions that push against assumptions about conflict, power, and interpersonal and community relationships. We are questioning our collective conception of power, considering accountability for harm over discipline and punishment, developing skills to better resolve conflicts in our neighbourhoods, families, organising spaces, and society. We are engaging in mutual aid and the creation of community spaces. We are building skills that generations of capitalist individualism have attempted to train out of us.

Living in Minneapolis-Saint Paul (Twin Cities), Minnesota, I listen to the stories of other abolitionists to learn how they came to this radical approach, and about what people are doing to model and build the world we want to see. The Twin Cities have an array of organisations working toward abolition (and related movements) creatively.

I see three main ways that abolitionists are engaging which go beyond obstructing injustice to creating prefigurative alternatives. The modelling of imagined future in the now, while fighting against present oppression. These works of what Sarah Lamble calls “everyday abolition” include:

- 1) the development of conflict skills and education around conflict transformation,
- 2) mutual aid, and
- 3) claimed and created spaces.

Conflict Skills

During my interviews, many abolitionists mentioned how we, as a society, need to build conflict skills. Collectively, we often outsource responsibility for managing conflict to the State, rather than addressing it ourselves. One way this occurs is through calling the police (or State institutions that do similar work). Abolitionists avoid doing so. One said, “if I have a problem with my neighbour and can talk to my neighbour about it, or if I can talk to another person who knows my neighbour, and get that solved, why would I ever have to go over here [to the police]?”

Abolitionists talked about how, to not rely on the police, people need to be willing to step in and help neighbours-in-crisis, or diffuse disagreements. To respond, people need to have the skills to do so. By conflict skills, I mean approaches or tools to use in conflict that equip parties to respond to acute or ongoing situations with de-escalation, communication of disagreement, and collective problem solving. This can include listening skills, conflict mapping, understanding underlying needs and feelings, nonviolent communication, and collective problem-solving skills.

These skills are relevant beyond avoiding the police. Abolitionists focus on the need to holistically respond to conflict, including in movement spaces. Conflict is neither good nor bad. Rather, it is something that can be positively or negatively engaged with, arising from disagreements, communication challenges, opposing interests, and so on. It can be interpersonal, or exist within a broader group. We must use conflict, and its transformation, as a way to identify harm, take accountability, repair relationships, grapple with complexity and differences of opinion or strategy, and ultimately determine how we can work together toward transformation. Often, people can be quick to sever ties during conflict. adrienne maree brown, in their book *We Will Not Cancel Us*, discusses



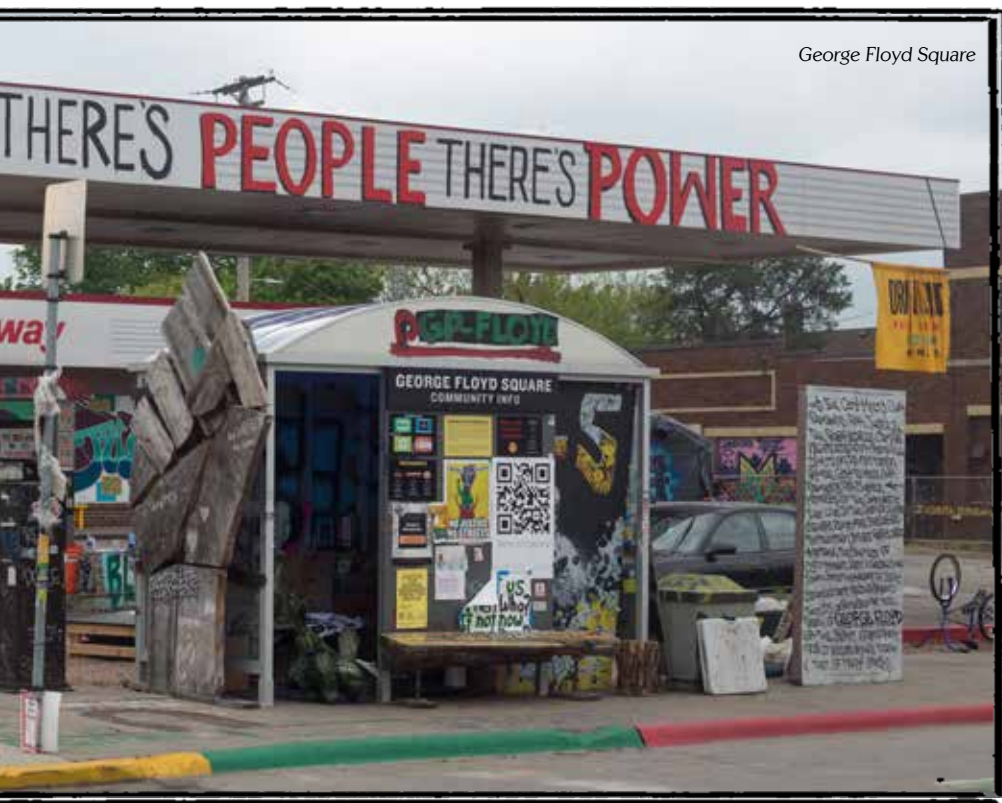
how the disposability projected onto others uses similar carceral logic to the systems we are working to dismantle.

Of course, when harm has occurred, people must be willing to acknowledge it and take accountability, and the safety needs for individuals and groups must be considered when navigating repair and transformative justice work.

Abolitionists also discussed examples of groups helping people develop these skills, and the importance of education and training. REP, in South Minneapolis, is a local organisation with a crisis hotline that operates several nights a week, and offers ‘studios’ to build conflict skills and knowledge around abolitionist principles. REP’s studios have included ‘consent and abolition’, ‘self-de-escalation and regulation’, ‘community trauma and care’, and ‘solving problems ourselves’. One abolitionist involved in the project said: “We’re striving towards a deep cultural shift in how people assess a crisis and address the crisis, instead of having that knee-jerk response to call someone else.”

This is key to the work of unlearning our existing social structures and learning how

TWIN CITIES



George Floyd Square

to face accountability without isolating ourselves, or choosing self-pity or self-flagellation rather than action and repair.

There are other community education projects, reading circles, and so on, around the Twin Cities offering different ways for people to learn together. People are creating participatory education programs, sometimes in a certain career or sector, sometimes in certain identity groups, and often for people looking to develop certain skills.

Mutual aid

Several abolitionists interviewed mentioned how they engage in mutual aid work, particularly supporting unhoused neighbours, because many of the biggest challenges our communities face are connected to lack of resources. Mutual aid is when people work together to meet basic human needs because they recognise the capitalist system is not designed to do so. Multiple people discussed working with programs that support our unhoused neighbours. One said of unhoused encampment sweeps, which often result in people losing everything they have, that

a lot of our 'public safety' interventions are more about preventing people from seeing the realities of capitalism than safety. Community members organise free distributions of clothing and food through Little Free Pantries in people's front yards, the People's Closet in George Floyd Square, neighbourhood-based "Buy Nothing" groups on Facebook, and cooked-meal distributions.

Abolitionists discussed how people come together to meet collective and individual needs, often stepping in to fill gaps that could be filled by reallocation of government funds. George Floyd Square, the memorial and community space located in the intersection where he was murdered by the police, was a mutual aid hub during the 2020 uprisings, and continues to be where free clothing, books, and other supplies are distributed.

An abolitionist explained: "In press conferences, [Governor] Tim Walz, Mayor Frey, [city council member] Andrea Jenkins and the crew, were all saying, 'oh, that's the best part of Minneapolis.' You see it. You see it. You see the people coming together. You see the people

forming groups to protect each other and their neighbourhoods. That's the best Minneapolis, to which I respond, if that's the best of Minneapolis, why aren't you doing it?"

While city officials continue to destroy encampments, state officials cut public health insurance for undocumented immigrants, and federal officials cut food, housing, and health programs, the needs of our communities will continue to grow. Mutual aid will become even more important.

Space/ taking up space/ intentional spaces

Abolitionists discussed the importance of taking up space and having intentional spaces. John Gaventa, in his piece *Finding Spaces For Change: A Power Analysis*, calls these spaces "claimed by less powerful actors from or against the power holders, or created more autonomously by them." One such space is George Floyd Square, which one abolitionist described as "community-built systems of networking and safety doing a lot more to provide feelings of safety than policing does." Others discussed student anti-war encampments pushing for their demands to be heard through getting in the way of business-as-usual, and providing space to try out alternatives.

Abolitionists discussed the need for community spaces that foster imagination, like 'third spaces', where people can gather, without needing to spend money, to exchange ideas, host events, and build community. Several interview participants are working on creating such spaces.

In this period of amplifying and expanding inhumanity by the State, people are working locally to meet our collective needs. We have the opportunity, amidst the intentional chaos created by those with formal power, to build ways-of-being in community that model a future worth fighting for. The abolition movement in the Twin Cities provides just one example of the prefigurative work happening around the globe. We may not live to see the future we prefigure, but as links in a chain, we continue this work, as Mariane Kaba says "until we free us."

~ Camille Tinnin

Memories of the US punk scene

In China With Green Day

by Aaron Cometbus

PM Press (2025)

192 pages

ISBN: 979-8887441382

£13.99

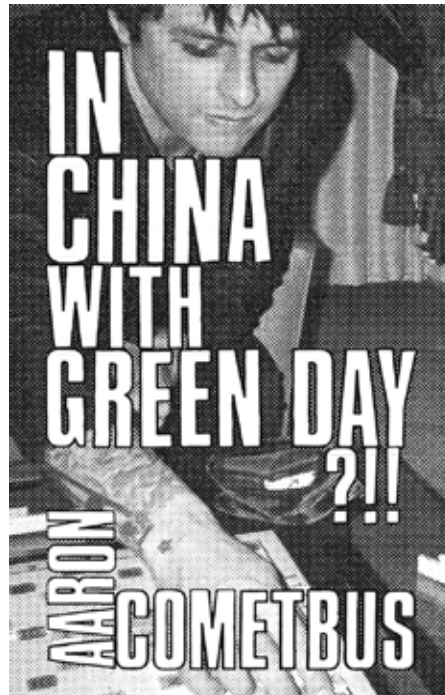
First, a confession: Aaron Cometbus was a sometime pen pal and full-time hero of mine during the 1990s and early 2000s when I, like so many others, left a claustrophobic hometown for the San Francisco Bay Area, seeking, in large part, the camaraderie and ethic of the punk scene described in the pages of Aaron's eponymously titled zine, *Cometbus*.

The American punk scene was primarily offline and highly regional. For people disconnected geographically but holding shared ideals and tastes, and especially away from more urban centers, zines acted as a locus of community and connection. Authors regularly swapped writing and art, and long-running correspondences were born that sometimes morphed into real world friendships.

Aaron published the first issue of *Cometbus* in 1981, and issues continued to be released until 2020. It centered around Aaron's gift for storytelling and character observation, constructing a cosmology of punk houses, lesser-known scenes, and the eccentric characters and contributors who peopled the *Cometbus* landscape. For myself, reading the world he described punctured my isolation and beckoned me with the "another world is possible" romance of its stories.

Cometbus manifested a particular set of analogue aesthetics and postures – both visually and in the suggested attitudes of its first person narrator. Those aesthetics were represented by a minimalist style which foregrounded the physicality, labour and devotion of writing, through Aaron's characteristic squared and loping hand.

Though he has always maintained that the pages of *Cometbus* were fictional, his stories nevertheless shaped the East Bay punk scene, both to outsiders and via a resonance between the community and its pages. *Cometbus* is arguably the most



important self-published document of the end of the millennium American punk rock landscape. And while later issues serve more explicitly as an autopsy of punk, *Cometbus* #54, *In China With Green Day*, functions as a tacit epilogue to the era of Bay Area punk from which the band and Aaron Cometbus both emerged.

Following Green Day's 2010 world tour, #54 marked two decades since they'd initially burst onto the scene – and at least a decade past what seemed like its expiration date. That scene was in many ways written into existence for the wider US punk rock audience via the pages of *Cometbus*. The narrative of #54 will likely evoke a sense of déjà vu for readers familiar with his oeuvre or the scene generally.

It opens with Aaron on a plane, in first class, with the band. That context articulates a distance that had grown between him and people once considered close friends; it is also a reckoning. While superficially an engaging tour diary, it is also *Cometbus*'s exploration of deeper themes like class, friendship, and the differing ways individuals related to, conserved, or abandoned the ethics of the Bay Area punk scene.

Ostensibly it's about the band itself, and indeed the familiarity between Cometbus and his old friends lends a descriptive intimacy which will be irresistible to longtime fans. Aaron has an uncanny ability to notice people, laying bare the quirks and workings of a personality in just a sentence or two. Of his old friend and original Green Day drummer Al Sobrante, Aaron writes: "He made punk idealism seem like a parlor game for people who have other options." Ouch.

But it is via this painful exposure of Al that Aaron is able to describe the class dynamic which affected Green Day's other members, noting they did not have the comfort of "other options." Aaron wrestles with his friends' fame and the decisions that led them there, but never settles on just one version of the story. Instead, he weaves complexity into the stories he relates. Never one to be satisfied with a simple summation, the main players of #54 are depicted as a continually shifting judge and jury in the mental courtroom of Aaron's mind.

In spite of the deeper conflicts at play, *In China With Green Day* retains *Cometbus*'s signature joyful and knowingly indiscrete style. Readers are treated to a panoply of comic and touching stories from both the tour and the Bay Area scene's early years. Aaron's proximity lends a level of detail that invites readers to feel as if they, too, were there.

Reading in 2025, it is the elegiac aspect to the writing which stands out. Some of the concerns which dominated the punk scene of the '90s ("selling out") could seem prosaic now. But what was obsessed about then resonates in a new way now.

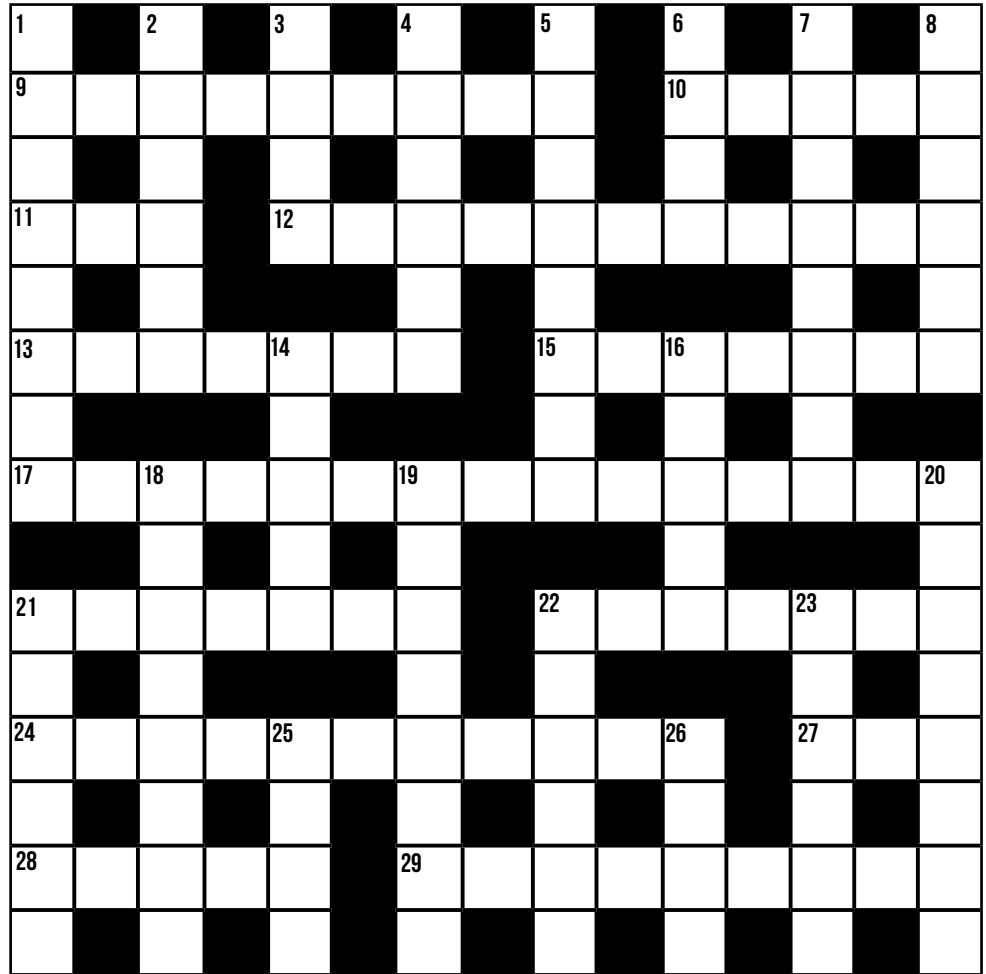
The question of how to make life within the framework of personal and political ethics, and whether it is either viable or useful to maintain friendships with people who have chosen differently, is still prescient. Many of *Cometbus*'s original readership are now middle aged, and reflecting on who we are – or were – through the lens of Aaron's own evaluation is a journey worth taking.

~ Soral X



Crossword

by Leonard Williams



ACROSS

- 9 Rat, i.e., to tell on a queen (9)
- 10 Aircraft worker (5)
- 11/27 Martial arts practice precedes chai tea for the Reverend (3,3)
- 12 Party forums are sites for networking (6,5)
- 13 Yellow, maybe red, giant asteroid (3,4)
- 15 A for anarchism? (7)
- 17 Plot twists startle, point to conclusions (8,7)
- 21 Pump, in Strasbourg, Rome's number two about destroyed city (7)
- 22 Revealing information about doing (drinking) Dos Equis (7)
- 24 Chic rings advertised on mobile devices (11)
- 27 See 11
- 28 A swell provocateur, perhaps (5)
- 29 Tourists sometimes proceed to emergency rooms (9)

DOWN

- 1 Followers of 7? (8)
- 2 After spending summer in Sénégal, cafeteria cooked for a continent (6)
- 3 Ambrose hugs dudes (4)
- 4 Santa's reindeer's a hooper (6)
- 5 Learned Doctor Frankenstein blurted out, mistakenly, "Vitalise!" (3,5)
- 6 Cheese fashioned standing up (4)

- 7 "Curled Rind" owned by Chomsky's painter (8)
- 8 Lose track? Trouble (6)
- 14 Bum steer, in brief (5)
- 16 Needle FTSE (5)
- 18 Called after Ares, it's said, then ran amok (8)
- 19 Greeted (in Dada-esque manner): "I hid oats" (4,2,2)
- 20 The most drenched say, shivering, "Go get Sis!" (8)

- 21 Pennsylvania cut scale, fired engineering head, but retained mathematician (6)
- 22 London bassonist inspired by eastern Ukraine (6)
- 23 The first of finches flies away but moves slowly (6)
- 25 Teetotaler comes back holding a large bag (4)
- 26 Check trunk, perhaps (4)

UPDATE FROM ANGEL ALLEY

It's been a reasonably quiet few months at Freedom, albeit with much hustling about to get to all the late summer and autumn bookfairs – thank you to everyone who put in sterling work to make those happen and, indeed, who came along to the events!

Thanks, too, go to the many volunteers who have been in and out of the building over the last while, both keeping the bookshop going and working on media projects helping the newswire (and this paper) come to fruition.

You may have noticed a slowdown in 2025 of our book publishing, which have mostly been reprints. This is largely due to our longrunning publishing officer stepping back a bit, but never fear, we're reorganising and hopefully will be back on track for 2026.

The building continues to be gently upgraded as we go, with Decenter remaining a rare space for movement groups – email decenter@riseup.net if you're needing a place to meet and plan red-and-blackivities.

CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS

Down: 1 Pietists, 2 Africa, 3 Bros, 4 Donbas, 23 Inches, 25 Tote, 26 Stem, 19 Said Hi To, 20 Soggest, 21 Pascal, 22 8 Derail, 14 Terse, 16 Index, 18 Rampaged, Dancer, 5 It's Alive, 6 Edam, 7 Mondrian, 22 Doxxing, 24 Smartphones, 28 Agent, Initial, 17 Surprise Endings, 21 Pompeii, Tai Chi, 12 Social Media, 13 Sea Star, 15 **Across:** 9 Informant, 10 Drone, 11/27

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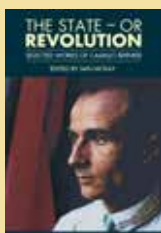


THE STATE — OR REVOLUTION

ESSAYS BY CAMILLO BERNERI, EDITED BY IAIN MCKAY

"It is not so much how one dies that counts in the ultimate evaluation of one's worth. It is how one lives; and the life of Camillo Berneri stands out in all its inner strength and radiant beauty." ~ Emma Goldman

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ABOUT ANARCHISM

There are many misconceptions about what anarchism is and what anarchists want in the media. Some of the myths are accidental, some spread deliberately – but the most famous is that we're all about chaos.

Little could be further from the truth, the famous circled A for example is historically a symbolic acronym. Anarchy is Order.

While we have our share of chaotic adherents and experiences, and sometimes comrades' methods are very direct, we have no desire to simply break the system. We also want to replace it with something better, known as the beautiful idea.

What that idea represents in its specifics differs from person to person, as with every broad creed (capitalism included), but for the last 150 years, from individualism to mutualism, to anarcho-communism, anarcho-syndicalism and libertarian municipalism, the irony is that we are often obsessed with organisation. Which will happen when you're trying to frame a whole alternative society to the one we have now.

This paper is itself produced by an organised non-hierarchical collective and covers some of the broad range of topics where you will find anarchists fighting for a better future.

Every member has an equal say in how Freedom Press runs, and no-one is unaccountable for their actions.

Some resources:

freedomnews.org.uk: Our very own newswire
libcom.org: Huge repository of history and theory on every aspect of anarchism
channelzeronetwork.com: Collection of podcasts and anarchist-aligned radio shows from across the globe
Activist Court Aid Brigade: Legal support for when the action goes a bit wrong
anarchiststudiesnetwork.org for academic writing on all aspects of anarchism

FINDING FREEDOM

Address: Freedom Bookshop, Angel Alley, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX

Opening times: Mon-Sat 12-6pm, Sunday 12-4pm

Tube: Aldgate East

Buses: 25, 205 and 254 stop nearby.

Contact: [shop@](mailto:shop@freedompress.org.uk) or editor@freedompress.org.uk

Front page image: At the Concert Parisien
by Georges Surat (modified)
Printed by Angel Press (angelpress.co.uk)
Dingbats from 1910 issues of Emma Goldman's *Mother Earth*.

We are socialists, disbelievers in property, advocates of the equal claims of all to work for the community as seems good – calling no-one master, and of the equal claim to each to satisfy as seems good to them, their natural needs from the stock of social wealth they have laboured to produce ... we are anarchists, disbelievers in the government of the many by the few in any shape and under any pretext.

Freedom, a Journal of Anarchist Socialism, Vol 1, No. 1, October 1886