The Road to Hell Is Paved with Good Intentions:

COVID-19, Corbyn and 'Crisis'

Introduction

We started to write this text last December, just after the general election in England, as a response to the huge number of anarchists who voted (and some who went canvassing). We didn't realise what we were embarking on, it started out as an article, then became a zine. We really wanted to finish it before the new Labour leader was announced at the beginning of April 2020, then COVID-19 hit.

Struggling to make sense of the new context we are in, we wondered if our critique of "democracy" (and the surge of Labour voting anarchists) in the UK was appropriate. However, there are unfortunately many important similarities and related issues running through the huge popularity of Corbyn and the responses of many to coronavirus. So, we decided, on reflection, that it was in some ways still necessary to create a space for discussion on these issues.

We planned to get this text together and then publish and distribute it when stuff "returned to normal". But, the reality is: there is no going back to what was "normal," so even though some may read this text as an unsympathetic distraction from a global "crisis", and an unhelpful poke in some festering wounds (when we should be focusing on "unity"), we hope our humble but fiery reflections will spark some much needed discourse. We are living in a hostile environment, but it was important to us not to shy away from our beliefs in these dark times, and to respond accordingly.

Better Late Than Never?

Like coronavirus, the paradox of anarchists engaging with democracy on its terms (voting or pressurising people to vote), does not seem to be a passing phase, and it is also a global phenomenon. As well as in the UK, some anarchists have been advocating for similar behaviour in the US, Catalunya, Greece and Germany. It wouldn't surprise us to hear of more places experiencing the same thing.

Everyone is fried. Switching between feverish anxiety and smacked out sleepwalking, endlessly oscillating between apathy and anguish. Within this landscape, the Labour party is reinventing itself, distancing

itself from the policies and priorities of Jeremy Corbyn and entering a new era with Kier Starmer at the helm as 'Leader of the Opposition.'

Many people who voted for Corbyn have been bewildered (or down right hostile) to our continued determination with this project, arguing that no one we know would vote for Kier Starmer so the discussions around Corbyn are history. Again, to us, this only serves to strengthen our critique of parliamentary politics and those who engaged with it.

It's as if everyone who got caught up in the social media frenzy and the cult of 'JC' has carried on scrolling, quietly moving on to the next bit of click-bait, forgetting their own browser history. Now the corona pandemic has hit, it has reminded many how fucked the system is. Anarchists who voted are now returning to the ideals they long held up as ideals (mutual aid, solidarity etc) and the electioneering frenzy many perpetuated seems like a distant dream (or rather, a nightmare). Many people are organising mutual aid through unions such as Acorn and the Peoples Momentum party (the 'radical' arm of Labour).

We are not trying to undermine the importance of organising in this situation, but as we have tried to demonstrate in our voting critique, it is also important to think outside the box, and be aware of all the possible ways these ideas can get co-opted.

Concern or Compliance?

Like many other schemes, we set up a Whats App group a while ago to keep everyone aware of anything suspicious in the neighbourhood. This has worked really well and we have quickly made people alert of any activity. It is also a great way to bring the community together.
<div align="right">Merseyside Neighbourhood Watch</div>

Already many mutual aid groups have become channels for gossip (who knows where this will go in the next few weeks... comrades in Italy warn us of neighbourhood snitching and people using these channels to do the work of the police). Already over half the police forces in England are co-opting the mutual aid groups and using them as an extension of their surveillance mechanisms. The divisive mentality that emerged with

the growth of social media (the idea that you are inherently dodgy if you don't engage; as you must have something to hide) has spiked, and like the virus, it seems unclear when it will "peak".

Selling Ourselves

Fuck, I hate having spoken this much about it, but I'm so passionate about it. I saw people sell themselves for fucking bullshit. That's the shit I hated this year.

Skepta on the elections and 'Grime4Corbyn'

Just as Skepta put his head above the parapet to cuss Grime artists who queued up to endorse Labours dismal and token attempts to make itself more popular, so we respectfully ask anarchists who voted: what now? where next? These questions feel especially important in the current context... there are choices to be made, and positions to be taken:

Fire can arise from the plague. And fire can bring freedom… we want to avoid that this moment of crisis leads to a restructuring of the current system. Because it could only happen in a more authoritarian and security-minded sense.

The Plague and the Fire

Resistance

To those who say that now is not the time for "civil unrest," that division is unhelpful, that we must keep going... we say: now is the time for it all. Mutual aid and solidarity can be no more than acts of charity if they are not combined with resistance in this current context. Carefully, whilst being safe and thinking of others... rebel, resist, and plan. Find the gaps, use the skills and networks you have. Keep yourself sane and your rebellious heart burning, because when the virus eases, the police state will continue, and food parcels and lending books are not going to dismantle it. Stay sharp.

COVID-19 is in many ways a global gift to all leaders and politicians seeking to ramp up social control. After the virus eases, we

will see unprecedented changes on a global scale as legislation that was rushed through hangs over us like a spectre and people obediently go about their business, terrified of Covid-20. We hope that we will never be too scared to resist. Corona shows us that the system is fucked. Will you kick it while it's down?

The NHS (National Health Service)

In the run up to the 2019 election in England, the NHS became a convenient electioneering tool for Labour and this will be discussed at length later in the text. Boris Johnson is now parroting his tired rhetoric also about saving the NHS. All too quickly the Labour slogan has been picked up by the Tories. Johnson in front of a banner in a grotesque photo-shoot. Or now after being in an Intensive Care Unit saying he owes his life to the NHS. Do not mistake us: we have full respect for health care workers right now, and we are not trying to diminish the strain that they are under. However, to us, the coronavirus also exposes a huge opportunity for the Tories… rushing through emergency power after emergency power, whilst suspending parliament. But it is clear that the NHS has become a facade to mask unprecedented level of social control in this country. The COVID-19 outbreak wont stop us from kicking off and focusing on the fact that behind the immediate situation is a whole apparatus and arsenal of repression.

In these times of rainbow flags (for the NHS) and weekly street clapping, it may seem inappropriate to be discussing the NHS as a political institution. However, it is impossible to discuss recent events in the UK (and globally as the pattern is repeated elsewhere) without mentioning it.

We reiterate once again our respect for all those working in health care (not just the NHS, but in all forms) during this pandemic, and cannot imagine the stress that people are under. But if we cannot call out the political machinations behind institutions, and highlight their role in legitimising a host of other legislation and proposals (from both the Tories and the Labour party) then we are lost. Our respect has a critical edge, and it is vital now more than ever that we are aware of the bitter-pill we are often asked to swallow in the name of national health.

We want to highlight the mass-surveillance system that is being

developed by the NHS. People will be "voluntarily" encouraged to sign up and become part of the "digital herd". 'NHSX', the tech arm of the National Health Service, is developing an app that will give the government unprecedented access to both health and location information. People will be given a dubious "health status" that is publicly visible: 'Potentially Infectious Persons' (PIP)… The rationale is that this new app will help "vulnerable" people. This is clearly a nonsense, as thousands of people are literally waiting to die with the pandemic in prisons, detention centres and migrant camps. The government is only concerned about the "vulnerable" when it suits them, when their reputation is on the line and when it enables further repression.

The Coronavirus Act 2020

It is a totalitarian coup by a right-wing government which has already shown it's utter contempt for the judiciary, for parliament and for the people. Many of the provisions of this Act are already experienced by those on the margins of society, by dissidents, those in the prison and criminal justice system, the poor, and ethnic groups consistently disposed of by the police and the system, through poverty, imprisonment and death. Now the grand experiment is whether the kind of control infrastructure and total suspension of rights already administered to particular groups can be rolled out to the entire population.

Prison-state UK comes into Law: Coronavirus, Anarchists

The 'Coronavirus Act' will be in place in the UK for at least 2 years. As with the NHS app, the Coronavirus Act uses infection as a way to stratify society and legitimise an unprecedented (but not unexpected) wave of social control. The Mental Health sections of the act mean that any unruly prisoners can be transferred to mental institutions and hospitals. The state has used psychological control for a long time as a way to silence prisoners (several people convicted during the 2012 riots were incarcerated in psych wards, many of which had more repressive regimes than "normal" prisons). We are highlighting these measures here to show how fast paced the changes in legislation have been, and how silent the Labour party (and Jeremy Corbyn) has been on these issues.

People are finally letting go of the idea that we will return to "normal" after the pandemic. We are interested to see how those who voted Labour will respond when the draconian powers that have been rushed through inevitably stay in place long after the "peak" has past. The act means, amongst many other things, that volunteer health-care assistants will hold the fate of many in their hands, as they can arbitrarily sign off peoples "status" (and compliance) on a whim.

The New Brexit?

People have called corona virus 'the new Brexit'. As with Brexit, Corbyn failed to challenge the Tory government in any meaningful way. When Johnson announced the 'The Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020' (an impenetrable set of powers covering pretty much every aspect of existence) Corbyn remained mute, despite still being Leader of the Opposition. Visits have been stopped in all prisons, the Navy are being drafted in to control the incarcerated population, trials have been suspended meaning people on remand are held indefinitely, and any court appearances are being made via video-link. The borders have been closed, everything has been shut down. It is unsurprising to us that Corbyn and Labour have commented on none of this, not to even make some token gesture for those who are affected.

Every measure that the state proposes in this time is as concerned with the maintenance of the economy as it is with public health. Even now, as governments implement packages that might bring a bit of relief to some of us, the main purpose is to keep the economy ticking over and the property market viable – that is, to ensure that we can keep paying rent.
Some old things to live by, some new things to live by[…]*, Au$tralia*

In his final letter to the Prime Minister on the 14th March, Corbyn talked about workers and renters rights and benefits, but he seems indifferent to the potentially lethal risk that many people mainstream "society" forget (prisoners, migrants and homeless people). We cynically note that as many of these people do not have the right to vote, it is perhaps not surprising that their voices and needs in these corona fuelled times do not get heard.

UK Context

In Bristol (as with many other parts of the UK), anarchists were first convinced to vote on the Brexit referendum. This seems to have been a kind of gate-way drug, a stepping stone into full blown engagement with parliamentary politics, culminating in the past two general elections for the Labour party (lead by Jeremy Corbyn). Initially we were naive in thinking that the Brexit referendum was unique in its nature and that when anarchists chose to vote on that occasion they really were doing it just the one time. And so, two years ago, with roughly one month of warning before the elections, we were caught off guard. We found ourselves asking old friends and comrades if they had voted, something we had previously felt confident was not necessary.

The intention of this text isn't to be snide, or sneaky. We have had many of these discussions in person, but we remain frustrated that our perspectives get lost in those talks or are not available to those who think that voting anarchists is not a contradiction. We want to use this medium to articulate our position more clearly in order to contribute to a wider conversation.

While many anarchists who read this text will find that not all of it directly relates to their position, we decided to include most of our thoughts that were sparked by this recent debate. There is so much published anarchist criticism of democracy we couldn't possibly read all of it in researching this text. We have included a lot of it in a bibliography at the end in case people want to get into it all a bit deeper. All of the stuff we reference or take influence from was written by much better writers than ourselves, but we still felt compelled to put our thoughts down in order to engage specifically with our own context and time here in the UK. If it was harder to find this wealth of information it might be less disappointing that people turned so easily to democracy. We believe that it highlights a wider problem in the UK anarchist/radical milieu: of not reading or engaging in critical analysis, and instead participating in sub-cultures with little substance beyond identity signifiers. When social tensions increase these sub-cultural signifiers dissipate and the actions of individuals become contrary to them.

We particularly want to engage more thoroughly with some of the

arguments that were levelled at us around the time of the 2019 general election. Our research has led us to understand that this debate has been ranging for a very long time and that we are not alone in our feelings.

What's The Meaning Of It All?

Many anarchists maintain that voting "doesn't affect their core beliefs", and after we got over our naive incomprehension at how antithetical and hypocritical it sounded, how much it reminded us of Orwell's doublethink, we finally realised that they were right! Engaging with the democratic process merely serves to reveal a different social analysis and projectuality that many anarchists in the UK hold and which we define as leftist (or radical leftist when the same people advocate for tactics more extreme than voting to achieve similarly progressive aims). It all helps to remind us that it is indeed possible to fight alongside someone in the street who identifies as an anarchist, and yet have an entirely different analytical reason for doing so.

The whole debate could be left right there, a simple difference of nomenclature. After all, the purpose of this piece is not inspired by a desire to have any purifying effect or quantitative impact, especially not on the political process, that would be totally contradictory. However, we do have a strong desire to clarify our position so it is not recuperated and so we can understand who our comrades are.

In the UK, there has rarely been much of a distinction between anarchists and the radical left. Obviously there are many exceptions to this generalisation, but it doesn't serve our purpose to discuss those here. However, in this text we will refer to those anarchists who voted or canvassed simply as anarchists… not as the radical left, voting anarchists, so-called anarchists or "anarchists" because we do not want the content of our perspectives to be lost behind a veil of perceived arrogance. We also want to recognize that even though all voting leads to the same place: the limitations of the ballot box; there are many different motivations and reasons for voting, and we don't want to tar everyone who disagrees with us with the same brush.

The purpose of this piece is to engage in conversation, not to suggest that we have all the answers, but to offer our critique and if we

have misunderstood peoples motivations, then to engage with them. We don't think we are "right", nor do we aim to be. We know that anarchists are "as varied as mankind" (Fredy Perlman). We all make compromises, and we are all hypocrites. But for us, voting is not consistent with our critical analysis. Sadly, we are a minority, a few pariahs in a rapidly changing social context.

Anarchy Under Attack?

We have no interest in defending anarchism as an ideology or sub-culture. If people want to call themselves anarchists and vote, so be it. Language is always evolving and perhaps the word anarchy is coming to mean its exact opposite as we understand it. If it has become stretched so far from it's original conception to become ultimately meaningless to us, we will leave it behind. However, as a friend said recently, saying "anarchists who didn't vote" is like saying "vegans who don't eat meat". It feels pretty incoherent to deliberately use language completely back to front, and so below we clarify our understanding of the word anarchy up until this point in time.

A is for Anarchy… The word Anarchy literally means "without rulers", "without leaders", or "without masters.

ABC of Anarchy, Hegarty

The word anarchy comes from the Greek *an* (meaning without) and *arkhos* (meaning leader or ruler). To quote Galleani: "In anarchy only one domination is justifiable, legitimate and desirable, and it is the domination each one exerts on himself. To exceed this is authority, command, despotism and, as anarchy is by definition absence of authority, anyone who calls for or sustains domination, that is authority, places himself, by his own action, against and outside anarchy." (male pronoun used in the original text, which was published in 1925 and we feel is still very relevant today).

Our anarchy is anti-political, and incompatible with any form of leadership, any form of representation, regime changes, any form of democracy (direct or otherwise), or anything that merely shuffles around the makeup of alienated power.

Unfortunately, we have begun to feel that anarchists voting shouldn't come as a surprise. In a time when everything is flexible, dissent is so quickly recuperated, and contradictions existing side by side become socially accepted, even normalised. The Identitarian's have made fascism hipster, "ethical consumerism" means KFC are selling vegan burgers, the #MeToo movement exists under the rule of Donald Trump. Home Secretary Priti Patel, the daughter of Ugandan-Indian parents, maintains Theresa May's "Hostile Environment" policy, and the beer mats at the pub that encourage us to stop smoking are sponsored by one of the world's largest producers and marketers of tobacco (Philip Morris).

Nothing makes sense any more.

Historical Context

It is not the first time (neither will be the last) that anarchists have engaged with the left and party politics. We feel that our position is largely justified by the legacies of such failures in his-story. However, to write about these examples would take a lot of time and research and fill many books. A lot of people have written (and acted) against democracy, from Élisée Reclus in 1884, Galleani and Malatesta in the 1920s to Bonnano in the 1990's, and many contemporary anarchists that we quote throughout the text.

The sentiment they all present is that it is common sense to learn from the mistakes of the past so as to not repeat them. One of the most famous examples in anarchist history is that of the Spanish Civil War, in which the Popular Front killed the revolution, long before Franco swept into Catalonia and Aragon.

In the UK, the last time Labour were in power, Tony Blair was responsible for the deaths of 10 thousand civilians in Iraq. Whilst Jeremy Corbyn has a very differing world-view to Blair and his acolytes, he still promised thousands more police on the streets than the Tories had, and perpetuated the New Labour project of UK prison expansion.

We can understand peoples hatred of the Tories. It should be obvious throughout this text that while we focus our critique on the left, we have no love for the right. We hate the Tories too. However, it is the whole spectrum we stand against. We don't hate the Tories because we

love (or even like) Labour. We hate them all. We hope this text is able to articulate what we perceive to be the negative effects of participation in democracy and the problematic dynamic of suggesting that one knows what is best for others.

Where do you draw the line? 2 metres? This has been one of the problems of this project: when to stop researching, poking, arguing. Are we fiddling while Rome burns? Like a late night drunken argument, we hope that there are some valid points among our tired ramblings.

We are aware that now, more than ever, we live on shifting sand and the ground beneath us is changing constantly. We are in information overload and the air around us is dense not just with the virus, but the heavy weight of data. However, it feels important to continue publishing our critiques, no matter how quickly they may get outdated, as without this, we will never articulate ourselves on our terms... swept along in the tide of clicks and scrolling.

It is worth noting, that we draw the line under this project at 14:32 on the 15th April 2020. We are being this specific, so that it is clear when we have stopped researching. We hope that people will comment and we welcome feedback on this text.

Please email **theroadtohell@riseup.net** with your thoughts.

Politics

Between November 2019 and the leadership elections that happened on the 4th of April, there were many arguments presented by anarchists who voted. Sometimes we didn't react well to them… our frustration and shock too strong to be able to engage with the convoluted attempts of people to reconcile their new world view with anarchist ideals. All around us, anarchists desperately tried to fit a square peg in a round hole, and tried to legitimise this shift. Below are some of the key arguments that we heard after Labour's crushing defeat in the 2019 general election.

A Vote For Jeremy Corbyn, Not For Labour

Sometimes a candidate appears who says everything people have been saying to each other for a long time— he seems… to really be one of us. By persuasively critiquing the system within its own logic, he subtly persuades people that the system can be reformed— that it could work, if only the right people were in power. Thus a lot of energy that would have gone into challenging the system itself is redirected into backing yet another candidate for office, who inevitably fails to deliver.

The Partys Over, Crimethinc.

Before the 2017 election, Corbynmania exploded. It was hard to imagine that the weird hysteria could increase, but it turned out to be a rolling storm; and the clouds were just building for the main event: the general election in 2019. The cult of Jeremy Corbyn reached epic proportions. The Left (and many anarchists) were convinced that their beloved 'JC' somehow transcended the Labour Party, existing in some kind of vacuum. In expressing solidarity with Palestine and with the well-documented love of his allotment, he was portrayed as some kind of benevolent character, seemingly impervious to critique by his followers. Whilst the right-wing press and the tabloids predictably turned him into 'The Grinch' who wanted to "steal Christmas"; the left desperately turned him into some kind of anti-establishment outsider, (much like the right did with Trump in the US). As if being rejected by the right-wing press was a badge of honour enough to warrant being endorsed by anarchists and anti-authoritarians. Both

of these visions of Corbyn are problematic, and both only represent a fraction of what he stands for.

Even if it were plausible that someone who wanted to control all aspects of the state could hold radical views, electing radicals into powerful positions immediately disarms and traps them because the democratic system is part of a wider, all-encompassing political and economic system that does not permit legitimate avenues for the deconstruction of power relations. History has consistently demonstrated that leftists will sell out and cling to power rather than dismantle it.

Simply put, party leaders do not exist in isolation. A person cannot be nominated to lead a political party without having a strong historical connection to it, and alliances within it. Even before they can be considered, they must appeal to those above them in the hierarchy of power. This process is dependent on compromise.

Using voting as a strategy towards some kind of "transition" can only ever lead to superficial change, because the leaders are always part of a huge repressive apparatus that is bigger than them and inherently opposed to even the most basic concepts of freedom. Democracy is intrinsically linked to, and dependent on: a nation state with its borders, detention centres (immigration prisons); a judiciary system with its police, courts and prisons; and a capitalist economy with its property ownership, banks, debts, disparities and exploitation. So, when someone goes to vote, this is what they are voting for. For example, let us not forget that in 2016, Jeremy Corbyn publicly (and repeatedly) condemned Theresa May when she was Prime Minister for not expanding the police force. In May 2017 as part of the campaign trail, Corbyn vowed to put 10,000 more police on the streets if elected. As recently as 2019, he promised to go further than the Conservatives on the issue: "We will re-establish neighbourhood policing and recruit 20,000 more frontline officers than have been planned for by the Conservatives." (Labour Manifesto 2019)

It is also important to remember that the current wave of prison expansion was drawn up under so-called 'New Labour' and in the lead up to the 2019 election, under Corbyn, they promised that "the next Labour government will restore prison officer numbers to 2010 levels," and went on to say that "the Tories must commit to doing the same."

Songs And Selling Out

In 1972 Stevie Wonder released 'Big Brother'. It's lyrics still ring true today… "I live in the ghetto, You just come to visit me 'round election time". Four months after the most recent election campaign, the grime artist Skepta commented that politicians "don't give a fuck about us again… They used them [other Grime artists] for what they wanted to use them for and they're back doing their bullshit. They need to understand we're human beings. Whatever they do on the TV or whatever, they never change in my eyes." The 'Grime4Corbyn' campaign was a cheap ploy to widen the Labour electorate. Jeremy Corbyn followed the same paths and patterns of those who came before him, using people as political pawns in a game to win power.

Now Corbyn has stepped down (less of a bang than a whimper) Keir Starmer won the poxy leadership elections with a landslide victory. Cue an overnight shift within Labour towards more centralist policies. On the day that Starmer was elected, did he celebrate Labour's involvement with mutual aid? Or try to promote some bullshit sense of community cohesion in this time of "crisis"? No. He swiftly highlighted the issues of anti-semitism within the Labour party (an obvious low-blow to Corbyn's struggles over Palestine, and a quick way to distance himself from JC, and all his followers). This is the game of politics: one second Corbyn is elevated to a hero, the next he is denounced as a villain.

The atmosphere of the "House" is not for deep breathing; it is corrupt. If you send one of yourselves in a foul place, you must not be surprised afterwards if they come back in a rotten condition.

Why Anarchists Don't Vote, Reclus, (1884)

Canvassing

Obsessed with the idea of "making a change" people went canvassing, going to (mostly working class) parts of cities previously alien to them, or even rounding up homeless people to vote.

To us, this could only serve to undermine the anarchist projects of those engaged with such activity. Many anarchist projects also engage with

door-knocking and word of mouth. The mutual-aid networks that have been building since the beginning of the pandemic are one example of this. However, how can anyone expect to be taken seriously when one day they are knocking door to door trying to sell elements of a political manifesto to people, the next trying to promote community responses to the state?

The task of determining the methods of making it clear to people that certain behaviour is unacceptable will be the task of the whole of the anti-hierarchical community.

Cop Out: the significance of Aufhabengate, FantoSamotnaf

Anarchists canvassing creates a paradoxical problem. Like a magnet with repelling poles, those who voted must try to reconfigure their world views to allow space for both endorsing and rejecting authority. The concept of canvassing is literally as well as figuratively repellent to our ideas. As far back as 1925 Luigi Galleani wrote: "The anarchist movement and the labour movement follow two parallel lines, and it has been geometrically proven that parallel lines never meet."

By engaging with the campaign process so thoroughly as to be organised in mobilising people to vote, we believe that along with influences such as social media (discussed below), people must experience some degree of psychological impact on the parameters of their thought process. Bleu Marin put it more concisely in their essay, On Behalf of the Barbarians, "The more the inner dialogue of the individual— his consciousness— conforms to the dominant language, the greater his consent, his submission will be."

If your version of anarchy can stretch to voting, you can keep it. If your version of anarchy incorporates canvassing, actively encouraging people to engage with parliamentary politics, this is 100% incompatible with any concept of anarchy we can conceive of.

You Haven't Read The Manifesto

It's easy to fall prey to the stories invented by those who are cleverer with words than we are.

What Can We Do With Anti-Fascism?, Bonanno

The content of political manifestos are rendered irrelevant when one takes into consideration the track record politicians have of actually following through on their promises. For us, Labour's 2019 manifesto was no different, and we feel our point is proven by how quickly many Labour Party members were to distance themselves from it soon after Labour failed in the general election. Maybe this seems like petty point scoring in pandemic times… but in order to highlight the wealth of ways in which people attempted to legitimise their new political positions, it is worth mentioning.

The Labour Party manifesto was renounced by its members upon its failure, as complex and confusing, and that's coming from the political elite. The language and platform of political rhetoric is inherently exclusive, (something we go into more detail later). In our experience during the peak of Corbynmania, people were much more interested in defending him at any cost from the right-wing press, than they were in actually looking critically at the manifesto or even referencing the 107 pages of pure electioneering. It was much more common for us to hear emotive, dramatic and coercive, false ultimatums such as '"NHS: save it or sell it." Such typical, fear mongering election dichotomies were clumsily invoked by so many anarchists who voted. With a wry smile, we note that it is now Boris Johnson who sends "personalised" letters from no.10 telling us to: "Stay at Home, Protect the NHS, Save Lives".

Crisis?

Saving the National Health Service was a constant reason given to justify voting. Left wing politicians (and the media who were sympathetic to their cause), were able to manufacture a sense of urgency, fear and desperation around the supposed threat to the NHS from the Conservatives. This example is symbolic of an age old mode of social control, that of permanent crisis management.

In 2005, Monsieur Dupont specifically addressed this issue: "If the NHS was a concession of the dominant class, a maximum quantity it was prepared to give up, then what was it intended to prevent; what is the functionality of healthy workers for the bourgeoisie; what other policing, stratifying, organisational functions does it perform in the bourgeoisie's

domination of society?". (One only need to think of the group Docs Not Cops to understand what Monsieur Dupont were getting at with that last question). They go on: "If we critically situate the function of the NHS within the wider strategic intentions of the ruling class then we see that our gains have never really belonged to us. And what goes for the NHS is equally applicable to education, employment rights, social wages, political inclusion and to all of the benefits of democracy."

What should ring alarm bells from this quote (whether you agree with it's position or not), is that it was published 15 years ago! The idea that we're in a particular and unique historical moment of crisis and we should all mobilize just this once is ironically used as a constant justification to participate in the political process. How often have we witnessed the democratic state justifying repression with the idea that it is protecting society from some momentary threat (Coronavirus? Daesh?). Monsieur Dupont suggest that the content of such a debate is irrelevant, that each supposedly liberal institution has the potential to be used as a manipulative tool of power.

The NHS is a particularly useful tool that is utilised so readily by politicians, seemingly because it is so effective and easy for them to manipulate people with. After all, to one degree or another, all of society benefits from healthcare. It's frequent usage as a political tool, is highlighted by the fact that only a few months ago Boris Johnson was described as the biggest threat to the NHS in order to coerce people to vote for Labour, yet now you see him and his team, standing in front of signs saying "Save our NHS" as he implements lock-downs and increasingly tighter and long standing socially repressive measures.

Reform, Class and Charity

The Lesser Of Two Evils?

The leftist conception of social struggle is precisely one of influencing, taking over or creating alternative versions of these institutions. In other words, it is a struggle to change, not to destroy institutionalized power relationships.
From Politics to Life:(...), Landstreicher

The coronavirus pandemic has led to much discussion about neo-liberalism and the issues connected to it. Many leftists and anarchists have rightfully pointed out that COVID-19 is a cruel and grim inevitability in the face of this globalised structure and the inherent power imbalances within it. However, it is striking that the critical analysis of many stops here. The reality is that the COVID-19 outbreak, and aftermath, are a brutal expression of the violence and horrors of capitalism in all it's forms— late stages, liberal and otherwise. Every single government administration can be said to represent capitalist interests, and is indeed entirely dependent on them. The two are mutually dependent:

Democracy itself is a euphemism for capitalism, as in "Britain is a Democracy..." Democracy cannot dismember capitalism.

Democracy, Monsieur Dupont

In voting, one could argue that you can have an impact on policy, but *only* on the specifics that you are allowed to. Everything is not up for debate, certainly not the system itself. It all comes down to the balance between what we can achieve through remaining true to our critique and reform. Is it more harmful to advocate for reform or to oppose it? Retaining our critique puts us in a position to find comrades and improve the quality of our lives in a manner consistent with solidarity and affinity. Reformist ideas appear to come from a more charitable position… and, to quote Skepta again, people risk "selling themselves for fucking bullshit".

We will all be told we are monsters if we do not vote to support more humane borders, more humane police killings, more humane wars, and the

In the elites game of politics, they obscure the power they have to reform and improve the quality of peoples lives, instead putting that responsibility onto the populace. The improvements will be made if power deems it lucrative in the long term, but the vote allows them to justify and wield their power. A vote can be seen as a vote for the NHS, or whatever reform that will have "real everyday impacts on real peoples lives", but a vote is always a vote for the continuation of the status quo.

Our ideas do not fit on their political spectrum. We are not so easily tricked into feeling like we have any potential within the limits of their rule book. And, we refuse to be guilt tripped into playing fetch with them. We are aware that between us we embody different aspects of privilege. But that doesn't mean that we cannot critique their rigged game.

The saying "the ballot box cannot contain our desires" has become a cliché; but the concept of voting being solely about single issues, suh as the NHS, has made the ballot box an even smaller arena for discourse and possible change, reducing a party to one empty promise in a desperate attempt to legitimise their position.

Proudhon said: "I oppose every system in which some authority can choose, on the basis of some supposed necessity, to over ride my free will." This was as valid in the 1800s and it's valid for us today. The concept of crisis is a liberal mask to limit people's dreams and actions. How convenient for a left-wing party like Labour to have the handle of the NHS to disguise all manner of legislation, discrimination and division. In the strange cult of personality that surrounded the general election in 2019, both Boris Johnson and Jeremy Corbyn were positioned as anti-establishment (with Johnson the rogue toff, and Corbyn as a joyless penny-pincher). Neither are outsiders. They are the establishment. You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs, and you can't rule a party without towing the line.

Progressivism is the idea that the current order of things is the result of an ongoing (though possibly "dialectical") process of improvement and that if we put in the effort (whether through voting, petition, litigation, civil

disobedience, political violence or even the conquest of power— anything other than its destruction), we can take this process further....Reform and revolution are simply different levels of the same activity. Such are the absurdities of leftism which remains blind to the overwhelming evidence that the only trajectory that we have been on at least since the rise of capitalism and industrialism is the increasing impoverishment of existence, and this cannot be reformed away.

<div align="right">From Politics to Life: [...], Landstreicher</div>

Reform is either allowed because it either benefits the societal power dynamic and the pockets of the elite, tolerated because it doesn't challenge power and it keeps the populace passive, repressed by violence or passed through the law books and then wholly ignored.

It's Only One Day...

Anarchists who voted have said to us that they fight on a daily basis to counter the state, but in the context of the horrors of the Tory government, on election day... this one day... they voted in the hope that the lesser of two evils will triumph. This makes no sense to us. Why spend 364 days fighting the prison industrial complex, only to vote in another 4 years of prison expansion?

We admit that we were woefully unprepared for the ferocity and scale of the shift in anarchist thinking around the time of the election. Many anarchists were whipped up by the fervour of voting... slack on their critical analysis, sucked in by their social media stream, guilt ridden by their peers or family members and convinced by the social band wagon of fear and desperation. These moments can be opportunities for anarchists to enter into the conversation. Instead of telling others what they should do, anarchists are in a unique position to offer what only they can: an otherwise unheard social critique of all forms of power whether that be right wing or left... obvious or subtle. We will learn from these experiences, and develop our techniques for the next round.

Solidarity vs Charity

The rejection of the idea that anyone, either due to "privilege" or due to supposed

membership in a particular oppressed group, owes uncritical solidarity to any struggle or movement, and the recognition that such a conception is a major obstruction in any serious revolutionary process.

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From Politics to Life: [...], Landstreicher

</div>

There was much discussion around the time of the 2019 election about what the 'working-class' want (ie. a Labour government). Many middle-class anarchists and activists seemed to develop some form of telepathy with this supposedly homogeneous group, assuming that some how this imagined group of people (we say imagined, because, as many more eloquent and well-read writers than us have articulated, class stratified on these lines in today's economic climate is at best unhelpful, and at worst, dangerous and divisive) didn't know what was good for "them" and therefore it was the duty of those "in the know" to get out door-knocking in parts of Bristol they had no connection to. This mindset is reminiscent of the murky world of ally-politics:

According to ally politics, the only way to undermine one's own privilege is to give up one's role as an individual political agent, and follow the lead of those more or differently oppressed.

<div align="right">

Ain't No PC Gonna Fix it Baby:[...], Crimethinc.

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It is also tied up with concepts such as charity, and what we perceive to be desperate attempts at 'movement building'.

As Peter Gelderloos has observed, "to many people, the democratic ideal is meaningless". There are many people in this country with a healthy disregard for authority, and no faith in politics… a more instinctive anti-government approach than many anarchists. We refuse to say that we know what is best for others. We will defend this position, and we will not adopt a leftist agenda and allow (our) anarchist ideas to be recuperated as a result.

Class Analysis/Privilege

Democracy at its heart is a trick to distract attention from economic domination of one class by another.

<div align="right">

Democracy, Monsieur Dupont

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Ain't nobody in the hood got no hope in this fucked up system and that's why we don't vote.

<div align="right">

W-4, Dead Prez

</div>

In the fevered electioneering and canvassing that occurred in the 2019 election campaign, voting became endowed with a huge level of meaning; an important tool to combat inequality, that you were a fool to ignore. The logic and argument that was levelled at us was that anarchists who didn't vote were middle class/ privileged/ dogmatic/ juvenile/ idealistic and uncaring people.

This is a dangerous, patronising, and highly problematic set of arguments. As we discuss later, the concept of 'universal suffrage' in this country excludes many, many people, either explicitly in law, or through it's inherent elitism. This argument about not utilising the option of voting also imbues it with a huge amount of power. We find it baffling and confusing trying to work out when voting become such a meaningful act? And in this new context, where it is given so much power and meaning... where does the power lie? And where does it end? The current situation in the UK is likely to deteriorate in terms of austerity and inequality. We are holding our breath to see when the Tories will capitalise on the mutual-aid networks, and the looming recession related to the pandemic, to reel out a new wave of cuts. Will those who voted keep voting regardless? With Starmer at the helm, will they continue to vote Labour? Surely if the argument that: "anything but Boris" was relevant in last December, it's still relevant now...?

To argue that a vote for Labour is the best way of helping the working class suggests a naivety or unwillingness to acknowledge an underlying liberal agenda. To generalise that Labour will be better for minorities, or under-privileged people, is obviously false when you start looking at individuals in specific contexts, such as prisons, or those without papers. It is proven false, even further, when so many working class people vote Tory. Are you going to say that they are all wrong and they don't know what is good for them?

Despite our critique around the typically manipulative use of carefully manicured statistics, a cursory glance at the stats that were released after the election will show that voting was not stratified along

class lines. One of the info-graphics published the day after the election showed the sea of blue across many traditionally working class areas.

Democracy can at best be seen as a form of political compensation. We're given some basic sense of choice in place of topics that are completely off limits. "The fact is, the democratic process is designed to craft and maintain an effective ruling coalition from among the elite; to win the loyalty of the middle class by dispensing token rights and privileges; to prevent discontent by creating the illusion of fairness and equality.

What Is Democracy?, Gelderloos

A final point on stereotyping: it is frustrating to us to see that the same people who hailed Jeremy Corbyn (a highly privileged individual) as an anti-establishment figure, now accuse all anarchists who didn't vote as privileged.

In such a state of affairs, the essential function of the democratic process is to limit the appearance of what is possible to the narrow spectrum debated by candidates for office. This demoralizes dissidents and contributes to the general impression that they are impotent utopians— when nothing is more utopian than trusting representatives from the owning class to solve the problems caused by their own dominance, and nothing more impotent than accepting their political system as the only possible system.

The Party's Over, Crimethinc.

Fascism, Exclusion and 'Civil' Society

Democracy vs Fascism (two sides of the same coin):

It is very convenient for democracy to spread the fear of fascism. Fear has always been a favourite weapon of power.
   Neither dictatorship nor democracy... Long Live Anarchy, Anonymous

In the run up to the 2019 general election everyone from elements of the mainstream media, to anarchists and the left, parroted the problematic polemic that Johnson was a fascist and Corbyn was a man of the people.
         Democracy and fascism are two sides of the same coin. Labelling the conservatives as fascists... as uniquely problematic, obscures the root of the problem. This argument implicitly allows other political parties to play the role as the defenders of freedom and democracy (and to capitalise on grass roots movements that focus their negative attention on the Tories, instead of critiquing the entire political spectrum. Anarchists who say "anything but Tory", (or go even further and directly advocate for Labour) miss the opportunity to expose the continuity with which all governments oppress people and will watch once again, as history repeats and left wing politicians use these efforts as the beginnings of a new structural base of power.

But every day has its to-morrow. As soon as the conditions alter, likewise do men change. To-day your candidate bows humbly before your presence; to-morrow he will say "pish" to you. From a cadger of votes he has turned to be a master of yours.

Why Anarchists Don't Vote, Reclus (1884)

We are for attacking the left, not being assimilated by it.

The new social conflict brings together a broad left to fight a dangerous right in a way that does not question any fundamental aspect of the state. On the contrary, the new terrain is shaped in such a way as to funnel our efforts towards the renewal of the state... [When] we have become so scared of the right that we begin to support the projects of the left, we are digging our own

graves. It is vital to articulate specifically anarchist positions with regard to social conflict rather than flocking to lowest- common-denominator stances, precisely because those stances are formulated to favour the interests of social control.

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Diagnostic of the Future:[...], Gelderloos

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Neither Boris Johnson's clumsy racism or Jacob Rees Mogg's fundamentalist Catholicism, are sufficient to drag an entire country into fascism. For a government to change its fundamental structures, a whole host of structural and societal elements need to be in place. None of those elements are currently in position. Even in the new pandemic, police-state fascism is not (yet) here. Now, more than ever, it is important not to "dig our own graves" as Gelderloos describes. In the face of repression; creativity and solidarity are key, not playing their rigged game.

But this is besides the point. Fascism is ultimately a tool of the same elite that profits under democracy and a more obvious manifestation of the same white supremacy that infuses all of society. The democratic state inherited the past successes of the old fascism, and, like coronavirus, democracy is reinventing itself to become more resistant in the face of parliamentary politics and state legislation. As we highlighted in the introduction, organised fascism in the UK today is increasingly a slick, social media savvy machine, luring students, hipsters, and a myriad of others into its murky world. Of course, there are many old-school networks with die hard supporters still, but neither of these ends of the fascist spectrum are occupying 10 Downing Street and it's related institutions right now. This is not to undermine, or downplay the horrific, systemic and inherent racism of the Tory government and many of it's members, but it is a gentle reminder that it is not fascist, and that falling into this trap merely strengthens both the right and the left.

For power, crude fascism such as has existed at various times in history under dictatorships, is no longer a practicable political project. New instruments are appearing along with the new managerial forms of power.

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What Can We Do With Anti-Fascism?, Bonanno

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By not voting for Labour, it was suggested that we were implicitly in league

with the Tories and therefore fascism. This argument is a red herring. As with COVID-19, power seeks the path of least resistance and is becoming more complex. At present, in the UK, democratic recuperation seems to be a more useful tool for power than authoritarian eradication. Labelling Tories as fascists "could represent an unconscious desire to avoid a deeper analysis of reality, to avoid getting behind that dense scheme of power which is getting more and more complicated and difficult to decipher" (Bonanno). In brief: Tories bad, labour good (or better), never touches the heart of the problem.

Universal Suffrage? Or Suffering?

It is well known that in ancient Athens, the "cradle of democracy," scarcely an eighth of the population was permitted to vote, as women, foreigners, slaves, and others were excluded from citizenship. This is generally regarded as an early kink that time has ironed out, but one could also conclude that exclusion itself is the most essential and abiding characteristic of democracy... What if democracy arose in Greece not as a step in Man's Progress Towards Freedom, but as a way of keeping power out of certain hands?

The Party's Over, Crimethinc.

Any votes, legitimize the authority of the victors. Under democracy, a "majority" victory does not mean a majority of the population, not by a long stretch of the imagination. It always means the largest of all the minorities, which in this case is old white British people. By legitimizing the process by voting, the victors already have their justification for oppressive actions that in many cases go against minorities who voted and yet didn't stand a chance of actually wielding any power in the process. As they say, "voting only encourages them!"

It is old news that parliamentary politics, governments and nation states operate by offering very limited choices, to a limited range of the population, who then choose between these options, and give over all their autonomy for another four years.

England is the only country in Europe still persevering in causing what has been termed "civil death" (ie. not allowing most prisoners to vote/ the loss of "civil rights" as the result of imprisonment). Convicted prisoners

still can't vote in any election, but after a 12 year long legal battle with the European Court of Human Rights, England reluctantly allowed those on remand and "civil" prisoners (ie. those complying with the system) to vote if they are on the register. The fact that under 18's cannot vote was discussed at length in the run up to the last election. 'Foreign Citizens' without UK Citizenship are also not allowed to engage in the farce of general elections.

Do not mistake us, we are not lobbying for electoral reform, even if "Universal Suffrage" would be a reality true to it´s meaning, it wouldn't change our views on democracy. Alienation is at it's heart and it is impossible to have it any other way. Power has made law and reason collide, and this is explicit in the crude category of "citizens" and "civil society". As mentioned above, in a majority-takes-all democracy, the "majority" is never the majority of a population, and leads to minorities having no more power than whats granted by despotism or dictatorship.

Corruption, privilege, and hierarchy aside, majority rule is not only inherently oppressive but also paradoxically divisive and homogenizing at the same time.
The Party's Over, Crimethinc.

'Social' media

The government doesn't need to directly control the media, and the corporations do not need to directly control the government, because they are all in the same boat, and they are all serving the same interests.

What Is Democracy?, Gelderloos

While the anarchists we spoke to were vocally critical of traditional media platforms, we experienced no critical sentiment from those same anarchists towards social media. Anarchists used social media platforms such as Facebook to organise around voting. This is deeply troubling to us, so while the following information is a bit of a tangent, we believe it is important. Bare with us.

Cambridge Analytica are a company who we will use as a case study to demonstrate how social media platforms such as Facebook are now used to influence the behaviour of individuals and therefore affect wider society. They were a company who rose to fame during the Republican presidential candidate race (preceding the 2016 Presidential elections), for the relative success of their campaign with Senator Ted Cruz. With Steve Bannon as a former Chief Executive, they were a self described "behaviour change agency", providing "a full service propaganda machine". By harvesting data from social media platforms like Facebook, they used artificial intelligence to build up psychological profiles of individuals in order to target undecided/first time voters whom they called "persuadables". One of their senior employees said "our creative team designed personalised content to trigger those individuals. We bombarded them through blogs, websites, articles, videos, ads, every platform you can imagine until they saw the world the way we wanted them to... until they voted for our candidate. Its like a boomerang: you send your data out, it gets analysed then comes back at you as targetted messaging to change your behaviour." They called themselves a "global election management company," and global they were. Before informally claiming credit for the last US election result (they worked with the Trump Campaign), as well as the Brexit referendum result (they worked with leave.eu), Cambridge Analytica had been honing their techniques by strongly influencing the elections for national state leaders

in dozens of countries, always working for the highest bidder.

Cambridge Analytica were a subsidiary of SCL (Strategic Communication Laboratories) who were founded on their experience in psych-ops (psychological warfare). They had contracts with the British Army, the British Navy, the US army, US special forces, NATO, CIA, the US State Department and the Pentagon. Once it was understood that this information warfare could be used against their own population to influence elections, it was simply a matter of collecting then selling data to whoever paid them the most. Their success is one of the reasons that data itself has become a trillion dollar industry, larger even, than oil. It all makes the US governments Counter Intelligence Program of the civil rights era (COINTELPRO) look like a nursery school project.

Clearly, social media has a become much more powerful tool than old news media platforms. It literally manufactures opinion and sells it. At the same time, it gives its user the false sense of independent thought and freedom of choice. With a wealth of information about this publicly available, why do anarchists risk such manipulation?

While the case study of Cambridge Analytica is clearly a story of how the right wing has utilised these tools of data harvesting and social manipulation, the important point to take from this is what constantly advancing technology has deemed possible and how social media platforms are now viewed by capitalists and politicians alike. Besides, one of the founders of Cambridge Analytica was originally hired because of their work on Obama's presidential campaign, so it's not a far stretch to think the left are also capable of this kind of thing. It's clear that now these tools exist they will be used. Cambridge Analytica is gone, but its important to understand that if you are using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp to name a few, then your personal data is out there and being used in ways you don't understand.

[...]*this is not about one company, this technology is going on unabated, and will continue to go on... In some senses I feel that because of the ways in which this technology is moving so fast, and because people don't really understand it... there was always going to be a Cambridge Analytica, it just sucks for me that it was Cambridge Analytica.*

The Great Hack, Former Chief Operating
Officer of Cambridge Analytica

To be clear… using data collection as a premise... any organisation with the resources, can use social media platforms to strategically encourage an emotionally driven, confined realm of debate in a way that leads the user to feel as though they are having independent thought, but which is actually based on the calculated manufacture of desperation and fear. It targets those most likely to be influenced, and those individuals are not aware they are victim to highly targeted content. *Embarrassingly* in this case, "anarchists" fell within that potential demographic, that of the "persuadable's". It all begs the question, why were they convinced they were making headway, that the movement was strong and that "change" was close? A clear example of this was not only the repetition of the idea that the Tories were going to sell off the NHS, but the manner in which the message was delivered. Both the right and the left are clearly capable of this. Anarchists should be the best equipped to call out this process.

Remember, if you use a social media platforms and you are sharing photos, likes, personal info, comments, updates etc., well, its going to get analysed, then come back at you as targetted messaging in an attempt to to change your behaviour.

We don't pertain to be able to outsmart this trillion dollar global industry based on unimaginable data collection, research and military expertise. We feel pessimistic about the ability of others to experience any success in this endeavour.

Corbyn Could Win

It was interesting in the run up to the election to observe how many people suddenly seized upon the idea that they could invoke real change by desperately trying to get Corbyn in. The social media "echo chamber" that so many exist in, and the popularity of the left in Bristol, combined to create an atmosphere where people advocated for Corbyn with a sense of feverish desire. Despite the overwhelming evidence before the election that there would be a Tory landslide, people threw their lot in with Labour anyway, whole heartedly signing up to, and perpetuating, the liberal position that voting is a common sense position.

What's Next?

The question for anarchists, then, faced with a resurgent right and the even greater possibility of a triumphant left, is: what are the positions that cut to the heart of the problem, no matter who is in power, while also speaking to the specific details of how power is trampling people down?

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Diagnostic of the Future:[...], Gelderloos

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It all leads to the conclusion that there is a gross poverty within the anarchist scene (in the UK) of genuinely independent critical analysis which simply cannot exist using the medium of manipulative social media platforms. Does it stem from burnout, from the realization of our irrelevance to affect wide scale social change, from fear?

There seems to be a strange paradox at play: if one suggests that anarchy doesn't work/isn't realistic, or, that in a voting scenario it makes sense to pause the anarchist analysis... then why is it still important for you to identify as an anarchist? If anarchy is inherently some kind of fad tied up in teenage angst, then why not just let it go?

We Are Tired

The concept of recuperation is also a prophecy, revolt is an expression of youth whilst the corruption of giving in belongs to age and experience."

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Democracy, Monsieur Dupont

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We are all tired, now more than ever in these pandemic times. The confusing, infinitely shifting world of recuperation and assimilation is a many headed hydra. Without wanting to sound like a bunch of dinosaurs: we are tired, most of all, we are tired of the preoccupation with social media crazes, of armchair organising and "likes". We view Corbynmania and the thirst for the ballot box as a bleak expression of this juggernaut... a logical conclusion in today's climate where people willingly give all their power over to a list of mediated options they can passively complete. It is no surprise to us that Extinction Rebellion and Jeremy Corbyn got so much coverage and momentum last year. Both phenomenons are symptomatic of a new language in which "resistance" is less about throwing bricks and

more about mindless clicks. This is happening on the left and the right, and the language of protest and defiance is being endlessly co-opted. Anyone fancy a vegetarian "Rebel Burger™" at Burger King?

The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic has seen the Leviathan of civilization lurching in even bigger ways, technology has now become at the heart of many forms of "organising"; and many anarchists have wholeheartedly embraced digital platforms, allowing their horizons and options for resistance to once again become mediated by what mainstream society dictates or allows. Do not mistake us, we are aware that there are some pros to engaging with technology, and that for many who are self-isolating it is a life line. However, our concern is when these limited options are utilised without critique, and peoples thirst to "communicate" and "share" over rides any possibilities or energy for attack or genuine systemic change. As we have said previously, we are not interested in telling people what to do, but it is important, in some weary way, to engage with these different approaches critically and create a space for discussion, if we are in any hope of having some semblance of resistance moving forwards.

As civilisation grows, the domain of death grows while the individuals living within it die.

Against His-Story, Against Leviathan!, Perlman

Maybe in these times it shouldn't be surprising that anarchists are now advocating for parliamentary politics, everything has become lost and meaningless. The ground on which we stood together has become cracked and shifted, moments of struggle reduced to anecdotes to tell in the pub. Relationships that were built on shared ideas and experiences have become damaged. This isn't some teenage angst ridden over dramatisation, it is a genuine reflection, a question about what remains.

Like an unused muscle, our ability to take care of ourselves, make our own decisions, govern our relationships with others, create voluntary associations and build communities, solve our disputes, and above all trust ourselves, has atrophied.

What Is Democracy?, Gelderloos

In discussions with various comrades before the election it became clear that the concept of wilfully not voting as a rejection of the system was seen as outdated. There was a generational disconnect, where many younger people were unaware of the discourses around the rejection of parliamentary politics. People viewed it as a failing of anarchists that there wasn't a solid opposition or alternatives to the Labour party for people to engage with. Corbyn and Labour became popular because of the failure of anarchists to provide an "alternative" to parliamentary politics, to be accessible, and to promote some kind of "community" resilience or response to Tory rule and austerity.

It is sad that the concept of rejecting parliamentary politics is seen as old-fashioned, and hasn't been articulated as much as it could have been outside of our bubble. However, that doesn't legitimise throwing your lot in with the enemy! It also smacks of a gross form of activisty arrogance to assume that all actions must be transparent, visible and accountable.

On the topic of more visible and formalised methods of anarchist organising, we agree that there was a collective failure to shout out alternatives to the act of voting, but let's reflect on that, understand frustrations, and move forward, on our own terms… not the ones forced upon us by those in power, it can be better late than never!!

Critique For It's Own Sake

What is lacking today are adequate projectual hypotheses – ideas and methods – for the new conditions of the conflict; but maybe above all what is lacking is that sense of defiance that is ethical tension and dreaming combined, that great passion for free discussions and for resolute action.

Diavolo in Corpo, Marin

The "new conditions of the conflict" outlined by Bleu Marin are changing and evolving as quick as the pandemic. There are obviously many amazing examples of mutual aid within this context, and it is not our intention to sound entirely doom and gloom or critical of those participating in these networks; we are too. However, we are still holding our breath hopefully for the "sense of defiance" to emerge (this is inherent to our concept of anarchy, and to us, without it, it is meaningless). The pandemic will peak

and pass, claiming thousands of lives with it and we are fully aware of this. But the Coronavirus Act 2020 will be in place long after the 'lockdown' ends, it's impacts far reaching, enshrined in law for the next 2 years (at least). Many countries have taken repressive measures to tackle the virus, but with the length of time of the act and it's rigidity, they are much further reaching here than in many countries. Yet there is little dissent, or even questioning, around it. Once we are told we can leave our homes; the stop and search powers, the imprisonment without trial, the snitching will continue. As Marin wrote, we have a "great passion for free discussions and for resolute action" and we hope that this text will create a space, however challenging, for some of this, and shift away from the lack of critical discourse around the new world we are in. We must be able to critique concepts such as 'immunity passports', bracelets giving people a 'health status', telephone apps that encourage people to report the location of people "breaking the law" to the police, and the unprecedented access the government will have to peoples contacts and data. Despite it feeling difficult, and maybe antagonistic, to us, we have to find ways to create an anti-authoritarian response to this pandemic, because we cannot swallow their antidote, when we do not know what the "side effects" will be and how long they will last.

There is much we do not know about coronavirus. But most people are aware of the police state we are now operating. To quote Monsieur Dupont again, to challenge democracy, you "first make power explicit, then human beings can organise themselves accordingly." Even the mainstream press are full of column inches about the new state legislation in the UK (and the rest of the world). In many ways it is already explicit. The question is, what now and what next?

We believe there is importance in this conversation so we are not blinded by labels and symbols and so we can identify those who hold power today. Our struggle is against all power, "even when it wears the permissive and tolerant guise of democracy" (Bonanno). We hope that the experience of COVID-19 and the networks that arise around it will put some fire in the bellies of those involved in such groups but we also hope that among what is "permitted" and deemed "socially responsible" there will be moments of rebellion, and that cracks are turned into crevasses. For us, the 'peak' is only the beginning in a battle far-wider reaching than

this pandemic. "It's a marathon not a sprint" and to us, whatever the race, we don't know its rules, where the finishing line is or who is participating. We must remember this at all times, and keep ourselves alert to this rigged-game.

It is time to remember our own power and desert their lines. There is so much to be done and it is in our hands to turn our desires into possibilities.
<div align="right">Anarchist flyer from Galizia, (2019)</div>

We aren't trying to find a solution, and we are alright with this... Just because we don't have all the answers, doesn't mean we will resort to their questions. We want to create a space for discourse, discussion and reflection, to dig around in the filth... whilst looking to the stars.

Conclusions

It's like that feeling of disillusionment you get when, after running to catch a bus you realise that the driver, although he saw you, has accelerated instead of stopping.
<div align="right">*What Can We Do With Anti-Fascism?*, Bonanno</div>

Now that voting is not only being employed but also promoted by many anarchists as legitimate tactic, what will come next? If the argument of the ends (avoiding a Tory Government) justify the means (canvassing/ voting) then where is the "new line" drawn?! Who knows where we will be in two years time when they revisit the 'Corona Virus Act', and how much damage will have been done by their relentless and unchallenged attack on (and manipulation of) people's sense of "duty" and "social responsibility"? Indeed, is it possible that the shift from critique and rebellion to political participation is actually helping to smooth the transition for more blanket repression even if those participating are supporting the so called "opposition"?

Contrary to how this text maybe received, we don't thrive in division; but we do feel a need for critical discourse. In the midst of this pandemic, more than ever, is the time for difficult questions. We hope this text may create a space (albeit an uneasy one) to explore the frayed edges

of false unity and dissonance, whilst trying to find ways to form some kind of fragile solidarity. Our dignity is important to us, and we recognise that we are all hypocrites within this system; but voting (and especially canvassing) is a step into enemy territory that is very hard to come back from. We have lost trust and affinity, and the shared experiences that we felt forged strong bonds have been re-calibrated and re-imagined to create space for a political system that is abhorrent to us.

We do not seek adherents, but accomplices.

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Bristol, 2020

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(GRAFFITTI)