

A FANTASTIC RESPONSE TO MONBIOTS STUPID CRITIQUE OF ANARCHIST IDEAS ARTICLE (IN REVERSE ORDER)

The article below was posted to the 'aut-op-sys' mailing list, where george monbiots' original article attacking anarchism was posted. The article was in reply to another monbiot post so parts of it might refer to material not included here, but the gist remains. To follow the entire thread see:

<https://lists.resist.ca/pipermail/aut-op-sy/2008-August/000101.html>

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1. UNDERLYING CAUSES

Monbiot's approach is to seek a pragmatics of single issues, without looking seriously at underlying causes. In fact, the causal analysis in use naturalises capitalist motives.

Climate change may be the most pressing problem, but it is not the underlying problem. The root problem is not global warming or climate change as a technocratic "single issue"; the root problem is alienation - separation from ourselves, from one another, and from the environment. Climate change is one particular symptom of this alienation. The reason it is so difficult to solve is that it is deeply connected with this basic alienation. Now, in principle, it might be possible for the alienated system to find a way to restructure alienation so as to address this particular consequence. (It is also possible that it will be unable to do so). But the underlying issue will not go away. If people are separated from nature and are unresponsive to ecological pressures and issues, if people live and consume passively, then the underlying ecological crisis will not go away - even if the particular manifestation of climate change is "solved", it will be followed by another, and another - until eventually either a crisis comes up which it can't or fails to "solve", or the system is destroyed and alienation is overcome. The system's current response to climate change seems to be to switch to nuclear power. Is this a solution? Well, it would stop climate change if all fossil fuel burning was replaced with nuclear power. But it poses the danger of the sudden extinction of life on earth because of a chain reaction of Chernobyls in the various nuclear facilities. Now, if climate change is the "main issue", if it is "ideological" to pick and choose between ways of fighting it, then the nuclear turn must be embraced. If Monbiot wants to reject nuclear power - and I'm guessing he does - then he also needs to recognise that this "main issue" vs "ideology" binary doesn't really work, and that creating an ecologically sustainable world is not just about climate change in isolation, it's about dealing with the way human beings relate to the rest of the biosphere in general - and this means taking on capital and the state, which have an instrumental and dominatory relation to the biosphere.

2. STATELESS SOCIETIES

Regarding societies without the state, notice that Monbiot moves the terrain from one group of societies without the state to another - from Papua to East Africa. Paul's point about modes of production is probably relevant here: nomadic herders and sedentary herders have quite different production systems which bring them into conflict, and there are debates over whether there is a conflict logic built into cattle-herding as a mode of production. I've seen

ecologists suggest that herding systems like these, in desert and savannah areas, with high prestige attached to accumulation of numbers of heads of cattle, lead to desertification which in turn leads to violence against out-groups to gain access to land (I can't vouch for this theory, I've heard of other societies of nomadic herders which are pretty persistent and peaceful, so I'd guess that external squeezes on available land come into the equation somewhere). Claims regarding peaceful stateless societies are associated rather more with hunter-gatherer societies, some of which (the !Kung and Mbuti) have been reported as peaceful (the !Kung were reported by Turnbull as saying "someone who fights is stupid"), others as having warfare but of a non-acquisitive and mostly non-lethal kind. In any case the Turkana and Toposa have an ongoing tit-for-tat feuding which is not at all simply acquisitive, but built into the mechanisms of social ordering in these societies; the guns are coming in from outside (quite possibly a town near you or I), and the balance of power has been upset by Kenya disarming the Turkana (victims one might say of a stronger state: the Sudanese have no such ability to disarm the Toposa). One also needs to recall that southern Sudan and northeastern Uganda are in a state of semi-permanent war, and that the warring factions and states use local groups for their own ends (the Toposa are reputedly involved in gun-running); and these wars are hardly unrelated to global capitalism or fights for control of the local state. The Toposa have apparently been reconciled with the Buya on the basis of community rehabilitation, so there is no reason on principle they can't coexist peacefully with others.

Now, of course it is possible that a society which is internally egalitarian can also be brutally violent to outsiders. For the claim that "without a state the strong dominate the weak" to be true, it would be necessary that all societies without the state be characterised by brutal violence, and that this characterise internal as well as external relations. That violence is possible among stateless peoples is not in doubt, but for the argument for the state to hold up, it needs to be unavoidable and pervasive, not just in one case but in all cases. Even one exception disproves the claim that the state is necessary. Even if there were a million stateless societies and only one were entirely peaceful, an anarchist could still justifiably claim that this one society is enough to falsify the claim that people slaughter each other without the state, that this one society shows that peaceful anarchism is possible.

Of course, one can also reply that "war is the health of the state", that people slaughter each other in state societies, that they do so in greater numbers and with far greater lethality, that all the great genocides in history have been perpetrated by states, and that quite apart from deaths recognised as "violent", the statist-capitalist system causes millions of wholly preventable deaths of those it deems expendable, ranging from famine and malnutrition to road deaths; furthermore, that the state does not end interpersonal violence, it simply labels it illegitimate, which normally does not prevent it continuing or escalating. One can also find again and again, the state used as the means whereby the strong dominate the weak. The Nigerian army works for Shell in the Niger Delta, the Indonesian army for Freeport, the army of Botswana arrests Bushmen at the behest of diamond miners, the Canadian state works for uranium companies against the First Nations, and so on. One can also definitively say that there has never been an entirely peaceful state, since by its nature a state always has police or soldiers, some kind of apparatus of repression, operating a day-to-day coercion. There is not a single state in the world today which does not stand accused of some kind of atrocity - remember it was the Swedish police who first opened fire on anti-capitalist protesters, the Swiss who nearly killed someone by cutting a rope, Iceland devastating the environment for heavy industry, Holland attacking immigrants and with vicious police raids on squats, Canada with troops in Afghanistan, Ireland with the Rossport issue, New Zealand arresting Maori dissidents as "terrorists" and holding children at gunpoint. who if not these are examples of the "good" state? Where and when,

anywhere in the world, has there been a state which is the tool of the weak against the strong?

There is a sophisticated anthropological literature on the functions and limits of conflict in indigenous societies, Pierre Clastres being the best-known, though Max Gluckman for example has reached the same conclusions in a different setting. The logic of "war" wards off the state by preventing concentrations of power - war is a way of "warding off" the state. The "normal" form of conflict is (or was before colonialism) ritualised, consisting of non- or less-lethal exchanges such as stick-throwing or raiding (in the Sambia society, it involves exchanges of bow-fire which are not intended to kill, but to show martial prestige and to train participants). Livestock raiding and the like was often part of this ritualised warfare; it does not at all have the connotations of either theft or capitalist plunder in the west. It only escalates into potentially lethal feuding if someone is accidentally killed in such exchanges. And there are mechanisms to end the feuding if it escalates. For the Sambia for instance, this happened through an assertion of power by the otherwise subordinate women, who implored the men to stop fighting because of the impact on subsistence activities. Also, even the most warlike societies are also capable of maintaining peaceful relations not only within the society but with distant allies and trading partners. There is nothing natural or inevitable about war in stateless societies. People certainly do not slaughter each other the moment the balance of power suits them. Only in capitalist-statist society do people act this way. Or are we forgetting that this is in fact how corporations and states behave?

Speaking of which: I don't suppose the history of colonialism, or the resource squeeze due to capitalist resource grabs, have anything to do with so-called "tribal" conflicts in Africa and elsewhere?

Let us see whether the addition of the state to regions such as, say, Darfur, Rwanda or Afghanistan has reduced or intensified inter-group conflicts. In virtually every case, while the state may have suppressed low-intensity ritualised disputes, it has replaced them with bloody resource wars and accumulation-by-dispossession. The Afghan state has never been anything but a means for one ethnic group or faction to wage war on others. Rwanda has no history of genocide until colonisers come along and import external ethnic labels such as the Hamitic-Bantu distinction. In Sudan it is well-known that the Janjaweed are a state construct born of the war in the south.

Sharon Hutchinson has studied the impact of the modern state and found that it undermines conflict-resolution structures and introduces destabilising forces which lead to more extreme forms of violence among formerly stateless peoples. The Nuer of southern Sudan became the exemplar of a stateless society from early anthropology, but the colonial state undermined their conflict-resolution structures as government-appointed chiefs manipulated rituals to accumulate power. One result was that feuding became more central to social life. The introduction of modern weapons into a society with a relational and holistic epistemology is a lifeworld-shattering event, especially when states or statist agents can manipulate the shift in meanings it entails. One of the constraints on feuding was that a killer risked pollution; the leopard-skin chief who acted as mediator was able to maintain this role because of a posited ability to remove the pollution. The initial Nuer response to firearms was to equate them with death by lightning, an especially dangerous form of death in which the dead became a guardian spirit. But with such deaths becoming increasingly common, this inscription was undermined by another - promoted by the SPLA, the dominant

statist force in the Nuer region - that killing with guns does not pollute. Hence the imported state plus the imported technology is the cause of the apparently unconstrained violence that a people such as the Nuer may display in a contemporary context. It did not happen because there was something in Nuer society as a stateless society which makes the strong prey on the weak. Nuer society also contained, and still contains, mechanisms pointing towards conflict resolution. It's just a matter of which potentialities are activated or enabled by the dominant framework.

So, stateless societies which assimilate statist meanings and state forms of warfare are quite capable of atrocities against social outsiders. What about stateless societies which endorse anarchistic worldviews instead, or which simply resist the demand to assimilate? I suspect that even communities which are antagonistic to begin with tend to become peaceful towards one another in the context of an attachment to a politics of horizontal networks in opposition to verticality; this has happened to a degree with the Amazonian peoples who were antagonistic in the past. If instead of being inserted into dominatory state frameworks, indigenous peoples become connected to one another and to other networks through horizontal affinity relations, the conflict-resolution and autonomous aspects of their existing approaches are played up, instead of the conflictual and exclusionary aspects. (In my current research project I'm theorising this kind of thing in terms of relations between "light-side" networks, which are affinity-based and open-ended, and "dark-side" or reactive networks, which are closed off by some kind of ultimate referent of identity or exclusion; while networks can go either way, statism and capitalism seem to favour the latter, since they allow the insertion of networks into hierarchies, whereas the former establishes networks as antagonistic to hierarchies).

3. THE "PEOPLE", AND SOURCES OF OPTIMISM

One basic claim on this account is that "people" don't want ecological change (hence they have to be forced).

Who are the "people" of this account?

First of all, hardly anyone will allow massive mines, power stations etc to be plonked on their land, at the expense of localised land loss, risk, health problems, pollution and so on. Without the state to impose these things, they don't happen. This is true even of the most consumerist western societies, even of Mail readers (indeed, especially of Mail readers). It is even more true of the periphery. Virtually everywhere mines and power facilities are built, they are resisted. Strengthen the networks of horizontal activism and one strengthens the resistance movements. In fact, destructive projects will generally be stopped when the local (communities, people) has precedence over the global (states for instance). So it is in strengthening the local against the global that stopping extractive industries becomes possible.

On the other hand. Yes, it's true - they might not want the effects on their doorstep, but most people at the core want to carry on overconsuming endlessly, want someone else to sort out climate change along with immigration and terrorism, and aren't very interested in changing the world for themselves. This leads to a pretty depressing picture of what is politically possible, but

it certainly doesn't give the slightest credibility to statist-reformist arguments. Let's put it this way. Either capitalism and the state can solve climate change, or they can't. If they can, they will - the end of the world is bad for business after all. But if they can, there's nothing activists can do about it - they don't care what we think, and they have sufficient rational motive of their own without needing external persuasion. If they can't - and this is more likely than it sounds - then diverting activism into pressuring them will destroy what little chance we, and the planet, have of surviving the crisis; we have to hope that the existing balance of forces can be turned around. Even if it is as unlikely as George Monbiot thinks, if it's the only option then it's the necessary option.

How would ecological activists solve problems through the state? One might ask how long it will take before we could expect a Green parliamentary majority in Britain, or Nader as President. But now it seems not even to be this degree of participation - instead, hoping that politicians elected on a grey agenda will turn green overnight. But if the electorate won't vote Greens into power, why will it tolerate greys who turn green? The passive consumers aren't going to consent to huge reductions in electricity use, which in an alienated society would either mean sky-high bills or state rationing - they are already kicking back over the comparatively small costs of rising fuel prices, bin charges and congestion charges. An elected government in a multiparty system can't afford to do things which upset the decisive sections of the electorate. And a dictatorship would not fare much better, being if anything even more vulnerable to outbursts of popular anger. Anything which will make people vote for the other party or rise up against the regime is usually a political non-starter for state agents. Don't forget, also, that a state (democracy or dictatorship) decreeing something does not make it happen. One would be relying on the police who so enthusiastically attacked Climate Camp, and who so enthusiastically FAIL to enforce the fox hunting ban and FAIL to enforce health and safety at work, to enforce whatever measures the government tried to put in place and to repress whatever reaction the government policies, or the overall situation, provoked.

So I would read an approach of asking the state nicely as pessimism of the will, optimism of the intellect. What would be pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will? This would be to create directly the world one wants to see. This is the optimism Monbiot tries to squelch by insisting it is doomed to fail - though a tiny chance of anarchist change would still be better than no chance of influencing the state - with precedents such as France 68 and the Poll Tax revolt, I'd rank the collapse of the state more likely than a Green landslide or Daily Mail readers voting for electricity rationing, which have precisely zero precedent.

A first source of optimism. On a global scale, the Daily Mail readers are a tiny minority. Granted, they are a tiny minority who happen to overconsume massively. But the point is less to appeal to this tiny stratum of conformists, than to mobilise the overwhelming majority. One might add that consumerist ideals have been installed in the periphery also; but alternative social movements with other agendas still have massive appeal. The depth of channelling of desires and ways of seeing which is found in Britain, is not found elsewhere. As a result, the faultlines of the system start to show at the more peripheral points - places like Chiapas, Bougainville, West Papua, the Amazon region, and so on. On a global scale, the really significant issue is not what the 20% or so of British citizens who matter electorally want, but what the billions of subsistence peasants, small producers, informal economy workers, marginal and peripheral people, shanty-town dwellers and villagers want. The power of horizontal networks displays itself only to a limited extent in Britain, where a few thousand mobilise; it reaches its apex when entire regions

are shut down or taken over repeatedly and for prolonged periods. Imagine an entire global periphery made up of hundreds of little Chiapas, living more sustainably and preventing neoliberal resource extraction. This would surely lead to a huge reduction in resource consumption, create global conditions which interrupt the monologue of the Daily Mail readers and the persistence of passive consumption, and also offer a possibility of another world to operate as a counterpoint. If things look dismal in Britain, it bodes well to remember that Britain is currently one of the most politically passive places on earth.

The political question for ecological activists then becomes how to deepen, strengthen and make consistent the tendencies in the global movement of resistance. The question would be, for example, how one fuses an ecological element into the politics of people fighting on the edge of survival. And in such contexts, the fusion of ecological concerns by means of horizontalism provides a way in which the two concerns come together - horizontalism is a means of survival and also a means to prevent ecological disaster. In fact they are already joined, in the politics of groups such as Via Campesina, Karnataka State Farmers' Union, and various indigenous movements. On a vertical, statist model, the two are necessarily counterposed: commodity prices either go up or down, the state either takes on ecological concerns or it takes on concerns of making the poor richer. Movements are deepened and strengthened by increasing the numbers mobilised, increasing the horizontal connections within the movements and increasing the transversal connections through which the movements communicate outwards. And this kind of movement works. The Bougainville uprising shut down the local mine. The Niger Delta uprising periodically puts massive dints in oil extraction. Just last month, the Peruvian government was forced to back down from selling off the rainforest by Amazonian protests and shutdowns. To strengthen and deepen the global movement is the task of the moment.

A second source of optimism. Most of the passive consumers also have some degree of active life, in families, associations, neighbourhoods, unions or the workplace. In fact, even in the most atomised and statist societies, most of social life actually happens through horizontal networks and self-activity. Workplaces keep working, not because of hierarchies, but because workers take some pride in getting the job done, and cooperate to do it even against what the bosses want. If workers don't invest this horizontal activity, one sees something like the situation in the old USSR where factories turned out tractors which broke down within a year. Networks of solidarity might be mobilised in unexpected places, through churches for example. People help out families and friends in need. Millions still belong to organisations of various kinds, some being active in certain activities such as charity collecting. British society seems very dead right now, but there is always life below the surface.

The everyday networks kick in when things start to go wrong, as was seen for example in New Orleans (a classic demonstration of the cruelty and uselessness of the state and the comparative superiority of everyday networks). On the statist side, one saw the terrible and the absurd: a man threatened with being shot as a looter if he rescued his neighbour's dog; a pilot rescuing people off roofs, told by his superiors to turn back; a qualified, certified doctor ordered on pain of arrest to stop treating injured people because he was not FEMA qualified; an armed police officer standing guard over a neighbouring suburb, prepared to shoot anyone who might "contaminate" the area with New Orleans' problems; buses called in by friends and local associations to take people to safety turned away by the military who had locked down the city; people sent at gunpoint to concentration camp-like points in which they were effectively imprisoned, and where conditions bred the worst abuses among survivors; people jailed for "crimes" such as taking unsaleable food from wrecked stores to

survive and firing in the air to get the attention of circling helicopters. And sometimes it gets worse - in Sri Lanka, prisoners seeking to break out to escape the tsunami wave were massacred. Against this, the horizontalism of ordinary people shines through as a basic resource of survival. Authors such as Colin Ward and, in his day, Kropotkin show clearly the kinds of "anarchism" which are already active in everyday life, in apparently "apolitical" ways. There would have been starvation in both world wars were it not for the anarchistic, and widely suppressed, allotment movement which suddenly became the backbone of survival after spending more than a century eking out its existence on the margins of cities.

A third source of hope is that people can and do learn very quickly. At the moment, the greatest problem is that most people don't feel the need to learn, and their time and energy are sapped by the system (remember that one purpose of passive consumption is to keep people in the work-system). Look at something like the Cuban and Venezuelan literacy programmes, and one can see how fast people learn by viral, horizontal means. Most probably, people could learn autonomous ways of living just as quickly, given the opportunity and the motivation.

Anarchists and autonomists work day to day to create autonomous spaces and networks. At present this is a long, slow process. It could become a lot easier in conditions of crisis. Maybe the crisis will happen, maybe it won't. And maybe it would have this effect, maybe it wouldn't. My suspicion is this: unless the state wards off the problem without anyone's help, it's pretty likely a crisis will happen (from early effects of climate change, rising prices, peak oil, reactions to whatever alternatives are put in place); when it does, people will either become active in autonomous networks or they will become active in fascist and far-right movements. If the former then climate change will become soluble. If the latter then they will probably deny climate change and demand continued consumption come hell or high water. The more we build autonomous networks and increase their social connectedness, the more likely it is that the former scenario will come about. If we give up constructing autonomous networks and resort to just asking the state, then we will lose legitimacy along with the state when the crisis comes, and we make it almost inevitable that the latter scenario will arise. It also creates a big danger that should climate change be solved, activists will "burn out" or be recuperated (c.f. the German Greens), and then there'll be no movement, or a weaker movement, to confront whatever the next big crisis is.

4. POLITICS AND FACTS

As to which statements are political not factual:

I will grant that 1) is factual. The remaining three are all political statements dressed up as factual statements, which contain weasel-words which make a political judgement seem like a statement of fact.

"2. We require a massive political and economic response to prevent [climate change]" It requires a response, but whether the response has to be "political and economic" will depend how these terms are defined. The statement is roughly factual if these terms are taken to mean "a response affecting distribution and

use of resources". But it seems to also carry the meaning "a response exercising political and economic power". These are NOT the same thing. "3. Governments and corporations, whether we like it or not, currently control both money and power." Again this depends how one defines "control", "money" and "power". The statement is true if all these concepts are defined in the dominant system's own terms, i.e. within the dominant system, governments and corporations are defined as having the entitlement to exercise the forms of social power that "money" and "(political) power" denote (the ability to dispose of resources, to give commands, etc). But it is also true that governments and corporations do not produce either resources or value. It is true that mass social movements exercise considerable power against the system, as and when they are mobilized, sufficient to render minimal the power of governments and corporations, to overthrow governments, to shut down corporate operations, to reconstruct the whole of social life. Money as a social relation depends on the extraction of surplus-value and as such is dependent on the labour and the compliance of workers, and on the ability of capital to insert natural resources into the production process. Political power as a social relation is dependent on the obedience of the population. Both of them potentially break down very quickly. Neither of them is a simple, self-evident thing or fact which can simply be "controlled" by governments or corporations. And in this sense the statement is false; it would be more correct to say, "the statist-capitalist system defines governments and corporations as being entitled to a position of relational dominance, which they in fact exercise only and to the extent that this system is able to impose itself (by violence or by general passivity) against every other possible arrangement". Rephrased in this way, the true version of the statement says precisely nothing about what strategy one should adopt to bring about social change. "4. Unless we manage to mobilise them, we stand a snowball's chance in a hell of stopping the collapse of the biosphere."

This is political for the following reasons. Firstly, it assumes "we" (meaning activists?) can have some impact in terms of "mobilising" corporations and governments. This is not a factual statement, but is politically contested, since anarchists and a whole range of other people (probably including most of the Mail readers) are convinced that governments and corporations don't listen to anything "ordinary" people or activists say. "We" can disrupt them, but "we" can't mobilise them. The belief that "we" can mobilise them implies a political commitment to a view of the state and corporations as at least sufficiently malleable and benevolent to be open to constructive pressure. Secondly, the judgement that strategies not involving capital and the state have next to no chance is subjective and contestable. Thirdly, the claim as formulated implies the counterpoint that if "we" somehow manage to "mobilise" capital and the state, then "we" stand more than the next-to-nothing chance "we" otherwise stand of saving the planet. This is also a political claim. It assumes capital and the state can find a meaningful solution which addresses climate change without bringing out ecological collapse in some other way - an assumption which ecological anarchists would question.

5. DIY ALTERNATIVES vs STATIST "ALTERNATIVES"

Then we have the issues of local production and alternatives.

"You claim that "the DIY solution to transport issues is cycling". Yes, of course. But unless the state is also reducing the road space available to cars, your decision to ride a bicycle merely frees up road space for someone to drive a less efficient car than you would have driven"

There's a kind of iron-grid structural determinism at work here which reeks of

mainstream economics. I'm familiar with the argument that car use tends to expand to fill road space, but there's also roads around which are nearly unused, so there's clearly other factors involved. If enough people use cycles, they take over the roads from the cars, the cars have to drive at cycle-friendly speeds and the whole advantage of having a car is much lessened. One point of things like Critical Mass is to reclaim road space for cycles from cars. And of course DIY activism also includes disrupting road building - which is the main reason it's been pretty much suspended until recently. In certain peripheral countries such as India and most of Latin America, blockading roads is a common tactic to protest any issue, even unrelated to roads or the environment (in Africa it goes even further into stoning any cars in sight). The social networks seize control of the space from the state, and it becomes unusable on statist terms.

On the other hand, the state arbitrarily reducing road space won't reduce demand but simply increase congestion. The shops and workplaces will still be the same distance from homes, so all it does is make life miserable for the poor. We've all seen the effects - reduced parking space in city centres, increased illegal parking; pedestrianised city centres, so people drive to more remote sites and some other area is clogged. I'm not saying it isn't sometimes possible to produce little incremental changes this way, but not enough to address the scale of the problem. The London congestion charge had - what - a 15% reduction effect or something like that (including displacement)? That's trivial in climate change terms. Now, of course, one could decentralise services and work, reduce the amount of work done, move workplaces nearer to homes, replace factories and offices with homeworking, replace centralised hospitals with local clinics, the whole E.F. Shumacher agenda. But capitalism is never going to go for that, because it implies zero or negative growth. Or the state could provide alternatives, such as free public transport, payment for each item recycled, etc. But that's unfashionable too, as it would mean rolling back the last 30 years of neoliberal "reforms".

Ultimately it's pretty simple: either people will do something (switching to cycling, reducing electricity use, etc) or they won't. If they'll do it then the simplest, most direct way to get them to do it is to explain the problem and have them make the choice themselves. If they won't do it then they aren't going to like people trying to force them, in fact they'll become less likely to do it than before. The statist "solutions" that actually happen (mostly punitive) are disempowering and hence are something people resist complying with; the "push" factors to not comply remain the same, so compliance is partial even when "rational" reasons to comply are not overwhelmed by a desire to do the opposite of whatever the state says. DIY action is empowering, it involves taking control of one's own life, making ethical choices instead of being bossed about.

Statist projects are disempowering, engendering resentment and a desire to deviate from whatever is the prescribed course. A lot more can be done with unconstrained, empowered flows than with flows which are bouncing around neurotically between different sources and degrees of resentment. If people won't do something of their own accord, they sure as hell won't consent to being forced to do it, which is ten times more onerous. Look at the evidence from reactance theory in psychology: trying to force someone to do something makes them less likely to do it freely, even if they had no prior preference against doing it. Forcing someone to do something attractive makes it unattractive. Law produces transgression. One is not going to get drastic 80, 90, 100% reductions in anything by playing around with these distorted, unpredictable reactive forces. How effective, really, are states? Do they manage to cut crime by any significant amounts, without addressing economic causes? Did the

Soviet Union manage to produce efficient functioning industries, or solve its agricultural problems? Did the Nazis manage to create an unstoppable war machine unable to withstand partisans and foreign enemies? In a society with open spaces, attempts to coerce desired behaviour simply move social deviance sideways or force it further underground. And totalitarianism is no better - here, the problem "returns" as insolubility of apparently administrative problems, as a generalised incapacity even of those at the top to get information on what the situation really is.

Oh, and I'm not sure how Monbiot proposes to persuade India, China and the rest to not build roads. The cycling vs cars issue is very real in China in that cars are pretty new most places, cycling has become the norm, but cars are taking over. This is state-driven, the whole GDP growth thing - as against the local resistance movements whip pop up intermittently, quite often over ecological issues, in the marginal areas. The DIY movement already has connections with Indian grassroots movements, with Chinese dissidents, and affinities with the resistance in China; this provides a real possibility (which may or may not be actualised) of changing things on the ground in these places. The statist approach? India could maybe be bullied through international organisations if there was a consensus of western states (which there isn't), and if we're really to stoop so low as to support this. But nobody in the state system has any meaningful leverage on China. In terms of the periphery, there are plenty of arguments for ecologically sustainable "alternatives" (the subsistence alternative, sustainable development, gross domestic happiness and so on), but they all rely on everyday networks as the central referent, rather than state control and homo economicus. If we assume homo economicus then there's no way to stop the periphery to stop "growing" economically.

"You maintain that "Local energy production such as homemade turbines are also part of the DIY ecology scene". Micro-wind turbines generate on average 5% of household electricity demand. . . Your proposals demonstrate better than any argument I could make that a DIY approach cannot deliver them. "

First of all, the term "such as" has a meaning. Wind turbines are certainly not the limit of DIY, it can also be water for instance. And such schemes go hand in hand with reducing energy consumption. And again, if a DIY approach cannot provide such things then neither can a statist approach. The wind turbines won't spin faster because some guy in a suit tells them to or threatens to lock them up. People who won't reduce their electricity consumption of their own accord, certainly won't vote for a government which will make them do it. Anything DIY activism can't do, the state can't do either.

"And this is before you tackle the problem of OTHER PEOPLE's use of energy. How does your decision to build a homemade wind turbine prevent your neighbours from buying their electricity from a coal-burning powerstation? The brutal truth which your politics will not admit is that most people do not want to join Critical Mass, build their own wind turbines or become eco-activists."

There is no such thing as "just do not want to". Motives and actions have causes. People are not homo economicus. People's actions arise from their conceptions of the world and systems of meaning. That's a proven fact. Trying to manipulate people as if they are objects does not work. Any successful appeal must take account of people's conceptions and understandings, or it will bounce off the density of the lifeworld. Of course this transformation of beliefs and attachments is a difficult matter. Hence the delusional temptation to seek a short-cut in some kind of mythical "essence" of what people "really are", which can be moulded as a short-cut, cutting out all the messy business of dealing with real people, trying to solve everything with a few simple macro-

policies directed at affecting this supposed essence (making homo economicus comply by altering the cost-benefit calculus). Quite frankly, if one sinks to this then one might as well be praying to God or cleaning out thetans. Serious politics has to deal with flesh-and-blood human beings with desires, needs, beliefs, commitments - not with analytical constructs derived from the stock exchange.

Positive action doesn't prevent others from doing things - though direct action certainly can. The point of positive action is twofold. First of all it is cumulative: while it doesn't prevent others from destructive actions, it doesn't compel or encourage them to do so either; each person who makes the change is one fewer who is doing things the destructive way. With enough people opting in, it builds up, and soon a revolution has happened. This is how, for example, the freeing up of a lot of the digital commons has happened. It is how Vietnam War draft resistance happened. But the thing is, one doesn't only do the positive things (cycling, recycling, using less energy, not flying, growing food, using homemade wind turbines), one also disrupts the functioning of the dominant system by means such as blockading power stations, blocking roads, occupying company offices, maybe torching SUVs. By doing the positive things as well, one helps put in place the infrastructure to replace what one is trying to shut down.

Secondly, it's prefigurative. By seeing someone else do something, one might consider doing the same. It shows there's an alternative. It shows people aren't powerless. Prefiguration appeals to hope, to active energies, and challenges aspects of the dominant conception. It shows that another world is possible. One can do through prefiguration everything one can do through the state, with the exception of coercion - and as is shown in psychology, coercion simply generates increased opposition. If something can't be done prefiguratively, then it can't be done. There is no statist opt-out.

And it works. The defeat of GM is a good example. The anti-GM movement had three main tactics - spreading information, trashing crops, boycotting. It worked. Look at the animal rights movement - Huntington Life Sciences only survived because of a state bailout, hundreds of smaller businesses quit, fur is taboo, foie gras off the menu in most of Britain and America.

Hence it is not a priori ineffective or "gesture politics". It is also not automatically or necessarily effective. Neither is any other method. But it is a contingent, not a predetermined matter whether one is successful in convincing others to join in. And it is the only possibility in terms of producing real effects as opposed to displacements.

(BELOW IS the ORIGINAL ARTICLE By MONBIOT)

Climate change is not anarchy's football

In seeking to put politics ahead of action, Ewa Jasiewicz is engaging in magical thinking of the most desperate kind

- [George Monbiot](#)

If you want a glimpse of how the movement against climate change could crumble faster than a summer snowflake, read [Ewa Jasiewicz's article](#), published yesterday on Comment is free. It is a fine example of the identity politics that plagued direct action movements during the 1990s, and from which the new generation of activists has so far been mercifully free.

Jasiewicz rightly celebrates the leaderless, autonomous model of organising that has made this movement so effective. The two climate camps I have attended this year and last were among the most inspiring events I've ever witnessed. I am awed by the people who organised them, who managed to create, under extraordinary pressure, safe, functioning, delightful spaces in which we could debate the issues and plan the actions which thrust Heathrow and Kingsnorth into the public eye. [Climate camp](#) is a tribute to the anarchist politics that Jasiewicz supports.

But in seeking to extrapolate from this experience to a wider social plan, she makes two grave errors. The first is to confuse ends and means. She claims to want to stop global warming, but she makes that task 100 times harder by rejecting all state and corporate solutions. It seems to me that what she really wants to do is to create an anarchist utopia, and to use climate change as an excuse to engineer it.

Stopping runaway climate change must take precedence over every other aim. Everyone in this movement knows that there is very little time: the window of opportunity in which we can prevent two degrees of warming is closing fast. We have to use all the resources we can lay hands on, and these must include both governments and corporations. Or perhaps she intends to build the installations required to turn the [energy economy](#) around – wind farms, wave machines, solar thermal plants in the Sahara, new grid connections and public transport systems – herself?

Her article is a terrifying example of the ability some people have to put politics first and facts second when confronting the greatest challenge humanity now faces. The facts are as follows. Runaway climate change is bearing down on us fast. We require a massive political and economic response to prevent it. Governments and corporations, whether we like it or not, currently control both money and power. Unless we manage to mobilise them, we stand a snowball's chance in climate hell of stopping the collapse of the biosphere. Jasiewicz would ignore all these inconvenient truths because they conflict with her politics.

"Changing our sources of energy without changing our sources of economic and political power", she asserts, "will not make a difference. Neither coal nor nuclear are the 'solution', we need a revolution." So before we are allowed to begin cutting greenhouse gas emissions, we must first overthrow all governments and corporations and replace them with autonomous communities of happy campers. All this must take place within a couple of months, as there is so little time in which we could prevent two degrees of warming. This is magical thinking of the most desperate kind. If I were an executive of E.ON or Exxon, I would be delighted by this political posturing, as it provides a marvellous distraction from our real aims.

To support her argument, Jasiewicz misrepresents what I said at climate camp. She claims that I "confessed not knowing where to turn next to solve the issues of how to generate the changes

necessary to shift our sources of energy, production and consumption". I confessed nothing of the kind. In my book Heat, I spell out what is required to bring about a 90% cut in emissions by 2030. Instead I confessed that I don't know how to solve the problem of capitalism without resorting to totalitarianism.

The issue is that capitalism involves lending money at interest. If you lend at 5%, then one of two things must happen. Either the money supply must increase by 5%, or the velocity of circulation must increase by 5%. In either case, if this growth is not met by a concomitant increase in the supply of goods and services, it becomes inflationary and the system collapses. But a perpetual increase in the supply of goods and services will eventually destroy the biosphere. So how do we stall this process? Even when usurers were put to death and condemned to perpetual damnation, the practice couldn't be stamped out. Only the communist states managed it, through the extreme use of the state control Jasiewicz professes to hate. I don't yet have an answer to this conundrum. Does she?

Yes, let us fight both corporate power and the undemocratic tendencies of the state. Yes, let us try to crack the problem of capitalism and then fight for a different system. But let us not confuse this task with the immediate need to stop two degrees of warming, or allow it to interfere with the carbon cuts that have to begin now.

Jasiewicz's second grave error is to imagine that society could be turned into a giant climate camp. Anarchism is a great means of organising a self-elected community of like-minded people. It is a disastrous means of organising a planet. Most anarchists envisage their system as the means by which the oppressed can free themselves from persecution. But if everyone is to be free from the coercive power of the state, this must apply to the oppressors as well as the oppressed. The richest and most powerful communities on earth – be they geographical communities or communities of interest – will be as unrestrained by external forces as the poorest and weakest. As a friend of mine put it, "when the anarchist utopia arrives, the first thing that will happen is that every Daily Mail reader in the country will pick up a gun and go and kill the nearest hippy".

This is why, though both sides furiously deny it, the outcome of both market fundamentalism and anarchism, if applied universally, is identical. The anarchists' associate with the oppressed, the market fundamentalists with the oppressors. But by eliminating the state, both remove such restraints as prevent the strong from crushing the weak. Ours is not a choice between government and no government. It is a choice between government and the mafia.

Over the past year I have been working with groups of [climate protesters](#) who have changed my view of what could be achieved. Most of them are under 30, and they bring to this issue a clear-headedness and pragmatism that I have never encountered in direct action movements before. They are prepared to take [extraordinary risks](#) to try to defend the biosphere from the corporations, governments and social trends which threaten to make it uninhabitable. They do so for one reason only: that they love the world and fear for its future. It would be a tragedy if, through the efforts of people like Jasiewicz, they were to be diverted from this urgent task into the identity politics that have wrecked so many movement