

Roads out ahead

Interview with an Anti-Roads Protestor and Essex Anarchist

Anarchist Communist Federation

1996

***ORGANISE!** – How did you become involved in the Anti-Roads movement?*

EA – I met some people in London and became friends with them. They were involved in the anti-roads protests and various other campaigns; they had been heavily involved in the ‘No M11’ campaign in East London since it started. I met some more people, and because I’ve got anarchist views anyway became more involved myself, because I saw that the motorway was just another way the authorities were taking liberties with people’s lives, making people who have lived in their houses for years move out (like Dolly, who was 93). Also the ecological side of it, pollution and how they are fucking up people’s health and the ozone layer.

***ORGANISE!** – What campaigns have you been involved in?*

EA – I’ve mainly been involved in the ‘No M11’ in East London, I was on that campaign for the best part of a year, doing other things as well like anarchist stuff, marches, meetings. I was involved in animal liberation campaigns like Brightlingsea, I nearly got nicked there for trying to climb up the side of one of the lorries, to get on the roof; I got grabbed but I pulled myself away from the police officer and escaped by running away through the crowd! I went down to Kent as well to a 2 day ‘Stop Work On The Road’, building site invasions and that. There was a full moon party, the organisers said in the local paper that they were expecting 2000 road protesters, so the police were ready for those numbers, outnumbering the protesters by 6 to 1, as there were only about 250 protesters turned up. They were at one of the two camps the Blue group had built and set up, 70 protesters on site, and about 200 Old Bill turned up and formed a circle all around us. They read out the Criminal Justice Act (CJA) about how they thought there was going to be a party or illegal rave there that night, and anybody who was (found) within a 5 mile radius of that area in the next hour was liable for arrest. One of the protesters who had been there for a few months asked us if we could help carry his tent, a big 12 person army job, me and my mates said yes. We helped him carry it and all his belongings, everything in the middle of the tent. We had to go across building sites, ploughed fields (for) the full length of the route. Then the police pulled up, 2 vans, they all came up to me and said was I at the site when the C.J.A order was given out, and as it was one and a half hours since it was given out I was under arrest as I was only three and a half miles away. They took me to an intelligence gathering unit set up in a local school, staffed by the C.I.D and photographed and questioned me. I had to go to court and was fined £40 and given a conditional discharge for the offence of failing to leave the land fast enough

when the order was given. It was section B or C of the C.J.A, and the jury were out for three and a half hours deciding what to do with us, cause we was the first people to be up for that offence in Kent. Five of us went “not guilty”, and four of us were found guilty. I also went to Newbury when it first started, the first three weeks, it was right good because we stopped them from doing any work in that time. Then the police started to help the security guards, they were no longer keeping an eye on things and having an unbiased view as they say they are supposed to, being there to make sure there is no breach of the peace. Every time the protesters broke through the security lines or got the better of them, the police jumped in and took the security side.

ORGANISE! — *What were the backgrounds of the different people involved?*

E.A — I would say that most of the people involved in these campaigns were ‘alternative’ types, hippies and new agers, and just local residents who has been around the area the motorway is built in. All sorts in general, but some lunch outs, (people who) don’t do any work, just there for free grub and that.

ORGANISE! — *Has the movement changed, and if so, in what ways?*

E.A — I think the only way that it has changed really is that there seems to be a lot more people getting involved, at the start a lot of the protesters were alternative types, individualist anarchists and just locals. Now groups of people come from different areas all over the place, just for weekends and a week at a time, liberal “fluffy” types, middle class greens, seems sometimes as if it’s become almost fashionable to be a protester, weekends away and all that, bed and breakfast style.

ORGANISE! — *Has the Anti-Road movement radicalised people?*

E.A — Yes, I do think so, in some ways. Like normal people who you would have at one time called straight goers or law-abiding citizens, just local people, residents in the area where the roads are going through, have seen what attitude the police have, and been man-handled themselves, and even arrested. Old ladies and middle class, middle aged people who have been pushed about, arrested by police in full riot gear, the Old Bill have turned whole communities against them.

ORGANISE! — *What are the politics of the people involved?*

E.A — I think that most of the hard core protesters that live in the tree houses 70 foot off the ground, and travel from one road protest to another where there are trees involved, the real McCoy sleeping in tree houses when it’s minus 2 or 3 , would call themselves anarchists. They are individualists, because when I tell them I’m a member of the ACF they always say if I’m an anarchist, why do I need to be a part of an organisation? They can’t seem to grasp that we need to be organised, to be in the position to fight the capitalists and the Ruling Classes — the State — effectively. I reckon that most people involved at the moment are fluffies and liberal woolly types: believers in non-violent direct action. There are a few socialists and people who call themselves nothing at all, also local residents who are sympathetic and donate food and stuff. All the different Green parties also try to get involved of course, trying to make it their protest, their banners all over the place. At the start of Newbury, when you phoned up the enquiry line, it was answered “Third battle of Newbury, can we help you?”. Now it is “Third battle, Friends of the Earth speaking”.

ORGANISE! — *What roles have the various Green organisations taken?*

E.A — Many of the national organisations have taken part in different ways. Some of the big well known groups have donated goods and equipment to some of the smaller protests such as money, food, climbing ropes and equipment, cargo nets etc. and don’t want their name used or even mentioned. They don’t want their names associated with the protests, preferring that it is

associated with big gimmicks to get their point across, or high class big money stunts that get them on T.V. Some of the smaller Green parties try to get their teeth into road campaigns so that they are, or seem to be, the main force behind a particular protest. They put all their banners and posters all over the place, you know the sort of thing, a take-over job really, the same sort of thing that the Socialist Workers Party do on a normal march. They give their ready made placards out to all the non politically involved people on the march, so that it looks as though the march is S.W.P oriented. To quote Green Anarchist – “Friends Of the Earth and Earth First are dead!, long live the E.L.F!”(Earth Liberation Front).

ORGANISE! – *What are people’s views in the violence/non-violence debate?*

E.A. – Most of the people involved in the roads protests take the non-violent direct action approach, they are really the people who get called fluffies, a lot of them class themselves as anarchists, but pacifists. On the other hand, all the protesters who think that that when the security get heavy handed or violent – as they do sometimes – that we should have a go back and fight, self defence really, they get called spikeys. There is quite a lot of conflict between the two different groups, mostly verbal disputes, but the fluffies heavily outnumber the “let’s have a go” brigade. I myself think that we are entitled to defend ourselves if the police or security attack or get heavy with us, “by any means necessary,” you know, the old anarchist saying, but there isn’t enough of us to get heavy at the moment, so I would say that tactically the non-violent approach is best at present. It gets more of the general public on our side, they like sit-downs, but not riots.

ORGANISE! – *How are different strategies devised?*

E.A – Through discussions and debate, or people have learnt different ways that are good to stop the road builders or bailiffs at other road protests. The knowledge is passed around campfires during debates at night, tree people who have learnt climbing skills, and have equipment like ropes and harnesses, teach others how to climb trees safely, and how to move around the tree defence walkways without much risk, and how to set up a tree defence network. These are very effective, especially the tunnels, people lock themselves on to props holding the roof of the tunnel up.

ORGANISE! – *How have the authorities (Police, Bailiffs etc.) reacted to the protests, and how have the police used the C.J.A?. (Criminal Justice Act)*

E.A – On most of the protests I’ve been on, it’s been the NVDA approach, so there is little violence or hostility from the protesters. I would say because of that most of the old Bill don’t get wound up, but there is always some that want to get stroppy. They make remarks about how smelly we all are, “when did you last have a bath.” ? It’s the same with the Sheriff’s men really, some are OK with you really, some are nasty horrible bastards. I think really (that) the most grief comes from the security men, a lot of them are quite aggressive, they like to think of themselves as tough guys, and us as silly hippies. They’re silly fuckers if you ask me, they only get £3.50 an hour and they have to 12 hour shifts. On some protests, evictions from buildings and tree houses, when the police get you they just walk you away from the area, search you, and ask for your name and address. Sometimes, more recently, they have used the C.J.A, if you don’t leave the area you will all be nicked for criminal trespass. They used it a lot at Newbury, nicking everybody they could grab for criminal trespass, and anybody who got in the way of the diggers or chainsaw men.

ORGANISE! – *What is the role of the Media, and how do activists view them?*

E.A – A lot of the daily tabloids are against us: “hippy squatters, and they’re all anarchist.” I just wish it was all true, the bloody Old Bill wouldn’t be able to move us so quick as they do. A few

of the dailies are OK, give us good write ups about how we are doing it for the environment and that, but not many of them. A few of the local papers take the protesters side, because they can see what the road in question is going to do to the area. A lot of the protesters don't trust the media, photographers or reporters. There's been a lot of photos taken by freelancers, and when their photos to the papers they sell them to the police cheap, so that they get good close ups of people's faces. Some protesters like the press because they say it gets the point across, and shows that somebody is trying to do something about it, or it might bring more support from local people.

ORGANISE! — *Has the response to the Authorities changed?*

E.A — I do think that quite a lot of people's attitudes towards the police and authorities have changed over the last year. A lot of people who used to be fluffy, who now have seen violence from police and security at various marches, demos and evictions now think its time to be spikey and fight back. Those who have been on various campaigns and lived on the road are often fed up with all the shit the authorities throw at them all the time, its time for action not for talking about how to lay on the floor. According to certain fluffy papers this is the best way to defend certain parts of your body when getting a beating off the Old Bill. More people getting spikey is a good sign as far as I'm concerned, if attacked we should defend ourselves by any human means we have.

ORGANISE! — *How do you see the future of the Anti-Roads movement?*

E.A — I think that as long as there as they keep on building roads there will be a movement, the hardcore protesters are right in there, the tree people and that, they all know each other, and anywhere they are trying to chop down a tree for a road, these people are going to go. Its no joke, the authorities have chopped down half of Britain's ancient woodland, just since the Second World War, 10% of Britain's landmass is covered in tarmac; 75,000 new cars hit the streets of the world every 24 hours, so its got to come to a stop at some point, or its going to be goodbye world. We've just got to get the point over to the masses, the ozone (layer) is knackered, the icecaps are melting, we have got to do something drastic. Anything that causes poisonous fumes or toxic gases to be put in the atmosphere has got to be stopped; car culture, industry, lots of things, we've got to put ourselves back a few hundred years, go back to horses and carts, electric trains, trams around the city instead of buses, pushbikes instead of cars. Viva the anti-road movement, long live anarchist communism.

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