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Does my Society look Big in this?

Anarcho

April 27, 2011

On March 26th it quickly became obvious that the TUC anti-cuts demo was going to be nearly as big as the 2003 anti-war march. It was an impressive show of numbers – not strength, though, as there was no coherent call for turning words into action. That is why getting our message of direct action (strikes, occupations, etc.) is key. The notion that “peaceful” and “dignified” walking from A to B will change policies was, surely, put to rest for this generation when Blair took us into Iraq?

Anarchists took part in the main march as working class people protesting against cuts in our living standards. We were there as trade unionists and users of council services. There was an impressive radical workers block. However, while it is always good to see a mass of red-and-black flags going past it is less impressive if the bulk of the rest of the march have no idea what these flags represent! In short, we need ensure that we do not accidentally self-ghettoise ourselves and that enough comrades spend time explaining our ideas on marches *outside* of any libertarian blocks.

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As far as the Black Bloc goes, such actions seem to have become increasingly ritualistic – the pictures and footage could have been taken at any time and anywhere in the past decade and a half. We are at the stage of having McRiots? Suffice to say, minority actions *can* be a useful part of the struggle but only if the reasons for them are understood and supported by the many. Can we really say that the bulk of the march understood *why* the Black Bloc exists? And, if not, can it be said that the Black Bloc is contributing to building a revolutionary *social* movement?

After the march, the Black Bloc provoked a spate of articles by commentators whose obvious ignorance of anarchism did not cause them to pause before expressing it in the printed page. One, in the *Evening Standard*, proclaimed that anarchists wished to abolish the state and so should have been supporting the (neo-liberal) cuts. First, anarchism has never been purely anti-state (surely “property is theft” shows that?) and so, say, privatising government services is just as anti-anarchist as nationalisation (we favour workers’ associations running industry). Second, it is the *government* which is imposing these cuts onto the general population. It is a strange “anarchist” who would side with the state against its subjects...

And that is the key. Anarchists are against the state because it is an instrument of class rule whose function is to protect the interests of the owning class. These cuts are top-down class war by the ruling elite, ideologically driven to grind the working-class even more into the ground (“fairness” being used to level down the many while enriching the few!). We are not against the state in the abstract. We are against it for very specific reasons and recognise that “reforms” imposed from the top-down by politicians (aiming to please big business) are of a significantly different character than those imposed from the below, by the people, against the wishes of state and capital. In short, the state can only be abolished by its subjects – along with the class inequalities and hierarchies it defends.

Suffice to say, there is no contradiction between the long-term goal of abolishing the state and a short-term defence of the welfare state. To use an analogy, anarchists are also against wage-labour and aim, in the long term, to abolish it in favour of associated-labour but that does not stop us supporting, in the short-term, struggles to improve our wages and conditions. At its most basic, anarchists are anti-state AND anti-capitalist – privatising state functions, handing over services to capitalist companies, reducing the state to just defence of private property are anti-anarchist.

Moreover, the struggles against these cuts can create a social movement, a culture of resistance in our communities and workplaces, which can tame the power of state – until such time as we can abolish it. So if we are strong enough, we can create a popular power able to control (and ultimately destroy) the state – which is another good reason to support these protests.

Anarchists must take part in this struggle and argue for occupations, strikes and other forms of direct action across the country to stop the cuts. In them we can argue that we need to go beyond defending ourselves against “reforms” (which always make things worse) and present a vision of a world in which we go beyond surviving into one where we start *living*. And that we can create the embryo of such a society in our struggles against the current unjust one.

This will build a genuine “Big Society” which can tame the state and capital by means of our social and economic power. This is where our libertarian message must be raised – in our streets and in our workplaces. That is the message of March 26th.