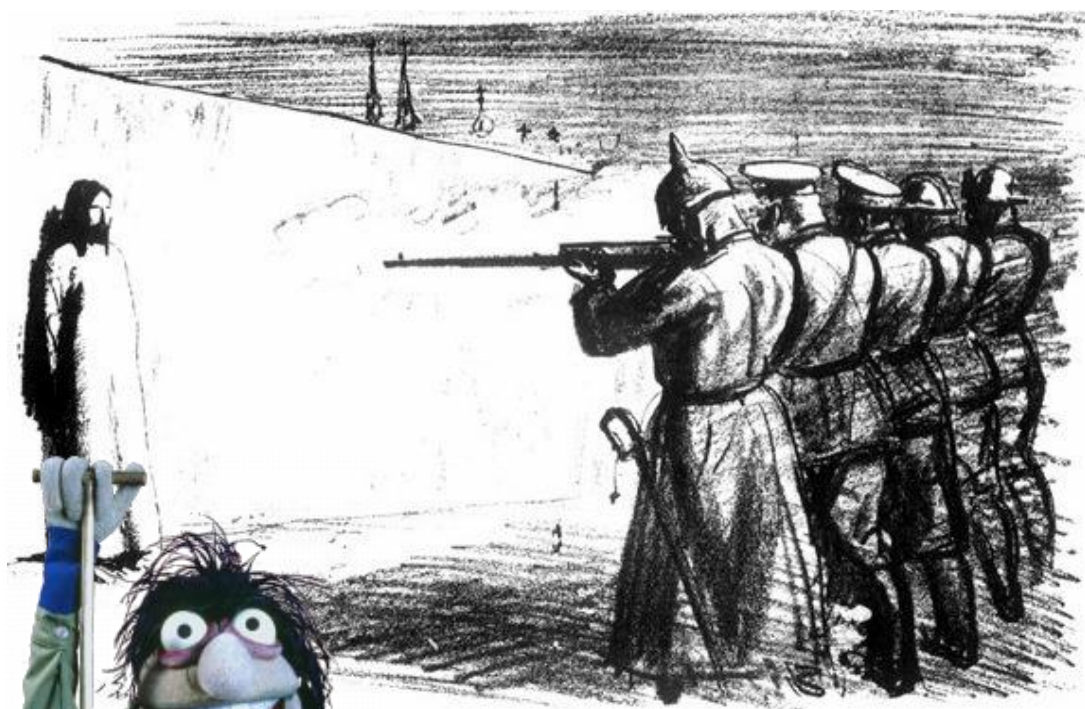




# WIDGAT

*FOR ANARCHIST UNIONISM*



- \* interview with a laid off meat worker
- \* Left trainspotting! Two weeks with the Christian Anarchists
- \* Anatomy of an inspection

"To revolt is a natural tendency of life. Even a worm turns against the foot that crushes it. In general, the vitality and relative dignity of an animal can be measured by the intensity of its instinct to revolt."  
- Bakunin



**RECLAIM & DECOLONISE**

Produced on Turrubul & Jaggera country.  
Sovereignty never ceded

# Workers Inquiry



The following is an interview Tony, who over the years I have known him has come to be more and more critical of the trade union, but from a perspective of militant worker organising and solidarity. Since Tony would rant a lot about this anyway, I asked if he'd be ok doing an interview so others

could get a glimpse of what goes on in the meat industry as someone who has been involved his entire life (for a project at the time, *The Grind*). The following was transcribed from a recorded interview in a Kangaroo Point boarding house back in late 2012.

My name's Tony and today I'm just going to go through a few things with you today about my life in the meat industry. I left school at 15 and got a job at a butcher shop. This was in the 80s around 83, 84 in New Zealand – then I came to Australia when I left the butcher shop and started working for Thomas Borthwick and Sons. They had sheds in NZ as well as in Australia. I worked there in south western Victoria – it was a pretty big shed, we used to do beef, mutton and lamb. That's when I discovered how strong a union culture could be – there were much better conditions than I'd previously experienced.

We worked on piece rate – which as you know is tally – you cut your tally and you go home – basically the quicker you work the quicker you go home, which all of us loved. Then that was all well and fine for many years. We got up around the 90s and the Liberal government come into power in Victoria and all hell broke loose. Borthwick's was bought out by a company called AHM – Australian Meat Holdings- which is now owned by a Brazilian company called JBS Friboi. I still say to this day the destruction of the meat industry in Australia began when AMH started buying all the sheds they can buy – they pretty well own the majority of the sheds. The funny thing was that Australian Meat Holding's frontal piece was John Elliot who just happened to be a big player in the Liberal party.

This move changed everything around – I’ll give you one example. Our forefathers in the industry worked hard for the lappo. A lappo is basically where you work for an hour and you have a 5 minute break – time for a cigarette or to sharpen your knife, rest your hand as well whatever the case may be it gives you a break, that’s the main idea so there’s less carpal tunnel injuries from repetitive stress and stuff like that. Now the industry has deteriorated that much and the union has lost all its clout with companies now wanting you to work for an hour and 30 minutes before a break, then your next break will be your smoko. The smoko, or your lunch break, goes for 20 minutes and was always a paid break.

Now they’ve extended the hours so that although you work an 8 hour day you don’t get paid for your break so in actual fact it’ll say 7.4 or 7.6 hours. Also when we used to be on tally you’d have a break at a set time – even if there were only two or three bodies of beef to go you’d still have a break because it was a paid break, then you’d do the last three and go home, if you understand what I’m saying.

Now what they do now is if you only have 3 to go and it comes on break time you finish them off and get told to go home. Its’ terrible. To get your 8 hours now you have to work the extra 20 minutes to pay for your lunch break which our forefathers fought hammer and tong for – to have a paid work break, now you got nothing.

Back when I started if you went to work and there was for some unknown reason there was no work for you, you used to get paid waiting time – whether it be a mechanical failure or an electrical fault – no electricity or anything like that you would get paid waiting time. Now they write some ridiculous thing on your clock card – L.O.W – Lack Of Work. And then subtract that from your daily wage.

The companies are so tight and because the unions have sold out they don’t support you anymore – simple stuff like that we’d be out the gate on strike back in the day. There’d be action straight away. Now with a lot of companies if they decide they’re going to change something – the shop steward or the shed delegate doesn’t come down and tell ya “oh the companies thinking of doing this and we’ll put it to a vote” or anything like that – they just come down after the fact! It’s done! The industry has gone

downhill so much its quite disheartening actually because it's been the love of my life for 30 years. I love this kind of work.

We had many strikes around that time in different sheds throughout Victoria and Queensland, with or without the union. We'd swap between lamb season in Victoria and come up here to Queensland for beef. The liberals had a mob called Trouble-shooters Available which were a mob of semi-skilled scabs that would go in and try to do your job while you were on a picket line so we struggled to keep them out by force to save our jobs



**TROUBLESHOOTERS  
AVAILABLE**

and the union culture was very strong then. Strong barricades and strong picket lines.

The union just started becoming weaker and weaker – both sides of government but especially the Liberals took away the rights of workers and the union as well. The union had less clout- all of a sudden it wasn't worth bugger all. At the end of the day you're paying so many bucks a week and at the end of the day when the company wanted to sack you and it wasn't really fair, well, we used to go on strike straight away to get old matey's job back. But now you have to go through industrial relations and unfair dismissals – so on and so forth. We used to sort that out ourselves. We'd walk right up to em and say look we think you've sacked matey for no reason – there was a real culture of solidarity. All these tribunals destroyed that – what you used to fight together you now fought on your own through lawyers, legal avenues etc. Now when there's an issue we hear straight back from management, 'oh nah we're not giving it to ya'. Why not? 'Because we've passed legislation that you Have to work'. Now there's no difference between labour and liberal – it's all about the market.

Y'know, as we used to call each other – 'Comrades' –There was a great mateship in the industry – how you goin brother, yea comrade and all that – Ah ya capitalist swines, you know. They were always talking about bloody capos' and everyone was full-on about it.

When Jeff Kenneth took over in Victoria he just put the breaks on everything and if you didn't like it, it was stiff shit – his cronies Michael Croger and Trouble-Shooters Available – the same situation happened on the docks with Patrick Stevedores. The painters and dockers had gone out

on strike and he's said fuck you, we'll get someone else to do it. He sacked about 9000 people from the public sector and put a whole bunch of painters n dockers in jail. He shook up the joint something shocking. You can take a bit out of Chopper Read actually. Stuff like that happened – gangs and bikies – people were hired to bash strikers in jail, no word of a lie. Some of the leaders in the union movement got a fair bit of a touch up in Pentridge jail, where I actually spent a fair bit of time.

Shed delegates also used to work beside other workers in the boning room – the boner was the shed delegate or shop steward. But now you find they're doing Quality Assurance jobs and they're in positions where they don't actually do any work and they get the golden handshake off the company. I've noticed they're usually in quality assurance or they might be the Occupational health and safety rep that also happens to be shed delegate, which to me is a bit of a conflict of interest – because one part they're working for the company when they're supposed to be working for the worker – so which one are they working for if you know what I mean. Like we all understand that at the end of the day you have to make a good product we understand that and take pride in that, but it has to be without jeopardizing the worker.

Plus another thing too – when the chain got slowed down and everything like that – that costed people jobs. Because when you finish cutting you're on a knife hand. Right. Once you finish cutting and that last carcass has passed you, that used to be it – you go and wash your gear and you go home. Now they require in a lot of places a bloody slaughter-man, a boner or a slicer to clean their area which was absolutely unheard of – that used to be the labourers job – that's cutting the labourer out of work but now they want you to hose down or pick up a bit of fat or something like that.

I was devastated. I was there one time when old mate said, 'Oi, where are you goin?' I said I'm going home mate that's my job finished that's me last cut I'm packin up n hooroo. He said 'oh no you gotta help clean up'. I said when did this come in? He said 'what?' I said when did that come in mate. I said an A-grade butcher doesn't clean the floors that's the labourers job – that's cutting out two or three blokes. If you're cleaning your area and you've got a boning room with 30 odd people and everyone's cleaning their own little square at the end of the day that's putting out hours of work

for the labourers. It'd help them get a much better wage as most of this is overtime. It's giving them those extra dollars.

The funny thing is that compared to 20 years ago, in a lot of cases I reckon the number of carcasses going through have been less, but there's more precision cuts. I don't know how many actual sheds there are where people are on actual piece rate anymore. Now there's a standard wage for the day from this workplaces agreement shit. What they've done not just in the meat industry but in a lot of other industries they said righto we're gonna give you for example \$250 per day rain, hail or shine, weekends and everything and take all your penalty rates off you – that's gonna be your set rate. But when they do that they pay you more but then do this even timing where people go to work for two weeks and then have two weeks off. But you don't get paid for your two weeks off! Then come to the end of the year you don't get any holidays. People thought it'd be great but at the end of the day you don't get as much cause you're not working the other time. You work your 8 hours and after 8 hours you should be on penalty.

My argument is back in the day when you were on tally break, say you were a solo slaughterman and you had to cut 80 sheep a day for your tally. Well if you cut anymore that was overtime. If it only took you 3 and a half hours to cut 80 sheep and you cut over you got paid double. You used to get paid waiting time, overtime, bonuses at the end of the week. But they framed it in a way that made it sound better.

A lot of people think Tally was bad but if you couldn't cut tally after a certain time they'd find you an alternative job – we were that strong they couldn't sack you so there was no dramas. I used to go to work at quarter to 7 when I was working at the bull chain in Portland – I'd be at the pub by 10 o'clock having a beer! The bull was only slash cut because its 2nd rate meat – by the way unfortunately that's your 100% Australian beef that goes into McDonalds. All the really good meat doesn't go into McDonalds that's rubbish, specialist cuts go overseas.

The way I've seen it they slowed the chain down that much to produce a better looking product but the quality of work has gone down the shithole. People aren't happy anymore. They're sitting around, they don't rotate –

some people do the same cut day in day out 5 days a week. Work is slower and the quality of life is worse. They've taken everything off you. Sometimes they wind the chain up though and you are working very fast and for longer. I don't know how it's ever been calculated because it doesn't make sense. The roo processing plant – I've been told that in the skinning room there's about 12 people, there's 2 that are on piece rate and the rest are on labourers rate – you can't tell me that two blokes are doing everything by themselves. What are the other fellas doing?

I'm laid off now looking for work, and I've been told I now have to go on a trial period at a lesser wage. I said a try out? I said you're kidding. You're only cutting 8 or 900, I used to cut 1400 mate I'm pretty well right I don't need a fucken trial period. How do companies justify paying a couple of people piece rate and others hourly rates? Others don't have piece rate at all. You could go to work one day, cut for example 900, and then the next day you go there and cut 1400 – you get paid the same wage either way. To me it doesn't make any sense.

Most of the issues in the sheds at the moment are around driving down wages and conditions. The major issue is the company trying to get the job done as cheaply as possible. If they can avoid paying penalty rates they will. When you're employed you have a hook number – 1,2 right up to however many A grade butchers are on the chain. After that you'll have your labourers and stuff like that. When layoffs did used to happen – and they didn't happen easily i'll tell you that – they happened to the last hook number but now they can lay off whoever they want – especially the outspoken people. I've been stood down. Back in the day I wouldn't have. Nothing has changed for the better.

We used to get union letters all the time, every now and again you'll see a notice put up. You get some correspondence sent to your house, but its been ages since there's been an actual meeting the way we used to have. We used to have stop work meetings – we'd all go and sit down and discuss what the company wanted and what our approach would be. I haven't sat down for one of them for years.

There's still a culture on the ground though. We all have a yarn 'this is fucken shit and rah rah' but the foreign workers are too scared and won't



come into it. They don't want to discuss better conditions or anything like that. Some of them have Visa issues and all that shit too.

With a lot of the older meatworkers they've become disgruntled, many have pulled up n gone into other industries. Now there's a lot of immigrants, as it's always been actually. Maybe if you got some of these migrants a little bit more active in what a workers movement can do that could build things again, cause they don't give a fuck mate, they'll just work. I try to tell em that sticking together is a good thing and that we have to do it. They don't know that you should be getting paid this or that – they just accept conditions no matter how shit – I hate to say it but a lot of them will work for a bowl of rice and a pair of thongs. Understandably they're trying to make life in a new country – they'll work for minimum wage and don't give a fuck. And the boss knows that and uses it against you. Say you got a couple of outspoken people like myself – they try to ween outspoken people out. No opinion, just shut your mouth. The worst thing too now is it's not compulsory to join the union anymore. Christ yeah we pressure them in don't worry about that. I'd say Oi what's ya bloody name – join ya fucken union. One of the migrants would say "no I don't pay money for nothing". I'd say nahh look you can get a paint job on ya car, a holiday for your wife, there's even hairdressers – your misses can get a fucken haircut. A lot of them from Laos for example have been through war and I've got heaps of em to join the union. They get a lot of respect in the industry. I told em what union organising's all about – I said 'fair' do you understand 'fair'? The fella that refused at first – He's a top bloke now. Because at the start they had this poor fella from Laos on \$7 an hour. I said you're bloody kidding me. I said to a mate of mine how come this poor cunt's only getting this much an hour. And they said they must have him on trial period. Taken back, I said a fucken trial period? He's been here bloody 6 months longer than I have! I said he should be on top dollar, he's nearly as good a cutter as me doing the same job. Same happens with a lot of the workers from Sudan and Korea, they get exploited. That's the thing about proper unionism – any racism goes out the window because you all respect each other for sticking together – you become comrades. Now the bosses have us all divided.

On union meetings, occasionally now people will go straight up to management and say oh look we're not happy with this what's going on here outside of the union structure. That would've never happened before

because you would've went through the formal avenue – you woulda said hey Jimmy can you go and talk – what's the go with this it's not bloody cricket can you work out why this is going on with me rate being dropped etc – you went to the shed delegate.

Being a union official is now a fulltime job in itself – you got shop stewards, every particular area has their fella but then the shed delegate is the union boss of the whole shed. He gets paid by the union as well as the company as far as I know. The shop stewards, they need to be more active in going around saying is everyone happy with what's going on. The shop steward doesn't do that anymore – the role's completely changed and flipped upside down. Strange to say, I'm a unionist but have no time for the union.

Like I was saying before our forefathers fought for so many things. We used to take stop work breaks all the time, for example when the meat was too cold to cut. You do that nowadays and the company will take that time off ya – they'll call it Lack of Work or take that time off you for their mistake. The idea with management is you've come here to work – if you're not working we're not paying you regardless of if its our fault, which 9 out of ten times it is (like a mechanical failure). In a lot of sheds now you will not get paid waiting time – they will not pay you waiting time.

Our idea is we're here to work, we've come here too work – you have to pay us waiting time. Now it's just like there's lack of work. For example last week I worked until half past 9, around 10 o'clock and I was told its time for you to knock off. I said you're kidding me – 'yeah you have to knock off there's no work'. I said right, fair dinkum.

So you get up, you travel nearly an hour and a half to get to work, you go there and work 2 and a half hours then you're told to go home. Then you get told you're stood down for a day or two, then you're sitting there going what's goin on, you ring em up and then you get told there's no work for 2 or 3 weeks.

The bosses now prefer their workforce to be casual permanent so they don't have to pay you holiday pay, they don't have to pay you anything,

whereas if it was permanent like the old days, like back in Borthwicks days- if a situation like this arose you could just use some of your holiday pay to get by but you don't have any now. Because they reckon 'we actually pay you more' – they pay you more and you don't get anything! No security, no holidays.

On the floor this is one of the main issues that gets talked about – the main talk on the kill floor is about the companies taking away penalty rates, not giving people opportunity to work on public holidays to get that extra overtime, working conditions with companies being tight arses and cost cutting, the main talk is how scabby the joints are. Everyone says they can't believe these pricks lately you know

In today's climate people are reluctant to organise and start industrial action because people are so insecure – but it wouldn't happen in the first place if people had've held staunch in the 90s in response to AMH and the liberal government.

## **Ways forward?**

Well I think the only way to do it is to one time have a sort of a mass walk out – not just one shed – all the sheds together like a general strike. We need to rebuild that culture of sticking together – back when the union movement was stronger we used to have a butchers picnic – it was like a union holiday for butchers down in Victoria every year – we used to have that and that was a big family day, jumping castles for the kids, little competitions, beers and barbeques and you'd be discussing 'oh yeah this is what's going on in this shed', and this is what's going on here and there but now there's nothing close to that that happens – there's no opportunities outside of work. We used to have all sorts of things like that – monthly barbeques with a keg of beer, there'd be people from the mutton killing floor, there'd be people from the beef killing floor. You would've never worked with em but you could chat and meet people across the industry. Find out what's going on, compare conditions. You'd discuss 'oh yeah what's going on on your side – oh they've got this one bloke doing change over and he's actually physically lifting every sheep'. And you'd go 'What! Youse can't do that, that's bullshit he'll end up breaking down, getting a broken back', you know.

That's another thing – they all say they're for safety and all that shit but these health and safety things are just to cover their arses. At the end of the day you look at some of the jobs people do and that's just out the window, that's just a crock of shit. You know they get you to watch a bloody safety induction and then what you watch goes straight out the window because you start doing stuff that they tell you not to do cause that the only way to do it.

In a big park mate we'd be there having a yarn, some of the big bosses of the union would turn up and old mate he'd have a van and they'd have knives and steels and booklets of where you could get cheap types get ya cars fixed, where you could get loans and finance, all that there was that many things you know. You'd get this card with all these reciprocals, you could go to a motel and because you're a union member you'd get 20% off. You could go on holiday, go to Corowa or Rubber Glen bowls club or something and you'd get buy one meal get one free – coupons n all that you know. But back then the coupons were secondary to the action you know, now it's like it's the other way round!

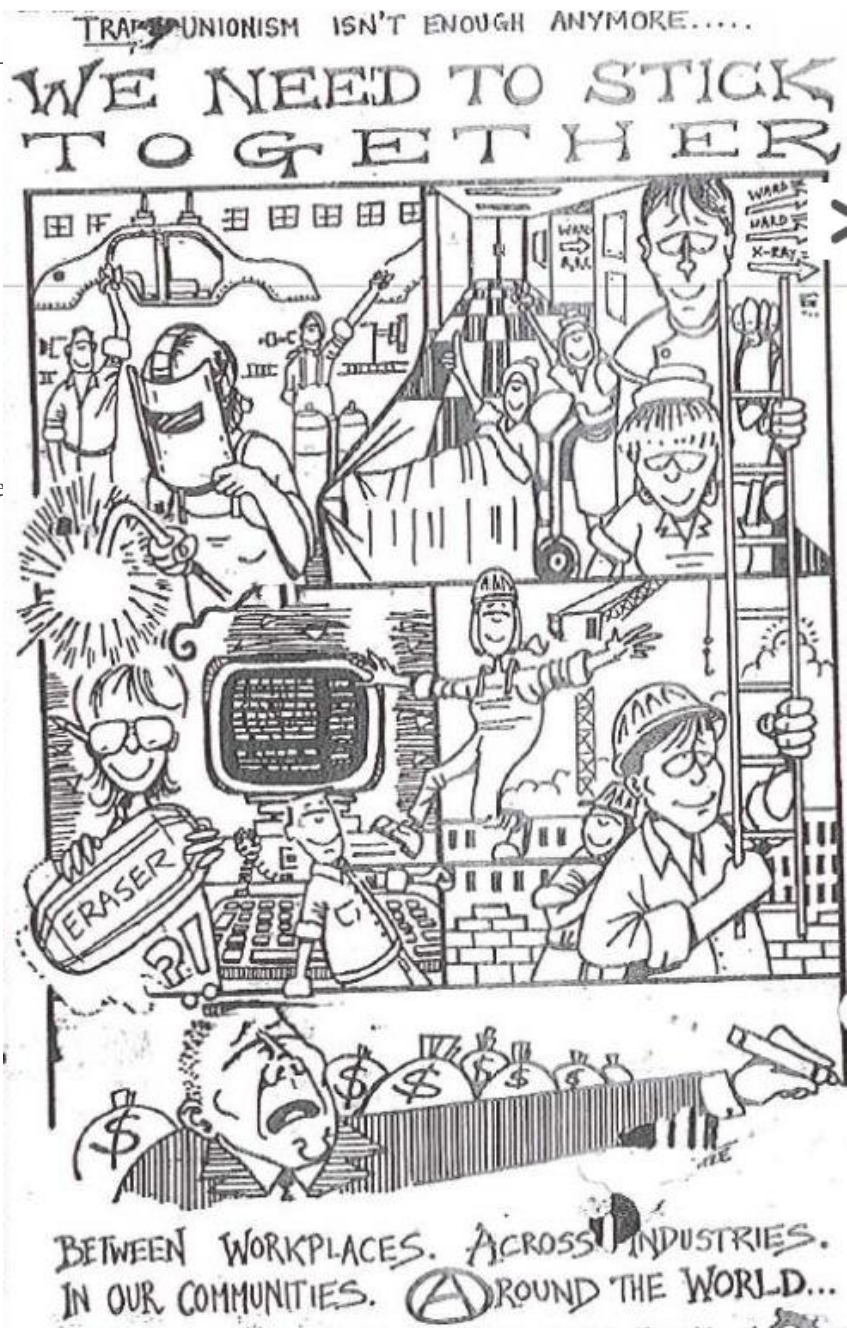
There are attempts by us workers to organise each other. We used to have a social club and we were recently trying to get a social club off the ground together at this last Brisbane shed. We were trying to get one going and had full support. We approached the company and asked if they'd take money out of people pay and hang on to it, but they said nah that's out of the question because that's part of our administration costs or something so they wouldn't do it. How bloody hard's that – it's a wonder why everyone's got a gutso. Take \$2 out for the social club that becomes your opportunity to have your organising discussions. That becomes the nucleus of your solidarity. That's how you get people together – at get togethers. So you have the social club right and you think righto every month we'll do beers, go fishing, have a kids day or whatever and then you get everyone together and righto what are the issues. Any issues in your area, boom boom boom – you bring them to management all together. And you have a resolution process. Give em within reason but if it isn't resolved well then action should be taken.

When people are disgruntled and they gotta keep battlin and toilin on, turning up to fucken work and getting shit on by a company with little

For a good look at the meat industry I highly recommend the book ***Making a Killing: The political economy of animal rights*** by **Bob Torres**, which looks at the meat industry more from the perspective of its damage to workers, not just typical vegan consumption arguments.

Also recommended:

**Beasts of Burden: An attempt to rethink the separation between animal liberationist and communist politics**



# Left Trainspotting

As some of readers who enjoy left-trainspotting may know, Brisbane has a reputation for being a hot-bed for Christian anarchists. The mention of this term evokes a variety of responses, outrage, curiosity etc. Regardless of what you think, there's so many of them in Brisbane that you're bound to come across one eventually if you're involved in any sort of campaign work. What follows are some of my notes from the Waiters Union 2 week community course back in 2010 and I aim to shine a bit of light on the Christi-anarchist milieu. The Waiters Union camp happens twice a year at the House of Freedom (this is also where BSN meet and has its library) and other locations across West End.

Not being raised a Christian and avowedly anti-Christian, I'll say from the beginning that I took this as a bit of a cultural exchange – there's a lot that didn't sit well with me

both politically and spiritually but plenty of inspiration as well. There were sessions everyday throughout the two weeks (such as on violence & non violence and the dichotomy between the two, how words like 'love' and 'hate' can be coopted and are not class neutral, Gerard Winstanley and the True-Levellers/Diggers, direct action – and one by me on community responses to homelessness)– but I'll focus on a few of the sessions given by Dave Andrews.

*"England is not a free people, till the poor that have no land,  
have a free allowance to dig and labour the commons..."*  
*Gerard Winstanley, 1649*



A bit of a background on Dave Andrews, an all round solid bloke and organiser who's well known both in West End and internationally. He gave away all he had in his early 20s, moved to India and lived in a place in the slums where he invited people rejected by mainstream society to live in community with him (self harmers, those with mental health issues, addicts, those with disabilities, homeless, people being hunted during the fights between Sikhs and Hindus etc). During this time Dave was frequently placed into life and death situations, was kicked out of the church community and helped set up a variety of counter-institutions – stories which I won't recount here. Up to 40 people at a time were living with him and his partner Ange in the slums, and they both continue to do inspiring work across Brisbane. Dave gravitated towards anarchism through being inspired by people like Jesus/ Tolstoy/ Chomsky/ Ghandi/ Kropotkin. Along with a few other people, he helped start up the Waiters Union network (which contrary to popular belief is not a union for waiters – the concept being to 'wait' upon people), which in turn assisted in setting up famous spots like the **House of Freedom** and **Kropotkin's Books** (now Shibui in West End). They had a few radical newspapers (can't remember their names) and operated a printing press. The house of Freedom now hosts a variety of groups – A Place to Belong, a reading & writing adult literacy group, men's groups, survivors of psychiatry, Food not Bombs etc. The Waiters' Union are basically a network of 'Houses of Hospitality' dedicated to practicing community as 'radical inclusivity and hospitality'. A lot of people that identify with the Waiters Union are known as solid people in the West End neighbourhood. For a small network they have real links with hundreds of people in Brisbane, particularly those who are struggling/socially isolated, largely because of their real effort to do outreach, whether through BBQ's or visiting boarding houses – and because their doors are always open. At the time of writing they run mainly out of their centre at 69 Thomas Street, individual people's homes and Black Star Coffee, a shop they helped start up.

I won't go into the problems with the concept of 'community' which runs the risk of ignoring the tensions of class divisions/class collaboration in organising for social change and the fact community workers often serve a double role of ensuring social peace, co-opting social struggles etc. There was a lot of useful discussion critical of professionalisation which I won't go into; Dave's website has some great articles on care work/social work and professionalization.

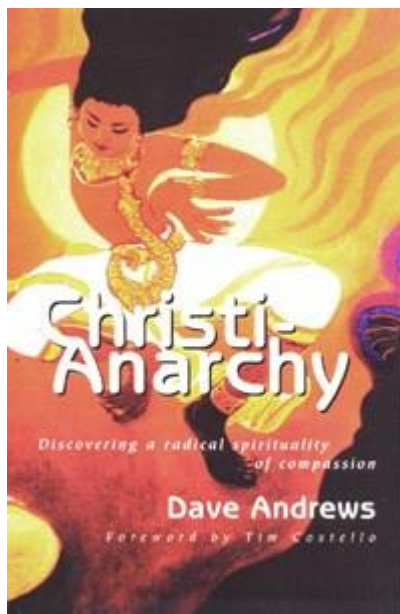


What follows is a summary of a few of the sessions which people may find interesting.

## **SESSION ONE: CHRISTI-ANARCHY**

To begin with, this is their definition of 'Christian-Anarchism'. Hang in there and i'll go into how they see God and Christianity further down. Christi-Anarchy is..

*"A way of life characterized by the radical non-violent sacrificial compassion of the Christ way of life distinguished by a commitment to love and to justice, working from the bottom up to empower people, particularly the marginalised and disadvantaged, so as to enable them to realise their potential as men and women made in the image of god, through self directed, other orientated intentional community groups and organisations."*



The first session was an exploration of Christianity's history, which went from being an unorganised 'open-set' grouping of pacifist 'christ-like' principles informed by Jesus' life, to becoming an oppressive, brutal organised religion characterised by tyranny, domination, colonisation, evangelism and state collaboration, shattering entire worlds and creating wounded spaces across the globe. In this session Dave said that religion, more than being simply the 'opiate of the masses', has more often than not been a 'Benzedrine for brutality' with the most demonic and diabolical acts committed under its name. This was refreshingly honest for a Christian to acknowledge.

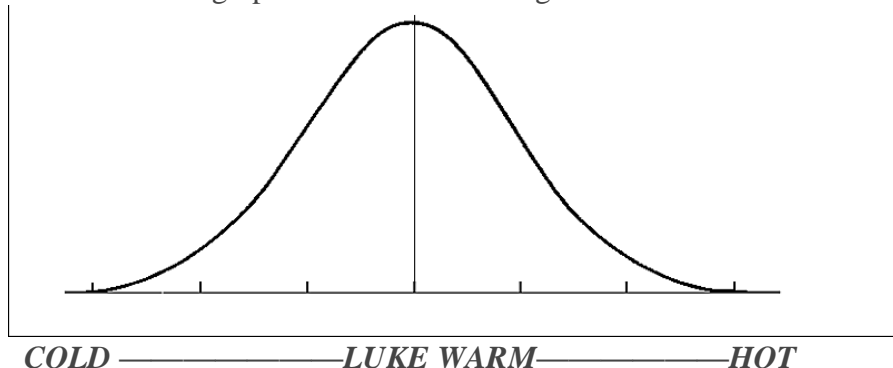
A lot of crying and squirming went on at this stage, particularly from the fundamentalists in the room (3 of them left the camp). It was an interesting space to be in – to see the powerful grip religion had on some people; it's not a section of society I encounter very often. One person in particular



considered what Dave was saying to be the work of the devil and would immediately begin reading the bible and praying afterwards! This fellow came from a very sheltered background and was blown away during the session on Christianity and its relation to the oppression and it's attempt at the cultural genocide of Aboriginal peoples – he also refused to go to an 'interfaith' dialogue night. Nonetheless he was a good chap to speak to and I think a lot of seeds were planted in his mind that will hopefully shake loose some of his ignorance and add a bit of depth & dimension to his world-view.

A lot of time was spent examining Bible verses politically (something that went on every morning). For example, the idea of 'creating heaven on earth' etc. One interesting point was the exploration of a verse that went something like "Give me cold water or hot water and I will drink it, but give me luke-warm water and I will spit it out." Dave used it to interpret religion and its relationship to prejudice as follows:

Dave showed a graph that went something like this:



Imagine a bell-curve. The horizontal axis represented the level of involvement with religion and the vertical axis represented the level of prejudice. The basic idea was that it was better to not get involved with religion at all (a-theist) than to get involved with religion at a luke-warm level (ie: ceasing critical thinking and taking everything literally ala fundamentalism – which results in high levels of prejudice). He went further to argue that if one goes beyond religion to spiritual principles (ie: the 'hot area') one ends up being even less prejudiced than atheists. This 'luke warm' principle applies to all things.

## SESSION TWO: THE TRINITY AS A SUBVERSIVE PARADIGM AND 'TRINITARIAN' COMMUNITY ORGANISING.

For those who don't know what the trinity is really about, God is explained in the bible as a trinity of 'father/son/holy-spirit' – In this session Dave rejected organised religion's view of the trinity as a legitimisation of hierarchy and patriarchy and reinterpreted it as a 'subversive paradigm for social change'. More on this in a minute.

God and the trinity were explored through bible versus (eg: the mention of Sophia – meaning wisdom and the 'feminine' within God) and this classic picture of the trinity:



Through the above picture (and accompanied by versus), God (and the trinity) is reinterpreted as '*3 people living in perfect harmony forever*', which is then interpreted on a practical level as *equality, community, hospitality and inclusivity*. This is God. In terms of relating this to the picture, here are a few notes of interest: Although their looks to be a hierarchy, they're in fact sitting level at a table, sharing a meal, and the painting is done in a way to make it look like you could be 'invited' to the table to share with the three (gender-neutral?) beings. You'll see why this is important to his idea of the trinity as a model both for community and radical community development.

So on this idea of the trinity (3 people)..

Take the idea of 'Love' for example..

One person alone can think about and make a point about love..  
Two people can incarnate love through their relationship together..  
But it's only when you have three people that you can create a space in which people can 'step in' and experience the love – a space through which you can incarnate an alternative (eg: resisting dominant values) and invite others to experience that alternative.

The whole idea of this approach to community development rests on the necessity of having three people to begin with, who can create a space (counterculture) to which other people can be *invited* into.

He then compared three approaches to micro-level community development/social change..

### **1) Charismatic community development**

Involves one person trying to create social change – doing everything by themselves (eg: Creating a program for people who are socially isolated). This is usually unsustainable and thus leads to..

### **2) Institutional community development**

Upon finding the initial approach unsustainable the 'charismatic' community developer will bring in other people to help in providing the particular service or program. This results in your typical 'service' or institution – a top down structure characterised by one way relationships where people are essentially expendable and can be replaced. This approach provides a service for community but does not create community.

### **3) Trinitarian community development**

Using the 'socially isolated peoples' example again, what Dave calls 'Trinitarian community development' essentially involves visiting someone who is socially isolated and asking if they know others in a similar position or seeking to bring together others in similar situations – the aim is to develop relationships and achieving the desired ends through matching means; ie: even though the approach is messy and fragile, if done

right it results in a self managed form or organisation which creates community, mutuality and reciprocity.

On a broader level Dave gives an example of how he used a ‘trinitarian’ approach to turn the St.Andrews church into an inclusive and hospitable place for marginalised peoples. This is an amazing achievement in itself, and every Sunday the church’s basement hosts a horizontally run ‘service’ which serves as a hospitable place, lots of people attend, particularly those who are homeless/peeps with disabilities etc – a testament to the waiters union’s effective organising. During the service they share food, discuss politics, discuss various issues and sing songs about creating heaven on earth, John Lennon’s ‘imagine’ made an appearance etc. Unfortunately the character of the service very much depends on who runs it, and one night there was a sermon given where the presenter drew a line, on one end it had the word ‘love’ and the other end ‘truth’ (a strange spectrum) – basically the sermon was that we can ‘love’ people from other religious traditions but we can’t get too far away from the truth.. eughh..

Dave’s guide for ‘subverting hierarchical (top down) structures and systems’ goes something like this..

### 1) Having a dedication to transformation

‘Being prepared for blood, sweat, tears and humiliation – playing helpful roles and suffering for just causes – the constant dialectic between privacy and proximity, collectivity and individuality – aiming to go the marathon not just the sprint’

In this part he explored the role of faith or ‘spirit’ in sustaining long term dedication to social transformation and looked at some practical tips for not burning out... one of these being the idea that you have to constantly ask yourself the question ‘What can I risk today’ – some days you might only have enough energy to ‘risk’ saying hello to someone, on a good day you might be able to risk having a deep chat – the point being that its never all or nothing. Essentially the advice was that before you engage in any social change type activity you should ask yourself “To what degree can I be vulnerable to reach out to people, where if what I do is not reciprocated

or appreciated, will not destroy me, leave me bitter, twisted or resentful.” We were asked to reflect on this statement.

## 2) Look for a ‘sponsor; within the system and find supporters

Essentially this involves finding someone up higher in the hierarchy than you to sponsor your idea (In Dave’s case – to open up the church to be inclusive) and find a supporter or supporters (‘creating a counterculture within the structure’ as in the trinity mentioned above)

## 3) Long term Strategy

The commitment to reframing hierarchy one relationship at a time towards mutuality, creating spaces within the structure that are mutual and supportive for people to grow – a counterculture.

In Dave’s case this involved creating an ‘experiment’ outside of the church (A picnic for marginalised peoples associated with the St Andrews church but outside of it). Once the experiment had become successful the person at the top of the hierarchy (the Pastor/Priest/highest church figure) was invited into that experiment both to experience it and to develop a personal relationship (basically befriending the boss). He made the point that its important at this point not to let the ‘experiment’ be coopted. The aim is to eventually bring the experiment into the structure and let it act like a virus. This was done by eventually asking the ‘highest church figure’ (not sure of the term) if they could bring the marginalised picnic group into the church to lead their own service. This was agreed to and slowly the radical culture infected the church to the point where now every Sunday St Andrews run a service where people sit in a circle, anyone can have a go at running it (when I went it was a manic depressive guy), political-religious songs are sung, food is provided etc. The point of it is to be inclusive of everyone and anyone (the only rule being ‘Bizarre is OK, Abuse is Not’). He made the point that there are paedophiles etc who attend the service, and that its actually safer than any other church because everything is out in the open and there’s a strong culture of accountability and everybody knowing each other.

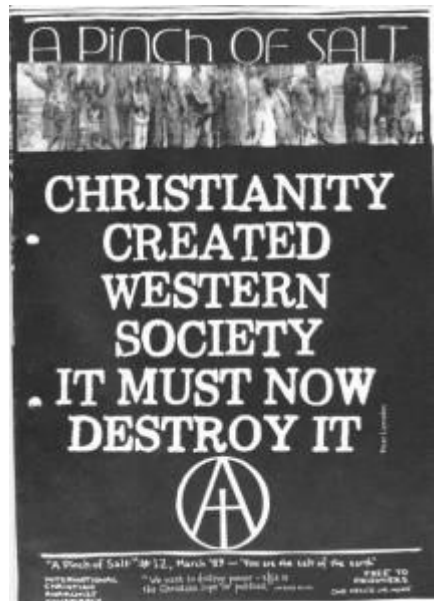
#### 4) Short Term Strategy

In the case that things don't go so smoothly, this is the area that involves solidarity, direct action etc. Much of the discussion revolved around pacifism at this point (relating to social revolution, there should be no defence, only loving the enemy and turning the other cheek – the idea is that faith, not outcomes are of the highest importance – if your brother is being crucified pray that the oppressor will see his mistakes, violence can only be solved with love etc). Not something I agreed with.

Someone brought up an interesting quote (from some Buddhist) at this point which I'll share: "As a means of bringing into harmony those things which are incompatible, violence becomes necessary." It generated a lot of useful discussion.

We also visited the Catholic Worker farm. Just to make it clear, Catholic Worker and the Waiters Union are two separate entities. Catholic Worker began out of Dorothy Day's movement and bases itself on principles of 'Christian anarchism, non-violent direct action and personalism' (basically individual lifestyle change). You probably will know Catholic Worker through their Ploughshares actions (turning swords into ploughshares. They're the ones who did the actions on the US spy base in Australia/the Waihopi spy base in NZ etc).

Unfortunately you might also know these people as the drongos who hold up the anti-abortion placards at the Mayday rallies. There was a lot of tension around this and also honest discussion. The Catholic Worker crew ran a House of Hospitality in West end for about 10 years (sharing their home and bed with marginalised people/self harmers/homeless etc) and had some amazing stories. Jim, a Catholic Worker, has also refused to



wear shoes for over 20 years, an impressive feat in itself. A lot of discussion revolved around their activism, and it being about 'witnessing for god' rather than effectiveness or outcomes.

The Catholic Worker property reminded me of Crass' famous [Dial House](#). They're completely off the grid, solar panels, a windmill that pumps water, they make their own fuel out of vegetable oil, their toilet converts the waste into compost and methane which powers their stove etc. We left with complementary Catholic Worker home-made soap and home-grown pumpkins.

This short reflection doesn't do justice to a lot of what the waiters union are about or their activity. If you're interested in doing the community course or want more information on the Waiters

Union/Christian-anarchism see:

[www.waitersunion.org](http://www.waitersunion.org)

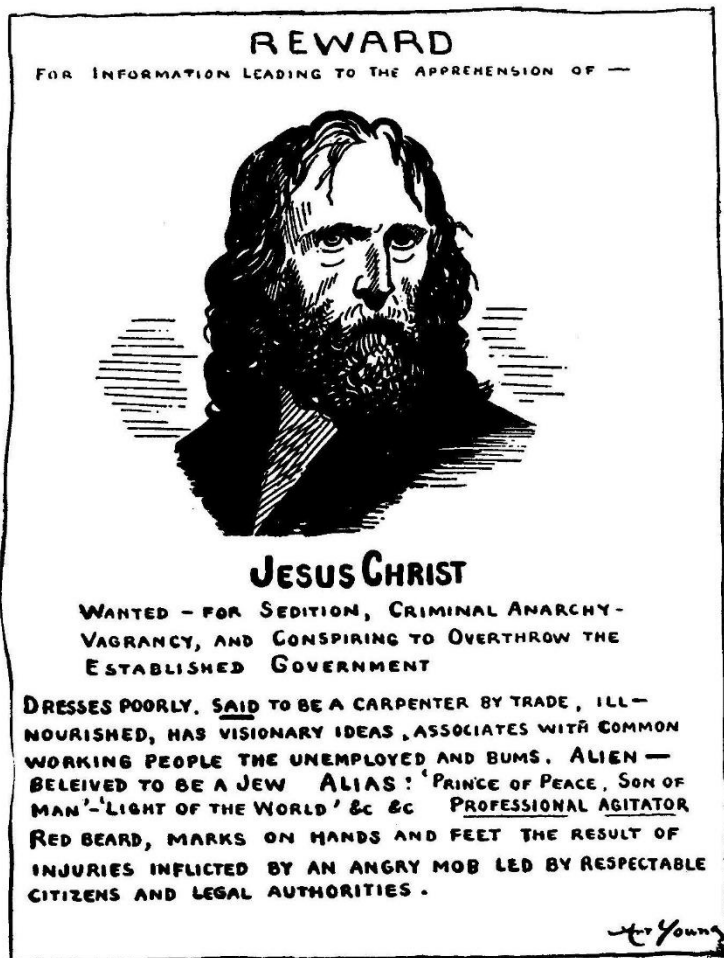
[www.daveandrews.com.au](http://www.daveandrews.com.au)

<http://www.wecan.be/>

<http://www.jesusradicals.com/international/south-pacific-anarchists/>

'Christi-Anarchy' by Dave Andrews

'Christian-Anarchism' by Alexandre Christoyanopoulos



# Anatomy of an inspection



2pm, the landlord's about to show up for another inspection, the ritual where we pretend to be something we're not – the type of person my boss would like – clean, simple and

efficient. The ritual is designed to remind me that the place where I live isn't mine, that it isn't in fact my home, it's not a place where I can express myself freely or feel secure in. This is the type of landlord that makes you feel like you should just lean palms against the wall with your legs spread.

*"...Small landlords are sometimes better than large ones because they tend to want to minimise turnover more than they want to maximise rents. If they immediately raise the rent in response to changes in the housing market, they risk tenants leaving and having their apartments sit vacant for a month or two. The risk of vacancy compared to the benefit of increased rent is much higher for the landlord who rents out three or four apartments than for the landlord who rents out three or four hundred. Of course a smaller landlord will also be more likely to live nearby and to constantly snoop around and spy on us at home."*

My housemates know the drill, we play respectable music, take everything off the walls and hide all the extra beds from friends and comrades who aren't supposed to be living there – We pull out a board game, our 'extra tenants' get cleaned up and sit around as if they've come over to watch. Like our parks, high-rises etc, our home life is supposed to look like it's not used – it's to be kept pristine & fluid, flexible, casual, temporary, something alien, just like our work environment.

*"...In cities with strong tenants rights that are enforced, renting can be somewhat more secure, and we might take some initiative to paint the walls or do other minor repairs or improvements ourselves. In places where tenancies are less stable, improving the apartment just feels like*



*doing unpaid work for the landlord. Whatever the quality of rental housing, the house is someone else's property... It's a paradox that an old squat can feel more homely and lived in than some of the so called 'luxury apartments' where it's only possible to set down the furniture and get the décor just right while waiting for the next move."*

The landlord comes in and looks at the game in progress 'looks serious', he says – I greet him and guide him through the house to make sure he doesn't snoop around where we don't want him to. He asks probing questions about our personal property, our books and things sacred to us. All goes well, and he ends it with the usual crushing declaration that's announced at every 6 month lease renewal – *'I'm thinking of raising the rent another \$10, you's should have no problem splitting that, right?'*. I stumble back, acting shocked 'has something changed?' – I at least want him to admit he's a grub that just wants more money. 'I mean I can live in the simplest conditions but since you're raising the rent, the cupboards have still got cockroaches breeding behind them, the hot water system's still fucked, the taps are still leaking and half your shit is still in the garage.' He's taken aback, *'well I have to keep up with the rising cost of the area, this area's changing quickly'*. I endure his ramble about getting some 'quiet Asian students' in the unit below us. *'That thing starts next week'* he says as he leaves making his way down the stairs.

*"..The decay and development of neighborhoods are both automatic market processes and the result of conscious action by developers and city planners. The same things that make us want to live in a neighborhood are what make it attractive to developers. Capital doesn't care if we feel at home somewhere. That feeling is a barrier to investment. It's an uncompetitive use of land to have cheap housing where you could have luxury hotels. At a certain point, the image of the 'neighborhood community' becomes just a blurb on propaganda. Since capital can't create real community, it creates imaginary ones. But being part of an imaginary community doesn't make someone any less isolated. Real, authentic, traditional communities are a valuable commodity, but by being organised for sale they lose their reality and authenticity... Living in a neighbourhood targeted by developers is eerie. You can almost feel how the built-in assumption in the land prices is that we will leave the neighbourhood."*

There is a reason why landlords aren't very motivated to spend money on repairs. In a capitalist society, the goal of housing is not to give people shelter, but to generate a profit. We've seen this with the latest economic crisis: when a homeowner can't make their mortgage payments, even if those payments no longer have anything to do with the value of the house, they are no longer allowed to live in that house: the bank would rather see it sit empty. The same principle of profit-generation applies to rent. Rent is not determined by what a person can pay, or what kinds of amenities an apartment has, but by what a landlord can command for their own profit.

With the buildings that they do operate, landlords always try to squeeze as much rent as possible out of tenants while providing as little in terms of living conditions as they can get away with. That makes us our interests opposite to the landlords', and if they have the upper hand, we are vulnerable.

There's no rent-capping in Australia's private-rental market, and the fact that our unit complex is split and owned by different landlords makes it difficult to express any sort of tenant's solidarity. We've had minor successes in meeting with other tenants in the building, generalising our experiences and have even taken minor collective action in opposition to some of the landlords whims, but I'll save those stories for another time – I just want to briefly flesh out his justification for raising the rent.

Now the landlords who own our complex and the ones around us are all in cahoots with each other – they have their own association, have meetings etc. Come every 6 months they raise the rent not because anything's different, but because they can – they're aware (consciously or not) of their status as a class. They won't be swayed by argument or reasoning (not that we should have to rely on the good nature of individual landlords), because from such a position of solidarity, strength and Power (as a class) all arguments can be safely ignored.

The following is a good extension of this point from Solidarity Federation's article *Winning the Argument or Winning the Fight?* (in the context of funding cuts):

*“..The reason that reason gets us nowhere is that politics is not based on good arguments but on power relations. Democracies institutionalise power struggles to a certain extent, since it’s rather disruptive to have periodic coups and civil wars every time there needs to be a change of government. But only certain interests are institutionalised. Here’s a clue: they’re not ours. If we want to win, we need to recognise that being right doesn’t cut it. It’s a matter of power. A case in point: it is true that the Welfare State was founded at a time when the national finances were in a far worse state. But it’s worth looking at what the ruling class were saying when the welfare state was founded. For the avoidance of any doubt, let’s hear from a Conservative: “We must give them reforms or they will give us revolution”, said Quintin Hogg in 1943.*

*When the ruling class feared the working class, a welfare state was a price worth paying. Now they don’t fear us, they feel confident to dismantle it. So the paradox is without the threat of social-revolution, reformism is a non-starter. On the other hand, with an unruly mob on the streets and a strike-prone workforce, those reasoned reformists all of a sudden look like workable negotiation partners to whoever’s in government. They’ll no doubt claim it was their ‘responsible’ protests which got them there.”*

Our society is not a debating chamber, but a power struggle between different groups and classes with competing and opposing interests. We want a stable home; they want an asset that will make them a lot of money. Yes, building more housing might make things more affordable and alleviate some of the effects of a market where competition and high demand allows landlords to pick and choose exactly what they want, but ultimately the landlords are raising the rent because they have the power to do so pure and simple. Applying for a rental is already getting to the point where it’s just like applying for a job. Anyone who works in housing knows of Brisbane slumlords who straight up go into questionnaire mode — Are you Aboriginal, have you had a drug history, are you in a relationship, what are your friends like, who would you have visiting.

‘White and Over 30’ I’ve heard one say over the phone as if it were a slogan.

*“..Ownership of the land, is ownership of the right to collect rent payments from the land. When a landlord loans his land out to a corner store owner, he is expecting a cut of the corner store owner’s future profits. If a new subway line is built with a stop near the corner store, this will bring more people by the corner store, and the landlord will raise the rent. If a new book about the city gets internationally popular and people come from all over the world to visit the city (and therefore pass by the corner store), the landlord will raise the rent. Private property in land is a social relationship between the landowner and other capitalists—the landowner profits off development and progress in society without having to do anything to contribute to it.”*

### **AN INSPECTION PLAYLIST**

**The Police – “Landlord”**  
**Bob Dylan – “Dear Landlord”**  
**Christ on Parade – “kill your landlord”**  
**Half pint – “mr landlord”**  
**Black Uhuru – “rent man”**  
**Junior Delahaye – “working hard for the rent man”**  
**Gladys Knight – “landlord”**  
**Low – “Landlord”**  
**D.O.A – “Slumlord”**  
**Kevin Kinney – “Hey Landlord”**  
**X – “We’re desperate”**  
**Bob Dylan – “Dear Landlord”**  
**Dead Kennedys – “Lets lynch the landlord”**  
**Ray Charles – “Hit the road Jack”**  
**Bomb The Music Industry – “Slumlord”**  
**D.R.I – “Slumlord”**  
**The Coup – “Kill your Landlord”**  
**The King Blues – “Lets Hang the Landlord”**

The legacy of rights and social gains which we enjoy today weren’t granted as gifts from above or because we asked nicely through reports and funding proposals— they were won and forced upon the system through popular struggle and have to be maintained through struggle. Now that we’re weak – the State is able to take away things we’ve won in the past: The tenants rights sector, public services, the right to strike, abortion rights, schools, the health of our communities and environment. This goes way beyond housing – If we don’t get organised we basically give those in power a blank cheque to do as they wish. There’s no point talking about rent strikes, general strikes or anything of the sort since we have no power as tenants as it is.

The essence of anarcho-syndicalism (and *unionism* in general) is about association – ie communities, neighbourhoods, tenants and workers getting together directly to form organisations to defend and extend their interests. Trade Unions today, much like the official ‘Tenants Union’ on the other hand are purely representational – operating as service orientated lobby groups and NGO’s do, over and above the people, with all the rotten fruits of bureaucracy, parliamentary politics and hierarchy, far removed from the collective self-organisation and real empowerment of tenants/workers. Don’t get me wrong – it’s good to have people who can remind us of the few “rights” we have (or don’t have), lobby and help us navigate the confusing world of the Law, but it’s not unionism and it encourages people to approach these issues as individuals through the disempowering legal system – nearly always weighted in favour of those in power.

We need to re-learn basic nuts and bolts organising and begin to form the types of relationships, networks, social life and fighting-unions that will serve to express, sustain and encourage a culture of class-solidarity between tenants and workers – one that can’t be demobilised from above or used as springboards for bureaucrats and career politicians. Start talking to your neighbours and get something going! If things are getting bad where you live, there’s no excuse not to chat to your neighbours and see if that experience is a generalised one – start a facebook group to discuss issues, meet the landlord together instead of individually, start up a notice board – there are plenty of small things you can do to set up a foundation for a collective response if things get hairy, but first we have to get up off the couch.

Our social-memory is one of defeat and ignorance, from the recent failed anti-war movement to the broader social-amnesia around Aboriginal resistance, general strikes, mutiny’s and uprisings throughout the past 200 years. There’s a whole period of people’s history which needs to be reclaimed, dissected and recovered, from the workers/neighbourhood council movements across Europe, to the wide scale attempts at reorganising society from the bottom up which have occurred throughout history (eg: in Spain 36’-38’, Oaxaca 05’, Chiapas 94-..) that demonstrate that another world is possible and necessary. As struggle and solidarity movements escalate and widen, so do our imaginations and realms of possibility.

During the 60s in Australia rent strikes were not unheard of – but today that concept isn't even in people's vocabulary. Eviction blockades were not uncommon in 30s Australia either. Many of those people organised were in and around the *Unemployed Workers Movement*, a short lived organisation which was highly successful in preventing landlords, real estate companies and bailiffs from evicting families, but which also facilitated a broader culture of class struggle. In May 1931, for the first time, the police became actively involved in evictions across NSW which often escalated into open class warfare. In the words of those who remember that time, and those who have had the stories passed down to them, *Forever Striking Trouble*, a folk song from the Bankstown eviction fight, recounts a little known aspect of Australian history:

**“I’m forever striking trouble,  
Striking trouble everywhere,  
the landlord came, the landlord went,  
I said no work, no rent,  
The butcher wants his money,  
Baker, grocer too,  
I sent all the bills to Jack Lang,  
Cause he said he’d pull us through,  
which he never!**

**..For we met them at the door,  
And we knocked them on the floor,  
Bankstown and Newtown, we made the cops feel sore,  
They outnumbered us ten to one,  
And were armed with stick and gun, But we fought well, we gave them  
hell, When we met them at the door.”**

*“Calling something a monster is admitting that you don’t understand it. There are plenty of bosses, bankers, landlords and developers that probably deserve to be severely beaten in an alley somewhere, but demonising them only covers up how the system continually recreates repressive police, asshole bosses, and two-faced politicians—not to mention weak, timid, prejudiced and isolated workers. More often though, those who explain the system only by its worst consequences just play into the hands of the politicians who denounce these consequences in the name of*

*the system. Capitalism means suburbs and slums, condos and ghettos. It means evictions and bond deposits, cold, moldy, infested apartments and high rent. It means repetitive, boring, dangerous work, unemployment and homelessness. It means isolation, imaginary togetherness and real conservative communities, prejudice, racism and political correctness. It means speculation and regulation, growth and stagnation, crisis and war. It means landlords and loan sharks, police and politicians, bureaucrats and bosses.”*

## **Another piece of people’s history we should celebrate and learn from: Green Bans.**

*“The Green Ban’s movement is of worldwide significance; it signifies the refusal of workers to build socially or environmentally destructive projects.”*

Workers across Australia were the first in the world to use the strike weapon for ecological & environmental purposes. The culture of ‘Green Bans’ was influenced by and spread way beyond the union structure, for example, Resident Action Groups like the ‘Carlton Association’ were formed, which rallied professional planners and architects in the neighborhood to draft alternative proposals to the urban renewal programs of the Victorian Housing Commission. This was an example of an attempt towards grassroots popular control over housing and development which unfortunately didn’t go far enough.

During the 1970s a grassroots political movement was under way in many neighbourhoods across Sydney and other Australian cities. There was widespread disenchantment with local government failure to resist private developers inducements and state government sponsorship of high rise public housing and massive expressway construction. Small pockets of neighbourhood people – like the Hunters Hill trust and the Battlers for Kelly’s Bush – were beginning to resist. As at Kelly’s Bush, they first used traditional political and planning channels, but became frustrated when that seemed not to work. They became known as Resident Action Groups (RAGs). In the wake of the Green Ban at Kelly’s bush. Group after group approached the Sydney Builders Laborers Federation, and pushed for the base of the union to build on the Green Ban concept. The BLF quickly

adopted two principles (1) a neighbourhood group had to first request help and (2) the request for a BLF green ban had to be approved at a public meeting in the neighbourhood. This had the effect of countering the inevitable charges that a green ban was a Commie tactic with no real popular support.

The Green Ban movement fought both private developers and the State of NSW. Requests from Green Bans also came from the NSW branch of the Australian Institute of Architects, who for example opposed plans that would ruin the Botanic Gardens. All throughout the 70s the Green Bans movement took on a whole range of issues:

- ~Preservation of historic buildings, hotels and live theater
- ~Bans on development in the inner city
- ~Housing standards
- ~Retention of parkland, environment and open space
- ~No demolition for expressways
- ~No demolition of homes for car parks and other uses
- ~Inadequate compensation paid on compulsory purchase
- ~Miscellaneous social issues.
- ~Air and water pollution
- ~Preservation of recreational facilities and wholesale markets

The 'social issues' which the green bans movement took on, such as Aboriginal & women's issues, are particularly interesting and demonstrate the type of political-economic organisation that Anarcho-syndicalists point towards. In 1973 for example workers imposed a green ban supported by university students when the university discriminated against a gay student. In the same month, a similar ban was imposed at Sydney university when the philosophy department refused to allow a course in feminist thought and issues. Approximately 50 Green bans which stopped an estimated 4.0 billion in construction projects were declared in Sydney within three years of the first one at Kelly's Bush.

Victoria Street, Woolloomooloo, was the site of the first public housing campaign in Australia. In 1971 first-time property developer Frank Theeman acquired whole rows of houses in historic Victoria Street, Woolloomooloo. Theeman developed



plans to demolish the terrace houses and build massive office and apartment towers. It wasn't until March 1973 that Theeman gained council approval for his plans, and in the following month he began to institute a mass eviction of over 400 tenants. While some tenants left 'voluntarily', others defiantly stayed in their homes and the Victoria Street Residents Action Group (VRAG) was formed. Street patrols were organised to protect the remaining tenants from intimidation by Theeman's security company, and to protect the empty houses from vandalism. The 'Squatter' residents quickly gained the support of the National Trust, which classified Victoria Street as an area of national importance. Most importantly, VRAG approached workers involved with the Sydney BLF Union, who immediately placed 'green bans' on the threatened houses, effectively preventing them from being demolished. Green Bans were active mainly across Sydney and Victoria, though Perth, Adelaide, WA, Hobart and Queensland also had a few bans, including one on the export of uranium from outback QLD mines.

Apart from State repression, the green bans movement was unfortunately ultimately demobilised by their own trade-union officials and their links to parliamentary politics. In QLD for example even if affiliated union representatives supported a Green Ban, the secretary of the Trades and Labour Council could effectively veto a motion for a green ban, which frequently happened. The government announced increased powers and repression, starting with thwarting the green ban

Once a jolly resident living in his bungalow  
Found he was threatened by redevelopment;  
And he cried as he watched his city slowly crumbling  
"Who'll come a green ban defending with me?"

Green Ban defending, green ban defending,  
Who'll come a green ban defending with me?  
And he cried as he watched his city slowly crumbling  
Who'll come a green ban defending with me?

Down came developers to profit from their residents  
Up jumped the people to fight for their homes  
And they sang when the B.L.'s started up their green bans  
"We'll come a green ban defending with you!

Up rode the wreckers mounted on their dozers  
In came the paddy-wagons, six, eight, ten;  
"Where are all the stirrers duping all the residents?  
Who'll come a green ban defending with us?

Up rose the residents and said unto the government;  
"Now we have green bans and so we are free;  
Take your crazy plans and stick them up your jumpers  
All come a green ban defending with us!  
—1976 the Green Ban Tabernacle Choir

active on Frazer island. The struggle to defend the environment was slowly shifted into the courtrooms where strike action was replaced by disempowering injunction processes; the 'Black Robes' of the lawyers took over the Green Bans of the Workers.

