

MAFW and Anarchy

-Cyber Dandy-

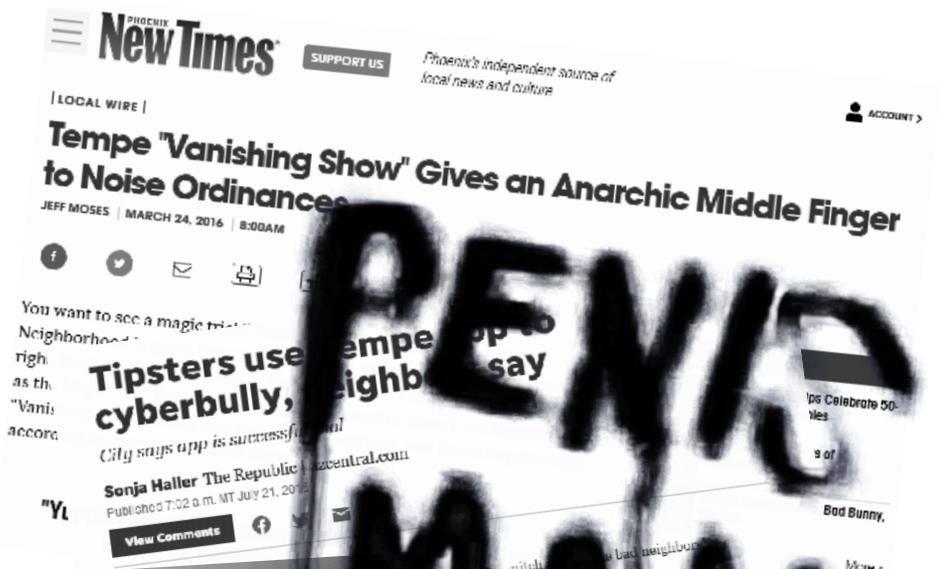
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Let's Keep Tempe Weird!



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For some time now, it's been no secret that there is an evil cabal of anarchists behind the MAFW page. While the various political positions, memes, and admissions of its moderators could leave no doubt about it, there has actually been very little in the way of explaining the "anarchism" that these anarchists are so hot on. There's a few reasons for this... one of them being that the moderator line-up hasn't always been 100% anarchist. But more importantly, MAFW wasn't and still isn't a recruitment effort or anything of the sort. The emphasis has always been on participating in, and openly defending, what could be called "the counter-cultural element" of the area. And as we are all well aware, there has been an ongoing onslaught of initiatives meant to crush said "element" so that it could be paved over with smooth vibrancy for the city government's development projects.

All that said, let's be frank(enstein): MAFW is definitely an anarchist project that has been guided by anarchist thought and practice. So I think it's about time to describe the fundamentals of anarchism broadly, and as it informs this project... That isn't an easy task to do in a short paper, but I am going to try by starting with a little bit (just a little bit) of history.

Anarchism mostly comes out of the labor movements from a while ago. The same kind of labor movements that Socialism inspired and Communism came from. The same kind of labor movements where people fought and died to get rid of child labor, to institute an 8-hour day, to prevent bosses from stealing wages, for workers self-education, mutual aid societies, and struggles to overcome their precarious circumstances as a class that can't break through the limits capitalism creates without a revolution. The time-periods I'm talking about here are roughly between the Liberal revolutions that overthrew Feudal societies all over the place and the end of World War II, what some call the end of the Modern Period.

After Kings and Queens and other Lordly pieces-of-shit created masses and masses of subjects dispossessed of any land, any commons they once shared, and other such means to life... those masses were so debased and reduced to such powerlessness that they filled the industrialized cities looking for any work they could get. Then those feudal powers were overthrown and a new ruling, propertied class solidified their own governments to protect their own interests at the expense of the propertyless who were exploited to further concentrate wealth into the hands of the new rulers. After endless attempts had failed by the propertyless to elect those who could represent them and to pass reforms that could alleviate their conditions, revolutionary ideologies emerged as the necessary solution. That is the environment that anarchism mostly formed in.

This environment had made it obvious to most people that capitalism was fucking terrible and something had to be done about it. That the governments were only there to use them as cannon fodder and protect a social order where capitalists could dominate those who worked for them. A whole ton of people created labor unions to try to deal with this all and then these union types formed an international organization to coordinate their revolt. Two major ideologies were prominent at this time that will help make sense of anarchism quickly: Democratic Socialism and Communism. Democratic Socialism is more-or-less an approach to anti-capitalism where elections and voting would be the means by which the working class could solve their problems within capitalism through taxation and redistribution. Communism deals with most of the same problems, but it wants to solve them with a revolutionary dictatorship that is supposed to be composed of the smartest workers (the vanguard) making sure that



All of that said, we're still here. As MAFW continues to thrive and facilitate local communication and coordination of activities by neighbors and ourselves, we are consistently asking ourselves "what will come next?" Admittedly, we've been dealt some hard blows and even the Liberal efforts to gain seats in City Council have thus far been a wash. However, this doesn't mean any of us have given up on not just living in MAFW, but enjoying our lives here together. The relationships that have formed since the beginning of this project are irreplaceable and we are far from powerless in creating the neighborhood we all want to live in.

So as the mods of MAFW, we say "Cheers! Let's Carry On!"

the tyranny of government institutions can be used to control the dumb workers and suppress capitalist (and other reactionary) attempts to prevent their revolution. Eventually, Communists said, this tyrannical dictatorship would become unnecessary when there were no more class divisions in society ...but we all know how that's gone.

The anarchists were opposed to both of these strategies and defined their positions by emphasizing the ability for workers, their unions, and their community associations to solve their problems themselves without any appeals to governments, without attempts to reform governments, without any attempts to take over governments. The anarchists said, "you fucking Communists are going to create a form of dictatorship that is more tyrannical than anything the world has ever known." And they said, "Democratic Socialists, it's nice that you care but seriously by now you should know better." Then, anarchists went on to create all sorts of institutions, insurrections, and even a revolution or two. Their direct action "got the goods" and such results were a powerful argument in favor of the anarchist position.

That was pretty much the minimum definition for being an anarchist: you thought that the problems created by capitalists and the new liberal nation-states that protected them could only be solved by people organizing themselves to meet their own needs. As a theory, this also meant... y'know, instead of the rights being granted to individuals and/or share-holders to own the new industrial technologies and factories of the industrial revolutions, the community (or at least the workers) would own that shit collectively. It also meant that those rights wouldn't be given to any government, that there wouldn't be centralized planning by a dictatorial party... that people would federate freely to meet their economic, social, and spiritual needs, through federated networks of smaller organizations, as they had already been doing. Here's a short list of some other anarchist positions:

- Anti-Conscription/Anti-Militarism ...sometimes called Pacifism
- Free Love (as in anti-Marriage) and Free Love (as in sexual freedom)
- Women's Emancipation and Equality with Men
- Anti-Nationalism and Anti-Racism
- Naturalism ...and in today's parlance, environmentalism, ecology, and such
- Nudism
- Vegetarianism and Veganism
- Free Education
- Rent Strikes
- Peasant Revolts

And that's just the list prior to the rise of Fascism, Nazism, and other such WWII-period nasties. Now as we all know, the 20th Century was FUCKING HORRIFIC. One of the more relevant points about the World Wars though, for anarchists, was that pretty much everyone else worked together to completely annihilate anarchists, their theories, their historical contributions, and their ability to openly organize. Democracies, Communist Dictatorships, and Fascist Dictatorships all made it a point to make anarchist existence illegal and as a result, what had been a fairly large and loud movement was reduced to whispers until the last bit of the Century. As a lesson, this has often added to the list of positions above, a distrust and sometimes outright antagonism towards the classical Left Wing.

So how did anarchists recover, you might ask? (just pretend you asked.)

Well... while an anti-Bolshevik New Left started to form from the rubble after WWII, a handful of resisters who had been driven underground poked their heads back up and a handful of historians began to put the pieces back together. The New Left and the rise of the 60's counter-cultures supplied the momentum and when insurrectionary rebellions broke out in '68, a new chapter in Western anti-capitalist history was born. The new anti-Capitalist ethos, critical of both Liberal Democracy and Soviet Communism, was ripe for anarchism ...the main historical opponent of those traditions. However, the Western world post-'68 could not be meaningfully engaged like it had in the golden age of Labor.

Liberal Democracies had risen to a new position of global superiority and their expansionist projects gave them a new capacity for establishing societies of spectators and consumers. Society became full of a "middle class": people who were technically workers being exploited by a capitalist ruling class, but who were to benefit from war spoils and foreign exploitation, provided cheap credit, and encouraged to use this credit for home ownership in newly developed suburbs. At the same time, this new "middle class" was full of people who would be so far removed from both industrial and political positions of power that they hardly had any ability to revolt. Nor did they have the ability to self-govern many aspects of their lives, as their livelihoods depended on automobiles, imports through extensive and complex supply chains, and jobs rather far from where they lived. In such an environment of consumer alienation

vertise garage sales. Meanwhile, the official neighborhood groups were uptight and bourgeois as heck, not representing the spirit of the neighborhood as we knew it. So we decided that if we could find a way to create a competing forum that challenged that, and which didn't have the same uptight pro-police/anti-fun hangups as Nextdoor.com and the official neighborhood groups, we might be able to undermine them. The fight against Safe & Sober combined a lot of the elements that we thought were important to the project. Out of that came the Vanishing Show, for instance, in which we mobilized hedonism to challenge the attempt by the city to control the neighborhood, and then we leveraged that as an attack on the racist police force, eventually ending in the firing of the police chief and the canceling of the program, which was operating basically as a local version of Stop and Frisk, using racist police forces to invade downtown and stop thousands of people over the course of several weekends each year. Needless to say, those stops disproportionately targeted people of color. A city inquiry found as much to be true, and the top cop got the boot and his jackboot thugs got told no more Safe and Sober.

From all this, the group membership was growing by hundreds, and then thousands. Candidates for office were attempting to use the space for their campaigns. Officials were coming to us about various issues. News media were mentioning the group and sending in reporters. So we thought that surely we'd stand a chance at stopping some of this insane City-planned gentrification. And we did! But eventually, the City was approving new developments faster than we could stop any of them. Some of the original MAFW admins became uncomfortable with the increasingly explicit anarchist positioning, then left the group. A bunch of splinter groups formed that addressed more specific interests. People moved, many of them because their increasing rents forced them out of the area. The presidential elections really bummed a lot of people out. And the betrayal of the neighborhood groups by the Mayor when it mattered took a lot of wind out of our sails.

would have been able to prevent. Another sizable chunk of this supposed “failure” comes from the Liberal framing itself, imposing their ideas about what success would be onto a movement that didn’t accept those ideas. The practical projects of Occupy, besides maintaining the occupations themselves, were expressed in the formation of countless working groups that were created during Occupy and were often maintained long after, achieving goals they had set out to achieve.

One of the forms said working groups took were attempts to create Neighborhood Associations, similar to the models anarchists and other radicals were exposed to in Europe and elsewhere. MAFW was created around this time with a similar spirit. However, because we already had lived in and had been active in the MAFW area for so long... and because of our own characters, the characteristics of the neighborhood, and many other influences, MAFW was not going to be just some Neighborhood Association.

In many ways, MAFW would just be a Facebook version of the things we had already been doing since the early 2000’s. It wasn’t expected to become very large and while there were many ideas for things to do, there wasn’t any clear purpose or mission. Additionally, after experiencing all the bans from Occupy-related Facebook groups, on top of all the banning we experienced from the official neighborhood groups in Tempe, we weren’t just going to let our shit get walked all over by anyone who could utter the phrases “free speech” or “community”. We’d long had enough of that bullshit.

As many of you ought to know by now, MAFW became popular far beyond what any of us expected because of the way we handled Safe and Sober when no other group was willing to go against the City. To elaborate a bit on this, some of us are influenced by a specific radical tradition known as Race Traitor, which puts a special emphasis on mobilizing white people against institutions of white supremacy. That became part of the MAFW project, which can be seen in the way we’ve consistently tried to undermine various white power structures, formal and informal, such as the police and Nextdoor.com, notably with our successful organizing against Safe & Sober.

One thing we noticed before starting MAFW was how Nextdoor.com brought people into a relationship with the police simply by offering a way to find lost pets and ad-

and boredom in the suburbs, poverty and unemployment in the cities, without any hope a strong Labor dictatorship may save them, it was punk bands with their D.I.Y. lifestyles that came to the fore of anarchism’s return. “NO FUTURE!!!!” sang the Sex Pistols, a band pieced together by Malcom McLaren, a member of Kings Mob carrying on the tradition of the Situationist International. “Do They Owe Us A Living? Of course they fucking do!!!!” sang Crass, the band who would do so much to establish the D.I.Y. Anarcho-Punk movement of the late-70’s to today.

These two punk ethos revived anarchism in two very different ways. The Sex Pistols’ confrontational, belligerent, and destructive style characterized the more nihilistic attitude of some punks; more focused on the disruption of everyday life and inducing discomfort among the status quo. Crass however, carried on in a more traditional British anarchist manner, espousing anti-militarist/pacifist values and paving the way for those who would come later by forming their own record label, booking their own tours, opening their collective house to other punks, and including much more ideologically explicit content with their albums. The two different paths would later be called “chaos punk” and “peace punk” by some.

One of the main differences between pre-WWII anarchism and now is that prior to WWII, anarchism emerged as a popular movement among large populations of workers. Now, Punk anarchism emerged in the cracks of society where the promises of post-War prosperity meet the realities of teen angst in a meaningless consumer society. The mass movements of the 60’s had faded away after winning some reforms, and Labor had barely hung-on by the threads of some blue-collar unions. Complacency, even after the Great Recession, still ruled the day in the suburbs and the cities. As for the communes, the free schools, the coops and unions... their absence tied in with the overall concerns that the anarchists of MAFW have been getting at...

Most of the anarchist administrators of MAFW have been active in Tempe going way back to 2000 C.E. when the Phoenix Anarchist Coalition had its first meeting at the Gentle Strength Co-op. That’s right, the co-op right where the Local is now being built. Mill Ave. was a very different place. Us counter-cultural types were far more prevalent, especially because we had not only 1, but 2 record stores: Zia Records and East Side Records. The ASU bro presence wasn’t nearly as strong and the police weren’t

anywhere near as militarized. This was pre-9/11, pre-Patriot Act, afterall.

On the national stage the momentum of the Anti-Globalization Movement was getting supplanted by anti-War momentum and the Green Scare was being felt hard by the green anarchists. With that, the rise of 9/11 Truthers, the Zeitgeist Movement, Ron Paul, and other turns in popular activism took the stage pretty much until Obama's elections and the crash in 2007/8. That is to say, the protoplasm that became the Tea Party and Donald Trump's base were in the streets just as much as the anarchists were, sometimes even at the same protest demonstrations. Anarchists, losing steam from the uphill battles in the Anti-War Movement and its mobilization as a base for the Democratic Party, could be found here and there among many of these tendencies. Anarcho-punk also went into decline for whatever reasons, perhaps because the liberal voting enthusiasm of the broader punk scenes made punk seem like a dead-end for any substantial break with mainstream ways of life. But, this could also be a consequence of the overall drying up of underground (music) subculture mapping closely to the spread of Broadband Internet and Smart Phones.

At the MAFW level, the co-op had become our space to meet, run an Infoshop that distributed literature, a free store distributing clothing and other basic goods, and center to coordinate local actions. We organized a few events for May Day, which is the international workers holiday that takes place on May 1st in most countries with a socialist history. I personally helped the IWW unionize the Starbucks workers on Mill Ave. We held a public cursing of the Brickyard and it became infested by black mold shortly after. And anarchists were also regularly out watching, photographing, and filming police actions in an attempt to create some degree of police accountability.

But besides all of this dry, activist effort, we were regularly throwing house parties. They were large enough and numerous enough that if you partied in the area at the time, you likely went to one. If signs, flags, and fliers needed to be made for a protest, it was a party. If we had a meeting, afterwards it was a party. When the protests were over, party. And a few of us, including me, were in different bands playing at a variety of houses and venues. To say the least we all had more energy back then.

That is pretty much how shit went until the Co-op closed. When the Anti-War Move-

ment petered out, the Anti-SB1070 movement was the next major popular outrage. Anarchists went door-to-door in Tempe to address the issue, which lead up to a large march through the MAFW neighborhood. Myself and others donated artwork for a No Borders auction. Other anarchists put pressure on the issue of free movement, traffic surveillance cameras, and the hypocrisy among right-wingers regarding migration and free movement. And just like during the Anti-War Movement, we made ourselves and our positions heard loud and clear through the overall Liberal narrative.

As the Great Recession began to sink in and Smart Phones began to take over, the terrain of activism began to shift. Overall there was a lot of burn-out and drained resources for activism. Anarchists in the United States began reading stories about the insurrectionary activities in Greece, Spain, France, and elsewhere. Riots... something almost unheard of since the L.A. riots in the 90's, were happening all over the place. Students were occupying their universities, mostly in California and New York. In Madison, WI the State Capitol building was occupied to fight back against attacks on collective bargaining rights. The Arab Spring was kicking off in Tunisia, giving history its first social networking-backed revolutions. And all of this eventually lead to Occupy Wall St. with its related occupations all over the United States and beyond.

The Occupations were the most radical revolts seen in the United States for a very, very long time. Occupy Phoenix became the new gravity of local anarchist energy. As had been our experience working with the broader Left Wing since our early actions at the turn of the century, we were enthusiastically embraced when "the Movement" required initiative, and then quickly thrown under the bus by the Liberals and Socialists seeking to drive energy into electoral strategies realized we wouldn't capitulate to their media-oriented ideas about civil disobedience and social acceptability.

It was longer than most of us expected before the government began cracking down on Occupy encampments. The fall of the last (and most radical) holdouts, such-as the Oakland Commune/Decolonize Oakland signaled the end of those battles. A lot of media pundits tried to blame anarchists for Occupy's supposed failures, saying that the consensus processes, the lack of concrete demands, and the general horizontalism were the major faults. But, the majority of the reasons why the occupations ended was because of government suppression which no Liberal or Commie organization