

Interview with an Anarchist at Dale Farm

Dale Farm Activist

18.10.2011

A self written interview by a group of anarchists currently involved in the Dale Farm struggle. The interview attempts to answer some basic questions about anarchism in order to explain our position and reasoning for being at Dale Farm; attempting also to solidify the Dale Farm struggles place in the broader class war.

Q. So you describe yourself as an anarchist, what do you mean by that?

We believe in a society based on mutual aid, social responsibility and basic human solidarity. We feel that people should be free to live as they wish (where that doesn't infringe on other people's freedoms) and there should not be systems of control that restrict or dictate how we live our lives. The democracy we have is a farce, we would like to build a free and equal society where people give to their abilities and receive to their needs. Anarchists see a distinction between the rich ruling class and the ordinary working class, and seek to build a society based on working class solidarity without the inequality between race, sex or creed that this distinction creates.

Q. Are all supporters at Dale Farm anarchists?

A lot of people here would not call themselves an anarchist, however what brings us together is a shared belief that travellers are at the receiving end of oppression, discrimination, violence, and racism and that this is manifested in the ethnic cleansing at Dale Farm.

We recognise the principle of autonomy, and this means we are willing to work with people who come from different ideological perspectives as long as we are centred around a common aim. There is a shared strength between us.

Q. How does being in Dale Farm fit in with anarchist ideas?

Anarchism is about fighting the struggles of the oppressed against the oppressors (in this case the struggle of travellers against the state); Dale Farm is a flash point in the class struggle and the battle against state racism. Whilst the religious and political beliefs of the community here are not necessarily in keeping with all anarchist thought, residents have been incredibly receptive to our politics and interested in our ideas.

Q. How is the eviction ethnic cleansing?

Ethnic cleansing is the act of eradicating a particular ethnic group from a nation or area. The case of Dale Farm, which will make it impossible for a certain ethnic community to live in a specific area is a localised example; whilst the broader discrimination and criminalisation of travellers (via the eradication of the right to park up on the roadside) is indicative of the national picture. There is a discrimination against travellers in government policy, travellers have settled because the right to travel freely was taken away; now they attack settled travellers in their homes. 90% of traveller planning applications are refused compared to only 20% of the settled community. This criminalises travellers and destroys their cultural norms and we see this situation as a continuation of a broader attack against travelling communities. The process that has been going on for the last 10 years at Dale Farm is a key part of this cleansing - the diggers will demolish homes, but the government is demolishing culture through a process of forced assimilation to societal norms.

Q. There has been a lot in the media about anarchists 'hijacking' or 'taking over' the Dale Farm protest, what is your response to these claims?

To begin with, we don't see this as a protest because protest is merely stating our disagreement with something; we see it as a resistance because we intend to put a stop to the eviction of Dale Farm and

stand up to state violence against travellers everywhere. We are here in solidarity. Everything we've done here we've been asked to do, we've been invited by residents to support them in their resistance of the eviction and they continue to direct our actions and decisions, and call on more support. We came here to show solidarity through a shared struggle. Many of us now also consider the residents here as personal friends, we feel welcome among the travellers and are happy that they are letting us be a part of this autonomous community.

Q. The media has painted a picture that some activists have taken leadership roles? Is this true, and if not, how do you make decisions?

Decisions are made collectively on an equal basis. We take responsibility for ourselves and are decentralised and autonomous, however all our actions are accountable to the collective community through the process of consensus decision making. People are given an equal opportunity to raise their thoughts and we have open meetings to involve everyone in decision making. However this space is not isolated from the problems of wider society and issues such as patriarchy, class privilege, and dominance do come up. We struggle against these inequalities and hierarchies in our actions, but aim to recognise and deconstruct them where they occur. There is a dialectal process constantly going on, and we try to resolve issues by allowing conflicts of interest to play out. We deliberately don't create positions which could result in hierarchy, but organise jobs openly and encourage participation in an attempt to combat invisible hierarchies.

Q. Why are you here, what makes an anarchist want to support Dale Farm residents?

The struggle at Dale Farm is about anti-racism, homelessness, class struggle and the freedom to live your life as you choose. As anarchists we see these struggles as fundamental to personal and societal liberation and as a step in the direction of social revolution. With the growing political agenda in England of forced evictions motivated by class and race, we are fighting that whole agenda when we are fighting the eviction of Dale Farm; we do this to show solidarity with other members of the working class and in order to fight the actions of the state, which we see as unjust.

Q. If you don't believe in planning law, what do you believe in? How do you choose what social rules you follow?

It is not about what is legal or illegal...it is about what is just and unjust. The law is made by the ruling class and serves the purpose of preserving the unjust status quo. We haven't had a say in the creation or upholding of planning laws, and consequently don't feel obliged to abide by them; if people are expected to obey the law, they must have the right to directly create it. The political institutions and laws (such as the Enclosures Act) in this country are based on injustices and inequalities that existed prior to the movement to democracy; as such we feel it is our duty to fight them. We follow social rules that are created by the communities they directly affect.

Q. What about the concerns of other local residents?

The representation of local residents has been warped and manipulated by mainstream media. Many local residents do not have a problem with the residents of Dale Farm and live in peace with them. There are some local capitalists that feel they can make money from Travellers and support them, and there are some who discriminate against them, for example pubs refusing to serve the Travellers. We see this as a part of the institutionalised racism that exists against Travellers, and feel that they (Travellers) are exploited in a variety of ways by the capitalist system. Proportionally the views of more well-off residents have emerged in media and this has often involved property interests, for example local resident Len

Gridley has voiced his concern over property value and this has received a huge amount of coverage. We don't want anyone to lose their homes but we don't see property value as important as a home to live in. The Crays Hill residents should also be allowed to have their homes, but it is wrong to suggest that the two communities cannot live side by side. There are Crays Hill residents who support Dale Farm but feel they cannot say it to their neighbours for fear of being ostracised.

Q. Why do you think there is prejudice and hostility against Travellers?

One of the main reasons Travellers are oppressed is that they do not fit into the current capitalist wheel and face demonisation by the media and the state as a result, this is disturbingly similar to stigmatisation faced by Jews in the past and Muslims and asylum seekers today. There are deeper questions to be asked here about the function of racism within capitalism and the rise of fascist ideology at times of economic crisis. Jews and Travellers traditionally move around, therefore modern nation state capitalism doesn't have a place for them. Institutionalised racism happens because travellers aren't as 'useful' to capitalism in the same way as the settled working class. Travellers had a place in capitalist Europe but don't have that anymore and for this reason they are at the receiving end of policies of ethnic cleansing. British capitalism has exploited travellers where it has wanted to (Gypsy wedding/circuses/festivals) and this is the same with other migrant populations – used when needed, then discriminated and ultimately eradicated.

Q. What difficulties have you faced being at Dale Farm?

It is impossible to escape the hierarchies that are endemic in society; the Dale Farm resistance is not isolated from the problems of patriarchy and white privilege. There are people from many countries here and English language speaking privilege has been a problem but we do our best to recognise and confront these. The challenge of communicating specific jargons of the legal process, media trends and local activism has also been apparent, but we are working well on this. As well as travellers we have been treated badly by media and police through smear stories, increased police presence (such as helicopters), and more greatly the fear of constantly living under the threat of personal physical harm in an eviction situation. We are currently at the forefront of state violence, intimidation and repression, but being at the brunt of this state and corporate repression just makes us want to fight it more. Institutionalised racism has been difficult to witness – taxis not wanting to drive here, shops and pubs not allowing Travellers in. There have been many emotional difficulties, such as a 12 year old boy asking for us to build a lock on in their home because their mother and sister are so scared, as well as witnessing the residents' reactions to court verdicts and eviction hoax.

Q. What about the bailiffs, are they not just doing their job?

It feels bad to have to fight other working class people; we recognise that they are being badly abused by the state and their profiteering bosses at Constant & Co who are putting them in this position. As such we put out an open offer to the bailiffs to join us in the struggle against the bosses; we would show solidarity to them in their struggle against their bosses as we show solidarity to Dale Farm, but if they choose to be the oppressors then we will fight them as class traitors. We acknowledge that the severe unemployment probably results in people who would not normally want to be bailiffs becoming bailiffs, but we also acknowledge that their role is directed at punishing working class people and minorities and this is not acceptable. Further, there is understanding amongst us all that some of Constant & Co's bailiffs are migrant workers and we see this as another example of capitalist subjugation pitching one ethnic minority against another in order to break class unity; the British government has the privilege to exploit minorities as it always has through a process of colonialism, divide and conquer.

Q. With the government's current policies towards Travellers, evictions will become more regular, how will anarchists respond to this?

Governments over the past few years have been drawing up increasingly fascist anti-Traveller laws, whipping up and taking advantage of ethnic and class-based prejudice. Anarchists must respond by standing strong in solidarity with travellers as they have done here at Dale Farm. Networks of people committed to anti racism, class unity, and eviction resistance will be required to help prevent the continuation of the ethnic cleansing process. It is hard to say exactly what the response will be on a broad basis, but it is likely that the Dale Farm resistance will set the tone for Traveller solidarity in the UK. We hope to make a statement here that resistance and solidarity are our greatest weapons against state violence, and to show the world the power of struggle.

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