

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH IS ENOUGH IS ENOUGH IS ENOUGH IS ENOUGH ISN'T IT?

WHY STOP THE CITY? QUITE SIMPLY BECAUSE ENOUGH IS ENOUGH. THE CITY OF LONDON IS THE CENTER OF THE 'CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY INDUSTRY'. IN ITS DARK OFFICES THE WEALTHY ELITE PLOT THE DESTINY OF OUR WORLD, DECIDE OUR FUTURE, AND DESTROY OUR LIVES. WHY SHOULD THESE RICH SCUM BE ALLOWED TO HOLD THE WORLD IN BONDAGE? AS THEY SUCK ON THEIR FAT CIGARS, WE, THE ORDINARY PEOPLE OF THE WORLD, ARE EXPECTED TO BEG FOR A LIVING. WHY SHOULD WE BE SLAVES TO THESE CALLOUS FOOLS? THE WEALTHY HAVE GROWN RICH AT OUR EXPENSE AND THROUGH OUR SUBMISSIVENESS. THEY HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO PLUNDER OUR WORLD FOR TOO LONG, IT'S TIME TO FIGHT BACK AND SAY 'NO'. THEY HAVE TAKEN OUR LAND, OUR HOMES AND OUR ENERGIES AND TURNED THEM INTO THEIR PROFIT, IT'S TIME TO START TAKING IT BACK. ENOUGH SO RESPECTABLE PEOPLE IN THEIR OH SO RESPECTABLE SUITS ARE THE REAL ENEMY OF DECENCY AND OF THE HUMANS WHO PULL THE STRINGS ON THE LITTLE PEOPLE LIKE PRESIDENT THATCHER. SHE IMPLEMENTS HER MEDIEVAL BRUTAL POLICIES, THEY GET RICHER AND RICHER. AS SHE ENJOYS HER VICIOUS LITTLE WARS IN THE FALKLANDS, LEBANON, LAND ETC., THEY GET RICHER. AS THEY CLIMB THE SOCIAL SERVICE LADDER, THEY GET RICHER. AS WE ARE KEPT ON THE RECEIPT HAND OUTS ON THE WELFARE, WE GET RICHER. AS WE ARE KEPT ON THE RECEIPT HAND OUTS, WE GET RICHER. ENOUGH IS ENOUGH.

STOP THE CITY GIVES US A CHANCE TO DEMONSTRATE TOGETHER AND SHOW OUR DISCONTENT. IT GIVES US A CHANCE TO LET THE WEALTHY KNOW THAT WE'RE NOT GOING TO LET THEM GET AWAY WITH IT. BUT MARCH 29TH IS JUST ONE DAY AND IN ITSELF IS NOT ENOUGH. THE STATE CAN BECOME MORE OPPRESSIVE, SO IT IS TO US TO INCREASE OUR EFFORTS IN OPPOSING IT. WE ARE GOING OUR OWN WAY, GOING JUST THAT, FROM MAKING INFORMATIONS THROUGH OUR OWN MEDIA TO DIRECT ACTS OF SUBVERSION. THE STATE. EVERY LITTLE BIT HELPS CONTRIBUTE TO THE WHOLE. IF WE ARE PREPARED TO ACT RATHER THAN TO BE ACTED UPON, WE CAN WIN THE BATTLE FOR FREEDOM. IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO SIMPLY ASK FOR PEACE, THE ONLY WAY WE'RE EVER GOING TO GET IT IS TO FIRSTLY DEMAND IT AND SECONDLY BE PREPARED TO FIGHT FOR IT. IT IS TIME TO REALISE THAT THE 'PEACE MOVEMENT' IS BY NATURE A 'REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT', IT IS TIME TO BOTH REALISE IT AND ACT UPON IT. ENOUGH IS ENOUGH.

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH IS ENOUGH IS ENOUGH IS ENOUGH IS ENOUGH ISN'T IT?



PROTEST & CARNIVAL AGAINST WAR, OPPRESSION & EXPLOITATION

RICH CROSS

'STOP THE CITY SHOWED ANOTHER POSSIBILITY'

MOBILISATION AND MOVEMENT IN ANARCHO-PUNK

*'All officers should bear in mind that this is not a lawful protest/ march/demonstration. It is a deliberate attempt to paralyse the financial heart of the country by mainly unlawful means... All [protestors] are anti-establishment, uncooperative with the police, and in the case of some extremists, potentially violent...'*¹

*'Who is going to take any notice of anyone who smashes windows? You go round like that, your hair all done up, you'll frighten a lot of people – as well as the coppers.'*²

1 City of London Police, *Stop the City Briefing*, March, 1984.

2 Pub worker, the City of London, March 1984, quoted in *Peace News*, April 27, 1984.

*'The banking community struggled to keep money flows moving, despite the unrest. They succeeded – but only just. [...] Bank balances were £11m below target overnight.'*³

ON 29 SEPTEMBER 1983, the City of London (the powerhouse of British financial services, domestically and globally) played host to an unruly, radical, and uncompromising demonstration, which had drawn thousands of young militant activists onto the crowded streets of the London financial district.

A large proportion of the demonstrators were punks; and amongst them the predominant contingent were anarchist-identified punks. Unlike so many of the standard demonstrations of the early-Thatcher era in the UK, this 'Stop the City' (STC) event was not organised by an officially-sanctioned pressure group or single issue campaigning organisation. The event had no endorsement from any political party, trade union, or charitable agency. The demonstration had no official organising committee, had not met with either City officials of the City of London Police to discuss its requirements or to agree the route and stewarding of the march.

In fact, 'Stop the City' was not to involve a march of any kind, nor conclude with a traditional rally at which the marchers would gather and listen to speakers from political leaders and supporters. Instead, the participants in Stop the City were encouraged to share collective responsibility in the delivery of a day long series of direct action events which cumulatively, it was hoped, would bring the business of the City to a standstill. All of this was in protest at the operation of the financial-military-industrial complex which the demonstrators insisted was responsible for war, poverty, exploitation, and oppression across the globe, and which now threatened to pitch the planet into a final nuclear conflagration.

The politics of those who were drawn to this unusual style of demonstration were diverse to the point of incoherence; but the 'demands' raised by the action were distinguished by their very scope and ambition. There were few requests for the City to reform its business, or to act more equitably or with a greater sense of moral responsibility.

³ *The Times*, quoted in *Freedom*, May, 1984.

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Few of the leaflets or banners which were carried by protestors called for 'reductions' or 'moratoriums' on global debt or arms race expenditure; or 'reforms' in the operation of the City's business practices. The demands that the demonstrators had raised on the streets of the City were absolute and uncompromising (and completely beyond the ability of the City to concede).

As a 'Carnival against war, oppression and destruction', Stop the City demanded that the City (and the capitalist system that it served) cease its profit-making activities, end its subsidy of systems of human and ecological exploitation, and renounce its role in financing the international arms industry and the proliferation of weapons of death and destruction. In effect, the demonstrators were demanding that the City cease to be, and the state system which it underpinned be simultaneously dissolved. Beyond such 'absolutism', the demonstrators were far less clear about what their response would be if their demands were not met. 'Half riot, half carnival', was Crass founder member Penny Rimbaud's assessment of the Stop the City initiative. The demonstrations 'attracted thousands of people who in their own ways protested against the machinery of war and the oppression that it represented.'⁴

Crass identified with the potential of Stop the City (STC) from the outset. Rimbaud later reflected that Crass took seriously the 'major commitment [...] to promote and to take part in' the demonstrations; approaching STC as an enthusiastic advocate rather than as an initiator.⁵ (The fact that the proposal did not originate from Dial House in many ways made it easier for Crass to embrace it so wholeheartedly; precisely because it did not ensnare the band in unwanted organisational baggage.)

STC occupies a unique position in the history of British anarcho-punk and provides an illuminating illustration of the movement's attempts to project its political practice at a collective level: taking the messages of the culture's musical and printed output and mobilising around them (in an autonomous, confrontational way), in territory which the movement considered to be the 'belly of the beast'. In the context of the anti-Thatcher opposition of the early 1980s, STC posed a sharply different model of radical political expression to both

4 Penny Rimbaud, *Shibboleth* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1998), 245.

5 Ibid

the prescriptions of the Left and of the mass pressure groups such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). STC showcased the political and cultural pre-occupations of anarcho-punk, in a context of direct confrontation with the forces of law and order and the business logic of the City – at no little cost to its activist base (in terms of injuries, arrests and court cases). It is plausible to argue that:

Stop the City represented anarcho-punk's collapse of the protest space and the pop space, bringing the seriousness of the demonstration to the gig, and the revelry of the gig to the demonstration.⁶

The Stop the City events broke new political ground for the activists who they attracted, and redefined the terrain on which anarchist and libertarian groups would attempt to mobilise (and against which they would be compared). While Stop the City initially enabled the demonstrations to seize the initiative and out-manoeuvre the police and City authorities, (enabling them to secure greater impact than the numbers mobilised by the demonstration might have warranted), the Metropolitan and City police forces quickly adapted to the demonstrators' methods and within a year had been able to overwhelm and neuter the activist breakthrough which STC represented.

During the short life of the Stop the City initiative the event showcased many bold, imaginative actions; some strikingly effective symbolism; and a mischievous sense of playfulness – all of which distinguished the protests from the drab and routine 'march from A-to-B for a rally' which remained the stock-in-trade of so much of the political-cultural opposition to Thatcherism. For all of its innovative qualities, Stop the City also highlighted some of the key blindspots in anarcho-punk's revolutionary manifestos; revealing tensions and uncertainties over questions of strategy, agency, alliance-brokering and the future orientation of the movement. The evolution of STC also reflected the shifting attitudes within the anarcho-punk milieu over

6 Palmer Foley, "Stop the City: Identity, Protest, and the Punks who Occupied London's Financial District in 1983", *gadflyonline.com*, 1 October 2012, <http://www.gadflyonline.com/home/index.php/stop-the-city-identity-protest-and-the-punks-who-occupied-londons-financial-district-in-1983>, accessed August 1 2014.

'STOP THE CITY SHOWED ANOTHER POSSIBILITY'

STOP 'THE CITY'

OF LONDON

THURSDAY 27 SEPT



The 'City' is a place where the real decisions that affect our lives (and those of people like us all over the world) are made. People once lived in the area, but now its just packed with the Headquarters of Banks, Companies, multinationals and places like the Stock Exchange. Billions of pounds change hands every day making profit for a few, whilst millions of people all over the world are starving. Money is made from weapons dealing, destroying nature, and generally by exploiting and controlling us all.

PROTEST AND CARNIVAL AGAINST WAR EXPLOITATION AND PROFIT

During the day there'll be constant protests all over the area, including leafletting, talking to 'City' workers, taking over the streets, street theatre and music etc...

- join in or organise your own events...

Flyer advertising the first Stop the City demonstration in September 1983, widely circulated in the months running up to the event, 1983.

the form that direct physical confrontation with the ‘forces of the state’ should take.

ORIGINS AND INITIATIVE

Popular histories of 1980s’ British counterculture often mistakenly credit Class War as the organising force behind Stop the City.⁷ In fact, Class War were entirely peripheral to the initiative. The catalyst for Stop the City was an ad-hoc alliance of radical anti-militarists, peace activists, and punk militants. The class struggle anarchist group later acknowledged: “Individuals in Class War might have taken a small part in organising it but as a group Class War took absolutely no part in organising it and we didn’t attend as a group.”⁸ Even that modest assessment risks over-stating Class War’s input.

The impetus behind Stop the City came from two principal directions. On one side, the idea gained support amongst radical currents within the mass anti-nuclear movements that had mushroomed across Europe in response to a new superpower nuclear arms race in the early 1980s. This movement had a vociferous antimilitarist fringe that organised more militant, (though usually avowedly nonviolent) actions against different elements of the ‘war machine’. A group of activists within that radical coterie had begun to argue the case for a shift from the (largely rural) focus at the nuclear bases and towards the loci of political and economic power:

Many felt that if we were, in the short term, to be able to stop the arrival of the new missiles, and, in the long run, challenge the whole war machine, then there needed to develop opposition within the towns

7 Marshall makes the less specific (but no more accurate) claim that: ‘Class War members (and fellow travellers) were prominent in the ‘Stop the City’ of London campaign in 1984.’ Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008), 495. Franks notes that: ‘Class War took part in the Stop the City (STC) demonstrations’, but does not discuss STC’s organisation. Benjamin Franks, *Rebel Alliances: The Means and Ends of Contemporary British Anarchism* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2006), 79.

8 Andy Brown [interviewer], “Solidarity and Class War Meet Uptown”, *Solidarity*, 13: 3-10; Class War, *This is Class War: An Introduction to the Class War Federation* (Stirling: AK Press, 1989).

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as well. For it is in towns that decisions are made and also where people live and work who will all need to be involved if we are to be successful.⁹

On another side, the idea won support amongst a new generation of specifically anarchist activists who had been drawn into revolutionary politics through the anarchist punk movement. The political energies of the activists of anarcho-punk found expression in a wide range of protest and oppositional arenas – including the anti-nuclear lobby, the hunt saboteurs' movement, and anti-Thatcher mobilisations of all kinds. Anarcho-punk's particular reading of the anarchist impulse meant that this activity was, in the main, decentralised, uncoordinated, and pursued independently by those militants. Anarcho-punk attempted to rally its forces in a collective way only rarely: the most significant attempt to do so came with Stop the City itself.

Militants from both sides had been looking for a way to extend and redefine anti-war protests in a way that drew attention to what they identified as the root causes of militarist bloodshed – a global system of capitalist exploitation which generated war and in which periods of 'peace' were only, in the words of Poison Girls: 'an illusion. A short space between the bullets'.¹⁰ The idea that protestors could swarm into the financial centre of the British capitalism and 'wreak havoc' with the smooth running of the economy of war and exploitation, if only for a day, struck a chord with activists from both these oppositional movements.

The London Greenpeace group became an important organisational conduit,¹¹ but as the campaign's publicity group were soon keen to emphasise: 'no one organisation is in charge of the action; it is a collection of all interested people who want a world without war or the threat of it'.¹²

In the early summer of 1983, the radical activist group circulated a discussion document exploring the idea of 'spreading our opposition into the towns as well'.¹³ The paper made the case for generalising the existing oppositional momentum:

9 "Together We Can Stop 'the City,'" *Freedom*, 44:19, September 24, 1983, 6.

10 Poison Girls, *Total Exposure* tour flyer, November 1981.

11 George Berger, *The Story of Crass* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2009), 246.

12 Stop the City Publicity Group, "Together We Can Stop the City" [leaflet], 1983.

13 London Greenpeace, "Occupy 'the City'? This autumn?" [leaflet], 1983.

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Already there's been protests in town – at bunkers, recruiting offices, town halls, courts, police stations, and recently at prisons too. For these to become effective, we need to develop actions similar in strength to those at the bases.

The document drew parallels between the proposal and the history of radical post-war protests, which had:

happened before in many places at different times: the Gdansk workers' council (Poland, 1980), Wall Street anti-nuclear blockade (New York, 1979), Cable Street and Lewisham anti-fascist takeovers of the streets (London, 1936 and 1977), the anti-bomb sit-downs of the early sixties, Derry occupied to stop repression (Ireland, 1970), etc. The situation now needs such actions, in even greater strength (London Greenpeace 1983).¹⁴

It was a wide ranging (and somewhat surprising) mix of historical comparisons; and, with the exception of the Lewisham and Committee of 100 (anti-nuclear) references, any claim that STC could hope to emulate the political significance of the name-checked events seemed entirely implausible. Although the list included actions which stood far outside the tradition of 'nonviolent civil disobedience', it was notable for omitting any reference to the wave of urban riots which had convulsed (and effectively brought to a halt) several British inner-cities, just two years earlier, in the summer of 1981. Neighbourhood or estate riots were clearly not seen as any kind of relevant model, practically or philosophically.

Absent, too, were any references to that experience of activist-led anti-capitalist actions in urban settings which were arguably far closer to the premise of Stop the City than most of the other entries in the list: the 1970s street confrontations which were initiated by militant autonomist groups in western Europe; the 'carnavalesque' happenings and cultural disruptions that were engineered by the King Mob group in London in the late 1960s; and the militant three-day 'Days

¹⁴ Ibid

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of Rage' ruckus held in October 1969 on the streets of Chicago, in the US, organised by The Weathermen – then a current within the Students for a Democratic Society group.¹⁵

In effect, there was little or no attempt to theorise what the symbolism or metaphor Stop the City was intended to be, or to codify its exemplar status. The aspiration to fuse a defiant 'carnival' with a militant 'protest' was frequently referenced, as was the aim to break with the norms of the 'ordinary' demonstration format. But it remained unclear if STC's claim was that it was an unparalleled innovation or the extension of an existing radical historical method. This reluctance to engage with theory, and weak sense of radical political history, was not imported directly from anarcho-punk, but it did strongly reflect the impulses of that subculture's body politic.

As Stop the City's frame of reference began to take shape, interested parties were called to a planning meeting at the Tonbridge Club, Judd Street, London on 2 July. Infused with libertarian sentiments, and mindful of the imperative not to be prescriptive, the invite tentatively proposed 'an action in London, this Autumn, which – because of its nature – might appeal to others in our area and beyond'. The prospective target?

an area with a concentration of people who make decisions about (and profits from) the warfare state – The City – where once people lived. Now it's crowded with banks, company headquarters, and places like the Stock Exchange.¹⁶

The document raised the possibility of occupying the area, or of holding a celebration of life in the City streets, and suggested that 29 September 1983, 'one of the four annual "days of reckoning"'

15 George Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (Stirling: AK Press, 2006); Hari Kunzru, "The Mob Who Shouldn't Really Be Here," *Tate Etc.*, Issue 13 (Summer, 2008) available online: <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/mob-who-shouldnt-really-be-here>, accessed August 2 2014; Jeremy Varnon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, The Red Army Faction and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

16 Geoff Price, "Closing down the City," *Peace News*, June 24, 1983, 7.

might provide the ideal opportunity. It was to be, in the words of Conflict: ‘an occupation to stop people at theirs’.¹⁷ An announcement in *Freedom* anarchist newspaper declared that the event would be:

a chance to show that the will of the people is stronger than the institutions of war and destruction. [...] Together we can reclaim the City, for ourselves. There will be a carnival on the streets, and a chance to show our opposition to the death machine.¹⁸

The timing was just right to excite anarchist punk activists. Enthused by the idea:

it was through the anarcho-punk scene that a lot of the information circulated about Stop the City, and through which many people came together to organise themselves to get to London from all over the country.¹⁹

And as the initiative developed, the militants of anarcho-punk became the most populous of Stop the City’s principal agents on the ground. Moreover it was ‘the DIY communication networks which were established within the anarcho-punk scene that allowed for the demonstration’s viral, decentralized organization’.²⁰ And in this analogue, pre-internet era, promotion and publicity within anarchist punk networks was ‘basically a word of mouth thing’.²¹

AMBITION, PUBLICITY AND PREPARATION

The Stop the City initiative thus became an audacious attempt to close down the financial nerve-centre of the City of London on the

17 Conflict, “Stop the City,” *Increase the Pressure*, Mortarhate, 1984.

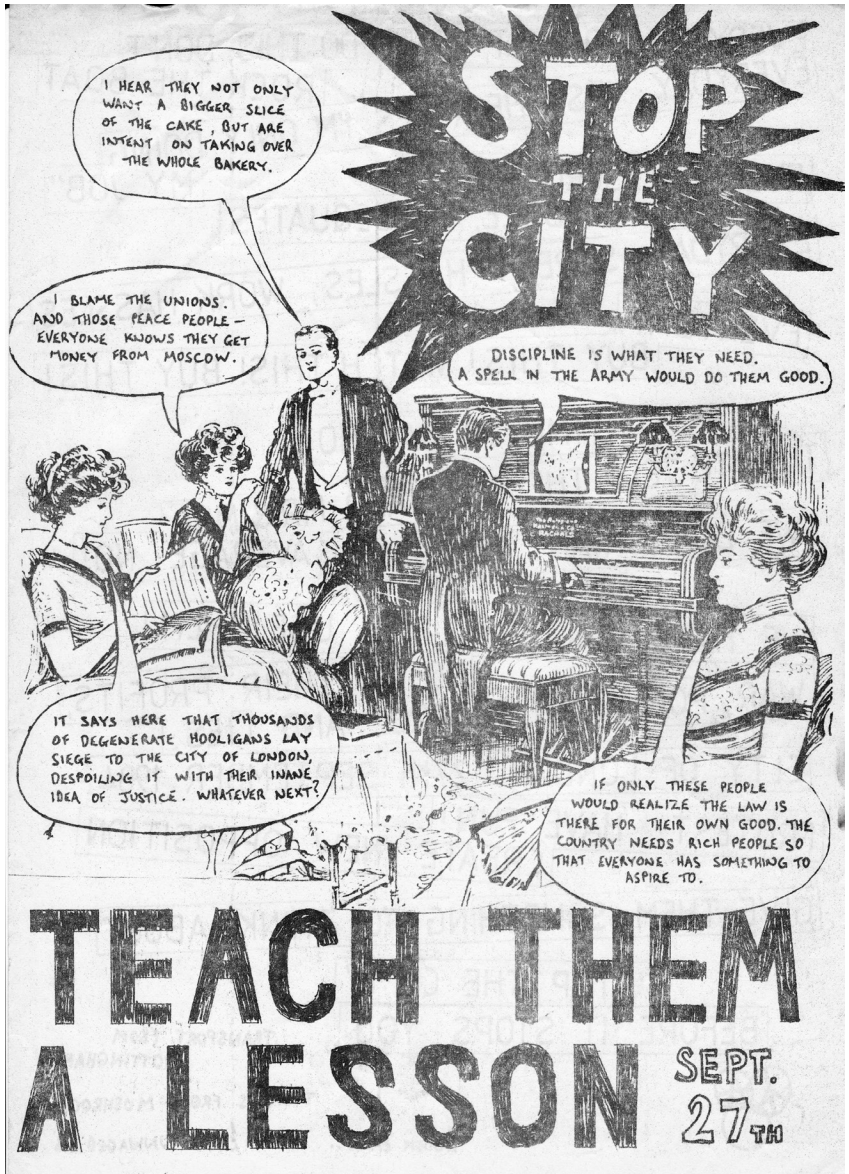
18 “Stop the City,” *Freedom*, 44:17, August 27, 1983, 7.

19 A2, “Stop the City 1984,” *History is Made at Night*, October 30, 2011, <http://history-is-made-at-night.blogspot.co.uk/2011/10/stop-city-1984.html>, accessed 2 August 2, 2014.

20 Richard Metzger, “The Original Occupy Wall Street: Stop the City, 1984,” *dangerousminds.net*, October 16, 2011, http://dangerousminds.net/comments/the_original_occupy_wall_street_stop_the_city_1984, accessed August 2, 2014.

21 Metzger, “The Original Occupy Wall Street: Stop the City, 1984”.

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Leaflet produced by Nottingham Anarchist Group to promote Stop the City, parodying the reaction of the 'privileged classes'. 'It says here that thousands of degenerate hooligans [will] lay siege to the City of London despoiling it with their inane idea of justice. Whatever next?', 1983.

day when quarterly revenues were calculated (or as *Vague* more luridly described it, the day when: ‘fat corrupt purveyors of this disgusting trade counted up their money and drooled over their profits’²²) using a combination of a mass presence in the streets, and a whole array of loosely coordinated disruptive activities. This was in the era before the so-called ‘big bang’ of Information Technology had hit the City. At this time much financial information (held on paper ledgers, print outs and ‘computer tape’) was still moved around the streets by runners and couriers. Attempting to snarl up the streets, the protestors judged, could therefore tangibly frustrate business dealings.

Publicity and promotion for the first event appeared in the press of the radical peace and anarchist movements in the spring and early summer of 1983, at a time when other large set-piece direct action events (particularly those associated with the nonviolent direct action wing of the disarmament movement) were also in preparation, and when movements against different iniquities of Thatcherism (including the People’s March for Jobs) were also mobilising. CND had held a huge march and rally in London the same year, which had attracted hundreds of thousands of supporters (and at which an anarchist ‘black bloc’ had gathered to rally, chant and disrupt the speeches of speakers from the party political establishment).

Some on the left feared that the pitch of STC was a dereliction of duty and a denial of responsibility on the organisers’ part: drawing hyped-up militants to confrontations with the forces of law and order without plan or management methods in place, and then denying any culpability for the events that might follow. Such anxieties echoed the concerns of the City and the Metropolitan police forces who criticised organisers for refusing to negotiate on any aspect of the day’s events.

The issue of political violence was a recurring one in discussions which preceded the first Stop the City. The editors of the radical pacifist magazine *Peace News* reported:

Some people have expressed doubts about the action – it is called on the basis that ‘it is intended to be peaceful, not involving violence to people’ – but

22 Tom Vague, “Stop the City,” *Vague*, 15, archived online at *vaguerants*: http://www.vaguerants.org.uk/?page_id=135, accessed March 23, 2014.

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they felt that some of those involved were hostile to nonviolence.²³

Peace News continued to urge pacifist involvement in the action (as a counter-weight to the influence of other forces), while the organisers reaffirmed their intention that the action would not involve violence (although damage to property was not foresworn; the involvement of non-pacifist activists welcomed; and no absolute commitment to the *principles of nonviolence* [as distinct from a tactical agreement not to commit violent acts] was forthcoming).²⁴ Some peace activists, unconvinced by the organisers' reassurances, made clear their public opposition to the action. Writing in *Peace News*, one such critic anticipated disaster, condemning the 'dangerous experiment', and insisting that the planners' preparations for:

an action in a dense, congested urban area, full of politically sensitive buildings, seemed woefully inadequate. A 'carnival' is planned: as far as I can see only negative and indiscriminate disruption can be guaranteed. Such disruption will terrorise innocents (tourists, shop assistants, residents, for example), interfere with essential services (fire, ambulance) and be unable to demonstrate the truth of London Greenpeace's analysis of the link between capitalism and war.²⁵

Of acute concern to many was that 'an action resulting in violence [...] will be a gift for the media less than a month before CND's major demo on October 22'.²⁶

The traditional anarchist movement did provide support and encouragement for the action (even though the catalyst for it did not come from within its ranks), with the 121 anarchist bookshop in Railton Road, Brixton providing logistical support with accommodation

23 "Stop the City?" *Peace News*, July 22, 1983, 18.

24 See, for example, the defence of the commitment to non-violence by one of the 1983 STC organisers. Dave Pitt, "Stop the City 2," [letter] *Peace News*, August 5, 1983, 20.

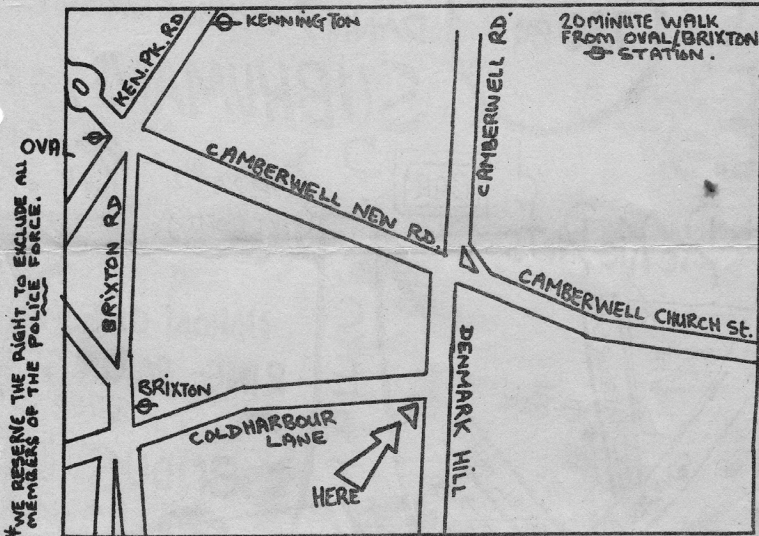
25 David Cormack, "Stop the City," [letter] *Peace News*, August 5, 1983, 20.

26 Ibid

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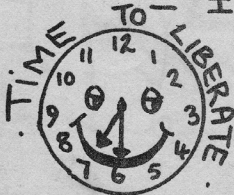
STOP THE "CITY"

ACCOMMODATION — WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR ALL THOSE WHO NEED IT (WE HAVE UNLIMITED SPACE SO LARGE GROUPS OF PEOPLE ARE WELCOME AS ARE INDIVIDUALS) DETAILS WILL BE GIVEN OUT IN GREATER DEPTH AT THE GIG VENUE. IT'S BEST NOT TO BRING TOO MUCH STUFF ALONG WITH YOU — A SLEEPING BAG AND INITIATIVE WILL BE OK!



GIG VENUE AT 'DICKIE DIRTS' ON CORNER.
COLDHARBOUR LANE ENTRANCE, LONDON S.E.5.

ARE YOU GOING TO MAKE STOP THE CITY THE ONE THAT THE CITY CORPORATIONS WILL NEVER EVER FORGET?
TO — IT'S UP TO YOU!



SEE $\frac{1}{A}$ THERE @ $\frac{1}{Vase}$

(PLEASE PASS ON — COMMUNICATE.)

Leaflet promoting the second Stop the City demonstration — called on 29 March 1984.

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(with its efforts south of the river Thames mirrored by crash spaces in Tollington Place, Islington to the north).²⁷ Organisation remained ad-hoc and informal, with logistical responsibilities shared out between working groups at open planning and co-ordination meetings.²⁸

THE FIRST STOP THE CITY

By late August 1983, plans had been finalised: between 6am and 6pm on 29 September, decentralised, autonomous actions protesting against war, militarism and oppression would be linked by a continuous 'carnival' which would:

peacefully reclaim the streets to show that community and creativity can replace the commercialism and death-dealing of the area.²⁹

Assembly points on the steps of St Paul's cathedral, at Finsbury Square and at Tower Hill were to provide contact, logistical support, and jumping off points, but responsibility for the specifics of all protests would be in the hands of those turning up. There would be no central decision-making or co-ordinating body, but consultative 'on-the-spot evaluation meetings' would assess the next steps every three hours throughout the day. Those unable to attend would be encouraged to join in the telephone blockade, which was intended to overload company switchboards, and lock-up telephone lines into and out of the City.³⁰ As they passed responsibility over to the participants, the

27 "Stop the City," *Peace News*, September 16, 1983, 9.

28 See, for example, the report of the July 2 STC planning meeting; "Stop the City!" *Freedom*, 44:14, July 16, 1983, 1. Working groups were established around the themes of 'press; publicity; legal; contacting 'city' workers; research; children's area; carnival; [and] co-ordination on the day'; "Stop the City," *Freedom*, 44:18, September 10, 1983, 7.

29 "Stop the City," *Peace News*, September 16, 1983.

30 To facilitate this, lists of the phone numbers of 'some of the institutions involved in "objectionable" practices' were printed off and circulated ahead of the protest. This practice grew with each successive event. The 'Great Phone Blockade 1984' leaflet lists the address and telephone details of dozens companies under headings including 'Animal Exploiters', 'Meat/Murder', 'Arms Traders', and 'Merchants Banks', but acknowledges that there 'are too many disgusting

organisers affirmed that, if the police attempted to ban the demonstration, 'it will go ahead as planned anyway'.³¹ Large scale arrests were considered likely (albeit many of them were expected to be for offences such as obstruction and minor criminal damage), and legal briefings were circulated (backed up by a volunteer legal support telephone service on the day). As well as outlining the rights of arrestees, some documents urged total non-co-operation with the police once in custody; the aim being 'to use up as much police time as possible' and to cost the courts 'time, money and effort, discouraging future mass arrests'.³²

In the event, the demonstration was not banned outright, although the police carried out a series of early morning raids; including a major fishing-operation at the Islington Peace Centre, where many demonstrators had bedded down.³³ At the centre, there had been a rising sense of anticipation as 'loads of people started arriving from all over the day before.' At a planning meeting prior to the raid 'the mood was [*one off*] excitement as ideas of taking over buildings, burning flags, sit-downs, etc., buzzed about'.³⁴

From early the next morning, several thousand demonstrators gathered at the Mansion House and at sites across the financial hubs of the City. Direct action events, spontaneous and prearranged, which were carried out by individuals, crowds, and tight-knit affinity groups, took place right across the densely packed streets of the City. Crowds seethed and surged throughout the area, roaming across streets to blockade traffic (amidst whoops, cries, shouts and songs), before regrouping at the Mansion House and then racing off in a fresh direction. Crass's Penny Rimbaud recalled:

We soon developed the enjoyable tactic of forming large groups of between one and two hundred people who would suddenly break away from the main gathering and rush into the narrow streets shouting slogans

institutions in the City to list them all here.' "The Great Phone Blockade 1984," [leaflet] March, 1984.

31 "Stop the City," *Peace News*, September 16, 1983.

32 "Non-co-operation with the Police," [leaflet] 1983.

33 "Earwigings," *Peace News*, October 14, 1983, 24.

34 Skinz, "Stop the City," *Death on a Summer's Day*, 2, 1983.

‘STOP THE CITY SHOWED ANOTHER POSSIBILITY’



Protestors link hands around the war memorial in the heart of London's financial centre, during the first Stop the City demonstration in September 1983.

Photo © camera_obscura [busy]

and generally causing as much confusion as possible. [...] Meanwhile city workers peered from behind the smoked-glass windows of their offices, confused, bemused and bewildered.³⁵

Peace News reported that the actions, ‘cramming parts of the City with the sorts of people not usually encountered there’, were, ‘unstructured and free flowing’.³⁶ Facing an event ‘without leaders’, and without an agreed structure, police officers from the Metropolitan and City forces were at a loss as to how to police the demonstration. Of particular concern to the senior officers was the decentralised nature of the demonstration, and the absence of single focus or linear destination (such as a rally point). Occupations, breakouts, ‘die-ins’, blockades and invasions of financial buildings occurred, without notice or warning, at venues and locations across the City. An article in *Catalyst* fanzine sought to capture the innovative nature of the demonstration:

Humour was a tactic the police didn't expect either. A dozen of us formed a moving, dancing, musical blockade that ran and skipped down streets, singing ‘I'm only doing my job’ at the top of our voices. We found a police van waiting at traffic lights. We circled it – dancing, laughing.³⁷

35 Penny Rimbaud, “Stop the City!” *Punk Lives*, 10, 1983.

36 “News,” *Peace News*, October 14, 1983, 3.

37 “Stop the City,” *Catalyst*, 6, January, 1984.

Some demonstrators displayed strong Ghandian, hippy sensibilities in relation to the City authorities and their police defenders. 'Chris' (whose leaflet included his home address) addressed the police directly:

If you joined the police force to serve the community, not the corporations, then help the people to find their stolen lives – and look for yours too. Let us dance and sing in the street. Join us.³⁸

If it was clear that these demonstrators were unlike the usual marchers of the left, it was just as clear that they were unlike the usual cooperative peace demonstrators; more militant, less predictable, and distinctively less compliant. If the police response was marked by uncertainty (and very low levels of specific intelligence on the demonstrators' plans) then, at this first gathering, the demonstrators had no clear, agreed sense of what the actions of the event might cumulatively deliver; how the crowd might deal with the police's attempt to contain the demonstration; and what the key messages and symbolism of Stop the City might be. During the course of the event, the temperature of the demonstration rose and the sense of confrontation and resolute defiance on the participants' part intensified.

Much press attention focused on the appearance, behaviour and cultural practices of the punk and activist participants. *Peace News* observed, in some frustration that, 'it was almost laughable, the absurdity of these gents working for god knows what loathsome, harmful enterprise, getting upset about the "so-called ecologically minded people" leaving beer cans around', but remained worried about the movement's apparent lack of concern with the presentation of its self-image.³⁹ *Death on a Summer's Day* fanzine suggested:

It seemed that everybody concerned with the anarchist 'movement' had made the effort to get there: groups like Crass, Flux, The Subhumans, The Mob, Faction, Chaos UK (who are not a 'chaos' band), The Alternative and numerous others.⁴⁰

38 'Chris,' "Dear Policeperson," [leaflet] n.d., but September 27, 1983.

39 "Stop the City," [editorial] *Peace News*, October 14, 1983, 3.

40 Skinz, "Stop the City."

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As the day wore on significant numbers of demonstrators were arrested by the police, often on charges of obstruction (both of the highway and of police officers), in some instances for acts of criminal damage, and in a smaller number of cases for assault. During the latter stages of the demonstration, the focus moved to the magistrates' court where those arrested were being fast-tracked from bail or remand – a 'suicide mission,' Rimbaud suggested, 'but one that we felt was important... [to] let compatriots who were being held inside know that the day had been a success'.⁴¹ A large solidarity gathering assembled outside the courtroom to greet each defendant that was bailed (and to taunt the police lines which were protecting the court).

Rimbaud chose the unexpected outlet of the glossy, commercially-produced *Punk Lives* magazine to celebrate the achievements of the first event and to urge the wider involvement of punks (of all types and hues) in future demonstrations. He reported excitedly:

Royal Exchange messengers had been prevented from operating; British Telecom workers had refused to work in the City; restaurants and cafes had been stink-bombed; fur-shops had been attacked; people had spent the day jamming telephone lines to banks and offices; there had been lie-ins and sit-downs, street theatre and music and innumerable acts of individual subversion from lock gluing to flying anarchist banners from the various statues that decorate the City.⁴²

In the aftermath of the demonstration, participant perspectives on the event were generally extremely positive, and widely reported in the radical, anarchist and libertarian press. A correspondent to *Freedom* declared that 'the day surpassed everyone's expectations', adding:

We had succeeded in creating a well organised event without any 'leaders' or central organisation. Also an effective public action against war in a very sensitive area, without any contact or negotiation with police,

41 Rimbaud, "Stop the City!"

42 Rimbaud, "Stop the City!"

and where people of many differing views and groups acted in solidarity and with respect.⁴³

Key members of the London organising group who were keen to see the demonstration as the opening salvo on a new front declared it, 'a historic, though only partial, success,' which had to be recognised as integral to the advance of a campaign of, 'anti-nuclear, anti-militarist and anti-authoritarian actions'.⁴⁴

Discussion did focus on the question of the number of arrests which were made during the demonstration, and the frustration of experiencing the police thwarting efforts at occupation and other actions (despite the widespread acknowledgement that fluidity and unpredictability all clearly played in the demonstrators' favour). Rimbaud took particular heart from the demonstrators' flexibility: 'Taken aback by the diversity of our tactics, the police were [...] unable to co-ordinate a response'.⁴⁵

Chumbawamba judged that the event had been: 'happy and constructive and peaceful and interesting, for both demonstrators and "public"'.⁴⁶ The band Conflict, whose politics were far less shaped by pacifism and the experience of the counterculture than Crass's own, offered a more measured assessment of the day, enthused and frustrated in equal measure. On the *Increase the Pressure* album, the band suggested:

The carnival was enjoyed, but the City was not stopped
They worked well under siege; even though many
visited the carnival out of curiosity
Their dull day was brightened, but it left no mark
The next day most walls had been scrubbed of their
graffiti messages
But the fact remains – power has been tested.⁴⁷

43 "Stop the City," *Freedom*, 44:20, October 8, 1983, 3.

44 'Dave, Clare, Steve and Dave,' "A Time to Act," *Freedom*, 44:21, October 22, 1983, 3.

45 Rimbaud, *Shibboleth*, 246.

46 Chumbawamba, "We've Been Asking For Far Too Long," [leaflet] 1984.

47 Conflict, "Stop the City."

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What remained less certain was whether the initiative could develop sufficient momentum to pull in greater numbers in future. The dire predictions of calamity, which were raised by some peace movement critics had proved to be without foundation; but there will still concerns about the future direction of the event. That supportive-but-critical perspective was writ large in the editorial position of *Peace News*, which praised the innovative and radical qualities of the actions, whilst sharply criticising STC's hostility to formal organisation, press liaison, and the reluctance to agree tactical ground-rules – all of which, the paper suggested, left atomised and unsupported demonstrators vulnerable to police violence and provocation, and opened the door to uncontrolled escalation.⁴⁸

What appeared to have little negative impact either on future participation or the assessment of the success of the day itself was the large number of people who were arrested. There are a number of related reasons why the impact appeared to be muted. For less serious offences, such as obstruction of the highway, or minor criminal damage, there was no automatic translation from arrest through charge to court-case. Most arrestees could expect to be released without charge later (albeit much later, in many cases) the same day. Many radical activists, with experience of demonstrations at nuclear bases or during hunt-sabbing, were familiar (sometimes extensively so) with the inside of a police van; and for many the potential for arrest was a known and acceptable risk of participation. In anticipation, the STC Legal Group fixed the date for a defendants' meeting prior to the action.⁴⁹

Amongst radical peace activists there was also some support for a strategy of civil disobedience which aimed to 'fill the gaols' with protestors arrested for principled political actions. Influenced by Gandhian thinking the idea, previously advocated by the Committee of 100 in the 1960s, remained contentious; yet the idea of *seeking*

48 "Stop the City" [editorial], *Peace News*. *PN's* criticisms of the apparent lack of legal support offered to demonstrators was misplaced; as both legal back-up on the day and subsequent support and solidarity campaigns were provided. In the next issue, *PN* suggested that the paper had published 'what was perhaps an over-critical report of the action, based on a limited number of eye-witness accounts.' "Stop the City," *Peace News*, October 28, 1983, 5.

49 'Martin,' "Re-appraising Stop the City," [letter] *Peace News*, October 28, 1983, 17.

arrest still had some currency.⁵⁰ Some activists saw court cases and solidarity campaigns as a political extension of the original action, while many low-level offences only carried the likely cost of a small fine or a suspended sentence. These factors combined to reduce the intimidating effect which was posed by the spectre of arrest. That sense of confidence was reflected in the fact that many police stations which were packed with arrested demonstrators became sites of active protest, with cells being flooded or graffitied and processing being slowed to a crawl by non-co-operation. The danger posed by more serious charges of assault, major criminal damage, or theft (the expropriation of companies' property) were recognised, but overall the sense that the risks were acceptable reduced the deterrent impact. This sober cost-benefit calculation, it should be acknowledged, ran in parallel with a reckless lack of calculation on the part of many young activists who were caught up in the febrile atmosphere of the day, who 'went for it' regardless. For those amongst the 200 arrestees facing charges, most court dates were set for November 1983, with the major trial dates of 4 and 11 November 1983 immediately designated as 'Action Against Banks' days of solidarity actions, with pickets of the Guildhall Court arranged to coincide with the defendants' appearances.

What pulled in greater numbers for the second demonstrations was the percolation, through the fanzine reports, correspondence, word-of-mouth, and active promotion of the initiative by bands, allied to the efforts of the radical and anarchist press. Self-assessments of the effectiveness of the first STC within anarcho-punk remained extremely positive. In the view of Subhumans's lead singer Dick Lucas, that sense of political momentum 'gave people a lot of fresh motivation, I think'.⁵¹

A follow-up meeting in London of around 50 in London in October 1983, noted that (against the expectations of numerous critics) the demonstration had been a success, and took both *Peace News* and CND to task for their alleged efforts at the 'suppression of the idea' of STC.⁵² Such trenchant criticism of national peace organisations view of STC gained traction. Worthing CND Chair Ian Svennevig (an enthusiastic STC participant) claimed that the 'insidious lies that

50 'Ali,' "Should we Fill the Gaols?" *Peace News*, March 16, 1984, 16.

51 Quoted in "Subhumans Interview," *Crisispoint*, 1983.

52 "Stop the City," *Peace News*, October 28, 1983, 5.

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were being spread throughout the peace movement' ahead of the demonstration led many CND members to 'disgracefully ignore the call for help'.⁵³ It was an atypically strong reaction from a local CND officer, but it reflected a wider unease; allied to a growing sense that the British disarmament movement remained politically timid and over-cautious in the face of an impending nuclear catastrophe.

THE SECOND AND THIRD STOP THE CITY

As news of the excitement of the first STC spread, larger numbers were drawn to the idea. A planning meeting in London in early January 1984 drew up to 100 people.⁵⁴ It was quickly agreed to plan for a larger, follow-up Stop the City, to be held on the next 'profit calculation' day: March 29 1984. This second Stop the City event would have the largest impact and attract the greatest level of interest in the series. Activists who were enthused by the idea were keen to extend and generalise the experience around the country. On the evening of 21 March 1984, demonstrators in Bristol daubed and super glued bank premises across the city; rallying the following morning outside the local police station (in solidarity with arrested comrades). At the same time, a roving group of demonstrators occupied banks, army recruitment offices, and the offices of the city council in Glasgow.⁵⁵

This second event offered a fuller programme of opt-in events throughout the day, giving the demonstration slightly more structure than previously. Picketing was scheduled to begin at 8am; followed by simultaneous 'women's actions' (including the liberation of tampons from a major branch of Boots), animal rights protests in the fur trade area, and 'alternative energy' actions outside the headquarters of the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) an hour later. At noon, symbolic 'die-ins' were timetabled at different sites which were associated with militarism and war, with rally times set for the Royal Exchange and Bank of England in the afternoon. The day was scheduled to wrap-up at 6pm with pickets at any police stations holding demonstrators.⁵⁶

The organisational framework around Stop the City was continuing to evolve. In addition to the outline timetable of events, the

53 Ian Svennevig, "CND and STC," [letter] *Peace News*, October 28, 1983, 17.

54 "Spring in the City," *Peace News*, February 3, 1984, 5.

55 "Stop the Cities," *Peace News*, April 13, 1984, 3.

56 "Stopping the City," *Peace News*, March 16, 1984, 17.

STOP THE CITY

THURS
MARCH 29 8 AM - 6 PM

MEET AT: -

1 ST. PAULS 2 TOWER HILL 3 FINSBURY SQUARE

TO PROTEST AGAINST: -

THE ARMS TRADE

HUMAN & ANIMAL EXPLOITATION

FOOD MOUNTAINS

POVERTY STARVATION

EMPTY HOUSES

HOMELESS PEOPLE

HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT

AND AMONG OTHER THINGS TOO NUMEROUS TO MENTION: -

RAPE OF THE THIRD WORLD

ECOLOGICAL DESTRUCTION

SLAVE STATUS OF WOMEN

POLICE BRUTALITY

AND (A CHIEF GOVERNING FACTOR)

MISUSE OF MONEY BY RICH PEOPLE

CONTACTS

NORTH WEST - STC BOX LAG, 82, LARK LANE, LIVERPOOL 17

NORTHEAST - STC % PEACEWORKS, HUDDERSFIELD 0484-23915

MIDLANDS - CHRIS & ALAN 0602 624742/784-963

LONDON - RON 01-281 0719

SOUTH - JOE 0273 602708

OR SEND SAE TO: -
BOX STC,
6 ENDSLEIGH ST,
LONDON WC1

Leaflet listing the regional contacts (and the key political themes) of the second Stop the City demonstration, 1984.

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pre-demonstration briefing included details of legal support services, details of crèche and first-aid support, the post-STC defendants' meeting and pre-arranged benefit gigs to raise defence campaign funds.⁵⁷

Writers for *Vague* reported, with evident pleasure, that the 'pin-stripe ranks were once again infiltrated by spiky tops and soon black flags were being raised outside the Royal Exchange'.⁵⁸ From the other side of the fence, *The Times* noted the assembly of 'a combination of punks, anarchists, nuclear disarmers, and people demanding the liberation of gays, women or animals'; a gathering of 'people in multi-coloured hairstyles and all sorts of dress' who 'cavorted round the City'.⁵⁹ The paper acknowledged that, in terms of scale and reach, the event was 'vastly more impressive' than the first event. Many participants shared that sense of growing self-belief (albeit from a very different perspective to that of *The Times*):

At first it looked like nobody was going to show up. Then it went from almost no one there, to hundreds and hundreds of people streaming into the area within a matter of just minutes. [...] It was an absolutely magical moment to partake in as people seemed to 'materialize' in the light London rain that morning.⁶⁰

This second Stop the City is the most extensively documented of the series, in large part due to the reportage documentary of the event which was filmed by three members of Crass: Mick Duffield (camera), Joy de Vivre (sound) and Andy Palmer (interviewer). A rough-cut edit of the film, assembled by Duffield, was released for screening within the radical milieu later in 1984, and was widely shown at anarchist and other events in the years that immediately followed. This initial cut, filmmaker Duffield explained, had 'been released early in the hope that it will inspire people for the next Stop the City' that was arranged for the Autumn.⁶¹ The raw edit captures much of the

57 "Come in Your Thousands: Stop the City," *Peace News*, September 21, 1984, 21.

58 *Vague*, "Stop the City."

59 Rupert Morris, "383 held in City protest," *The Times*, March 30, 1984, 1; 28.

60 Metzger, "The Original Occupy Wall Street."

61 Crass, *Stop the City. London. March 29th 1984*, [booklet] (London: Crass, 1984). The booklet accompanying the video indicated that: 'Copies of the final

rough-and-tumble, excitement, volatility, anger, and passion of the demonstration, and also reveals the huge breadth of motivations and expectations of participants (not all of whom are anarchist punks, or indeed punks of any hue).

While images in the press coverage of the first Stop the City focused on the appearance of the 'fancy-dress mob',⁶² the defining media image of the second demonstration was Ken Towner's photo of a young policewoman (recklessly and pointlessly) throwing a spewing smoke canister back across a busy street crammed with vehicles, commuters and protestors; an act of unauthorised stupidity variously described in the press as 'brave', 'courageous' and 'determined'.⁶³ In fact, throughout the day, the police again struggled to contain the protestors' ire and ingenuity.

Rather than get caught up in ritual set piece confrontations with the police, there was endless movement with groups heading off in all directions and no direction, blocking traffic and forcing the police to spread themselves thinly. There was a tangible sense of power – it was the first time I had seen people de-arrested.⁶⁴

Even so, the arrest toll remained high. With around 550 police officers deployed (including plain clothes officers and undercover *agent provocateurs*), more than 400 demonstrators were arrested.⁶⁵

The context this time was also different. This Stop the City took place on the same day that a far larger labour movement protest,

film, which will be radically different, will be available towards the end of the year'; but no completed edit was forthcoming.

62 Neil Darbyshire and Peter Dobbie, "Peace, Punks and a Little City Anarchy," *The Standard*, September 29, 1983, 3.

63 The image was used in: Standard Reporter. "The Strong Arm of the Law," *The Standard*, March 29, 1984, 1; "Take that! Police Girl Hurls Back a Demo Smoke Bomb," *The Sun*, March 30, 1984, 7; Ian Black and Don Cooligan. "The Bobby Strikes Back!" *Daily Express*, March 30, 1984, 2-3; Robert Norris. "383 held in City Protest," *The Times*, March 30, 1984, 1; 28, and [untitled photo story], *The Guardian*, March 30, 1984, 1.

64 A2, "Stop the City 1984."

65 "Stop the Cities," *Peace News*, April 13, 1984, 3.

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called by a number of trade unions in protest at the Thatcher government's attacks on local government, marched through central London (its route took it from Malet Street, WC1 to Jubilee Gardens, Southbank). As industrial conflicts with the Conservative administration intensified, the start of the national Miners' Strike of 1984-85 was only weeks away. Yet despite the geographical and temporal proximities, the extent of cross-over and connection between the militants of Stop the City and other groups locked in battle with the government of the day was strictly limited. The isolation of STC activists highlighted not only the weaknesses in the culture's ability to broker alliances, but also (more damningly) its lack of interest in making the kind of wider common cause that might extend the reach and range of the protestors' combined leverage.

There was greater militancy, a reduced identification with pacifism, and a greater sense of combativity and confrontation in evidence than before. Demonstrator Phil 'Hedgehog' Tonge observed that the previous year's sense of 'subversive glee' had been replaced by a 'brooding, threatening atmosphere'.⁶⁶ The tone of Crass's own exhortations had also changed, and with it the political language. One of the band's flyers spoke in strongly provocative terms about the City's occupants:

Why should these rich scum be allowed to hold the world in bondage? As they suck on their fat cigars, we – the ordinary people of the world – are expected to beg for a living. [...] Stop the City... gives us the chance to let the wealthy scum know we're not going to let them get away with it.⁶⁷

This was hardly the kind of rhetoric expected of 'peace punks'. Yet amidst the growing seriousness of STC, whimsy and humour remained in evidence (although little of it originated directly from within the ranks of anarcho-punk). A banner hung at the main assembly point which displayed anarchist Emma Goldman's celebrated insistence that 'If I can't dance to it, it's not my revolution'; a couple in fancy dress declared themselves to be 'Royals against the bomb';

66 Phil 'Hedgehog' Tonge, quoted in: Linda Peirson, "Stop the City Considered," *Peace News*, April 27, 1984, 10-11.

67 Crass. "Stop the City – London, March 29," [leaflet] 1984.

another activist in a simple bird costume sported a T-Shirt with the slogan 'pigeons against the pecking order'.⁶⁸

Criticism of the initiative continued. At *Peace News*, co-editor Linda Peirson described her frustration with the lack of organisation, weak strategic and tactical clarity and the predominant atmosphere of 'chaos, confusion and confrontation'.⁶⁹ But while Peirson looked forward to improved 'effective and fun' STCs in the future, Dr Tony Weaver urged those 'whose concern is to reduce violence to have nothing more to do with this of protest', which delivered action, 'indistinguishable from hooligans on the rampage'.⁷⁰ Other militant pacifist demonstrators were struggling to reconcile the tensions raised through the demonstration's heightening polarity:

There are so many fine distinctions in active pacifism; we have to find in work in the area between the contradictions: we must neither place ourselves as passive willing punch-bags under the boots of the frustrated policeman, nor must we 'confront' the guardians of the state simply for the *confrontation* itself, and then accept anything short of a near-riot as nonviolent.⁷¹

Others felt that the scruffy, punky tone of the demonstration was unfortunate: 'We need to express ourselves more tactfully, to use what is construed as good, responsible, and worthy to express our affirmation of peace, growth, and life. Consequently, I feel we should "clean up our act", so to speak,' suggested one demonstrator.⁷² Others reaffirmed the righteousness of confrontational pacifism: 'Smashed windows belonging to banks which finance death is hardly anti-pacifist. [...] Pacifists want a better world through peaceful means. But the governments don't always play cricket, my dear chap, so sometimes you have to break the rules'.⁷³ This divergence in approach was

68 "STC – London," *Peace News*, April 13, 1984, 7.

69 Peirson, "Stop the City Considered."

70 Dr Tony Weaver, quoted in: Peirson, "Stop the City Considered."

71 Rich Cross, "Pacifism is Not 'Nice'," *Peace News*, May 11, 1984, 13.

72 John Kendall. "Clean-cut anarchy" [letter], *Peace News*, May 25, 1984, 9.

73 R Scanlon, "Reassess Your Attitudes!" [letter], *Peace News*, May 25, 1984, 9.

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becoming more pronounced as the momentum and direction of the wider anarcho-punk movement itself shifted.

On 14-15 April, a follow-up weekend conference drew 60-70 participants to discuss the outcome of the event, arrange solidarity and support work, and to agree the outline for an autumn Stop the City, to be held on 27 September 1984. At the second event, there was growing evidence that the police were now adapting to what had previously been a novel experience. Despite the sense the numbers were growing and the temper of the demonstration was itself becoming more intense, it was just as clear that the police and authorities were learning more effective methods of containment, and were themselves becoming more fluid and flexible in their response. The balance of initiative was now shifting. The police had become adept in identifying the punks, peaceniks, and punk-identified militants liable to be the most 'troublesome', and the authorities seemed increasingly able to pre-empt these unruly agents' ability to act.

With a feeling that the net was closing around the protestors, some advocated a pro-active response. As a result a follow-up Stop the City event was organised by militants in London on 31 May 1984, taking advantage of short-notice and surprise, in an attempt to circumvent police efforts to contain the demonstration. This was to be a 'totally self-organised protest' without co-ordination meetings.⁷⁴ Flux of Pink Indians explained in their giveaway *Taking a Liberty* booklet:

This time it is expected to be a 'low-key' event. No advertising has been planned and it is hoped that word of mouth will draw sufficient small active groups to cause havoc – and hopefully, because the action is less central[ised], the police won't be able to control it.⁷⁵

The 'secrecy' of the event was immediately compromised, and it also proved difficult (in an analogue age) to publicise the demonstration. As a consequence, the numbers which were mobilised on the day were low and the police were able to prepare and deploy a sufficiently sizeable response.⁷⁶ The authorities' approach was a pre-cursor

74 "Stop the City," *Freedom*, 45:5, May, 1984, 4-5.

75 Flux of Pink Indians, *Taking a Liberty* [booklet], 1984.

76 Glimpses of the demonstration can be seen in footage shot by a Thames TV news

of the strategy which they would implement, more firmly still, that September. London Greenpeace reported that although several hundred people turned out, many of whom ‘showed great courage in continuing to leaflet and protest’, most ‘were unable to do anything effective due to swamp policing’.⁷⁷ A Stop the City ‘planning gathering’ in London on 21 July acknowledged that the event had not lived up to the more optimistic expectations, and that clear lesson was that ‘widespread publicity, preparation and co-ordination will be needed for September, as in March’.⁷⁸

THE FOURTH STOP THE CITY

The fourth Stop the City was a turning point event, and one which confirmed that the police’s efforts at containment had reached an entirely new level of effectiveness. Anarcho-punk benefit gigs, which had the goal of raising money for the inevitable Stop the City ‘Bust Fund’, were held at Dickie Dirts on Coldharbour Lane, London the evening before and the evening after the demonstration. Their pre-emptive action, including the arrest and detainment of all identifiable demonstrators, roving patrols, and the fencing off of the Mansion House assembly point, effectively meant that the demonstration was scuppered; and in fact never properly got started at all.

The possibility of a police lockdown had been anticipated by some activists within the movement; who proposed a pro-active clandestine response. Writing in *Peace News* author ‘B Sneaky’, urged protestors to avoid detection and arrest by going in disguise:

Go in a decent suit or dress and mingle with the businessmen, as commuters, as a tourist who wants to see St Paul’s and got lost, as a press reporter, as a plain clothes policeman, whatever makes sense.⁷⁹

film crew. Thames TV, “Demo – Stop the City – Thames News,” <http://youtu.be/kjQ6sFCssmA>, accessed April 3, 2014; and Thames TV, “Protest – Stop the City – Thames News,” http://youtu.be/J_2Li5-sKIM, accessed April 3, 2014.

77 London Greenpeace, “Let’s Try to Reclaim the City, Sept 27 (Thurs),” [leaflet] 1984.

78 “A Brief Report on the Stop the City Planning Gathering, London 21st July,” 1984.

79 B Sneaky, “Stop the City – Time to Be Sneaky,” *Peace News*, September 7,

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The article cautioned against 'people turning up with no plans, no actions, and very little forethought and parking their bums on the steps of the Corn Exchange.' At Dial House, Crass's Pete Wright produced an anonymous 'press pack' (including extracts from the Sneaky article, alongside leaflets describing how to build a police radio jammer), which *The Standard* used as the source for the front page preview it ran on the eve of the demonstration, warning that: 'City faces demo chaos'.⁸⁰

Although the *Standard* piece quoted Sneaky's disguise proposal (giving it far greater prominence than it would otherwise have had), the reality was that few radical peace movement activists (and even fewer punks) felt able or willing to considering change their appearance, even temporarily, in this way.

The only demonstrators able to escape the attention of the authorities were those who had taken to heart the encouragement to conceal their identity. Those demonstrators were small in number and immediately came to the attention of the police when they sought entry to buildings, unfurled banners or began to protest. There were exceptions (the suits worn by members of Flux of Pink Indians, for example, were good enough to grant the band safe passage through police cordons), but most participants arriving in the City wore their normal attire, and were immediately identifiable.

The steps of St Paul's were barricaded off and were patrolled by police on horses and the steps of the Royal Exchange (the main meeting point last time) were similarly sealed off. The police were stopping and searching everyone not dressed the part [*and*] immediately broke up any group that got larger than about six.⁸¹

Many banks had boarded their windows, and hired security staff to vet visitors at the door. Some actions were successfully executed despite the lockdown, including a 'people's party' in a Russian bank, and the hanging of a 'People Not Profit' banner from a building rooftop.

1984, 10-11.

80 Peter Gruner, "City Faces Demo Chaos," *The Standard*, September 26, 1984, 1.

81 Rich Cross and Linda Peirson, "Stop the City: Covering Our Tracks," *Peace News*, October 5, 1984, 5.

The Standard reported that the only recorded damage in the City was ‘graffiti on the walls of the Stock Exchange where earlier windows had been smashed’.⁸² Such events were exceptions. For the first time, counter-demonstrators felt sufficiently confident to set up pitches around the City, with one small group handing out pro-business leaflets urging employees to ‘Aggravate an Anarchist’.⁸³ Displaced demonstrators rallied on Oxford Street, for an impromptu anti-apartheid action against South African Airways; and in Trafalgar Square, where the water in the fountains was briefly dyed red, but these were fringe, peripheral actions to a main event which simply did not take place.⁸⁴ A rundown of the actions:

listed more of what the police had done and what they had prevented us from doing than it did of what we had ourselves achieved. [...] One of the things so obviously missing from this Stop the City was the feeling of togetherness and mutual strength – that positive shared feeling [*that*] inspires you and empowers you to act. Unable to meet together, it was impossible to act together.⁸⁵

By the end of the business day, more than 470 arrests had been made; with most demonstrators being released without charge later in the evening. Police strategy had been to smother and snuff out the demonstration, rather than focus on charging participants with offences. Protestors were simply denied the opportunity to mount an organised response.

A detailed log of all the actions that did take place concluded with the stark observation: ‘it is clear that we need to bring together *a lot* more people if we are going to be able to challenge the System’.⁸⁶ The

82 Standard Reporter, “City Demo: 251 Held,” *The Standard*, September 27, 1984, 1-2.

83 Ibid

84 Cross and Peirson, “Stop the City: Covering Our Tracks”; Rich Cross, “London’s Burning,” *Freedom*, September, 2013, 11.

85 Rich Cross, “We Have Every Right to be Angry,” *Peace News*, October 19, 1984, 10-11.

86 “Stop the City, Finsbury Sq, Log of Events, September 27 1984,” October, 1984.

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fragmented and fractured nature of the action reinforced the argument of critics keen to make the case that the idea of Stop the City was 'hampered by it being a rag-bag of autonomous action thrown together on a certain date' and lacking 'some form of real central co-ordination'.⁸⁷ It did seem that the initiative had reached an impasse. Chumbawamba declared that the idea's utility had:

gradually become outweighed by the inevitable "gag effect" of the mass arrests; it has become just another twice-yearly demonstration... a chance for the State's bully-boys to flex their muscles.⁸⁸

Crass's Rimbaud also conceded that the game appeared to be up: 'Aware that we had been out-manoeuvred, no further Stop the City actions took place in London'.⁸⁹

Discussions at follow-up meetings, reflected the sense of uncertainty about where the initiative might be taken next. A debriefing meeting in Leeds heard 'mixed feelings about the London protest – some people felt we should wait until we have more support, and then return to the City better prepared. It was also suggested that there could be co-ordinated local demonstrations around the country in March'.⁹⁰ There was evidence too of growing concern with the 'isolation' of Stop the City's militants, and the need to connect and make common cause with other in struggle, particularly Britain's miners in the context of the Great Strike.

AFTERMATH

After the fourth London Stop the City event few organisers or participants could deny that the time had come for a strategic as well as a tactical rethink (even if they did not use terminology of that kind). One option, which was already being tested out, was to attempt to replicate and decentralise, by taking the original initiative and recreating it in other city centres, where the focus could be on the operation of retail capitalism and conspicuous consumption as well as that of the

87 Paul Rogers, "Stop the Demo?" [letter] *Peace News*, November 2, 1984, 16.

88 Chumbawamba, "A Call to Act," [leaflet] 1984.

89 Rimbaud, *Shibboleth*, 246.

90 "Stop the City Discussion," *Peace News*, October 19, 1984, 3.

financial services industry. Several, far smaller, Stop the City events were held in cities across the UK, the largest of which took place in Leeds on 9 August 1984 (Nagasaki Day), and involved members of Chumbawamba, Passion Killers, and numerous other anarcho-punk activists. Timed to coincide with a local CND memorial vigil, and the arrival in the city of the Greenham Common women's Walk for Peace, hundreds of activists took part in actions:

ranging from symbolic (showers of Monopoly money falling on shoppers from a roof-top) to more direct action – the Plaza porn cinema had its doors chained up, coats in fur shops were sprayed, and a large statue of the Lloyds bank black horse was daubed with red paint. Thousands of leaflets and booklets were given away to passers-by to explain the actions; and a pirate radio station transmitted for most of the day on and near local commercial and BBC wavelengths.⁹¹

More than 100 demonstrators were arrested, most were charged with obstruction, breach of the peace or 'using insulting words and behaviour'. What was notable was that: 'Many people who had planned specific actions were able to carry them out because they went "under cover": they went in disguise and stayed away from the main meeting point. People who turned up unprepared and dressed in black had a very rough time of it, and often a fruitless day'.⁹² A smaller Stop the City action was held in Birmingham on 11 October 1984, and a number of similar sporadic (and often sparsely attended) days of action were held, usually at the initiative of local punks, in other cities.

Between 1985 and 1988, new variants of decentralised, locally co-ordinated 'action day' were organised under the rubric 'Stop Business As Usual' (including spin-off initiatives such as the 'Smash South African Business Day' called for 30 September 1985). Rather than a single city location, this initiative attempted to rally simultaneous protests in cities across the country. In stretching the numbers of those who were involved still further, the action proved harder to sustain even than the one-day events which were held in single provincial cities. In Norwich,

91 "Reaching Out," *Peace News*, August 24, 1984, 3.

92 Sneaky, "Stop the City – Time to Be Sneaky".

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for example, a short-lived surge through the high street, targeting banks and other financial companies, ended abruptly with the arrest (and later prosecution) of around 20 local punks. In any event, by this time, the attention of the disarmament movement had refocused on the issue of the deployment of Cruise and the escalation of anti-nuclear activity at the USAF bases at Greenham and at Molesworth, while the anarcho-punk movement (no longer the innovative, agenda-setting force within the ranks of British anarchism) had begun to retrench and contract.⁹³

LEGACIES

Stop the City could quite reasonably be held up as the quintessential anarcho-punk political event: imaginative, inspired, subversive, and norm breaking, but politically polarising. Its world-changing ambitions were uncompromising, its list of social iniquities lengthy (in pursuit of 'a dazzling range of opinions and ideas'),⁹⁴ its politics inchoate and sprawling, and its hostility to 'institutional organisation' pronounced. STC's politics were not mapped by anarcho-punk, but shared a common lack of concern with strategy, and a fierce sense of outsider autonomy, which militated against the forging of common cause with others in struggle whose politics were not so absolute. *Freedom* acknowledged how, even at the height of Stop the City's powers:

it was difficult to involve those who went on strike the same day to defend public services and the GLC, and also striking miners.⁹⁵

It was a shortcoming which the organisers themselves acknowledged. Ahead of the final STC, activists articulated the urgent need to broaden and deepen support for the action by:

linking up with Greenham people, and also the mining communities. [...] We can also encourage

93 Rich Cross, "British Anarchism in the Era of Thatcherism," in Evan Smith and Matthew Worley (eds.), *Against the Grain: The British Far Left from 1956* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014) 133-152.

94 "Stop the City," *Freedom*, 45:5, May, 1984.

95 Ibid

people active in the women's movement, ecology, international solidarity groups, the labour movement, ethnic groups and everyone struggling in various ways for a better life... It's vital we continue to broaden out all the time and not allow the media to succeed in caricaturing Stop the City as a marginal protest.⁹⁶

It was an agenda that proved largely beyond the activists' ability to deliver. Numerically speaking, Stop the City's continuing 'marginality' could scarcely be doubted. Weeks after the first STC drew some 1,500 radical oppositionists to the financial heartland of the capital, estimates suggest that as many as 400,000 (generally moderate) anti-nuclear demonstrators gathered in Hyde Park for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament's largest rally to date.⁹⁷ Weeks before, some 4,000 nonviolent peace activists (representing the radical current within the disarmament movement) attempted to shutdown USAF Upper Heyford by human blockade. While STC showcased innovative methods of mobilisation of action (demonstrating, in embryonic form, some of the collective political potential of anarchist punk, and its wilful, passionate utopianism) it also revealed many of the limitations of punk activism.

All movements and subcultures experience differing levels of engagement; separating an activist core at the centre and a less committed periphery beyond. But for anarcho-punk, premised on the principles of individual and collective self-activity, it is possible to see the levels of engagement with Stop the City revealing not the *strength* of the conviction driving anarchist punk culture, but its *fragility* and shallowness. Given the numbers of bands and fanzines that were active, the turnout at gigs across the country, the volumes of record and tape sales, and the animated postal correspondence all taking place under the rubric of anarcho-punk in the early 1980s, should not the scale of Stop the City been that much larger? On *Yes Sir, I Will* Crass had derided the numerous inactive consumers of punk culture, insisting: 'Passive observers offer nothing but decay'.⁹⁸ But ultimately

96 "A Brief Report on the Stop the City Planning Gathering, London 21st July".

97 "What Comes Next?" *Peace News*, October 28, 1983, 3.

98 Crass, *Yes Sir, I Will*, Crass Records, 1983.

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Flyer advertising a Stop Business as Usual demonstration, circa 1985.

if ‘there is no authority but yourself’,⁹⁹ then the decision *not* to participate in active resistance to the ‘existing order of things’ must be accepted as no less valid a personal choice.

Strong echoes of the Stop the City initiative came to be discerned in more recent libertarian political mobilisations – including the anti-globalisation protests which emerged in Seattle in the late 1990s, the Reclaim the Streets protests which later followed them, and in more muted and contradictory form, in the worldwide Occupy! phenomenon. Rimbaud insists that the events: ‘inspired actions throughout the world that continue to this day’.¹⁰⁰ Yet it remains questionable how *conscious* that sense of historical continuity really is. STC’s currency in the minds of present day activists appears faint. For one participant, Stop the City, ‘was one of those mythical events that if you weren’t there it’s almost as if it never happened [...] and it simply disappeared into the mists of history’.¹⁰¹ Stop the City’s opaque legacy is testament to the short-term memory which so often afflicts contemporary anti-authoritarian cultural and political movements.

Thirty years ago, its punk protagonists were clear about the wider significance of the explosive but short-lived experiment:

The machinery of oppression thrives on appearing
invincible, unquestioned and eternal, and our protests
have begun slowly to break this spell.¹⁰²

They sensed the actions’ inadequacy too; at least when compared to the scale of the tasks which the movement had set itself. In the words of Subhumans’ *Rats*:

We fought the city but no one cared
They passed it off as just a game
The city won’t stop till attitudes change
Rats in the cellars of the stock exchange [...]
The papers played the whole thing down

99 Ibid

100 Rimbaud, *Shibboleth*, 246.

101 Metzger, “The Original Occupy Wall Street: Stop the City, 1984.”

102 “People Against Profits – in the City of London,” *Children of the Revolution*, 6, 1984.

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Said there was nothing to worry about
The rats have all gone underground
But we'll be back again next time round.¹⁰³

One of the key organisers, Dave Morris, remained insistent about the profound long term repercussions of Stop the City. For him, the demonstrations ensured that: 'the secrecy and supposed invulnerability of the City was punctured for all time'.¹⁰⁴

103 Subhumans, *Rats*, Bluurg Records, 1984.

104 Quoted in David Kynaston, *The City of London, Volume 4: A Club No More, 1945-1999* (London: Pimlico, 2002), 718.

STOP THE CITY... REVISITED

An exhibition organized as part of the Substation's "Discipline the City" series
23 August – 23 November 2017

Born out of the anarcho-punk scene, Stop the City demonstrations of 1983-84 were a series of performances and events to blockade and disrupt 'The City' (the financial district of London). Protesters and activists coalesced around artists like Crass, Subhumans and Poison Girls. Punk was not only a music and subculture, but a serious proposition of alternative politics built upon Do-It-Yourself practices connected through social centres, performance venues, and independent media.

During the past decades, the power of financial flows and markets have become all the more intense, between the imposition of austerity to service all kinds of debt to the financialization of daily life. Even after the repeated financial crises there seems to be little chance of disciplining, let alone stopping the city.

This exhibition brings together images and materials from this anarcho-punk forerunner to other large scale protests like Occupy Wall Street and the movement of the squares. They are presented not out of nostalgia or purely historical interest but rather to ask these experiences might mean today. What lessons can be learned the politics and protest of the anarcho-punk scene? How do these histories speak to the present in Singapore? What today could Stop the City?

Organized by Stephen Shukaitis

Exhibition materials and images sourced from: Mick Duffield (Camera_Obscura [busy]); *Taxic Grafity*, Dial House archives (Gee Vaucher), and the 56A Archives.

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More information:

The Substation: <http://www.substation.org>
Discipline the City: <http://disciplinethecity.sg>