

beforehand, who comes into the scene—or the movement, or the milieu or whatever you want to call it—to see the *constant* play of power dynamics in almost everything we do. And there seems to be no underlying critique of it, and instead we obscure it, we talk about big overarching forces, use these big abstractions, these borrowed maoist terms, like race, or hierarchies of oppression. So on the one hand we've kind of embraced that; I think certain components of the nihilist milieu have surrendered to it and say, like, “yay, yay cruelty. Yay any disregard for interpersonal ethics.” This turns into immediatism and psychologism, but it's become a double-edged sword because while we're celebrating conflict and punching the kid in the face, all of a sudden this gets turned around by our enemies, who have really terrible totalizing analysis, and terrible maoist ways of categorizing people, they use it against us—that we can't police their rage, that there is nothing substantive about how to define bullying, that “I'm a member of an oppressed class so I can say anything, I can do anything...” And of course lots of people in our community are a lot smarter than that, there can be a lot of complexity in the dynamic, but I do think there have been ways that the maoist tendencies and the nihilist tendencies have collaborated: here i'm trying to stir something up since we agree on most things on this topic.

Yea, so ... [sigh] You stole all my points. So, let me run through...

I think that it's important to note that in these topics, or like today, in the talks I sat in on, I heard a lot of going over the same old arguments against an enemy that I think has basically dried up and is gone. Syndicalists, people who don't understand the critique of organization, or the critique of meanings, or the critique of various dynamics. We're still levelling these old, really really dated critiques against them and taking pride in being totally right. I think the conversation should move on past the point of “the drive to mass, the drive to get everyone inside of a union organization, is such a stupid and terrible idea,” and instead start breaking down what the strategy would actually look like.

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A RAGORN! AND W WILLIAM GILLIS

**FROM THE BOOK BASTARD
©HRONICLES: SOCIAL W WAR ETC**

Outside of Social War by Aragorn! and William Gillis
From the book BASTARD Chronicles: Social War etc 2014

Social War, or some sort of explicitly revolutionary conflict with the state, has been a central assumption in anarchism for at least a century. Our end-of-day panel discussion involves anarchists who are outside of this point of view who express their hostility towards the Social War premise from their different perspectives. They will probably also engage in dialog with each other.

The final workshop of the day was supposed to be a conversation challenging the idea of social war, mainly from individualist perspectives. Wolfi Landstreicher and William are noted individualists from pretty much opposite ends of the civilization spectrum, and Aragorn! was going to make the conversation less dualistic. Instead Wolfi bailed on the talk, and Aragorn! and William had a different kind of conversation than the one probably either had been expecting.

Aragorn!:

My anticipation was that the three of us were going to say things to make the room uncomfortable, and my hope is that that still happens, but there's no Wolfi here, so this will have a different tenor, and maybe it will be better for having more of a back and forth. Shall we introduce ourselves so that people have a sense of where we're coming from?

William Gillis:

You can start.

A!:

A preface

I wasn't really familiar with social war (as much more than a bumper sticker term) until 2009, when the Greeks came over and talked about their book and about the Greek approach. So maybe I've been playing a bit of catch up in terms of this discourse.

End of preface.

Why Social War is a Bad Way to Practice Anarchy

If I were to be generous, I would say that social war is a nice term in search of meaning. At best it's a way to dress like a soldier and act like the lines of conflict are as simple as they are for class war, but, you know, *social*. And at worst it's a way to dress up and punch bystanders on a march. Which is another way to say that in my

And when it comes to conflict itself, it's not really clear what that means in a lot of contexts. Is conflict a matter of tension? Like, social war is every little troll fight on anarchistnews.org, every little bickering or contest or dumping water over books for the nth year in a row... Every single time this thing gets brought up and of course we make jokes like, "what's the answer, the answer is attack!" To literally any question, right? But it's not clear what conflict is in this context. Is it tension or is it demarcation. Are we saying there are forces pushing back and forth in every single interrelation, or every single relationship between people, between institutions, between what-have-you. Or are we saying they're trying to demarc out a boundary or border, which I think fits more closely with the notion of war. In a war there's a border, a frontier, something being contested back and forth, typically through space, some resource being contested, and the assignment of it is an important component of the conflict. If we look at social war solely in terms of tension, interpersonal tension, what have you, that's a triviality. Of course, everything is tension, but I'm not sure that's a good paradigm because there are plenty of other ways we can look at those interactions that is not solely as a matter of "does this charge push against that charge." It can be a matter of what are the overall symmetries of a system, what are the relational components of it. There're lots of other paradigms we can use as opposed to discrete individuals and the tensions between them.

But if it is demarcation, than that itself is kind of nonsense. What does it mean to say "I am at social war with another person"? If your resistance to them is an expression of the overall conflict – of the overall hostilities that society as a whole has engendered within you -- what would a resolution to that war look like? Wars do end, at least most of the time. (I mean, you could say that some never end, but then that again becomes trivial.) I'm not sure that this analysis has *any* substance whatsoever. Ultimately, both of these ways of looking at social war—either in terms of tension or in terms of contestations over some sort of boundaries or territory—both, through their obscurantism of the underlying dynamics they serve to excuse interpersonal power relations. We're in a scene that, even though we're anarchists and are supposed to have better power relations, is rife with interpersonal cruelty, with politicing, and the like. I think it's shocking for anyone who comes into anarchy with any sort of analysis

swam there would get cut. [laughter in audience] Yay social war!

The analysis there... You want to think that that's joking, but honestly I know a lot of people, and I think many people in this room know people, who would look at that and try to defend it, who would glamorize it, who are trying to take the extreme, provocative, stance. And I think that this speaks to the fact that even though social war is a very loose, abstract idea, it has ramifications for what we actually advocate and the sorts of critiques we end up having.

To tear apart the term social and war, I won't focus so heavily on the term war itself—I think the notion of conflict one way or the other is problematic—but the very notion, as Aragorn! said, that says: this terrible, ridiculously huge abstraction needs to be expanded even further, needs to be torn from the roots of our interpersonal interactions (and the dynamics that underpin every aspect of society)... and be made even larger, even more alienated (you can fill in anything here, breaking glass and hurting kids, “don't police my rage I'm going to shoot up kindergarten classes,” etc)... It's completely nonsensical.

And of course a lot of people here recognize the irony of the term in a lot of positive ways, the positive ways in which the discourse can be shaped, so yea, with any sort of ridiculously abstract, ridiculously open-ended concept you can have people who will build something nuanced and very smart out of it, and use that term to say something intelligent, but for the most part it helps inane analyses.

Social war is either the sweeping abstraction—we are against not just the state, not just capital, but now civilization, the entirety of existent society, all of the structures, somehow—it's this big, overarching thing... As was said today in one of the workshops, in contrast to (for example) the maoist focus on hierarchies of oppression, the impact of which has been rather strong inside of our community, instead, the presenter said, we want to understand that everyone is oppressed—I think the person even said “equally oppressed”—and that's ridiculous. We can't get anywhere if we're so abstract with the term, if we simplify everything away, and get rid of all distinguishing characteristics... This would mean that we couldn't make tactical, strategic, or ethical distinctions on the interpersonal level.

experience, self-identified social warriors are a two part lie.

War. What *is* war good for? Absolutely nothing. We either can accept the premise that war is always the war of the state, *or* that we would somehow wage war differently. But what is our evidence of the latter? I don't believe that we have any, as any so-called people's war has been just as arbitrary and capricious about who is killed as wars of commerce and state. In fact the primary problem I have with any definition of war is that it is an abstract way to define something that is not abstract at all, which is the death or dismemberment of any body that gets in its way.

Abstraction, whether you're for something or con something, comes to be the way in which rational people justify how to annihilate disagreeable others; how to use algebra to subtract people, ideas, or dialog.

This is not to confuse war, with conflict. My issue with social war is not that I have a conflict with conflict per se, quite the opposite. My issue is that I don't think there's any way to frame something as war other than war.

War means the destruction of opposition as the precursor to victory, which is the goal.

Of course, in typical anarchist fashion, social war has all the moral authority of being impossible, so configured as to obscure the totalizing nature of its impersonal nature, or the asymmetry of our current conflict configurations. Just because we have no chance of winning today, doesn't mean that there aren't future generals among us, figuring out how to divvy up the spoils, name roads and bridges after themselves, and even weep alligator's tears in the style of Smedley Butler.

Every conflict began as an impossibility in the minds of its conspirators. But to put an entirely different spin on this, I want to assert that war itself isn't merely a problem related to the excesses of industrialization and WWII thinking. Instead I would say that the aspiration of victory in win/loss terms, of the monopolization of

violence over a terrain or a people, of politics by the barrel of a gun, is participation in statist logic. The term war is indistinguishable from this logic; it cannot be reclaimed, and I ask the question of all the presenters today, why would we even want to?

It seems to me that the strongest argument *for* war, social or not, is as a palliative to the other failed approach, which is class war. By all measures, convincing the vast population of humans that they're being fucked over by an economic system that determines their access to resources through a fixed competition seems like it should have been a sure fire way to align them against the organizers of this game. But it didn't work. An response to the failures of the class-based analysis that states that the analysis isn't universal enough seems like pretty weak sauce. The failure is that we can't *think* our way out of this geologic formation. And that is what the current social order is, when abstractions become fixed over time, and take on (what we would call in other situations) "reified aspects", it isn't an improvement to switch up marxist-flavored abstractions with the mealy-mouthed abstractions of pop psychology, pop sociology, or pop metaphysics.

What is social about social war?

It's often said in radical circles that humans are a social animal, and that's a fair statement. Something about communication seems to be central to self-awareness, and language in particular is how identity formation is constructed. Isolation seems like a distinctive form of torture, whether in explicit prisons or in the work-a-day life of isolation-by-proximity that is the hallmark of the modern ikea lifestyle.

If isolation is hell, then, its opposite must be heaven? Not even close to true. The social aspects of social war follow the same mediocre direction that class war took, which is the fascination with mass. Social bodies are confused with sociability, and social life is confused with participation in distinct organizations.

If we accept the premise that human nature is social, which I'll do, as long as we recognize the future asterisks to develop, we should all be very concerned with the next step of the conversation, because it will involve defining "social" in an abstract way. It isn't an evening with close friends, but a meeting with butcher paper, an agenda, and

rhetoric, about the 99%, defending the bay, or our understanding of ourselves as the precariat. In other words, we're back to class-based false unity using pop terminology in an attempt to modernize our position. Social war ends up reflecting social scenes, rather than the sociability of the dinner party or a plot to kill a motherfucker.

Genocide

Just to wrap up, there's the little matter of genocide. We all know that action movie, where once we figure out how to win the next battle, the credits roll, we all live happily ever after. Instead, war thinking necessitates that our next victory will be the first in an unending series of fights to determine the fate of the future of humanity.

The new thinking, after WWII, is that we can wrap up total victory by way of annihilating the forces of state and capital. But this is deeply naïve. There is no version of this story that will not require the equivalent destruction of millions, if not billions, of people, in service of our holy war for something-better-than-what-came-before. Social warriors do not desire the genocide of any particular people, and would probably be offended by the implication, but would accept the total destruction of "bad ideas" and that as a goal worth achieving, and would us all to join in the dice-roll, for the implications of what comes after isn't just unclear, but clearly war-thinking, and social in all the shallow, vapid ways this entails today.

Thank you. [applause]

W:

I think you stole a big chunk of my presentation. But that's all right, I'll just repeat it all again.

Well, social war. I think most everyone here recognizes it as a problematic term. I think back in 2007 there was some blog that was dedicated to the social war and it's hard to tell most of the time but I'm pretty sure that for the most part it wasn't ironic; they had very serious pieces, they had various serious examples of the social war in everyday struggle, that you could see outside of the radical milieu. Then one day they posted this story with positive reference to some janitor at some motel in podunk America who had gone around breaking light bulbs and putting them in the pool so that children who