

NEWS

NEW KIDS ON THE BLACK BLOC

By Chris Low

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Last month, at **the riots surrounding the TUC protest on March 26th**, I was surprised to keep bumping into groups of masked-up teenagers. I've known lots of the old anarchist guys who've been fighting the police for decades, but this was something different. Seeing young members of the black bloc at protests in Europe is very common, but in England it's totally new.

I went to meet some of the new kids on the black bloc as well as some of the old guard, to find out why anarchism in the UK is getting an adolescent kick up the arse.



Andy is 16, he spends his life dossing around his mates' flats and he rolls a mean skunk spliff. Michelle is 17 and she lives with her mum and is studying for her A-Levels.

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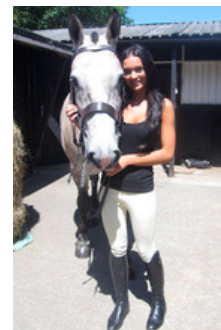
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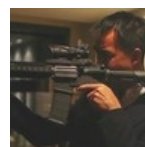
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Hello Andy and Michelle. What made you get into anarchism and the black bloc? Isn't politics all a bit BORING for teenagers?

Andy: I'd never been on a demo in my life till I started going to some of the schoolkids protests last year. We just went for a laugh really, and cos we'd heard it might kick off with the old bill. We saw a few of the gangs from round our way hanging about Trafalgar Square, but when we saw the black bloc arrive, all masked up in their hoodies we thought, "Fucking hell! Now THAT's what you call a gang!" Especially when we saw them giving it back to the cops when they were charged. You don't even see football hooligans that up for it.

So it was the student protests in 2010 that politicised you?

Yeah, if you'd spoken to me a year ago I wouldn't have had a fucking clue about politics or anarchy or any of that, but after we spoke to a few of the black bloc lot we sussed they were sound and not student mugs. Me and a couple of my mates went along to meet up with them at the start of the next protest they were turning up to so we didn't miss any of the action. We got to know each other and it all started from there I suppose.

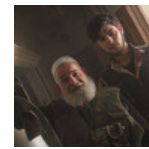


How about you Michelle?

Michelle: My experience is pretty similar to Andy's really, I also knew a few black bloc anarchists from the student and schoolkids protests. They seemed nice folk and dedicated to what they were doing. I suppose what really did it for me was when I went to the Climate Camp at the G20 and the cops attacked it. It was terrifying. And a lot of the black bloc folk I knew – in fact I'm not sure they called themselves the black bloc then – were there fighting back, which gave a lot of other folk some strength and probably saved someone there from being killed.

That was a bad day for the cops.

When you see something like that it really makes you realise, "Yeah, it really IS a 'them and us' situation now". Seeing the way the cops just went mental, attacking folk, and then killed Ian Tomlinson, turned a lot of people towards the black bloc in the same way I've read the events on Bloody Sunday turned a lot of folk towards the IRA. So you could say they've only got themselves to blame when people get angry and want to attack the cops on other demos. It's us getting our own back.



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Obviously you're too young to vote, but what made you turn your backs on mainstream politics and take to the streets?

Andy: All I can remember of politics is Tony fuckin' Blair. He's meant to be Labour; the party of the working class. Now we've got two posh cunts in power and I can't see any difference. They're all lying, corrupt bastards who are out for themselves. How are they going to speak for me? That Clegg only lives a few miles from where I'm from, but it may as well be on the other side of the world for all he knows about how we live. If you ask me the only thing that gets the attentions of politicians is the sound of smashing shop windows and police sirens.

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Micky is a forty-something hospital porter and riot veteran who lives in Shadwell, and his mate Sean is a 28-year-old unemployed former caterer who lives in a squat in Bow.

Micky and Sean, you've been involved with anarchism for a while. What do you think of the new breed of anarchist running rings round the cops while you wheezily lob bricks?

Micky: Fucking brilliant. I've been involved with anarchist groups since the Poll Tax riots and Welling anti-BNP riot. The black bloc and the kids who come along to these demos might not even regard themselves as 'anarchists', but as far as embodying the anarchist ethos of 'propaganda by deed' they couldn't be doing a better job. Anyone who regards themselves as a 'revolutionary' and doesn't see that has just got their head up their arse.

Sean: There's a whole younger generation now with no stake in society who don't give a fuck. They know there won't be any jobs for them when they leave school and now they can't even secure grants to go to

college. They feel like they've been thrown on the scrapheap before their adult lives have even begun. Their anger may not have any definite political expression but it's that very factor which makes these times so exciting. Those in power are shitting it as there's a real underclass emerging who have no respect for authority and no fear of the police.



Most people have assumed for years that the young are just apathetic.

You just have to look at that **mini-riot at the American Apparel sale on Brick Lane** last year. The Left would say it's just mindless consumerism, but to us it's more like folk standing up and saying: "Why shouldn't I be able to get something nice to wear just because I'm skint?" These people aren't demonstrating for a slice of cake from the tables of the rich, they want to kick down the doors of the fucking bakery and take the lot.

Pretty much every protest and demo these days seems to end up in a riot. For me the craziest thing about the March 26th protest was just how many black bloc there were. I've seen this in other European cities on the news but I never expected to see it here. It seems anarchism has well and truly arrived in the UK. This must be what you've been always been waiting for.

Sean: As far as we're concerned if it means folk out on the streets giving the cops grief and it's not Countryside Alliance, religious nuts, the EDL or some shit like that, it's all good. Every time there's people on the street it makes the position of those in authority just a bit more unstable. It's a very visible expression of opposition to them and that empowers others to think, "I'm not taking this shit", and get off their arses and fight back. Yeah, some of the protests like those to do with tax avoidance or education cuts haven't got fuck all to do with us, and to be honest we don't really give a fuck about that anyway. But people only become politicised when the screws start tightening on them at a personal level. Once they start to realise that the system they've worked for all their lives, and the state they've paid their taxes to, doesn't give a shit about them, they'll get angry.



What do you think of UK Uncut, Climate Change and the other radical groups who have been involved in the anti-globalisation and tax protests?

Micky: From acorns oak trees grow. We can only hope that those who get drawn into groups like Uncut will develop a more revolutionary class consciousness and come to the realisation that it's the whole political system that must be smashed. Not just the banks and the bankers. The one thing we are a bit worried about is the fact that by now you can bet there'll be some police plants within a lot of these anti-globalisation groups. Because a lot of these folk have no real experience of activism behind them they'll be easier to infiltrate. We've already seen the cops have had folk in the **Clown Army** for fuck's sake, so it doesn't take any great leap of genius to suss how much of a priority it'll be for them to have insiders in the black bloc.

With all the police's technology, it must be harder to be anonymous these days.

Sean: Yeah, the most significant development has been CCTV, which is now fucking everywhere, and the police's own special film squads. Gone are the days when if you made it home after a ruck with the old bill you were pretty much in the clear. I've known folk getting identified in riot footage a good year or so down the line, getting their door kicked in, and even though they may then have a family or a job... BANG! That's them looking at a two-year sentence for violent disorder charges and their life is fucked.

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Micky, you're old enough to have fathered half the kids who are rioting these days. You must have seen some pretty dramatic changes in policing tactics and crowd control at demos over the years?

Micky: A fucking lot! Back in my day it was a choice of "a nicking or a kicking". Meaning if you got nicked in a street-fight or if it kicked off at a demo the cops would pretty much act as judge and jury there and then.

Depending on the situation, and whether there were any photographers or press around, that might mean a weekend in the cells and up in court on the Monday morning, or getting the shit knocked out of you there and then. Whilst I've had countless experiences of the former I always preferred it when you just got a beating and could then fuck off to lick your wounds in the boozier. Thing is, if you got nicked, more often than not you'd experience a "slip on the stairs" and end up in court with your face black and blue on the Monday morning anyway.



The black bloc has been getting loads of press recently. Do you think this media attention has been positive for you as a group even though you're now the great black-clad bogeyman of British politics?
Micky: Again, publicity is the oxygen of any movement. Obviously the press, whether it's the liberal left or the reactionary red-tops, is going to say how terrible it is when kids are out rioting on the streets. Of course, it's OK if it's **in Greece**, or Afghanistan or somewhere that doesn't threaten their own nice cushy job. But when it's in the centre of London, then it's all: 'anarchist troublemakers' this and 'sinister masked subversives' that. That's only to be expected. What pisses me off more, actually, is when you get supposed radicals championing the 'legitimate protestors' but denouncing those who get stuck-in as 'mindless' or 'hooligans'. As if everyone who has ever rioted, or been part of a revolution, has had some Hegelian textbook in their back pocket and a clear agenda in their mind.



Do you really think we're experiencing some apex of revolutionary feeling in Britain?

Sean: One of the most refreshing things about these recent protests is that a few years ago you got all this 'fluffy' hippy shit with folk prancing about in clown costumes, hugging the police. Did the organisers of those groups really think that would change any hearts or minds when you've got coppers in full riot gear steaming into them? Those sorts of muppets are the contraceptives of dissent rather than any benefit to it. Also, I hardly

think the kids from estates who were smashing up the shops and the cop cars in Piccadilly on the 26th are gonna want to have anything to do with a bunch of cunts wearing fairy wings and tiaras trying to hand coppers tulips! Anyone who has seen the black bloc in action knows they don't fuck about, and if it's action you're after that's where you'll get it.



Finally, what's going to happen next?

Micky: More of the same I hope, only bigger and better. We don't give a fuck about the royal wedding, we'd rather celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Brixton riot and other uprisings over the summer of 1981 and hope folk take their inspiration from THOSE street parties. Let's make this year another long, hot summer of cop cars and barricades burning on the streets.

WORDS: CHRIS LOW

PHOTOS: HENRY LANGSTON AND CHRIS LOW

(Names have been changed to protect the identity of interviewees)

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By Chris Low | 1 year ago

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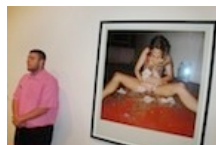
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