

Common ground meeting minutes 4th/5th June

Minute compiler's note: These minutes are a collection of various feedback and discussion from small groups and the whole group of people at the meeting. They don't represent decisions, but should give a flavour of the meeting. The notes reflect the range of feelings in the room (not necessarily a general feeling).

Contents:

1. Saturday morning: our common ground; visioning exercise
2. Saturday afternoon: conflict resolution role-play exercise (*not minuted*)
3. Sunday morning: feedback, 'climate action maps', parallel discussions on future action
4. Sunday afternoon: summing up, next steps

1. Saturday morning

Why we came:

- Looking for unity, common purpose
- Looking for something politically inspiring and effective we can do together
- Our network has a lot of potential waiting to be used
- It's a community to reconnect, that people feel loyalty to
- Climate change is still an urgent issue
- Feeling lost, end of climate camp leaves a gap
- Find out whether we can work together healthily and effectively

Our common ground as individuals (answers to the question given by small groups)

- Looking for alternatives to capitalism
- Politically active / committed to direct action
- Feminist liberation
- Looking beyond our locality, our lifetimes
- Like being outside / growing things
- Care about social justice / equitability, fighting injustice
- Community important
- Personal sustainability / inspiration important
- Commitment to horizontal / leaderless structures

Issues we might disagree on (again in small groups)

- Whether consensus decision-making is always the best organising form / its limits
- Can hierarchies be healthy?
- The limits to the usefulness of lobbying governments / of using electoral politics
- Action now – on cuts or climate? / Cuts – strategic at the moment, climate – wider ongoing issue
- 'Single-issue' vs wider campaigning, and what's the right issue
- Are we an anarchist movement? / At heart but not by name
- Are we against capitalism or something even broader than that? (stopping excess / exploitation)

Visioning exercise – participants asked to sketch their vision / inspiration in activism; then talked about **what values are expressed**

- Intensive social support
- Creating community + fighting back; creating & defending what we love; both positive vision & protest
- Going back to the roots

- Working together in a community
- Shared history
- Children
- Power of collective action
- When process works well
- Compassion, kindness
- Defiance / autonomy
- Climate change is not just about nature. Relations

More common values

- Solidarity, Hope, Dignity
- Creating autonomous spaces
- Connection with natural world
- Ingenuity, audacity
- Transforming how people think
- Integration, different perspective
- Breaking addiction to unsustainable ways of living
- Empowering, proactive action

2. Saturday afternoon

The group did a conflict resolution exercise – we discussed the question of 'how we organise'. *There are much fuller notes than this but they haven't been typed up yet and we can't delay the minutes any more.*

Some notes: Strong feeling that we should call ourselves anti-hierarchical rather than non-hierarchical (which is misleading as it's a process not a fixed state). Roles other than meetings should be valued. Trust people who made decisions at a meeting if you couldn't take part. (The discussion was very wide ranging).

3. Sunday morning

Buddy Group Feedback

A few minutes talking in buddy groups about the discussion the previous afternoon. Feedback was by each group, and the points below weren't discussed after being raised.

- Repeat of many of the conversations at Space For Change (SfC)?
- Haven't solved the question of how to progress from there
- Suggestions: we should:
 - Think of ourselves as anti-hierarchical and not non-hierarchical
 - Have transparency in the rules/structures around meetings
 - Not focus on meetings so much
 - Have trust in meetings we individually can't attend
- We should have a balance of discussing issues and conceiving of solutions
- Agreement upon and appreciation of "process group" (*this wasn't explained fully in the feedback session so it's left ambiguous in the minutes too – ed.*)
- The "role-play" mechanism was ineffective
- Common Ground (CG) itself is evidence that the "national gathering" mechanism is broken
- It seemed there was a lot of unity in the room, but maybe this was a false impression; were we discussing the right issues?
- There's a common purpose, trust and positivism shared by people at CG

- We need to answer questions about closed vs. open and large vs. small group/movement

Climate Action Maps

In two groups, two 'maps' of climate action were created (with kinds of activism & potential allies); areas of 'gaps' and opportunities were identified. These were highlighted and written on separate pieces of paper. The facilitators placed these around the room, and people were asked to stand by whichever activity they wanted to talk about: *(apologies for the cryptic summaries; activities which were discussed later in the exercise are highlighted in bold and written in more detail further below – ed.)*

- "Start a European/Madrid-style movement in the UK"
- "What motivates community work?"
- **"Re-framing the debate in communities"**
- "Mass mobilisation"
- "How to create dialogue"
- **"UN climate process"**
- "Bottom-up movements, the Transition Towns project"
- "Politicisation"
- "Outreach"
- **"Action against fracking, new coal etc."**
- **"Cuts and climate"**
- "Re-energising the climate movement"
- "Platform for climate change"
- "Climate and other (non-cuts) issues"
- "Event opportunities: Green and Black Cross, evictions etc."
- "Taking land"
- **"Anti-government action"**
- "Coal action in Scotland; reaching out to groups not here"
- **"Solidarity with front-line struggles"**
- "UKUncut joint operation"
- "Provide a strategy"
- **"Workers, Workers' Climate Action"**
- "Us vs. state repression"

Groups of varying size formed around "UN climate process / actions in solidarity with front-line struggles", "Re-framing debate in communities / Workers' Climate Action", "Actions on fracking" and "Radical anti-government action" / "Cuts and climate", and discussions ran until 13:15 with a summary feed-in session until 13:30.

(All of these groups seemed eager to continue discussions regardless of the meeting's general outcome; to get involved in those conversations, join the `climateaction2011` mailing list.– ed.)

Future action (smaller group discussions)

UN Climate Process / Actions in Solidarity

- Creation of alternative global process
- Solidarity actions with critique of existing international process
- Not trying to modify or integrate with UN process directly, but explicitly building on success of "radical lobbying" campaigns e.g. Tar Sands
- Potential to put a human face on climate disaster and re-energise UK activism

Re-framing Debate in the Community / Workers

Aims:

- Create wider involvement in climate action

Outreach targets:

- Workers; potential obstacles and problems, but there are existing organising structures
- Front-line climate communities, with the potential for us to call conferences and establish good contact links
- White middle-class; we need to mobilise and politicise "green" people. Concerns around whether civil disobedience is an exercise of privilege or a rejection of it
- Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET); outreach opportunities in parallel with anti-austerity campaigns

Action on fracking

- International connections and solidarity
- Political benefits to our movement
- Human face on climate change
- Shared global vision
- Bringing majority voices back to the UK - provide a communications strategy
- Ways forward: online viral-type campaign; email list for people interested in planning further action

Linking Radical Anti-Government Action with Climate Issues

This group, that brought together several of 'the pieces of paper' with: Spain-like people's assemblies; joint camp/event with UK Uncut; linking cuts and climate; and others. Out of the discussion we formed an idea: 'Common Future' or 'A future in Common'.

- It would be a "brand", a collection of tactics, a collaboration of groups
- A Vision of our future: Over-arching, positive and progressive view of the kind of future we want, where there's No Cuts, No Climate Chaos and Social, Political and Economic Justice.
- To counter the specific – This Cut will affect this, and will screw the climate in this way – and regressive perspective of sounding like we want to get back to the way things were before the cuts, or before climate change (industrialisation).

Activity and actions discussed:

- Shutting down the city; Occupy parliament; People's Assemblies; Website; Film; Having an alternative conference around the time of the conservative conference in October.
- To do any of this effectively, we would need to actively link up with other climate and cuts related groups. Broadly speaking: Climate focussed groups + UK Uncut, student groups and student occupations and local anti-cuts groups.
- Nobody else is really doing this. Most groups and organisations and NGOs are just fighting the immediate battle of the cuts we're being hit with as they come
- We can be the ones to be 'un-realistic', 'idealistic', forward looking and ambitious
- We, potentially, have the networks and skills available to pull this off

Discussion around this:

- How do we link the Cuts and the Climate?
- People dissatisfied with attempts so far to link cuts and climate. Not enough.

- Complicates the message. Climate not as resonant currently as the cuts.
- Strategic to fight the cuts at the moment
- All agreed it would be disaster if we 'ditched climate', simply knowing implicitly that we are fighting the root causes of climate change, and that it needs to be an explicit factor.
- Can we transcend this whole thing with a more overarching, systemic critique, which includes the cuts and the climate.
- Can use the climate as a way of broadening and deepening the messages and demands of the anti-cuts movement, make it less regressive.
- Way of broadly tying the two together, two quotes given by R (paraphrased here):
- "Enslaves humanity and destroys the environment"
- "World full of poverty, while oil companies have all the money"
- Could focus on 'Our Common Future', the kind of world we want, without cuts or climate chaos
- Shouldn't worry about being un-realistic or being taken seriously, we are the ones with the umphf and the skills to do this – Create a big, ambitious, view/demand of the future.
- Need to expose the gap between government rhetoric and actions, disintegrate the public trust of the government. UK Uncut have done pretty well at doing this so far – exposing lies that there are no alternatives to the cuts.
- Lots of people looking for a way to trust the government again, to get back to where we were before
- 'A Common Future' transcends much of this, and overarches it.
- All kinds of commons: ecological / health / land / social etc, and the modern idea of a digital commons

An event, or something else?

- It is our default position, coming from Climate Camp to think in terms of an event. This may not be the best thing
- What are the alternatives? Open Source technology/software / film / website / on going projects / shut down the city / occupy parliament. Must be lots of things we haven't thought of yet.
- Need an event to bring people together, to spread an idea.
- An event could be part of an ongoing project, as long as we don't limit ourselves to just putting on events, it still might make sense to put on an event.
- If we were going for something like what has been happening in Spain: People's assemblies turning into camps in popular squares, we should not frame it as a 'Camp', but popular assemblies or whatever, where people sleep.. in tents.
- Madrid, Tahrir Square: These things were not labelled as 'camps'
- Can also break away from the idea that a successful event needs to be extended – 7 days. But that it would be fine to work for months for an event which is much shorter.
- Camping maybe shouldn't be the first thing we do.. then looks like nothing's changed.
- We may be bored of camping, but the newly mobilised masses aren't. Shouldn't close it off as an option. And it very fitting with what's going on internationally.
- Situation is very different here to the middle east, and Spain: Not the same levels of unemployment; not as out-doorsy, hang around in squares kind of culture. These popular assemblies tactics might not be as appropriate here.
- Even if not the same successes as in Madrid, could still have a heavy impact.

- Popular assemblies that stay over nights is not what we already know! This would be a leap into the unknown.
- How diverse do we want to be? In terms of people's politics, do we include everyone? How? Would need to address this issue.

Short term / long term tactics:

- Peoples assemblies, or other such big events \ things would take months and months of organising, mobilising, linking with other groups.
- Are we desperate for something to happen quickly, or willing to work for 6-months or a year working towards something? Lots of energy for a longer-sight strategy.
- These are not mutually exclusive. Could do events in the next months, which are working towards something else further down the line.
- 'Common Future' could include a diversity of tactics, short term and longer term.
- Could find common targets to help link up. E.g Tax dodging Fossil Fuel company or something.

Structure

- Had short and inconclusive discussion about the structure of this group/network/alliance, and how we would organise. In particular, what would our relationship be with the 'other groups' involved, and who are 'we'. Noted that this certainly needs further discussion.

After lunch, it was decided not to spend more time on these conversations (with the intention that they are continued independently after CG)

4. Sunday afternoon

Identity, structure, activity → what general conclusions can we make?

Is climate change core identity, or just a part of what we do?

- A strong feeling that fighting climate change is what we cohere around while at the same time it is important as strategy into a general social justice perspective: the system that needs to change is capitalism, but on the way we need to do various things which might not be just linked to that.
- Broad agreement that we see climate change as a symptom of a broader issue

Climate label?

- Having Climate in our name doesn't prevent us from working with other groups on a more general project
- Are we a space or a movement or an event?
- It's the "camp" aspect that doesn't really work for us, not the climate bit
- We need a diversity of activities and an identity that enables that- we do want to be active year round
- Perhaps we should be called something like "rising tide for climate justice" (just an idea – of course Rising Tide is already a separate group and we should discuss our relationship to them and possible ways of working together)

Anticapitalism as a label

- It's not always popular to label oneself explicitly as anti-capitalist- we've tried to develop an anticapitalist critique with new language- trying to be pragmatic and accessible. Anticapitalism indicates "subculture" too much- we don't need a specific

Marxist/autonomist/anarchist etc label.

- Not every group needs to express everyone's personal values- a vague umbrella group isn't that useful to us- already loads out there.
- A lot of people prefer to not explicitly define as anticapitalist, but we have a common anticapitalist analysis
 - A strong feeling that it's not just that we are anticapitalists “personally” but not as a group. We definitely are an anticapitalist group but that doesn't need to be our label. We can be more accessible to more types of people just by talking about the issues- don't have to use the word capitalism.
- We can present ourselves through an identity around climate change, but express our broader critique through our alliances to other groups and through our actions
- It seems that local groups are broader activist collectives, but when we come together nationally we do it around the specific issue of climate change
- There was general positive feeling that we are an anticapitalist group but it might not be strategically useful to use this as a label - but this leads to a disjoint between what kind of group we want to be, and the expectations of people who just enter
 - Perhaps it would be useful to have some sort of “baseline” for getting involved - if you think “green markets” are the solution, maybe this isn't the group for you.
- Strong feeling that we don't have to be “ashamed” of, or “admit to” being anticapitalist
- Anticapitalism is not enough- patriarchy, racism and other forms of exploitation are also things we oppose, and they don't hinge solely on capitalism.

-Open-ness in structure

- Some thoughts that it has led to dilution of identity in that our initial common aims are no longer a strong force of unity
- There is an interest in labelling roles more clearly, having a clearer process of induction and introduction so there is a distinction between learning and organising.
- We need internal openness as well as external openness
- It might not be a good thing to grow- brings strains, tensions- we can trust each other more when we are small
- But growing also increases field of influence and transformation
- Two kinds of openness: 1) big events when anyone can come (which can be frustrating if lots of people show up and talk about state solutions, etc)- but we can generally control the parameters of the big actions (through having decided the format, media, etc). General agreement that big events need to be open, and that means we can't always control what gets said, promoted within the events we organise.
- 2) openness in meetings- new people coming in and we get frustrated because the same questions keep on getting asked and we need to defend our premises all the time. People should be able to come in right away, but we need to be honest about what our aims and objectives are.
- Inductions
 - Induction processes will mean that there is some prerequisite for participation in decision making, and it's more inclusive in that it's easier to understand where everyone is coming from.
 - There is good energy for staying open- because it's important that we are skilling up and transforming activists. We want to exclude disruptive behaviour and revisiting our core beliefs, but we don't want to exclude all new people- climate activism as a radicalising force really important aspect. So how do we filter out people who would never be happy in a radical anti-capitalist climate group, but retain people who can positively contribute and be happy and radicalised.
 - Induction can't just be about what consensus is on paper, hand signals, but also

- what kinds of decisions we make and our politics and the principles underlying consensus.
 - Okay to make it clear that newcomers are welcome to participate to an extent, but not necessarily participate in decision making process right away- get involved in workshops and attend meetings before you can really understand enough of what is happening to get involved
 - Some groups like Radical Routes have a far more clear and formalised process of attending several meetings before becoming part of the network
- Tiers
 - Separating the entry-point from the organisational space- so the first step in getting involved isn't going to a meeting and participating in a decision making process
 - A sort of tiered system can be useful which has a clear process of how to move between the "outer" tier into core group
 - More definition of open or closed working groups- don't want something to be open "on paper" but closed in reality because people don't trust your abilities, politics. Needs to be clearer and not "fudged" to appear more open than it actually is.
- National/local
 - A lot of people get involved through national events and come to a national gathering- not through local groups where learning process can be more organic.
 - We need a good national process and a way for local groups to affiliate/be involved in process. We are still looking for a viable model for local climate action. Education is an important part of this.
- Important to remember that a lot of other groups are really very cliquy and unwelcoming- and if we move too far towards a formalised process of getting involved we might become more like them
- A lot of this is quite similar to what we've been doing- intro sessions for newcomers at national gatherings, defining clear working group remits
- Continuity has been an issue in terms of structure- the Process group is essentially a lot of people who consistently show up
 - Having a functioning and empowered process group to make all of the suggestions about openness in structure happen (induction, clearer remits, etc)
- General agreement we need to tweak what we've been doing, not start from scratch

A few shout outs

- St Anne's South Coast Climate Camp about to get evicted
- Tannie and Stine from CJA have been convicted and sentenced- CC to write a letter of support (International Working Group? Old or New?) Also, need to fundraise to contribute to the £30,000 in legal costs.
- Dale Farm eviction approaching- get info at dalefarm.wordpress.org or savedalefarm@gmail.com
- Just Do It film showing coming up

Next Steps

Have another meeting (CONSENSUS) and in the interim people to get info about structures of other groups and how it works.

Who is calling this meeting- Climate Camp?

Are we the 'new structures' group set up a Space for Change?

We don't need to worry about a name- more about what (if anything?) we want to do together. We need to continue the conversation about what form of change we want to embark on.

We want groups who were talking about possible projects to continue

Next meeting open or closed? Not happy with it being closed to those who did not

attend this one- but we do want to build from where we are now.

We are growing out of Climate Camp, but we need to stop referring to “us” as Climate Camp – we are growing past that and need to look forward not back.

Possibility of day-long meeting rather than weekend.

We need a group of people to put a lot of thought into setting agenda, sort out facilitation based on the minutes and flipcharts- pass agenda by mailing list of people who were at this meeting.

Would be useful to go away and do research into different structures and techniques for organising- maybe more energy now than after Space for Change?

Working group for next meeting was formed- contactable at

spaceforchange@climatecamp.org.uk

Mandate: take away notes from the weekend and compile agenda, sort out email list, advertise the meeting in the same way as this one- set parameters as moving forward rather than destructive criticism of past, incorporate the progress we made this weekend.

Concrete aims for next meeting: what do we want to do and how do we want to get there. CONSENSUS.

END OF MAIN MEETING MINUTES
