

The Utopian Communard Project Primer

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The UCP support struggles for indigenous peoples sovereignty and acknowledge the Turrbal as the holder of Native Title over Brisbane.

This zine is not meant to be a proscriptive manifesto. Rather, it is a primer to initiate ideas and discussion about the establishment of a communitarian project. It is important to formulate a coherent plan for such a project to succeed.

While the scenarios are specific to the area immediate to south-east Queensland and northern NSW, the principles behind them can be applied to anywhere in Australia. We welcome hearing about and discussing similar plans, projects or possibilities.

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The author welcomes feedback and discussion on this text:

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1 - Introducing The Utopian Communard Project

Revolutions are about making radical changes in daily life and making this a common experience. The Utopian Communard Project (UCP) is about creating these radical changes in daily life through social evolution, not confrontational insurgency. It is about building the new system within the old, by occupying spaces approaching 'autonomous zones' and creating alternative economies and communities there.

To begin, the UCP will collect a number of Utopian Communards together, who will find and acquire space on which to build a radical eco-village. This eco-village is to be expansionist. Either it will evolve into a larger urban site, or initiate the establishment of a network of new radical eco-villages.

This eco-village is not about hippies hiding in the bush, being a drug culture drop-out zone, and relying on government welfare. It will actively engage with surrounding authoritarian/capitalist society, be economically independent of the State and private market system, and function as a true permanent autonomous zone.

Members will be expected to contribute economically (through co-operative labour and resources), and be active in political campaigns and community building projects. The UCP will use mutualist programs where necessary to build its own capital basis which will fund and support its own expansion and other broader campaigns.

The UCP will draw philosophically on Permaculture, Communitarianism, Anarchism and Hakim Bey's concept of the Permanent Autonomous Zone. It will be vegetarian and respect the intrinsic worth of animals as individuals.

Current society treats the individual as an atomised spectacle of production/consumption. The UCP will attempt to dismantle this separation of labour/leisure/art and make these whole experiences of every day life. It will demonstrate another world that is possible.

2 - Definitions

There is a lot of jargon used here to describe ideas, and a lot of it is 'loaded' language. This list of definitions will explain exactly what it meant by the terms in this zine. Please spend a little time becoming familiar with these terms to minimise misunderstandings and misrepresentations.

Utopian describes the efforts or imaginations to create the ideal society. It is the positive affirmation of actual attempts at radical social change and visionary dreams.

Communard describes a person who is an advocate of of Communalism or a member of a commune. With respect to the history of France, the Communards were the supporters/members of the short-lived Paris Commune formed in the disturbed period immediately after the Franco-Prussian War. Synonymous with Communitarian.

Communism refers to a system of social organisation and a political movement based on common ownership of the means of production. As a political movement, communism seeks to establish a classless society. In the context of Utopian Communard it is not referring to any form of Statist program such as Leninism,, Socialism or Marxism. It is being used synonymously with Communalism.

Communalism/Communitarianism focuses on community as the locus for radical social change. Communalist projects can take the form of communal living (such as intentional communities), community activities (such as community gardens or direct democracy assemblies) or communal property (see communism). The core principle is that the community exists for the benefit of the individuals who participate in it, so the best way to serve the interests of the individual is through the interests of the community.

Anarchy is the philosophy/political program to destroy all forms of domination, exploitation and coercion in society. The anarchist vision is to create a society based on the free and voluntary association of autonomous individuals, co-operation, mutual aid, and self-management. It is the highest expression of individual freedom coupled with collective responsibility. Anarchists are radicals that oppose all forms of Statism/Authoritarianism, Capitalism, Gender & Racial oppression, and Nationalism. They practise a variety of non-hierarchical programs such as Social Ecology/Communalism, Syndicalism, Mutualism, Eco-feminism, and many others.

Radicalism means to analyse and change the root cause of a problematic issue. It does not mean to be an irrational extremist.

Reform means to support the status quo, but analyse or change the symptom of a problematic issue. It does not mean to pragmatic or progressive, although this is the rhetoric to justify reformist programs.

Mutualism is a political program developed by Proudhon which attempts to use collective ownership of capital within the existing market system to advance the anarchist ideal. It includes establishing worker and housing co-operatives to ethically provide various material needs, and a People's Bank to provide capital for these projects. These enterprises would ultimately federate to express political power. Through their control of the economy, these economic federations would control and destroy the State in the same way corporations operate now. It is an evolutionary, long-term approach to radical social change.

Permanent Autonomous Zone is a concept developed by Hakim Bey. He says that the control of the State and the Spectacle of capitalism does not have absolute control and is in process of denigration. Through this denigration places and spaces are being abandoned and becoming functionally autonomous. These places are not utopias, for example police no-go zones in poor suburbs of Washington. Anarchists can occupy these spaces these places with little confrontation or interference by the Spectacle. These places can then form networks and function as humanitarian 'monasteries' among the coming dark ages of the collapse of Capitalist society, facilitating the rise of anarchistic civil society.

Permaculture is a concept developed by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren. It is a project to create ecologically sustainable and humanitarian society. Its core ethics are care of the earth, care of people, the sharing of resources to help others achieve their needs and reduce consumption. Permaculture is “consciously designed landscapes which mimic the patterns and relationships found in nature while yielding an abundance of food, fibre and energy for provision of local needs.” (Holmgren in *Permaculture One*.)

Eco-village is an urban settlement that is intended to be socially, economically and ecologically sustainable. It uses numerous 'green', cluster and co-housing design techniques, to create the 'autonomous house'. This is a house that produces most of its own resources like energy, water and is not reliant on mass centralised services like piped water, sewerage or State electricity grid. Emphasis is placed on the social impacts of architecture, with the objective to facilitate co-operative, self-managed communities through the design of the eco-village.

3 - The Specifics of the Utopian Communard Project

Objective: To purchase or acquire land for the following purposes:

One: To establish eco-village specifically for radical, non-authoritarian social change activists. Populations to be decided by residents.

Two: To create internal gift economies, while operating external, collectively operated, market enterprises for the purpose of transferring private wealth into common wealth. Possible enterprises could be organic food, timber and energy production, light manufacturing and food processing.

Three: To build a collectively controlled capital base to economically support radical, non-authoritarian political projects and those activists.

Four: To perform earth repair or conservation activities.

Five: Pursue long-term goal of becoming functionally autonomous from the State and capitalist markets, and establish a network of like minded communities.

Location Conditions:

One: The location is to be within 2.5 hours drive of Brisbane. The closer the better.

Two: The land is in total larger than 25 acres, or within a small country town or urban locality.

Three: It is not near Nimbin or Milmerran.

Four: All land and capital is owned collectively. No private ownership of capital or land within the project.

Five: Good group dynamics to always be maintained through closed membership and consensus on who resides at the site.

Six: The land has been denigrated and able to be repaired.

Seven: Located in an area approaching a Permanent Autonomous Zone. This includes: minimal council regulations, the fewer the better ; away from tourist centres and state authorities ; local economy and township is static or in decline ; generally ignored or forgotten.

Eight: The site has potential to be economically productive.

Nine: To have a treaty with local indigenous groups and support their struggles for sovereignty.

Financials:

One: To raise initial capital a group of savings accounts is to be set up. Participants are to deposit a minimum of 5% of their fortnightly income to that account, or \$25 if on welfare payments. Temporary non-payments can be negotiated if need be.

Two: All participants are entitled to withdraw their savings should they leave the project before the cash is spent. It is up to the participant to demonstrate how much money they have deposited. No interest will be paid on withdrawn savings.

Three: The UCP Collective can solicit or raise funds and donations.

Four: When enough capital has been raised and the group is in a position to buy land, a formal organisation (such as a non-profit co-operative) is formed to take legal title of the land, all raised capital, debts and required materials. The UCP collective then becomes the managing board of this co-operative.

The UCP will actively refuse 'drop-out', drug and welfare cultures. The UCP is independent, communal and self-reliant.

Membership.

Healthy groups have a healthy group dynamic and central to this is control of membership. Some considered having open, democratic processes is reliant on having open membership. In practice this fails because it is impossible to establish internal group stability and relationships of trust and mutual aid with strangers who have just walked in off the street. Democracy requires responsibility and this is lacking in open groups.

The UCP collective and the eco-village communities would have complete control over who is allowed to be a member, resident and worker. Expectations and responsibilities of each position should be clearly communicated so that everyone knows where they stand.

The UCP collective would create its own membership process by consensus. However, in the initial stage, membership should be by invitation. New members would only be accepted after group consensus, then, with induction and a 3-6 month probationary period.

4 - Scenarios.

There are a number of scenarios though which this project could be accomplished. These are described on the following pages. They are not meant to be proscriptive, but more as an exercise in imagining practical possibilities.

Scenario One: Purchasing a large bush block and building a new eco-village on this site.

In this scenario, the UCP collectives first act is to establish a solid group savings account. Members are regularly depositing an agreed percentage of their fortnightly income in a credit union savings account for the sole purpose of getting cash together for deposit or outright purchase of land.

The US collective has discussed in detail about what specifics the land should have, what economic activity will go on there, living arrangements, and the legal details of collective ownership, etc. The collective also nuts out exactly what each members needs and desires are for the site.

A couple of members are delegated to search for the appropriate land, gather as much information about possible sites and regularly inform the collective about these activities. This first step can be expected to take years.

The decision to purchase is eventually taken and it is important to have full consensus. One or two people are delegated to handle the paperwork and another small group is delegated to create the site design using permaculture principles. Each members begins taking on the required duties to begin construction and development of the site.

One of these duties may include schmoozing local councillors to get support for the unconventional building requirements, or even campaign to gain presence in the local council.

The collective should begin constructing and developing the eco-villages internal economy and organisational structures alongside the physical construction and development. This would include market gardens, tool library, the eco-village bank or credit union, communal warehouse and store, plus internal accounting records.

Once the eco-village is established, members would be expecting a break and time to enjoy what they've created. This is the time of consolidation and when this ends will be determined by the vibe in the village. However, once things are running smoothly, thoughts should go on to expansion, and how to spread the Utopian Communard project. Either the process is repeated elsewhere, or the population of the village

allowed to grow.

Scenario Two: Building within a small country town.

This scenario approximates the Aquarian move into Nimbin in the sense that the ideal site for the Utopian Communard eco-village is an established urban area that is in economic decline and approaching an autonomous zone. However emulating and being near Nimbin should be avoided entirely.

As in scenario one, the first steps are about developing an understanding of each member needs and desires for the site, details of the town characteristics, size, etc. The same steps to group savings would also take place, although this option will need greater amounts of capital. For this it may be appropriate to have a member delegated to solicited funds or property. For example, they may discuss a joint effort with an existing housing co-operative to purchase housing. When an ideal township is located and consensus is reached on its appropriateness the migration can begin.

The first steps of the migration should include the establishment of an economic enterprise within the region, namely a collectivised farm near the town. The farm would provide initial accommodation and employment to UC members. It would also function as a 'staging ground' for further migration into town.

The primary goal of this scenario is to establish good social relations with local residents, and ultimately encourage them to participate in the UC project. They could participate by joining the UC housing co-operative, providing capital and knowledge for new collective enterprises, holding direct democracy town assemblies, and participate in new social activities. So the first communards from the farm also have the role of initiating positive social interactions with the locals and building solid relationships. The farm should also generate income to help fund the second stage of the township migration.

When the farm workers say so, the other UC members can begin moving in to the chosen town. Accommodation could be rented, but a preferable option is for UC members with stable jobs to acquire housing loans to purchase housing. These can then be rented out firstly to other UC members and the secondly to the general population. The rent should contribute to the cost of servicing the home loans. Legal title should be transferred to the UC housing co-operative and treaty done with the local indigenous group.

These new residents should immediately begin finding local employment and establishing collective enterprises, such as light manufacturing, food processing of farm produce, or a local co-operative store/cafe. As the UC population of the town increases other enterprises and entertainment can be produced. These enterprises

should be focussed at generating enough wealth to purchase more town property and fund new enterprises. All the while locals should be positively engaged with and offered opportunities to participate.

When a significant majority of the town's capital is collectivised the town can be rebuilt or redesigned according to permaculture principles. This will allow the town to take on the structure and dynamics of an eco-village. In keeping with PAZ the town profile needs to be kept low. This will help prevent property values increasing , which would attract property developers, bureaucrats, tourists and other sub-cultural opportunists. Drug culture needs to be kept in check, and self-policing established.

A population target for the town should be set, and when it is approached plans should be made to expand the UC project to the next town.

Scenario Three - Squat the lot.

This scenario for the implementation of the UTP draws inspiration from Christiania.

Christiania began when residents in Copenhagen, Denmark began knocking down the fences to a neighbouring but unused military base in 1970. A little later the large Danish squatting movement organised a festival on the site to attract attention. After the festival about 200 people stayed on the site, and built it into the largest autonomous commune in Europe. The population is now about 800, they have a collectivised internal economy that includes bicycle manufacture, a consensus based Citizens Council and history of constant skirmishes with Danish state and drug dealers.

So why can't we do this in Brisbane? There are numerous abandoned sites in the greater metropolitan area and the scenario is definitely a possibility.

The first steps are just like the other scenarios where the collective has discussed in depth what needs and desires the members have for a site, how it is that there is no need to accumulate a large cash deposit. The land and possibly buildings are acquired through occupation. It is squatted.

So how does this scenario offer what the others don't?

Positives:

One - It would be more fun, exciting and attract more attention.

Two - No significant amounts of cash or capital need to be collected prior to its enactment.

Three - Can be established in shorter amounts of time.

Four - People with very limited income or poor budgeting skills can be involved

Five - The site location can be close to the Brisbane CBD and public transport

Six - The ability to be largely free of council or state constraints in the design of the site

Seven - The organic, spontaneous creativity that would be released

Eight - The interactions with and reactions of local residents

Nine - It looks more hardcore, which important for street cred, right?

Negatives:

One - Due to greater visibility and easier access to larger populations, there is less control over who becomes involved. This increases the likelihood of living, working or dealing with elements of cultural opportunism and fluctuating interest or workload who are unable or unwilling to contribute constructively beyond the short term.

Two - The inevitability of confrontation with the state. Squats in Queensland do not have a good history of winning this confrontation. It would take broad public civil disobedience to win a concerted state campaign against the squat.

Three - Potentially more chaotic and harder to get reliable long-term commitments and plans and therefore harder to build a reliable, long time alternative economy.

Four - Not as secure living for families with children.

Five - Potentially expensive and destructive repercussion from the state.

5 - Civil Disobedience - Good for the soul

The UCP is an evolutionary approach to creating radical social change. Its focal point is to create communities where radical activists can live as free as possible within the current constraints of Australian society and economy. Liberty within community is essential for healthy and happy humans.

However the reality is that should this project get off the ground, capitalist society will continue to oppress and destroy around the globe. To sloganeer *We are not free until all are free*. For the long term viability of the project it is essential for members to also engage in broader campaigns of civil disobedience. To agitate, educate and organise and subvert the state and the military/industrial systems.

This is because should the state choose to, it can easily create legislation or a false 'public demon' to target UCP communities and use police/military force to break them. If there is broad public disaffection with the state and active civil disobedience the state is in a weakened position to pursue UCP communities.

This is why it is important for UCP members to remain politically active. Activist projects could include everything from animal liberation and environment protection actions to anti-globalisation protests, refugee support and anti-nationalism campaigns to alternative media to organising General Strike, Rent Strike and Tax Strike clubs. There is a lot to do and we should enjoy doing it.

The other role of UCP communities then should be providing the economic and social support to prevent activist burn-out and to heal those that have it. Having secure housing, food, resources, private space and networks of close community and supporters goes a long way to preventing burn-out.

So again, the UCP is not hippies hiding in the hills from the world, but creating positions of strength and support from which to challenge the world.

6 - Sounds nice, but I got not cash!

The UCP obviously needs some form of capital to get going, be it cash, land, building materials, tools, etc. The natural first reaction is to say “Where's it supposed to come from? How is it going to happen?”

Firstly, Australia is drenched with wealth and even the average dole bludging bum has a higher standard of living and income than the average Vietnamese labourer. There is absolute poverty here, but for most people poverty is just a perception. Worrying about your own individually perceived scarcity or poverty is a form of social control based on fear.

If most people, including activists, sat down and did a personal budget we'd see \$40 to \$200 a fortnight spend on beer, cigarettes, entertainment and take-away food. Put that \$50/fortnight into a savings account with ten other activists and we'd have \$12,000 a year. In five years there's plenty for a 30 acre bush block behind Toowoomba.

If five years sounds like a long time, let's consider it's been over ten years since one of Australia's biggest urban blockades at the WEF protests in Melbourne 2001. Since then there have been plenty of activists events, but there hasn't been any significant transfer of wealth to communal control. Point being that this time will pass regardless, we can continue to do what we've always done and we may have nothing tangible to show for it in the end.

The other point here is not to focus on individual possessions and income (or lack of), but to focus on how our pooled resources can create communal wealth. As mentioned Australia is covered in wealth, it just needs to be transferred from private ownership to communal control and that is what the YCP is about. The biggest real obstacle here is not police, multi-nationals or the Labour/Liberal parties - but our own levels of trust, planning and budgeting skills.

The core of community is trust and the shared interests and history. Australia capitalist society has been amazing effective at destroying trust and any existing bonds of community. The result is a society of alienated, dysfunctional, atomised people and this includes most 'lefties'.

In such a situation only the mad, naive or Christians would put a percentage of their income in control of self-professed utopians. The likelihood of that resource being ripped off or lost is very good, right?

The project of building communally controlled capital that sustains an active, radical

community requires the building of trust. This is only done by the group making certain demands on an individual, and that individual demonstrating that they can be trusted to follow through. Doing this repeatedly establishes a history between communitarian activists.

In the case of the UCP the collective needs to work on trust building activities. One of the most prominent should be the group savings. This fulfils a number of functions at once. Firstly, it provides a marker of membership, a tangible way of defining who is an active member of the UCP and who is just a sympathiser. It demonstrates a level of actual commitment, instead of just empty talk. It provides practice for a member to increase their skills of budgeting and managing pooled resources. It provides practical experience in working together as a collective. These all function to raise the level of group trust. Also over time it creates a real, useful capital basis for the UCP.

The details of such a savings group should be created by the UCP collective, but ought to at least have the option for a member to leave with their share of the savings at any time. Conditions could be applied to this, but people need to feel comfortable that their money is not going to be lost down a collective black hole.

Another useful function for the savings group is that it could also act as a credit group, providing micro-loans to members and act as a precursor to the establishment of the eco-village's "People's Bank". Using this organisation to start a tool and toy library would also be a great thing.

The Utopian Communard Project Primer is an introduction to and initial discussion of the immediate possibilities of founding a explicitly functional and long term anarchist commune in Australia. It puts forward three scenarios - the eco-village, the country town integration and the urban squat.

The Utopian Commune is designed not to be isolated from the society around it, but to integrate with it. The *UPC Primer* discusses the methods and tactics the anarchist-communist should use to employ this project. It talks about the successes to be emulated, the failures to be avoided, how the workload and the financial burdens should be shared the the members, and, indeed, who should be members.

The *UCP Primer* is a tool to start discussion for us to start thinking about starting a revolutionary, everyday life solution to the moribund world around us.



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