

RU PARTICIPATING

MEMBERS | NETWORK PROJECTS | SOLIDARITY

From the Education & Skills Team

- E&S meetings:**
 The team meets (almost) every Tuesday at 9pm UTC. Every other week the members try to discuss various perspectives of kinship and the imagined participatory society versions. Everyone is welcome to these discussions.
- Session with Kathy Kelly:**
 The team held a session with Kathy Kelly on Merchants of Death War Crimes Tribunal on January 14th. She highlighted examples of war crimes that arms trade causes. The tribunal will take place between 10th - 13th of November 2023.

From the Outreach and Events Team

- New team members:**
 Paulo and Milles have joined the team.
- 20 theses session:**
 The team discussed to put on a session using Michael Albert's 20 thesis article as a basis and is exploring this further.
- Live RU meetup:**
 Paulo talked about RU having an attendance at an event in Belgium in the summer and is also putting together a spreadsheet of organisations he wants to contact as a recruitment drive.



Biodiversity in a Real Utopia

Mark Evans

Why do real utopia members smell so bad? To find out the answer go to our jokes section. We also have a sonnet, submitted anonymously, about participatory economics. See if you can guess who (or what) wrote it.

Whilst making your way to those sections be sure to check out Matic's condensed history on ZNet, now rebranded as ZNetwork. In his whistle-stop overview, Matic discussed Z's origins in the 1980s, where the name came from, and then takes us right up to the relaunch in 2022. I am sure I am expressing the feelings of all RU members when I say that I wish the new Z staff all the best with the relaunch!

This issue also includes an important article by RU member Ian Pflugsten on the topic of biodiversity, which he defines "simply as the richness and abundance of organisms assembled in a community across a landscape". If you are interested in the issue of sustainability, as I am sure you are, then this article is a must read! Hopefully, Ian will be doing more on this topic for RU, so keep your eyes peeled.

This issue's member interview is with the creative powerhouse Lonnie Ray Atkinson. In his candid answers Lonnie discusses growing up in East Nashville where he encountered both racism and religious fundamentalism and the negative impact this environment was having on his developing character. He also highlights self-education as a remedy for this, which led him to the likes of Chomsky and Zinn and Arundhati Roy and bell hooks. Lonnie also includes a couple of links for some of his brilliant work for other RU members to explore and enjoy.

Finally be sure to check out members' picks and RU member Dave Roviks tour date for 2023 that we have included in full. Perhaps some of us could try to meet up at some of his gigs as he tours the globe?

From the Site Team

- **New member:**
Site team has a new member of the team, Paulo Rodriguez. Welcome.
- **Map updates:**
New members locations have been added onto the map.
- **Adapting RU participating:**
Paulo will research possibilities of converting RU Participating into a form that is better suited for sharing over social media and easier to display on the website.
- **Redesigning homepage:**
Bridget is taking a stab at redesigning the homepage in order to be better intelligible to new and old members.
- **Get involved page:**
Paulo is redesigning the get involved page.
- **Internal task keeping:**
Team started using Google Agenda to keep track of goals and tasks.

From the Membership Team

- **Alternative time RU Garden:**
Membership team is organizing an After Hours RU Garden on Saturday 4th of Feb at 11:00 UTC, to make it more accessible to our Asian and Australian members.
- **RU Gym:**
We are still looking for a person to work at organizing RU Gym.
- **1 on 1 meetings:**
One on one meetings between members are back in swing with 24 members participating.

ZNetwork: A Media for participatory politics

Matic Primc

The proliferation of contemporary online media channels means that we have more information available to us than at any time before in human history. Yet, it is harder than ever to find trustworthy voices that give us news that mainstream media ignores and analysis of events through the socialist prism.

ZNetwork has a long history of being such a media. It began life in 1987 as Z Magazine which was founded by Lydia Sargent and Michael Albert. The magazine developed into a major left-wing, activist-oriented publication before going fully online in 1995 and becoming ZNet.

Z's name was inspired by the 1969 film Z which tells the story of repression and resistance in Greece. Comrade Z, a leader of the resistance, has been assassinated and his killers, including the chief of police, are indicted. Instead of the expected positive outcome, the prosecutor mysteriously disappears and a right-wing military junta takes over. As the closing credits roll, instead of listing the cast and crew, the filmmakers list the things banned by the junta. They include: peace movements, labour unions, strikes, long hair on men, Sophocles, Tolstoy, Aeschylus, Socrates, Ionesco, Sartre, the Beatles, Chekhov, Mark Twain, the bar association, sociology, Becket, the International Encyclopaedia, the free press, modern and popular music, the new math, and the letter Z, which has been scrawled on the sidewalk as the film's final image, symbolizing "the spirit of resistance lives."

In the early days, Z's success depended heavily on just a few writers who included Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn, Bell Hooks, Edward Herman, Holly Sklar and Jeremy Brecher. But the number of contributing writers grew and ZNet became a rich source of information about participatory vision and strategy, and a north star for many on the Left.

After the sad passing of Lydia Sargent in 2020, Michael Albert decided to hand the ZNet baton to a group of like-minded activists. The group gave the site a facelift, renamed it ZNetwork and launched it in October 2022. Run by a staff of seven volunteers, half of them RU members, ZNetwork continues the tradition established by Z Magazine and ZNet, and with an overarching focus on vision and strategy, it curates global content from independent media outlets, as well as soliciting and generating original content.

ZNetwork, like most independent media, exists in an oppressive and restricted present but it is unabashedly oriented to an equitable and liberating future, and you are cordially invited to browse the new site, engage with the content and even contribute content of your own.



Why biodiversity?

Ian Pfungsten

Last year I was invited to be interviewed for a new podcast called Here to (T)here on the topic of biodiversity loss. The focus of our discussion was around the importance of biodiversity and how this sometimes ambiguous term relates to our ecology and our survival. Here I define biodiversity simply as the richness and abundance of organisms assembled in a community across a landscape. The host was interested in the problems with current economic reactions to ecological catastrophes and how a participatory society might offer an alternative response. Unfortunately, it shouldn't be controversial to prioritize sustainability and survival of our species in light of the cliff we are approaching with climate change and rapidly depleting resources.

But why should we care about biodiversity? Because we care about sustainability, which means we care about the health of our families, communities, and future generations. We care about availability of clean water, nutritious food, and habitats for us to live and play. And we care about diversity of life not only because we believe life has intrinsic value and purpose, but because living and decomposing organisms provide known and unknown functions that benefit ecosystems (some call them ecosystem services). The mangrove forests along our coastal marshes provide protective buffers to rising waters from storm surges. The fungi in our soils absorb and break down toxins like heavy metals, chemicals, and even radiation. Predators like cougars and wolves prevent stream bank erosion by controlling the herbivores that, if left unchecked by predators, will overgraze soil-stabilizing plants. Even mosquitoes have roles beyond transmitting diseases; the male mosquitoes never bite but drink nectar and move pollen in flowering plants. We care about the services that an ecosystem provides through the functions of its diverse community members. We therefore value sustaining an ecosystem that functions for our long-term survival just as we value an economy and society that functions for the well-being of all.

Of course there is cynicism in how the guilty industries and their contracted scientists absolve themselves of blame and distract the affected from very real threats to sustainability. But there are also many well-intentioned public and private organizations working tirelessly to mitigate these problems. If those that care about sustainability and biodiversity have the knowledge and means to mitigate losses, then what are the mainstream answers to these problems? Do these solutions reverse our fall to catastrophe or simply slow the descent?

Some mainstream solutions advocate stakeholder (instead of shareholder) capitalism combined with regulatory policy to solve our problems. The claim is that value can be achieved not just for the consumer and the shareholder, but for the

community and the planet. This runs counter to current shareholder-focused, neoliberal economics, where stakeholders are ignored due to non-shareholders lacking economic standing and the environment lacking legal standing. With the conflicting interests of stakeholders ultimately biased towards maximizing shareholder profits, the market-driven trend is to keep business as usual with profits and decision-making to the same sectors that provide the problems in the first place. Under current practices, there is little debate whether we prioritize the value of sustainability; the discussion instead is how to keep the plane in nosedive as long as possible without acknowledging the impending ground. Despite the intentions of current economic practices and environmental policies, they violate the value of self-management, that is your access to making decisions proportional to the amount you are affected by those decisions, which is crucial to empowering those most affected by biodiversity loss.

The public and private sectors create barriers to decision-making using the current economic and political institutions. Fundraisers for politicians and advocacy groups will gladly take donations for well-intended causes, which basically means give them your support and they will handle the tough decisions. At the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity that just concluded in Montreal, attendees and reporters celebrated the inclusion of Indigenous, Tribal, and First Nation representation at the meeting as if it was this gift to society from the policy-makers instead of a victory from the protests for Indigenous Rights during the convention. While little if any mention was made of economic policy changes or condemnation of the previous policy of Indigenous exclusion, the victory of Indigenous protesters is not to be overlooked; they overcame the disempowerment and atomization that much of the excluded majority feels and that keeps them from just voting for their survival let alone organizing and contesting. In the words of Greta Thunberg at the protest against creation of future coal mines in Lutzerath, Germany, "when governments and corporations are destroying the environment and putting people at risk, the people step up."

I don't propose to know the best "hows" of getting more people to participate or to include ecological indicators into prices. Presumptive ecological value could be applied under the ecological precautionary principle due to the fact that we do not understand or know all ecosystem functions and services. Obviously we can't cease to function in our economy and society due to never utilizing natural resources. People will decide what is sustainably harvested and extracted, but with the understanding and consideration of our ecological limits to survival. How we do this will need to



Live WolfAlps EU

balance our needs for survival above subsistence levels while working less and sharing our collective resources.

I was invited to return for a follow-up panel discussion for the same podcast episode. The panelists were asked what systemic changes and practical steps are needed to address biodiversity loss. After providing the rationale for a vision of participatory society, I explained how we need to work on issues now with the aim of reaching that vision later. In other words, we aren't getting the societal change we need in time to stop the current trend towards multiple catastrophic tipping points in climate change and biodiversity loss. Therefore we need timely reforms to our current institutions, and not just modest reforms that promote the same institutions, but vision-focused, "non-reformist" reforms that lay foundations for new institutions.

A flexible strategy with the goal of winning non-reformist reforms has the most potential for reaching the society we envision. Modest reforms like carbon trading and offsets simply delay solving the emissions problem and promote the institutions we want to replace such as markets and capitalism. Instead, redistributing defense budgets to investments in green infrastructure, research, and education would be non-reformist in reducing militarism and promoting sustainability. A goal of promoting social and environmental justice in education curricula would lay a foundation of solidarity and sustainability for future generations by teaching not just history of systemic racism, sexism, and imperialism, but also ecological principles along with history of Indigenous heritage and culture in public schools. We could push for infrastructure changes that curtail personal vehicles by fighting for reforms that incentivize investment in mass transit research, design, and construction. We could nationalize the energy and agriculture sectors completely and replace boards of directors and owners with neighborhood and worker representatives from the community and

agriculture and energy sectors. This would be a substantial achievement towards eliminating capitalism's influence on energy and food production as well as replacing hierarchical state and corporate control of resource distribution. We would likewise need to retrain an entire industry of workers towards green energy production and sustainable agriculture while creating strong unions in these green sectors and providing retirement for those workers that don't want to learn new skills.

And what is there to do when these reforms fail to pass (or even be brought to a vote) in the institutions we are provided? We aren't going to get far with current hierarchical institutions that create barriers to sustainability through corporate influence in policies and prioritization of profits. Reliance on government institutions, non-profits, politicians, and corporations is not a rational strategy to avoid our immediate ecological catastrophe. We should encourage community and worker empowerment to fight for new institutions where decisions are made by those proportionally affected. This means those in privileged positions in the sciences must share their research with the community and not shy from denouncing capitalism, corporatism, and hierarchies of power in private and public sectors. They must also risk their privileged positions; they must strike, boycott, protest, write, call, speak, demand, organize, and repeat as if the world depends on it.

The task at hand is not easy. There are people with more resources and institutional power who want to maintain the status quo even if it is harmful to their own interests. Yet, we are witnessing the very real threats to our survival that will likely worsen if we stay the current course. These realities will be more difficult to ignore as we approach each new tipping point towards ecological collapse. Ultimately, the Earth will survive after the sixth mass extinction event, but it will do so without us unless we care enough to change.

Why RU Participating, Lonnie?

Lonnie Atkinson

Tell us a bit about yourself. What is your name? Where were you born? Where do you live now? What kind of work do you do? What are your interests? What is your all time favourite book, film or piece of music? Anything that you feel comfortable sharing.

My name is Lonnie Ray Atkinson. I grew up in East Nashville (back when that shit meant something). I currently reside in North Carolina where, in between parenting and a 40-hour desk gig, I try to steal away as much time as I can to write (and scheme).

My most recently released books are [Don't Think Of A Republican](#) and [A Good Kid and His Ghosts](#). Back in the day I wrote [protest songs](#), a couple here and there that were pretty good.

Did you have any significant events in your life that ignited your interest in politics and social justice?

I came to my politics far later than I wish I had.

Trying to grapple with the racism and fundamentalist evangelicalism I had come up in, and finally seeing the loser I was becoming (as well as the piece of shit I had at times been), I read my way to a place where I had a chance at more. One author would recommend another author, and eventually I stumbled upon Chomsky and Zinn and Arundhati Roy and bell hooks and yadda yadda yadda.

What attracted you to RU? Why did you join?

I contributed to the Z “rebirth” for a time and got to know some wonderful people that turned out to also be RU members. I’m not much of a joiner, so I hung out for a while on the periphery. At the risk of wearing out my welcome, I eventually made it official, swore my oath, and was initiated (he he).

Which aspect of RU appeals to you the most?

I’m personally attracted to the sense of community RU offers. Not too many places you can nerd out to this kind of stuff. More importantly, though, I’m impressed that RU members can hold quite disparate (at times even contentious) views on certain current

issues while sharing the same value-based trajectory of vision.

Are you engaged in any other organisations? If so, which ones? What appeals to you about them?

I’m founder of the Hail Mary Brigade (the pass, not the prayer), focusing on long shot political and activist projects. Our endeavors are audacious not for the sake of being brazen, but because we are desperate. At this late stage (of Climate Change and capitalism), I fear Hail Marys may be all we have left.

What are your hopes for RU and the progressive left more generally?

It’s my hope that, as the network grows, we’ll be able to put more focus on strategy and transition, implementing various experiments geared toward moving us beyond capitalism and significantly closer to a Participatory Economy/Society.

A Sonnet about Parecon (submitted anonymously)

Parecon, a vision grand and bold
 A model for a world that’s fair and just
 A system that is based on more than gold
 Where work and wealth are shared, not hoarded or lust
 With balanced job complexes, all can thrive
 No longer ruled by bosses or by greed
 A participatory planning process, alive
 Ensuring everyone’s needs are met with speed
 A system that promotes equity and self-management
 Where everyone has a voice and a say
 Where power is shared and balance is abundant
 And profits are not the only goal, but rather sustainability
 Parecon, a dream that we can make real
 A world where all can truly thrive and feel
 A sense of purpose, dignity, and fulfillment
 A world that’s just, and fair, and beautiful.

RU Member Dave Rovics: Touring in 2023

Very briefly, what am I doing, why am I doing it, and how does it work?

I'm playing mostly original music about current events and history, for live audiences on several continents. The reason I do it is because I love how live music can impact people, how it can help build and sustain community, and bring people together. I also love how you can, in a good year, pay the rent by traveling around and doing concerts.

As to how it works, first a few words on how it doesn't work. It doesn't work by me contacting my booking agent or manager, and then organizing a tour. There is no booking agent or manager. About 97% of the time it also doesn't work for me to just contact venues where I'd like to play, and have them organize a concert. The vast majority of venues have no capacity for promoting the gigs that happen in them -- and this is not to say anything negative about these venues, just to point out how it is.

It can seem a bit confusing from outside the indie music biz, because most people don't need to know how these things work, they just show up to the gigs they want to go to. But in the little corner of the acoustic music scene I occupy, it's the folk clubs, sponsoring organizations, or concert promoters that need to be part of the equation, if enough people are going to find out about a gig, such that you stand to have a few dozen of them come to it. The venues themselves don't generally do that, unless the venue is inseparable from the folk club or the sponsoring organization. And anybody can be a concert promoter! But someone needs to play that role, for each gig.

So the way I have always crowdsourced my tours is like this: I try in various ways to let people out there know that I'm planning some tours, and I wait to hear back from people who might be inclined to be the local concert promoter for a gig in their town. Then I correspond with these wonderful folks who are willing to do this, basically to organize a local gig, and I string together a bunch of tours this way. When they're successful, it's pretty much entirely due to the efforts of a collection of individuals in different towns who have volunteered to join me in this crowdsourced touring effort.

So after that hopefully interesting and informative introduction to crowdsourced touring, I'll get into some specifics of what I'm planning for 2023, and how people can collaborate with me in this project. Regardless of whether you might be willing and able to take on the role of local gig organizer, everyone can, by whatever means, let other folks know about a gig happening in their area, or otherwise spread the word about a gig, or a tour, by word of mouth, by email, or by posting on various platforms.

Hawaii and the west coast: for the last half of January I'm in Kona working on a new album with a stellar international cast of musicians. This will involve at least one public performance. During the second week of February I've got six gigs lined up between Eugene, Oregon and southern California. There are still a couple of dates free when I could do a gig in between San Francisco and LA, or somewhere else in northern California. Also lots of spring or summer dates free for other potential shows in the PNW, including BC!

Australia: from March 20th until April 12th I'm in Australia. I'll definitely be in Brisbane, Sydney, and lots of points in between, traveling by car. So far confirmed are a couple of dates in the Sydney area. I'd love to hear from more folks in Australia about house concerts or other gigs, especially in southern Queensland or anywhere in NSW or ACT.

Denmark: I'll be there for the last week of May, playing in Aarhus and at an acoustic music festival in Roskilde. I won't be in the country for very long, but I have a couple of dates free for other potential gigs if anyone can organize anything in other towns.

England, Scotland, and Ireland: Throughout June I'm on one of those two main islands. Specifically, for the first week of June doing gigs in London and elsewhere in southern England. Then up towards the north, with one gig confirmed so far in Wakefield on June 10th. Then further north, taking a ferry to Ireland for gigs there around the weekend of the 17th. Then back to Scotland for a gig in Glasgow on June 22nd. Then back down south to the Glastonbury Festival for the last weekend of June, then back home to Oregon. If you followed this geography you can see that I'll be most everywhere, and as you may imagine, I have dates free for potential gigs anywhere in England, Wales, Scotland, or Ireland, if you're flexible with the date and the day of the week.

Midwestern US: I'm in touch with friends in the midwest about visiting there in October. Plans are afoot for house concerts in Michigan and potentially elsewhere in the region, depending on interest.

Hope to see you on the road and in the streets!

<https://www.davidrovics.com/>

Member's Picks

Books:

People's Power: Reclaiming the Energy Commons. OR Books, 2020
by Ashley Dawson

People's Power provides a persuasive critique of a market-led transition to renewable energy. It surveys the early development of the electric grid in the United States, telling the story of battles for public control over power during the Great Depression. This history frames accounts of contemporary campaigns, in both the United States and Europe, that eschew market fundamentalism and sclerotic state power in favor of energy that is green, democratically managed and equitably shared.

Animals and the Moral Community: Mental Life, Moral Status, and Kinship. Columbia University Press, 2008
by Gary Steiner

Steiner rejects the traditional assumption that a lack of formal rationality confers an inferior moral status on animals vis-a-vis human beings. Instead, he offers an associationist view of animal cognition in which animals grasp and adapt to their environments without employing concepts or intentionality. Steiner challenges the standard assumption of liberal individualism according to which humans have no obligations of justice toward animals. Instead, he advocates a "cosmic holism" that attributes a moral status to animals equivalent to that of people. Arguing for a relationship of justice between humans and nature, Steiner emphasizes our kinship with animals and the fundamental moral obligations entailed by this kinship.

Articles:

Interdependence

"It is from being disabled that I have learned about the dangerous and privileged "myth of independence" and embraced the power of interdependence."

Irish Peace Activists Trial

January 11th 2023 also marked the beginning of a trial that is part of a long history of Irish anti-war resistance to the illegal military use of Shannon airport and Ireland's complicity in murderous illegal wars and extraordinary rendition.

Radio Plays:

Tinsel Girl

Uplifting comedy drama about the life, loves and misadventures of wheelchair user Maz. Starring and inspired by actress Cherylee Houston.

Music:

Sam Fender: Aye

(Album: Seventeen going under, 2021)

[Real Utopia: Foundation for a Participatory Society](#)



Movies:

Tenet, (2020)

A very interesting twist on the traditional rules of time travel. An agent finds himself working against an enemy that has reversed the arrow of time, and coexists in the same moment. Some amazing action scenes within the reverse time stream context, and definitely thought provoking!

Tár, (2022)

A psychological drama about an imagined principal conductor of a major German orchestra, Lydia Tár. Tár is a music genius, living a high end life in Berlin with her violinist wife, a small daughter and a personal assistant never far away. She is touring the world, running a mentoring scholarship programme for women musicians, dining with other famous conductors... But something is wrong-she suffers from insomnia, is nervous, has selective sound sensitivity syndrome and a young woman seems to be stalking her. When she becomes infatuated with a young cellist and ideological disagreements seem to arise between her and her students, her past behaviour and decisions come to haunt her. A challenging film that captures cancel and digital culture and #Me too movement all in one breath and one that will make you discuss it for days to come.

Videos:

My pitch for a socialist revolution

Belmarsh Tribunal on Julian Assange

Website:

La Borda housing cooperative

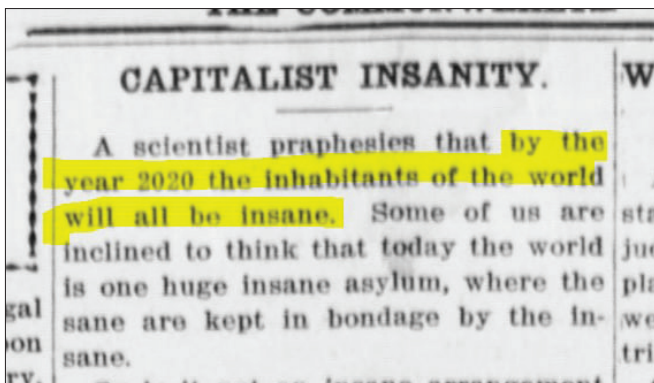
For the lolz:

Why do real utopia members smell so bad? Because they're all revolting.

My New Year revolution is to never use autocorrect again.

RU Serious?

... it's memeing time.



Ari Drennen
@AriDrennen

Whenever I see people talking about the "skyrocketing" rates of people saying that they're trans, I think of this chart. They used to punish children for being left-handed and force them to write with their right hand. Guess what happened after that stopped?

The history of left-handedness
Rate of left-handedness among Americans, by year of birth

Year of Birth	Rate of Left-handedness (%)
1900	~4
1920	~3.5
1940	~11
1960	~11.5
1980	~11.5
2000	~11.5

WIKI OF WONKESLOG

