

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Exeter		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 19 Politics and International Studies		
Title of case study: Anarchist constitutions: changing organisations and shaping radical social movements with research on anarchist constitutionalising		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Alex Prichard	Associate Professor of International Relations	2012-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Dr Prichard's research shows anarchy to be a viable constitutional principle. Constitutionalising organisations in accordance with a commitment to anarchy establishes more horizontal, equitable, democratic and participatory ways of dividing power within organisations. This research has helped build organisational durability and democratic engagement in two large partner organisations by designing and supporting constitutional reform. This primary impact spurred the production of popular 'how to' guides for anyone wishing to constitutionalise in an anarchistic way. These pamphlets were then central to the development of new training materials, constitutions and conflict resolution mechanisms in numerous UK organisations, a large publicly funded social enterprise in Copenhagen, and a social centre in Iceland.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Anarchy tends to be equated with chaos and disorder and is rarely understood in anarchistic terms, let alone as a constitutional principle. Prichard's research on anarchism has helped change these perceptions, showing anarchy to be a constitutional principle in its own right. [3.1] In the research literature, different constitutional principles distinguish different traditions of constitutional practice. For example, non-domination and non-interference distinguish between republican and liberal approaches respectively. Prichard and Kinna have demonstrated that anarchism emerged out of the republican tradition of thought in the mid-nineteenth century, crucially arguing that the state and capitalism were antithetical to freedom as non-domination. If non-domination was the goal, anarchists argued, anarchy was the means. [3.2]</p> <p>Between 2016 and 2018, Prichard and Kinna (PI at Loughborough) undertook an ESRC-funded research project Anarchy Rules, to identify the ways in which anarchist organisations constitutionalise today. There is considerable research on anarchist approaches to democracy, but the aim of this project was to (co)produce new understandings of the processes by which anarchists formally divide and constrain power and how anarchy operates as a constitutional principle.</p> <p>This project had two parts. The first part of the analysis was retrospective. With Kinna and Swann (PhD student at Loughborough) [3.3], Prichard developed a contextualised and comparative analysis of the minutes of the general assemblies of three Occupy camps, in London, Oakland and Wall Street. The research demonstrated that constitutionalising according to a principle of anarchy involves writing constitutions and establishing rules, legitimising them through consensus or supermajorities, developing a horizontal and</p>		

egalitarian group culture, and by developing policy from the bottom up, without recourse to the institutions of the modern state. The aim is to maximise formal and informal participation and maintain the autonomy of the groups. In practical terms constitutionalising in anarchistic ways counters hierarchy and domination, often ossified in gendered, racialised, or material structures of power, within anarchist groups as well as beyond.

The second part of the research project was co-created with two UK partner organisations: the UK Regional Administration of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and Radical Routes. The IWW is a revolutionary syndicalist union in operation globally since 1905. Currently it has thirteen branches in the UK and Ireland with a membership of nearly four thousand. It has a similar membership in the US, and regional administrations on mainland Europe and Australasia. Radical Routes is secondary cooperative, a federation of twenty-nine anarchist worker and housing cooperatives, with a membership of roughly two hundred individuals. The membership of these two organisations comprises the majority of the formal anarchist movement in the UK.

Using co-production methodologies, which involved developing everything from the research questions to final outputs with the two partner organisations, Prichard was able to gain unprecedented access to these organisations, and shed new light on how anarchists constitutionalise in practice. While not all members identified as anarchists, it was shown that an anarchistic ethos and politics generated unique, identifiable constitutional design principles, process and outcomes.

Prichard's co-authored reports with these two organisations were central to the subsequent impact within them, [3.4, 3.5] and the wider impact of the research was made possible by this primary partnership with these two organisations. The findings of this research project were distilled for a lay audience into two short pamphlets, *Anarchic Agreements*. [3.6] The first explored anarchist modes of group-forming, the second how to combine groups into durable and egalitarian networks. These research outputs were the basis of our impact.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1 Alex Prichard (2013) *Justice, Order and Anarchy: The International Political Theory of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203386170>

3.2 Ruth Kinna and Alex Prichard. (2019a) 'Anarchism and Non-Domination', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 24(3), pp. 221-240. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2019.1633100>

3.3 Ruth Kinna, Alex Prichard, and Thomas Swann. (2019b), 'Occupy and the Constitution of Anarchy', *Global Constitutionalism*, 8(2), pp. 357-390. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S204538171900008X>

3.4 Heather Blakey, Ruth Kinna, Richard Musgrove, Alex Prichard, Thomas Swann, (2017) 'Democracy and Participation in the Union: Report to the Executive Council of Wales, Ireland, Scotland and England Regional Administration of the Industrial Workers of the World'. *Available on request*.

3.5 Lukas Hornby, Ruth Kinna, Alex Prichard, Thomas Swann, Matt Wilson, (2018) 'I'm not really interested in giving housing to Nazis: Preliminary Report of the 5.1 Sessions'.

3.6 Ruth Kinna, Alex Prichard, Thomas Swann and Seeds for Change, *Anarchic Agreements* (Part 1 and 2), available at: https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/anarchic_agreements

Projects:

ESRC 'Transforming Social Science'. Grant number: ES/N006860/1 (Awarded July 2015)
Project title: 'Anarchy as constitutional principle: Constitutionalising in anarchist politics'. Co-I with Professor Ruth Kinna (PI) (Loughborough), Project value: £249,995.60. Project website: www.anarchyrules.info/

4. Details of the impact

This underpinning research on anarchy as a constitutional principle has resulted in demonstrable, transformational changes in a range of organisations. It has directly influenced the development of constitutional processes and the re-design of over twenty third sector organisations and enterprises, in the UK, Denmark and Iceland. Central to this impact has been the popular two-part pamphlet, *Anarchic Agreements*, that has helped to change the way key community activists and training organisations think about anarchy and constitutionalising.

Building organisational capacity through a constitutional reform process

In 2016, Prichard, Kinna and Swann, began a coproduced research project with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The IWW struggled with relatively low levels of participation, which was more problematic for an anarchistic organisation than for more mainstream unions. [5.1]. Our coproduced research discovered the surprising fact that that 68% of survey respondents identified as anarchist in some way. Respondents, among the union's most active members, shaped the culture of the union, and their prevalence explained a general perception of, and dissatisfaction with, and centralisation of authority in the union. The report alerted senior union members to the views of the membership that *"elected officers were somehow separate from the rest of the IWW"* [5.1]. As the chair of the organising department put it, the project *"gave us [the Union] some evidence of shortcomings in our organising that needed to be addressed"* [5.1].

The report made two sets of recommendations. The first called for more representative officer roles and more limited terms of office; the second related to integrating and updating IWW training. Both initiatives were primarily geared towards widening participation and upskill the membership, flattening hierarchies of experience and expertise in the process. Motions passed at the 2018 annual conference established the BAME and LGBTQI+ officer posts, and also limited branch officer terms to two consecutive two year terms (recommendation 1). The two new officers now lead the Equalities Committee, addressing intersecting barriers to participation in the union [5.2]. Secondly, between January 2018 & July 2020, Prichard led and completed a project to develop an online training platform for the IWW (recommendation 2). Initially designed to host IWW-specific rep/casework training content, the platform will be used to deliver officer training and inductions, equalities training and organiser training. Being open to the public, it will also be an invaluable free resource to all workers [5.3].

The second constitutional reform process was coproduced with Radical Routes, a federation, or 'secondary' cooperative, of worker and housing cooperatives. Prichard and Kinna's work with Radical Routes began in 2017 with a preliminary report completed in January 2019 [5.4]. The team explored barriers to participation through focus group meetings with 28 of the 30 member cooperatives. The focus groups enabled all members to think about barriers to participation in the federation, and, through critical reflection on the aims and purposes of the federation, to begin a process of constitutional renewal. Constitutional renewal in Radical Routes consisted in bringing together all members to critically reflect on the federation's core values. Our work, as part of the Anarchy Rules project, facilitated this. As the testimony states: Radical Routes *"needed a way to bring [everyone...] together at the same time - it needed a constitutionalising narrative. We now have that story, and that's in large part thanks to the work of Ruth and Alex."* [5.5] As one member put it, our collaboration aimed to develop *"an effective network of support for UK-wide radical cooperatives"* and thereby *"make a lasting contribution to radical democracy in the UK"* [5.5]. As we show below, the impact of this work was felt far wider than these two organisations.

Re-constitutionalising third sector organisations and private enterprises

Anarchic Agreements [5.6] was enabled by a large HEA impact grant in 2017 and smaller impact grants from the University of Exeter. The first pamphlet, informed by Prichard's work

with the IWW, was a guide to 'group forming' in anarchist and activist circles: how to agree rules, divide power and sustain the identity of anarchist groups. The second shared insights from the coproduced work with Radical Routes and on the Occupy movement, explaining how best to build horizontal coalitions and networks of likeminded (though not necessarily anarchist) groups.

After a process of negotiation, Seeds for Change agreed to work with Prichard and Kinna to produce these pamphlets. Seeds for Change is a training organisation supported primarily by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and an important node in the contemporary UK social and environmental justice networks. Gaining the support of Seeds for Change is impact in itself. Their website has 400,000 downloads per year and is linked to around 1500 sites. Not usually known for supporting explicitly anarchist projects, working with Prichard and Kinna gave Seeds for Change the opportunity to discuss constitutionalising as a key aspect of "the support we offer to grassroots social and environmental change groups" [5.6]. Nearly two thousand copies of these pamphlets have been printed and distributed, and hosted on seven websites, leading to considerable further unanticipated impact, as demonstrated in the following cases.

A long-term member of Radical Routes and community organiser for over 20 years, Jed, has been using *Anarchic Agreements*, and our mutual work with Radical Routes. It has enabled her work with two housing coops, two worker cooperatives, two social centres (one with over 200 members), two farms, her work with Permaculture Association UK, and WOOOF, a world-wide volunteer network for organic farm workers. The pamphlet changed the way in which Jed worked with these groups, moving from a focus on consensus decision making to developing constitutions that were changeable, conscious and consensual. *Anarchic Agreements* acted as "a bonding agent for campaign groups, charities and committees with an aspiration to be less hierarchical" [5.6].

In 2019, a Bristol housing cooperative used *Anarchic Agreements* and other texts "to come up with some agreed steps should a conflict arise" [5.6]. Later that year, a member of a worker cooperative in Manchester explained that *Anarchic Agreements* had helped highlight problems with their organisation: "I read *Anarchic Agreements* when I was having difficulties in a workers' co-op I'm involved in. It helped me identify ways that the problems had to do with a lack of shared goals, accountability systems and clarity about our decision making processes. That in turn gave me the confidence to address the issues and I'm pleased to say the co-op has now massively turned around in that respect. Since then, I've been involved in setting up the local Extinction Rebellion group, which gave me a chance to apply some of the lessons at an earlier stage!" [5.6]. During the establishment of the Andrymi social centre in Reykjavik, Iceland, in the winter of 2018, *Anarchic Agreements* fed into discussions about the importance of a positive group culture for communication and decision making. As one member put it, the pamphlet helped crystallise the anarchist "common sense" of the project [5.6].

Anarchic Agreements was also picked up by the founding members of Foodsharing Copenhagen [5.7]. Originally a small group of anarchists, retrieving and redistributing edible waste food from supermarket wheelie bins, they developed into a network of 700 paid and unpaid activists, with c.19,256 followers on Facebook, redistributing to foodbanks and homelessness charities across Copenhagen. Managing this new network, while staying true to their anarchist principles, was a challenge. In an unsolicited email received in 2018 from Foodsharing Copenhagen, the group explain that "The aim was through focussing on the key principles and some of the later questions [of the pamphlet] to make decision making more distributed within the working groups so that people were more empowered in working within and collaboratively running them. We can happily say that both of these working groups have been functioning well without a clear leader for just over 3 months now" [5.7]. Foodsharing Copenhagen has since gone from strength to strength, in 2019 saving 13000 tonnes of food to feed over 16000 people [5.7].

Finally, Common Weal is a Scotland-wide 'think and do tank', which consisted of over two dozen activist groups active during the Scottish independence referendum campaign in 2014. In order to sustain the network after the referendum, and to build capacity in non-hierarchical ways, Common Weal invited Prichard, Kinna and Swann to work with them to develop a constitutional process to link up their various local groups. As they put it, the aim was to *"provide a clear direction and purpose for our local groups. A constitution could be the connecting force bringing national and local levels together, and (possibly more important) it could be the connecting force bringing all local groups together"* [5.8]. This collaboration mirrored in parts the work with the IWW and RR, and resulted in a co-authored report, and recommendations for network building and internal horizontal democracy. As with the other projects, this research and consultation process helped support and build the network, by drawing the parts into a collective conversation about who they were and what they wanted as a whole.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Blakley et al (2018), 'Democracy in the Union', Report to the IWW, and testimony from Peter Davies, IWW.

5.2 Motions as Carried, IWW Annual Conference 2018.

5.3 IWW online training platform:

<https://retraining.jones.iww.org.uk/#/id/5e55689228407522a2c7d6fd>

5.4 Hornby et al (2018) 'I'm not really interested in giving housing to Nazis: Preliminary Report of the 5.1 Sessions', and link to Radical Routes website.

5.5 Radical Routes, letter, 20.2.18.

5.6 Anarchic Agreements (2018, 2020) with testimonial evidence from: (5.6a) Co-Director of Seeds for Change, (5.6b) Bristol Housing Coop, (5.6c) Andrymi, social centre and, (5.6d) a Co-operative development worker and community organiser.

5.7 Food Sharing Copenhagen Website

<https://web.archive.org/web/20201117105712/https://foodsharingcph.org/story/> and testimonial from Food Sharing Copenhagen.

5.8 Common Weal, letter, 21.9.16.