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An Anarchist Guide to Fashion

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In the 90's, the anti-(corporate) globalization movement was at the forefront of the conversation in radical political circles. From the Carnival Against Capital to the Zapatistas to the Battle in Seattle, the fight against global capitalism raged on. This battle raged on side-by-side with the fight against sweatshop labor with protesters targeting companies like Gap and Nike for their use of child labor, workers' rights violations, and environmental destruction.

Since then, Gap has put out a series of public statements denying prior knowledge of these problems, and promising to investigate and correct the issues — while time and again continuing to be caught engaging in the same practices. Nike has made a conscious effort to green their image, and reduce their environmental impact (in certain areas) with programs such as Nike Grind and products like the Trash Talk shoe. Yet, it seems that they've done little-to-nothing to improve their labor practices in any meaningful way. Nothing more than typical greenwashed capitalism.

With the rise of fast fashion culture, the problems of the fashion industry are only multiplied. Such a culture demands that new cheap products be released on a continuous basis, with old prod-

ucts being rotated out typically every week. This not only leads to increased consumption, as people strive to maintain the latest fashion trends, but it also vastly increases waste output as we toss more of our old clothing in the garbage. Such cheaply made clothes are not made to last and such an increase in demand for new products only amplifies the problems in the production process.

With the increase in demand for cheap clothing material, many manufacturers are turning to inexpensive synthetic materials such as polyester instead of natural materials such as cotton. The petroleum-based synthetic fiber has become one of the most used clothing materials worldwide, consuming up to 70 million barrels of oil a year. This doesn't include the fossil fuels used in the rest of the extraction, production, and distribution process. Polyester, being non-biodegradable, takes between 20–200 years to break down and is also one of the largest contributors to microplastic pollution in our water systems.

For those that do use cotton or other natural materials, high demand is met by the use of industrial farming methods which typically include the use of toxic herbicides, pesticides, and fungicides which can harm the soil and flow into our water systems. Such farms often utilize other harmful practices such as monocropping or worker abuse as well. All those child laborers didn't stop making clothes, they started making even more to meet the higher demand. Fast fashion has lead to worse working conditions and more abuse, all for the sake of cheap new clothing.

Yes, Students United Against Sweatshops still exists, but what else can we do to help combat these industries in our everyday lives?

Divest from these corporations as much as possible. Boycotts, informational campaigns, and calls for other institutions to divest from these companies could all play a part in advancing this cause. But this also means divesting from the state, which props these entities up via subsidies, immunities, and favorable regulations, by avoiding paying the very taxes which fund these actions. This can

released into our water systems when we wash our laundry. Other factors such as electricity, water, and chemical use should also be considered.

Some tips to reduce these concerns include washing clothes only when necessary, only in full loads, and at lower temperatures. Since friction produces more microfiber debris, it is advised to separate hard and soft fabrics when sorting laundry, to only use liquid detergent (yes, this means no soapnuts or washing balls), to never wash clothing with hard items such as shoes, and to lessen your spin cycles. Microfiber filters come pre-installed in some washing machines, but for those without, one can be manually installed. Alternatively, one could use another form of filtration such as microfiber filtering laundry bags or items such as the Coraball. Hand washing or using a manual wash bag is also a solid alternative, although it still comes with the same concerns over microfibers entering our water systems, so it all depends on how you filter and/or dispose of the water you use. Concerning detergent, it is best to use organic unscented detergents since they are less likely to contain toxic pollutants. You can always add in a few drops of their favorite food-grade essential oils if you enjoy scented detergent. Finally, avoid tumble dryers if at all possible, for the same reason you want to avoid long spin cycles. Clotheslines are always a classic alternative.

All of these models offer something to build off of when creating our own models moving forward. We need to build a fashion industry that is built on organic farming, sustainability, reuse, repurposing, sharing, recycling, democratic control of the workplace, tax avoidance, and the circular economy while also shifting the ways we consume, wash, and dispose of our clothing. We need to build a more anarchistic fashion industry.

be done by operating in the informal economy — by means of gifting, barter, and alternative currencies such as precious metals, labor notes, or cryptocurrency. #DivestWallStreet is encouraging individuals to do just that by exchanging at least $1 into a cryptocurrency of their choice every single day for the next year as a means to slowly transition people to using crypto as their main currency.

Boycotts and divestment are only half the answer to combating fast fashion, however. We must still tackle the issue of building ethical alternatives — otherwise, people will have nothing to turn to instead. As of now, few exist. Even the ones that do exist still have issues of their own. The best thing folks can do is to get their clothing second-hand instead of buying new. Yes, you can always buy from thrift stores but there are plenty of other options as well. Clothing swaps, free stores, hand-me-downs, free boxes, and even dumpster diving (especially behind thrift stores) are all ways you can find free clothing. These are also resources we can use to decrease our waste. Instead of throwing away clothing we no longer wear, give it away to someone who will use it! One can also repurpose old clothes into new designs and outfits with just some basic sewing or crafting skills, while some clothing can even be recycled to make brand new clothes or other products.

Teemill has been at the forefront of the fight against fast fashion. Their model attempts to be as sustainable as possible at all points in the product's lifecycle. They use organic farming methods to produce the cotton they use for their products. They run as much of their operations as possible using solar and other forms of renewable energy, and also have an in-house water filtration system for their factories. All their clothing is printed on-demand to decrease waste and overproduction and is shipped out in sustainable paper packaging made from cotton scraps left over from the production process. Their products are meant to last and can be sent back when the wearer no longer wants it, no matter the condition, so it can be recycled and made into new shirts, thus completing the circular economy.

This model seems to be leading the way for a new environmental standard in the fashion industry. However, they are still a capitalist company and operate on a hierarchical model that is inherently built on worker exploitation, and thus a worker-controlled model is still very much a necessity.

Another company looking to tackle the waste created by the clothing industry is Rent the Runway, which attempts to solve the problem by utilizing the sharing economy. Much like tool libraries or ridesharing, Rent the Runway allows folks to rent clothing for a few days at a time a return it either in person at one of their retail locations or via mail. This idea on its own does little to discourage fast fashion itself, as Rent the Runway customers can still seek the latest fast fashion trend via the service, but it does help tackle the problem of waste and gives us another model to look to when developing our own.

In the realm of footwear, Liberty Shoes has made waves recently for their anarchist-themed designs. Started with the desire for an agorist shoe-maker, Liberty Shoes unfortunately currently operates through a larger on-demand shoemaking company based in Italy. But much like Teemill's print-on-demand service, their on-demand service also greatly reduces waste by ensuring that products are only made upon purchase thus ensuring no overstock. Other information on their extraction and production methods is sparse, however, and it is unknown how sustainably sourced their materials are or what their working conditions, electricity and water usage, or environmental policies are. Of course these are things that we as consumers are purposely kept in the dark about in most cases, which is why ethical consumerism is essentially impossible under our current system, but thankfully the future plans for Liberty Shoes includes raising enough money to begin manufacturing independently — which would allow for them to have more control over the materials used and the labor standards set and to operate in a much more agoristic fashion.

Of course, Adbusters beat Liberty Shoes to the game almost a decade ago with their Blackspot brand shoes. Touted as the most ethical shoe ever made, their Converse knock-off is made from organic hemp with recycled bicycle tire for the sole — and is 100% vegan and union made. While the Blackspot Unswoosher design looks great, their selection is limited to just the one design, and their plan to challenge Nike's sales has yet to take off.

Aside from Adbusters, one of the few other radical alternatives comes from the Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities in Chiapas, Mexico where the Zapatista community has established thriving agricultural and clothing industries which export around $44 million worth of goods each year to communities worldwide while striving for ecological sustainability. While they are probably most famous for their coffee, via their online store you can also find shirts, blouses, hats, shorts, bandannas, boots, bags, scarves, and more.

In their quest towards ecological sustainability, the Zapatistas have discontinued practices such as the extraction of oil, uranium, and precious metals in their communities and have also embraced organic farming methods which eschew the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers. Despite this, they have been criticized by both environmentalists and the local indigenous Lacandon Maya people for their use of protected areas of the Lacandon Jungle for practices such as logging, farming, and settlement construction. So even while their practices may be more sustainable, they are still using protected wildland to grow the crops and raise the livestock which are later used to create the clothing they sell.

At the end of the day, no matter where you get your clothing from, there are still other concerns, be they environmental or economic. Even if you buy locally made organic clothing from your local worker-run union shop and recycle every scrap, there are still other concerns to be had.

As stated previously, microfibers are one of the leading causes of water pollution, although they are far from the only microplastics