## An Anarchist's Cookbook

a blog about food & lifestyles outside 'consumer society'

Written & produced by Paul Mobbs – ramblinactivist at fraw orgale

Available free on-line at: http://www.fraw.org.uk/aac/

For the video accompanying this post, go to: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nA7yZ4lfghc

As a Russian commentator said recently, "you thought politics was something that didn't involve you, and now it's sending you to be killed". The emerging, multifaceted crisis of global food supply has been created by 'political choice', operating, for the most part, outside the political debate which most people perceive: Governments set food policy for ideological and economic reasons; and most of those reasons do not protect, as a priority, the well-being of the public or their long-term future; instead, it enhances the economic power of the assetowning class at the heart of, "the 12".

Archbishop Helder Camara<sup>4</sup> famously said, "When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist." Why doesn't the popular discussion of food recognise its innately political nature? 5; why has food become a signifier of status and affluence, not a means to guarantee general human well-being?; and conversely, why is the failure of states to guarantee a 'right to food', and to 'food sovereignty', the greatest political challenge to our future well-being?

Unless people wake up to that, rather like those indifferent Russian citizens, the developing global food crisis will upend the presently insulated, indifferent, and comfortable lifestyle of those in 'The West' – for which the recent 'cost of living crisis' has been only a brief taste of what is to come.

The 'radicals' of the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century knew this. Their politics was far more tangible: It was about food, shelter, and meeting the 'basics' of life. As industrialism dulled people's senses to the 'essentials' of sustaining life, so the political debates which occupied people's minds drifted toward more esoteric, 'First World' issues'.

'An Anarchist's Cookbook', Part 7, Snow Moon 2023:

# Bread, Soup, & Pie, Episode 1. 'Food! - It's Political!'

(whether you like it or not)

When I started 'An Anarchist's Cookbook', I was trying to push (ever so softly) a neglected debate in Britain: 'The politics of food'. In many parts of the world this is a major issue in daily life. In our affluent culture, though, it appears that many - even the anarchists! - don't regard 'food' as the guarantor of life, health, and hence our very existence.

In this mini-series: I'm going to explore the issue of food in the affluent world; how its value to our existence as free individuals is neglected; why people need to focus on the practical expression of 'food sovereignty'; and I'll do that by cooking the simplest of foods – bread, soup, and pie.

That isn't a new problem. It was lamented by the anarchist Peter Kropotkin in his 1906 book, 'The Conquest of Bread's:

"Whether the leaders belonged to the middle or the working classes, it was always middle class ideas which prevailed. They discussed various political questions at length, but forgot to discuss the question of bread."

I love food: I like growing it; I like foraging for it; I like preparing it; I like preserving and storing it; and through all of that practical effort, I like feeding it to family and friends. For me, food is the basis for all the other parts of our lifestyle. Food is the connection to our authentic, biological nature as living creatures, sharing the world with a host of other creatures, in a complex global ecology. Get that one thing right, and all the other parts of your chosen lifestyle are 'negotiable'.

It's taken a long time to create the materials in this mini-series. Truth be told, it's actually really annoying to have to interrupt the joyful process of food preparation by trying to film it; or worse, weighing the ingredients!

Instead of rushing to publish this series, over 2022 I produced some 'cooking-free' videos around the subject of 'The Right to Food'9, and how that intersects with the origins of the 'cost of living crisis' 10 – just to test people's reactions to these ideas. While positive, I felt the response to those videos was still ignorant of the innately 'political' nature 11 of food within our lives; and why the alternatives to that process are based within anarchist ideas – as they require us to collectivise and take control of the natural resources communities require to ensure their future, sustainable supply of food.

Though future episodes will focus on food preparation, in this first part I'll talk about the 'big idea': That a successful lifestyle must be based on access to sufficient, healthy food.

#### Our food habits are an expression of our life

I've perceived the politics of the land and food<sup>12</sup> all my life: From learning as a child to grow food on our family's allotment, and why that was important for our family's well-being. That allotment doesn't exist now - it's an industrial estate. If we have a crisis of food quality, food banks, and poverty in Britain today, it's because the local support mechanisms which once enabled people to feed themselves have been dismantled by neoliberalism's 40-year project<sup>13</sup> to asset-strip the British state<sup>14</sup>.

Like those awakening Russians mentioned earlier, I could introduce this series with some hard-core, but perhaps boring analysis of the politics of food. Instead, I'll just describe my average week while I was writing this script (in September 2022):

We live on a minimal income. That's a conscious decision 15: A trade-off between being able to live and follow our creative passions; and living in a way where our material desires demand that we have 'proper jobs' to fund that lifestyle. Therefore - like those who the media describe as being, 'in poverty' - how we feed ourselves, stay warm, and meet life's everyday material challenges, is more significant for us than the 'average' (i.e. middle class) family.

On Monday, my week began by making bread. Three large loaves of blended wholemeal/white sourdough. Each probably costs around £1/loaf to make. A few pence cheaper than a bag of sliced 'industrial' white bread 16, and probably much less than half the cost of something similar in the supermarket. But the price is irrelevant: It tastes lovely; it's way better for you than 'industrial' bread; and making it is a joy.

Over the Summer we filled one draw of our freezer with fresh raspberries — picked from our small plot<sup>17</sup> of next-to-no maintenance raspberry bushes in the garden. That four-square-metre plot probably produced getting on for £100 (shop equivalent price) of raspberries this year: We've five or six kilos in the freezer; we also ate a lot fresh; and then we distributed the excess to our neighbours.

In return, a neighbour had just given us about six kilos of fresh pears from their tree. We ate some. And on Thursday I turned much of the rest into pear pies to store in the freezer for later.

Such examples of 'co-operative' food culture are a natural part of human communities across the globe – and are innately political: They express the basic ideas of non-economic exchange and reciprocity<sup>18</sup> which operate across human societies; albeit one which Western economics has re-engineered into a hierarchical, non-reciprocal, and exploitative process.

We don't have access to land to grow food; the allotments where I grew food as a child are now industrial units; and our small house has little space to store or grow food. The situation where an economic elite controls access to land, for their exclusive benefit, is a political choice; it's not a technical

inevitability<sup>19</sup> because that's not the situation which existed here locally<sup>8</sup> just a century ago.

The way we use our raspberries, and the reciprocal pears, are examples of 'time-shifting' food calories — more boringly called, 'food preservation'20. For centuries human communities have stored food, shifting the calories available in times of abundance to support their lives in the hard times of 'the hungry season'. And the closer those communities are to the poles, the more deeply engrained these food storage practices become in local traditional cultures.

In this alleged, 'Age of Abundance'21, less romantically named, 'The Post-Scarcity Economy'22, that idea has been lost: People have traded work in this industrialised, highly technical society, to produce an income, to supply their engineered desire23 for goods on demand; but as was shown in the recent 'supply chain crisis24, that's an illusion based upon the seamless operation of logistics chains - and if that seamless operation is perturbed the supermarket shelves empty fairly quickly.

After a supermarket shop in the middle of the week I had to rearrange 'The Brexit Box'25.

As well as the freezer, to manage our more mundane urban existence we have something recently named, 'The Brexit Box': Large plastic boxes, stored in a cupboard, containing bags and boxes of dried, tinned, and bottled foods. In fact, we've used this tactic for many years, the result of being members of a food co-operative during the 1980s and 1990s when we used to buy large quantities of food in bulk - until that kind of 'hippie food' became fashionable, and was cheaper to buy in the shops.

Since Brexit we've expanded our storage to deal with rising prices. It acts like a buffer: We buy an excess of goods when they're reduced in price; we store the excess in the boxes; and then we use our stock rather than buy full-priced goods each week to save money. Ideally, when goods are on special offer, we buy enough to last until the next special offer — but with the important restriction that they will all get used before they go out-of-date.

On Saturday I had my regular walk out into the countryside. On the way back into town I collect two kilos of blackberries<sup>26</sup>; and on my return, before I even take my boots off, they're dunked in water to remove the cobwebs and thistledown, drained, and then put in the freezer.

Like raspberries, blackberries are a treat for the Autumn and Winter months - providing valuable vitamins and minerals on those dark cold days. Yes, you could just buy orange juice; but these provide not only 'free' nutrition, they're also an emotional, evocative smell and flavour of the late Summer that cheers the spirit in the dark days<sup>27</sup> — way more than a glass of orange juice ever could.

Why go to all this effort? Well, personally, it's not an effort, it's fun! More importantly, it's about being able to freely assemble the lifestyle I want rather than having to follow a proscribed pattern.

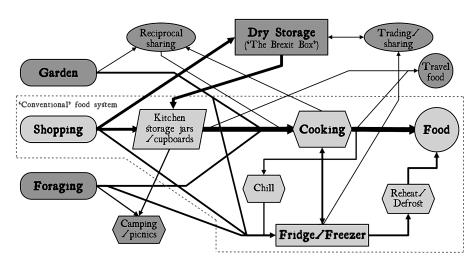
When I tell people about our lifestyle a common reaction is, "I don't have time for that". That's precisely the point: By not having a conventional 9-5 job, I have the freedom to do this28; and in return, I can pursue the kinds of work I want to do.

Of course, the 'cost' of not having that regular job is that, willingly, I forego many of the material things other people consider 'normal': I don't drive; I don't have foreign holidays; I don't have a mobile phone (that one's getting hard these days); and I tend to wear what clothes I have to destruction.

Friends who live a far more off-grid existence then me, based upon permaculture principles<sup>29</sup>, often map their lifestyle. These plans illustrate how each part functions – sometimes to the level of individual plants or equipment – to enable their life as-a-whole to operate successfully. The diagram below shows a far simpler map of our home 'food system'.

If we had a larger garden, and storage space, we could expand this to favour the garden and foraging far more; and rely less upon 'conventional' supermarket shopping. That would also significantly reduce our costs. In reality, we have to work within the restrictions the 'urban system' places upon us which ultimately means paying the higher costs that urban living entails due to the barriers British society erects to the 'self-sufficient' options<sup>30</sup> for living.

If our 'everyday' lifestyle is in doubt — be that because of Russian gas blockades, climate change, or an economically inept government — then the only true response is to focus on the 'real' things in our lives, not abstract political or economic ideas. To adapt to inevitable future change, what we have to focus on is the boring, humdrum details of how we eat every day, and how we sustain that. In the end, that all relies on one thing: Practical skills.



This diagram shows how our 'food system' operates. The 'conventional' system (the central line) assumes that food is bought, stored in cupboards or the the freezer, and then heated and eaten. Our system extends/supplements that through the use of more storage, gardening, foraging, and sharing with friends and neighbours — optimising price and availability.

### "What we proclaim is The Right to Well-Being: Well-Being for All!"

'Politics is boring'. Even if you're in the 10%-20% who the mainstream political debate addresses, it's still something not to actively participate in. Today both politics and economics are abstract<sup>31</sup>, operating outside of most people's direct experience (and in fact, it's most people's direct experience which those in power rarely address these days!). Worse still, those trying to 'change the world' then react to that irrelevant political debate, also talking in abstract ideas, and so don't enthuse people's vision for change.

There are always 'alternatives': If someone – for example, Margaret Thatcher – says 'there is no alternative'32, then inevitably there's some deeper ideological motive in that statement which seeks to restrict your available choices.

That's what this mini-series – 'Bread, Soup, and Pie' – is all about: It focusses on the basic issues of how we can organise our lives to meet our need for food, and by meeting our basic need for food, enable those 'other options' to take place – irrespective of the options we are told to follow by the 'suicide cult'33 of the dominant consumer culture.

The subtitle above is from Peter Kropotkin's<sup>34</sup> 'The Conquest of Bread'. As Kropotkin says at the beginning of that chapter<sup>35</sup>:

"Well-being for all is not a dream. It is possible, realisable, owing to all that our ancestors have done to increase our powers of production."

In order to have 'choices', outside of the conventional consumer lifestyle, what is required are practical skills — of the sort possessed by our ancestors. Not simply cooking, or gardening, but more generally the ability to anticipate and plan what we do

'right now' to enable our lives to be easier in the future.

For example, the diagram of our home food system shows 'travel food'. When travelling we can't afford to stop at cafés or chain coffee shops. We take our own food.

That idea was taught to me in my childhood, when on long journeys we'd stop and cook food on the side of the road. Over the years — with my love of the outdoors and camping — I've developed that basic skill to the point where I can cook many of the things I make in the kitchen outdoors on a stick-fire.

That's another 'skill level' that creates greater freedom to choose: It enables you to

leave-behind the 'conventional' cooking process — be that by choice, or because of future power cuts, or economic crises — to improvise how you cook the ingredients available, to feed yourself under any circumstance.

Why, then, choose 'bread, soup, & pie', to illustrate this process of developing our skills?:

'Bread'<sup>36</sup> is something innately human; it represents the use of cereal-based agriculture to feed society for the past 12,000 years<sup>37</sup>. Now there's a lot that's bad about that system, especially its recent industrialised form; and despite the protestations of 'primitivist'<sup>38</sup> types against eating cereals, the fact is people will be forced to continue using some cereals in the near future as a means to feed themselves.

A kilo of raw wheat (the weight of a loaf) doesn't give a lot of nutrition: You can boil it and eat the 'gruel'<sup>39</sup> produced to get some calories from the starches; it's possible to sprout those seeds to get calories from the liberated sugars, and some better levels of nutrition as the indigestible components are broken down through germination<sup>40</sup>; but the greatest level of nutrition is produced by fermenting those grains — which magnifies the nutrition available to a level higher than the wheat alone — with the assistance of the micro-organisms used in bread-making.

Bread-making is a foundational skill in a society based upon cereal agriculture; and if mastered, it enables people to convert a supply of cheap raw grains into a highly nutritious food.

By 'soup'41, I don't simply mean a watery broth. About 800,000 years ago<sup>42</sup>, long before the development of settled agriculture, one of humanity's most important developments was the use of fire to cook food. In particular, first roasting, and later boiling, was essential to breaking-down the fibre and carbohydrates in food, making more of the calories they contained available to our gut.

'Soup', therefore, means boiling things to make them more nutritious - from grains, to root vegetables, to foraged greens. That includes watery soups, but also the more traditionally lumpy 'stew'43.

Finally, 'pie'44 isn't about the pie-filling — it's about pastry-making45, which was humanity's more recent food invention. When pastry was made in Medieval times it wasn't usually eaten. It was basically a container made of flour and water, used to hold meat or vegetables, that could be baked and then consumed — with the hard, often burnt outer pastry case thrown-away.

From the Sixteenth Century what made pastry edible was the addition of fats – varying levels of which, in combination with different grades of flour and leavening agents, created the range of pastries traditionally used today.

'Pie' is therefore really about pastry-making – because once mastered, this allows you to create sweet or savoury pies, either in baking tins, or free-standing like old-fashioned baked pies and pasties.

Essentially then, 'Bread, Soup, and Pie' is about learning the foundational skills of cookery; where possible, not just in the kitchen but outdoors too. That's because - in usual circumstances, or in emergencies - once you have these basic skills in your head it's possible to feed yourself and others under any condition.

#### 'Better living through Anarchy!'

Finally, to return to the 'political', the deeper motivation behind this process is to liberate people<sup>46</sup> from the consumer lifestyle: To help people avoid eating 'products', where convenience or fashion<sup>47</sup> is used to extract more 'added value'<sup>48</sup> from consumers; and instead enabling people to use 'raw' ingredients, to cook either conventionally bought, or better still grown, traded, or foraged foods.

Recent academic research demonstrates that allotments<sup>49</sup> and integrated polyculture<sup>50</sup> systems, like permaculture gardens, produce as much or more food than intensive agriculture<sup>51</sup> – emitting less carbon, and demanding less material inputs in the process. Likewise food cooked from raw ingredients, where that takes place as part of a whole system of food buying, storage, and use, is more efficient than the conventional, highly packaged ready-meal or pre-prepared ingredients option.

If we are going to adapt to climate change and resource depletion, and still live in a civil manner, then we need to co-operatively produce more food<sup>52</sup> – and where possible that has to be through direct production rather than relying upon the 'food industry' to supply that for us. That means people relearning the skills to produce food; and as part of that process, living more simply and communally in order to satisfy their need for food.

'Bread, Soup, and Pie' is not meant to be a 'solution'; it's 'a start'. A means to learn the skills to create food independence, and from there develop those skills to whatever level suits a person's chosen lifestyle: It's about options, not 'pure' ideological outcomes; it's about 'personal choice', not 'brands'; most of all, it's about realising that good, nutritious food is the pre-requisite to any lifestyle – and therefore it has to be at the forefront of our future plans, not a vague, assumed outcome of some other grand vision for change.

An Anarchist's Cookbook, Part 7: Bread, Soup, & Pie, Episode 1. 'Food! - It's Political!' (whether you like it or not)

Note: The experiences described in this paper are to be performed at your own risk! No liability is accepted for any loss or damage to your illusory affluent consumer lifestyle. © January 2023 Paul Mobbs. Made available under the Creative Commons Attribution

Non-Commercial Share-Alike 4.0 International license. For commercial use, or to commission bespoke articles or workshops by Paul Mobbs, email ramblinactivist{at}fraw org uk

- 1 Ramblinactivist's Blogs: 'An Anarchist's Cookbook'. http://www.fraw.org.uk/aac/index.shtml
- 2 Wikipedia: 'Food politics'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Food\_politics
- 3 Wikipedia: 'We are the 99%'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/We\_are\_the\_99%25
- 4 Wikipedia: 'Helder Camara'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H%C3%A9lder\_C%C3%A2mara
- 5 The Conversation: 'Veganism why we should see it as a political movement rather than a dietary choice', 24th January 2023. https://theconversation.com/veganism-why-we-should-see-it-as-a-political-movement-rather-than-a-dietary-choice-197318
- 6 Wikipedia: '2021-present United Kingdom cost of living crisis'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021%E2%80%93present\_United\_Kingdom\_cost\_of\_living\_crisis
- 7 Wikipedia: 'First World problem'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\_World\_problem
- 8 A Book in Five Minutes: 'The Conquest of Bread', Peter Kropotkin (1906). http://www.fraw.org.uk/blog/reviews/008/index.shtml
- 9 Ramblinactivist's Videos: 'The 'Right to Food' Revisited The Cost of Living Crisis & the Coming Crash', May 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rF\_-ydw48Do
- Ramblinactivist's Videos: 'Fuel Poverty, the Cost of Living Crisis, & Climate Change'. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGprWXyHKiM
- 11 Ramblinactivist's Videos: 'The State's Monopoly on Hunger', November 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogyHZo7wbA8
- 12 Wikipedia: 'Indigenous land rights'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous\_land\_rights
- 13 A Book in Five Minutes: 'The Shock Doctrine', Naomi Klein (2007). http://www.fraw.org.uk/blog/reviews/019/index.shtml
- 14 Ramblinactivist's Videos: 'Why the lights are going out on Britain's asset-stripped nation', September 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRXMqN4iDQk
- 15 Wikipedia: 'Simple living'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simple\_living
- 16 Wikipedia: 'Chorleywood bread process'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chorleywood\_bread\_process
- 17 An Anarchist's Cookbook, Part 4: 'The Autumn Raspberry Harvest', 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvjeksuBR28
- 18 Wikipedia: 'Reciprocity (cultural anthropology)'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reciprocity\_(cultural\_anthropology)
- 19 IPPR: 'Wealth inequality isn't inevitable it's a political choice', December 2017. https://www.ippr.org/blog/wealth-inequality-isn-t-inevitable-it-s-a-political-choice
- 20 Wikipedia: 'Food preservation'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Food\_preservation
- 21 Eudaimonia and Co: 'The End of the Age of Abundance (and the Beginning of the Age of Scarcity)', 28th August 2022. https://eand.co/the-end-of-the-age-of-abundance-and-the-beginning-of-the-age-of-scarcity-9222a316c8e1
- 22 Wikipedia: 'Post-scarcity economy'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-scarcity\_economy
- 23 Wikipedia: 'The Engineering of Consent'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\_Engineering\_of\_Consent
- 24. Wikipedia: '2021-2022 global supply chain crisis'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021-2022-global\_supply\_chain\_crisis
- 25 CNN: 'Boris Johnson's Brexit choices are making Britain's fuel and food shortages worse', 29th September 2021. https://edition.cnn.com/2021/09/28/business/brexit-fuel-food-shortages/index.html
- 26 Ramblinactivist's Videos: 'Autumn Blackberry & Apple Pie Welcoming the Autumn with a forage', 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ex6wEbmXv54
- 27 Wikipedia: 'Seasonal affective disorder'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seasonal\_affective\_disorder
- 28 Journal of Peasant Studies: 'Introduction critical perspectives on food sovereignty', October 2014. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03066150.2014.963568
- 29 Wikipedia: 'Permaculture'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Permaculture
- 30 Wikipedia: 'Off-the-grid'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Off-the-grid
- 31 Wikipedia: 'Metanarrative'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metanarrative
- 32 Wikipedia: 'There is no alternative'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/There\_is\_no\_alternative
- 33 Wikipedia: 'Ecological collapse'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecological\_collapse
- 34 Wikipedia: 'Peter Kropotkin'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter\_Kropotkin
- 35 Anarchist Library: Chapter 2, 'The Conquest of Bread', Peter Kropotkin (1906). https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/petr-kropotkin-the-conquest-of-bread\*toc6
- 36 Wikipedia: 'Bread'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bread
- 37 Wikipedia: 'Neolithic Revolution'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neolithic\_Revolution
- 38 Wikipedia: 'Anarcho-primitivism'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anarcho-primitivism
- 39 Wikipedia: 'Gruel'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gruel
- 40 Wikipedia: 'Sprouting'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sprouting
- 41 Wikipedia: 'Soup'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soup
- 42 New Scientist: 'Early humans may have cooked fish in ovens 780,000 years ago', 14th November 2022. https://www.newscientist.com/article/2346856-early-humans-may-have-cooked-fish-in-ovens-780000-years-ago/
- 43 Wikipedia: 'Stew'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stew
- 44 Wikipedia: 'Pie'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pie
- 45 Wikipedia: 'Pastry'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pastry
- 46 Wikipedia: 'Food sovereignty'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Food\_sovereignty
- 47 Journal of Marketing: 'Price Competition in 1955', Victor Lebow, Spring 1955. http://www.fraw.org.uk/data/simplicity/lebow\_1955.pdf
- 48 Wikipedia: 'Value added'. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Value\_added
- 49 University of Sussex: 'City allotments match farming productivity per square metre', December 2021. https://www.sussex.ac.uk/broadcast/read/56961
- 50 Landscape and Urban Planning: 'Life-cycle energy assessment and carbon footprint of peri-urban horticulture', vol.172 pp.60-68, 2018. http://www.fraw.org.uk/data/simplicity/perez-neira\_2018.pdf
- 51 Nature Food: 'Food systems are responsible for a third of global anthropogenic GHG emissions', vol.2 pp.198-209, March 2021. https://ecbpi.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Nature-food-systems-GHG-emissions-march-2021.pdf
- 82 Resilience: 'Food Sovereignty This is What Anarchy Looks Like', 19th October 2015. https://www.resilience.org/stories/2015-10-19/food-sovereignty-this-is-what-anarchy-looks-like/