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# A No Borders manifesto

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1. Freedom of movement is not a right; it is a real living force. Despite all the obstacles that states put in people's way — all the barriers of barbed wire, money, laws, ID cards, surveillance and so on — millions cross borders every day. For every migrant stopped or deported, many more get through and stay, whether legally or clandestinely. Don't overestimate the strength of the state and its borders. Don't underestimate the strength of everyday resistance.

2. In the 19th century, militants fighting against slavery in the US created an 'underground railroad' that smuggled many thousand runaway slaves to safety, as well as enabling acts of sabotage and rebellion. In the 20th century, the term was used again by the anti-Nazi resistance in Europe. Can No Borders become a 21st century underground railroad across Europe and beyond?

3. The most successful and inspiring No Borders work has been just about this: creating strong networks to support free movement across Europe's borders. This is the infrastructure of a growing movement of resistance: contacts, information, resources, meeting points, public drop-ins, safe houses, and so

on. A pool of formal and informal connections, a web of solidarity, working on both public and clandestine levels.

4. People manage to move, live, and evade state control because they are part of communities and networks. Migration happens because of millions of connections between millions of people. Our No Borders networks are one small part of this. Yet, as a movement, we can play an active role in bringing such connections together across national and cultural boundaries. Our struggle is one and the same.

5. People move for many different reasons. Many of the causes of global migration can be traced back to the West's imperial and capitalist ventures: western-manufactured weapons and armed conflicts, wars of aggression in pursuit of oil and other natural resources, repressive regimes backed by Western governments, climate change and land grabs, and so on. But this is not the whole story. We shouldn't overemphasise the role of western powers and fall into the trap of seeing people who migrate as helpless victims. People have always travelled in search of better living conditions, or simply to pursue their dreams and desires.

6. Modern states try to turn movement into a right that is granted or denied according to economic and political power. Elites and 'first world' citizens with purchasing power can travel and settle where they want, while the poor are controlled and criminalised. Some may be let through because they are deemed to be useful to the economy, or because they are classed as 'genuine refugees'. Categories like refugee, asylum seeker, economic migrant and illegal immigrant are used to divide and control. This is why we use the term 'migrant' for all.

7. There are many fronts to fight on against this rotten economic and political system. We do not want to make No Borders some kind of model or metaphor for every fight against domination and repression. We are drawn to this struggle for our own reasons and out of our own passions and histories

nesses. We should be clear about what our actions can actually achieve, and where we need to improve and be better prepared. Dogmas, fantasies, and ingrained habits should be questioned all the time. We must acknowledge the valuable work to be done by people who, for various reasons, cannot take on certain risks. But we must also recognise that, if our movement is to begin to really challenge the border regime, many of us will face serious risks and far more serious repression. Our defence against repression and fear is to create a strong culture of solidarity.

12. Radical grassroots movements are the groundwork for the new world we carry in our hearts. At first they start as essential support lines for escape and small-scale resistance, and for the small hidden acts of counter-attack and sabotage that are available to the weak. At the same time, resistance and struggle are not separate from the rest of life – these networks and communities are the same ones in which we live, learn, play, work, invent and build alternative social and political structures. As a movement's strength grows, and as crises expose weaknesses in its enemies, these networks become the infrastructure for open rebellion. So the 19th century underground railroad was the basis for slave revolts during the US civil war. The underground railroad of the 1940s broke out into partisan uprisings. What new forms might struggle take in the 21st century? We don't know, but let's find out.

– for example, many of us are migrants or the children of migrants. However, there are some specific reasons why we think free movement is right at the heart of struggles in Europe at this moment.

7.1. Migrants from poor countries are the first line of attack for retrenching European governments and economies in a time of crisis. With limited rights and no visibility, migrants are often the first workers to lose their jobs when the recession bites; the first to be targeted by increased repression and new surveillance technologies; the first to be blamed and scapegoated for capitalism's crises; and the first to be dispensed with when their labour is no longer needed.

7.2. But migrants are often also the first to resist, and to develop alternative infrastructures outside the reach of the state. In 17th century England, travelling workers and beggars thrown off their land by the enclosures started early revolutionary movements like the Levellers, Diggers and Ranters. In the 19th century, anarchism grew up among dispossessed migrant communities in Barcelona, Buenos Aires, Chicago or the East End of London. In the 20th century, the anti-Nazi resistance in France was begun by exiles from Spain and Eastern Europe. The precariousness of migrant groups means they would always need to develop new ways of organising in order to survive. The loss of old ties and certainties encourages new ways of thinking and acting.

7.3. Migrants may be the first under attack, but they won't be the last. The conditions faced by clandestine migrants show what we can all look forward to in austerity Europe: mass unemployment, less employment rights and more exploitation, less welfare, repression more brutal and naked. This is what the crisis really means: the so-called first world turning into a third world, with widespread poverty and a stark class divide. The old compromise of the welfare state, which kept workers in the West quiet by guaranteeing basic living standards, is crumbling. As illusions and disguises are shattered, we see the re-

turn of open confrontation between the elites and the rest of us.

**8.** No Borders has its roots in anarchism. There is plenty to criticise in the recent history of European anarchism. Too often anarchists have retreated into their own identity, forming a subculture and cutting themselves off from the wider struggles around them. But there are also many positive things we should retain, including the Do It Yourself (DIY) culture of recent decades. Social centres, activist kitchens, independent media, housing and workers' co-operatives, secure communication networks and other DIY projects are valuable resources – so long as we recognise that, like migration, activism is not an identity but something we do. For example, No Borders squats in Calais and in big cities across Europe are not lifestyle choices but essential shelters and resource points. And as the safety blanket of European welfare systems is pulled away, more and more of us will have to find new ways to do things ourselves. All our know-how on the streets, at the barricades, in practical support and mobility, will become precious. The point is to make our skills and resources part of wider movements of resistance.

**9.** No Borders needs to be an open and diverse movement. Many different people, with and without papers, have contributions to make. To make this a reality we have to tackle the borders within our movement too. We need to constantly address different forms of privilege, whether based on people's legal status, language, education, gender, race, class, or simply people's other commitments and abilities to face different levels of risk.

**10.** This is not a game. We are fed up with shit actions. We need to distance ourselves from the symbolic stunt activism that has come to dominate many activist scenes. Stunt activism seeks to grab the attention of the mainstream media and, through them, to win over so-called public opinion. It can make sense to pay attention to the media, but not to make

them our main focus. We need to scrap the idea – pushed by the state and media corporations – that there is one unified, homogeneous mass of 'normal people' called the public. There is no such public; only lots of different people and groups with different, often conflicting, interests and desires. And the mainstream media don't speak for any such public anyway – they speak for the media corporations and advertisers who set the agenda.

**11.** We therefore propose a few principles for No Borders activities:

**11.1.** Number one: our actions should be direct actions in the true sense. They should have direct material outcomes, even if these are only small – if we stop one person being deported, if one migration prisoner manages to escape, if one person gets a safe roof over their heads, if we stop one eviction, win one asylum case, help one person trapped in the system to find strength to get through the days, win one workplace struggle, cause some real damage to a company's profits, this is a material gain. When we do meaningless symbolic actions that fail to achieve anything, we only get discouraged, while the system gets stronger. When we achieve direct successes, these reverberate in our communities, encouraging those already taking part and inspiring others to get involved, thereby strengthening the network as a whole.

**11.2.** Number two: every action should also have a broader aim: to build the infrastructure of resistance and rebellion. This means developing and strengthening our networks, making new alliances, acquiring useful skills and material resources. The audience of our actions is not 'public opinion'; it is all those we want fighting beside us. Our aim is not to convince the majority of the European population of the No Borders argument. The people we most need to work with already know very well what borders mean.

**11.3.** Number three: pick tactics strategically. We should think carefully, and seriously, about our strengths and weak-