

Opportunities

Lawrence Jarach

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The recent string of arrests and indictments of anarchists across the United States and Europe should come as no surprise. With increased visibility at various large and small protests, anarchists have begun to instill the same kind of panic among polite society as they did in the 1880s. What is surprising is the kind of commotion the forces of law and order are trying to stir up when attempting to show just how dangerous these various anarchists are. The captured anarchists in the US are all environmental activists who are supposedly associated with the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) or the Animal Liberation Front (ALF); the affidavits of the federal officials involved in the cases throw around the terms anarchist and ELF/ALF as if they were synonymous. While the total number of anarchists is still relatively small, the FBI and other cops would have the public believe that the ELF and ALF are the most dangerous terrorists in the US today. The irony (if there is any in such a situation) is that, unlike the actions of 9-11, abortion clinic bombings, gay bashings, and racially motivated assaults, no actions claimed by either the ELF or ALF have resulted in the death or even injury of a single person. Whatever “terror” is being instilled by the alleged acts of property destruction is the terror of corporate executives losing thousands of dollars, and the terror of the forces of law and order at being shown to be ineffective at preventing and punishing crime. It is only the use of informants/provocateurs and those who have crumbled under the threat of exceedingly harsh sentences that has allowed the FBI to make any cases at all.

With the unwanted attention from law enforcers, anarchist activists have placed a renewed stress on what has been termed Security Culture. While murky in the actual details, the general advice (from those who are supposed to know) remains limited to never using one’s legal name, always masking up at demos, and only talking to trusted comrades. This kind of posturing almost inevitably creates a hierarchy of values concerning the activities and projects of those who Get Shit Done. If you are serious you will opt for the semi- clandestine—often extra-legal—lifestyle promoted by the mythology of Security Culture; others are judged to be neither serious nor effective. However, the majority of the North American arrests were precipitated by the infiltration of snitches into the radical environmental milieu; this should cause people to question both the fetish of Security Culture as well as how it has been honored mostly in the breach. Bragging about one’s accomplishments and invulnerability would seem to fall outside the parameters of good sense, let alone Security Culture.

Anarchists have had an organizational form for decades that precludes the supposed need for Security Culture: the affinity group. Not the phony affinity group model adopted by the American anti- nuclear/peace movement of the late 1970s-early 80s, which still holds sway over most of the current generation of activists, but real *grupos de afinidad*.

Based on strong friendships, enduring relationships, and—most importantly—agreement on political perspective, authentic affinity groups are impossible to infiltrate. But in order to discover if people share affinity, we must get to know each other. Not the knowledge of recognizing comrades at various demos or actions or meetings, but a deep knowledge of our respective political analyses: how we arrived at those analyses: who inspires us; having discussions about the history of and the current issues within our tendencies; and probably getting into arguments about all of it. Knowing where we differ from one another allows us to gain better insight into what we actually agree on.

Before activists make a decision to engage in semi-legal or extra-legal action, it would be wise for them to know—really know—who their comrades are, what they think about the action, and more importantly, if they can be counted on to keep quiet by not bragging to other activists, and not rolling over if caught. Looking at the history of the legal oppression directed at anarchists, the affinity group model, while not perfect, has succeeded far better than anything offered by those who invoke the slogan of Security Culture.

The opportunity to secure ourselves against defeat lies in our own hands, but the opportunity of defeating the enemy is provided by the enemy himself.

- Sun Tzu

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