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Interview with the Mary Nardini Gang

From Vengeance 3

A Gang of Criminal Queers

2009

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The essays in this zine [“Writings of the Mary Nardini Gang”] were written by the Mary Nardini Gang/A Gang of Criminal Queers. These texts come from Bash Back!. Bash Back! was a queer anarchist tendency that started in the Midwest. It aimed to be a network for queer anarchists to connect and to confront the pitiful normality of capital, the state, and heterosexuality. To read more texts like these go steal a copy of “Queer Ultraviolence: Bash Back! Anthology” or look around online.

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VENGEANCE: Does being a proletarian change for you being a militant queer?

MARY NARDINI: Being queer complicates the way we experience our role within capitalism. Queer bodies are often forced to sell their labor in ways that would be excluded from traditional marxist narratives of what it means to be a worker. This includes service workers and sex workers. These forms of exploitation problematize the often heteronormative and patriarchal ideas surrounding what is or isn't labor. Ultimately, the positions of queers and proles intertwine—we are the class that has no control over our bodies. This means different things in various situations. But the bosses that manage our time and the queer bashers that manage our gender are clearly all class-enemies.

V: Why does both the Spectacle and also the mainstream gay and lesbian movement seem to only identify with the middle and upper classes, and never with working and poor people? Who benefits from such a narrative?

MN: It is abundantly obvious that the politicians who lead the “lgbt community” are only interested in preserving power for the ruling class. Political campaigns for gay marriage, gays in the military, and hate crime legislation, only reproduce the capitalist institutions of marriage, military, and the prison industrial complex. And it goes much deeper than that. Representations of queers portray and capitalize on images of wealthy, affluent, white, able-bodied gays and lesbians. You only need to look as far as Will and Grace or a copy of any LGBT magazine to see the way that queer bodies and desires are shaped by capital.

V: Within anarchism, there seems to be a coming clash (or a current clash) between activists and hooligans. Why do you think this is? What are the tensions that have given rise to this division?

MN: To be cheesy and quote The Coming Insurrection: “Everyone finds herself forced to take sides; to choose between anarchy and the fear of anarchy.” The divide that is happening in the broader anarchist milieu is also happening among radical queers. I think that a lot of the tension is rooted in that a lot of people have confused radical queer struggle as a safe haven for the worst form of identity politics. They’re really sorely mistaken. This isn’t about sustaining identities, it is about destroying them.

V: Can you speak about the actions that occurred around the time of the Bash Back Conference and your disappointment with some of the people who responded to those actions?

MN: At the Bash Back! Convergence, a dance-party train occupation. The temporary occupation was an absurd mix of dancing, making-out, and a cacophony of ridiculous chants and singing. This created a situation where people caused a lot of havok, vandalizing the train and reclaiming it as a queered space. A spontaneous street march then erupted from the train. The march attacked luxury cars and pulled shit into the streets.

Someone within the march began pulling newspaper boxes out of the streets and back onto the sidewalk while yelling “this is a peaceful protest.” After the newsboxes were removed, a police

cruiser literally ran over someone’s foot and officers began beating people with their telescoping batons. Four people were arrested.

The next day, all of the liberal, activist types went on a tirade to denounce the previous nights events. A telling anecdote: Three white people stand up in a row, and denounce the occupation as racist, because there were people of color on the train. “There were people of color who actually live in Chicago on that train! They are actually part of the community! That’s racist! People were being rude!” Then, two female-bodied people of color who live in Chicago respond, saying that they find everyone disgusting. “Bash Back! isn’t about being polite, or nice. Bash Back! means challenging and destroying normalcy. This is going to be rude. It’s going to be messy! If you aren’t into this, then you’re in the wrong place.” Everyone is silent for a moment. Then the stack continues. They are ignored and more white activists continue to talk about how the action was racist and alienating to people of color. It continued as folks talked about all the “white dudes with passing privilege” who instigated the situation.

I’m really disgusted by people’s actions and sentiments that day, because of their complicity with the police and their silencing of all the bodies that weren’t white, cisgendered, and male.

V: Where would you like to see Bash Back! go in the next several years, if the network is going to continue?

MN: I would like to see groups of queer anarchists working to build autonomous power and get more conflictual. I’m really excited about the squat that BB! Memphis just opened for homeless queer/trans youth. I’m really excited about groups distributing free pepper-spray and teaching people to fight. I’m excited about queers kicking the shit out of queer bashers, and always about fighting in the streets. Whether people continue to organize under the name “Bash Back!” or not, I think that the network of wild-ass queers who hate everything is going to keep growing and building autonomous power.