CrimethInc.
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mous action, they did not set out to be celebrated, but to privately do what they thought was necessary, just as all of us ought to. They are as normal as any of us—any normal person who takes responsibility for his or her actions is capable of tremendous things.

This is not to say we should all become arsonists. There are countless paths available to those who would take responsibility for themselves, and each person must choose the one that is most appropriate to his or her situation. Let the courage of the non-cooperating Green Scare defendants, who dared to act on their beliefs and refused to betray those convictions even when threatened with life in prison, serve as reminders of just how much normal people like us can accomplish.

But Aiken and her kind are responsible for a lot more than this. As the polar icecaps melt, rainforests are reduced to pulp, and climate change inflicts more and more terrible catastrophes around the planet, they are responsible for stopping all who would take direct action to avert these tragedies. They are responsible, in short, for forcing the wholesale destruction of the natural environment upon everyone else on earth.

Aiken might counter that the so-called democratic system is the most effective way to go about halting that destruction. It sure has worked so far, hasn't it! On the contrary, it seems more likely that she cannot bring herself to honestly consider whether there could be a higher good than the maintenance of law and order. For people like her, obedience to the law is more precious than polar icecaps, rainforests, and cities like New Orleans. Any price is worth paying to avoid taking responsibility for their part in determining the fate of the planet. Talk about *cowardice.*

...and Heroes

So—if McGowan and the other non-cooperating Green Scare defendants are not cowards, does that mean they are heroes?

We should be cautious not to unthinkingly adopt the inverse of Aiken's judgment. In presenting the case for the government, Peifer described the Operation Backfire defendants' exploits as "almost like Mission Impossible." It serves the powers that be to present the defendants as superhuman—the more exceptional their deeds seem to be, the further out of reach such deeds will feel to everyone else.

Similarly, lionizing "heroes" can be a way for the rest of us to let ourselves off the hook: as we are obviously not heroes of their caliber, we need not hold ourselves up to the same standards of conduct. It is a disservice to glorify McGowan, Exile, Sadie, Peter Young, and others like them; in choosing anony-

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make even the insufficient changes called for by liberals. If the dystopian nightmare those scientists predict comes to pass, will the refugees of the future look back at this encounter between McGowan and Aiken and judge *McGowan* the coward?

We live in a democracy, Aiken and her kind insist: bypassing the established channels and breaking the law is akin to attacking freedom, community, and dialogue themselves. That's the same thing they said in 1859.

Those who consider obeying the law more important than abiding by one's conscience always try to frame themselves as the responsible ones, but the essence of that attitude is the desire to evade responsibility. Society, as represented—however badly—by its entrenched institutions, is responsible for decreeing right and wrong; all one must do is brainlessly comply, arguing for a change when the results are not to one's taste but never stepping out of line. That is the creed of cowards, if anything is. At the hearing to determine whether the defendants should be sentenced as terrorists, Aiken acknowledged with frustration that she had no control over what the Bureau of Prisons would do with them regardless of her recommendations—but washed her hands of the matter and gave McGowan and others terrorism enhancements anyway. Doubtless, Aiken feels that whatever shortcomings the system has are not her responsibility, even if she participates in forcing them on others. She's just doing her job.

That's the Nuremberg defense. Regardless of what she thinks of McGowan's actions or the Bureau of Prisons, Aiken is personally responsible for sending him to prison. She is responsible for separating him from his wife, for preventing him from continuing his work supporting survivors of domestic violence. If he is beaten or raped while in prison, it is the same as if Aiken beat or raped him. And not just McGowan, or Paul, or Sadie or Exile, but *every single person* Aiken has ever sent to prison.

Postscript: Cowards…

In reflecting on Judge Aiken's sentencing, let us put aside, for the time being, the question of whether executives who profit from logging, animal exploitation, and genetic engineering are "doing what they need to do to survive." Let's allow to pass, as well, the suggestion that those who run these industries are *more* likely to enter into a "real dialogue" with environmentalists if the latter limit themselves to purely legal activity. Let's even reserve judgment on Aiken's attempt to draw parallels between domestic violence and sarcastically worded communiqués—which parallels the prosecutors' assertion that the ELF, despite having never injured a single human being, is no different from the Ku Klux Klan.

There is but one question we cannot help but ask, in reference to Judge Aiken's rhetoric about cowardice: if she found herself in a situation that called for action to be taken outside the established channels of the legal system, would she be capable of it? Or would she still insist on due process of law, urging others to be patient as human beings were sold into slavery or the Nazis carted people off to Dachau? Is it fair for a person whose complicity in the status quo is rewarded with financial stability and social status to accuse someone who has risked everything to abide by his conscience… of *cowardice*? Perhaps Aiken would also feel entitled to inform John Brown that he was a coward, or the Germans who attempted to assassinate Hitler?

Once this question is asked, another question inexorably follows: what qualifies as a situation that calls for action to be taken outside the established channels of the legal system, if not the current ecological crisis? Species are going extinct all over the planet, climate change is beginning to wreak serious havoc on human beings as well, and scientists are giving us a very short window of time to turn our act around—while the US government and its corporate puppeteers refuse to

For years, the FBI targeted ecological activists as their #1 priority. This is one of the chief reasons environmental devastation has continued unchecked.

At the end of 2005, the FBI opened a new phase of its assault on earth and animal liberation movements—known as the Green Scare—with the arrests and indictments of a large number of activists. This offensive, dubbed Operation Backfire, was intended to obtain convictions for many of the unsolved Earth Liberation Front arsons of the preceding ten years—but more so, to have a chilling effect on all ecological direct action. In the following analysis, originally published in *Rolling Thunder* in 2008, we review everything we can learn from the Operation Backfire cases, with the intention of passing on the lessons for the next generation of environmental activists.

For Those Who Came in Late…

Of those charged in Operation Backfire, nine ultimately cooperated with the government and informed on others in hopes of reduced sentences: Stanislas Meyerhoff, Kevin Tubbs, Chelsea Dawn Gerlach, Suzanne Savoie, Kendall Tankersley, Jennifer Kolar, Lacey Phillabaum, Darren Thurston, and, much later, Briana Waters. Four held out through a terrifying year, during which it seemed certain they would end up serving decades in prison, until they were able to broker plea deals in which they could claim responsibility for their actions without providing information about others: Daniel McGowan, Jonathan Paul, Exile (aka Nathan Block), and Sadie (aka Joyanna Zacher)[1]. Another defendant, William Rodgers (aka Avalon), tragically passed away in an alleged suicide while in custody shortly after his arrest. Fugitive Justin Solondz

[1] After this writing, it came to light that Sadie and Exile hold both racist and transphobic views. The anarchist community has parted ways with them.

was captured in China in 2009 and completed his sentence in January 2017; Rebecca Rubin turned herself in in 2012, after many years on the run, and was sentenced to five years in prison. Joseph Dibee was extradited from Cuba to the US in August 2018 to face charges. One more defendant has been charged but not found.

The months following the launch of Operation Backfire saw an unprecedented increase in government repression of anarchist environmental activists, which came to be known as the Green Scare. Longtime animal liberation activist Rod Coronado was charged with a felony for answering a question during a speaking appearance, and faced potentially decades in prison. Six animal rights activists associated with SHAC, the campaign against animal testing corporation Huntingdon Life Sciences, were sentenced to several years in prison, essentially for running a website. Animal liberationist Peter Young, who had spent seven years on the run from the FBI, had finally been captured and was being threatened with double jeopardy. Tre Arrow, famous for surviving a 100-foot fall when police and loggers forced him out of a forest occupation, was fighting extradition from Canada to the United States to face arson charges. Innumerable people were subpoenaed to grand juries,[2] and some did jail time for refusing to cooperate. Perhaps most ominously of all, three young people were set up by an agent provocateur and arrested on conspiracy charges without having actually done anything at all. Two of them, Zachary Jenson and Lauren Weiner, pled guilty and became government informants; the third, Eric McDavid, who has contracted life-threatening health problems as a consequence of being denied

[2] In theory, the task of a grand jury is to examine the validity of an accusation before trial. In practice, grand juries are used to force information out of people: by granting an individual immunity regarding a specific case, a grand jury can compel him or her to answer questions or else go to prison for contempt of court.

information about any other person without his or her express consent.

Regaining the Initiative

We must not conceptualize our response to government repression in purely reactive terms. It takes a lot of resources for the government to mount a massive operation like the Green Scare cases, and in doing so they create unforeseen situations and open up new vulnerabilities. Like in Judo, when the state makes a move, we can strike back with a countermove that catches them off balance. To take an example from mass mobilizations, the powers that be were eventually able to cripple the so-called anti-globalization movement by throwing tremendous numbers of police at it; but in the wake of lawsuits subsequently brought against them, the police in places like Washington, D.C. now have their hands tied when it comes to crowd control, as demonstrated by their extreme restraint at the IMF/World Bank protests in October 2007. We're in a long war with hierarchical power that cannot be won or lost in any single engagement; the question is always how to make the best of each development, seizing the initiative whenever we can and passing whatever gains we make on to those who will fight after us.

There must be a way to turn the legacy of the Green Scare to our advantage. One starting place is to use it as an opportunity to learn how the state investigates underground activity and make sure those lessons are shared with the next generation. Another is to find common cause with other targeted communities; a promising example of this is the recent connection between animal liberation activists in the Bay Area and supporters of the San Francisco Eight, ex-Black Panthers who are now being charged with the 1971 murder of a police officer.

Judging from the lessons of the 1970s, drug addiction is another factor that tends to correlate with snitching, as it can be linked to deep-rooted personal problems. Indeed, Jacob Ferguson, the first informant in Operation Backfire, was a longtime heroin addict. Just as the Operation Backfire cases would have been a great deal more difficult for the government if no one besides Jake had cooperated, the FBI might never have been able to initiate the cases at all if others had not trusted Jake in the first place.

Prompt prisoner support is as important as public support for those facing grand juries. As one Green Scare defendant has pointed out, defendants often turn informant soon after arrest when they are off balance and uncertain what lies ahead. Jail is notorious for being a harsher environment than prison; recent arrestees may be asking themselves whether they can handle years of incarceration without a realistic sense of what that would entail. Supporters should bail defendants out of jail as quickly as possible, so they can be informed and level-headed as they make decisions about their defense strategy. To this end, it is ideal if funds are earmarked for legal support long before any arrests occur.

It cannot be emphasized enough that informing is *always* a serious matter, whether it is a question of a high profile defendant snitching on his comrades or an acquaintance of law-abiding activists answering seemingly harmless questions. The primary goal of the government in any political case is not to put any one defendant in prison but to obtain information with which to map radical communities, with the ultimate goal of repressing and controlling those communities. The first deal the government offered Peter Young was for him to return to animal rights circles to report to them from within: not just on illegal activity, but on all activity. The most minor piece of trivia may serve to jeopardize a person's life, whether or not they have ever broken any law. *It is never acceptable to give*

vegan food by his jailers, was recently found guilty and awaits sentencing.

This phase of the Green Scare seems to be drawing to a close. Most of those apprehended in Operation Backfire are now serving their sentences. The first of the SHAC defendants has been released from prison. Peter Young has been out of prison for a year and is doing speaking tours. Rod Coronado's trial ended in a deadlock, and he took a plea in return for a short sentence when the government threatened to bring further charges against him. It's been months now since a new high profile felony case was brought against an environmental activist, though federal agents have been poking around in the Midwest. It's time to begin deriving lessons from the past two years of government repression, to equip the next generation that will take the front lines in the struggle to defend life on earth.

Distinguishing between Perceived and Real Threats

In some anarchist circles, the initial onset of the Green Scare was met with a panic that rivaled the response to the September 11 attacks. This, of course, was exactly what the government wanted: quite apart from bringing individual activists to "justice," they hoped to intimidate all who see direct action as the most effective means of social change. Rather than aiding the government by making exaggerated assumptions about how dangerous it is to be an anarchist today, we must sort out what these cases show about the current capabilities and limits of government repression.

The purpose of this inquiry is not to advocate or sensationalize any particular tactic or approach. We should be careful not to glorify illegal activity—it's important to note that most of even the staunchest non-cooperating defendants have ex-

pressed regrets about their choices, though this must be understood in the context of their court cases. At the same time, federal repression affects everyone involved in resistance, not just those who participate in illegal direct action; the Green Scare offers case studies of the situation we are all in, like it or not.

Case Study in Repression: Eugene, Oregon

Operation Backfire took place against a backdrop of government investigation, harassment, and profiling of presumed anarchists in the Pacific Northwest. It is no coincidence that Eugene, Oregon was a major focus of the Operation Backfire cases, as it has been a hotbed of dissent and radicalism over the past decade and a half—although repression and other problems have taken a toll in recent years. We can't offer a definitive analysis of the internal dynamics of the Eugene anarchist community, but we can look at how the authorities went about repressing it.

One useful resource for this inquiry is "Anarchist Direct Actions: A Challenge for Law Enforcement,"

an article that appeared in Studies in Conflict & Terrorism in 2005, authored by Randy Borum of the University of South Florida and Chuck Tilby of the Eugene Police Department. According to Jeff ("Free") Luers, Tilby was one of the cops who surveilled Free and his co-defendant Critter on the night of their arrest in June 2000. Tilby has given presentations on the "criminal anarchist" movement to law enforcement groups, and was intimately involved in the Operation Backfire cases, even making statements to the media and providing a quote to the FBI press release at the end of the Oregon federal prosecution.

Surprisingly, the article does not explicitly reference Eugene, Oregon at all. Besides Tilby's byline at the beginning, there's no indication that the paper was co-written from Eugene. All

nities with a shared culture of resistance; dropouts must do this from scratch, swimming against the tide, but it is not impossible.

Healthy relationships are the backbone of such communities, not to mention secure direct action organizing. Again—unaddressed conflicts and resentments, unbalanced power dynamics, and lack of trust have been the Achilles heel of countless groups. The FBI keeps psychological profiles on its targets, with which to prey on their weaknesses and exploit potential interpersonal fissures. The oldest trick in the book is to tell arrestees that their comrades already snitched on them; to weather this intimidation, people must have no doubts about their comrades' reliability.

"Snitches get stitches" posters notwithstanding, anarchists aren't situated to enforce a no-informing code by violent means. It's doubtful that we could do such a thing without compromising our principles, anyway—when it comes to coercion and fear, the state can always outdo us, and we shouldn't aspire to compete with it. Instead, we should focus on demystifying snitching and building up the collective trust and power that discourage it. If being a part of the anarchist community is rewarding enough, no one will wish to exile themselves from it by turning informant. For this to work, of course, those who do inform on others must be excluded from our communities with absolute finality; in betraying others for personal advantage, they join the ranks of the police officers, prison guards, and executioners they assist.

Those who may participate in direct action together should first take time to get to know each other well, including each other's families and friends, and to talk over their expectations, needs, and goals. You should know someone long enough to know what you like least about him or her before committing to secure activity together; you have to be certain you'll be able to work through the most difficult conflicts and trust them in the most frightening situations up to a full decade later.

may be that the hullabaloo about how many eco-activists have turned informant is partly due to commentators' ignorance of past struggles.

If anything discourages people from informing on each other, it is blood ties. Historically, the movements with the least snitching have been the ones most firmly grounded in longstanding communities. Arrestees in the national liberation movements of yesteryear didn't cooperate because they wouldn't be able to face their parents or children again if they did; likewise, when gangsters involved in illegal capitalist activity refuse to inform, it is because doing so would affect the entirety of their lives, from their prospects in their chosen careers to their social standing in prison as well as their neighborhoods. The stronger the ties that bind an individual to a community, the less likely it is he or she will inform against it. North American radicals from predominantly white demographics have always faced a difficult challenge in this regard, as most of the participants are involved in defiance of their families and social circles rather than because of them. When an ex-activist is facing potentially decades in prison for something that was essentially a hobby, with his parents begging him not to throw his life away and the system he fought against apparently dominating the entirety of his present and future, it takes a powerful sense of right and wrong to resist selling out.

In this light, it isn't surprising that the one common thread that links the non-cooperating defendants is that practically all of them were still involved in either anarchist or at least countercultural communities. Daniel McGowan was ceaselessly active in many kinds of organizing right up to his arrest; Exile and Sadie were still committed to life against the grain, if not political activity—a witness who attended their sentencing described their supporters as an otherworldly troop of black metal fans with braided beards and facial piercings. Here we see again the necessity of forging powerful, long-term commu-

the same, the article provides several important clues about how the government proceeded against the Oregon defendants and those who were perceived to support them.

The authors centralize the importance of intelligence and informants for repressing criminal "anarchists," while acknowledging the difficulty of obtaining them. In the case of grand jury subpoenas, anarchists regularly fail to comply, and support groups are often set up for those targeted; one of the more recent examples of this was Jeff Hogg, who received a grand jury subpoena while the Backfire prosecutions were underway and was jailed for nearly six months in 2006 as a result. The authors warn that "investigators and law enforcement officers should be cautious during questioning not to divulge more to the subject about the case (via questions), than is learned through their testimony." Indeed, questions asked by grand juries turned up more than once in the pages of the *Earth First! Journal*, which was edited from Eugene for a time. It is extremely important to support those under investigation and keep abreast of investigators' efforts. Some believe that the Backfire investigation only arrived at a position of real strength once such support started to weaken in Oregon.

Regarding infiltration, "Anarchist Direct Actions" advises that:

What we know of the early Backfire investigation points to a strategy of generalized monitoring and infiltration. While investigators used increasingly focused tools and strategies as the investigation gained steam—for example, sending "cooperating witnesses" wearing body wires to talk to specific targets—they started out by sifting through a whole demographic of counter-cultural types. Activist and punk houses as well as gathering spots such as bars were placed under surveillance—anarchists who drink should be careful about the way alcohol can loosen lips. Infiltrators and informants targeted not only the most visibly committed anarchists, but also bohemians who inhabited similar cultural and social spheres. Police

accumulated tremendous amounts of background information even while failing to penetrate the circles in which direct action was organized. The approximately 30,000 pages of discovery in the Oregon cases contain a vast amount of gossip and background information on quite a few from the Eugene community.

A similar profiling methodology appears to have been used in nearby Portland, Oregon. In March 2001, for example, a large-scale police raid was carried out on a house party attended by Portland punk rockers. The attendees were photographed and questioned about the Earth and Animal Liberation Fronts. Some were arrested and charged with kidnapping and assault on an officer—a standard over-charging which eventually led to plea deals. The defendants from the raid were videotaped at their court appearances by officers later identified as Gang Enforcement Unit members. In the aftermath of this raid, cops routinely harassed punks on the street, demanding to be told whether they were anarchists.

In retrospect, it seems likely that such efforts were not meant simply to intimidate Portland's punks, but to uncover information relevant to the anarchist and ALF/ELF cases of the time. This may have been a wrong step in the Backfire investigation; right now there's no way to know. We do know, however, that "wide net" approaches by the state can be effective at stifling socially aware subcultures, even when they uncover no real links to radical action. Fortunately, in Portland those affected by the raid came together in response, aiding each other, limiting the damage done, and taking advantage of the situation to draw attention to police activity.

Another point of speculation is the degree to which authorities fostered division and infighting within radical circles in Eugene. This was a common COINTELPRO[3] tactic, and is prob-

[3] The FBI's Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) existed officially from 1956 to 1971 and probably continues to this day in some form.

These were all experienced activists who presumably had spent years considering how they would handle the pressure of interrogation and trial, who must have been familiar with all the reasons it doesn't pay to cooperate with the state! What, if anything, can we conclude from how many of them became informants?

There has been quite a bit of opportunist speculation on this subject by pundits with little knowledge of the circumstances and even less personal experience. We are to take it for granted that arrestees became informants because they were privileged middle class kids; in fact, both the cooperating and non-cooperating defendants are split along class and gender lines. We are told that defendants snitched because they hadn't been fighting for their own interests; what exactly are one's "own interests," if not to live in a world without slaughterhouses and global warming? Cheaper hamburgers and air conditioning, perhaps? It has even been suggested that it's inevitable some will turn informant under pressure, so we must not blame those who do, and instead should avoid using tactics that provoke investigations and interrogations. This last aspersion is not worth dignifying with a response, except to point out that no crime need be committed for the government to initiate investigations and interrogations. Whether or not you support direct action of any kind, it is never acceptable to equip the state to do harm to other human beings.

Experienced radicals who have been snitched on themselves will tell you that there is no surefire formula for determining who will turn informant and who won't. There have been informants in almost every resistance movement in living memory, including the Black Panther Party, the Black Liberation Army, the American Indian Movement, and the Puerto Rican independence movement; the Green Scare cases are not particularly unusual in this regard, though some of the defendants seem to have caved in more swiftly than their antecedents. It

can obtain some bargaining power of his own by threatening to put the state through a costly, challenging, and unpredictable trial—to that end, it is essential to acquire the best possible legal representation. When a defendant agrees to cooperate, he loses all that leverage, throwing himself at the mercy of forces that don't have an ounce of mercy to offer.

As grim as things looked for Sadie, Exile, McGowan, and Jonathan Paul through most of 2006, they looked up when McGowan's lawyer demanded information about whether prosecutors had used illegal National Security Agency wiretaps to gather evidence against the defendants. The government was loath to answer this question, and for good reason: there had just been a public scandal about NSA wiretaps, and if the court found that wiretaps had been used unconstitutionally, the entire Operation Backfire case would have been thrown out. That's exactly why so many members of the Weather Underground are professors today rather than convicts: the FBI botched that case so badly the courts had to let them go free.

No matter how hopeless things look, never underestimate the power of fighting it out. Until Stanislas Meyerhoff and others capitulated, the linchpin of the federal case in Operation Backfire was Jacob Ferguson, a heroin addict and serial arsonist. Had all besides Ferguson refused to cooperate and instead fought the charges together, Operation Backfire would surely have ended differently.

On Informants

If becoming an informant is always a bad idea, why do so many people do it? At least eleven high profile defendants in Green Scare cases have chosen to cooperate with the government against their former comrades, not including Peter Young's partner, who informed on him back in 1999.

ably still in use. Borum and Tilby hint at this in the final section of their paper, "Law Enforcement Strategies/ Implications":

For those familiar with Eugene radical circles, this brings to mind the heated conflicts over gender and feminism within that community. There is no concrete evidence that government operatives were involved in escalating such debates, and we should be careful not to jump to conclusions; such speculation can only assist the state by propagating paranoia. However, law enforcement from local to federal levels must have been aware of the vulnerabilities that opened up when real debates turned to groupthink and factionalism in Eugene. Tilby and his cohorts must have used such insights to their advantage as they devised anti-anarchist strategies. By the time Operation Backfire grand juries began following up on real leads in Eugene, many who could have come together to oppose them were no longer on speaking terms. While this does not justify the lack of integrity shown by those who assisted grand juries, it does offer some context for why the grand juries weren't resisted more effectively.

Borum and Tilby close their paper by urging investigators to display "patience and persistence"—and indeed, patience and persistence ultimately paid off in Operation Backfire. This is not to lend credibility to the notion that "The FBI always get their man." The investigation was riddled with errors and

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Aiming to "expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize" the activities of groups like the Black Panther Party, the Program utilized a wide variety of dirty tricks. Houses and offices were searched and documents stolen without any warrants having been issued; rumors were spread in order to foster mistrust and even violence between different organizations or factions within them; group members were harassed through the courts or even wholly framed for crimes they did not commit; infiltrators and agent provocateurs were distributed within target constituencies; no act of psychological warfare or blatant violence was ruled out. The program was finally exposed when radicals broke into an FBI Office and seized documents relating to the secret program, circulating them to various sources under the name of the "Citizens' Commission to Investigate the FBI."

missteps; plenty of other actions will never be prosecuted, as the authorities got neither lucky breaks nor useful cooperation. But we must understand that repression, and resistance to it, are both long-term projects, stretching across years and decades.

According to some accounts, one of the most significant leads in Operation Backfire came from a naïve request for police reports at a Eugene police station. According to this version, the police deduced from this request that they should pay attention to Jacob Ferguson; Ferguson later became the major informant in these cases. It is less frequently mentioned that the police were accusing Ferguson of an arson he did not participate in! With Ferguson, the unlikely happened and it paid off for the authorities to be wrong. Later on, when agents made their first arrests and presented grand jury subpoenas on December 7, 2005, two of those subpoenaed were wrongly assumed to have been involved in attacks. Their subpoenas were eventually dropped, as the authorities gained the cooperation of more informants and eventually made moves to arrest Exile and Sadie instead.

The investigation was not as unstoppable and dynamic as the government would like us to think, although the prosecution gathered force as more individuals rolled on others. The authorities spent years stumbling around, and they continued to falter even when prosecution efforts were underway—but they were tenacious and kept at their efforts. Meanwhile, radical momentum was less consistent.

Let's review the arc of radical activity in Eugene over the past decade. The anticapitalist riot of June 18, 1999 in Eugene led to jubilation on the part of anarchists, even if one participant spent seven years in prison as a result. The participants in the June 18 Day of Action had put up a fight and fucked up some symbols of misery in the town, catching the police unprepared. The pitched battles on the streets of Seattle later that year at the WTO meeting only reinforced the feeling that the

The other side of this coin is that, despite all their precautions, the Green Scare defendants did get caught. No matter how careful and intelligent you are, it doesn't pay to count on not getting caught; you have to be prepared for the worst. Those who are considering risky direct action should start from the assumption that they will be caught and prosecuted; before doing anything, before even talking about it, they should ask themselves whether they could accept the worst possible consequences. At the same time, as the government may target anyone at any time regardless of what they have actually done, it is important for even the most law-abiding activists—not to mention their friends and relatives—to think through how to handle being investigated, subpoenaed, or charged.

The Green Scare cases show that cooperating with the government is never in a defendant's best interest. On average, the non-cooperating defendants in Operation Backfire are actually serving less time in proportion to their original threatened sentences than the informants

despite the government engaging the entire repressive apparatus of the United States to make an example of them. Exile and Sadie were threatened with over a thousand years in prison apiece, and are serving less than eight; if every arrestee understood the difference between what the state threatens and what it can actually do, far fewer would give up without a fight.

In the United States legal system, a court case is essentially a game of chicken. The state starts by threatening the worst penalties it possibly can, in hope of intimidating the defendant into pleading guilty and informing. It is easier if the defendant pleads guilty immediately; this saves the state immense quantities of time and money, not to mention the potential embarrassment of losing a well-publicized trial. Defendants should not be intimidated by the initial charges brought against them; it often turns out that many of these will not hold up, and are only being pressed to give the state more bargaining power. Even if a defendant fears he won't have a leg to stand on in court, he

Preparing for the Worst

Conventional activist wisdom dictates that one must not mix public and clandestine activity, but Daniel McGowan's case seems to contradict this. McGowan was not brought to trial as a result of investigations based on his public organizing, but rather because he had worked with Jacob Ferguson, who turned snitch under police pressure. Though the government was especially eager to convict him on account of his extensive prisoner support work and organizing against the Republican National Convention, McGowan received tremendous public support precisely because he had been so visible.[5] Had he simply hidden in obscurity, he might have ended up in the same situation without the support that enabled him to weather it as successfully as he did—and without making as many important contributions to the anarchist movement.

Considering how many years it took the FBI to put together Operation Backfire and the prominent role of informants in so many Green Scare cases, it seems like it is possible to get away with a lot, provided you are careful and make intelligent decisions about who to trust. McGowan's direct action résumé, as it appears in the government arguments at his sentencing, reads like something out of an adventure novel. One can't help but think—just seven years, for all that!

[5] This is not to say that all visibility is good visibility. Media attention was a significant factor in the conflicts that wracked Eugene. Such visibility can divide communities from within by creating the appearance that spokespeople have more power than everyone else, which provokes jealousy and stokes ego-driven conflicts whether or not what's on the screen reflects reality on the ground. Those who fall prey to believing the media hype about themselves become dependent upon this attention, pursuing it rather than the unmediated connections and healthy relationships essential for long-term revolutionary struggle; the most valuable visibility is anchored in enduring communities, not media spectacles. There are reasonable arguments for using the media at times, but one must be aware of the danger of being *used by it.*

whole world was up for grabs. Most of the active anarchists in Eugene had never lived through such a period before. Despite the paltry demands and muddled analysis of much of the official "antiglobalization" movement, there was a sense that deeper change could be fought for and won. Being an anarchist seemed like the coolest thing you could be, and this perception was magnified by the media attention that followed. The ELF was setting fires all over the region at the time.

A series of reversals followed. In June 2001, Free received his initial sentence of 22 years and eight months. The following month, Carlo Giuliani was murdered on the streets of Genoa during protests against the G8 summit in Italy. While both of these tragedies illustrated the risks of confronting the capitalist system, Free's sentence hit home especially hard in Eugene. In the changed atmosphere, some began dropping away and "getting on with their lives"—not necessarily betraying their earlier principles, but shifting their focus and priorities. This attrition intensified when American flags appeared everywhere in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Anarchist efforts did not cease, but a period of relative disorientation followed. A year and a half later, the invasion of Iraq provided another opportunity for radicals to mobilize, but some consistency had been lost in the Eugene area. And all the while, FBI employees and police kept their regular hours, day in and day out.

Law enforcement received its most significant breakthrough in the Backfire cases—even though it started as an incorrect hypothesis—just before Free's sentencing, in the period between anarchist jubilation and the shift to the defensive. The same fires that were incorrectly linked to Ferguson were used to justify Free's stiff sentence, which intimidated some anarchists out of action. There was not enough revaluation, learning, and sharpening of skills, nor enough efforts at conflict resolution; the retreat occurred by default. What would have happened if the Backfire investigation had continued under different circumstances, while radicals maintained their

momentum? That would be another story. Its conclusion is unknown.

Putting up a Fight

Repression will exist as long as there are states and people who oppose them. Complete invulnerability is impossible, for governments as well as their opponents. All the infiltrators and informants of the Tsarist secret police were powerless to prevent the Russian revolution of 1917, just as the East German Stasi were unable to prevent the fall of the Berlin Wall even though they had files on six million people. Revolutionary struggles can succeed even in the face of massive repression; for our part, we can minimize the effects of that repression by preparing in advance.

For many years now anarchists have focused on developing security culture, but security consciousness alone is not enough. There are some points one can never emphasize too much—don't gossip about sensitive matters, share delicate information on a need-to-know basis,[4] don't surrender your rights if detained or arrested, don't cooperate with grand juries, don't sell other people out. But one can abide by all these dictums and still make crucial mistakes. If anti-repression strategies center only on what we should not talk about, we lose sight of the necessity of clear communication for communities in struggle.

State disruption of radical movements can be interpreted as a kind of "armed critique," in the way that someone throwing a brick through a Starbucks window is a critique in action. That is to say, a successful use of force against us demonstrates

[4] It does appear that Operation Backfire defendants could have done better at limiting the flow of information inside their circles. Rather than organizing in closed, consistent cells, the defendants seem to have worked in more fluid arrangements, with enough crossover that once a few key participants turned informant the government had information about everyone.

that we had pre-existing vulnerabilities. This is not to argue that we should blame the victim in situations of repression, but we need to learn how and why efforts to destabilize our activities succeed. Our response should not start with jail support once someone has been arrested. Of course this is important, along with longer-term support of those serving sentences—but our efforts must begin long before, countering the small vulnerabilities that our enemy can exploit. Open discussion of problems—for example, gender roles being imposed in nominally radical spaces—can protect against unhealthy resentments and schisms. This is not to say that every split is unwarranted—sometimes the best thing is for people to go their separate ways; but that even if that is necessary, they should try to maintain mutual respect or at least a willingness to communicate when it counts.

Risk is relative. In some cases, it may indeed be a good idea to lay low; in other cases, maintaining public visibility is viewed as too risky, when in fact nothing could be more dangerous than withdrawing from the public eye and letting momentum die. When we think about risk, we often picture security cameras and prison cells, but there are many more insidious threats. The Operation Backfire defendants ended up with much shorter sentences than expected; as it turned out, the most serious risk they faced was not prison time, after all, but recantation and betrayal—a risk that proved all too real. Likewise, we can imagine Eric McDavid, who currently awaits sentencing on conspiracy charges, idly discussing the risk factor of a hypothetical action with his supposed friends—who turned out to be two potential informants and a federal agent provocateur. Unfortunately, the really risky thing was having those discussions with those people in the first place.