Report anarchists to the police

Why the authorities fear direct action

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As Europe recoils in horror from the wake of the massacre of 77 people by an anti-Islamic nationalist crusader in Norway, and Britain continues to await daily revelations on the absolute corruption and cynicism of their current governing elite (from media barons to politicians to police), a branch of London's Metropolitan Police force published — and later retracted — a leaflet asking people to report to them information about anarchists.

The wording of the leaflet, much quoted, is quite remarkable:

> *Anarchism is a political philosophy which considers the state undesirable, unnecessary, and harmful, and instead promotes a stateless society, or anarchy. Any information relating to anarchists should be reported to your local police.*

Any information? Really? Does that include shoe size? Favorite colour? Sexual predilections? Mobile phone messages?

The truly remarkable thing about this statement is that while it was ostensibly issued to warn the public of the threat of terrorism,

it gives the reader absolutely no reason to believe that anarchists might actually be inclined to engage in terrorist activity. In a way this is not surprising, since such evidence is almost impossible to find. To come up with an example of an anarchist blowing someone up, would have required going back to around the period of the First World War; and an anarchist mowing down a crowd of people with a machine gun would have been quite impossible, as it seems pretty clear that no anarchist anywhere has ever done anything remotely like that.

But the police bypass this task entirely. They don't even make insinuations. Instead, the statement seems almost disarmingly honest in suggesting that the police are mainly concerned with their own jobs: "there are people who believe we aren't even necessary. Tell us everything you know about them! That will also give us something more to do."

We anarchists are as concerned about upcoming layoffs as anyone, and we'd like to do our part, but is this really the most effective way to go about fighting the cuts?

Europol is more ambitious: they have been actually trying to make a case that anarchists are a terroristic threat. In a much-cited recent report, they count actual incidents and conclude that while separatists were responsible the overwhelming majority of terrorist incidents in 2010, "left-wing extremists" (mainly anarchists) came in second, right wing groups only third, and Islamists trailed far behind, with only one significant incident.

While this is has, understandably, been invoked mainly as a way to remind Europeans that they shouldn't immediately assume the presence of Al Qaeda every time a bomb goes off somewhere, the idea that left-wing "terrorists" are more of a threat than right-wingers is rather startling. That is, until you examine how they cooked these figures up. It turns out Europol's definition of "terrorism" has little to do with what most of us assume the word to mean: politically motivated attacks on unarmed civilians designed to create terror. For instance, Nazi assaults on immigrants, clearly

designed to create a climate of terror within immigrant communities for political purposes, rarely show up. However, if, during a protest, Greek anarchists set fire to an empty building or clash with police, this is considered a terrorist incident. In fact, if you read the report carefully, pretty much all acts of "left wing terrorism" turn out to be assaults on empty buildings or battles between protestors and security forces—in other words, none are acts aimed to induce terror in anyone, since the perpetrators make it clear that they have no intention of harming non-combatants of any kind.

Acts by security forces, meanwhile, even if they are indeed violent assaults on non-combatants designed to induce terror for political reasons, can never be referred to as "terrorism" and are never included in any official report.

To give a sense of how biased this is, consider the current situation in Syria. Hundreds of thousands of pro-democracy protestors have been met by a policy of outright terror, massacres, mass arrest, systematic torture, every conceivable form of brutality. If we were to apply Europol's definitions, Syria would have indeed seen a huge spike of "terrorist" incidents in recent months—but its perpetrators were, exclusively, the democracy protestors themselves! After all, some of those protestors have thrown rocks at police or damaged government buildings, even, set a few of them on fire. Therefore, since nothing security forces do could can ever, by definition, be "terrorism," the only terrorists are those opposing the regime.

Actually, the example of the Middle Eastern revolutions are a perfect example of what anarchists are really calling for—and why the police are so distressed. Years of recourse to bombs and bullets by resistance movements in the Middle East accomplished remarkably little—and in many cases, backfired terribly. Once resistance movements turned to a classic strategy of direct action, on the other hand—sit-ins, occupations, strategic civil disobedience, facing the security forces with linked arms, perhaps with barricades and stones, but never with explosives or firearms...—everything

changed, in many cases surprisingly quickly, and even some of the most brutal regimes began to topple or were shaken to their foundations.

Historically, anarchists were perhaps the first to figure out that terrorism doesn't work, having abandoned bombs and assassinations in the 1910s and '20s, after realising that—even if directed only at heads of state or Wall Street magnates—such tactics ultimately only served to give the state an excuse for even more repressive behavior. Since then, they have been at the forefront of encouraging just the sort of mass strategies of direct action that have been so effective in the Middle East. This is what genuinely terrifies those in charge of this increasingly bankrupt political order. Terrorists they know how to deal with (they are mostly kindred spirits, after all).

Non-violent mass mobilisation, particular militant forms of non-violence that may not be afraid to damage property but which take the moral high ground by refusing to use lethal force against humans, terrifies them—because they know how powerful and effective it can be. Non-violent mass mobilisation in a way that challenges not just the legitimacy of this government, but of any government, is their worst nightmare. If they are suddenly seized by uncontrollable impulses to urge loyal citizens to turn in their local Free School organiser, or Food Not Bombs volunteer, this is the reason. Because they know direct action works.