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Introduction to a Series of Questions

Institute For The Study of Insurgent Warfare

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The questions remain:

- Does insurrectionary anarchism mean the conscious intensification of attack by individuals and groups? Or is it the generalization of revolt its tools and skills-to every part of society? Are these two mutually exclusive?
- What is the point of the named group? Does this merely invite repression? Does group coherency really matter?
- Can anonymity help mitigate state repression? Can it prevent our attacks from being recuperated into the Spectacle? Can it mean the negation of political identities and an assertion of an individualism that evades subjectivity?
- Can guerrilla warfare truly be separated from vanguardism, specialization, and formalism? Is the anarchist guerrilla a totally different breed?

-Introduction, Letter to the Anarchist Galaxy

Indecisiveness seems to be the central concern of anarchism (insurrectionary and otherwise) these days. After years of unprecedented notoriety (and the mainstreaming within revolutionary left discourses of more attack based conceptions of revolutionary activism) the seemingly boundless enthusiasm for taking on violence as a project, building barricades and smashing windows has ebbed and we are mostly left with questions about what the insurrection is or if it really was the best idea in the first place. The current impasse regarding revolutionary activism (or at least activism predicated on radical politics rather than the more vaguely defined politics of movements based around singular issues) has resulted in a lack of new discourses and a turning backwards to more established activism. Aside from the question of so-called “revolutionary activism” is the wider question of the relationship between the concept of activism and the concept of “revolution” are, or whether there is any connection to be found at all. This question occupies much of the sorry state of contemporary anarchist discourse, a discourse populated more by half thought through symbolic platitudes of strategies, loosely defined, from the past and from other parts of the world, than a discussion of the harsh realities, dim futures and present dynamics of the spaces that we reside within. Maybe this is the best that we could expect at this moment, a moment where many of us have either burned out and dropped out, fallen prey to trauma and addiction or come to abandon activity or the possibility of activity at all. Maybe this is the best we can hope for a generation that was weened on the often repeated “truisms” of the activist milieu, only to have many of us abandon the symbolic engagements, symbolic narrative of symbolic enemies, a form of speech typified by the attempt to make speech and expression rise to a point of primacy, at the cost of sober material attempts at analysis. Further, maybe it is the time for the abandonment of this history, of this lineage; maybe it is the time to complete this

break from the activist milieu and the frameworks that come along with this space, and to begin to construct the project yet again. For, it has become clear, that the best that we were able to achieve, for all the press attention and destruction, was nothing but a form of militant activism, jumping from city to city, planned confrontation to planned confrontation, from broken window to broken window.

As a formation our frustration, often made physical in the pages of this journal, is less with the necessity to abandon that which we had come from, and more with the repetition of the same platitudes by the same partisans of activism, just with a new generation of those driven by an underlying desire to deal a death blow to the current order, for however we define this. Part and parcel of this return is the recuperation of newer forms of activism within the milieu of class oriented anarchism/communism. While the miasmatic alphabet soup of moribund dinosaurs seems to have staying power that more dynamic organizations lack (look at the longevity of ISO versus the rapid rise and fall of ELF or SHAC), this has never correlated to particular successes (accomplishments by the more organized left are largely limited to arguments about the Russian Revolution or the Spanish Civil War). Instead we are left with the fossilized remains of the early 1900s reiterating the same tactics and debates about efficiency that have failed to deliver any substantive change to our lives for the past 100 years in the messianic hope that they will somehow work this time if the ritual is only altered just a touch. As opposed to fundamentally rethinking the rules of engagement, the terms of engagement and the categories that these terms are thought, we are once again locked in a debate about a mythological future that may magically emerge if we only replicate the right strategy, thought through within the walls of activist apartments and coffee shops.

Exacerbating this state of affairs is that many veterans of the past years are seeing the efficacy of our collective tactics for the past decade and have opted out of those tactics because the cost/benefit analysis of direction action is overwhelmingly tilted towards incar-

ceration with minimal gains for “the movement :’ This condition is made worse through the collapse of trust within those circles, a dynamic set off by infighting, burn out, trauma and frustration, leaving many of us in situations where, even when conditions may be present to attempt an intervention, we are beset by enemies, many of which wear the typical well-meaning liberal attire of the traditional activist. Many are caught in a situation in which they, not having divested thoroughly from the perceived moral injunction to act all the time against “injustices ‘: are left vulnerable and unable to discuss their past experiences fo r fear o f being thought to b e transgressive, too dangerous, or being put at risk of being informed upon. This has meant that not only are many o f us lost and alone, cut off from our former networks o f trust, but also that we are living examples of a history that is quickly being lost from memory, complete with the memory of our failures.

It is impossible in any situation to attempt to posit the answer to this question, to the questions that have arisen through our defeat, through our failures, a failure that many o f us live the remnants of every day still in our constant sense of being disjointed from the world. To posit an answer to the mythological “way forward” for the conceptually defined “movement” is not only to come to embrace the categories of assumed unity and symbolic engagements but also to replicate the context of symbolic engagements within conceptually equivalent moments divorces from their temporal specificity; it is to replicate the same categories that generated activism to begin with. Our purpose here is not to provide answers, answers cannot be provided except through replicating the same frameworks that lead us to this current moment. Our purpose is to only ask questions.