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Linking anarchism to deliberate acts of violence might seen very natural to most people if they think about anarchism at all. But for most younger anarchists, it must be difficult to imagine that in the early 1980s, armed struggle in Canada not only seemed possible, but a small group coming out of the anarchist community in Vancouver actually engaged in it. Moreover there was small but significant support for all three actions.

As Direct Action and the Wimmen's Fire Brigade, they never explicitly claimed to be anarchist. For that matter neither did their supporters. We never denied being anarchists either. Our anarchism developed out of political practise rather than theory and history. In this discussion, the word "We" will be referring to the small milieu that the Vancouver Five came out of. Only those five choose to follow their ideas through to a logical conclusion and go underground. But others were influenced by similar developments elsewhere, and shared a desire to shake up Canada politically.

The political context for Direct Action was international. In the mid to late 1970s and into the 1980s the Red Army Fraction

in Germany and the Red Brigades in Italy were only the largest of various guerrilla groupings in Europe. Insurrection in Europe seemed possible in spite of the massive level of repression directed against these militants who assassinated and kidnapped politicians and corporate executives. Canadian anarchist papers such as *Open Road*, *Bulldozer* and *Resistance* brought news of these struggles to North America.

Armed struggle was also very much on the agenda in the U.S. The popular idea is that political struggle ended in the early 1970s after the end of the Vietnam war. But even if the anti war, and other movements had pulled back, remnants of the more militant groups had gone underground to wage war against the system. On the east coast, the Black Liberation Army, formed when Black Panthers went underground after learning the lesson from the intense and deadly repression directed against them, was active until 1981. The United Freedom Front and the Armed Resistance Movement were active into the early 1980s, bombing government buildings to protest American military involvement in Central America and attacking corporate targets to protest their involvement in South Africa.

On the west coast, groups such as the Symbionese Liberation Army and the New World Liberation Front robbed banks, set off bombs and kidnapped Patty Hearst, a wealthy heiress. These groups were politically suspect and certainly not anti-authoritarian. Many radicals considered them to be heavily police infiltrated. But none the less they contributed to the sense that armed actions could be effective because they did have an impact.

There were also many small autonomous groupings, some of which were explicitly anarchist or anti-authoritarian, that were active up until the end of the decade. Bill Dunne and Larry Giddings, for example, are two anarchists who continue to be imprisoned in the U.S. today for actions that took place at that time. Bill and Larry were arrested in October 1979 after a gun

battle through the streets of Seattle when they tried to break a friend out of jail.

The best known of these west coast groups was the George Jackson Brigade which was made up of both anarchists and Marxists. They committed a series of actions in the Seattle area in the late 1970s, often in support of the prisoner movement which was very strong at that time. The GJB was anti-authoritarian, pro-woman, pro-gay and lesbian and advocated collective as opposed to party politics. Even though all of these groups were eventually crushed, they did offer a political alternative to organizing demonstrations and putting out papers.

Open Road in Vancouver, *Bulldozer* in Toronto, and *Resistance*, which started in Toronto and then shifted to Vancouver, covered the armed resistance in the U.S. and the subsequent repression. This coverage played an increasingly important role as their above ground supporters in the U.S. were broken up, and as the mainstream left tried to distance themselves as much as possible. We published communiqués explaining the actions. We provided supportive coverage of their trials and offered an outlet for the writings of the captured combatants. Revolution, or at least a protracted struggle, seemed to be quite possible. They were very much part of the wave of armed struggle in North American, and were part of a broader anti-NATO, anti-war machine politic. Our perspective was very much internationalist even if we understood that we had to work within our own local and national situations.

In the spring of 1982 a bomb destroyed the nearly completed Cheekeye-Dunsmuir Hydro substation. It's construction had been strongly opposed by local residents on environmental grounds. It was thought that it would lead to the industrialization of Vancouver Island and the construction of nuclear power plants for export sales to the U.S. Several hundred pounds of dynamite stopped that plan in its tracks.

There was a lot of local support for the action. It wasn't clear whether or not Direct Action, which had claimed the action, was an anarchist group, and in a sense it didn't make any difference.

The action had raised the political stakes in Canada. But as the bombing had taken place in the wilderness, it was easy to ignore. The next action wouldn't be.

In the late evening of October 14, 1982, a truck exploded outside the Litton Industries plant in Rexdale, in the northwest corner of Toronto, resulting in millions of dollars in damages. Seven workers were injured, one permanently. After a few days, Direct Action issued a communiqué claiming responsibility*. As a political piece, the communiqué is as relevant today as it was in 1982, the only change being that the Cold War is over. Most importantly, they criticized themselves for seeing the cops and security guards as superheros. They weren't. The mistakes made by Direct Action were compounded by the inadequate response of both the guards and the cops.

The bombing was pretty simple: drive a stolen van loaded with dynamite through the front gates of the Litton and park it in front of the building, leave the van, and in 35 minutes, the van explodes. To ensure that the bomb threat would be taken seriously, they drove the van right in front of a glass enclosed security guard booth. But the guards didn't notice the truck even though the van driver could clearly see the guards. Then the phoned-in warning was not understood. But at least it drew the attention of the guards to the van. Unfortunately Direct Action was a bit too clever. They had placed a box painted fluorescent orange outside the truck, easily visible from the security booth. On top of the box they placed a sheet of paper with information and instructions. They expected the guards to come over to the box once they received the phone warning. To emphasize the seriousness of the situation, they placed a stick of unarmed dynamite on top of the box. Another mistake. The security guards of course stayed away from the box, given that

tivists develop their politics from the base that has already been created. Fortunately, a relatively small, but very active milieu of young activists adopted many of the politics around Direct Action and developed them through such projects as *Reality Now*, the Anarchist Black Cross and *Ecomedia*. Their work in the peace, punk and native support movements, helped ensure that such politics did not end when the Five went to prison.

they didn't know that the dynamite on the box was unarmed. In spite of the obvious threat, the security guards didn't start to evacuate the plant until 20 minutes after receiving the warning phone call. And then the bomb went off early, probably set off by radio signals from the arriving police cars.

The bombing took place at a time when the cold war between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. was very intense. Ronald Reagan, representing that section of the American ruling class that was out to get the so-called evil empire, had been elected president. Both sides were attempting to achieve first strike nuclear capability through new weapons such as the Cruise and Perishing Missiles, the Trident Submarines, and the Neutron Bomb. The possibility of nuclear war was very real at the time.

In response, a peace movement developed in Europe, North America and elsewhere. Canada's agreement to let the U.S. test the Cruise over northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories was seen as a particular affront to peace activists. Litton had been the focus of extensive protests by peace groups since they were producing the guidance systems for the missile. There had been a series of peaceful protests at Litton resulting in the arrests of scores of protesters for civil disobedience. But as in the case of Cheekeye-Dunsmuir, the protests were going nowhere.

The initial reaction of many radicals and activists was joyful on first seeing the headlines in the paper. But this changed on more sober reflection as the implications were thought through. The bombing wasn't just a threat to the militarized state, but to the peaceful coexistence so many activists have with the system. It is clear that even with the injuries, there was not much reaction to it by the average person. For most people the bombing was just one more spectacular event in a world gone mad.

Of course it certainly was a major event for the anarchists and the pacifists. The Toronto anarchist-communist paper *Strike!* initially condemned the action because it would discredit the movement. It repeated the usual critique that

such actions could not by themselves do anything. Direct Action never claimed that it would. To quote the communiqué, "(w)hile we have no illusions that direct actions, such as this one, can by themselves bring about the end of Canada's role as a resource based economic and military functionary of Western Imperialism, we do believe that militant direct actions can have a constructive function as a springboard to the kind of consciousness and organization that must be developed if we are to overcome the nuclear masters."

A more sophisticated critique was issued anonymously by anarchists around *Kick It Over*. They complained that "the bombing at Litton can not be said to have increased the self-activity of either the community or the employees at the plant". Fair enough, though the same point can be said about putting out newspapers and most other things we do. These anarchists didn't condemn Direct Action for being violent, rather they put the violence in the context of state violence. Though wrongly labelling the bombing as "Vanguard Terror", it was valid to say that "clandestine organizations tend to become isolated from the people" and see their continued existence as becoming a goal in itself. Again, this problem is not unique to underground groups.

In early November, less than a month after the bombing, the Toronto *Globe and Mail* ran a major front page article linking the Litton bombing to the Vancouver anarchist community. It quoted unnamed anarchists who drew out the similarities between the politics of Direct Action and the Vancouver anarchist scene. In a later, more sympathetic article, other anarchists provided some background information as to what the purpose of the bombing might be without explicitly claiming that it was an anarchist action. This article was condemned by many anarchists in Toronto but it did help to get the ideas to a wider public.

In mid-December, the offices of the main peace groups in Toronto were raided along with the homes of some of their

about their own political work with a renewed enthusiasm…

> "For most North American activists, armed struggle is reduced to a moral question: 'Should we, or should we not use violent means to advance the struggle?' Though this is relevant on a personal level, it only confuses what is really a political question. Most radicals, at this point in time anyway, are not going to become involved directly in armed attacks. But as resistance movements develop in North America – and they had better or we are all lost – it is inevitable that armed actions will be undertaken by some. The question remains if these armed actions will be accepted as part of the spectrum of necessary activity. Much will depend on whether people suffer harm or injuries. Far from being "terroristic", the history of armed struggle in North America shows that the guerrillas have been quite careful in selecting their targets. There is a major difference between bombing military or corporate targets, or even assassinating police in response to their use of violence, and setting off bombs on crowded city streets. The left in North America has never used random acts of terror against the general population. To denounce any who would choose to act outside of the narrowly defined limits of 'peaceful protest' in order to appear morally superior, or to supposedly avoid alienating people, is to give the state the right to determine what are the allowable limits of protest."

Repression is most effective when it is able to keep the radical ideas from being transmitted to a new generation of activists. If the ideas can be passed on, then the next wave of ac-

level activity also "has a much less intense impact on one's personal life. If you are not underground, you are less emotionally isolated, and the overall stress level is very much lower. Capture for a medium-level action would be much less devastating in every way. A two or three year sentence is no joke, but it is substantially easier to deal with than a ten or twenty year one."

To summarize, let me quote from an article in *Prison News Service* written ten years after Litton:

> "Overt political actions such as these bombings, propaganda by deed, as they are known, are not understood in a non-political society. Even though few people will understand the motivations behind the attack, the positive side is that there won't necessarily be a major reaction against it either. It is an error to think that something like the Litton bombing will be a wake-up call for people to do something about a critical situation facing them. But properly explained it can make a difference to those people who are already concerned about the situation and who have become frustrated with other methods of dealing with the issue.
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> "Guerrilla actions are not an end in themselves; that is, a single act, or even a coordinated series of actions, has little likelihood of achieving little more than some immediate goal. Such actions are problematic if it is assumed that they can be substituted for above ground work. But if they can be situated within a broader politics, one tactic amongst many, then they can give the above ground movements more room to maneuver, making them both more visible and more credible. At the same time, activists are given a psychological lift, a sense of victory, regardless of how fleeting, so that they go

most prominent members. Activists in Toronto and Peterborough were picked up and harassed and threatened by the police. It has never been clear to what extent the police actually thought that these pacifists were really suspects or whether the raids were simply used to disrupt their work against Litton. Some pacifists tried to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the bombers. But there was enough support from other pacifists to show that there need not be a total split between militants, whatever their position might be on the use of violence. The largest demonstration ever to occur against Litton happened on November 11, 1982 less than a month after the bombing. As we said at the time, armed actions can make other forms of protest more visible, rather than less credible.

Litton lost a major contract shortly after the bombing. As Litton President Ronald Keating put it, "(t)hey (the protesters) are an irritant, they get a lot of publicity, and the Americans read every damn bit of it. Pressure from these people is making the Americans look twice. " He added rather sadly that, "no one else has been bombed."

In Vancouver, there had been little response to Cheekeye-Dunsmuir. But in early November, things became more intense with the firebombing of three outlets of Red Hot Video, heavily damaging two of the shops. The Wimmens' Fire Brigade had decided to make literal the name of this chain which specialized in violent pornography. The attack came just as the video industry was being introduced. Red Hot Video, an American chain, built up an inventory of video tapes that were pirated from hard-core porn films. According to *Open Road*, "(m)any of the films depicted not only explicit sex scenes, but women being trussed up, beaten, raped, tortured, forced to undergo enemas by armed intruders and other forms of degradation."

Women's groups had been fighting for six months against Red Hot Video, but there was no response from the state. Within a few weeks, scores of women's groups of all stripes

had issued statements of sympathy and understanding for the action, demonstrations had been held in a dozen centres across the province, and six porn shops had closed, moved away or withdrawn much of their stock out of fear they would be the next target. Within two months the first charges were laid for combining explicit sex with violence.

The reason the Wimmen's Fire Brigade action was so successful was not simply the tactic employed, but the fact that it was so well integrated into, and complementary to the public campaign. As B.C. Blackout, a biweekly autonomist newsletter put it, "the action of the WFB could only have the impact it did because of the months of spade work by many groups and individuals educating themselves, doing research, making contacts, pressuring the authorities, documenting their case – in short, building the infrastructure for an effective, grass roots, above-board movement. That's why women's groups were able to move so quickly and coherently to deal with the appeals of the media and the public for facts and commentary after the firebombings."

On January 20, 1983, near Squamish, B.C. the Five were returning to Vancouver from target practice in the mountains. The police, dressed as Department of Highway workers, stopped their van and in a violent attack pulled them out of the van and arrested them at gunpoint. They were charged with 12 to 15 counts, including Red Hot Video, Cheekeye-Dunsmuir, conspiracy to rob a Brink's truck, as well as conspiracy to commit more bombings. Immediately after the arrests, the police had a news conference at which displayed the extensive weaponry which they claimed had been seized from the Five. This was the beginning of what came to be called, "Trial by Media" as the police and prosecution used the media to try to contaminate public opinion not only against the Five, but against the anarchist movement in general. Newspaper headlines screamed about "police netting terrorists" and "national network of anarchist cells." The police raided 4 homes in

the basis for the belief that if I played the legal game, I would get acquitted or less time. This fear obscured my vision and fooled me into thinking that I could get a break from the justice system. But this eight months in court has sharpened my perceptions and strengthened my political convictions to see that the legal game is marked and political prisoners are dealt a marked deck."

Doug Stewart was sentenced to 6 years, and served the maximum 4. Gerry Hannah got 10 years, but was out in 5. Julie, only 21 at the time of sentencing, got 20 years. She appealed and got five years off when she turned against Ann and Brent, effectively sabotaging their appeal. Many people were really pissed at this betrayal by Julie, but her testimony was not the reason why Ann and Brent were convicted. If Julie really wanted to make a deal, she could have implicated other people by lying. This she didn't do.

Brent got 22 years, and Ann got life. The sentences, especially Julie's and Ann's, were considered unduly harsh. But the state wanted to stamp out any incipient guerrilla activity. The prison system, though, determined how long people actually served. Ann and Brent were both out before 8 years were up. In comparison to what happens to American guerrillas, this was almost lenient.

Doug Stewart wrote in *Open Road* after their conviction that the size of the bombs was problematic. He suggested that medium-level attacks such as arson and mechanical sabotage are easier to carry out than bombings, noting that large scale actions virtually demand going underground. Direct Action understood that they had to break off contact with other political people; that to act in one city, they should live in another. But this demands enormous emotional and personal sacrifices. It was the failure to completely cut off ties with friends and lovers that left a trail for the local police. Smaller actions are technically simpler and allow, as Stewart says, "a group to come together easily and quickly around a particular issue." Medium-

top full of weapons, and reports of meticulous planning for a raid on a Brink's truck, were calculated to defuse claims that the Five were principled political activists. The fight for a fair trial did draw support from activists, progressive journalists and lawyers and human rights activists. But it can create real problems if the trial is made to appear legally "fair". Or when, as happened, the Five eventually pled guilty. Some people who did support work felt manipulated into supporting guilty people, even though we tried to be clear that there is a difference between pleading not guilty and being innocent.

The Trial by Media strategy fell apart when the court ruled that the wiretap evidence was admissible. The first trial for the weapons and conspiracy to rob the Brink's truck began in January 1984. The evidence of the first 4 months mainly involved the surveillance prior to their arrests. In March, Julie Belmas and Gerry Hannah entered guilty pleas, including Red Hot Video, and for Julie, the Litton bombing. In April, Doug Stewart was ordered acquitted on the Brink's charge but found guilty of weapon offenses. In June, he pled guilty to Cheekeye-Dunsmuir. The jury found Ann and Brent guilty of all the charges from the first trial. In June, in a surprise move, Ann pled guilty to Cheekeye-Dunsmuir and Litton.

Brent was brought to Toronto for a trial around Litton and eventually pled guilty. Recognizing our own weakness, we told him that little could be gained politically in Toronto if the trial was to go ahead. In our relative isolation it was difficult to imagine taking on what would have to be a major effort to present the politics behind the bombing through a hostile mass media. Yet not doing so meant that there was never a longer-term focus nor sense of direction for those who might have been willing to come forward with more active support. It was not our most glorious moment.

To sum up this section, let me quote from Ann's sentencing statement, "(w)hen I was first arrested, I was intimidated and surrounded by the courts and prisons. This fear provided

Vancouver the morning after the first support group meeting. No arrests were made, but typewriters were seized and people were subjected to verbal abuse.

The official police story was that the break in the case came when a reporter from the *Globe and Mail* showed anarchist papers to the Toronto police who, noticing the Cheekeye-Dunsmuir communiqué in Resistance, sent the Post Office Box address to Vancouver. The cops there supposedly put the box under surveillance and were eventually able to track down the Five through a series of contacts. The story was convincing enough that the reporter was going to apply for the substantial reward before being talked out of it by more conscious and principled friends.

What this story was a cover for was that the police were already very aware of the Five. They had been under police surveillance for one reason or another since well before the first action. Brent Taylor and Ann Hansen in particular were pretty notorious in Vancouver. A cop didn't have to be too bright to consider them as possible suspects. Many activists who didn't even know them suspected that they probably had something to do with Direct Action. They were the only ones who regularly went to demonstrations all masked up, looking much more prepared for protests in Germany than in Vancouver.

It is quite likely that the security police had actually watched them carry out the Red Hot Video actions. This became very relevant at the trials. The Vancouver police obtained warrants to tap their phones and bug their house in order to investigate Red Hot Video. Such warrants are only supposed to be issued as a last resort when all other means of investigation have failed, but in this case were issued shortly after the firebombing. Moreover, they were not needed if the police already knew who had participated in the attacks. The RCMP security service had watched them commit other crimes and had them under observation at the time of Red

Hot Video, but there were no surveillance notes covering the period of the actual attack.

It was assumed that the wiretaps were actually needed by the police to connect the Five to Litton, for which it would have been more difficult for the Vancouver police to obtain a legal warrant. The evidence obtained through these bugs provided the bulk of the case against the Five, which is why the first part of the eventual trial dealt with their legality.

On June 13, 1983, the Bulldozer house in Toronto was raided by the local Litton squad. The warrant – which included the charges of Sabotage of Litton, Seditious Libel, and Procuring an abortion – specifically allowed the police to seize anything related to *Bulldozer* magazine. They took layout flats, letters, articles, magazines, and the mailing list. We finally got all this stuff back after a year of legal fighting.

The seditious libel charge was apparently related to a leaflet entitled *Peace, Paranoia and Politics* which laid out the politics around the Litton bombing, the peace movement and the arrests of the Five. Seditious Libel apparently involves calling for the armed overthrow of the state; the last time the charge had been used was in 1950 against some trade unionists in Quebec. Our lawyers eagerly anticipated defending us on this charge, but nothing ever came of it.

The Procuring an Abortion charge came about when an alleged menstrual extraction performed by a midwife, Colleen Crosby, on a member of the Bulldozer collective, had come to the attention of the police through phone taps. Crosby was picked up a week later by cops who drove her around for several hours, threatening to charge her with the procuring an abortion charge unless she told them about any links between Bulldozer and the Litton bombing. Crosby would have refused to cooperate anyway, but she had no information to give. It took a couple of years and thousands of dollars in legal fees before the charge was eventually dropped.

Our political weakness – referring to both the Five and their supporters – became apparent during the trial and the support work we did around it. The Five assumed that they would go down in a hail of bullets, but instead of the relative glory of the spectacular death, they had to deal with the much more pedestrian reality of sitting in jail awaiting trial. This lack of political and personal preparation for the almost inevitable consequences of their actions was compounded by a lack of preparation by their supporters. It is easy to reprint communiqués from underground comrades, but far more difficult to handle raids and lawyers, harassing arrests, and watch friends and comrades distance themselves just when support and work is needed the most. One must be able to handle high-stress politics for what could be a period of years, while advancing politics that may not even be supported by one's own friends and political associates, let alone the wider society. Yet competent and principled above ground support is crucial if underground actions are to have any long term impact. The community in Vancouver was able to maintain a presence outside and inside the courtroom during the trial in spite of differences in strategy as to how to support them. In Toronto, we were able to keep the ideas in circulation, but had little public impact.

In the initial confusion, the right to a fair trial became the main demand. Since it seemed possible that the room bugs which provided the main body of evidence might be thrown out, this strictly legal course was hard to resist without prior political clarity as to how trials should be conducted. The right to a fair trial must not be ignored if the battle is going to be fought on the legal terrain at all, but it is the state's battleground, and their first weapon is criminalization. The Crown split the indictments into four trials, the first of which was on the least overtly political charges, weapons offenses and conspiracy to rob a Brink's truck. While it may be obvious to those who have a certain political understanding why guerrillas need weapons and money, television pictures of a desk-