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Remembrance Day
Reflections on War and Militarism
November 6, 2024

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anarchist podcast *Seeds of Revolution*, originally titled
Remembrance Day & reflections on war and militarism. The
interviewees' names have been changed on this transcript version.

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Remembrance Day

Reflections on War and Militarism

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JOEL (Interviewer): With us today are two Camas community collective members. We have Gul and Bob. Gul has been a member of Camas for several years. She has worked long and hard with the diaspora and refugee community. And she's previously done a lot of work on anti-war activism. We also have Bob returning with us. Bob is a geographer and he is a conflict studies researcher.

So let's start off with just discussing how you each conceive of Remembrance Day. When you think about Remembrance Day and that it's coming up, what are the first thoughts that came into your head?

GUL: I had a different understanding of Remembrance Day growing up as a kid in Canada than I do now. Being a young refugee kid in Canadian elementary school, whose classmates were also other refugee kids, whose families had escaped conflict and war, Remembrance Day had a much more somber meaning. It was a very narrow focus and perspective on Canada's military involvement in World War I.

Even though I didn't really have an understanding of why World War I happened, or what the war was even about, it was

a memorial of the war dead, but in particular those who at least fought in the war with the main message being, you know, “lest we forget.” So for me, with my limited understanding as a child, war is horrible. It’s a horrible, disastrous, devastating thing that ruins people’s lives, so we should remember these lessons because we don’t want to repeat these lessons. That was my takeaway and understanding from it as a kid. And so it did have more meaning for me as a child.

JOEL: When you were that young, before 9–11, before you got a little older, did you understand Remembrance Day to be in honour of all war dead or just *Canadian* war dead?

GUL: The focus was definitely just on the Canadian war dead. I know Remembrance Day includes World War I as well as World War II and other Canadian military missions and ‘peacekeeping’ missions. For myself, coming from war, and intimately understanding the devastating, dramatizing affects it and it had on our families. I was able to personally connect with it in that way and that yes, war is terrible and we should not forget that it is terrible and have respect for the lives that were lost. And yes, it wasn’t until later on I realized and came to better understand that, okay, so we’re not actually talking about all people who died in these wars. Certainly not all civilians. Just, it was just focusing on war veterans, which I’ve come to understand as being a very limited, if not somewhat problematic message.

JOEL: When and how did you come to that understanding that Remembrance Day was more about honouring Canadian soldiers and less about honouring people all over the world who’d been traumatized and victimized by war?

GUL: I first heard that from war veterans themselves. And for them, whether it’s, you know, Memorial Day in the US or even Remembrance Day here, they didn’t see as much honour or even respect for the war dead in these kind of ceremonies. And certainly from what I’d seen under the Harper government, which is former conservative prime minister Stephen Harper, was

using Remembrance Day as a way to valorize Canada's mission in Afghanistan, which at that point I was staunchly against. From the very beginning, I was opposed to the NATO-led occupation in war in Afghanistan. And so I had a real problem with Remembrance Day being used as a propaganda tool.

JOEL: Bob, how about you? How did you conceive of Remembrance Day growing up?

BOB: Yeah, it was very similar to Gul through public school, right? The focus is very heavily on World War One. And in my education of World War One, we were taught about how it was not in these words, but ultimately like an imperialist kind of colonialist war fought between empires in Europe that was presented as a tragedy. You know, it was presented as a series of conflicts that had gone too far and ended up churning through entire generations of people. So it was presented as a tragedy and, you know, coming from my perspective now, like we can really see it as like an imperialist bullshit war. There's an American anti-war vet who did tours in Afghanistan, who has a podcast called *Lines Led by Donkeys* named Joe Kasabian. And to paraphrase him, he calls these kinds of wars a bunch of inbred kings fighting over turf. And they are willing to spend the lives of their populations through mass conscription for prestige. You know, they just wanted a bit more territory to sit under their throne.

...And, you know, I had ancestors who fought on both sides of World War I and who died. And for me, World War I was always that idea of understanding tragedy and atrocity—like how callous the monarchies and hierarchies can be in the way that they treat the people who suffer and live under them. I also had relatives who were still alive who fought in World War II. And World War II is presented a bit differently, although, you know, Canada did not join for any ethical reasons out of the goodness of Canadian hearts to stop Nazi or Imperial Japanese atrocities. What got the Commonwealth involved was the Nazis violating Belgian borders. So it

was like the sovereignty being impinged of Belgium that got them involved.

The British and the Canadians were more than happy to stand by as the Nazis and the Soviets carved out Poland and other parts of Eastern Europe. But, you know, World War II is presented as some form of just war—not ignoring that the British and other groups were engaging in colonialism and their own atrocities during that period of time. The sort of Nazi war machine, the Holocaust, the camps, and the atrocities they committed, as well as the Imperial Japanese atrocities, were effectively stopped by the military aims of the Allies during World War II. So there is like a bit of a, you know, “remember we fought fascists” kind of idea that was in my high school education. You know, it’s like: Nazis are bad. We fought Nazis. You grew up with that idea as well, that the armed forces and, specifically, the Canadian armed forces were a force for good and national liberation in the world.

JOEL: Yeah, we all did. That was the bottom line and main takeaway when they had us do the annual Remembrance Day ceremonies. When did that start to change for both of you? When did you start to think that maybe what you were being told about Remembrance Day and what it represents is not reflective of the reality as you were experiencing it?

BOB: Well, the other part of my education in public school was learning about the Rwandan genocide. So I think most Canadians who went through high school when I did would have watched *Hotel Rwanda*, which—though there were problems with the film—talked about Canadian peacekeeping involvement during the Rwandan genocide and the failures ultimately of not the peacekeepers on the ground themselves, but the United Nations and some of the ideas of peacekeeping. We also learned about Canadian involvement in the Balkans in peacekeeping and other peacekeeping operations.

So we were presented both with this tragic idea, the kind of more heroic idea, and also the fuck-ups of various military opera-

the troops were defending freedom and rights here—they were a contradiction then and they still are now. When Black Lives Matter and these Indigenous-led actions were taking place—and continue to take place, really—that should have been the end of it. I think these nationalists, these self-proclaimed nationalists and patriots who were so defensive of their militaries and police forces should have been humbled. Instead, they just dug their heels in. Which really is what leads me to my last point: Don't waste your breath or energy on these people. They don't care.

As the saying goes, the cruelty is the point. And I think no one has said it as powerfully as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, also known as Malcolm X, who at the time was speaking in the context of Black liberation in the U.S. And there's a reason why he's a source of inspiration for so many—because he gets straight to the heart of the issue, a lot of these issues, which is still relevant today. I think it applies to all people who are resisting inhumane institutions and fighting for their basic survival.

So as Malcolm X had put it: [paraphrased]

“You can't appeal to the moral conscience of someone that is morally bankrupt. You can't change their mind. They don't try and eliminate an evil because it's evil or because it's illegal or because it's immoral. They eliminate it only when it threatens their existence.” And he went on to say: “If you want freedom, if you want justice, and if you want equality, you shouldn't have to wait for it or even ask for permission. You reserve the right to defend yourselves—and to do that by any means necessary.”

JOEL: I always think it's great to end on a Malcolm X quote.

tions that Canada has been involved with. As I got more into my undergrad and started looking more at history and understanding that Canada had been celebrating Canadian military dead from the Korean War—which I don't think there's a way to frame Canada's involvement in that conflict that comes off as nicely for a narrative as World War II, for example.

Canada started to commemorate military casualties after the Anglo-Boer War, which is known quite well for the British putting Black Africans as well as the Boers, the Afrikaners, into concentration camps. The Afrikaners were running a horrible apartheid government, but Canada was celebrating itself kind of as an independent nation participating in the colonial projects of the British. So that is also a part of the legacy and inheritance of Remembrance Day.

It's not just World War I and World War II and the various peace-keeping operations that succeeded or failed to some degree. It was also the Anglo-Boer Wars as well as other operations that Canadians engaged with. And it was really under the Harper government as well that I noticed the jingoism and this kind of military nationalism. Some people would connect Canada's... Harper in particular would celebrate Canadians fighting at Vimy Ridge as this very important moment in Canadian history, as a part where Canadians kind of made a stamp for themselves on the world. But that was an atrocious battle. Tens of thousands of people died in the mud, in the trenches.

And for what? I don't think there's anything honourable and there was anything gained out of that. But Harper was trying to use that to justify the Canadian involvement in the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and the participation in the civil war there. And that was also around the time that I learned about peace activists using the white poppy instead of the red poppy. So the red poppy remembers specifically veterans and Canadian military dead, but the white poppy is all casualties of war—everybody who

dies, as well as the civilians and the indirect deaths. So people who are dying from famine or a lack of access to water.

So the white poppy has been something that I've been wearing consistently, and I think is in the better spirit of remembrance—tragedies.

JOEL: Gul, when did your conception of Remembrance Day start to change?

GUL: Well, yeah, it was 2001 where we watched the invasion of my home country of Afghanistan. And the thing is, every year on Remembrance Day, we were painfully reminded that it was being used—as I mentioned earlier—as a war propaganda tool. This war has claimed—and we're talking about the war on terror in general, which includes Iraq and even hybrid parts in the war regions in Pakistan—has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians. It has further escalated violence and created a platform where these foreign military forces were committing horrible crimes against humanity. They were detaining people. They were torturing civilians. They were killing civilians. Like I said, I've had a strong stance against the NATO-led occupation war. That includes the militarization of our own Canadian generations here.

And that's what Remembrance Day was being used for. Militarism in itself is a very dehumanizing experience. And this claim that it's spreading freedom, democracy, is just used as a pretense—through military force. It's the same idea that's been used by Canada or the US and other parts of the world before. It's not a new concept. And it sounds noble, but it really is anything but in its execution.

You can't bring freedom and democracy by imperialist or colonial wars. This is an idea that really needs to be expired and just left in the past with other outdated terms and ideas. And if we're talking about an alternative to having these wars, you first need to understand the true essence of war. War by its very nature destroys the pillars of society. And these are devastating effects that will last generations. So to find an alternative, you have to respect those

liberation. That just makes you another reactionary—or at the very least, an enabler of one.

So I would advise listening to the experts—those who are on the front lines, academics who are peer-reviewed, researchers, and the reliable journalists who aren't operating as state actors funded by dictators. It's easy to be swayed by soundbites and slogans that sound good on the surface, but if you're not critical of where it's coming from, then you're putting yourself at risk of being used for agendas that aren't as noble as you want them to be. The last piece of lesson I would give is to stop trying to appeal to the other side's moral compass. They don't care.

All those right-wingers that were harassing me with messages after Remembrance Day—most of them used their real names and real pictures on their social media accounts. And I was able to follow their activity. Every year I think, "Well, what's our favorite Canuck patriots up to this year?" And, you know, the ones who were the same ones who were so upset over an Afghan woman saying, "War is bad, actually"—without fail, they were progressively more hateful and bigoted than before in their views. I saw them voicing their disdain against Indigenous and Black-led protests. I saw how they were unironically critical of cancel culture, woke-ness.

They mocked women for speaking out against misogyny or toxic masculinity. They talked about the queer community—and in particular the trans and gender nonconforming community—as a threat to Western civilization. They've been having ongoing tantrums that generalize all migrants, asylum seekers as criminals. And some of them got real local about white genocide—which should tell you everything. And so, to the surprise of no one, I saw them embrace and go full MAGA here in Canada, supporting a U.S. presidential candidate whose own former chief of staff had described as a fascist.

So, you know, when they were talking about exporting freedom and democracy overseas through state military violence, or that

GUL: Another key element to organizing against state wars, at least in my opinion, is to keep ourselves in check and not be so quick to be swayed by ego or pride—so much so that you lose the ability to be critical of what is truth. To echo a young Jewish activist I met from the recent Palestine encampments: none of us are immune to propaganda. This was in context to communist party groups—also known as tankies—attempting to hijack the Palestine Solidarity Movement with misinformation, which they have done previously in other conflicts. And I saw a similar thing happen during post-9/11 action against the U.S.-led war on terror.

I was fortunate to not have a lot of exposure to tankies in these actions, but things took a turn when Syria happened. I had to stop and take a step back and reevaluate where I stood and who I stood with. Some of the people I had previously organized with and knew weren't opposing NATO for the same reasons I was anymore. My perspective was formed through a lens of watching their failures in Iraq and Afghanistan. Their perspective was being influenced by a proxy war with Russia, who was allied with Assad. So in their binary worldview, if NATO equals bad, then opposing forces like Russia and dictators like Assad are good. And this is a very dangerous mindset, and it's necessary we don't fall into those traps and become agents for war propaganda and state imperialism by someone else.

This is why I argue it's so important to not flatten the important nuances and complexities of these conflicts—because these aren't simple issues. I mean, yes, we can keep our calls to action simple, but not necessarily our solidarity and who we're actually supporting when we're building awareness and with the information that we're sharing—whether it's through speeches and teach-ins or social media content and so on. We have to be critical of who or what we're platforming. If your position is “the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” regardless if they're also an oppressive force to someone else, then you can't claim to stand for principles like justice or

very same pillars—like the foundations of society: having access to education, healthcare, housing, culture. We have to empower communities.

We have to improve human quality of life. And what the war on terror did is it may have created small bubbles of green zones in a few major cities where they were able to throw billions of dollars into Afghanistan without any real consideration or sustainability or accountability. And that's going into the NGO industrial complex, which I'm not going to dive too deep into right now, but it was such a waste of billions and billions of dollars.

If you couldn't use it responsibly, then at least that wealth could have been used for domestic civilian infrastructure. Millions of people here in Turtle Island could have instead benefited and improved their quality of life. Instead, what we saw was our taxes going to contribute to the destabilization of Central Asia and the Middle East. So yeah, myself and my Afghan counterparts, we were outraged. We were right to be outraged. The system was failing our community. And it was failing by design. And so I decided I was not going to be silent about that. We wanted better for people. If you're contributing to the problem and to their suffering, then our argument is they deserve justice.

JOEL: How did those arguments and those feelings manifest for you in 2012 from Remembrance Day?

GUL: So in 2012, Remembrance Day, at that point, I was part of an Afghan-led movement against the occupation of war in Afghanistan. And what people don't know is that year there were already several massacres that had taken place by foreign-led troops in Afghanistan. We had gone through night and day—hours and hours and hundreds of documents—going through victim testimonies, countless images, and video documentation of war crimes.

We were also working with Afghan youth inside Afghanistan and with the refugee and diaspora community. And the message that they always had for us being in the diaspora—those who at

least were raised here in the West who had certainly more privileges than they did—is: “Don’t abandon us. Be our voices where our voices cannot be present.” And so I was determined to do that. If I’m going to be an Afghan in opposition to this occupation of war, the least I could do is to bring the voices of my community who are on the front lines on the ground here. And that’s what I often did.

A lot of the speeches and protests and actions that I did... In 2012, myself and one of my Afghan colleagues, Leila, had—like I mentioned, that year there were a lot of massacres that had taken place. The Harper government was drumming on about cataclysmic military involvement in Afghanistan being this noble cause. Every year in the years since before then, we were constantly reminded of this thing. And so we were like, you know, we’re here to remember our own dead. We remember the Afghans who have died—as a cause of this war, a cause of insurgent and Taliban violence, and as a cause of military violence.

We had showed up with our own sign saying, “We remember the Afghan dead.” And we were one of four groups that were protesting that day. In fact, there was an Indigenous group, a women’s group, a group of anti-fascists, and then myself and Leila. And the only ones that anyone ever actually heard about ended up just being us because a right-wing tabloid source—also known as the *Toronto Sun* and Sun Media—had covered that day of action and really did their best to portray us as essentially terrorists, traitors to Canada, and a national threat to the country.

JOEL: They printed your name in the newspaper and claimed that you were what—a Taliban supporter?

GUL: A jihadist Islamist and a Taliban supporter, none of which were true. And we actually didn’t intend on having it become a public spectacle. We actually just showed up with a sign and were going to stand there with our sign and just be like, this is us commemorating and in remembrance and respect to honour our dead. And the reason it turned into a spectacle is because the police who

forth—and we were able to help them get access to housing and food and medicine supplies, translation support, legal support. And of course, I didn’t stop Rebel News, which is another garbage tabloid, from naming me again almost a full decade later during a Remembrance Day action that happened last year for Palestine. They tried pulling the same shit—suggesting I was a threat for protesting at Remembrance Day. Again comparing me to terrorists. Except this time, I learned there is an Islamophobia legal assistance hotline that provides pro bono support for Muslim individuals who deal with these kinds of attacks. And with their help, I was able to get the support I needed and legally get them to back down and retract their statements.

GUL: There were other major events that took place after Remembrance Day 2012 that I didn’t really see coming, but it was a long time coming. Within days, Idle No More had taken off. Idle No More being an Indigenous land movement—it started against Bill C-45, that overhauled the Navigable Water Protection Act. It compromised Indigenous land stewardship. That was followed by major protests and blockades that interrupted a lot of intersections and major infrastructure. And then a few months later, the Black Lives Matter movement had started—BLM being a Black-led movement against police brutality and racism. It was sparked by the murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, who was killed. George Zimmerman was acquitted on self-defense—wrongly acquitted. And the movement continued with the murders of George Floyd, Tamir Rice, Breonna Taylor, countless, countless more.

There were both protests and just straight-up riots—justifiably so, I would argue. And we saw police stations being burned down. What was the message behind these movements? It was: the system is failing our communities. It is failing by design. And they’re not going to be silent about it. This was when I saw more intersectional alliances and solidarity grow and evolve. So it just goes to show that the numbers are on your side.

When you're dissenting against state and media-sponsored death and violence, pushback will be inevitable—especially if you are from a marginalized community that is already the target of attacks. And if or when that happens, we have to make sure we're practicing self-care and to not let it defeat us. At the time in 2012, when I was facing a witch hunt by national conservative media outlets and their audience, I dealt with death threats, rape threats. Our universities and places of employment were contacted. They were essentially trying to ruin our lives, and that was a lot to deal with. I'll be honest—it was kind of a scary time and it really sucked. But I want people to know that the aftermath and what happened later was actually in our favor. Our workplaces didn't fire us. We weren't kicked out of school—because on what basis, right? There were none other than a lie that was effectively disproven.

These are intimidation tactics that have been used against post-9/11 anti-war protesters to silence us and to put us in our place. But the reality is we're not alone in these kinds of struggles. I remember a local Canadian journalist was so appalled at the coverage that was directed at us. He reported on one popular radio station that was calling for violence against us. And that host was immediately fired. We were very quickly able to raise funds from overwhelming community support against some of these media outlets who were falsely labeling us as terrorists. We successfully settled out of court along with a statement from them acknowledging that they had lied. And by the way, we didn't want to settle. I wanted to take it all the way to court, but our lawyers at the time had advised us to settle because we simply didn't have the same resources these media outlets did to fight this for a long period of time.

However, Sun Media eventually shut down a couple of years later. And I was able to use that settlement from what was an anti-war protest to provide support for refugees during the refugee crisis that was taking place in parts of Europe afterward. I worked with a network of diaspora delegates from those refugee communities—largely Afghan, Syrian, Iranian, Palestinian, and so

were there actually ripped our sign out of our hands. It's like, okay, well, if you want to take away our voice and our words on this piece of paper—hey, we can still use our mouths. Not to mention your charter rights—take away your voice and your words, also illegally and unconstitutionally violate your charter rights to free speech and free expression.

JOEL: Right. And so that created conflict from the get-go. That was the police who did that. And then of course it got the attention of several attendees who were there to supposedly commemorate Canada's war dead, some of whom claimed to be family members from Canadian wars. And I would say they were largely what we now understand to be conservative boomers who were quite literally frothing at the mouth at the sight of you and focusing narrowly on you because you were two visible Afghan Muslim women who were present—and just yelling obscenities at you, screaming at you to go back to where you came from. It doesn't really sound like they were as upset about any sort of disrespect towards war veterans, because that wasn't even what they were yelling about. They were just saying, "Go back to where you came from."

GUL: Right. And what's ironic is—one of the propaganda messages of the war upon a stone is they're there to liberate Afghan women. Here they are just fuming at the sight of us—not just being there, but speaking our own truth. And this is not like we came to disrupt a private funeral. This is a national Memorial Day. Like the former mayor of Toronto was present. You were saying that the messaging is that the Canadian armed forces and the U.S. armed forces are in Canada in part to protect Afghan women. And yet here are two Afghan women exercising agency over themselves and their beliefs and trying to exercise it over how their country is portrayed and invaded. But it's when the Afghan women that we're supposedly protecting have the indecency to exercise their own agency and give their own opinions that people all of a sudden think twice about trying to empower these same women.

JOEL: Right. And so this really kind of illuminates their double standards. And you're not the first and only people whose voices have been criminalized. There have been a lot of—because people ask, “Well, whatever happened to the anti-war movement?” And a lot of those folks were also criminalized. They were called national traitors and they were demonized and they were threatened and harassed and stalked and had people do their best to ruin their lives. And so a lot of them fell off radar. And seeing you, you were like the trifecta of everything they hated. You were young, you were women, and you were visible—women of color at that too. And Muslims. God, how dare you be Muslim and even speak up. And so it really highlighted just the hypocrisy and double standards they had—claiming that they were there to defend freedom and rights of Canadians and then trying to deny you that access. It also highlighted their own white supremacy. They never really saw you as true Canadians to begin with.

GUL: Not only that, but to completely omit their own presence as being a colonizing force here in Canada on Indigenous lands. I call them war pigs—whether it was the conservative media at the time. When I talk about war pigs, I'm talking about not just the politicians, but the media that was a tool of war propaganda—and their supporters and audiences. So what they want is simple, outdated, cartoonish even narratives of this white Western civilization being the good guys, and brown people are the savage terrorists. And they get to not only fight them, but also act as their saviors. Again, Afghanistan is not the first time they've pulled this shit. This is like a tale as old as fucking time.

Should we even have a Remembrance Day? I mean, Bob, I was thinking about what you said about the white poppies, and I've always had two minds about the white poppies since I first found out about it when I moved to Canada. On the one hand, I understand the impulse, and I certainly think that we should be spending a lot more time thinking about all of the people who've died and whose lives have been horribly, horribly altered due to war. But on the

respect for, Aaron Hughes: “Don't stand with the global 1%. Don't stand with these generals that continuously abuse their own service members and then talk about building democracy and promoting freedom.”

JOEL: Bob, any lessons you think we can learn from Remembrance Day when we approach future movements that fight for justice and liberation?

BOB: Yeah. In confronting Remembrance Day, I think of the practices of the anti-fascist three-way fight. You have to fight fascism, you have to fight the state. And to do that, you have to fight nationalism. You have to be internationalists, you have to fight militarism. We need community self-defense. And through direct actions on Remembrance Day that have challenged the Canadian nation-state's perception of itself—or the one that it tries to impose on people—we can generalize that and have solidarity with people who are in conflicts around the world without celebrating the various military exploits or the military parties that are involved. There are a lot of lessons we can take away from these movements. And I just want to acknowledge that we did have to pause and redo this last part because for me, it does require a longer answer. And I do think it's the most important takeaway. It can feel powerless not being able to stop a war death machine or even a desolation. So I think we have to keep our objectives and goals realistic on what we can do.

For me, that was mobilizing my own community at a time when we had no voice or representation or platform to be heard. We created that for ourselves. The second was networking with a coalition of people who shared the same values and being intersectional and principled against state brutality and gaining the support and trust of the broader public by debunking propaganda using trusted and reliable sources. And with that comes media training and knowing how to navigate both investigative research and manufactured misinformation. We have to accept that doing this kind of work does come with the risk of facing backlash.

for war veterans who did in fact make sacrifices—most of all sacrificing their own humanity—they would have actually listened to them. Instead of punishing them for speaking the truth, as we’ve seen with whistleblowers. Instead of punishing them for refusing service, for not wanting to be redeployed, and treating them oftentimes like an afterthought when they were asking for support after they put their bodies through the brutalities of war—a war that these war pigs themselves defend and sent them to in the first place. That’s the real disgrace.

GUL: And that same year that we did the Remembrance Day action, there were war veterans—Canadian war veterans—who were suing the federal government. Yeah, they were suing the federal government over the kind of altruistic subsidies and payments they were given for the various injuries that they suffered while in Afghanistan. And the effect that would have on their income going forward, right? Like if you lose your limbs or you suffer traumatic bodily injury or mental injuries, that’s going to detrimentally impact your life—the rest of your life. And the pittance that they were giving out to these people who they claimed to venerate is disgusting. And anti-war vets have always been on the front lines of the anti-war struggle. They know how horrible it is.

Remembrance Day has been a useful site for challenging these ideas—for protesting and for criticizing, as I did in 2012. That year in particular, there was a lot that happened. I was talking earlier about the civilian massacres that happened. But also in May of that year was NATO’s 25th summit in Chicago. And myself and a couple of my Afghan counterparts were invited by local anti-war organizers—mainly U.S. veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars—to take part in what appeared to be the largest anti-NATO rally in U.S. history. And it was the war veterans who put us front and center of that march before we all took the stage and spoke. They threw their medals at the building of that NATO summit. To quote one of the war veterans who I know and have tremendous

other hand, can we do that without inherently celebrating war at all? I mean, no matter how we try to twist it and turn it, at the end of the day, is Remembrance Day always going to be inevitably a celebration of militarism?

BOB: Well, my work on memorialization and controversies over these things—for my thesis and the research work that I’ve done, interviewing over a bunch of these different controversies that have been happening, including name change controversies—the state and the various powers that be will always try to impose a way of understanding the past and our place in it. So whether it’s the Harper government’s kind of imposing this idea of Remembrance Day as militaristic and jingoistic, and trying to use it to whip up support for their government’s involvement in the war on terror, or other uses that the state can divine for it—there are always going to be counter-hegemonic ways of interpreting it and being critical and reconsidering Remembrance Day. Thinking about all of those who die in war, the atrocities of war and the ripples that war has, and the ongoing wars, international conflicts that we’re embroiled in around the world—it can be a time to consider these things and our place in it, and how we, as autonomous agents and political actors, can affect these changes. I think for anarchists as well, anarchists have a history of engaging in conflicts.

We have the Black Army during the Russian Civil Wars. There are the Spanish columns in the Spanish Civil Wars. We also have anarchist brigades and anarchist-aligned or anarchistic community self-defense—whether it’s the autonomous areas of Northeastern Syria or other places where anarchists have joined brigades to fight against reactionary and authoritarian forces. There are things that we have to think about—how we orient ourselves towards conflict and war, how we think about them, and how we have to defend our communities, whether here or overseas. We can take that opportunity to consider that. And the “lest we forget, so it doesn’t happen again” idea—I think is a very moving way to consider it. And it’s

something that certainly hasn't been taken to heart by those who have been in power.

JOEL: Yeah. It's funny you said "lest we forget," because as a Jewish American, I grew up with that from the earliest days I remember. "Never forget" was a phrase that was part of my upbringing. And it's ostensibly about the victims of one of the 20th century's greatest holocausts. But if we interrogate it, "never forget" has quickly become a justification for Zionism, a justification of imperialism, a justification for precisely the kind of militarism that led to the deaths of more than 6 million people that we're supposed to never forget. So I come back to this question: can we really commemorate officially—not as individuals or even as small communities—but on the level of a nation-state? Can a nation-state that was born in imperialism commemorate its war dead without celebrating, inherently as part of that commemoration, current imperialism and current militarism? Can we separate those two in a settler colonial state like Canada?

BOB: It's a convenient tool for jingoism. And if they can utilize it to support jingoistic narratives, why wouldn't they? It always comes back to: "Because of their sacrifices, you have freedoms here that you should be grateful for." And it's a way of keeping the population in line and brainwashed. It has to be decoupled from the nation-state. You know, we can't have Remembrance Day with the red poppies, which are specifically about the Canadian war dead, and not—yeah, that doesn't sit beside the idea of the white poppy, where we think about everybody. Which is a more generic move, because in World War I, my ancestors were not Canadian. They were British or they were German. So even though I'm Canadian, they don't fall into Remembrance Day as it stands.

That's why having maybe a more encompassing one—thinking more broadly about Canadian military action, thinking about World War II, they think about the liberation of the camps. And then on the other hand, we don't really talk about or celebrate or commemorate the RAF's firebombing and indiscriminate bombing.

So the narrative of constructing the nation-state and constructing the citizen's place in it—as a citizen soldier or someone who could be a soldier—is the problem. It needs to be decoupled from this idea of the nation.

JOEL: I think the phrase that I associate most with the Holocaust is "never again," right? Like, "Never again will we let a genocide happen." But there have been numerous genocides that have happened since World War II. Several have been ongoing for the past few years, and the international community has sat on their collective hands and done nothing. And the current one—arguably the largest one—is being perpetrated by Jews in the name of "never forget, never again." So I guess that just goes back to my point—and Bob, maybe you've already answered it to the best that we can answer this: How do we, even if our true desire is to commemorate the war dead—unless that commemoration is coupled with an active pacifism, an active anti-imperialism, an active anti-statism—then doesn't it just inevitably degenerate into a celebration of militarism? And Remembrance Day is not actively coupled with any of those things.

BOB: Yeah. Like it needs to be internationalist and anti-state and taking the side of all of those who suffer. And that's not going to happen as long as we have things like nationalism and jingoism and the celebration of militarism. Ultimately, war is very lucrative for these weapons contractors, these big oil and arms companies. They shape our war policies because they benefit from it. The human casualty and catastrophe of war is nothing more than numbers and figures on a document for them.

JOEL: Gul, I think you've hit on something very important, which maybe gives words to an emotion I've had—whether it's looking at Remembrance Day in Canada or Memorial Day in the States—which is that I've never gotten the feeling that it really is about remembering the dead, whether they are the dead of the armed forces or victims of war. That it's actually a celebration of all the advantages of militarism. If these war pigs had any respect