

Finding Our Own Fire

The Fayer Collective

March 3rd, 2021

The US South is a region of the world that can't be understood from any less than a hundred perspectives. It's home to over half the United States' Black population and yet is viewed, seemingly across the board, as the most racist part of said country. It's been ignored by the political establishment and wealthy for decades, then labeled as backward and unintelligent by the same ones that landed us where we are. This has put us, as anarchists, and more so Jewish anarchists, in an unfortunately unique position. We've had to fight tooth and nail against classist forces that wish us gone in the name of development and safety, and at the same time, fight those of our class who dawn white hoods and wish us dead because we don't eat pork. At the front line of both these enemies are blue and red flashing lights, excitedly ready to beat and arrest us at a moment's notice.

This is still a simplified summary, of course. To assume that the whole southern fascist movement is working class is itself classist—something that coastal liberalism has yet to (or chooses not to) understand. Many of those we face on the streets are the same ones who're raising our rents, flipping our neighborhoods, and cutting our pay. Nevertheless, for the past decade, this is the situation that we and our friends have found ourselves in.

Indeed, Klan and Nazi activity are never infrequent in our lives. For instance, a rich Klan lawyer is actively buying up property in the Atlanta, Georgia, neighborhood where some of us live. And as Jews in the South, this has never been hidden from us, whether it took the form of some of us being attacked at our homes to witnessing parents pull their kids from school when they found out that they'd learned about Chanukah that day.

As anarchists, we've been organizing, building our world, and fostering a revolutionary culture for close to ten years now—some of us for longer than that, and some of us for only a matter of months. But for most of this time, those of us who would become the Fayer Collective never thought to or saw the benefit of organizing explicitly as Jewish anarchists. While for some of us, our Jewishness may have been prominent in our personal lives, it was only a background fact in nearly all our political lives. That was soon to change.

In 2017, the National Socialist Movement, a neo-Nazi political organization, had announced that it would hold a rally in Newnan, Georgia, on April 21 of the following year. Around November, in our own various crews and groups, we began organizing with the coalition that was forming under the banner #NoNaziNewnan. One of the coalition's goals was to get marginalized religious communities, such as synagogues and mosques, to support the counterorganizing

effort, so we did outreach, but not one synagogue decided to join us. At first this seemed surprising. There were two main reasons, though, that the synagogues did not want to sign on. One was understandable: the fear of being targeted by these neo-Nazis in the future. The other was frustrating: they didn't want to be associated with what they called "the Antifa" (Atlanta Antifa was part of the coalition and the most publicly associated group with the counterdemonstration). Despite this setback and with less support than hoped, the coalition forged ahead, but what we experienced in Newnan would only encourage our already-growing resentments toward what felt like another betrayal by the institutional and liberal wing of Jews in the United States.

As we arrived in downtown Newnan, we saw the full force of what we were up against. Tanks filled the streets, snipers were positioned on the rooftops, and soldiers occupied all the "public" space. The small, rural, Georgian town was militarized, ready to defend neo-Nazis against any and all threats to their "freedom of speech." The arrests began only minutes after we gathered on a corner, before the march had even started. This was simply a prelude of things to come in Newnan that day. The police targeted us, the counterdemonstrators, by tasing people, dragging folks through the streets, violently arresting others, and threatening to turn their guns on us, and this went on, nonstop, for hours. The fascist rally was held as planned, although all the news attention was on us and not the neo-Nazis. Whether this was a victory or not has since been debated, but either way, we all left demoralized. It should be noted that many of these military police had been trained by Israel Defense Forces soldiers under the Georgia International Law Enforcement Exchange program—thus Israeli-trained police had defended literal neo-Nazis.

It wasn't long before we found ourselves in the exact same situation. The International Keystone Knights of the Ku Klux Klan called for a rally on February 2, 2019, at Georgia's Stone Mountain, where a massive Confederate memorial is carved into the rock wall. Once again, we joined in the counterorganizing effort. A coalition dubbed FrontLine Organization Working to End Racism (FLOWER) was formed. And like last time, we reached out to the institutional Jewish community, only to hear the exact same reasons for refusing to join us that we'd been given for Newnan. Fortunately we had more success overall in Stone Mountain because the Klan, which was disorganized and plagued by infighting, decided at the last minute to cancel its own event, and our antifascist coalition enjoyed an arrest-free victory march in downtown Stone Mountain.

Between the two events and failing to gain support from Jewish institutions both times, we learned a harsh lesson—one that maybe we had been in denial about for some time: we needed an explicitly revolutionary Jewish organization in Atlanta. We needed, in essence, to clearly and visibly weaponize our own identities as Jewish anarchists in order to force people to understand that some of us exist and organize beyond the liberal wing of our community.

Later that same year, Fayer, the Yiddish word for "fire," went public. While many of us are often involved with other projects and don't necessarily have the time to dedicate to a new collective, it made sense to at least have a platform—a place to give our perspective as Jews as well as a banner to march under as revolutionary Jews when necessary. Still, it wasn't long before other Jewish rebels found us, and quickly a new community formed—the first one in Atlanta where diasporic, radical, and anti-Zionist Jews could actually exist together without being harassed as "self-hating." Forging a revolutionary Jewish culture in a city that has been dominated by liberalism is not an easy task, and we've only really just started. For us, the fight against fascism isn't about "allyship"; it is a personal and direct fight for our lives. And that knowledge has put a fire in our hearts, as both anarchists and Jews.

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There Is Nothing So Whole as a Broken Heart: Mending the World as Jewish Anarchists. Edited
by Cindy Milstein

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artists, revolutionaries, workers, students, criminals, and free lovers—fighting for the earth, the
good life, and total liberation. You can find Fayer on Twitter at @FayerAtlanta.

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