

# **A Murder of Crows**

Various Authors

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# **Issue 1**

# We Are Much Too Young to Wait

The revolt that exploded with determination and persistence in the French banlieues (with flare-ups in Belgium, Berlin and Athens) is animated by the lively rage of young casseurs, human beings who, like so many around the world, suffer endless condemnation to a daily life that is nothing but dissatisfaction, misery, humiliation and exploitation. The acts of these wild youths, which the “right-thinking,” priggish bourgeoisie simplistically write off with contempt as violence for its own sake, reveal a much more subtle meaning, laying bare the violence of an economic-social system that imposes increasingly dehumanizing obligations in its own interests and in the interest of the few who benefit from it: a useless and harmful job in exchange for a wage to pay back to the masters for homes, goods or “free” time. And just as this legalized violence is not blind, but sees quite clearly against whom it is acting, so also, the casseurs are quite aware when they vent their hatred against cops, cars, businesses, commercial centers and other symbols of isolation and power.

The riots that are going on attack two levels of state intervention at the same time: the police deployed to keep an eye on and punish the poor, and the car to be paid off in installments, symbol of individual “independence”, of consumption, of time on credit.

To drag in religious motives — as the right has done — is a pathetic attempt to stem the revolt. The excommunications of the Islamic authorities have not stopped these enraged people who do not recognize any mediators. So it is here that a more democratic politician or commentator from the left comes to concede, if not a justification, at least a motivation to the episodes that are overturning the horrifying normality of the banlieues: these invisible outskirts are an example of the degradation that bad administrations ignore, thus allowing their inhabitants, who are mostly immigrants that society does not want to integrate, to nourish a most uncontrollable rage. Thus, a plan for urban “requalification” is supposed to be necessary, perhaps entrusting the project to some architectural standards and following the principles of bio-architecture (or more simply those of a more effective social control). But from New York to Paris, from London to Ramallah, ghettos are the very form of the market and of politics. The latest illusions of the integration of the poor are burned up together in the blazes of Clichy-sous-Bois. No one seems to ask what cities have become. Doesn't anyone even notice that the “most rational” urban plans serve to obliterate the natural — and with it the human — environment, paving and building solely in order to give priority to the circulation of commodities and consumer-workers, to the detriment of human circulation and communication? Cities are containers of capital and human resources to invest and exploit. What then are a few hundred cars burned and other sad places damaged in comparison to the millions of people who are damaged and destroyed every day by those who impose the usual, senseless and boring life on them?

It seems unlikely that this revolt will become generalized. To achieve this, it would be necessary for each and every common mortal, pen-pushers mechanized by stereotypes and daily rhythms, to decide to become aware of the need to put an end to this system — the sole true cause of the misery which we suffer — sabotaging it once and for all.

We joyfully greet these manifestations of the refusal and destruction of everything that represents and contributes to exploitation, brutalization and destruction of the human being.

*Long live the wild youths of France!*

*Social war against capital!*

Some friends of the “riffraff”

November 2005

# **Solidarity is a Weapon: On the Recent Wave of Repression**

On December 7, 2005, six people, Chelsea Gerlach, Bill Rodgers, Sarah Harvey, Kevin Tubbs, Daniel McGowan and Stanislas “Jack” Meyerhoff were arrested for allegedly taking part in a wide variety of attacks claimed by the Earth Liberation Front (ELF). On that very same day, several people across Oregon were subpoenaed to testify before a grand jury to be convened in Eugene. One of those served with a subpoena, Darren Thurston (a Canadian citizen), was also arrested and is now facing charges related to false documents. Within days it was revealed that informants, including Jacob Ferguson, a lifelong friend of one of the accused, were used to gather information. It was also revealed that Meyerhoff had turned state’s witness.

In a terrible turn of events, on December 22, Bill Rodgers was found dead in his cell in Flagstaff, Arizona from an apparent suicide. Bill worked at the Catalyst Bookstore and Infoshop in Prescott, Arizona and was involved in ecological struggles for many years in different parts of the United States. According to those who were in contact with him and a news story, which interviewed one of his supporters, Bill was doing well despite the terrible circumstances. His death came as a shock to many, both to those who did not know him and especially to those who did. Bill’s passing is a loss to all of us and the loss of someone who cared immensely about people and the world in which we live. There is much more to be said about his life, and even more to be done about his death, but it is important to remember that we can honor his death by continuing to struggle.

On January 20, federal prosecutors and Attorney General Alberto Gonzales announced a 65-count indictment of 11 individuals related to 17 attacks in the northwest. In addition to the six people arrested on December 7, 2005, it also indicted Jonathan Paul, Suzanne Savoie, Joseph Dibee, Rebecca Rubin and Josephine Overaker. Paul and Savoie, who were originally subpoenaed to appear before the grand jury, were both arrested in Oregon only days before the indictment was announced, and Dibee, Rubin and Overaker are luckily out of the country. In the weeks that followed five individuals were revealed as “confidential sources” for the government’s case, and on February 23 two individuals in Olympia, Washington, Nathan Fraser Block and Joyanna L. Zacher, were arrested and indicted in connection with the May 2001 arson at a Clatskanie, Oregon tree farm. It has become painfully obvious that the government intends to bury each one of these people to set an example for anyone even thinking of taking action.

## **Strike One to Paralyze a Thousand**

One of the main motivations behind the arrests and subpoenas is undoubtedly the state’s need to halt the multitude of direct actions undertaken by the ELF. The FBI has labeled them, along with the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), the greatest domestic “terrorist” threat, and with good reason. What began as a few attacks in the late ‘90s, has blossomed into scores of direct actions



across the U.S. against a wide variety of targets including suburban developments, car dealerships, genetic engineering labs and crops, logging sites, and more. Also many attacks claimed by the ELF overstepped the bounds of simply fighting ecological devastation, and were linked to situations of wider struggle such as the attack against an Army recruiting station in Alabama, an attempted arson of a water bottling plant in Michigan.

Many have come to recognize that the fight against ecological destruction has many fronts, and that striking the enemy, while dangerous, is quite simple. Radical participation in social struggles, attacking structures of power, and rejecting compromise and reconciliation with those who are destroying our lives and our world, are the real cause for the state's fear. Thus they round up those on their watch-lists, hoping to make an example of them in order to frighten others into submission, to halt any attempts at solidarity for fear of being swept up as well, and to make us remember that the State is master of orchestrating violence.

## **The Real Terrorists**

The U.S. government exploited the attacks on the World Trade Center that occurred in 2001, using the specter of terrorism to attack many social movements and to frighten people into acceptance of the most invasive "security" measures. This strategy has been used in the current wave of repression, with each of the accused being fitted-up as eco-terrorists. For the state, anyone who refuses institutional channels for dissent, or who chooses not to simply have an opinion and take direct action, is a terrorist, an extremist, and an enemy of freedom. It is ironic that states across the world vehemently denounce "terrorist violence" while at the same time causing more death, destruction and misery than any so-called terrorist groups.

None of the attacks for which the accused are charged harmed a single person, which is more than can be said for companies like Union Carbide and Freeport-McMoRan, who are responsible for the deaths of thousands in India and West Papua. It is the same for the U.S. government, who is responsible for killing well over 30,000 Iraqi civilians in the last three years of war, and millions of others in Southeast Asia and Latin America in wars of counter-insurgency. It is clear that the real terrorists are those who arrested and rounded up the accused, and not the other way around.

## **A Link in the Chain**

Since the 1960s the state has repeatedly used grand juries to target forces antagonistic to it: the Black Panthers, the American Indian Movement (AIM), and animal and earth liberation groups. Composed of 16 to 23 jurors, grand juries do not actually decide innocence or guilt. Rather, they decide whether or not there is probable cause to charge someone. Unlike a normal court hearing, there is no judge, nor are those subpoenaed entitled to legal counsel within the courtroom. Instead the hearings are conducted in secret, with defendants who are forced to testify or face jail time. Grand juries are used to divide and isolate individuals, to turn social fighters against one another and to break the bonds of friendship and affinity that form the basis for social movements. In 2005 three grand juries targeting activists were convened: one in San Diego and two in San Francisco. The grand jury in San Diego was convened to look into the 2003 ELF arson that destroyed a large apartment building under construction in the University City district. One in San Francisco targeted former Black Panther members for a bombing at an Ingleside police

station over 30 years ago and the other targeted animal rights activists for possible connection with the bombing of a pharmaceutical company. Three people refused to testify before the San Diego grand jury and spent several months in prison and five ex-Panthers refused to testify in San Francisco. The former panthers were imprisoned for two months and were only released when the grand jury's time limit expired. The other grand jury in San Francisco was reconvened in late January 2006 and concerned animal rights activity as well. It is apparent that the state is taking action against current movements and is also trying to settle old scores in a time when political repression seems to be well tolerated.

It is important to remember, however, that repression experienced by activists and radicals is not abnormal and cannot be separated from other aspects of state repression. Across the U.S., the government and mass media are attempting to scapegoat undocumented immigrants, so-called "illegals," portraying them as terrorists, criminals and leaches on American people (while at the same time creating opportunities for businesses to legally employ them for extremely low wages). This has led to increased support for the further militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, for round-ups and especially for deportations of immigrants. Aside from this new upsurge in anti-immigrant sentiment, there is the daily repression faced by working class people across the board, and specifically communities of color. The U.S. has the largest prison population in the world, and hundreds of people are beaten, shot and killed each year by the police. From our perspective, the prison system, which helps maintain social-peace, is an instrument of daily terror masquerading under the guise of law and order.

## **A Thousand Daggers and One Voice**

Thus we are faced with a dilemma, what to do in the face of repression? First and foremost, when the state focuses its repressive apparatus on radicals, it must be fought. Thus this is no time for becoming quiet and closing in on ourselves in hopes of weathering the storm. Quite the opposite, it is time for increased struggle and solidarity with comrades facing repression. Supporting the accused through monetary donations is important, but revolutionary solidarity must go beyond simple support campaigns. This type of solidarity is based on the recognition that struggles are intimately intertwined, of the way in which the exploitation and repression of others and our own fate are connected, and it also demonstrates the points at which capitalism and the state operate in similar ways in very different places.

Comrades in Greece are particularly active when it comes to showing revolutionary solidarity. Following the European Union summit in Thessaloniki in 2003, seven people from Spain, Greece, and England were arrested. The Greek government wanted to scapegoat these seven, threatening them with long prison sentences. Rather than appealing to the state, anarchist comrades decided to play their own game. Demonstrations occurred at the prison where the seven were being held, at the home of the prime minister, and in city squares across Greece. These demonstrations were complemented by occupations of universities in Athens, Hyraklios and Thessaloniki, and by occupations of radio stations in order to broadcast solidarity statements and the statements of the prisoners. Also the headquarters of various political parties were attacked with molotov cocktails, as were many banks, all in support of those who were being held by the Greek state. Clearly this strategy differs significantly from the sad and ineffectual petitioning that passes for solidarity in most countries.

Therefore revolutionary solidarity also implies attacking power ourselves. Rather than playing the state's game of compromise and negotiation, we can pursue our own course of action. In light of the current crackdown in the U.S., comrades in Spain and France have demonstrated their support. On the night of December 31, 2005, the ALF liberated 28 beagles from the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at the Independent University of Madrid in memory of Bill Rodgers. Another action undertaken in memory of Bill, occurred in the town of Arles in France. There the ALF torched a bus belonging to a bullfighting organization. Those in France and Spain who carried out these actions did so with the recognition that their struggle is linked to Bill's and his to theirs. This leaves us with a thousand and one possibilities for attack: against repression, against ecological devastation, against war, against the industrial system, against work and so on.

It is important to remember that certain actions could adversely affect the outcome of any political trial, so intelligent choices must be made. One particular case that comes to mind concerns Jeff "Free" Luers. Prior to his sentencing an attack occurred against the same exact car dealership that he was accused of targeting. A communiqué was issued claiming responsibility for the attack, and Free and his co-defendant Critter were mentioned in it. Some speculate that this action may have contributed to his nearly 23-year sentence. But, caution and inaction are two very different things. There are a multitude of things that can be done to support the accused and combat repression: street demonstrations, fund-raising, holding public meetings, increasing struggle against the real eco-terrorists, and attempting to radicalize and connect current social struggles.

So we have a choice, we can run and hide or fight back. If we give the state an inch, it will certainly take a mile, therefore we must stand firm in the face of repression. Repression is being meted out precisely because the social situation is becoming more precarious and because the types of actions for which the defendants are accused are dangerous to the state. So solidarity is not simply raising money for legal defense and pleading to the state for leniency. Instead it is an attack on power, and choosing to attack is not only refusing to bow down, but also contributing to the wider atmosphere of social combativity. In many countries a simple slogan abounds: solidarity is a weapon. Let us put it into practice.

# Fragments from Argentina

Dear Comrades:

Insurrectionary anarchism in Argentina is not of old age. What's more is that the writings of Alfredo Bonanno, Constantino Cavalleri, etc., except for *The Anarchist Tension* and a few others, are practically unknown amongst anarchists, even amongst those who consider themselves insurrectionists. A lack of awareness of these writings is not accidental, since the anarchist movement of Argentina has been reformist for the greater part of its history, and has rejected all attempts, whether by individuals or affinity groups, to break with the status quo.

Despite the lack of knowledge of large parts of the theory and praxis of insurrectionary anarchists, individuals and affinity groups have begun to propagate texts such as *The Anarchist Tension*, *At Daggers Drawn*, those by Cavalleri (about prisons and about post-industrial capitalism), things from *Willful Disobedience*, either as translations from the website Palabras de Guerra, or translated imperfectly by various comrades here.

This effort has borne fruit, and with great help from a few web pages, has allowed for the spread of experiences and the materialization of local experiences. The list of publications that can be considered insurrectionary are *Confrontación* (1 issue), *Disarmo* from Rosario (10 issues), *La Anarquía* (6 issues), *Nihil* (2 issues), *Aullidos Nocturnos* (Howls in the Night, 4 issues), the site La Coordinación Anticarceraria del Río de la Plata, which involves individuals from Argentina and Uruguay and the webpage Mariposas del Caos (Butterflies of Chaos), which hosts a large number of texts and publications.

Also of great importance, it has resulted in the participation of insurrectionist individuals at the Anarchist Conference in Rosario, which despite being organized by the AIF (a platformist group), there were many workshops which referred to insurrectionary anarchism, and a big debate occurred confronting the platformists of the OSL and of the neo-platformists of Red Libertaria.

The practice of insurrectionary anarchists is not limited to this however. Demonstrations were held at the embassies of Colombia and Germany, because of the death of a young Colombian anarchist on May Day and in solidarity with the Aachen 4. Likewise anarchist action continued with actions against Italian interests, against the Summit of the Americas in November 2005 in Mar del Plata and Buenos Aires, and solidarity with prisoners in Uruguay.

Insurrectionary anarchism in Argentina, if we use a concept that I find repugnant, is very weak. It is not comparable to Spain or Italy, but the interesting thing is the emergence of individuals in search of affinities and accomplices who are insurrectionists, who reject any compromise or evolutionary ideas, which make up the majority of Argentine anarchism. Our limitations include isolation, a lack of contacts outside of the country and to more important centers of activity, the absence of books, pamphlets etc. that we copy ourselves as well as mail to other comrades. This is insufficient and many writings remain unknown due to this reason.

Recently a public action took place against the Summit of the Americas, organized specifically by anarchists under the name Fire to the Summit. It was held in a public plaza in Mar del Plata and involved a decent number of people.

This is but a short and incomplete list of what is happening in Argentina. We don't have information about all of the activities carried out in solidarity with comrades in Italy or with the Thessaloniki 7, most of which are passed around through word of mouth or by e-mail.

Pablo

Some Internet links:

- La Anarquía  
[geocities.com/edic\\_insumisos](http://geocities.com/edic_insumisos) [www.geocities.com](http://www.geocities.com)
- Mariposas del Caos  
[mariposadelcaos.cjb.net](http://mariposadelcaos.cjb.net)
- La Coordinación Anticarcelaria del Río de la Plata  
[anticarcelaria.info](http://anticarcelaria.info)

# Revolt and Misrepresentation: A Few Points on Analysis

Analysis can be undertaken for a variety of reasons: as a critical appraisal of tactics, as an attempt to construct a plan for intervention within a specific situation, in order to learn the lessons of past failures, or simply to deepen our understanding of the functioning of this society. In this essay we hope to offer a critical look at some of the analyses of the insurrections in Algeria and Argentina, and an analysis the events following hurricane Katrina. We have used these three events in order to make a few points about analysis in general, things to avoid, as well as a few suggestions for ways of improving analysis.

Putting together a piece of analysis requires gathering as much information as possible in hopes of discerning what is “truly” transpiring. If we lack contact with those who are actually participating, we are usually left with news reports, NGO dossiers, or the analyses of a variety of political rackets. Each of these contains an implicit bias: for the media most revolts or uprisings are criminal acts of insubordination that should be crushed, and many political analyses by leftists are employed to only further their particular ideology. We are not, however, simply trying to escape bias, after all we have an agenda, which includes the destruction of this society as it now exists. What we hope to offer are a few criticisms of the way in which wishful thinking can allow for the misrepresentation of events, and how this misrepresentation does little to further our project.

## New Orleans

When analyzing a situation, first and foremost, one must be honest and upfront about the amount of information being used as well as the type of information being used. When hurricane Katrina hit the New Orleans area and looting ensued, an article from *Army Times* entitled “Troops begin combat operations in New Orleans,” which was widely circulated on e-mail and on anarchist news-wires, stated that an insurgency was underway in the city. This was along with mainstream media reports, which stated that looting, carjackings, and general mayhem had spread across the entire Deep South. Some anarchists from St. Louis, in a piece called “Now is the Time? Now is the Time! The Potential of the Gulf Coast Crisis: Points for Discussion and Intervention,” spoke of the beginning of some kind of Iraq along the bayou. This was in fact far from the truth.<sup>1</sup>

We must be wary when using various sources of information because they will present things in a certain way. The mainstream media depicted looters as violent rapists and murderers, and also took part in vicious rumor mongering, spreading fear of armed black people on a rampage

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<sup>1</sup> “Troops begin combat operations in New Orleans,” *Army Times*, September 2, 2005. “Now is the Time? Now is the Time! The Potential of the Gulf Coast Crisis,” *St. Louis Indymedia*, September 3, 2005.

throughout the entire Gulf South. The *Army Times* writer, not surprisingly, presented events as a military operation, employing the most recent ideological prism: insurgents vs. American heroes. Most revolutionaries rejected mass media representations of events, but the *Army Times* article on the other hand was not subjected to a critical look because it promoted an idea that was appealing to the authors of “Now is the Time:” a possible armed uprising by the dispossessed of New Orleans. The lesson to be learned from this is that a critical appraisal of information sources is necessary across the board regardless of whom they are written by. Thus even if a situation is depicted in a way that seems favorable from our point of view, it should be scrutinized nonetheless.

Despite the faults in “Now is the Time...” the writers attempted to do something that is sorely lacking within American anarchist discourse, analyzing events as they are occurring and making proposals for action. It was not an attempt to outline an ideological position, but rather a proposal for struggle. Thus it becomes even more important to critically employ sources of information. Seeing an insurgency where there is none, based solely on one news report, is a product of wishful thinking. Therefore one task of analysis should be to take a cold hard look at the often bitter reality of situations.

## Algeria

Publications such as *Willful Disobedience*, *Class War*, and *Communism* described the village committees, or *aarch*, as vehicles towards a self-organized society. An article from *Willful Disobedience* stated that “[t]he strength of the insurgence in this region is due largely to the fact that it has been able to revive and use old tribal methods of horizontal communication.”<sup>2</sup> These horizontal methods an 11-point honor code which prevents delegates from making statements in the name of their *aarch* or its coordinating body, from accepting a position of power (elected or appointed), or of using their position for electoral ends. Delegates are also revocable and held no decision-making powers over other members of the *aarch*. Therefore it should be clear why these structures were of interest to anarchists: they appeared to be anti-political organs of struggle.

It was later found out that the *aarch* were not as horizontal as they appeared. In fact women were barred altogether from taking part in the decision-making. Even younger men had a difficult time being accepted within the *aarch*. Clearly women played a role in the insurrection, participating in mass demonstrations and road blockades, but this is not enough. Also young men were a strong force behind street fights with police, attacks against offices of political parties and looting. As a result many of those who took direct action and made the insurrection what it was, were excluded from the *aarch* all together.<sup>3</sup> The insurrection was not simply the *aarch*. To call these organizations horizontal, or coordinating bodies for the insurrection would be a mistake. The analyses that misrepresented the delegates and the *aarch* at the least suffered from a lack of information, as most news sources from Algeria are obviously written in Arabic, and to a lesser degree French and Tamazight. The articles, which mention the exclusion of women, were few and difficult to find, but this does not change the fact that it was a major oversight. Thus it is important not to jump to conclusions concerning the nature of specific insurrections.

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<sup>2</sup> “Insurrection Continues in Algeria,” *Willful Disobedience*, Spring/Summer 2004.

<sup>3</sup> See “Les archs misogynes”, *El Wata n*, 7 March 2002, which is cited in the International Crisis Group’s dossier on the Kabylia uprising.

## Argentina

The insurrection in Argentina, which broke out in December of 2001, is another case in which a variety of writers simply wanted to prove the party line. The full course of events is too large to go into here, and I admit to lacking the capacity to do so, but a few points can be made nonetheless concerning the various *piquetero* groups. The *piqueteros* became heroes to leftists and anarchists across the world as unemployed people who were blockading highways across Argentina, effectively halting the flow of commodities inside and outside of cities. Some spoke of building a dual power through the coordination of *piqueteros* and neighborhood assemblies, while others spoke of horizontalism and autonomy that represented a new form of politics. Either way there was a tendency to avoid intricacies and cheer for one's ideology.

For those not familiar with the situation in Argentina, it was easy to homogenize the *piqueteros'* actions and to ignore the complexities of real events. The *piqueteros* are in fact scores of local groups of the unemployed, which predated the uprisings by nearly a decade. Each *piquetero* group is affiliated with larger coordinating bodies, each with different politics. Many were, and remain, autonomous from parties and unions, while others are appendages of leftist parties and even the Peronists. Being wedded to parties led to some *piqueteros* taking part in reformist, and one could even say counter-revolutionary, actions during the insurrection of 2001.<sup>4</sup> So even using the term *piqueteros* is problematic in that it implies a homogeneity that does not exist.

To illustrate this point further, in their Spanish-language organ, *Communismo*, the International Communist Group (ICG) claimed that the actions of the *piqueteros*, "demonstrated to the world that the proletariat was able to affirm itself as a historical subject," meaning that the actions of the *piqueteros* as a whole represented anti-political communist activity. If, however, many of these groups are in fact appendages of party organizations, then they absolutely are not anti-political, and their practice would not extend towards the abolition of capitalist social relations. While the ICG is guilty of homogenizing the activities of the *piqueteros*, this is indicative of a larger trend in radical analysis towards the homogenization of groups and activities within an ideological framework.<sup>5</sup>

## Conclusion

To be clear, we are not questioning the intentions of any of these comrades or claiming in any way that they deliberately misrepresented events. We intend this critique in the way critique of comrades should always be made, as constructive criticism. To sum up:

1. For anarchists, analysis should never be undertaken in order to spread an ideology or to try and prove the correctness of one's ideas so as to gain adherents. Many leftist rackets use uncritical cheerleading as means of recruiting members for their organizations or in order to sell more newspapers.

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<sup>4</sup> For more background on the complexities of the *piquetero* movement, see "Picket and Pot-banger Together:" Class Recomposition in Argentina?, *Aufheben* 11 (2003).

<sup>5</sup> "Acerca de las Luchas Proletarias en Argentina," *Communismo* #49, November 2002. We do not expect many readers to be familiar with the ICG, but we still feel it is important to address some of their writings. There are particularly interesting writings of theirs online about the worker's councils in Iraq in 1991.



2. Insurrections are not pure events, and often they have contradictory tendencies within them. Therefore it is important to highlight those elements that we find encouraging, but not to overemphasize them. We gain nothing through misrepresentation or wishful thinking. Those aspects that we find deplorable should obviously never be hidden, nor should they be deemphasized.
3. Homogenizing events and activities, or trying to fit them within a particular political framework can lead to ignoring evidence, falsification and useless conclusions. The reality of situations can be disheartening, but seeing revolution everywhere does not change the actual content of movements and events.
4. It is impossible to know about the particularities of every situation, but intellectual laziness is also a danger. Simply finding the information that supports the story one wants to tell is the hallmark of mass media. Therefore it is important to be honest about how much information one has and recognize the obstacles that a lack of information presents.
5. We can easily sharpen analyses through a variety of means. It would greatly benefit revolutionaries to learn other languages in order to have access to a wider array of information. Of even greater importance is the necessity of establishing international contacts with whom we can share information, analysis and critique. Comrades on the ground can help give us a more nuanced understanding of insurrectionary events, rather than us painting them with a broad brush due to a lack of information.

Kellen Kass

# Fire at Midnight, Destruction at Dawn: Sabotage and Social War

The world in which we find ourselves is enveloped by capitalist social relations. Nearly everyone has been reduced to the condition of selling themselves for a wage. All space is divided and quantified into commodities that can be bought and sold. This commodification of life has made exchange the dominant feature of our relations. The implementation of these relations was achieved through a massive project of dispossession and exclusion. States manage populations and territories through a vast network of control creating a world very much resembling that of a prison. Borders are militarized, surveillance networks surround us, the police have grown in number and are better equipped, and all of this has become extremely efficient due to the advance technology.<sup>1</sup> This is all justified under the ever-growing system of laws. These changes in no way contradict the nature of the state; they are true to its form and function. The state and capital are inextricably linked in a project of domination.

We are permitted the insignificance of voting for our rulers, signing petitions, and taking part in referendums. Yet the conditions of our lives stay essentially the same. We can hold signs on the sidewalk and shout as loud as we want, throwing ourselves into the abyss of public displays of dissatisfaction. But when all is said and done we still face the humiliation and prostitution of this reality. We are only allowed to symbolize our anger at the daily degradation that must be silently endured. Obscured within a dreamland of television, commercial consumption, and social withdrawal, the world is made slightly bearable but never one in which we can determine what we want with our lives.

For a social order so dependent on a large class of exploited and marginalized people the possibilities for revolt are many. Not only does this system require people's labor power to function, but it also requires us to produce and maintain its physical infrastructure, enforce its laws, cooperate with and consent to its plans. Ultimately *we* allow it to exist. The state needs roads, buildings, vehicles, information technology, surveillance and weaponry systems to function. Capitalism requires these same things for efficient movement of commodities and labor, and for resource extraction and exploitation. While these mechanisms have strengthened control and exploitation like never before, they have also created many weaknesses. These weaknesses are an opportunity.

For us, the question of *how* to proceed is vital. We must be willing to examine and scrutinize the methods and strategies of the past so that we do not follow in the footsteps of history's failed attempts at revolution. To this end we will focus on a method that is as powerful as it is easy to put into practice: *sabotage*.

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<sup>1</sup> Technology is not neutral. It's a goddamn motherfucker.

## The World As They Would Like Us to See It

All insurrectionary tools must be examined in order for us to place them firmly within a theoretical framework for subversive action. Theory, like all ideas, is only as good as its ability to be *applied* effectively to the conditions of our lives. Only through critical analysis can we hope to sharpen our methods of struggle and avoid the mistakes and pitfalls of the past. It is important for us not to lose sight of how we determine the results of our efforts. While achieving concrete goals is important, these do not necessarily determine success. A better indication of our accomplishments could be determined by the extent to which current social relations are subverted and the qualitative changes that are realized through revolt.

Situations of revolt are not always easy to discover. The writers of history marginalize and deliberately disconnect news of resistance from a tradition of refusal. Discontent is misrepresented, pacified and moved into channels of legality, compromise, and dialogue. The media distorts the impulse for social war, deferring it to the confines of single issues, mismanagement, and individual cases of dissatisfaction. Revolt becomes a disfigured story, obscured in the past, manipulated in the present, hidden from view.

Our actions should not appeal to these machines of “reality production.” The only thing that will affect the reality of things will be to *act* upon reality, not to merely *present* it as we wish it to be. The only way to change the conditions of society is to change the nature of how we relate within them. There is no fixed or static condition that we are trapped in. The future is not only unwritten but also unpredictable and therefore capable of being affected by our willful determination.

## The Tools That Can Destroy the Master’s House

Revolt can begin on an individual level or through the process of larger social upheaval. One of the oldest and most destructive acts of revolt is sabotage. To be clear, we define sabotage as the deliberate act of destroying or damaging physical structures. From workplace machinery sabotage to monkey-wrenching housing and industrial developments, to smashing a window at a bank, fur store or cop station, sabotage has become a common and well-dispersed instrument of social struggle. This tactic is often used to achieve a greater goal, or employed within a larger campaign or a struggle. However, the potential of destructive direct action lies in its ability to be carried out individually or in groups without any need or desire for formal organization, hierarchy, or campaign to act in unison with. Sabotage, like all tactics, should be easily reproducible, therefore increasing the possibility of its spread. This spreading threatens the structures of power precisely because it is difficult to manage and contain.

Sabotage can be used in all situations, in all terrains, and by anyone who wishes to use it. It requires no specialization or skill, just initiative. While news of sabotage is difficult to find, obscured and negated as it is by those in power, there are some notable examples of its use that we would like to examine. This list is by no means comprehensive but rather a sampling of relevant examples.

## **A Global Attack: Shell and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle**

If you understand how the structures of capitalists are built up and how the big companies are weaving their nets closer and closer around the world, then you realize that the fight against the system has to be carried out globally.

— Brand magazine

In Europe during the late 1980s, a wave of sabotage hit the Shell Oil Company because of their economic involvement with the then South African government and their policy of apartheid. Many acts of sabotage occurred in Denmark, Holland, and Sweden during the years 1986–1988. Shell stations were attacked with firebombs and paint in addition to the cutting of gasoline hoses and damage to gas tanks and cash machines. These actions were claimed by anonymous groups of people acting in solidarity with the social struggle in South Africa. While at the time an international boycott of Shell was in affect across the world, it is interesting to note that in 1986 a spokesman for Danish Shell admitted that the boycott had not affected them much economically but that sabotage was costing them vastly larger amounts of money.<sup>2</sup>

It was clear that a global attack was taking place against one focal point of capitalist exploitation. These attacks were easy to undertake, requiring only simple tools and a will to act. This fact facilitated their spread across a wide area and far from the center of the anti-apartheid struggle. The acts of sabotage drew a clear parallel between the business done in *one* place and its direct connection to the administrative and operative functions of the project of capital in *another*.

## **The Bolt Weevils Attack!: Power and its Opponents in Minnesota**

A very interesting example of dispersed sabotage occurred in western Minnesota in the late 1970s. During this time the electric industry was seeking to exploit coal reserves in the West to feed the energy demands of urban centers. One of these projects consisted of building a coal strip mine and generating plant in North Dakota, then constructing a 435 mile power line to transport the energy produced to the suburban areas around Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota.

What the energy industry and the state's regulatory agencies did not expect was the opposition that followed. Farmers along the proposed route of the power line viewed the project as sacrificing their land to feed energy-hungry urban centers. The state was planning to expropriate 160-foot-wide swaths through their fields and erect 180-foot pylons to support the wires. These concerns were augmented by the fear of health problems associated with electromagnetic pollution from the currents running through these power lines. It was clear the state had no regard for these concerns when throughout the years of 1974 to 1977 farmers tried lengthy and ultimately ineffectual legal channels to block the construction of the line. The result, not surprisingly, was that they were merely permitted to request that the construction happen on someone else's land.

Yet the failed dialogue with the state did enable networks to be made among those who were affected by the plans. In 1977, after the state had finalized and approved of these plans, surveyors and construction crews attempted to start work on the power line, but hundreds of farmers blocked their way. In the winter of 1978, confrontations in the fields spanned weeks, prompting

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<sup>2</sup> "Sabotage Against Shell," *Insurrection* #5, Autumn 1988.

the Governor to send almost half of Minnesota's highway patrol officers to protect the electric company crews.

Even more impressive was the wave of sabotage that hit the infrastructure of the project. In the space of two years, fourteen towers were toppled and nearly 10,000 insulators shot out. The actions were being attributed to the "Bolt Weevils," a name used by the anonymous individuals carrying out the attacks. Electric industry officials termed it "vandalism;" the farmers called it "sabotage," a tactic that received a great deal of support from local communities.

During these years no arrests were made despite the electricity company employing private security. The police used helicopters to patrol rural areas but were unable to stop the spread of sabotage. By the summer of 1980, the energy company forced to turn over ownership of the power line to the U.S. government in order to avoid further economic losses directly attributed to sabotage and the costs of security. While this maneuver gave jurisdiction to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, it did not deter attacks from continuing. A fifteenth tower came down on New Year's Eve of the same year.<sup>3</sup>

Despite all of their attempts, the line was finally constructed, but only with the intervention of the federal government. Yet, what can be taken from this struggle is that the people who attacked this project had learned from their experience of trying to dialogue with the state over its plans. Industrial development had taken priority over those who stood to suffer from its completion. But without retiring in defeat, a social struggle sprang forth, one that did not waste time in the channels of legality but rather *directly* attacked the source of their problem. While the fact that no arrests were ever made may be incidental, it is clear that the state was ineffectual in containing the use or spread of sabotage due to its ability to be used by anyone, anywhere, even in the fields of Minnesota.

## **Destroying What Seeks to Destroy You: Anti-Nuclear Action in Italy**

Let us spread sabotage over the whole social territory, striking the structures that are bringing about such projects of death.

— Antinuclear revolutionaries<sup>4</sup>

Also in the late 1980s there were a number of explicitly autonomous acts of sabotage taking place against the nuclear industry in Italy. These actions occurred within a larger social movement against the project of nuclear power that was proceeding forth and accelerating on the European continent. The nature of these actions rejected the reformist strategies and tactics of the peace, environmental and religious movements who opposed nuclear power as an issue of protest. Unlike these groups, a critique of nuclear power and its relation to centralized political and economic power, as well as environmental destruction, was made clear and visible in actions that did not seek to merely replace one type of destructive process for another. Rather these autonomous actions were undertaken with the clear understanding that nuclear power is part of the larger project of capitalist domination.

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<sup>3</sup> "The Rural Energy War — Report from The Front Lines." *The Nation*. December 26, 1981.

<sup>4</sup> "Anti-Nuclear Sabotage in Italy," *Insurrection* # 4, May 1988

In October of 1986 machinery used to construct a nuclear plant in Trino Vercellese was destroyed by demonstrators. In addition to this, acts of sabotage were occurring in various parts of the country. High-tension pylons, the metal frames that support power lines, were sawn and downed in the Cosenza province in July 1987. Then in September a pylon in the area of Pec del Brasimone was downed as well. This one had supported power lines that supplied electricity to a nuclear reactor. Then in December of 1987 a nuclear power station was blockaded in Montalto di Castro and a research center had its gates locked shut. A leaflet was found at the site stating, "sabotage the research centres, universities, death production." Anarchists and autonomists organized anti-nuclear meetings and demonstrations in Rome, Venice, Milan and Bologna, among other cities.

Another high-tension power line was downed in Sicily that same year. A communiqué claiming responsibility for this action had this to say: "...the final course in this mad race towards perpetual enrichment and global domination, shamelessly passed off as progress, civil society, etc., is the total destruction of our planet which is now taking place. To speak, write, dance, sing, march is not enough to stop this madness and free ourselves from its ferocious oppression...We maintain: we can and we must take our fate into our own hands and organize ourselves. Sabotage. Attack. Insurge."

Attacks against power lines continued throughout the year. Many of the attacks were not only directed towards nuclear energy projects but also against energy supplied to factories. By the end of the 1980's an estimated 400 attacks against the infrastructure of the energy system had occurred throughout Italy. These made clear the connection between nuclear energy and energy produced through other means such as coal, which also creates its own set of toxins and destructive extraction processes.

At the time it was unclear how much damage was done by some of these actions. In some cases the pylons were sawn but did not fall. Yet anarchists were clear to point out the importance not only of some certifiable amount of financial damages but additionally the *uncontrollability* of this method of autonomous action. The now-defunct Italian anarchist magazine *ProvocAzione* explained this point clearly: "The method of direct attack against small objectives spread over the social territory is far more effective than the great spectacular actions and demonstrations that are as spectacular as they are innocuous. The State knows very well how to manage and exploit these grand actions...What it does not know...is how to control and prevent simple direct attacks against the distribution...of structures that are responsible for projects of repression and death."

## **Every Worker, A Monkeywrench: The Destruction of the Machines of Production**

Sabotage has a long history of use in the workplace. Workplace sabotage still certainly exists today though the actual frequency of these acts is suppressed to avoid encouragement on a wider scale. Still, it has had many applications within workers' struggle when the realization of union-capitalist collaboration and the ineffectuality of official strikes have been made. Its ease of use has made it a popular form of response to the degradation of bosses, unions, wages, and routines.

In March of 1990, 6,300 bus drivers and an estimated 3,000 other Greyhound workers went on strike in what would become the second largest and most violent strike in the company's history.

The dispute took place between Greyhound Lines Inc., the largest North American privately-run bus line, and the Amalgamated Council of Greyhound Local Unions, over wages, job security and grievance procedures. Fewer than 100 of its drivers crossed the picket lines, requiring the company to rely on scabs. Violence and sabotage erupted *immediately* despite negotiations between union representatives and Greyhound officials. Throughout the course of the strike over a hundred bomb threats were called into bus terminals, causing large disruptions. Dozens of shooting attacks were made against buses and their terminals. One striking driver was killed by a scab driver and one replacement was seriously injured. In April, 60 workers were fired by the company for sabotage and violence. This came a day after a bus terminal in Boston was set on fire. Unfortunately after three years of conflict, the strike was lost. This however does not invalidate the struggle that took place, and it still serves as an important example of the use of sabotage within a large-scale labor struggle.<sup>5</sup>

Towards the end of the 1990s another violent workplace conflict was underway. In July of 1999, the largely immigrant Latino workforce at Basic Vegetable Products in King City, California went on a Teamster-led strike. The strike was in response to the company imposing a wage freeze, a two-tier wage system, changes in pension plans and the slashing of health benefits. Almost immediately the strike was followed by a rash of small-scale sabotage, harassment, threats and even fire bombings that spread *beyond* the ability of the local police to contain. In early August, a supervisor's house was firebombed, leading to the arrest of one worker who was later sentenced to three years. Later in the month a scab's car was set on fire, nearly engulfing her home in flames. Acts of sabotage included tampering with the vehicles of replacement workers in order to cause malfunctions. By year's end some 270 acts of sabotage had been officially reported, against such targets as company buses, scab vehicles, scab homes, and the company's factory.

In October the company held a press conference requesting strike intervention by the governor and the state attorney general. At the press conference a spokesman for the company displayed photographs of smashed windows, slashed car tires and homemade spike strips used against scab workers. King City Police Chief Richard Metcalf conceded there had been "a huge increase in reported vandalism... This is not uncommon during labor disputes, in my experience." Two months later, the police chief told a newspaper, "you can double the amount of officers on the street and it would still be pretty hard to catch them." Efforts to stem the force of the workers' struggle were to *no avail*, and they won after two-years of striking and sabotage. While we are quite conscious of the limits of workplace victories, and *ultimately* seek the destruction of work itself, it is important to see that autonomous direct action can develop outside of the control of unions and extend beyond the confines of the workplace.<sup>6</sup>

More recently, in the summer of 2005, negotiations broke down between the Canadian telecommunication giant, Telus, and the Telecommunication Workers Union (TWU). The dispute affected the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia, but the most radical activity was centered in B.C. Within days of the strike being called, multiple acts of sabotage occurred and a representative for the company stated in an August 2005 interview that the company had suffered 42 attacks in the three previous months. In many cases phone lines were either damaged or pulled down and fiber-optic cables were repeatedly cut, shutting down phone and internet service to thousands.

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<sup>5</sup> "Business Brief — GLI Holding Co.: Sixty Fired by Greyhound for Strike-Related Violence." *Wall Street Journal*. April 6, 1990.

<sup>6</sup> "From Vandalism to Firebombing at Basic Vegetable." *Union Violence Lookout*. Vol.I, Issue 10. November 1999.

These acts were a compliment to flying pickets and clashes with scabs. It is also interesting to note that anarchists in Vancouver were involved in solidarity pickets, attempting to halt public transportation from city bus depots in hopes of disrupting the economic functioning of the city.<sup>7</sup>

These examples are but a small sampling of the use of workplace sabotage. Yet they point to the widespread use of direct action outside of legal channels. Their effects cannot be understated. Capitalists would prefer dialogue and compromise but autonomous action makes these forms of cooptation ineffectual.

## Revolutionary Solidarity

We think of solidarity as a way of being accomplices, of taking reciprocal pleasure and in no way consider it a duty, a sacrifice for the “good and sacred cause”, because it is our own cause, i.e. ourselves. Revolutionary solidarity...should be demonstrated incessantly, precisely because it contributes to widening what we are already doing.

— Pierleone Porcu

With the constant changes and maneuvers of the capitalist system also arise the dispersion of social struggle worldwide. The same system that has forced us to sell ourselves to survive also bars those who are deemed unnecessary from looking for an exit from the warfare of states and the starvation of the capitalist periphery.

We all want the same thing: to decide for ourselves how we will *live*. Autonomous struggle for this very thing has presented itself wherever people refuse to succumb to the inertness of passivity. This is the struggle we share.

But how can we make the similarities between our struggles spread? By recognizing our struggle in the struggle of others and *acting* upon it through revolutionary solidarity. The same companies that are exploiting the forests of West Papua or the Pampas of Chile have their homes in the dominant capitalist countries of the North. The wars fought in Iraq and Afghanistan are fought with the weapons and personnel of the U.S., Europe and collaborating nation-states. The prisons and detention centers that lock away those who refuse the system of exclusion and exploitation are the same that function safely in our backyards. There are some notable examples of this practice of solidarity that deserve a closer look.

## They Cannot Take What Is Not Given: Oka and the Spreading of Defiance

If there is an attack against the Mohawks, it would be considered an attack on all of us...There’s hydro-electric lines crossing most of our communities... There are major highway arteries...major water supplies...

— Peguis chief Louis Stevenson<sup>8</sup>

In March of 1990 in Oka, Canada, Kanehsatake Mohawks began a blockade of a road leading to a pine forest scheduled for clear-cutting. This piece of land, considered to be Mohawk land by

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<sup>7</sup> “Cut Phone Lines ‘Obvious Vandalism,’ Telus Says.” *Vancouver Sun*. August 16, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> “Oka, 1990.” *Only a Beginning, An Anarchist Anthology*. Ed. Alan Antliff



treaty, was planned for use as an expansion of a bordering golf course. Four months later, in July, over 100 of Quebec's provincial police attacked the blockade with tear gas, concussion grenades and thousands of rounds of live ammunition. An officer was killed during the confrontation. The attack was considered a failure when the police were forced to retreat as tear gas blew back at them with the wind, causing them to leave several vehicles behind. These were later smashed up and used to reinforce the blockade. Then the area was sealed off with hundreds of policemen.

Still, news of the raid at Oka reached the Kahnawake, a Mohawk tribe located south of Montreal, who then proceeded to block the Mercier Bridge that served as a main artery from Montreal to the south shore. Armed Mohawks threatened to blow up the bridge if a second attack occurred, and they also blocked two other highways that ran through their territory. The occupation of the bridge continued throughout the summer and received demonstrations of solidarity in Montreal.

After careful planning by the Canadian government, a massive military operation was deployed against the Kanehsatake and Kahnawake blockades in August. It involved the use of 4,400 soldiers, mortars, several hundred armored personnel carriers, armored cars, missile launchers, helicopters, and three tanks. Over the course of the month there was a tense standoff between Mohawks and the repressive forces of the government.

The repression set into motion a wave of solidarity actions across Canada. Demonstrations of support occurred on Native lands and in every major city. Occupations took place in government offices. Sabotage was made at various points of the capitalist infrastructure. On August 18, a Canadian National (CN) rail-bridge was set on fire. Then on September 4<sup>th</sup>, five hydroelectric towers were toppled and a CN railway-bridge was destroyed by fire, near London, Ontario. The vulnerability of these structures was made readily apparent through these actions. The repression of the Mohawk blockades had brought costly acts of solidarity among many people in many places *removed* from the actual point of focused struggle.

Though the discernable point of contention was the expansion of one development, the police operation was targeting a much greater threat. Mohawk communities were known by the Canadian government for their defiant autonomy and self-management. Their struggle spread outward as others recognized themselves in it. Acts of sabotage provided a damaging and essential tactic in this larger struggle of solidarity, proving to the state that its actions would not go unchallenged.

## **Setting Fire to Surrender: Anarchist Solidarity in Europe**

Long enough has the charity of those who have everything to lose destroyed our dignity and militancy. Our struggle without compromise for freedom is taking place – not only here, but in the whole of Europe and the whole world.

*No borders, no nations; stop deportations*

*Love and strength for all persecuted people, fugitives and rebels*

– from a leaflet distributed in Belgium<sup>9</sup>

Acts of sabotage as revolutionary solidarity have had extensive usage over the course of the past few years in Europe. Following police raids carried out across Italy in May 2005 dozens of

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<sup>9</sup> From a leaflet made in solidarity with prisoners in Lecce, Italy.

anarchists were imprisoned and accused of “subversive association.”<sup>10</sup> Anarchists in Barcelona, Spain, demonstrated in solidarity with their Italian comrades in June. They were attacked by riot police who then made seven arrests. As a response, 60 anarchists in Greece occupied a Spanish cultural institute in Athens. Just the day before 80 anarchists held a demonstration at the Spanish embassy in solidarity with the prisoners in Spain and Italy. Yet acts of solidarity, however, went *beyond* these defiant demonstrations.

On December 16 of that same year, 15 cars were burned at three FIAT (Italian car company) dealerships in Athens and two bombs went off outside bank offices in the northern city of Salonika. On December 31, an explosive device blew up in the sales lot of a FIAT car dealership in Grenada, Spain. The attack was undertaken in solidarity with Italian comrades being prosecuted in the “Operation Cervantes” case.<sup>11</sup> The communique for the action also claimed solidarity with anarchist prisoners in Spain, Greece and Germany.

Then on January 3, 2006, three makeshift bombs went off in Athens. The first bomb had been placed under a car that had diplomatic plates. Another bomb detonated at the entrance of the ruling party’s, New Democracy, offices. In the meantime, a fire was set at the car of the mayor of Therissos, Chania, and that of his wife. The attacks were claimed by the group “Antikratiki Dikeosini” (Anti-State Justice) and made in support of anarchists held in prison.

The actions of solidarity continue in Europe as more and more anarchists are facing an increase in state repression. Solidarity of this type circulates struggles and finds meaning in common enemies. There are those of us who are confined to the logic of survival but who hate our slavery and wish to attack it. It is from the understanding of the relationship between our own struggle *and* the struggle of others that related struggles can emerge. The embrace of attack is the refusal of surrender.

## To Strike Without Waiting

While the majority of the examples above are tied to larger situations of struggle, this does not mean that single actions outside of collective struggle are worthless. On the contrary, these isolated actions demonstrate not only a willingness to act, but also a willingness to attack capitalist projects *regardless* of popular support or of the presence of a larger struggle. Thus we must make a point to separate ourselves from those who counsel waiting or who claim that actions are only valid within “mass struggle.”

In many cases mass struggles do not exist against capitalist projects. This lack however does not preclude action being taken by individuals or small groups. We are not slaves to a quantitative logic. If we waited for permission to act, we would be resigning ourselves to waiting *forever*. Fortunately however, many individuals, those with consciously revolutionary ideas and those without, reject the assertion that actions must be justified by their inclusion in something larger. One need only open the newspaper to read reports of dispersed acts of sabotage against a wide variety of targets: suburban sprawl, luxury condominiums, banks, chain stores, fur stores, fast

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<sup>10</sup> Arrests were made throughout Italy beginning in Lecce on May 12, in Sardinia on May 19, and in Bologna and Rome on May 26.

<sup>11</sup> For more info see “State Repression Against Anarchists in Italy.” *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* #60. Fall/Winter 2005/2006.

food restaurants, etc. Acts of hatred against the projects of domination and exploitation deserve no respite. Their execution needs no delay.

Likewise, we must differentiate ourselves from those who support vanguardism and specialization in struggle. All too often radicals fall into the fetishization of armed struggle and the uncritical support of armed groups such as the Weather Underground, Red Army Faction, Black Liberation Army, Red Brigades and many others. These things are problematic from an anarchist perspective.

## **Fear at the Point of Departure: Some Points of Critique**

Sabotage is generally carried out with a certain amount of security precautions. It is often done individually or in small groups of people who share affinity or friendship and who are trusted not to discuss the action outside of the group or to confess if caught. Care is taken not to leave any evidence behind and to keep the planning of the action secret. However beyond these practical concerns some see the need for going underground and creating a specialized role for themselves.

The concept of underground living, maintaining no public ties to radical groups, changing one's identity, blending in as "normal" and living in hiding is antithetical to an *expansive* life of relations decided on one's own terms. To live life in the underground is to sacrifice potential relationships and projects under the pretext of avoiding suspicion or discovery by the State's agents. On the other hand some would argue that radical direct action is best carried out if one has no ties to any of the networks from which the state can fish for suspects. However, an ability to form relations is hindered by avoiding those relations that are deemed "unsafe." Thus, it cuts individuals off from potential comrades and leaves them only with members of their organization, imposing unhealthy social isolation. All of this poses the very real problem of a lack of networks of support needed in case of arrest.

Another problematic tendency includes vanguardism. A critique of vanguardism is inherent within anarchist ideas. False is the idea that some group of people are more skilled or adept at leading the rest of us towards something better or creating a revolutionary situation by themselves. A revolution can only happen with widespread participation, individually and collectively, towards a transformation of social relations. Delegation to anyone else will only lead to their ends, not ours. Revolt *must* be socially autonomous and self-organized for the process and result to manifest individual and collective desire.

Lastly, specialization and the spectacularization of struggle deserve their own critique. Much like vanguardism, specialization imposes specific roles on people. Participation in certain activities is elevated above and away from generalized use. In this way it is confined to particular individuals or groups. This exclusion is contrary to the spreading of a social rebellion. On the other hand, the spectacular nature of the actions of many armed groups can also be detrimental to the widening of social struggle. Actions that are deliberately spectacular generally aim for high-profile news coverage and attacks on purely symbolic targets with a tendency to emphasize technically complex methods.

## Sabotage as Social War

Sabotage is but *one* tactic from an array of tools employed within the social war. Its use alone cannot substitute for the destruction of the very relations that define our capitalist system.

The destruction of the infrastructure of the state and the functioning of capitalism can be crippling. But it can only cripple as much as it can spread through its ease of use. A rupture with the present will be as inclusive of sabotage as it will be of creating relations beyond the narrow and numbing confines of the social order.

Sabotage will take many forms but it must always be done so with the intent of expanding our revolt globally. Solidarity with the struggles of others will then become little more than an after thought. Through the process of experimentation in strategy and the initiative of attack, the sharpening of our struggle will become realized, always moving forward and outward. Revolution will not be the certainty of a future world but the certainty of ourselves attacking the world that has been imposed upon us.

Sabotage must go *beyond* the limits of mere economic attrition. Militaristic formations, along with their style of centralized formal structure are of no use to us. Organizations for armed struggle and clandestine vanguards will not bring us closer to generalized insurrection, as examples of the past have shown. Guerrilla wars of attrition will only be a losing fight against states much better equipped technologically and numerically within the logic of standard warfare. Our warfare must be *social*.

Social war will put arms in the hands of generalized rebellion. Sabotage will be made at the points of departure towards that place.

Kasimere Bran

# Insurrectionary Anarchist Projects and Social Conflict in Vancouver

Since May Day of 2002, when a small group of anarchists and street kids broke away from an anti-poverty protest and vandalized stores and stalls inside a downtown shopping mall, insurrectionary anarchists in Vancouver have been intervening in various social struggles and developing projects based on a perspective of irreconcilable conflict with the dominant order. Through the rejection of political methods, such as protests, press conferences, and reformist demands presented to the powerful, local anarchist comrades have upheld self-organization, direct action, and permanent conflict with the exploiters as the only viable and desirable principles on which to base anarchist intervention in the class war and its contribution towards social revolution.

The lessons and experience of the riots against free trade in Seattle and Quebec City, indigenous peoples' land struggles in various parts of Canada, the analysis of insurrectionary anarchists in Italy based on their involvement in various struggles, the Vancouver anarchist movement of the 1980s (including the armed "Direct Action" group), and the reoccurring mini-riots at public events in Vancouver, have all been influential on anarchists in this city.

Local comrades have been galvanized by the heightened level of social conflict in this province, British Columbia (within which Vancouver is located), since the Liberal government was elected in 2001. The quick and aggressive economic and political restructuring of the Liberals, involving major cuts to welfare and social services, mass lay-offs of government employees, the tearing-up of union contracts, and a racist referendum on "treaties" between Native and non-Native politicians, provoked mass discontent among the exploited. Unions and political activist groups have worked hard to manage social struggles into a position of defeat and demoralization for the exploited, ending in reconciliation with the power structure. Insurrectionary anarchists have tried to counter the manipulations of these groups by directly communicating with exploited and excluded people.

In the fall of 2002, the opening of the Woodward's Squat (a massive, long-empty department store in the ghetto of the Downtown Eastside) created a space for older anarchists experienced in conflicts outside of Vancouver to meet young squatters interested in anarchist methods and the hundred or so people from the neighborhood who came to live in the building. The anarchists verbally clashed with activists and politicians, some of whom wanted the squatters to leave the building voluntarily after a week (the occupation was intended to be a media spectacle by the activist city-employee who initiated it). At first, police entered the building freely, negotiating with the self-appointed leader of the squat. Later, amidst quarrels between activists, the police realized there were anarchists living in the building and from then on kept their distance, while preparing for a forceful eviction.

Although many squatters simply ignored the activists, the ideology of civil disobedience and the reformist demand for social housing took a significant hold over the situation. Most squatters considered the building to be their home and much preferred its collective space to the isolation

of the single-room occupancy welfare hotels that people in the neighborhood have to live in. For Woodwards to be converted into social housing would require the ending of the squat. Despite this, many squatters, under the direction of the activists, sat in a circle to be mass arrested when the riot cops invaded.

After the initial eviction by riot cops, squatters returned and set-up camp again around the outside of the building. Police attacked and evicted the tent city, but it sprung up once more. Finally, the city government had to use social workers to end the tent city and move people into a miserable welfare hotel. These events further clarified the role of the police and the State for many of those involved in the struggle.

In hindsight, it can be seen that the conflict could have developed in an insurrectional direction if anarchists had communicated more effectively with fellow squatters and built an informal organization to defend the squat through attacking Capital and Politics in their immediate manifestations, while pointing out the irreconcilable class interests between exploiter and exploited, included and excluded.

The evicted squatters' anger against the police quickly came to head at an East Vancouver school when police arrested an elderly man at a protest against a public appearance by the Premier of the province. Masked anarchists dragged a dumpster in front of a police truck carrying the detained man, leading to another arrest. From there, scuffles with the cops developed somewhat beyond the designs of the activists who engaged in civil disobedience by sitting in front of the truck, as children coming out of school began to taunt the cops and throw drink containers and pebbles at them. After the police left the area, kids threw eggs at the nearby police station.

In January of 2003, an Iranian refugee broke free from the grasp of a security guard and escaped deportation at the Vancouver airport during a protest by her family and supporters. The same anti-authoritarian comrade taken into custody during the school incident was arrested once again. The woman seeking refuge from imprisonment and death in Iran mysteriously turned herself over to the police and was deported without first contacting her family, taking sanctuary in a church, or going "underground", possibly due to manipulation by activists.

Throughout the rest of 2003, masked-up anarchists intervened at numerous protests against the provincial government and the war on Iraq with graffiti, newspaper boxes dragged into the streets, a break-away march, and a smashed window at the building housing the US consulate.

During this time period, several independent window-breaking attacks were carried out against banks and a Canadian army recruiting center. Different groups claimed responsibility for these actions, using anti-government and anti-capitalist explanations for their actions.

In 2004, one East Vancouver community police office had its windows smashed in an action that was claimed in solidarity with people beaten down or killed by the cops. Another community police office in a park suffered repeated and unclaimed acts of graffiti, paint-bombing, window-breaking, and arson.

In the summer of 2004, a hospital workers' strike was declared illegal by the government, provoking solidarity wildcat strikes in many industries across the province. Local anarchists walked the picket lines, talked with workers, and made banners calling for a general wildcat strike and describing solidarity as a "weapon". Also that summer, anarchists also held a number of public events entitled "Wild in the Streets", which included anarchist movie nights, a picnic and information exchange in a park, and a march against the police which resulted in a scuffle and three arrests.

In the winter, comrades held a two day public event called "Breach of the Peace", during which food was shared and a Mohawk comrade from the reserve of Kanehsatake in eastern Canada showed a video and spoke on the traditional people's ousting of Native cops from their community. For the finale of the event, a movie was shown detailing the case of John Graham, a local indigenous Tutchone man of who was part of the Vancouver Red Power movement and the American Indian Movement (AIM) in the 1970s, and who is living under house arrest while he fights extradition to the United States on fraudulent charges of murdering fellow AIM member Anna Mae Pictou Aquash (who died as a result of an FBI's counter-intelligence/counter-insurgency program, involving many assassinations on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota).

Much time that winter was taken up by anarchists maintaining a presence in court to show solidarity with John Graham, as well as the comrade charged in relation to the refugee's escape at the airport. Despite a lack of any substantial evidence, a jury convicted the comrade of aiding the refugee's escape, and the judge declared a sentence of three months in jail, referencing the totalitarian theorist Thomas Hobbes in explicitly describing the matter as a conflict between civilization and anarchy in her reasons for sentencing, just as the crown prosecutor did in her arguments to the judge.

On March 15<sup>th</sup> of 2005, Vancouver anarchists organized a march for the International Day Against Police Brutality (the day was founded by anarchists in Switzerland). Local comrades didn't limit themselves to the question of police brutality, instead calling into question police control in general. A newsletter called "Against Police Control" was published, detailing police murders of persons in Vancouver and the involvement of Canadian cops in the military occupations of Iraq and Haiti. The callout for the march explained that the march wouldn't be a protest, but rather would create a space for exploited and excluded people to put their anger against the cops into practice. During the march itself, this anger took the form of eggs, paint-bombs and fireworks tossed at police cars and the Main Street police station in the Downtown Eastside. Police cars were also smashed with sticks and a media van was egged. At least two people were arrested. This march was especially significant because many ordinary people never seen at protests showed up and took part, while the activists stayed away, knowing they had nothing to gain from an event they could not control.

In the summer and fall of 2005, insurrectionary anarchists talked with striking truckers, telecommunications workers, teachers, and school support workers in Vancouver, also distributing leaflets calling for the extension of the direct action and sabotage that some workers were already implementing, while trying to further illuminate the repressive function of the unions and political parties who managed the strikes into compromise, disempowerment, and defeat for the workers. An attempt was made by anarchists to cross-picket and shut down bus depots in solidarity with the striking telecommunications workers and teachers, mimicking the actions of telecom strikers in several locations in this province. Many strikers expressed rebellious sentiments and criticisms of their unions to our comrades, indicating some possibilities for further coordinated efforts between anarchists and the rest of the exploited.

Local insurrectionary anarchists have been strengthening lines of communication with anarchist comrades in other parts of the province, and also initiating and maintaining contact with refugees and indigenous people who are resisting, in one form or another (hunger strikes, land reoccupations, etc.), the conditions imposed upon them by capital. Through this, comrades are slowly building the basis for projects of solidarity rooted in affinity rather than politics.

Sam

December 2005



# **An Example of Struggle Against Deportation and Detention Centers for Immigrants**

## **Presentation**

We are a group of anarchists from the south of Italy, and after many other activities, we occupied ourselves with the detention and deportation of immigrants.

## **A Few Beginning Points**

We cannot tolerate that an individual can be incarcerated because they lack a piece of paper, or because they don't accept being a slave. We think this is repugnant.

We think that this situation is the product of an infamy with concrete and specific responsibilities. Because of this we cannot close our eyes.

We think that we live in a time of war. And if in some places this fact is explained by bombs and armies in the streets, in others it is explained by the terror of doing without enough to survive, without something to eat, or of ending up in jail; it explains the fact of having to leave your own land to look for better living conditions and to be exploited there. Therefore we can see the war everywhere, along with a feeling of uprootedness, which envelops the world.

We believe that a society incapable of recognizing and attacking the causes of such a situation can only create false enemies and generalize fear. Many times the immigrant is seen as an enemy. The immigrant is described by propaganda as a terrorist or friend of the terrorists. The same happens with communists, anarchists, or workers that strike without permission.

The important thing is that State terrorism is able to continue, while those that are bothersome can be incarcerated or expelled.

The machine of expulsion isn't just a despicable mechanism of repression and social control, but also a mirror into the reality that we inhabit. Millions of women, men and children come looking for more hospitable living conditions, pushed out by war, misery or because of the daily disasters of industrial production. To greet them they find police, concentration camps and later deportation; this is when they haven't found death, in sea or in the desert, along the way.

In particular, in the Salento (the land where we all live, the peninsula situated to the southeast of Italy – the heel of the boot so that we understand each other) is the “Regina Pacis,” a Center for Temporary Residence – CPT – or Temporary Stay Center for immigrants. It is situated on the east coast of the Salento, towards Albania and Greece.

## **The Centers of Incarceration for Immigrants in Italy**

According to Italian law, the centers for immigrants are divided into Centers of First Identification (which of late have replaced Centers of First Welcome) and Centers for Temporary Residence. The latter are the most brutal face of the mechanism of expulsion: structures created by the Center-Left government in 1998, having as its objective the incarceration of all clandestinos (immigrants without regular papers), to verify the identity of the immigrants and to facilitate expulsion decrees.

The new law of the Center-Right has increased the maximum time of detention from 30 to 60 days.

Today in Italy, 14 CPTs exist, many others are under construction and there will be 28 in total as ordered by a new law, with a minimum of one per region.

## **Why CPTs as an Object of Struggle**

The choice of a continuous struggle against these jails in general, and against the Saletine one in particular, has come about because of the necessity of concentrating the majority of our time and energy on one single objective in order to make the struggle itself concrete.

It is important to say that this struggle has not developed in a compartmentalized, exclusive or specialized way. What we already understand is that these centers (and the repression that is outside of them) are only one face of state violence and its domination across the land.

The expression of violence has found much room in our region, the Puglia: being both land on the border and a passageway of people arriving from the east or south, it has become a permanently fortified area over the past several years with an increase in militarization and social control which has affected everyone.

To justify the incarceration of such people, the executioners of the pen (journalists) have created the image of the immigrant (and especially of the clandestino) as a public enemy who causes conflict with the local exploited and they also describe them as criminals and low-cost reserve labor, ready to steal jobs from the locals. What's more is that this has grown stronger with alarm over international terrorism and the arabo-islamic danger.

For us, the struggle against these centers, against expulsions and that which supports them isn't a humanitarian question, nor a form of democratic anti-racism or of "third worldism" — that identifies immigrants as the new revolutionary subject — rather it signifies the necessity of recognizing and showing solidarity with individuals that live in the same conditions of exploitation and uprootedness, which means beginning to attack a particular structure of power.

Without a doubt, the militarization of entire neighborhoods, police dragnets in the streets, ever more unbearable and odious conditions of work and living that are imposed upon us affects both the immigrant (naturalized or not changes little) and natives in the same way.

## **When and How the Struggle Began**

The institution of CPTs has changed the course of the Regina Pacis Foundation. In its beginning it was managed by the local church as a summer camp for children. Abandoned for several years, it was turned into a Center of First Welcome during the second half of the 90s with the arrival en

masse of Albanian refugees. In 2001 we began with a diffusion of counter-informational material to explain the real function of the Regina Pacis and to lay bare the interpretation that economic and state power wants to give to the phenomenon of migration — an image shown through mass media that describes it as an invasion that must be repelled. To this we added demonstrations (generally in front of the center), which a few times had involved other individuals from the antagonistic left (with rage and/or solidarity but without flags in hand). Demonstrations were called especially on occasions that affected the incarcerated (like the spread of contagious diseases, hunger strikes, petitions for asylum, etc.), on occasions when the issue reached the national level, and on the occasion of summits whose principal theme was the control of immigration.

At the beginning of 2002, the diffusion of a document written by some comrades concerning the question of immigration and the struggle against these places (like nazi concentration camps), gave us the motivation to begin a more constant and conscious campaign.

From then, the distribution of flyers, posters put up in the streets and other counter informational material have become tools of primary importance not only in exposing the police-role played by the Regina Pacis (incarcerating and helping to expel immigrants), but in explaining the close relationship between the economy and “clandestinization” of individuals with the aim of obtaining grand pools of reserve labor power (a labor force that is easily manipulated through blackmail and through the precarious situation of lacking papers — truly modern slaves). Additionally they have been useful instruments in explaining the real interests of the church of Lecce and of all the businesses co-managing the center: given that the State provides variable daily payments for each person incarcerated (and those for Regina Pacis are among the highest) one can easily understand the strong economic interest of the Foundation and the local ecclesiastical hierarchy. To confirm this it must be said that over the years the Foundation has turned itself into a true multinational of “charity,” opening centers of a different type (another in Italy and five more in Moldova) taking on every task: the rehabilitation of prostitutes and street children, of refugees, and distribution of food to the poor..

In an interview with that son of a bitch Father Cesare Lodeserto, priest and director of the Regina Pacis Foundation, he boasted that Moldova produces 10,000 clandestinos each year. This does nothing more than confirm that they are considered merchandise.

## **How the Struggle Continues (or at least how is has continued)**

These prisons are not simply those who manage them. Although banal, it is a fundamental fact that even though these terrible places and everything connected with them appear untouchable and un-attackable — like all structures of power — they are not, because they are made up of people, places and things. This basic fact has developed through the gathering of information about those who collaborate with the Regina Pacis, like businesses or people who sell their wares and/or services, and those who work for the foundation: employees, doctors, guards, directors...

At the time we were carrying out this activity, we were increasing the number of demonstrations in front of the Center in solidarity with the incarcerated, in particular when revolts and escape attempts were on the rise.

During the time of this work there was a considerable increase in people involved in the struggle, direct actions, sabotage, methods of critique, as well as counter-information (always done in

the streets), murals and moments of open confrontation on the occasion of public interventions against those responsible.

Incendiary attacks, and not only incendiary ones, have increased as well; against banks that manage the Foundation's money and against structures involved with the Foundation on other levels.

The aspect of struggle least dealt with has without a doubt been the involvement of those most interested in the problem, in other words the immigrants. This has happened in spite of having made a few attempts. This has probably happened as much from our own deficiency in seeking out relations with them, as from their difficult position, which allows them to be easily blackmailed and/or persecuted by the police.

## **The Objective of the Struggle and the Current Situation**

We do not want CPTs — like jails — to become more humane or respectful of human rights or legality. We simply do not want them. For this reason we want to close the Regina Pacis. Without a doubt this is the principal objective. Despite a few moments of rest, there will be no truce until the this happens.

Repression will not cease either and recently it has increased, through searches, charges, investigations, arrests, harassment during demonstrations and micro-GPS tracers in cars. All of this has not weakened the struggle, but rather it has increased the level of confrontation and has put the Regina Pacis Foundation in the middle of a serious controversy. Now we will speak about the current situation.

At the beginning of this year the bosses of the local clerical hierarchy declared that they did not want to renew the contract with the Italian state and expressed their desire to transform it into a "Multi-purpose Center for Immigration." Apart from the fact that such centers do not exist under law, it is important to mention that March 13, the bastard priest, and director, was incarcerated. Already under investigation and with a case in process, he, along with 10 officials, 6 orderlies and 2 doctors, is charged with violence and other acts against a group of North Africans who tried to escape. Now he is under arrest awaiting trial, standing accused of violence, kidnapping and abuse of the means of corrections against four Moldavian women who were incarcerated in a reform center for prostitution in the north of Italy.

We don't believe in the State's justice and it doesn't make us happy to see it in process. As anarchists we are against prisons and against torturers. If we didn't live in this backwards world, the just thing to do with respect to these terrorists would be isolation from the community and social disdain.

Apart from this question, at the end of April the dismantling of fences, barbed wire and the CPT's cameras began.

Aside from the incarceration of the priest, which gave the definitive and lethal blow, if the closing of the center is now possible, it is because the costs now outweigh the benefits. Apart from the considerable and noticeable pressure the struggle has put on the church and the foundation, it is important to keep in mind that the bad image they have acquired is as much from the trials as it is from the many escapes and revolts, particularly last summer's, which unmasked the real nature of the center.

Now with this closing, the same role will be assumed by another center that is finishing construction in Bari (the biggest city in the region). This center will be located within the “Finanzen” base — of the Italian military. It will be much harder to escape from there. For this reason one of our goals is to create a coordination of opposition at the regional level.

In addition to the larger struggle — at a national level — for over a year *Tempi di Guerra* (Times of War) has been published, which is a journal specifically for the question we are involved with along with other comrades.

All of this because of the intolerable presence of these places and for their total and complete disappearance. For a world without States or borders.

## **Final Considerations**

We live in an information society. We lack neither ideas nor perspectives. We think that which we lack is a direct practice against that which oppresses us. Practices that consider each question under discussion, along with the world (specific, authoritarian and capitalist) that creates them.

Gathering information, analyses that explain it all and also describe the movements of the enemy, get us nowhere and keeps us in the same world in which we now live. Nor does simply enumerating the thousand and one possible forms of resistance change little or anything at all.

On the other hand it is a question of finding the mechanism to stop/block them. It is a question of giving a voice to the impatience that exists and give its reasons. It is a question of identifying causes and naming their authors. Doing this, the situation ceases to be inevitable. Clearly a perspective of struggle of this type can be extended from human liberation to that of the Earth and animals, to the liberation of all.

## **Small Update**

The European Union, which until now has controlled the politics of immigration in a more or less indirect way, will in a few months become more explicit and directly controlling.

Last month the members of justice and interior of the European Union agreed to the creation of a system of information and prior warning in the case of important decision concerning immigration such as the naturalization of “illegals,” that could affect other member States. The European Commission has to present a further proposal concerning this.

# Strangers Everywhere: About Some Anarchists Arrested in Lecce

On Thursday, May 12, in a massive show of force, the Digos (Italian political police) arrested five anarchists in Lecce, Italy. The arrested are Annalisa Capone, Angela Marina Ferrari (Marina), Cristian Palladini, Salvatore Signore and Saverio Pellegrino.

The police show of force in this situation could appear absurd. In operation “nighttime”, as the cops termed this series of raids, searches and arrests, one hundred and fifty cops were deployed in the region of Lecce alone. These included canine units, border cops, postal cops, units from the Central Antiterrorism service, bomb specialists, a helicopter and so on.

Charges against the arrested anarchists include:

- subversive association with the intent of terrorism and the subversion of the democratic state;
- attacks against the Cathedral of Lecce and Father Cesare Lodeserto’s house; Lodeserto was the director of the “Center for Temporary Residence” (CPT, i.e., concentration camp for undocumented immigrants) in San Foca, Lecce, until he was arrested for private violence and kidnapping in relation to his treatment of inmates at the “center”;
- instigation to revolt, during a march in front of the CPT that ended in conflicts;
- attacks against ATMs of Banca Intesa, where the Regina Pacis Foundation, the organization through which the good priest ran the concentration camp in San Foca, kept their funds;
- telephone “harassment” against collaborators in maintaining the operation of the CPT;
- “defamation” of these collaborators in flyers;
- dirtying the entrance of the house of one of these collaborators with paint;
- organizing an unauthorized march against the Benetton corporation that is taking over large portions of Patagonia (the southern portion of Chile and Argentina) and driving the Mapuche people off their land;
- dirtying the windows of a shop owned by Benetton;
- damaging pumps at an Esso gas station; Esso is the European branch of Exxon, fuel suppliers for the war in Iraq and Afghanistan;
- occupying the empty and unused space, Capolinea;
- writing messages on walls.

These charges refer to actions that have taken place over the past two years.

In addition to these arrests, ten other people were informed that they were under investigation, eight for subversive associatiopynchonn with the intent of terrorism and two for unauthorized demonstration. The cops closed down and seized the anarchist occupied space, Capolinea, and carried out searches against anarchists all over Italy (in Lecce, Aosta, Turin, Trento, Trieste, Chieti, Cagliari, Taranto and Catania).

I do not know whether those arrested had anything to do with the activities for which they are charged, nor do I care. Guilt or innocence do not interest me since such terms belong to the justice system and the state. My solidarity is based on seeing my own struggle in that of the comrades, seeing possibilities for complicity and mutuality, even across and ocean.

## **No Home in This World**

The real crime of the comrades of Lecce is that they have quite openly expressed their solidarity with rebelling immigrants in the CPTs and with the Mapuche fighting against being dispossessed in South America, as well as their disgust for the war in Iraq. In doing so, they have recognized what they have in common with the undocumented immigrants, the Mapuches losing their land and the Iraqis having their homes destroyed before their very eyes by self-proclaimed “liberators” — that they too are among the dispossessed and exploited who increasingly have no place in this world, no home, who are strangers everywhere they go.

Undocumented immigrants and democratic concentration camps. The number of immigrants roaming the globe trying to escape repression, war, poverty and starvation is growing exponentially as this world falls apart. Social, economic, environmental and political disaster are everywhere. So the immigrants in the CPTs in Italy have their brothers and sisters throughout the world, not all of whom are in concentration camps. In Italy as elsewhere, undocumented immigrants in and outside of these concentration camps have begun to rebel. It only makes sense that anarchists would respond with solidarity, since they are also strangers in this world. In fact, the undocumented immigrant is simply the most blatant expression of the precarious reality that capital is imposing on all of the exploited at present. Capital and the state are spreading devastation into every corner of the globe, poisoning those lands that they haven't yet stolen, where a few still manage to create their lives on their own terms. Just as the homeless within the borders are not simply individuals who love sleeping in doorways and under bridges, so the immigrants from outside the borders are not carefree nomads wandering for the love of adventure. Desperate conditions of poverty, environmental devastation, war and political repression have forced them to take to the road in hopes of finding anything even slightly better. And for their desperation and poverty, they find themselves criminalized, defined by a racist propaganda as dangerous and undesirable elements. In every country, capital needs cheap labor. The most desperate, those who live in daily fear of capture and deportation, are the most easily blackmailed. If they do not accept the worst of conditions at the lowest pay, they are not needed and can be turned over to the authorities. In turn, the rulers present these immigrants to the local exploited as a threat to their own precarious jobs, using this as blackmail to enforce servility among all of the exploited. This makes it easy to use racist and nationalist ideologies to prevent solidarity between immigrants and “native-born” exploited who are deluded into believing that they have more in common with the masters who exploit them than with those who have been forced into desperate wandering.

But those in power understand the real threat of those that they have excluded. If the nazis began to build their concentration camps as the places of exception for holding those who, in their eyes, constituted objective threats to the state (political dissidents, homosexuals, Jews and gypsies) simply because they did not fit in, the various refugee camps, holding centers and “Centers for Temporary Residence”, as the Italian humanitarians so euphemistically call them, are the concentration camps of the modern democratic states — not metaphorically, but literally, because they are places for holding those who are perceived as objective threats to that state, outside of the arena of civil rights, stripped of all but that bare minimum recognized as “human rights”. This exposes the poverty of the democratic state of rights, in which there are only ciphers whose values are defined in abstract terms that prove, in the end, to be economic.

As these concentration camps for undocumented immigrants have spread throughout the world (and particularly the democratic states), they have become hotbeds of rebellions. Riots, hunger strikes and planned escapes are frequent. Those locked up inside are not resigning themselves to their imprisonment. This is why solidarity is possible. Since those locked up in these specialized prisons within the larger social prison are rebelling against the reality imposed upon them, we can find ways to intertwine our own struggles against the larger social prison that is our daily reality with their specific struggle. The destruction of these concentration camps for the undocumented requires the active destruction of this social order that turns the entire world into a prison-shopping mall.

One such concentration camp exists in Lecce, the CPT of San Foca, run by the Regina Pacis Foundation, a Catholic charity. Up until recently it was under the direction of Father Cesare Lodeserto. This contemptible lackey of god lost his position when it was found that he was torturing inmates at the camp. As if being locked up simply for being in desperate straits were not torture already. But the democratic state must keep its hands clean of excesses like those of Father Lodeserto. It needs its scapegoats to prove its own humaneness. In any case, the anarchists in Lecce recognize that the excesses of Lodeserto were simply an extension of the logic of the concentration camps and the world that creates them. They have no interest in making these hellholes more humane. They want to destroy them and the world that creates them, a world that has objectively estranged all of the exploited, stealing away our capacity to create our lives on our own terms. And so they expressed their solidarity with the rebellion of those inside the concentration camps, and this is the crime for which they have been arrested.

## **The Mapuche and Dispossession.**

The Mapuche are an indigenous people of Patagonia the southern portion of Argentina and Chile. Like all indigenous people, they suffered from the original European invasion of the area. But for some time they have managed to create their lives on the basis of small-scale agriculture and animal husbandry in the region. This has become increasingly difficult as capitalist projects intrude more and more into this area. ENDESA, the Spanish multinational electric company has been building hydroelectric facilities along the course of the Biobio River in Chile, a project that has met with much resistance from the Mapuche including marches and demonstrations, but also sabotage of machinery. But perhaps the biggest and most devastating intrusion into the lives of the Mapuche in recent years has been that of the “progressive” multinational Benetton. This company, with its anti-racist, pro-environmental, progressive image, bought several hundred



thousand acres of land in Patagonia where the Mapuche had been living. Along with its own exploitation of the area, Benetton has granted mining rights and rights to search for underground minerals and hydrocarbon to various multinational companies, and has been involved in building highways, airports, railroads and so on in the area. If Benetton is the most devastating of the forces of capitalism dispossessing the Mapuche, the most bizarre and, in certain ways, telling is the Human Genome Diversity Project. It has requested five hundred specimens of genetic material from this tribe of about eight thousand to preserve in its storage facilities. The tribe has refused to cooperate, seeing this equation of people with a small group of molecules within their body as a symptom of what is wrong with this society in which everything, including human beings is simply a resource, a commodity. This massive dispossession of the indigenous people of the region has not been accepted silently. Mapuche resistance has been consistent and often fierce. Along with demonstrations and battles with the police, there have been attempts to occupy portions of the land Benetton took over. The Mapuche are not accepting dispossession and the consequent proletarianization that is being imposed on them quietly.

## **War and Resistance in Iraq.**

The Iraqis have been watching their home get devastated from the beginning of the “first” Gulf War: by the intensive bombing of that war, by the sanctions and continuing bombing over the next twelve years and by the new officially recognized war of the past two years. I have no illusions about the resistance there. Portions of it, possibly quite significant portions, are under the influence of nationalist or sectarian ideologies, embracing an artificial solidarity imposed by a collective identity. At the same time, despite the horrific circumstances, a large part of the resistance has remained truly social in nature, showing a clarity about who the real enemies are. While attacks against American military and “private” \* targets as well as against Iraqi police and military forces go on apace, inter-sectarian and ethnic violence has been minimal so far, despite a US policy that seems clearly intended to promote this sort of hostility between Iraqis. The resistance in Iraq, however deformed it may be by the circumstances there, is also a desperate fight against the destruction of their homes. For years now, the US and its allies have been forcing the Iraqi exploited into the role of strangers in their own land. There is seventy percent (or more) unemployment in Iraq. The only jobs available are service to the invaders. And these invaders destroy entire cities where hundreds of thousands of people once lived. A prime example is the city of Fallujah, which American troops devastated in the search for insurgents last November. The population was driven out or killed, houses were destroyed by the thousands and chemicals used in the siege continue to pollute what is now largely a ghost town. Only twenty percent of the original population has dared to venture back, and to enter the city that had been their home, they are forced to give their fingerprints and retina scan to the American invaders who keep them on file in order to monitor the comings and goings of the population. Truly the Iraqi population — all but the few willing to be puppets — are becoming strangers in their own home. This is what they are resisting.

There is a common thread that runs through each of these situations — the thread of the dispossession, proletarianization and exploitation that capitalism spreads everywhere. The system of capitalism indeed forms a totality, but its development is not the same everywhere. If we in the so-called Western world have been long since dispossessed of the means for making our lives on

our own terms directly from what the earth offers, in other places this process of dispossession is going on right now. And the circumstances in which it is developing are quite different. Yet it is the recognition of the common thread that can provide the basis for solidarity in the battle against the impositions of the ruling order. The struggle of the Mapuche or the West Papuans is class struggle inasmuch as it is a struggle against the class relationships capital imposes, a struggle against being proletarianized. In the West, we were dispossessed and forced into the class relationships of capitalism long ago. But our struggle to take back our lives is also a fight against the class relationships that have defined our lives now for centuries. If this can take the form of resistance for those who are only now being dispossessed of the means by which they have created their lives, for us here, it must take the form of destructive attack. But despite the specific differences in how each of us struggles where they are, it is in this common struggle against the class relationships imposed by capital and the state that the real possibility for active solidarity and the interweaving of struggles exists.

## Showing Solidarity

Solidarity is not an obligation, but a choice based in mutuality. If I choose to express solidarity with any struggles, any comrades, any prisoners, it is because I see my battle to take back my life and live it on my terms within them. This is why the most essential aspect of solidarity is the continuation of the struggles and revolts we share with our comrades here where we are.

Understood in this way, solidarity is never with the suffering of others — that would merely be pity, not true solidarity. Rather it is precisely with the ferocity with which they refuse to accept their suffering. This is why questions of guilt or innocence are of no importance in relation to solidarity with arrested and imprisoned comrades. What matters is that we know that they are fighting the state and its servants and that currently the state has chosen to strike them fiercely for attacking it.

The five comrades arrested in Lecce, the ten under investigation and the dozens whose homes were invaded by cops all recognize what their daily revolt shares in common with others of the exploited who rebel. All of these comrades acted in their own way to express their complicity and solidarity with the rebellions of those in the CPTs, in Patagonia, in Iraq and in other places against this imposed existence.

In the same way, my solidarity with Salvatore, Saverio, Cristian, Marina, Annalisa and the other comrades in Italy starts from a recognition of complicity and mutuality, seeing my own rebellion in theirs. The greatest act of solidarity would be to find the places where my struggle can interweave with those they are involved in, and thus also with the revolts of undocumented immigrants, the Mapuche, the portions of Iraqi resistance that remain free of sectarian and nationalist rackets and act there. In this way, the threads of revolt can weave an ever-expanding tapestry. The forces of domination, exploitation and repression are the same here as in Italy, Patagonia and Iraq, even if the specific methods of their functioning vary due to differing circumstances. We can find the links in the chain of exploitation that connect us with the comrades in Italy and with all the exploited and dispossessed in revolt and aim our attacks at these points. And this is true solidarity which gives substance to any support we may choose to give the arrested comrades, showing its basis in complicity rather than charity or duty.

# Casualties of a Social Disaster: Immigrants and the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina

In the present world, it is no longer possible to talk of purely natural disasters. On every level, disasters are always social. This is especially clear in terms of the effects they have on the different people caught in their midst.

Hurricane Katrina made this so clear that even pundits in the service of the ruling regime had to speak of “class war” in reference to its aftermath. The state’s priorities were obvious from the beginning: the restoration of order and the reestablishment of functioning capitalist relationships as quickly as possible. These priorities moved the state to act openly against the various self-organized actions people were taking to meet their own needs in an emergency situation, to such an extent that state activity interfered with its own proclaimed end of aiding those caught in the storm.

The stories of the ways that people organized their own activity are quite worthy of examination. Though remaining on the level of survival, due to the state’s interference, these activities were an expression of social war. Out of necessity, the poor people of New Orleans and the surrounding area had to attack the institutions of property and of the state in order to meet their needs. There was no way to hide the fact that these institutions stood in the way of real human need.

But this is not the story I want to tell here. The region struck by the hurricane (southern Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana in the United States) has a significant immigrant population. Many of these immigrants do not have documents. Since they are at the bottom of the social hierarchy, this disaster struck them even more harshly than the rest of the region’s poor.

It is estimated that there were about 300,000 immigrants living in the region struck by Katrina (though the official number is closer to 150,000, showing how many are undocumented). These included a large number of Hondurans (about 120,000 many of whom were refugees from Hurricane Mitch which tore through Honduras in 1998), other Latin Americans, Bangladeshis, Vietnamese and others. They face specific problems that those that the state recognizes as citizens do not.

In a CRS Report for Congress (Order Code RL33091), we find a bureaucratic assessment of some of these problems in a language devoid of humanity. Despite this language, one can learn a few things by reading this report. Many immigrants who had their papers in good order lost them in the storm and have nothing to prove their status. In addition, many immigrants are only allowed in the country because they have a job or a place in a university here or relatives who already live here and are capable of supporting them. The damage that Katrina caused has closed down many workplaces and schools, so that these immigrants are likely to have their status reassessed. And many of their supporting relatives are now themselves in need. Thus, many immigrants who had their documents in order now face the loss of their status, with the threat of deportation. In addition, the undocumented and those who lost their papers in the storm rightly fear asking for

aid. The bureaucrats list all of these problems, and then go on to speak in the terms one would expect, asking what is necessary to reestablish and maintain control while promoting a quick return to normality, and basing any policy of aid to immigrants on this priority.

The United States government public relations apparatus has tried to present a humanitarian face, but the reality has been obvious from the beginning. While Bush and other people in the government told immigrants that they could feel safe applying for aid regardless of their immigration status, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was unwilling to promise not to deport those without documents who applied for disaster relief. And yet the US government apparently promised several Latin American governments that immigrants from their countries had nothing to fear regardless of their status. By September 28, this promise had been proven to be a lie, after five immigrants who had applied for aid found themselves facing deportation proceedings. As expected no one in the administration was willing to take responsibility for this lie.

Although the DHS was unwilling to make any promises to undocumented immigrants, it proved its compassion for the rich glowingly. Aware that employers in the region would be looking for cheap labor, particularly for the rebuilding of New Orleans (most likely as a kind of Cajun Disney World in which there will be no place left for the poor), it has temporarily suspended sanctions against employers that hire workers who don't have documents proving their immigration status. So while every immigrant who lacks documents whether because they never got them or because they lost them in the hurricane will have to continue to live in fear of being detained and deported, but employers will have even easier access to cheap labor, guaranteeing the quick reestablishment of fully operational capitalist relationships in the region.

The treatment of immigrants in this situation has, of course, become another cause for reformist moral crusaders in the United States to latch on to, lamenting the injustices of the government response to the situation. But this response is not an injustice from the standpoint of the ruling order. It is the only response we could expect from the rulers of this world. Their top priorities were to reestablish their control and to guarantee the healthy revival of capitalist relationships in the region. Their actions with regards to immigrants in the region were aimed precisely toward these ends. Non-immigrant poor and exploited managed to find ways to fight to meet their own needs in the situation, temporarily overcoming the usually one-sided nature of the social war in the US, but I have found no evidence that the wall between non-immigrant and immigrant, documented and undocumented poor and exploited people was breached in this situation. Particularly in light of the recent uprisings in France, we need to put every effort into overcoming this division along with all the others that the rulers of this world impose on us. This is an essential part of learning how to take advantage of the unexpected ruptures that can open the door to social upheaval. And in a world where anything can happen, those of us who want to overturn this world need to be prepared to seize these opportunities.

An anarchist stranger in an alien world

November 2005

acraticus at angrynerds.com

## **Issue 2**

# Repression as State Strategy

Repression is a topic that is often discussed in the revolutionary milieu, but unfortunately it is a subject that is not well understood. Because of democratic baggage, repression is often understood as simply an anomalous and outrageous violation of rights. What people fail to comprehend is that repression is part of the standard operating procedure of any class society. There are those that rule and those who are ruled, and to maintain this divide, a combination of coercion and accommodation is necessary. To preserve the social structure of our society then, it is necessary to recuperate parts of social movements, and to repress the other parts. Essentially, repression is a *strategy* for maintaining power by capitalist ruling classes within nation-states. Thus, since it is a long-term strategy, it is *always* in motion and not some occasional occurrence.

When repression strikes and comrades are arrested, such as in the “green scare,” the reaction of many is to disassociate themselves from those who are being attacked by the state. Liberals, progressives, and most activists draw up official statements denouncing violence, sabotage, and illegality, all in hopes of proving to the government that they are just good citizens who like to follow the rules and who are interested in “positive” social change. This spineless response is standard for the left, and serves to flank the state’s actions. Disassociation is not only a cowardly act, but is also based on faulty logic.

The underlying premise of disassociation is that the state has reacted to a *specific* occurrence and that those being persecuted are responsible for bringing repression upon themselves and everyone else. Certainly there are specific acts that the state responds to, such as actions of the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), but this is not where repression stems from. In actuality, repression is a long-term strategy employed by the state regardless of specific illegal acts and is an attempt to maintain the status quo by any means necessary. Repression, then, is always present in many forms. It is the police, the courts, the prison system, the proliferation of security cameras, the immigrant detention centers and the like. If anyone needs further proof that the state doesn’t merely punish people for breaking its laws, and instead represses in order to destroy its opposition, one need only take a look at recent events.

## Some Recent Attacks

A well-known example of state repression within the anarchist milieu is the infiltration of various conferences, protests and even affinity groups by one particular state agent: Anna Davies.<sup>1</sup> Following the arrests of Lauren Weiner, Zachary Jenson and Eric McDavid in January 2006 for conspiracy to commit several acts of sabotage, the government revealed that one of the three’s comrades was in fact in the employ of the state.<sup>2</sup> What’s more is that the government funneled

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<sup>1</sup> We are still unsure about whether or not Anna Davies is the informant’s real name, but for the article we will use that name for the sake of simplicity.

<sup>2</sup> At this time, both Lauren Weiner and Zachary Jenson have taken plea deals and agreed to cooperate against Eric McDavid. For more information see: [www.supporteric.org](http://www.supporteric.org)

money to Anna to rent a house where planning allegedly took place and to pay for supplies to commit these alleged acts. When this information was revealed, comrades across the country quickly posted photographs of Anna to popular anarchist and activist sites, and within days a picture of Anna's activity was pieced together.

Rather than simply being involved with the three people arrested in California, Davies had been actively working for the FBI as far back as 2003. She has taken part in major protests such as the Democratic National Convention in 2004, the 2004 anti-G8 Protest in Georgia, the June 2005 Organization of American States protest in Florida, and the Bio-Democracy protest in Philadelphia, also in June of 2005. Along with major convergences, Davies attended anarchist conferences and gatherings in 2005 such as Feral Visions in the Appalachian Mountains and the CrimethInc Convergence in Indiana. On various Indymedia sites she also solicited photographs and video of protests under the guise of publicity, but it should be presumed that any information sent to her was added to the FBI's intelligence base.

So the intention behind her infiltration was not to help solve a particular case, or to investigate one specific crime. Instead, she was employed as an infiltrator to gather information about the anarchist scene in general. It should also not be surprising that the case that she is currently involved in focuses on alleged acts that were planned to occur in the future, not ones that had already occurred. Based solely on the evidence made available to the public, it is not hard to see that the FBI was facilitating these alleged crimes by renting a house for Davies and the three arrested people and funneling money via Davies for supplies. In effect, the state was justifying their existence through aiding and abetting. In the US government's latest terror war, arrests and examples need to be made; Weiner, Jenson, and McDavid have served this purpose quite well .

In addition to the case of Anna Davies is the 2003 infiltration of direct action anti-war groups in California. In July 2006, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Northern California released a detailed report in which they documented a variety of instances in which local police departments, along with the California Anti-Terrorism Information Center, placed officers into anti-war groups. First and foremost they infiltrated the groups in order to gather information, but more insidiously, the police hoped to steer the organizations in a direction more useful to the state. When asked why officers had been placed in the San Francisco group Direct Action to Stop the War (DASW), Captain Howard Jordan of the Oakland Police Department stated: "if you put people in there from the beginning, I think we'd be able to gather the information and maybe even direct them to do something that we want them to do."<sup>3</sup> Clearly the state's perspective is one of infiltrating in order to undermine.

This strategy manifested itself on multiple occasions. In April of 2003, DASW organized a picket at the Port of Oakland in opposition to the war in Iraq. At least one shipping company at the Port was handling war supplies, and the group organized to shut the port down for the day. Nearly 500 demonstrators took part, splitting into smaller groups to picket the various entrances to the port. The Oakland Police Department, however, was prepared. Through surveillance, police had already gathered information about the protest, and in this instance, they also brutally attacked demonstrators with rubber bullets, tear gas, and wooden dowel shots causing scores of injuries. In response to the police crackdown, DASW organized an anti-police brutality march in May of 2003. What members of the group did not know was that they had elected police infiltrators to plan out the route for their march. No one, not even the police, could fail to see the irony

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<sup>3</sup> State of Surveillance ACLU report, p. 13. Available online: [www.aclunc.org](http://www.aclunc.org)

of that situation. While in their report the ACLU decries the actions of the police as evidence of misconduct, these acts should more importantly be viewed as evidence of the state's attempts to undermine and destroy opposition to it.

As shown by FBI infiltration of anarchist demonstrations and events and local police infiltration of protest groups, it is easy to see that they were not investigating crimes that had taken place, but rather they were investigating *possibilities* of concrete resistance, which by necessity, generally break the law. This shows that there are plenty of examples, and certainly many that we may never know about, which demonstrate that repression already exists and is underway. It is not intermittent, and does not always respond to particular violations of the law; it is a long-term strategy of the state to destroy opposition. This strategy, however, has wider implications beyond the bounds of the radical milieu and affects the exploited as a whole.

## The New Repressive Strategy

Author Kristian Williams, in his book *Our Enemies in Blue: Police and Power in America*, examines fundamental changes in the repressive strategy of the United States government. His main observation, which he thoroughly documents with official papers and statements, is that following the upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, the state switched to a strategy of permanent repression, or as he calls it, counter-insurgency. Learning from their past failures, the police developed a preemptive model of repression which sought to prevent insurgency before it happened. Williams outlines two major components functioning hand in hand: militarization and community policing.

Militarization is one of the most obvious changes within police departments in the United States. In city centers across the US, police departments are well armed and equipped for urban warfare. Not only has their weaponry been upgraded in a variety of ways, but also newer and more powerful firearms are available. Armored personnel carriers (APCs), helicopters and even tanks are at their disposal, as are a multitude of so-called non-lethal weapons such as tasers, tear gas, rubber bullets and pepper spray, which are known to kill and permanently injure people. But it is not only the tools, but also the manner of organization and the scope of the mission that define militarization.

Organizationally, many police departments were restructured along military lines into squads and platoons, and paramilitary units were created as well. Special Weapons and Tactics units, better known as SWAT teams, are a manifestation of militarization in terms of organization, armament, and dress. Created in the late 1960s, their first missions involved raids on Black Panther Party headquarters and on the hideout of the Symbionese Liberation Army. SWAT teams were also mobilized dozens of times in relation to the activities of the American Indian Movement at Wounded Knee. Now however, SWAT teams aren't simply used for "extreme" situations or in the case of potential shootouts; they are also used for routine patrolling in the ghettos of many major cities. In this way, paramilitary units -equipped with machine guns — targeting people for ID checks, loitering, and even traffic violations, has become a normal part of life for the most exploited members of this society. This is but one part of the state's counter-insurgency campaign.

Community policing is the friendly face, and perhaps the more insidious side, of the new repressive strategy. Community policing developed in response to the state's inability to predict



and control urban uprisings in the 60s and 70s and was designed, “to build a bond between the police and the public in hopes that this would increase police legitimacy, give them better access to information, intensify penetration of community life and expand the police mission.”<sup>4</sup> This is not the same as infiltration because it is an *overt* attempt to work with civic organizations, churches, homeowners, and the general public in order to transform people into the eyes and ears of the state. Some of the tactics employed include: neighborhood watch groups, public forums, meetings with religious and civic leaders, foot and bike patrols, a focus on minor offenses, citizen volunteer opportunities, and police sponsored community activities such as Night Out Against Crime.<sup>5</sup> This is how the police and the state worm their way into the social networks of various neighborhoods in order to gain legitimacy. Therefore when force is used, it is presented as being validated by “community support.”

Community policing has also expanded the role of the police from simply dealing with violations of the law to an overall focus on “public order” and “quality of life.” This is based on the Broken Windows theory which argues that small issues such as rundown property and juvenile loitering eventually contribute to an ever-growing sense of disorder in the neighborhood and consequently, to greater violations of the law. This means that rather than simply focusing on serious offences, the police also focus on many smaller crimes that supposedly lower the quality of life and eventually snowball into great social disturbances. Quality of life issues include ridding neighborhoods of graffiti, breaking up homeless encampments, and dealing with noise complaints; this focus essentially promotes a zero-tolerance approach to crime. The underlying premise is that any amount of lawbreaking, whether it is jaywalking or kids hanging out on corners, contributes to ever-greater lawlessness.

The confluence of community policing and militarization amounts to nothing less than a consistent campaign of counter-insurgency.<sup>6</sup> Penetrating communities and including common people in the state apparatus, in combination with paramilitary units and a war-based conception of crime, are part of a strategic shift to preempt any major disorder or uprisings. Poor neighborhoods and districts, especially black and Latino ghettos, which were the source of much insurgency during the 1960s and 1970s, are hit particularly hard by this preemptive strategy. Undoubtedly, since the exploited pose a permanent threat to the social order, there is a direct connection between this daily repression and the repressive activity focused specifically on radicals.

## How to Deal

If we begin to understand repression as a strategy of the state that is continually in operation, then we must transform our way of dealing with it. In the US, radicals deal with it in a reactive way: first the state strikes, then we come out with posters, leaflets, statements, and attempts to raise money for our imprisoned comrades. This is of course assuming that repression is even responded to; *most* choose to look the other way as long as it poses no threat to themselves or their acquaintances. Unfortunately, the mentality of some is that those being targeted by the state are responsible for bringing repression upon themselves. Without simply repeating the usual

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<sup>4</sup> Kristian Williams. *Our Enemies in Blue: Police and Power in America*. p 239

<sup>5</sup> Williams p 237

<sup>6</sup> Calling this strategy counter-insurgency is not in any way a hyperbole, because occupying armies in situations such as Algeria and Ireland primarily developed these strategies. While there is too much to go into here, William’s *Our Enemies in Blue* is an excellent resource for gaining a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

principles of revolutionary solidarity, we feel the need to reaffirm that it's important to start using our heads and thinking about what can be done outside of the usual support campaigns. Comrades in Spain, once again, have given us some examples to learn from.

On February 9, 2006, two anarchist comrades, Ruben and Ignasi, were arrested in Barcelona for an arson attack on a prison labor company and for vandalism at a bank. The anarchist response to the arrests was immense. Graffiti and propaganda covered walls in many neighborhoods in Barcelona, and dozens of acts of sabotage were carried out in solidarity with them. Individuals attacked banks and ATMs across Spain, a satellite signal antenna was destroyed in Barcelona, and the offices of real estate companies were targeted. Public demonstrations were held in support of the imprisoned comrades, and on a few occasions in Barcelona, major intersections were shut down during rush hour, as banners flew and flyers were handed out to passersby. The acts of sabotage were not random; they were an extension of pre-existing fights against gentrification and the media's repeated efforts to label anarchists and autonomists as domestic terrorists. Thus they served to intertwine and deepen the implications of their resistance. And in their resistance, comrades in Spain employed a variety of tools: posters, graffiti, sabotage, protests, and blockades. Perhaps more importantly they demonstrated a refusal to allow the state to kidnap their comrades without repercussions.

Outside of the scope of friends and comrades being taken by the state, there is the daily repression that is ever growing. We need to get in the habit of resisting the daily indignities that are imposed upon us by this regime of repression. They will push us to see how far we will bend, to make us bow and show respect to authority. They hope to police our every move, to make simple things illegal, for the sake of constantly having a reason to interfere with our lives. This is manifesting itself in a variety of ways: the proliferation of video surveillance devices monitoring public spaces, constant harassment for identification, more aggressive policing of demonstrations, random searches, and more importantly, the racist policy of mass incarceration. All of these changes are the result of the convergence of interests between states and businesses with mutually reinforcing agendas. One of the most nefarious aspects of this growing network of control is the way in which it is normalized over time. We get used to being watched, inspected, harassed, beaten and treated like prisoners. The media is complicit in this process by continually promoting a climate of fear -fear of pedophiles, gangs, immigrants, and eco-terrorists — that serves to build democratic support for repression.

There are some precedents for struggle against the slow creep of repressive technologies. In Britain there has been widespread sabotage over the past several years of speed cameras, which seek to catch drivers violating the speed limit. Hundreds of cameras have been destroyed across the country by chainsaws, burning tires, and rifles. The recent implementation of speed cameras in Australia has produced the same reaction. Surveillance cameras, however, are more prolific and more useful to police. In many cities across the world, surveillance cameras are routinely targeted with rocks, paint, and hammers. People generally use brightly colored paints to disable the cameras and draw attention to them. Cameras are only one part of the repressive web that threatens to envelop us, but are certainly a worthy target.<sup>7</sup>

Also, anarchists and other radicals in many countries have initiated projects that focus on immigrant detention. In Australia in 2002, there was a direct attack on the Woomera detention

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<sup>7</sup> For more information about the UK speed camera attacks, see [www.speedcam.co.uk](http://www.speedcam.co.uk), and for the Australian case, see "Speed Cameras: The War Begins," available at: [sydney.indymedia.org](http://sydney.indymedia.org)

facility by hundreds of people who tore down several layers of security fences. This allowed several detainees to escape. In Greece in December of 2004, anarchists held a solidarity rally with Afghan immigrants who had been tortured by the police. There, the demonstrators attacked the police station where the torture had occurred. In Lecce, Italy, a very determined struggle against the Regina Pacis detention center has been developing over the last three years. Riots have broken out in the facility, and sabotage and arson attacks were undertaken against those who manage and profit from it. As long as capitalism exists, it will ravage large parts of the world, sending people on forced marches across deserts, oceans, and national borders; thus these revolutionary projects of immigrant solidarity are worthy of close study.<sup>8</sup>

If we hope to have any impact upon repression, we need to begin refusing their commands and disobeying their orders, and start thinking about ways we can meet face-to-face with others who are facing state repression. When the state hits us, let's hit back. After all, like the police argue, a few broken windows eventually lead to full-scale disorder.

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<sup>8</sup> Also for information on anarchist activity against immigrant detention centers see "An Example of Struggle Against Deportation and Detention Centers for Immigrants" in the first issue *A Murder of Crows*.

"Oaxaca Teachers Union Protests face Police Repression," available at: [www.chiapaspeacehouse.org](http://www.chiapaspeacehouse.org), and "Up From Below: The New Revolution in Southern Mexico," available at: [www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org)

# This is What Recuperation Looks Like: The Rebellion in Oaxaca and the APPO

By Kellen Kass

On May 22, 2006, teachers in the state of Oaxaca, Section 22 of the National Education Worker's Union (SNTE), went on strike. Section 22 has yearly strikes in Oaxaca to demand a variety of concessions from the state, and this year's strike included calls for higher wages, the construction of more schools throughout the state of Oaxaca, as well as free lunches and supplies for students. Section 22 members occupied the city center, the Zócalo, to further their protest and disrupt the state capital during the beginning of the tourist season. They set up camping sites in the main square, occupied public buildings and organized large marches, or mega-marches as the Oaxacans call them, to reinforce their economic demands as well as calling for the resignation of Governor Ulises Ruiz. Public support was quite strong for the marches as well as the occupation.

In early June, teachers were given a final offer and ultimatum to vacate the Zócalo. On June 14, a police raid authorized by Gov. Ruiz involving nearly 3,000 officers from the state police attacked the central square in the early morning hours. A helicopter dropped tear gas into the square to disorient the occupiers, while outside of the city riot police readied themselves for an invasion. Police attacked the main square, completely destroying the teachers' encampments and injuring hundreds. Teachers and Oaxaca residents fought back against police aggression and were able to retake the square in a matter of hours with their fists and makeshift weapons. During the fighting, however, 8 people died and others were "disappeared."<sup>1</sup>

After people reoccupied the Zócalo and took control of surrounding blocks, a mega-march was held on June 16, with an estimated 400,000 people taking part. This time however, the teachers dropped their economic demands in exchange for one political demand: the removal of Gov. Ruiz. Despite the narrowed focus, the struggle was extended in a variety of ways; teachers occupied seven city hall buildings across the state, and students at the Benito Juarez Autonomous University of Oaxaca (UABJO) took over their school radio station in support of the striking teachers.<sup>2</sup> In addition to these actions, teachers and many on the left formed the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (APPO). The APPO was an ad hoc organization for people to come together to talk about the events transpiring and to plan future action.

July was contentious as well because the Mexican presidential elections took place at the beginning of the month. Much like Ruiz's election, the presidential election was fraught with allegations of fraud. Throughout the recount, groups in Oaxaca managed to not be drawn into any particular party's machinations.

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<sup>1</sup> "In Oaxaca Mega-March, 400,000 Send A Firm No to the Repression by Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortíz," available at: [www.narconews.com](http://www.narconews.com)

<sup>2</sup> "In Oaxaca Mega-March, 400,000 Send A Firm No to the Repression by Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortíz," available at: [www.narconews.com](http://www.narconews.com)

On August 1, a women's march involving some 2,000 people made its way through Oaxaca to the city center. From there a few hundred women took their protest out of the street and into the building of TV Channel 9. They occupied the building and took over the station, broadcasting themselves and their views on the current situation; video footage of the various marches and police raids was also shown.<sup>3</sup> By August 22, Ruiz and his cohorts had had enough, and they launched a paramilitary attack against the station. In response, people took to the streets, overturning several city buses, setting them on fire, and using them to block major roads. In addition, demonstrators took over private radio stations to spread news of the raid and to announce solidarity messages. At the same time various smaller groups armed with clubs shut down intersections across the already paralyzed city.<sup>4</sup>

Paramilitary violence has been a serious problem throughout the teachers' strike and occupation of the city. The term paramilitaries is awfully vague, and it has been extremely difficult to find out who has been behind some of the shootings; those captured are seldom identified by the state. Certainly the paramilitaries involve Mexican military, Oaxacan police, as well as the private army of Ruiz who is, at the time of this writing, still desperately clinging to power. At a march on August 10, gunmen opened fire killing one teacher, Jose Jimenez.<sup>5</sup> On October 18, a teacher and APPO participant, Pánfilo Hernández, was shot and killed in a paramilitary drive-by. On October 27, Brad Will, anarchist and Indymedia journalist, was shot and killed by paramilitaries, as were Emilio Alonso Fabián and Esteban López Zurita. These are some of the most well documented cases, but there are dozens of others who have died in this fight as well.

Events in October were tumultuous, and the month came to a crashing conclusion. On October 26, Section 22 teachers voted to end their strike amidst allegations of voting fraud and accusations that their leadership had sold out. And on October 28, Vicente Fox announced that he was ordering thousands of Federal Preventative Police (PFP) into Oaxaca in order to retake the city. When the PFP invasion came, the APPO urged peaceful protest and non-violent resistance to the police. Lines of riot police equipped with tear gas and batons pushed back thousands of people, and they also used armored trucks with water cannons and plows to disperse people and destroy barricades. The APPO sent out numerous communiqués exhorting people to act peacefully, and even went so far as to denounce all violent actions against the PFP as the work of agent provocateurs.<sup>6</sup> People laid down in the roads, pushed against police lines, but by nightfall the PFP had made it's way into the city center.

As police pushed further into the city on November 2, they attempted to retake the university and destroy the occupied radio station within it. In a six-hour battle with police, students and many other people used molotov cocktails, rocks, steel pipes and slings to fight police, and they overturned cars and buses to further reinforce their blockades. This fierce resistance forced the police to withdraw, and put a stop to police advances into the university area. Students and many others were clearly upset about the loss of the Zócalo to state forces. Therefore they decided to use violent means to continue occupying the university regardless of what the APPO said. At the time of this writing, the students and the APPO still control the area surrounding the university.

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<sup>3</sup> In Oaxaca Mega-March, 400,000 Send A Firm No to the Repression by Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz," available at: [www.narconews.com](http://www.narconews.com)

<sup>4</sup> "Oaxaca's State TV Station Under Popular Control," available at: [www.narconews.com](http://www.narconews.com)

<sup>5</sup> "Mexico Teachers Extend Protest," available at: [news.bbc.co.uk](http://news.bbc.co.uk)

<sup>6</sup> "Violence Flares in South Mexico," available at: [news.bbc.co.uk](http://news.bbc.co.uk)

## Roots of Rebellion

“The rich will do anything for the poor but get off their backs.” — Karl Marx

The uprising in Oaxaca and the popular mobilizations have made international headlines recently, but the causes of the situation have not garnered as much attention. In August 2004, Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, a lawyer, “won” the Oaxaca governor’s election by a slim margin. Ruiz’s opponents immediately contested the election results, charging that he and his cohorts had rigged the outcome. Apparently the opposition’s claims were not unfounded, but Ruiz still took office in December later that year. Ruiz is a member of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) that completely controlled the Mexican federal government for over 70 years until the 2000 election of Vicente Fox, a National Action Party (PAN) member, to the presidency.<sup>7</sup>

Considering the extreme poverty in Mexico, with some 40 million living well below the poverty line, it is not surprising that one of the main ways that the PRI remained in power was through a system of patronage: contracts, jobs, and funding for education and basic services are handed out *after* successful elections of PRI officials on the local and national level.<sup>8</sup> In thousands of other cases, and specifically in Ruiz’s case, bags of groceries were handed out in exchange for votes. In Oaxaca though, it was not just Ruiz who came to power in this way. In the first few months of 2006 there were also conflicts over town elections in San Blas Atempa, Oaxaca between the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) candidate and a PRI candidate over issues of voter fraud and purchasing of votes. While this may seem outrageous, patronage has been a normal procedure in politics worldwide for centuries, and the PRI is just a standard political machine that many throughout Mexico are finally fed up with. Unfortunately, many people think that these corrupt politicians should simply be replaced by honest politicians.<sup>9</sup>

The roots of the problem, however, go much deeper than PRI patronage and corruption that permeate Mexican politics. The cause of the mobilization and violent clashes with police lies in the absolutely wretched economic conditions that dominate life across southern Mexico. Oaxaca, bordering Chiapas to the west, is Mexico’s second-poorest state and has the second-largest population of indigenous peoples. According to human rights organizations, nearly 80% of Oaxaca lives in extreme poverty.<sup>10</sup> The main industry that props up the economy of Oaxaca is tourism. And like all tourist areas, most people work in services where wages are low, and many public services are geared towards visitors as opposed to actual residents.

International trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have only made things worse. The implementation of neo-liberal reforms to the Mexican state, which has meant an overall cuts to basic necessities over the past several years, has made it even more difficult for people to survive.<sup>11</sup> In recent years, Mexico has been unable to keep pace with China’s offer to the altar of economic sacrifice: its immense, expendable and therefore cheap work force. Thus Mexico has been subject to the migration of factories and jobs to Asia in the same way that the United States has experienced “job loss” to Mexico. Thus it is not hard to see

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<sup>7</sup> For the APPO’s denunciation of violence, see [codepappo.wordpress.com](http://codepappo.wordpress.com)

<sup>8</sup> “Under the Volcano,” *The Economist*, September 28, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> “Police Retake Oaxaca Town Hall Occupied Since January 2005,” available at: [www.narconews.com](http://www.narconews.com)

<sup>10</sup> “How Many Deaths Is the Oaxaca Governor Worth?” available at: [www.commondreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org)

<sup>11</sup> “Oaxaca’s Dangerous Teachers,” *Dollars & Sense: the Magazine of Economic Justice*, September/October 2006.

that dictates of the market care little about countries, and that capital flows in the direction of greater profit and greater misery.<sup>12</sup>

It is this complex situation that has led to decades of social conflict and has culminated in the struggle we see now.

## **We're All on the Same Team: the APPO**

“Our aim is a more democratic government that listens to the people more than the current government does.” — APPO Spokesman Florentino Lopez Martinez

While many inspiring actions are taking place in Oaxaca, one must not lose the ability to look critically at situations. On the surface the APPO appears to be simply an assembly of common people charting out their future, but there are very distinct political perspectives and groups involved. The membership of the APPO is extremely varied and is composed of a variety of social organizations, political groupings, unions, and human rights organizations. Members of Section 22 are involved, as are anarchists, municipal authorities, and indigenous organizations such as the Movimiento de Unificación y Lucha Triqui (MULT) and the Popular Indigenous Council of Oaxaca — Ricardo Flores Magon (CIPO-RFM). Within the APPO, representatives from each group participate in meetings where issues are decided based on consensus as opposed to majority rule. Members are not supposed to be involved in parties participating in electoral politics, but membership is open to groups such as the Revolutionary Popular Front (FPR) and the Union of Revolutionary Youth of Mexico (UJRM), both of which are openly appendages of the Marxist-Leninist Mexican Communist Party. One of the spokesmen for the APPO, Florentino Lopez Martinez, has stated in interviews that he is a member of the FPR.<sup>13</sup>

Aside from small aspiring states such as the Marxist-Leninist Mexican Communist Party, there are other politicians in the midst of the APPO. One of the spokespeople of the APPO, the media-darling and crass opportunist Flavio Sosa, was a part of Vicente Fox's election campaign in 2000 through his organization the New Left of Oaxaca. Sosa has also been actively involved in the PRI splinter-party the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) for years, a party he actually quit in order to be involved in the APPO.<sup>14</sup> It should be pretty obvious that Sosa is a political opportunist who moves from one group to the next in hopes of carving out some kind of position for himself. He's a classic recuperator, and one in serious need of an ass kicking.

It is also interesting to note that APPO member and Section 22 leader, Enrique Rueda Pacheco, gave a speech at the fifth mega-march in Oaxaca in early September calling for “national unity” and a movement that would incorporate the PRD and the Zapatistas. He has also been involved in trying to end the teachers' strike as far back as July. Like a typical union hack, he consistently tried to undermine the strike in exchange for political clout. Clearly, the APPO is a mixed bag

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<sup>12</sup> For more information about the economic background of Mexico, see “A Commune in Chiapas? Mexico and the Zapatista Rebellion,” *Aufheben* #9, Autumn 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Frente Popular Revolucionario: [fprweb.tripod.com](http://fprweb.tripod.com), and Unión de la Juventud Revolucionaria de México: [pagina.de](http://pagina.de). For interview with Florentino Lopez Martinez see: [www.infoshop.org](http://www.infoshop.org).

<sup>14</sup> “Liderazgo “camaleónico”: Flavio Sosa, cabeza de la APPO, apoyó al PRD, luego a Fox,” *Diario de la Yucatán*, Nov. 6 2006.

and includes its fair share of aspiring politicians and real politicians. This, however, is not the most damning aspect.<sup>15</sup>

At the end of September, three days of meetings were held to discuss the transformation of the APPO from an ad hoc organization to a more formalized and permanent organization in Oaxaca. Following the meetings, a document entitled “Resolutions of the First State Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca” was released. This document is perhaps the best indication of the nature of the APPO because it is an attempt to define “...Statutes, the Declaration of Principles, a definitive Structure and a Program of Struggle.” Within the resolutions there is a section entitled “Proposal for a Program of Struggle,” which is most revealing of the overall aims of the APPO.

The first point of the program of struggle is entitled “For the Defense of National Sovereignty,” in which they outline their proposal for withdrawing the Mexican state from trade agreements such as NAFTA and the FTAA, as well as from organizations such as the IMF and World Bank. Their second point, entitled “For a New Model of Economic Development” reaffirms national ownership of natural resources and calls for the re-nationalization of industries that have been privatized, as well as the nationalization of monopolistic industries such as banking. Thus the APPO identifies neo-liberal institutions like the IMF and World Bank and privately owned corporations as “bad” and the sovereign Mexican state as “good.” A later portion of the economic program even calls for further economic integration of Latin America and the Caribbean and the creation of a common market therein, a sort of alternative FTAA. According to the APPO, the problem is not with the market, not with capitalism, not with the existence of bureaucratic institutions, but rather with US imperialism and the bad countries of the North that take advantage of the good countries in the South. It’s the same tired charade of national liberation that has proven time and time again to be a miserable dead end.

The third point of their program of struggle is “For a Popular Democracy,” in which they proclaim that the “present antidemocratic State should be replaced with a new State with a democratic and popular character...” which in turn will be based on “...the will of the Mexican people to constitute and make effective a Democratic and Representative Federal Republic.” This points asserts that the state is a neutral institution and that everything would be better for all of us if only the corrupt, lying politicians were replaced by honest, democratic politicians. Perhaps their critique of the state is so liberal because many representatives in the APPO would like to see themselves as the next ruling elite, but that remains to be seen. Thus their program of struggle is not proposing the revolutionary transformation of social life, but rather the democratization of the state and the continuance of capitalism, albeit with a friendlier face.<sup>16</sup>

Given the participation of many dubious groups and characters, as well as the “Resolutions of the First State Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca,” we must conclude that the character of the APPO is reformist, and their overall plan is one of recuperating the rage and resentment of the dispossessed in order to manage the misery of the current social order. The APPO does not seek to destroy the state, but it intends to democratize it. The APPO does not seek to end capitalism, but it intends to increase state ownership of corporations and make capitalism fairer. Plainly stated, the APPO — an organization with defined principles and a long term strategy of struggle — does not share common goals with anarchists, and is certainly taking part in activity that will

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<sup>15</sup> “Oaxaca’s Social Movement Develops Radical Vision for a National Government of the People” available at: [www.narconews.com](http://www.narconews.com).

<sup>16</sup> Resolutions of the First State Assembly of the People’s of Oaxaca are available online at: [www.asambleapopulardeoxaca.com+](http://www.asambleapopulardeoxaca.com+)



actively undermine the overthrow of this system. They promote false alternatives and question only the management of the state and capitalism, not the system itself.

## Solidarity?

“Prepare to die...Put down your shields and take off your helmets, and I’ll beat the living shit out of you!” — anonymous Oaxacan woman defending the UABJO

This brings us full circle then to the issue of solidarity. Clearly the APPO is an organization with wide support from those who want to see major change come about in their lives; this cannot be denied. But their popularity does not erase the fact that there are micro-bureaucrats actively involved in the APPO, nor does it change the fact that the APPO’s program is one of promoting a new way to manage the state and capitalism. Also despite its name, the APPO does not represent everyone involved, or the revolt in its entirety. The uprising in Oaxaca has been inspiring because of people’s willingness to take their lives into their own hands and direct their own activity. This is the greatest potential of the rebellion: its ability to break with the normality of being controlled and directed by others and then spread further, eventually leading to revolutionary social transformation.

People are beginning to rediscover the ability to meet face-to-face in occupied zones — the Zócalo, the university, the neighborhoods and streets — in order to discuss matters of real importance. Direct actions such as strikes, occupations, blockades and sabotage are being employed by all of those involved. Women are asserting themselves even more, planning actions, taking over television stations, organizing blockades, and participating in street fighting against the police. The cessation of “business as usual” and the casting off of subservience has opened up many possibilities and has led to massive resistance to the Mexican state. This growing self-organization must remain truly autonomous if it is not to be slowly ground down by piecemeal reforms and other political tricks. Therefore the APPO and its alternative management plan must be rejected.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the deficiencies of the APPO, we should extend solidarity to the people fighting in Oaxaca. In the United States many solidarity actions were undertaken during the PFP raids in late October and early November. Protests were held outside of embassies and consulates in many cities across the US, including Houston, Phoenix, and Seattle. Consulates in Sacramento and Minneapolis had their windows smashed, and other consulates and embassies were blockaded or occupied like in New York, Indianapolis, and Raleigh. Anarchists in the US have been very active in concretely demonstrating their solidarity with the events in Oaxaca, and one can only hope that these actions will spread.

The course of the conflict is being played out as we write. The Zapatistas have called for a general strike in Mexico on November 20, and scores of actions are planned in the US and abroad for that day as well. Consulates and embassies are clearly targets of interest, but one should not forget that we are fighting an entire system, and that demonstrating solidarity with Oaxaca can take many forms such as shut downs of corporations with financial links in Mexico as a whole, blockades in our own cities, and of course the escalation of activity against more direct issues in the US. People in Oaxaca are taking steps to combat this system as a whole, let’s do the same.

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<sup>17</sup> For a look at one neighborhood’s activities which are outside of the APPO, see “Two Days in the Life of Oaxaca’s Revolution,” available at: [narconews.com](http://narconews.com)

# The Harvest of Dead Elephants: The False Opposition of Animal Liberation

I never met anybody who said when they were a kid, 'I wanna grow up and be a critic.' -Richard Pryor

We believe there are *some* who take action under animal liberation's very broad banner that are just as concerned as we are with completely transforming this society based on exploitation and misery. However, we find many within radical and anarchist circles *acritically* embracing animal liberation philosophy and veganism. These ideas have maintained an inertia and perpetuance that have unfortunately met little challenge, especially in North America. We hope this critique will provide some starting points toward greater critical thought and theoretical reflection, tools that will be required of us if we are to take effective action against domination and exploitation.

## Animal Liberation: A Brief Overview

The animal liberation movement developed and radicalized in the 1970s in Britain, and to a lesser extent, in the US. Its philosophy grew out of, and often overlaps with, animal rights, which claims that all animals are entitled to possess their own lives, should possess moral rights, and that some rights for animals ought to be put into law, such as the right to not be confined, harmed, or killed.

Peter Singer is one of the ideological founders of the animal liberation movement. His approach to an animal's moral status is not based on the concept of rights, but on the utilitarian principle of equal consideration of interests. In his book *Animal Liberation* (1975), he argues that humans should grant moral consideration to other animals not based on intelligence, their ability to moralize, or on any other human attribute, but rather on their ability to experience *suffering*. The animal liberation ideology maintains that humans can make moral choices that animals cannot, and therefore humans must choose to avoid causing suffering.

Since animal rights and animal liberation's philosophical beginnings, many animal liberation groups have sprung up worldwide, each with differing approaches but all working for the same fundamental goal. Likewise, veganism, the lifestyle of not consuming or using any animal products, nor products tested on animals, has become ever more popular. My intention is not to be comprehensive here. Anyone interested in learning the particulars of the animal liberation movement can find an abundance of books and websites with more information.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For info on the ALF: [www.animalliberationfront.com](http://www.animalliberationfront.com). For info on the radical animal liberation movement: [www.nocolnpromise.org](http://www.nocolnpromise.org). For news about illegal direct action for animals: [www.directaction.info](http://www.directaction.info). Likewise, the internet is full of endless amounts of information. Probably more than you'd ever care to read about anything.

## Manipulations, Representations, and Abstractons

Animal liberation is...a war. A long, hard, bloody war in which all the countless millions of its victims have been on one side only, have been defenseless and innocent, whose one tragedy was to be born nonhuman. -Robin Webb, British ALF Press Officer

...the most abstract of the senses, and the most easily deceived... -Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*

To begin a critique of anything, we must understand *how* its advocates represent it. The animal liberation movement first and foremost appeals to various acritically-embraced clichés that are abundant within activist movements, as well as throughout society in general.

Concepts of niceness, compassion, and philanthropy, all socialized into us as being civil, responsible, and good, are played upon in the language of the animal liberationist. Animal liberation presents itself as a moral and civil progression of human society, a process of “widening our circle of compassion.”<sup>2</sup> We are told that humans can and should avoid causing pain and suffering for animals, and that by doing so, humanity will be on the right path to a kinder and more peaceful world.

This focus on suffering and the supposed necessity of its elimination is highly problematic. Under capitalism, animals are used as commodities — as objects whose sole purpose is to be bought and sold — and as objects entirely. that are counted, commercialized, and price-tagged. However, animal liberationists reduce all of these things to one broad categorization: suffering. This reduction eliminates the intricacies and specifics of how animals are used within the current social context and flattens the nature of their exploitation. What is paramount to animal liberationists is the amount of pain caused to animals and the number of animals killed. This generally leads to ridiculous oversimplifications about anyone or anything that kills animals. Hunters are bad because they kill animals, just like factory farms, and just like abusive pet owners; to animal liberationists it’s only a matter of scale. Their focus is simply on ending suffering — a complete absurdity in itself.

Let’s make no mistake, animals feel pain, and anyone who argues the opposite is a fool. But just the same, anyone who argues that pain and suffering can be ended is equally as foolish. Pain is an inseparable part of life. Animals can starve to death in the wild, break their bones, or be torn from limb to limb by other animals. Pain, then, is a biological indicator of danger, injury, and disease. It happens to animals without any human influence. Still, animal liberations represent animal pain and death as consequences of the supposed human moral backwater in which animals have always been used and dominated because we have not given them equal consideration; we have not progressed. So animal liberationists embrace a contradictory and dangerous proposition that pain and suffering, at least for animals, can be ended, either entirely or as it is caused by human agency. Yet the idea of ending suffering is as silly as if one wanted to end sadness and went around trying to make people laugh. It would be an exercise in futility. We are intimately connected in a cycle of life and death that, by necessity, involves pain and suffering, just as it involves sadness and joy. Yet they tell us if only we do not turn a blind eye, we

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<sup>2</sup> This phrase is taken from Albert Einstein. Groups like Vegan Outreach and PETA like to use this and other celebrity quotes in order to prove that not only should we trust these revered people but that they too believe in animal rights and so should we.

would be convinced of their cause. Horrifying images of blood and death in factory farms and brutalization in vivisection labs are abundant in animal liberation propaganda. These images, like the ones we are shocked with by the news media, are used to represent and exploit misery. While the media shocks and normalizes us to images of global misery, the animal liberation movement represents misery in order to manipulate and guilt us into wholly embracing their perspective. It is not uncommon to hear animal liberationists compare animal exploitation to the holocaust, while also implying that what animals go through is actually far worse than anything humans experience. This analogy plays on our sympathies while quantifying the suffering of animals and attempting to convince us with the sheer weight of numbers. Pain and death are abstracted and measured, represented in a way that serves ideological promotion. If we do not care about the millions of animals that die every year, then we are cruel and uncaring. If we do not care, then we are *responsible*.

Animal liberation does not provide us with any critical assessment of social domination. It promises liberation while actually confining most everything to the quantified logic found throughout society. The abstracted language and manipulative imagery of the animal liberation movement is indicative of its wider logic, and ultimately, of one of its major weaknesses. Measuring the misery of the slaughterhouse or the vivisection lab is an appeal based on a certain number of capitalist horrors. The horrors inflicted on animals are elevated over any others by continually pointing to body counts and units of measured suffering. Yet misery and exploitation cannot be measured; they are not made worse by how often or how many experience it. We relate to it concretely because we experience it everyday, and we see it experienced throughout the world.

Few of us would react indifferently to the carnage of the slaughterhouse floor. Our society treats animals as it does humans or trees or genes. All are treated as units of economic value, processed as efficiently as possible and then turned into marketable commodities. But our disgust does not come from any fantasy about the end of suffering. We seek the revolutionary destruction of this society of exploitation. We hate the degradation and misery of everything being turned into objects for sale, valued according to the capitalist dictates of the modern world. We want to decide our own lives and relations, outside of the market. It is from this perspective that we analyze exploitation and enslavement as a condition of social domination — a condition that can be transformed. It is also from this perspective that we critique animal liberation and its dubious promises.

## **This, That, and the Same: The Contradictions of Cruelty-Free Consumerism**

Welcome, shoppers! Thank you for being a caring consumer! By purchasing only cruelty-free products, you can help save rabbits, mice, guinea pigs, rats, and other animals. -from PETA's Caring Consumer website

The animal liberation movement seeks to reform current social conditions, in part, by promoting “cruelty-free” and “compassionate” consumerism. By advocating this type of economic consumption, they claim that animal suffering will be reduced. The logic goes that not using or consuming an animal

means that no animal will be harmed or killed. This idea of consumer reform is based on the belief that the system is faulty, unnecessarily cruel, and merely needs to be fixed. This movement is evidently not opposed to capitalism itself, regardless of what some may claim. The reality, however, is that misery is an inevitable consequence of capitalist consumption and production. Everything we buy is an object and commodity — quantified, reduced, and valued solely in terms of its role in the economy. Misery is just another by-product, like pollution, that has no economic value and thus is dispensed freely.

The cult of veganism is effective in encapsulating the false reasoning of consumer reform. The contradictions of the vegan ethic become painfully apparent when we look at the origins of all products and commodities in our society. A pound of tofu or a bottle of cruelty-free shampoo hides behind the superficiality of its claim. The claim that vegan products have not contributed directly to the killing of animals is one of many marketed illusions promoted by companies profiting off this niche market. Capitalist production, driven by mass consumption, requires an enormous quantity of resources. These resources are extracted from the earth through the cheapest and most destructive processes possible, contributing to massive amounts of animal habitat destruction and animal killing. The brutal reality of production is buried beneath the glitter of the marketplace.

Simply look at how production works. The manufacture of plastics is based on oil, so the packaging used for vegan products entails the usual pollution and “accidents” of the oil industry. Industrial oil spills in the ocean account for an estimated average 100 million gallons a year.<sup>3</sup> Only an estimated 5% of this is from large tanker spills such as the infamous Exxon Valdez disaster.<sup>4</sup> The other larger portion is comprised of routine spillage from the normal operations of oil transportation and extraction. Oil spills damage bird-nesting sites, coat beach habitats in sludge, and poison and directly kill fish, birds, and other marine life. Pipeline construction destroys wildlife habitat. Oil refineries spew pollution into waterways, poisoning animals and destroying their breeding sites. This says nothing of the resource wars for oil that have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, and continue to, in Afghanistan, Iraq and Africa, as well as destroyed the ecological integrity of those regions.

The fact is, organic soybeans used for tofu, tempeh, and fake meats, just like any other product in the store, use the same industrial distribution system that consumes enormous amounts of oil and other resources to package, store, transport, and distribute food and non-food commodities the world over.<sup>5</sup> This translates into mountainsides and rivers destroyed from mining fossil fuels, forests cleared for packaging materials, chemical pollution from the manufacture of inks, adhesives and lubricants, and so on and so forth. All these industrial processes poison animals and

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<sup>3</sup> Worldwide consumption of oil is 2.73 billion gallons per day. Each day 31.5 billion gallons of oil are at sea being transported. Not all spills come from tankers. Some come from storage tanks, pipelines, oil wells, and tankers and vessels cleaning out tanks. This does not account for the many more tens of millions of gallons of oil that are spilled by consumer dumping, also still a consequence of industrial capitalism that factors in no environmental costs into its products. Source: “Analysis of Oil Spill Trends in the United States and Worldwide” ([www.environmental-research.com](http://www.environmental-research.com))

<sup>4</sup> In 1989, the Exxon Valdez ran aground in Prince William Sound, Alaska spilling nearly 10.8 million gallons of oil. The spillage was only 34<sup>th</sup> largest worldwide spills but was the largest in U.S. waters. The result was major environmental damages, e.g., 35,000 seabirds, 2,800 sea otters, 300 harbor seals, 250 bald eagles, up to 22 orcas, and billions of salmon and herring eggs died and there were major damages to fisheries.

<sup>5</sup> The industrial product distribution system is so because the larger a market a product has, the more profit can be made from it. This fact demonstrates capitalist profit-growth through consumer market expansion.

destroy their habitats. The capitalist economy will do nothing to avoid this massive destruction because these precautions would increase the cost of production and decrease profit. This is to say nothing of the fact that capitalist consumption is dependent upon an unrestrained acceleration of resource consumption and ecological destruction to feed its growth. Capitalism must expand or die. Through its expansion, the world must die.

Veganism presents a *false* alternative to capitalist misery. It doesn't and won't ever change things for the animals or for us human beings. Capitalism defines the condition of our suffering and dictates how we will live, and ultimately how we cannot. The production processes that go into making vegan products are the same as those used for any products on the market today. Mass production is part of a global division of labor that exploits millions and millions of people worldwide. Resources don't turn into commodities by themselves. People produce them. They are exploited in order to power the economy, to turn its gears and make it function. It's no surprise then that capitalists treat both animals and humans as dispensable objects. Yet the animal liberation movement would argue for the destruction or abolition of factory farms and butcher shops but put animal-free workhouses in their place. This ignores the human suffering that wage work causes by destroying bodies and dulling minds. We humans may not be raised and killed for food production like other animals, but we are definitely raised and killed for production just the same. The morning commute, debt and rent, the fatigue, the boredom and the dissatisfaction — all these will still exist in society that sells only vegan products. There is no cruelty-free capitalism, just capital for capitalists. The economy runs the show, taking what it needs and destroying the rest.

To counter capitalist misery we must counter it as a whole and reject the illusion of piecemeal half-measures and consumer-reform campaigns. More importantly, a coherent analysis of social domination requires an unflinching critique of the moral and ideological forces that seek to prevent this very analysis.

## **Damned if You Do: Morality's Mind-Hold Trap**

His Holiness is pleased at being called upon... to eradicate from the hearts of men barbarous and cruel tendencies. -Pope Pius X

Morality is herd instinct in the individual. -Friedrich Nietzsche

Morality is a system of rules, a set of rigid codes based on an "objective" right and wrong, which in turn are based on conceptions of good and evil. These codes supposedly apply in all places and at all times. That which is considered "right" or "wrong" under a moral code is not simply the correct or incorrect action for one person in a specific time, place, or culture, but is rather the correct or incorrect action for all people in all places, at all times. Moralists claim that their strictures are universal standards by which their actions and the actions of others should be judged. Thus morals themselves are authoritarian because we must conform to them *regardless* of our own will.

Morals come from some authority above us. This authority could be god, the state, the family, or various reified ideas or entities that validate the supposed objectiveness of a particular morality. Moral codes define and direct the choices one makes. They must not be violated because they are absolute and inflexible. In this way, decisions are not based upon what one feels is appropriate to

one's situation or desires in the world, but rather one's decisions are predetermined by a moral system. While many moralists occasionally break out of their shackles, there is a sense of shame and guilt because they have broken rules they believe are righteous and good. Thus morality is antithetical to anyone seeking to think and interact in the world in ways that reflect his or her desires.

Likewise, moral arguments are not based upon critical theoretical thinking. Moral arguments or claims can simply be refuted by opposing moral claims. If eating animals is wrong to a vegetarian, to a meat eater it is not. Assertions of right and wrong can go on and on until one's mouth is tired and tongue is dry. However, morality is relative to the culture from which it evolves.<sup>6</sup> Notions of right and wrong are determined by society, and particularly by those who control society. Anyone who says that tribal hunter-gatherers are murderers because they eat meat is merely entrenched in their own arrogant moral judgments. It is precisely this lack of critical thought that places barriers between recognition of common interests among people.

Some animal liberationists, full of righteous indignation, will tell someone who eats meat how evil their food is. These indifferent or apathetic meat eaters must be told that they participate in the murder of innocent beings. If they do not listen, they are guilty. If they listen but do not act, they are guiltier still. The black and white shadows of morality cast themselves down like a judge's gavel. Campaigns to "educate" people about animal cruelty or veganism are carried out like missionary projects. Pious condemnations of other people's failures to commit to "ending suffering" are much like the preacher on his pulpit, chastising those who have yet to rid themselves of their sins. This guilt just makes people feel like shit for their already powerless position in society, limited by the choices that capitalism imposes upon us. It does not foster a critical assessment of the social conditions that contribute to animal exploitation, but rather encourages blind obedience to predetermined rights and wrongs.

Various social institutions — religion, school, work, and the family — impart moral obedience in us in order to regulate our actions and thoughts internally and reinforce various institutions of social domination. Morality is the cop in our heads, a shackle on individual and collective realization, and an impediment to anyone who wishes to *freely* determine her or his life. When we begin to decide for ourselves what we want and how we will live, and allow others to do so as well, we'll make great strides in freeing ourselves from prisons unseen.

## Ideology, Reliable Shackles

Because ideology is always the form taken by alienation in the realm of thought, the more alienated we are, the less we understand our real situations... And the less we assert our own autonomous existence, the more palpable an existence is taken on by capitalism, by the frozen images of our roles in all the various social hierarchies and transactions of commodity exchange. -Lev Chernyi, "An Introduction to Critical Theory"

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<sup>6</sup> This is descriptive of relativism, the theory that conceptions of truth and moral values are not absolute but are relative to the persons or groups holding them. What is wrong in one culture may not be in another. This is clearly demonstrated in many cultures throughout the world. Some cultures were and some still are vegetarian. Others, like the Inuit, consume only meat. Most of these dietary habits developed around environmental circumstances and resource availability and evolved into cultural tradition.

Ideology works similarly to morality. Rather than adhering to the rules of objective truths, of right and wrong, one adopts the rigid programs and perspectives inherent or implied in an idea or concept. There is no room for any flexibility. Ideology encompasses an aspect of life entirely and governs our relation to it. In this way, ideological thinking is used in place of critical thinking. The world, or aspects of the world, are explained and understood through the filter of ideology. For example, democratic ideology upholds the idea of social change through voting, political representation, and legislation. It promotes faith in formal politics as much as it prevents autonomous direct action. The power of this ideology, like all ideology, lies in how it conforms and directs one's thinking into limited possibilities and perspectives. Ideology stands counter to a critical theoretical analysis that can assess situations and ideas based upon their actual usefulness to our practice and approach.<sup>7</sup>

Animal liberation does not fall outside of this; it is ideological at its foundation. It subsumes everything *under* animal issues. The exploitation of people and the destruction of the environment may still be important to the animal activist but they are seen as separate *issues*. Ideology makes one incapable of seeing or understanding things outside of it in any coherent way. Everything is framed by how it relates to an animal issue. A vivisection lab is merely a place of animal torture, neglecting the harm of pharmaceutical tests on humans, the millions made in profits, and the unquestioned advance of technology. A meat packer slices animals into pieces all day. We hate what is done to the animals as they bleed in lines, in rows, on hooks. But animal liberation ideology does not allow for the same consideration of the human worker who must endure the dangers and injuries of this tofu plant or that soymilk factory. Their degradation as replaceable cogs within the system of production is not viewed as deserving of equal consideration since animal and human are seen as separate categories, the former placed above the latter.

Veganism clearly demonstrates the all-encompassing power of ideology. Some vegans care little about how well they eat as long as they never consume any animal products. So eating like shit (e.g. highly-processed, chemical-laden, vegan junk food) and destroying one's body is acceptable as long as it's vegan. It's okay to destroy your health because it does not destroy an animal's — an illusion in its own right. So everything becomes an issue of the animals' interests, blocking out all other factors. The absoluteness of maintaining a vegan lifestyle takes priority over all other concerns and maintains the illusion that vegan consumption does not contribute to animal suffering. It blinds people to the reality of what they consume, allowing one to comfortably embrace its premises *without* critically evaluating them.

Animal liberation and veganism must be framed in a social context in order for us to understand them in scale and scope. Animal liberation ideology and the vegan lifestyle that springs from it are fragmentary oppositions that *fully* adopt the capitalist system's way of conceptualizing change. They embrace the idea that one's consumer choices are primary in not only determining one's identity, but also as a way of creating change. The promises of "cruelty-free" veganism promote an abstracted view of social change focused on "saving" numbers of animals through consumerism. This false opposition challenges one aspect of domination while doing nothing to destroy its systematic causes, in this case, the rule of capitalism.

Some vegans argue that their lifestyle choices are better than nothing, in the same way some argue that Democrats are better than Republicans. This is part of veganism's fragmentary understanding of the social order, which focuses its tunnel vision solely on "reducing animal suffering."

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<sup>7</sup> For more on critical thinking and the Chernyi essay, see the pamphlet *Critical Thinking* at: [anti-politics.net](http://anti-politics.net)



All the while, animals are still being made into meat machines, processed by people who are forced to work as labor machines – both traded around in monetary terms, exploited, and used for capital’s ends. Capitalism defines human and animal roles within society while veganism merely obscures this relationship by promoting illusory “compassionate” consumerism.

A related ideology, popular among radical animal activists, green anarchists, and environmental activists, blames the harm done to animals and the earth on all humans and specifically on human nature. This is thinly-veiled misanthropy. Animal liberationists elevate the condition of animals because they are seen as defenseless, peaceful, and innocent, whereas humans are seen as lacking these qualities. A misanthrope would say some or all humans are inherently bad, cruel and uncaring, or even that many humans love to kill, torture and hurt.<sup>8</sup> They would say this is human nature. But these acts aren’t a product of our nature; we are not governed by instinct or an abstracted idea of human nature. Nor does human history give credence to the notion that human beings are inherently cruel and destructive. This mess of imposed misery and domination is a product of human *society*, not of a human nature that must be repressed or made moral.

The various institutions that comprise society govern our actions within it. We are not mere individuals doing whatever we want. We have very few choices as to how we survive, all of which are governed by buying the products of exploitation and being exploited ourselves to make them. We are continually taught to accept this life, much like prisoners are conditioned into accepting their cells. Misanthropism does not explain or illuminate hierarchical and exploitative social relationships. It is merely a lazy ideological excuse for not thinking critically about the problems we are presented with.

Attacking the capitalist system and its consequences requires us to understand and act against it as a systematic whole. Otherwise, the opposition will take the form it usually does, playing into the ideology of reform and radicalism without any critical theory applied to how and what we must attack. Ideology makes sheep out of people. Because we are told, or we tell ourselves, we are free does not mean we are actually so. We will have to be critical of all theory, ideology, and practices if we are to determine how useful they are in transforming, or better yet, *destroying* this society of exploitation.

## Just Do It: The Activist

I firmly believe that our focus must be on ending the suffering and the death as quickly and efficiently as possible. If we all do as much as we can, the 21<sup>st</sup> century WILL be the one to usher in animal liberation. -Anonymous<sup>9</sup>

The supposedly revolutionary activity of the activist is a dull and sterile routine – a constant repetition of a few actions with no potential for change. -Andrew X., “Give Up Activism”

Activists play a specific *role* in our society. They are the specialists in social change much like artists are the specialists in culture. This specialization separates one group of people from the rest

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<sup>8</sup> This, of course, does not usually apply to misanthropes themselves since often they see themselves as somehow better or more caring than most everyone else. The logical progression of misanthropy leads to repulsive forms of arrogance.

<sup>9</sup> Taken from the article “Progress of the Animal Rights Movement” on the ALF website.

of society. This condition is not accidental, as it is in the nature specialization to be exclusive. The activist manages and represents social struggles, confining them to single issues and recruiting members to their cause. This is problematic from a revolutionary perspective, which is concerned with transforming current social relations instead of reproducing them.

The animal liberation movement reproduces the activist role by standing above and outside the realm of struggles that are inclusive and relevant to the exploited. Animal activism dedicates itself to specific causes and excludes those who do not adhere to its codes of morality and lifestyle.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, it glorifies self-sacrifice, an idea that is absolutely detrimental to liberation of any kind.<sup>11</sup> Activists see sacrifice and suffering as some sort of skills most people are incapable of. The activist must change society for others, for the supposed benefit of others. The masses must be educated and shown the importance of a cause or an issue. The animal liberation movement would make every human a vegan, regardless of how little it will actually help anyone determine the conditions of their lives. The worker trying to support a family will, find very little inspiration in a vegetarian diet if it does nothing to change the economic noose tied around his or her own life. A vegan diet does not make dissatisfaction any more palatable.

This is not the only reason why many people do not take animal liberation very seriously. The animal activist subculture limits interaction amongst non-activist people and obstructs an understanding of the struggles of others. Subcultures, activist or not, create divisions and obstacles between the exploited. They require others to adhere to their codes of thinking, conduct, and fashion, ultimately alienating themselves from the possibility of building affinity and solidarity with others. Who wants to constantly be told what to do, how to think, and what to wear? An activist group can isolate itself from this world, but they shouldn't expect that anyone else wants to share in their self-imposed isolation.

Some activists may see this isolation as another selfless sacrifice for the greater good. One must sacrifice for someone else, some animal, some abstraction, some issue or some cause. In the process, one does not act out of their own interests but the interests of someone or something else. You can get the shit beaten out of you at a demonstration or go to jail for liberating animals. The activist will claim that these are necessary sacrifices for just causes and that your personal suffering will, lead to less suffering for others. This is the myth of the martyr represented in action. Suffering is not alleviated by causing more suffering for one's self. Modern life is already perpetuated by sacrifice — at work, in school, under capitalism. That is not to say we should see something that sickens us and become passive and avoid risks. Rather, we should take action because we *want* to and not because we feel we have to. Then the risk we take is the risk of living our lives, not sacrificing for an idea.<sup>12</sup> After all, Jesus already died for our sins. Let's not follow in the footsteps of that fool and die for them as well.

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<sup>10</sup> It is common to hear in animal liberationist circles gossip about who “sold out” veganism by eating some animal product of some sort. This type of conversation reflects the banality of much of today's conversations in which our alienation makes us prefer not to concern ourselves with the reality of our alienation.

<sup>11</sup> This does not mean people fighting for social transformation will not be harmed or killed by those in power. Rather, it is simply not liberating to glorify punishment as some expression of social struggle. Martyrdom is so fucking boring and uncreative. When you're dead, you're dead. All the possibilities and dreams for your life then disappear.

<sup>12</sup> It is worth wondering how many people have turned away from activism after feeling like sacrificial lambs. People who have snitched out co-defendants in legal cases may have felt lengthy prison terms were not sacrifices they were willing to make. This, however, does not mean they aren't pieces of shit for sending someone else down the river. But it is useful to try understanding how and why people make these decisions so that we can understand and prevent them in the future.

In terms of actual practice, animal liberation activists seek successful reform campaigns rather than a widespread challenge to the system as a whole. They are keen on celebrating their self-proclaimed victories. One fur farm closes. A vivisection lab goes out of business. But later, the fur farm comes back in another place with a different owner when the fashion industry successfully markets Fur again.<sup>13</sup> Production starts up again just as it always does. And the cosmetics industry still needs to pour chemicals in rabbits' eyes and inject rats with pharmaceuticals in order to prevent potential lawsuits. So another vivisection lab opens overseas or an existing one increases its business, ultimately leading to more animals being brutalized and killed. The "Road to Victory" that many radical animal activists celebrate is a series of insignificant concessions doled out by the system.<sup>14</sup> Capitalism is flexible enough to reform as long as its overall function is not impeded. And as long as its overall function is not impeded, animals will continue to be commodified and exploited. Let's now take a closer look at the dynamics and practice of this movement.

## **Lost in the Fog of War: A Look at the Animal Liberation Movement**

### **"Radical" Animal Liberationists**

There are many activist campaigns that pride themselves on being radical and grassroots. Radicalism by itself is merely an oppositional *term* used to contrast some method with another. It is ambiguous and certainly does not position a "radical" as having any clear perspective other than being extreme in his or her tactics. There are many who are attracted to the allure of radicalism because it presents itself as an alternative to the reformist tendencies of other groups. This representation is a falsity. The animal liberation movement embraces reform wholly despite some presenting it as radical merely because of the tactics it employs. PETA and SHAC want mostly the same things. They just use different tactics and strategies to achieve the same goals.<sup>15</sup> But "radical" tactics should not be confused with radical goals. Social transformation is not made merely through broken windows and home demos. Departing radically from what exists requires deconstructing "radicalism" and not confusing tactics for philosophy.

### **Animal Commandos**

The Animal Liberation Front (ALF) has garnered much support throughout the years for its commando-style tactics of live liberations, sabotage, and fire bombings. These ALF cells are made

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<sup>13</sup> This is clear when looking at the trends in annual fur animal production in the US and abroad. Fluctuations in the fur market, while at times affected by animal activism, have yet to result in the decline of the fur industry completely. If something can be sold, it will be marketed and produced. Even if the fur industry were to be destroyed, some other type of miserable exploitation would fill its place.

<sup>14</sup> The term "Road to Victory" originated in the British animal liberation movement but the concept behind it applies to the North American perspective as well. The idea that one successful campaign or another is culminating in some grand victory is, sadly, an illusion probably promoted in order to stave off complete disillusionment.

<sup>15</sup> The Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) campaign is a perfect example of this. They use various forms of intimidation and harassment towards the goal of crippling a single vivisection company to put it out of business. PETA works for the same thing but with tactics that do not alienate their loyal membership base. There is nothing radical about closing one vivisection company's labs when another one will fill that market demand and begin killing animals just the same.

up of small, decentralized groups of vegetarian or vegan people who carry out actions under certain guidelines; for example, an action can be claimed by the ALF if it either liberates animals or destroys the property of animal industries without any life being harmed in the process. Their short-term aim is to save as great a quantity of animals as possible, and their long-term goal is to “end animal suffering” by putting animal industries out of business.<sup>16</sup> Evidently, the ALF represents the same ideological and quantified thinking as the rest of the animal liberation movement.

The allure of the ALF is in part due to their commando-style image of breaking laws in the cover of night. Popular ALF images have an angelic quality to them. They save innocence from evil, just like the boring fairy tale themes we are force fed as children. From the point of view of animal liberationists, direct action, while practical for liberating animals, is purely tactical rather than embraced as an ethic for how to interact in the world, outside of representation, and mediation. Law breaking of this sort is rationalized in much the same way Gandhi rationalized and validated breaking the law. This perspective adheres moralistically to non-violence and is carried out only with the intent of challenging laws that protect one aspect of social domination while leaving the rest untouched. Commonly, the ALF and its advocates compare the ALF to the Underground Railroad, the network of people that assisted slaves escaping from the South before chattel slavery was officially abolished in the US. This comparison is self-serving and reinforces hero worship – more illusions of grandeur.

The Justice Department (JD) and the Animal Rights Militia (ARM), on the other hand, play into a more militant pro-violence stance. While these groups are much less prolific than the ALF, it is worth noting their development within the animal liberation movement. ARM is known for beating up hunters in England, and JD is known for mailing razor blades to fur farmers and making threats against vivisectionists. Instead of glorifying non-violence like the ALF does, these groups glorify its opposing tactical form: violence. Here develops a tactical ideology still trapped within its own tunnel vision. They counterpose themselves to non-violence, which is seen as a failed method that doesn’t “get results” quickly enough, quantifying social change in itself. They see themselves as taking things “a step further.” This is the same reasoning that groups such as the Black Liberation Army and the Weather Underground used, culminating in spectacular acts that did nothing to diminish anyone’s exploitation and instead *glorified* political violence. Their approach demonstrates the frustration and powerlessness of “radical” action that is divorced from everyday revolutionary practice. Rather than seeking a qualitative break with a society based upon roles and specialists, these groups reinforce the instrumentality of individuals dedicated to ideologies, not the actual transformation of life for those involved.

## **Angels of Mercy: In Love with Heros, Martyrs, and Militants**

To those who have lost their lives fighting animal abuse and to those who took their own lives when the horrors became too much to bear; to those who gave their freedom... Thank you. -Robin Webb, British ALF Press Officer

Many animal liberationists love the martyrdom of the ALF. They are revered as selfless and brave, victims of caring too much and suffering for their compassion much like Mother Teresa and Jesus. One representation of this can be found in Ingrid Newkirk’s book, *Free The Animals*,

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<sup>16</sup> Source: ALF website.

which tells the story of a group of people who break laws and risk imprisonment in order to save animals from vivisection labs. This book has been a popular story among animal activists since the 1980s. Its appeal lies in its portrayal of people who are somehow better than the rest of us — more noble, brave, and compassionate. Like a character from a simplistic storybook tale, the ALF warrior risks all to save animals from evil. The animal liberation movement relishes its heroes in the same way the media does, reinforcing leader-and-follower social relations.

Yet many avoid illegal direct action because of the consequences of breaking the law. The risk of personal repercussion then strengthens the myth of the warrior's sacrifice. Breaking the law becomes a task for super humans, not the rest of us. ALF members appear to have been born with special abilities and a fearlessness that we do not possess. On pedestals, they sit like idols for worship. They are *the* heroes of the animal liberation movement. Below them are people who can only applaud like the spectator applauds a piece of art, which only someone supposedly gifted or extraordinary can produce.

Social transformation needs no martyrs, heroes, or militants. Revolutionary action *must* include a conscious effort to subvert the roles that define our exclusion and powerlessness. The sooner we throw hero worship and martyrdom into the fire, the sooner we can struggle for our own freedom. Revolution begins with each one of us. We are the executioners of fate. We must decide our own future so that no one else will be able to.

## You Can't Legislate Freedom

You would have to be mad to expect protection from the State... And I am not a fool.  
-Andrea Dorea, "N'Drea"

The animal liberation movement believes animals should be given legal rights and protections. They applaud bans on cock fighting, a truly insignificant institution in the grand scheme of animal abuses, just because it is seen as helping animals and adding to their number of supposed victories. However they criticize laws that protect businesses that use animals. They accept the state's rationale for why laws exist in the first place and ignore that the legal system regulates society, making it efficient, orderly, and controlled. Laws validate social control, outlawing the ungovernable and protecting the powerful. Laws and their enforcers hope to keep us from tearing the factory farm apart with our own hands.

The state protects animal industries and other capitalist ventures; it is the backbone and brute force of the capitalist system. The law criminalizes anyone who would oppose the smooth functioning of capitalism. Legal codes preserve capitalist social relations; the concept of property and its ownership are thus sanctified. Any appeal for additional laws merely strengthens the power of the legal system and its mythology of justice and fairness. Faith in the law is faith in capitalist exploitation, enforced by cops, bureaucrats, judges, and legislators. They have no interest in changing a social order they reap benefits from. Passing a law banning animal cruelty here, or a law against animals in circuses there, changes very little despite some claiming it as a victory. The factories of production continue to run more and more animals through their mills. Misery continues and the state's legal apparatus ensures it is so.

If we are to take animals out of the degrading system of production, we will have to reject any supposed remedies provided by the electoral and legal mechanisms of the state. The legal system only remedies the problems of those in power. Anyone who opposes the social order will be

opposed in law. The ALF at least knows this much. We're better off destroying the entire scheme of alienated political power instead of asking for more stale crumbs and empty concessions. If we oppose capitalism for what it does to animals, we should also *entirely* oppose the states that ensure this system continues enslaving the world to its logic.

## Direct Action not Ideology

Animal liberation has the most potential as a *direct act* rather than an ideology. Liberations of animals violate their status as property. Sabotage and destruction of animal industries can be directed against the commodification of animals. However, when these actions are done with the ultimate goal of animal liberation, they remain confined to a perspective that cares only for animals. For example, many vivisection lab raid communiqués focus solely on the oppression of animals, usually in moralistic or ideological terms, while ignoring all the other exploitative and disgusting aspects of the university research lab or pharmaceutical company. Instead of breaking down boundaries to understanding social domination, actions like these erect them and promote limited perspectives that don't take into account the underlying causes that turn animals into commodities. Likewise, the potential of these actions is stunted by their confinement to a single issue instead of being an act of solidarity linked to other social struggles. There are, however, some notable exceptions of people liberating animals and sabotaging animal exploitation operations without claiming their actions for animal liberation.<sup>17</sup> These should not go without notice as they are positive because they do not demarcate themselves as relevant to only one aspect of domination but rather are attacks on one of many forms. If we see domination and exploitation everywhere, we must not limit ourselves; we must attack it *everywhere* it is found.

## Against Activism, Towards Active Insurgency

What we are and what we want begins with a no. From it is born the only reason for getting up in the morning. From it is born the only reason for going armed to the assault on an order that is suffocating us. -Anonymous, "At Daggers Drawn"

The prison that is this society *must be destroyed* if we care to talk about freedom. The factory farm is but one location where we find its misery. This system of exploitation profits from animal *and* human sweat and blood. It is our common enemy. We will not change anything by asking the rulers to make misery more bearable or to exploit us, but with better wages and bigger cages. Our lives and our relations in the world must be decided on our own terms. To do this, we have a difficult task ahead. Let's not grow full on false promises, moral codes, and blinding ideologies. Let's grow strong on sharp ideas and self-determined action.

Some would say that something must be done. The world is getting worse and we must act. They would tell us that we must do things that make us feel like we can change things. Why, then, not work for animal liberation? If our action is an expression of our desire, there is little hope

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<sup>17</sup> Biteback magazine ([www.directaction.info](http://www.directaction.info)) and other pro-animal direct action advocate groups often report these actions though don't make a point to differentiate them from actions claimed by the ALF. It's very likely they see any action involving animal issues as being undertaken towards the goal of animal liberation. We, however, see direct action for animals as positive when it isn't accompanied by the foolish claims of animal liberation.

in counting converted vegans or numbers of liberated hens. Revolution is first and foremost a transformation of our interactions in the world — *qualitative* social transformation not quantified activist victories. We must spit on appeals to those in power and act directly for what we want. Revolution must be a daily practice if we are to have any actual potential.

Something must be done. But we need fire *as much* as we need ideas.<sup>18</sup> To affect any kind of real revolutionary social change, social relations must go beyond adherence to ideologues and their false oppositions, beyond the stratified decision-making, beyond pious proclamations. We want something radically different, a world where we can be free to choose how to live. This is only possible if we act outside of the social role of activist or consumer, without political parties and their hollow proclamations or nonprofit organizations and their single-issue campaigns. We must be liberators of *ourselves*, not slaves to causes driven by religious fervor and ideological blindness.

This critique made of the animal liberation movement should be equally applied against *all* false oppositions and causes — and they are many. We are not seeking converts to adopt our perspective. We are not asking anyone to neglect the exploitation of animals or simply start eating meat. Rather, we wish to foster greater critical thinking and analytical discussion of our own daily actions as well as the theories and practices of social movements.

In order to free ourselves from our shit-shoveling and shit-eating, we must become active participants in an insurgency against ideology, morality, capitalism, and the stranglehold of the state. In a word, we must destroy everything that dominates us because the world is evermore becoming a giant fucking prison. The misery of the factory farm and the vivisection lab is everywhere. So, too, are our targets. We will have to destroy the relations that reproduce and allow this society to exist and begin a disobedience and refusal that is neither civil nor blinded.

As some dead guerilla once said: *destroy what destroys you*. This world will unravel under the unleashing of our desires. For us, destructive rebellion against this shit society is the only thing that holds any promise of liberation. We do not want bigger cages. We want to destroy *all of them* entirely.

It is not only the animals who depend on us to set them free from this world. It is we who must ultimately feel the wind of freedom on our faces.

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<sup>18</sup> Someone else once wrote this very fine point. Sorry I cannot credit them because I do not remember who said it. Still, it is an important point: practice is strongest when informed by the dynamism of critical ideas. Likewise, ideas are only as strong as their practical application. Otherwise, theory becomes merely another hollow intellectual pursuit.

# Resources

## Publications:

- 325  
c/o ABC PO Box 74  
Brighton, UK  
BN1 4ZQ  
[www.325collective.com](http://www.325collective.com)
- Anarchy Magazine  
POB 3448  
Berkeley, CA 94703  
[www.anarchymag.org](http://www.anarchymag.org)
- Aufheben  
c/o BHUWC  
P.O. Box 2536  
Rottingdean Brighton, UK  
BN2 6LX  
[www.libcom.org/aufheben](http://www.libcom.org/aufheben)
- Green Anarchy  
PO Box 11331  
Eugene, OR 97440  
[www.greenanarchy.org](http://www.greenanarchy.org)
- Incendio  
PO Box 993  
Santa Cruz, CA 95061  
[www.anti-politics.net/incendio](http://www.anti-politics.net/incendio)
- Tempi di Guerra  
C.P. 1244  
10100 Torino  
Italy  
[digilander.libero.it/tempi diguerra](http://digilander.libero.it/tempi_diguerra)
- Terra Selvaggia  
Il Silvestre  
via del cuore 1 56127 Pisa  
Italy



## **Distros & Publishers:**

- Eberhardt Press  
3527 NE 15<sup>th</sup> #127  
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[www.eberhardtpress.org](http://www.eberhardtpress.org)
- Elephant Editions  
BM Elephant  
London, UK  
WC1N 3XX  
[www.elephanteditions.net](http://www.elephanteditions.net)
- Liberation Projects  
838 E. High St. #115  
Lexington, KY 40502  
[www.impassionedinsurrection.info](http://www.impassionedinsurrection.info)
- One Thousand Emotions  
PO Box 63333  
St. Louis, MO 63163
- Tarantula  
818 SW 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave  
PMB 1237  
Portland, OR 97204  
[www.socialwar.net](http://www.socialwar.net)

## **Internet Links:**

- Anti-Politics  
[www.anti-politics.net](http://www.anti-politics.net)
- Earth Liberation Prisoners Support Network (UK)  
[www.spiritoffreedom.org.uk](http://www.spiritoffreedom.org.uk)
- Guerra Sociale (Italy)  
[www.guerrasociale.org](http://www.guerrasociale.org)
- Insurrectionary Anarchists of the Coast Salish Territories (Canada)  
[www.geocities.com/insurrectionary\\_anarchists](http://www.geocities.com/insurrectionary_anarchists)
- Klinamen: portal por la autogestión editorial (Spain)  
[www.klinamen.org](http://www.klinamen.org)
- Mariposas del Caos (Argentina)  
[www.mariposasdelcaos.cjb.net](http://www.mariposasdelcaos.cjb.net)

- Prole.info: Pamphlets and Texts for the Angry Wage Worker  
www.prole.info
- Quiver Online Pamphlet Library  
www.anti-politics.net/distro

## Recommended Readings:

- *Against the Megamachine: Essays on Empire and its Enemies* by David Watson
- *At Daggers Drawn With The Existent, Its Defenders, And Its False Critics* by Anon. (pamphlet)
- *The Bonnot Gang* by Richard Parry (story of the French illegalists)
- *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* by Silvia Federici (about the origins of capitalism)
- *Critical Thinking as an Anarchist Weapon* by Wolfi Landstreicher et al. (pamphlet)
- *Direct Action: Memoirs of an Urban Guerilla* by Anne Hansen
- *Dynamite: A Century of Class Violence in America 1830–1930* by Louis Adamic
- *History of the Makhnovist Movement 1918–1921* by Peter Arshinov
- *Killing King Abacus #1 & #2* by Sasha K., Leila T., and Wolfi L. (available online)
- *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* by Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker
- *A Crime Called Freedom: The Writings of Os Cangaceiros* by Os Cangaceiros
- *Rebels Against the Future: The Luddites and Their War on the Industrial Revolution* by Kirkpatrick Sale
- *The Reproduction of Daily Life* by Fredy Perlman (pamphlet)
- *Sabate: Guerilla Extraordinary* by Antonio Tellez (story of a Spanish anarchist guerilla)
- *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* by Paul Avrich (US-Italian insurrectionary history)
- *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements And The Decolonization Of Everyday Life* by George Katsiaficas
- *The Undesirables: Class Struggle at the Turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* by Anon. (pamphlet)

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