

In it for the Long Haul



**Trust, Longevity,
and Building
Cultures of
Struggle**

This zine was collected for an event at Pipsqueak in Seattle on June 23, 2024.

It is a collection of reflections on staying in struggle for the long term. These reflections invite us to build real relationships with our comrades, bridge the gap between "activism" and life, and understand ourselves as participants in an intergenerational struggle that has existed for far longer than whatever current moment feels like the only moment that has ever existed.

We encourage you to read whatever calls to you. Our hope is that we will each read different things and that will bring us into conversation together.

We live in a culture where text seems to have some knowledge that is above all else, and we want to acknowledge that there is much that is not contained here. We'd ask that you bring as much from your own experience, knowledge, and relationships into the conversation as you do from these texts.

If you are not in Seattle and you want to use these texts to have your own event email us at pipsqueak@riseup.net, and we're happy to share promotional materials and our facilitation plans.

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Excerpt from an Interview with Martin Sostre, Black Anarchist and Prison Rebel (1976)

Context: *Martin Sostre ran the Afro-Asian Bookstore in Buffalo, NY in the 1960s. In 1967, in a long summer of urban uprisings including one in Buffalo. Law enforcement claimed that Sostre had been teaching people how to make molotov cocktails in the bookstore basement and that the bookstore had been a base for organizing the uprising. Without evidence of these activities the state decided to sentence him to 41 years in prison on trumped up drug charges. During his time in Prison, Sostre was active in organizing and was influential to many of the uprisings that preceded the uprising at Attica State Prison in 1971.*

DS: In 1967 weren't you really busted for operating a radical bookstore and organizing in the Black community, rather than the contrived dope charges on which you were prosecuted?

MS: Yes, I was, along with many others. That's the way the State deals with its dissenters. My store was more than just a radical bookstore. It was a hangout. It was a base. The way I perceived it from the very beginning it was what Che Guevara called a foco, only on a small scale. It was the only bookstore that sold that type of literature in Buffalo and it was raising consciousness. It became the hangout for the street youths, many of whom participated in the rebellion during the long hot summer. That was what brought everything to a head. When they saw the same youths who were hanging out in the bookstore, out in the street participating in the rebellion, they decided to frame me and destroy the bookstore.

The rebellion was a spontaneous thing, unlike what they put in the papers - that I was paying them to riot, using the basement to teach them how to make molotov cocktails and all of that. This was a spontaneous thing, just like all the other rebellions throughout the country during the long hot summer. It grew out of the repression of the State, the racism and police brutality under which the Black and Puerto Rican community had been suffering for so long. It finally reached the point. like a boiler when the pressure of steam has no outlet, where it just exploded into spontaneous rebellion and naturally they sought a scapegoat. So I became the scapegoat and they buried me with forty-one years in prison.

DS: Many of the young people who were attracted to the store started coming around when you began blasting music out into the street from it.

What relationship do you see between culture and the revolutionary process?

MS: Well, culture is a weapon. I've always said, we have to employ all means necessary, and culture is part of the revolutionary struggle. It projects revolution and attracts masses. The interpretation of the progressive aspects of culture, of art forms, of every aspect of society has to be mobilized to raise the consciousness of the people and get the message over. Culture should always be used as a medium to project our revolutionary anarchist message – through plays, movies, performing, lifestyles, dress, language, art, dance, music, posters. If the artist is projecting raised consciousness and interpreting the revolution in simple strokes of his pen or brush a poster is a very effective form. In fact, I used them at the bookstore after the pigs broke my windows and there was a fire next door. The firemen put the hose in the bookstore to destroy and water down my books, and I had to put plywood on the windows. I never closed. I put up wall posters and cut out clippings from the newspapers to make the plywood panels that were replacing the glass into a neighborhood bulletin board. I got the idea from the Chinese wall posters. They used them very effectively.

DS: Recently, many Leftists have abandoned the cultural revolution and subordinated such struggles as those against sexism and racism to strictly organizing the working class. How do you view this development and which people in this society do you see as most open to revolutionary ideas at this time?

MS: Well, as I said, the cultural revolution is a segment of revolution. So I believe that it's wrong to abandon it and not mobilize it to raise consciousness. As long as you don't get caught up in just a narrow cultural bag, I think culture is a very important aspect to be used on a global scale to show the interrelationship between different cultures and how they're co-opted by the system to be used for oppression.

I don't have too much hope in the working class myself: just concentrating on the working class. The lumpen is a different story. They're the ones I concentrate on, who I have my faith in. I'll leave working with workers to others. The lumpen is the class that I relate to, that I come from the detonators of the revolution as far as I'm concerned. It's the lowest and most oppressed class. Of course the revolutions have been taken over by others. But these are the ones who have started the process, the detonators, the ones who go out in the street. Blacks, in the forties and the fifties, were the ones that were out: the ones that rebelled. Later on other groups followed their acts – protests, marches and whatnot. They're the ones who opened the doors and fought in the courts and on every level. In the same way, the feminist struggle from way back – the old feminists like Emma Goldman – has also been in the forefront. Groups like the unemployed, Third World people and prisoners are among the most oppressed so they're the ones who rebel. The others who are not as oppressed naturally don't have the incentive.

DS: You were in prison during an era of cultural and political upheaval. What impression of the revolutionary level of struggle did you have during your incarceration and what's your reaction to what you've found since your release? Has it lived up to your expectation?

MS: Not really. I've found the spirit among the masses is not at the height of the Sixties. As you know, in 1967 the Black Panther Party had been in existence one year. SDS was really at its height in all the colleges. The Young Lords were organized just about that year. And there were many other politically dynamic groups that had fired the consciousness of the dynamic elements of our society, particularly the youth. Also, the anti-Vietnam War movement was at its height then. However, now all that has changed. Cointelpro, J. Edgar Hoover and the revelations now of the different programs they had to infiltrate and destroy the Left and frame up, kill, assassinate and everything – they finally destroyed that spirit. Partly because of the repressive State and their FBI-Hoover programs. Partly because of the mistakes made and shortsightedness of the anti-war movement which was merely a one issue deal, mostly having its base on college campuses. It never established any bases or roots in the community, so when the Vietnam War ended, the anti-Vietnam war movement ended. Because of this and because of different sellouts, I've noticed a lot of cynicism out here. Because of the turn-around that some of the Black Panther leaders have gone through. Like Bobby Seale with his tie and coat on – the good Democrat. After advocating destroying the pig system he tried to join it. And because of the clout of many other leaders who have been co-opted by the system: by money or positions, antipoverty jobs given to them, desks put in front of them. They sold out their original commitment.

This has made a lot of people cynical. They don't want to hear shit when you approach them. People who have suffered, who were in the Black Panther Party and the various organizations. Many were injured, had their heads beat in various demonstrations, had their eyes burned with gas, were fucked over and arrested and spent a tremendous amount of time putting out leaflets and financing some of the activities, and they're very cynical now. They aren't going for any more rhetoric. It's harder to get people. There's fewer naive people now. Fewer receptive people who will listen, who will try. They don't want to hear anything. Now everyone is into doing their own thing, as they say, which usually means nothing.

However, I've noticed another level of struggle, a much deeper and heavier level: the proliferation of underground groups, the guerrilla, particularly on the west coast. Here, in New York, the Black Liberation Army is an outgrowth of the Panthers. Many of the BLA cadre are ex-Panthers, ex-Panther 21 who were tried. On the west coast you find that many of the members of those guerrilla groups belonged to one of the radical groups. You have the Weather Underground who were part of the SDS, had their roots in SDS. And many other organizations. Now it's building. The underground is

proliferating. building its network, preparing for the upcoming struggle which will involve persons at all levels. And this is a good sign.

DS: How do you respond to the legal revolutionaries who tell us that armed action comes after mass consciousness has already been raised? That now it turns the people off. . .the people aren't ready for revolution yet?

MS Well, that's a cop-out. I've always said that's a cop-out for not doing anything. That's a cop-out to usually hide one's cowardice to confront the system, to stand up and do what has to be done. Whenever there's oppression it's time to oppose oppression by all means necessary. There's no way they can defend that the people aren't ready. The people have always been ready. It's those who make the cop-outs that are not ready and they're trying to push it onto the people.

It's just like when they have some of these marches. You get permission from the police department if you're going to march on Washington and the police department and you sit down and determine the route that you should march so every- thing is nice and orderly. In fact, the police will even escort you with motorcycles to make sure everything is orderly. There may be a helicopter up ahead. You have your marshals with the armbands to make sure that nobody deviates from the preset plan which you and the State have worked out. You finally get to this place where you have the police lines with barricades. They confine you in there just like cattle in a pen, you know what I mean. Then you've got your speakers. They even know who's going to speak because you had to give there that in advance. You makes your speeches and everyone gets their frustration off. You may have a little folk music and whatnot to entertain the people. Everyone has a good time and then it's time to go home so the marshals and the police clear them and everyone gets on the buses and trains and leaves. Somewhere along- the line the original objective and the anger is pacified. Everything is nice and orderly and according to a preset plan. By the numbers, as they say in the army. And the State suffers no injury.

DS: When you were in prison you went through the transition from Black Muslim to anarchist. Would you outline some of the experiences that prompted the change?

MS: Well, you missed a step. It was from Black Muslim to party leninist to anarchist. I became a Marxist-Leninist of the party-line type and then an anarchist when I saw the continual fuck-ups. I didn't completely go against the ideology, or say everything Marx and Lenin said was wrong. But it was the whole structure. The whole replacement of one State by another, the restriction of personal freedom which can occur under any ideology if it's not carried out with the basic objective in mind to further the cause or human freedom to its highest degree. To me, the struggle for liberation, which is used loosely, ultimately boils down to the individual exertion of his or her faculties to the fullest extent. I don't care what ideology you have, it isn't good if it

doesn't afford a person, first, personal freedom on its most basic personal individual level. That is my concept of the struggle or the war of liberation. It's not to replace one State by another, it's to liberate the individual. I have not seen any State or government or society, whether it's socialist or capitalist, where this freedom exists. Now, I'm not saying other States may not evolve. In fact, many party-liners and Marxist-Leninists defend some of the repression and restrictions on human rights by saying that this is merely a step along the way, that eventually it will be a stateless society, that it will wither, that it will be an anarchistic form of society, an egalitarian society and not another authoritarian State. That may be true but I can only go by what has gone on in the past, what I see now and my projections of the future. So I'm trying to make sure in my dealings, in anything I have something to do with, that it starts off right so it'll end up right. I want to start off with an anarchistic form of society rather than starting with a central headquarters and saying "well, eventually we'll get rid of the headquarters."

That's what I'm striving for. And the fact that my defense committee, an anarchist structure, proved successful is evidenced by my being here. This has encouraged me because I have been trying to live an anarchist life on a personal level but it was never tested in a concrete form until this defense committee was organized. That was the only real test and it proved successful. But this is my intent and I intend to project anarchist philosophy through everything I do.

Excerpt from The Tip of The Spear: Black Radicalism, Prison Repression, and the Long Attica Revolt by Orisanami Burton (2023)

Context: *This book details a series of prison uprisings in New York State in the 1970's that culminated in the Attica Uprising – a takeover of Attica State Prison that lasted four days and ended with pigs opening fire and killing 33 rebels and 10 prison guards and staff they had taken hostage. Many of those who were involved in this uprising were members of revolutionary groups active inside and outside of prison such as the Black Liberation Army (BLA) the Black Panther Party (BPP) the Young Lords Party (YLP) and the Weather Underground. (Referred to as “weathermen cells” in the text below.) This section details an interview with Larry “Luqmon” White, who participated in the Attica uprising and an earlier rebellion at Auburn State Prison.*

Larry “Luqmon” White remembered his time in Auburn during the late 1960s and early 1970s as a turning point in his intellectual and political development. Luqmon was politicized in Auburn by Jomo and the others who organized the Black Solidarity Day strike. In and out of youth “reformatories” for much of his childhood, Luqmon looked to these comrades for political mentorship. During one of our many conversations, I asked him to tell me about the rebellion and he responded not with stories of hostage-taking, property destruction, or torture, but with a discourse on self-realization:

Auburn is where I realized I could think. I began to understand that I could write. I never tried to. But I remember, I sat down and I starting writing things down and I was shocked, like where did this shit come from? So I began to write and read stuff about the Young Lords and the Black Panthers and I began to integrate their stuff into my thinking and I began to hang out with them and then it just began to evolve. I would gather us all in the backroom of the library and hold secret meetings and break down the political stuff [the Panthers] was teaching, especially as it applied to prisons.

For Luqmon, Jomo, and others, the Auburn rebellion was fundamentally a cognitive rebellion, one that was already in process within and between bodies and minds prior to the moment in which hostages we recaptured. Indeed, that the captives’ first overtly rebellious act was the seizure of a public address system—an instrument that facilitates communication through the amplification of sound and voice—supports this interpretation, as does the shape of the rebellion’s early stages, a refusal to work and a series of self-organized gatherings.

My question about what happened on the roof during the state of emergency elicited a more taciturn response: "After the rebellion, when they put us up in the box they treated us horribly." This simple string of words conceals the depth of their meaning, a depth conveyed not through the words themselves but in how they were uttered. Luqmon extended the word "hooorrrrribly" into a moan that finally trailed into silence. Seated on a couch across from me, he shook his head slowly and let his eyes drop to the ground. We sat there together with the heavy silence filling the room for what felt like an eternity. Just as I was about to change the subject, largely out of my own discomfort, he broke the silence. Flashing a broad smile, he changed the subject from the torture—the negation of being—to theater, its invention. "We had a dude up there who used to put on little plays. He would invent stories with different characters and do all their voices and sound effects." He told me about how brothers were always yelling across the bars, how they were banging on whatever made the most noise, doing any and everything to disturb the tranquility of the surrounding town. However, "everyone would get quiet and listen" when the thespian performed. "It used to sound so real," he explained.

Luqmon's refusal to re-narrate terror, and to instead transmit that which brought him and others joy, intimates an affective condition that the racial-colonial violence of the state could neither penetrate nor extinguish. For those ensnared within, this war zone was also a site of intimacy, care, and poesis, of narrative and subjective innovation. While defending their living, breathing bodies, this formally dehumanized population authored new practices of knowledge and sociality into existence. These practices constitute and reflect the "spirit" of rebellion about which so many of the rebels wrote. It is through these fleeting and improvisational labors of Black speculative production that demands for a departure from normative humanity are made and remade at the interstices of war.

As an experiment in archival interpretation, I brought Luqmon and his son Todd together to read "First Letter to My Son," which Luqmon authored after he was shipped from Auburn to Green Haven. Among the numerous accounts of state violence and militant refusal that comprise *Prisoners Call Out: Freedom*, Luqmon's entry stands out as the compendium's only love letter. While others mentioned love, they wrote about a truncated and incarcerated love, a love that was eclipsed by intense hatred of their keepers. By contrast, Luqmon leans into the love he felt toward his four-year-old son, whom he had not yet met: "And even now as I suffer the loss of freedom, my heart sings with the secret knowledge that now there is a part of me that does not suffer or feel the pain, and which is free and alive—and above all young and growing." The three of us sat in the community room of Luqmon's Harlem apartment discussing this document, which Luqmon had not seen in five decades and which Todd could not remember ever hearing about. Though I initially interpreted "First Letter to My Son" as a fairly transparent expression

of paternal longing and affection, after Todd asked his father to read the following passage a second time, a new meaning began to take shape:

I know without being told that you and your stubbornness are many and they are surely mine. That in your silence you see the countless thousands of things that is the world around you, and rather than speak or express your awareness of them in words, you feel them deep inside. And what you feel is like the notes of music, each different yet somehow related to each other so that they seem to create a sound. But the sound they make is strange and different that the music that you hear in your mind. So they will say, "oh he is so silent, so quiet," and they will not know that you see and hear, and are aware, but do not understand how or why they make the strange sounds they make. And later when you are older and able to express yourself you will try to tell them that they are making the wrong sounds, that what they make is not music. But they will tell you that you are stubborn and do not understand. This is what you will always have between you and the world, for you hear the sound of a different drummer.

In a profound moment of recognition, Todd turned to his father and said, "You wrote this in '71, when I was four years old and you knew exactly who I was." As Luqmon smiled and nodded knowingly, I too had a moment of recognition, realizing that this discourse on sound and silence, rhythm and language, expression, and affect, could also be read as a meditation on the Long Attica Revolt. Our collective reading of the letter unlocked hidden layers of meaning, invoking what anthropologists Sarah Ihmoud and Shanya Cordis call "a poetics of living rebellion": a method that "call[s] on us to think with the fugitive acts of everyday people struggling to survive the shifting terrains of white supremacy, settler-colonial, and capitalist power, and ecological devastation while also tending to the forms of expansion, imagination, and rearticulation that inherently exist beyond this frame. This poetics of living rebellion mobilizes its own rationality, a way of seeing "the thousands of things that is the world" not through reason, or logic, or by even by looking, a mode of apprehension that is structured through the episteme of racial-colonial power. Rather, it acquires meaning through feeling and listening, by engaging with sonic frequencies, pulsing cadences, and the quiet spaces in between. And as Luqmon explains, he could feel the world making the wrong sounds, he sensed its disharmony and arrhythmia in his body and soul, yet no amount of rational communication could make the world hear what he heard.

In her analysis of how Black life is made and remade under conditions of imposed non-being, Katherine McKittrick highlights the importance of sound: "waveforms—the beats, rhythms, acoustics, notational moods, frequencies that undergird black music—affirm, through cognitive schemas, modes of being human that refuse antiblackness just as they restructure our existing

system of knowledge." For Luqmon and others, sound was an essential conduit of knowledge. Captives throughout the carceral system had access to the radio and could sometimes absorb the sounds of Black music. The radio became a technology of revolutionary struggle through which listeners engaged in the process of reinventing themselves, developing sonic epistemologies that nourished resistance, contemplative practices, theatrical productions, and Black radical imaginings. Before the takeover and the state of emergency, their secret meetings in the library and other furtive spaces involved discussions of revolutionary politics and culture such that these domains became inseparable. An Attica Brother told me that he authored a manual for carceral guerrilla warfare while immersed in the spiritual jazz of Alice Coltrane. After seizing Attica, the rebels announced to the world that "what has happened here is but the sound before the fury of those who are oppressed." The Long Attica Revolt was a piercing sound, one that, as Fanon tells us, "infuses a new rhythm, specific to a new generation of men, with a new language and a new humanity."

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When liberal humanist fixations with rights and incorporation into imperialist regimes are dislodged, a remarkable truth becomes evident: the Auburn rebels were never defeated. The incomprehensible violence of the state failed to divest them of their will to resist and become.

Across their protracted and multifaceted struggle, they saw themselves as prisoners only in a material sense. In their minds they were already free. They aligned their actions with this belief and charted their own path on the cutting edge of carceral war. When we peel back the many layers of rage, and suffering, and revenge fantasy, when we listen for the rhythms in the heartbeats of struggle and read the text of unwritten and unspoken demands, when we strive for intimacy with the inner logic of Revolt, what we find is neither a desire for incorporation into their world nor dominance over it. Instead, we find an active desire for a new regime of human and a new world where it can thrive.

It was not until June 9, 1971, when the last of the Auburn rebels were transferred to Attica, that prisoncrats finally announced that Auburn had returned to normalcy. However, rebellion continued to seethe just beneath the surface. As with their "solution" to Black rebellion on the streets and in the city jails, the administration merely displaced this insurgency to other prisons. In Green Haven, Luqmon and others became involved in efforts to establish "aboveground" political formations, including a labor union and, as I show in chapter 5, an important "inmate organization" called the Think Tank. Several were shipped to Clinton, otherwise known as "Klinton Koncentration Kamp" (KKK), where, according to Ricardo DeLeon of the Tombs rebellion, they developed "BPP, YLP, Weathermen cells . . . underground prison newspapers, and carried [out] persistent organizational and propaganda

work." And of course, several were shipped to Attica.

Litigation forced prisoncrats to release Jomo and the original Auburn transferees into Attica's general population. Veterans of the jail rebellion, and those who had rebelled in large and small ways elsewhere, welcomed them into a giant human circle staged in Attica's A yard. The circle represented an ongoing effort to organize and politicize Attica's population, to break down the internal divisions that kept them divided. An informer later told state investigators he had witnessed "numerous meetings and discussions in the yard" between "inmates who had been involved in the outbreaks at the Tombs and Auburn." Among the topics of discussion, he continued, were "mistakes that were made in the Tombs and Auburn with a view towards implementing new techniques when a disturbance occurred at Attica." Authorities would later cite documents such as this to try to prove that Attica was a pre-planned conspiracy, an assertion that sanitizes the repression that made a rebellion inevitable.

Then, on August 21, 1971, California prisoncrats assassinated George Jackson. The chain of events that led to him being shot with a high-powered rifle is shrouded in mystery and disinformation. Painting him as bloodthirsty and demented, the official story is that after initiating a bloodbath that resulted in the deaths of three guards and two captives, Jackson made a mad dash for the prison's outer wall, which he planned to demolish using a vial of liquid he thought was nitroglycerin, but which was actually diluted sulfuric acid. A lesser-known counter-narrative is that Jackson sacrificed himself out of revolutionary love for those he cared about. According to people who survived the ordeal in San Quentin's ultra-punitive "Adjustment Center," where the conflict took place, Jackson knew the guards were planning to snuff him out and fled the prison's interior to protect them from meeting the same fate. Through words and deeds, Jackson theorized "a prison movement" that was intimately linked to global struggles against capital, white supremacy, and empire. His bold life and premature death had a profound influence on captives struggling in New York and beyond. The immediate response of Attica's population was to organize a memorial in remembrance of their fallen comrade. They organized a daylong silent fast and wore black armbands as a symbol of mourning. "This had an effect," noted one of the organizers. "We noted that if the people could come together for this, then they could come together for other things."

Excerpts from Rattling the Cages: Oral Histories of North American Political Prisoners (2024)

Eric King

Context: *Eric King is an anarchist political prisoner who was arrested and charged with an attempted firebombing of a government official's office in Kansas City, Missouri, in September 2014 in solidarity with the protests following the police murder of Michael Brown. In 2016, Eric accepted a noncooperating plea agreement and was sentenced to ten years in prison. He was released in early 2024.*

I wasn't mentally prepared [for prison] in any way. I had to learn a lot of things on the fly, and a lot of it was painful and difficult. I knew prison was shitty, but I wasn't prepared for the mental attacks, the lack of any control. It was horrible. Support was super-limited at first. I wasn't a part of any mass movement and didn't have any relationships with big radical groups. The first letter [from a supporter] was from Denver after about three days, and I ignored it because I thought surely it was a scheme. I called the number after a couple of weeks. Support grew slowly. I still have friendships with those first people (when I'm allowed calls and emails, that is).

It was hard to adapt to prison culture. I was very snobby. "I'm a revolutionary. I do what I want!" This didn't last long, but at first it was a challenge because we reject racism, we reject these divisions the system uses to keep us powerless. But, if you live in a shark tank and act like a turtle, you'll have all sorts of issues.

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I've lost hope many times in prison: My first time in segregation (nine months at CCA), while in holdover at Leavenworth, the first year in the Englewood SHU while pretrial. I'd like to say I just bit down and got through it, but that would be a lie. I cried. I got very violent. I got countless write-ups trying to cope. But over time, my wife helped guide me out of my wretched funks. Friends stuck it out and upped support. The hopeless times have been beaten by forcing myself to think of hopeful times. Sometimes you can do it on your own, channeling the strength of those before you. Other times, you need family and friends to hold you up, call it out, do whatever it takes to bring you back. Where there's love, there's hope.

I realize how important outside support is more and more every day. With every new restriction, I see why the bureau is so terrified of seeing people backed by real support. I don't think I've ever been more supported than right now. Even though I haven't had mail in over a year, some folks have really turned up for me. Some people have really stood up for me, refusing to let me be buried and forgotten. I get all the books, mags, and articles anyone could

want. I know that my name is being kept alive and my writings and updates are being shared with the world. My support team are some of my closest friends; they work with my wife and fight like hell to represent me and keep my mind and spirit alive and thriving. It's a wild sensation to feel as if your support is growing even though you are sidelined. It says a lot.

But more needs to be done. I feel the feds/police have the force to nullify any extreme actions. I have these unrealistic hopes . . . sectarianism, fear, and all-talkery will ensure there is never a unified front. There are some unrelenting people and groups who do everything possible to stand by and lift folks up inside. But I'm not sure we know how to tear down the system right now or have the structures in place to support two million freed people.

I've seen a lot of this recently, and I feel it's the most important thing that outside support should do as much as possible: outside advocacy. Spreading the word, getting unfamiliar folks interested, mobilizing people to participate in support-oriented activities. Ask prisoners what they need or want. I was four years into my bid before Daniel [McGowan] and Josh [Davidson] told me I could ask for things; that I could be demanding. We see pics of the protest in the North of Ireland in support of the prisoners, because their support built a connection to the populace in those areas. This is hard in the US because of how spread out we are. But we see it with Running Down the Walls. So, why can't we have days of protest, marching, et cetera? Make us visible, make my mom know who Oso [Blanco] is and who Sundiata [Acoli] is.

Jaan Lamaan

Context: *Jaan Laaman was a member of the United Freedom Front who spent over four decades in prison. The group known as the Ohio 7 were working-class revolutionaries charged with actions against US military facilities, recruitment centers, and corporate headquarters. These actions were done in solidarity with the people of South Africa and Central America, who were bearing the brunt of US imperialism. Jaan spent just over forty-five years in prison before being released on parole in May 2021. Jaan spent the majority of his time in federal facilities but also served time in various state prisons (including Attica immediately before the rebellion in 1971).*

I have never met one comrade yet who coming into prison somehow broke them or made them question who they were and what they were or the need to do the things they had been doing and that still needed to be done. It became a question of how do I continue to struggle here, and how do I survive here? What level of activity, what level of security, and just survival do I have to act on? And all those things, of course, change between being in captivity and not. But the basic need and continuation of activism as a freedom fighter, as a person involved in the freedom struggle, that always remains the same.

So the question becomes, What can I do here? What's most needed to be

done here, and how can I be helpful in that? Who are the other people that I'm working with, and what are the other forces involved (besides, obviously, the enemy, the cops, the guards, the fascists)? Of course, when we're speaking about the reality of the prison struggle—certainly in this country, but also around the world—we're talking about fascism. We're not just talking about different rules but open fascism in and under what we all understand as a white supremacist, ideologically based, capitalist, and, more and more so, police state. The prison system is the harshest and most extreme part of that.

Being in captivity sucks, totally and fully. But that's not the point. The point is to keep up the struggle. The point is to do every day whatever the plan and strategy is to further the advancement of the freedom struggle. That's the point. If you have to do it within a not very nice environment, so be it. It's very important to deal with the physical reality of yourself—both as a person in captivity being held there by people who hate you and would just as soon kill or harm you as not—and the whole prison system and the guards. Also other people—everything from people with emotional problems, and there's certainly a lot in prison, and white supremacist elements and so forth.

...

So there were many, many small, daily, but useful and powerful moments of being able to be yourself and maintain yourself. One of the things that you have to watch out for in captivity—certainly as a political prisoner but any prisoner, for that matter—is to not get overwhelmed by anger, by hatred, or by fear. Any of these things, not only are they harmful to you in the physical sense, but you yourself then become a tool of the harm that's being done to you. So you have to work against it. Don't be the tool that harms yourself. In fact, if anything, try to be the tool or the person or use the method that even within a very negative situation, you can breathe, you can let your body be as healthy as possible, under those conditions.

So that became almost a daily thing that I did, especially the last ten, fifteen years, I was more focused on things like that. And that's very important. It's very useful. It's very necessary. Even though physically you maintain yourself, you protect yourself, you continue to do your work—all good things—but it starts to hurt your spirit or your essence of who you are and how you feel and how you think and how you see and relate to other people. As much as possible, even in a very negative situation, you have to stay human, you have to stay as a human being in touch with humanity and the world, because that's really what the freedom struggle is all about. We're trying to allow people—the human race, poor and exploited and oppressed people—the ability to live positive and healthy and happy lives. So, in the process of doing that, in any situation, you've got to find ways to do that for yourself as much as possible.

Jalil Muntaqim

Context: *Jalil Muntaqim served just under fifty years in prison for his involvement with the Black Liberation Army. Jalil became affiliated with the Black Panther Party at age eighteen. Less than two months before his twentieth birthday, he was captured with Albert Nuh Washington in a midnight shootout with San Francisco police. He was subsequently charged with a host of revolutionary activities, including the assassination of two New York City police officers. Jalil was also implicated in the San Francisco 8 case and pleaded guilty to a lesser offense. He was imprisoned for forty-nine years in numerous maximum security facilities in both California and New York and was released in October 2020.*

Prison is a reflection of what's going on in the streets. Keep that in mind. So, when there's a high in political organizing and militancy in the streets, there's a high in political organizing and militancy in prison. When things are low in the streets, then the prison system becomes a cesspool of misery.

When I first came to prison in 1972, it was right after the assassination of George Jackson and the brutal assault and murders of prisoners and guards at Attica.⁵² There was an organized prison movement at that time, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This was the result of the incarceration of many people who had been part of the movement during the 1960s and the 1970s — people who are now in prison and continuing to raise the issues of white supremacy, anticapitalism, and anti-imperialism inside of prisons.

But because the movement on the outside had diminished, there was no real support base for those on the inside who tried to continue to build and organize. So, there came a period of time where there was no actual, real movement going on inside prison. Because there was no real movement going on in the streets. There was no synchronicity, no linkage, between the two.

This was mainly in the 1980s and leading into the 1990s until we began to rebuild a movement in support of political prisoners and the idea of a prison movement. I watched the diminishing of—the degrading of—the consciousness inside prison as the individuals coming inside prison were more “social criminals.” Drug dealers, gangsters, and gangs came into the prison system in droves. As a result of that, it basically disturbed the prison system the way it was operating before, prior to this inundation of gangs. If you find gang violence in the streets, you'll find gang violence in the prisons.

...

The struggle continues, a *luta continua*. There is no break. You're not going on vacation if you're going to prison. You're going into another battlefield. It's important that you understand that the movement continues, from the streets into the prisons. And that's what I did. I was organizing before I was in prison, I was organizing in prison, and when I came out here in the streets, I'm organizing again. That's what I do.

An Open Letter To Bo Brown – From the rest of the George Jackson Brigade (1978)

Context: *The George Jackson Brigade (GJB) were a revolutionary group active in Seattle in the mid 1970's. They claimed many bombings against corporate and state targets (including the Department of Corrections, an FBI Office, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs), many bank robberies, and the liberation of a jailed member from police custody. The GJB was multi-racial, had a number of queer members, and was ideologically diverse, consisting of both communists and anarchists. In this open letter, Brigade members write to Bo Brown, a member of the brigade who had recently been captured by the police.*

*It could have been me, but instead it was you.
So I'll keep doing the work you were doing as if I were two.
I'll be a student of life, a singer of songs,
A farmer of food and a righter of wrongs.
It could have been me, but instead it was you.
And it may be my dear sisters and brothers before we are through.
But if you can fight for freedom, freedom, freedom, freedom,
If you can fight for freedom, I can too.
—Holly Near*

It was your hair, comrade. Somebody around that fucking bank spotted you with that hair like Carol Newland, and the Feds came and staked out that bank waiting for you to come back. And you did, and now they've got you. Zip, just like that another one of our strongest fighters is locked up. They must have tried to follow you home from your walk on the beach with the dog, and you spotted them and doubled back away from the house insuring your capture and our safety.

We heard about it on the scanner when 2 Adam 23 was sent to "meet the FBI agent at 175th and Aurora" and impound our vehicle. Since we had neglected to remove Dillinger's (our dog—also in the slammer now) rabies tag, we realized that it wouldn't take the Feds long to trace it back to our house.

That was about 3:30 in the afternoon. Frank was out in the Dodge and wasn't due to call or be home until about five. The people left in the house spent the next hour and a half trying to determine from the scanner whether you were still being held at 175th and Aurora and could use some help, trying to locate Frank who had the only usable vehicle, and trying to judge how much time they had before the Feds showed up. Just before 5:00 they

decided they could wait no longer. They burned some shit, left a cryptic note for Frank, gathered up all the weapons and ammunition and tried to walk away.

They had to turn back after one block because the equipment was too heavy. About this time, Frank got home with the car, so we loaded it up with weapons and ammunition and a bare minimum of clothing and other equipment and left. By the time we got to a safe place and unloaded, it was only about 5:30 or 6:00 pm, just four or five hours since you were nailed, so Nora and Frank took the car back to the house to try to get one more carload of equipment out.

They did an area check approach to the house and discovered four or five suspicious cars apparently meeting in the school parking lot that faces Meridian (just where we always figured the police would use as a staging area to raid our house). Nora and Frank drove by these cars twice and were able to confirm that they were Feds by following one of them (a big, dark four door, Inspector Erskine type sedan) as it moved into position behind and to the North of our house. Its license number (IVU 004) was almost the same as the license number of an almost identical Fed car we had spotted downtown some time ago (IVU 001). Nora and Frank left the area just as the raid began.

So now we're in the process of summing up our mistakes and beginning to rebuild, once again from close to the ground.

We have so far identified the following specific mistakes that led to your capture and the raid on our house:

We failed to take your day to day appearance seriously enough and didn't realize how distinctive your hairstyle was and how closely it resembled a picture we knew the Feds had of you. This mistake cost us you, our greatest loss, both materially and conditionally, in a long time.

Although we had sense enough to remove the dog's license tag anytime anyone went out with him, it never occurred to us to remove his rabies tag. This mistake cost us our base.

We overestimated the security of our house and failed to develop clear emergency plans that would have allowed us to evacuate the most valuable equipment, tools, clothes and supplies first. This mistake cost us 90% of our supplies and equipment.

We seem to pay dearly for small mistakes in this work.

Overall, we made the mistake of too much doing with too little thinking and discussion. Since returning from Oregon, we quadrupled our workload with little or no change in our methods of work. During the last two months we did two bank robberies, four or five bombings, a thirty page political statement,

a major criticism of John Brown Book Club, and worked throughout on putting together another bank robbery. We were also working on a couple of other major actions that we can't talk about for security reasons. We also did four or five full tune ups on our vehicles, built a canopy for our truck and did all the shit work maintenance that takes two or three hours out of every day.

During this period we had almost no division of labor; tasks were completed on a pretty much hit or miss basis of who was free and capable of doing them. By and large, the tasks themselves were identified and defined spontaneously, as they came up, with very little advance planning.

We worked six days a week, a minimum of nine or ten hours a day, and our discussions were always the "minimum," which usually meant brief reports on today's tasks and assignment of tomorrow's. We took no time for serious discussion and analysis of the kind of problem that led to your arrest and the raid on our house.

We will correct these errors. As we rebuild our base, we will incorporate the following changes in our day to day methods of work:

We will develop and implement a realistic division of labor based on the number of people we have and logical definitions of areas of responsibility in our work. In this way, we will have clearly defined responsibility for such things as security practice and will be much less likely to make the kind of stupid mistakes that came from relying on spontaneous insight (for example, to remove the dog's rabies tag).

We will unfailingly set aside one day each week solely for meeting. We will use these meetings for political struggle, for discussion and analysis of our strategic development, and for reports, practical criticism, and planning of next weeks tasks.

We will immediately develop a set of evacuation plans, establish priorities for the removal of supplies and equipment, and will, from time to time, conduct evacuation drills so that we all understand what is to be taken, and how, for every possible situation.

Throughout the period of rebuilding, we will continue the process of analyzing and defining the mistakes that led to this defeat. In this way, we will transform the raid and your capture from a defeat into a solid foundation for the new base.

Mao Tse Tung says that to be attacked by the enemy is a good thing because it makes clear the distinction between us and the oppressor, and because it illuminates our weaknesses and provides us with knowledge gained from criticism/self-criticism to move forward and grow stronger. He says that we learn a thousand times more from a defeat than we do from a victory. This is true, but only to the extent that we make it true in our practice. And we will make it true because we love you, and we love freedom, and because we

are part of the masses of people and a handful of sleazy capitalists and their lackeys are no match for us.

So take care of yourself and hold on. Victory is certain.

The wheel of law turns without pause ...
after winter comes spring ...
What could be more natural,
after sorrow comes joy.

Love and Struggle,
The George Jackson Brigade
November 1977

• • •

To Bo, Wherever We May Find Her
They snatched you
Leaving that hollow empty gap
TUGs know
My pillow is drying
Spent grief is turning into rage

Eyes, lips, hips, thighs, flower
Arms enfold me
Remembering you on the beach
(Your first boat ride)
Halloween painted faces
Laughter, tears and
Good loving
My lover no longer shoots pool
with a .357
But you still make me feel like dancing

Aches turn to comfort
Bodacious sister woman you are
In my mind as I
Plant bombs, rob banks
Your strength and discipline will
Keep me fighting

—Jory

Communiqué for Anarchist Actions in Barcelona and Response to the Nihilist Comrades (2013)

Context: *This text was written by Anarchists in Barcelona in 2013. We don't have much context besides that. At this time there was a strong current of nihilist anarchism in Spain and across Europe that advocated small militant affinity-group-based attacks on the infrastructure of policing and capitalism, with a critique of more social anarchist organizing that wasn't inherently militant or confrontational. This piece argues against that simple dichotomy.*

With this communiqué, we wish to claim the following actions, as part of a struggle for the destruction of the State, Capital, patriarchy, and any system of domination, a struggle for the free creation of voluntary and solidaristic relations at the global and local level; in other words, a struggle for anarchy.

May 5, at night, we told a child the story of the maquis and the anarchist struggle against Franco and against democracy.

May 13, we cooked a healthy meal for a comrade who has a chronic illness.

May 17, we wrote a letter to a comrade imprisoned for participating in a riot.

June 12, we took care of the infant of some friends who suffer economic precarity and the imposed obligation of wage labor.

June 16, we spoke publically with our neighbors about the need to burn the banks and attack the police in order to realize our dreams.

June 19, we told some leftist activists that the masked-ones were not police infiltrators but ourselves, and that it was necessary and good to mask up and take the streets with force.

June 20, we gifted vegetables from our garden to friends and neighbors, without money or exchange.

Why do we claim these actions? In the last months, we have also barricaded roads with dumpsters, burned banks, injured journalists, smashed shop windows, and attacked cops.

For us, the attacks against the system are essential to our struggle. But we've fooled ourselves. A struggle does not consist only in attacks. The attacks are NOT more important than the need to care for ourselves, to preserve and spread our collective history, to create relations based in the gift, solidarity,

and reciprocity, to imagine new worlds and new struggles, to confront our isolation and establish subversive and honest relationships with people outside of the categoric and political ghetto in which the Spectacle hides us.

With a long memory, it becomes apparent that we have lost several times in the past, and that the hardest of all is the historical fracturing and the loss of our own memory of struggle; it's having to start from scratch. Hyperalienation, against which nihilism is a logical response, is nothing more than the result of defeat in past struggles. We find ourselves in a totality which must be destroyed in its entirety, only because nothing remains of what we built up in the past. So as not to lose everything every single time we rise up, we have to sustain ourselves, not as isolated individuals but as a commune, a collective and multigenerational struggle. And this cannot be accomplished with a singular prioritization of the attacks.

The hierarchy of tactics belonging to the Left was minimally transformed within nihilism: they took the head of the spear, the actions that were supposedly more important, as the only ones that mattered, and forgot about all the rest.

It is a patriarchal and counterproductive vision. It is the forgetting of all the actions—first disappeared by the patriarchy, then by capitalism, and then by the supposedly anticapitalist Left—that are necessary for life and for struggle as well. The most aggressive tactics only make sense and can be sustained and repeated in a complex of actions of all types, as long as they are libertarian and direct.

By not understanding that struggle means carrying with us a new world that is waiting to be born in the ashes of the dominant system, we transform ourselves into mere weapons against capitalism, in tools dedicated to destroy, without the other things that human beings need to live and fight. It is capitalism that wishes to treat us as tools. We should not do the same.

The truth is that we are overjoyed to learn of the attacks of the nihilists and other comrades. We know very well that bravery and rage are two of the most important things in order to rebel. Specifically in Barcelona, it seemed an error to us that in the last year fewer illegal attacks were realized as more opportunities to participate in broad spaces appeared. Naturally, the rise in attacks—carried out by nihilists and by more “social” comrades—pleased us. And at the global level, we laughed to find out about the kneecapping of the director of Ansaldo Nuclear in Italy, and we were inspired to read the letters of comrades (nihilist and other) imprisoned in Greece who have not submitted to fear.

But too many times we've seen comrades who, departing from desperation, impatience, and alienation, threw themselves recklessly into the war against the State that all of us live daily. They always ended up dead or in prison, and often after less than a year. And then what happened? The others, the comrades who survived, did everything we could to support each other and to support the prisoners, to not forget the slain, to not let the repression win, to not lose all our strength and not allow a historical fracture, so that we don't lose our collective memory of struggle.

But little by little this memory is lost, and every three or four years a new group appears that neglects all the other tasks of the struggle to dedicate themselves solely to the destruction of our common enemy. And when we support them but also criticize, or sometimes without even that provocation, they call us cowards for dedicating ourselves to other tasks (even though we also are in the riots or the nighttime actions), for differing with them ideologically and not glorifying their group or informal federation.

They don't know how many times they have already lost because one task they neglect is the transmission of memory. Instead of a memory that is profound, alive, and strategic, they only have their martyrologies. And then we have to watch as our friends and comrades are turned into symbols—and ultimately weapons—of ideology. Some of the dead comrades were nihilists. But in the nihilist martyrology comrades who belonged neither to one side nor the other, or who were clearly from the other side in this stupid division between “socials” and “antisocials” (like Lambras Foundas) are also recuperated, and their names and images are used to encourage attacks, total destruction, without stopping to reflect on their errors or the actual projects and desires of these comrades when they were alive.

It's clear that we have to fight and this includes the possibility of death or prison. But this does not mean having to celebrate death or prison. Suicide is also a form of resistance, but it is not revolutionary.

It's clear that we have to remember our dead and our prisoners, but this does not mean converting them into martyrs and heroes.

In conclusion, we want to criticize the current state of anarchist literature, disproportionately based as it is on superficial communiqués with no context, analysis, or reflection, that only value the attacks and not the other tasks that we have to carry out in order to remain alive and powerful.

Obviously, it's helpful to find out about clandestine actions done by other comrades. It gives us strength and joy to read that some symbol of power has been smashed or burned. But it is much more useful to think (and write) about strategies of conflictivity, according to each moment and place, instead of encouraging a quantitative vision of struggle. We refuse to convert our rebellion into a mathematical equation to measure our rage: the more blows and fires we produce, the stronger we are; the greater the economic damage, the more powerful the action. This is the thinking of an economist, a general, or a simpleton

For all these reasons, we decided to write this communiqué to claim a series of actions we consider just as important in the current situation as the attacks. They are actions we do every week, normally without thinking twice or announcing it on the internet. We publish them now to visibilize a personal worry and a weakness generalized throughout the anarchist space.

**AGAINST COMMUNIQUEÉS!
FOR ANARCHY AND ALL THE TASKS OF THE STRUGGLE!**

Excerpt from At the Root of My Survival: An Interview with Luciano “Tortuga” Pitronello (2017)

Context: *Luciano “Tortuga” Pitronello is an Anarchist from Chile who was sent to prison after the failed bombing of a bank in 2011 that resulted in him being badly injured - losing his right hand and a number of fingers from his left hand. This interview is conducted with the Ex-Worker Podcast after his release from prison. Tortuga's last sentence in the interview is a reference to May Day 2012 in Seattle, where the federal court house and businesses such as Nike Town and American Apparel were attacked by a large black bloc during an anti-capitalist march.*

Ex-Worker: In the anarchist movement, here in Chile and more broadly, what role does prisoner support play?

Tortuga: According to my way of thinking about this topic, here in Chile there is no movement. There are basically individuals that struggle, each in their own rhythm and pulse, in their own particular and unique ways, but there isn't a... I don't know how to say it... there isn't a movement, so to speak. There's convergence, gathering points, but beyond this... it's difficult to say. Because unfortunately, and I don't like to say it, there's a lot of people just here for fashion. They're around because politics is a means to other things: to find friends, to find romantic partners, to feel a sense of belonging, to feel like you're part of something. So sometimes you can find comrades who are super excited, very involved, but at the end of the day it only lasts for a year, a year and a half. Repression comes down and they run. I believe that to call something a movement it has to be something that moves you; it's something that can maintain itself against repression, and when there's not repression, onward!

So I don't believe there is a movement here. What no one can deny is that there are communities in struggle, which is different to me. This social center for me is a community of struggle. The Sacco and Vanzetti [ed. -see Return Fire vol.1 pg86] library is, for me, a community of struggle. For me, the squat Isla Tortuga is a community of struggle. Regardless of the forms of how each community or group involves themselves - their form, their rhythm, their pulse - we have different ways of going about things, but you can't deny that these people, these spaces are fighting back. This is something you can't lie about..

Coming back to your question - support for prisoners, the way I see it, has deteriorated. It has deteriorated because the anarchists here in Chile, or the anti authoritarians, the nihilists, the revolutionaries, however you want to call

them, are encountering prison as something pretty new in our lives. In general the anarchist "movement" in Chile is very new. I mean, CasoBombas[ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg73] demonstrated this. When police raided a few squats, everybody ran for cover, everyone hid their face. This shows you how unstable the movement was, evidenced by how unprepared we were to live through prison, and even less prepared to confront it. Through this you can see that in a lot of cases that you might say "good, they're getting support" or "they're getting attention" but obviously something is missing. Something is missing like... Why are we appealing to show that cases were frame ups? Why do our comrades stay silent? Or like, why don't we ever stand up to the judges? And I include myself, I criticize the way I've gone about things too. Why do we appeal to innocence? Why do we accept the way we're treated?

There's a ton of things that we might not always be capable of confronting. So for example I see, well I don't want to idealize anything, but I think it's worth understanding that Greece is a little more advanced, at least in terms of history, and in Greece it's a different conversation. The comrades there confront these issues in a different manner. So if you're over there and looking at the situation here... well here, if in Greece they're walking upright, we're crawling on all fours. Of course throughout the world there are other places where there aren't even comrades, where there isn't anything going on. But it's important to keep in mind how recent all of this is here, to understand how much further we have to go. But I'm not satisfied with crawling, I want to gallop, I want to run, I want to fly. And for this, you have to work.

Ex-Worker: Three questions in one: after your time in prison how has your orientation to anarchist strategy changed? And I don't mean which acts or tactics are more important, but I'm speaking about the anarchist project in general. How has your orientation changed and what tasks do you think are most important? OK, that's one; secondly, what would you say to someone considering risking their freedom to do something, like taking direct action? And what would you say to someone who would never consider that, who just wants to live a life of safety and comfort, but who are still anarchists?

Tortuga: Well, this reply may disappoint you a little, but my outlook hasn't actually drastically changed. I still hold the same beliefs that I did on the first of June in 2011, you know? For me, there isn't some big difference between a comrade who carries a bomb in their backpack or one who carries a book. For me, both tools, when aimed directly at the bowels of power, can achieve the same task. It's all the same for me if a comrade carries a submachine gun or carries a microphone. To me what is central is where the attack is directed towards. The tool you utilize is a question of comfort and familiarity, it's a question of whether you feel satisfied with what you're doing: to feel pleasure basically, to feel good and that what you're doing is the right thing. If you feel like the thing to do is publish a newspaper – great! Then I'm happy for you. If what you think is needed nowadays is to attack capital in some direct manner – all right then, do it! But for me, what upsets me is knowing that

something needs to be done and not doing it. In there I see a contradiction in my way of understanding the struggle.

So my way of responding to your question wouldn't be to say that we'll have a better revolution by having more of one thing, or that one thing is better than another... I don't know, the library, doing workshops, direct attacks, expropriations: to me these all have the same worth, there isn't one that's more valuable than another. If you can defend what you're doing with enough passion, then it's alright with me.

And what would I say to the comrades who want to carry out direct action, or who are carrying out direct action? Well... I know that if somebody is listening to this they're just listening, they can't make a case out of my words alone, but whatever. I would say to be careful, take care. For me its like they say, you've got to face reality, but you've got to take care. You have to give yourself time to plan well.

For the anarchists, or the nihilists or the revolutionaries, what we have plenty of is heart. But war isn't won with heart alone. We need to use a little more prudence – so the action won't be today, it will be tomorrow but it will also be better. It will be better planned, more focused on the safety of those involved, and other small details that I don't know if I can pass on here. But like I've written, one mistake, one small neglect can change everything. And we are far too valuable to be needlessly putting ourselves at risk. I think my most focused advice today would be, more than anything, that this comrade value herself [sic], that she not feel like her life is just a material contribution to the struggle. I would tell this comrade to value herself a little more, that she give herself time and room to breathe. That's all, that the struggle is for your whole life, it won't change by waiting one more night.

To the comrades who would never think of focusing their struggle on direct action, I would respond with basically the first points I made about fighting in an illegal manner – because I'm using the vocabulary of power, which is a contradiction, but, well, what can we do? Life is a contradiction itself! Well, OK, it doesn't matter if somebody doesn't want to confront power with a gun or a bomb. Getting involved in a newspaper or something, that's fine, but I think the important thing to understand is that prison, death, clandestinity, having to go to battle are things that don't only face the comrades who pick up a weapon. In the dictatorship here, unfortunately it was a struggle of fire and blood. To have had a newspaper, a printing press, just copying a flyer would mean torture, possibly even death. So in this sense, if you're not going to use a gun, that's fine by me. What's most important to me is that you can defend your project and your idea.

Ex-Worker: Anything more for our listeners, the gringos of the north, or the rest of the English-speaking world?

Tortuga: Keep it up, Seattle May Day!!!

Excerpt From Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times by Nick Montgomery & carla bergman (2017)

Context: *Joyful Militancy* explores how fear, self righteousness, and moralism take root in liberation movements. It is written by two people who have been involved in liberation struggles for many years and is based in interviews with others who have spent years struggling against capitalism, white supremacy, settler colonialism, and the state. These voices emerge in the text in the form of long quotes from conversations with the authors.

Towards conviviality

"Most people who have lived through any moment where formal institutions of power go away, or are forced away, agree with this point. When left alone, when left with one another, people turn to one another and use forms of mutual aid and support. The wake of the break is a beautiful opening up of possibility."

—Marina Sitrin

At Empire's edges, in its cracks, people are finding each other, recovering subjugated knowledges, revaluing their own traditions, pushing back against discipline and control. In dramatic uprisings and slow shifts, people are reconnecting with their own powers and capacities to make, act, live, and fight together. Conviviality is the name that Illich gives to ways of life that promote flourishing, which are being squeezed out by Empire:

I choose the term "conviviality" to designate the opposite of industrial productivity. I intend it to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment; and this in contrast with the conditioned response of persons to the demands made upon them by others and by a man-made environment. I consider conviviality to be individual freedom realized in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value.

Illich's conception of conviviality resonates with the relational form of freedom we explored in the last chapter. Conviviality names the creative relationships that emerge between people and their material surroundings, sustained by grassroots trust and responsibility. In other words, it is Illich's name for joy sustained by common notions. Conviviality helps clarify that joy

is not simply something felt by an individual, but the effect of enabling assemblages of bodies, tools, gestures, and relationships. It is not about a utopian future or a romantic past, but about breaking from dependence on Empire's stifling infrastructures. This is most evident after natural disasters and during insurrections, when some of Empire's radical monopolies are dramatically short-circuited.

While these situations often trigger elite fear-mongering and fascist vigilantism, they are also spaces where joyful and convivial forms of life blossom, as people discover—in haphazard, decentralized, and emergent ways—how to live without Empire's crushing monopolies. Here is what one anonymous participant had to say about their experience of the uprising in Cairo, Egypt, where people famously took over Tahrir Square:

Cairo was never more alive than during the first Tahrir Square. Since nothing was functioning anymore, everyone took care of what was around them. People took charge of the garbage collecting, swept the walkways and sometimes even repainted them; they drew frescos on the walls and they looked after each other. Even the traffic had become miraculously fluid, since there were no more traffic controllers. What we suddenly realized is that we had been robbed of our simplest gestures, those that make the city ours and make it something we belong to. At Tahrir Square, people would arrive and spontaneously ask themselves what they could do to help. They would go to the kitchen, or to stretcher the wounded, work on banners or shields or slingshots, join discussions, make up songs. We realized that the state organization was actually the maximum disorganization, because it depended on negating the human ability to self-organize. At Tahrir, no one gave any orders. Obviously, if someone had got it in their heads to organize all that, it would have immediately turned into chaos.

Similar accounts can be found by people who have lived through disasters and insurrections throughout the world. For example, the upwelling of autonomy, experimentation, and joy was palpable in the Argentinean uprising that began in 2001. While corporate media and politicians framed it as a chaotic, short-lived riot, Marina Sitrin has shown how autonomous forms of life have endured, despite challenges, for over a decade. Workers have taken over factories and learned to run them collectively, without bosses, through a process of autogestion, or worker self-management. This is not merely a transition from top-down factory production to cooperative production, but a process of transformative struggle in which whole neighborhoods defended factories against police and capitalists. Similarly, the neighborhood assemblies that formed through the uprising have created new ways for people to resolve conflicts and support each other without relying on the state.

Anywhere that Empire's form of life is suspended, emergent capacities to live otherwise rush in. Through struggle and experimentation, people formulate problems and respond to them together, taking responsibility for collective work and care, and bonds of trust take hold.

Rebecca Solnit speaks to the emergence of conviviality and joy amid disasters in her book *A Paradise Built in Hell*:

In the wake of an earthquake, a bombing, or a major storm, most people are altruistic, urgently engaged in caring for themselves and those around them, strangers and neighbors as well as friends and loved ones. The image of the selfish, panicky, or regressive savage human being has little truth to it.

Solnit documents and interviews the survivors of several disasters, including earthquakes and hurricanes, economic collapses, and terrorist attacks. Consistently she finds that in the wake of disaster it is mainly elites who panic and resort to violence. Furthermore, bureaucratic disaster relief tends to entrench misery and despair. At the same time, in the midst of intense suffering and pain, large numbers of people engage in mutual aid and solidarity. In fact, many people reflect on their experiences of earthquakes, hurricanes, and even bombings as joyful experiences in the Spinozan sense, in which they feel more alive and connected to others. Without top-down organization or bureaucracies, they coordinate food and medical supplies, take care of injured and sick people, and defend themselves in ways that are decentralized but not disorganized.

Why is there joy in disaster? Solnit suggests that it is because Empire's debilitating monopolies on life are suspended: "If paradise now arises in hell, it's because in the suspension of the usual order and the failure of most systems, we are free to live and act in another way." Solnit is not arguing that we should wish for disasters. What her argument exposes is that everyday life under Empire is already a certain kind of ongoing and seemingly intractable disaster, in a world where distraction, anxiety, individualism, and dependence have become normalized. What is enlivening about disasters is the emergent capacity they unleash for trust, responsibility, care, and simply being present and feeling connected.

The upwelling of conviviality and joyful forms of life is only one tendency among others in situations where control is abated. Alongside these are other tendencies: waves of sexualized violence, hoarding, bunkerism, fascist vigilantes, intimidation and violence from military and police, and desires for control based in fear and mistrust. To reinstall its rhythms, Empire must turn these moments into situations of extreme deprivation and violence so that its subjects can only experience the suspension of control as a horrifying prospect. The bubbling up of decentralized, convivial forms of life must be crushed as quickly as possible and "order" must be restored. In this sense, Empire's means of counterinsurgency include not only police repression but

also the liquidation of emergent orders, the stoking of divisions and terror, and the reinstallation of individualizing and isolating forms of life. People go back to their jobs, their houses, their smartphones, and control returns.

But never completely. A key question is how to keep these relations alive in everyday life, even as Empire's stultifying rhythms are reimposed. Among the stakes in these struggles, as we have suggested, is their potential to elicit responsiveness as people are drawn out of themselves and their routines. In an interview with Naomi Klein, Leanne Simpson insists that responsibility and reciprocity are the alternatives to settler colonial extractivism:

Naomi: If extractivism is a mindset, a way of looking at the world, what is the alternative?

Leanne: Responsibility. Because I think when people extract things, they're taking and they're running and they're using it for just their own good. What's missing is the responsibility. If you're not developing relationships with the people, you're not giving back, you're not sticking around to see the impact of the extraction. You're moving to someplace else. The alternative is deep reciprocity. It's respect, it's relationship, it's responsibility, and it's local. If you're forced to stay in your 50-mile radius, then you very much are going to experience the impacts of extractivist behavior. The only way you can shield yourself from that is when you get your food from around the world or from someplace else. So the more distance and the more globalization then the more shielded I am from the negative impacts of extractivist behavior.

To be more responsible and self-reliant in this way is not to inhabit the neoliberal ideal of the individual, nor an isolationist independence. Protecting ecosystems and non-human life from devastation is often cast in terms of conservation, austerity, or a new mode of management. But these tendencies exist in tension with the grassroots recovery and reinvention of ways of living that support human and non-human life, through ongoing and intimate contact with natural processes. This is not about protecting a separate "environment" but nurturing forms of life that persist through interdependent relationships: soil, water, plants, and animals are not resources to be exploited or managed, but an interconnected web that people can participate in and enrich. As people regain intimate contact with the places where they live, they get to know the way the water flows when it rains, the plants that grow up together and how they are used by birds and wasps and bees, the way that the sun warms a south-facing slope where different plants thrive.

This brings abstract concepts like climate change and biodiversity loss down to a practical scale, felt through interactions with the sensible world rather than intellectualized through statistics. Supporting these relationships might

entail intense grief and rage: one discovers that a childhood hideout among trees has been paved over; the absence of once-familiar birds and bees is felt; one finds cancerous fish and dried-up creeks. There are overwhelming and heartbreaking changes taking place, and being connected to communities of plants and animals makes it as painful as it is nourishing. It is from this place that joyful responses to ecological catastrophes are emerging. Not happy or optimistic responses, but capacities to respond to the horrors in ways based in lived and ever-changing relationships.

....

The power of baseline trust

"I think we cannot have any kind of trust in a mass of 100 million individuals, they will produce the horror. But if we bring everything to the human scale, to the communities, to small groups of people, then we can really trust that the people will have the wisdom to discuss and to generate consensus."

—Gustavo Esteva

We have argued that Empire's institutions are a ceaseless attack on conviviality, and we want to hold onto emergent forms of trust and responsibility as common notions. In this context, we want to share an excerpt from our interview with Kelsey Cham C.:

carla and Nick: Can you talk about the potential of trusting folks up front, and how you saw it play out at the Thistle?

Kelsey: Yeah totally, I think that's awesome. Actually I think you [carla] were one of the first people to actually trust me without even knowing me. And I was like what the hell? Why? Why? How do you know I'm not gonna just fuck everything up and run away and steal a bunch of money and go? How do you know that? But in trusting me, I was like, holy shit: I trust this situation and this collective twenty times more and I want to give back to it because I've been given this opportunity to do something that I've never been able to do before, which is awesome. But I have been thinking about trust and how with trauma we build all these walls and we start to mistrust everything—I have a pretty hard time trusting people—there's a point where I'm like this is too personal and too intimate and now my walls are going to go up. I was sitting and thinking about how it's probably one of the best ways to break down the walls of the system is to break down the walls around each other first, and I think the only way we can break down those walls is with trust. And that's the core thing you said.

Joyful militancy and trust, and compassion, and humility are all tied together: in other cultures, traditional cultures—I don't know

a lot about this—but from what I know, older Indigenous cultures have these ideas of respect, humility, compassion, and I think in karate I've seen it and it's funny because karate is a martial art, a fighting tool, and one of the things that we learn is that we have to love everyone including our opponents. And that's the toughest thing to say in this community. People are like, "what the fuck, how can you say that, you can't just love your abuser." And it's true, I can't just let go of everything. It's not that, it's being compassionate, I think, to situations.

carla and Nick: Can we have the expectation of trust up front? Is it an alternative to the idea that trust always needs to be earned?

Kelsey: Yeah that's like our society: you gotta earn everything; you earn money, you build trust, and respect. You gotta prove to me that I should trust you, or respect you. And that's an interesting point; I have a tough time with that, trusting people. But I think it's a feedback system: probably the more you allow yourself to trust people initially, probably the more well-reciprocated that will be. I felt it: you trust me and I didn't understand it. That's how fucked up our system is. Even though I didn't do anything wrong, or to harm you, I didn't understand how someone could trust me without knowing me first.

At the core of this conversation is the potential—never an obligation or guarantee—of trusting people up front. In a practical sense, it's our experience that when people offer trust up front, most people rise to the occasion. Without turning it into a commandment that everyone should follow, we want to affirm the ways that expanding up-front trust can be transformative and enabling. It can feel strange and scary to be in situations where people think well of us and trust us to do our best, without having to "earn it" or "prove it," but it also can be incredibly freeing, making us feel more capable. This is a trust not only in individuals, but in unfolding processes with open-ended potential, without fixed rules. In this sense, it is trust in joy: in emergent capacities to increase collective powers of acting.

But what does this look like? It happens in all kinds of subtle, relational ways. One of the things that made the Thistle different from many other youth projects was that everyone in the collective had keys to the space and were free to use them anytime. No one had to go through a formal interview process, or sign over their life to have a set. Many bureaucratic procedures like this are based in distrust, as are many radical spaces that replicate institutional norms of Empire. But this up-front trust also entailed responsibility: it required that folks met regularly to check in, talk about how things were going, and so on. These practices helped to create an environment of shared connection and kindness, a space filled with friendship and mutual support,

and ultimately a place to build community.

When we have been involved in movements, spaces, and forms of life imbued with this sense of trust, along with a fierce sense of mutual responsibility, we have noticed that it gave us an ability to be brave, to try new things, to be vulnerable, and to take risks. This is not a politics of “let’s all get along” pacifism. Writing in the context of collective resistance to evictions in the United States, Sitrin argues that trust is intimately connected to direct action:

It is not only about changing relationships and “feeling good” but inextricably linked to direct action. It is about creating the alternatives that we now desire and need. It is using the base of trust so as to occupy homes and prevent foreclosures and evictions, all the while knowing that to call on one’s neighbor means they will come out and support you—as has been done many hundreds of times throughout the US in only the past few months. People doing eviction defense in support of their neighbors even speak of how they might not have “liked” that particular person, but that they “felt” a connection to them and cared so much about what happened to them that they were risking possible arrest by putting their bodies between the marshals and the person’s home. From these relationships, in dozens and dozens of neighborhoods and communities across the country, networks of support and care have been formed. Neighbors go door-to-door to let others know that they can (and will) be defended if they need it, and also to just share stories, food, and support.

Excerpt from **Stitching Together Other Worlds** by **Cindy Barukh Milstein** from **Constellations of Care: Anarcha-Feminism in Practice (2024)**

Context: *This article describes the relationship building that helped to frame the organizing against a speaking tour by Richard Spencer. Richard Spencer is a white nationalist who gained media attention in the 2010's as one of the figureheads of the Alt-Right. He was famously punched in the face by an anti-fascist during an interview on the day of Donald Trump's Inauguration in Washington DC. In 2018 he planned a speaking tour around college campuses, which was cancelled due to organizing from anti-fascists.*

Richard Spencer's cross-country speaking tour at US colleges was put to a screeching halt by thousands of "little" acts of antifascist care.

Of course, what the headlines will tell you is quite different: "Violence Erupts on MSU Campus as Richard Spencer Speaks"; "Fights Break out at Michigan State [University] as Protesters, White Supremacists Converge for Richard Spencer Speech." And alas, some of the more bro-ey antifascists among us who contributed to this wildly successful deplatforming effort would largely agree, pointing to the fighting the physical community self-defense as what did the trick on March 5, 2018. Not that throwing punches at a neo-Nazi, antisemitic conspiracy theorist, and white supremacist such as Spencer is bad or wrong; often it's strategically wise and tactically necessary. Fascism tends not to listen to "reasoned" arguments, contrary to what liberals like to believe.

But sometimes liberals, including progressive and social democratic ones, can be moved by compelling arguments to actively and consensually take direct action against fascism. And so when we heard Spencer's tour was slated to come to East Lansing, and anarchist(ic) folks knew that if we hoped to squash his mobilization, we needed large numbers of people far beyond our confederation of anarchist groups in a half-dozen Michigan cities—we spent months making those arguments in a form that might not be recognizable as such. We asserted, in deeds not words, solidarity and care.

That wasn't without some contention with our own anarchist circles. Strains of machismo maintained that "care" wasn't radical. That attitude, in turn, meant that some patriarchal behaviors crept in, elevating "defense" and those who prioritized it, while at times denying "solidarity" to those of us focusing on

communal care (though never doing so on the streets thankfully). Remarkably, however, we all understood the big picture-smashing fascism-and the necessity of outreach to build momentum and, on the big day, numbers. So ultimately, for and through this antifascist win, we all took care (double meaning intended!) to make it work, before, during, and after #StopSpencer.

This manifested in so many ways, it would be impossible to capture them all, and such tender direct actions of care are better lived than described. But a few examples should provide an idea.

Before: The collective I was part of, in the town with the most amount of organizing toward March 5, joined in a coalition among a wide range of political tendencies, with the majority of folks falling somewhere on the liberal spectrum, new to activism, never mind antifascism. Many had never been to a demonstration, or at least not one where the risk of heavily armed cops and fascists was so palpable. Our collective already had the trust of most activists in our town due to how we'd consistently shown up, and as the most imaginative, savvy, and welcoming of mischief makers. We put that trust to work, with patience and humility, first listening to why most people in the coalition were so hesitant to actually be present in person to #StopSpencer; second, really hearing and believing them, with empathy not annoyance; and finally, offering weeks of mentorship. Because when we listened, it came down to two reasons: not so much their liberal or social democratic sensibilities, as we'd thought, but fear and lack of experience. Through trainings, one-on-one conversations, and myriad other support, we gave them the knowledge, skills, and wisdom to feel empowered to be there on March 5, on whatever terms and by taking up whatever roles felt most consensual to them. The result was not simply that our city brought out the most people, and in affinity crews, but also that those folks felt as comfortable and prepared as one can when facing off with cops and fascists.

During: As we'd taught other affinity groups to do, my collective had spent hours ahead of time talking honestly about our fears and preferred levels of engagement at #StopSpencer. Based on that, we'd created layers of a buddy system, off-site meeting point, secure communication, jail support forms, and backup plans, among other things, plus we had agreed to arrive and leave together. And we did that over a fun evening of banner making and food in the warmth of a collective member's house, further nourishing our friendships and the deep culture of care among us. On the "battlefield" (in this case, a cornfield behind what's known as Moo U) that March 5, our bonds meant that we could simply look each other in the eye and know what needed to dynamically shift or who needed extra solidarity. All the care work put into building the #StopSpencer coalition and other statewide social relationships among organizers, though, meant that many of us-beyond our own affinity crews-could do the same. Time and again, through eye contact or body language, people aided others in calming down or stepping back when needed, or crews felt braver than anticipated

and moved closer to the front line with the complementary support of other affinity groups. In the heat and intensity of this real battle, communal defense was inseparable from communal care.

After: It wasn't planned, but in the week after #StopSpencer, we not only celebrated what was a victory on multiple levels—Spencer canceled his tour, some prominent fascist groups unraveled, no one was shot or killed by cops or white supremacists (a real worry), and we forged loads of new mutualistic infrastructure and projects, to name some. We also dived gratefully into one debrief after another, large and small, in public spaces and private ones. For even though we won, the tension and trauma of being so close to heavily armed cops and fascists still brought up big feelings. Three things stuck out during our debriefs. People were deeply committed to this form of aftercare, showing up as their whole, vulnerable selves with and for each other. Most of those who weren't or hadn't previously been anarchists before #StopSpencer credited us anarchists with supplying the care and solidarity they needed to find their own strength, allowing them to go further than they ever thought they could. And crucially, processing together works wonders.

Care works, including in the fight to hinder fascism.

Excerpt from Confidence. Courage. Connection. Trust: A proposal for security culture (2019)

Context: *This zine was written by an anonymous author who faced repression as a result of different struggles over many years. It was originally posted to North Shore Counter-Info, a counter information website based in Canada.*

When we talk about security culture, people tend to have one of two kinds of experiences. The first is of building walls and keeping people out, the second is of being excluded or mistrusted. Both of these come with negative feelings – fear and suspicion for the former and alienation and resentment for the latter. I would say that they are two sides of the same coin, two experiences of a security culture that isn't working well.

I want to be welcoming and open to new people in my organizing. I also want to protect myself as best I can from efforts to disrupt that organizing, especially from the state but also from bosses or the far-right. That means I want to have the kinds of security practices that allow me to be open while knowing that I've assessed the risk I face and am taking smart steps to minimize it. Security culture should make openness more possible, not less.

This proposal for security culture is based on reframing — on shifting our focus from fear to confidence, from risk-aversion to courage, from isolation to connection, and from suspicion to trust.

It makes sense to feel fear – the state is very powerful, repression is common, and it has the power to crush us and all our projects. But I don't want to stay in that fear, and with accurate information and good plans we can begin to transform fear into confidence, knowing we have security practices that are up to the risk we face. In fact, without transforming fear, it's hard to imagine how we could manage to take action at all in face of the power of our enemies.

I don't want to be risk-averse. I want to decide on my actions based on effectiveness, appropriateness, my analysis, and my ethics. Good security culture lays the groundwork for us to show courage in our tactics collectively, since we know we can handle the risk. When we don't transform risk-aversion, we self-police and stay narrowly in the space for symbolic opposition that is provided to us.

Repression functions by isolating people. I don't want to contribute to isolation through the things I do to keep myself and my friends safe. I want a security culture rooted in deepening our connection with each other. When we don't transform isolation, organizing can feel no different than work and

we don't build the kinds of relationships that truly transform us, such that we can begin to feel the world we wish to create.

I don't want to feel suspicion when I meet people, that's toxic and erodes the spaces of struggle we create. Rather than feel suspicious of someone, I want to ask myself "what would it take for me to trust this person?" I want to go towards people and try to transform suspicion into trust.

I would like to offer a definition of security culture to frame this conversation. Security culture refers to a set of practices developed to assess risks, control the flow of information through your networks, and to build solid organizing relationships. There are countless different possible security cultures, but the important thing is that they come from clear, explicit conversations about risk that are ongoing and respond to change. In the following example, the ongoing conversation about risk reacts to changes in our actions and in how we are being targeted. The various security culture practices mentioned will be explained further down

Before digging more into specific ideas and practices, I want to speak to a common objection people have to discussions of security culture in their organizing: "I'm not doing anything illegal so I don't need to think about security." This could come up in a more specific way, like "I'm not discussing anything sensitive, so I don't need to worry about it being surveilled," or "I'm not usually stopped at the border, so I don't need to worry about the stacks of anarchist journals in my car," but the underlying objection is the same.

The choice to repress or to disrupt organizing belongs only to the state – it doesn't necessarily have very much to do with the actions being criminalized. Personally, I have a number of criminal convictions, have spent about a year in jail, two years on house arrest, and something like five years on various kinds of conditions. All of these convictions are for routine organizing tasks that the state chose to target with repression for its own reasons. I was sentenced to eight months in jail for facilitating meetings and for writing and distributing a callout for a march in the context of a big summit; some years later, I was sentenced to a year for distributing a leaflet announcing a march and then being in attendance at the march. In both of these cases, there was property destruction during the demonstration, but I was never accused of it. Rather, the state chose to use conspiracy charges to target people doing visible, routine organizing of the kind I have done many times. Similar dynamics have played out in other conspiracy cases in both the US and Canada, my experience was not exceptional.

However, security culture is not only about resisting criminal charges. It's about preventing our activity from being disrupted. Criminal charges are a particular threat, but they're far from the only one.

During the big summit where I caught conspiracy charges, only two of the Joint Intelligence Group's (JIG) 16 undercover were involved in the case.

Other undercover agents changed passwords on websites and email addresses, directed buses to the wrong locations, stole medical supplies, spread harmful rumors to aggravate social conflict, and even attempted to entrap youth in a weird bomb plot. All of these police actions were immensely disruptive, without ever needing to rely on the power of the courts, and we will probably never have a full picture of their impact.

Security concerns are already integrated into much of the organizing we do. Building a security culture involves being explicit about assessment of risk beyond just specific actions and adopting clear practices designed to keep us safe and our actions effective across all the forms our organizing takes. Good security culture means doing this while emphasising strong connections, building trust, and feeling confident.

Here are a couple of general principles that underline security culture as I understand it.

The Two Nevers. These points are somewhat well-known, but also quite inadequate. Their most basic framing is “Never talk about your or someone else’s involvement in illegal activity. Never talk about someone else’s interest in illegal activity.”

The most obvious inadequacy is that a lot of what we do doesn’t involve obviously illegal stuff. We could reframe the Two Nevers like this: “Never talk about your or someone else’s involvement in activity that risks being criminalized. Never talk about someone else’s interest in criminalized activity.”

This is still inadequate, since we aren’t only concerned about criminal charges. But having a clear rule that is widely agreed on about not running your mouth about illegal stuff is a good idea no matter what space you’re in. This includes things we might feel are jokes — loose talk about fighting cops or attacking property might not seem harmless when entered into a snitch’s notes.

One of the most common reasons people become suspicious of someone is if that person is trying to take people off to one side to discuss illegal tactics. Rather than saying, “this person is a cop trying to entrap me”, we can reframe and say, “I need to clarify my understanding of security culture with this person if we are going to work together”. The rephrased version of the Two Nevers can be one simple way of doing that. It also reminds us to not try to figure out or speculate about who pulled off actions happening anonymously around us — that’s the cops’ job. If others ask about anonymous illegal actions, you can gently remind them the action was done anonymously, it doesn’t matter who did it, and it speaks for itself.

(A less recognized form of bad security culture is how callouts around security culture can reinforce negative power dynamics. We should absolutely talk to each other about interactions we have security concerns about, but

this should always be mutual and done privately when possible – describe what you heard, present your idea of security culture, ask if they think that's a reasonable boundary, be willing to hear them disagree. The goal is to build shared understandings to widen the range of organizing we can engage in together, not shut people down or make them feel ashamed (or to make ourselves seem more hardcore). An extreme form of this is snitch-jacketing, where people are falsely called a snitch, which can have huge consequences in peoples lives and were a part of eroding revolutionary movements in the 70's, but a smaller example could be a more 'experienced' person shutting down others in front of a group for talking about actions they found inspiring or for who they are talking to.)

Another point is to privilege face-to-face meetings. Regardless of the platform or how secure or insecure it is, we build better trust, stronger relationships, and come to better decisions when we take the time to meet in person. When electronic means of communication replace the face-to-face, our conversations are easier to surveil, misunderstandings come up more often, and they can be disrupted by decisions or problems at far-away companies. For all the uses of electronic communication in your organizing, ask yourself if it's replacing face-to-face meetings, and if it is, ask if it really needs to. Consider reducing your reliance on these things and begin trying to shift more conversations back to in person. (More on tech stuff in a bit...)

Repression is inevitable, or avoiding it at all costs isn't worthwhile. Regardless of the struggle, if it's taken far enough it will become a struggle against the police, those defenders of the world as it is. If we take as a starting point that we will avoid repression at all costs, then we will only use forms of struggle approved of by the police, which makes it pretty much impossible to build collective power capable of transformative change. If we don't accept these limitations, then we need to be prepared to face repression.

There are many different security culture practices that groups have experimented with and I'm not going to try to be exhaustive. Rather, I'd like to share a few that I and the people around me have had success with. These are... vouching, circles of trust, flexible organizing structures, and proactively addressing bad dynamics.

...

Vouching is a practice for bringing new people into an existing group or organizing space. Like our other practices, it is best when it is explicit and done consistently. The first step is to have a clear basis for trust within your group. Perhaps your basis is just that someone has politics compatible with yours and is reliable. Perhaps you need to know people are who they say they are, that they stay solid under pressure, that they have certain kinds of organizing experience, and are comfortable with certain kinds of action. Whatever it is, vouching involves one or more people introducing a new

person and stating explicitly that the person meets the basis for trust. Others present should explicitly accept or reject the vouch. Being explicit in this way avoids some of the risk of implicitly trusting people for superficial reasons, like for fitting certain subcultural norms or being read as having a certain identity.

Here's an example of a vouch: "I have known this person for five years. During that time, we've worked closely together on public projects and I trust them to have my back when things get tough. I went for dinner at their dad's house one time and I've picked them up from work frequently." Here's another example: "I met this person last year at a public event about climate change and we've seen each other around at environmental events regularly since. We've talked a lot about the issues and I like them a lot. I know they're looking to gain some experience organizing actions and I think they'd be a good fit with us."

An exception to being explicit about why you trust someone is that you shouldn't breach the Two Nevers. If you are organizing clandestine actions, bringing in new people or introducing crews to each other is tricky, and the concerns are different. Vouching is still a good idea, but you also don't want to increase risk for anyone by talking about past actions. Since there needs to be a strong basis of trust to be doing those actions in the first place, it could be possible to take a vouch on someone's word without details about specific activities.

Circles of trust are mostly for informal networks and affinity-based organizing (which, to be clear, is most of my organizing experience). It involves writing out the names of people in your network in a circle, and then drawing different kinds of lines between them to represent the kinds of relationships people have. A solid line could mean a strong, trusting relationship with a lot of capacity. A dashed line could mean some trust, and a dotted line means you don't know each other well. This collaborative process will reveal a lot about group dynamics and also show where there is work to be done in building more trust.

It might show that only one person has strong relationships with everyone and that other peoples' relationships are less solid. This means there is work to do in making that more balanced, which makes groups more resilient (in case that one person gets arrested or even just gets sick or burns out) and also more egalitarian, since the ability to initiate projects is tied to the amount of trust people have in the person initiating them. The exercise might also reveal that some people are trusted by no one. This shows that work needs to be done to get to know that person better and see if trust can be built there.

Ofentimes, infiltrators will first approach one community, then use the contacts from there to name drop their way into a different scene. Vouching and circles of trust are great defenses against this. But more than finding

hostile people, circles of trust encourages us to build strength in our networks by trying to turn as many of those dashed lines solid as we can.

Flexible organising structures refer to the ability of our organising to adapt to reflect the needs of various kinds of activity. The practice of informal, affinity-based organizing is one that has developed to respond specifically to this need. In an informal (as in, without a fixed form) network, individuals communicate about their ideas and intentions, and affinity groups form around a specific project or around a shared desire to intervene on a common basis. The strength here is that it's very easy to initiate projects of various risk levels with security culture practices adapted to each. As well, there is an element of need-to-know incorporated automatically, in that only those involved in the organizing know its details or who is involved, unless those people decide otherwise.

Similar flexibility can be incorporated into other organizing models. The key is to respect and legitimate individual initiative, by not for instance demanding that all activity pass through some sort of central body (this can happen as an unspoken norm in loosely structured activist groups as well, not just as a rule in groups with fixed decision-making process). As well, respect for voluntary association, meaning it's seen as normal for people to work together in smaller, chosen groups alongside larger, more open structures. In a formal way, this can look like the use of committees or working groups that have the ability to set their own standard for participation. It can also just look like being open to elements of affinity-based organizing as described above, or by being explicit about what kinds of information are need-to-know.

Finally, proactively addressing bad dynamics is just a good habit to have in general, but it's so important to security that it should be emphasized in every conversation about security culture. There are a lot of dynamics that erode trust and can make organizing harder. Bullying is one example. Another is oppressive behaviour rooted in patriarchy or white supremacy. Yet another is centralizing contacts and resources, which means only certain people can lead projects. Others might be shit talk, boasting, or poor security practices like violating the Two Nevers by asking about people's involvement in criminalized activity. Anyone who has been involved in an activist subculture for any amount of time won't have any trouble listing bad dynamics.

Like I said above when talking about complex and sensitive issues related to ID checks, our difficulty in dealing with bad dynamics and issues of oppression in our scenes creates a blind spot that police and intelligence agencies are increasingly aware of. I mentioned the cop who pretended to be a survivor to worm her way into peoples' lives (she was even brought in as a roommate to someone's house). Another undercover experience involved a cop who was a middle-aged brown guy who, when people would

talk about how he made them uncomfortable (notably for breaching the Two Nevers), he was able to deflect concerns by claiming they were being racist towards him. He found a group of anti-racist activists in a different community from the ones he was most targeting to back him, and he successfully resisted multiple efforts to expel him from organizing spaces. Ultimately, he went on to testify in a case that sent six people to jail. He doubtless experienced racism in our scenes, and this and his cynical manipulation of anti-racism should also cause us to examine the weakness of our anti-racist politics. Having clear politics about race, gender, and other oppressions (meaning that you are comfortable saying in detail what your analysis is around them and why) as well as practices of addressing those issues head on when they come up can make it less likely that plays like this will work.

There are many reasons why someone might be untrustworthy and many kinds of predatory behaviour that aren't being a secret cop. We don't usually need to be asking ourselves if people are cops. An example is Brandon Darby. In the text "Why Misogynists Make Great Informants", the authors make the point that people should have tried to do more to deal with Darby's awful sexist behaviour before he ever began cooperating with the FBI, ultimately entrapping several people. He is an extreme example, but it's very common in our scenes for people to be made uncomfortable by patriarchal behaviour from men. Sometimes people will develop suspicion towards those making them uncomfortable in those ways, and this is understandable, but it's a mistake to begin looking for infiltrators when there is sexism right before our eyes. Destructive behaviour is worth dealing with in its own right, and if it helps us avoid informants like Darby too, all the better.

A note on formal, mass-membership organizations. Such kinds of organizing are often very resistant to conversations about security culture, since these discourses are most common in forms of organizing that look different than what they aspire to. Security culture can sound like a more general critique of their organizing than a proposal for how to strengthen it. Some of the practices above might not apply to formal, mass-membership organizations, but I would argue that all the general principles do. In fact, I think if such organizations look closely at how they operate, they will see that security practices already exist.

All I would suggest is that explicit conversations about risk and security be incorporated into the different kinds of work such organizations take on, since they have different needs. Empowering committees to decide their own security practices and basis of unity is a great step, as is welcoming individual initiatives by members associating on the basis of affinity, meaning the organizing structure is flexible enough to accommodate different ways of organizing for different kinds of activity.

Excerpt from Revolutionary Echos From Syria: Conversations with Two Anarchists from Aleppo (2016)

Context: *The Syrian Revolution emerged amidst a series of uprisings commonly referred to as the Arab Spring that began in Tunisia in 2010 and included revolts in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, and many more places. The history of the uprising in Syria is too complex to explain here. It was repressed brutally and escalated into a civil war. This conversation details the speakers' experiences in the early parts of the uprising and the ensuing war.*

X: So at one moment the idea grew that there was a need for coordination, did I understand well what you said? Like at which moment this idea was growing and why and how this took form? Or is it too fast, maybe we are not yet at that point.

A: Ok, there were a lot of local coordination groups, and they made a good job at the beginning of the revolution, and were called ...

R: Local coordination committees.

A: Local coordination committees actually does not include the majority of coordination groups and they were trying to represent everybody. They put goals, and values to "protect" the revolution from going so radical with religion, or sectarianism.

X: When did this start to develop more or less?

A: It started from April onwards and they were trying to conjoin all the other coordination groups, virtually or physically but I don't believe that was something based on values or believes, I think it was a political step, for example this council declares a document which said clearly "the revolution seeking for equality for all people regardless religion, gender, nationality etc".

And there were a couple of groups inside the council who agreed on paper, but when it came to actions they did the opposite. After three months, in July, when the violence had risen, something new appeared, which was called..

R: The Syrian Revolution Committees.

A: These committees were controlled by the Brotherhood movement, not officially but under the table, this is how the Muslims Brotherhood works.

X: Syrian Revolution Committees, what was this?

A: It was the alternative of the Local Coordination Committees. Or it is not the alternative, it is like munafiz... competition.

R: Especially when they started to become weaker and weaker because the regime arrested a lot of activists from these committees, the local coordination committees. They were starting to shatter. So that gave the opportunity to the other committees to replace the work that had been done by the local coordination committees.

A: And these committees had good thoughts, good goals, good values. But they didn't give anything new, a new strategy for example for how we could resist as a civil movement*. After the struggle was becoming more complex, more and more and without any solutions, so people were seeking to find another political solution. So it was not just a matter of how the Brotherhood hacked this civil movement, there was a real problem that wasn't solved. So after that we got this phenomena "I can make a council and invite some friends". You know we started to be divided between a lot of groups who wanted to be the center of all these groups. But the main view is that we got two councils, the Syrian Revolution Council and the Local Coordination, local councils because they had a good relationship with the main media channels and other international organizations let's say they got a good support from a couple of factors. In July the politicians started organizing as well, the individual politicians organized and what happened next...

**"Civil movement" is the term used by large parts of revolutionary activists in Syria to indicate the popular movement, generally outside of political parties or existing political structures and unarmed. This term allows to distinguish between the "civil" movement and the "military" movement. The military movement will be formed later on, starting from local people who took up arms to defend the demonstrations against security forces. The terms "civil movement", "peaceful resistance" or "civil disobedience" do not seem to imply a total rejection of "violence" as one often understands in Europe. When Syrian revolutionary activists are using these concepts, they embody wild gatherings, massive demonstrations, sit-ins as well as riots, attacks with molotov cocktails, arsons against official buildings, burning barricades. Therefore the distinction seems to point out the difference between a "military" approach of revolution and a "popular" approach of revolution.*

R: Yes, the Syrian National Council I think this is how it is called.

X: The one that was outside of Syria?

A: It is inside and outside.

X: Like the official representation.

A: And this is very important because why do people choose to trust politicians instead of trusting the councils which were created during the revolution? People immediately stated to be so motivated about waiting "What's this guy going to do?" and "Who is this politician?". Most of them were educated, highly educated. The discussions in the revolution were about them and how they would make a solution for the whole situation, not what we will make. Our mission at that moment was to go on the street and to do the same thing as we did before. To go to the streets and say "freedom, freedom", get killed and go again. To come with bodies, I don't know how to say... funeral. Funeral, funeral.

R: We were stuck in a vicious circle kind of, and the reason why people trusted so many councils, so many groups over and over again was because they were looking for a way to get out of this circle, because we were really stuck. Well first of all we don't have any experience, any civil disobedience experience, any political experiences in order to have the tools to inflict change. So what we saw from other Arab revolutions, we did the same thing. But the thing is that the regime we have is very different. It wasn't going to wait you know "These people seem very determined to change the regime, so I'll just leave". No, it wasn't like this, we were faced with violence over and over again and it was actually increasing, not decreasing, with time. So we felt like we were doing the same things and we weren't getting any results. So every time when a group or especially when politicians came into the scene people felt like: "These are political prisoners, ex-political prisoners and they have a political record so maybe they know what to do, because these councils and these civil groups that are being formed don't really have a solution for what is going on". So this is really... People started to loose hope I think, at that time. So they became more willing to put their destiny into the hands of others, no matter who those persons were.

....

A: ...If we were focusing on Damascus instead of dividing our powers in the whole country and call for help.

People in Daraa they shout for: "Where are you Aleppo, where are you Damascus, where are you Tartus". And people made invitations through demonstrations. We imagined that the whole country should protest at the same time. And it was a really hard task. We were not organized enough, we had hard conditions, the regime was violent, so the goal we put in our imagination to protest in the main squares in the whole country at the same time, it was kind of dreamy and not realistic at all.

X: But, like just to make it a bit more clear. First we are talking about the mistake of centralizing the struggle and then we talk about how we all have

to go to Damascus. But this would also be a centralization of the struggle no?

A: Yeah, it is kind of centralized but it would be understandable, for me. If we destroy Damascus... Laughs. The whole regime would be destroyed. But the regime has no interest in Homs and it already destroyed it, but it will never do this in Damascus because it is the main point of power for the regime.

R: And there is something else because a lot of these demonstrations that were taking place across Syria, were taking place in areas which had no regime presence anymore. So people were just, it was becoming a tradition that every Friday or every day people would go in the street and demonstrate but nothing was going from there.

They weren't building on this, they were just repeating the same thing and what we are saying is if these people and all of us really came up with a plan to occupy a quiet city, a still city, like Damascus at the time, it would have cost, even if we didn't demonstrate if just a lot of people would go there because they weren't going to stop people from entering the city they don't know. If a huge number of people would have just gone there, they would have been just walking around the streets without doing anything. If we had just came up with other means of struggle, other than demos because either it wasn't working because people were just getting killed and then repeating the same thing over and over again, or it was already dead. I mean if we are demonstrating for the regime to leave this city to go somewhere else we've done this already so we aren't putting anything at risk, we are just repeating the same thing.

So instead of this we should have come up with a different way of fighting the regime, in its castle, in Damascus, or even in Aleppo if people would just go to a big city where we had a lot of problems of media coverage, it would be a shock to the regime because it would never imagine that cities, big cities like Aleppo or Damascus would revolt. But if people were demonstrating in small villages, in small cities that didn't have regime presence anymore, if they just had moved to another big city and they would there... Because first of all it would shock the regime and second of all other people would see. Because these people were really afraid, no one would go into the streets and demonstrate, they were sitting at home and they were hesitant to join or not to join, to support the regime or not.

But if they saw people in the streets, even if they are not from the same city as theirs, demonstrating they would see: "These are civilians", that they don't have arms. A lot of the regime's propaganda and lies would be uncovered because they would see with their own eyes what is going on. But we didn't, we were stuck in this, in this cycle.

A: Instead of blaming... Because we are stuck on blaming Aleppo and

Damascus. People just for example Homsian, this people of Homs blame a lot Aleppo: where are the people, where is the support of Aleppo. And that has enforced a couple of ideas about localized movement, and you are responsible for your city, if I am from Aleppo I am responsible for what will happen in Aleppo. So they don't consider me as a friend, as a comrade of this revolution, they will blame me for my failure to make this city move in solidarity with the other cities.

Instead of doing this, come to Aleppo and let's do something here. It is not my city, just forget these fucking ideas like my city, it's stupid, fucking cities, the whole country is for us, so let's... It is still these kind of walls like "I am from Aleppo and you are from Idlib, you...". And that enforces this idea and people were becoming so proud about "Ah, I am from Homs!". Also, about centralizing the struggle in Homs, my cousins, I have cousins they are not from Homs but they started to say: "I am from Homs." Laughs. Really, it's like that. We have a village that belongs to the Assad family which is called Alqerdaha, so anyone who wants to make an authority on people he will say I am from Alqerdaha and the other man would be very afraid of him. So it became like this. "I am from this village, in this village you know we are..."

R: Yes, it is a tribal mentality I think. No one felt like we had a common enemy and this would abolish all the walls we have, all the barriers and the sense of belonging to certain groups that have discrimination against another group. We always felt constrained by these affiliations. So this is, if we are talking about the civil struggle, the peaceful struggle at the beginning of the revolution this is what really was holding us back from getting to the next level, from innovating new means to fight the regime, new tools and not just to keep using the same ones when we saw that even if it had effect it was a little effect and it was very slow, it was slower than we imagined. Because the thing is that when we saw the Egyptian and the Tunisian revolutions we thought that it would be that easy: if we could just get to a square and occupy it and people would see that we were peaceful that we didn't have any weapons and that the regime keeps killing us and keeps bombing us and everything, the whole world would stand with us and the regime would be in such a shame that it would leave. But it wasn't like that.

Firstly it was very hard to do that and second of all this may have worked on a short term but as time progressed and violence escalated and we had never changed our tools... Because I don't think we knew what else to do. We didn't have any former experience in the matter to help get us out of this hole that we had dug ourselves into. Because we had this preconceived picture of what everything would be like and when the things that happened didn't meet our expectations, we didn't change anything.

And this is where I think everything started to collapse.

A: Yes, also when the Libyan revolution started and the NATO decision was adopted...Eum... The new flag rose in the name of the Syrian revolution, and it was not a decision of... You know they start people and one of them, we start with that talk like: "This flag, old flag, is the Arabian flag. Because it is the flag of the Arab united nation between Syria and Egypt, which was declared by Jamar Abdel Nasser, so it is not the Syrian flag, we should use the Syrian flag and this is a historical fact. We should change our flag". What a silly thing we were discussing, why did we put another struggle in this society.

R: Because we were failing and the...

A: Because we were thinking to generate the same thing as in Libya. Because the same thing happened in Libya, they had two flags, the green one and the old one. So we wanted to simulate the conditions and after one week we were seeking for NATO and we called this Friday...

R: Foreign intervention. Yes, after what happened in Libya, we started thinking that a foreign intervention in Syria was possible, before we didn't. And so we thought if we are failing on a local level maybe a foreign intervention could solve our problems. That the regime was too violent, too strong for us but maybe if... you know the western countries and America if they could come with their big drones and they would drop bombs and the regime would leave.

A: Laughs. Now we are seeking for, also in the demonstrations we are seeking for a help from the Islamic world, from the arab world, and we created such a thing like "Where are you, Muslims?". We made an official invitation for Muslims to come here and declare jihad.

R: Yeah and when they did...

A: And when they did, they said: "Fuck you Muslims. Get out of our country."

R: Yes and even when we're being subjugated under different names and with different types. When the Free Syrian Army entered the city of Aleppo* and people were starting to criticize its wrong doings and were saying that they are doing this, they are doing that and it's not good and that they should change their behavior, we tried to communicate with them and then people are stating: "And what are you doing, they are putting their lives at risk to save you and what are you...", so people started becoming like the lovers of other dictators, under other names but they returned to their old selves when they accepted that people would treat them in a... You know as slaves that don't have an opinion, that don't have freedom to decide. Just because... I don't know.

*At its starting point commanded by former officers of the regime and composed of several brigades, the FSA was formed in July 2011. They enter Aleppo on the 20th of July 2011, taking over the southern and western neighborhoods of the city. Battles with the army and its reinforcements (tanks, helicopters, airplanes) started from the 28th of July. From December 2012 onwards, the regular demonstrations start criticizing the Free Syrian Army and protest against its abuses.

A: Because: "They didn't take enough risk. They didn't risk their life. So you have no right if you are in safety."

R: Between brackets.

A: Yes, it became like this: if you have a gun and you fight the regime you have a right to make decisions, but if you are not holding these guns you should be so careful about your words and what you are saying about the Free Syrian Army. We should be kind of respectful about these guys, what they are doing, they risk their lives, so you should respect them. What I was talking about we should belong to each other and if they made something wrong we should say it to them: "You are making mistakes here". It doesn't mean we hate them or we don't respect them, it is not a matter of something personal between us, it is a matter of the whole country and the whole revolution. I belong to this revolution and I put risk to belong to this revolution. I don't need to prove my beliefs and to go and fight with guns, it is not your business to talk to me like this.

R: They were starting to create new classes. While at some point we were on the same level, we were all comrades in the revolution and we were all the same, then it became people who had arms, and people who didn't. People who demonstrated, people who made strikes, people who stood in solidarity with the revolution but never really did anything. But at some point we started becoming divided: the class of activists who were going to do I don't know what and the class of humanitarian workers and the class of the Free Syrian Army, and everyone has this persona generalized, like the Free Syrian Army shouldn't be criticized because they were doing this and this and the activists are doing that. And each group started developing these biases, the in-group bias favoring its own group and against other groups. These rumors started being created and every group started hating the others. I don't know.

A: We are talking about the collapse of the revolution now.

R: Yes, this is it. When we had a common struggle, a big common struggle that united us and we were fighting for it, when we felt that we were losing we started having these pitiful small things that we wanted to win. Like I am

an activist and I want to win this sort of thing, I want to prove that my group is better than the other group because we weren't really succeeding on a bigger level. So we started just inventing this conflicts between each other in order to feel that we are doing something, like the flag for example. It would never have been a conflict if we weren't really feeling like we are loosing.

A: Laughs. But it is fucking revolution, what the fuck are you talking about.

Excerpt From Interviews with 3 Members of FAUDA: The Anarchist Movement in Palestine (2023)

Context: *FAUDA is an anarchist group based in the West Bank.*

This interview was conducted In October 2023.

We reject large international organizations, because they ultimately always stand with or are passive to Israel. When Palestinian youths are assassinated by Zionist settlers or Israeli forces, or when Israeli warplanes bombard Gaza and kill defenseless people and civilians, international organizations do nothing. What is the point of simple words of condemnation? Israel brings whatever disaster it wants to the defenseless Palestinian people and organizations only express regret!

But we announce to all the anarchist and humanitarian groups of the world that we are ready to cooperate with them to be the voice of the oppressed Palestinian prisoners, we must help their families. Fascist Israel will imprison the father of a Palestinian family on trumped-up charges then the family has almost no income and becomes poor. That father stays in prison for several years and there is no one to help his family. We ask the freedom loving groups of the world to pay attention to this issue and help us in this direction.

In our opinion, every Palestinian can be on the path of resistance by declaring his disgust with the apartheid system of Israel. What does resistance mean? It means standing in front of the enemy with all the strength, initiative and creativity and not giving up on one's right. This is the philosophy of resistance and we follow it in the FAUDA movement. We have stated many times that a student, student, poet, teacher, painter, musician, composer and singer, media activist, seller, an armed fighter, etc., can all be popular resistance by declaring disgust and taking appropriate physical action. This is the basis of the movement FAUDA. Resistance must be popular resistance. We should not wait for foreign armies or foreign organizations to come and defend us. In this movement, we have started a path that all people can die for and stand against Israel's racist policies. Today, the

movement has entered an important period. We used to be a small movement. By the grace of God, today we are present all over Palestine and we are present and active in various news, cultural and social sections, in the month of Ramadan, and guerrilla sections and campaigns against the occupying Israeli police forces. This is our national and people's resistance, and people's resistance has shown in history that it always overcomes the oppressors of fascist regimes. The resistance throughout Palestine and even in the Syrian Golan Heights, where Israel has occupied it, is a uniform resistance and has one goal, and that is to expel the Zionists who have conquered our land and homes. Therefore, we should not look at Gaza and the West Bank from a separate point of view. But naturally, there are differences in the way of resistance and fighting model in different regions.

Excerpt from Indigenous Rooted Direct Action in No Spiritual Surrender: Indigenous Anarchy in Defense of the Sacred by Klee Benally (2023)

Context: *Klee Benally was a Diné (Navajo) musician, traditional dancer, artist, filmmaker, & Indigenous anarchist. Klee was originally from Black Mesa and worked nearly all of his life at the front lines in struggles to protect Indigenous sacred lands. Klee helped establish Táala Hooghan Infoshop, Protect the Peaks, and Outta Your Backpack Media. He died earlier this year shortly after this book was released.*

For more than two decades I've participated in and organized various types of actions, from prayer vigils, marches, banner drops, blockades, and brief and long-term occupations. All in a range of communities from occupied-Ohlone lands in so-called San Francisco to occupied-Piscataway lands in "Washington, DC," and in other parts of this world (particularly during the anti-globalization movement).

In the early 2000s I started conducting Direct Action (DA) training and strategy workshops with friends who comprised an affinity group. We built on skills from experience, working with other crews, and attending other workshops and training camps. We followed the theater of direct action activism and oriented others with the familiar formula: Form an affinity group (or join a coordinated one comprising of around 3–15 people), select tactics with the considerations of tone, escalation, risk, and timing, go over roles (arrestees, action support, legal observer, media support, police liaison), exercise possible scenarios, research possible charges and bail amounts, do the action, get a cite and release or get hauled to jail and either bailed out right away or released on your "own recognizance," do media, go to court, plea out, or get stuck with the charges and then do the whole thing over and over again. We found ourselves re-organizing entire campaigns because groups (some very well established) had no basic understanding of strategy. Their tactics were driving their strategies (which typically results in constant reactionary posture) and they were focused more on outputs than outcomes. They approached direct action as an institution (which has become quite the business) and treated it as a contingency plan when other appropriate means inevitably failed.

The activist institutionalization of direct action approaches it as theatrical tactics to fulfill an organizational strategy. But if direct action is only viewed as a set of tactics or a means, its most beautiful offering is neglected; it is both a means and an ends.

In its most raw definition, direct actions means that instead of getting

someone else to act for you like a politician or institution, you act for yourself. It can be applied individually, in small groupings like a couple of friends, families and collectives, and in larger communities.

As a well-established core principle of anarchism, direct action is also articulated as a way of life. Direct action, as unmediated expression of individual or collective desire, challenges the dependencies, dispossession, and alienation created by hierarchy.

The nature of direct action compels us to get at the root-cause of any problem we might be facing. As a principle it urges us to constantly dig deeper and ask, What do we get from this system that we cannot directly provide for ourselves? What ways can we direct our energy, individually and collectively, into efforts that have immediate impact in our lives and the lives of those around us? How can we live our lives unmediated by authority?

The more I've contemplated direct action, the more progressive activism becomes a repetitive deadening sound of flesh against brick as heads bang against walls expecting them to crumble (or to be allowed within them to have a "seat at the table"). Why do Indigenous organizers continue to mirror social justice "Nonviolent Direct Action" strategies and tactics centered on civil acts of disobedience that have largely remained the same since their development in the 1960s?

These outdated formulas communicate that it only matters if you are peaceful, you get arrested, and the media coverage is good. Why is it a point of veneration to subject more of our people to the police, court, and prison system (aka the carceral State)? Don't get me too wrong, I'm all for escalation, risk, and preparedness, but there has to be a good reason to submit to capture (unless it's really, really inconvenient for the pigs). I appreciate those who spend as much time thinking through and rehearsing arrest scenarios while also planning on getting away with it. Any strategy that begs politicians to enact change through mass arrest should be ferociously scrutinized. Perhaps it's branded as "direct action," but it's really just aggressive martyr/victim complex lobbying. In the context of liberal social and environmental justice organizing, Indigenous suffering (and death) is a tactical resource, we are valued as the dignified victims, objectified as the ecological, manifest; ripe for extraction (there's a good audience and packed house for this performance). Our mouths stuffed with carbon copy agendas and talking points. Our teleological agency is colonially circumscribed (even if it feels like we have set the terms. The spotlight feels good though, doesn't it?). The game of colonial activism is rigged. It plays a politics that no matter the side you're on, colonialism always wins. And so, why do we continue to play this game? Those that rule and profit from and through colonialism and capitalism will never be morally persuaded to make decisions to benefit anyone but themselves. Those that stand for the Earth and existence will always be in their way. This is an "absolute" that

continues to be written in the blood of Indigenous Peoples throughout the world.

How do we contend with the violences of settler colonial power?

Certainly not through strategies informed by logics and frameworks that reinforce it.

...

There are cultures of direct action that are informed by those establishing the theories, critical analysis, and most important by those who implement them. They've set the terms, which in many instances shape the over and underlying narratives, this is why an Indigenous-rooted direct action is necessary: If we have an end to any system of oppression without the conclusion being Indigenous liberation on these lands, it just amounts to a reorganization of our domination.

The organizing framework we utilize is based upon Diné iiná (our life/lifeways). So it goes beyond activist interventions and tactics and applies to how we live our lives. We start with Ké' (our relations/connection) and organize around the four primary directions that are situated within the cosmology bounded by our sacred mountains: Nitsáhakees (thinking, intention, prayer), Nahat'á (planning, coordination and logistics), liná (living our plan and intention, action, implementation), and Sihasin (outcomes, review, debrief). It is non-linear and so once an action is completed, the cycle can be renewed. There are lifetimes of teachings that relate to ceremonies and medicines within these teachings.

When we assert these contextual frameworks, we build on the understanding that action is our prayer when we live our lives in accordance with our beliefs, or our reverence with the sacred. This means we intimately operate with the spiritual dimensions of our fights as well as the material, emotional, and psychological. We affirm that our power is rooted within our mutuality with existence, with the sacred.

Indigenous-Rooted Direct Action means being a force of Nature.

...

Beyond Civil Disobedience

Do we wish to be civilly obedient to a settler colonial system established and maintained on genocidal and ecocidal violence? The matter of civil obedience might appear to be questioned in the famed assertion that, "What is legal is not synonymous with what is right." But that statement assumes an agreeable morality of and in settler colonialism, its liberal synonymizing reinforces the State. It is a rallying cry of settler inclusion.

The relationships of power that comprise what is “civil,” demand obedience. They demand tactics and a politics that confine them to be respectably included (what is called respectability politics in activist speak). Their escalations are a fervor not to undermine and abolish, but to be a part of the club.

If you’ve been to any direct action training, the first terms defined are “nonviolent direct action” (NVDA) and “civil disobedience” (CD). These terms establish a framework that has been in use since it was created in the 1960s by Christian civil rights activists. They intentionally built an implicit consensus around nonviolence and contrasted their tactics to those of the Black Panthers, AIM, Weather Underground, Symbionese Liberation Army, and other militant formations that sought to abolish the US empire.

In the last fifty plus years, very little has changed in this organizing framework that continues to shape strategies and tactics used by activists throughout the world. At their core they are temporary interventions in social and political power relations that appeal—through varying degrees of pressure—for justice to be bestowed by the State. This model is not only the status quo in social and environmental justice organizing, it is also embraced by the State and capitalists as it reinforces and reproduces their underlying relationships of power.

The NVDA position speaks through activist managers in a moral binary of violent (bad)/nonviolent (good). It fails (by design) to understand that violence exists on a spectrum (structural, lateral, direct, etc.). This binary fiction of violence/non-violence, which is the preferred fantasy of liberals, normalizes the State’s monopoly on violence in declarations of demonstrations and principles as nonviolent. It alienates radical possibilities and the militant legacies of anti-colonial struggle. The question of nonviolence and violence has never defined Indigenous resistance, it has always been a more practical consideration of, what works?

Outside of the historical movement parentheses, the limitations, failures, and underlying power relationships of these fights aren’t discussed and examined enough. This is due, in part, to the overall ways that direct action has been institutionalized by non-profit managers and self-imposed “allies.” The criticisms aren’t new, as anti-political analyses from the Earth and Animal Liberation Fronts, to Bash Back, to Conspiracy of Cells of Fire, and other militant strains of what can be called resistance have long pushed against the narrowly prescribed economy of action in the milieu of what is cynically dubbed The Struggle.TM

Outside the parenthetical containers of sanctioned struggle are voices that distance and denounce actions as violent or extreme. After all, the context of their notions of disobedience is confined to the civil. Their moralism constricts their lineage to nonviolent martyred icons that the State also embraces such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. It dissects the violence of

abolitionists slitting the throats of those holding whips and keys to cages. It delicately separates the disfigured entrails of bloody liberation movements and moments that have underscored how power is imposed and disposed of in this world. It declares a monopoly of social transformation that is steeped in its utopic colonial imaginary. The liberal philosophies and ideologies of struggle have colonized and commodified social transformation.

...

Indigenous warriors and warrior culture are perversely fetishized by the white historic gaze, yet the intensity and brutality of these complex resistances are sanitized for colonial consumption. ... I want to emphasize that for the duration of the "Indian Wars" and most all history of colonial invasion, Indigenous spiritual and physical resistance was regarded as illicit terrorism against civilization. Most (we had our scouts and collaborators for sure) of our ancestors weren't concerned with legitimacy of their tactics and their moral implications. Broadly speaking, spirit and the sacred were their frameworks for action and they responded how they could with whatever worked, outside the enclosures, or reservations of dissent sanctioned by their enemies.

The fascinating instability of ongoing Indigenous dissent and disobedience is in its contentions of legitimacy and criminality. The "criminalization of dissent" becomes an invitation to embrace the anti-settler criminality of our ancestors in order to overwhelm colonial society's abilities to function. There is no need for activism in a world where collective-and self-defense is a way of life. There is no need to stay enclosed on reservations of resistance. Settler civility should always be undermined and contended.

Excerpt from *The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions* by Larry Mitchell (1977)

Context: *The Faggots and their Friends* is a fairy tale, a fable, and a manifesto that emerged from the Gay Liberation movement in the 1970s. It takes place in a brutal empire in decline, where the faggots and their friends (the queens, the faeries, the women who love women, and others) are surviving the ways and the world of men.

The faggots cultivate the most obscure and outrageous parts of the past. They cultivate those past events which the men did not want to happen and which, once they did happen, they wanted to forget. These are the parts the faggots love the best. And they love them so much that they tell the old stories over and over and then they act them out and then, as the ultimate tribute, they allow their lives to re-create those obscure parts of the past. The pain of fallen women and the triumph of defeated women are constantly and lovingly made flesh again. The destruction of witty faggots and the militancy of beaten faggots are constantly and lovingly made flesh again. And so these parts of the past are never lost. They are imprinted in the bodies of the faggots where the men cannot go.

The men want everyone to remember and commemorate only their moments of victory and plentitude. The men hope that only they have such moments. So history becomes a chronicle of wars and brutality and state splendor. Art attempts to transform men's brutishness into men's benevolence. The faggots know better. They know that one man's victory means the defeat of others and that some men's plentitude means that others go hungry. The faggots refuse to celebrate the men's lies.

**'DOES THE END
JUSTIFY THE MEANS?'** this is
process, there is no end, there are only
means, each one
had better justify itself.
To whom?

Diane di Prima
Revolutionary Letter #26

