

PERSPECTIVES ON ANARCHIST THEORY

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INTRODUCTION

THE *PERSPECTIVES*
EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE

The organizing theme for this issue of *Perspectives* is “building a movement.”

It is for this idea that we called for articles, sought out writers, and set to work to put a new issue in your hands. As we compiled the material printed here, we began a discussion of the ideas represented. Can one really “build a movement?” And is “building” an appropriate metaphor anyway, with its implications of the use of tools, and tractors, and slow, steady (predictable) progress? Perhaps “creating a movement” would be better? “Creating” suggests a broader range of activities beyond the mechanical act of building, implying the use of imagination, and perhaps a variety of approaches, including the artistic, the written, and the confrontational. “Creative” could describe the actions of the black bloc in Seattle in 1999, as well as that of the costumed turtles and people locking down in intersections. But “creating” also has a fantastic connotation, as though it’s making something out of thin air, like magic. “On the count of three, I will pull this movement out of my hat!” Can you really create a movement? To what degree are we agents of change, and to what extent are we just part of the flow of history? How do we make a movement? Initiate a movement? How do movements grow? Just what is a movement, and how does it happen?

These are some of the questions we are grappling with, and they are really the unifying theme for this issue. In trying to answer these questions, we approached people that we knew who were also struggling with these problems. There is a good deal of local work going on, with people engaging with a variety of issues and reflecting upon that work.

Stating a commitment to creating a social movement indicates certain assumptions about how we translate theory into practice, choosing means that create ends through the process of doing them, linking resistance to prefiguration to revolution. A movement is collective, not individualized, requiring accountability and flexible adaptation to circumstance. It has goals of fundamental change—ideas about what kind of change, and ideas about how best to bring it about. It implies a positive intention, an orientation toward weaving new, functioning social relationships into sustainable structures.

Perhaps controversially to some anarchists, it also often means being engaged in political organizing in relation to various issues and institutions. But that may be what’s required in order to confront the realities of race, gender, sexuality, class, age and ability-based oppressions—not as abstract theories, but as real people’s experiences, in whatever combination and degree each one of us knows their effects. It means insurrection and revolution, but also the more mundane day-to-day work leading up to these kinds of exhilarating times and experiences. It means committing to doing the unglamorous work without the certainty of results. This leads to further questions about spontaneity and organization, and the relation between the two; about insurrection and institutionalization, and the relation

between these; about how much conscious revolutionaries contribute to the circumstances of revolution, and how much we simply react to larger historical forces totally beyond our control. (For Emma Goldman, anarchism was about making sure things don't get worse.)

Finally, movement building implies—and necessitates—an interest in creating horizontal alliances and, through action, repatterning webs of connection with communities beyond a scene or subculture—larger communities with whom we would be sharing the better world, and those others who have reason to object strongly to the current one. We offer this issue in this spirit, and only hope it can lead to some answers, and probably more questions.

We'd also like to call attention to the fact that this issue of *Perspectives* comes on several important anniversaries. May 4, 2011 was the 125th anniversary of the Haymarket Affair in Chicago, a controversial bombing which took place just as a rally for an eight-hour work day was drawing to a close. Although to this day no one knows who threw the bomb—which killed eight policemen and an unknown number of civilians, mostly from police bullets following the blast—eight prominent anarchists were arrested and charged with murder. Four were convicted and executed, and one committed suicide while in prison, although the prosecution admitted that none of the defendants threw the bomb. This event, commemorated around the world in May Day marches, is significant because it points to a time when anarchists were a potent social force. In Chicago, over 30,000 workers belonged to anarchist organizations, publishing newspapers in five different languages.

This is also the 75th anniversary of the Spanish Revolution, in which

anarchist ideas and practices were widespread throughout Spain, building up after 70 years of organizing unions and collectives.

These two anniversaries illustrate times in which anarchists were on the move, putting our admittedly lofty goals into practice. These were times when hundreds of thousands were moved by the anarchist vision, and worked hard day after day to make it a reality. These times should inspire us to again take up the struggle, to move out of our comfort zones, and to again move forward.

There is one more anniversary of note. 2011 is the 15th anniversary of the founding of the Institute for Anarchist Studies. In 1996, Chuck Morse gathered a small group of anti-authoritarian revolutionaries in his living room in upstate New York to initiate a new project called the Institute for Anarchist Studies, or IAS. The purpose of this new group was to raise money to give to writers striving to critique contemporary forms of social and political domination and propose visions of a truly free society. He felt the anarchist movement needed to better develop theory and ideas, and required the material means to do that, partly in the form of economic support for the writing process. At the time, the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation, with its continental paper and Spanish language Mexican edition, was thriving, and the successful shut-down of the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle was still three years in the future. Much has happened in the last fifteen years.

During its existence, the IAS has given out over \$60,000 to over 40 writers from over a dozen countries. Initially solely a grant-giving organization, over the last decade and a half,

the IAS has grown into additional pursuits. This journal became a substantive publication when the IAS newsletter merged with Morse's other project, the *New Formulation*, a publication dedicated to comparative book reviews. The Renewing the Anarchist Tradition (RAT) conference has been put on by the IAS for 10 years, initially in Vermont, and last year in Baltimore. The IAS has sponsored radical theory tracks at conferences such as the National Conference for Organized Resistance (NCOR) and Left Forum, as well as establishing a visible anti-authoritarian presence in conjunction with aligned groups at the US Social Forum held last year in Detroit. Most recently, we have collaborated with AK Press on a new book series called Anarchist Interventions, publishing board member Cindy Milstein's *Anarchism and Its Aspirations* and Andy Cornell's, *Oppose and Propose! Lessons from Movement for a New Society*. This Fall will see the release of the third title, board member and *Perspectives* collective member Maia Ramnath's *Decolonizing Anarchism: An Antiauthoritarian History of India's Liberation Struggle*, and next Spring will bring Javier Sethness-Castro's *Imperiled Life: Revolution against Climate Catastrophe*.

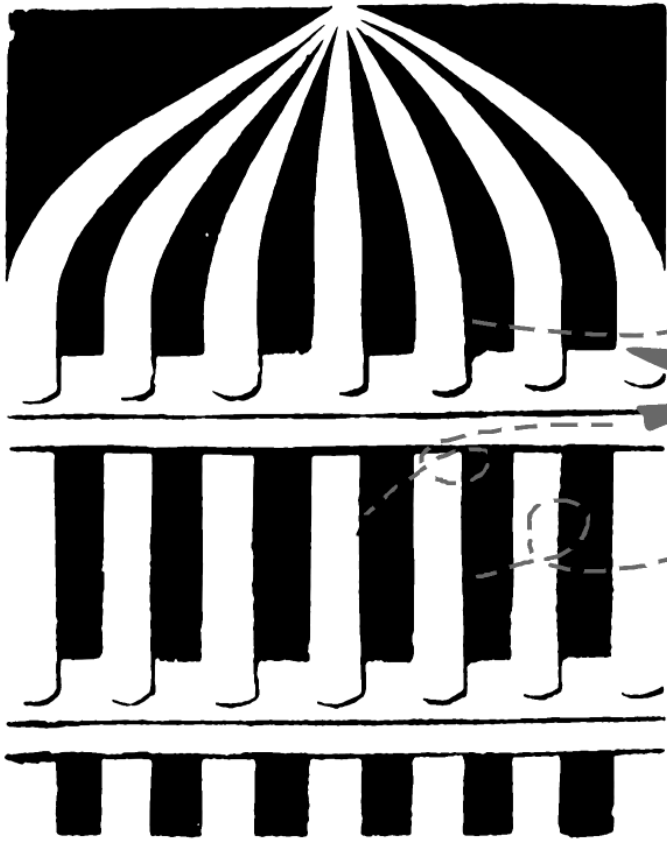
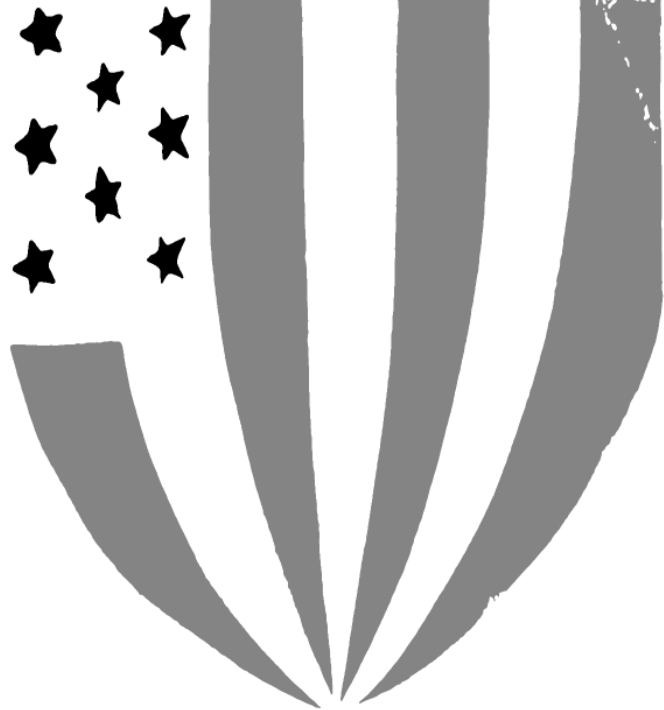
We are very excited about the future of the IAS, and the future of anarchism. We hope the essays, talks, interviews and reviews in this issue contribute to the creation of a vibrant revolutionary movement. Movement building (or creating, or growing, or crafting) does require going outside the anarchist comfort zone, which is not to say it requires abandoning, compromising or watering down our principles—a justification often given for NOT

working in broader groups and coalitions. But if available mobilizations about something we care about—such as housing and gentrification, immigration and borders, neoliberalization of education, prison abolition, or Palestine solidarity, for example—don't reflect our principles and don't satisfy our criteria of vision, strategy, tactic, and method...then what are the obstacles that prevent us from initiating mobilizations that DO?

At least we can start planting seeds. We in the IAS intend to continue to do this. We will continue to give grants to struggling writers to assist them in the writing process. We will continue to offer speakers to speak in your town, workplace, college or collective through our Mutual Aid Speakers Bureau. We will continue to publish books in the Anarchist Interventions book series with AK Press. We will continue to organize radical theory workshops at conferences and gatherings. And we will continue to publish *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory*, both in the form you hold in your hands, and on line, at our website: anarchist-theory.org.

-Maia, Lara, and Paul

You can contact us at: perspectivesmagazine@googlegroups.com



THE PANTHERS, THE BLACK LIBERATION ARMY AND THE STRUGGLE TO FREE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS AND PRISONERS OF WAR¹

ASHANTI OMOWALI
ALSTON

« Jericho

Josh MacPhee
2009

I want to get started off in a way that helps me get rid of the butterflies, and helps get us stirred as well. You know we always say, “Power to the People.” And usually the response back is, “*All Power to the People.*” If you don’t mind indulging me: “Power to the People!” (*audience response*) “All Power to the People!”

Second thing, to just take us back, again. There’s a little chant that goes along with a little march, that we used to do. I need your participation with it, if I may. It’s gonna go something like this: I’m gonna say, “Hold Your Head Up High, Panther’s Marching By. We Don’t Take No Jive.” When I say, “Sound Off,” you say, “Free the People!” Then at a certain point I’m gonna say, “Break it on down.” And you’re gonna say, “Free the People, Free the People, Free the People,” and then one loud one, “Free the People!” We got it? “Hold Your Head Up High, Panther’s Marching By. We Don’t Take No Jive, Got a Loaded .45. Sound Off!” (*audience*) “Free the People!” “Sound off!” “Free the People!” Right on!

Now imagine, in certain cities and certain towns where there were chapters, there were rank and file Panthers marching down the street. And here we are with this chant. It is performance, but it’s performance that’s really important. We are trying to show people that we are a disciplined force that is ready to

act. We are trying to show people that there is a new role for us to play. And here we are: we're the Black Panther Party. And it's not only about the .45, but not without it.

It was the organizing, it was the educating, it was being available to help people to figure out ways to resist that made the Black Panther Party what it became. You know, we did the best we could. I was young; Plainfield, New Jersey, small town. But hey, Plainfield had the same problems as every other town that had Black folks in 'em. We were treated bad. We stepped forward like so many other young folks—teenagers—in high school.

You gotta imagine what our parents thought. I didn't come up to them one day and say, "Mom and Pops, I'm joining the Black Panther Party." They just kind of noticed that I was hanging out with some *different people*, you know? And now I'm not sitting in front of the television anymore, watching the comedies, or whatever. I'm sitting up here reading Malcolm X's autobiography and *Malcolm X Speaks*, to the point where my father would actually get angry at me. Why is my head always stuck in this book? And sometimes he'd say, "Get out of the living room." And I'd be like, "OK, I guess I'll go outside and find my crew."

But it was where my head was at because I was a product of the '60s. A product that was, in every sense of the word, magical for so many of us. And when I tell people about the '60s, the thing I want them to get, as far as the Black community is concerned, is that we came alive as no other generation in this country since we were kidnapped and brought here 400 years before. We had been brainwashed, whipped, beat down, denied; everything that had

trained us to not think of any possibility that things could be different than what white supremacy had laid down for us. But now here's the '60s and the '60s is telling us, "You can be everything." But specifically, "Black is Beautiful! Africa is our roots. And be proud of it."

We had just come from a generation, and all them generations that just accepted that niggers ain't shit. Niggers will never organize, will never get it together. You'll never do it. Now all of a sudden, there's something capturing us, there's something in the air. They're saying Black Power, that's tying us into struggles not only in Africa, but in Asia, Latin America, and right here within the United States because the Civil Rights movement was in its upswing. The Native American struggles were coming up, the Puerto Rican struggles, the Chicano struggles, the anti-war movement, the women's movement: it was *in the air*.

So why not little thirteen-, fourteen-, fifteen-year-old Ashanti (known as Michael at the time), you know? Why not get involved? Just like any other, I want to know *what I can do*. And I don't think I was any different from a Palestinian teenager, who is answering those questions right now, in occupied Palestine. I saw what the Civil Rights movement was doing, and respected it. But when I seen those Panthers, and when my best friend Jihad saw those Panthers; their magazine had a particular cover that had Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale on the cover: black berets, black leather jackets, powder blue shirt, all down to the combat boots and weapons—one on the side and one in the hand—we knew right then and there we wanted to find out about *them*. And then to find out that they organized survival programs, and

they had liberation schools, where they were actually teaching Black people how to defend themselves cause they said it was *our right*. Going contrary to all the things we were seeing on television where the white reaction in the south was brutalizing Black people down there; killing folks, not only Black folks, but even white activists who was coming down there to help, in solidarity. Disappearing them. And then maybe finding them years later, and I'm sure there's a lot of other bodies that are still in swamps somewhere.

You know, but still, we're coming in. Seeing all this didn't frighten us or discourage us, it made us want to step up *more*. So now we are learning; Panthers from New York and Newark, different places, are coming to Plainfield to show us what it means to be a Panther. And the first thing we was hoping to get, or get close to, was the guns! But just like the other comrades, they shared the stories that the things we get is not the physical guns, but we get the books, which was the guns that we were first given; placed in our hands, *we're gonna read!* Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Mao Tse-Tung's *Quotations*, everybody had a Red Book, W.E.B. Du Bois, Robert Williams' *Negroes With Guns*: We are reading! And many, like me, didn't like to read at all because of what school has done to us. I didn't like to read. But you inspired now. There's something in you that's different now, and you want to know. I want to know everything about Africa; I want to know everything about Du Bois; I want to know all this stuff. So yeah, I'm reading now.

We got study groups: here is Black folks sitting together, in study circles, helping each other learn. Here we are now learning how to go out in the

community and help tenants figure out ways to resist all the stuff that landlords do. Here we are now trying to show people how to fight back against these racist, killer police. Heavy duty. And I'm telling you when we first stepped out in our community, people did not trust us. Because like me, and others, we were called lumpen, and a lot of us were. A lot of us were into a little hustle, maybe gangs, but nothing like the gangs now. But me, I was on the border between wanting to be a burglar and a revolutionary. And actually, later on, kind of combined both of them.

But the Panthers showed us that revolution involved engaging your community and organizing them. Helping to give them a sense of hope, that we could change our circumstances. And to know that we were doing it in concert with all these other communities and movements was heavy.

I did not like white folks. I was a stone nationalist. Didn't want to work with 'em. And it was the Panthers that helped to kinda broaden my perspective on that, you know, you can't be hating all men 'cause they're white. You know, you might not want to deal with them because of what they do, but if you got a white revolutionary that's here to support you and to be your ally, you can embrace him or her. And even moving into that grudgingly, I learned to relax and accept white folks. Plainfield did not encourage that because it's a very racist place. But we're seeing a very different kind of revolution, especially for a revolutionary nationalist group. It was heavy.

Gradually, the community started to support us. The back and forth between our desire to break a certain hypnosis, and a certain psychosis, around being a victim in society to

learning that you can be free individuals, and actually start to love each other, was powerful. But the government—of course, this is not a loving society, it's a very death-oriented society, a very hateful society—don't stand for that. No group that has been kept systematically on the bottom of the society is going to be allowed to come from the bottom of that society. You ain't disturbing nothin.' The history of this country says so. We understood: 500-Year War. This is 500 years of continuation. No break. From when the Europeans first came here and did what they did: Christopher Columbus and all of them. We understood that it's a liberation *war*. No different from the Du Bois, no different from the Indigenous Nations fightin' for sovereignty. No different than the Vietnamese fighting to get the United States out of their country. We said, "The United States out of the Ghettos!" That may have been where they confined us. But then we began to look at the ghettos as, "You got us here, now it's ours! You get out." And we're gonna take over the institutions, the voice of Malcolm X. Take 'em over. We became revolutionaries, but we understood we are up against a monster that will kill us without a blink of an eye.

Huey P. Newton had already been in jail. They were trying to frame him for the cop that got killed. Bobby Seale was being framed for murder, him and Erika Huggins, in New Haven, Connecticut. Fred Hampton had got killed, and Mark Clark, in 1969. *We understood*, but it didn't stop us. As we read, we organized. As we read, we fought. That's praxis. That's putting it right into practice. We are developing as we go. We don't have to wait to have no developed ideology, don't have to wait to have all the answers; we figure it out

as we go. Because our situation is that bad. We don't have the luxury of sitting back and doing all sorts of fanciful ideological positions: we'll figure it out as we go. But we took hits.

My first hit, and Jihad's first hit, was when a cop got killed in my hometown. So what do they do? They get the two main organizers, and they blame it on them, me and Jihad; seventeen years old, seniors in high school. They know we didn't do it. They know that. They know Mumia didn't kill a cop. They know that. It's not a question of innocent or guilty. They know what they're doing: break the potential of this becoming a solid movement in Plainfield, New Jersey. Get Michael and David off the streets. Fourteen months; the last four months was the trial. If it wasn't for the fact that we had good lawyers, no telling. I never say that we would have been on Death Row, or we would have been in prison for life. My thing is we would have found a way to get out of there. Because even during that fourteen months, we was on a hack saw blade, cutting this window, trying to get out even before the jury got the case. Seventeen! Because we understood, we are warriors, at war. No if, ands, and buts. White jury came back with a "not guilty" verdict. Lawyers were able to show, classic frame up. We're out. We're back in the ranks. New York and New Jersey chapters are under heavy attack: FBI forces, local police departments, they're losing numbers, the government, the media, police forces were very successful at isolating us from our communities. They were very successful: calling us thugs, murderers, or just by terrorizing people we were dealing with.

I was back and forth between the New York and the Plainfield chapter. The free breakfast program in New

York had always been very successful, in Harlem. The Harlem chapter program—every day, feeding the children. One day, some of the children get sick. And all of a sudden some of the parents start pulling their children out. We find out years later through the COINTELPRO papers that the police poisoned the fruit. So that's why they pulled the children out. It's no big deal what they're going to go through because they are that cold blooded. They're not going to let anybody come in and mess this thing up. Gotta kill you, kill you. Gotta discourage people from coming to you, gotta discourage them. Right? But they were good. We get isolated, then one day, they have charges against us and they pick us up, people not quick to come to our support. They had Panthers who were part of the Black Liberation Army, who were locked up in the Manhattan House of Detention. They are political prisoners. They're being charged with an ambush in New York and an ambush out in San Francisco. It's actually the San Francisco Eight case. Here I am, nineteen years old. And I'm approached by one of the members of the Panther Party, who asks me, would I become a member of a cell, the Black Liberation Army.

My partner at the time was pregnant. I have to think now, what am I going to do? I want to be around for this child. Daddy. I don't know nothing about being a daddy for real at nineteen. But just the idea, you know? But also, I want to win this revolution. So my decision is, goin' under. Maybe I won't be around for the victory, cause we still thought it was right around the corner. But maybe the child will come into a free world.

Alright, so here I am, I come back to the Sister and I'm like, "You got me,

and you got one of my comrades, who's a year younger than me. We are here. We were waiting. It is an honor to join the ranks of the Black Liberation Army." I'm proud of it to this day, and actually my children are too, and I'm happy about that. But the thing is we went to get these political prisoners out of the Manhattan House of Detention.

I'm bringing this up for a reason. *To be free*, you have to be a little crazy. Harriet Tubman back and forth, how many times? She's gotta be a little crazy. Nat Turner: little crazy. All those movements that gotta face the viciousness of white supremacy, you gotta be a little crazy. You ain't gonna be free otherwise, by doing things so careful, and so convenient. You know, you wanna be free, it's the same thing if you want to learn something, you gotta be a little daring with the material you pick up and read. 'Cause it may change your whole life.

So here we are. Manhattan House of Detention is just concrete, steel, buildings. The Manhattan area, the Federal Building is down there, immigration, police, all around. But here's the Black Liberation Army. We are no different from them Vietnamese guerrillas, up against the United States. American imperialism is a paper tiger. We read Frantz Fanon. And we learned from Frantz Fanon that if you can look your enemy in the eye, that fear will drop. Break the fear, and you'll see that they're not invincible. It's our fear of them that keeps them in power. So here we go. They're on trial every day. We're allowed to bring 'em food. Take the food to the jail, we give the bag to the police, he goes through it, gives it to the prisoners. But on one particular day, when we put that bag on the table, we don't let the police go through the bag. We open it up, and we pull

out the guns. We take them guards, we put them in the bathroom. And I always verify to say this, we handcuff them to the toilets. Because that's the job that they do. Their attitude, I say this because of their attitude, *to be free*—attitude is very important. You gotta believe it. You cannot have fear of these people.

So here they go, we're off to the second floor, to the visiting room; a solid wall of steel, windows, telephones. No contact. Got the bag with us. Next thing that comes out of the bag is an acetylene torch, and I proceed to cut. I wasn't supposed to be the one to cut, it was supposed to be someone else who was a professional, who couldn't make it at the time. Somebody had to do it. I gave myself a crash course, I did the best I could. I'm cutting. The prisoners on the other side have taken care of the guards. The visitors on the other side are just regular people, they watchin' me, but this is New York, ain't nobody, you know, I'm cutting. But if I was experienced, I could'a been zip, zip, zip, push it out, you all come on. And I'm sure some of them other prisoners would have come out too. But it took me a long time, to the point where I had two inches to go, and the tank ran out. And that's the thing that really cuts into the metal when you got that flame on it. So then I got to look at the political prisoners, and I got to look at my comrades, you know, and you got to make a decision, we gotta go! We gotta go. It was hard for me for two reasons. One, we're not getting 'em out. Two, two of the women in our cell, it was their partners behind that wall too. And their families was waiting, we had them, somewhere else. And we was all gonna hook up after we got everybody out. So quickly, we gotta go. You turn to your comrades,

"Power to the People. We out." They understood. We're gone.

Next thing you know, my family jokes about it to this day, usually when I disappear, they just gotta turn on the news, you know. So they turn on the news, and here's the thing about the Manhattan House of Detention: there's their son's picture. Alright, we know where Michael is. Or we know where he *was*. In the course of other things, bank expropriations, in New Haven, Connecticut. Now, I did not say robbery, 'cause we're revolutionaries; we don't commit crime. But we will go after them banks' money, 'cause that's blood money. We will fund the revolution. We will hit drug dealers. We will hit banks. We will hit insurance companies. We will hit armored cars. *We are at war!* And that's certainly what we did. But doing this bank expropriation in New Haven, Connecticut, Wild West shoot out, three of us are captured, I'm one of them. First day in court, we tell them, you have no right to even try us: we are soldiers of the Black Liberation Army. We ain't in here for no justice. We're soldiers. We ain't askin' for nothin.' We know what the deal is gonna be. This is a firefight. They had guns, we had guns. We are prisoners of war, at this point. When they is tryin' to frame us, we was political prisoners. With this, we're prisoners of war. That type of action, and others; many of the political prisoners that Jericho represents: Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin, Albert Nuh Washington, and a whole bunch of others out of the Black Liberation Army. And we represent folks from the Weather Underground, who placed bombs in a lot of places. We make no ifs, ands, and buts about it: we are at war. This is revolution; we want to bring this Empire, as George

Jackson says, to its knees. No ifs and buts. But here we are.

We didn't get a lot of support. The Left backed up from us. They called us "infantile Leftists." They used every Marxist expression they could find. You know, the liberals, of course, are not going to touch us. But they terrified our communities. So they were scared. And it wasn't but maybe the nationalist groups, or the really solid white supporters, who stuck with us. We didn't make it out of them jails, but boy did we try. We tried. Got sentenced to 45 years. Here I am off to Wisconsin. Next thing, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. Next thing, Marion, Illinois. Then Lompac, California. Then I gotta come back to Connecticut. But they moved us around like that, they would not allow us to be anybody in the same place, together. At one point there were so many of us, we had collectives: Panthers, BLA, Weather Underground, Puerto Rican *Independentistas*: we're fighting, we're organizing inside. Trying to figure out ways to get out. These are many of the individuals who Jericho represent. 'Cause we come out of liberation movements here, that operate out of that 500-year war understanding that this system is not able to reform or do anything humane. Our freedom, and its death, go together. Fear. But we don't get a lot of support.

To this day, we don't get money; foundations don't give us money. People in community don't even know who we are. That's the deal. Why? Because this system was very effective in not only putting down resistance, but giving people so many diversions that encourage them to forget about that. And many parents, neighbors, family, friends, communities, for the sake of survival, and not endangering their

families and children, didn't talk about it. Other communities, it's part of what they do; you pass the stories on. Ours didn't do it.

People don't know about us today. I get out of prison, first time I get out is '85, I go to New Haven, Connecticut, I ask a high school student, "What do you know about the Black Panther Party?" He asks me, "Was it a martial arts group?" Eleven years! How did that happen? Because the system is good at reconquest. The '60s shook 'em up. We shook 'em up. Even for a minute. It was good. Even for a minute. But they got it together very quickly too. And they know what to do. You see what they do in Iraq, you know? Knock all that stuff down, put American ideology in there, from prostitution to all the other bullshit about this fake democracy.

But they did it in our communities, when they destroyed Panthers and other groups, they flooded our communities with drugs and guns. Culturally, just dealing with television and movies, blackploitation movies. Turn on the television, you get comedy and athletes. Who are the spokespersons now? Integrationists, people that's into Black capitalism; you don't hear our voices no more, you don't hear Angela Davis, you don't hear Huey P. Newton, Eldridge Cleaver. You hear people who are trying to fit in. 'Cause in this new neo-colonial situation, you gotta get those who are willing to be Uncle Toms, so that potential resistance is quelled, quickly, even before it starts.

So the end of the '80s, there's nothing, going into the '90s. Nothing. And it wasn't until the Panther movie comes out that people start to ask questions. And then begin to find out there's still Panthers. Geronimo Pratt is still in.² All these other people are still in from

the Weather Underground. Then people start asking questions.

But then 9/11 happens. So then we get knocked back again. People don't even want to ask about it. They don't even want to bring up the topic, because of all the hyper-patriotism that's going on. But our fighters, our revolutionaries, our organizers, our thinkers are still behind walls. And now some of them are dying. I went in with them. We was all there in the '70s, I mean we were in the same places together, we made a commitment to each other, like, "Ashanti, you got parole," I'm like, "Yeah, OK man."

You know, the thing is, I get out, I work for them, to help get them out. And even back then it was still, "We'll get you out by any means necessary, whatever works." You know, but things had changed. You just can't be on the corners anymore and talk about revolution, and brother and sister would be like, "Yo, what you want me to do?" Then it's like people are like, "Yo, what, you from that period? I thought all you was dead." Different, but it hurts. Now you gotta figure out how to get that attention again.

And I'm telling you the truth, we haven't figured that out. We still haven't. Because the power of the dollar bill, the power of American cultural capitalism, is great: "Get Rich or Die Tryin'." And they're even trying to push the Black Republicans. They continue to bombard our communities, and they do this to other people of color communities, other poor communities, and people in general: keep them in sync, keep them in line, so their minds don't go to revolution, rebellion, insurgency. Do it.

But we show the possibilities. Even when it seems like they got us, here comes something happening,

here comes Seattle, then here comes the Zapatistas, and then all these other incidents where people from nowhere, seemingly...they uprise. And sometimes in very creative ways, and lots of different ways to organize. So I look at 'em, and I'm like, "OK, I don't have to be depressed. We can still do this. If one person fights back, we can do this. If one person still dreams, we can do this."

But we gotta get to them political prisoners. It's hard. When you gotta go visit them. You want to lie to them, and say, "Hey man, I think they got us." But when you don't have to, you can tell them, "Yeah man, I know we haven't quite pulled it together yet, but people are fighting back. They're fighting back." And they say, "Well listen, just figure out ways that involve us." Some of them can come to terms with dying inside, as long as they know that we're carrying it on, out here, and have not forgotten them.

They know it's tough, because what goes on in the prison is a microcosm of what goes on out here. It's a microcosm. They just want us to remember them. They want to be free. They would love to be free. But we know on the outside, and they know too from the Panther days in the '60s, that power is really with the people. It's with the people.

It's one of the reasons why I increasingly became an anarchist. Because I want power to the people where it *stays* with the people. Everything is with the people. And not just you say that, and then after all is said and done, you got a small clique of people who are really calling the shots. I want to figure out how to make a Zapatista-style revolution here in the United States, that brings all of us into this picture *how we are*, not erasing who we are. But also

respecting all of our ways of fighting back. But I know that ultimately to get them political prisoners out; from Earth Liberation Front, Animal Liberation Front, to the MOVE 9, to Marilyn Buck³, David Gilbert, all the Panthers, and others in prison: it's got to come from us! It's got to come from us in a way that poses a political consequence to this system if they don't free Mumia; if they don't give medical attention to Seth Hayes. We got to be that fist that says, "If you don't, other things may well happen." Now that's not necessarily nice. It's just like when Rob Los Ricos spoke, and Jeff Luers—and I got to tell you, I'm very proud of you all, I'm very proud of you—but they bring up just how murderous this system is.

There's a sense of urgency here, you know, and we can't take it lightly. All of our lives are on the line, all of them. Indigenous Nations say, "Think of the next seven generations." We gotta do that, and we also gotta think about those who've been in prison for the last thirty, forty years. 'Cause if we get them, we are bringing not only them, but whose shoulders they stood on. So we're bringing the ancestors, and the children who are yet to be born, into our scope, knowing that there's nothing this system can do for us. Nothing. Not a solid thing. Unless we make them. And we're making them only until we can finally get ourselves in the position to, as we used to say in the '60s also, a blade in the throat of fascism. I hate to get graphic. But, when you feel the pain, that's what you want. When Kent Ford tells me about his son, Patrice Lumumba, I feel the pain, you know, in him. Oh man, they snatched up another one of our children. Can't theorize about it too much. You can't just be on the, you want the correct political

position. We gotta figure out how to get his son home. Guilty, innocent, don't matter to me. Mumia, guilty or innocent, don't matter to me. It matters *what we do*.

The best things that have been happening in terms of political prisoners is that groups that had really not been working together, maybe really saw no reason, have begun to work together: the liberation movements and the animal and the Earth movements. 'Cause many of us in the liberation movements look at the animal movements in the way that the media projects you, that you're all these young white kids, with these funny looks, and you're huggin' trees, and you're throwing red paint on people with fur coats, and we're like, "Why do we want to mess with them?" Until you are in situations where you may be able to talk. Which I was. Daniel McGowan, Andy Stepanian, and people around the SHAC, I'm from New York. And then I got to step back and say, "Oh, that's what you're about. Now I get it." You go to one of the conferences and you see these documentaries on what they do to the animals, and you think, "Boy, Man is a motherfucker. A motherfucker." The same ones that did this to us, Africans. And they enslaved the indigenous folks too: enslaved them, lynched them. Even the Italians, and the Irish, everybody almost had a taste of this lynching, being treated bad. But it's when you see this, you gotta see how you can change this thing, get rid of it.

It's that we gave it our best, in the '60s. Some of them have been in there, the same as your age right now. You can't do it without having them in your plans. You gotta put them on your agenda. You got to. They are our Mandelas. And I said to one of them

a couple of months ago, they're "even better than Mandela." At least Nelson Mandela. I go with Winnie. You know, in many ways, Nelson walked them into neo-liberalism. I'm telling you that our political prisoners still want a revolution. We gotta get 'em.

So whatever your issues are: Earth, animals, and like the indigenous folks say, "I'm talking about the two-legged, the rock people, the wing people"; that's how the indigenous folks talk, I love it. I love it because it's picturesque. Deep down, we're all very picturesque, and when we get Western, we get very clinical. We take the color out of life. When we think that way then we can decenter "Man" and begin to see ourselves as part of all these living systems again and begin to figure out how to change these oppressive dynamics that we're a part of. I look at the New York City skyline and I'm like, "Man, I would love to see that thing go." Industrialism, industrialization, we see what it has done.

Also, when the movements interact, we not only really learn about each other, for the first time, but we get to share visions. And sometimes, your vision gets enriched by the other people's visions, 'cause it's things you didn't think about. From the Feminist movement, you know, men, we've lead the movements for so long, but what happens when the women say, "Stop it, hold it, no more." And then you have to enrich your vision 'cause you have historically left women out. And the first time I read queer theory, it shook me up when one of my best friends, who was queer, brought up to me that I made a very fucked up statement about queer people. So she gave me a book, *Queer Theory*; real quick: I'm on the subway, New York City—I love the subways, I do most of my reading on the subways.

Yeah, I got the book *Queer Theory*. I'm sitting down, but I kinda hold the book down, I mean I still got my macho shit, right? So I don't want people to see that I've got a book that says *Queer Theory*; they might think I'm queer. As I'm struggling with this, I am internally going through this process. Until I get like, "What the fuck am I doin'? Read the book! Like you normally read it." And so in reading it, I'm also challenging myself in terms of my perspective, 'cause queer theory is telling me something about identity, different lifestyles, and what historical forces have done, and what capitalism does, more than just exploit a class. It ruins people for all kinds of different reasons. So now my vision of the world changes more. It becomes more inclusive, a lot more lifestyles, than I had, maybe in the '60s.

And that's always the challenge, when you meet these political prisoners and you start talking to them, they open your mind up to a reality that you probably didn't know. And I'm not talking about the reality of the prisons, you probably learned about that if you ever go visit. But when they start telling you their stories about their people's struggles, then you have to begin to include that in who you are, if we're going to make this revolution work. So like the Zapatistas say, "We can make a world with many worlds that exist," but that starts with where we are right now, including folks who have historically been left out. From the voices of women to the bodies of prisoners, and especially political prisoners. So figure out ways to put them into what you do. Just today, I sat down and wrote Patrice Lumumba. I said yesterday I was gonna do it, and Paulette knows me writing letters to the political prisoners, I ain't that good at it. But I just felt ya yesterday, and I'm

like, “Oh my god, that could be my son.” You know, I got to write him a letter, ’cause sometimes, that’s all it calls for. And when it calls for something like just writing a letter, or the political prisoners say, “Call this number, ’cause they’re treating me like this, I need a doctor.” That may be all they’re asking us to do, and we should be jumping on that like...ice cream. Vegan ice cream! I want you to feel, I am, I’m playful and I’m optimistic. I am that way because you stay optimistic, you do things that give me a reason to go on, ’cause it’s been rough. I will not let this Empire have the pleasure of having a victory over me.

So. Rob Los Ricos is out, Jeff Luers is out, Tre is out. All three of them, actually, I have seen for the first time. I knew all about ’em, because others in their movements and us started collaborating. And I’m like, “Oh man, that’s who they are, that’s what they did, right on. Right on. Right on.” We can do this together.

We can figure out how we can do it together in ways that respect who we are, and in ways that enrich our vision, so that we can get the world—or worlds, many worlds exist—that we deserve! We deserve the best. We deserve it. Empire down. Down, down, down. And then, we can have a party where we’re dancing on it, you know what I’m saying? We can do that.

So let’s get ready, by doing it in ways that we really do enjoy each other, but we also know that we gotta be loving, we gotta be nurturing, we gotta be understanding, because it’s *hard*. Lot of wear and tear. And they’re going to hit us. But we’re going to develop to the point where we can hit them back.

And the last thing, there’s an anarchist saying that says, “It’s not so

much about overthrowing the government, it’s really about us pulling out and creating our own world so that the government gets lost in the shuffle.” Because really it’s our energy, and I think Rob was saying that too, it’s our energy, that really keeps them going. Let’s stop giving it to them, let’s start giving it to each other. The ’60s taught us that. Let’s do this people, we are together. We are the people. Right on. Power to the People! (*audience response*) “All Power to the People!”

NOTES

- 1 This is a transcript of a talk given at the Law and Disorder conference, held in Portland, Oregon from April 14—16, 2010. Transcription by Paul Messersmith-Glavin.
- 2 Geronimo Pratt died on June 2, 2011
- 3 Marilyn Buck passed away on August 3, 2010.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ashanti Omowali Alston help found a Black Panther Party chapter in Plainfield, NJ while still in high school. He later went on to join the Black Liberation Army. He did twelve years as a Prisoner of War, and became an anarchist while incarcerated. Sometimes referring to himself as the ‘Anarchist Panther,’ he occasionally publishes a ’zine with that name. Ashanti is a former board member of the Institute for Anarchist Studies (IAS), is a part of the Mutual Aid Speakers Bureau, and works with the National Jericho Movement to free all Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War. He’s also a recent father, and is writing his memoirs.

EMANCIPATION!



WHERE'S MY MOVEMENT? CONTEMPORARY ANARCHIST MOTHERS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

VICTORIA LAW

« *Born In Flames* (detail)
Meredith Stern
block print, 2009

Emma Goldman “silenced the voice of the child for the sake of the universal” and chose anarchism over motherhood.¹ Voltairine de Cleyre chose not to live with or raise her own son.² The “avowed and dangerous anarchist” Lucy Parsons was also a single mother who, after her husband’s execution, often wore herself out trying both to agitate and to take in enough sewing to support her two children.³

Over the last century, anarchist movements across North America have, by and large, continued to neglect the needs of caregivers and children in their midst. This neglect most often impacts mothers and female caregivers.

Despite its rhetoric and actions to reshape other aspects of society and social relationships, anarchists reflect—and replicate—the societal expectation that the ultimate responsibility for childrearing lies with the mother. Fathers (if fathers are involved) are expected to be able to continue their political involvement unhindered by the demands of caregiving. Emma Goldman acknowledged this in 1894: “Men were consecrated to ideals and yet were fathers of children. But man’s physical share in the child is only a moment’s; women’s part is for years—years of absorption in one human being to the exclusion of the rest of humanity.”⁴ And, as demonstrated by our knowledge of Lucy Parsons and Voltairine de Cleyre,

even when their names are well-known, their tales of motherhood have often been overlooked in favor of their public political activity. Other women, such as Pearl Johnson and Mary Isaak, have been relegated to the footnotes of anarchist history, usually as the companions and helpmeets of male anarchists and the mothers of their children.⁵

Little seems to have changed in this regard over the past century. Anarchists do not expect women to contribute or participate in political projects or organizing after becoming mothers. In addition, childrearing remains unacknowledged as a legitimate political action by many.

In 2003, anarchist mothers in Minneapolis formed the Revolutionary Anarchist Mom and Baby League (RAMBL) to challenge the radical community's dismissal of family issues as irrelevant: "We're frustrated when the movement for social justice steals our ability as mothers to continue to work as organizers and artists, while whining that not enough parents care about social reforms. We're tired of activists wondering where all the parents are when we're sitting at home with no money, no transportation and no childcare," they stated. "We expect to struggle against the world; we don't expect to struggle in our own community."⁶

The 2010 Renewing Anarchist Tradition (RAT) conference is a recent example of the continued dismissal of children's and caregivers' concerns as a valid issue. Childcare was not considered during the initial conference planning; it was only recognized one month before the conference after potential presenters inquired about childcare. Although one organizer tried to rectify the situation by calling for childcare volunteers and coordinating

childcare shifts, this oversight reflects the larger anarchist movement's continued failure to take seriously the needs of caregivers.

In a letter to RAT organizers, members of Kidz' City, an anarcha-feminist childcare collective in Baltimore, noted, "We've witnessed the failure on the part of too many conference organizers (from the most recent US Social Forum where there was lack of planning [resulting in grossly inadequate childcare] to Left Forum where there was no childcare at all) to think about the needs of parents and children until the last minute...Neglecting to think about it until the need presented itself is perpetuating the systematic neglect of the needs of parents and children."⁷

Over the past six years, I interviewed 22 mothers across North America who explicitly identify as anarchists. These mothers varied in terms of age, race, ethnicity, class, partnership status and sexual orientation. Many had been politically active before motherhood. Some found that continued involvement in projects and political actions was not possible and that their peers were unwilling to support—or even acknowledge—the challenges they faced as new mothers trying to stay involved. Others found their focus shifting to movements and groups more willing to accommodate their needs as parents. Many who stayed actively involved were able to do so largely because of community and movement support.

This article seeks to foreground the voices of contemporary anarchist mothers and to prevent their stories from disappearing from history like those of past generations. In addition, it seeks to examine how community support has helped mothers maintain their involvement and to demonstrate ways

in which other groups, and individuals can support the mothers in their midst. North American anarchist history often omits the lives and roles of anarchist women who are also mothers, resulting in a loss of knowledge about them—as both anarchists and mothers—as well as ways in which their communities worked to support their dual roles. Hearing stories of contemporary mothers allows anarchists to reconceptualize motherhood and reframe conversations about childcare and family support as integral to intergenerational organizing in our movements and communities.

CHANGES ACCOMPANYING MOTHERHOOD

During the 1980s in Washington, DC, China had been involved in many anarchist political actions, including stopping traffic to flyer about the U.S.'s secret funding of the Contras in Nicaragua, sleeping in a shantytown encampment demanding divestment from apartheid South Africa, street demonstrations like “No Business as Usual/ War Chest Tour,” and participating in Black Flag Village (the anarchist element of a peace march from California to DC protesting the nuclear arms race). Pregnancy did not curtail her involvement. “I traveled, I read books, I found a midwife, I hung out with my two best friends and lived similarly—went to shows, protested Rocky Flats Plant [a nuclear weapons production facility in Boulder, Colorado]...

Immediately after birth things changed! My roommates were gearing up for this big Women's Festival; one was in a band that practiced in our kitchen. The big event was a day or two after I gave birth. Everyone came home from the show

talking about the event excitedly and I felt intensely left out . . . This feeling of moving at a different speed, feeling a gulf between us, increased. When they decided to leave town when my daughter was a month old, I left with them. They welcomed me on the trip . . . [But] in New Orleans I felt left behind. It took me much longer than them to get ready. Once walking around, I didn't have the same stamina. I had a hard time carrying my daughter . . . I had to go back to the house; they went on and I went home alone... Definitely, my two intense friendships were smashed by me being a mother. We had shared so much but couldn't share this transition.

After losing old friendships, China made new friends: “I eventually wound up in Santa Cruz where people are better about those things. People helped out with Clover. My new boyfriend liked kids and helped out. And the punks *had* to accept Clover, many becoming friends with her.”⁸

Max had also been intensely involved in anarchist organizing and direct action in her preparenting days. “[I] got a two month sentence for a Livermore Labs Shadowpainting action on Hiroshima Day in 1993.⁹ [I also did] lots of organizing with our anarchist cluster of affinity groups, Circle A Cluster and Reclaiming Collective, a pagan collective which holds many public rituals and also has been at the center of a lot of environmentally-related direct action. We did organizing of the major actions in '88 and '89 at the Nevada Test Site, as well as actions at the Concord Naval Weapons Station. . . [I was] *in the middle of things*, actually as an organizer, not only as an activist participating in actions others had planned.” Max became pregnant shortly after being released

from jail and began feeling ostracized by her fellow activists. “I heard all sorts of comments put out like jokes, which were quite hurtful. People would say things like, ‘Well, now you’re not going to be able to do anything.’ Talk about a set up!” Her affinity groups continued organizing, but “no one thought to ask whether I wanted to be involved. I would have jumped (once I was past the first three months and nausea) but once not invited, I guess I just assumed, as did everyone else, that I wouldn’t be involved.” Reflecting back, she stated, “I guess I needed to hear, ‘Hey, we miss you. When do you think you’ll feel up to joining us,’ or something along those lines.”¹⁰

More than a decade later, those who choose to become mothers report similar experiences: Katie had been involved in radical transgendered and queer groups in Chicago. Once she and her partner decided to have children, she found that impending motherhood distanced her from her peers. Compounding this disconnect, she and her co-parent moved to Portland where she was unable to find similar political activity. “I felt really isolated because not only was I trans in a not very transfriendly community and seeking people whom I never found, but also I was in the process of having a kid. That was also something that people that I did meet couldn’t really relate to. I [also] didn’t know any people who were parents or who were planning to be parents,” she recalled. “You don’t have as much time once you have the baby to seek people out and get involved and people [also] don’t see you as having the energy and availability or even necessarily the kinds of focus or values that they want you to have. I found that I couldn’t get involved in things

again even though I wanted to and even though I felt really lonely. I tried to fill that gap by looking for parenting-focused things, but I never really found other parents whom I felt shared enough of my values that I felt like we could work on something together or go to events together. I specifically wanted to continue working with queer radicals, but once you add the queer thing and the kid thing and the trans thing, there’s just not a lot of people.”¹¹

“Since I was 11, I’ve been working on anarchist campaigns: black bloc, feminist marches, Quiver Distro (out of Santa Cruz, where I moved when I was 16), guerilla gardening, living in collective houses,” recalled Mikki. “I feel like it’s already changed so much since I’ve gotten pregnant. I feel a lot more isolated. Like everyone goes out bike riding or to the bar and I don’t really want to do those things.”¹²

Once her baby was born, she felt even more isolated. “In Baltimore, I was always invited places [and] people would come see me, but as soon as I had a baby, almost instantly I never heard from anyone. Not a peep. I was in Baltimore until Hunter was seven weeks and I spent the whole time trying to hang out with people, trying to connect, feeling so depressed and alone.”¹³

Others also found that their priorities shifted after becoming mothers. Those who had previously committed large amounts of time to activism and organizing lessened their involvement: “I used to spend almost all of my free time (that is, time away from my paying work) engaged in activism, organizing, and politics,” recounted Rahula. “Nowadays I probably spend five to ten hours a week on political pursuits, as opposed to thirty [or] forty [that I had] before,” she stated. “One of the big

differences is that I can't push myself to exhaustion, because I have a kid who needs me to be healthy and present. So, in spite of myself, I take better care of myself now."¹⁴

In some cases, previous encounters with police or other government authorities forced mothers to reevaluate their involvement and potential risks. Before pregnancy, Jessica was involved in Free Radio Gainesville, a pirate radio station in Florida. "I was a collective member, produced my own weekly show, authored public and press conference statements, housed the station, and even had to 'entertain' sexist and attempting-to-be-intimidating federal agents on my doorstep a few times. Housing the station had to stop when baby came along," she recalled.¹⁵

CHALLENGES OF COMBINING MOTHERHOOD AND ORGANIZING

Mothers have found that the difficulties of organizing and political involvement are compounded by the additional demands of motherhood and the lack of consideration of a largely childless movement.

Upon moving to Wisconsin, Jess became involved in starting an anarchist info shop. "It was great to be involved from the get-go as my little one was just part of it. There was about a year where I felt really welcomed and there were people who were so kind to my son. We held well attended Radical Family Potlucks and several non-parents were very supportive of parents/kids. But, as with most anarchist spaces, people move on and new folks come in. As the group became younger, I felt less welcomed. Also at first there were other parents but they also drifted away. Many left to work on other projects where people were

more conscious of time and had children themselves [like] neighborhood associations or welfare support groups ... slowly as the people involved changed, I started to feel unwelcome. Plus my son was becoming more mobile and it was hard to keep him safe. . . . But there are plenty of groups to organize with- but often those that are explicitly anarchist have felt the most unwelcome to kids."¹⁶

Meetings and events that work for childless activists are often hard for mothers of young children. Anna, a mother from Montreal, observes. "People don't realize that having a meeting from five to seven [pm] is not the ideal time for parents of children who need to be in bed by seven o'clock."¹⁷

Even when they want to be supportive, the absence of parents and children within anarchist groups and settings has resulted in childless people not always understanding how to do so. "I think people were really into the idea of raising kids in the community but not ready for the responsibility or they didn't quite understand what having a kid entailed," Mikki remembered. "When I needed help emotionally or someone to hold the baby while Bryan was at work and I had to pee or eat or anything, people just weren't there. That really hurt."¹⁸

Organizers often fail to take into account that spaces and situations that work for able-bodied adults are unsuitable—if not unsafe—for babies and small children. "I also find that movement spaces tend to be unfriendly to mobile children (in that they are dirty and often dangerous), and that folks, when booking spaces for events/trainings, don't think about how the space/environment impacts me and my child even if I have given them advanced notice that I will be there with an

infant,” said Autumn. She recounted one example of traveling with her partner and baby to another city to facilitate a consensus training. “When we got there, we found that we were staying in a room with one twin bed and one mattress on the floor. No pillows. No towels in the bathroom. No food in the kitchen. We were hungry and uncomfortable. The training space was changed at the last minute to another woman’s home, a run down spot with no safe indoor space for a baby to move around in. I would say in this situation that my needs, and my child’s needs, were definitely not met, though the intention of the group was to be welcoming. I emailed them about it after and got an apology.”¹⁹

Even when childcare space exists, it is often inadequate in other ways, particularly when childcare planning is left until the last minute. At the 2010 RAT conference, the room designated for childcare was cold and dirty. One mother who attended RAT (without her toddler) noted, “People think a childcare space should just be a room with crayons. There’s not necessarily a real understanding that the child can’t spend the whole day in a closed room with pencils.”²⁰

SUPPORT

Despite frequent hostility and general unwillingness of anarchists to address mothers’ and children’s concerns, many mothers have continued their political activity.

Some have found support has been limited to other parents. “Only other moms have done childcare for me,” stated Katie. “I’ve done childcare for both of the people who’ve done childcare for me.” However support from non-mothers has been virtually

non-existent.²¹

Anna notes that in the Autonomous Social Center, “there are more parents and mothers and [so] often there will be childcare for meetings. But the people who often run the childcare are often the parents themselves.”²²

Recognizing that if they want children and families to be included in larger actions and protests, parents have actively organized programs and spaces for themselves. During the 2004 Biotech Convention in San Francisco, radical parents created a kids’ space within the convergence center. Max, who was active in Reclaim the Commons, recalled:

A couple [of] parents decided to do a call to parents to be part of organizing these actions and to call ourselves Radical Family Collective (RFC). We started by making it a priority that we had a specific kid zone space as part of the convergence center but worked out that it was not generally set up as a drop-off babysitting scene but rather a place to have as a cool out area, a place where kids could nap, parents could hook up and watch each other’s kids to spell each other, families could do art. When we got together to divvy up spaces within the warehouse, predictably, people without kids assumed the kids should be in a room way back in the bowels of the place. I was very assertive on our behalf, pushy one might even say, in refusing that spot and insisted that for various reasons we needed the little room right up front. I pointed out that, for one, kids would be in the most danger in case of a cop riot in the convergence center if we were stuck all alone back there. Up front, everyone would be aware if anything were about to happen and we

could quickly get the kids out. RFC also had strategized ahead that as part of the larger organizing, it was important to have out in the media that there was a kid zone at the convention center and that not only would that be a sign of welcome to families, but it would also serve to put the cops on alert that the convergence center would have families in residence. We realized that this would be likely to keep them in check ... All in all, we realized that we could help safeguard everyone, and our convergence center, by our very existence in there. So we had the room up front and a huge banner outside the place announcing the kid zone and no cop attacks happened at the center at all. . .

Another thing we wanted to do for/with parents was to create ways to make us feel safer about going out as families to street actions, fully assuming our right to do so, but also knowing we'd be facing a load of pissed off and violent cops. So we offered a one-day legal workshop for families and the lure was that we had a movement lawyer willing to offer services to any parent needing them if arrested if she/he had attended this workshop. At the workshop, parents got to learn more about what could be the results if risking arrest intentionally or if swept up and arrested without intending to be arrested ... how to be reunited with kids as quickly as possible . . .

During that week, the feedback was fabulous . . . Non-parents were really happy to have kids around and liked the family vibe, but there were a few crotchety people who, once the action was over, didn't want kids at meetings. There was a very, very big scene about this at our post-action evaluation meeting. People would say things like, 'We really want kids here, but they should

be in another room.' Then there were the comments about how kids can be disruptive, to which we all as parents were both outraged and amused. As we pointed out, we'd rarely been to a meeting where some adult hadn't interrupted a meeting or somehow made it go on longer than planned."²³

However, as pointed out by Jessica, who organized a family bloc for the 2003 FTAA protests in Miami, "When we're talking about fellow anarchist parents, we're not talking in terms of support; we're talking in terms of cooperation and easing each other's daily life. There's a difference!"²⁴

Some mothers have experienced judgment, hostility, and a lack of support in some groups, but have found others to be more friendly and open. Maka, a mother in Oklahoma, recounted that she had left groups where people displayed their discomfort around her children. She recounted the first time she did feel supported by the community was not until her son was six years old: "This was just a couple of months after we became part of the collective. After school one day, I was very tired, so I lay down in the sleeping room at the info shop while my six-year-old son played a board game with a group of folks who were there hanging out. I woke up to the sound of my son 'having a meltdown.' I came out to deal with it, which was already being attempted by the folks who were there. My son was raging and angry and shouting very ugly things at me. I was dealing with this while everyone looked on. After he calmed down enough, I took him home, fixed him some dinner, and got him settled down there. I left him at home with his older brother while I went back to the info shop for a meeting that

had been planned previously. When I walked in the door, everyone was sitting on the sofas talking. Every head turned to look at me. I felt immediately defensive, having experienced judgment and lack of support in other groups. Then someone said, 'We want to know how we can best support you in a situation like that with Griffin. We are so impressed with how calmly you handle him when he's out of control like that. Please help us help you.' I cried."²⁵

Jessica became less involved in a feminist group in southern Florida when the group continually failed to address her needs as a mother of an infant. She found that a neighboring community was more responsive to her needs: "The anarchist community in Lake Worth, 45 minutes north of where I live, has by far shown the most shining example of support. They go out of their way to let me know about things going on and even think ahead of time about how/if I can be involved. They will take turns being with my daughter and any other kids present in another room or outside so I can listen/contribute in a meeting. They let me know about kid-specific and/or kid-friendly events, like volunteer days at the community garden. They are very involved in organizing in their community and that largely entails getting involved with the kids in their own community, in support of the kids' mostly immigrant, working poor parents."²⁶

In Santa Cruz, people would get vitamins for me. I really needed housing though and I didn't feel like I had the support (to get it). Or help with transportation to and from my midwife. It seemed that people thought that these things would take care of themselves," said Mikki. When she and her husband moved to Baltimore, their fellow bike

messengers helped them find a home. "People here were like, 'Of course you need housing. It's going to be winter soon. We will help you find housing.'"²⁷

Other mothers have found a mixed amount of support from those around them: "I live in an anti-racist, anarchist collective household and my housemates are committed to supporting me and my partner as parents," wrote Rahula, a mother in California. Her housemates not only supported her by babysitting, but also did so financially while she was on maternity leave. They also accommodated her daughter's daycare coop at the house once a week. "Plus they have participated in making our house kid safe and tolerated the toddler takeover of common space." However, she found that outside of her household, "the necessary community support for moms to remain active is just not there. Most anarchist events are even close to baby/child safe, never mind 'friendly,' and anarchists often belch out anti-breeding rhetoric which is damn close to rhetoric heard from the right wing about 'welfare moms' (which is generally code for moms of color and poor moms). These things are the opposite of supportive."²⁸

For Maka, the activists around her are a continual source of support, both during political events and in her personal life: "At a street corner protest action a few months ago, the attendees took turns engaging Griffin to keep him from being bored. One person who had driven a car had it parked nearby and had a pillow and blanket in the back, just for Griffin to lie down with when he got too cold and bored," she recounted. When she had the flu, friends from the collective called and offered to both make her soup and hang out with her son. "No need for

me to ask for help, because it was offered based on their knowledge of my having nobody else who could cook for me and care for my kids.”²⁹

I’ve never had to pay for childcare, which is nice, because I have such a strong support system between my community, my family and Nicolai’s father’s family,” stated Connie. Her partner, housemates and larger political community are willing to watch her son while she showers, cooks, does household chores, works a shift at Confluence Books (the local info shop), or writes for *The Red Pill* or other zine projects with which she’s involved. “Everyone seems pretty attuned to the babies at larger [local] gatherings so that I don’t have to keep my eye on him all the time because there are a lot of eyes on him.” However, Connie acknowledges that her position is not universally shared: “I feel lucky because I realize not everyone has such a strong support network. I’m definitely grateful.”³⁰

However, even when activist organizers and movements are willing to accommodate children, some mothers continue to be excluded, often reflecting their marginalization in mainstream society:

As a transwoman in queer and feminist radical circles, I often feel this assumption that I am somehow not doing my share or doing things right or that I have all these privileges that other moms don’t have or that it couldn’t possibly be the case, even though it is, that I am the stay-at-home parent and have all these experiences in common with other moms who aren’t trans because there’s such an intense narrative in that community of a transwoman as basically

being a man who decides, someday in the distant future, to become a woman. This is not at all my experience of myself,” stated Katie. “Being trans, there’s skepticism whether I’ve done enough or whether I have an authentic mother experience...I think that, as a community in general, there’s a lot of suspicion around transwomen.”³¹

I have yet to see a conference run by anarchists that say, ‘[for] special needs childcare, contact us.’ I’ve seen things that say, ‘If you have special needs,’ but they usually mean ‘if you’re vegan’ or ‘if you need something that’s wheelchair accessible for a grown-up that’s going to be at the conference,’” stated Elizabeth, whose older son has autism. “I think people are scared when they hear special needs or autism and [think] they won’t be able to handle it. Or they don’t look. I mean [for] conferences that happen on campuses, just call the education department. There’s got to be someone who’s a special education major. This could be like lab time for this person! For the [2006] Providence [Anarchist] Bookfair, when I asked how many people had experience with autism, half the people raised their hand! So why can’t I find that [kind of support] or why can’t people think to offer that?”³²

WAYS THAT MOVEMENTS CAN SUPPORT MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

Every mother interviewed agreed that political movements and communities need to support the families in their midst. Several had suggestions on ways they could do so:

“I need people to be friendly to my kid, to offer me friendship and comradeship, to recognize and respect that I

am a mom, that it's hard, amazing, and political work, and these needs are not often met by the larger anarchist community," stated Rahula.³³

"When you organize childcare, when you want us to participate, offer it. Standardize it. If you don't understand how to do it or what that means, ask us. Don't assume you can't do it. It's not building a rocket," said Elizabeth.³⁴

"The continued effort on the national part of offering childcare spaces and family friendly events does a lot. If folks know that these resources are available, they may be more likely to attend. I like when it's announced in meetings or gatherings that babies and baby noises are not only okay, but welcome," suggested Connie, whose immediate community has worked to ensure their meetings and events are child-friendly. "I realize it can make it a little stressful in a meeting, but to not exclude parents is a big deal to many of us."³⁵

"We organize a lot of events for ourselves as adults, but we hardly ever organize events for kids. It would be nice to see some kid-organized events, even if it was a component of what a speaker was going to do that could be a representation for kids somehow," reflected Gretchen.

Just like we do presentations, workshops, events, [we should] have something for kids. It doesn't have to be exclusively for kids...like there was this puppet troupe in Montreal who were doing an adaptation of the Paris Commune. They made all their own puppets and they did their own show...They could have done a matinee [for kids].

I can think of lots of speakers who could really engage young people. Even if it's not young kids, like a 4-year-old, they could do a presentation that

has a 10- to 15-year-old sitting on the edge of their seat thinking, "Wow, this is an amazing talk. I like this."³⁶

Radical events that make a point to include children have also inspired people in other cities to organize children's programming at their events. For the past several years, the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair has included a Kids' Program as part of their childcare. After seeing that program, China, whose daughter is now an adult, approached the organizers of the 2006 Mid-Atlantic Radical Bookfair about supporting parents' and children's inclusion. She initially met with some resistance to the idea that parents could leave their children and have childcare provided. However, by the end of the meeting, the organizers agreed to a more radical vision of supporting parents and children. China put out a call for volunteers and publicized the existence of Kidz' Corner. "I asked everyone, fliered everywhere, went to everyplace I could think of. Most things didn't pan out but you never know what will and where the volunteer will come from," she said. She recalled that, while attending meetings at Red Emma's, the radical bookstore where planning meetings took place, she met an activist who expressed his discomfort around children. Nonetheless, China gave him a flier for Kidz' Corner and asked him to spread the word.

At the start of the bookfair, the man asked if he could watch the child of his guest so that his guest could give a presentation at the info shop meeting. "He told me that they [the father and child] stayed at his house and he was playing with the child that night, and it had been really good. They needed childcare and asked, but I said I was too busy setting it up [and] not open yet. So

he came back to volunteer and watch the child, asking his partner to help him ... *That* was my greatest success! Here was a boy who said that children didn't like him, that he was uncomfortable around children, and he wound up being the first volunteer, so a dad could talk at the meeting. [Before this happened] the dad had been sitting in the back trying to keep the fidgety child entertained. That dad was so happy. He thought the kids' room was great. He was grinning and hugging everyone on the way out."³⁷

"At the [2009] Allied Media Conference, there was a document in the program about how to be kid-friendly at the conference. It was a list of ways in which you, as a participant, could be an ally to the parents there. I think every event that purports to be kid-friendly should have a similar educational document about exactly what that means," recalled Autumn. "It would be great to have more political organizing that revolved around 'families' as a population/demographic. If radical organizers forced themselves to acknowledge that most of the people they wish to organize are members of families, they would have to rethink everything: how events are organized, how campaigns are run, who is brought to the table, etc."³⁸

Including mothers and children in political spaces and events should not simply be viewed as a chore offered for the sake of political correctness. Instead, anarchists should view children's inclusion as vital to intergenerational movement-building and the growth of building the worlds we wish to inhabit. Anarchists can take inspiration from the Zapatistas in Chiapas who, from the start, have integrated children into daily life, including political discussions and events. Ten years later, many of these children have joined the EZLN and,

according to Marcos, are more politically astute than their elders: "Those who were children in that January of '94 are now young people who have grown up in the resistance, and they have been trained in the rebel dignity lifted up by their elders throughout these twelve years. These young people have a political, technical and cultural training that we who began the zapatista movement did not have. The youth is now, more and more, sustaining our troops as well as leadership positions in the organization."³⁹

As Max summed up, at the end of her recollections, "Revolution sure won't be handed to us, or made for us...we have to shape it as we will."⁴⁰

NOTES

1 Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 153.

2 Paul Avrich, *An American Anarchist: the Life of Voltairine de Cleyre* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), 71-2.

3 Carolyn Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, published for the Illinois Labor History Society, 1976), 137.

4 Goldman, *Living My Life*, 153.

5 Pearl Johnson is best-known as the lover of anarchist Benjamin Tucker, publisher of *Liberty*, and mother of their daughter, Oriole. Mary Isaak was the wife of Abe Isaak, publisher of *The Firebrand* and *Free Society* and founder of the Aurora Colony. Although Mary helped publish both papers, her granddaughter, Grace Ulmraht, only recalled that "Grandma helped support the paper [*The Firebrand*], and *Free Society* after it, by taking in wash." (Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 24.)

6 RAMBL, "Allies, Who Aren't."

InfoShop News, April 09, 2003, <http://news.infoshop.org/article.php?story=03/04/09/1286018>.

7 Kidz City, e-mail message to RAT organizers, October 12, 2010.

8 China, interviewed by author, 16 February 2006, e-mail.

9 “The Shadowpainting action was in memory of people vaporized and everyone killed or harmed by the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in ’45. There have been shadows painted in memory all over the world . . . we wanted to memorialize the dead but also wanted specifically to confront the workers, whether designers or administrators, to remind them that their work carries on the nuclear program which disrespects all life and endangers us all.” Max, e-mail to author, 19 July 2009.

10 Max, interviewed by author, 24 July 2004, e-mail.

11 Katie, interviewed by author, 12 May 2009.

12 Mikki, interviewed by author, 2 July 2006.

13 Mikki, interviewed by author, 21 December 2007, e-mail.

14 Rahula, interviewed by author, 24 September 2004.

15 Jessica, interviewed by author, 8 February 2006, e-mail.

16 Jess, interviewed by author, 7 August 2009, e-mail.

17 Anna, interviewed by author, 7 November 2010.

18 Mikki, interviewed by author, 21 December 2007, e-mail.

19 Autumn, interviewed by author, 28 July 2009, e-mail.

20 Anna interview.

21 Katie, interviewed by author, 12 May 2009.

22 Anna interview.

23 Max, interviewed by author, 12 April 2007, e-mail.

24 Jessica interview.

25 Maka, interviewed by author, 16 February 2006, e-mail.

26 Jessica interview.

27 Mikki, interviewed by author, 2 July 2006.

28 Rahula interview.

29 Maka interview.

30 Connie interview.

31 Katie interview.

32 Elizabeth, interviewed by author, 31 May 2009.

33 Rahula interview.

34 Elizabeth interview.

35 Connie interview.

36 Gretchen interview.

37 China, interviewed by author, 16 February 2006, e-mail.

38 Autumn interview.

39 Subcomandante Marcos, *Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona*, June 2005. <http://www.zcommunications.org/sixth-declaration-of-the-selva-lacandona-by-subcomandante-marcos>.

40 Max, interviewed by author, 12 April 2007, e-mail.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Victoria Law is a writer, photographer and mother. She is the author of *Resistance Behind Bars: The Struggles of Incarcerated Women* (PM Press, 2009) and the co-editor of *Don't Leave Your Friends Behind: A Handbook for Radical Parenting Allies* (PM Press, 2012).

A RESPONSE FROM A RAT ORGANIZER

Victoria Law and the many other radical parent/ activists whose voices she channels in the piece speak eloquently on the issues they face in raising greater awareness of their needs

and the significance of kids and caregivers in anarchist spaces. But I also feel some responsibility to address one aspect of the piece's context, by giving a little background on the Renewing the Anarchist Tradition (RAT) conference in November 2010.

Many participants had found aspects of the gathering problematic, in part because of some lack of clarity about its function, especially because of its shift from rural Vermont to urban Baltimore in an attempt to reimagine the conference's format while increasing accessibility and inclusiveness. RAT also went from a mainly in-house IAS affair to a collaboration with a division of labor between a dedicated IAS working group doing programming and content, and the locally-based Red Emma's collective hosting and doing logistics, for the most part brilliantly. However, one serious casualty of this division of labor was childcare: with both camps assuming it fell within the other's domain, and with a series of gaps in communication...in a nutshell, there was none. Until participants started asking about what arrangements would be available, a few weeks before the conference date, and oh shit! Really? How could we have—shouldn't they have—fuck! And someone had to make something happen, ASAP. Long story short, that someone ended up being me.

At first I had great reluctance to taking on this task. It seemed like a mordant joke: I had no experience doing childcare. It had never been my interest or my forte, and I had never felt there was any reason it should be. As a female-bodied person, I had always resisted being slotted into conventional gender functions. Was it not ironic that the woman on the organizing committee was now the one taking this on?

But of course, childcare should NOT be a gendered function, or an optional afterthought, but rather something at the center of our collective ethic AS a community-in-movement. If, in prefiguring alternatives, we

truly conceive of social relations in movement spaces as nonpatriarchal and multigenerational...if we expect to build movements that last longer than one activist lifecycle, that sink deep roots and develop stable counter-forces capable of bringing about and/or surviving a post-capitalist meltdown, with or without Zombie Apocalypse...if, like the early 20th century syndicate ideal, we hope to provide a form that serves both as model for the future society AND as vehicle of effective resistance...then mutual nurturance of all ages is everyone's responsibility.

This is not to say that everyone should be a hands-on caregiver—whether of young children, elders, the sick, or anyone who ever needs care, which at one point or another is every single one of us. Not everyone is suited for it, and we are entitled to retain our differences of inclination, personality, and relational style: some of us are introverted and not-particularly-nurturing, and there's nothing wrong with that. In utopia there would be tasks for each of our strengths. But we DO all have to care. We DO all have to take active part in contributing to, facilitating and supporting the work of care. And we DO all have to actively respect the humanity of our youngsters. Besides, where better to start nurturing transformations in consciousness toward revolutionary futures?

Clearly the fiasco had opened up some deep issues that went far beyond the infrastructure of one conference, requiring us to think through entrenched attitudes not just to childcare but to race and ability. In a series of meetings, email exchanges and conversations, radical parents hit home the point that this affects every aspect of the way we think about the communities we want to create, the movements—and the futures—we want to build.

—Maia Ramnath



MOVEMENT, CADRE, AND DUAL POWER

JOEL OLSON

« *The Kraken*
Alec Dunn
block print, 2010

Global capital has weak spots. I want to hit them. I do not believe, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri assert in *Empire*, that there is no “center” to global capital and that any strike at the beast is equally effective. Nor do I believe, as many anarchists do, that attacking any mode of oppression is equally effective. While I firmly believe that all forms of oppression are evil and must be abolished, I do not believe we can or should try to fight them all simultaneously, or that we even need to. Because global capital has weak spots, and we should hit them first.

The task of anarchists and other radicals is to find and exploit those weak spots. That means we must think and act *strategically*: we must carefully choose the kinds of political organizing we do, and we must perform that organizing in the most effective way possible. Cadre organizations are an important way of doing this.

I will use my experience as a member of Bring the Ruckus (www.bringtheruckus.org) to explain the role of a cadre organization in political struggle; and how being in a cadre informs my work in the Repeal Coalition, a grassroots, all-volunteer, organization that seeks the repeal of all anti-immigrant laws in Arizona, including the notorious, racist law known as SB 1070. The purpose of a cadre, I argue, is not to lead the revolution but to seek out

and participate in those struggles—such as the immigrant rights struggle in Arizona—that have the most potential to bring about a *dual power*.

RUCKUS AS A CADRE ORGANIZATION

A cadre organization is not necessarily a vanguard organization, as some anarchists mistakenly assume. It is simply a group of committed, active, revolutionary intellectuals who share a common politics and who come together to develop revolutionary thought and practice and test it out in struggle. By “active” I mean one who is involved in political struggle, not merely a book reader. By “intellectual” I don’t mean someone with a college degree but one who makes a serious, ongoing commitment to understanding the world in order to better agitate within it. A cadre group is not a mass organization like Anti-Racist Action, Janitors for Justice, the Wobblies, or the Repeal Coalition, i.e. a political group that involves a (potentially) large amount of people fighting for specific demands. Nor does a cadre assume leadership of mass organizations (i.e. it doesn’t create “front groups”), although its members may play leadership roles if they have earned the respect of others in the organization. Nor does it try to co-opt or use these organizations for its own ends, although it certainly participates democratically in struggles over their purpose and direction.

Rather, a cadre group seeks to participate in those mass (or potentially mass) struggles that have the best chance to blow the lid off this society and build a free one, and to work with them to make them as radical and as democratic as possible.

Bring the Ruckus, for example, believes that it will take revolutionary changes to create a free society. But we do not believe that we will lead the revolution. Rather, the purpose of Ruckus is to create a place where revolutionaries with similar politics can debate theory, history, and strategy, and seek to put ideas into practice.

The system of global capitalism, we believe, is the root source of exploitation, oppression, and alienation in this society. It must be abolished and replaced with a free society in which people are able to fully develop their capacities without hurting others to do so. But how to do this? Ruckus believes that in the United States, the key to abolishing capitalism is to attack white supremacy. In a nation whose economic and social structure has depended on slavery, segregation, genocide, and reservation, to attack whiteness is strike a blow at the pillars of American capitalism and the state.

White supremacy, as our founding statement puts it, “is a system that grants those defined as ‘white’ special privileges in American society, such as preferred access to the best schools, neighborhoods, jobs, and health care; greater advantages in accumulating wealth; a lesser likelihood of imprisonment; and better treatment by the police and the criminal justice system. In exchange for these privileges, whites agree to police the rest of the population through such means as slavery and segregation in the past and through formally ‘colorblind’ policies and practices today that still serve to maintain white advantage. White supremacy, then, unites one section of the working class with the ruling class against the rest of the working class.” The task of revolutionaries, we believe, is to break up this unholy

alliance between capital and middle and working class whites, so that whites begin to think of themselves as workers rather than whites and begin to act in solidarity with working peoples of color throughout the nation and the planet.

We are not arguing that white supremacy is the “worst” form of oppression. Nor are we claiming that if white supremacy is abolished then all other forms of oppression will immediately disappear. Rather, ours is a strategic argument, based on a theory of U.S. history, that argues that the “public and psychological wages” of whiteness, as W.E.B. Du Bois terms them, have been the principle obstacle preventing the development of radical movements in the United States. Thus, attacking these wages creates opportunities to challenge all forms of oppression, just as what happened with abolitionism (which gave rise to the first wave of the feminist movement and unionization struggles) and the civil rights movement (which gave rise to a host of social movements).

Ruckus cadre seeks to develop this analysis within our organization. This means regularly critiquing it. In fact, we begin our annual meetings by challenging our most fundamental concepts and assumptions. (Like Marx, we strongly believe in a “ruthless criticism of everything existing,” including ourselves.) We also try to apply this analysis in the mass organizations and struggles we participate in. Our analysis of white supremacy helps us choose which forms of struggle to participate in. This is why Ruckus members are active in struggles around the police and immigration, but not really around vegetarianism or “anarchism.”¹

Revolutionaries have neither the time nor the resources to get involved

in every moral evil. The existence of a moral evil, or even evidence that lots of people are “on the move” fighting such an evil, are not sufficient criteria for us for participating in a struggle. If fighting such an evil does not challenge the wages of whiteness, we will not participate actively in it, because we don’t regard it as strategic.

The purpose of a cadre organization is to help distinguish those struggles that seem to have more revolutionary potential than others. A cadre seeks to determine which mass struggles have the best chance to build a *dual power*.

DUAL POWER

Dual power is a situation in which two or more social forces assert power over the same territory and fight for it outside of the official political institutions (elections, parties, etc.). A dual power struggle poses a revolutionary or potentially revolutionary challenge to state power and it prefigures a new society in some way. It does not aim to create alternative institutions that live alongside the existing state, but to *replace* the existing institutions, through a great clash if necessary. Dual power implies civil war between the haves and the have-nots. The most famous example of a dual power situation is the conflict between the Provisional Government versus the Soviets in Russia in 1917 (Lenin’s description of that struggle is where the term comes from). However, there have been numerous examples of dual power situations in the U.S., including the American Revolution, “Bleeding Kansas” in 1854, the Civil War, and Birmingham in 1963 in the midst of the civil rights demonstrations.

A dual power strategy works by participation in those mass struggles

and organizations that a cadre believes can bring about a dual power situation. No revolutionary organization can create a dual power situation; to believe one can is vanguardism. Dual power comes about through the struggles of the great masses of people to overthrow their rulers, like in Tunisia or Egypt. The task of a cadre organization is to determine, through study and debate, which struggles have the best potential to create a dual power situation, and then to participate in them to try to strengthen them and make them as radical as possible.

In trying to decide which struggles have the most revolutionary potential, Ruckus members evaluate them according to our Six Criteria. The political work we engage in 1) must address systems that attack working class people of color, 2) must attack white supremacy, 3) must have the potential to further the development of revolutionary consciousness among the working class, 4) must have the potential to build a dual power, 5) must actively push the development of a feminist praxis, and 6) should stretch the boundaries of political organizing. If a struggle does not meet these criteria, members will have a difficult time persuading other members that they should be involved in it.

For example, in 2007 Ruckus comrades in Arizona, after much debate and discussion, decided that immigration struggles have the most potential to create a dual power in the state. In our study of the Arizona immigrant rights movement, we judged that the fundamental demand of undocumented people and their allies is not citizenship but the freedom to live, love, and work wherever they pleased, and that this demand cannot be co-opted by global capital. Global capital *needs*

borders to control labor flows, even as goods and services flow freely across them. Without borders workers can organize internationally against their exploitation. Merely by crossing the border illegally to support their families, undocumented workers express their belief that borders are or should be irrelevant. They suggest a world without borders, and a willingness to clash with those who depend on them. Immigrant rights struggles in Arizona thus have the potential to build a dual power between a world that insists on walls and fences and one that is indifferent or hostile to them. Based on that analysis, we became determined to join with undocumented workers in their struggle.

REPEAL AND DUAL POWER

We began by looking for existing organizations to join to do this work. Finding none in Flagstaff, we decided to create our own. (We also found that no organizations in Phoenix fully acknowledged the radical potential of immigration struggles, so we also built a Repeal chapter there.)

The Repeal Coalition is a grassroots, all-volunteer organization that seeks the repeal of all anti-immigrant legislation in Arizona. We demand the freedom of all people to live, love, and work wherever they please, and for the right for all people to have a say in those affairs that affect their daily life. The organization, founded in 2008, has fought the notoriously racist law known as SB 1070 and dozens of other anti-immigrant laws in the state through grassroots organizing. Repeal's organizing strategy has two parts. The first is our noncompliance campaign, in which we urge individuals and businesses to publicly refuse to abide by SB 1070 and

all other anti-immigrant laws. The second is to develop the radical potential of young people by creating “Freedom Schools” that teach them how to create grassroots campaigns of their own, such as demanding ethnic studies programs at their school. (Ethnic studies programs were banned in Arizona in 2010.) These campaigns, we hope, will pit young radicals against the powers that be in a struggle they can win and build on.

We talk to people in their homes, hold mass meetings, organize protests, teach people about their rights, and hold open meetings every week. Our goal is to repeal SB 1070 and other nativist legislation. Even more, we seek to create a third pole in the immigration debate. Right now the debate is limited to nativists who scream, “Kick them all out!” and liberals who want to exploit people first and then kick most of them out, providing a path of citizenship for a few. (This is sometimes called “comprehensive immigration reform.”) Repeal is trying to inject a third, radical, and common-sense position: In a world in which TVs, t-shirts, and technical support recognize no borders, humans shouldn’t have to either. Everyone deserves the freedom to live, love, and work where they please. (This is the slogan of the Repeal Coalition.) If we can change the debate in Arizona, we think, we can change it nationwide.

One could argue that Repeal is a “reformist” group, in that we seek the repeal of laws (though we don’t go to the courts or legislatures to do so, but to the streets). But this criticism fails to see the radical potential of this struggle, a potential that a dual power strategy recognizes. The repeal of nativist laws, like the supposedly “reformist” struggle for the ten-hour working day in nineteenth century England or the voting

registration drives during the civil rights movement in the U.S., is a reform that challenges the pillars of the capitalist system itself. Repeal is a strategy to defeat nativism, break up whites’ distorted class consciousness, and organize Arizona workers on a class basis rather than a racial one. It seeks to bring workers who are white and of color together to fight their bosses. It seeks to improve the organizing capabilities of the worldwide working class by struggling against the borders among them (literal and otherwise), and to get more and more whites to recognize that their interests lie with undocumented workers and other workers of color, not with white democracy.

As David Bacon notes in his book *Illegal People*, the goal of nativism is to depoliticize undocumented workers. Nativist laws like SB 1070 are designed to silence undocumented people, their families, and their allies. “Comprehensive immigration reform” is designed to exploit their labor while denying them political power. The antidote is to politicize undocumented people and their allies by getting them involved in grassroots politics. For the active participation of the working class always portends the possibility of open class struggle. The dual power.

Ruckus members see Repeal as a mass organization that has a better chance to bring about a dual power situation in Arizona than any other current struggle. Yet Repeal is not a Ruckus front group. Non-BTR members also helped found Repeal, and Ruckus has always been a minority presence in Repeal. Some BTR members have taken on leadership roles, but that is a result of our commitment to the group (and, to be honest, to our privileged status as documented people), not vanguardism.

If we lead in Repeal it is because we earned leadership, not because we presumed it.

Ruckus members discuss Repeal at BTR meetings in order to discuss strategy and tactics. We help keep Repeal alive during lulls in the struggle. We encourage political discussion in Repeal meetings. In particular, we try to help Repeal members see the international nature of their struggle (i.e. the immigration struggle is not limited to Arizona or even the U.S.) and its radical nature (i.e. it goes beyond the quest for citizenship or just taking care of one's family but toward transforming society).

The task of revolutionaries is to develop this "praxis," this combination of cadre work and mass organizing. Revolutionaries need both kinds of organizations. That way, when a crisis hits and people take to the streets, they will be experienced, they will have the respect of important sectors of the working class, and they will be able to show to the working class the truly international and radical nature of their struggle. When the weak spots of global capital are exposed, in other words, radicals need to be ready to hit them—hard.

NOTES

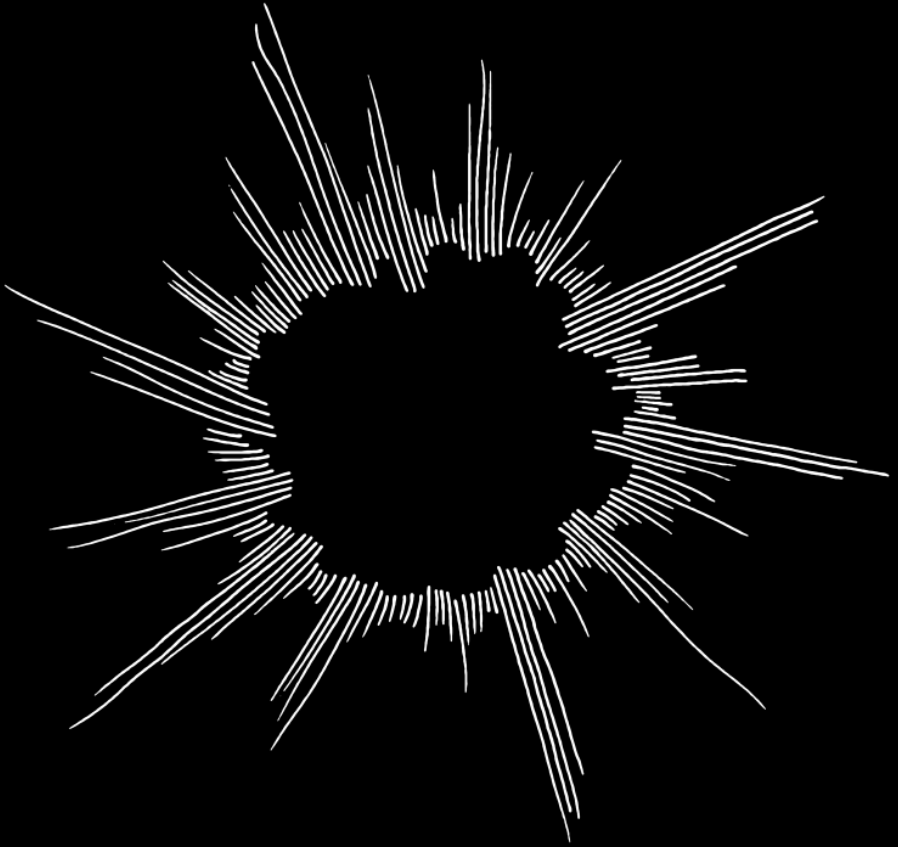
1 Some members of Ruckus identify as anarchists, others as communists, some as both, and some as neither. We believe that the old arguments between communists and anarchists are largely irrelevant today—though as an anarchist, let me just say that our side was right in those old debates.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joel Olson is a member of the Repeal Coalition, a grassroots group seeking the repeal of all anti-immigrant laws in Arizona

and that fights for the freedom of all people to live, love, and work wherever they please. He has been a member of two cadre organizations over the past twenty years, the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation and currently Bring the Ruckus. He is also the author of *The Abolition of White Democracy* (University of Minnesota Press) and is currently writing a book on fanaticism in the American political tradition.

Big Bang »
 Josh MacPhee
 drawing, 2002



SUPPORT THE MST!



BRAZIL'S LANDLESS WORKERS MOVEMENT



WHY MUST WE BE SMALL? REFLECTIONS ON POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL WORK IN BRAZIL'S LANDLESS MOVEMENT

TAMARA LYNNE

« *Support the MST*
Katie Burkart
(taken from the *Land & Globalization*
poster set produced by the Street Art
Workers), 2006

“People ask us ‘how is it you can be a movement — how can you achieve your objectives with no weapons?’ This is not entirely true. We have political education; a critically thinking mass is our best, our most powerful weapon.”

—MST cultural organizer
Matto Grosso do Sul, 2004

“In revolutionary times, the masks drop very quickly — people learn in minutes what might otherwise take a lifetime to figure out. In pre-revolutionary times, it is like we are walking through a thick fog. Here in Brazil, we have had over 400 years of pre-revolutionary times.”

—Marta Harnecker, speaking on the importance of political development in Brazil

W

alking through
fog...

I was in Guararema, just a half hour outside the sprawling concrete city of São Paulo, days before the grand opening of the first MST public university, the National School of Florestan Fernandes. The workers were all members of the Movimento Sem-Terra (MST), Brazil's Landless Movement. These volunteers from across the country were still placing the final bricks. Rows of school desks littered the surrounding patios, topsy turvy, ready for the classrooms to open. Men and women of all ages were spraying mud off the concrete, dumping buckets of water and scrubbing the open floors with stiff brooms. I stood in line for morning coffee with my comrades in the Culture Sector of this immense movement. The Culture

Sector was one of the newest aspects of the movement, and its members were tasked with creating art, music, theatre, and cultural programming that inspired members, supported the movement, and encouraged the critical thinking and political development of its base. I was grateful to have been invited to leave my studies in São Paulo and tag along to help develop the *mística*, the important opening performance of this historic occasion. Sleepily, I waited for strong sweet coffee and squishy bread, and looked down the hill at the school in a daze.

◦ ◦ ◦

I had gone to Brazil because I wanted to see what it was like to be part of a mass social movement, and what to do here in the US to make such a movement more likely. It was 2004, and I'd grown weary of comrades in the US quoting Margaret Mead: "a small group of dedicated citizens can change the world." The frequent reference had become a kind of conciliatory slogan - a reassurance, perhaps, of our own significance - despite our small numbers. More importantly, the phrase seemed to cover up or excuse the real limitations in our political, educational, organizing work, and our failure to attract larger numbers to engage in anti-capitalist struggle. My question was, "why must we be so small?"

By this time, the momentum from the 1999 Battle of Seattle - which had politicized me and thousands of other young activists - had faded, leaving many feeling burnt out or paralyzed. Others had become more firmly entrenched in sectarian debates, which were taken up by an ever-shrinking circle of the very well-educated. It felt like after the sharp crack of clarity

that Seattle offered, we had once again slipped into a fog.

We were now facing two wars, a climate of increased political repression after 9/11, and a new wave of anti-immigrant hysteria. As if these political challenges were not enough, I could see attitudes within our organizations that impeded the possibility of attracting a broader range of participants to the struggle, and kept us certain about our identity as a small, insular group. There were ongoing practices that tended to squash lively and insightful political discussion. Among the obstacles were a tendency towards sectarianism, a dogmatic approach to political analysis, a disconnect between theory and practice, and an elitist attitude regarding political development, which reinforced hierarchy based on class and educational background within the group - effectively silencing many with different class, educational, or cultural backgrounds.

Having run into these roadblocks within political organizing, my own work had turned to the question of political development and cultural work. As a theatre artist, I was drawn to a form of popular theatre that originated in Brazil, known as Theatre of the Oppressed. Like the radical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, the participatory theatre of Augusto Boal seeks to fundamentally alter social relationships, and to shift the balance of power between teacher and student, actor and audience, leadership and base. It is a form of theatre that invites reflection and action.

The power of Theatre of the Oppressed is based on a similar idea of *praxis*, the concept that theory and practice are necessarily connected and part of the same thing. Through simple

activities, participants engage ideas of power and reflect on their own lived experiences of it. This reflection then determines future action.

In one activity, two people work in pairs as one puts their face within six inches of their partner's upraised hand. The 'following' partner is led around the room in a particular way and in a particular pattern that suits the leading partner. This activity invites dialogue about the ways people typically cope with power, the strategies they employ for gaining it back, and the ways in which people unknowingly give up their power. It might invite deeper reflection on the dynamics of a worker dealing with her boss, a disempowered partner in an unbalanced romantic relationship, a student dealing with a teacher, or even the relationship between those who make international trade agreements — and the unquestioned way that entire countries follow without questioning the arrangement. The effectiveness of such techniques lies in their ability to link people's lived experiences of oppression with more abstract political concepts. This opens up political dialogue that does not depend on strictly academic knowledge and creates a space where everyone, regardless of academic background, is invited to engage in political debate.

The summer before I left for Brazil, I'd had the chance to hear a national leader of the MST speak on the topic of political development and its connection to participatory decision-making. I knew I wanted to see a vibrant movement with decentralized leadership, that was able to make quick and participatory decisions, where the national political leaders had started with only an eighth grade education,

and where the leadership saw its primary task as the development of a critically thinking base. I'd believed this was possible, but it was not enough to know that. When I got an invitation to visit Brazil's Central West to see how theatre and cultural work was part of the MST organizing, I knew I would have to go in order to experience it for myself.

POLITICAL EDUCATION VS. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT— WE ARE NOT A HEAD WITHOUT A BODY

The Portuguese word for 'to know' (*saber*) has the same root of the word 'to taste' (*saborear*).

In the MST, the term "political education" is not frequently used and is looked upon with some suspicion. In Brazil, the word "education" connotes the idea of filling the head with facts, information, analysis, and theory. This notion of filling the heads of the people with facts and theories, without concern for the rest of their bodies, minds, and spirits, is an unpopular idea among members of the MST and the community at large.

Instead, the phrase "*formação política*" translates roughly to political development. It does not mean formation in the sense that participants are formed like clay into obedient foot soldiers, carrying out the actions and holding firm the ideologies of a particular political analysis - quite the opposite, in fact. Political development and critical thinking are seen as the antidote to entrenched sectarian dogma.

Effective political development is a process to link these two forms of knowledge; it's what makes reflective, critically engaged action possible.

Systemized knowledge incorporates a large body of material: publications, analysis, books, and philosophy classes that study Marx, Hegel. This includes study at all levels, from pre-literate to those pursuing advanced university degrees. *Experiential knowledge* is the set of experiences found or discovered in the lives of all people and the understanding that they know (whether they realize it or not) in great detail the way the capitalist system works, *and* the points at which it has exploited them, traumatized them, and limited, blocked, or frustrated their deepest dreams and aspirations over the course of a lifetime. While systemized knowledge uses books, lectures, and diagrams, experiential knowledge is best tapped by processes of popular education, art, participatory theatre, and cultural work. The intention of such popular methods is to engage, encourage and activate the processes of critical thinking that have been dormant after long years of adaptation to the capitalist system and its ideology.

This expansive view of political development engages not only intellect, but also the whole body of participants: the senses, the emotions, the experiences, the dreams, hopes, desires, and fears; and the cultural, the subjective, the personal.

I see this as evident in regard to my own entry into political activism. I'd stumbled into a training where activists were practicing nonviolent resistance in preparation for the WTO protests. I'd been about to leave, when a stranger called over to me and invited me to 'practice resistance' with his small group. Reluctantly, I set down my backpack and clamped down on the floor as four people tried unsuccessfully

to move me. The visceral experience of physical resistance brought back a flood of memories relating to my experiences and sense of power. I was stunned. In about thirty seconds, my understanding of myself and my potential power had been completely transformed, and a few hours later I was helping to pull together an affinity group that later went to Seattle. No teach-in, no books or notebooks, no academic discussion could have accomplished what thirty seconds of action told me about my own power and its connection to why we were resisting the WTO.

However, post-WTO, the processes of political development I observed appeared to focus on *information*. There was an attitude that if people simply had the correct information, they would see clearly what to do and take action. This view misses the point that most people feel powerless most of the time, their experiences of themselves and their world are often submerged, and that many people do not have enough sense of their own power to speak up in the face of injustices in their daily lives, let alone in the face of unjust international trade agreements.

Those who had gone to Seattle had been transformed by the lived experience of that struggle, the state repression of police on the streets and in the jails. However, for thousands who did not have this opportunity, we as a movement did not know how to make the connections clear between people's own sense of power and lived experiences of oppression and the global economic system.

EXAMPLE: WORK, STRUGGLE, EDUCATION - AT THE SCHOOL OF FLORESTAN FERNANDES

I'd already been in Brazil for several months when I was invited to attend the opening of the School of Florestan Fernandes. I was excited to see this new MST university, which would provide a central location where people from all over Brazil - and from social movements around the world - might come and study. The university was named for a well-known activist and educator in Brazil, a contemporary of Paulo Freire who committed his intellectual life to the development of critical thinking of his students.

The opening *mística*, which we'd been asked to create, was a participatory performance that tells the story of the current events of the movement in the context of its past, present, and future. It can be a powerful way of demonstrating to the larger masses in visual form the reasoning behind the 'current conjecture' or present analysis; its creation was an important assignment. It was also an important process of political development for its members.

Fifteen or so activists gathered to discuss the topic at hand, and the given theme: Work, Struggle, Education. It seemed obvious that the task was to show the struggle of the movement, the work done by hundreds of MST residents to build the school, and the creation of the school opening up the possibility of education to thousands. The following dialogue ensued.

"First you work, and then you struggle for education."

"No, first you must educate, and then struggle. Only after that does the work begin."

"No, struggle must happen first,

for there is no work. And education is out of reach to us without struggle."

The discussion continued, as each person drew from his or her own experiences of work, education, and struggle, to try to come up with a logical sequence for these important points. It occurred to me that even within this movement of people with similar conditions, a tremendous diversity of experiences and perspectives brought each of them here to this moment. Different relationships to work, struggle, and education meant that each had different ideas about the way critical consciousness happens.

It was revealing to realize how many different ways MST activists had entered the movement, and the ways people developed a critical consciousness of their circumstances. There is no single recipe. Alessa, living just outside the city, had grown up working the land. Sharp as a tack, she had no way to get to university as she could not pass the tests with upper middle class bias in language and cultural references. Junho was from an indigenous family, and grew up on the border of Paraguay, speaking Guarani. His family joined the movement after many, many times being forced off their land. Another MST militant, Claudio, tall and blond, was a student studying theatre in the city but became bored and disillusioned with the limitations of his study. Not seeing a future beyond, he joined the movement for the opportunity to create theatre that inspired him. Anna's family moved to the North when an underhanded government campaign moved poor Brazilian families to farm the Amazon region. This was a way to pave the way for large corporations to buy the land after the farms fail. After struggling for years and facing near-death

by starvation, she found her way into the movement and traveled here to the Central West to reclaim land. Now she acts as medicine woman for the camp, awaiting settlement. She practices the medicine she learned in the North to heal the sick, and showed me the herbs she grows that ward off the symptoms of starvation in a region so desolate that people eat dirt to alleviate their suffering.

It is clear that there are many different reasons people might join a movement and choose to struggle against capitalism. Some join for food, shelter, and greater security. Some join for opportunities not found elsewhere, like the opportunity for land or for starting a farm. Others join to fulfill their dreams of a more expansive life, or for the creative potential that comes from collective struggle. Still others join out of intense desire for education and intellectual fulfillment that is frustrated by the exclusive closed doors of Brazilian universities.

One of the successes of the MST is that it has found ways of bringing in all the different sectors of society who desire change, who come to the movement for different reasons, all the reasons that the capitalist system does not meet their needs. Capitalism limits us not only on a physical, survival level, but it also binds our intellectual possibilities and our creative dreams. As artists and intellectuals, we too have a personal stake in ending capitalism; under capitalism we will always be bound.

The success of the MST is not simply in its commitment to bringing people into the movement, but to keeping them engaged, keeping them in the struggle once their basic survival needs are met. The MST manages to do this through their commitment to

a multi-layered and lifelong political development process.

EXAMPLE: READING CIRCLES AND THEATRE IN MATTO GROSSO DO SUL

After having spent several months in the camps with my friends in the Culture Sector, I'd been invited to be part of the organizing efforts for the National March for Land Reform, an ambitious march of 10,000 people over 20 days, and an enormous challenge for the movement. We were asked to organize a series of theatre brigades for the occasion, and the group had already met for a week in Goias. There, cultural workers from six of the states in the Central West spent a week creating theatre, puppets, music and even doing early morning acrobatics. Never in my life had I met activists willing to wake up before 6 am, even before the morning coffee, in order to practice acrobatics. Many had been up late into the night studying philosophy and political economy.

Now, seven of us had returned to the Central West to strengthen our brigade, to rehearse theatre that would entertain and activate marchers as they rested each night, and would engage the residents of the towns we passed through on the way.

Just after morning coffee, all members of the Culture Sector met for study. Little pamphlets were passed out, "The Situation of Land in Brazil." I could see daunted expressions on a number of the dusty faces of the workers as the books were handed out. We were divided into five groups and each given a section to read out loud.

Our group circled up, and we each took a paragraph of reading. For

a few members of the group, the reading was easy; but several struggled to sound out the longer words. There were frowns of concentration and at times, a general sense of puzzlement. After each paragraph, there was a brief discussion where participants could ask each other questions, or comment on the content. I could see a brightening of faces, as one worker realized that the farm his family had lost had been bought by one of the international corporations and was now growing soybeans for the US and Japan, instead of the black and red beans that fed most Brazilian families.

Once we'd finished reading our section, it was time for the theatre. Immediately, people were engaged, moving around, animated, trying out ideas of how to show this information to the larger group.

A half hour later when we circled up again with the other four groups, we had a total of five new theatre pieces that demonstrated the situation of land in Brazil, and twenty-five new leaders - of all different levels of education - who'd been part of creating this material, which would be used to educate the masses about the purpose of the march.

This method of participatory education was effective political education for all levels of literacy and political consciousness. It activated all members and got them on their feet and moving with the material. It allowed those with more political experience and critical awareness to offer leadership in the process, by offering suggestions and asking questions. It put the material in the words and movements of all people, regardless of education. By using their metaphors, their language, the plays had energy and a sense of humor that would speak to those living in the camps and the broader community.

In addition, the development of five new plays would further the reach of this political education process from a group of five to a mass of hundreds, if not thousands over the course of the march. Such a process shifts the participants, regardless of literacy level or previous political experience, from passive subjects in their learning to leaders. Now, as creators of the material, they are responsible for helping to educate a much larger mass. Such processes of political development redistribute power that has been lost over a lifetime. As participants become creators of the material, they break the cycle of passivity, dormancy - a necessary step of political development for people who faced years or a lifetime of being silenced.

To be clear - there was nothing 'dumbed down' about this process. The question of how to develop theatre that simply and effectively communicates ideas to a mass is a task that requires even the most politically 'advanced' to think quickly on their feet, to respond with clarity to questions and confusion, and to struggle to determine the most effective ways to relate material to the larger world.

BRINGING IT BACK

In the US, I'd run into frustrations as I tried to incorporate experiential knowledge and the systemized knowledge of political theory that many fellow activists seemed to have easily at hand. I deeply wanted to connect to the theoretical work, and engage in the political debates that help frame the question of what to do; however, I had not yet found an effective way to do this. After working to develop processes of political education for others like myself, I'd been told, perhaps only half-jokingly,

“First, read all these notebooks. Then, maybe someday we can talk theory.”

This kind of seemingly innocent chauvinism was commonplace within a circle of activists that perhaps, on some level, *wanted* to stay small and elitist. It seemed to keep safe a certain number of ‘experts’ in the field of political theory (who tended to be men and to be white) and relegated those doing actual on-the-ground organizing in the community (often women, and in a broader sense, people of color) to some sort of secondary intellectual status. Perhaps there was the underlying assumption that on-the-ground organizing - the very thing that contributes to one’s experiential knowledge of struggle - does not require the same kind of intellectual capacity, for example, the capacity to understand abstract thought or interpret theory, as does the intellectual and theoretical work of publishing papers and journals. For many of us who were less confident academically, it was too easy to accept this sense of ‘secondary’ status in relation to political debate, to devalue our language and the experiences gained from organizing. When faced with arrogance of our more academic comrades, it was easier to withdraw our comments from the political debate and focus instead on our organizing work. The result was an increasingly entrenched disconnect between political theory and political practice.

Simple chauvinism wasn’t the only the obstacle. When facilitating a political conference a number of years ago, I had asked participants to break up into small groups to more thoroughly discuss a topic at hand - in their own manner, of course. There was immediate resistance, with perspectives ranging from “But I want to hear what everyone says,” to “Why are you dividing us up like

this?” There was also strong opposition to the large notebook/flip-chart where I had jotted down notes from the discussion for all to read. As a visual learner myself, I found it helpful to write key ideas as a way to follow an otherwise chaotic and long-winded debate. I was told that flipchart notebooks were too ‘bourgeois’ for our organization.

I was stunned that a few simple changes to process faced such opposition and controversy. It is clear that strong resistance to alternative methods of discussion or political development says something essential about a particular culture, and begs the question ‘what’s the problem?’ There are a number of possibilities and cultural realities that might explain why this is a cultural problem, particularly for predominantly white groups. I had not run into the same obstacles in the organizing I’d seen within immigrant communities.

For many activists in the US, the cultural obstacles might relate to the historical connection between social movements and universities - a place where many white US activists have been politicized, and where a number of important social movements have emerged. In recent years, working class people with relatively new access to universities have gained the power of academic language to describe political realities. Also, the history of settlement in the US is culturally different than a historically Catholic country such as Brazil, and the Protestant cultural impulse has a specific tendency to separate the head from the body, so to speak. Disconnect from the body and the emotions is key in this historical context, a connection which is essential in order to explore alternate methods of tapping into people’s experiential knowledge.

In addition to these possibilities, I believe that strong resistance to alternative methods of political development may indicate an underlying impulse for those with higher levels of education to control the outcome of the political discussion. As long as those with more education, those seen as the intellectual leadership, are present to express their views, and as long as methods of political education remain unchanged, those with less formal political education will always be slightly suppressed and the internal hierarchy of the organization or movement will remain intact.

Therefore, the idea of talking 'all together' really means: let those who are more confident, educated, and who are seen as leaders discuss the topic. Those with less confidence, formal education, or who are less pushy are invited to listen and learn - in a passive way - the views of those with more social, educational, and political power.

Interestingly, it is not only those in intellectual leadership who may resist more participatory forms of political dialogue. A number of years ago, a friend was organizing a conference here in the US. When asking the participants to form small groups to discuss a topic in more detail, he faced objections - not only from the leadership but from one of the participants who seemed most eager to learn. "But what if the person who knows the right answer isn't in our group?" they said, in panic. The concept of one or two people having the "right answer" is at odds with the idea of a collectively developed analysis that is based on participants' own experiences and understanding of constantly changing conditions.

Clearly, it is not only those in political leadership who may resist the difficult, often frustrating work of

genuine political development. So do those within the movement who may have an easier time 'learning' the dominant analysis of the group rather than developing their own critical thinking abilities to contribute to that analysis, or develop their own. Ultimately, this limits the ability of the group to develop a comprehensive analysis that prepares for effective action.

If political analysis had no way of being informed by the actual issues and experiences faced by members of the community, and if the theory has no way of offering assistance, insight, and relevant direction for those who are working to organize a community politically, then it becomes nothing more than an academic exercise. There is nothing necessarily wrong with this - but it should not be called politics; it should be called academics.

Confusing academics with a political development creates a disconnect between theory and practice, which severely limits effective political engagement, both in terms of developing a complete and comprehensive analysis, and in terms of taking effective political action.

In Brazil, the idea of the current conjecture, or present analysis, emerges from both systemized knowledge: facts and figures about agriculture in Brazil, political theory, philosophy, and an understanding of history, but also from the popular education work in the camps, the lived experiences of ordinary workers and their understanding of how capitalism works. There is a saying, "*if you are not with the people, then you are against them.*"

Without the perspective of the masses, something constantly in flux, the analysis of the moment is yet incomplete, insufficient, and inadequate

to determine an effective course of action. This is quite different from the idea that a small group of people can study and know what is needed to be done to liberate society.

BACK IN GUARAREMA...

As the guests arrived at the School of Florestan Fernandes, there was a buzz of excitement. Members of social movements from all over Brazil, South America, Cuba, India, France, Germany, and many more countries took their leisurely coffee, then made their way down to sit at the student desks, now lined up in tidy rows inside an enormous circus-like tent. Half a dozen translators tested their equipment, while the Culture Sector opened up their banners. A young girl stood with a violin, as the participants in the *mística* took their places.

I did not know what to expect for the three days of study that opened the school, a program called 'Political Development for Militants,' but when I looked down at the program, I smiled. The MST organizers -who are seen internationally as leaders in the area of political development and education - had not created a program that instructed participants the correct way to do political development. Instead, the program listed presenters from around the world, each prepared to share her or his own experiences of political education in the context of their own countries, their own cultures, their own struggles. They would offer examples of successes, failures, and the objective and subjective political conditions that generated their methods. There was a sense that somewhere in the conversations, in this space of hundreds, there would be a new understanding of the current

conditions of political development processes of anti-capitalist movements around the world.

It was time to start. The violin began to play, and participants in the *mística* emerged from the sidelines with hammers and carrying bricks. Young and old, they began their procession across the plenary stage, and the first of three banners unfolded.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tamara Lynne is an activist, theatre artist and cultural worker, and founder of Living Stages, a company committed to interactive theatre for community dialogue, reflection, and action. www.livingstages.org.

**INTERVIEW:
AFRO-COLOMBIAN
ANARCHIST
DAVID LÓPEZ
RODRÍGUEZ**

**LISA MANZANILLA &
BRANDON KING**

We were in Bogota at Processes for Black Communities' (PCN) national meeting this past February. Our goal was to connect with people from different regions in Colombia, to possibly link with PCN members later on in our trip. We also were there to share and draw connections with the work that the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement and Take Back the Land Movement are engaged in in New York City. We also informed folks of the current situation many New Afrikans/Black people are faced with in the United States, in relation to discrimination, criminalization, displacement, and lack of access to jobs/resources, etc. Our goal was to try to build solid bonds with people and figure out ways that we could not only learn from folks there, but also to think through ways that we could concretely support one another through engaging in active solidarity.

David López was actually our first contact from PCN. We met him in Medellín before the national meeting. There, David explained the problems Afro-Colombians were having in terms of their claims to ancestral lands, and shared information about Law 70 of 1993, which grants Black communities collective rights on ancestral land. He also gave an anarchist explanation for its contradictory element. Even though this law has been passed, mass displacement has continued as the law is not

enforced. We talked about how even though the laws aren't recognized, still having something on paper shows much further progress than Black people have made in the US in regard to "legitimate" claims to ancestral lands.

In Bogota, we wanted to follow-up on the conversation, and also to document it, so that we could share his views, and the work that PCN does, with more people.

[Translated from Spanish by Brandon King, Lisa Manzanilla, and Monika Rammath.]

David Lopez Rodriguez: I was born in Barrancabermeja in the Magdalena Medio region of Colombia 56 years ago, of Zambo (mixed indigenous and Afrikan ancestry) maternal grandparents who were farmers and fisher folk in the low water regions of the Rio Grande of the Magdalena. I am an anthropologist from the University of Antioquia in Medellín and started working on projects in the Pacific southwest in 1985. Beginning in 1990, I was working with afro-leaders on the dissemination of Transitory Article 55 (TA 55)¹ of the Colombian constitution of 1991 in the ten municipalities of the Pacific Coast in the department of Nariño, and the negotiation process of Law 70 or the "law of Black communities" between them and the Colombian government.

Since July 2004, I made my official link with PCN in Colombia, who were those who I was mainly working with since 1990 and this integration was through the *Colectivo Libertarios Afromagdalénicos* - Afrolibertarios from Barrancabermeja. In the PCN National Assembly of 2007 in Cali, we participated with Afrolibertarios in the PCN Working Group of Magdalena Medio, which we helped to form. In

mid-February of 2010, we also participated in an expanded meeting of the PCN National Coordination Team with a PCN Working Group of Valle de Aburrá (Medellín) where I live with my companion, Gladyz Amu, also a descendent of Afrolibertarios, and our three children - Julián, Juan and Rafael. I am currently part of the PCN National Coordination Team in support of the PCN Working Group of Magdalena Medio and the Valle de Aburrá. I am also working on two projects with Black communities in the port of Buenaventura on the Colombian Pacific.

ON LAW 70

Law 70 of 1993 was an initiative of Black organizations in the Colombian Pacific supported by Black militants of Palenque San Basilio (near Cartagena on the Caribbean coast) and of a minority of afro-activists from cities like Cali, Medellín, Bogotá, among others. In the 1991 Colombian Constituent Assembly, with the support of indigenous constituents, some of the M-19 Democratic Alliance Movement and independents won approval of TA 55, by which it recognized the Black communities of Colombia as an ethnic group and ordered that no later than in two years to enact a "law of Black communities" in Colombia that would enable the collective titling of lands of Black communities in rural areas bordering the Pacific basin according to their traditional production practices and other areas of the country of similar conditions. It also ordered that the law develop rules on the protection of identity and the social and economic development of Black communities across the country.

This triggered an extensive and intensive social mobilization of Black

communities throughout the Colombian Pacific, primarily, and ultimately led to the enactment of the law on August 27, 1993 by the Colombian government. Simultaneously, with the enactment of the law came the privatization of COLPUERTOS (state owned company - Colombian Ports) in Buenaventura, and megaproject capitalists backed by the paramilitary—a concerted and calculated strategy of the State—began the process of harassing Black communities of the Colombian Pacific coast. In the last 25 years, Colombia has nearly five million displaced with a high percentage being Afro-Colombians from the Colombian Pacific, the Caribbean mainland, Magdalena Medio, Urabá, Bajo Cauca, and northeast Antioquia, all areas of which have a large Afro-Colombian population. They have largely been forced to Bogotá, Capital District and major Colombian cities like Cali, Medellín, Barranquilla, Cartagena, Bucaramanga, and Pereira among others. The current situation is so grave and delicate given the extreme violation of the rights of the Black ethnic group of Colombia as evidenced by forced displacement, that the Colombia's Constitutional Court ruled the sentence T025 of 2004, which defines the "State of Unconstitutional Affairs." Given the increasingly severe evolution of this situation, in 2009 the Constitutional Court, in reviewing the failure of the sentence T 025, issued a new mandate called Auto 005,² setting precise responsibilities and determining State deadlines. Two years later, the situation continues to be one of neglect on the part of the Colombian State.

ON THE CONTRADICTIONS OF LAW 70

Anarchism has much to offer in this part, and the Black movement has the

possibility of nourishing itself from anarchism in order to understand this problematic.

Starting with the historic stance of anarchism, of no or the negation of the state, such as that proposed by the bourgeoisie and capitalism, and also finally by some sectors of the proletariat [sic]. That has been a constant element of anarchism that has a lot to do with the Black movement, the afro-descendants; because since the tribes in Africa, when the elders were forced over here to America, there already existed laws, there already existed ways of organizing long before the nation-state, and precisely as an ethnic group, as a Black people, there is a difference with the state. The state corresponds to another logic and although [the Black movement] recognizes a great power in the state and therefore the need to relate with it, to mediate with it, this can not signify that all the action of the Black movement is based around the state, it can not neglect its own internal logic which has much to do with the principle of autonomy.

Now in the specific case of your question, in this context when the state grants through its laws, from within anarchism it's possible to ask, "but what or which state is it that gives those laws?"

And there are distinct analyses. One of those, for example, is the conception of the state which is not exclusively the apparatus or the organizational structure. This is the organizational expression of the state, but the state is ultimately fed by something qualitative, which is the social relationship of capital, as those analyses suggest.

Here it is very important to differentiate this category from the element of money which within Marxist critique of political economy, which argues that

capital is not strictly money. Money is a result of a social relationship that makes this possible, and we recognize the contradictions between Marxists and anarchists, but we also know that there is a culture of anarcho-communism and that there are some elements we do observe there, some similarities in the middle of the controversy and the debate that has been presented historically, and perhaps this [element] is one of the important ones.

Returning to the point, capital is not metal, it's a social relationship between one human group that exploits another. This model of social relations generates the accumulation of wealth; the accumulation of wealth is the result. So in that sense, the characterization of the state, not only as an apparatus, as a repressive apparatus, as an economic apparatus, as an educative apparatus, as an ideological apparatus, not only as that, the state is an expression of the social relationship of capital. From that analysis, from that support how will it be possible, one would ask, that the social relationship of capital which is exploitive, alienating, homogenizing, will recognize in its laws other cultural logics, other ways, that have other sensibilities? This is a contradiction.

So it all depends on how well we understand the state to be able to weigh and calibrate its own laws, and in this sense in general anarchism contributes to this reading. In other words, we obviously need to work with the laws of the state because of the great power that it has, and the necessity to concretize things on the short term for example, but that can not lead us to interpret or understand that within [the state] there is a solution to our problems.

That [understanding] will resolve, even within Marxism it resolves, the

social relations of capitalism. That is precisely what is devouring us, what is killing other cultural logics. It's like an explanation in part to, let's say, why anarchism, the contribution of anarchism that even reinforces and gives support to Marxist analysis [as an explanation to the contradictory element of Law 70].

NOTES

- 1 Transitory Article that recognizes collective land rights for Black communities, plus protecting cultural identity and the promoting economic and social development.
- 2 Protection of fundamental rights of people of African descent, victims of forced displacement under the unconstitutional T-025.

For more information on the chronology of Law 70 see: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/469f387bc.html>.

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWERS

Brandon King is a community organizer and cultural worker, a member of Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, Take Back the Land Movement, and a former organizer with Picture the Homeless. He is a New Afrikan anarchist who is a part of the Anarchist People of Color (APOC) network.

Lisa Manzanilla is a xicana, radical librarian, musician, and capoeirista. She is part of APOC and the Northeast Climate Confluence Network. She has volunteered with Books through Bars, NYC Radical Reference, and No More Deaths.

INTERVIEW: CREATING DEMOCRACY WITH CHRIS BORTE

LARA MESSERSMITH-
GLAVIN

In the fall of 2009, a call was put out for communities to self-organize People's Movement Assemblies leading up to the US Social Forum in Detroit the following summer. Led by Project South, the Southwest Workers' Union and others, this call was answered by over 100 assemblies before and during the US Social Forum. One group who answered the call was Creating Democracy, a movement building organization based out of Portland, Oregon. Creating Democracy brought together 26 groups to participate in a People's Movement Assembly (PMA) in Portland. In this interview, we discuss movement building and the Portland PMA with one of the co-founders of Creating Democracy.

What are some of the common challenges that you see us facing, as a movement?

That gets exactly to the right question that I think many of us are asking ourselves. Why aren't we moving forward faster? For me, probably one of the highest points of the work I've done was organizing to shut down the WTO in Seattle in 1999. And even to this day, I feel like the strong lesson I learned from that was...what a direct action can look like and what mobilization - for a moment in time - can look like. What we didn't have and what we're still not doing well is doing movement building, taking something like organizing against the WTO and maintaining it, sustaining

it, and building organizations that grow, rather than having this huge upswelling and really great organizing leading up to it, but then having no structure or no way to hold people and keep them engaged.

[What] we're missing are community organizing skills. Community organizing is an absolutely key component to movement building. You can't have a movement without community organizing practice, but the people who do community organizing now are mostly contained in non-profits. Whether they have great politics or not, the organizations are mostly oriented to more short-term reforms and elections. (I want to say that acknowledging and giving due respect knowing they are the role models for the community organizing work we need to learn from.) Also I think there are lots of great community organizers...who don't have democratic practice as a central focus. You can do decent community organizing without having democratic practice. I think you can do better community organizing and will build better, stronger movements if they are more democratic.

It is useful to talk about what exists today as a movement, and I think it is useful to say that we have a movement, but it's also different than the scale of the Civil Rights movement. I don't want to say that what we have today *isn't* a movement, but I think that maybe [we should use] different language, like "large mass movements." When it gets to the scale where it's on the news every day, or where the President of the United States has to negotiate with people directly because it looks like a city's going to get shut down—*that's* the scale... What we need are movements that are so big and so powerful that we can really make the changes happen that we want. The Frederick Douglass quote about power

conceding nothing without demand is true, and it can't be just the demand of a one-time direct action; it has to be the demand of a large-scale, mass movement that has participation from ordinary folks, from all walks of life, not just a college educated, group of friends. It has to be large and extend out.

Who were some of your role models that you think people were using for the WTO organizing?

It's amazing [that] the most recent book in the [AK Press/Institute for Anarchist Theory Anarchist Interventions] book series, *Oppose and Propose!* by Andy Cornell, was on Movement for a New Society because...when I found out about MNS I was really inspired, and I came to find out that many of the institutions where I learned my politics and some of my early organizing experience, like Food Not Bombs, came through the upsurge of anarchist infoshops and organizing that happened in the '90s that traces back to people who came out of MNS. [For example,] David Solnit, who was a mentor, Katya Komisaruk, Mike E, Asante Riverwind, Dana, Lisa, all playing key roles in the direct action in Seattle largely came out of the Abalone Alliance and Lawrence Livermore actions that were direct descendants of the MNS: using consensus, using large-scale nonviolent direct action, but with anarchist politics woven in through it. Even my brief experience with Earth First! at the time was heavily anarchist influenced, and I feel many elder Firstlers were also veterans of the anti-nuke movement. Even though, I wouldn't say EF! was a direct descendant [of MNS], I think threads ran through...

Does CD identify as an anarchist organization?

The shortest answer would be no. But the longer answer—more than any other tradition, I come out of the anarchist tradition...

...Around the world and throughout history, democratic practice—not the weak “democracy” we have here in the US—but strong, grassroots democracy has been part of all revolutions even those that ended up being authoritarian revolutions—the early stages were democratic. It’s what moves individual people to take action - when you own it, when it’s your revolution. So for me, I don’t see a distinction between anarchism and democratic practice, but I think I’m still in the minority....

For example, a common thing to hear in the 90’s would be that anarchists are “anti-state.” To me, who is successfully anti-state today? Well, the Tea Party and corporations. If you say, well, within socialism, anarchism is really a response to the authoritarian Left, that’s fine to place it there. But it also has at least a relationship, if not a clear academic lineage, that traces back to Haudenosaunee democratic practice and Greek democratic practice. Everywhere humans have ever existed, you either have a small unaccountable group of people making decisions, or you have people making decisions together as a community. I feel like anarchists should see themselves as part of that tradition of humans trying to make the world a better place...rather than keeping themselves/ourselves in the isolated group of “well, within the Left, within socialists, within the tiny group of revolutionaries who talk about revolution on a regular basis, we’re the ones that think that Communism didn’t go far enough”...a really tiny sliver.

I can talk about democratic practice with anyone. I can talk about it with my conservative father-in-law, with someone

I meet on the street, even within the workplace—the connections between democratic practice and unions, democratic practice and fighting for tuition reform, democratic practice and shutting down the WTO. Those links are clear, and to me, I didn’t have to make any ideological shifts or give up any commitment to revolution to talk about democracy.

Following up on you identifying what some of the gaps are in what we’ve had since the WTO, what are some of the efforts that you’ve been a part of to correct that, to be a part of moving us forward?

[One of the] challenges we’re facing in terms of movement building and why we’re not having more success in moving justice work forward is a lack of improving and expanding our large-scale democratic practice. We know how to do small-group democratic work pretty well, and we know what we *don’t* like about our crappy form of democracy in the US.. We can do large assemblies like the [US] Social Forum, or similar gatherings. But could we, as a movement, if we were in charge of the water system, run the water system in a democratic way that was successful, that would get people water without also giving them giardia? Could we work together in a sustainable way and not be at each other’s throats? Can we do governance? To me, three key things are: really looking at movement building in a much broader sense, community organizing, and expanding our democratic practice.

With those in mind, Creating Democracy is a movement building organization, which can mean a lot of things, but really, [we’re] trying to shine a light on movement building. CDs most recent formation started about a year and a half ago, and included a small group of

about 10 people who helped initiate and facilitate a People's Movement Assembly in Portland with the goal of participating in the national PMA as part of the US Social Forum process.

There's lots to say about USSF, but briefly, it's the US part of the World Social Forum process, which is both in relationship with and distinct from the WSF. Like the WSF, the USSF is a gathering where people on the Left, trying to make justice happen in the world, can talk without necessarily having to have the same ideology or organizations or even goals. One of the limitations people saw at the first USSF in 2007 in Atlanta was no formal discussion across organizations as part of the social forum - no one actually trying to make decisions or trying to come up with a movement agenda. So, one response to that limitation was the efforts to use People's Movement Assemblies— basically, really trying to either add to or push the social forum process towards saying, “yes, it's good that we gather and assemble, but we also need to move from those assemblies towards stronger collective action.”

CD was aware that this work was trying to happen leading to the USSF in Detroit in 2010, so we wanted to participate and be part of it. The PMA was brand new. It was being developed, literally - the final process for the national assembly was refined days before the USSF actually happened, so we were a part of it, and began our organizing before we had a really clear sense of what we were plugging into, but we knew the general thrust. We also wanted to take the opportunity to experiment with models and democratic practice that we hadn't seen before. We wanted to see [if it is] possible to get people from diverse parts of our movements together - for example, people who are part of community

organizations with a base, a large membership, to be in the same room with a small activist group which is only representing themselves, with folks from the labor movement... Could those people get in a room and have conversation and try to make a decision together? We knew that PMAs were supposed to bring a resolution or multiple resolutions to the National Assembly, and we didn't know a lot more than that. So, we came up with our own model here in Portland that, as far as I know, no one else tried—to the level of detail that we tried—to make that process as open and clear as it could be so that we could try to actually say this group of people and these organizations agreed to these resolutions and they were brought to the USSF.

Can you describe the organizational models of the PMA and explain the assumptions on which these models rest?

In Portland, our PMA process was supportive of the National goals trying to move towards agenda setting, and also focused on trying to experiment with “Can we do better small and large group decision making? Can we have a one-day meeting that's meaningful by trying to do pre-work ahead of time?” [We asked] groups to write resolutions a month before the meeting and tried to get everybody to read them so they could come together ready to try to make a decision rather than taking hours just trying to get on the same page. It's not feasible to have 26 groups like we had meet a lot more than a few times a year [due to other organizational commitments]. [We wanted to see if we could] do a successful one-day meeting where we've tried to do that pre-work ahead of time. [We were also] wanting to experiment with different democratic decision-making processes, wanting to

experiment with trying to bring groups together that don't usually work together, meet together, trying to experiment with a model that could try to gather goals, interests, vision from groups ahead of time so we could have a meaningful conversation with people with widely divergent backgrounds and experience in one day.

What were some of the preparatory asks that you had, and how did you go about communicating that to people?

We had a “movement building conversation series” leading up to it, and the goal of that was to both try to ask key movement building questions that we should be asking, like with the economic collapse that hit us recently, when we have such a great opportunity to have that conversation and dialogue and talk about alternatives. If we hate capitalism, why can't we talk articulately about what we would do instead? Another key question we looked at was the nonprofit industrial complex - inspired by the book and conference “The Revolution Will Not Be Funded.” It was a great critique and beginning of a discussion, but left us hungry for alternatives to the 501c3 model. If I was going to start an organization today that required a full time person to be dedicated to it without having some magic inheritance or winning a lottery, you know, if you have a staff, there are not many model alternatives to having a 501c3 in order to apply for grants or accept donations to be able to fund that work. So even today, I think the critique of foundations is great, but if I want to start a nonprofit today, how can I avoid the traps and the pitfalls that were articulated in that book? We also had a great conversation with white people doing racial justice work, where we explored how our racial justice work as white people was feeling stuck. We wanted to have those movement building

conversations as ends in themselves, to move movement building questions forward, but also to stimulate interest around the social forum and the Portland PMA and get people involved and try to make connections. It was good for outreach and good for the conversation.

What were some of the other strategies that you employed when you were going about organizing the PMA, and in particular, reaching out to people in the community?

There was a challenge because we wanted to have a cross-section. We were experimenting. It wouldn't be as useful to see 10 people who always talk to each other talk to each other and have a meaningful conversation, but could we really cross organizational style? So we wanted to have groups like Sisters of the Road, which does community organizing [around homelessness and poverty] and has a base, work with Parasol [Climate Collective], a study group—it's a different structure, and there are not many opportunities for groups like that to get in a room and have a dialogue. Similarly, Jobs With Justice or Rural Organizing Project does not have as many opportunities to be in the same room with BARK! [an ecodefense organization] to have a conversation. But one of the challenges for us was wanting to have this really high quality discussion meant that at some point we had to actually close the door. It meant that if you came in at the very last minute, you're not going to know what's going on enough... We want[ed] to have equal participation with everyone in the room, so we set a deadline. You had to be registered by a month or two months ahead of time, you have to have your resolutions submitted by this time, and then feedback for all the other resolutions by a week before. People within CD and outside CD, when they heard

some of the standards we were setting, they were like “You’re crazy. That’s never going to work—it’s way too extreme; people are busy, they can’t, you know...” and those have real merit, those concerns and criticisms, but we couldn’t come up with any other way [not] to have people come in cold to the space. We wanted to experiment—and in the end, 28 groups registered, the majority of the 28 groups put forward resolutions. I can’t say for sure how many of the groups actually read the resolutions before they got there, but, you know, it wasn’t a complete failure. Something like that could be done in the future, and I think definitely improvements could be made, but we definitely had to struggle with closing that door. There were a couple of groups that wanted to participate and we had to say no in the end. We were up against the deadline of the USSF, and if it were something where it weren’t a one-time event, [where it was] part of an ongoing community organizing effort, there wouldn’t have to be the same kind of closing. It could be like, “well, this month, no, but the next month’s meeting”...but that was a challenge for sure.

It wasn’t just a homogeneous room. A group that presented a logistical challenge—and it was a great logistical challenge—and I think it went much better than it could have gone, was having a group of Spanish-as-a-primary-language group, *Comite de Solidaridad y Apoyo Mutuo*. We had to have every resolution translated into Spanish and make it available online, and then have simultaneous translation for any [session] or small group meeting. I hadn’t seen that before successfully, and early on I thought that we wouldn’t be able to without funding, for us it was all volunteer. That was another reason why the deadlines mattered—we had to get the resolutions translated.

One major aspect to the way that this was organized was that it was a consensus-based model. Where did that decision come from, and what did it end up looking like?

I think we need to try new things more and experiment more with democratic practices because I do think that unmodified consensus and unmodified parliamentary procedure have problems. The better we are at using some kind of process that allows the fullest participation possible, that doesn’t shut down voices, that allows individuals and numerical minorities to be heard and have their concerns heard while still getting things done—that’s also key to building democratic mass movements. And so I’d say I’ve been a part of a lot of groups over 10 years who assume that the process you use is consensus, and equate consensus process with radical politics and with anarchist politics, and I’ve also worked with some groups who don’t see that at all, groups that hate consensus. I think, to me, like the nonviolence versus violence debate, a lot of energy is spent with consensus versus parliamentary procedure in a way that doesn’t result in better movement work. It can be just a very polarizing, pointless debate, unfortunately. But I think when it’s a conversation that’s trying to look at new models, that’s when it’s more meaningful.

In particular, what we chose to do was take a page of history from 1981, a strong argument from within one of the key sources of consensus process [for] Food Not Bombs [and other] groups today tracing back to MNS. One of the key consensus manuals that still inform that process today is a book called “Building United Judgment,” and tucked in on page 33 of that book was this small page that was saying why we shouldn’t have blocking. And I don’t know actually the

full details of how the block was introduced, but I have been told that it was introduced when consensus [began to be] used in activist circles. Quakers don't have blocking when they use consensus in Quaker spaces. The fact that blocks may have been introduced only in activist circles, and the people who have the most history with consensus don't even use blocks, I think was a good reason to ask the question, "Why do we have blocking?" The argument on page 33 of that book, when I read it the first time, my jaw dropped because I had been using consensus for at least 7 years doing organizing, and had been taught that blocks were essential. I had actually only seen a few blocks, and every block I'd ever seen was a painful, demoralizing experience. Mostly, in 7 years—and now I can say for 20 years—I can count on one hand the number of times I've seen a block, and in every case it was not a positive experience. So we wanted to experiment with using consensus without a block, to see how it went. We felt like if we did do parliamentary procedure, it wouldn't be as interesting of an experiment because the default decision-making procedure for everything around the world has been parliamentary procedure; there've been millions of experiments in the sense that we use it all the time, and so there aren't any lessons to be learned there.

So, following the experimental analogy—what, then, was the hypothesis being tested? What was the result?

I guess the hypothesis was, "You can take the strengths and successes of consensus process without keeping the block." The theory that people who are strongly attached to a strict way of doing consensus is that without the block you get tyranny of the majority, or people are silenced;

individuals don't want to disrupt the groupthink and so they won't hear their voices. The right to block gives individuals the ability to have their voice heard. We weren't attached to calling it consensus—we ended up calling it "simple democratic process," although to anyone familiar with consensus, this looks a hell of a lot like consensus. We didn't want to get into fights about "well, you said it's consensus, but without blocking, it's not consensus..." So we tried to sidestep that.

What did you see that happened?

I didn't see anything that made me feel like we were missing a huge something without a block. I felt like if we had blocking as a possible option that any participant at any point could have grabbed onto, we would have had no resolutions. We would have ended the PMA without a resolution because...I could have seen the level of concern grow so high that someone would have just said, "I have a concern - I block." Because we didn't have the level of trust and familiarity and knowledge of where we're coming from and what we mean when we say certain things; that makes for better process in general, and especially with consensus process. It goes better with that level of familiarity and trust. My conclusion is that I didn't see a problem not having [blocking], and I did see an atmosphere where it easily could have gone at lot worse if we'd had [it].

That answers the question of to what degree were your goals and expectations met regarding the consensus part. What about in terms of a movement building exercise, and in terms of plugging people in to a sense of belonging to something larger, via the Social Forum—how do you feel like that went?

I think we were somewhat successful. We wanted part of the outcome of the work to be in parallel with and supporting mobilizing people around the country towards the USSF and the National PMA in Detroit, so whenever we would put out an email, we would link to the Social Forum, and we were trying to encourage people to go, as well. That wasn't the only goal, but—I think that was somewhat successful. There was a caravan that we helped make a space for... I think we helped mobilize individuals and organizations towards Detroit.

In trying out the consensus model, I would say it was a successful test. In trying out [getting] together across groups from different places, I would say it was a successful test.

We didn't set as a goal "this is the beginning of a new model that we're going to continue," which I think frustrated a number of people who participated, who were like, "This is great, we need more of this. Let's do another one in a month." I definitely had multiple nights where I didn't get any sleep getting this done, with a full time job and as a new father. I couldn't maintain that, so part of our commitment to each other to do this work was we would have this surge of organizing as this group of 10 people, and then reflect back and see what we would do next. We're kind of catching our breath, I guess. In general, I don't like to do one-time things where people work toward something, and then it kind of all falls apart (and maybe this is overstating it), and people go home, where it's not clearly building relationships. We didn't do follow up work to maintain any relationships that people built. People did continue some on their own, but we didn't help. If we were to continue that and build those connections and

facilitate them and make them stronger, that's what I would like to do; that's movement building. We just didn't have the capacity at the time for that. That's the kind of thing that I hope CD can do in the future—that kind of work in an ongoing way, not in a one-time way.

That reminds me of what a lot of people talk about as one of the shining aspects of the WTO organizing, that it had exactly that kind of quality.

In that case, we all had to drop what we were doing to defend [against] this scary threat because it was aiming a gun against all of our heads simultaneously. I hope that we don't have to wait for giant threats that threaten every one of us to do that kind of cross-movement work.

What would you do differently in the future, or what future plans do you, either as an individual or as CD have for this work? Are there other movement building projects that you see?

The national PMA work is still continuing. The best place to get information is <http://www.pma2010.org>—the website has all the resolutions, including the ones from Portland, that the Portland PMA all agreed to on it, as well as the 100 PMAs that happened before and during the USSF, so that's a piece that's out there.

The next work for CD is doing some community organizing in Portland and trying to wrestle with those questions of what models work within and outside of nonprofits, with staff and without staff, taking the lessons we learned from trying larger-scale democratic practice, trying to experiment with new democratic models, to have not just a top-down decision-making process, not just a small group of people making all

the decisions, but to really share decision-making in a large-scale way that can reinforce movement-building, that can reinforce shared leadership development. The more people participate, the more they can feel a sense of ownership, the more they *have* real ownership. So really taking the lessons from the PMA and the movement building conversation series and trying to put it in practice more for the long haul—putting it into practice with a long-term vision.

One of the problems you identified with that one-day thing, something that I think resonates for people movement-wide, is that issue of trust. You were talking about how there just wasn't that feeling of trust within the room, and maybe because we are all coming from such diverse end-points, some with some very particular ideological backgrounds—how might we address that?

A lot of the things that are hard about decision-making become easier when you can spread it out over time. If you have just one meeting, and one decision that you have to make, you have to make the right decision at that one meeting. I don't know if there is any process that will make that happen perfectly. But if you get to say, well, we'll have this decision-making process and we'll try it this day, and we'll see what works, and we'll try to work together, and then we'll try something different the next time, and we'll learn from that experience. It becomes much easier to imagine a future possibility where people can work together and have this agreement and build and learn, than to try for this one-time, one-shot where it has to be perfect. It's an awful lot to expect if a group comes together for one day, but I don't think it's as much to expect if we are able to start to build those links and reinforce and

encourage them... It's happened in the past we had massive Labor movements in the 20s and 30s that weren't just labor movements. They were people who were not directly workers in the unions that supported those movements happening; it was whole communities. The Civil Rights movement was not just people of color, it was not just students, it was not just churches; it was massive, whole, large sections of society, mobilized and working together. It's been done, and I believe that it can happen again. Part of it is really focusing on that question: why don't we have larger, more successful movements? What do we need to do? I think just asking that question brings us closer toward making them a reality.

NOTES

1 Outside the US, in the World Social Forum, the process is called Social Movement Assemblies, and inside the US, people call them People's Movement Assemblies.

2 INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, ed., *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (Boston: South End Press, 2009).

3 Elaine Nesterick, *Building United Judgment: A Handbook for Consensus Decision Making* (CCR, 1981), 33-35.

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWER

Lara Messersmith-Glavin is an educator, writer, and organizer based in Portland, Oregon. She participated in the 2010 Portland People's Movement Assembly as a representative of Parasol Climate Collective, an outreach group that seeks to find radical solutions to climate change. She is a member of the *Perspectives* editorial collective and is on the board of directors for the Institute for Anarchist Studies.



Anarquía
Santiago Armengod
block print, 2010

PRACTICAL ANARCHY, NYC

A PROGRESS REPORT

During an open announcement time at the 2010 Renewing the Anarchist Tradition conference, a New Yorker took the microphone and suggested that people in his home city get together to organize as anarchists. This proposal has now taken root in the form of Practical Anarchy NYC. PA is a group whose goals include facilitating conversations about anarchism and praxis, and providing a platform for action. While there are many anarchists in NYC working on many fantastic projects, there are few spaces explicitly grounded in anarchist principles that encourage reflection, dialog, and planning. PA seeks to create such spaces for both self-described anarchists and their allies.

Our first project was to create an anarchist reading group. Since the group's founding in January, we have read a book each month, alternating between "Classical" anarchist texts, such as Rudolf Rocker's *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, and more contemporary works such as Murray Bookchin's *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism*. These books have prompted many different discussions, each providing an opportunity to reflect on the relationship between history, theory, and revolutionary praxis. When reading classic texts, such as Kropotkin's *Conquest of Bread*, fundamental ideas about human nature and the promise of technology led to conclusions about revolution and the possibility of an

anarchist society. In the discussion of Rucker's text, we questioned assumptions about the privileged position of a working class in bringing about a liberated society. Throughout all the readings, we analyzed the stated and unstated theories that resonated with us and confronted those that we found discordant. For all of us, the texts and discussions have stimulated reflection on the world we live in and the future we might want.

In addition to providing an opportunity to investigate our own principles and understandings through the readings, these discussions also feed back into our own process, becoming occasions to consider our own anarchist praxis as a group. For instance, in our most recent reading, *Anarchy Alive!*, Uri Gordon describes how some anarchist organizations fail to adequately grapple with issues of intra-group power and accountability. This often manifests in the creation of exclusive spaces - specially designated meetings - for group planning and discussion. However, the emphasis on overtly political spaces risks devaluing other locations for participation and creativity. The effect is to close off spaces that are not only important to the health of an organization but often are places of origin for political action. This analysis has direct implications for how we value and plan our time together at parties or drinking at bars, as well as at formal meetings.

These questions on process are of particular importance to us as PA evolves. For example, we would like to adequately document the reading group meetings so that we can tie together the many threads that run throughout the texts from a variety of frameworks - historical, theoretical, practical - and synthesize the authors' thoughts with

the points raised by discussion participants. We also plan to experiment with "salon"-style gatherings that will incorporate books, articles, blog posts, and other media that focus on a single topic. Keeping a dynamic discussion group going will involve being accessible to new members while keeping the integrity of the original PA vision. And of course we want to ensure that the book group is not a dead end but a path that connects people to anarchist thought and action.

The Anarchist Reading Group is only one of our projects that fuels the struggle for liberation. We organized a panel at this year's Left Forum, "What's Unique About Anarchist Solidarity?", generating a lively discussion on what that means and how it can be practiced, offering examples discussing real cases of anarchist forms of solidarity while also bringing up theoretical issues: what distinguishes anarchism from either the socialist left or the libertarian right? With whom are we in solidarity, and on what basis? In the attempt to lay the foundations for the longer term relationships that underlie real solidarity, PA members have participated in large marches and small community dinners, all of which are opportunities to share with others what we are doing and to learn what is happening among other activists here.

New York City is alive with activism of all tendencies, but it has its challenges for anarchist organizing. While we have our native residents and the people who move here for the long haul, the city also attracts folks who drift in and out. NYC is enormous and spread out - there's more to it than the density of the island of Manhattan - and it can be difficult for people to make it to meetings in a given neighborhood, let alone feel part of a cohesive movement.

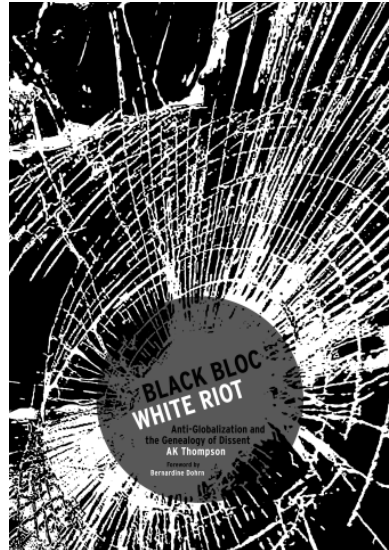
Despite an APOC (Anarchist People of Color) collective in varying stages of activity in NYC over the years, self-identified anarchists, here as elsewhere in the U.S., tend to be white. For example, the five-year-old NYC Anarchist Bookfair, which should serve as a wide umbrella for anarchists throughout the five boroughs, still struggles to overcome a rather homogeneous subcultural reputation. Issues of race, as well as class and gender, need to be examined head on. Finally, there are many exciting radical projects here that display forms of horizontal and anti-authoritarian structure, process, and goals, even if they do not use the word “anarchist.” PA will look for instances of anarchist values in practice in our city - to examine, to critique, or to join.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Compiled by Damian, Melissa, and Tristan
for Practical Anarchy NYC

REVIEW:
*USES OF A
WHIRLWIND &
BLACK BLOC,
WHITE RIOT*

GEOFF BYLINKIN



The world cries out for resistance: glaciers melt, species go extinct, poor youth are shot down in the streets by police or warehoused in prisons, families are evicted from their homes, queers are beaten down, and workers labor long hours at miserable jobs for too little money. Across the planet, power exploits and brutalizes the lives of most people. People do, of course, resist. In China, workers riot against oppressive conditions. Palestinian youth throw rocks (or rockets) at Israeli soldiers, refusing occupation. In India and the Philippines, Left-wing guerrilla armies build power and wage war against conditions they describe as semi-feudal. In Chiapas, the Zapatistas continue to develop autonomous politics to empower the indigenous. Globally, people are organizing to fight back. Most recently, the people of Tunisia and Egypt rose up and, through mass mobilizations and community organization, overthrew corrupt US-backed regimes. We may well be seeing the beginnings of a new period of upsurge and popular struggle against oppression and exploitation.

Where then are social movements fighting for justice in the United States? What is the state of resistance inside the borders of the imperialist superpower? How should we understand the struggles that take place here, and what are their potentials? AK Press has given us two new books that begin to answer

these questions by addressing radical movement building in North America in recent years.

Uses of a Whirlwind anthologizes reports, strategies, and theory that give insight into the state of radical organizing in the United States today. The book is organized into four sections, following a preface by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and Andrej Grubic, a foreword by Marc Herbst for The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest Press, and an introduction by Team Colors Collective. The four sections are: "Organization Case Studies," "Movement Strategies," "Theoretical Analyses," and "Interviews," with about eight essays in each section and four interviews at the end.

The book begins with a solid preface by long-time anti-imperialist feminist Dunbar-Ortiz and Balkan anarchist Grubic, in which they ask, "How do we move from resistance movement to revolutionary transformation?" Looking at different historic struggles, these authors call for a "new libertarian-socialist, inter-racial movement based on principles of opposition to imperialism and militarization, self-activity, local institutions, and solidarity."¹

Uses of a Whirlwind is compiled by Team Colors, a national collective of radicals around the United States who, deeply influenced by the theoretical frameworks of Autonomist Marxism and Postmodernist theory, have come together to analyze the state of liberatory movements in the United States. In their introductory essay, they argue that the great social movements of the last century have both been shaped by and have shaped the social and economic structures of capital. Thus, the struggles of the 1960s, the "movements of fire," were an attack on the Keynesian liberal welfare state (which in turn was

a structural adjustment of capital to coopt and capture militant workers' movements during the 1930s). The "movements of fire" weakened and undermined the welfare state model, and capital again adjusted with the renewed attack of a flexible and brutal neoliberal model. Team Colors argues that the new movements developing now are fundamentally different than those of the past and are more "whirlwinds" than fires. Exactly what the differences are is not entirely clear, and one is left with the feeling that "whirlwinds" and "flames" are an attempt to use poetry as theory. While poetic images of fires versus whirlwinds are powerful, they fail to fully explain the ways in which the context, politics, strategies, and tactics of 1960s militancy differs from struggles today. They go on to critique the cooptation of social movements through non-profit organizational structures and lack of revolutionary vision. They also argue that we must build movements that engage in real community organizing around oppressed people's needs while continuing to ask the big questions about transforming the world.

The book's first section, "Organizational Case Studies," is where activists from various groups and movements describe, sum up, and analyze the struggles they have participated in. The projects described vary greatly from anti-war and environmental groups emerging from white anarchist countercultures to housing organizing among working class people of color. Stand-outs include a piece on organizing Starbucks workers in the context of neoliberalism, called "The Precarious Economy and Its Discontents: Struggling Against the Corporate Chains Through Workplace Organizing" by The Starbucks Workers

Union, and the work of Domestic Workers United and the Right to the City Alliance, which organize women of color and build radical politics with urban workers, called "Building Power in the City: Reflections on the Emergence of the Right to the City Alliance and the National Domestic Workers Alliance" by Harmony Goldberg. These essays present examples of radical organizers doing work that is based on a Left analysis while building power with working class and oppressed people outside of narrow activist circles.

In the "Movement Strategies" section, radical activists and thinkers explore questions broader than the experiences of particular organizations addressed in the previous section. There are useful essays addressing the relationship between the global justice movement and local anti-capitalist struggles, the politics of food, climate justice, independent media, and more. Stevie Peace from the Team Colors Collective contributes a powerful piece called "The Desire to Heal: Harm Intervention in a Landscape of Restorative Justice and Critical Resistance." In it, he looks at the work of Restorative Justice Community Action, a restorative justice group, and Critical Resistance, a prison abolition group, as two different examples of projects struggling to develop liberatory ways to address violence and create justice. Unfortunately, Peace's article is the only one in the book that explores contemporary work against the prison industrial complex and the police, and it does so only indirectly, in the context of other arguments around harm and healing. Benjamin Shepard's article on radical do-it-yourself queer politics is also a gem. In this piece, Shepard makes the distinction between the radical

politics of queerness oriented toward the total transformation of life, kinship, and sexuality and the reformist interest-group politics of “the gay movement” exemplified by groups such as the Human Rights Campaign that seek to integrate gays into the dominant society through legal and legislative methods.

The “Theoretical Analysis” section of *Whirlwind* is grounded in the framework of Autonomist Marxism, which emerged largely from the radical upsurge of Italian workers and students during the 1970s. This political orientation argues that social change is made by the often spontaneous “self-activity” of working class people developing their own struggles independent of the institutions of official society, including unions and political parties. Workers, through their own concrete struggles, undermine capitalism and lay the basis for a new society without depending on “condescending saviors,” be they union bureaucrats or revolutionary vanguards. There are interesting pieces in this section dealing with the economic crisis, radical democracy, and sustainable movement building. There is also a useful piece called “Feminism and the Politics of the Commons in an Era of Primitive Accumulation” by Silvia Federici.

The book ends with three interviews with movement historian Robin D.G. Kelley and movement elders Ashanti Alston Omowali and Grace Lee Boggs, all long-time participants in the Black Liberation movement. Kelley is one of the most important and radical scholars of African American history active today. In his interview, he discusses his political background, his bottom-up approach to history that focuses on everyday working class resistance, and the election of Obama. Alston discusses coming of age in the midst of the Black

Power movement. He argues for a synthesis of Black nationalism, anarchism, and post-modernism that non-dogmatically struggles to smash power by any means necessary while building movements in which we support and nurture each other. Grace Lee Boggs, a long-time revolutionary philosopher and community organizer, discusses her experiences in the movement, the importance of theory, and the necessity of hope.

The interviews are an outstanding addition to the book. These long-time activists, theorists, scholars, and warriors share decades of collective study, experience, and wisdom. Their perspectives should be at the center of a new revolutionary politics. It is striking that they are all participants in the Black Liberation struggle in particular. This is not surprising given the leading role of African American freedom struggles throughout the history of the United States. From abolitionism, the Civil War, and Reconstruction to the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s, the struggles of Black people for freedom have been at the forefront, unleashing the power of other sectors of the population to challenge oppression and leading the transformation of society for all people. It’s fortunate that Team Colors seems to get this on some level, though they never say so explicitly.

Unfortunately, the book contains very little on the struggles of people of color against white supremacy. In an anthology of radical struggle and liberatory social movements in the United States, this is shocking. A few of the organizational case studies are powerful exceptions to this. But as a rule, white supremacy and militant struggles against it are missing from this book.

Several of the most interesting organizational case studies highlight the

work of people of color organizations doing work around housing and worker organizing. However, reports and analysis explicitly dealing with Black people's struggles against white supremacy are nowhere to be found in the first three sections. There are no full organizational case studies of Black radical groups, there are no strategies for transformation that explicitly put white supremacy at the center, and there is no article theorizing white supremacy or drawing on the Black radical tradition. Therefore, while the interviews with Kelley, Alston, and Boggs are inspiring and powerful, they feel tacked on. Additionally, because the book's only engagement with the Black Liberation struggle is through movement elders, it gives the impression that the Black struggle is a thing of the past. We are left with the impression that activists should learn from and be inspired by the Black radical tradition, but it is not something we need to engage on the ground in our work now.

Stemming perhaps from this racial blind spot, there is nothing in *Whirlwind* that deals with struggles against domestic state violence. Stevie Peace's piece on Critical Resistance examines the group in the context of transformative justice and harm reduction, not challenging the prison system. There are no other pieces that deal with struggles against police brutality, mass incarceration, immigration enforcement, or political imprisonment of radicals, all of which are issues that disproportionately brutalize and tear apart working class communities of color. But this work is happening.

Critical Resistance works to abolish the prison industrial complex. The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement in New York City and FIERCE (a queer youth of color group, also in New

York) are building copwatch programs to monitor police activity. The Jericho Movement works to free political prisoners and prisoners of war. Latino immigrants are organizing across the nation to resist US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids and racist criminalizing legislation. Everywhere activists, particularly people of color, are attacking the state repressive apparatus and criminal justice system, which is the frontline of white supremacist terror. Unfortunately, these struggles and the theory and strategies they are developing are left out of this anthology almost completely.²

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While *Whirlwind* is a sprawling anthology and a pleasure to read, containing much inspiration, A.K. Thompson's *Black Bloc, White Riot* is a very different kind of book. In this work, Thompson attempts to analyze the core themes and dilemmas of the North American anti-globalization movement. He particularly looks at the militant wing of this movement, epitomized by the Black Bloc, in which (mostly anarchist) activists march together, hide their identities, attack corporate institutions, and street fight with the police.

The black bloc tactic emerged out of the German *autonomen* movement, which began in the 1980s. The *autonomen*, or "those who are autonomous," struggle to defend squatted housing, protest US imperialism, and fight against neo-nazis. This tactic of mass anonymity used to engage in political militancy and property destruction spread beyond Germany in the 1990s and was embraced by US anarchists protesting ecological destruction at Wall Street and the first Gulf War, culminating ten years later in the widely publicized actions at the 1999

World Trade Organization in Seattle. Black blocs in the decade since have become a common component of US protests. For Thompson and others, the black bloc as a tactic symbolizes the most militant wing of social protest in its willingness both to confront the state and to defy legality.

Thompson takes on the task of analyzing this political phenomenon and its implications. Unfortunately, his intentions are overshadowed by his writing style, which is extremely alienating. Thompson's prose is dense and challenging, seeming like a hybrid of Judith Butler and G.W.F. Hegel. At times, his book is close to being unreadable, with references to "the logic of inversion and conceptual negation," which "have tended inadvertently to reiterate the restrictive epistemic frame."³ While it is essential that radicals grapple with difficult ideas, Thompson's writing style tends to hide his genuine insights in post-graduate philosophical prose.

Black Bloc, White Riot begins by identifying the North American anti-globalization movement as a white middle class phenomenon. The forces that marched in the streets against the World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and Group of 8 were largely white, as has been addressed by people such as Elizabeth Martinez in her piece "Where was the color in Seattle?"⁴ The claim that the movement was middle class seems less clear. While those who jet-set across the planet to every major summit may have economic privilege, they also are a minority in the movement. By assuming a middle class movement, Thompson universalizes the experience of privileged activists, while making invisible the experiences of working class militants. Another problem with this assumption

is that, while Thompson spends pages talking about the history of "middle class" politics, he never defines what this class is or who is in it. This lack of clarity reinforces the tendency to universalize middle class as being the normal and majority position.

As Chris Carlsson writes in "Radical Patience: Feeling Effective Over the Long Haul," his contribution to *Whirlwind*, "If you are not pushing a shopping cart down the street looking for cans and bottles, or riding your Lear Jet to your next golfing vacation in a tropical paradise, you probably think you are middle class. In the United States, nearly everyone believes they are middle class. Whether anyone wants to admit it or not, the majority of us are working class."⁵ Carlsson and other Autonomist Marxists argue that those who do not own the means of production and need to sell their labor to survive make up the working class. While autonomist politics is sometimes overly broad in its definition of "worker," this expansive materialist approach is useful as a challenge to the United States' universal "middle class" approach, which Thompson unfortunately perpetuates.

Thompson takes on the debates that raged in the movement around race and the importance of local organizing. Following the WTO shutdown of November 1999, Chicana movement veteran Martinez's piece "Where was the color in Seattle?" critiqued the whiteness of the emerging anti-globalization movement and the ways in which radicals of color were unable to participate fully. Thompson takes this critique and the white activist response to it as his jumping-off point. Many in the movement responded to this critique by increasingly prioritizing "local

organizing” with the communities most affected by capitalist globalization, largely communities of color. While this shift was an important move away from the “white” of the white Left, Thompson speaks to some of its limitations in practice.

While the focus on how capitalism attacks oppressed communities in the United States was an important corrective to a movement initially focused on “summit hopping,” Thompson critiques the way in which a simplistic notion of “the local” separated struggles from the context of global capital in which they exist. He also rightfully criticizes white activists’ tendency to romanticize “oppressed communities” and seek authenticity in them and in relationship to them. There also was (and remains) a tendency to view communities of color as natural and homogeneous. White activists in their quest for authentic struggle idealize communities of color, seeing them as stable and united. It would be easy to follow the adage “follow the leadership of people of color” if this were true. It is not true, and Thompson points out the ways that this white vision of communities of color ignores real contradictions around politics, gender, and power that exist within these communities. Without being sensitive to these divisions, white activists often follow the “official” leadership in these communities while ignoring other forces that may be more radical. Thompson urges white radicals to be mindful of these dynamics and to try to build real relationships and solidarity with people of color-led struggles, rather than tailing conservative forces in communities of color based on a simplistic, and ultimately racist, view of community.

Thompson also addresses issues of gender in the black bloc. Thompson

goes after the critique that black bloc militancy was macho and male-dominated. He rightfully challenges the liberal and radical feminist essentialism that argues that violence is inherently male, pointing to the role of women in riots and uprisings historically. Drawing on the work of radical women of color such as Audre Lorde, he critiques the false assumptions of universalizing “sisterhood” that ends up locking militant women out of Feminist politics. He then goes on to suggest that rioting women destabilize gender categories by crossing the boundaries of gendered behavior, and thus that riots can in a limited way serve as an experiment in the abolition of gender.

Thompson draws on Frantz Fanon’s work, arguing that violence is a precondition to real politics. By engaging in violent activity through black bloc tactics white middle class radicals began to break through the limitations of representational and staged opposition and open up space for the creation of new worlds and possibilities. Unfortunately, Thompson’s definition of violence is incomprehensibly academic and broad, understood as any act “by which objects are transformed through their relationship to other objects,” as well as being “the precondition to politics and the premise upon which it rests.”⁶ He explicitly places the act of breast-feeding in the “violent” category, suggesting that the breast-feeding of a child undermines traditional notions of autonomy and bodily integrity. By this standard almost any act that people engage in in the world is violent, from gardening to cooking. While his understanding of violence as central to all politics is a useful challenge to liberal notions of rational negotiation, this definition serves to make violence almost meaningless. If violence is understood

as being synonymous with transformative activity, there is no real reason for the focus on the Black Bloc rather than other movement actors, whose civil disobedience and other direct actions were equally “violent.”

The use of Fanon’s work is noteworthy, as his *Wretched of the Earth* adorns many an activist bookshelf. But it is not engaged here as it should be. Fanon, while certainly a proponent of the necessity of violence, was first and foremost a fighter for and theorist of decolonization. He argued about the transformative and liberatory power of force and militancy within the context of a brutal and violent system of colonial oppression of Black and Third World people. The idea that this is easily related to the theatrical pseudo-violence of white punk rockers breaking Starbucks windows seems dubious. In the context of North American settler colonial societies whose very existence is based on the colonization and genocide of indigenous people, and, in the case of the United States, chattel slavery and apartheid, the application of Fanon to the black bloc seems confused and not rooted in the material conditions and real history that Fanon always addressed.

While *Black Bloc, White Riot* contains real insights in its analysis of the debates and tensions within the radical wing of the North American anti-globalization movement, it does not go very deep. Thompson quotes from a handful of communiqués and CrimethInc documents, but there is little in the way of real engagement with the writing or debates within the movement. One wants to get a feel for what young radicals were thinking and doing as they challenged global capital. One wants to know what they were arguing about, how they lived and organized,

and what they were reading and writing. Instead, one is treated to lengthy analyses of the movies “Fight Club” and “Natural Born killers” (which Thompson somehow thinks were major influences on the movement) and the highly theoretical works of Fanon, Butler, Paulo Freire, and Michel Foucault. These Leftist philosophers are used to make incredibly abstract philosophical points about the necessity of violence for meaningful political action.

Theory is certainly a necessity in our struggle for freedom. Understanding it sometimes requires great concentration and hard work. However, Thompson fails to really connect his theory to the practice he is examining. Further, he does not give the reader a living sense of the activities, ideas, and overall composition of the movement he purports to analyze.

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Team Colors’s *Uses of a Whirlwind* and A.K. Thompson’s *Black Bloc, White Riot* are both attempts to understand and learn from people’s struggles against neoliberal capitalism in North America over recent years. *Whirlwind* is a diverse, sprawling collection full of insight, experience, and wisdom engaged in building relevant resistance. It does at times lack focus as an anthology, and sometimes feels like a 400-page issue of *Left Turn* magazine in its wide-ranging snapshots of activity without a strategic orientation of how struggles fit together and what their potentials are. The anthology also has a real blind spot in its lack of attention to race and state violence, leaving its broad overview unfortunately skewed.

Black Bloc, White Riot is far more focused in its intention to examine the white middle class radical wing of the anti-globalization movement. It contains

significant insights into and important critiques of the ways in which gender and race play out in the movement, and also makes a necessary call for the importance of taking risks and engaging in uncompromising militant action. Problematically, these insights into real movement debates are the exception, overshadowed by long theoretical tangents and often unreadable verbosity.

What both of these works leave us with is the necessity not only to continue struggling and building movements, but also to theorize, sum up, and share the lessons of our work with others. Too often, we are so engaged in our day-to-day organizing that we fail to think about how our work connects to our vision of a radically different world. If we take our work seriously, we need not only to think about these questions of revolutionary strategy, but to write about them. Both Team Colors and Thompson have made serious attempts to do this. And, for this, they deserve our thanks.

NOTES

1 Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and Andrej Grubacic, "Preface: In the Wind," in Team Colors Collective, eds., *Uses of a Whirlwind: Movement, Movements, and Contemporary Radical Currents in the United States* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2010), xxiv.

2 When making these critiques, it must be taken into account that this is an anthology of previously unpublished work. Team Colors worked with what was submitted to them and they cannot be entirely blamed for what is missing here. Nonetheless, the gaps in this vision of radicalism are too significant to ignore, despite how good this collection is in many ways.

3 AK Thompson, *Black Bloc, White Riot: Anti-Globalization and the Genealogy of Dissent* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2010), 38.

4 Elizabeth Martinez, "Where Was the Color in Seattle?," in *Colorlines*, Spring 2000.

5 Chris Carlsson, "Radical Patience: Feeling Effective Over the Long Haul," in *Uses of a Whirlwind*, 306.

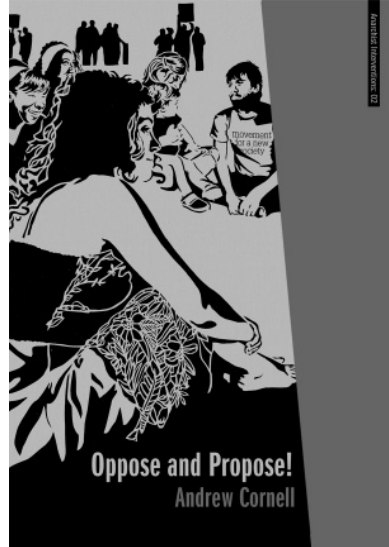
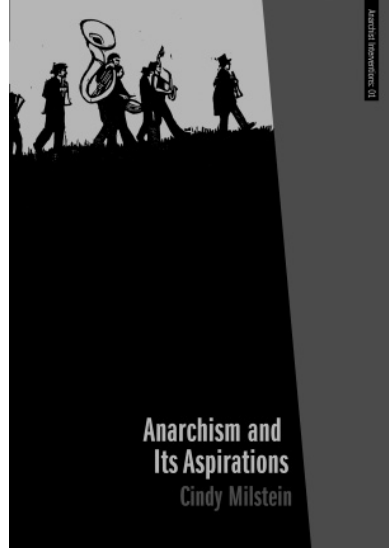
6 Thompson, 23.

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REVIEW:
*ANARCHISM AND
ITS ASPIRATIONS
& OPPOSE AND
PROPOSE!*

A. CATES



The Institute for Anarchist Studies' (IAS) and AK Press's new book series, called *Anarchist Interventions*, begins with the publication of two books: Cindy Milstein's *Anarchism and Its Aspirations* and then Andy Cornell's *Oppose and Propose!: Lessons from Movement for a New Society*.¹ Milstein's book is a thoughtful primer on anarchism in the vein of Alexander Berkman's *The ABC of Anarchism*.² Cornell's book is a historical case study of an anarchist-inspired organization called Movement for a New Society (MNS), which analyzes and evaluates the many lessons the organization lays out for current anti-capitalist organizers. Using Cornell's book as a case study, readers are able to get a concrete example of many of the aspirations Milstein covers in her writing and see some of the limitations of those aspirations.

Movement for a New Society strived to be a cadre-style organization that combined community organizing and the creation of counter-institutions rooted in revolutionary principles and ideas. Cornell relates:

"MNS members believed they could serve as 'leaven in the bread' of mass social movements responding to...crisis, giving them the tools and nonviolent principles they would need to effectively make a social revolution. In the short term, they believed,

radicals needed to develop strategic campaigns that combined organizing and direct action to win 'revolutionary reforms' while simultaneously building alternative institutions based on radical principles, which could serve to model the future society."³

For them, a cadre was an organization of people united by a revolutionary nonviolent politics that was committed to creating and implementing revolutionary organizing strategy while building its members' political education and skills and creating a non-oppressive organizational culture. Unlike the traditional cadre model of Marxism-Leninism, in which cadre members are professional, full-time revolutionaries disciplined by majority-rule decisions, MNS's model, following the lead of the Quakers and anarchism, utilized decentralized leadership and consensus as its main method of making decisions. While this approach would later limit the organization in many ways, members believed it was the clearest way to build a non-hierarchical culture that could push forward a living model of revolution. The living revolution that MNS so ardently attempted to embody and push forward is a concrete example of the aspirations of anarchism that Milstein argues for in her book.

At the heart of Milstein's argument is the position that anarchism strives to build a free and liberated world through both destructive and reconstructive means. Milstein offers an eloquent elaboration on the core of what she calls anarchism; this core is an ethics of liberation, freedom, equality of unequals, from each to each, mutual aid, ecological orientation, voluntary associations, accountability, joy, spontaneity, and unity in diversity. These principles, historical overviews of how

classical and modern anarchism came into being, and theorizing about direct democracy and current forms of protest fill out a holistic look at anarchism. It is useful to see the totality of Milstein's writing as a manifesto on the principles and core values that a broadly defined anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist organization or movement might incorporate into its politics.

The openness, adaptability, and transformational nature of anarchism that Milstein describes is a much-needed intervention in current political projects and organizing. It is a call for movements and organizations to strengthen their abilities to analyze, evaluate, and re-strategize as the political terrain changes through their self-activity, agency, and organizing. Her articulation re-centers humanist ideas in revolutionary political struggle while emphasizing that these principles will and must be transformed as part of the very nature of struggle itself.

Milstein argues against pragmatism in politics. Yet the limitation of her book is not its lack of pragmatism, but rather its lack of answers to the complex questions that arrive from the tension between pragmatism and the revolutionary ideal; questions such as, "How do we deal with a growing reactionary right that is also opposed to the state?" For this reason, Cornell's look at MNS's attempts to deal with these tensions and the balance between organizing and building counter-institutions is helpful in both better understanding what Milstein is getting at and in pushing her ideas forward in practice.

The ethics described by Milstein formed the foundation of MNS's philosophy along with ideas, theories, and practices from other traditions such as Marxism and the Quakers. The group's

effectiveness and relevance seemed to stem from its creative, imaginative, and effective mixing of theory, strategies, and ideas from a multitude of liberatory anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist ideologies, as well as from the way they retrofitted these for the context of their time and location. The group saw the revolutionary potential in taking these principles and broadening them to be the foundation for organizing projects, promoting an internal culture, and building revolutionary counter-institutions. As Milstein advocates, MNS equated the means to the ends, which was its great appeal to many revolutionaries at the time.

However, as Cornell outlines, MNS's mass work, with its emphasis on building revolutionary counter-institutions, gave way to the building of alternative institutions and counter-culture mostly because of the limitations of its leadership structure, consensus decision-making process, and homogeneous membership. Cornell argues:

"When the self-help efforts take place in the context of a revolutionary movement, such as the Black Panthers' breakfast program or medical center, they take on a revolutionary character. To be more precise, counter-institutions become revolutionary when they carry a revolutionary ideology, build a revolutionary organization, and take place with the context of open revolutionary struggle."⁴

Movement for a New Society ended up prioritizing alternative institutions that were not becoming revolutionary or being built through revolutionary struggle, but rather provided a comfortable living for its members outside of the system while not directly challenging it.

The over-reliance on the creation

of alternative institutions outside of struggle is a central weakness of Milstein's argument in her essay "Anarchism and Its Aspirations," which opens her book. She claims that by simply building alternative institutions, anarchists are building the revolution. But this is only part of the work that must be done. Former MNS member Robert Irwin highlights this truth, saying, "Revolutionary system transformation toward anarchist ideals cannot be achieved through the proliferation of alternative institutions, no matter how exemplary."⁵ In order for alternative institutions to create dual power and revolution, they must either start out as or transform into a revolutionary counter-institution as part of a broader struggle for society-wide change. In Milstein's defense, she positions this argument differently later in the book by placing reconstructive ideas and institutions as part of protests and broad struggle: "Only when the serial protest mode is escalated into a struggle for popular or horizontal power can we create cracks in the figurative concrete, thereby opening up ways to challenge capitalism, nation-states, and other systems of domination."⁶

However, for both MNS and Milstein's vision of anarchism, what is lacking is a clear understanding that alternative institutions only become counter to state and capitalist power when they help build a revolutionary organization, push revolutionary politics, and are built in the process of revolutionary struggle. Both Milstein and MNS too easily slip out of the realm of revolutionary ideology into counter-culture lifestylism.

In the case of MNS, the result of this slippage was the end of the organization. If your end goal is to

broadly and expansively challenge state and capitalist power in addition to oppression more generally, lifestylism or alternative institutions cannot alone enact the sweeping transformation needed. The real power of counter-institutions, rather, is that they stand in direct opposition and resistance to the dominant power of capital while building forms of a new, free world. While small-scale initiatives have their place, a challenge to systemic power must happen on a broad, society-wide scale. Masses of people must be engaging in direct action that both takes back power through resistance and redistributes that power through the construction of horizontal institutions outside of capitalism, the state, and forms of oppression such as white supremacy. Milstein gets to this point in her fourth essay, called "Reclaim the Cities: From Protest to Popular Power." However, the frame of this essay seems more intended to temper protest movements into building reconstructive institutions than to place reconstructive efforts within the context of revolutionary struggle. When paired with her earlier essay on the aspirations of anarchism and its emphasis on the importance of building small-scale alternative institutions, and if not read closely, it appears that she is calling more for a politics of lifestylism than of revolution. Taken at its best, it is clear that she is trying to push back on insurrectionist arguments that fetishize rebellion as the end goal and place anarchist politics more in the tradition that MNS was struggling for in its earlier days: a dialectical relationship of challenging power that considers both aspects separately but sees them as dynamically bound together.

Milstein's essays "Democracy is Direct" and "Reclaim the Cities: From

Protest to Popular Power” strengthen her earlier arguments for a prefigurative politics by placing the building of directly democratic institutions and other forms of a free society as part of a challenge and resistance to capitalism and the state. Further, she takes MNS’s lessons on the use of consensus and suggests that consensus has a place in high-risk and smaller-scale decision making, but that on the scale of neighborhoods, towns, and cities where there is a lack of homogeneous identity, it will take majority decision-making models to make decisions truly democratic. In order for majority decision making to remain democratic, it must be based on shared principles, direct criticism, and accountability to those principles. Movement for a New Society itself stagnated when its use of consensus would not allow for more diversity in identity and thought. This decision-making model stunted the organization’s ability to transform itself as the politics and society around it were changing. This stagnation was also bound up in the homogeneity of the membership of MNS, especially in terms of race.

Given the large role that white supremacy and racism have played historically and currently in shaping capitalist and state power, lacking both a firm analysis and road forward in challenging this homogeneity within the organization itself and understanding the role these systems play in society as a whole was a large limitation in the continuing relevancy of MNS to revolutionary struggle. The lack of recognition of this in Milstein’s arguments throughout her book is its largest limitation, and is a huge question hanging over it.

The experience of Black and Brown people throughout the history of the United States is qualitatively

different than those of the majority of white people. Whether it is schooling, policing, prisons, access to health care, or employment, people of color, and specifically Black people, have faced inequality, segregation, oppression, and exploitation at the hands of white supremacy and the privileges of whiteness. This legacy has split organizations and movements, as well as shaped some of the most direct and revolutionary challenges to power in the United States. White supremacy’s central role in building the US empire and what has become global capital poses specific challenges to how revolutionary struggle happens, who leads this struggle, and what a revolutionary politics and organization should look like.

One of MNS’s greatest failings, which is echoed in Milstein’s envisioning of anarchism, is a lack of a clear politics that challenges white supremacy both within society and within organizations. Revolutionaries will continue to face what MNS did: a racially segregated project that either must transform to centralize the experiences and lives of people of color within the organizational culture, politics, and leadership or just maintain itself as majority white organization with all the limitations that this brings. A challenge to white supremacy in all its forms and functions must be at the core of their politics.

Movement for a New Society’s recognition of the need for a truly multiracial revolutionary organization in order to both effectively resist the status quo and to build a new society with the direct participation of those most feeling its burdens meant the dissolving of the organization. The members could not overcome their whiteness, which had shaped MNS as an organization for the majority of its life. This was,

in some ways, buoyed by their lack of democratic leadership and a clear organizational strategy that could have enacted the widespread changes needed to shift the organization's culture away from being so thoroughly white to being a culture shaped and participated in by a multiracial membership. As members of MNS point out, it was the conservative bent of consensus decision making that favors staying with the status quo that kept the organization from being able to create a "formal systematic method for internal education or improvement of its analysis, vision, and strategy."⁷ This is essential to challenging organizational barriers such as a culture of whiteness.

Without clear and formal leadership, informal or covert leaders are able to push the organization on a specific track without having to be accountable to group decisions, elections, or critiques, the tools that are most important to ensuring democracy in an organization. Formal, democratic leadership must carry out the decisions of the organization, even if those decisions, strategies, or theories seem to face large obstacles to their implementation. Leaders must be directly accountable for their actions and choices in carrying out these decisions. If the majority of the organization's members are unhappy with those choices or feel that they are not being made within the spirit of the decisions, those leaders can then be replaced. Movement for a New Society shows that this type of decisive yet directly accountable leadership must be in place in order to push forward internal transformation around questions of internal culture, political understanding, principles of operation, and political analysis of the contradictions facing society.

Milstein's discussion of the aspirations of anarchism and Cornell's presentation of the lessons of Movement for a New Society come at a time when the revolutionary Left is facing a growing global economic and ecological crisis. Organizations across the globe are trying to figure out how to fight for liberation effectively, successfully, thoughtfully, and in a principled manner while struggling to articulate a vision of what a free and just world will look like. Movement for a New Society's cadre model—the combination of building an organizational culture that develops the skills and potentials of a free society while organizing with masses of people and jointly building counter-institutions that can be prepared to take power—is both a useful and relevant historical example for revolutionaries to be looking at today. Their lessons—especially around the problematic use of consensus, the need for a multiracial organizational structure, forms of mutual aid and support for organization and community members, questions of leadership, the need for internal education and political analysis, and a strategy of dual power—are all important elements that current revolutionary organizations need to think about and consider. The ethics laid out by Milstein, the historical context, and the discussion of democracy as a core of revolutionary movements further elaborate on what one learns from MNS's experience. The combination of these two books, both their strengths and limitations, lay out many of the essential questions and ideas that revolutionaries must grapple with as they build organizations, campaigns, counter-institutions, and social movements towards the goal of anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist revolution and a free,

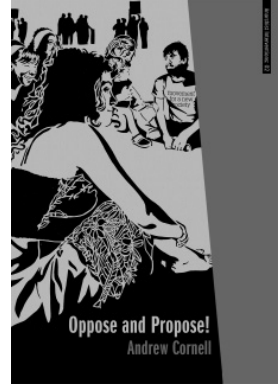
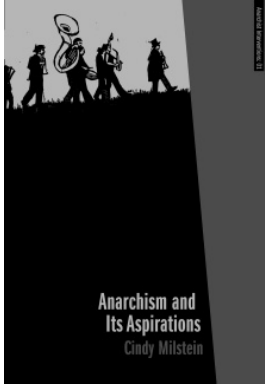
liberated, and just new world.

NOTES

- 1 Cindy Milstein, *Anarchism and Its Aspirations* (Oakland, CA: AK Press/Institute for Anarchist Studies, 2010) and Andrew Cornell, *Oppose and Propose!: Lessons from Movement for a New Society* (Oakland, CA: AK Press/Institute for Anarchist Studies, 2011).
- 2 Alexander Berkman, *The ABC of Anarchism* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2005).
- 3 Cornell, 26.
- 4 Cornell, 104.
- 5 Cornell, 102.
- 6 Milstein, 110.
- 7 Cornell, 100.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A. Cates is a teacher and community activist living in Portland, Oregon. They enjoy listening to young adult and fantasy fiction on tape and fighting for a queer, liberated, and free world.



ANARCHIST INTERVENTIONS

IAS/AK PRESS BOOK SERIES

The IAS is pleased to announce the next two books in our Anarchist Interventions book series with AK Press.

DUE OUT THIS FALL, 2011

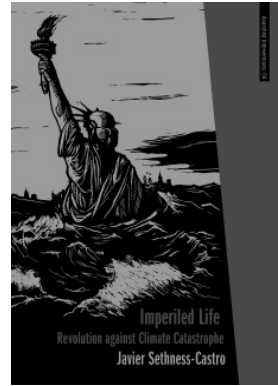
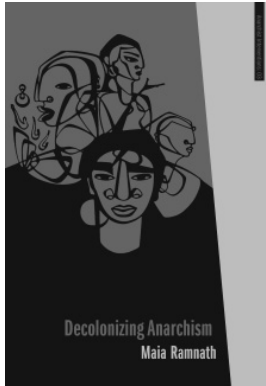
*Decolonizing Anarchism: An
Antiauthoritarian History of India's
Liberation Struggle*

by Maia Ramnath

Training an antiauthoritarian lens on the history of South Asian struggles against colonialism and neocolonialism, *Decolonizing Anarchism* highlights lesser-known dissidents as well as neglected aspects of iconic figures. This reveals an alternate narrative of decolonization, in which achieving a nation-state is not the horizon of freedom. Debates central to the anarchist tradition—on

rationalism, industrial development, and modernity—also shaped the dynamics of South Asian anticolonial resistance, with the additional dilemma of whether these were to be seen as quintessentially alien. Without imposing the contextually specific language and history of Western anarchism, key principles nevertheless appear in different guises, with tendencies ranging from the progressive modernism of the antiauthoritarian Left to romantic antimodernism and insurrectionary nihilism. This facilitates not only a reinterpretation of the history of anticolonialism in India but also insight into the meaning of anarchism itself.

Anarchists and antiauthoritarians in colonized regions have been among the most progressive (though seldom dominant) elements in their own countries' anticolonial resistance movements from Mexico to China. "Western" anarchists have acted on their principles by standing in solidarity with national liberation struggles in places such as nineteenth-century Poland to twenty-first-century Palestine. While it's natural that there should be an affinity based on the principles of self-determination, autonomy, and self-governance (plus anticapitalist and anti-imperialist)



rebellion, many anarchists wrestle with the contradictions of supporting a nationalist state-building project.

But anticolonialism is not reducible to nationalism; it has also manifested in far more comprehensive visions of emancipatory transformation. In fact, an anarchist vision of alternate society closely echoes the concept of total decolonization on the political, economic, social, cultural, and psychological planes. Decolonization in the global South is also intrinsically linked to racial and economic justice in the global North. In the North American context, this emphasis illuminates the substantive contribution of an “anarchist people of color” politics to anarchist analysis and strategy—namely, foregrounding colonialism as a primary structure of oppression, as a nexus of the logics of state, capital, and race, while combating it in nonnationalist, antiauthoritarian ways.

DUE NEXT SPRING, 2012

*Imperiled Life: Revolution against
Climate Catastrophe*
by Javier Sethness-Castro

Imperiled Life theorizes an exit from the potentially terminal consequences of capital-induced climate change. It is a collection of reflections on the phenomenon of catastrophe—climatic, political, social—as well as on the possibilities of overcoming disaster.

By means of an appraisal of the current state of the Earth’s climate and of the possible futures that would be imperiled by further climate destabilization, the book clearly states that dramatic revolutionary transformation must be had in the near term if humanity and life itself are to have something of a chance to flourish in light of the ongoing climate crisis. Its alternative, that of a ‘solar anarcho-communism,’ is set forth at the book’s close.

Combining reportage from the 2010 Cancún climate negotiations with investigations into historical and contemporary anti-systemic thought and praxis, *Imperiled Life* seeks to promote critical thought as a means of changing our historical trajectory.”

Both will be available from AK Press:
www.akpress.org

RECENT GRANTS

WINTER 2011

In the Winter of 2011, the IAS gave grants to four projects. They are:

The Stolen Milk Riots: History and Ramifications of the Israeli Black Panther Movement, by Asaf Shalev and Clayton Hartmann—\$250

The brief existence of the Israeli Black Panther (IBP) movement has gone relatively unnoticed in both traditional academic publishing as well as radical academic circles. Through their IAS grant-funded research, Asaf and Clayton plan to briefly trace the early beginnings of the IBP movement along with the conditions of the Mizrahi (the term Mizrahi applies to all Jews of Middle Eastern ancestry and ethnicity) ghettos that inspired it. From there they will follow the IBP's collapse due to the spread of nationalism by the 1973 war and Cointelpro-style repression by the administration of former Prime Minister Golda Meir. They will then finish with a brief examination of how little has actually changed for the Mizrahi community in terms of socioeconomic and political disparity vis-à-vis the Ashkenazi (European Jewish) minority. Asaf and Clayton

feel by highlighting the issues of intra-Jewish oppression through the accessible and marketable history of the International Black Panther movement, their research will further help the conflict to be seen not as a simple border struggle between religious camps but rather as the Imperialist project that it is, where the only solution is a no-state solution. Asaf is an Israeli American and a Mizrahi from an Iraqi Jewish family. The question of heritage, responsibility, and identity compel him to this project. He has spent many years in Palestine/Israel during various times in his life. He speaks, reads, and writes fluently in Hebrew, and therefore has access to numerous resources about the subject matter. Asaf believes in employing both practice and theory in antiauthoritarian work. Clayton studied colonial legal theory at the University California at Santa Barbara. He first published a research project in summer 2008 with the Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group that used critical race theory to point out the disparity in legal norms between Israeli and Palestinian youth engaged in lawful and unlawful protest. In addition to completing the research project, he also spent extensive time in Mizrahi neighborhoods, witnessing many of the project's subject matter firsthand. While the continued oppression of the Mizrahi and Israeli-Ethiopian communities spur him to this historical research, it is his time spent working with the popular committees in the West Bank that give him hope for peace and justice in historical Palestine.

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Translation of two chapters of Murray Bookchin's *The Ecology of Freedom*: "Introduction" and "The

Concept of Social Ecology” into Russian, by Nadia Shevchenko—\$500

By combining various disciplines, including radical political theory and history with anthropology and environmental studies, *The Ecology of Freedom* makes a systematic and profound analysis of the causes, evolution, and consequences of structures of domination, while simultaneously offering a vision of an ecological society that is free, cooperative, and just. Even though anarchist and environmental movements in the West have been informed by Bookchin’s ideas and concepts since the 1980s, the majority of his works are still unknown to residents of the former USSR. This translation project will make the most fundamental parts of this work accessible to a Russian-speaking audience. Nadia has been active in the field of social ecology for the last twenty years, working with various social and environmental grassroots movement and NGOs in the former USSR and Eastern Europe, primarily through the radical environmental movement “Rainbow Keepers” (followers of Bookchin’s ideas), organizing public campaigns and direct actions, translating, and working for education and mobilization. She received a master’s degrees in mathematics from Kiev University and in environmental management and policy from Amsterdam University.

◦ ◦ ◦

Outlaw Lives: Gender Self-determination, Queer Abolition, and Trans Resistance, by Eric Stanley—\$250

This essay will serve as an introduction to the emerging fields of study and organizing collecting under the umbrella of trans/queer prison abolition. Through an archival rereading of the 1969 Stonewall uprising, Eric will argue

that the “Stonewall” moment was one example of a long history of queer abolition. While the contemporary moment of assimilation and police cooperation is produced via mainstream LGBT organizations, this essay will work to undo this logic and offer its alternative. Finally, Eric will work to build a theory of gender self-determination as an embodied theoretical and political idea that must be at the center of any and all radical analysis. Eric is finishing a PhD in the History of Consciousness department at the University of California at Santa Cruz, and is the codirector with Chris Vargas of the films *Homotopia* (2006) and *Criminal Queers* (2011). Eric’s writing has been published in the journal *Social Text* and in numerous anthologies.

◦ ◦ ◦

Genoa Ten Years Later: Lessons Learned for International Legal Support, by Thomas—\$500

Through a series of interviews and analysis of related literature, Thomas will review the progress that the Genoa legal support team has made in mass defense projects over the past ten years since the G-8 summit in July 2001, where hundreds were arrested and many were tortured, and will assess the specific challenges of defending against international conspiracy charges. Thomas, a law student at the University of California Hastings College of the Law, was inspired to work in law after his experience as a surviving witness to the infamous “Diaz School Raid” in Genoa 2001. Thomas is excited about the continuing movement to end the use of the cages into which we put land, people, animals, and ideas.

DONATE TO THE INSTITUTE FOR ANARCHIST STUDIES ON OUR 15TH ANNIVERSARY

Eat one fewer vegan donut, drink one fewer beer a month, or both—and help fund anarchist written work!

Just think of all the little things you spend money on each month. Nice things—like a book, your friend's latest record, or the ingredients for a yummy dish to take to the community potluck—and annoying things, like bus fare or rent (which is actually a big thing!). Skip just one treat and set up a monthly donation to support the work of radical writers and translators around the world through the IAS and our grant-giving program. You'll also ensure that all the other crucial IAS projects are able to sustain themselves, from *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory* and the Anarchist Interventions book series, to our Mutual Aid Speakers List and Anarchist Theory Track, to Renewing the Anarchist Tradition conference, and more. With your help, we've been building a smarter anarchism since 1996. This year is our 15th Anniversary!

Fortunately, we've now made it doubly easy to give up one soy latte each month and kick the money to the IAS instead. You can now set up a

recurring donation via either Network for Good or PayPal, from anywhere and everywhere in the world, and for as little as \$1 to \$10 to \$100 per month (one-time and larger donations are equally appreciated).

Do it today, by following this link: www.anarchiststudies.org/support/donate.

Of course, there are other ways to contribute financially to the IAS too. Throw a fund-raiser for us, help distribute *Perspectives* in your town, or the books in our new Anarchist Interventions series, and/or bring one of our Mutual Aid Speakers List folks to talk. Our Speakers List is available at www.anarchiststudies.org/speakers, and features a bunch of new people this year.

The IAS also encourages anarchists and other like-minded radicals to give frequently to the many other wonderful projects trying to build a new world from below and yet in need of funds, from your local collective spaces to your local collectives, to all our many innovative publishing, organizing, and agitating projects around the world. We're all in this together, from Cairo to Madison, from Japan to Libya, to our own corners of the globe.

In solidarity,
Cindy Milstein, for the IAS Board

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CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Our deadline for the next print issue is January 31, 2012. All submissions should have endnotes rather than footnotes, contain no page numbers, and conform to the Chicago Manual of Style. Please include your name and reliable contact information. Send your essays or questions to: perspectivesmagazine@googlegroups.com. We are particularly looking for essays on the following topics: Health Care/Self-Care/Wellness; Shifts in Gender and Feminism; Religious Perspectives on Anarchism; and Food Systems. This is an open call, so all topics will be considered.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Santiago Armengod lives in Mexico City where he part takes in several collectives seeking social/political/ environmental justice; his art is inspired by the work individuals and collectives do to shake off the noose around our necks. He is a member of the Justseeds Artists Cooperative.

Katie Burkart is a musician, photographer, and artist living in Portland, OR. She is often touring the world with her band Defect Defect.

Alec Dunn is a printer and illustrator living in Pittsburgh, PA. He is a member of the Justseeds Artists Cooperative.

Josh MacPhee is an artist, designer, curator, and writer living in Brooklyn, NY. He is on the board of the Institute for Anarchist Studies, and is a member of the Justseeds Artists Cooperative.

Meredith Stern works with garden soil, linoleum, and drums. She is a member of the Justseeds Artists Cooperative and currently lives in Providence, RI.

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Anarchism emerged out of the socialist movement as a distinct politics in the nineteenth century. It asserted that it is necessary and possible to overthrow coercive and exploitative social relationships, and replace them with egalitarian, self-managed, and cooperative social forms. Anarchism thus gave new depth to the long struggle for freedom.

The primary concern of the classical anarchists was opposition to the state and capitalism. This was complemented by a politics of voluntarily association, mutual aid, and decentralization. Since the turn of the twentieth century and especially the 1960s, the anarchist critique has widened into a more generalized condemnation of domination

and hierarchy. This has made it possible to understand and challenge a variety of social relationships—such as patriarchy, racism, and the devastation of nature, to mention a few—while confronting political and economic hierarchies. Given this, the ideal of a free society expanded to include sexual liberation, cultural diversity, and ecological harmony, as well as directly democratic institutions.

Anarchism's great refusal of all forms of domination renders it historically flexible, politically comprehensive, and consistently critical—as evidenced by its resurgence in today's global anticapitalist movement. Still, anarchism has yet to acquire the rigor and complexity needed to comprehend and transform the present.

The Institute for Anarchist Studies (IAS), a nonprofit foundation established in 1996 to support the development of anarchism, is a grant-giving organization for radical writers and translators worldwide. To date, we have funded some sixty projects by authors from countries around the world, including Argentina, Lebanon, Canada, Chile, Ireland, Nigeria, Germany, South Africa, and the United States. We also publish the online and print journal *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory*, organize the annual Renewing the Anarchist Tradition conference, and offer the Mutual Aid Speakers List. The IAS is part of a larger movement to radically transform society as well. We are internally democratic and work in solidarity with people around the globe who share our values.