



Rolling Thunder

ISSUE NUMBER SEVEN / SPRING TWO-THOUSAND NINE / A NEWS FLASH FROM THE CRIMETHINC, EX-WORKERS' COLLECTIVE

an anarchist journal of dangerous living

We are not delicate, not
China that belongs in the cabinet
But experimental material
To be shot into space
Perish in flames
And discover new passages
Out
of
this
world.

“Defiance and resistance are illegal. Therein lies the salvation of man.
Everything illegal necessitates integrity, self-reliance, and courage.”

—Emma Goldman

ARREST US
DRAG US BEFORE
GRAND JURIES.
RAID OUR HOUSES.
SHOWER US
WITH PEPPER
SPRAY, IMPRISON
US, SHOOT
US. THERE IS
NOTHING YOU
CAN TAKE FROM
US THAT WE DO
NOT FIRST OBTAIN
ONLY BY
RESISTING.

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we fight because there are things in this world
inside of us
worth not giving up

because faced with such horror
we have to be our own hope

we fight because we are fucking losing,
we are dying
and there is so much more than this

*-one of the reckless ones
facing felony charges from the RNC*

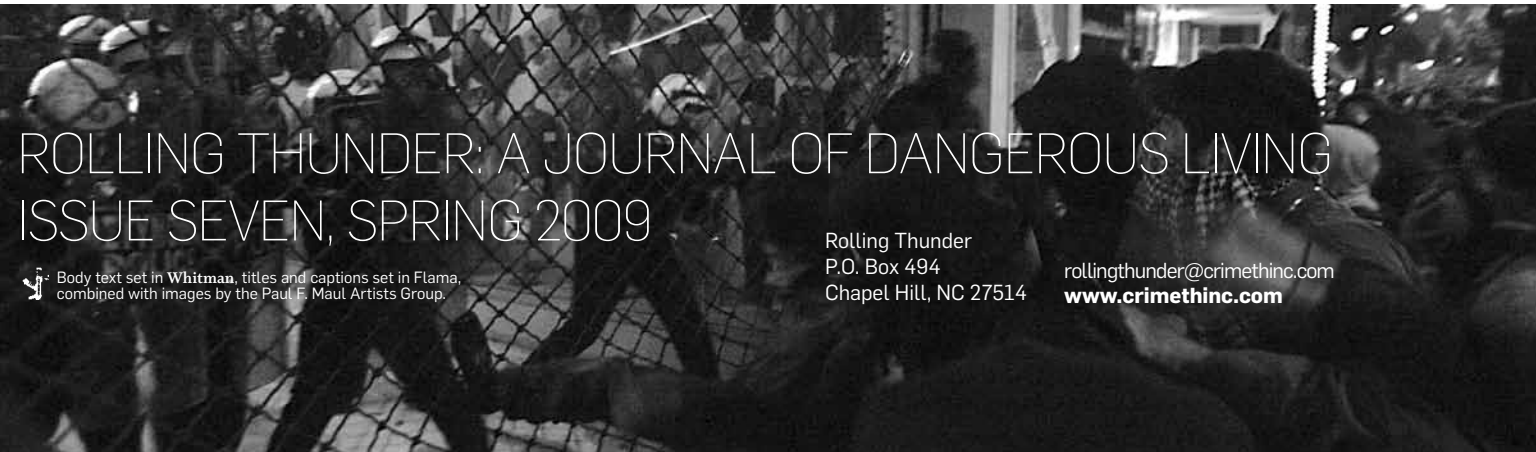


NO PLEAS FOR FUNDING

Rolling Thunder is written, illustrated, edited, designed, and distributed entirely by volunteers. It is not funded by grants, sponsors, donations, advertisements, or subscriptions; in an era when even corporate print media is losing ground to the internet, we pay for this magazine by selling copies at no more than the costs of production and transportation. We invite readers to contribute writing and artwork and to distribute copies, but rather than appeal for everyone to entrust their resources

to us—as if we or anyone could be qualified to utilize them on behalf of our whole readership—we urge you to launch your own magazines and projects. Often, would-be radicals set out to build monolithic structures intended to represent everyone's interests; such projects inevitably fail to be equally accountable to all. As anarchists, we believe it is better to decentralize power by fostering networks of equals. We don't want to build up this particular project as an institution—we want to *change the world*.

Of course, we can't do it alone. The rest is up to you.



Errata

#2

An hour after our second issue went to press, we discovered a structural flaw in the crossword puzzle on p. 101. The clue to #1 across reads “The contraction of the ischiocavernosus muscles will make a penis ____ and can create an orgasm”; the answer, obviously, is “ERECT,” but there is an extra space at the beginning. Worse, we could not simply go through and black out the extra space from every issue, because #2 down begins from the second space: we would have had to renumber every single word in the puzzle. In despair, we racked our brains as to whether there might be another correct answer that could fill the six spaces and accommodate the necessary “E” in the second one; sadly, the best we could come up with was “GETBIG.”

#3

On p. 14, it was alleged that the agent provocateur “Anna” was sleeping with one of the three young activists, including Eric McDavid, whom she managed to set up on conspiracy charges. This was based on faulty intelligence. Technically, the four were sleeping together in the wiretapped cabin she rented to entrap them, but there seems to have been no sexual activity beyond Anna leading McDavid on. An insinuation to this same effect appeared in the “Letter to Infiltrators” on p. 5 in issue 4; we’ve since learned better than to trust anarchist gossip, even regarding the machinations of the government.

That issue also included an offhand jab at *Clamor* magazine, which had uncritically run a screed from an avowed authoritarian communist excoriating the publishers of *Recipes for Disaster*—and this magazine—for not being authoritarian communists. Unfortunately, the publishers of *Clamor* showed no better business acumen than they showed editorial judgment, and the magazine collapsed immediately thereafter. Though we stand by our conviction that those who quote Mao approvingly do not deserve space in publications aimed at liberation, it was not our intention to bring *Clamor* to a sticky end by printing the witticism on p. 99.

#4

An editor who subsequently worked with the authors of the story beginning on p. 43 brought it to our attention that they are prone to inaccuracies. Suffice it to say, if you are doing research for an academic report on the city of Buffalo, this is not the first source to cite.

More importantly, it came to light during the first week of September 2008 that the primary contributor to the Urban Exploration recipe beginning on p. 69 was not only an urban explorer but also a federal informant. This individual, who first appeared at the 2006 CrimethInc. convergence under the name “Andy” and operated inside the RNC Welcoming Committee later as “Panda,” is responsible for framing Matthew DePalma, whom he met at the 2008 CrimethInc. convergence, on charges of “felony possession of a destructive device,” and for collecting intelligence against numerous other targets of federal repression. Now that we know he has a more powerful agency looking out for him than our own, we no longer feel obliged to protect his privacy; if you run into Andrew Darst (see figure i.), feel free to congratulate him on his work.



figure i.

#5

On p. 3, it was stated that the expression “Quincy punks” derives from a British television show. In fact, the show was produced in the United States.

Acephalous ›

Having no head; e.g., a horizontal federation of autonomous collectives, or an anarchist after an uprising

Anarchia ›

A disorder resulting from too much freedom, first identified by physician and professor Benjamin Rush. A devout Christian, Rush was one of the Founding Fathers of the United States and is still regarded as one of the most important pioneers in the field of psychiatry. In a review of the effects, as he saw them, of the events of the American Revolution upon those who participated in it, he observed:

The termination of the war by the peace in 1783, did not terminate the American Revolution. The minds of the citizens of the United States were wholly unprepared for their new situation. The excess of the passion for liberty, inflamed by the successful issue of the war, produced, in many people, opinions and conduct which could not be removed by reason nor restrained by government. For a while, they threatened to render abortive the goodness of heaven to the United States, in delivering them from the evils of slavery and war. The extensive influence which these opinions had upon the understandings, passions and morals of many of the citizens of the United States, constituted a species of insanity, which I shall take the liberty of distinguishing by the name of Anarchia.

Antidepressants ›

Nowadays, it's too much to ask to be happy. But for the right price, you can be anti-depressed!

Glossary of Terms

lucky number seven

Balaclava ›

On October 24, 1854, English, French, and Ottoman forces fought Russian troops north of the port of Balaclava in one of the major conflicts of the Crimean war. The British managed to halt the Russian advance,* but when the British commander ordered the cavalry to prevent the Russians from carrying off the guns they had captured, the commander of the Light Brigade misunderstood him. Believing him to intend for the Brigade to prevent the Russians from moving their own guns, the commander launched a suicidal frontal attack through a valley surrounded by Russian artillery.

The Light Brigade was utterly decimated, and the commander cantered back alone to enjoy a champagne dinner on his yacht in the Balaclava harbor. The Heavy Brigade, which was commanded by his estranged brother-in-law, had been ordered to follow—but it had halted at the edge of the valley, its commander not seeing any point in squandering his troops as well. The commander of the Light Brigade was hailed as a hero, while his brother-in-law never recovered his reputation.

* This initial British success gave rise to the expression “the thin red line,” from which is derived the more recent custom of referring to the police as “the thin blue line” separating civilization from chaos—or the ruling class from justice, depending on your vantage point.

figure i.
The valley of death a year later, still strewn with cannonballs





figure ii.
Modern applications
of the balaclava

The balaclava, a form of knitted headgear that obscures one's identity, is said to take its name from this battle. It has since featured in similarly courageous and ill-conceived confrontations, involving an outmatched challenger, as Tennyson mused in his poem "Charge of the Light Brigade," "Charging an army, while all the world wonder'd." (see figures i. and ii.)

Black Hole of Calcutta ›

The British East India Tea Company, one of the most famous international drug trafficking cartels of all time and the de facto corporate ruler of India for over a century, insisted on fortifying a military base in Calcutta over the objections of the locals. In 1756, the Nawab of Bengal laid siege to the fort; the garrison's commander slipped away, leaving former surgeon John Holwell in charge, and the base soon fell. According to Holwell, 146 captives were then imprisoned overnight in the fortress's twenty-foot-square dungeon, subsequently known as the Black Hole of Calcutta, and all but 23 of them were dead by morning.

Legend has it that a Bengali landlord, convinced that Holwell had been exaggerating, attempted to crowd 146 of his tenants into an equally tight space and found that he could not. He took this as proof of his hypothesis, pointing out that a Bengali villager's body occupies much less space than a British soldier's—an assertion which is incontrovertibly true, if only because the latter were fattening themselves from the larders of the former. The tenants' feelings about this experiment are lost to history; no

doubt the landlord would have been thrilled if he could have packed his tenants as tight as his countrymen had once packed the British, so as to extract a greater value from his property.

There are still black holes in Kolkata and elsewhere around the world, into which disappear the millions who live and die in abject poverty; but their deaths, unlike those of British colonists, go unrecorded.

Bottomlining ›

The problem with collective projects is you have to do them yourself

Bowdlerize ›

Prison reformer Thomas Bowdler is best remembered for *The Family Shakespeare*, a ten-volume collection of the Bard's plays in which "those words and expressions are omitted which cannot with propriety be read aloud in a family." Similarly, as soon as Michelangelo was dead, his colleague Daniele Ricciarelli was hired to paint over the genitals in his fresco of the Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel. All this happened hundreds of years ago, but today there is still no shortage of philistines who bowdlerize anything they can get their hands on; one can even find supposed anarchists who think revolutionary struggle would be more appealing without Molotov cocktails, lust for revenge, and unlimited sexual freedom.

Broken Window Theory ›

The superstition that if minor infractions are aggressively repressed, more serious crime will

decrease. Nowadays, this is often associated with Rudy Giuliani's brutal tenure as mayor of New York City, during which the New York Police Department grew to be one of the largest standing armies in the world in order to crack down on graffiti and subway fare evasion; but the theory originally appeared in an article by James Wilson and George Kelling:

Consider a building with a few broken windows. If the windows are not repaired, the tendency is for vandals to break a few more windows. Eventually, they may even break into the building, and if it's unoccupied, perhaps become squatters or light fires inside.

Or consider a sidewalk. Some litter accumulates. Soon, more litter accumulates. Eventually, people even start leaving bags of trash from take-out restaurants there or breaking into cars.

There you have it—it's not poverty or homelessness that causes people to become squatters, arsonists, or larcenists, but unrepaired windows. Similarly, Western thinkers as prestigious as Aristotle once believed in spontaneous generation—that aphids arise from the dew that falls on plants, fleas from putrid matter, mice from dirty hay, and so on.

In an interesting twist, ever since the WTO protests of 1999, anarchists appear to be operating on the same premise: if only a few windows can be broken, revolutionary struggle is bound to escalate.

Contempt of Court ›

A healthy sentiment

Editor ›

A sort of King Midas who shoulders the thankless task of turning literary lead into gold; a paragon of humility no less than genius, qualified to be the supreme arbiter of taste, economy, and style; an august personage who blesses ungrateful hacks with priceless insight and expertise—whatever the original author of this definition might say.

Exploitation ›

After seizing control of the factory, the workers march to the owner's neighborhood, accompanied by their husbands, wives, friends, and children. They tear down the fences of his gated community and pour through its quaint streets, a riotous torrent clamoring for vengeance. The security guards withdraw in fear as the mob approaches; by the time it reaches his house, the owner is long gone.

On the return journey, one former employee sets down his new wide-screen television to slap a mosquito on his arm. His son, lugging an armful of groceries, is surprised: "Wow, dad, that mosquito had a lot of blood in him."

"That's not his blood, son," his father responds. "That's my blood."

Expropriation ›

If property is theft (see *Robbery*), expropriation is a settling of accounts.

Liberals, who accept the capitalist line that a social group only deserves to wield as much power as it has access to funds, show

this by focusing their fundraising efforts on their own kind. Anarchists, on the other hand, may gather resources wherever there is a great concentration of them serving no good purpose.

It's said that capitalists will sell you the very rope with which to hang them, but only—the adage fails to note—at a price you cannot afford. That's where expropriation comes in.

Guile ›

A more determinant factor in conflict than brute force.

A samurai of great importance once had to cross a broad river in a ferry with a bunch of commoners. Surrounded by such insignificant people, he became magnanimous, and began to entertain the unfortunates around him with tales of his military prowess and courage.

The pauper next to him did not appear to be particularly impressed, however. After regaling him for several minutes, the exasperated warrior finally burst out, "And you? What do you do?"

"Oh, I'm a samurai too," the little man answered.

"You, a samurai? Ho ho!" scoffed the samurai, splitting his sides laughing. "Who is your master, then?"

"Me? I have no master," replied the old man, unconcernedly.

"He has no master! Ha ha! Well then what kind of samurai are you?"

"I'm a swordless samurai."

This gave the warrior pause, for as a child he had been told of the Swordless Samurai, a legendary order reputed to be virtually invincible. "You're hardly a bundle of sticks in a burlap sack!"

"Since you insist on insulting me, I fear I must challenge you to a duel."

"You? You—ho ho—challenge me? Ha ha!"

"Fine then, if you will not fight, you may apologize."

The nobleman was enraged. "Oh, I'll fight! You think I'm afraid of *you*? I could snap you in two with my fingers! Name your terms!"

"I have only one. It would be irresponsible of us to fight here in this boat—we would endanger the civilians around us. Let us fight in the water, if you are really such a mighty warrior."

By this time, the ferry had reached the middle of the river, where the current was strongest and the black water extended around them in all directions. Undaunted, the warrior stood up, placed his hand upon the hilt of his katana, and leapt from the prow, crying out "Come on then! I'll chop you to pieces!"

But the swordless samurai only waved to him pityingly as the river bore him away.

Insurance ›

Perhaps the only form of gambling in which you bet on your own losses, and if nothing goes amiss squander your entire outlay. The matter is further complicated by the paradox that, when it comes to choosing an insurer, your best bet is to find one who underestimates the risks you face, while correctly appraising those threatening all its other customers—lest your provider pay out all its takings before your hoped-for misfortune occurs.

In former times, insurance is reputed to have taken less sophisticated forms, such as neighbors taking up emergency collections; but such primitive methods were deemed unreliable.

Jurisprudence ›

The self-satisfaction of a magistrate who had the good sense to be born on the right side of the defendant's bench

Me ›

I am me when I have lost the initiative, just as we are us when we have lost it (see *U.S.*). As for you, it makes no difference whether you have the initiative or not.

Megalomania ›

In common usage, obsession with the exercise of power, especially in the domination of others. In clinical psychology, a pathological condition characterized by delusional fantasies of importance, wealth, or omnipotence. In politics, a combination of the two, with the added complication that the public shares the delusions and thus gives them substance.

Robbery ›

Legend has it that one night Voltaire and some traveling companions lodged in a wayside inn. The surroundings were evocative, and after supper they agreed to take turns telling robber stories. When Voltaire's turn came, he began: "Once there was a high-ranking employee of the Internal Revenue Service." He stopped there, and his companions encouraged him to go on. "That," he said, "is the story."

Scripture ›

That which the devil quotes for his purposes

Stalinism ›

Not a consistent ideology, but a contradictory aggregate of all the positions that could be inferred from Stalin's actions at various points in his career. One can't help but pity the toadies of the Comintern, who had to play along at the risk of losing their heads as the correct lines on fascism, internationalism, and everything else changed according to what was politically expedient for the Dictator of the Proletariat. That a few psychopaths persist in this today, when the beloved leader is long dead and there are no rewards for doing so, boggles the mind.

Sword of Damocles ›

The Greek thinker Plato, better known for his doctrine that the ideas of philosophers are more real than the experiences of the masses (see *The Republic*), made only one attempt to realize his vision of a philosopher king who would rule with perfect wisdom. As no one would hire him for the job, he had to settle for advising the notorious tyrant Dionysius, a venture that ended disastrously.

The story goes that when another of Dionysius's flatterers exclaimed how fortunate he was to be such a powerful man, the sovereign offered to trade places with him for a day. Damocles eagerly accepted, and Dionysius ordered that he be seated on a lavish couch, surrounded by gold and jewels and waited upon by the fairest boys in the realm. Damocles luxuriated in the attention, shouting out instructions and gorging himself on delicacies until his eyes rolled back in his head in ecstasy.

Only then did he behold the sword suspended over his neck by a single horsehair.

At least this is how Damocles' story reaches our ears through Cicero, a typically literal-minded Roman. Had Kafka been the one to pass it on, Damocles might have described the sword in the eyes of his servants and sycophants.

Trial ›

A formal proceeding designed to emphasize the innocence of judges and lawyers by contrasting them with a defendant, often drawn from the most desperate sectors of society. If this exercise is not sufficient, the defendant is subjected to such an affliction that the worthy jurists can at least congratulate themselves on not being in his shoes.

Trotskyism ›

Stalinism would be fine if only it were more international (see *Trotskyist*)

Vanguard ›

In communist usage, a party that leads from the rear; lest anyone get the wrong idea, they sometimes show their courage by putting themselves at the forefront of a charge backwards. In early anarchist usage, a group that does not lead, generally doing so from prison, though the word is out of favor.

White Collar Crime ›

A redundancy

Y'all ›

In the southern United States, as well as many African-American communities throughout North America, a contraction indicating the second person plural. With the exception of certain blue collar Pennsylvanians, who utilize "yinz," no equivalent exists in the northern U.S. This is supposed to be a sign of refinement, but it may simply be that the concept of collectivity is lost on Northerners and wealthy white people.

Zionism ›

Between 1881 and 1906, sardonist Ambrose Bierce published an irregular column under the title "The Devil's Dictionary"—a sort of antecedent to this glossary, though Bierce would doubtless have considered his work inferior. Bierce, who had quipped that "war is God's way of teaching Americans geography," disappeared without a trace while traveling to observe the Mexican revolution.

What does this have to do with Zionism? In one installment of his column, written well over a century ago, Bierce offered the following definition:

Manna ›

A food miraculously given to the Israelites in the wilderness. When it was no longer supplied to them they settled down and tilled the soil, fertilizing it, as a rule, with the bodies of the original occupants.

Alas, how history repeats itself.

Word of the Issue: **Presumption**

Certain pundits have a lot of nerve expostulating against militant action on the grounds that it does not serve the needs of the working class. Those needs are generally a lot more complex and diverse than such self-appointed experts assume.

Thanassis Papandropoulos had car trouble. His little jalopy had died its final death out in front of his apartment building in downtown Athens, and he couldn't afford to have it repaired. If only it had been hit by a bus, or floated off in a flood or something! Year after year, he'd diligently paid the insurance—a sizeable portion of his meager salary at the baklava stand—and now all that money had disappeared down the drain.

One afternoon, Thanassis was startled from the football game by the sound of explosions. He hit the mute button and looked out his window. The street was filled with young people, many of them in black hooded sweatshirts, running and shouting. There was a university only a few blocks away, so this was not an entirely unfamiliar sight—but this time, they were dragging cars into the middle of the street and setting them on fire.

It only took him a few seconds to realize what he had to do. In a flash, he was down the stairs and out by the curb, fist in the air, shouting "Down with fascism! Avenge Allende!" as he imagined his brother had in '73.

A pair of young toughs approached at a brisk pace, molotov cocktails in their hands. Thanassis stepped out into the street. "How about this one?" he called out, gesturing at his broken buggy. "Nice kindling, eh?"

The one with the kaffiyeh around his face looked at him incredulously. "Are you kidding? That's a working person's car!"

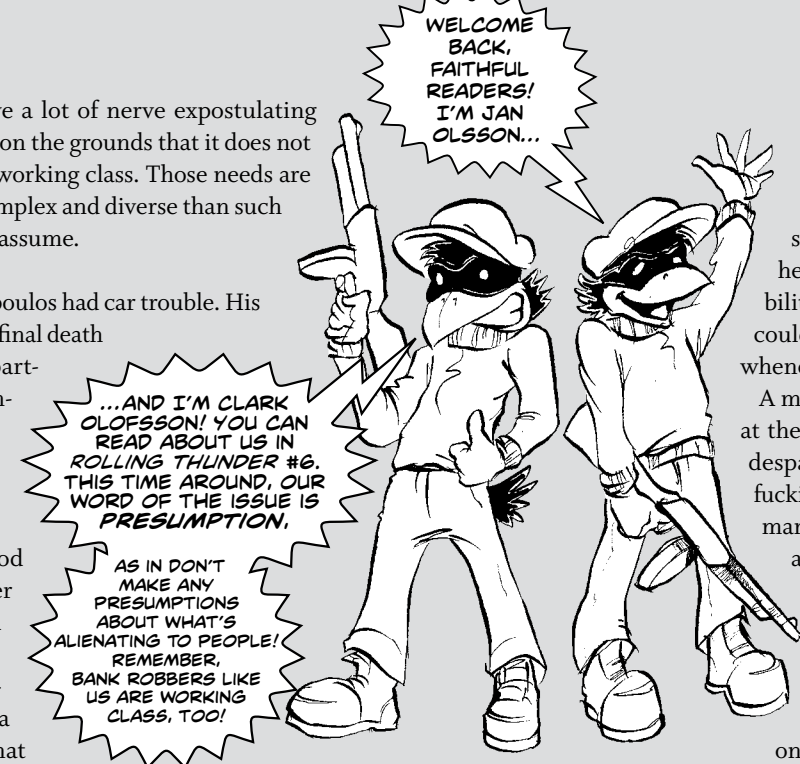
"Well, it's a car, isn't it? You're burning all the other cars on the block! What about the revolution?"

"Forget it!" hissed the other student, and then, under his breath, "Damn hooligans!" They continued down the street.

"You . . . you *pacifists!*" Thanassis shouted after them, waving his arms in impotent rage.

"Provocateur!" the one in the kaffiyeh shouted back over his shoulder.

Line after line of rioters passed by him. No one was taking the slightest notice of the jalopy. "Hey!" he cried. "Nice car here! Hey! Over here . . ." The mob was almost all past. "Hey!"



"Come on, join us!" a beautiful young student urged him, skipping gaily across the paving stones. Thanassis shook his head and scowled: he was an adult with responsibilities and mouths to feed. He couldn't just go gallivanting off whenever he pleased.

A moment later, he was looking at the backs of the last rioters in despair. "Come back here, you fucking cowards! Can't an honest man get his fucking car burned around here? What the fuck is wrong with you people!" There was nothing for it; he stormed back up the stairs. His wife was still in the kitchen. "What's going on out there, honey?"

"Nothing. Just a bunch of kids." He went to the closet and rummaged around for the fuel they used to power the space heater.

Back on the street, he poured the kerosene all over the hood, then attempted to strike a match from a damp matchbook that had been sitting in the silverware drawer all year. How was this supposed to work, anyway? Damn it—should he have put the fuel *under* the hood?

Just then, a line of armored police came charging up the street—and there was Thanassis, still fumbling with the matches, an empty kerosene can on the curb. He looked up helplessly at the officers rushing forward to apprehend him.

The one in front slammed him back against the hood. "You should be ashamed of yourself—burning a poor man's car like that! And at your age, too! You people are crazy, you're animals—destroying your own neighborhoods! You'll be burning down your own houses next!"

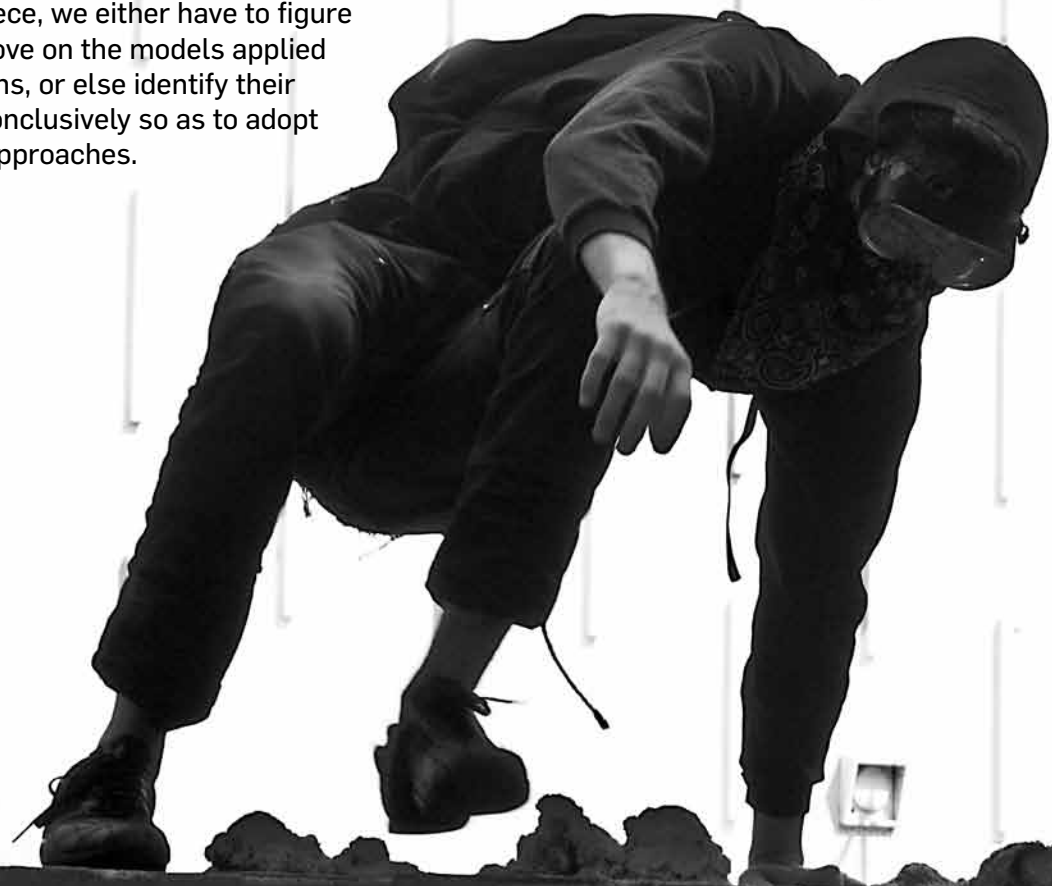
"Leave him be—he must be one of ours," a plainclothes officer said, nonchalantly chucking a brick through the window of the flat next door. The policemen continued on at a trot, and Thanassis, dazed, began looking around for the matchbook he had dropped.

He had finally found it and was coaxing the tiny flames to spread when another person came walking up. It was his neighbor, a staunch liberal who had been in the Communist Party some years earlier. "What are you doing?" she burst out in dismay. "You too, Thanassi?" He stared back in mute stupefaction. "You know it doesn't do any good! You can't just burn and smash things and expect the world to change—that doesn't do anything for working people! You have to meet people where they're at, with initiatives that provide for their real needs."

Going It Alone

Anarchist Action at the Democratic & Republican National Conventions

FOR GOOD OR FOR ILL, the protests at the 2008 Democratic and Republican National Conventions constituted the most significant nationwide effort anarchists have undertaken to organize militant action in the US in several years. Two weeks later, the global economy collapsed, followed shortly by anarchist-initiated rioting in Greece dwarfing anything in Denver or St. Paul. It's easy to feel that the DNC and RNC mobilizations were inconsequential by comparison. But if US anarchists are ever going to be capable of contributing to insurrections like the ones in Oaxaca and Greece, we either have to figure out how to improve on the models applied at the conventions, or else identify their shortcomings conclusively so as to adopt more effective approaches.



Appraisal

The convention protests had limited effect primarily because of low attendance, though anarchists made a much better showing than practically any other demographic and were better prepared than usual. They provide a classic example of a movement learning from its mistakes too late: anarchists finally regained the initiative in the antiwar movement just as that movement breathed its last. But if those who organize future mobilizations also learn these lessons, this could set the stage for more significant victories. Ultimately, the importance of the DNC and RNC mobilizations will be determined in the future, according to how they inform the next phase of radical organizing.

In terms of specifically anarchist participation, many aspects of the mobilizations were unprecedented. Nationwide preparations began well over a year in advance, and the majority of participants showed up in organized affinity groups. Anarchists took the initiative to determine and coordinate their own strategies and tactics, and made breakthroughs in establishing solidarity with other groups—as exemplified by the historic St. Paul Principles. They also debuted communications structures that had not previously been applied at mass mobilizations, which have since been cited by the US military and utilized during the riots in Greece. Just as the global indymedia network came out of the Seattle WTO demonstrations,* the DNC/RNC mobilizations produced the Bash Back! network† and plenty of other projects and momentum that continue to the time of this writing. Proportionate to the number of participants, the mobilizations were surprisingly successful.

* Some critics pose a false dichotomy between building radical infrastructures and focusing on mass mobilizations; in fact, the latter often produce the former.

† Bash Back! came out of a Midwest anarchist consulta in November 2007, initiated by queer anarchists who felt that there hadn't been sufficient space for radical queer and trans participants at earlier demonstrations. Months after the conventions, Bash Back! groups were making headlines with provocative actions, and the network continued to spread across the US.

The question, then, is whether they provide a model that can be expanded on. The conventions revealed the risks of initiating a mobilization so far in advance: by the time the event finally occurs, the context may have changed dramatically. Likewise, so much preparation can raise unrealistic expectations; it also invites serious repression and intelligence gathering from the authorities. One might ask whether the US anarchist movement can sustain such costs; on the other hand, one might also ask whether it can afford to remain a marginal participant in others' campaigns, as it was throughout much of the past decade. This brings up the most fundamental question: was the explicitly anarchist character of the mobilization a fatally limiting factor, or a starting point towards building a bigger and more independent anarchist movement in the US?

Can we go it alone? Are we better off in the shadows? Or is there another way?

Prehistory: The Rise and Fall of the Anti-War Movement

The so-called "anti-globalization movement," named by corporate media with a vested interest in obscuring the possibility of modern-day anticapitalist struggle, emerged as if from nowhere in the late 1990s. In fact, it was the convergence of a wide variety of smaller social currents ranging from indigenous liberation struggles to the do-it-yourself punk scene, all of which had been quietly developing over the preceding years. Perhaps the most surprising accomplishment of the movement was to revitalize street-level conflict, which many had deemed irrelevant in the postmodern era.

The US wing of this movement was not prepared for the sudden changes wrought by September 11, 2001; although the militant anti-IMF protest organized for that month became the first antiwar protest, anarchists swiftly lost the initiative to liberals and communists more familiar with reactive single-issue organizing. To the glee of authoritarians of every stripe,

In short, the convention protests were not a stunning victory, but they set valuable precedents in coordination, strategy, and infrastructure. Perhaps the greatest danger is that, because they were not an unqualified success, they will have been forgotten by the time of the next mass mobilization.

between 2001 and 2003 the antiwar movement replaced the anticapitalist movement in the public eye.

The antiwar movement of the following years failed to stop the war, but succeeded in taming protest itself. Considered as a whole, the worldwide demonstrations on February 15, 2003 comprised the most widely attended protest in human history—and yet they did nothing to hinder the Bush administration. One might say it was a triumph of co-optation that so much outrage and motivation was diverted into ineffectual rituals so soon after anticapitalists had demonstrated the power of direct action. To be fair, the effectiveness of the efforts of 1999-2001 did not become clear until years later



A banner at Civic Center Park in downtown Denver, indicative of the politics of Recreate 68.

when many were no longer paying attention. There were scattered efforts to apply direct action in antiwar efforts, such as the targeting of recruitment centers and ports engaged in military shipping, but these were too little too late. Imagine the effect if a mere tenth of the participants in the February 15 demonstrations had blockaded ports or smashed recruitment center windows!

Some have charged that the antiwar movement failed because it was not empowering for the working class or people of color. This is a half-truth: the antiwar movement failed because it was not empowering to *anybody*. The groups that dominated it did all they could to limit the tactics and strategies of participants to the lowest common denominator. Few will stick around in a movement that is not committed

to or capable of accomplishing its professed objectives, and this is doubly true of people with limited resources who are all too familiar with being exploited for others' gain. There were efforts to recruit laborers and people of color, but these rarely created mutually beneficial collaboration and dialogue. It could be charged that organizers sought to involve a wide range of demographics in order to present the movement as diverse, while still endeavoring to control its content and direction. Approaching the antiwar movement as an opportunity to create a mass under liberal leadership, rather than a means of fighting the war machine, actually undermined the possibility of it ever adding up to a durable, empowered mass.

By the middle of Bush's second term, public sentiment was acknowledged to be overwhelmingly against the war, and yet the antiwar movement had effectively collapsed. The tactic of mass mobilization, which liberals had hijacked from radicals, had accordingly been abandoned; protests still occurred, but none drew numbers worthy of the word "mass."

By 2008, liberal politics beyond the voting booth had been completely deflated by the failure of the antiwar movement. Liberal hopes were once again pinned on electoral politics, and the streets were as quiet as they had been in the mid-1990s when neoconservatives crowed that capitalism had triumphed as "the end of history." This was the context in which anarchists prepared to go to Denver and St. Paul.

Genesis

The DNC/RNC mobilizations got started in a relative vacuum. In 2007, when organizers first decided to focus on them, few nationwide events were bringing people together for militant struggle or putting anarchism in the public eye. After the rise and fall of anti-globalization "summit-hopping" and the resulting backlash, reverting to the mass mobilization model was something of a failure of imagination. This goes double for those who had been saying for years that it was time to find something more effective, without ever presenting a concrete alternative that could fill the same role.

It's important to remember that when the conventions were first chosen as a target, it was not yet clear that the antiwar movement was on its last legs. The previous two election years had both included fierce protests at the Democratic and Republican National Conventions, with plenty of anarchist involvement but little serious advance organizing. Hundreds of thousands

"Overall, the RNC-WC's early formation, comprehensive membership drives, strategic partnerships, and flexibility will likely result in a more robust and balanced effort than in recent conventions. Consequently, security will likely be more difficult to maintain than in previous years."

—Department of Homeland Security Report, March 27, 2008

of protesters, including thousands of anarchists, had participated in the 2004 RNC in New York, though there had been little coordination or common strategy for anti-authoritarians. With this missed opportunity still fresh in people's minds, it was not unreasonable to expect the upcoming DNC and RNC might offer another chance in a similar context.

To this end, starting in a couple communities and spreading slowly across the country, small knots of anarchists began to discuss the conventions. In the host cities, these coalesced into the RNC Welcoming Committee and Unconventional Denver; nationwide, a network of ad hoc collectives emerged under the moniker Unconventional Action. From early on, most agreed that there should be a generalized strategy for direct action and an anarchist-organized infrastructure. Some also argued, drawing on examples from earlier mobilizations, that it was important for direct action to start on the first day of the conventions and coincide with other protests, rather than occurring at a separate time.

Buildup

For many, their first exposure to the organizing was a humorous video short from the RNC Welcoming Committee, depicting masked anarchists engaging in everyday activities throughout the Twin Cities and ending with the words "We're getting ready." Later, humorless state and federal investigators referenced this video during interrogations and presented it at felony trials. When it appeared in August 2007, it showed radicals around the country that organizers in the Twin Cities were already focusing on the RNC and were resourceful and clever to boot.

Similarly, the first groups that appeared under the Unconventional Action banner didn't just put out a general call for organizing against the DNC and RNC, but went ahead and held consults in their own communities. Once it was clear that some people were already

preparing for the conventions, it was easier for others to do the same.

Taking a cue from the Dissent network that had organized against the G8 summits in England and Germany, the WC organized a "pRe-NC" planning conference exactly a year before the RNC. For many younger anarchists not yet entirely clear on the distinction between strategy and tactics, this was itself an educational experience; despite the resultant challenges, a blockading strategy emerged for the first day of the convention, relying on a diversity of tactics. Once this element was in place, the RNC mobilization gathered momentum steadily. Groups around the country signed on to the call to shut down the convention, and an Unconventional Action paper circulated advertising the strategies for both St. Paul and Denver. All this helped build confidence in the protests.

The DNC mobilization got off to a shakier start. Many Denver radicals were less enthusiastic about taking on the police state. Recreate 68, a leftist umbrella group,* took the initiative to begin organizing, but it took longer for explicitly anarchist coordination to pick up steam. Early gatherings in Denver drew fewer participants than those in St. Paul, and the goals of the mobilization seemed less clear. As the DNC drew nearer, a split occurred in R68; meanwhile, Unconventional Denver gained momentum and local participants, and pulled together a week-long schedule of themed events. The people who organized in Denver took on disproportionately more work, with less support than those in the Twin Cities; but in fighting this uphill battle, they enabled anarchists to frame the mobilizations as a rejection of representational politics itself, rather than just the Republican Party.

Both Unconventional Denver and the Welcoming Committee met regularly, establishing committees for logistical work and maintaining informative websites. Members of the WC

* As one cynic quipped, "A lot of different things happened in 1968—not all of them good!"



Radical and rebellious youth pour into the streets of Denver on the evening of August 25 . . .

undertook nationwide speaking tours encouraging groups to coordinate their own participation, and maintained interest with a series of witty pranks and press statements along the lines of their initial video. Like many public organizing bodies, the WC was beset by painful internal and external ideological conflicts; despite this, they managed to lay the foundations for coordination among anarchists and coalition organizing with progressives.

In May, the WC hosted a second pre-NC, at which organizers from around the country attempted to flesh out the blockading strategy. The participants opted against dividing the city into zones according to level of risk, as had been done in Quebec City and Genoa, agreeing that organizers could not determine how the police would behave. Instead, it was agreed that the permitted rally and march would be kept free of direct action, as per the St. Paul Principles; meanwhile, the regions surrounding the convention center were divided into seven sectors, so that different organizing groups could choose in advance where and with whom they would act. In the final months before the conventions, direct action trainings took place throughout the Midwest, while affinity groups from one coast to the other finalized their plans and organizers in the host cities rented convergence centers and scrambled to coordinate logistics.

Nothing ever goes as planned, but if you plan and work hard enough, *something* will happen. The stated goal of blockading the conventions was probably unrealistic, but anarchists had set the stage for a confrontation.

The St. Paul Principles

For years leading up to the conventions, mass mobilizations had been plagued by conflicts between advocates of direct action and other protesters; in some cases, pacifists and authoritarians had attacked militants or actively collaborated with the police against them. The RNC Welcoming Committee took steps to ensure that this would not happen in St. Paul. In February 2008, the Welcoming Committee and Unconventional Action Chicago joined a range of other groups, including the Coalition to March on the RNC and Stop the War and the Anti-War Committee, in drafting an agreement across ideological and tactical lines:

- Our solidarity will be based on respect for a diversity of tactics and the plans of other groups.
- The actions and tactics used will be organized to maintain a separation of time or space.
- Any debates or criticisms will stay internal to the movement, avoiding any public or media denunciations of fellow activists and events.
- We oppose any state repression of dissent, including surveillance, infiltration, disruption and violence. We agree not to assist law enforcement actions against activists and others.

This agreement helped to legitimize the anarchists in the eyes of other organizers—which in turn saved anarchists needless internal bickering over whether or not they were “respecting the local community,” a frequent stumbling block at mass mobilizations. Even after the



RNC, organizers of many stripes respected the St. Paul principles, refusing to denounce or inform on militant activists.

Attendance

After all the promotion, where was everyone? The permitted march at the RNC was scarcely a tenth the size of the one in New York four years earlier; there may have been about as many hard-core militants as there had been at prior conventions, but nothing like the numbers imagined by those familiar with the high point of the anti-globalization era.

Several factors probably contributed to this. The conventions occurred away from the coasts, where the majority of radical communities were located. Some had hoped that the resurrected Students for a Democratic Society would organize a great deal of youth participation, but this did not occur on a national level. As anarchists had established their own social circles over the preceding years, their presence had decreased in subcultural milieus such as the punk scene, which may have resulted in lower attendance from those demographics. The high price of gasoline may have discouraged others.

Though some diehards showed up to play logistical roles, the generation of anarchists that had been instrumental in the mobilizations from Seattle to Quebec City largely stayed home. One might hypothesize that in this regard, the anarchist movement was still paying off bills from the anti-globalization days: many veterans of that era were still nursing their bitterness, or

else tied down by new responsibilities, while many younger anarchists who never participated in a mass mobilization had been turned against them by the lingering backlash. In the buildup to the conventions, impressive new networks were established, but the failure to rebuild the old networks proved costly, as did the general lack of training and experience.

Meanwhile, the NGOs that had been so important in the anti-globalization movement were nowhere to be seen, and the liberal coalitions that had provided the bulk of the anti-war movement were drastically eroded. As mass mobilizations and traditional civil disobedience had produced diminishing returns, many NGOs had shifted away from them; now, without the older generation of anarchists involved, many connections with these groups had been lost.

It wasn't clear until months later just how dramatically the Obama campaign had affected the context, drawing people away from grassroots organizing and into voter registration and similar activities. Certain self-described anarchists who said they envied Obama's campaign for its success in mobilizing the masses failed to point out that it flourished to the same extent that our fair-weather allies disappeared. Reformist co-optation is a weapon against popular autonomy and self-determination no less than the tear gas of riot police. On the other hand, this made it all the more important that anarchists emphasize possibilities beyond the voting booth, and in this regard we could have done worse.

All this underscores the generosity of the longtime activists from outside our immediate

. . . and the police respond with typical finesse, taking the opportunity to express their affection for independent media.

milieu, such as those from the Pagan Cluster, who chose to bring their substantial skills to the mobilizations even as their compatriots stayed home.

August 24-28: The Democratic National Convention

People began to trickle into the convergence center in Denver in mid-August. Saturday night, August 23, was the first thickly attended spokescouncil; Unconventional Denver spokespeople appraised a full room of predominantly young anarchists of the various permitted and unpermitted events scheduled for the week, noting to applause that *all* UD events were unpermitted.

The liberal antiwar march the following day was unexpectedly small. An energetic anarchist-organized Reclaim the Streets march took off on its heels, however, crisscrossing downtown for hours and attracting a wide range of participants. Even after the march reached its destination, at which a standoff with police ensued, it spontaneously departed again; police eventually attempted to corral it between intersections, but the participants escaped through a parking deck. In retrospect, this was perhaps the only action of the entire DNC/RNC mobilization that was an uncomplicated success. The organizers had correctly predicted that police would be hesitant to attack a mixed crowd the day before the convention, when Code Pink and Iraq Veterans Against the War were also in the streets; this helped to get the whole mobilization off on the right foot.

Back at the convergence center that evening, people regrouped to plan an action targeting party fundraisers the following night. In a typical example of how large meetings can get stymied in irrelevant deliberations, it didn't come out until well into the discussion that practically everyone involved also planned to participate in the black bloc called for 6 pm Monday. There had been no planning to speak of for the black bloc, and at that point it was too late.

R68 had reserved Civic Center Park downtown, which hosted ongoing musical performances and Food Not Bombs servings and generally served as a convergence area. This was also the starting point for the aforementioned black bloc, the fate of which is described in the introduction of *Rolling Thunder #6*. Suffice it to say the bloc didn't get far before being surrounded by police, resulting in approximately 100 arrests; more thorough preparation and strategizing might have produced better results, but at least the attempt produced a situation of social conflict—albeit at the expense of the other scheduled action, which never occurred. That evening, rebellious young people seemed much more desirous of conflict with the authorities than organized anarchists seemed prepared to facilitate it.

Tuesday saw anarchists scrambling to do jail support; arrestees' court dates were all scheduled for September 2, an obvious attempt to paralyze those committed to both mobilizations. Wednesday, hundreds participated in an anticapitalist environmental march; meanwhile, at the convergence center, at which a police raid had been feared all week, warrantless police arrested people outside and used a bulldozer to destroy signs and banners in the parking lot. Later that day, Rage Against the

Machine headlined a show that ended with anarchists supporting Iraq Veterans Against the War in an unpermitted march to the convention center. Further confrontations with the police did not occur, though perhaps this was for the best with the RNC around the corner.

Afterwards, one UD organizer regretted that the mobilization did not produce common cause with other locals against the inequities of capitalism and white supremacy; in this regard, it may have been a missed opportunity to test new strategies for resistance in the Obama era. Despite fears, however, media coverage did not misrepresent anarchists as racists, and locals on the streets seemed to be sympathetic—an important point of reference for future efforts. Whatever its shortcomings, the mobilization in Denver succeeded in achieving some visibility and built up momentum for the RNC without inflicting unsustainable costs. As the week wound to a close, vehicles packed with anarchists set off for St. Paul.

Pre-Emptive Repression in the Twin Cities

Like Denver, the Twin Cities had never seen a mobilization of this scale; it was a new challenge for anarchists and city officials alike. Although government repression increased to new levels in the months leading up to the RNC, there were precedents within recent memory hinting at what to expect. A decade earlier, the Minnehaha Free State—a 16-month anti-road occupation in Minneapolis—had been infiltrated, harassed, and raided multiple times by hundreds of officers.* In July 2000, during protests against the International Society for Animal Genetics (ISAG),† over one hundred people were brutally mass-arrested, and organizers experienced violent house raids and snatch arrests. It should not have been a surprise when these tactics reoccurred eight years later.

After public outcry following the ISAG arrests, the Minneapolis City Council enacted new laws governing police treatment of protesters, but these were repealed in advance of the RNC. The cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul also passed a host of new laws regarding permits and protest, and broke out one that had never been used—the now-infamous “crimes committed in furtherance of terrorism” provision of the Minnesota PATRIOT Act, which defines terrorism broadly enough to encompass civil disobedience.

In August 2007, the night before the pRe-NC began, police from several departments attacked the monthly Critical Mass bicycle ride in downtown Minneapolis, beating and arresting 19 people and exclaiming “See you next year!” The arrestees were bailed out and the conference proceeded as scheduled, but this was a foreshadowing glimpse of the repression to come. The majority of the arrestees' charges were later dropped, and as this goes to press the city government is negotiating to pay one a \$170,000 settlement.

Over the following year, the government sent multiple

* The Free State produced an entire generation of Twin Cities activists, some of whom later helped found the WC.

† Comically, these were coordinated by the ISAG Welcoming Committee, a group promoting “decentralized actions” which foreshadowed the RNC WC by failing to engage with corporate media while police mobilized a massive campaign of repression.



undercover police officers and federal informants to infiltrate the WC. The long buildup to the convention and the transparency of the WC enabled the state to gather tremendous quantities of intelligence. In the weeks before the RNC, police blatantly tailed and photographed organizers, staked out their houses, and attempted to question them. They also detained and harassed perceived anarchists, photographing them and searching and seizing their belongings and vehicles. Some of these photographs were later used to identify arrestees who would not give their names.

On Friday, August 29, the Ramsey County Sheriff's Department raided the WC convergence space. They detained several dozen people, including a five-year-old child,‡ face down at gunpoint while they searched the building, taking everything from computers to children's artwork. The following morning, police raided three houses, arresting four organizers, handcuffing and questioning dozens more, and seizing a great deal more material. The seized items were used as props in a press conference at which Sheriff Bob Fletcher implied that they were dangerous weapons. Two other houses were raided in the course of the RNC: in one

‡ One detainee who attempted to sing to the child to keep him calm was gruffly instructed to “Shut the fuck up” by a gun-waving officer. As far as the editors of this magazine are concerned, that officer's life can't end soon enough.

case, a federal informant had entrapped an unfortunate protester into making Molotov cocktails; the other raid was conducted on a space occupied by videographers.

Throughout the following days, undercover snatch squads roamed in unmarked cars, kidnapping organizers wherever they could be found. One legal worker stepped into a courthouse to support an arrested friend, only to be detained and interrogated by Bob Fletcher himself. Andrew Darst, the federal informant who had spent months inside the WC as “Panda” (see p. 2 of this magazine), invited an organizer to meet him in a public place and identified him to a snatch squad by embracing him—unwittingly mimicking Judas, who identified Jesus to the Roman soldiers by kissing him.§

Taken as a whole, this was a higher level of repression than had occurred at a mass mobilization in the US in several years. Convergence center raids are not uncommon, the total number of arrests had been higher at the 2004 RNC in New York, and the bail of targeted arrestees was initially set higher at the 2000 RNC in Philadelphia; the house raids and snatch squads were more unusual, though preceded by ISAG. But the felony charges brought against the organizers who became known as the RNC

§ Imagine the conscience of a person whose chosen career echoes that of the most hated traitor in Christian history.

More scenes from
Denver, August 25.

8—all of whom were indicted on “conspiracy to commit riot in furtherance of terrorism,” among other charges—were unlike anything since the 1968 conspiracy trial following the DNC in Chicago.

None of this could derail the momentum of the organizing, however. The strategy for September 1 had been established far in advance, and scores of autonomous groups had already prepared. If anything, the raids and persecution made the public more sympathetic to the anarchists on the eve of the demonstrations.*

Final Countdown

Despite the raids and arrests, sleep-deprived organizers eventually forced the city to reopen the convergence center, and on Saturday night hundreds of anarchists from around the country gathered for a spokescouncil. As in Denver, the meeting ended in a tiresome circular discussion; but in this case, because the strategizing was already complete and even the start time of the blockading had been set at a less crowded spokescouncil the previous Wednesday, this focused harmlessly—if irrelevantly—on how the actions of September 1 would conclude.

* This has continued since the RNC demonstrations. Older Twin Cities progressives in particular have mobilized around the RNC 8 case.

Perhaps the most important thing that occurs at gatherings like this is not the centralized decision-making, but the experience of collective power and determination. There’s nothing like the feeling of being in a space with hundreds of comrades who have come to risk everything in the struggle against oppression; it is utterly unlike daily life in the US. At the beginning of the meeting, as the spokespersons of dozens of affinity groups introduced themselves and stated their intentions, the atmosphere was electric. After all the repression of the preceding days, just being present was an act of courage and defiance. Comrades who hadn’t seen each other for years, perhaps not since they had last fought side by side, embraced or nodded to one another in passing. Those moments of connection, and the indomitable will to resist that made them count, were themselves a sort of victory.

The following day, everything was suddenly up in the air again. As news came in that another hurricane was headed for New Orleans and rumors circulated that the RNC might be canceled, preparations ground to a halt all around the city, as all eyes focused on the convergence center at which another spokescouncil was taking place. After the Republicans announced that they would hold only a shorter and less attended afternoon session, the spokescouncil agreed that the blockades would go forward, picked a new time for them to occur, and split up so affinity groups could hastily reorganize their plans. Throughout the Twin Cities, police cars prowled and sirens wailed, while paranoid activists wondered whether they would even be able to get downtown the following morning.

September 1: The Big Day

At 11 a.m., the Coalition to March on the RNC and Stop the War rally kicked off at the capitol, while three miles away police prevented Mcalester students from leaving to march to the rally site. Meanwhile, anarchists all over the city were getting into position and some of the first blockades were going up. By 12:30, the Funk the War march had left the rally area, encountering a confused police attempt to stop it, and the first hard blockade was in place on the I-94 off-ramp on the east side of St. Paul. At 1 p.m., the permitted march departed from the capitol; at the same time, there were major confrontations between police and the Funk the War march, the black bloc moving through northwest downtown, and the Bash Back! blockade. Protestors moved in and out of intersections evading the



Police Confrontation / Protester Movement / Blockade / Property Destruction

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 10:37 AM Massed police temporarily prevent students from marching 2 11:00 AM Coalition to March on the RNC and Stop the War rally begins. 3 11:00 AM Protestors push a trash bin into a squad car, narrowly missing a pig. Five arrested. 4 11:30 AM Intersection blocked with caution tape and twine. 5 11:48 AM 150 people massed near Triangle Park. 6 12:21 PM Funk the War march begins. 7 12:28 PM Police try to stop the Funk the War march. 8 12:30 PM Six people lockdown in an intersection using lockboxes and a car. 9 12:35 PM Wacouta Commons permitted meetup underway. 10 12:38 PM Three people break the security perimeter. 11 12:38 PM Campus Antiwar Network successfully blockades intersection—including police buses. 12 12:39 PM A line of bike cops formed along Minnesota, directing Funk the War to turn right on 7th. 20-30 people rush the line with reinforced banners, but are peppersprayed and pushed back. 13 12:40 PM Protestors blockading the intersection. Fight with cops, one officer down. Dispersed by 12:50 PM with one arrest. 14 12:49 PM Black bloc nears the capitol, surrounded by police. Heading back on John Ireland Blvd toward downtown. 15 12:54 PM Lockdown on Shepard Rd. 16 12:55PM Blockade broken; 20 demonstrators detained. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 17 12:59 PM Reclaim the Streets! 18 1:00 PM Two sandbags and a traffic sign thrown off the overpass to the highway onramp. 19 1:02 PM Bash Back! Blockade. Benches and dumpsters are broken in the street. BB! successfully holds their line against bus and horse charges. The Westboro Baptist Church (God Hates Fags) are attacked. 20 1:10 PM New hard blockade at I-94 offramp. 21 1:19 PM Many from Bash Back! join the black bloc as it passes by. Windows of delegate bus smashed. 22 1:20 PM Large trash bin used to block road. 23 1:25 PM Legal observers surrounded by police blockade. 24 1:25 PM Police cut activists out of lockboxes. Blockade is cleared with six arrests. 25 1:27 PM Windows broken. Squad car tires slashed. 26 1:27 PM Pagan cluster blockades delegate buses. 27 1:30 PM Attack on an empty delegate bus. One cop tries to make an arrest, is hit against the back of his head, and knocked to the ground. He uses pepper spray and retreats. 28 1:35 PM First national bank windows smashed. 29 1:44 PM Window smashed. 30 1:45 PM Unpermitted march, swarming from all directions—joined by a black bloc. 31 1:47 PM Breakaway march making total destroy. |
|---|---|

“The initial law enforcement response downtown was primarily from individual Patrol Officers, who found themselves outnumbered and facing hundreds of anarchists. Because of radio communication problems, Mobile Field Force either did not respond or responded too late to assist the Patrol Officers.

Between approximately 12:30 p.m. and 3:00 p.m., the anarchists moved relatively freely through downtown Saint Paul. Loose items, including planters, refuse containers, newspaper boxes and traffic signs, became weapons of convenience for anarchists, who also used them to block streets. During their rampage, the anarchists broke windows on buildings and police cars, slashed tires on police cars and media vehicles, blocked streets and attacked individuals, including police officers, RNC delegates, and bystanders.* They also attempted to prevent RNC delegates and delegate buses from entering the Xcel Energy Center. Throughout the day, the anarchist groups engaged police in a game of ‘whack-a-mole,’ in which police were always chasing, but never controlling, the anarchists.

Shortly before 3:00 p.m., MFF units gathered south and east of the Landmark Center and began moving the anarchists out of downtown. This led to a large confrontation between anarchists and law enforcement along Kellogg. During these confrontations, MFF Officers used less-than-lethal weapons. Facing MFF pressure, the anarchist groups split at Kellogg and Robert, one group fleeing to the area of 9th and Temperance, where they were arrested or escaped. The other group fled to Shepard Road. The anarchists on Shepard Road were driven west to a park near Chestnut Road. At that location, the anarchists merged with a crowd of bystanders. The MFF units surrounded and detained the entire crowd.”

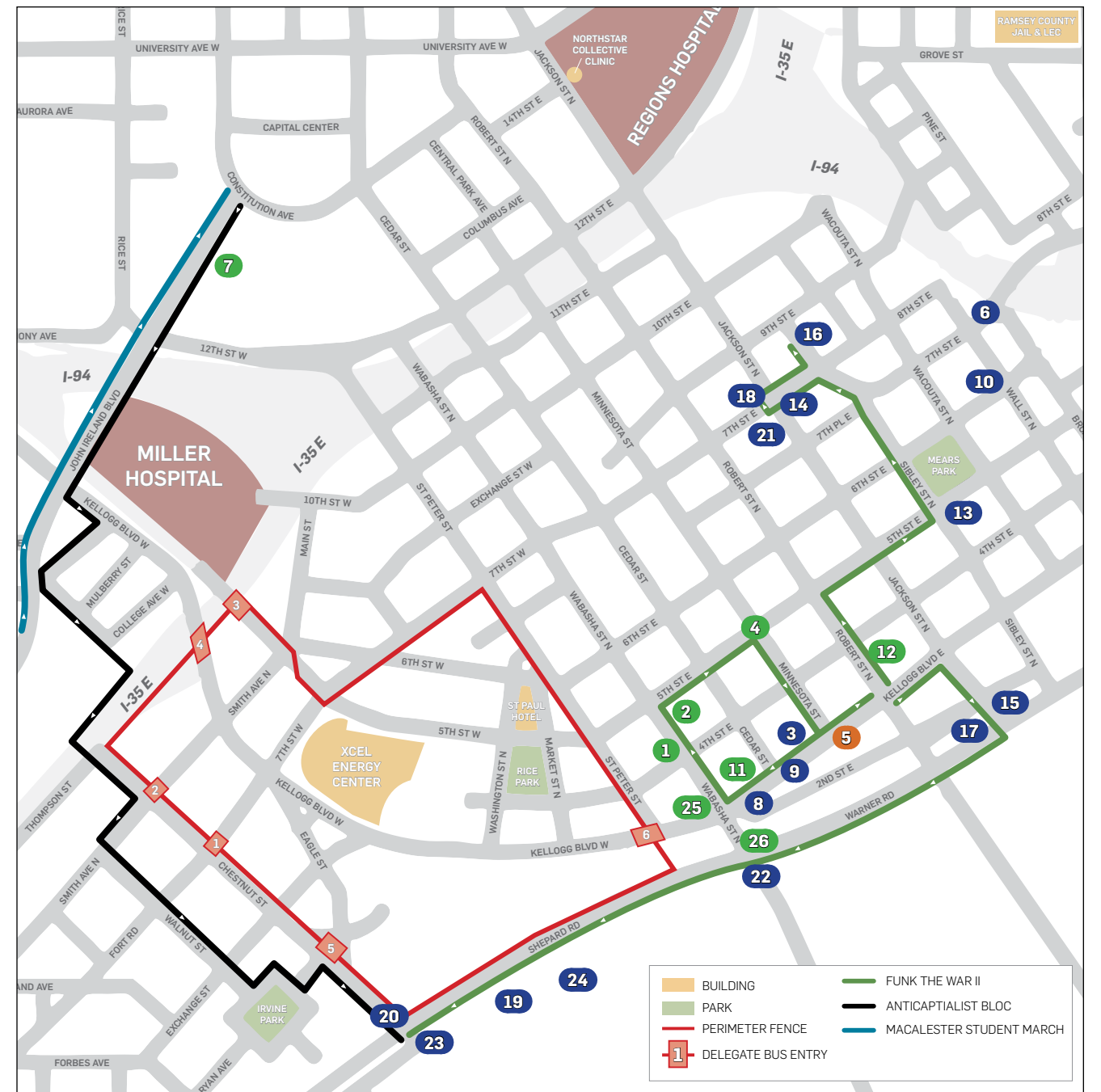
—Report of the RNC Public Safety Planning and Implementation Review Commission

* This is presumably disinformation, though there are reports of a conflict between anarchists and pro-war demonstrators. Compared to police officers, anarchists are extremely principled about not attacking civilians.



Police Confrontation / Protester Movement / Blockade / Property Destruction

- 1 1:52 PM Eight arrests. Pepperspray used.
- 2 1:55 PM Tear gas and rubber bullets shot at a black bloc.
- 3 1:56 PM Peace march on Minnesota St, heading to 4th.
- 4 1:57 PM Small blockade being attacked by police.
- 5 2:00 PM Student march begins.
- 6 2:01 PM Blockade.
- 7 2:05 PM Macy's window shattered. Two squad cars' windows smashed with hammers.
- 8 2:07 PM Squad cars smashed, windows broken, bricks thrown.
- 9 2:16 PM Blockade is surrounded by police. Police threaten to detain protestors until they search everyone.
- 10 2:20 PM Breakaway march blocked by police—can only go north.
- 11 2:30 PM Thousands of demonstrators massing at the capitol.
- 12 2:31 PM Delegate bus blocked in.
- 13 2:35 PM Fifty anarchists block delegate van. Police are pushing them eastward.
- 14 2:36 PM Six arrests and pepperspray.
- 15 2:38 PM Blockade still strong. Ten mounted police are sent in.
- 16 2:39 PM Buses blocked.
- 17 2:42 PM Three delegates on foot being blocked. Serious confrontation.
- 18 2:45 PM Breakaway march dispersed. Police try to make arrests.
- 19 2:46 PM CAN soft blockades the intersection.
- 20 2:50 PM 18 arrested. Protestors trapped by police.
- 21 2:52 PM Soft blockade of buses.
- 22 2:53 PM A black bloc moving north on Minnesota St.
- 23 2:54 PM Blockade requesting reinforcements.
- 24 2:57 PM Mounted police attack protestors.
- 25 3:01 PM A black bloc marching north toward the capitol.
- 26 3:09 PM Sleeping dragons deployed.



Police Confrontation / Protester Movement / Blockade / Property Destruction

- 1 3:24 PM Funk the War is marching again.
- 2 3:26 PM Funk the War group marching north.
- 3 3:30 PM People knock over newspaper boxes and trash cans, throwing trash in the streets. Delegate buses are surrounded. Standoff with police.
- 4 3:30 PM Funk the War moving south.
- 5 3:32 PM Funk the War, the pagan cluster, and many others are regrouping and are holding the intersection.
- 6 3:34 PM Approximately 28 arrests.
- 7 3:45 PM The many anarchists regrouped at the capitol march again in the second anticapitalist bloc.
- 8 3:47 PM 300 people stampeded by police horses.
- 9 3:54 PM Tear gas, concussion grenades, rubber bullets.
- 10 4:00 PM The communications office is raided.
- 11 4:05 PM A black bloc from the Funk the War II march drags barricades into the street.
- 12 4:18 PM Funk the War II being pushed up Robert St, with the police close behind.
- 13 4:20 PM Funk the War II running from cops and throwing barricades in street.
- 14 4:30 PM Dozens arrested in the area.
- 15 4:30 PM Large group with shields and wrist rockets advance on police. Projectiles thrown.
- 16 4:35 PM 20-25 arrests, including Democracy Now! staff.
- 17 4:40 PM A black bloc is tear-gassed by river.
- 18 4:40 PM About 30 arrests.
- 19 5:15 PM SPPD close off Harriet Island including 100-200 people with kids and elderly folks. Police on horses and with gas masks present.
- 20 5:17 PM Massive regroup and standoff at upper landing park. Mass arrest by 5:30 PM.
- 21 5:55 PM About 50 people arrested, including 5 medics.
- 22 6:46 PM Police close Smith Ave bridge "to keep protestors out of downtown."
- 23 6:55 PM 150 people still cordoned off by the river. About 50 are let go. About 300 police on horses and bikes, along with the Coast Guard.
- 24 7:56 PM Most people being released, but police are still making arrests.
- 25 8:20 PM Code Pink rally.
- 26 8:34 PM Code Pink/Mothers Against the War pushed back up the Wabasha bridge.

Compiled from Twitter, police, and eyewitness reports.



OHS, AHS, AND WOWS FOR



Police pay here, as it were.

[Opposite] Ohs, Ahhs, and Wows for somewhat less than \$15.

police; in the southwest and northeast, two new hard blockades were in place.

Between 1 and 2:30 p.m., a breakaway march departed from the Funk the War march, while the black bloc was joined by many from Bash Back! All over town, windows were smashed, squad car tires were slashed, and delegate buses were swarmed. Police responded with horse charges, pepper spray, tear gas, and rubber bullets. By 2:30, the permitted march had returned to the capitol and the Macalester student march was finally on its way. Shortly before 3, the police dispersed the breakaway march, and hundreds of anarchists headed to the capitol to regroup, quieting the north part of St. Paul. Meanwhile, near the Excel center on Kellogg, protestors were roving from intersection to intersection in increasingly large groups; many participants in earlier actions joined the Pagan Cluster and Funk the War there.

After calls for reinforcement went out over the comms system, the anarchists who had regrouped at the capitol began to march west around the perimeter fence in the second Anticapitalist Bloc of the day. Within the hour, the police utilized tear gas, pepper spray, concussion grenades, and marker rounds to clear the area around the Excel center, pushing the Funk the War bloc east and bringing out the National Guard to hold the ground they had retaken. Around 4 p.m., police illegally raided the communications office; the arrestees were

originally held on probable cause for felonies, but were released without having been charged. Meanwhile, the new Funk the War bloc dragged barricades into the street in the course of its retreat, then split up; some participants were mass-arrested in northeast downtown, while others traveled west on Shepard and still others safely dispersed.

Late that afternoon, over 200 people were corralled at the intersection of Shepard and Ontario, and most were mass-arrested. Most of the detainees were simply there to attend the "Take Back Labor Day" concert on Harriet Island.

In all, downtown St. Paul witnessed over ten hours of running confrontations. After the initial blockades and marches were broken up, protestors repeatedly found new convergence points such as the Funk the War sound system. That night, at a spokescouncil hastily convened on a college campus, a few dozen exhausted participants compared notes and discussed plans for the following days.

Communications

The group that had formed to coordinate communications opted to use Twitter to distribute SMS messages to participants, as the txt.mob system used at the 2004 RNC had sometimes suffered significant delays.* The comms team

* There were also security concerns, as txt.mob records had been subpoenaed in subsequent court cases.



Scenes of jubilation, conflict, and disorder in downtown St. Paul, September 1.

[Opposite] Enjoying the scenery at the permitted rally at the capitol, September 1.

established user groups around themes such as food and police activity, including one for each sector, so people could sign up to receive information only about subjects that concerned them. Scouts on the ground reported back to a communications hub at which reports were verified and sent out.

After the raid on the comms space, the Coldsnap Legal Collective's Twitter became the de facto comms system, as people called the jail support hotline to report unfolding events and legal workers passed these on to the public. On Friday, August 29, only 23 people were following Coldsnap Legal; a week later, over 1800 depended on it for news updates.

In some situations, the comms system enabled groups to evade police attacks and disperse safely. Others users complained that the flow of information was overwhelming and it was hard to make practical use of it on the streets, especially after the comms hub was raided and everyone was depending on Coldsnap's single feed.

September 2-4: Continued Confrontations

As hoped, the events of September 1 set the stage for the rest of the week, emboldening protesters and causing police to behave

irrationally. On Tuesday, just as the permitted Poor People's March was concluding, police shut down an attempted Rage Against the Machine concert nearby. The two crowds mingled; few avowed anarchists were present, but there was a rebellious atmosphere, as participants had presumably seen footage of the previous day's events. Police eventually forced the crowd to disperse by attacking with smoke bombs, tear gas grenades, and marker rounds. A similar scene played out the following night after the Rage Against the Machine show in Minneapolis; there was a fair bit of rebellious energy in the crowd, but no organized initiative to get things off the ground, and eventually the police attacked, divided, and dispersed the small march that occurred, arresting 102. Some have speculated as to what might have occurred at these events had anarchists been present with a plan; many anarchists were in jail or busy doing arrestee support, but others did not show up because they had been so focused on September 1 as to be totally unprepared for the rest of the week.*

On the final day of the RNC, there was a march organized by the Anti-War Committee, a group open to civil disobedience tactics. Police

* While organizers in Denver risked spreading themselves too thin between different events, in St. Paul it could have been advantageous to plan more past September 1; on the other hand, there may simply not have been enough time and resources for this.





blocked all the bridges downtown with snowplows. A reporter who had called anarchists “hooligans” three days earlier said “This city has never felt more like a police state.” After police canceled the march permit, over a thousand protesters spent several hours attempting to make their way out of downtown. Once again, there were few avowed anarchists present, but the crowd was not exactly docile. As night fell, police began tear-gassing and pepper-spraying indiscriminately, eventually forcing approximately 350 people—including reporters and civilians—onto Marion Street bridge and arresting them all. This flagrantly illegal mass arrest was a public relations disaster for the city.

Did the Strategy Work?

The blockades failed to prevent delegates from reaching the convention. This may have been in part because of the last minute change in plans on the part of the RNC: it must have been easier to get half as many people into the convention center as originally planned. The small turnout from outside the anarchist camp was also a contributing factor: had thousands more protesters showed up, many would surely have reinforced the blockades.

Ineffective as they were at their stated purpose, the blockades created an unpredictable situation, stretching and distracting the police. By forcing the authorities to focus on protecting access to the RNC rather than controlling protesters, the blockading strategy opened space for other tactics which might otherwise have been impossible. Had there simply been a call for confrontational marches, the police might have been able to surround and neutralize them, as in Denver on August 25. This illustrates the strategic difference between what one calls for and what one actually hopes to do.

The strategy also offered a point of entry for everyone who wished to participate in direct action. It gave anarchists something to plan around, which helped them feel invested in the mobilization. Without this, it might have been difficult to get people to come to the RNC in organized affinity groups, ready to act.

There is a tension in mass action strategizing between concentrating forces for maximum strength and dispersing them for maximum surprise; if protesters are too concentrated, they can be trapped, while if they are spread too thin, they cannot support each other. The Seattle WTO blockades took place in a space of a few blocks; the blockades at the 2007 G8 in Germany were spread out over many miles.

Though some protesters did spend hours wandering St. Paul looking for the action, by and large the blockading strategy resulted in an optimal distribution of forces.

Behind Enemy Lines

The police strategies at the 2004 RNC in New York and at the 2008 RNC in St. Paul were both typical of those police departments. The NYPD is one of the world’s largest standing armies. It is accustomed to crowd control, and was still benefiting from post-9/11 patriotism in 2004—hence it was easy to line the streets with thousands of police and make targeted arrests rather than depending on chemical weapons. St. Paul, on the other hand, is a smaller city unused to large events. The liberal public was not excited about the RNC occurring there, so the government hurried to reassure them that there would be no riots, oppressive policing, or traffic disruptions, promising a surge in shopping and emphasizing the \$50 million security budget provided by the Republican National Committee.

The Republican National Committee also hit on the innovation of offering \$10 million to cover any lawsuits from police misconduct—acknowledging that, even with the repressive laws on the books, the desired level of repres-

[Opposite]
In the Pioneer Press article “Fletcher on Day 1: ‘This town would have been destroyed.’” Sheriff Bob Fletcher acknowledged that the 3700+ law enforcement officers tasked with securing the RNC were unable to prevent “500 anarchists” from creating “eight hours of chaos and mayhem” on September 1.

“As told to this Commission, the St. Paul Police Department’s approach to anarchist’s [sic] efforts to block a street was: ‘If we don’t need a particular intersection, let them have it.’ The SPPD believed, through this approach, they could prevent encounters with anarchists from escalating, thereby limiting violence and the need for large numbers of arrests. One consequence of this strategy, however, was a heavy emphasis on mass crowd control* versus using extraction or targeted arrests when anarchists were conducting violent or unlawful activities.”
-the aforementioned Report

* Indeed, at least 600 of the 818 people arrested during the RNC were captured in mass arrests.

sion would demand massive illegal activity from the forces of law and order. Thus, while the city was concerned about PR, the police had a free hand to break their own laws to the tune of \$10 million.

In the months leading up to the RNC, a conflict played out between Ramsey County Sheriff Bob Fletcher, on whose shoulders rested the actual dirty work, and the St. Paul Police Department, which was struggling to maintain its image. While the SPPD had promised a “St. Paul model” in contrast to the notoriously brutal “Miami model” from the 2003 FTAA ministerial,

The Republican National Committee hit on the innovation of offering \$10 million to cover any lawsuits from police misconduct—acknowledging that, even with the repressive laws on the books, the desired level of repression would demand massive illegal activity from the forces of law and order.



In the same Pioneer Press article, police reported that they utilized “tear gas, pepper spray, flash-bangs, smoke grenades, and projectiles made of plastic and foam,” yet St. Paul Police Federation President Dave Titus insisted that “a minimal amount of force was used.”

Fletcher let it be known that the police would be out to crack heads, predicting correctly that there would be at least 800 arrests.

Yet despite millions of dollars and months of intensive training, the police were not prepared to control even a few hundred anarchists coordinated within a versatile framework. Most of the police had been positioned along the permitted march route; dispatch tapes reveal that between noon and 2 p.m. on September 1,

a communications breakdown permitted anarchists to act freely throughout downtown. Fletcher later said, “We had 15 officers responsible for the conduct of 500 anarchists. They were outnumbered 40 to one.” This should dispel the myth of an invincible police state.

With the inflexibility typical of authoritarian institutions, once the police escalated to more repressive tactics, they found it impossible to de-escalate even when it was in their interest. Anarchists were not actively organized after September 1, but that first day was enough; after that, the police inflicted defeat after defeat upon themselves, needlessly attacking and radicalizing civilians.

If the RNC had occurred without direct action or police brutality, this would have signified that the resistance that flared up at the WTO protests had been definitively quashed during the Bush years, heralding a return to capitalist consensus. Instead, for the first time in years, militant confrontations set the tone for the protests and the police responded with indiscriminate violence—a major black eye for the government after all its assurances. Riot police filled the air with tear gas directly in front of delegate hotels and illegally arrested prominent journalists and at least one Republican delegate.

The events of September 1 indicate that even against the assembled might of the state, a small organized group can escalate social conflict and produce a situation in which others join in. Comparing the RNC to the DNC, we can see that the authorities wouldn’t have responded with such intense repression if we hadn’t done effective organizing.

Losing Our Innocence

Whatever victories occurred in St. Paul came at a great price, however. The few felony charges stemming from the RNC in 2000 had been a major shock to activists; in contrast, 159 people were arrested for supposed felonies during the 2008 RNC. Though most of those charges were dropped or lowered, as of this writing 16 face



pending felonies, several more have pled, and new charges are still being filed. Between 2000 and 2008, anti-anarchist repression had escalated dramatically, as FBI witch hunts sent environmental activists and animal liberationists to prison for up to decades. No convictions from mass mobilizations had resulted in multiple-year prison sentences in the US since the 1990s, but Matthew DePalma, an inexperienced youth entrapped into making Molotov cocktails by informant Andrew Darst, currently awaits sentencing, facing up to ten years. Bradley Crowder is in a similar situation, facing up to four years, and several other RNC defendants may do time as well.

The RNC 8 case is one of the first instances in recent memory in which public organizers are being charged with terrorism simply for coordinating the logistics of a mass mobilization. In this regard, it echoes the SHAC 7 case detailed in *Rolling Thunder #6*. It’s interesting how the concept of terrorism has evolved over the past decade; after the September 11 attacks rocketed it into prominence, the meaning of the term could only expand. At first, terrorism was associated with Al Qaeda, an exotic,

distant enemy almost all America could agree to hate. Then it expanded to include eco-terrorists and animal rights extremists—a demographic somewhat closer to home. Now the sphere designated by the term seems to be broadening at an unstoppable pace. On one hand, this means things are going to get tougher for anarchists and other radicals; on the other hand, when every working family includes a young rebel being charged as a terrorist, the so-called “war on terror” will no longer be the distraction from the class war it was intended to be, but will simply be that war, and people will choose sides accordingly.

If the authorities create a new generation of activists inured to the threat of prison time and the accusation of terrorism, they may regret it. On the other hand, the anarchist movement in the US is small and has very limited resources; there are only so many expensive and exhausting trials it can afford. Only time—and the outcomes of the pending cases—will tell if the repression resulting from the RNC mobilization is sustainable.

Some have pointed to this repression and the case of the RNC 8 in particular as evidence that

As is customary, anarchists chivalrously ceded police the advantage in St. Paul, taking on mounted riot cops empty-handed.



When anarchists famously smashed windows at the Seattle WTO protests in 1999, there were ten times as many people on the streets, and a tenth as many police. Whether or not it was a worthwhile use of energy, it is impressive that it happened at all in St. Paul.

it is foolish to organize resistance publicly.* This is alarmist and misguided; the authorities would like nothing better than for anarchists to draw this conclusion and retreat into the shadows, losing track of one another and forfeiting the ability to coordinate their own large-scale initiatives. It's important not to be careless, but effective organizing against the government will always result in repression, whether or not people choose public roles. In this regard, it's noteworthy that one of the RNC 8 was not involved in the Welcoming Committee, but is being accused as an organizer nonetheless. The more public our efforts are, the more we can build up momentum and support, and the better equipped we will be to handle repression.

One example bears mentioning here. In the months leading up to the RNC, the Pittsburgh Organizing Group, which first received national attention during preparations for the Miami FTAA protests in 2003, publicly announced that it would coordinate blockades in sector 1 of downtown St. Paul, going so far as to identify the intersection. This struck anarchists of a more clandestine bent as insane; some hypothesized that it must be a red herring to mislead the police. But come September 1, true to their word, Pittsburgh activists drove a car into the middle of the intersection at 7th and Wall, disabling it and shutting down the intersection for some time; all their charges

* Those who glorify clandestine action over participatory militant organizing should ask Daniel McGowan, who participated in several major Earth Liberation Front actions and went on to play a central role in organizing the 2004 RNC protests, which he found to be more effective. His address can be found at www.supportdaniel.org.

were subsequently dropped. Let no one say it is impossible to organize resistance publicly.

Learning from Infiltration

Debates about public organizing aside, the WC's approach made it easy to infiltrate. Some infiltrators were more competent than others; nevertheless, their appearance and behavior differentiated them from others in the community, raising suspicions.† They seemed uninterested in radical politics and visibly uncomfortable with the lifestyles of some anarchists, and displayed classic informant behavior such as asking inappropriate questions while accusing others of being agents. It is important not to decide who is trustworthy solely on appearances, but it's noteworthy that the infiltrators turned out to be the ones who looked like cops. The WC had identified most of the infiltrators in its midst long before they were outed, but did not expel them for fear of defaming innocent people. Good intentions are admirable, but we must also be able to protect ourselves—the WC might have saved themselves a lot of grief by doing so.

The paranoia that often passed as security culture in convention organizing offered limited protection. Vouching systems failed to keep out informants such as Brandon Michael Darby, and taking batteries out of cell phones—as Darby did to create trust while wearing a wire—did not prevent surveillance. Real security culture depends on deep-rooted social bonds and shared

† Realizing this, the FBI attempted to recruit at least one individual to infiltrate “vegan potlucks,” convinced he would be trusted as he “looked the part.”

context, not to mention trusting one's intuition. Anarchists' greatest strengths lie in solidarity and community—we can find risk-free ways to cooperate with people who are new to us, and take risks only with those we know and trust intimately. People in the targeted communities have since expressed that they find it difficult to trust anyone; this is exactly what the authorities want.

Media as a Weapon

The RNC protests received nationwide coverage, but not as much as many had hoped. At this point, anarchists have to accept that the corporate media is not going to cover every broken window. The setbacks following September 11, 2001 showed how important it is to be able to maintain momentum without media attention. Anarchist organizing has to be aimed at achieving something more lasting than airtime on the evening news.

At the same time, it's important to see how media strategies affect police repression and public response. Before the RNC, the police used corporate media to assure the public of their good intentions and smear anarchists as violent, waste-throwing invaders. This was essential to prepare the grounds for repression; police have been using these propaganda techniques since the Seattle WTO protests, when they learned to script a strategy beforehand lest the media accidentally focus on real issues.

Unfortunately, the WC's approach to the media played into the hands of the police. The WC experimented with various media strategy, ranging from complete non-engagement to pre-written statements and theatrical stunts. However, they did not fully engage with corporate media until after the raids, when those who had not been arrested appeared unmasked at the newly re-opened convergence space and took questions under their real names. This initial reticence allowed the WC to retain its mystique, but it also permitted the police to gain the upper hand, leaving the WC constantly on the defensive.

The corporate media is corrupt and vapid, and cannot be trusted to represent radicals—or anyone—fairly. At the same time, it's important to see the media as the battlefield on which the police position themselves to attack. The WC did a brilliant job of using independent media to build excitement in the radical community; it is unfortunate that it did not also find ways to exploit the corporate media to outflank the police.

Diversity of Tactics

By September 3, one could hear all the discussions from 1999 beginning all over again. Is property destruction violence? Is it strategic? What tactics can build an effective movement for liberation? To some extent, it's good news when we have to start from scratch again about these issues—it means new people are involved in the discussion. Too much agreement on these questions is a sign of stagnation and insularity.

At the same time, intra-movement bickering provides the authorities valuable opportunities, so it is potentially historic that the St. Paul

“The very use of the word ‘violence’ to describe the actions of protesters in the face of the police state we witnessed is ridiculous. Pepper spraying a girl repeatedly in the face after she attempted to hand a flower to a police officer is violence. A broken Macy's window is not. And even though some activists don't prefer property damage as a tactic, maintaining some amount of perspective is important. What is a broken window compared to a million Iraqis killed, or entire cities destroyed by the U.S. occupation forces? A whole lot of windows get broken when the U.S. drops bombs. Which is the bigger concern?”

—Katrina Plotz, member of the Anti-War Committee and the Coalition to March on the RNC and Stop the War

Principles served to prevent it. It remains to be seen whether this agreement was a precedent for future mobilizations or simply an anomaly produced by a dwindling antiwar movement. Would other protest groups have sought mutual respect with anarchists if there had been more influential allies available?

At the Seattle WTO protests, militant anarchists were a minority who exerted influence by acting outside the central organizing framework. In St. Paul, they were intimately involved in coordinating that central framework. Does this indicate that anarchism is shifting from the margins to become a significant force in political organizing? Or will the intensity of government repression in St. Paul discourage organizers from participating in future mobilizations based on diversity of tactics? Or, for that matter, did anarchists simply inherit the antiwar movement after everyone else had abandoned it?

Party Like It's 1999

After the MTV success of Nirvana and the explosion of “grunge” music, record labels sought for years to find the “next Seattle.” Radicals who grew up on footage of the riots outside the Seattle WTO summit have engaged in a similar

It remains to be seen how the precedents set at the RNC, during a comparatively quiet phase of social struggle, will influence events next time resistance becomes widespread.

pursuit throughout the past decade. The Seattle WTO protests have become a common point of reference for both protesters and police. For the former, they are a sort of creation myth, and a messiah some believe will come again; but you can never repeat the past, even if it inspires you to make new history.

Let's compare the RNC protests in St. Paul with the WTO protests, then, since it is practically impossible not to. A great deal of the organizing for Seattle was funded by NGOs, while the DNC and RNC mobilizations came entirely out of grassroots initiatives. There were only a few hundred utterly unprepared police in Seattle, while over the past decade events such as the RNC have come to be defended by literally military occupations; in that light, it is a miracle any direct action occurred in St. Paul at all. Some New York anarchists who had participated in the 2004 RNC reported that they had a much more fulfilling experience in St. Paul. If it were possible to compose an equation charting dollars spent on security and policing against numbers of protesters, minutes of airtime, and degrees of disruption, we might find that the 2008 RNC scored fairly well compared to the WTO protests.

Yet such an equation would tell us nothing about how effective the RNC mobilization was at actually bringing us closer to liberation. The critical difference between Seattle and St. Paul was that the WTO protests brought tens of thousands of people, including but not limited to anarchists, together in an unfamiliar and inspiring situation. The RNC mobilization was a much more limited affair. However successful our mobilizations are in themselves, they are useless if they do not ultimately enable us to generalize the struggle against hierarchy.

Critical Assessment

Viewed as a means of breaking a few windows or obtaining television airtime, any multi-year organizing effort is extremely inefficient. But the year and a half of preparation was valuable in itself as a means of building networks, visibility, and experience; the same goes for the legal support phase afterwards. Regardless of

whether the RNC was successfully blockaded, the real significance of the mobilization lies in the way it raised the bar for what it means to organize as anarchists. If those who cut their teeth preparing for the convention continue to mobilize nationwide networks, organized into autonomous affinity groups within a larger strategic framework, it will have been worth the trouble. Often it is events like the RNC, or for that matter the protests against the EU summit in Greece in 2003, that lay the groundwork for anarchist participation in more spontaneous and far-reaching uprisings such as the recent ones in Oakland and Greece.

So intensive organizing is valuable in itself—but was the RNC the most sensible target? Probably not. As described, when it was first chosen, anarchists expected it to attract tens of thousands of protesters from other demographics. Once upon a time, the Republicans seemed invincible—by the time we finally built up the courage to take them on, they were so weakened that we could not build a long-term organizing strategy upon opposing them.* Between the backlash against Bush, the hurricane, and the revelation that Palin's unwed teenage daughter was pregnant, the RNC would have been a disaster even without anarchist resistance.

Obama's election signals a definitive end to the context that generated the RNC protests. Now that the Bush years are over, anarchists should congratulate ourselves on having survived a difficult era with at least some vestiges of continuity and collective memory intact. The Obama era will doubtless pose its own challenges; we will have to find new ways to mobilize and reach out to potential comrades. We must lay down a root system that can sustain us well into the 21st century, so we can build on experiences such as the DNC and RNC mobilizations.

Backlash

As mentioned above, a few self-described anarchists had been horrified that others were mobilizing militant resistance to both political parties rather than trying to emulate the Obama campaign.

* See David Graeber's "The Shock of Victory" in *Rolling Thunder* #5.

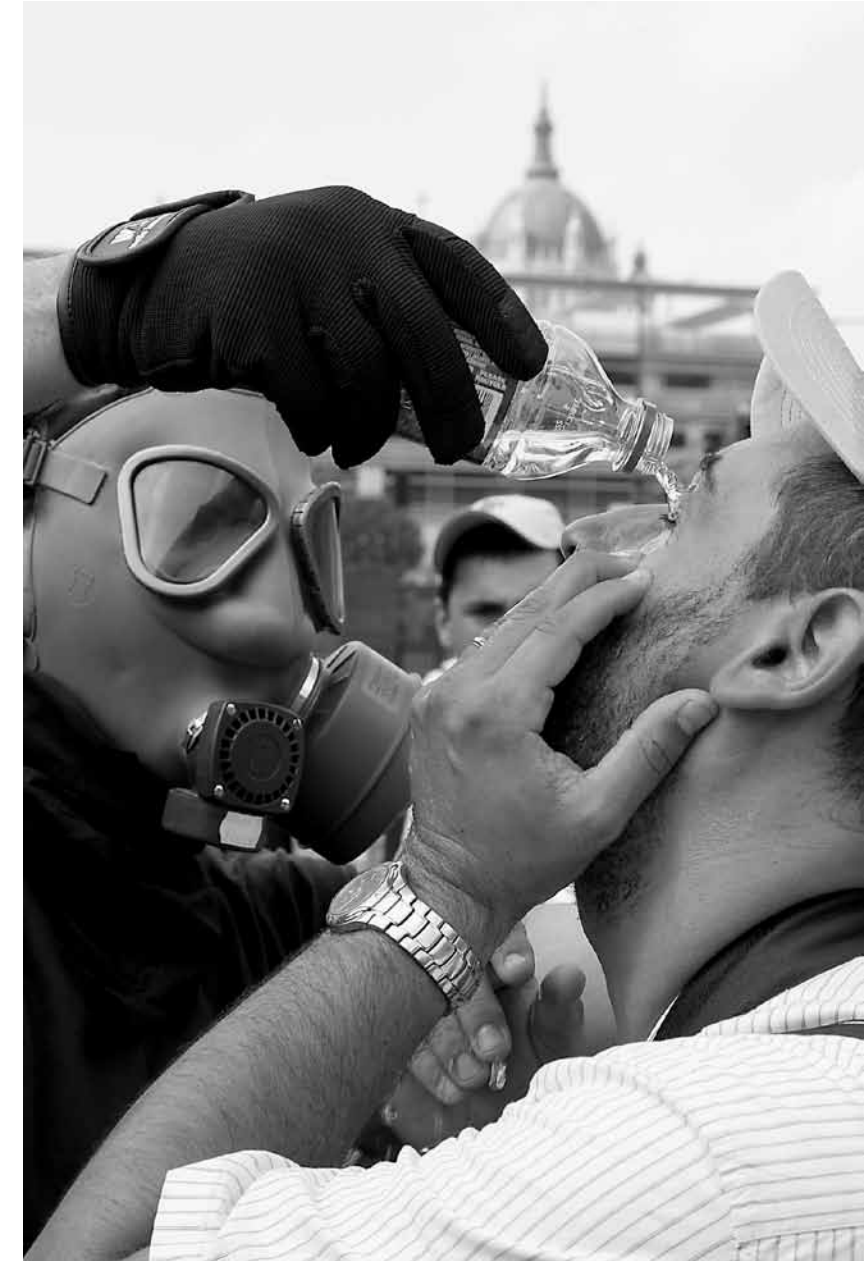
In November 2008, while many who had participated in the DNC and RNC mobilizations were busy coordinating legal support, these individuals resurfaced with a tortuous call to attend Obama's inauguration in a spirit of "presence rather than protest." The idea was to "gather as a bloc, unmasked and with open arms, respecting the celebratory spirit of the day" and "illustrate the many moments when people on this continent and across the world aspired to better approximations of freedom." Perhaps because there was nothing else scheduled for the inauguration, a few respected organizing groups and a fair number of individuals signed on to the call, but its apparent rejection of militant opposition provoked vicious controversy. In the end, despite other calls, no other mobilizations came together for the inauguration, and scant few people participated in the "Celebrate People's History & Build Popular Power" bloc.

It's hard not to interpret this call as an opportunist attempt to counteract whatever momentum towards militant organizing had come out of the convention protests. The originators of the call feared that if anarchists took a stand against Obama it would guarantee "irrelevance," but the outcome showed that however limited the social base for confrontational direct action might be, the social base for a more conciliatory anarchism was practically nonexistent. In this emerging era of reformism and co-optation, resistance will be militant or else will not be at all.

In the buildup to the DNC and RNC protests, anarchists had emphasized opposition to all politicians and parties, including Obama. The absence of any visible protest at the inauguration, despite the precedents from the two previous inaugurations and the desire to maintain momentum from the conventions, indicates that the militant wing of the anarchist movement had exhausted itself. Perhaps if organizers had included plans to protest at the inauguration in the mobilization against the conventions, emphasizing that this would occur whoever won the election, things might have played out differently. There are risks to picking targets far in advance, but also to not doing so.

This anecdote illustrates how militant victories, however modest, can provoke internal as well as external backlash. It also shows how reformist victories can divide and disable anarchist organizing. Although the inauguration may not have been the most strategic opportunity to manifest opposition, it is important not to forget how many other people have a stake in

resisting the oppression they experience daily. Remember the diverse crowd that gathered in outrage in Denver, when the police mass-arrested the black bloc on August 25. Even with Obama on the ballot or in the White House, when the lines are drawn, people know where they stand in relation to authority.



A medic attending a victim of police violence.

We Are All Legal Workers

Legal Support at the RNC and After

Ever since the Seattle WTO protests, legal collectives have sought to counteract state repression by supporting participants in direct action. Even outside mass mobilizations, such collectives can serve a valuable role wherever people face police harassment or arrest. Unfortunately, it's notoriously hard to recruit people for legal support; it isn't portrayed as sexy, it takes a lot of work, and many people wrongly fear that it requires special training.

The RNC legal effort started with a small group of determined people; most had no experience with legal work. Some met at the poorly attended legal breakout session at the first pRe-NC, where they agreed that there was a need for more legal resources in the radical community and discussed organizing legal support structures for the RNC and beyond. The challenge of doing legal support for such a large

*“Coldsnap Legal—
this line is not secure.”*

mobilization was daunting; even the group's most experienced legal workers had never attempted anything near that scale. Ultimately, they pulled it off, with a lot of help from others who had done that work before.

In January 2008, they formed Coldsnap Legal Collective with the intention of setting up a jail support hotline, composing materials and trainings, and preparing legal support infrastructures for the convention. After speaking with legal workers from around the country, they also decided to organize a jail vigil and street team.

We're Ready—Are We?

Months before the RNC, Coldsnap began offering trainings locally and regionally, teaching people solidarity tactics, their legal rights, and how to interact with police. These evolved from dry lectures to participatory role-plays drawing on materials* from more established legal collectives.

* Many of these can be found at midnightspecial.net.

Coldsnap called the first national RNC legal support meeting to coincide with the second pRe-NC. The more experienced national legal workers wanted Coldsnap to provide direction for the effort; to help, they offered support, resources, and access to pre-existing networks. They put on “trainers' trainings,” established a database,† and arrived weeks in advance to help set up the office and other structures.

One of the purposes of legal collectives is to bridge the gap between activists and the legal community, between whom there is often mutual distrust. Coldsnap's attempt to navigate these relationships produced mixed results. The lawyers made dire predictions about what would happen at the RNC, which were poorly received by many radicals. Lawyers regarded Coldsnap with suspicion, on account of their unprofessional appearance and lack of law licenses; though the lawyers, legal workers, and activists all needed each other to be effective, communication was a struggle.

Originally, Coldsnap intended to create a decentralized model of legal support, encouraging every affinity group to have its own legal support structure in place. They hoped that doing so would dismantle the perceived hierarchy of knowledge connected to legal work. This did not occur; most affinity groups did not make viable legal support plans for themselves, and Coldsnap ultimately did legal support for almost everyone.

The Storm Hits

Utilizing a web service that forwarded a single number to multiple phones, Coldsnap set up a 24-hour hotline in the spring, providing jail support for local events and encouraging everyone to memorize the number or write it on their bodies. For the convention, they set up shop in an office of NLG lawyers. The office included six phone lines connected to the hotline number and multiple computers sharing the central database. The hope was that occupying a legal

† The database began with affinity group support forms; it has enabled legal workers to track arrestees through the system, providing a record of the details of arrests, instances of police brutality, and other important information.



office would protect against raids and subpoenas, due to attorney-client privilege issues.

The jail support hotline was connected to the office on August 29, hours before the convergence space was raided; from then on, people staffed the space 24 hours a day. Legal workers were busy that whole weekend dealing with house raids, detentions, and arrests, as well as preparing for the convention. Coldsnap sent representatives to the weekend spokes-councils, and helped form a jail solidarity plan in which arrestees would give the name Jesse Sparkles rather than their real names and refuse to be separated on account of gender or severity of charge.

On September 1, the office was at maximum capacity. There were volunteers answering the phones and entering data, two information coordinators, one person handling media, and one person sending out reports via Twitter. Lawyers were constantly in conferences in the other room. The hotline received thousands of calls; information on police actions and arrests was verified and publicized, and arrestees spoke to

caring people who listened to their stories, took down their information, and gave their loved ones updates and reassurance. A non-stop vigil outside the jail provided arrestees clean clothes, food, and hugs upon release. Legal observers were alerted of unfolding events and dispatched to the streets from a separate location; between missions, they dropped off reports at the office. The atmosphere was intense—no one had slept, everything was happening at once, and not all the news was good. At times, tempers ran high. At one point on September 1, the lawyers became particularly irritated when an anarchist posted “black bloc make total destroy everywhere!” over the Twitter system, fearing it might pose problems for future legal efforts.

Things did not improve from there. On the third day of the convention, a day still known to many legal workers as “Black Wednesday,” several things happened at once. The affidavits in the RNC 8 case were released to the press, with a number of Coldsnap members listed as members of the Welcoming Committee. Police came to the building housing the legal office,

Graffiti in small-town Minnesota, late 2008.

claiming to be responding to a hostage situation involving the videographers upstairs; then the landlord showed up, demanding an explanation and threatening eviction. The lawyers responded by banning everyone involved with the WC from the office and barring them from participating in RNC legal work. The black-listed people, however, were the Coldsnap collective members responsible for bottomlining the office, which left out-of-town legal workers with all the responsibility and confused arrestees calling a place where no one had any context for them.

By the end of the week, the police had arrested 818 protesters, downtown St. Paul had become a full-on police state, and almost everyone was exhausted, in jail, or both. Not everything had gone as planned. The street team was a literal bust, as members were immediately singled out and targeted for arrest. The jail solidarity plan did not get the desired results: the police brutalized arrestees rather than meeting their demands, and the separated and demoralized Sparkles eventually gave their real names. In the office, processing the massive quantities of information that came in proved significantly more difficult than anticipated; volunteers struggled with the data entry backlog for months afterward. And although the banned Coldsnap members were eventually allowed to participate again, relations between legal workers and lawyers remained strained for some time.

Aftermath

The first meeting of RNC arrestees and supporters two days after the end of the convention evolved into CRASS (Community RNC Arrestee Support Structure), a spokescouncil of working groups dedicated to helping arrestees through the court process. CRASS provided a travel fund for arrestees,* helped them file civil suits, and called protests and press conferences to put pressure on city officials. Coldsnap got a new office and continued to staff the hotline and conduct trainings, but mostly they worked with CRASS, having organized themselves out of a job.

CRASS came up with strategies for court solidarity that have achieved concrete victories.† These included packing courtrooms, standing up when defendants' names were called and wearing clothing expressing support; writing letters to judges regarding sentencing; and speaking on defendants' behalf as character witnesses. Courtwatch volunteers attended every single hearing, maintaining contact with arrestees and taking notes to update the database. Supporters organized call-in days, letter-writing campaigns, and other forms of pressure to drop charges, including crashing city officials' events. Fighting charges has usually led to prosecutors dropping them; the first felony arrestee to be sentenced was given a stay of disposition rather

* The travel fund, along with locals' willingness to host out-of-town defendants, has helped people come back to fight their charges. This in turn helps with court solidarity, which can involve defendants coordinating and fighting their charges together, as well as people coming out in support.

† It also gave a community of militantly unemployed people a 9-5 weekday schedule.

than jail time, and the judge specifically cited the supporters packing the courtroom as one of the reasons.

The Twin Cities are still dealing with the aftermath of the RNC. The networks and friendships created during the mobilization have been important for supporting those facing felony charges; many of the accused have moved to the Twin Cities for the duration of their cases, bringing new energy with them. However, lasting trauma and the fear and tedium of long court cases with potentially serious consequences have taken their toll on many people's mental health, especially through the bleak Minnesota winter. Constant meetings, court dates, and pending cases have sapped energy from the radical community in the Twin Cities; these have also distracted organizers from their work, and this will only get worse if they wind up in prison.

The community has come together around legal support, galvanized by common cause and shared experience. The Felony Working Group, an offshoot of CRASS, meets weekly to share updates on cases and brainstorm ways to support those facing felony charges. Supporters produce propaganda, raise funds via secret cafés,‡ attend each other's court dates, and make sure no one feels alone.

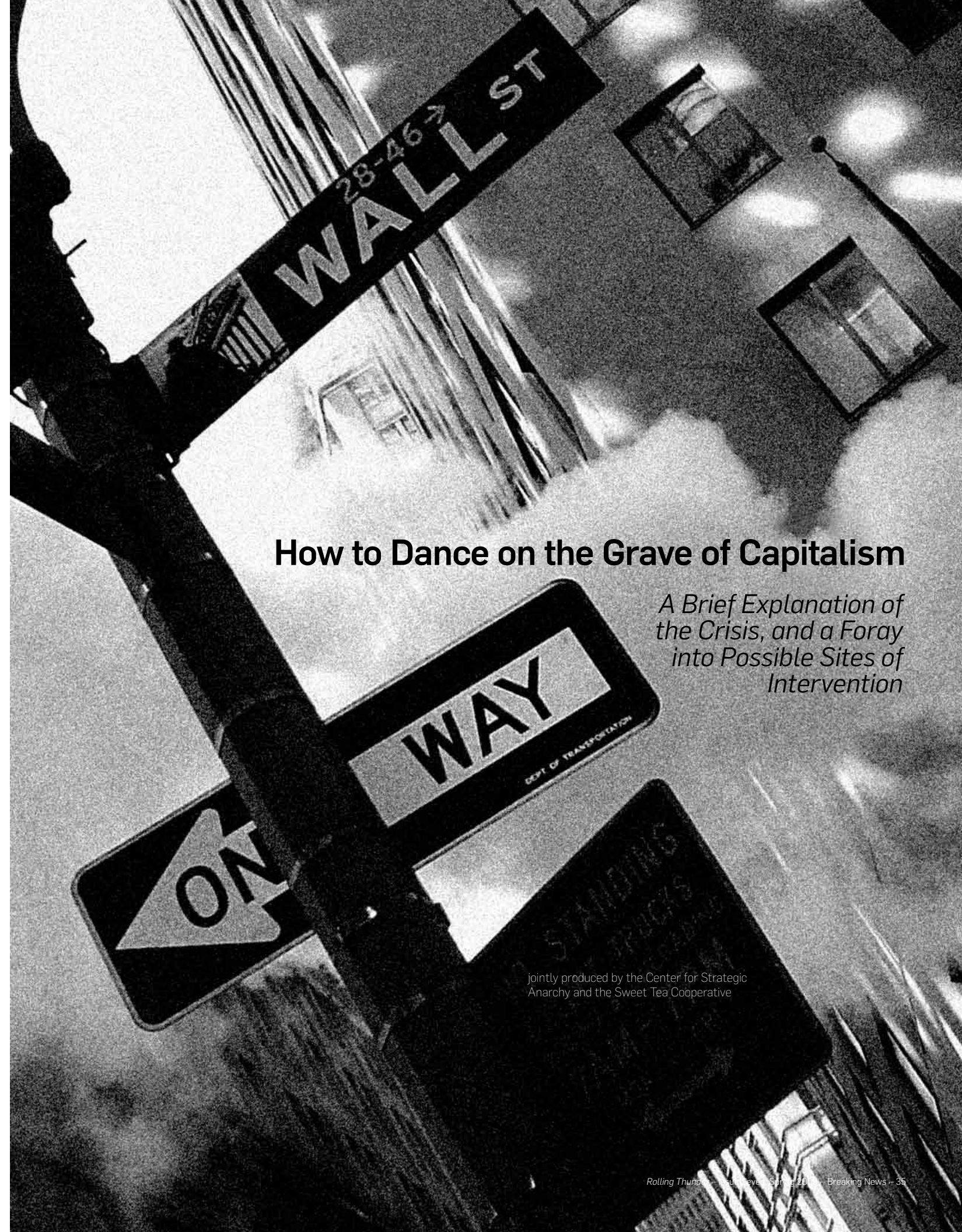
Prosecutors continue to persecute RNC defendants. New felony cases are still being filed, and new charges have been added to existing cases in a dubiously legal attempt to coerce guilty pleas from the accused. The RNC 8 started out with one felony charge and are facing four as of this writing; another arrestee started out with two felony charges before the prosecutor increased the number to six and threatened to add six more. We have yet to see the results of these efforts, but it is clear that this fight is far from over.

Mutual aid and solidarity strengthen our communities and discourage repression. Police tactics are intended to maintain isolation, silence, and fear. When people are familiar with the legal system and confident that they will be supported, they are less likely to be cowed by threats or fall for trickery. Many participants in the RNC protests expressed that the legal support available to them helped them feel more empowered to take action.

We can no longer afford to leave legal work to the experts. In light of the repressive response to the RNC protests, this is more important than ever. Whether or not we organize or participate in mass mobilizations, anarchists will continue to be charged with felonies; in addition to keeping the potential consequences of our actions in mind and mentally preparing ourselves for worst-case scenarios, we must plan and be equipped for legal support. In an age when anarchist organizing attracts federal attention and multi-million-dollar security budgets, all of us are at risk. The safety and security of our communities depend on our ability to respond and support each other.

Like it or not—these days, we are all legal workers.

‡ See p. 95.



How to Dance on the Grave of Capitalism

A Brief Explanation of the Crisis, and a Foray into Possible Sites of Intervention

jointly produced by the Center for Strategic Anarchy and the Sweet Tea Cooperative

Capitalism without failure is like religion without sin—it just doesn't work. Far from abnormal, the boom/bust cycle is as predictable as the furious scapegoating and wild-eyed cheerleading that accompany it. But every situation, even the most predictable, creates unique opportunities.

Them . . .

So how exactly did some of the world's most powerful economies land in this deep recession? That's a deceptively difficult question. The global financial system operates on a variety of levels of transparency, making it impossible to be certain who has what and how much it is worth. The system also relies on a high level of interconnectedness between different institutions and industries, making it difficult to predict when and where the dominoes will stop falling in a recession.

Starting in the mid-1990s, due in large part to the lobbying of commercial banks, the US government began deregulating the banking industry, repealing laws that had governed the terms of credit and investment since the Great Depression. Simultaneously, it created institutional and consumer incentives for home buying, motivated in part by statistical evidence that home ownership was the single greatest determinant of a family's financial success. At the same time, the dot-com boom was putting (fake) money into consumers' and bankers' pockets; although that bubble burst in 2001, it was quickly replaced by a new bubble in real estate.

Thus began a massive surge in home buying. Part of the increase in buying was made possible by "sub-prime mortgages": loans with adjustable interest rates, given to people who probably couldn't afford to buy houses in the first place. The details vary from loan to loan, but in general they start with a low-interest "grace period," then shift to a higher rate as time passes or payments are missed. These were attractive loans for banks to make, based on the assumption that all but a few homeowners would continue making payments after the upward adjustment of their interest rates.

The scheme seems idiotic in hindsight. A huge rise in demand for homes led to rapidly rising real estate values. To keep the market

booming, less qualified buyers were found and given sub-prime mortgages to buy houses at inflated prices. Because prices were rising and wages were stagnant, lots of people with sub-prime mortgages were unable to keep up with payments. Their interest rates rose, but instead of paying banks a premium many stopped paying altogether. As of this writing, at least two million of the seven million sub-prime mortgages used to buy homes since 1998 are expected to default and one in ten mortgages are in some stage of "delinquency."

What led to the failures of Lehman Brothers, AIG, Morgan Stanley, Fannie Mae, and Freddie Mac, the news of which had cable news anchors on the verge of tears? To put it in very general terms, the trading of sub-prime loans became a market unto itself, a market that was almost completely unregulated and pushed to wildly unrealistic heights by mountains of debt. Additionally, banks made further loans on the assumption that the full value of their sub-prime loans would be "realized": that is to say, they were spending money they didn't have. When the loans themselves started going bad, the obscure financial products based on them became worthless. Suddenly, banks had a lot less money, making it impossible for some of them to pay for everything else they did.

After a few dramatic bank failures, the federal government rushed to approve \$700 billion to buy bad loans issued by banks, but it was quickly decided that buying toxic debt wouldn't accomplish much of anything. Instead, the federal government began taking ownership stakes in various troubled banks and corporations, extending "bridge loans" to companies on the verge of collapse, and making cheap loans available to any bank that wanted them. The goal of all this was to prevent banks from going under—which could have caused a domino effect of bank failures and the subsequent collapse of the entire banking system—and to get healthier

banks to start lending money again.* When banks don't know how much money they've lost or how much more they might lose in the future, they become hesitant to issue new loans, and this can contribute to the economy beginning a downward spiral.

The problem is, the government's strategy hasn't succeeded in getting banks to start lending money again. So now the newly elected Democratic Party is planning to spend as much as \$850 billion on a wish-list of government projects in order to create jobs and reverse the downward spiral. Historically, such moves have generally not succeeded at jumpstarting moribund economies, but they have succeeded at deeply indebting governments.

Ironically, the official left has been duped into supporting some of these bailouts as well, particularly when they've been framed as attempts to prevent job loss, as in Bush's bailout of the automobile industry. This flies in the face of common-sense observations that this bailout will likely be used to coerce auto workers into accepting lower pay and less benefits, and that even with the bailout money auto plants could still eventually pack up and move overseas. Nevertheless, much of the left sees these bailouts as a path to nationalization, and therefore something positive. Why we would be better off having our fate decided by businessmen in Washington than businessmen in Detroit remains a source of mystery to anarchists.

. . . And Us

The US economy has been in decline for over a year now. The economic crisis that made headlines in September 2008 was not the beginning of the recession, but rather a stage in an ongoing collapse. By the year's end, unemployment had hit a 34-year high. Whether this becomes a depression or merely a harsh recession, anarchists in the US will undoubtedly see levels of poverty and class anger† unrivaled in the recent past.

Economic forecasts are difficult to make. Nevertheless, we can study the effects this crisis is already having on ordinary people, along with some current organizing efforts and actions, and begin formulating an anarchist strategy for the coming years of economic turmoil. Currently, the two most immediate effects of the economic crisis are in housing and unemployment. This time around, unlike in the early 1970s, layoffs at businesses that can no longer get loans from banks will supplement the closing of factories that began after the neoliberal economic reforms of the late 1990s. Foreclosures and evictions are increasing throughout the country as well.

* Buying huge blocks of "equity" (ownership) in failing corporations is probably the quickest way to give them an enormous amount of unearned cash, but it makes the buyer an owner of that corporation in the process. When a government does this it is called nationalization, a word favored by red-baiting American capitalists and conservatives for decades. Today, the chief promulgator of nationalization as a means of economic stabilization is the neo-conservative establishment, the very same group that orchestrated the destruction of various Latin American, Caribbean, and Asian countries in the 1980s because their policies of nationalization threatened American economic interests.

† The Associated Press reported that banks on the receiving end of the bailout plan paid their CEOs an astounding \$1.6 billion this past year. One CNN journalist, after observing the heated public reaction to Bush's bailout plan, stated that we are entering "a new era in class fury."

The Chicago Occupation

On November 5, all 240 employees of Republic Windows and Doors in Chicago began an occupation of their factory to protest the company's refusal to pay them the 60-day severance pay to which they were legally entitled. The company's stance was a direct result of Bank of America's unwillingness to grant them a loan despite receiving \$25 billion in bailout money only weeks earlier. This action was proposed from within the union and approved through official union channels. UE, one of the more rank-and-file and independent unions in the US, acted as an intermediary between workers and the company. Perhaps because the workers had a legal claim, politicians throughout Illinois right up to Obama expressed support for the factory's occupants. An IWW support committee also formed in Chicago, and solidarity pickets occurred at Bank of America branches across the country. By day six of the occupation, Bank of America had agreed to grant Republic a new loan, and a deal had been negotiated for workers to receive full severance pay and benefits.

In some senses, this action signals the return of the workplace sit-in,‡ a direct action tactic first used by the Wobblies in 1906 but not seen in the US for many decades. Despite mediation by UE in this case, this tactic has historically been a crucial first step in workers developing their own decision-making bodies independent of union bureaucracies. The solidarity pickets that took place nationally also hint at future possibilities for direct action campaigns in which supporters might harass bank branches across the country in order to pressure both local bosses and those who supply their loans.

On the other hand, the Chicago occupation also illustrates how even direct action-based struggles can be legitimized and thus defused. Obama's public stance on this issue seems to have made a major difference in how the media presented the occupation, and later how the workers presented themselves. Union mediation and Democratic support of the sit-in kept a potentially inflammatory situation under control. If this support had not materialized, would the workers have achieved their victory, or would the occupation had continued indefinitely due to the closure of the factory itself? Even if the workers had taken over and self-managed the company, would it have made any sense to run a worker-owned windows and doors factory in a failing housing market, during an economic depression? Although institutionalized mediation will be less likely in struggles in which the workers have less legal grounds for their claims, anarchists must watch to see whether Obama's support of this sit-in indicates a new strategy on the part of the authorities. If it does, how can we push direct action struggles above and beyond their institutionalized management?

Take Back the Land

In the face of the foreclosures and evictions of the housing crisis, one solution that immediately comes to mind is squatting. Unlike workplace direct action, which has been at an

‡ Technically, this action was not a sit-down strike, as the factory officially closed the day the occupation began.



all-time low for years in the US, housing and land occupations are more familiar to US anarchists. Though squatting large buildings is much more difficult here than in Europe, some US anarchists have lived in squatted houses, and others have developed direct action tactics for land occupations.

One of the most public and effective attempts at applying squatting to the current housing crisis is being orchestrated by Take Back the Land (TBL), a radical group from Miami, Florida affiliated with the Center for Pan-African Development. Some anarchists may be familiar with this group from the Umoja Village Shantytown, a squatted shantytown organized in downtown Miami in 2006 by TBL, local radicals and anarchists, and homeless people. Since October 2008, as part of the Community Control Over Housing* campaign, TBL

* In their text "Gentrification is Dead," Take Back the Land asserts that, due to the economic downturn and the bursting of the housing bubble, the phase of gentrification that determined much of US inner-city activism over the past decade is coming to an end. While this transition will proceed differently in various areas depending on the local housing market, it seems reasonable to argue that in many areas oppressed communities can now go back on the offensive.

has been scouting abandoned houses in Miami and helping families and individuals move into them. As of this writing, at least six families have moved into houses, while over fifty more are on a waiting list. Beyond advising individuals on available houses, TBL helps residents obtain utilities, food, construction supplies, and free legal representation. The group combines this direct action with a powerful critique of how private land ownership and development has affected the Black community in Miami. While not explicitly anarchist, TBL organizes on a horizontal basis; it is harshly critical of elected officials, argues that land in the Black community belongs to that community, and structures initiatives so as to avoid "replicating the power and social relationships of the broader society in a smaller setting."

The approach taken by TBL utilizes skills that many US anarchists already have, in a cause to which millions of Americans are already sympathetic. While some anarchist infrastructural projects have been criticized for doing nothing more than providing social services, TBL's approach seems to combine what is useful in the services model—the distribution of needed resources—with a strategy based in direct action and anti-racist analysis. By rendering a covert tactic publicly reproducible, TBL assists people in meeting their needs while simultaneously challenging private property and the roots of the economic crisis. The question is to what extent this approach is reproducible in the rest of the US. At minimum, it requires connections in communities where evictions and foreclosures are imminent, a pro bono lawyer willing to be on call, and some basic squatting experience. Additionally, it demands a media strategy that preserves squatters' privacy while publicizing the reasons people take such action.

Where large numbers of abandoned houses are less available, another approach to the housing crisis could include pressuring banks to stop foreclosures and evictions of families occupying bank-owned houses. This builds on the recent successes in pressuring Bank of America to drop mountaintop removal companies, as well as the aforementioned events in Chicago. While some groups have already started picketing bank branches, this is the perfect time to step it up. The campaign against mountaintop removal successfully combined public flier-ing, daytime disruption of banks' business, and consistent night-time vandalism with a broad media strategy. The efficacy of such a campaign depends less on the level of risk participants are willing to take on than the consistency of

The election of Barack Obama during an economic decline does not signify that it is time for anarchists to retreat into the shadows, but rather to assert anti-authoritarian ideas and tactics militantly and publicly.

the actions themselves. Vandalism and disruption that occur multiple times a week in dozens of cities are more effective than one or two bank branches being burnt to the ground. Such a campaign might offer opportunities for mass participation, allowing anticapitalist groups to grow in numbers during this "new era of class fury."

Funerals for Capitalism

In late 2008, unpermitted marches themed as "Funerals for Capitalism" occurred in cities including New York, Washington, DC, and Chapel Hill, NC. Rather than presenting a specific demand such as severance pay or housing, these were one-off actions attempting to inject a humorous radicalism into public discourse about the economy. In New York on Halloween, approximately 400 costumed anticapitalists stormed an office complex housing the Lehman Brothers, a company whose self-destruction helped fuel the financial crisis. A similar but smaller street party happened in Chapel Hill, erupting into a full scale brawl when police attempted to seize a mobile sound system from the crowd.†

In a town where there are few immediate prospects of workplace actions or where the housing bubble has yet to burst, this kind of action offers a way to publicize an explicitly anti-capitalist stance on the economic crisis, though it is certainly not a substitute for ongoing campaigns and community-based direct action. Creative street actions can be an antidote to the dull, bleak dialogue that surrounds the recession, offering a celebratory tone not found in many workplace battles, which sometimes take on the character of a private grudge match between workers and bosses.

Conclusions/Horizons

As government social services are likely to diminish even further and non-profits will surely suffer a decline in donations, this is the perfect time for anarchist mutual aid programs to expand and take the offensive. Free food providers could capitalize on increased demand by pressing for access to space from which to conduct their programs, or mobilize public support in order to squat spaces themselves. This is a time when such groups should use their position to vocalize an anti-capitalist stance, not shrink from their politics.

The rise in job loss and the likelihood of intensifying

† It is possible that the feistiness of the crowd and their willingness to defend each other could be attributed in part to some of them having participated in the RNC mobilization only a few months earlier. In this example, we see how mass mobilizations can inform and intensify ongoing social struggles in local contexts.

deportations during a depression can also exacerbate xenophobic tendencies in communities, increasing the importance of Anti-Racist Action and specifically anti-Minutemen groups. It will be important to find ways to show active solidarity with those facing deportation, be they inside or outside our own communities. Many of the workers facing deportation will also be the most vulnerable to housing instabilities, as they often have even less legal recourse when faced with foreclosures and evictions.

The contraction of the economy and the change in presidential administration both provide powerful propaganda opportunities. In contrast to authoritarian leftists who offer only ineffectual protest and a dystopian vision of the future, we can link a systemic critique of capitalism to the immediate, tangible alternative of mutual aid. Especially when it is a component of direct action, accessible anti-capitalist propaganda will play better in the coming years.

The current heightening of expectations in the political sphere can serve us as well. Some radicals assume that rebellions happen when things finally "get bad enough"—that if the poverty rate gets a little higher or the air gets a little smoggier or the administration gets a little more repressive, people might just stop putting up with it all. But rebellion is not simply an inevitable product of exploitation and misery—rather, it occurs as a reaction to the tension between the realities we experience and our expectations of what is possible. An individual socialized to expect a life of poverty and marginalization might never raise a finger in protest, but a person brought up to expect decent prospects in life, who suddenly finds all options closed off, may be ready to participate in an insurrection.

Thus the election of Barack Obama during an economic decline does not signify that it is time for anarchists to retreat into the shadows, but rather to assert anti-authoritarian ideas and tactics militantly and publicly. Never before in recent US history have we been presented with a situation in which expectations are so high and reality so bleak. The votes that Obama received in November can vaguely be interpreted as a demand for an end to the war, for racist inequalities to be "healed," and for social programs such as healthcare to be expanded. Obama's support for expanding the war in Afghanistan, expanding the Wall Street bailout, and expanding policing and surveillance virtually guarantees that those hopes will go unfulfilled, especially in light of the economic recession. Despite the turn of many quasi-leftists towards Democratic party politics, this radical contradiction between what people believe is possible and what is likely to happen presents the perfect field for planting anti-capitalist seeds. We can accomplish this by consistently, concretely, and unapologetically applying basic anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian principles to everyday problems.

We Got This Shit Tonight

Oakland, January 7, 2009

A dumpster is burning in the intersection of 17th and Webster in downtown Oakland. To my left a teenager is kicking through the window of a closed shop, to my right glass showers a young girl holding a two-by-four. Up ahead there are people jumping on the windshields of every car on the street to the beat of Bay Area Hyphy music, leaping from one to the other like some rebellious version of Mario Brothers in a dark urban landscape.

Suddenly, someone scurries up next to me: “Yo, can I holla at you?”

I turn and look at the kid in disbelief and annoyance: “Man, you can’t holla at someone during a riot!”

“Why not? It’s chill!” And he spreads his arms out in front of him at the scene unfolding before us—everything is breaking, smoke is filling the air, there are hundreds of people in the street and the police are nowhere to be seen, only the whirl of a chopper overhead. He’s got a point, I think. This may be a riot, but somehow there is also time to holla.

Whereas the 1992 riots in LA were a response to the acquittal of the officers who beat Rodney King, the rioting in Oakland was a warning to

the city—the police officer who executed Oscar Grant on a train platform in the early hours of New Year’s Day, in front of scores of witnesses, hadn’t even been charged yet. A week later, Officer Meshlerle was arrested in Nevada and charged with murder. According to the Oakland Police Department, he was arrested in order to appease another demonstration that was planned for that same day.

Nevertheless, at the demonstration that was supposed to be appeased, the windows of a Wells Fargo bank and dozens more at a mostly corporate outdoor mall were broken. Once again, glass was being swept up the next morning, the media was blaming the anarchists, people were in jail, and debates were raging over the legitimacy of property destruction and whether or not it constitutes violence.

It all started at a rally on January 7 at the Fruitvale BART station, where Oscar Grant was murdered. At 3 p.m., a diverse crowd began gathering around a sound system at the station entrance. As the mic was passed between speakers it was immediately evident that there was a split in the sentiments of the crowd over what action should be taken—or rather, what action had to be taken. Rally organizers who urged people to be peaceful were met by a damning silence. In contrast, there was heavy applause

from the crowd as the Black Panther Party—which originated in Oakland—and Malcolm X were referenced over and over again. One speaker put it bluntly: “I’m feeling pretty violent right now, I’m on some Malcolm X shit: by any means necessary. If I don’t see any action, I’m gonna cause a ruckus myself.”

A loud march of about 300 mostly young people split from the rally and headed down International Boulevard. Police cruisers cautiously kept their distance but were met by angry screams from the marchers as floodlights from a helicopter splashed over people chanting and carrying banners.

As the sun began to set and shadows stretched across the avenue, heralding the quickly approaching night, there was an urgency in the crowd like electricity in the air when a storm is gathering. As the march pushed on, closer and closer to downtown Oakland, a panicked rally organizer, feeling the tension and asking over a bullhorn for the crowd to be peaceful, wanted to lead the march back to the Fruitvale BART station.

“Fuck that,” said one youth in the front. “We know where we’re going. We’re going to BART police headquarters.”

8th and Madison. BART police headquarters, a police cruiser is in the intersection.

As we’d crossed the highway and a parking lot into downtown, people had taken advantage of the temporary absence of police to scavenge the urban landscape. A dumpster rolled quickly down the street as marchers began to jog.

The crowd approached the cruiser and surrounded it, shouting, “Pigs go home!” The cops exited their vehicle and hastily retreated.

The cruiser was quickly destroyed, setting off hours of what became a full-on riot. People jumped up and down on the cruiser with smiles across their faces, shouting and laughing. It was the first of many moments that night when we felt the injustices of the world temporarily reconciled by the power rising from the streets.

The dumpster was lit on fire and passed through the hands of people of all colors before being rammed into the cruiser. As 15 people began to rock the vehicle in an attempt to overturn it, riot police arrived and shot tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the crowd.

We ran through Chinatown towards Broadway, the main street in downtown Oakland, pulling things into the street to prevent the police from following. Two hundred of us were on Broadway approaching Oakland Police Headquarters when the police charged, scattering people on foot and bikes through the streets of downtown.

Solidarity between strangers and defiance to authority were felt most strongly during unarrests. Throughout the night, all sorts of people pulled arrestees back from the police unflinchingly and without a second thought.

But the crowd would not be dispersed.

I arrived at 14th and Franklin an hour later, just as police were backing up the crowd that had gathered a block up on Broadway.

As I took in the diversity of the people gathered in the intersection, the potential of what was unfolding in the streets sank in. An older Black woman was screaming at the police. A group of young Latinos were standing in front of the police line, refusing to be moved off the street. A white person in his thirties was being dragged away behind police lines. These were “everyday” people, indignant, refusing to back down.

Solidarity between strangers and defiance to authority were felt most strongly during unarrests. Throughout the night, all sorts of people pulled arrestees back from the police unflinchingly and without a second thought.

As the police continued to move their line down the street, a sudden tactical decision spontaneously swept the crowd. People turned and began heading the other way down 14th street, with the police behind them. It was then that the first SUV went up in flames, and people began to kick in the windshields of lines of cars.

The crowd moved quickly, hitting a McDonald’s on the way. The riot police, confused by the burning SUV, stayed behind to order people away from the car that was now engulfed in towering flames. Suddenly an armored police truck came tearing wildly down the street toward the destruction at the McDonald’s, sending people running in all directions.

People began to regroup fifteen minutes later. Another SUV had been set on fire, and police were still trying, and failing, to get people off the street.

Before a group of us turned and ran down side streets, I was struck by the image of a dozen white police officers tackling a Black man while orange flames licked the evening sky behind them. For some unknown reason, almost every cop on the streets that night was white, and at one point as they pulled Black youth from the crowd I heard someone shout, “What? You looking for a race riot now?”

A moment later I was one of the only white people running down the street with about 50 Black youth. More cars were being destroyed and the helicopter with its intrusive floodlight wasn’t anywhere near us. We were alone in the streets and thought we were in the clear.

I have no idea where the police appeared from. In retrospect, they may have jumped out of the armored vehicle that was stalking the streets that night. Suddenly they grabbed someone behind me, obviously a minor. I unarrested the kid; after a long



For some unknown reason, it seemed almost every cop on the streets of Oakland on January 7 was white.

scuffle, I was still pulling him down the street even though the police had lost their grip on his arms. I remember a look of shock and then realization coming over his face: “What, blood! Some white broad stole me back from the cops!”

In the chaos of the group trying to decide where to turn and nearly running into a dead-end courtyard, we almost didn’t get away. I felt a billy club sting the back of my head and sharp pain shoot down my spine. Suddenly blows landed all over the right side of my body. Instinctually, I put my arms over my face. My right arm was swollen for days afterwards.

Every car on Lakeside Avenue was being smashed. People were walking casually from car to car with two-by-fours or poles, smashing out windows. We heard a gunshot from someone on a balcony above, most likely watching his car destroyed.

When we saw the armored vehicle again, two blocks behind us, we all split up. I headed towards 14th street. The adrenaline from the police beating I had received earlier was beginning to wear off and I winced with pain as I walked. I needed a cigarette. At the next corner, I came upon two men with masks on, casually standing around smoking. I bummed a cigarette and told them where I had last seen the police. “I don’t care about no police,” one of them said. “We got this shit tonight.”

Practically limping from the blows to my right leg, I continued up 14th without a plan. That was when I ran into the Mayor.

RT

For all the blame that the media and organizers put on different participants for the riots, it was the Mayor of Oakland who managed to consolidate an otherwise fully dispersed crowd; indeed, the second wave of rioting was ignited directly after the Mayor spoke on the steps of City Hall.

When I first saw Mayor Dellums, there were only about 20 people following him as he strolled up 14th street, walking over broken glass and past burned vehicles. Many people were yelling at him, and as he walked, he gathered more and more of a crowd. At some point riot squad police began quietly pacing behind the crowd; some of us turned and began yelling at them, while others yelled at the Mayor to call off the police, which he did, for the moment.

By the time we reached City Hall over a hundred people had regrouped. The Mayor stood on the steps of City Hall and attempted to give a speech. He said that Oscar Grant’s murder would be treated as a homicide; he apologized for the slow pace of the investigation, and asked the crowd to be peaceful. His words were met with booing and screams: “Your police beats Black people everyday!” a woman standing on a ledge on City Hall Plaza yelled. Either in frustration or for want of anything else to say, Dellums went inside City Hall with his entourage.

There are some moments that stay with you; upon thinking back to them you smile to yourself, high on the memory. The huge doors of City Hall had barely shut behind Mayor Dellums when the crowd turned and ran from the steps

into the streets to resume rioting. That image will always remain burned into my mind.

RT

After destroying dozens of city officials’ cars parked along City Hall, the crowd crossed Broadway and moved down 17th Street. We didn’t see any cops for a long time, and rioting took on a casual, almost nonchalant attitude. There was indeed time to holla, time to ask to borrow a lighter to set dumpsters on fire. Dozens of people had two-by-fours in their hands. A North African man came up to me and chatted about riots in his country, then hugged me and gave me a kiss on the cheek. Taking the streets with strangers you have never met before or seen in a meeting, people you may have stood next to at a bus stop or passed in a grocery store but never spoken with, is a powerful and joyous feeling.

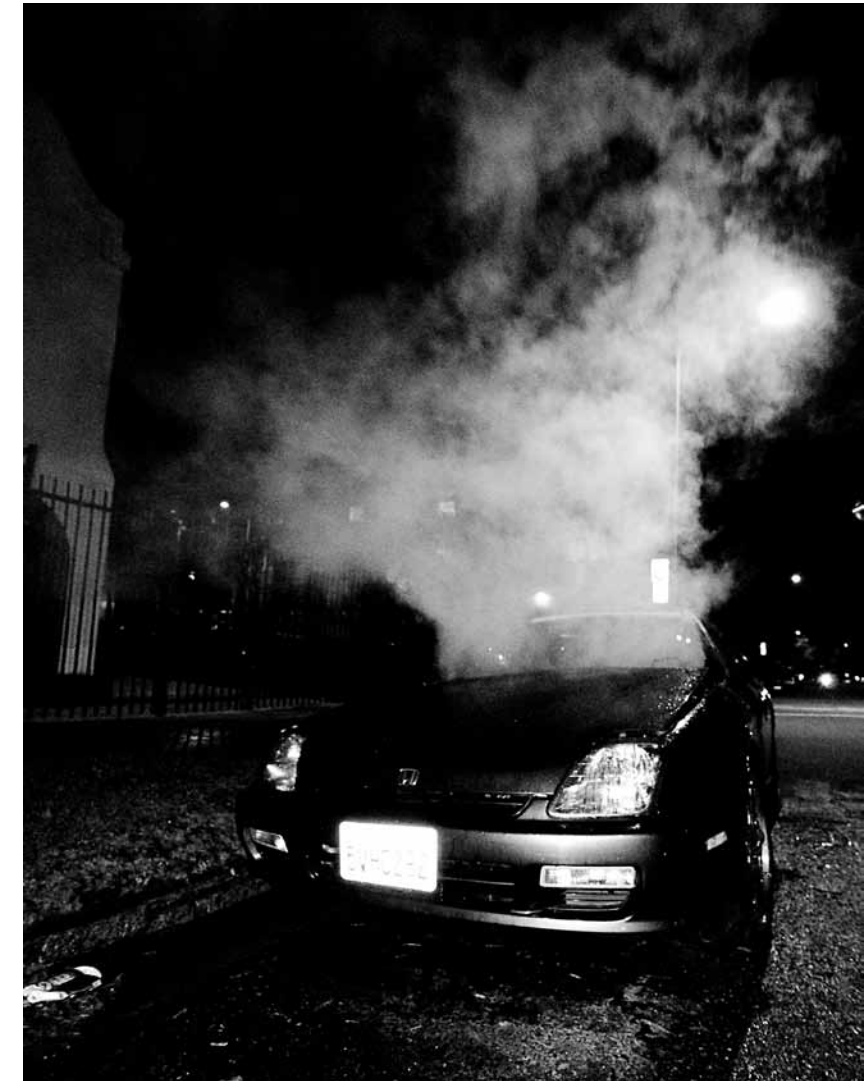
After most of the businesses and cars on 17th Street had been destroyed and many dumpsters had been set on fire, the crowd split up. The random group of strangers I was with passed a forklift. “Give me a screwdriver,” I said, pointing to it. “If we take that thing, we can do anything.” Everyone laughed and we turned a corner.

We regrouped on Broadway and there was another face-off with riot police. After impassioned shouting about all the people who have been killed or beaten by police, the group suddenly turned and went up Telegraph Avenue, dragging objects into the street. At a Sears, people banged on the window, and shouted about taking the jackets inside. It was the only time that night that I heard anyone mull over reappropriation. The windows of the Sears shattered, more trash was burned in the street, and the windows of bus shelters were destroyed.

On the corner of 20th and Broadway there was a police cruiser and a single officer with a rubber bullet rifle pointed at the crowd. The sight of what looked like a semi-automatic weapon sent everyone into a panic. People took a right, but upon reaching the next corner realized they were blocked off. “I’m feelin’ a bit trapped, I’m feelin’ trapped,” someone was shouting. The police blocked off the corner we had come from and came rushing in from both sides with clubs out, brandishing rubber bullet guns.

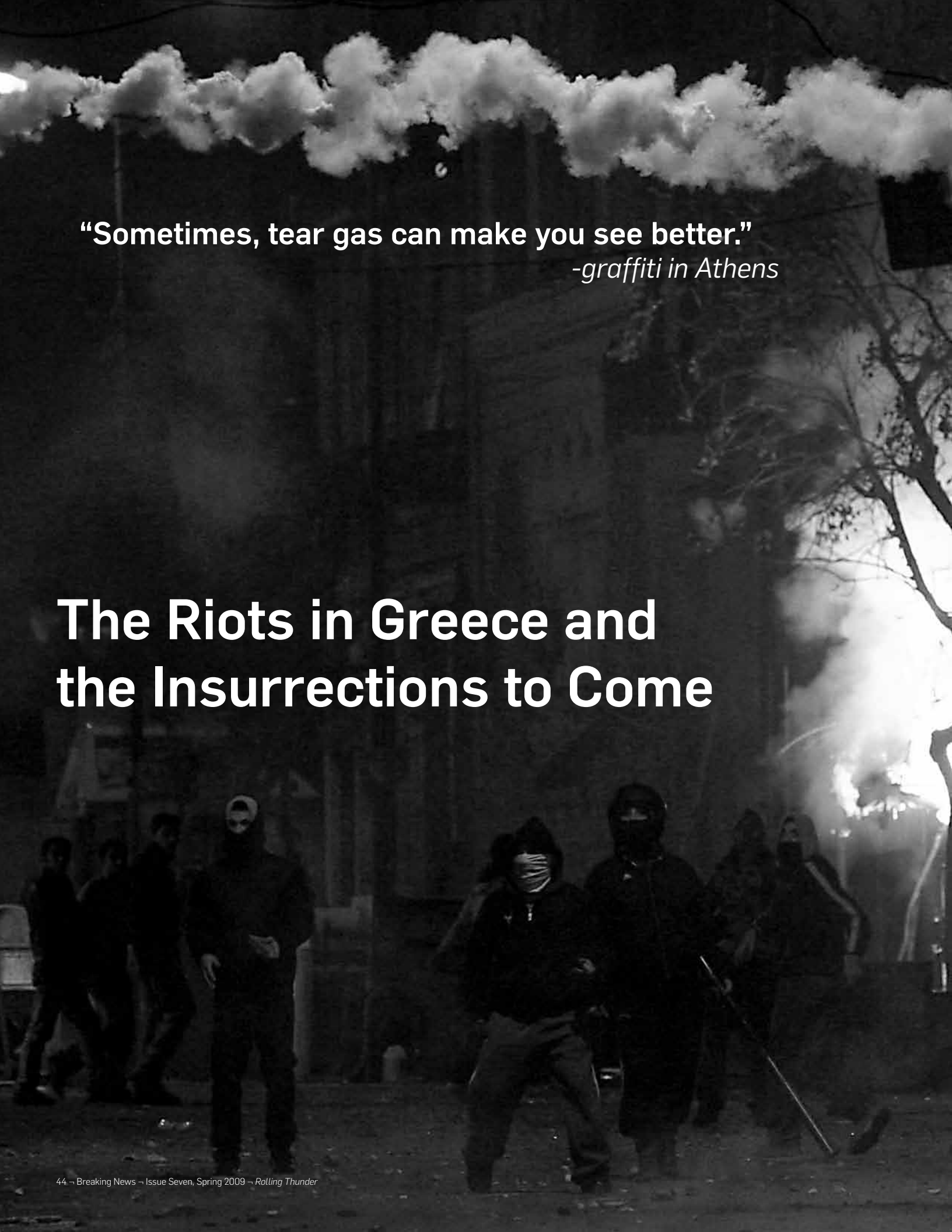
Seventy people were made to get on their stomachs with their hands behind their backs, the same position that Oscar Grant lay in when Johannes Mehserle shot him to death.

RT



Somehow, the events that night did not feel like a single-issue initiative. It wasn’t just about Oscar Grant or police brutality. It was the streets of Oakland screaming its daily struggle—war with the police, the city, and the state—in which the pendulum that swings between imprisonment and everyday economic struggle is part of the life cycle. The ones who rose up put a lot on the line; many had previous charges, warrants, and trauma from their daily dealings with the state. They were risking more days or months off their lives that they might spend in jail or prison or on probation, more time lost in the traps of a racist system. They risked beatings from those whose brutality is concentrated on young black and brown skin. Later that night in the holding cell, some of those arrested had moments of serious regret as they speculated about the possible charges they might face. A seasoned Black organizer who had also been rounded up addresses the group: “In ten years, nah fuck it, in six months you ain’t gonna remember sitting in here right now—all you’ll remember is the night the town stood up.”

In a society in which property is valued over human life, it is necessary to destroy a great deal of it before many people even take notice of an outrage such as the murder of Oscar Grant.



“Sometimes, tear gas can make you see better.”
-graffiti in Athens

The Riots in Greece and the Insurrections to Come

Following the police killing of 15-year-old Alexandros Grigoropoulos in downtown Athens, Greece was wracked by weeks of unprecedented rioting. Anarchists and students, supported and often joined by significant swaths of the population, clashed with police, destroyed corporate and government property, and occupied government buildings, trade union offices, and media outlets, not to mention universities.

There is a lot to learn from the uprising in Greece, most of which is not immediately apparent from photographs.

TIMELINE

December 6: Police shoot and kill Alexandros Grigoropoulos, a 15-year old student, during a minor confrontation in the Athens neighborhood Exarchia. Exarchia is the center of Athens' anarchist community and a frequent site of clashes with police. Within hours, 10,000 people fill the streets of Exarchia, including many anarchists, and begin burning banks, stores, and cars and erecting flaming barricades while fighting riot police; 24 officers are injured the first night. A police station near the Acropolis is attacked and severely damaged. Ermou Street, a strip of posh boutiques, is attacked by enraged crowds, including some from local bars and clubs, who smash windows and loot goods. Anarchists occupy the campus of Athens Polytechnic as a base for organizing; Greek police are barred by law from entering universities, making them frequent sites of occupation by anti-authoritarians. The nearby Schools of Law and Economics are quickly occupied as well. Riots also erupt in the northern city of Thessaloniki, where anarchists attack City Hall, two police precincts, several shops, and a bank, as well as Greek television channel vehicles.

December 7: In an attempt to calm the rioting, the police officers responsible for the shooting are arrested and condemned by Greek politicians. That afternoon, tens of thousands of people pour into the streets all around the country. In Athens, three banks, a supermarket, and dozens of shops are attacked with Molotov cocktails and destroyed, while dozens of other

symbols of capitalism—including 17 banks, a favorite target of Greek anarchists—are damaged during an afternoon march intended to reach police headquarters. Police respond with rubber bullets and tear gas, splintering the marchers, who continue targeting corporate businesses as they retreat. Riots also erupt in the western city of Patras, where a police officer is beaten by students. On the tourist islands of Crete and Corfu, three banks are damaged by Molotovs, as is a city hall, and spontaneous marches fill the streets. Everywhere, police attempt to control the crowds with massive volleys of tear gas.

December 8: In Athens, hundreds of high-school students gather in front of police headquarters to protest the killing. The students march towards the city center, with one group attacking a police station and overturning police cars. A demonstration is called by the Law School occupation for the early evening in the city's center. About 20,000 people gather and some of the most severe rioting of the entire month begins almost immediately. Dozens of shops, banks, and luxury hotels have their windows smashed and are subsequently burned as youths fight running battles with riot police. Rioters torch the massive Christmas tree in central Syntagma Square. In Thessaloniki, hundreds of masked youths hurl rocks and Molotov cocktails at storefronts and riot police, who respond with tear gas. In Athens, rioters surround a fire truck as it tries to extinguish a blaze, smashing the truck's windows and setting it alight. Elsewhere, rioters loot a store selling hunting weapons and swords. Burning barricades also light up the night sky in the city of Larissa in central Greece.

*[Opposite]
Civil war in the streets of
Greece, December 2008.*

December 9: The funeral for Alexandros Grigoropoulos, in a southern Athens suburb, is attended by 6000 people. Police fire tear gas at the crowd when mourners refuse to disperse after the ceremony; an afternoon of street fighting ensues. Locals gather in the streets, shouting at police to stop firing gas in the residential area. As midnight approaches, those occupying Athens Polytechnic set the surrounding streets ablaze with firebombs as they target police who again respond with tear gas. In the western port of Patras, 500 youths lay siege to the police headquarters during the evening; approximately 100 of them subsequently make for the sanctuary of university buildings, where clashes continue. Anarchists also occupy a local TV station to broadcast their own message.

December 10: A general strike planned by the country's main business union prior to the start of the riots paralyzes the country. Foreign and domestic flights are grounded, banks and schools are shut, and hospitals run on emergency services as hundreds of thousands walk off the job. Clashes break out at Athens' main court complex, where the two police officers accused in the fatal shooting are testifying. Youths hurl Molotov cocktails at the courts and police fire tear gas. The protesters also attack and



By December 12, police had used over 4600 capsules of tear gas, and were seeking more from Israel and Germany.*

* It is one of the sad ironies of history that these two nations set the modern standard for repression—proof once again that having been persecuted is not itself enough to prevent one from becoming a persecutor.

damage a television satellite truck. Members of a fascist organization attempt to suppress ongoing riots and occupations in the city of Patras with the tacit approval of police. The Greek consulate in Paris is occupied; solidarity actions also take place in Frankfurt, Moscow, Istanbul, and many other cities.

December 11: 35 police stations are blockaded in Athens by high-school students and their parents; students also attack the entrance of a prison. A mix of anarchists and local residents occupy a town hall in the suburbs of Athens and hold an evening assembly. The number of school occupations around the country increases in spite of the efforts of the communist party's youth wing to prevent protestors from entering campuses.

December 12: Despite heavy rains, several hundred protesters erect burning barricades in Athens and attack police with rocks and flares. Riot police respond by firing tear gas and chasing the protestors through parts of the city, who chant "murderers out" and use laser pointers to attempt to obscure the vision of police.

December 13: Youths firebomb a police station near Exarchia, where a silent vigil marking one week since the murder was broken up by riot police earlier in the day. Rioters in Athens also smash cash dispensers and shatter dozens of shop windows, carting off mobile telephones, watches, clothes, and computers. Dozens of youths attack a police station in central Athens, at least three banks, several stores, and a government building with Molotov cocktails and broken paving stones.

December 14: During the day, four major radio stations are occupied by protesters who broadcast their views, read communiqués, and call for more people to participate in the protests; additionally, two radio stations in Athens and one in Thessaloniki operate from within the occupied universities. Also in Thessaloniki, firebombs and homemade incendiary devices are used to attack the offices of the Greek communist party (KKE), which at first attempted to co-opt the riots and then denounced them.

December 15: In Larissa, youths are met with tear gas as they hurl stones at the city's main police station and then retreat to the occupied medical school. In the northwestern Greek city of Ioannina, groups of young protestors take over the municipal radio station after attacking

the offices of the local newspaper. In Athens, more than 4000 students hurl eggs, oranges, and flour at officers outside the main police headquarters and block one of the capital's main avenues, where they chant slogans, set fire to dumpsters, and throw projectiles at riot police who eventually respond with teargas. In the afternoon, a coordinated attack on a police station by anarchists occupying Athens Polytechnic leaves ten police cars destroyed and six cops slightly injured. Across the country, students are reportedly occupying nearly 600 school buildings in protest.

December 16: Protesters hang giant banners from the Acropolis, calling in multiple languages for resistance and demonstrations across Europe. A dozen anarchists on motorcycles set fire to a police bus in central Athens; no one is hurt. In Thessaloniki, a bank and a local government office are firebombed before dawn.

December 17: A group of anarchists storm a supermarket in Thessaloniki, filling shopping carts with food before charging past the checkouts and distributing the booty to passersby. In Athens, 5000 protesters swamp riot police outside parliament; a breakaway group attempts to breach a cordon guarding the central Syntagma Square complex, and police respond with teargas. When the initial attack at the parliament is repelled, protesters return with a hail of oranges before setting cars, dumpsters, and furniture from outdoor cafés ablaze as they retreat towards Athens Polytechnic. Meanwhile, the headquarters of the country's largest labor union—the bureaucratic General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE)—is occupied by insurgent workers; an open workers' assembly is hosted in the building.

December 18: 7000 students and other protesters march through central Athens. A group breaks away from the peaceful march to hurl rocks and firebombs at police and buildings near parliament, overturn a car, and set fire to dumpsters; they also splash police with red paint. Firefighters and police rush to prevent another group of protesters from burning down the city's main Christmas tree, which was replaced after the first was torched.

December 19: Thousands of youths demonstrate as anger flares following the shooting of another 17-year-old student in the western suburbs of Athens. Students holding a banner reading "Their Terrorism Will Not Work" march through the streets to protest the shooting, which many see as an attempt to intimidate student protestors. Elsewhere in Athens, 20 anarchists attack the French cultural institute, burning its exterior and smashing windows in its courtyard; a nearby bank ATM is also destroyed.

December 20: Hundreds of rioters battle police in central Athens following a memorial gathering at the site where Alexandros was murdered. The rioters emerge from Athens Polytechnic to launch coordinated attacks against police, throwing rocks and petrol bombs and erecting roadblocks. In the evening, masked assailants break into the offices of a credit reporting agency and set it on fire; all of its records are destroyed before the fire is extinguished. 1000 people attend a solidarity demonstration in Hamburg, Germany.

December 21: Six police vehicles are torched by hooded assailants in the west Athens district of Nea Philadelphia in the early morning; the vehicles were parked outside the police accounting department, which is also damaged. Around the same time, clashes with police continue around Athens Polytechnic, with protestors lobbing petrol bombs. An anti-racism rally in Syntagma Square leads to another violent confrontation between protestors and riot police when a group tries to deposit bags of rubbish at the foot of the new Christmas Tree; police use tear gas to disperse the protestors. A solidarity march in San Francisco enters an upscale mall, where a small riot ensues after police attempt to arrest marchers.

December 22: On the resort island of Crete, in the early morning hours, assailants throw petrol bombs at a bank, which is completely destroyed in the ensuing blaze. The arsonists attack another bank before moving on to a car dealership. In Athens, the administration of Athens Polytechnic gives Greek police the authority to raid its grounds. The occupation of the GSEE headquarters ends voluntarily.

December 23: More than 3000 protesters chanting "Cops, Pigs, Murderers," which has become the unofficial slogan of the youth protests, march through Athens, during which a group of youths overturn a police car; the march keeps many stores in downtown Athens closed. A group of high-school students stage a rally in front of the education ministry, which they announce will be their last before the holidays. Meetings occur at Athens Polytechnic to discuss the future of the occupation; it is decided that it will end voluntarily at the end of the week. Earlier, shots are fired at a riot police bus passing the Athens Polytechnic campus, although none of the police on board are injured. The attack is assumed by many to be the work of provocateurs attempting to create a justification for police to raid the campus.

December 24: On Christmas Eve, about 700 protesters march peacefully through Athens' main shopping district to demand the release of arrestees. At the city's main cathedral, protestors chanting "Priests, thieves, pedophiles" spray paint slogans and anarchist symbols on the 19th century building's marble columns and tear down a Greek flag; cathedral officials cancel a scheduled Christmas Eve service after the vandalism. Riot police cordon off the central Syntagma Square to protect the capital's main Christmas tree. An anarchist group calling itself Nocturnal Arson Insurrection claims responsibility for a blast targeting the offices of a far-right political party earlier that morning; the homemade device, comprising several gas canisters, caused damage but no injuries.

December 25 and on: Christmas Day is mostly quiet in Greece. The riots wind down as the holidays send many home. But the following day, a government official's car is firebombed in front of his house in Athens, while assailants target a bank with a Molotov cocktail and another group attacks a police car. The struggle continues over the following weeks.



A memorial at the site where Alexandros was murdered.

“Tell me yourself—I challenge you: imagine that you were called on to build the edifice of human destiny so that people would finally be happy and would find peace and tranquility. If you knew that, in order to attain this, you would have to sacrifice the life of just one innocent creature, let’s say a child, and that on his unavenged suffering you could build that edifice, would you agree to do it? Tell me and don’t lie!”

“No, I would not,” Alyosha said softly.

“And do you find it acceptable that those for whom you are building that edifice should gratefully receive a happiness that rests on the blood of a tortured child and, having received it, should continue to enjoy it eternally?”

“No, I do not find that acceptable.”

**-Fyodor Dostoevsky, “Rebellion,”
in *The Brothers Karamazov***

Trouble in Paradise: Economic Crisis, Social Upheaval, and Anarchist Infrastructure

Greece is no longer ruled by a dictatorship, as it was until 35 years ago. According to the common sense of our era, there is no reason to riot in a democracy. Even if an employee of the state accidentally kills someone in the course of carrying out his duties, such misfortunes are simply an unfortunate side effect of the necessary role of the authorities in keeping the peace. When rioting does break out, it must be the work of a criminal minority not mature enough to understand the benefits and responsibilities of democracy; if it spreads, the only possible explanation is that a temporary irregularity in the economy is preventing citizens from participating in the capitalist market. The idea that government and capitalism themselves might be undesirable—that no authority should have the power to kill people in the first place—is unthinkable.

Accordingly, as soon as the scale of the response to Alexandros’s murder became clear, the corporate media turned away from the banners decrying police brutality and unaccountable authority, seizing instead on the idea that the unrest was the result of poor economic prospects for young Greeks. Some corporate outlets went so far as to announce—in language that might be less surprising in a magazine like this one—that the events in Greece might presage the second coming of the anti-globalization movement thought vanquished after September 11, 2001. Though that would hardly be unwelcome, we should be careful about taking up any narrative from the corporate media, lest it be a Trojan horse.

Are we to believe that—were the economy more stable—it would be acceptable to shoot 15-year-olds? In the years leading up to December 2008, the police gunned down countless people in the United States without anyone smashing a single store window. Is this simply because we had a lower unemployment rate? If we accept that the rage vented in Greece originated in economic conditions, the implication is that it could be dispelled by economic solutions—and there are capitalist solutions for the crisis in no shorter supply than socialist ones. The exploitation and unemployment currently rampant in Greece could be exported to some meeker nation, or enough credit could be extended to the disaffected stone-throwers that they would come to identify as middle class themselves. These approaches have worked before; one might even argue that they have driven the process of capitalist globalization.

If Greece could somehow be transformed into Sweden—if every nation could be Sweden, without any having to be Nigeria—would it be OK to shoot teenagers then? They shoot anarchists in Sweden too, remember—for example, during the protests outside the European Union summit in Gothenburg in June 2001.

So to the extent to which the Greek resistance is simply an expression of frustration at dim financial prospects, it can be defused or co-opted. But there are other forces at work that are invisible through the corporate lens.

Masked anarchists setting fires and fighting the police have been common in Greece since before the turn of the century. In 1999, shortly before the Seattle WTO protests, there were major riots during a visit from Bill Clinton. At the time, the economy was livelier—and the socialists were in power, which seems to contradict the theory that the current unrest is simply a result of dissatisfaction with the conservative government.

On the contrary, the rioting in Greece was not simply an inevitable result of economic recession, but the fruit of decades of anarchist organizing. Though the rioting was provoked by the murder of Alexandros, it was only possible because of pre-existing infrastructures and social currents—otherwise, such murders would catalyze uprisings in the US as well. Such an immediate and resolute response would not have occurred if anarchists in Greece had not developed a culture conducive to it. Thanks to a network of social centers, a deep-seated sense that neighborhoods such as the one in which Alexandros was killed are liberated zones off-limits to police, and a tradition of resistance extending back through generations, Greek anarchists felt entitled to their rage and capable of acting upon it. In the preceding years, a series of struggles against the prison system, the mistreatment of immigrants, and the privatization of schools had given innumerable young people experience in militant action. As soon as the text messages circulated announcing the murder, Greek anarchists knew exactly how to respond, because they had done so time and again before.

The general public in Greece is already sympathetic to resistance movements, owing to the heritage of struggle against the US-supported dictatorship. In this regard, Greece is similar to Chile, another nation noted for the intensity of its street conflicts and class warfare. With the murder of Alexandros, anarchists finally had a narrative that was compelling to a great number of people. In another political context, liberals or other opportunists might have been able to exploit this tragedy to their own ends, but the Greek anarchists forestalled this possibility by immediately seizing the initiative and framing the terms of the conflict.

So whatever the corporate media alleged, the riots in Greece were not about the economy. That is to say, they were about the economy, but not just the economic hardships accompanying the recession—they were also a revolt against the exploitation, alienation, and hierarchy inherent in the capitalist system, all of which set the stage for police to murder teenagers whether or not there is widespread unemployment.

To repeat, if alienation and hierarchy alone were sufficient to inspire effective resistance, we’d see a lot more of it in the United States. The decisive factor in Greece was not the economy, nor the brutality of the police, but cumulative efforts that built a vibrant anarchist movement. There is no shortcut around developing an analogous movement in the US if we want to be capable of similar responses to oppression and injustice.

Anarchists in the United States face a much different context than their Greek colleagues. Greece is a peripheral participant in the European Union, while the US remains the epicenter of global capitalism, with a correspondingly more powerful repressive apparatus. The consequences of participating in confrontations with police are potentially more severe in the

US, at least in proportion to the support available to arrestees. Much of the population is more conservative, and radical and oppressed communities are more fragmented, owing to the tremendous numbers of people in prison and the transience enforced by the job market. There is little continuity in traditions of resistance—in most communities, the collective anarchist memory does not stretch back beyond a decade at the most. The events in Greece are inspiring, but US anarchists can probably learn more from the infrastructures behind them than from the superficial aspects of the clashes. We might start by noting the role of the occupied universities as safe zones that provided a nerve center for the revolt, and brainstorming about how to create similar spaces on this continent.

Likewise, radicals in the US can draw inspiration from Greek anarchists without forgetting what is worthwhile in local anarchist communities. Though Greek anarchists clearly excel at confrontation, this does not guarantee that they are equally equipped to contest internal hierarchies and forms of oppression. The capacity to work out conflicts and maintain a horizontal distribution of power is as essential to the anarchist project as any kind of offense or defense. It would be unfortunate if fascination with the Greeks led US anarchists to deprioritize discussions about consent, consensus-based decision-making, and privilege.

The Insurrections to Come

At best, the events in Greece might help reframe the global context the way the Zapatista revolt did in 1994. The Greek riots are hardly the only recent conflict to occupy the world stage—tragically, the Israeli invasion of Gaza occurred immediately afterward*—but they may be the most promising, in that they were explicitly directed against hierarchical power.

* In one heartening example of effective solidarity, the US government canceled a major arms shipment to Israel that had been scheduled to pass through Greek ports after Greek anarchists threatened to mobilize massive resistance.

Most current hostilities, even those not organized by governments, are not as promising. Not everyone who takes up arms outside the state's monopoly on violence is fighting for the abolition of hierarchy. Nationalist campaigns, fundamentalist crusades, religious conflicts, ethnic strife, and the gang warfare of illegal capitalism pit people against each other without any hope of liberation. Earlier in 2008, for example, South African rioters angry about their economic prospects carried out a series of brutal attacks on immigrant workers. Not only is there no guarantee that economic crises will produce riots, but when they do produce them there is no guarantee that this will be for the best.

We have to set visible precedents for liberation struggles if we hope future conflicts will pit the oppressed against their oppressors rather than against each other. This is especially important in times of crisis, when the initiative is up for grabs—if we do not seize it, liberals or fascists certainly will. Greece may be one such precedent, but it is far from enough. We can create similar precedents on smaller scales in the US by taking the initiative to determine the character of confrontations with authority. The mobilization at last summer's Republican National Convention was arguably an example of this, though certainly not the only format for it; the riots in Oakland offers another model.

Today, party communism is largely discredited, and most resistance movements do not see seizing state power as feasible or desirable. This leaves two roads for proponents of social change. One is to support reformist heads of state such as Obama, Lula, and Chavez, who cash in on dissent to re-legitimize the state form and, as if incidentally, their own power. On the other hand, there is the possibility of a struggle against hierarchy itself—whether waged consciously, as in Greece, or as a result of complete social and economic marginalization, as it was in the suburbs of Paris in 2005. Such a path offers a long struggle with no victory in sight, but it is our only hope of reaching a new world.

“If something scares us, it is the return to normality. For in the destroyed and pillaged streets of our cities of light we see not only the obvious results of our rage, but the possibility of starting to live. We no longer have anything to do, other than to install ourselves in this possibility and transform it into a living experience: by grounding on the field of everyday life, our creativity, our power to materialize our desires, our power not to contemplate but to construct the real. This is our vital space. All the rest is death.”

-from a statement from the occupation of the Athens School of Economics and Business (ASOEE), December 11



Appendix: How to Organize an Insurrection

We conducted interviews with Void Network, a collective focusing on “Theory, Utopia, Empathy, and Ephemeral Arts,” and with an anonymous anti-authoritarian/autonomous communist post-graduate student, who participated in the uprising primarily through the occupied university of ASOEE.

How were the actions coordinated within cities? How about between cities?

VOID: There are hundreds of small, totally closed affinity groups—groups based in long-standing friendship and 100% trust—and some bigger groups like the people from the three big squats in Athens and three more in Thessaloniki. There are more than 50 social centers in Greece, and anarchist political spaces in all the universities around the country; also, the Anti-Authoritarian Movement has sections in all major cities. For all of them, Indymedia is very important as a strategic point for collecting and sharing useful information: where conflicts are happening, where the police are, where undercover police are making arrests, what is

happening everywhere minute by minute; it is also useful on a political level, for publishing announcements and calls for demonstrations and actions.

Of course, in practice the primary form of coordination was from friend to friend through mobile phones; that was also the main approach used by young students to coordinate their initiatives.

ANONYMOUS: There were two phases of the actions in December. Roughly, the first week was characterized by direct actions on the streets: destruction of state and capitalist targets, attacks on police stations, commodity expropriation, and so on. The second week was more obviously a social movement in which several forms of action were coordinated.

The actions of the first week weren't organized in advance. As soon as news of the murder spread, on December 6, anarchists and anti-authoritarians reacted by gathering in Exarchia and the Polytechnic University. Riots had already started in the area. Clashes in Exarchia would have been easily contained by the forces of repression, so there was a

Militants preparing for confrontation. As impressive as the December uprising was, US anarchists probably stand to gain the most from learning about the infrastructures that made it possible.

general opinion that the clashes should extend all over the town. That same night, there were attacks in at least two other parts of Athens: on Psirri shopping center and the police station of that region, and also on the police station in Petralona. That same night, in addition to the occupation of the Polytechnic University, two more central universities, ASOEE and the Law school, were occupied and used as staging areas for more actions. In the same spontaneous way, actions started elsewhere in Greece, but mostly in places where there was already organized anarchist/anti-authoritarian activity.

Left groups called for a march to the headquarters of the police the next day. Anarchists and anti-authoritarians also participated in this demonstration. During it, Alexandras Avenue in central Athens was completely destroyed. On the second night, another demonstration took place, during which thousands of people destroyed, burned, and looted a great part of downtown Athens. Everybody was talking about a social uprising that was not coordinated by a political center, group, or party.

In Athens, the most impressive thing was the spontaneous organization and response of the students, who organized demonstrations in their neighborhoods and attacked police stations. The students coordinated themselves through mobile phones and the internet, as well as through a student coordination group named for the murdered boy, Alexis. This group called for demonstrations and actions, and this encouraged the popular response. Left university student associations also called for demonstrations.

The three biggest occupations either circulated calls for action via the internet or organized attacks, depending on how many people were present in each one.

During the second week, students participated in more demonstrations. These were actually called for by left groups, but these groups couldn't control them, due to the disposition of the participants. The strategy of decentralizing actions to the neighborhoods also emerged. The municipal buildings in some neighborhoods of Athens were occupied and used for open public meetings. Some demonstrations that took place during this period attacked banks and similar targets.

The coordination group between the central occupations called for a major solidarity demonstration on Christmas Eve for those who were arrested during the riots. Before that, the Polytechnic occupation called for a European day of action and a demonstration in Exarchia on Saturday, December 20. The ASOEE occupation, on the other hand, suggested decentralized demonstrations in different parts of Athens on that day. But the demonstrations on December 20 weren't as aggressive as many people expected, revealing the limits of the continuation of the revolt through the occupations' calls.

The coordination between cities happened mostly as the exchanging of ideas and experiences through the internet. For example, the call to occupy municipal buildings quickly spread nationwide. One other organized action was the call for a demonstration on New Year's Eve at the prisons all around Greece. This call came after a meeting that took place before the conclusion of the occupations of the four central buildings in Athens.

What kinds of organizing structures appeared?

VOID: a.) All sorts of small companies of friends were making spontaneous decisions in the streets, planning actions and carrying them out themselves in a chaotic, uncontrollable manner: thousands of actions taking place at the same time everywhere around the country . . .

b.) Every afternoon there was a General Assembly in occupied schools, public buildings, and universities . . .

c.) Indymedia was used for announcements and strategic coordination . . .

d.) The various communist parties also organized their own confederations of students . . .

e.) . . . And also, one especially influential federation was organized by friends of Alexis, to organize student demonstrations and school occupations, and to publish general announcements from the students' struggle.

ANONYMOUS: The basic structures of organization were rooted in the occupied public buildings. At first, there were the three biggest occupied universities in the center of Athens and the occupied GSEE, the union building, also in the center. In the occupied buildings, every day hundreds of people organized themselves through general meetings. In general, the ASOEE and Polytechnic University occupations functioned through self-facilitated meetings, while in ASOEE, working groups and initiatives for different actions were also created. The occupation of the law school university, in which non-governmental, extreme leftists were participating, functioned through "directly democratic" structures, such as voting and the formation of associations. The GSEE occupation was somewhere in the middle; for example, they had a presiding board to coordinate and mediate the meetings. In addition, in some neighborhoods occupied public buildings were used successfully for public meetings. Some schools were also occupied by their students; I don't know much about them, but we were always meeting the students on the street.

Were there any structures already in place that people used to organize?

VOID: For the young students who were in the streets for the first time, and also for the immigrants who participated, the telephone was enough; this produced a totally chaotic and unpredictable element in the situations. On the other hand, anarchists and anti-authoritarians have used General Assemblies as an organizing tool for the last 30 years during any kind of movement. All affinity groups, squats, social centers, university occupations, and other organizations have their own assemblies, as well. During the fight, a lot of new blogs appeared, and new coordinating networks of high-school students.

ANONYMOUS: Anarchists and the anti-authoritarians typically organize through self-facilitated meetings that

are announced via a call out. There are also some settled structures, like the self-organized spaces ("stekia") in the neighborhoods and some universities, and some self-organized associations in workplaces and Antifa groups. Of course, there are also squatted houses; nowadays we are seeing an increasing number of squatting actions, mostly in the countryside.

What different kinds of people participated in the actions?

VOID: The majority were anarchists, half of them older ones who come into the streets only in very important struggles, as most have previous charges and would have to face prison time if they were arrested. Beside them were thousands of students 16-18 years old. Alongside these groups were immigrants, thousands of university students, many "gypsy" [Romani] kids taking revenge for social repression and racism, and old revolutionaries with experience from previous social struggles.

ANONYMOUS: Lots of different kinds of people participated. Students got organized all over Greece in the same way—from poor neighborhoods to rich and bourgeois neighborhoods. A great number of youth, university students, precarious workers, young workers, and unemployed people took part in the actions. Theater students and actors and actresses stopped several theater performances. Hooligans participated as well, not on a political basis but because of their hatred of police and the system. Workers participated too, as the occupation of the GSEE building indicates. In contrast to the students, the workers who took part were mostly radical minorities who were already politically active. Many of them also participated in the occupations in their neighborhoods.

The participation of first- and second-generation immigrants in the clashes was impressive. Lots of them took part in the clashes and expropriations on Monday, December 8, and many were arrested. During those days, the Romani groups that live in Athens also fought against the cops.

Politically, the greatest proportion of people who took part in the actions were active anarchists and anti-authoritarians and people close to that scene who are not politically organized. These are the people behind the occupations and the movement



that continues today. On the other hand, the uprising superceded this political arena as well as the left organizations that participated.

Department store mannequins burn in a spectacular rejection of consumerist utopia.

What different forms did the actions take?

VOID: a.) Smashing, looting, and burning were the primary tactics used by young people. They often attacked expensive shopping districts, opened the luxury shops, took everything from inside, and set fire to it in order to counteract the effects of the tear gas in the air. Many turned cars upside down to serve as barricades, keeping the police at a distance and thus creating liberated areas. The police used over 4600 tear gas bombs—nearly 4 tons—but people set countless fires, enough to maintain areas in which you could breathe despite this chemical warfare.

When the thousands of people on the streets realized that the black smoke of the fires could cancel out the white smoke of the tear gas, they took up this tactic



Molotov cocktails were used to force riot police to respect demonstrators.

of setting fires. Other tactics included smashing up the pavement with hammers to produce stones for use as projectiles, and, of course, producing and throwing Molotov cocktails. This last tactic was used especially to force riot police to fear and respect the demonstrators, and also in order to control the space and time of attack and escape.

b.) Attacks with sticks, stones, and Molotov cocktails were carried out against countless banks, police stations, and police cars across the country. In smaller cities, banks and police were the primary or only targets, as the small-scale society and face-to-face relations discouraged attacks on shops, with the exception of a few multinational franchises.

c.) Groups of 50-70 people carried out hundreds of symbolic occupations in all kinds of public buildings, municipal offices, public service offices, theaters, radio stations, TV stations, and other buildings. Also, there were many symbolic acts of sabotage and blockades of streets, highways, offices, metro stations, public services, and so on, usually accompanied by the distribution of thousands of pamphlets.

d.) Every day there were silent protests, street theater, and non-violent actions in front of the parliament and in other cities.

Most of these were brutally attacked by police.

e.) Leftists organized concerts in public spaces for underground bands and politically conscious pop stars. The biggest one in Athens involved more than 40 performers and drew over 10,000 people.

f.) Controlled student demonstrations were organized by the Communist Party. Many of these attracted significantly fewer participants than the more spontaneous student demonstrations.

ANONYMOUS: There was also commodity expropriation. On December 8, the peak of the uprising, a lot of people—mostly immigrants—participated in this. There was also a great deal of organized commodity expropriation to support the occupations.

How many of the participants had previously been involved in similar actions?

VOID: Of the participants, several thousand were experienced anarchist insurrectionists, anti-authoritarians, and libertarian autonomists. There were also several thousand young people who had been radicalized over the preceding three years during the struggles for Social Insurance and against

the privatization of education, and also in the huge spontaneous demonstrations that took place during the fires that burned almost 25% of the natural areas of Greece during summer of 2007.

We estimate that for about 30% of the people, this was their first rioting.

Which of the tactics used in the uprising had been used before in Greece? Did they spread in the course of this rebellion? If they did, how did that occur?

VOID: Most of the tactics used in this struggle have been used here for a long time now. The most important new characteristic of this uprising was the immediate outbreak of actions all around the country. The assassination of a young boy in the most

important area of anarchist activity provoked an instantaneous reaction; within five minutes of his death, anarchist cells all over the country had been activated. In some cases, the police were informed much later than the anarchists as to why they were being attacked. For many, it was a surprise that so many young people adopted the tactics of “anarchist violence, smashing and burning,” but this was a result of the generalized influence that anarchists have had over the past four years.

ANONYMOUS: All of these tactics had been used before by anarchists and anti-authoritarians, but until the December revolt they were repressed by police and resulted in lots of arrests. The actions of the first night were mostly carried out by anarchists and anti-authoritarians; on the second day, the uprising spread to the political left, and on the third day the students and a great part of the rest of society took part. The students were encouraged by the determination and passion of the first people who reacted and the effectiveness of their direct action. And, of course, we should not forget the anger about the murder of Alexis that sparked the revolt.

Concerning the spread of the actions beyond anarchists and anti-authoritarians, I think it’s not necessary to have experience to throw a stone, make a barricade, or smash a shop window. We saw students 13 or 14 years old making Molotov cocktails.

Did any conflicts emerge between participants in the uprising?

VOID: The Communist Party separated itself from anarchists and leftists, organizing separate demonstrations. Also, the announcements that the Communist Party published, their statements in the corporate media, their speeches to the parliament, and the negative propaganda that they carried on against all leftist organizations prove that they are a real enemy of social change.

ANONYMOUS: Some little problems occurred in the squatted places with people addicted to heroin or who stole things

from the squats. There was a lot of discussion about the commodity expropriation, when it was used for personal profit by selling the stuff on the black market. Leftists tried to stop these actions, arguing that the people who do this are only thieves. In the end they didn’t manage to stop them. Also, leftists unsuccessfully tried to stop the clashes and attacks by making chains separating the demonstrators from the rioters.

What is the opinion of the “general public” about the actions?

VOID: What is called the “general public” during a period of tele-democracy is something that demands a lot of consideration.

Generally speaking, the “general public” feels fear when the TV says that we were “burning the poor people’s shops,” but the people know well what kind of shops are in the expensive districts where the riots took place; they feel fear when the TV says that angry immigrants came out to the streets and looted, but they also know that the immigrants are poor and desperate, and that it was only a minority of them that came to the streets. Many artists, theoreticians, sociologists, and other such personages offered explanations about the revolt, and many of them were beneficial for our cause; some were probably trapped by their need to participate in the spirit of the times, while others were using the situation as an opportunity to honestly express their real ideas. The “general public” is angry about the murder of a 15-year-old boy by a police officer, and they hate the police much more than before; anyway, nobody liked the police in the first place. The majority of “normal” people in Greece don’t trust the right wing government or the past (and probably future) socialist government, and they don’t like the police, expensive shops, or banks. Now a new public opinion is appearing that includes all the social and ethical justifications for revolt. If it was difficult to govern Greece before, now it will be much more difficult.

ANONYMOUS: A great part of society supported the young people, for many reasons: the murder of the child, the economic crisis, the general decadence of the Greek state. The general consensus was something like “no more,” “the children are right.” On the other hand, the conservative/fascistic part of the society—which is not so big here—focused on looting and damage to property, alleging that the workers would have to pay for it.

How important to the context of these events is the legacy of the dictatorship in Greece? How does it influence popular opinion?

ANONYMOUS: In general, 19th century Greek history was characterized by repressive regimes rather than social peace and consent. The last example of that was the dictatorship. Since then, there have been 35 years of social peace. During these years, police repression and brutality have continued: state murders, torture, cooperation between police



According to some accounts, Alexandros was not murdered in cold blood, but rather hit by a ricocheting bullet. Demonstrators didn't buy it.

[Opposite] A riot policeman, shortly before being extinguished; the aftermath of a major confrontation.

and fascists. This has been highlighted consistently in anarchist and left propaganda to reveal the parallels between democracy and dictatorship.

A common slogan in the uprising was “the agreement of Varkiza broke up,” relating the events of December 1944 to December 2008. In 1944, there was a civil war between antifascist partisans and the Greek state, which was supported by the middle class and England. In December 1944, the agreement of Varkiza was signed by the communist party, leading the partisans to surrender all firearms. From then until the dictatorship there was a repressive state supported by the right wing and fascists.

VOID: In 1973, the young people were the only ones who took the risk to revolt against the seven-year-running dictatorship; even if this was not the only cause of the end of dictatorship, it remains in the collective memory that the students saved Greece from the dictators and the domination of the US. It is a common belief that young people will put themselves at great risk for the benefit of all, and this produces a feeling of hope and a tolerance of their actions. Of course, this is now an old story, and though it influences

the context of the confrontations, it is not mentioned in reference to them.

Another influence comes from the student struggles of 1991 and 1995 against the privatization of education, which forced the government to change plans and preserved public education to the present day. Granted, the revolt of December 2008 was probably the apex of the anarchist movement in Greece thus far, as it appeared all around the country and with a great deal of influence on the actions and ideas of a general part of society; but the earlier student struggles, especially in Athens in 1991, were more visible and more generalized.

Do you think the economic crisis was as influential in setting the stage for the uprising as the corporate media alleged?

VOID: Young people from the wealthy areas of Athens also attacked police stations in their neighborhoods, so even the class war Marxists are at a loss to explain what is happening. The separation of the rich and poor doesn't seem to matter as much as long-existing solidarity and participation in the fight for equality and social justice.





Clashes between youth and police.

[Opposite] Student protesters; mourners bearing the coffin of Alexandros during his funeral on December 9.

On the other hand, it is true that because of the economy Greeks between the ages of 25 and 35 cannot start families. Greece is the most underpopulated society in all Europe. But here we don't talk about that as the cause of the revolt. Young people are angry and they hate the police, capitalist cynicism, and the government in a natural, instinctual way that doesn't require explanations or a political agenda. The local media avoid speaking in depth about social conditions here the way the English, French, and US media have. Local corporate TV stations attempt to pass off lies about chaotic "masketeers" with no ideas and no social identity because the moral influence of anarchists is so strong now that if they start to talk about our ideas seriously on television society could explode. With the exception of some TV programs and newspapers, most of the mass media are trying to keep economic issues separate from the revolt.

Even the leftists of the May '68 generation, when they speak to the media, say that the riots are not political expressions of the needs and hopes of the people—that anarchists and young people don't have the ability to express a political agenda, and the people

need other kinds of political representation. Of course, all this has little influence on the young people who will participate in the social struggles of the future, as after this struggle there is a lot of tension and a great distance between younger people and any kind of political leadership or authority.

ANONYMOUS: The economic crisis is obvious in every aspect of our lives at the moment. There are intense layoffs and the Greek state is close to declaring bankruptcy. Greece has the lowest salaries in Europe, the highest percentage of unemployed young people, and the greatest number of people living under the poverty line. There is a general feeling that the majority of society is working just to make the banks richer. The politicians, media moguls, and priests are all involved in scandals involving billions of Euros, which come from the wealth we produce. When all this is happening and the government says it is going to give 28 billion to the banks because of the economic crisis and we'll have to work more for less money to save the banks, then it is logical that a huge number of people will support attacks on banks.



Throughout December, barricades, clashes, and university occupations transformed the social and political landscape of Greece.

What other motivations, besides rage against the police and the economy, inspired people to participate?

VOID: The personal and collective need for adventure; the need to participate in making history; the chaotic negation of any kind of politics, political parties, and “serious” political ideas; the hatred of any TV star, sociologist, or expert who claims to be able to analyze you as a social phenomenon, the need to be heard as you are; the enthusiasm of fighting against the authorities and ridiculing the riot police, the power in your heart and the fire in your hands, the amazing experience of throwing Molotovs and stones at the cops in front of the parliament, in the expensive shopping districts, or in your small silent town, in your village, in the square of your neighborhood.

Other motivations include the shared feeling of planning an action with your best friends, making it happen, and later hearing people tell you about this action as an incredible story that they heard from someone else; the enthusiasm of reading about some action that you did with your friends in a newspaper or TV program from the other side of the planet; the feeling that you are responsible

for creating stories that will become examples for the future struggles. It is also the great celebrative fun of smashing shops, taking products and burning them, seeing the false promises of capitalism smoldering in the streets; the hatred for all authorities, the need to take part in a collective ceremony of revenge for the murder of a person that could have been you, the personal vendetta of feeling that the police have to pay for the death of Alexis across the whole country; the need to send a powerful message to the government that if police violence increases, we have the power to fight back—that they have to take us seriously because we are everywhere and we are going to change everything.

ANONYMOUS: With uprisings, protests, demonstrations, and occupations people are coming closer and meeting in the streets and in buildings that were formerly only places where commodities were transferred. Revolt enables people to develop an idea of a collective and communal life. Another slogan that expresses this situation is “Call your loneliness or go out again to the street of fire,” mostly used after the end of the student movement of 2006-2007.

Did political parties succeed in co-opting energy from the uprising?

VOID: In “real” numbers [as of late December], the Socialists increased their lead over the right wing government, gaining an 8% lead in the polls; the “European Social Forum communists” lost 1% even though they helped the revolt, but still they are in third place with 12%; the Communist Party has 8%, the Nationalist neo-fascists 4.5%, and the Green Party is holding steady at 3.5%.

It is also interesting that the leader of the Socialists appears now to be regarded as the most “capable of governing the country” after many years of being less popular than the right wing prime minister. The riots had a great effect on the political scene: the political parties seemed unable to understand, explain, or react to the massive wave of violence and participation from every level of society. Their announcements were irrelevant to what was really happening. Their popularity decreased dramatically among the younger population, who don’t see themselves in the logic and the politics of the political parties and don’t feel represented by them.

ANONYMOUS: SYRIZA, one reformist alternative party of the left—it can be compared with the green parties—increased significantly in popularity after the student movement of 2006-7, because it addressed the “700 Euro generation” [the younger Greeks for whom the average salary is 700 Euro a month] and the fight for a free education. Also, it is the only party that supports those who are imprisoned, in contrast with the communist party KKE that always insists resistance is only the work of provocateurs. Now it is difficult for SYRIZA to co-opt energy from the uprising because they support peaceful demonstrations as a means of struggle. The same goes for other small non-governmental parties.

What was the role of anarchists in starting and continuing the actions? How clearly was their participation seen by the rest of society?

VOID: Over the past few years, anarchists have created a network of communities, groups, organizations, squats, and social centers in almost all the major cities in Greece. Many don’t like each other, as there are significant differences between groups

“The personal vendetta of feeling that the police have to pay for the death of Alexis across the whole country; the need to send a powerful message to the government that if police violence increases, we have the power to fight back . . .”



and individuals. This helps the movement, though, as the movement now can encompass a variety of approaches. Many different kinds of people find comrades in different parts of the anarchist movement and, all together, push each other—in a positive, if antagonistic, way—to communicate with society at large. This communication includes creating neighborhood assemblies, participating in social struggles, and planning actions that are relevant and meaningful to a wide range of people. After 30 years of anti-social anarchism, today's Greek anarchist movement, despite all its problems, limitations, and internal conflicts, has the capability to look beyond the anarchist microcosm and take actions that improve society at large in ways that are readily apparent. Of course, it will take a lot of effort to realize this in practice.

As for the role of anarchists in starting and continuing the actions, especially at the beginning—Saturday and Sunday, December 6 and 7—and also in the continuation after Wednesday, December 10, anarchists constituted the vast majority. In the middle days, especially on Monday when the destructive Armageddon took place, students and

immigrants played a very important role. But the vast majority of students found it easy to feel satisfied after one, two, or three days of smashing, and then went home or attended demonstrations with a more pacifist atmosphere. Likewise, immigrants had to face a very strong backlash from locals, and were afraid to return to the streets.

So the 20,000 anarchists in Greece started it, and continued it when everybody else returned to normality. And we have to mention that the fear of returning to normality helped us keep up the fight for ten days more, putting ourselves into great danger, as acts of vengeance for the assassination of our comrade were transformed, in our fantasies, into preparations for a general strike. Now European society knows once and for all what a social insurrection looks like, and that it is not difficult to change the world in a few weeks.

But you need everyone to participate and play a role. The young people of Greece have sent an invitation to all the societies of Europe. We are now awaiting their responses.

ANONYMOUS: People see the role of anarchists and anti-authoritarians in initiating

Student demonstrations; like Denver police, Greek cops maintain cordial relations with the press; the Christmas tree in front of the Greek parliament burning on December 8.

*[Opposite]
"The first stone is for Alexandros, the rest are for us." –Graffiti in Athens*



At this point everyone has realized that the riots aren't just the work of a few young people in sweatshirts.

and maintaining the uprising, while the media talk about “youth” in order to separate this political scene from the rest of society. One positive thing is that the media has ceased using the dismissive term “Koukouloforos” (“the hooded ones”); at this point everybody has realized that the riots aren’t just the work of ten people in sweatshirts.

How much visibility do anarchists have in Greece in general? How “seriously” is anarchism taken by the majority of Greek people?

VOID: You could say that it has only been three or four years now since anarchists started to take ourselves “seriously.” It is only in the past few years that we have succeeded in expanding beyond the limitations of the anti-police strategy that characterized our efforts for 25 years. In that strategy, we would attack the police, they would arrest people, and we would do solidarity actions, over and over again. Of course, the anti-police attacks

continue, and the prisoner solidarity movement is stronger than ever, but the anti-social element inside the anarchist movement is under conscious self-control and we can speak and act for the benefit of our whole society now, using tactics that can be comprehended by at least a part of that society.

Many actions, like the attacks on supermarkets and the free distribution of stolen products, have become popular and accepted. The attacks on banks, especially following the economic crisis, are also accepted, and the attacks on police stations have been adopted and utilized by high-school students around the country. In one way or another, we have been the first subject on the news for the last 15 days [as of late December]. Generally speaking, with our participation in students’ or workers’ struggles and also in ecological struggles, every week some action offers visibility to the anarchist movement.

This doesn’t mean that “anarchism” is taken seriously by the majority of Greek people; most people still believe the media portrayal

of us as “masketeers” and criminals, and don’t have any idea how an anarchist society could function—that includes most anarchists, also, who refuse to address this question! But our actions and ideas have a strong influence now on left and progressive people. It’s no longer possible to say that we don’t exist, and our existence is radicalizing the majority of the younger generation.

ANONYMOUS: Those who are politically active recognize anarchists and anti-authoritarians as a part of the movement, because this scene intervenes in a lot of fields around Greece: workplace initiatives, self-organized spaces in schools and the universities (the “stekia,” which increased in number after the student movement of 2006-2007), neighborhood and environmental issues including free spaces in the neighborhoods, supporting immigrants, and fighting sexism. Before the December uprising, a lot of commodity expropriations from big supermarket chains were carried out by groups of anarchists and anti-authoritarians. Groups would enter a supermarket close to a street market and take as much of the basic foodstuffs as they could—oil, bread, cheese, and cleaning products. The re-appropriated goods were then distributed for free to the people at the street market. Society supported these actions. Consequently those who previously formed their opinions from the media were forced to think differently, and with the spread of this revolt some of them have changed their minds.

What role have subcultural groups such as punk and squatting played in making the uprising possible?

VOID: After ’93, there was a strong initiative in the Greek anarchist movement—accompanied by many internal conflicts—that eliminated the influence of “subcultural” styles inside the movement. This means that there is no punk, rock, metal, or any other subcultural identity that defines the Greek anarchist movement; you can be whatever you like, you can listen to whatever music you like, you can have whatever style or fashion you like, but that is not a political identity.

In the street fights of December, many “emos” participated, together with hippy freaks and ravers, punks, heavy metal boys and girls, and also trendy, “normal” kids and students who like Greek music. It has



If it was difficult to govern Greece before, now it will be much more difficult.

to be social and political consciousness, social critiques and collective understanding that bring you to participate in the anarchist movements, not fashion. Of course, for at least the last 19 years, the Void Network and similar collectives have played the role of offering a cultural introduction to radical political spaces. Such groups organize many cultural and political events, festivals, and parties every year and have the power to attract thousands and thousands of people to underground cultures. But even the Void Network doesn’t create subcultural identities or separate different subcultures; instead we try to organize events that involve most of the underground cultures. It’s true, though, that the majority of the people in the scene attend and participate in most of the events of the d.i.y. underground; many events are organized every month in liberated spaces.

ANONYMOUS: In Greece, the music subcultures—punk and hip hop—are the same as in the West. Housing squats are not very common, because most young people live with their parents until their 30s, more or less. Of course, the subcultures influence the political thinking of the youth.

What things have made the anarchist movement healthy in Greece?

VOID: The separation from subcultural identity politics made people understand that to be an anarchist it takes much more serious participation, creativity, and action than just wearing a t-shirt with the antichrist on it and walking around punk concerts drinking beer and taking pills. Now there is an



“There is no longer the feeling of being the losers that I remember in social struggles over the past 25 years. For the first time, we saw that the struggles that had happened without the feeling of winning had managed to change the psychology of our whole society.”

understanding that to be an anarchist you have to come to demonstrations with banners and black or red-and-black flags, shouting slogans and manifesting an anarchist presence; likewise, you should participate every week in one, two, or three different assemblies to prepare actions or advance struggles. You have to be friends with people you trust 100% to plan anything dangerous; you have to be aware and informed about what is happening in the world in order to decide what the proper course of action is; you have to be crazy and enthusiastic, to feel that you can do incredible things—you have to be ready to give your life, your time, your years in a struggle that will never end. It is healthy not to have expectations, because then you can't be disappointed. You don't expect to win. You are used to appearing, fighting, and then disappearing again; you know how to become invisible as a person and visible as collective power; you know that you are not the center of the universe, but that at any time you can become the center of your society.

ANONYMOUS: The anarchist and anti-authoritarian movement in Greece has been more visible in Greek society over the last few years because it has been involved in more fields of the social and class struggle. In general, even if things are not as ideal as some people outside Greece think, many of us who participate in this movement have the idea that we are no different from the rest of society, we have to face the same problems

as those who don't identify as anarchists or anti-authoritarians. They are next to us all the time in our workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods. Maybe it's also important that, in contrast to anarchists in the rest of Europe and the USA, we don't live much differently from everyone else our age—we work, we study, we meet each other at bars. My impression of the squats abroad is that most of the people who participate in that movement live a different life than the rest of society.

The other really important thing in the movement is solidarity with arrestees, which makes it more difficult for the state to repress us.

In what ways do you think the anarchist movement in Greece could be better or stronger?

VOID: We need to find more intelligent ways of explaining our ideas to people. We need techniques for communicating with all of society, better ways to frame the struggle in its social context. In a tele-democracy, where politicians are nothing more than television superstars, our refusal to communicate with or through the mass media is healthy, but we need to find new ways to overcome the mass media “consensus reality” and the propaganda against us. As long as whatever the TV shows “exists” and whatever doesn't appear on TV “doesn't exist,” we will be there with our crazy ideas, dangerous actions, and street fights to break the normality of the TV program, we will use the negative advertisement of our actions to kidnap the fantasies and dreams of the common people. But how can we explain our ideas to everyone? How can we help people cease to trust the media? How can we come into contact with millions and millions of people?

It will take millions and millions of posters and free pamphlets, traveling from hand to hand in the streets; it will take millions of invitations for demonstrations and participation in social struggles; it will take more free public services in spheres that the government doesn't cover—anarchist doctors and teachers, free food, free accommodation, information, underground culture, and so on. It will also take more and more squats and social centers. If you can start a squat, that is better, but even if it's not possible to squat in your town, rent a building with your friends, make a collective, start an assembly,

and put the black or red-and-black flag at the entrance. Start offering the people of your city a living example of a world without racism, patriarchy, or homophobia—a place of equality, freedom, and respect for differences, of love and sharing. We need more “Autonomia” in the insurrectionism of the Greek anarchist movement, to make it shine as a paradigm of a new wave of social life and demonstrate this novel survival methodology in the metropolis.

ANONYMOUS: As I mentioned before, we need more intervention in social issues. The uprising gave us the opportunity to overcome the “adolescent stage”—lots of young people participate in the scene, but when they start to work, they insert themselves totally into the system. Because the anarchist and anti-authoritarian scene does not intervene strongly in labor issues, many workers come under the control of the unions and left parties, which play the same role as the bosses. Consequently, workers cannot self-organize, and instead everybody just focuses on individual survival. I think that the evolution of the movement over the coming months will be all the more powerful because of the economic crisis; it's important to overcome the sectarian tendencies that existed before the uprising if we want to go in a revolutionary direction.

How effective has police repression been in shutting down the anarchist movement? How have people resisted it?

VOID: The dreams and plans of the insurrectionists came true: a huge wave of participation surpassed the anarchists, and for many chaotic days people traveled and fought in the city like never before, in an unfamiliar time and space.

In the same days, of course, they came face to face with the limits of the insurrection. Now people spend hours discussing how to expand popular understanding and invent approaches that will sustain and enrich the struggle. Many people think about ways to link all the different elements of this revolt. The police repression didn't play a more important role in the conclusion of the riots than physical fatigue. All of us share a feeling of completion and a feeling of beginning, and the police cannot touch those feelings.

ANONYMOUS: Repression has definitely increased since the student movement of 2006. The cops try to surround every demonstration held by anarchists and anti-authoritarians. They attack first, using tear gas and chemicals, and arrest a huge number of people. Our answer has been massive demonstrations and better security—sticks, helmets, masks—when we are alone in the streets, so we can avoid getting surrounded by the police. There's also a great deal of solidarity extended to those who are arrested: continuous demonstrations outside the courts and prisons, legal help, and so on. Thanks to these solidarity actions, the courts are forced either to release people or to convict them with smaller punishments.

I think that during this uprising, the cops lost the ball. At the beginning, after the murder, they had orders only to

defend, not to attack—to be careful not to kill someone else or be caught on TV beating students. Consequently it was difficult for them to repress the uprising, especially when there were attacks all around Greece.

Of course, the cops are supported by the fascists, who pose as outraged citizens who want to protect their property in order to attack demonstrators. Fascists are more difficult to fight because they can do everything that is illegal for the police, such as stabbing people or entering the occupations or the asylum in the universities. From our side, we accuse the state of cooperating with the fascists, and this makes our movement bigger, because of the general antifascist sentiment in Greek society.

What do you think the final result of the events of December will be?

ANONYMOUS: I haven't lived through a major economic crisis or an uprising, so I can't speak confidently about the ultimate result of the revolt. I hope the struggle will spread to the neighborhoods and everywhere, and bring people together to change our lives and attack the system. At the same time, I am afraid that the left parties will try to control the movement.


There are two things that are certain about December 2008:

1. In Greek society, two social camps have been created. In the first are the youth and people in revolt; opposite them are the petit bourgeois and the landlords. For a moment, the uprising took the characteristics of a civil war, and it's going to continue. The question is whether the majority of the workers who didn't take a side yet will do so and even the odds against their bosses.

2. There is no longer the feeling of being the losers that I remember in social struggles over the past 25 years. There is a common feeling that we won, we beat the system. For the first time, we saw that the struggles that had happened without the feeling of winning had managed to change the psychology of our whole society. From now on, the bosses will think hard before they bring new measures against students or workers, and if they try to do so we know that they will be afraid of our reaction. It is going to be difficult to murder one of us again, unless they want to play more with the fire that burned down all of Athens.

The last thing I want to say is mostly a wish; it has to do with the spreading of the uprising outside Greece. Maybe Greece is an “Eastern” society in a way, but we are also children of globalization: we face the same problems and issues as other European and also American youth. The solidarity actions and discussions around the world gave us a lot of confidence to continue. The crazy dream of an uprising that explodes worldwide is starting to seem less unrealistic. I am sure that in the eyes of capitalists and politicians this dream is truly a nightmare.

VOID: The riots interrupted the cynicism of the authorities, banks, and corporations, radicalized a new generation in Greece,



and enabled us to open a dialogue about the social struggles to come. As the slogan of December 2008 in Athens and Exarchia goes:

**WE ARE AN IMAGE
FROM THE FUTURE.**

MUSIC AS A WEAPON THE CONTENTIOUS SYMBIOSIS OF PUNK ROCK & ANARCHISM

**“People talk about ‘preaching to the converted’
—well who fucking converted them?”
-Penny Rimbaud of Crass**

From Victor Jara to the MC5 and Public Enemy, music has been important in countless cultures of resistance. It's no secret that a great proportion of those currently active in anarchist circles have at some point been part of the punk counterculture; indeed, many were first exposed to anarchist ideas via punk. There are two ways to look at this. Perhaps it's merely circumstantial: the same traits that make people seek out anarchism also predispose them to enjoy aggressive, independently produced music. At the other extreme, one could argue that music that pushes aesthetic and cultural boundaries can imply a wider spectrum of possibility in other spheres of life as well—that is to say, that there has been something *intrinsically subversive* about punk.

Whether or not this is the case, the context is swiftly changing. Just as anarchism was coming into its own in the US around the turn of the century, radical activity in the domestic punk scene began a nosedive that has since brought it to an all-time low. If so many current anarchists came out of the punk subculture and that subculture is no longer fertile ground, we might ask ourselves whence the next generation is to come.

In some circles, the contemporary anarchist movement is attempting to function as a subculture unto itself, rather than grounding itself in other subcultures. This is a risky proposition—it might lead to more isolation, rather than less. Whether or not it is desirable—or even possible anymore—to depend on the punk subculture as an incubator for anarchists, we must at least understand how and why it served this role for the past thirty years. Otherwise, in attempting to supercede it, we may end up worse off than before.

Rebelling against Our Origins

Anarchists have a singularly contentious relationship with the subculture that spawned so many of us. Offhand dismissals of punk as alienating, insular, and hopelessly co-opted are de rigueur; the notion that punk in itself might be something worthwhile strikes the average ex-punk anarchist as laughable. Perhaps this hostility towards punk is itself a symptom of the punk involvement in anarchist circles—negativity, after all, is a classic feature of the punk attitude. Thus the anarchists who harp on about how alienating and insular punk is are frequently the most alienating and subculturally blinkered, and their disdain for the punk subculture is paradoxically a consequence of punk involvement in anarchism.

This is not to say that none of these criticisms are well-founded. There are countless reasons not to tie the fate of a revolutionary movement to the fortunes of a music scene. Coming into anarchism via punk, people tend to approach anarchist activity in the same way they would participate in a youth subculture. This contributes to an anarchist milieu characterized by consumerism rather than initiative, a focus on identity rather than dynamic change, activities limited to the leisure time of the participants, ideological conflicts that boil down to disputes over taste, and an orientation towards youth that makes the movement largely irrelevant upon the onset of adulthood.

Yet vitriolic indictments of the limitations of youth subcultures do not suffice to transcend

them. It might be that despite all the drawbacks, it is better for people to discover anarchist ideas via punk than it would be for there to be even fewer avenues in which to encounter them. For a critique to be useful, it must indicate an alternative, and differentiate between incidental and inherent flaws. It is unfair and unrealistic to expect the punk scene to produce anarchists free of subcultural baggage. It might be better to take its shortcomings in stride and focus instead on creating an anarchist movement that makes the best of its subcultural roots while endeavoring to grow beyond them.

For perspective, we might look at other music-based subcultures that have helped to propagate value systems. Reggae music has been instrumental in the proliferation of Rastafarianism, for example, but one rarely hears Rastafarians complain about those brought in via reggae being trendy, alienating, or unreliable. On the contrary, many Rastafarians hold reggae music in high esteem as a means of bringing people together and celebrating Rastafarian beliefs. Contrast this with Crass gleefully announcing that punk was dead—in 1978! To be fair, one of the ways punk retained its vitality and autonomy for so long was by constantly rebelling against itself; but there's no sense in seeking to expand the anarchist movement by rejecting one of the primary venues through which people have discovered it.

The Do-It-Yourself Subculture as Sanctuary and Staging Area

So the punk scene, to be sure, has never been perfect. The average punk show is more dominated by patriarchy than a college classroom; all the hierarchies, economics, and power dynamics of capitalist society are present in microcosm, along with the trendiness and transience of youth culture. And anarchism is not the only creed that has utilized this soapbox: countless ideologies have competed in the punk milieu, from Neo-Nazism to Christianity and Krishna “consciousness.” This makes it all the more striking that anarchist ideas have fared as well as they have, considering that they have had less success in other venues.

Perhaps this is the result of structural factors. In a decentralized, network-based milieu, participants experience firsthand the effectiveness and benefits of anarchic structures. Once one has booked a tour oneself, sidestepping the monopoly of profiteering venues, record labels,



and tour promoters, it's no great stretch to imagine that other aspects of society could also be organized on a more horizontal basis. Likewise, in a scene founded on the premise that everyone should be able to “do-it-himself” (and sometimes even “-herself”), there are fewer built-in mechanisms to suppress radical ideas.

Alternately, perhaps anarchist values took root in the punk scene precisely because they were so marginalized elsewhere: in an era when radical ideas are pushed to the periphery, peripheral subcultures are bound to be crowded with them. One might hypothesize that this creates a feedback loop that keeps those ideas marginal, as they are not associated with popular or successful initiatives. The romanticization of obscurity and failure that made punk hospitable terrain for obscure and failed revolutionary ideals certainly did not encourage their new partisans to fight to win outside the punk ghetto.

But the self-imposed exile of the punk community has also been an effective defense mechanism through an era of capitalist standardization. The punk scene has helped keep anarchist ideas alive over the past thirty years in the same way that monasteries preserved science and literature through the Dark Ages. Although the demands and influence of the capitalist economy recreated the same power imbalances and materialism that punks had hoped to escape—and this in turn limited the punk critique of capitalism to a variant of the liberal maxim “buy local”—the d.i.y. underground has displayed a remarkable resilience. In a cycle that became familiar, each generation expanded until profit-driven record labels skimmed the most popular apolitical bands off the top, setting the stage for a return to grass-roots independence and experimentation. Thus the punk scene provided the music industry a free testing and development site for new bands and

trends, but this process also served to cleanse it of parasites on a regular basis.

Far from MTV talent scouts, competing independent labels, and alternative consumerism, you could occasionally find something truly beautiful and free at the heart of the d.i.y. underground. At best, it was a space in which the roles of protagonist and audience became interchangeable and the dictates of the dominant culture were shaken off.

Let's contrast this format with the models of anarchist activity and outreach that are currently in vogue. While anarchist activism typically focuses on matters outside the daily lives of the participants, and thus tends to cost more energy than it generates, d.i.y. punk was basically pleasure-oriented, offering activities that were fulfilling in and of themselves. While this often appeared merely frivolous, sociality and affirmation are as essential as food or housing. In some areas, the punk scene was significantly more working class and underclass than much of the current anarchist milieu; this may indicate that it provided for real needs, rather than catering to the middle class propensity for abstraction. In contrast to protests, which are often criticized as reactive, at its best punk emphasized creativity, demonstrating a concrete alternative. It was youth-oriented, certainly, but as youth are arguably among the most potentially rebellious and open to new ideas, this could be seen as an advantage. In focusing on self-expression, it enabled participants to build their confidence and experience in low-risk efforts, while producing a great deal of material that doubled as outreach; as a decentralized cultural phenomenon, it reproduced itself organically rather than through institutional efforts. Were we to attempt to invent a counterpart to contemporary activism that could replenish energy and propagate anarchist values among young people, we could really do worse.

Disambiguation:
The term “punk” has been used to describe an incredibly broad range of phenomena over the past three and a half decades. In this analysis, it refers to the social and cultural networks associated with the do-it-yourself underground, not to any particular musical style or fashion.

Anarchists often complained that in practice the punk scene was full of people with no regard for anarchist values. Unfortunately, if you want to be able to introduce new people to anarchism, you are going to have to deal with a lot of people who are not anarchists. This is especially true in the United States, in which so few people grow up with any point of reference for radical ideas. There's a lot to be said for operating in diverse environments, in which the ideas of individuals and the culture that connects them are still evolving. For example, while a punk zine written from an anarchist perspective could reach and influence readers coming from a range of political perspectives, a magazine focusing on anarchist ideas alone presents anarchism as a special interest unto itself rather than a way of approaching life in general, thus limiting its readership to confirmed anarchists. Had this lesson been applied elsewhere—had anarchists initiated influential projects in other politically diverse, horizontal, network-based milieus—anarchist ideas might have spread further afield. The fact that the decentralization and iconoclasm of the punk scene occurred outside any rigid ideological framework contributed to it being a more fertile and unpredictable space than many more explicitly radical milieus have been.

Though critics often accuse the punk scene of being nothing more than a playpen for privileged consumers, punk has been integral in the resurgence of anarchist ideas far outside the US and Europe.* While punk originated in Britain and the US, a great proportion of the global punk underground is located in Latin America and the Pacific rim, not to mention South Africa, Israel, Australia, New Zealand, and the former Soviet bloc. In many of those nations, punk is more overtly associated with radical politics than it has been in the United States; punk has been especially instrumental in revitalizing anarchism in contexts in which there was no radical alternative to Marxist hegemony. It would be instructive to examine why punk has taken root in nations like Brazil, Malaysia, and the Philippines but not India or most Arabic-speaking nations, and study how this correlates with the spread of anarchist ideas over the past thirty years.

Punk and Resistance: A Trajectory

The first major wave of politicized punk can probably be traced to the British band Crass, which drew on Dadaism and other avant-garde traditions to fashion early punk rock into a form of cultural agitprop. Decades later, a visitor to Britain could find small circles of middle-aged anarcho-punks who had been politicized by Crass still participating in the same independent music underground and resuming the same arguments about The Clash whenever they got drunk.

More recently, in the United States, the d.i.y. underground of the mid-1990s contributed to an increase in animal rights activism and helped pave the way for the anti-globalization movement. Magazines such as *Profane Existence* introduced radical perspectives on everything from feminism to firearms; d.i.y. communities developed in which everyone wrote a zine, played in a band, or hosted basement shows; even in the most macho

scenes, every band addressed the audience between songs—if only, in some cases, to urge people to dance more violently.

On the eve of the debut of the anti-globalization movement,† hundreds of punks gathered in Philadelphia late in April 1999 for Millions for Mumia, a march to deter the state of Pennsylvania from executing Mumia Abu-Jamal. For many, it was the first time they had traveled out of town for a protest; likewise, though no major conflict took place with the police, it was the first time most of them had assembled publicly in black masks and sweatshirts. This moment, in which politicized punks realized that there were enough of them to constitute a social force, set the stage for everything that came after; a year later, many of the participants fought shoulder to shoulder at the demonstrations against the IMF/World Bank meeting in Washington, DC. The night following the march, a standing-room-only crowd assembled at Stalag 13, a local d.i.y. venue, to see His Hero Is Gone; there was a feeling in the air that there was no real distinction between subcultural identity and political activity. That same year, the Primate Freedom Tour achieved a synthesis of punk music and radical activism, using a series of shows around the country to promote regional demonstrations against laboratories experimenting on primates.

The d.i.y. boom of the mid-1990s fed easily into the momentum of the anti-globalization movement. Those who have been in or around punk bands already understand how an affinity group works; operating in decentralized networks and coordinating autonomous actions came naturally. It was easy for people who routinely traveled across the country to engage in rowdy subcultural events to shift to traveling across the country to participate in rowdy anticapitalist demonstrations. So-called “summit-hopping” offered many of the same inducements as punk—risk, excitement, togetherness, opportunities to be creative and oppose injustice—along with the additional attraction of feeling that you were on the front lines of history.

In the period leading up to this explosion of political activity, punk music and culture had become more experimental as punks sought to match daring aesthetics to radical rhetoric. There had always been a tension in punk between the folk art aspects of the craft—three-chord musical formulations and hand-drawn layouts anyone could do themselves—and the desire to innovate and challenge. As the subculture offered participants broader conceptions of what could be possible, they began to play music and make demands that strained against the limitations of the medium. On one hand, innovative music could make radical ideas more compelling: following an unfamiliar yet exhilarating experience, a listener might be more likely to believe that an entirely different world was possible. On the other hand, this experimentation may have contributed to the fragmentation of the punk subculture, as traditions were abandoned and the standards for musicianship and creativity reached prohibitive heights.

Volatile phenomena eventually break into their constituent elements and stabilize. The Swedish band Refused, for example,

† On June 18, 1999, a global day of action coinciding with the 25th G8 summit, London was shut down by a Reclaim the Streets “Carnival Against Capitalism” that resulted in massive rioting. The independent news coverage of this event presaged the indymedia network that was formed during the historic demonstrations against the WTO summit in Seattle five months later, and heralded a new era of anticapitalist organizing.

* This point is also made in an overview written in South Africa, “Non-Western Anarchisms: Rethinking the Global Context.”

Punk had been exciting because, in contrast to corporate rock, it offered a relatively unmediated experience: one could meet one's favorite musicians, dance and interact outside the prescriptions of a repressive society, even form one's own band and remake the subculture itself. Thousands of people attended Black Flag shows because they offered a genuinely different experience than anything corporate capitalism had to offer. But once the internet made every band into its own promotions agency and youtube.com made it possible for everyone to appear on the equivalent of MTV, independent music was no less mediated than corporate music, and no less vapid.

who had combined hardcore, techno, jazz, and classical music on their final album, split asunder in 1998, and the members went on to form much more traditional bands according to their individual tastes—none of which were nearly as interesting as Refused. Once there was an anarchist movement for the most politicized punks to join, a similar process occurred within the punk scene. Until 1999, politicized punks tended to stick around the d.i.y. underground, as often there was no larger revolutionary milieu to move on to; playing music and writing zines were seen by many as political activity, despite the narrow horizons of the subculture. All that changed after the 1999 WTO protests, which kicked off an era of non-stop demonstrations and political organizing. Many of those who were most serious about their politics shifted focus out of the punk scene entirely. Meanwhile, the people who were involved in punk only for music and fashion remained, and led a reaction against political engagement of all kinds. While others focused on anarchist convergences, black blocs, and accountability processes, the reactionaries were the ones still booking shows and recording albums, and they set the tone for an apolitical and apathetic 21st century punk scene.

Between 1998 and 2002, nearly every band that had helped to politicize the punk underground broke up, and many influential magazines ceased publication. By May 2002, when Boston anarchists staged a Mayday festival, a rupture had developed between the aesthetic and political elements in the subculture, evident in tensions between punks who only attended

for the shows and anarchists striving to establish a revolutionary movement. To name a single example, the person who had booked the His Hero Is Gone show after Millions for Mumia and later played a role in anarchist organizing against the Republican National Convention of 2000 came to perform with his band, but headed home afterwards instead of attending the demonstration scheduled for the following day.

A few years later, the split between punk and anarchism was complete. Even Against Me, the progenitors of the folk punk reaction to the stagnation of the anarcho-punk scene, had deserted the d.i.y. movement and eschewed their former anarchist politics. From Ashes Rise, who had been colleagues of the uncompromisingly independent His Hero Is Gone, signed to a larger record label and recorded a final album with songs about nuclear war—a regression to 1980s nostalgia all the more absurd in the midst of the Iraq war—before breaking up. Punk—at least for that generation—had reached the end of its trajectory as a force for social change.

Technology, Legitimacy, and Accessibility

Let's return to the resurgence of folk punk shortly after the turn of the century. His Hero Is Gone had been one of the first d.i.y. bands to shift from single cabinets to full stacks, and within a few years every band that wished to be taken seriously had done the same. This led to an arms race and a sort of aesthetic inflation: no volume was loud enough, no recording powerful

enough, no gear expensive enough.* Folk punk was a reaction to this: an accessible, cheap, self-consciously unrefined format. Yet it never achieved the popularity of gear-based punk; tellingly, the flagship band Against Me shifted to standard rock instrumentation in the course of their shift to corporate careerism.

On a similar note, one might ask why, out of all the formats that flourished in the d.i.y. underground, there were never any traveling drama troupes. On the face of it, theater would be the perfect medium for independent performers with limited access to resources. A drama troupe could travel without expensive equipment or need of a large vehicle; performances could take place practically anywhere. From Dario Fo to the Living Theater, radical theater has had a rich history in every other nation and era. Puppet shows were practically a cliché on the d.i.y. circuit—so why not drama?

Perhaps this indicates a lingering materialism in d.i.y. culture. Equipment, be it a shoddy cardboard puppet stage or ten thousand dollars' worth of amplifiers, conferred the legitimacy that both performers and audiences longed for. "Look," working class dropouts could say to themselves, gesturing at a rusty van full of gear that cost them years of wages, "we're a *real band!*"

In capitalist society, activities are invested with meaning primarily through the marketplace and the media. Rock music is an unusual hybrid, a working class art form cultivated by capitalists as a cash crop; the meaning people find in it is real enough, but is generated through forces largely beyond their control. Rock stars are important precisely because not everyone can be one; paradoxically, punks took up the rock format as a way of asserting their own importance, even in the process of rebelling against the corporations that introduced them to it.

One could read the rise and fall of d.i.y. punk as the historical "hiccup" during which record-releasing and printing technology first became accessible to the general public. Crass was one of the first bands to release their own records; this was exciting because they were using technology that had been largely off limits to the working class. But just as Jewish fighters won control of the Warsaw ghetto at the very moment it was destroyed, within a couple decades this development was rendered moot by technological advances and oversaturation. Once *anyone* could release a record, it wasn't meaningful anymore—it wasn't "real" in the sense that everything on television is "real" while our lives feel unreal and insignificant.

The punk scene had been founded on the tensions created by limited access to the musical means of production; with the arrival of technologies that extended this access to everyone, its structures collapsed. The internet replaced painstakingly built distribution networks and zine cultures with the offhand immediacy of music downloading and blogs; some of this took place in genuinely decentralized structures, but more of it was based in corporate counterfeits such as myspace.com. The proliferation of the latter was particularly ironic in that the d.i.y.

* Anyone familiar with the inner workings of the music industry knows that few venues, fewer labels, and practically no musicians ever make money on their efforts. So where does all the money go? Perhaps to the gear manufacturers. One can find innumerable used amplifiers for sale that "never left the basement"—once again, capitalists sell us impossible dreams, then cash in on our attempts to realize them.

underground had been a testing area for the sort of network-based systems that the internet universalized.

When every band of middle class teenagers could have their own webpage and home recording studio, the ensuing disenchantment revealed how banal the promised utopia of rock stardom had been all along. In some ways it is healthy to be divested of one's illusions, especially the ones instilled by one's enemies. On the other hand, if nothing takes their place, this only drains the world of meaning even further—and pure nihilism helps maintain the status quo.

What Now?

For all we know, a resurgence of d.i.y. culture is taking place at this very moment, and we're simply not positioned to notice it. Doubtless somewhere in the world the cycles described above are beginning again; it's only a matter of time before some offshoot of the old d.i.y. scene adapts to the new technological context. The end of punk has been prematurely announced annually for over three decades, and this may well go on three decades more.

The point is not to predict the future of youth subcultures, but to derive lessons about how to build anarchist communities and momentum. If punk is finally dead, we'll need to create other spaces for people to discover anarchism; if it's not, we'll still need to do much better if we hope to bring about a revolution. So which characteristics of the punk scene should we emulate, and which could we improve on?

Punk's long run as a breeding ground for anarchism shows how much we stand to gain from social activities that are pleasurable and creative. In nurturing organic cultural currents, we can create social movements that do not depend on any one institution but are naturally self-reproducing. Ideally, they should be subversive while not immediately provoking repression—it's important that the lines be drawn, but participants must have enough time to go through an evolutionary process before the police break out their batons. A sustainable space that nurtures long-term communities of resistance can ultimately contribute more to militant struggle than the sort of impatient insurrectionism that starts with confrontation rather than building to it.

As much as punk has been dismissed as insular, the success of anarcho-punk demonstrates how effective it can be for anarchists to invest themselves in ongoing outreach in a milieu of a manageable scale. All the better if it is a politically diverse space in which debate and dynamic change can occur and new people can encounter radical ideas.

At the same time, it is crippling for a social movement aimed at transforming the whole of life to be associated with only one subculture. Learning from years of anarchist organizing rooted in the punk scene, we can see the importance of creating spaces that bring together multiple subcultures on an equal footing. Likewise, we can learn from the factors that both produced and crippled punk, such as the love-hate relationship with rock stardom. Channeling desires fostered by capitalist society into resistance movements can produce swift growth, but also fatal flaws that only come to light over time.

APPENDIX: BEYOND THE WHITE PUNK GHETTO STRADDLING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN MUSIC AND RESISTANCE IN 2009

How strong are the connections between the punk scene and the anarchist movement in Mexico?

In the 1980s when punk began in Mexico City, the music, the aesthetic, and the punk attitude—rejection of society, defiance of traditions, going against the opinions of others—dominated the scene. In reality, people were not familiar with anarchist ideas, and at first anarchist organizations, publications, and individuals did not exist. Of course, punk was full of references to anarchy, principally in the song "Anarchy in the UK" by the Sex Pistols, and so many believed that to be an anarchist was to be against everything, to live according to the slogan No Future, to die before turning twenty, and so on. So the way the first punks gravitated to anarchist ideas was through personal interest, and then slowly collectives and fanzines appeared with clearer ideas. This began with *Punks Not Dead* (PND), later *the A-Collective*; the '80s fanzine *Caramelo* introduced references and information about anarchism, then the collective *Contra Violencia* and its eponymous fanzine offered Magonist and anarchist ideas with more clarity and coherence. *Brigada Subversiva* was the first zine to use "fanzine libertario" (libertarian fanzine) as a subtitle; it functioned as a collective within a larger group called Colectivo Cambio Radical Fuerza Positiva CCRFP (Positive Force for Radical Collective Change). The great majority of those participating in *Brigada Subversiva* considered themselves anarchist punks. They published eleven issues between 1988 and 1992, when the last issue was put out with a 3000 print run.

And so the first anarchist punks arose in the late '80s. We knew of ex-hippy anarchists, survivors of the Spanish Civil War of '36, as well as the publisher Antorcha, but there was no connection as a movement, just personal connections between hundreds of anarchist punks of similar ages; only a dozen or so had contacts with anarchists that weren't punks. Conferences began to occur at the end of the '80s, at which punk and anarchy were discussed, and in the '90s anarchists from the journal *Testimony* developed a strong bond with Omar and Chantal from Antorcha. An anarchist gathering in 1991 helped tighten the bonds between punks and non-punk anarchists.

Punk in Mexico

The Bibliotheca Social Reconstruir



So how strong are the connections? The arrival of punks to anarchist struggle signified the arrival of youth to the anarchist cause. If in the beginning there were only a handful of anarchist punks, in these days there are more or less 300 anarchist punks and more than a thousand with strong anarchist sympathies. Around 80 percent of the anarchists here are punks or have their roots in the punk movement; the remaining 20 percent are students, professors, some workers, and militants from an older time.

In your opinion, what potential is there in the Mexican punk scene for radicalization and political organization? What are the advantages and challenges of the punk scene as a site for this?

Though some in the US assume that punk is a product of First World privilege, it has been instrumental in revitalizing Mexican anarchism.



In Mexico City, the appearance of anarchist ideas in the punk subculture heralded an influx of youth to the anarchist movement.

Punk shows are a form of bonding for youth; they can reach between 200 and 1000 people, and are a place where we can spread anarchist ideas in pamphlets, zines, and other forms of propaganda. We make a point of booking anarchist bands, and also organize discussions on anarchist issues. At demonstrations the anarchist contingent is 95% punk. What are the disadvantages? Punk has its own problems: drugs, alcohol, and above all being a youth movement, from which people retire when they get married or reach 30. We lack a broad organization and common objectives.

What has been the role of individual punks and the punk counterculture in Mexican social conflicts, such as the revolt in Oaxaca in 2006, the struggle in San Salvador Atenco, and the ongoing conflict in Chiapas? Can you tell us more about other social conflicts we haven't heard about in the US?*

Many individuals and some collectives have participated in these conflicts. In Atenco, many compañeros participated in violent resistance; some were incarcerated and some compañeras

* In 2002, the residents of this small town near Mexico City forcefully prevented the government from building an airport on their land. In 2006, violent clashes with government forces resumed; it took 4000 federal and state police to recapture the rebel city.

were sexually assaulted by the police. Their participation extended beyond the violent struggle, with punks proposing anarchist forms of organization to the rebellious people of Atenco and Acuexcomac. In Oaxaca, there was significant anarchist participation at the barricades; this also extended to the organizing, squats, pirate radio, and so on. In Chiapas, there has been anarchist punk participation since the beginning of the conflict and the first gathering convoked by the Zapatistas. For some years we've come together as the Union Libertaria Autogestionaria (ULA), though that would take a long time to discuss—suffice it to say that there has always been an anarchist presence in the Zapatista cause. There are other conflicts in which anarchist punks have participated, such as the strike at the University of Mexico and the protests against the World Trade Organization in Cancún; some other Mexican cities have had a noticeable anarchist punk presence, as well.

In Guadalajara in 2004, there was a meeting of European and Latin American economic interests, and more than 500 militants from various Mexican cities came together to protest. There was brutal repression directed principally towards the anarchist punk contingent, which resulted in hundreds of arrests; arrestees were groped by police, tortured, beaten unconscious, subjected to electrical shock, and threatened

with death. Another ongoing fight has been the workers' struggle against pro-government company unions, in support of workers' rights and self-organization. We've participated in and supported workers' struggles at several different corporations and in a range of contexts. People who work with the Bibliotheca Social Reconstruir have had the satisfaction of seeing unions that are now independent and have achieved better living conditions, and workers in those unions have seen that the people who support them are punks and anarchists.

In the US, punk is associated with younger generations rebelling against older ones—that is to say, punk generates a distance in culture, language, and values between younger and older people. How does this compare with punk culture in Mexico? Does punk culture generate a distance between anarchist punks and past radical traditions? Or does it strengthen these same institutions?

Of course that division does exist—rebellious youth struggle against everything, including older people, and this has its advantages and disadvantages. As everyone knows, a movement without youth will grow old and die, and a movement with only youth will commit mistakes it could avoid. So the challenge is to combine the two struggles. In Mexico, the struggle is primarily made up of youth, but even so, with older folks as few as we are, it is still an advantage for us to be united by punk, and to find a closeness through this. We also share a connection with other anarchists who aren't punks, and over the last few years there has been an interest in getting familiar with their form of participating in social transformation.

There is a feeling among anarchists that we are part of a cross-generational movement, a struggle that stretches across centuries. We would say that those who struggled before us, with their virtues and defects, opened the path for us; now we are pushed by this past to continue and carry on a more radical struggle. For many in Mexico, an old person in the anarchist punk movement is someone older than 35. In Mexico we are few, but are integrated multi-generationally. Some musical groups include older folks, and in some collectives youth and older people live together, so that the generational division isn't so visible. That is to say, even some who consider themselves old still feel like punks in their music, culture, collective living arrangements, and so on. It is a spring of eternal youth.

How does the punk culture in Mexico compare with other cultural trajectories and countercultures as a site for organization and radicalization? What are its advantages and disadvantages?

In other musical cultures such as goth, metal, ska, and salsa, the only thing that unites people is a taste for the music and the clothing; there is no emphasis on political consciousness, only entertainment and diversion. Punks, then, are seen as people who struggle to change the world through marches, publications, and organizing. There are other political youth currents, such as socialists and democrats. We have few contacts with them, for we have no affinity as movements. Marxists dedicate much of their press to attacking and slandering anarchism, while democrats endeavor to get close to the youth by pretending to be involved in struggle. The advantage that we have is that punk works as an intermediary through which to reach young people. Every now and then we spread propaganda in the schools and factories, as well.

Being based in punk is also a disadvantage, in that we should be closer to other youth, workers, and students in order for the anarchist movement to extend itself further. The anarchist punk movement has lasted more than two decades since its inception, and in that time we have grown from the original handful to the hundreds that we are now, but in terms of effectiveness, there are errors and mistakes that we have yet to surpass.

ABOUT THE BIBLIOTHECA SOCIAL RECONSTRUIR

The Bibliotheca Social Reconstruir (roughly, library of social reconstruction) was founded over 25 years ago by a survivor of the Spanish Civil War named Ricardo Mestre Ventura. The Bibliotheca is located in downtown Mexico City, where it brings together Mexican libertarians for study groups, lectures, classes.

The group is also active in encouraging this kind of self-education throughout the rest of Mexico. In the midst of the social conflict in San Salvador Atenco, for example, the Bibliotheca helped to start a libertarian community library. They have also helped organize multiple conferences, participated in mobilizations against the World Bank and World Trade Organization, and maintain an active collaboration with anarchist punk circles throughout the country. Part of this collaboration occurs through fundraising efforts: members have organized large benefit concerts with bands like Los Crudos, Sin Dios, Tragedy, Disidencia, Crimenes de Guerra, and others. The Bibliotheca has been a longstanding component of the Mexican anarchist movement, but is in constant need of support with publishing, rent, and other costs. Readers who appreciated this interview might consider expressing their appreciation with a donation of some kind.

To share questions or comments with the Bibliotheca, or to help with donations, email biblioteca@libertad.org.mx or bibliotecasr@hotmail.com.

The Rebel Call of Blackfire



"We feel that it is important to educate people about our ancient living culture. We are not going to share everything, but we do want to build understanding and respect among different cultures and communities."

Blackfire is a Native American punk rock band from Flagstaff, Arizona comprised of a sister and two brothers: Jeneda, Clayson, and Klee Benally. They were born into the heart of a political land dispute on Black Mesa in the Dine' (Navajo) Nation. Blackfire are everything a punk rock band should be. Each song is a call to action—they address government oppression, relocation of indigenous people, ecocide, genocide, domestic violence, and human rights—reflecting a deep commitment to resist injustice and build true community.

Blackfire has toured extensively throughout North America, Europe, and Africa. They have recorded with CJ and Joey Ramone, recorded

It's getting hotter, harder to breathe
why should I calm down,
I know I've been deceived
like oceans of regret,
all these questions rise
will they drown with our mistakes
or will they learn to fly?

unreleased songs by Woodie Guthrie at the request of his daughter, and gained international acclaim for their performances and recordings. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the band.

Who is Blackfire? When and how did you start?

Jeneda: Blackfire is a family. We didn't start playing music with the intention of starting a band. My brothers and I always played together when we were young; it didn't matter if we were making movies or organizing the neighborhood kids into a ninja camp. We are close in age, so we always did everything together. While growing up, we all gravitated towards different instruments, luckily! Otherwise, who knows—we might have all been kazoo players.

Where are you from?

Jeneda: We are originally from Black Mesa, Arizona on the Dine' (Navajo) Reservation. Many people have heard about the ongoing land and cultural survival struggles that our relatives are still facing. We grew up protesting a nearby coal mine called Peabody Coal that was depleting our precious aquifer. The coal slurry line also dried up the sole source of water in our high desert homeland.

Klee: Peabody Coal Company has been strip mining a large part of Black Mesa for decades. Our family has been directly impacted by "United States" policies of forced relocation that result from efforts to further exploit the resources beneath the land there. Many people have heard of the struggle at Big Mountain, which really is a larger area from which more than 14,000 of our people have been forcibly relocated and where some are still resisting. When we first started our band in 1989, our songs were about this issue. Our name, Blackfire, comes from the burning of the coal from Black Mesa; it also comes from one of our warrior society's smoke signals, meaning "the enemy is near."

You also perform as the Jones Benally Family; can you explain that as well?

Jeneda: We are the Jones Benally Family. Our father, Jones Benally, has traveled throughout the world many times to educate people about our Dine' (Navajo) culture. My brothers and I have been educating people since we were still in diapers. Many of the dances that we perform have been carried on since the beginning of

time. Some of the dances we share are parts of ceremonies that are allowed to be seen by the public. We feel that it is important to educate people about our ancient living culture. We are not going to share everything, but we do want to educate people so we can build understanding and respect among different cultures and communities.

I've heard you describe yourselves as an independent band. Why is this important?

Klee: We don't answer to anyone but ourselves when it comes to the music we make. We book our own tours, design our own albums and website, produce our own videos, print our own shirts. When we can't do it all or don't have the time, we work with folks we know. This enables us, as artists, to express ourselves in the ways we want. This is in contrast to mainstream music production where bands become businesses that are controlled by large or small corporations. It's no secret that the record industry is based on the exploitation of artists and listeners; that's why we, like so many other groups out there, are trying something different. Some bands say, "We're signing to a label to reach a wider audience with our political message." I've yet to see that be effective on any tangible basis towards the social transformation that our communities really need. We're not building community that way, we're just building our own capabilities on the terms of an industry that's still based on exploitation.

What are some of your motivations and goals as a band?

Clayson: Blackfire has always been a tool to address the issues that face our communities. When we started, our message was directed at our peers on the Navajo reservation. We could see the impact of assimilation—the degradation of our culture, the hopelessness that remains when all has been taken from you. By addressing the root causes of the symptoms that afflict us, we see our music as an element of the healing process. It's not so much a goal, but a need! This is what keeps us moving forward.

Politically, how do you define yourselves as a band and as individuals?

Klee: I think each of us has our own self-identification. You could say as a band we are Dine' traditionalists seeking balance in the contradictions of our times. We believe in the natural law and we are struggling to maintain our cultural identities in this modern world. In this way, politics define us. We actively stand against the destruction of Mother Earth, racism, sexism and sexist oppression, homophobia, ageism, and fascism. We're into whatever is effective towards those goals; sometimes we'll urge people to vote and support a Democratic candidate for Congress, other times we will be organizing or demonstrating and rejecting any perceived authority established by the so-called United States. Current political labels don't encompass our traditionalist views—some may say we act more like anarchists.

Clayson: Dine' translates to "the people." This is who I am

and how I relate to the world. Many people have lost their identity, and thus they have no cultural foundation from which to relate to the rest of the world and its indigenous inhabitants. Only seeing differences in a fear-based society can lead to the dangers of intolerance.

How have your family and larger community shaped your politics and worldview?

Klee: When you grow up seeing your family members face forced relocation, arrests, constant racism, health effects from uranium mining, and so on, you don't have many options. We were practically raised at meetings and protests, but we were also raised traditionally. Our father is a traditional medicine practitioner, so we've grown up with that as our foundation as well. Hozho', or the Beauty Way, is the basis of our identity as Dine'. This would take too much time to explain, but ultimately it establishes your relation to all life and Mother Earth.

Do you believe punk music and the punk subculture can be a force for change?

Klee: The reason we got into punk-style music was because of the high energy and social-political expression. From bands like Dead Kennedys to Subhumans there was a unique aggressive quality of resistance to the same dominant culture that we are in conflict with. So in certain respects punk music has changed us and many young people on our reservation. But just because bands are punk, or a person is punk, doesn't mean they have a social-political agenda. I do think, though, that individuals find political affinity through punk music more than any other style today. It also depends on what kind of change we're talking about here. If it's some kid from the suburbs who gets connected to a conscious band, and that leads to her getting involved in community organizing, that's a force of social change, but it's limited. This is because the US punk subculture is limited to scenes and is patently white and middle class. You can see how organizing efforts reflect the ways that folks compartmentalize themselves in these scenes—but I've also seen strong squatter punk groups that effectively organize against fascists and build bridges to other groups in their community.

What roles have you seen punk music and subculture play in social movements in the US over the last ten years?

Clayson: Joey Ramone, the godfather of punk, once told me that the Sex Pistols cast a negative image on the ideals of punk. He felt that the energy of punk was something that everyone could relate to and that it was a liberating process in the evolution of music. I've seen punk in its purest form when it's confronting oppressive systems in communities throughout the world. But here in the states punk has been devalued to nothing more than another way to sell a product.

Klee: The inevitable commercialization of punk has come and gone and come and gone again, but the anarcho-punk scene seems to have really defined itself as more actively oriented.

As far as their role in social movements, I can only speak to my experience as an Indigenous organizer, and their role has yet to be seen. We see a lot of attention given to direct action and anti-globalization actions but not really to our Indigenous struggles. While we're organizing our communities to protect the environment and our cultural survival, we don't see much support unless there's some "exciting" action element. I feel that the way some folks celebrate and promote the "exciting" actions undermines the constant hard work that needs to happen to sustain movements to build healthy communities. It's the same anywhere; lots of people show up for the party, and a few are left doing all the work. Sure we need to celebrate, but we need to sustain as well.

During the 2008 presidential campaign, did you address the subject of the elections when you performed? What are some of your thoughts on the 2008 election in general and specifically what do you think about the election of Barack Obama?

Klee: We organized in the Dine' (Navajo) Nation a lot around the 2004 elections. We did two outreach tours, one for registering people to vote and one to remind people to get to the polls. We also did a short documentary on our reservation addressing voter apathy. We were trying to communicate that when we are being negatively impacted by political decisions, we have an imperative to find out how we can affect those decisions. We didn't really do any outreach for this election, I think mainly because we were touring Europe and wanted to put more energy and resources into organizing around issues in our community.

Sure, voting is validating the system that is oppressing us, but until someone can step forward and offer another tool to give some relief from the energy policies that target our lands, I'm going to do pretty much whatever I can. The 2008 elections were an absurd political circus that displayed how ignorant the mainstream media is about racial and gender issues, and the most costly exercise of social control parading as democracy in US history. For that reason, I chose to abstain from voting in this election.

Obama is another political tool of a nation where racism is systemic. Of course it is historic to have a Black man sit in an office that was designed and reserved for rich white men. If Obama getting into office will be a means to deconstructing white privilege, than I'm all for it, but I don't think that's going to be the case—he may just be a tool to validate it. While I think the image of a Black man in the White House could demonstrate the transformation this country needs, it's hard to say that it's as meaningful as it could be in relation to matters of abolishing white privilege. The power structure that is screwing us over will now have a black face instead of a white one; it complicates matters a bit but doesn't change the situation.

Describe the social movements you've observed in the course of your travels.

Klee: Everywhere we go we connect with inspiring individuals or communities that are taking action. In Mali, Africa our friends in the Tuareg band Tinariwen started their group

within a rebellion. We went to their land twice and saw how the US military is attempting to move into their lands to secure access to natural resources. Today, Tuareg people are being killed in Mali and other areas due to efforts to mine uranium in their lands. In Europe, the anarchist scenes comprise a movement defined by resistance to corporate globalization. It appears similar to the dynamics in the US, where folks will rage against the G8, WTO, IMF, or World Bank in force, seeming to be more present for protest than sustaining a process of organized resistance. It was very interesting playing in Belgrade, Serbia; we actually played there twice, but the first time everyone we knew said, "Don't go there; they're all just neo-Nazis." But when we went and played it was powerful. Folks were sharing stories of how they creatively organized against Milosovich and faced severe punishment for it. They talked about how they would throw parties on rooftops while NATO was bombing them 'cause they were tired of living in fear. In Mexico we've been encouraged by the visibility of Indigenous people's resistance and meaningful support for their struggles for self-determination. I think that non-Indigenous folks there have a better sense of how Indigenous people's resistances are related to their own personal struggles as well. No matter where we go, though, we see the increased criminalization of dissent.

Jeneda and Clayson, both of you recently had children, and you now travel with them. How has this affected or changed your experience of touring and playing in a band?

Jeneda: I feel like I could write a book on this topic. I love being able to share my work with my daughter. I am so blessed that she also enjoys the adventure life. Since becoming a mother my entire being is enriched with compassion, patience, and absolute love. Of course, when children grow up with a particular lifestyle, like touring, they learn to be adaptable. My daughter has rock and roll hours and enjoys sleeping in. She is not yet school age, so we will see how it all changes when she's older.

Clayson: I also have a baby girl, and of course she travels with us when she can. It's the best way to experience life. I grew up on the road sharing and learning. This is one of the best educations that life offers.

Talk about the work you do outside of the band: what are some of your other projects?

Klee: We all are part of the Save the Peaks Coalition which was formed to stop a small ski business from desecrating an Arizona mountain held holy by more than 13 Indigenous Nations. I founded and am a coordinator for a non-profit media justice group called Indigenous Action Media which produces documentaries on Indigenous issues and does consultation and support for grassroots campaigns in Indigenous communities, including graphic design and website development for Indigenous organizations. We also have a project called Outta Your Backpack Media where we hold workshops and empower young people to make their own media. I also helped establish



and now volunteer with Taala Hooghan, an Indigenous-established/oriented infoshop and youth media arts center in Flagstaff, Arizona.

What is "Peak's Song" about?

Jeneda: "Peak's Song" is about protecting the holy San Francisco Peaks. The San Francisco Peaks are located in Northern Arizona and are holy to 13 Tribes and culturally significant to 22 Tribes. This holy place is managed by the Forest Service, which presently leases a portion of the mountain to a ski resort. This ski resort wants to make snow out of reclaimed wastewater. Not only would this be an environmental catastrophe in the making, it would also be an extreme desecration to our holy place, an act of cultural genocide.

Klee: Right now the Save the Peaks Coalition is awaiting a decision by the Supreme Court on whether it will hear the case or not. Whether the Court will hear the case and do the right thing is uncertain, especially considering history. While we are forced to take our fight to the courts, we also urge everyone to join us wherever they can in the struggle for self-determination and the protection of our Mother Earth.

The song ends with a chant, "Protect Sacred Sites, Defend Human Rights" and mentions many different land struggles through out the United States.

Jeneda: Hopefully people will recognize that a mountain or natural place can be just as holy as a Catholic or Christian church. I hope people will remember that there were and still are civilizations that hold natural places holy—that



we are still practicing our ancient ways and we need these places intact to continue these ancient living practices that are essential to cultural survival.

The San Francisco Peaks; Blackfire performing.

Klee: Wherever there is an environmental crisis, there is a cultural crisis, because we are part of the earth. We don't have guaranteed protection for our religious freedom in the US as Indigenous peoples. Hundreds of sacred sites are either being desecrated or face the threat of desecration right now and we have no legal mechanism to stop this. The struggle to protect these sacred places is the struggle for our cultural survival.

At best what effect do you hope to have on those that hear your songs?

Jeneda: I hope that people become inspired not only to understand their connections to these struggles, but also understand their own

indigenous connection, perhaps even learn about their own heritage. The basis of all indigenous teaching is about respect and our delicate balance with Mother Nature. All of our songs are about different issues that we see and experience . . . to open someone's mind and heart so they might want to make positive change in their own community, that's what I hope our music will inspire.

Is there anything else you would like to add, in closing?

Klee: Solidarity Means Action.

Jeneda: If you see injustice in your community, speak out about it. Do what you can in what time you have to create healthy and respectful communities. Remember that we all have the power to make a difference in the world and in people's lives with the decisions that we make and the actions that we take.

www.blackfire.net

Support Indigenous Resistance: A Brief List of Struggles and Resources

The San Francisco Peaks, in northern Arizona, are held holy by more than 13 Indigenous Nations and threatened by development. www.savethepeaks.org, www.stopthesnobowl.com

Medicine Lake, in northern California, is a ceremonial place of spiritual and physical healing for the Pit River, Wintu, Modoc, Shasta, Klamath, and other nations. It is facing the threat of a proposed geothermal power plant development. www.treatycouncil.org

Black Mesa, Navajo Nation, in northern Arizona, is the site of a continuing struggle against mining interests, forced relocation, forced livestock reduction, and more. Peabody Coal plans to obtain a "Life of Mine" permit—by which it would be permitted to continue its unsustainable and dirty coal mining practices until all of the coal is removed! www.blackmesais.org, www.blackmesawatercoalition.org

Dooda' (No) Desert Rock, in Burnham, New Mexico, is the proposed site of a 1500 MW coal-fired plant in the Four Corners area on the Navajo Reservation. Community members have established a blockade to prevent preliminary work. www.desert-rock-blog.com

Skelkwelk' Welt, in British Columbia, Canada, is a sacred site for the Secwepemc People; the Sun Peaks Resort Corp. is currently desecrating it and threatens more expansion and destruction. The 2010 Winter Olympics will be held in this area, increasing the threat to these sacred lands. Boycott the 2010 Olympics! www.no2010.com

Mount Graham, in southern Arizona, is sacred to the San Carlos Apache. For decades, Apaches, scientists, conservationists, and students have resisted the University of Arizona's attempts to build several large telescopes on the mountain's summit. www.mountgraham.org

Mount Tenabo is sacred to the Western Shoshone Nation. Growing antagonism toward aboriginal land ownership and a crumbling U.S. economy are combining to threaten Western Shoshone sovereignty, as this is the third largest gold-producing area in the world. The Western Shoshone people maintain this ancestral land base, though the U.S. classifies nearly 90% of it as "public" lands. www.wsdp.org

Bear Butte, in the Black Hills in South Dakota, is sacred to approximately 30 of the Plains Tribes, including Lakota, Dakota, Nakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapaho. There has been an increasing presence of bars, clubs, strobe lights, campgrounds that sell alcohol, concert venues, and helicopters over the mountain. www.protectbearbutte.org

Tsoodzit/Mt. Taylor, in New Mexico, is the southernmost sacred mountain for the Dine' people. Eight uranium mining companies have filed for exploratory permits around Mt. Taylor, proposing more than 50 exploratory drillings between 1000 and 1500 feet deep. www.sric.org

The Grand Canyon area in northern Arizona is homeland to the Havasupai and Hualapai Nations. This area has a vast reserve of uranium ore which is in huge demand as the calls for nuclear power increase. The Mayfair company VANE Minerals plans to drill at up to 39 spots on seven sites bordering the northern and southern rims of the Grand Canyon. www.grandcanyontrust.org

The Bay Area Shell Mounds in California are traditional cemeteries and ancient monuments for many First Nations including the Ohlones, Coast Miwok, Bay Miwok, Mutsun, Plains Miwok, Yokuts, and Patwin. There are currently over 14,000 remains housed within cardboard boxes and lockers at UC Berkeley that the university refuses to return to the Ohlone people. www.vallejointertribalcouncil.org

Shundahai Network opposes all nuclear weapons research, development, testing, and production, as well as nuclear waste dumping on indigenous peoples' lands, and is fighting to halt the proposed high-level nuclear waste dumps at Yucca Mountain and Skull Valley Reservation. www.shundahai.org

Leonard Peltier is a citizen of the Anishinabe and Dakota/Lakota Nations who has been unjustly imprisoned since 1976. www.leonardpeltier.net

The Transform Columbus Day Alliance actively rejects the celebration of Christopher Columbus and his legacy of domination, oppression, and colonialism, along with historical misconceptions regarding his "discovery" of the Americas. www.transformcolumbusday.org

Mohawk Nation News Service began during the Mohawk/Oka crisis of 1990 by providing updates on the resistance. MNN grew to become an internationally recognized news service providing independent indigenous commentary on Kanion'ke:Haka/Mohawk land, legal, culture, history, and current issues. www.mohawknationnews.com

Censored News covers indigenous issues and provides updates on many of the campaigns listed above: www.bsnorrell.blogspot.com

Deletetheborder.org: towards a global network of movements against borders.

Broadcast Live is a fiery, passionate political band combining deep rhythms with spoken word and powerful vocals to create a unique sound. They just finished recording an album and doing a nationwide tour; they are Victorio, Seantel, Gaetano, and Jory Leanza-Carey. We interviewed Jory.

How would you describe your sound?

We play a mix of hip hop, indie rock, and spoken word. Musically, we all come from different places and listen to a wide range of music. Our collective playlist right now would probably consist of hip hop, some indie rock, some electro-dance (à la CSS or ESG); some old-school soul; and Latin music. I've been obsessed with Sam Cooke—and lots of '80s power ballads.

We've also had the privilege of working with a lot of great radical musicians who are an ever-evolving influence. In particular, Son of Nun, Taina Asili, and Evan Greer.

How would y'all describe yourselves politically?

We don't have a uniform political identity. We're all dedicated to deconstructing all forms of hierarchy and oppression. The foundations of our belief systems are pretty much the same; it's only in the smallest details that you'll find differences. I, myself, am an unrepentant anarchist.

What kinds of different venues/social spaces have y'all found yourselves playing?

All of my favorite shows have been at activist/community spaces. On our last tour we played this Chicano art space in Berkeley, CA. The police showed up right before we went on, and somehow the organizers managed to get ten minutes of performance time out of them. So we only got to play two songs, but the room was electric.

Playing colleges is interesting because everyone is usually very enthusiastic, but college shows involve contracts and lots of money and other weirdness. They're usually fun, but sometimes it feels more like a "real job"—a sold labor situation. But the money we get from those shows enables us to us play spaces like infoshops for next to nothing.

Compare some of your experiences with punk and hip hop subcultures and their potential for revolutionary change.

That's an interesting question. Both of those cultures are almost inherently rebellious by

A Cross (Sub)Cultural Mix: Broadcast Live

their mere existence, but they also come loaded with problems. To me it seems that they've both been bought and co-opted, and had their essences ripped out of them.

I'm not really a believer in the creation of art for its own sake. It has to have a purpose or a message, and most of what I hear lacks that. I'm not saying that every song has to be about rising up against the system. But I think that a lot of people write the music they think they should write without any real *cause à faire*.

What does creating a revolutionary culture mean to you?

That's something very difficult to achieve in the short term. The way our society and economy is constructed forces you to participate in it, even if you oppose it. Some would say that you can remove yourself from it, but there are a few problems with that. First is the issue of community responsibility. We could all run off and live in insular "revolutionary communities" but would effectively end any solidarity with others' struggles. The second issue is a cultural one. I've never quite felt a true part of this larger American anarchist scene. Sometimes it's frustrating that the ideology is associated with a particular set of cultural indicators. I believe that we can deconstruct forms of racism, patriarchy, et cetera, and still have a genuinely multicultural world.

How has your music intersected with the political projects y'all are a part of?

Our music is all political, and we're all involved in various forms of activism, but I'm not sure how to take it to the next level.

We're involved with the Albany Political Prisoner Support Committee, so we've done a lot concerning political prisoners and prison abolition. I've also been talking a lot with Evan Greer, of RiotFolk, about setting up a network of radical musicians to provide resources and material support to various grassroots struggles. I think that's the best way that the music—beyond its message—can facilitate real change.

www.broadcastlive.org

Small Town Organizing for Anarchists

If you live, or have lived, in a small town* in the US and have spent any of that time trying to get a project off the ground, you're already familiar with the obstacles small town radicals face. If, in addition, you've ever turned to radicals in much larger cities with much larger projects under their belts, hoping for guidance and inspiration, you will know how demoralizing it can be. Most contemporary anarchist organizing has been

Personnel Diagnostic

The most important step is always the first. If you're hoping to move forward quickly, you'll need to establish a working group of committed comrades. This is a delicate matter—make sure your friends understand that you're ready to commit to sticking around and working through the hard stuff when things get difficult, but don't twist anyone's arm. If you're all on the same page, you'll all benefit from having companions equally willing to invest time and energy; by the same token, you can't count on a group of people you've managed to talk into your wild ideas if they don't really share your drive and desire. It's better to work closely with those with whom you have the greatest affinity than to be always making plans for others who may not come through! Likewise, though there will be plenty of situations in which it will be beneficial if someone "bottomlines" a task, take the time to maintain a horizontal social structure for the big picture plans. Be careful to work with friends who are equally committed to this.

If you don't have anyone—if there is no one you can collaborate with to create anarchist space and sentiment where you live—you can still make amazing things happen. Be outgoing and adventurous, stay committed, and keep your eyes open: an active anarchist is only lonely for a short time!

Once you have a sturdy working group, ask yourselves some core questions. Who is stuck in your town? Who lives there by choice? Who feels relatively alone? Which of you belongs to a larger, supportive social circle? The answers to these and other questions—questions about privilege and family relationships, for example—are vital to healthy communication and relationship dynamics, and can aid in properly

defined by radical projects coming out of larger metropolitan areas: Food Not Bombs projects to feed the homeless and hungry, anarchist bookstores and collective spaces with dozens of members and volunteers, theoretical debates about dusty European anarchists. These projects are unthinkable or irrelevant in the small towns where many of us live.

diagnosing breakdowns in communication and dynamics when they occur.

For a Healthy Working Group:

Don't project responsibilities onto your friends

Do remind your companions that their company is important and wonderful

Don't take on projects that require more hands than your group has; don't count on volunteers miraculously appearing

Do bear in mind what other groups can offer your projects

Do let your friends know what you need to stay in the game

Do check in frequently to see what is changing

Don't let your friends down! A thousand times no!

The most important thing for your group of friends to do is *be friends*. Know each other well so you can anticipate each other's needs and trust each other to communicate them.

Welcome others into your group whenever it makes sense. Don't be so eager to get helping hands that you jeopardize your safety or the success of your plans, but don't exclude others for lack of experience alone. Without a doubt, your small town circle will be connected to at least a few other groups and social circles. Perhaps the local Catholic Workers share some of your goals and interests? Maybe there is a college in your town and you know members of student groups with connections to resources or potential volunteers? Are there burnt out activists, or *anyone* for that matter, who might be sympathetic? Make note of all of these groups and decide whether or not to invest energy in any connections you might have with them.

Sketch out some short-, medium-, and long-term goals. If everything went smoothly, where would you like to be in a year? How about in five? Let your fantasies run wild—just keep in mind that you'll have to commit to all the incremental steps that can enable you to realize them. A good timeline should consist of projects that are rewarding in themselves while establishing the conditions in which more will be possible.

Start at the end of the timeline. What is the furthest thing out on the horizon—where are you headed? What will it take to get there? Maybe you'd like to be able to organize unpermitted Reclaim the Streets parties in your town. That would require a fair bit of momentum for most small communities—not to mention an analysis of how public space is used and what the role of the authorities is in such situations, at least among the few dozen people it would take to pull it off. If these are among your long-term goals, you could plan to author and distribute literature that calls attention to issues around public space. You'd also need the logistical skills and resources to make a Reclaim the Streets party happen; that might mean planning safer block parties, parades, or Really Really Free Markets first. In order to get those preliminary projects off the ground, you might need a reputation for throwing great parties, which you could acquire by hosting exciting events in your home. The trick is to understand how

In building a community, the most important aspect of outreach is maintaining points of entry; without accessible activities, your group will have to proceed with all its plans alone. Don't be demoralized if people aren't coming forward in throngs, though—outreach is a slow process full of unpredictable chain reactions and coincidences.

Work out the practical matters. How will you connect with eager participants? Who are they, anyway? Make sure you show up with literature and enthusiasm at all-ages events, and keep the projects you work on accessible to young ones. Sober spaces are almost always a good idea, even if they are controversial. If you yourself

Distributing literature isn't what it used to be; thanks to blogs, MySpace, internet forums, and www.infoshop.org, information travels quickly through the anarchist community. Lots of material can be read online—which drains the magic

connected one activity is to all the others. This is the case in all kinds of organizing, but especially in smaller towns. Lay plans strategically; each one should simultaneously *feel* feasible and outshine all previous activity.

All this said, all the planning in the world can't guarantee the results—it simply guarantees that *something* will happen. Reality is always different from anything you can arrange or imagine in advance, and that's a good thing. Stay flexible enough to react to new developments and seize unforeseen opportunities.

Example of a timeline from feasible feat to wild-dream:

Learn the schedules of all bountiful dumpsters in the region

Connect with local small-scale food producers and farmers for access to excess

Distribute literature calling for an end to food scarcity through anti-capitalist gift economics

Maintain free food servings once a week and earn a reputation for distributing healthy, unspoiled foods

Convert two trucks to run on veggie oil

Start a "canning club" to preserve perishable food items

Hold bake sales and other fundraisers to prepare finances to support a space

Establish a Free Grocery Store open every other day.

are a radical youth, don't underestimate your own capabilities—you can do anything in this recipe an older person can.

No outreach strategy should rely too much on turning liberal activists into radicals. You'll waste too much energy trying to convert their firmly established way of looking at the world. An eager young person, a disillusioned service worker, a friendly neighbor—these people and more will likely be excited to delve into radical politics for themselves, if given the opportunity to participate in inspiring situations; leftists, on the other hand, will lock you in endless grueling debates that can isolate you from everyone else.

and intimacy from such readings. But you can't depend on the internet to accomplish all of your outreach tasks, so start a *distro*.

Offering tangible and relevant literature at strategic times and public events is an invaluable

Establish a Rough Timeline

Pose as a student group at campus club fairs and distribute relevant radical literature. Share wildcrafting recipes and anti-civilization tracts with local wilderness enthusiasts. Plan games like capture the flag for high-school students and other explorers. Host themed parties in your home; challenge all attendees to do something unfamiliar and absurd. Bond with non-heteronormative neighbors through conversations challenging patriarchy. Outreach is all about imagination: how will you meet people and share exciting experiences with them?

Outreach

If there is a liberal event that needs more fire, bring the fire.

Give away free food and zines at every opportunity.

Distributing Anarchist Literature



* As of this writing, some useful online sources for print-ready PDFs include www.anti-politics.net/, www.distro.com/, www.tangledwilderness.org, www.zinelibrary.info, and of course www.crimethinc.com—where you can also order a great deal of literature for the cost of postage alone.

† You may actually find that giving zines away for donations moves more zines and brings in more money than selling them.

‡ Staple your damn zines! Nothing says “please recycle this instead of reading it!” like loose leaves of folded paper.

you can scan homemade zines and create PDF files of them to print on college, home, or workplace computers.

Give away the essential zines. Hopefully you can sustain this on donations alone;† if it doesn’t bring in enough, consider selling books and other wares to balance your budget. Gathering some basic raw materials will enable you to produce on a larger scale: get cardstock for covers, CDRs for bootlegs, postage money to order bulk zines from other groups, a long-arm stapler.‡

Setting up a distro in a small town is an art; it’s important to learn how to anticipate where you’ll be controversial or invisible and where you’ll be a welcome presence. Be ready to explain who you are and what you’re doing confidently in a single sentence. If there is little awareness of contemporary radical politics in your locale, your presence at an event will itself be an expression of your intentions. If you find yourself tabling at events you detest in order to highlight an alternative, be prepared to make a compelling case and frame your literature as an elaboration of your point.

Presentation is everything! Save space by adding another dimension to your table: build shelves and displays for your books and merchandise instead of laying them flat. If you or your friends are skilled in web design, create a website advertising your catalog. Take your distro to events outside your town, or supply nearby communities with literature for their projects; you could even put together a bookmobile and tour the region.

Public Relations and Crime

When a small group of anarchists is engaged in aboveground organizing, they might be singled out as the culprits of any underground trouble; bear this in mind and don’t put yourselves needlessly at risk by leaving dots that are too easy to connect. At the same time, your public presence shouldn’t deter others from taking action; just as

you shouldn’t do things that jeopardize others, try not to police others who share your values. In some cases, local anarchist organizers can maintain a clandestine alter ego group that acts anonymously when a riskier or more militant approach is called for.

Diplomacy

Be intentional about your relationships with others. Be clear about who you are openly opposing: for example, some local government, all law enforcement, the owners of certain businesses, known unrepentant abusers. Likewise, give thought to which allies you are seeking. You might make gestures of goodwill to certain people simply for strategic purposes: the city inspector, for example. This can be

demoralizing, but in small towns it’s often better to maintain an unmediated relationship with these people than to rely on second-hand gossip to present you in the best light. It is up to your working group to decide where to draw the line. At the same time, you will likely find other groups you genuinely respect and wish to support.

Being diplomatic with other anti-authoritarians should be easy . . . if you are *strangers!* Realistically, your personal lives will probably be intertwined, and it can be very difficult to keep private matters separate from your work as organizers. This is not to say your lives should be utterly disconnected—just know that to the degree they are entangled, you are opening yourself up to potential drama. If punks and anti-authoritarians are familiar with your projects, they’ll probably participate if they’re interested; resist the temptation to “recruit” them if they aren’t, while staying open to criticism and endeavoring to keep your projects accessible. Likewise, support others’ efforts,

Resolve any disputes within your group about who you all consent to work with. There is no sense in one of you being friendly with the neighborhood church group, for example, while others harass them—not unless you have some crazy scheme that demands this, anyway. Make sure you are aware of each other’s opinions about such groups so you can work out a course of action everyone supports.

Make your decisions based on what is ultimately good for the work you’re trying to do. Don’t maintain a working relationship with a group that has a conflicting agenda simply because of a friendship—you can be friends without being working partners. At the same time, it always pays to be friendly with people, at least at first. Friendships with people who hold leverage—or simply inside roles!—in hierarchal organizations can open doors. Maybe you can get radical materials into the teacher’s lounge or a waiting room? Maybe you can gain access to grocery donations from the food bank? Perhaps a librarian will set up a zine shelf or order special books?

If you genuinely respect a group, but hold significant differences in opinion, remember to affirm your alliances with them: “It’s been great working with you.” “It’s nice to know others feel strongly about this.” “Y’all have really

Your small group can’t singlehandedly take advantage of every opportunity in your town. The larger your radical community is, the more diverse ideas and initiatives you can expect it to produce.

One way to expand your community is to draw from other communities. Like it or not, not every anarchist will be committed to his or her hometown. The social tides are constantly

but don’t co-opt their projects with overbearing contributions or suggestions.

In a worst-case scenario, you may be plagued by nihilists from your own subculture who resent your plans and act against them in a spirit of inertia, self-destruction, and entitlement. Don’t hesitate to call them out if need be—but do so in such a way that fosters conflict resolution, rather than resentment and territorialism.

Ultimately, it is up to you to prevent your organizing from negatively affecting your friendships and other aspects of your lives. Take the initiative to resolve conflicts early—most small towns are too small for you to be divisive with other anti-authoritarians.

come through for us—how can we return the favor?” If, for example, you are unabashed militant insurrectionists working with a group of committed non-violent activists on a shared



campaign, bear in mind that they might be especially sensitive about your contrasting perspectives. You don’t have to compromise your ethics or tactics to work well with others, but don’t be insensitive.

pushing and pulling traveling radicals into and out of geographic places. As you establish projects in your community, you’ll undoubtedly benefit from more helping hands—so you might as well extend deliberate invitations to regional and traveling anarchists.

If the regional anarchist community doesn’t already know your group is active in your town,

Punks and Other Anti-Authoritarians

Liberal or Conservative Activists and Community Organizers

Putting Your Town on the Map

inform them. You can do this by attending regional and national gatherings as a group: share stories about your town and contribute to networks and projects that involve other communities. This alone may not suffice; you can always host events of your own and invite people from the region to come participate.

adventure and mischief in your town. Be responsible about hosting traveling groups as well, be they touring bands, films, workshops, or adventurers; it's good to become a point of interest for such groups, and you may help them get excited about visiting small communities.*

Whenever there is an influx of out-of-town radicals visiting a small anarchist community, it's important that they not dominate your allies' space or overstay their welcome. Don't insult your visitors' intelligence, but inform them about boundaries they should respect.

zines or audio recordings. Better, you could publish a journal or newspaper at regular intervals, or organize major public events. No matter the medium, make your intentions and desires clear and set the stage for new possibilities.

welcome the opportunity to bond and play. Plan festivals that revive the spirits of everyone who participates, and structure them to foster inclusion and excitement about radical projects. Such events can connect social circles that rarely overlap, galvanize enthusiasm for your and others' projects, and reward all participants with fun.

You could organize block parties, dance parties, parades, film or music festivals, masquerade balls, massive picnics, variety shows, town hall meetings, puppet shows, carnival games, free bazaars—your imagination is the limit. Be realistic about who will attend and what resources you can access. You'll find that planning festivals tests and hones skills you can use for larger, more ambitious projects; likewise, organizing festivals is a great way to improve your group's reputation for planning exciting events.

hone? Respect you've yet to earn? Chutzpah you haven't found? Every step of this recipe should bring you closer to possessing those things.

How will you use the space to provide for your community? You might offer some kind of infrastructure: a reliable large-serving kitchen, a point of distribution for radical literature, a free department store. Or maybe the first priority is to create a space that will be inspiring to you, and help you stay active for years to

Travelers may pass through your town, especially if it is near major transportation corridors. Unless they're insufferable, house and feed them. Maybe you'll get some help with your daily work and they'll pass on stories of

After you have established the presence and tone of your group, communicate your analysis and projects to the local community at large. To accomplish this, you could start out with clandestine art projects like wheatpasting or banner drops—presuming you're already disseminating

Perhaps more desperately than big cities, small towns need *action*. They need fun and excitement, adventure and magic. Commit to creating these things; if you do, others will appear who

The success of your progress toward long-term goals may well depend on the establishment of permanent anarchist spaces and institutions. Think this over in advance. What is a realistic space for your group to manage? A garden? A bike basement? A collective house? An infoshop? A squat? A woodland compound?

Though opening such a space might seem feasible, what would you need to make it happen? Money you don't have? Skills you've yet to

* Touring projects take note: small towns can be worth visiting! Schedule a good number of small towns into any tour for less driving, less stress, and a receptive, attentive turnout.

Transmission

Small Town Festivals

Acquiring Permanent Space

Exciting moments can be demonstrations of anarchism, rather than iterations of it. Inspiring situations are the best form of outreach; people will associate your intentions with their experiences.



come. Whatever your goal is, let those intentions inform the decisions you make in the planning stages.

Like many other activities mentioned in this field guide, it would take another entire recipe to discuss all the details of managing a collective space. But if you're in it for the long haul, all this work will be worth it! Think of the momentum you could sustain with a permanent greenhouse in which to incubate projects and relationships. You'll likely inspire others to take risks to acquire more spaces themselves, if they can count on your space to be there for years.

It's easy to overlook the most important priority for any small town organizer: doing what it takes to *stay in the game*. Small radical communities are especially vulnerable to burnout, and if your working group is all you have, make every effort to keep the band together. Recognize that emotional maintenance means taking breaks: from each other, from your projects, from your whole town. Don't stretch yourself or your friendships to the breaking point. No long-term organizing effort is sustainable if it depends on unsustainable activities. Though it may be intimidating to take lengthy breaks from fragile newborn projects, you may have to do so to maintain your emotional health.

Be aware of when your cohorts are struggling, and do your best to support them. Don't press on with failing methods; take the time to regroup and devise new plans that accommodate everyone's needs. If you're managing a project

Finally, make sure whatever space you're establishing is important enough to your group that you can all commit yourselves to defending it—that means protecting it with good security culture when applicable, maintaining healthy public relations, taking calculated risks when necessary, and above all coming through on your commitments month after month and year after year. Don't go through the trouble to establish a space that feels like an unrewarding burden—if you don't enjoy your volunteer shift enough to look forward to it, it's probably not going to last!

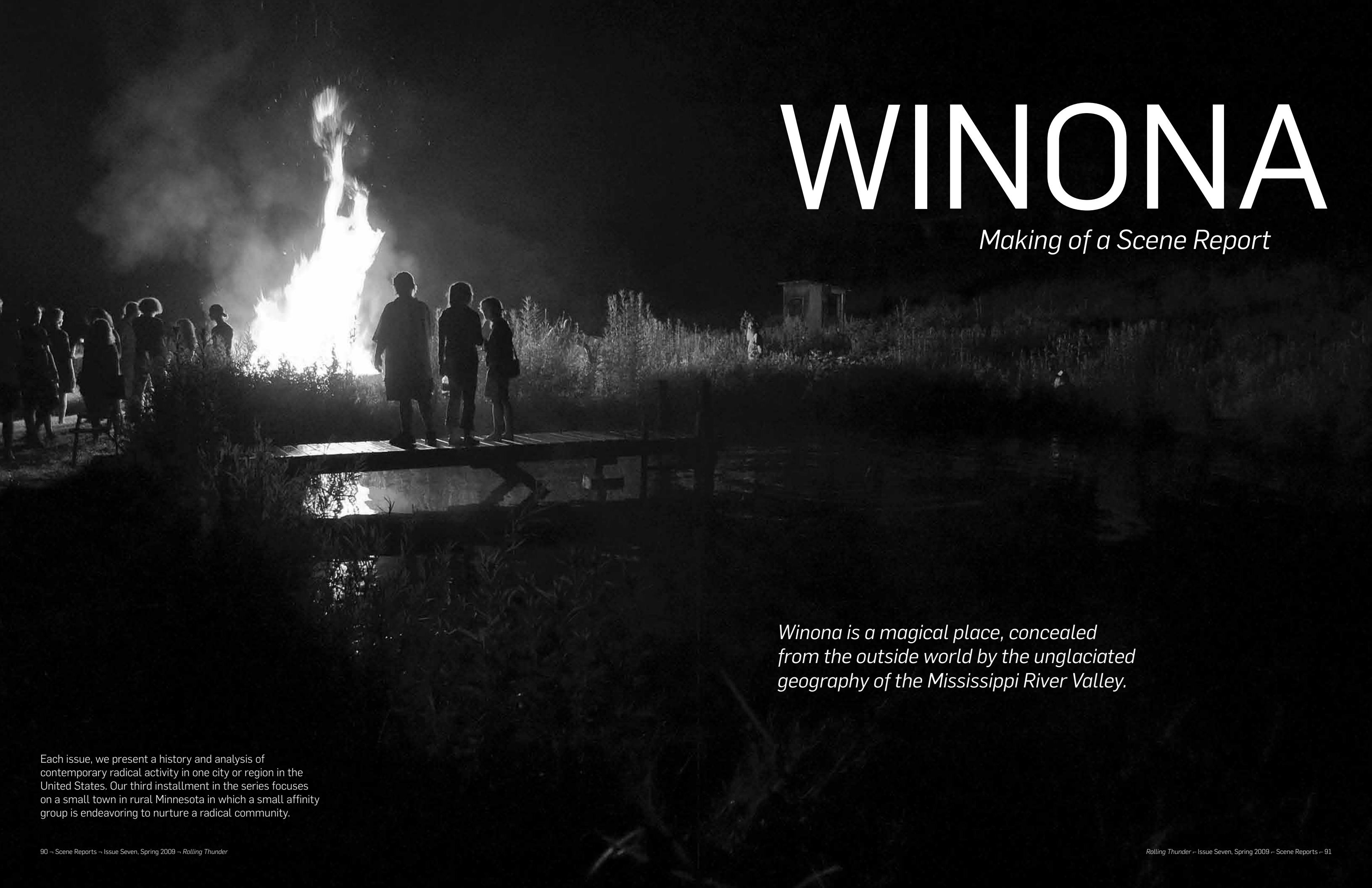
We can measure our strength by the presence and scope of permanent anarchist spaces: how frequently they are established, how consistently, consensually, and joyfully they are maintained, and how fiercely they are defended.

single-handedly, meditate on your own needs and watch for warning signs of loneliness and defeatism. These tough times can be eased by relationships with nearby anarchist communities. Let regional radicals build your morale—they stand to lose from your absence no less than the locals around you. Hopefully they'll seek your support when they need it as well.

Keep your head up and move forward. Hold hands through the celebrations, link arms for the confrontations—stand your ground!

Supplementary instructions available in the book *Recipes for Disaster* include *Affinity Groups*, *Bicycle Collectives*, *Collectives*, *Dumpster Diving*, *Festivals*, *Food Not Bombs*, *Screenprinting*, *Unemployment*, and *Wheatpasting*. This text is the first version of a small town operator's manual; to contribute to the next revision, email smalltown@wildnettle.com.

Final Thoughts



WINONA

Making of a Scene Report

Winona is a magical place, concealed from the outside world by the unglaciated geography of the Mississippi River Valley.

Each issue, we present a history and analysis of contemporary radical activity in one city or region in the United States. Our third installment in the series focuses on a small town in rural Minnesota in which a small affinity group is endeavoring to nurture a radical community.



A birdseye view of winona from the legendary Sugar Loaf mountain

[Previous spread] Local youth mingle and swim while enjoying a bonfire at the land cooperative just outside of town.

To be clear, this text is only one interpretation of the radical history of our town. We roll in a tight group of three: two of us grew up in Winona, while the third moved here from another small town. Each of us comes from a very different world. One was forced to attend his parents' church as an aspiring anarchist, and thumbed through Days of War, Nights of Love during sermons; one of us is a high-school dropout who barely made it out of punk rock alcoholism and apathy alive; another was lost in college, depressed in an empty dorm room, wanting more. We've come to unfold our plans for small-town radicalism together, hoping to create a vibrant anarchist community in our humble city—and we've been taking notes along the way.

Prehistory: Where We Started

Setting the Stage

Winona is a small town of 30,000 in the south-east corner of Minnesota, almost an hour north of the Iowa border and separated from Wisconsin by the Mississippi River. If you were on your way to Minneapolis from Chicago, or passing across the Midwest on Interstate 90, you might stop in Winona to take a break in the lush, prehistoric river valley. There aren't any skyscrapers or music clubs, or much in the way of public transit or tasty restaurants; the pace of living is slow and steady. There is a state university, a private college, and a vocational school, but Winona isn't a college town *per se*. Winona began as one of the larger European prairie settlements during the area's colonization. Because of its position on the river, where freight trains from the north unload their cargo onto barges, it became a booming industrial town, devouring the massive hardwood forests. Accordingly, Winona is characterized by factories and a hardy working class population.

Winona is the sort of place people spend their entire lives in. It's hard for a local to pass from one part of the city to another without bumping into many familiar faces. The faces

familiar to us are mostly part of a large community of big-tent dropouts: hippies young and old, back-to-the-land types, environmentalists, Catholic Workers, retired hobos, punk rockers, and aging radicals. Four decades ago, this town was a countercultural hub. One of the first food co-ops in the nation, Famine Foods, was born here in the late '60s at a time when the legendary movement-founding co-ops in the nearby Twin Cities were beginning to implode and divide. Floating homesteaders built houses on docks to evade property taxes and formed an autonomous DIY village on the backwaters of the Mississippi river that still exists today. And, as *bioregionalism* began to come into the dialogue in the '70s, an "off the grid" land cooperative developed into almost two dozen square miles of organic farms and hippie communes.

By the early '90s, the hippies had all become professors and board members, and the boat-houses had become a bureaucratic headache. There won't be another generation to inherit the land co-op, and bioregionalism has been all but replaced by dry liberal trends.

Contemporary Anti-Authoritarianism

Compared to most towns of similar size in our region, Winona has a deeply rooted punk scene. In the mid-nineties, the punk scene here was

teeming with kids; by 1997, local bands were touring the region and Winona had joined the network of scenes that stretches across the upper Midwest. Punk rock introduced all sorts of ideas and behaviors; youth and a few disillusioned adults began to participate in a horizontal social scene and adopt confrontational cultural customs. As usual, the good came with the bad and ugly: stenciling, wheatpasting, graffiti, dumpster-diving, and all the wonderful DIY ethics of punk were indistinguishably interconnected with self-destructive alcoholism and drug use, abusive behavior and communication, and unhealthy emulation of role models.

The local punk scene sowed the seeds of the town's contemporary anarchist community. At the beginning of the new millennium, the city government banned punks from renting public facilities, accusing them of being a hate group—they hate *cops*, apparently! In response, punks initiated graffiti campaigns to pressure the City to change its tune. This was a formative experience for many involved, as it was an opportunity for collective effort beyond music-centered activities. The City changed its tune, then banned the punks again; this happened over and over.

In those early years, lots of exciting small-town things happened. Kids broke into abandoned buildings to sing songs to each other. They made their own sidewalk chalk* and covered the entire downtown district with snarly demands. Some dabbled in direct action: dumpster locks were glued, radical literature was distributed at shows, workshops and skillshares were hosted in living rooms. There were actions against the 2004 election, graffiti and wheatpasting, even some broken windows.

Like most such scenes, Winona's punk scene revolved around music. But even the concerts showed an earnest radicalism; some were benefits for Sherman Austin,† Books to Prisoners, various short-lived collective projects, and Food Not Bombs. Winona FNB never quite blossomed into large-scale free food servings, but it teemed with activity within the punk scene.

At one point, a weekly round-table discussion group appeared with radical politics and the structure of an Alcoholics Anonymous

* To make your own sidewalk chalk, mix plaster of Paris with water at a 1:1 ratio; add powder tempera paint, and pour it into a toilet paper tube lined with wax paper. Let dry for 24 hours.

† Sherman Austin was arrested and sentenced to a year in prison in 2003 for maintaining raisethefist.org, a resource hub for street tactics and anarchist theory. He was one of the first victims of the Patriot Act, and was convicted as a terrorist essentially for linking to another website's instructions for assembling Molotov cocktails.



meeting, called "Love, Learn, Teach." It thrived for months but eventually succumbed, ironically, to alcoholism and social drift. Similarly, in May 2003, some people tried to set up an all-ages event booking collective, but it died after the first few shows because of poor social dynamics between local punks and other anti-authoritarians.

The Down n' Dirty Bike Club (DDBC) was founded around 2003 from within the punk scene. At first, it was nothing more than a few punks who fixed up bikes and gave them to their friends.

For a time, the Green Lantern Coffeehouse was the one space for Winona punks. It was a hole-in-the-wall late-night coffeehouse and cabaret theatre adjacent to one of the three punk houses in town, run by a wild puppeteer and local countercultural prophet. To this day, every August this guy and his pals host a festival in which punks, Renaissance Festival employees, and hobos gather to wrestle in a giant hay-bale ring of home-brewed cream corn. The coffeehouse fizzled out with time, but the puppeteer remains a prominent member of the community.

The legacy of 1997-2005 lingers. Some graffiti remains unbuffed, a relic of the active days. A conspiracy of three dozen secret, subversive

Generations of punks call Winona home. Though trends and friendships shift and settle, the impetus of small-town living pulls anti-authoritarians into rich social webs.

paintings remains nailed just out of arm's reach on all the wooden telephone poles downtown. Big Action Records, the college student punk label, dissolved and resurfaced in the nearby Twin Cities. At this point, the punk shows have simmered down to an annual Ciderfest featuring punk-rock bike Olympics, and the occasional benefit show.

Boat Punks

Early this century, a new phenomenon hit Winona: boat punks. One part Huckleberry Finn, one part sideshow caravan, these drifters construct rafts with scavenged materials in order to ride the currents of one of the world's longest



The Leona Joyce docked at one of the 100 floating boathouses in Winona.

river. Typically these flotillas are launched in the Twin Cities area; some make it all the way to New Orleans. Word circulated that Winona was a good place to spend a week on the way down the river, and the boat punks started showing up.

One of the first such groups that tied up to our boathouse community sailed under the moniker "Leona Joyce." That river-faring caravan comprised a dozen river rats, two or three dogs, and a few rafts. A zine about their adventures influenced a whole subculture of water-borne traveler kids, and since then the SS Circle of Death,* the Miss Rockaway Armada,

* The SS Circle of Death bore a stowaway—Matt Power, a freelance journalist writing for Harpers magazine. Power wrote a lengthy account about this vessel's voyage, which crossed paths with the 2006 CrimethInc. convergence. Also, for archivists, the Leona Joyce zine is called *Strange Voyage of the Leona Joyce*.

the Cletus, and a number of nameless troupes have floated homemade mobile homes past our Latsch Island.

Boat punks are a huge inspiration to the DIY community of Winona, and often leave behind valuable tools and knowledge.

CrimethInc. Convergence

Summer of 2006, our small circle hosted the fifth annual CrimethInc. convergence with the help of a handful of locals and regional anarchists. It was our first real group project, and could easily be considered *the* formative endeavor for us. The convergence preparation was the first test of our commitments to each other and future projects. Planning such a gathering proved an incredibly useful exercise—for instance, organizing volunteer shifts and shuttles for the redirect point tested our ability to bottomline the specific mechanisms of a much more complicated larger machine.

The convergence itself was incredible. It was tremendously motivating to see other anarchists excited about a place we had come to see as dull and disappointing. Thanks to the efforts of the local bike collective, Critical Mass rode boldly through the newly constructed Walmart one hundred strong—more than twice the size of any other 'Mass in Winona before and since. We disrupted the local Shakespeare festival with a guerilla theater performance including pitchforks and torches, coordinated dancing, over two hundred

people in peasant costumes, the beheading of a 30-foot-tall puppet king, one of Brad Will's last legendary firebreathing displays, and the Serf's Up Drum Corps. We took over downtown Winona to play capture the flag and invited participants to document that part of their experience in a zine.† The convergence also marked our first attempt at a Really Really Free Market, which was not a success in terms of community participation—though that itself was instructive.

† Editor's note: Though the contents of this zine are esoteric to say the least, it has a certain surreal charm as a document of a fleeting and carefree adventure, and the careful reader can deduce elements of that night's events even without other context. The authors of this report still distribute the zine.

Collective Living

Winona hasn't seen many anti-authoritarian attempts at intentional collective living environments. However, during winter and spring of 2007, one housing situation developed into a collective of sorts. It wasn't an intentional project; the participants merely wanted lower rent to accommodate their low-work lifestyles. But once it appeared that they were likely to be living together for months, they began experimenting with collective endeavors. The collective's name—Up n' Clean, a playful reworking of the punk bike group's handle—spoke to the positive household projects they undertook. Although it wasn't an explicitly sober space, the activities there offered a break from the substance use prevalent elsewhere.

The house buzzed with activity as the residents experimented with greywater, shared nightly meals together with rotating cooks, maintained a weekly letters-to-prisoners group, and began an anarchist literature distribution project. They also formed a musical project without a name, songs, or a roster of talented musicians, but which played publicly on more than one occasion in order to create extraordinary group interactions.

The collective got along well, for the most part, but it was clear from the outset that no one planned to live cooperatively for any extended period of time. A few left for warmer climes near the end of a long winter; soon after, the collective projects dissolved despite the four months remaining on the lease. However, spring was in the air and the idea of another project was circulating; though the house projects were essentially over, the space became the central hub for planning a cross-country barnstorming tour.

Cross-Country Tour Preparation

When the Miss Rockaway Armada performed in Winona, they left an impression on some of us. An idea lay brewing from summer 2006 until the following spring. With the DIY spirit alive and well after the end of the Up n' Clean house project, old housemates and others came together to plan a massive cross-country tour. They planned to convert an old school bus to run on waste vegetable oil and travel from town to town performing music and puppet shows, sharing art, painting faces, distributing literature, and telling stories.

The project started to seem realistic once such a bus was discovered for sale in a nearby

Wisconsin town. Everyone involved pooled money to purchase the bus and brought it to Winona, where they removed its bench seating, painted it inside and out, built bunk beds, and decorated the new mobile home.

The group hosted three secret cafés‡ and a yard sale to pay for insurance and supplies, and solicited the help of the DDBC to weld a bike rack onto the roof of the bus. The aging dropout community was incredibly supportive



The Social Obstacle of Substance Use

Like many scenes, Winona is troubled by alcoholism and drug use. The working-class roots of the town have made Winona a city of bars and churches, and twenty-somethings are affected the most. With two medium-sized colleges in our town, the local young person's atmosphere is totally shaped by drinking culture, with binge-drinking weekends completely transforming the downtown experience.

Though not everyone in our group identifies as straight edge, none of us are engaged by party culture, and we find that this has created social rifts between our working group and other anti-authoritarians. In the punk rock glory days, drinking may have been a central theme, but it held space side by side with fantastic shows, free food servings, house shows and punk houses, conversations about radical politics, and so on. One by one, those themes have fallen out of view, while drinking remains the ever-available pastime of choice.

Navigating the unfortunate communication breakdowns between our working group and other local anti-authoritarians has been a real challenge. Recently, we've taken steps to rekindle bonds with weekly games of 4-square, at which participants can enjoy themselves with or without substances. Our success in Winona will depend considerably on our ability to come together to share projects and experiences as anti-authoritarians without the divisive dynamics that often develop in diverse DIY communities.

‡ Secret Cafés are a small town must. The idea is to turn an ordinary (or extraordinary!) space into a temporary restaurant with sliding-scale food and entertainment. A much wider range of people may turn out to these than, say, a concert, and the social benefits can equal the financial ones. Turn your backyard into a Cajun Grill, or your living room into a vegan bakery and coffeehouse. Provide scandalously delectable treats to people who otherwise couldn't afford them, and give your friends and neighbors the opportunity to support radical projects instead of the service industry!



One reader browses our mutual aid newspaper (see p. 84) at a local coffeeshop.

[Opposite] Neighbors discuss how to preserve and share fruit harvested from residential trees; The Up n' Clean bus on its cross-country trek.

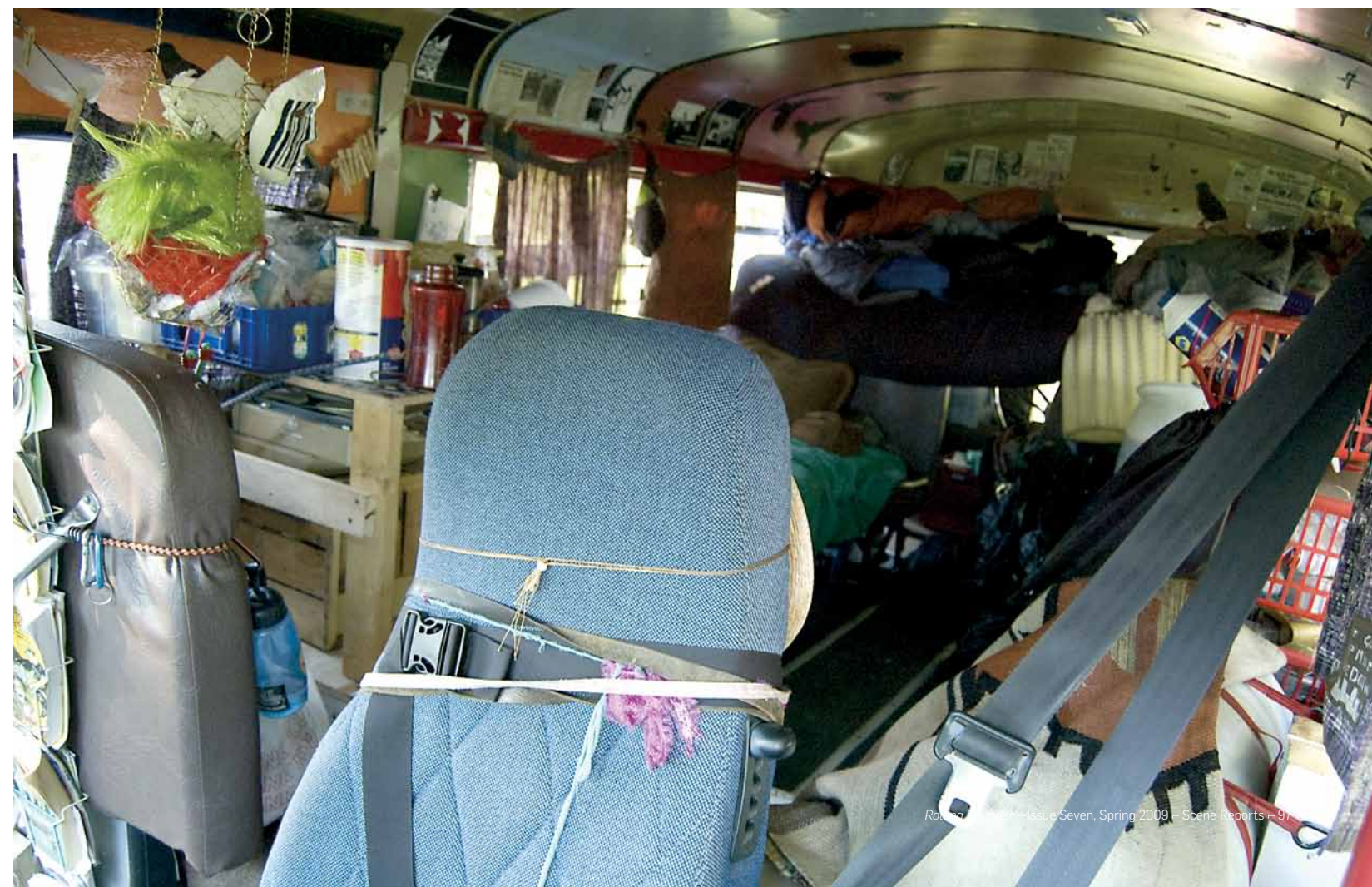
of this project—they showed up in full force to all the fundraisers and shared stories of hippie adventure from 1970s Winona. Fundraising also involved collecting clothes from local thrift store dumpsters and printing designs on them and making other merchandise to sell on tour. In addition, the group organized a “field trip” before removing the seating from the bus, taking people to a rural park to play games and eat sack lunches.

The bus crew was busy booking and promoting the tour stops, taking turns collecting and filtering vegetable oil, and converting the engine to run on it. Everything seemed to be coming along well: the dates were booked, the engine conversion was successful, and two brimming totes of screenprinted clothes were ready along with a rack of free literature, an emergency fund, and plenty of excitement about the tour.

Unfortunately, there were weaknesses in the organizational structure of the project. For example, beyond the music, there were no performance plans established. Nor was there a clear, consensual distribution of labor. These

issues went unresolved even as the bus rolled out of Winona for its first act in faraway Oregon. When engine troubles developed, further challenges appeared in the internal dynamics of the group. In the end, the tour as promoted was cancelled after less than half a dozen performances, and the group returned home for a show, to recharge and divide. The bus later went on to reach the East Coast, traveling a total of 7000 miles without paying a dime of gas tax, and the music act hitchhiked a portion of the remaining tour.

Though not everything went according to plan, the tour taught important lessons. Committing to the project meant committing to work well together, not being afraid to ask for help, and always making sure *someone* is committing to doing everything that needs doing. By far the worst aspect of the outcome of the tour was the social fallout; our community still hasn't completely recovered. There is a silver lining, though: we're more conscious of our interactions with others and more aware of the importance of clear communication.





Occasionally, members of the community gather for a Critical Mass ride. These events draw a representative cross section of our town's DIY community.

Bringing Small Town Strategy Into Play

Our efforts to create radical infrastructure and momentum in our home town

Letterpress

In late spring 2006, members of our working group began to plan the first of our intentional projects for Winona: a design and printing firm to raise funds for future projects. We were inspired to try this following our experiences with printing and graphic design. To our joy, we found an entire letterpress studio essentially free for the hauling. After an intense moving scenario, we managed to acquire one Chandler & Price 8x12 Platen Press, two small hand presses, rollers, ink, 100 trays of moveable lead type, and all sorts of other letterpress essentials.

Two years in the making, Keoxa Artists' Guild* offers sliding-scale graphic design and

* For more anarchist printers, investigate the work of Community Print in Olympia, WA, 1984 printing in Oakland, CA, Eberhardt Press in Portland, OR, and Kerbloom! zine by Artnoose in Pittsburgh, PA.

letterpress printing. While most of our paid work involves fancy wedding invitations, we also print zine covers, our friends' CD packaging, and other such rewarding jobs. Of course, it also provides a valuable resource for our other projects, and allows us to cover most of our living expenses by working occasionally from home.

Wild Nettle Distribution

Years ago, when we were in high school, a couple of us distributed radical media in Winona—we brought zines, music, books, patches, and other anarchist paraphernalia to punk shows, and this sparked our interest in networking with the broader anarchist community. We experimented with screenprinting and making zines, and designed our first website; we would fill orders out of our parents' houses. When high school ended, these endeavors faded into history. Years later, faced with all the unsold merchandise that remained after the cancellation of the aforementioned tour, we dusted off the leftovers of the distribution we did in high school and Wild Nettle Distro was born.

We bought a photocopier for \$25 and located other printers on the local campuses,† and our free zine selection grew and grew. We've sold CrimethInc. books, other anarchist publications and projects, shirts and patches, and given away countless free zines, posters, and advice to the idealistic youth and middle-aged dropouts of Winona. Lately, we've been setting up at legitimate events outside the anti-authoritarian community; we've been enthusiastically accepted there, despite the extreme sentiment of most of our literature. We've also taken Wild Nettle Distro on tour to the East Coast and back and to various regional anarchist events.

Long Weekend

Our first project as a working group was to initiate our long-term strategy with a three-day

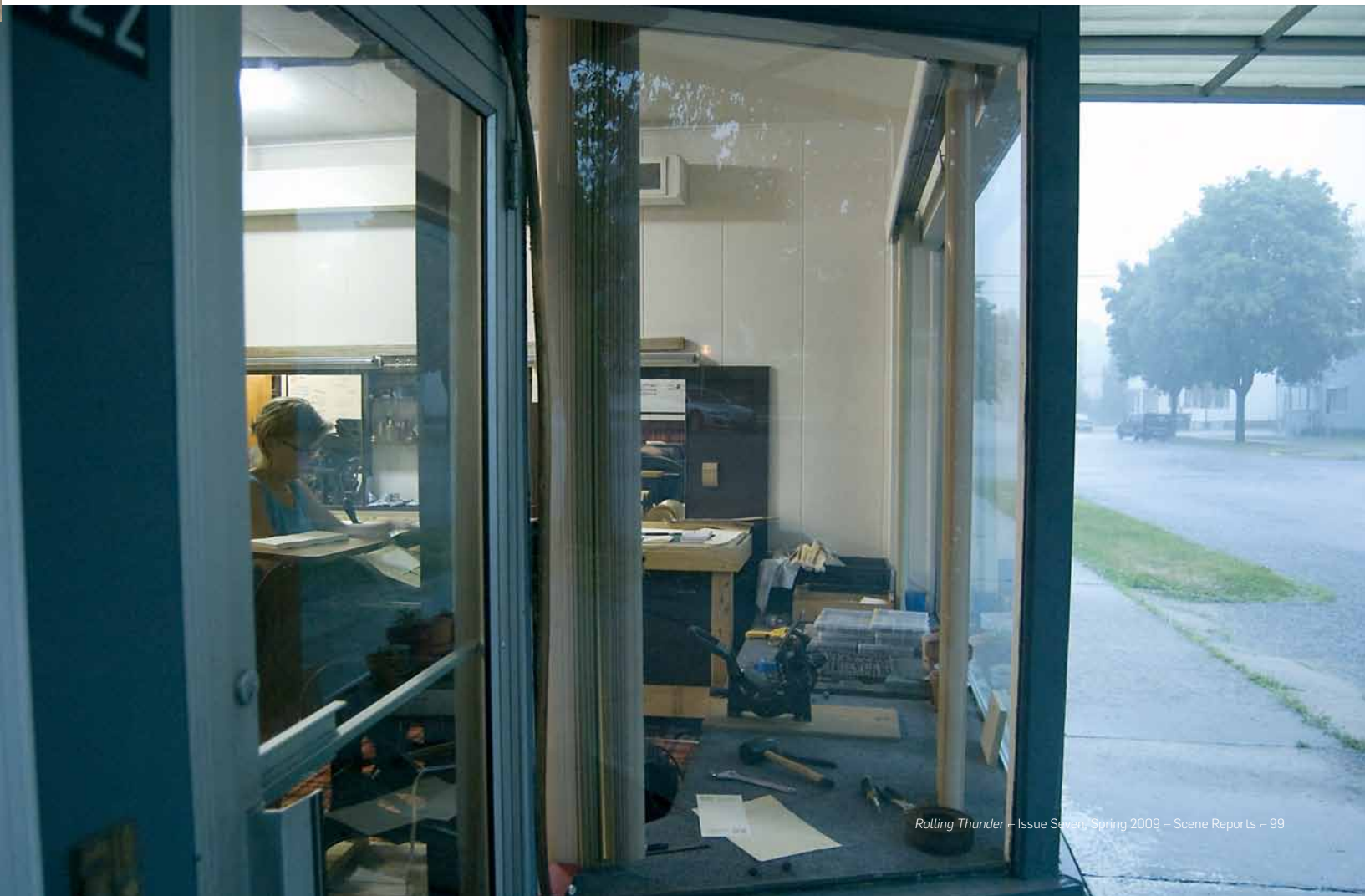
† Editor's note: In our experience, it has almost never worked out for the best when small DIY groups buy their own photocopiers—this always ends up costing exorbitant fees for supplies and repairs. Until we can seize the entirety of the means of production, it is often more sensible to steal what we need from our exploiters and make them pay the maintenance fees. The authors of this report insist that they bought a photocopier and enough toner to make more than 10,000 copies for \$25, and this may indicate that with the advent of the internet there are new opportunities—but nothing beats good old-fashioned theft.

festival dubbed "Long Weekend: Neighborly Discussion for a Free Winona." Our ulterior motive was to determine whether or not there might be community support for a free newspaper. We also wanted to create an intimate town meeting atmosphere in which people could talk candidly about mutual aid in Winona. The three of us brainstormed, contacted friends, and prepared a schedule of exciting events. We compiled this information and a manifesto about gift economics and mutual aid into a program and distributed it everywhere: in mailboxes, on doorsteps, directly into people's hands. Soon, the little booklets had infiltrated conversations all around town.

The weekend opened with a potluck in the basement of the Winona Arts Center. As people were finishing their meals, a scripted dialogue was heard above the conversation and the room quieted to listen to the words from the program text: "The gift economy means presents for everyone. It is how information travels through our community. How we feed ourselves. It is a warm meal on a cold night . . ."

In the course of the weekend we showed a few films and held a number of conversations about subjects specific to Winona. A critical

That's a lot of rain. Fortunately, printing is an indoor activity.





Wild Nettle's literature table has distributed countless zines and posters at various events.

[Opposite] Participants enjoy a collective banquet at our first Long Weekend event.

discussion on the rise and fall of Food Not Bombs resulted in a series of monthly potlucks and planted seeds for a possible Really Really Free Market. There was a DDBC panel at which five members talked about their experiences and entertained questions.* During a discussion of electoral politics and their role in small town local organizing, people weighed in from very different social circles and perspectives.

Many people threw around ideas for a community newspaper. Only two months later, a free monthly newspaper appeared featuring an article detailing all that went on during the event. This provided a solid point of reference for the establishment of intentional mutual aid networks and won us many people's support.

Newspaper

Shortly after the "Long Weekend," we began publishing a monthly newspaper about mutual

* One example of the usefulness of such discussions in small towns is that when the bike club expressed that they'd had a difficult time spreading the word, one member of the audience stood up and offered to provide advertising in the grocery cooperative's newsletter.

aid called *Free Winona*. We wanted a newspaper that would connect different social circles and invest this interconnection with a broad sense of community self-determination. Our goal was to promote conversation about ongoing adventures in gift economics by analyzing different projects in our community.

Starting the newspaper with a small affinity group was a wise choice: we were able to create exactly what we wanted, balance the workload according to a consensus process, and lay the groundwork for bigger plans in terms of ideas and rhetoric.† Focusing on a specific theme in each issue enables us to connect the newspaper to the other projects we are working on and use it as a supplement to our other efforts.

By our fifth issue, we were prepared to open the editorial collective to other people. We began having formal meetings and before long we'd doubled our work power. As of this writing, we've just celebrated our one year anniversary.

† With the basics covered in our newspaper, we can be confident that the anarchist principles referenced in the zines we distribute and the character of our festivals won't be lost on the "masses."





DDBC Bicycle Co-op

In spring of 2008 the bike club signed their first storefront lease downtown—a substantial change from the punk house backyards from whence they'd come. Let's back up to 2003, when the bike club got its start. *Castle Greyskull*, one of the few punk houses at the time, was a swarming hub of activity: there were always people working on bikes, sharing tools, and teaching each other about bicycle maintenance. Immediately thereafter, the *Far East House* hosted an era of ambitious freak bikes. In these formative years, the Bike Club learned to roll together as a group and developed an understanding of what they wanted for Winona. Meanwhile, the bikes kept accumulating. The club hoped to start a free bike program, and began distributing free red and black bicycles and racks.

Eventually, city inspectors complained about the bicycles in the yard, and it was clear that the group needed a permanent space. The DDBC worked to receive state non-profit status, found a grant with the help of the Miss Rockaway Armada, and located a home for the project: the basement of a nearby thrift store. It wasn't

a space that invited foot traffic, but it was a step in the right direction.

While the basement lease lasted, the club searched for other spaces. Finally, a space became available in arguably the most beautiful historic downtown storefront. Our working group and other members of the DIY community showed up for some solidarity work, hauling bikes and helping prepare the new space for the club.

So it was that in 2008 the DDBC Bicycle Co-op launched several new programs: bike maintenance workshops, free bike rentals, a cheap bike parts thrift store, and a space offering tools for fixing and building bicycles. No bicycle has ever been sold by the DDBC, and over 100 have been given away since the space opened.

'Free Markets

Regular Really Really Free Markets began in April 2008. We held two open group meetings weeks before the first one to determine the loose organizational tasks that needed covering—things like publicity, food, and cleanup duties. Thanks

to our work with the newspaper, we already had connections to various social groups interested in demonstrating mutual aid in action.

We asked some of the town's charitable organizations to help distribute fliers—an ironic venue through which to promote self-determination and mutual aid rather than guilt-induced charity—and initiated a rigorous promotional campaign with posters and radio call-ins. The DDBC pitched in to raffle off kids' bikes for free. Our local puppeteer planned something different for each 'Free Market: he gave away free tacos from his taco bike, hosted a talent show, performed with his puppets. A few volunteers from the Catholic Worker group brought surplus supplies of soap, shampoo, and toothbrushes. Community Harvest, a local revision of Food Not Bombs, served hot meals made with reclaimed food.

The event has been advertised in the mainstream newspapers as a free yard sale one month, and a block party the next; this ambiguity has kept it populated with all the best sports in town. It has been heartening to see participants come back month after month with a greater sense of how they'd like to participate.

Regional Networks

It was becoming apparent that we had a lot to offer to and a lot to learn from anarchists in neighboring towns and cities. We began making ties with kids in the cities around us: Des Moines, IA, the Twin Cities of MN, Milwaukee and Madison, WI. We met a lot of new friends at convergences and consultas including gatherings preparing for the Republican National Convention, various CrimethInc. convergences, and other regional events. We met kids from small towns like ours—Brainerd, MN, Bemidji, MN, and Oshkosh, WI. Comparing notes really paid off in our local organizing, and discussing small town dynamics with others from the region has helped us form a loose network of anarchist communities in the upper Midwest.

We shared our observations formally at the Milwaukee CrimethInc. convergence, and informally elsewhere; one of us went on a tour the summer of 2008, visiting small towns with the literature distro and a musical act. We're interested in visiting communities within a reasonable traveling distance from Winona to share the lessons we've learned and learn new ones—see our contact information below to get in touch.

The Down n' Dirty Bike Club backyard, where donated bikes were repaired for riding or parceled out into usable parts.



Epilogue

Our working group spent its first year living apart, with no real common space to operate from. We had talked about renting a house—even two—but had really wanted to buy a property to get the most out of our long-term investments. After months of searching for the right fixer-upper, we received an offer we couldn't refuse: a contract for deed with no banks involved on a large, decrepit duplex—from anarchist sympathizers,* no less!

This means great things for us: we will now have storage space for our 'Free Market' supplies and leftovers, meeting space for our newspaper, a radical library for the DIY community, a

* "We like what you're doing here. To be honest, we're betting anarchists will be more dependable than the economy, so let's cut a deal."

permanent home for our printing equipment† and literature distribution, and room enough to host visiting travelers.

Committing to live together has meant a new intermediate step for our group—learning how every aspect of our lives can transform a world of defeat into an arena lush for triumph. We have a new face for public relations: an embassy of sorts for the anarchist communities of the Midwest to visit, and an ambassador's office through which we hope to interact more with locals. Our next great challenge will be to overcome the disparities within our local anti-authoritarian scene, and to work with others to nurture an anarchist community on the verge of eruption.

† Ironically, because we now own a home and the means of production, we officially qualify as petite bourgeois, according to ancient scripture.

Our region put a lot of effort into facilitating resistance to the Republican National Convention in September 2008. Participating in that work helped solidify Winona's place in a network of anarchist communities, and we were happy to contribute time and energy to the grunt work. May the networks we build last generations.

Our most recent and demanding project: restoring a dilapidated duplex to serve as a hub for our projects and a growing regional network.

[Opposite] Some of our Really Really Free Markets have attracted more than 250 participants—a huge victory for a rural town of our size.

Visit Winona! Contact ambassador@keoxa.com for instructions and directions. Write to us if you're in the midwestern US and would like to invite us to share this account, or the associated recipe, with your community. We can be reached via snail mail through:

*CrimethInc. Sandbaristas
PO Box 765
Winona, MN, 55987*

Bringing the Storm to St. Paul

As the RNC approached, a seething hurricane named “Gustav” (German for “staff of God”) with winds of 135 miles per hour took aim at my little house on the levee.

A couple days later, having agreed to form part of the support element for a lockdown blockade, we found a secluded spot near the intersection and waited for word that delegate buses were on the way. As soon as the text message came in, we pulled up our bandannas and dashed from our hiding place toward the blockade site, creating a few improvised roadblocks along the way. At the site, eight people locked themselves together in a circle with “sleeping dragons,” and a black bloc of around three dozen more formed a protective buffer and built a secondary blockade by moving large metal benches into the street and locking them together. We took control of the major thoroughfare for over two hours, forcing an official closure of the road

of younger student-types wearing matching shirts screen-printed with the aforementioned name in block letters. An ad hoc black bloc had discussed participating in the Funk The War march at a hastily convened meeting the night before, a sort of clearinghouse for everyone who hadn’t made plans before arriving in St. Paul. Funk The War was said to be amenable to black bloc methods, so in spite of some trepidation, it was agreed that the two groups would join forces just south of the park in front of the capitol building, the site of a large, heavily-policed liberal rally.

The crowd grew steadily as the Funk The War sound system blared electronic music and a handful of energetic young people danced—fully masked—in the center of the group. Masking up too early has doomed breakaway marches in the past, but in this case it only seemed to attract greater numbers of rambunctious young people. Eventually the group departed through the park and down a street leading straight into the heart

turned and grabbed him by the collar. After walking a few steps in the officer’s grasp, the detainee went limp and fell to the ground; the officer then began dragging him down the street while waving a can of pepper spray with his free hand. The officer had chosen a difficult task: surrounded on all sides by a hostile crowd, with no backup, he was trying to drag 150 pounds of dead weight down the street.

This went on for a surprisingly long time. Suddenly, a masked individual leaped out of the crowd and threw a hockey-style body check, sending the officer flying awkwardly to the ground. Still grasping the collar of his would-be arrestee, the officer fired an arc of pepper spray, mostly hitting the midsections of the individuals in front of him. The detainee was plucked from the prone officer’s grasp, who seemed too shocked to resist. The crowd cheered and the officer retreated to his car.

The bloc continued its rampage for twenty more minutes. Windows were smashed with

considering that they were pursuing a group of people who, for the most part, had no clue where they were going.

Campus Antiwar Network Takes on the RNC

About 50 Campus Antiwar Network members rendezvoused on the corner of 9th and Robert Street, about a dozen blocks northeast of the Xcel Center, and immediately swarmed into the intersection to seize it. Several people began wrapping police caution tape across the street and traffic came to a standstill as police began to arrive on the scene. Once the riot squads showed up, we took off for the most strategic intersection in our sector, 10th and Jackson, where there were on- and off-ramps for 35E. We couldn’t hold it for very long, as our nonviolent brigade was not equipped to deal with riot police armed with pepper spray, tear gas, tasers,

Postscript: Stories from the Republican National Convention

and rerouting of candidate buses. For the first time that day, but certainly not the last, I was overwhelmed by the bravery and determination of ordinary people.

Once the lockdown was established, the black bloc linked arms and began chanting and singing. At that moment, the hurricane was hitting the Louisiana shoreline with unknown consequences. In retrospect, I believe that if we had managed to bring enough people from New Orleans—people whose anger and fortitude had been forged in the fires of years of hardships and outrages, motivated by the knowledge that on that day, their actions might be the last testament to the world they knew and loved—the events of September 1 would have played out differently, and the stated goal of “shutting down the convention” might have been achieved.

Black Bloc, September 1

Around 11 a.m., a crowd began to form around the booming sound system of Funk The War, a group which appeared to consist primarily

of St. Paul’s financial district. Amazingly, not a single uniformed cop followed,* which only served to convince some that the group was packed with undercover snatch squads.

After meandering through the streets unmo- lested for about 15 minutes, the crowd turned onto a street lined with banks and department stores, and the sound of breaking glass immediately reverberated through the artificial canyon of office buildings. Every loose object in sight, from newspaper dispensers to concrete garbage bins, was dragged into the street, leaving a path of detritus to prevent the police from pursuing in vehicles. For several blocks, the crowd rampaged through the streets, smashing the windows of stores and police cars, as well as slashing the tires of numerous empty police cars and at least one delegate bus.

A one point, a lone police officer wearing only the powder blue uniform of a patrolman sprinted into the crowd from half a block away. He ran up behind one person with his back

* Editor’s note: Comically, some reports suggest that police permitted Funk the War to proceed because they thought it was the permitted march.

We fall back slowly, medics rushing to attend to the injured and get them out of harm’s way. Everything that isn’t bolted down is dragged into the street; the sound of scraping metal mingles with the explosions of concussion grenades and tear gas canisters.

bricks, road signs, and slingshots. Several times a line of riot cops appeared in an intersection a block or more ahead of the crowd, but the group avoided them without difficulty, having decided the previous night to avoid close combat.

Eventually, the bloc encountered a smaller group pursued by a line of very slow-moving patrol cars with lights flashing and sirens wailing. None of the police themselves pursued on foot, however, and the chances of arrest seemed minimal. Members of the now larger group dragged garbage into the street to obstruct the cars, but a small number started to run away and a stampede quickly developed, fracturing the crowd in the space of a single city block. The bloc quickly dispersed among the conventioners and locals walking the streets of downtown St. Paul.

At no point did the police attempt to trap the crowd or seal off its exits, and whatever snatch squads had infiltrated it only succeeded in making a single arrest, an individual prevented from staying with the others by a freak injury. All in all, the police response was unbelievably slow, disorganized, and ill-trained, especially

and rubber bullets. The next three hours were a game of cat and mouse. We seized intersections at random, halted traffic, then dispersed when the cops started forming lines to rush us.

As random other crews joined us, our numbers doubled; at one point, we held an intersection for nearly twenty minutes because MSNBC, CNN, and dozens of other media outlets had swarmed into it with us. The impromptu press conference allowed us to state our objections to militarism and war and articulate our vision of the peaceful world we wanted to see, and briefly discouraged the cops from kicking the crap out of us. The police were almost as hostile towards the media as they were to us, but for a moment they limited themselves to verbal assaults.

Eventually we moved down to Kellogg Boulevard, due East of the Xcel Center, where one of the six “Loading Zones” for the Republican delegates was located. A squad of bicycle cops successfully divided our lines and our internal communication and coordination began to break down. Things got ugly after CAN members began linking arms and standing in front



Riot police attacking the second Funk the War bloc on Kellogg Blvd. in downtown St. Paul shortly before 4 p.m., September 1.

of the delegate buses. Ten of our members were sprayed in the face with pepper spray and two were violently thrown to the ground by police officers; one cop on a motorcycle drove right into our crew and hit a person, who suffered minor injuries. Two of our members were arrested with misdemeanor charges and later released.

Up the street, a Funk the War contingent of about 300 black-clad anarchists were having a dance party in the intersection of Kellogg and Wabasha. Police fired tear gas into the crowd, and also rubber bullets and concussion grenades. Anarchists attempted to slow the police line by dragging newspaper bins, traffic signs, dumpsters, and sandbags into the streets. Skirmishes between protesters and police were widespread by 4 p.m., and downtown St. Paul was clearly in the middle of a riot.

Bullfighting in the Twin Cities

“This is your third and final warning.” It’s hard to make out the voice from the megaphone in the midst of all the noise and confusion; there must be a couple hundred of us now. “. . . order you to disperse, or you will be subject to—”

Yeah, I know, I think to myself, or we will be subject to arrest—but he surprises me: “—chemical weapons.”

Chemical weapons! My heart soars. We’re in front of one of the most prestigious delegate hotels—if they gas us here, they’re practically

admitting defeat! I haven’t been tear-gassed since Quebec City, and I have such fond memories of gas-masked anarchists throwing back the smoking canisters. Too bad I’m not really dressed for it.

“Whose streets?” I yell, hoarse but enthusiastic. “OUR STREETS!” everyone answers, making good on it by holding their ground as the first shots ring out. As clichéd as it sounds, I could do this all day. It beats gnawing my nerves in private rage, wishing for a chance to engage with the murderers who are destroying the planet.

On reflection, it’s not surprising that they’re trying to force us back—with an open park to our left, there’s no way they could surround us. They need to get us onto terrain they can control.

We fall back slowly, medics rushing to attend to the injured and get them out of harm’s way. Everything that isn’t bolted down is dragged into the street; the sound of scraping metal mingles with the explosions of concussion grenades and tear gas canisters. Eventually, rather than retreat from downtown, we turn the corner and begin to move north.

Now it’s a different ball game—the city is a grid of closed walls, and they could box us in and mass-arrest us in the middle of any block. My partner and I are constantly checking in, keeping abreast of police movements in all four directions. Every time we see a solid line of cops form, we make sure we have at least two escape

routes open. A couple times, they form a line ahead of us when we’re between intersections, and we have about thirty seconds to run out the other end before they close the line there as well; as fast as their orders go out, our legs are always faster. It can be frightening to run right through forming lines of police, but riot police are extremely predictable if you can tell what their orders are. At one point I practically crash into one officer, but as his task is to block the way rather than to make individual arrests, he doesn’t react.

We’ve been doing this for over a week now, first in Denver and now here. It’s worth noting how much less experience the officers on the street have than we do—for many of them, this is their first time, while I’ve been playing this game half my adult life.

Now they’re setting up lines at every intersection—closing down the entire area. We separate from the rest of the crowd, moving as fast as our

the news that some hadn’t made it back, and started making plans for the days still to come.

Amidst all the conversation and commotion, someone turned on the TV to see what the local news had to say about anarchists wreaking havoc and swarming the streets of downtown St. Paul. When the news segment came on, it included a montage of clips from over the course of the day. The newscaster deadpanned a narrative as the video jumped from scene to scene: “Some protesters locked themselves to a car in the middle of an intersection”—cut to muddled video of riot cops starting to remove lock boxes—“some protesters dragged items into the street and confronted riot police”—cut to video of police charging horses into protesters wearing colorful clothing—“some protestors damaged storefronts”—cut to video of someone shoving a sign through the Macy’s window. The narrator then continued, “. . . and then there’s this man, Keith.”

No friendly faces in sight, and delegate buses at the end of the block with accompanying militia. The reality is setting in that we are alone and in danger. Luckily, we find an alley and duck into it before our pursuers can make the previous turn.

legs will carry us, passing through line after closing line of riot cops. Finally we’re in the clear.

The city around us is suddenly eerily empty. We walk arm in arm, letting our breathing slow. Later, we discover that police had sectioned off an area of several blocks, mass-arresting many of our comrades, and we were the only ones free inside it.

Turning a corner, we come upon a wagon upended in the street, its contents scattered everywhere along with a single lost shoe. “Is that the Funk the War sound system?” It is. We turn it back on its wheels, load the speakers and piles of fliers back in, and walk it right up to the line of police with their backs to us. They let us through without a thought.

A Love Letter To Keith

After the first day of coordinated action at the RNC, we all wearily returned to the house where we were staying. Coming back one by one or in small groups, everyone excitedly shared stories and wild tales from the day, smiled to see that their friends were alright, cringed at

The video cut again to show a single teenager sitting cross-legged and completely alone in the middle of an intersection downtown, calmly beating out a feeble-sounding rhythm with a small jingle-bell stick, surrounded by a large circle of imposing but confused-looking riot police. The reporter managed to get into the circle of police to interview Keith, who simply said “Well, I just wanted to come up here and show them that they can’t get away with whatever they want.”

The video dragged on as Keith continued sitting in the intersection, lightly shaking his jingle-bell stick amidst the otherwise-silent stone-faced glares from the police, having obviously been there quite a while. We watched with wide eyes at the gall Keith had managed to muster by himself, and laughed at the absurdity of so many unamused riot police standing around sweating through their gear in response to a single rogue teenager.

I don’t know anything about Keith, where he came from, or what compelled him to take his stand in that lonely intersection downtown. But I like to imagine that he lives in a small



Police attempting to secure downtown St. Paul.

Midwestern town not too far from Minneapolis, and that somehow he came across an Unconventional Action paper or the RNC Welcoming Committee website which, for one reason or another, he found deeply inspiring. Maybe he read about the proposed plan: pick a sector, find an intersection, and shut it down.

And I like to think that, wanting to know what that felt like, but not really having any co-conspirators amongst his friends at home, he just fucking did it. He didn't sign up for a ticket on an activist bus that would dump him into the march, and he didn't give up on being a part of it because he was alone. He somehow traveled to St. Paul, found his intersection, and perhaps with some uncertainty of what was going to happen, sat down with his jingle-bell stick. And he stayed there.

Keith, wherever you are, I hope you keep following your urges—even if you have to start alone.

Caught!

So there we were, Z and I, in downtown St. Paul, separated from the relative safety of the throngs of protesters, walking briskly out of a parking lot, breathing heavily and talking about where to go next. We were just a block away from people leisurely strolling along the Mississippi riverbank when I noticed a man biking

a short distance behind us. He was a middle-aged male, smoking a cigarette and watching us with a decidedly unfriendly consistency. I guessed him to be a loyal Republican local, and by the way he seemed to be following us felt an increased sense of urgency to disappear into the non-protesters. I pulled Z's shirt slightly, but before I could explain, my concerns turned from thoughts to threats. We had reached the riverbank and were waiting impatiently for the light to change when I saw the biking man approach two stout men with short hair and similar outfits. The do-gooder pointed towards us, and my heart skipped a beat. I didn't know if the two men were cops, but didn't stick around to find out. "We gotta go," I said, grabbing Z by the arm. We shuffled away as quickly as possible without drawing attention to ourselves, but after only a few feet a loud "Hey!" came from the opposite corner—and the chase began.

I distinctly remember thinking, "OK, it's happening. This is what you were preparing for. This is it." All the jogging and talking, all the practicing had been for situations like this: trapped in an unfamiliar setting, with enemies at nearly every corner and a few coming for us. My mouth went dry as we ran. I looked back to see the two men about a block behind. Z and I were committed to staying together throughout the RNC, but hadn't explicitly discussed

scenarios such as this. We ran together, following each other's lead in a fluid manner with few verbal cues—friends in struggle, in fight and flight. We took the first turn available away from the river. Another quick block and a left turn later, I surveyed the scene. No friendly faces in sight, and delegate buses at the end of the block with accompanying militia. The reality really set in: we were alone and in danger. Luckily, we found an alley to the right and ducked into it before the pursuers had made the previous turn. The alley was a block long with a dumpster on the right and cars parked on the left. We hid in a slight alcove made by the closest car and a cut away in the building and changed our clothes as best we could. We seemed to have lost them for the moment, but weren't well hidden enough to stay where we were. I wanted to jump in the dumpster across the alley but hesitated because there was a camera nearby; I also didn't want to be so confined. I let my idea go without sharing it with my friend, a decision I regret upon reflection. We also could have slipped underneath the cars, but without knowing where the thugs were and if or when any aid would pass our way, it didn't seem like a smart decision to hole up where we were.

Z was ready to leave, and feeling indecisive, I went with his lead. We popped out onto the street at the far end of the alley and found another wall of busses and police to the left. We turned and walked anxiously away from them. The walls of the buildings on either side of the street were made with the type of dark, reflective glass characteristic of downtown high-rises. I used them to check our surroundings, and in the window of the building across the street I saw one of the men from the corner running down the street towards us, no farther than half a block away. Again we ran like wide-eyed deer in a concrete forest trying to understand an incomprehensible landscape. We raced forward towards what I recognized with a tightness in my chest as the intersection one block from where this had all started. We ran across an empty lot and turned right, away from where we had been. Downtown seemed to be an endless ghost world full of hollow, metallic trees and a feeling of oppressive emptiness. As we looked up the street, seeing small groups of police scattered here and there, it seemed we were going to have to risk proximity to them to make it out. As I processed the possibilities, Z, a few steps ahead of me, stepped into a building and as the door closed behind him so did my hope. I saw the place as a box without an exit, only a doorway to another box—one with bars. I did not want to go in, but I didn't feel comfortable leaving Z. In an excruciating few seconds I weighed my options and chose staying with my friend over splitting up without communication.

This is my second regret, and the one I have thought the most about since September. I know Z would have understood my decision to leave him in hopes of finding sanctuary. From the beginning of the chase, if we had split up we would have been less easily identified—no longer the pair the biking man pointed out—and would have been harder to follow, going in different directions. The possibility of one of us getting caught would still have been high, but better one than two. I knew that if we were caught it would be a lot easier to face jail and the legal system together, but I didn't consider the fact that we would have received support either way.

Inside, I tried to find a rear or alternative exit but to no avail. The rest of the story goes as one might imagine: we lost this time.

There will be more opportunities in which to confront the state face to face, and next time I will not make the same mistakes.

Elsewhere in Town . . .

On the afternoon of Thursday, September 4, dressed in our finest civilian attire, three of us took the bus to meet friends due to be released from jail near downtown St. Paul. Soon after we sat down, a woman across from us in her late twenties made a sound of disgust. She had sighted a cop car in another lane of traffic.

An older woman on an adjacent seat chimed in. "I know, they're everywhere. You can't go anywhere without seeing a damn cop."

"I was in St. Paul on Monday," the younger woman replied, "and what I've seen those cops doing makes me ashamed. I saw one girl, beaten and bloody on the pavement, with three cops standing over her."

"I believe it. And I haven't read a thing about it in the papers." "And they just get away with whatever they want . . ."

This dialogue continued for a few minutes as the bus slowly made its way through traffic. Gradually, other riders began offering their own accounts of police brutality. Finally, a man roughly in his sixties, with a white beard and a large Episcopalian Church pin on his hat, spoke up.

"I would never go to a protest without packing."

At this point, everyone on the bus, most of whom had been minding their own business, visibly shifted attention to the older man in the front.

"I'm serious, I don't trust them cops one bit. I'm telling you, if you ever go to a protest, always be able to defend yourself." The rest of bus was silent, but some people nodded. "I was living in Chicago in 1968, in law school at the time. I remember the Democratic National Convention was going on, and Mayor Daley had the National Guard out on the streets. One of those days I was driving through town, trying to get to class, and got stopped by a National Guardsmen redirecting traffic. I rolled down my window and told him I had to get through. He refused, and then I refused to go the other way. Eventually he pointed his rifle at me, saying I better move my car down the other street. Well, I just pulled out my .45, pointed it right back at him, and said, 'Mine's loaded, how 'bout yours?' And then he let me right on through. So I'm saying, always be prepared. .45 ACP."

My friends and I had been content to listen to the discussion in silence until then. But I couldn't help smiling: "Naw, man, .40 Smith and Wesson, that's where it's at." He smiled back, and the entire bus broke out in heated discussion about police brutality, little of which was actually centered around the unusual events of the preceding few days.

As the conversations got more and more intense, we arrived in downtown St. Paul only to find our way blocked by a large contingent of cops and National Guard in riot gear. They were preparing to attack an antiwar demonstration, which later came to include many nearby residents angry about the police state around them. A audible groan was heard on the bus as we were forced to park on a highway on-ramp facing the wrong

way. Five tense minutes later, a cop ran up to the bus driver and yelled, "You gotta get outta here, we're gonna gas the whole area in a couple minutes!" People on the bus started yelling and cursing and, as this was the closest they would get to their destinations, getting off the bus. We did the same.

My friends and I weren't able to get into the downtown area, much less to the jail, but we did manage to pull off a banner drop from a nearby overpass, thanks to unused materials stashed earlier that week. We had been frustrated by feelings of helplessness as we watched the pigs suit up in their fascist uniforms, but were excited by the conversations we'd overheard. They reminded us how the discussions and desires of the broader public often parallel those of anarchists in remarkable ways, requiring only the right circumstances to come to light. As attested by the participation of Seattle and Quebec residents in riots during mobilizations in those cities, the police state created at protests can provide these circumstances. In this instance,

Suddenly, a cop runs up to the bus driver, yelling, "You gotta get outta here, we're gonna gas the whole area in a couple minutes!"

Everyone on the bus starts yelling and cursing and, as this is the closest they'll get to their destinations, getting out.

levels of repression normally reserved for poor people of color had been temporarily extended to practically everyone, and the resulting tension and resentment was electrifying. Police harassment, and the potential for resistance, became unifying rather than dividing.

It's also worth pointing out that this police state, and the resentment it generated, was a direct result of the militant tactics used on September 1 and the embarrassment of the police after they were consistently outmaneuvered during the first few hours of the RNC. This serves as a reminder to anyone who thinks that street fighting, property destruction, and blockading alienate the public or reduce public sympathy for those who oppose authority. This conflict also shifted the focus for many outside observers from the Republican Party to the police and the state in general, demonstrating the importance of making sure our tactics match our desires.

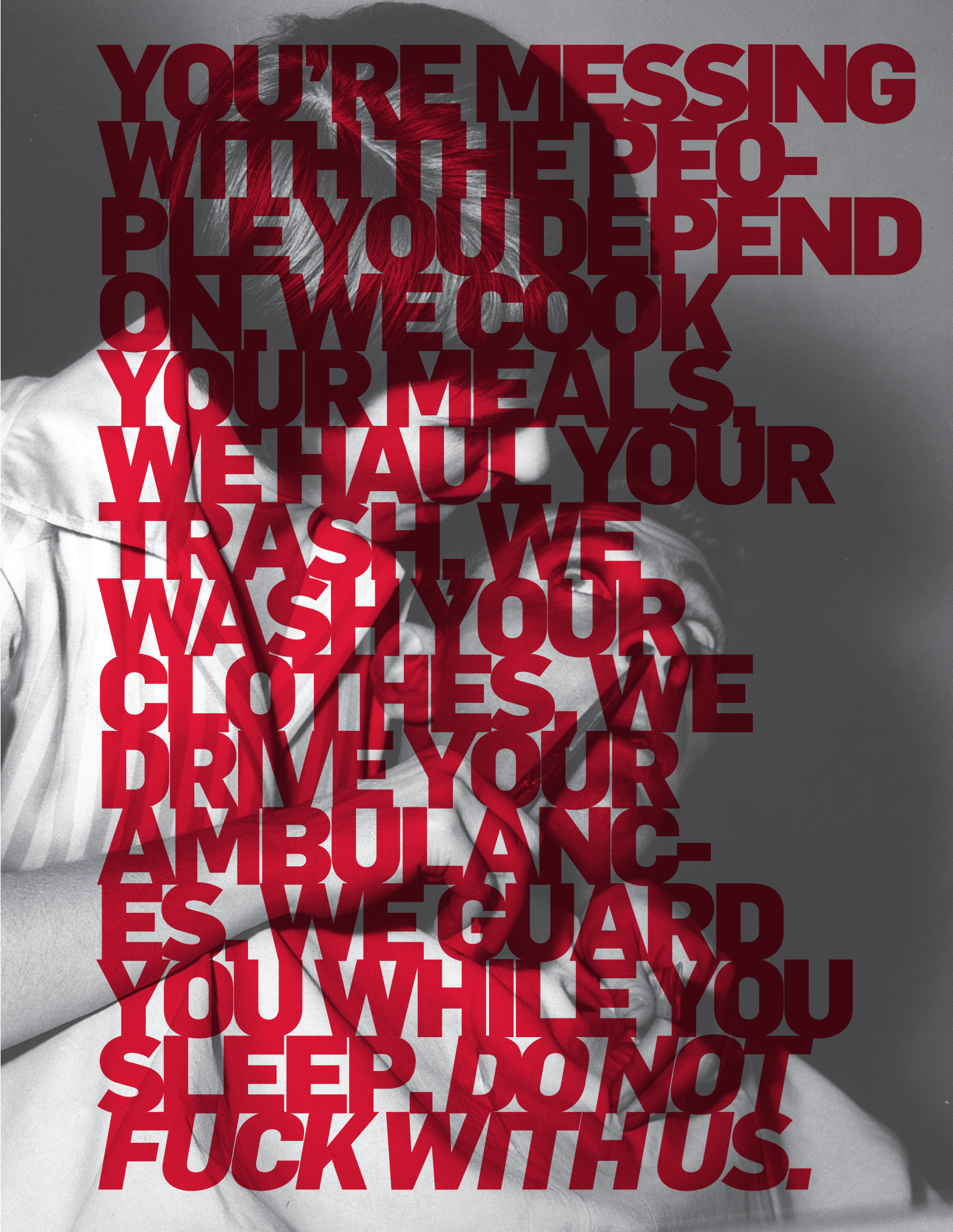
Afterwards

Five months had passed since the convention and I was sitting down for a pancake breakfast at the local anarchist community space. The local crew was there and dozens of folks from other cities had joined us for a weekend of play and mischief. I'd met many of the people in the room through the organizing and network-building leading up to the conventions. As we were enjoying the food and each other's company, a friend's phone rang; a few seconds later he was cursing and slamming his fist on the table. He hung up and informed the room that warrants had been issued for two of our closest friends. There were gasps and disbelief. My heart dropped. How many times now had I felt this since the RNC, the realization and fear that people I loved could be going to prison?

Everyone immediately shifted into crisis mode. Devastated, we informed our friends about their warrants. We arranged their rides to Minneapolis and made sure lawyers and loved

ones would meet them there. We raised their bail within hours. And of course we cried, held each other, and cried more.

It amazes me that a single day in September continues to shape our lives so dramatically. In the year before the convention, we declared our intention to build relationships and infrastructure that would live beyond September 1. That morning five months later proves to me that we won on that front. Despite the state's continuing efforts to imprison our friends and lovers, the friendships and affinities that formed during the anti-RNC organizing continue to deepen, while our infrastructure for handling state repression—and attacking the state—is stronger than ever. So many of our people are currently in the clutches of our enemies, but it has become increasingly clear that we are all in this together.



YOU'RE MESSING WITH THE PEOPLE YOU DEPEND ON. WE COOK YOUR MEALS. WE HAUL YOUR TRASH. WE WASH YOUR CLOTHES. WE DRIVE YOUR AMBULANCES. WE GUARD YOU WHILE YOU SLEEP. DO NOT FUCK WITH US.

Repression and reformism—handcuffs and “hope”—
are both strategies to discourage us from developing
our own power and autonomy. Don't let them box you in.

**FASTER, COMRADE—
THE OLD WORLD IS BEHIND YOU**



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