PLAIN WORDS

ANARCHIST COUNTER-INFORMATION IN BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA

ISSUE THREE FREE AUTUMN 2017

PLAIN WORDS

Plain Words is a website and publication that focuses on spreading news and developing analyses of struggles in and around Bloomington, Indiana. As anarchists, we approach these struggles from an anti-state, anti-capitalist perspective. However, we aren't interested in developing a specific party line – even an anarchist one – and instead value the diverse forms resistance can take. Our anarchism is vibrant, undogmatic, and finds common cause with all others who fight for a world without the state, capital, and all structures of domination.

All texts and images in Plain Words are taken from the internet or submitted to us by others. **We are not an organization or specific group**, but simply a vehicle for spreading words and actions of resistance in Bloomington.

As such, **we actively seek collaboration**. If you have news, images, reportbacks of actions and demonstrations, communiques, event information, publications, analyses of local trends and situations, updates on projects and campaigns, or anything else coming from an anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist perspective, please get in touch.

If you have comments on or critiques of anything we've printed that you'd like us to publish, feel free to send them our way.

PLAINWORDSBLOOMINGTON.ORG
PLAINWORDSBLOOMINGTON@RISEUP.NET

INTRODUCTION TO THE AFFINITY GROUP

From 1890's Spain to present day Bloomington, anarchists of varying stripes organize ourselves and take action together in what's called an "affinity group." Central to anarchy is not only respect for autonomy, but the belief that without stifling systems of control, people are capable of creativity, beauty, and courage. Because it is flexible, leaderless, and informal, the affinity group is one way to facilitate these drives.

In light of there being so many formal organizations with acronyms in Bloomington, I'm writing this piece hoping to encourage people to act with those they trust on their own initiative, and be skeptical of joining preexisting groups, because I believe "joining" hinders creativity and the blossoming of self-initiative.

An affinity group is an informal convergence of people who choose to struggle together, usually consisting of two to ten people. "Affinity" means closeness. Those who form an affinity group often share ideas, strategies, and goals. The uniqueness of each group means that they follow paths of their own choosing, experimenting with actions that are specific to their shared skills and desires without seeking permission from a larger decision-making body. If affinities weaken, people will leave the group or choose to dissolve it altogether. There are no membership lists, and the organization of the group is minimal. People come together as an affinity group to act, not to grow the group through recruitment. In fact, the label "affinity group" makes it seem more formal than it actually is: a more fitting name would be "crew." An affinity group doesn't even have to be political: bands and sewing circles are examples of affinity groups.

Affinity groups are simple, they are a vehicle for like-minded people to do things together. Things such as wheatpasting propaganda around town, reading and discussing texts, navigating a demonstration, sabotaging gentrification efforts, learning a skill together, or working on a publication. The basic formula for being in one is to feel out your desires, talk with your comrades, survey the situations you're in, and take action or form projects that make sense to you. When the focus is explicitly not to recruit, a whole world of possibilities opens up, and you begin to realize that you have more power than you previously thought. While it is certainly true that there's power in numbers, there's also power in confidence, self-initiative, courage, and the bonds that come from shared experiences in the streets. A large mass of people may actually be significantly less capable than a small affinity group, simply because people in the latter learn to be strategic with their small numbers and are aware of their capacity together.

Affinity groups can exist for a long time or form temporarily to accomplish one task: for example hanging a banner from a highway overpass or removing police barricades during a demonstration. Whether they're long-term or short-term, a key element in forming an affinity group is trust. If you're planning to do illegal things together, you definitely should make sure you trust the people you're doing them with and know how they act under pressure. When doing illegal things, it's best to operate on a "need-to-know" basis. An affinity group conspires together, figures out logistics, and does the thing. There's no need for others to know. This helps keep repression and potential damage from informers to a minimum. That anarchist networks are informal also makes it hard for state investigators to map them out.

The flexible structure and emphasis on trust and action is intentionally there to prevent some trappings that political groups often fall into. People with radical politics first think to join a formal organization with a name that sounds like something they'd be into. Usually when working in such groups, they end up spending a lot of time and energy for the sake

of the organization itself, instead of working on the goals it claims in its charter or points of unity. Bureaucracies work in this way: the number one priority is always for the organization to continue existing; and everything else is subordinate to and structured by that. Contrastingly, affinity groups are structured to facilitate action; it doesn't matter if the group exists or not, the affinity group is tool belonging to people with shared ideals and goals, not the other way around.

This society does not create people who are experienced in taking initiative, who have healthy methods of engaging in conflict with each other, and who are in touch with what they want. Instead, it promotes obedience, passivity, apathy, and toxic social relationships. Being in the ranks of hierarchical political parties or mass-based groups where decisions go through a democratic bottleneck does not encourage liberation. These groups require their participants follow orders just as much as bosses and cops do, and promote thinking as much as watching television does.

Massive general assemblies (like those during the Occupy movement) that act as decision-making bodies discourage individuals or small groups from taking action on their own. Since decisions must be agreed upon in the General Assembly, the initiatives agreed upon are those that ruffle the least feathers, often the most conservative and banal. The only creativity channeled is that of manipulation, a talent needed by competing sects trying to wrestle control of the GA through slimy political maneuvering. A similar dynamic happened to Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in the late '60s and again in the 2000s, a true testament to democratic society.

When coordination is needed on a larger scale, affinity groups strategize and work together. One model for this is the "spokes-council" where affinity groups converge for discussion, each appointing one person to temporarily represent their group. The spokes-council is not a decision-making body, so it doesn't come to any binding conclusions that each affinity group is expected to follow. Usually what happens is that affinity groups have pre-formulated proposals for action to give at the meeting: they describe what they plan to do or what they think should happen, and then discussion follows. Those ultimately interested in the proposal will likely meet together afterwards to plan logistics, while those who are uninterested will make their own plans accordingly.

This formula works in some situations, like when there are multiple, experienced affinity groups involved, but it's not always appropriate. Anarchists in the U.S. have tried borrowing some of these methods to create open assemblies that anyone can attend under similar pretenses. A recent example of this were the daily assemblies anarchists in Bloomington called for during the September 2016 U.S. Prison Strike. The assemblies were advertised around town and on the internet, and it was made clear that anyone interested in taking action in solidarity with the strike could attend. While actions did eventually come from those assemblies, the problem was that most people attending did not have affinity groups or proposals to give. That many people don't organize and take action in this way was something that those who called for the assemblies didn't anticipate.

It's not always possible for someone to form an affinity group, since the model relies on one having people in their life with shared beliefs who want to take action together. People newly interested in radical politics often come to these ideas on their own and/or through the internet, and look for established formal organizations to find people who share them. Nevertheless, even if not everyone can form one for themselves, these underlying ideas and critiques are important to consider when thinking about taking action and working on projects.

BANNER DROP FOR ERIC KING

In September 2014, Eric King was arrested after attempting to firebomb a congressman's office in Kansas City, Missouri in solidarity with the Ferguson uprising. Openly defiant in court, Eric proudly stood by his action and proclaimed his commitment to the struggle against white supremacy, patriarchy, and the state. Sentenced to 10 years in prison, Eric has faced repeated threats and repression from prison administration and guards – always responding with the same rebellious spirit and mocking contempt for this world of laws and cages.

As a small gesture of complicity and love for Eric, we dropped a banner on College Avenue for the International Day of Solidarity with Eric King. We will continue to show our solidarity with Eric until the day he is free (and after!), keeping alive the fight for a life without prisons, without congressmen, without the state.

Stay strong comrade, you are ever in our thoughts.

JUNE 11TH

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY WITH LONG-TERM ANARCHIST PRISONERS

In the month leading up to the June 11th International Day of Solidarity with Marius Mason & All Long-Term Anarchist Prisoners, we set up two tables at Boxcar Books with an array of free zines, stickers, and posters for June 11th and about anarchist prisoners.

On June 6th, the bi-monthly Read & Revolt anarchist reading group met at Boxcar Books to discuss "The Sun Still Rises," a text written by imprisoned fighters of the Conspiracy Cells of Fire (CCF) urban guerrilla group in Greece. It had been nominated by regular attendees of Read & Revolt and, given that it was written by long-term anarchist prisoners, was scheduled for discussion the week before June 11th. Those in attendance for this session seemed to appreciate how concisely it was written, how clear the authors' intentions were, and how it was written passionately yet without unnecessary flair. The conversation bounced between topics relevant to local conditions, while various ideas throughout the text acted as conduits for people to discuss ideas related to their own personal problematics.

On June 9th, we showed Sacco & Vanzetti, a 2006 documentary on the two militant anarchists. Without falling back on idolization and martyrdom, we want to affirm our history. As we continue on a path as anarchists of action, as enemies of this and all states, we carry with us the spirit of those who have, before us, carved out their own path of defiance. After the movie, folks wrote 25 cards and letters to long-term anarchist prisoners in the US.

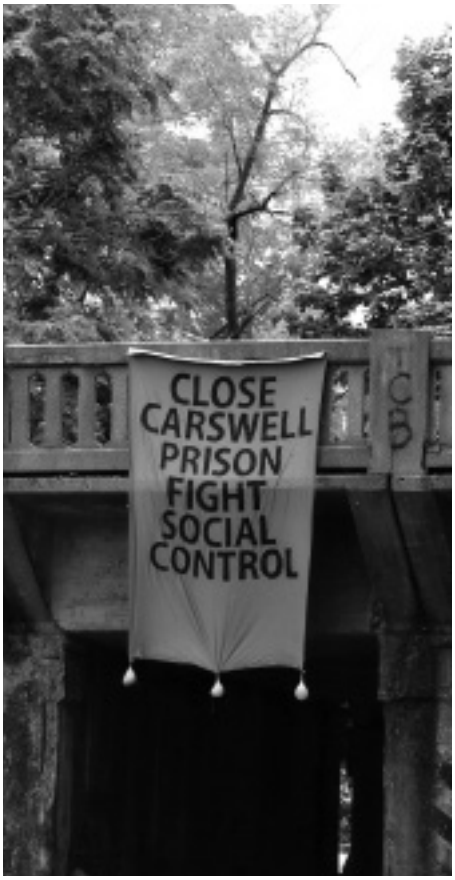
On June 11th, we held a picnic in a public park as a celebration of anarchist action and in honor of our imprisoned fighters. Beneath black flags, people talked, wrote cards to anarchist prisoners, and shared food. Some comrades prepared a songbook and performance of classic anarchist songs. Anarchists in the early 20th century often held picnics on holidays of their own creation, and we hoped to carry on this tradition. As the world becomes increasingly dominated by the technological mediation of the internet, it is imperative that we create spaces in which we can be together, face-to-face, without the noise of alienated chatter. There is, for us, a clear connection between the walls that separate us from our imprisoned comrades and the walls that separate us all from each other. We celebrate, with joy, the crumbling of both.

Earlier that day, anonymous individuals dropped two banners in solidarity with Marius Mason and against social control:

> *As a small, anonymous gesture of complicity, we hung two banners to honor June 11, day of solidarity with long-term anarchist prisoners. These banners are on the main north/south roads into and out of Bloomington. No matter how long he is held at FMC Carswell or in any other cage, we will make sure Marius isn't forgotten here, especially given the vital role he played in defending the land and building a community of resistance in our region.*

On the evening of June 11th, anonymous individuals wheatpasted dozens of posters and put up stickers about imprisoned comrades.

While our efforts this year were modest, they exist within a continuum of action for our imprisoned comrades that manifests every day. We take time on June 11th to remember and act for imprisoned anarchists, but this does not stop when the clock strikes midnight. For us, solidarity is not a one-off event, an act of charity, or something removed from our daily lives – it is an inseparable part of our existence as anarchists, a tension affirmed through action. Solidarity is the word in our mouths, the rock in our hand, and the blood in our veins.. The prison walls cannot break us.



SOLIDARITY WITH JANUARY 20TH
ANTI-INAUGURATION DEMONSTRATORS

This past week, there have been initiatives taken in Bloomington and around the world for the Week of Solidarity with J20 Defendants. The J20 Defendants are 211 people arrested in DC during Trump's Inauguration on January 20th, who are being charged with at least 8 felonies, including "rioting," "inciting or urging a riot," "conspiracy to riot," and multiple counts of "destruction of property." If convicted, they face a maximum of 75 years in prison each. The mass arrest took place after the police surrounded the block they were in, using a likely illegal police maneuver called "kettling" to prevent anyone from escaping. In this case as well as countless others, the state casually breaks its own laws whenever they become inconvenient.

On that day and night, hundreds of thousands of people across the country took action, including a rowdy demonstration here in Bloomington. In Washington DC, there was coordinated blockades in a number of intersections in order to stop attendees of the inauguration from arriving, as well as property destruction and widespread disorder. There were some beautiful acts of revolt coming out of DC, including corporate windows and cop cars being smashed in broad daylight, a limo being set on fire, and the iconic punch in the head of a white nationalist celebrity.

Many of these actions, including the limo burning, took place after the police kettle began, and those that didn't couldn't have been committed by more than a handful of people. So charging over 200 people with 8 felonies each is a clear attempt by the state to set a legal precedent allowing for further repression in the future, as well as intimidate those who would dare to revolt. That said, if any of the 211 arrested did break a window, vandalize something, or attack the cops; then all the more reason to support them. The police, the banks, and corporations are extremely powerful institutions that play important roles in perpetuating this nightmare society. If people are willing to risk facing the violence of the state in order to attack these multi-million dollar institutions in broad daylight, then their courage and passion is to be commended.

Bloomington Solidarity

Some support for the J20 Defendants has been taking place in Bloomington for the last six months since the charges were announced, mostly in the form of informally organized fundraisers. For the Week of Solidarity, a handful of initiatives were organized.

Boxcar Books, a not-for-profit bookstore and community center that hosts space for anarchists and other radicals to have events and meetings, released the following statement in support of the J20 Defendants:

Boxcar Books is a bookstore and community center in Bloomington, Indiana. For 15 years, Boxcar has been a hub for radical literature, underground zines, and alternative publications. It provides space for reading groups, film screenings, organizing meetings, and a reliable location to learn more about, and plug into, an array of political projects, creative endeavors, and service organizations that exist in Bloomington. One of Boxcar's many missions is to support resistance and radical organizing in Indiana and beyond. We see the case of the J20 defendants as relevant and instructive to all those who dream of a better world, especially those who are going to fight for it. The outcome of these exaggerated charges could either embolden the repressive forces to go after more of us, or it could strengthen our bonds of solidarity and ability to defend ourselves. It is in this spirit that we extend our solidarity and encouragement to all the J20 arrestees, and demand that their charges be dropped and that the arrestees be compensated by the state for all travel expenses, abuse at the hands of the police, lost wages, and emotional distress.

On January 20th we were inspired to find the words, images, and videos of resistance

from D.C. We recognize the importance of setting the tone and energy of fighting back as we face the next 4 years under Trump's regime. We appreciate everyone who showed up and participated in whatever way they could, even with the threat of a heavy presence of police and other fascists. We swelled with pride to see protestors helping each other when pepper sprayed and attacked by the police. It is our responsibility to stand with those who took risks, even now, months later, and for as long as they need our support.

One could be indignant about the absurdity of charging over 200 people with several felonies, but we know better than to appeal to the state for reason or decency. That said, we were surprised by the ambition of the prosecutors and the amount of resources the state is investing. To us, that's illustrative of how important this precedent is, and how important it is that we don't back down in the face of it.

Politically-motivated action has historically been met with harsher charges. This serves a purpose. The state has always used fear and intimidation to destroy resistance. Mass arrests, inflated charges, and terrorism enhancements are all part of a wider "divide and conquer" strategy. People who are isolated and exhausted are more easily pacified. Fear breeds in isolation. If the state can convince us that the only way to play is on their terms, then we turn on each other and do their job for them. When we take cooperating plea deals, we neutralize ourselves. If we give in to fear, if one person cooperates and even unknowingly implicates others, it becomes infinitely easier for the state to steal people away.

We have been inspired by the J20 Defendants Points of Unity. With the focus on protecting each other, on not giving in to the illusion of safety in isolation offered by capitalism and cooperating pleas, the defendants stand to gain more power and freedom than they risk losing.

It makes sense to feel afraid. The question is how we deal with that fear – if it brings us together or drives us apart. We have to deal in a way that makes us stronger, not weaker. Together we are more resourceful and better equipped to resist. What does it look like for defendants to grow power together in the face of felonies? It means keeping an eye on the we. If we see ourselves as a thread in the tapestry of resistance, we know that our lives are important, vital, to the structure of the fabric, but we can also refocus on the whole. We are engaged in a fight against fascism, against white supremacy, for autonomy and for freedom. Part of the strategy is to keep us busy, exhausted, and depleted. If, instead, the 211 defendants can not only support each other but build connections and inspire each other in further resistance, then these charges will translate to a sentence for fascism, not for us.

We support the J20 defendants, whether guilty or innocent of that which they are accused. We refuse to be intimidated. We refuse to let them erode and divide our movements and communities. And we refuse to let so many of our friends and comrades be taken from us.

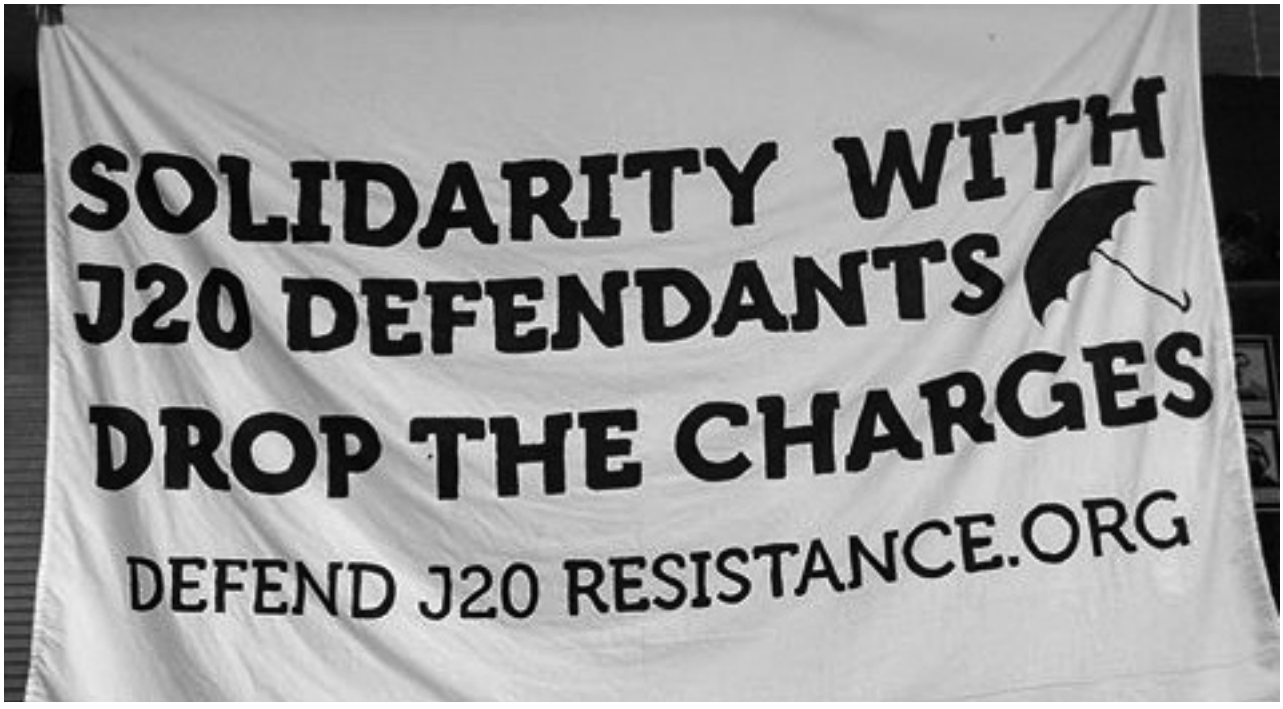
We all cheered,
Love and solidarity from Boxcar.

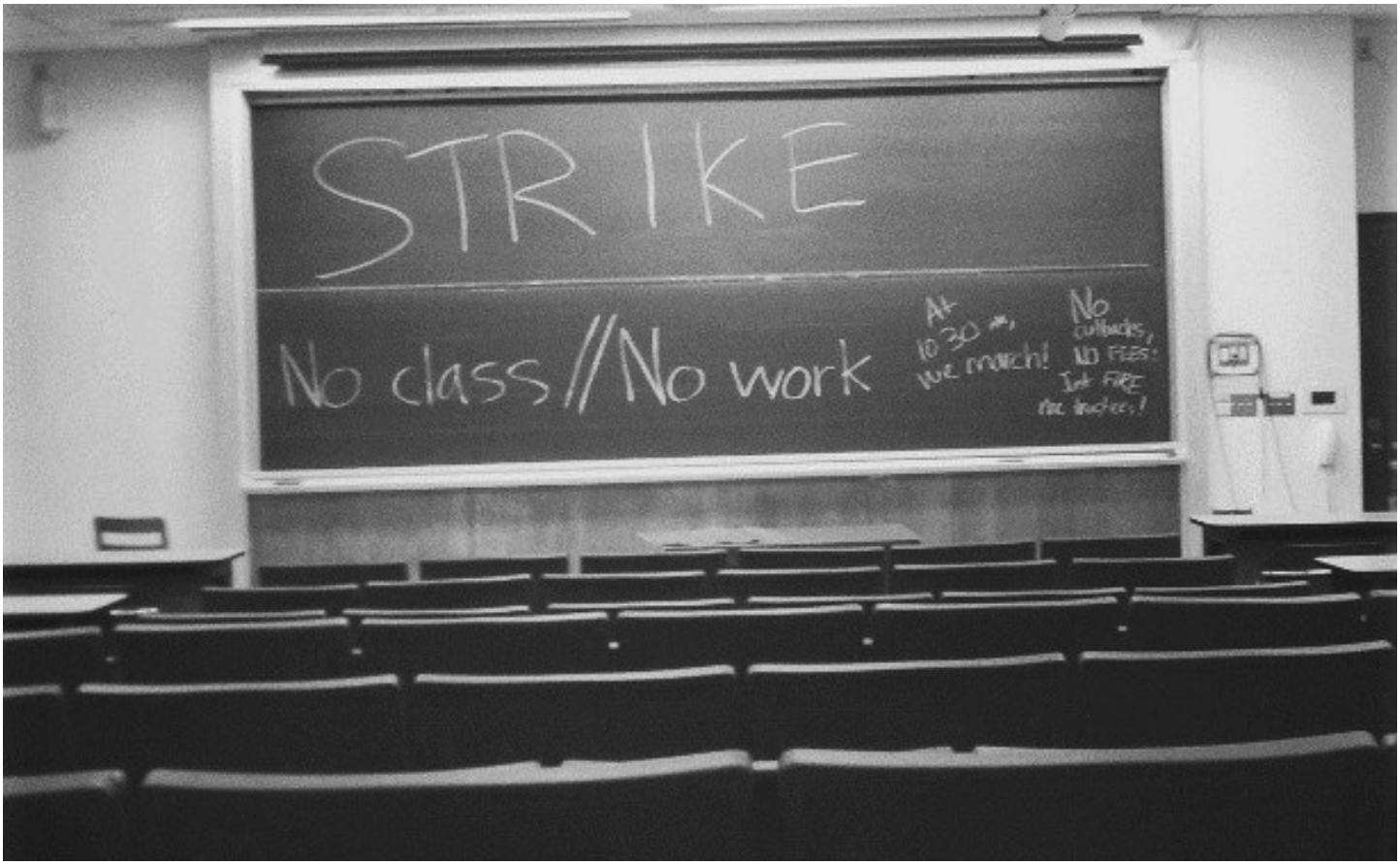
Throughout the week, Boxcar Books has had handbills, fliers, and posters regarding the case sitting on a table at the front of the store during this last week. In the same time frame, a banner was made and has been hanging over the porch facing 6th Street.

The Bloomington Anarchist Black Cross organized an info night for the case that took place at Boxcar Books on Monday, July 24. Two episodes of subMedia's "Trouble" series were shown, "Bash the Fash" and "No Justice, Just Us". Before starting the second one, a member of the Bloomington ABC discussed the details of the case in length; shared ways to support J20 defendants including signing on to or writing a statement of solidarity, joining the campaigns for Drop the Charges and early release of the money to investigate the police, fundraising, and signing up for the emerging public newsletter for updates on that case; and distributed literature for flyering and posting.

On Tuesday, January 25, an informal group of friends and comrades organized an information demonstration at People's Park in downtown Bloomington. Comrades held banners facing Kirkwood and a couple hundred handbills with the J20 statement of solidarity text were passed out to people walking and driving by. Those that passed out the handbills were friendly and went out of their way to talk to people about the case and answer questions anyone had. Somewhat surprisingly, the group only received positive feedback, with people honking, waving, and giving folks thumbs up after reading the statement of solidarity.

The day this reportback is posted, July 27, 2017, the judge in the J20 case is going over a motion filed by some of the defendants to drop all of the charges against them. More information can be found at **defendj20resistance.org**





REMEMBERING
THE 2013 INDIANA UNIVERSITY STRIKE

After months of build-up and preparation, hundreds of students, campus employees, and city residents went on strike at Indiana University on April 11 – 12, 2013. A number of things are interesting about this struggle from an anti-authoritarian perspective, including a heightened focus on collective action as a way of building power, and a dismissal of dialogue with the administration as unimportant and distracting.

In this piece, Sasha interviews Roger and Mona, two organizers for the strike, about their experiences during that time and reflections they've since had.

Sasha: Why did you participate in the strike? And what were its stated goals?

Mona: The strike came out of the Occupy U assembly, and that morphed into the IU On Strike assembly. Having been a part of Occupy Bloomington and then Occupy U, I followed that trajectory and ended up in the Strike Assembly. Do you want to talk about the goals a little bit?

Roger: When the assemblies first started there was a really good effort to spread awareness that they were happening. I don't exactly remember how I heard about them, but I did hear pretty early on. I had been a little more distant from people who were doing Occupy at the time. Some stated goals, well there was a list of demands but really I feel like the goals of the strike were pretty diverse, which was really nice. Even though there was this list of demands, it didn't really matter. They existed as a jumping off point, but they weren't the end goal. I think a lot of peoples end goal was just the destruction of the university, so ultimately reducing tuition didn't matter. But I would say it also picked up on all of the financial crisis talk, so austerity was a lot of the logic that people used to present it.

Mona: Maybe we can talk more about the demands, if that seems important. But like Roger said, the goals of the strike weren't strictly to have these six demands met by the administration. It was more like an opening up of activity and challenging power on campus. So it wasn't a strict program, but really trying to shift those power dynamics and build collectively the power of the students, workers, and faculty against the administration and their austerity measures and their racism.

Roger: And what also feels important to go back and mention is that the dates of the strike coincided with the trustees meeting. So it's interesting that there were in these ways of "speaking towards power," and a lot of debate that went around whether it should even be on the date of the trustees meeting if ultimately we're not exactly trying to acknowledge or appeal to them.

But really quickly, some of the demands were:

Stop privatization and outsourcing at IU. At the time there was a lot of parking lots were going to be outsourced, and parking spaces.

End the wage freeze for workers.

Critiques about the promise IU made for enrollment for African American students, and how low the numbers were.

Abolishing both HB-1402 and SB-590, which said that students who were undocumented, they couldn't have in-state tuition.

And then no retaliation for the strike.

I think one thing that was really interesting was how when we were talking about the strike, we tried to connect it to broader things. There was a lot of talk about universities cutting their funding for incarcerated people, they were losing their ability to get a college degree. That happened around this time, and we thought it was important to draw attention to that, to make sure it wasn't just swept under the rug.

Mona: So that brings me back to the question of why I participated in the strike. I liked the openness of that, that it wasn't a strict program, but it really had the space for people to bring to it what they wanted. If this thing about college education for people in prison in Indiana was something they cared about, that would be tied in. If it's about the wage freeze, that can be tied in too. So both the content was open and everybody was able to contribute to it, that seems like qualitatively different than a lot of organizing and activity, and then sort of the structure of the organizing too, like the open assemblies where we tried to make it so that anybody who wanted to say something could say something, without having hierarchies there or leaders of the meeting. And so I liked both the openness of the structure and content, and that was important to me at a time when I was developing these skills and getting into this kind of organizing. It was a good opportunity to learn how to do some of those things and to practice taking initiative, and things like that.

Sasha: Did you say there was a wage freeze? Like, the university said workers can't make more than a certain amount, and one of the demands was to end that?

Mona: Yeah, the wage freeze was that for a few years the university stopped giving wage increases to most of the workers. Administrators, they found workarounds for that, they would get bonuses still, but all the other workers at the university didn't get raises for a few years because "they couldn't afford it," and it was spun like everyone had to do their part for the goodness of the university. But it always becomes clear who actually has to sacrifice, and it's not the administration, right?

Roger: And they started scheduling working hours so nobody was at 40 hours. Everyone was capped at like 29. One thing that was pointed out too was a lot of jobs were shifting to being volunteers or unpaid interns around that time. A lot of people were losing their jobs and getting replaced by students.

Mona: I think this was also the time that some temp agency, Manpower, was being brought in to fill these spots. The university fired all the groundskeepers I think, and hired Manpower to fill those positions. They told people, "oh no you can keep your job, you just have to go back through Manpower." But then there were all these tests that were obvious barriers because they wanted to keep certain people out of jobs.

Sasha: What do you think you gained from your experiences organizing for the strike?

Roger: One thing, besides getting the understanding of what works and what doesn't by people who were older than me who were doing things with a certain logic, is that we pushed a lot against the limits of what a strike could look like, and we learned to be creative. A strike didn't just have to look like the traditional pickets, and that narrative was spread a lot, and we really tried to communicate that to a lot of people. This idea of "strike" could be any number of things. Ultimately we're taking this break the norm and that's maybe the broad definition of it, but it didn't just have to look like us not going to classes, and I think that was also a way to get many people involved who could meet their own comfort levels. I think that was really successful, taking these very basic ideas and bringing them to people.

Mona: Yeah, that's a really good point. Another point that was really interesting to me, that I was just engaging with for the first time, and there was a lot of debate around this, was how we really tried to push that we're not just debating with the administration, like we didn't want to "come to their table." But rather build power ourselves, because sitting at the negotiation table with the administration doesn't mean anything if we don't have any power. Also it was interesting how the IU on Strike assembly was officially dissolved after the strike, specifically to avoid the institutionalization or the formality of an organization, because that really wasn't the spirit of the strike. There was also a lot of debate around that, and I think some people still think that that was a mistake, to have dissolved that name because it did get so much attention. But I think that's another example of like the interesting logic and the way that it pushed "activism" into a more interesting and more effective direction.

Roger: And I think on those lines, a lot of people were pushing for us to become a formalized student union, you know. I think the grad students were definitely pushing for a grad student union, but along the same lines trying to push back against this formalization of what we were, because it wasn't just a group of students. That also feels important to say. There were a lot of people in town and workers on campus that felt affected by these things. So if we just rallied behind this single identity it just would become useless for most people and would be something a lot of us weren't interested in. And wrapped into that is these critiques we pushed against unions in general, like we were having to deal with unions…

Mona: …being against the strike.

Roger: Unions for workers at IU were against the strike, and were intimidating their own workers, and retaliating against their own workers for participating.

Mona: For public employees in Indiana it's in their contract that it's illegal to strike. And so really, with the union structure they had no choice but to be against the strike, but it's an obvious implication: maybe unions aren't the best way to go about things.

Roger: And we were trying for something beyond that, which would allow people to fight for their own reasons and give space for that.

Mona: One more thing on that: I think one of the most important things for me was meeting people. Like I kinda met Roger

through the strike, and lots of other people that are my close friends five years later. And I think that's a particular kind of relationship to build, to like be working and organizing together. Getting to know each other on that level, and lots of those friendships lasting still to this day…

Rogers: Years!

Mona: It's actually like one of the best things about the strike.

Roger: Yeah. And just being able to always be around each other, because it was almost this daily thing that we were all having to do leading up to it. Just getting to know people and what their thoughts are. So then getting to experience playing out our own beliefs and see what we're each interested in, like a testing ground.

Sasha: What do you think you all, being the general people going on strike, did well? And what do you think you could have done better?

Roger: Part of what we tried to do well was to set up a hotline and e-mail for workers to contact if they were facing repression, so they could send their information to us anonymously, and we would know what trouble people were in, without them having to show up publicly. It seemed smart that we covered this base, although I don't think it was used that much, but we were trying to think ahead as much as possible and cover our bases, we did a lot of that pretty well.

Mona: Yeah, and I remember that it was used at some point after the strike. One of the RPS food service workers had been threatened, and so one of the last activities after the days of the strike was we had this demo at the RPS office in support of workers who were striking or organizing. And it felt really good to like actually follow up on those things that we had tried to be pre-emptive about.

Roger: And another thing I think we did pretty well was really carving out a space on campus that was relatively free for us to use. We pretty much took over an entire building, and part of that was because teachers were on board with us with the strike. So they weren't holding their classes there, or they were holding alternative classes. But really I think that feels like a huge precedent that we set, that like, if we made it so known that the strike was going to happen, and there was so much backing behind it, that we were able to basically take over this building for two days.

Sasha: Which building?

Roger: Woodburn. It was actually a strong hub for food and meetings.

Mona: It seemed to be pretty important that there was a central place for people to go in-between things and share food and stuff. But one of the critiques of the strike was that the downside of having that centralization is it made the strike less visible across the rest of campus. Woodburn is right in the middle, so it's a good location. But then there's all the locations on the periphery where maybe people couldn't tell the strike was happening. So people tried to organize pickets both through departments and at different buildings throughout campus. But due to weather and people being too busy with just making sure things happened, it didn't occur that much.

Roger: A lot of the efforts to get the pickets to happen felt like last minute attempts, like "oh we need these pickets," but I think it was not that successful. Maybe with more mobilization that would have worked. On the other hand, there was a huge snake march that happened throughout campus that had over 300 people in it. And I think that brought a lot of visibility for the first day, and everyone was hanging outside their classroom windows, yelling whatever at us.

Mona: *laughs* Some good things, some bad. A little bit of both.

Sasha: What's a snake march?

Roger: It just winded throughout campus.

Mona: Hopefully a little bit more unpredictable than marches happen in town now. I think outreach was really good with the strike, and I can't say that for most things that I have been a part of. I mean, I was obviously in sort of a bubble, but it really felt like campus knew about it. There were stories about it, both for or against, or liberal waffling bullshit in the IDS all the time. People were wearing these red squares that came out of Montreal student stuff. And so that was a way that people could support the strike, and you could like notice how many red squares you see when you're walking to class or whatever. People could participate in that way, even if they didn't want to come

to assemblies or whatever.

It really made it feel like there was this palpable thing at the university, that people were anticipating it and supporting it. There were a few smaller assemblies too, there were grad students organizing together, the school of social work put out a letter of support. In a lot of ways it generalized more so than anything else I've really been a part of. And that took a lot of work, you know? We went to talk to classes all the time, we flyered and chalked, and wrote stuff for the newspaper. And that all kind of paid off.

Roger: Yeah. And maybe this was just because things hadn't happened on campus really in a while, but a lot of professors were behind it. They supported the strike because a lot of them were excited to do some kind of alternative schooling for the day. We made it easy for them to get involved and still be professors. I mean, there can be many critiques about that but I think it still was nice that a lot of professors supported it.

Mona: Yeah. A few other things that I think could have been better. Even though a lot turned out well, we still could have been a lot better organized. There were a lot of things that were left last minute, like the food and picketing. And that's totally fair that we were all learning how to do this together, but we definitely could have been a little bit more efficient. I'm sure too that there were things we could have done to be a little more accessible. Like if someone worked on Monday nights, they couldn't come to the assembly. Or maybe that environment was intimidating for some people. And so I think we probably could have found more ways to include more people, but that's like always the case I guess.

I feel like we spent a lot of time very tediously debating things in assembly, and this in itself was a debate, like is assembly a time where we debate each other and consent on a certain way to do things? Or is this a space for us to share initiatives that we're going to do and find other people to do with, and be inspired by each other? And so there were many times when we had that argument, like do you need to get this approved by the assembly or do you not? We spent so much of the time having those discussions and trying to figure out how to work together in a semi-formal kind of way. And that's always going to be hard, but maybe we could have been more efficient with that, which would have given us more time and energy to do the things that we needed to do.

Roger: At least I feel like that taught us a lot, and our frustrations really made it so now I'm like, "ugh, just do what you want to do! Why are we talking about this?!" And that crystalized a lot for me, just feeling very frustrated by people going on and on about one thing.

Mona: I did learn a lot from seeing some of that play out, and it helped me figure out where I stand on some of those things. So even though it's kind of awkward, tedious, and kind of annoying, I do think there's some value to it.

Roger: Some learning experience.

Sasha: If you have any dreams or visions of another world without capitalism, does the university as an institution exist in them?

Mona: As an institution? Of course not. I'm not so much for the pre-figurative thing, but I imagine that lots of people will, in my ideal world, want to pursue education beyond what's just necessary or general education. Like some people are wingnuts about a certain thing, or really fascinating by a something, and I really want them to be able to pursue that as much as they can. And people can learn from each other, but it wouldn't be an institution that especially exists for profit and social control, it would be more collective and self-guided education.

Roger: I think learning can look like many different things, but it can't when it looks like a university.

Mona: Yeah. It would be unrecognizable to what it currently exists as a university.

Sasha: Do you think it's worth time and energy to reform the university? And are there attainable goals you can see that might come out of student struggles?

Roger: For me, it depends on what the reform might look like. It's so easy to fall into traps with those things, and just be stuck in this cycle that doesn't actually feel good. Like, if we were holding tight to getting these demands met, we wouldn't get anywhere. If reform was coming out of us having dialogue with the university, then we're going to get nowhere. But I think there are many ways to push back against things.

Mona: To the question of if it's worth trying to reform the university, I'd say occasionally. Generally how I approach reforms, or like organizing and struggling for reforms, which I end up doing a lot, is that they should be things that build our capacity and give us more space to move. I'm not so into the reforms that are based on morality or injustice, because that just doesn't really work for me. And that does for some people, and that's fine. But strategic things that give us a little bit more freedom, or anything that makes it easier for us to do know what we need to do. Which is like, meeting each other, and trying to live free lives as much as we can. There are a lot of reforms that can contribute to that, like lowering tuition would give us a lot more room to move if people didn't have to work two jobs while going to school, and not have any time to do anything else. That's a really concrete example of how a reform could build our capacity.

But reforms for their own sake, I think that's a losing battle. Most things can be framed as building our capacity, so I think we have to be critical and realistic about what are we giving up for that. Because it's also a trade-off. If you spend all your time and energy asking for reforms, then you don't have time to do other things, so I think that has to be part of the calculation. Is this reform worth it because it's actually going to improve our lives and make us more powerful? I don't see that calculation being done very often, and it's more of this moral obligation, especially with campus stuff right now. Not just in Bloomington, but across the US it seems to be very moral outrage/injustice stuff. And that's just not what motivates me.

Roger: I agree.

Mona: *laughs* Maybe that just makes me a hardened anarchist. But I think we need to keep the broader strategy in mind when we're fighting for reforms. Like, where does this move us ahead in our struggle for total liberation. And attainable goals?

Sasha: I think you answered that with what you were saying, ultimately building capacity to fight.

Mona: I think there's lots of little things

that are attainable, like better policies for students who are Trans, or challenging racist policies. I think that lots of these things are attainable, and we see them on occasion, like the sanctuary campus struggle that peaked a couple of months ago in Bloomington, but is still ongoing. I don't really think it's attainable because of the money and ways that the university and state government are intertwined, and all that the university has at stake. I don't actually think it's going to happen, but I think it could push things in a better direction, like getting something from the university for example that they won't give information to ICE in a certain circumstances. That's something, and it makes people who are undocumented feel a little safer, and that does give us a little more capacity to fight, and struggle in larger ways.

Roger: It often feels like people think they just have to say the right words, and the university will see their reasons, and then be like, "oh, I see the light now, I was wrong." And that's just not what I think makes sense for understanding where they're coming from. If you're just like, "oh, how CAN you arrest people who are undocumented?!" But clearly they have all this money and things tied to it, so begging them is not going to do anything.

Mona: Clearly Provost Robel is a monster, and no op-ed or letter or really moving soap box at an event is going to change her mind. Like, she's not morally swayable, and I think that goes for anybody in those positions.

Sasha: I'm glad you called her a monster.

Roger: It does seem important to note that we were battling with her during the strike…

Mona: *laughs*

Roger: …and doing sit-ins then. I feel like that memory has been lost, people just now are like, "oh, look what Robel said?!" It's like, yeah, she's been saying monstrous stuff for years! If people had that kind of knowledge or any kind of research into the past, it would be easier to understand how to come to head with her.

Mona: She was reprehensible during the strike. She tried to say all these things about how she really values civil disobedience but we weren't doing it right. Or saying, "You should be expect to be arrested if you're organizing, and you deserve that, but its part of the sacrifice you're making." So there was this one demonstration at her office, and something happened at the office…

Roger: Somebody grabbed candy.

Mona: Somebody grabbed candy from her candy dish, people left fliers all around her office. And so then she did this thing, which she's still doing now, where suddenly she's the victim. Like she's been so "violated" because that happened in her office. And it's just like when she started to cry during the state of the campus thing. She's had these patterns for a long time, and that history is useful for figuring out how to engage with her in the future, which is hopefully mostly non-engagement except maybe trolling her.

Sasha: Lastly, do you have any moment or moments from the strike that you remember especially fondly that you want to relay now?

Roger: Living there in that moment felt very powerful, it felt like there were so many people that were coming together, and it felt like an actual shift that was taking place in the university. Even if it was just for a moment. I think those small moments are always really important to remember.

Mona: The three things that stand out to me. One was the art school occupation that was earlier in Fall semester 2012. Dozens of people just stayed overnight in the art school auditorium, and there were some texts that came out of that which can be found on the internet. The logic and framing of it was way more interesting than lots of university occupations, so that was one thing.

When we were coming up with the demands, we debated for weeks and weeks about how to do the demands, and ultimately it culminated in this meeting at a house, where we drew imaginary lines in the kitchen, two axis. One axis was how reasonable they should the demands be, on one end was really unreasonable, things we can imagine the administration granting, on the other end were things totally unreasonable. The other axis was how many, very few demands at one end, a lot of demands to cover all our bases at the other. So we all went into the kitchen where all these axes were, and stood somewhere in one of the quadrants to indicate what we wanted the demands to be. I think that visual way of seeing where everybody else was at was very interesting, because you can't really do that when you're just having a discussion, right? So to see that everybody was bunched up at a few unreasonable demands made it a little more obvious what direction we could go in. I just thought that was a really creative and interesting way to really actually stake out your position and also see where other people are at. And it was fun.

Roger: One thing I was going to say was it felt like because things were happening all over different universities, we were definitely in conversation with other places, which felt really nice. People were actually visibly inspired by what we were doing, we were inspired by what other campuses were doing, and that felt also like a huge thing.

Mona: You bring up a good point that this was happening in the context of lots of university struggles across the US. There was lots of stuff happening in California in 2012, and we definitely pulled some stuff from the New School in New York during 2009. And so it really was part of this ethos of a thing, which made what we were trying to do feel less desperate and alone.

Roger: I think because it was being talked about nationally, it gave us more credibility in some ways. That credibility that we weren't just students doing this random thing, which was probably unfortunate, but also nice because it showed that a lot of people were angry and they couldn't ignore it.

Mona: I think the objectively most beautiful moment of the strike was at the end of the second day. Roger talked about earlier how we had Woodburn as the strike hub for both days. And we had been on the fence about if we were going to keep it or try to keep it overnight, but on the night of Monday the 11th…

Roger: The police decided for us if we were going to stay there or not,

Mona: Yes, and they came in early too. The building is supposed to be closed at 10 PM, and so we were having an assembly and discussing what we were going to do, and they came in at like 9:40 and immediately kicked everybody out. But obviously that didn't go completely smoothly, and one window

on one of the doors got broken when they were shoving everybody out, so one person was arrested for that. There was also a little bit of a stand-off afterwards because the police were being a little more aggressive than they usually are in Bloomington.

Roger: And there were a lot of undercovers that we realized were also among us, or they tried to make among us. But it was all IU cadets that were coming at us full force, like the whole force of IU cadets.

Mona: So they were able to kick us out, but when they arrested this person there was obviously a lot of anger about that. And they sort of ended up retreating back into Woodburn after they kicked us all out, so that at least felt like a moment of some collective power, even though we had just been kicked out of the strike hub. So then we did a noise demo at the jail…

Roger: It was raining too, and that was a bit demoralizing, which I think will also come into what you're going to say about the next day.

Sasha: A noise demo meaning a bunch of people standing outside a jail and making noise with banners so that people in jail see they're being supported?

Mona: Yeah, and we did that from Woodburn to the jail, with a sound system and banners, waiting for them to get out. Anyway, the next night we talked again about what we were going to do and we decided to not try to keep it overnight, assuming that we would just be kicked out again. And so some people had prepared lyric sheets for us all to sing "Bella Ciao" together as we walked out of Woodburn, arm and arm. A few people led us in that song, and we all picked up on it, and we marched out together.

Roger: It was so beautiful, like way too beautiful a moment.

Mona: I feel like we don't get a lot of those, so that one of the highlights. Leaving on our own terms, and having this sense of cohesion, which was true or not true in some cases. But a real feeling of cohesion and collective power, and singing this really beautiful song too.

Roger: And we did it all the way from Woodburn to the Sample Gates while some cops trailed behind us, and then we stood at Sample Gates for awhile singing, until we decided to leave.

Mona: And then we all lost it cuz we didn't know what to do after the strike.

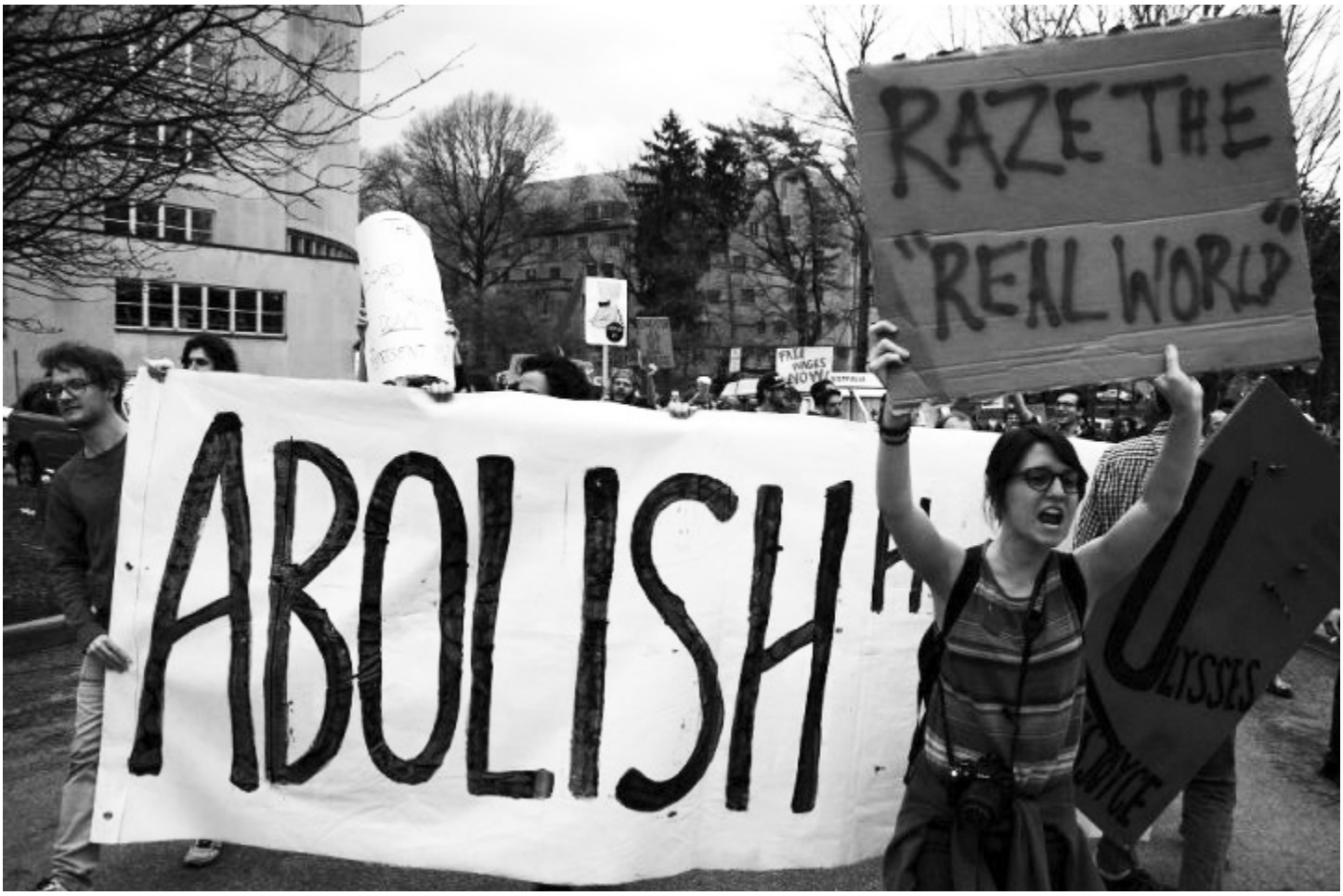
Roger: But we all know Bella Ciao really well to this day!

Mona: *laughs* Yes, and we still sing it together.

Sasha: That song is really nice.

Roger: No one who was there could forget the lyrics after repeating them for 20 minutes.

For more information about the strike, check out **iuonstrike-blog.tumblr.com** *and* **rififibloomington.wordpress.com**



NOISE DEMONSTRATION AGAINST SOCIAL CLEANSING

In the last week of June, dozens of houseless people were removed from Peoples Park and numerous other public spaces by the Bloomington Police Department. After evicting people who stayed at the park, the cops began to do roll-call for their officers there, and usually had at least one of their ilk stationed there to make sure houseless people didn't use the park. This is part of the City of Bloomington's social cleansing campaign, the appropriately named "Safe and Civil Cities Campaign."

Eventually multiple houseless people were thrown in jail after police removed people from a public encampment on Kirkwood near the library. In response, around thirty people gathered outside the jail on the corner of 7th and College at 11:00 p.m. on June 29th for an impromptu noise demo. The crowd consisted of many faces beyond the usual suspects at noise demos in recent years. Very few were masked, making it easy for everyone to see who was who, including the State, those watching one of multiple livestreams, and followers of participants on social media.

What set this noise demo apart from others, aside from the large crowd, was the quality of noise-making devices present. The mobile sound system hardly got use, as people banged incessantly on pots and pans, large hippie drums, and even an oil drum. About 30 minutes into the racket, people trapped inside the jail began waving from their cages and signaling by opening and closing window blinds. At this point, a small handful of older fancy types approached us to ask what the commotion was about. Turns out, they were staying in the Hilton across the street from the jail and couldn't sleep due to all the drum beating and carrying on. (We noted this unexpected positive side effect for possible anti-gentrification efforts in the future.)

At midnight, the crowd moved into the street, blocking all three lanes of College Avenue. It was a Tuesday night in summer, when most students are away, which meant there wasn't much traffic to block. Only one driver made a futile attempt at passing through and arguing with the demonstrators, but quickly retreated to his car and drove away through a side alley. At this point three BPD turds, including one shiny headed cop-scum with an impressively cocky strut, approached the group and told people to move out of the street. Nobody listened or engaged with these foot soldiers of indignity and ineptitude, and they used their scum mobiles to block traffic for us. Around 12:30 a.m., a few more badge bedazzled pond slime began to convene with zip-ties in tow. The demo turned south and marched towards the square, dispersing soon after that.

This demo was impressive for its size and volume, especially having been called for just a few hours before. We could have done better with messaging, as the few signs present were mostly vague and small. With just a few faces covered, it reiterated the usefulness of handouts about how and why to mask up, even during relatively chill demos. Those whose faces were exposed were also likely documented by the ample livestreamers and other photo and video documentation that was happening. What may seem obvious to many anarchists — that posting photos and videos of demonstrators online only serves to provide the State with more information that can later be used to repress movements —isn't so for many liberals and progressives. It would be useful for anarchists and everyone else if there was a more concerted continuation of efforts in recent years to disseminate information about safety and security at the demos themselves. Overall, even if it was only symbolic, this noise demo was a surprisingly rowdy response to the city's efforts to accelerate gentrification by targeting people experiencing homelessness.

CHRONOLOGY

June 9, 2017
Movie and Letter-writing for Day of Solidarity with Marius Mason and All Long-Term Anarchist Prisoners

June 11, 2017
Banner drops & picnic for anarchist prisoners

June 18, 2017
Community Picnic to Take Back People's Park

In early June the Bloomington Police Department began to drastically increase their presence in People's Park, holding roll-call there in the afternoons and having cops stationed there most all day. This occupation resulted in more strict enforcement of park regulations, and police constantly harassing homeless and poor people who hang out in the park, often even without any ordinance to point to. Their obvious motivation is to push out homeless communities from downtown, especially from the business districts on Kirkwood. Food Not Bombs, a group who has been preparing and sharing free food in the Park every Sunday for many years, was also threatened with ordinance violations and arrest. A broad coalition of activists, students, townies, and others organized a picnic in the Park to challenge the police presence and control of the Park, and to try to welcome those who were forced out back into the space. The picnic was attended by over 50 people with lots of food and games. This gathering was part of ongoing organizing to stop the gentrification and social cleansing of downtown.

June 25. 2017
Rally at People's Park & the occupation on Kirkwood

In the days after BPD kicked everyone out of the Park, many people set up camp a few blocks down on Kirkwood. This Sunday, too, many people showed up to support Food Not Bombs, who came to the encampment on Kirkwood with free food. Originally they were to have food in the Park, but were quickly pushed out by the police and chose to go to the encampment, since many people would no longer come to the park. Again, this gathering was a space for discussion of ways to push back against the BPD and their targeted harassment against poor and homeless folks downtown.

This encampment lasted for a few days until it too was disrupted and disbanded by the police. This reveals the city's strategy to cleanse and sterilize Bloomington block by block, and well as their commitment to controlling public space in order eliminate the creation of community and the possibility of encountering each other for any purpose other than commerce.

June 26, 2017
Veganism and the Prison System

Inspired by the Day of Solidarity with Eric King, who is vegan, the Bloomington Anarchist Black Cross hosted a presentation about the experience of being vegan while incarcerated, featuring a call-in interview with former animal liberation prisoner Kevin Olliff; Green Scare laws; and ways to support vegan prisoners. The event ended with a letter-writing, and they sent off about a dozen letter and cards to vegan prisoners!

June 26-30, 2017
Bloomington Solidarity Network's picket against Parker Real Estate

The Bloomington Solidarity Network and several Parker tenants have been organizing for months against Parker Real Estate, one of the biggest slumlords in Bloomington. Complaints include stealing deposits and moving new tenants into apartments known to have bedbugs. BSN hosted a picket outside of Parker's office on Walnut street several hours a day for 6 days, culminating in the biggest crowd on Saturday. Despite Parker cutting down a tree to create a better few for their camera to spy on the picketers, they were undeterred. They picketers received lots of encouragement from passing cars, and met even more Parker tenants with stories to tell. BSN is continuing to organize with current and former Parker tenants and discouraging prospective tenants from renting with them.

June 28, 2017
Day of Solidarity with Eric King banner drop

June 29, 2017
Jail Noise Demo

July 11, 2017
Tilted Scales: Fighting Police Repression, Strengthening Movements

Two writers from the Tilted Scales Collective presented on their new book, A Tilted Guide to Being a Defendant. They discussed the complexities of dealing with a criminal legal case, and the interaction between personal, political, and legal goals.

July 24, 2017
Week of Solidarity with J20 Defendants: movie screening and info-session

July 25, 2017
Mic Demo in People's Park for J20 Defendants

August 11, 2017
IDOC demo against censorship of prisoners

A couple dozen people from a handful of cities across Indiana converged on the Indiana Department of Corrections headquarters to protest the new, even more severe mail restrictions implemented in prisons across the state in early April. This new policy bans all incoming mail that is not hand-written on white, lined paper and in a plain white envelope. This restricts birthday cards, greeting cards, drawings, photocopies, printed articles, and more. The demo was called by the New African Liberation Collective, founded by two prisoners in Indiana's Pendleton Correctional Facility. While the DOC claims the new mail policy is to limit drug trafficking, it is clear that one of the real targets is political material, especially afrocentric and black liberation literature. The family of a man murdered in Pendleton was also briefly in attendance. The demonstrators held signs and banners, passed out leaflets asking supporters to call the Commissioner and rescind the policy, and read statements from Indiana prisoners Kwame Shakur and Angaza Bahar.

PLAINWORDSBLOOMINGTON@RISEUP.NET

PLAINWORDSBLOOMINGTON.ORG