

PLAIN WORDS

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We all love conflagrations. When the sky changes color, it is a dead man's passing.



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.

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THE ELECTORAL CIRCUS



Election time is here again and the leftist clowns are honking away! The socialist jesters pile into their tiny car. *Bozo, do you know how to get to the polling station?*

The past months have been a flurry of activity on the campus of the clown college. The stand-bys of the past two years – *Drumpf*, *Cheeto-in-Chief*, *small hands* – just wouldn't cut it anymore. The old tall tale was exhumed from the chest-of-drawers: *this election is just too important, we have to vote*. Dust it off. Mend its edges with some fine new silk: *the fascist state, left unity, revolutionary reformism*.

Slowly they exit the car. Clarabell trips over his big red shoes, drops his little red book. *Thank god Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez wasn't here to see this.*

The line at the polling station stretches around the block. There's Emmett from the local co-op, Ronald who teaches at the university, Herschel from the Love Rumps Hate queer dance troupe, even that ol' wingnut Pogo is here.

One by one they enter the voting booth. Gacy aims his gloved finger at the button marked "Democrat," presses down, and smiles. *Long live the Resistance!*

I voted. Doink adds his sticker proudly beside his Scaramouch Against Scaramucci button. *I sure did.*

The work of voting is exhausting. Some of our guffawing gagmen, worked into a fever over their brave acts of subversion, have begun to sweat, transforming the sidewalk into a mess of pancake makeup and crimson noses-come-unglued. *That's the sacrifice we make*, thinks Pennywise. *A progressive clown's job is never done.*

IN THE TIME IT TAKES TO VOTE, YOU CAN...

Cook a meal. Listen to a friend. Wheatpaste a poster. Identify a flower. Pick berries. Watch the clouds roll by. Have sex with yourself or others. Break a window. Read a chapter. Paint a watercolor. Slash a tire. Write to a prisoner. Do pushups. Give a massage. Crack a squat.

Dry leaves. Glue a lock. Write a poem. Hike a trail. Pull survey stakes. Call your mom. Stretch your muscles. Punch a heavybag. Shoplift. Learn a new word. Spraypaint a wall. Write an essay. Take a child to the park. Throw a rock. Plant a seed. Write a song. Bandage a wound. Can vegetables. Harass

a landlord. Listen to a record. Encrypt your computer. Swim laps. Run a mile. Prank a priest. Build a barricade. Take a nap. Practice your fighting stance. Cut a fence. Make medicine. Mend a tear. Sabotage machinery. Steal campaign signs. **Not vote.**

is to call the jail. We're primarily trying to figure out a few things: charges, holds, bail, and the condition of the person arrested. Some jails are more forthcoming than others. I find that in Bloomington you generally don't need a person's DOB to inquire about them, but in some places you do. If the person appears to have been injured during the arrest, or you know if they have any medical conditions, ask how they're being cared for. The honest answer will always be "poorly" but if someone's asking, perhaps it will be a small incentive to do better. Ask what they're being charged with. Again, these might not be finalized, but it informs the bond and the holds, so they'll have initial charges at least. With less serious charges, a person is often OR'd, or released on their own recognizance. That means they don't have to pay any money. Otherwise, they'll have a bond set. If they want to be bailed out, and you have enough money, you go to bail bondsman and pay a percentage of the bond to him, as well as a fee to the jail. The jail should be able to tell you what this amount is that you'll need in cash. If someone has a **hold**, you won't be able to bail them out right away, even if you've got the money. There's many kinds of holds, but the most common one I've seen is the 24-hour battery hold. This means that if they're being accused to battering someone, including battery on an officer (a charge sometimes tacked on when the prosecution is feeling ambitious) they have to wait 24 hours in the jail.

Hopefully you've gotten your friend out of jail, or maybe they're still in, but you're figuring out how to support them and reach them. Next is the arraignment. Generally, this happens the morning following the arrest, Mondays for weekend arrests. This is their first hearing, where they'll be formally charged. The judge may also make a ruling about the bond amount. The judge will ask how the defendants pleas, and, in my experience, that plea is always not guilty at this point. In fact, I doubt a judge would even accept a guilty plea at the arraignment, but I've seen people try to do it. The judge will also ask about assets to determine if the defendant qualifies for a public defender. In my experience, most people do. Of course, movement lawyers or paid lawyers often give more attention to a case, but it often isn't possible to get one.

After that, the defendant will (ideally) start meeting with their lawyer and attending pretrial conferences. Sometimes it's hard to know what point there is to a given

pretrial conference, if any. They often only last a few minutes. But they can deal with things like filing motions and talking about discovery and taking **depositions**. This is a good opportunity to invite more people to attend court to show support, if that's what the defendant wants. These hearings are also some of the only times you'll see the lawyer face-to-face, so make the most of it. Have questions ready. Prep with the defendant if the lawyer won't talk to you directly.

In most cases, after a few months of hearings, a plea deal will eventually be offered by the prosecution, or negotiated between the prosecution and the defense. Sometimes the charges will be dismissed outright, or the defendant could be offered a **pretrial diversion**. The vast majority of criminal cases are settled with pleas and never go to trial. Sometimes a defendant can hold out for a better plea, but there's obviously some risk to that, so that's a conversation to be had between them, their lawyer, and their supporters. It's important to say that many pleas are non-cooperating, but not all of them are. Sometimes the state will try to get someone to snitch to get a better deal. There's been much written on the dirty tactics of prosecutors and the state so we won't get into that here, but it's something to look out for.

If no acceptable plea is offered, the case will go to trial. It could be a bench trial (presented only to the judge) or a jury trial. Trial support is a whole other thing, so I recommend looking into that more deeply if a friend is going to trial. But I will emphasize, again, the importance of not throwing other people under the bus in the defense, and the need to consider multiple angles in deciding how to conduct oneself in court and on trial: the individual, larger impacts, and personal and political convictions, to name a few.

So now that we've got a general road map to facing charges, I want to point out a couple considerations. The first is respecting the wishes of the defendant. This can be hard when people don't know what they want or if it is difficult to communicate with them in jail. One good practice is to make arrest plans with your friends before anything happens. Do you want to be bailed out? Who should or shouldn't be contacted? Are there any medications we should try to get to you if you're in jail? Talk through these things with the people who are closest to you who will have your back if you get popped. However, people rarely have arrest

wills in place, so we have to navigate things more carefully. Generally people appreciate court support, but sometimes a personal or embarrassing thing may come up in court and they don't want a bunch of people to hear it. I'd say just use your best judgment and that it will get easier with practice.

The second is the importance of being an active defendant. And there's a lot we can do as supporters to enable that. I find a lot of people are so confused by the proceedings that they have a hard time knowing how they want to handle it. Or it's too stressful to think about so they avoid it. Here, we can be really helpful by explaining the processes to them. Even being familiar with the local judges and public defenders can be useful. (Most of the judges for criminal cases in Monroe County are leaving the bench soon, but the worst one, Diekhoff - yes, as in married to the chief of police - will still be around). You can develop a sense of what's normal and thus be able to interpret things that the prosecutor or judges do. Another vital aspect is helping people figure out how to talk to their lawyer. Public defenders often get a bad reputation, and sometimes for good reason, but they (sort of) work for the defendant and I believe they will do better if they are pushed. Often we see lawyers as this authority and let them take the lead, but the defendant themselves should be leading. Ask a lot of questions. Contact them often. Challenge them. Be pushy! Emotional support is also indicated here. We're here to support and empower them to get the most favorable outcome (as defined by the defendant) while also building practices to resist state repression.

Discovery is basically the legal word for 'evidence.'

A **hold** is put on someone in jail when they are ineligible for release. In addition to the 24-hour battery hold, there are holds for warrants in other counties and for ICE, among others.

A **deposition** is a recorded testimony, taken pretrial, of witnesses or other parties relevant to a case. Depositions are part of discovery.

A **pretrial diversion** is an alternative resolution to a case in which the prosecutor agrees to drop the charges if certain conditions are met. I've only seen this offered to people in their first criminal case.

THOUGHTS ON



ACCOUNTABILITY

Like many of my peers, I was taught that I was solely responsible for my actions, that admission meant guilt, and that guilt meant punishment. To avoid punishment, I knew never to admit fault, to say *I'm sorry*. As a survivor of childhood abuse and sexual violence, I was intimately familiar with harm. In a world of binaries, I became both a survivor and a perpetrator. I was convinced that accounting for my harms would somehow erase the former.

In the ten years I've lived in Bloomington, I have spent countless days and nights studying and contemplating what "accountability" means with the help of friends, zines, and books. I'm still unpacking my intentions throughout that journey, but the impact is clear. In a search to mitigate and prevent harm, I've harmed countless friends and allies. Harm can't be undone but I do believe it can be learned from. Conflict is generative. What I offer here is a series of lessons I'm still learning about what it means to practice transformative justice, to reject notions of disposability and binaries, and to embrace the unknown of building the world we want.

Two Truths

We are capable of holding two truths. One truth does not have to dismantle another. Refusing to sit with this complexity and discomfort disregards the complexity of harm. Two in-

dividuals both hold truths of being harmed by one another. One person's truth is that they were harmed and another's is that they did not harm. Beginning with an individual's truth makes room for the messy humanity at the core of transformative practice.

Rejecting Disposability

At a recent training on community accountability Mariame Kaba, founder of Project NIA, said "I don't want you ostracized or thrown away *and* I don't want to sit with you, and that's okay. Accountability and boundaries must coexist." For years, I envisioned the success of an accountability process marked by my ability to share space with someone who once made me feel powerless and scared. I'm not sure how a world without boundaries became my standard for transformative justice. I'm learning to disrupt this false success/failure binary. In *Bleeding Out in a Prison Visiting Room*, Walidah Imarisha reminds us that "it is so much easier to imagine a new world than to go about the painful work of constructing it out of our bones and hearts."

Non-Linear

Healing, nor accountability, is linear. The second accountability process I participated in (as the person who was harmed), I expected a smooth progression from harmed to healed, from denial to

accountability. Sold on this false linear vision, I became caught up in the unexpected detours. I could not differentiate needs and wants, and my wants changed weekly. While I know my trauma will likely never cease, I also know that my assaulter's accountability is not dependent on my healing. After all, healing is not curing. Mariame Kaba says that our goal should never be for someone never to harm again. While the desire is fair, this standard denies our humanity. Expecting people to be their best selves on their worst days is far from transformative practice. In *How We Learned Not to Succeed in Transformative Justice*, Bench Anfield and Jenna Peters-Golden remind us, "where a success model might seek to push through the disappointment, convolutions, and complexities intrinsic to this work, our approach aspires to hold a transformative process in its messy entirety."

Privacy

Two truths I'm learning to hold:

"Gossip is a valid, important, survivor-oriented form of communication (pass it on)." *Femme Filth #1* by Karina Killjoy

A certain degree of privacy is necessary for transformation.

Transparency should be intentional.

In other words, how do we resist the ways in which notions of “privacy” have allowed violence to flourish and repeat in communities for long periods of time, while also recognizing that accountability is messy and blasting our worst selves across digital space motivates few to achieve meaningful change?

Scope

In KatyKatiKate’s article “Not that Bad,” about the survivor who outed Aziz Ansari, she writes “...if what happened to her is a violation, then we are all violated. And everyone is a violator. And that’s a scary fucking world to live in. I don’t want to be in the world I live in.” This doesn’t mean we downplay sexual violence or we raise our threshold for what is “bad enough.” Rather, we learn to sit with the reality of rape

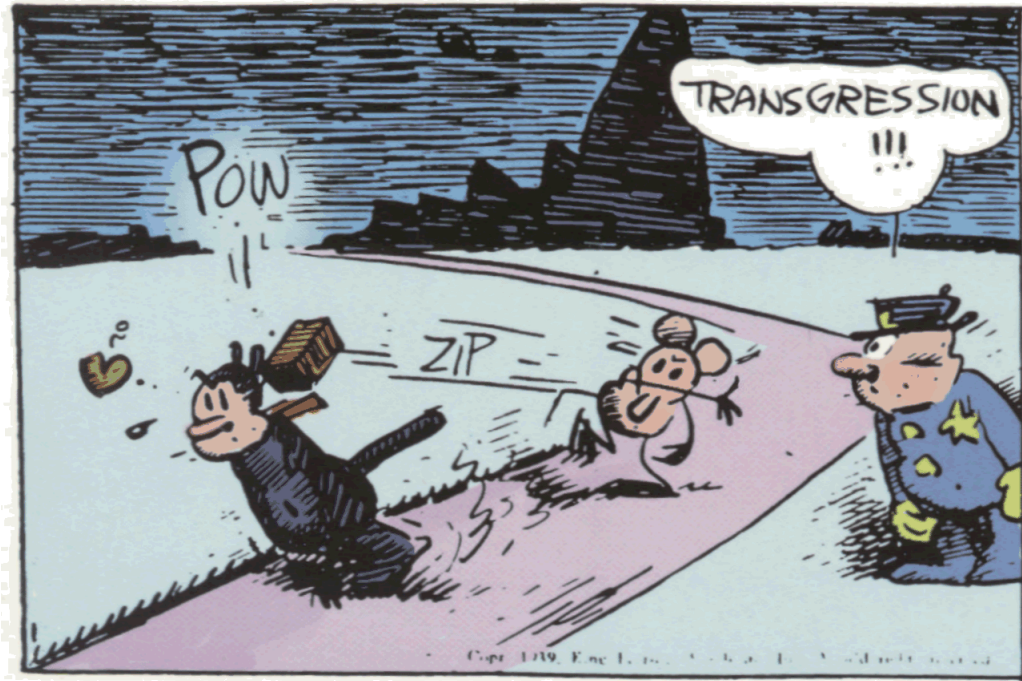
culture and hearing our harms named. We practice building the world we want (healthy relationships and sexual practices) rather than simply tearing it down.

Unknowns

I’m still lost in a sea of questions and I don’t think that’s necessarily bad. If transformative justice relies on community, what resources can people without community garner? What happens when online discourse about a harm precedes, coincides, or follows an accountability process? How do we develop shared values and definitions for this week? How do we build capacity for life-long transformative justice processes? When have we tried hard enough and what happens when transformation doesn’t come?

We will not cancel us, but we must earn our place on this earth. We will tell each other we hurt people and who. We will tell each other why and who hurt us and how. We will tell each other what we will do to heal ourselves and heal the wounds in our wake. We will be accountability. Rigorous in our accountability. All of us unlearning. All of us crawling towards dignity. We will learn to set and hold boundaries. Communicate without manipulation. Give and receive consent. Ask for help. Love our shadows without letting them rule our relationships. And remember we are of earth, of miracle, of a whole, of a massive river, love life, life love. We all have work to do.

How to Survive the End of the World podcast



ACTIVISM

SOME NOTES ON POPULISM &

Anarchists sometimes organize rallies, demonstrations, and break-out marches that we know are meaningless and boring, entirely for the sake of “new people.” That is, we do things that sap our energy and waste our time trying to appeal to people who are not in our radical milieu. From what I can tell, there are two arguments for this activity:

1. There are probably people excited/outraged/motivated around the cause

of the day. A break-out march from a liberal rally might reveal to them the existence of options besides voting and liberalism.

2. Organizing a demonstration where we walk down the street could be an opportunity for us to meet said newly excited/outraged/motivated people, and for them to meet each other.

Do these arguments hold water? Break-out

marches and street demonstrations, if that’s all they remain, fall under freedom of expression. You’re making your voice heard, that’s it. What makes them different from liberal rallies? That we’re sometimes in the street? As long as we’re marching downtown, the BPD leaves us alone. The city government seems to have caught on that us marching in the street is our version of attending a rally at The Square to listen to speeches by politicians. It’s the radical way of feeling like we’re doing something.

to develop, alone and with others in mutual affinity, projects of revolt against society. Novatore’s comrade-in-spirit Max Stirner distilled this into a simple truth: *one must rise in revolt to rise in the world.*

communize material wealth,
individualize spiritual wealth,
margot v.

The Revolt of the Unique

(an excerpt)
by Renzo Novatore

I don’t want to dictate moral maxims to my “neighbor,” or teach anyone anything... I leave this task to the missionaries of all faiths, the priests of all churches, the demagogues of all parties, the apostles of all ideas.

I only want to howl my extreme rebellion against everything that oppresses me; I only want to push far away from me everything that the religious, socialist, or libertarian priesthood wants to impose on my individuality without me having freely accepted and wanted it.

Digging into the underground of my depths, I have been able to penetrate the mystery of my “I” (emotional—spiritual—physical—instinctive); I have been able to discover my will and my power; I have been able to take possession of my “uniqueness.”



I’m not a lawyer. I’ve learned all this stuff from being in court rooms and sometimes reading stuff on the internet.

One could write volumes on legal proceedings and responding to state repression, so this piece is meant only as an introduction. For the most part, I’ll be talking about supporting defendants facing criminal charges; most of my experience is in arrests for protests or other political activity. But the practice of court support can also be useful for arrests due to lifestyle, either by choice or coercion, such as squatting, theft, or sex work or for people who have been profiled and targeted by the police because of their race, mental sta-

The dogmatic frogs of societarianism and the geese of the ideal croaked, but their croaking only served to fill my heart with intoxication and distill poisons in my words.

The theoretical and philosophical chattering of the ruling plebeian “wisdom” no longer moves me, just like the choreographic demonstrations of starving mobs or those of the people cheering new redeeming Jesuses no longer move me...

I have a personal truth of my own that isn’t and can’t be universal “truth.” I am guided by an instinct, by a feeling, by a dream, that are only the trilogy composing the unique ideal that is my individuality. Individuality that nobody except me and my power can make strong, free, and happy!...

I don’t deny to anyone the beauty of their ideas, the strength of their dream, and the truth of their thought.

I know that everyone may lock within himself precious mines filled with unknown treasures; I know that where a human being lives there is—or can be—a world with all its lands and seas, its joys and sorrows, its sun and stars, its loves and hates.

Let each human being therefore work—if he thinks this way—at the discovery of his own I, at the realization of his own dream, at the complete integration and full development of his own individuality. Every human being who has discovered

and won himself walks on his own path and follows his free course.

But let no one come to me to impose his belief, his will, his faith on me. By denying god, fatherland, authority, and law, I have achieved anarchism. By refusing to sacrifice myself on the altar of the people and of humanity, I have achieved individualism.

Now I am free...

The war that I opened against phantoms has ended with my victory. Now the cycle of a new war has opened!

The war against the brute force of society, of the people, of humanity. Against these terrible and colossal monsters that aren’t ashamed to dare to act against the unique and the brutal force of their thousand monstrous arms, I “authorize” myself to defend myself with all the weapons that it is possible for me to dare to use: with all those means that I have the power and the ability to make use of. Without scruples!

Because I am one who really follows himself!

I cultivate the flowers of my garden and I quench my thirst at my own springs.

If for you my flowers are poisonous and my waters bitter, to me instead they fill the heart with a fierce joy and give me wild and heroic quivers in the flesh and spirit.

WHAT IS COURT SUPPORT?

tus, or other factors. While I’ll focus mostly on pretrial support here, we can apply some of it to post-conviction hearings such as sentence modifications or appeals, or civil cases.

Court support can start before we ever get to the court room. Witnessing an arrest can be very helpful for understanding the circumstances and the behavior of the cops. Filming the police has become a bit of thing lately. Sometimes it’s a good idea, sometimes it isn’t. Think about whether that person would want the arrest and possibly preceding events to be on tape, and potentially end up in **discovery**. If you’re present for the arrest, you can ask the cops what they’re arresting this person for, on what

charges. There’s a decent chance that whatever the state actually charges someone with will be different from anything the cops tell you, since that’s the decision of the prosecutor, but it’s helpful to have an indication of what you’re dealing with. In Bloomington there’s only one place an arrestee is going to be taken, but if you’re in a bigger city with multiple police stations and jails, it’s a good idea to ask where they’re taking them. Also, if they seem to have closer friends or family around, talk to them! Get a name, ideally a birth date, and whatever you can on what kind of support they might need.

Ok, so somebody has been arrested. Maybe you saw it, maybe you heard about it, or you just suspect it. The next step

ANARCHIST PORTRAITS

RENZO



NOVATORE

Renzo Novatore was born Abele Rizieri Ferrari on May 12, 1890 in Arcola, Italy. A rebellious child from peasant stock, he rejected formalized schooling immediately, favoring self-education. Fleeing labor on his father's farm, he stole fruit and chickens to sell in order to purchase books, and through this studied theory, fiction, drama, and poetry. From Max Stirner, Friedrich Nietzsche, Oscar Wilde, Charles Baudelaire, and Henrik Ibsen, he looted critiques of mass society and its herdlike behavior, formulating for himself, through theory's grand soirée with lived action, an insurgent individualist anarchism.

His war with society escalated in 1910, when he was imprisoned for three months for burning a local church. In 1911, wanted by the police for acts of theft and robbery, he chose clandestinity, but was arrested on September 30 for vandalism. With the approach of World War I, he was drafted, deserted his regiment, and was sentenced to death for desertion and high treason. Once again living in clandestinity, Novatore spread propaganda against the army, and in favor of desertion and insurrection against the state. Despite pursuit by state authorities, Novatore - married with two children - returned home at great risk

to say goodbye to his dying son. In another instance, he used home-made grenades to drive away fascists who came to his home to kill him.

Though a fierce individualist, Novatore formed close bonds with other anarchists, bringing forth common projects strengthened by the collaboration of autonomous individuals. He participated in an archo-futurist collective, pushing it to join with the Arditi del Popolo (The People's Daring Ones), an anti-fascist group dedicated to militant opposition to Mussolini.

Alongside action, Novatore gave life to words, writing for anarchist papers from 1914 on: *Cronaca Libertaria*, *Il Libertario*, *Gli Scamicciati*, *Nichilismo*, *Pagine Libere*. He published a magazine, *Vertice*, and, with individualist youth Bruno Filippi, formed the journal *Iconoclasta*. Novatore's writings have been translated and collected in *Toward the Creative Nothing* and *Novatore*, both available freely online.

By 1919, Novatore was captured after being ratted out by a farmer. He was sentenced to ten years in prison, but released a few months later in a general amnesty. With fascism quickly spreading throughout Italy, Novatore went underground, pursuing a life of crime and revolt amongst the gang of famed robber Sante Pollastro.

On November 29, 1922, Novatore and Pollastro were ambushed by carabinieri (Italian military police). Pollastro escaped, but Novatore was killed as he lived: on his feet, shooting at the cops. With his body, investigators found a Browning gun, false documents, a hand grenade, and a secret container filled with cyanide.

While Novatore's writings appear to many to be elitist and contemptuous of the oppressed, how can one look at the horror of World War I - in which the proletariat of opposing countries were riled by nationalist fervor to slaughter each other - and not rail against the herd mentality of "the People?" How can one see the crimes against life perpetuated by those who daily choose conformity and not bring to arms against this one's own biophilic crime? In our contemporary world, in which the individual is shattered by technologically-induced mania and reduced to prescribed (and increasingly numerous) identities, Novatore's insurgent individualism offers us tools of escape, weapons of war.

The unique individual - straight-jacketed by social duty, manacled by moralism, broken by work, hounded by police of all breeds - finds herself with no option but

Are our marches different because some people posture with militant chants and banners that don't reflect what we actually do? Again, the first amendment guarantees freedom of speech. Unless we're a threat for other reasons, what we say is not subversive in the United States.

Demonstrations in the street can potentially be interesting, like the night of Trump's inauguration in downtown Bloomington, where ATMs, parking meters, the jail, and a bank were fucked with by a group of people wearing masks. But, that's not seen as targeting "new people," despite evidence to the contrary regarding who came to that demo. Apparently, "new people" are all cowards with middle class morals regarding respect for property. They couldn't possibly be interested in fucking shit up.

In my experience, the more talk of appealing to "new people," the more watered-down, tame, and boring the actions are going to be. If these practices somehow do bring new people into our circles, or prompt them to begin their own radical projects separate from us, they will only have learned to do things that are tame, boring, and meant to appeal to new people. Organizing demos to walk down Kirkwood teaches organizing demos to walk down Kirkwood. Break-out marches from Indivisible rallies teach break-out marches from Indivisible rallies. If there's no combativeness, creativity, or spark of joy and life, then what's the point in bringing in new people? Just to have more of us? Orienting our goals towards growth is to adopt the logic of our enemies: of capitalism, political parties, and religions. (see Fredy Perlman's *Against His-Story, Against Leviathan!*)

Admittedly, there are benefits to people new to radical politics entering our circles, or starting their own, separate projects. Folks who haven't been anarchists or radicals for a while tend to have energy and excitement that's revitalizing and inspiring. They usually aren't as jaded and cynical as we are, at least regarding radical politics.

And it's possible, but in no way guaranteed, that we can impact the world in some way, perhaps even spread our values throughout society. If there are more of us, that could mean more opportunities for such possibilities to play out. But, if the mentality we adopt is one of growing a movement, that's going to produce none of those effects, since the only value we'll be imparting is the imperative to grow.

Since Ferguson erupted in the summer of 2014, a fixation on social strug-

gle and popular revolt has dulled anarchy's radical edge, and aimed the anarchists' sight onto appealing to the masses. Since oppressed people threw down against the police and white supremacy en masse, all of a sudden everything is about that, about trying to pull more people into these popular struggles. While more people struggling and revolting against white supremacy and police would clearly be a good thing, the problem is that chasing after these people and moments is self-defeating.

Riots and revolt used to be scorned by the populist anarchists, who were chiefly interested in building working class organizations that would supposedly imbue their members with an anti-state brand of class consciousness. Things shuffled around once oppressed people began regularly rioting in the US alongside a clearly identifiable social struggle. Now, riots and revolts are in the populist playbook, but only if they're part of a popular struggle, consisting mostly of non-radicals. Revolts taken without a social base are scorned as irresponsible, juvenile, and insular.

Anarchist insularity is the boogiemanager that appealing to "new people" sets itself up against. Criticisms of anarchists being insular are almost always calls to water things down and hide our politics. To wage Gramsci's War of Position, like Communist Party cells operating in the McCarthyist 1950s. We shouldn't talk about anarchy or openly identify as anarchists, no, that's too much of a bugbear for the timid masses.

Activists look down on "nihilists" (their predecessors called us lifestylists twenty years ago) for not filling our days with visible, populist, activist projects. As if the only valuable activities are those you can

boast about to people you barely know. As if our desires are decadent and indulgent.

Activism is exhausting. Running between projects and tasks that don't seem to be going anywhere is a recipe for burnout. And yes, burnout is real, and no, feeling it doesn't mean you are lazy or uncommitted.

Here's a theory: the best way to appeal to new people is not trying to appeal to new people. Watered-down populism is boring. Its goal is its very downfall. Tame demonstrations are not exciting. If a lot of people show, like they did after Charlottesville last summer, it's probably because they care about the cause and want to feel like they're doing something about it. Not because the practice itself is effective or interesting.

Instead of draining yourself with obligatory-feeling demonstrations, feel out and follow your desires. Go down a path that makes sense to you. If you're creative, your activity likely won't fit the image of radicalism and social struggle legible through the spectacle. That's fine. If you're earnest and audacious, and people notice you, your actions may be contagious and the ideas behind them appealing.

And if nobody cares, oh well, at least you're doing what you want to anyways. Better that than burn yourself out playing "more righteous than thou" with liberals at their parades and rallies.

My arguments are based on my perception of a political tendency that I disagree with. I don't mean to yell at strawmen. Did I get something wrong? Submit a response article to Plain Words.





THE FINEST ART

contributions to a dialogue

The following is a continuation (of sorts) of the dialogue on art started in issue five of *Plain Words*. It is an effort to contribute another perspective to the debate. Where one side decries television (and, by proxy, art) as a social pressure valve and apparatus of pacification, and the other finds hope and beauty in art appreciation, I wish to offer an alternative: the oft-neglected fine art of revolt.

What becomes possible when we transcend the mere consumption of beautiful things and become active participants in the creation of new moments, new creative expressions? What world-transforming works might spring from the bodies of those who take Bakunin's words seriously: *the urge to destroy is also a creative urge*? Or, better, Breton's: *beauty will be convulsive or it will not be at all*.

margot v.

A chronology of emergent possibility

1911: An unemployed navy cook tries to cut Rembrandt's *Night Watch* with a knife.

1913: Abram Balashev attacks with a knife the painting *Ivan Grozny and his son Ivan* by Ilya Repin.

1914: Mary Richardson slashes the canvas

of Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus* in opposition to the state's repression against suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst, stating, "If there is an outcry against my deed, let every one remember that such an outcry is an hypocrisy so long as they allow the destruction of Mrs Pankhurst and other beautiful living women, and that until the public cease to countenance human destruction the stones cast against me for the destruction of this picture are each an evidence against them of artistic as well as moral and political humbug and hypocrisy." [Note: Richardson later, disgustingly, became a fascist, an act for which I have no affinity.]

1956: The *Mona Lisa* is severely damaged when a vandal douses the painting with acid. Later the same year, Ugo Ungaza Villegas damages the painting with a rock.

1959: A vandal throws acid on *The Fall of the Damned* by Peter Paul Rubens.

1964: Edvard Eriksen's the statue *The Little Mermaid* has its head sawn off and stolen by individuals associated with the Situationist International.

1967: Pierre Pinoncelli sprays art critic and French culture minister André Malraux with red paint.

1969: Unidentified persons leave long scratches in five paintings at the Stedelijk

Museum Amsterdam, with most damage inflicted to the *Holy Family* by Lorenzo Costa.

1972: Tony Shafrazi sprays "KILL LIES ALL" across Picasso's *Guernica*, protesting Richard Nixon's pardon of William Calley for the latter's actions during the My Lai massacre.

1974: A handicapped woman, upset by the Toyko National Museum's policy for the disabled, sprays red paint at the *Mona Lisa*.

1975: William de Rijk, an unemployed school teacher, cuts dozens of zigzag lines Rembrandt's *Night Watch* with a knife.

1976: Blue dye sprayed over Carl Andre's display of bricks at London's Tate Gallery.

1977: Ruth van Herpen kisses a painting by Jo Baer at the Oxford Museum of Modern Art, claiming to having been trying to cheer up a "cold" painting.

1978: A Dutch artist, disgruntled over the non-payment of his welfare by the Amsterdam authorities, makes three long cuts in the center of the painting *La Berceuse* by Vincent van Gogh.

1978: An Italian man slashes the painting *The Adoration of the Golden Calf* by Nicolas Poussin at the National Gallery in London.

are good, even if we're badass, even if we all like the same music, we are all of us nevertheless still broken and damaged people. (If you haven't learned it yet experientially, hang around for a while... you will.) We gather as comrades to escape the senseless cruelty of imperialist capitalism, and then we turn around and act senselessly cruel to one another. If a community is going to be truly life-giving, if it is going to be sustainable for a new future, then it has to create spaces that accept our own failures and hurts. It has to be an instrument of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a pretty unnatural concept, and yet it is essential for any group of people who will truly and intimately live together and bear one another's burdens.

At the Catholic Worker, we have a weekly ritual of reconciliation. We sit together quietly, we encourage one another, we confess if we've made mistakes or hurt one another, and we share grievances if there is conflict between or within people. We try not to leave the circle until everyone is in right relationship with each other. Because there is no joy or love in one another without forgiveness.

Hope

One persistent enemy of all those who work for justice is despair. The powers and forces of oppression are so great, and our resistance is so small. The planet is unlikely to survive long enough for even the most short-term revolutionary timeline. The game is rigged on the side of the rich and we can't change the rules.

And yet the message of Easter is "Do not be afraid." An affirmation of Christian hope is that Love Wins; as Dr. King said, "The moral arc of the universe is long but it bends towards justice." We should not despair but have hope, hope that nothing, not even death, will defeat the cause of the just. What can stand against us?

At the Catholic Worker, we try to express hope by continuing to work and engage in direct action against war, knowing that we are merely sowing seeds. We continue in protest and hospitality not because we expect them to yield results, but because we are part of something greater. We also have babies, which reminds us that God has not given up on people. We also like to sing a lot.

Tradition

If we are marching toward a new society, it helps to have a sense where we are going. Moving toward an utterly unknown destination is not only disorienting, but more importantly it allows our own prejudices and flaws to sabotage the journey. It is good, then, to remember we are not the first humans to strive for justice, nor are we the first people to try and love-in-action. Heroic and inspiring people have come in every generation before us, and we can use their lives and examples as signposts to discern the path before us.



This is not to discount the serious flaws of previous (and current) generations. Consider Francis of Assisi, Harriet Tubman, Oscar Romero, Fannie Lou Hamer, Dr. Martin Luther King: there's not an anarchist among them, and yet we still have much we can learn from these forerunners. Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker, once wrote "Tradition is the democracy of the dead," meaning that we will be severely impoverished if we limit our pool of wisdom to only those who are still breathing.

Our community has a "saint wall," with pictures and stories of flawed yet profound examples of well-lived lives: folks like Basil the Blessed, the Buddha, Eugene V. Debs, John Donne and Therese of Lisieux. It reminds us that we don't have to figure it all out ourselves, but can receive the torch from others before we pass it along.

Love

At the Catholic Worker, we "hope and work for a new society brought about by the revolution of the heart." We hope to be the vanguard of a revolution of values, declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism and militarism by continually welcoming the poor and homeless into our midst, affirming the sacred value of all human beings, and by nonviolently resisting the works of war. This must be no weak and sentimental love; but Love as an empowering force that actualizes the saving choice of life and good against the damning forces of evil and death, Love as the supreme unifying principle of life. Anger and hate are completely justified in this world of capitalist oppression; and yet anger and hate are self-defeating. We must love another, love our children, love our friends, love our planet, love our neighbors and, yes, even work to love our enemies.

This is not about dictating to oppressed people how they should respond to their oppression or encouraging victims to love their victimizer; no one should do that. But we must also not be ashamed to recognize that communities and nations built upon hatred, fear or violence inevitably spawn greater hatred and violence; while communities and societies truly organized around the principle of love create beauty and human flourishing. Whoever does not love abides in death, and so we must love in truth and action.

Love, Tradition, Hope, Reconciliation, Selflessness, Sharing; these are indispensable nutrients for planting a new society. If we want a world without police, we need to build communities where people know how to get along. If we want a world without corporate power and upscale condos, we need communities that are content with sharing and simplicity. If we want a world without national anthems or borders, we need to build communities rooted in something deeper than patriotism. We need deep reserves of power to fight the masters of postindustrial capital. We can find deep wells of that power in religious traditions and in Christianity, and we should take it. We all have so much to learn, one from another.

Ross E Martinie Eiler

ANARCHISM & CHRISTIANITY

FRUITS FOR THE SPIRIT



I am a Christian Anarchist. I have been for fifteen years. As a founding member of the Bloomington Christian Radical Catholic Worker Community, my faith has been instrumental in arriving at a revolutionary criticism of modern capitalism, and my politics have been instrumental in developing my religious beliefs. I want to share some particular gifts that Christianity can bring to anarchist thought and practice.

These gifts are gifts of emphasis; these elements can be found both in people of different religious traditions and in people with no religious traditions at all. But they have a distinctiveness within the Christians tradition, and they can enrich secular political radicals. I share these reflections not to convert anyone to Christianity or to get folks to join the Catholic Worker, but rather to encourage reflection and dialogue on these ideas and also to build awareness and comradeship between my Catholic Worker community and *Plain Words* readers.

But first things first. I am painfully aware that people who claim to be Christian have perpetrated some of the most oppressive evils and reprehensible crimes against humanity in the history of the world. Many of the most dangerous people alive today claim the mantle of Christianity. The majority of Christians either stood aside or cheered developments such as slavery, the crusades, colonialism and nuclear weapons. Those facts are indisputable, and the hypocrisy and failure of professed Christians is a

profound challenge to the entire religion.

However, there are also other facts to consider. Jesus of Nazareth was a brown-skinned Hebrew rebel, nailed to a Roman cross as a threat to the empire. Jesus of Nazareth went to his death challenging unjust state power. Jesus proclaimed a new Kingdom, one that opposed the powers of his day, a Kingdom that privileged the poor and outcast while condemning the rich. He invited his followers to “take up your cross and follow me,” inviting them to a life of communalism, peace and confrontation with empire and its enablers. These facts offer a continual reminder that the white, blond-haired, blue-eyed, gun-toting, woman-hating Jesus of the religious right is a god of their own making. And that “god” is one I have no interest in defending.

So what am I defending, then? I want to discuss six characteristics emphasized in Christian Anarchism that are beautiful, good and true: sharing, selflessness, reconciliation, hope, tradition and love. A fine definition of “anarchism” I once read in *Plain Words* suggested that anarchism demands “we sow the seeds of a new humanity now.” These six virtues, I propose, are good seeds; and we who are trying to forge new societies should cultivate them.

To provide practical examples, I will also touch briefly how these seeds are (imperfectly) lived out in our Christian Radical Catholic Worker community. I’ll say more below, but the Bloomington Catholic Worker is a community gathered together to imitate Jesus’s nonviolence, voluntary poverty and radical hospitality. We are committed to caring for children, homeless people and the earth. We have no connection to the Roman Catholic Church or any other church institution.

Sharing

It is reported that the first Christians rejected private ownership of any possession but instead held everything in common. Those who had wealth sold their possessions and distributed the proceeds to whomever had need. This tradition of communities in which people work according to their ability and receive according to their need has been unbroken for 2000 years, continuing through counter-cultural Christian communities. And it reminds us that the first work of culture-building is taking care of one another.

The Amish call this duty of sharing “mutual aid.” It is the recognition that

you exist in a wider community and are responsible for it, whether you asked for it or not. The virtue of sharing also reminds us that our work needs to be intergenerational. We cannot be radicals if we are not hospitable to children and to old people. There will never be a revolution if the only people who can participate are single, able-bodied 16–to-36-year-olds.

At the Bloomington Catholic Worker, we talk about “personalism”: that we are bound to take personal responsibility for the people around us at a personal sacrifice. We commit to caring for our homeless sisters and brothers, for our own children and our neighbors’ children, even if it means we have less time, money, or energy for ourselves or things we want. To take sharing seriously, then, we also have to cultivate selflessness.

Selflessness

Capitalism is dependent on selfishness. Indeed, the profit motive is nothing other than a monetized form of self-concern. We daily swim through a morass of propaganda and advertising telling us to be selfish and to pursue our own self-interest. One of the traditional “seven deadly sins” is Avarice, also known as “greed” or “desire for wealth;” and yet Capitalism lies by elevating greed to a virtue rather than the vice it is.

Because selfishness is so deeply ingrained in our culture, it is exceedingly difficult (and counter-cultural) to uproot. This is one place where spiritual roots and traditions can be valuable. Reflecting on God can help us cultivate selflessness. A friend once told me that the heart of all religious traditions can be summarized as “Get Over Yourself.” Christian Anarchism reminds us that the individual self, while good, is not the object of ultimate concern.

At the Bloomington Catholic Worker, one way we try to cultivate selflessness is commitment to Voluntary Poverty: we pledge to serve God rather than money, success or stability. By accepting less than we want, we learn to place a higher value on sharing and we learn to give up our own wishes in order to better serve one another.

Reconciliation

Everyone who hangs around in radical or community circles learns a very difficult lesson: even if our politics

1985: Rembrandt’s *Danaë* attacked with acid and a knife.

1990: A man throws acid on Rembrandt’s *Night Watch*.

1991: Pietro Cannata, maligned by authorities as insane, attacks Michelangelo’s *David* with a hammer, damaging a foot.

1993: Pietro Cannata returns, scribbling with black pen on a fresco by Filippo Lippi in Prato Cathedral.

1993: Pierre Pinoncelli urinates in Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* (a signed urinal) and attacks it with a hammer.

1994: Mark Bridger pours blank ink into the tank of Damien Hirst’s *Away from the Flock* – a white sheep floating in formaldehyde.

1996: Canadian artist Jubal Brown vandalises Raoul Dufy’s *Harbor at le Havre* and Piet Mondrian’s *Composition With Red and Blue* by vomiting primary colors on them.

1997: Alexander Brener paints a green dollar sign on Kazimir Malevich’s *Suprematisme*, stating in court that “the cross is a symbol of suffering, the dollar sign a symbol of

trade and merchandise... What I did was not against the painting. I view my act as a dialogue with Malewicz.”

1998: Michael Bethell paints a yellow pound sign on Rembrandt’s *Self-Portrait at the Age of 63*, citing the Situationist International in his defense.

1998: *The Little Mermaid* decapitated again.

1999: Yuan Cai and Jian Xi Ianjun jump on *My Bed*, a work by the British artist Tracey Emin comprising an unmade bed accompanied by empty bottles, dirty underwear and used condoms.

1999: Pietro Cannata strikes again, hurling a pot of ink at a Jackson Pollock painting at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome.

2000: Yuan Cai and Jian Xi Ianjun urinate on the Tate Modern copy of *Fountain*, noting that Duchamp himself said artists defined art.

2001: Another work by Damien Hirst – a display of coffee cups, dirty ashtrays, beer bottles, etc. – is thrown away by cleaners who mistake it for refuse.

2003: *The Little Mermaid* blown from its base by explosives.

2006: Pierre Pinoncelli attacks another copy of Duchamp’s *Fountain* with a hammer.

2006: A 12-year-old boy sticks chewing gum to \$1.5 million abstract painting *The Bay* by Helen Frankenthaler.

2007: Police arrest artist Rindy Sam after she kisses the all-white canvas of *Phaedrus* by Cy Twombly, leaving a red lipstick mark, explaining “It was just a kiss, a loving gesture. I kissed it without thinking; I thought the artist would understand... It was an artistic act provoked by the power of Art.”

2007: Vandals break into the Orsay Museum in Paris in the early morning, set off the alarm and damage the painting *Bridge at Argenteuil* by Claude Monet.

2009: A Russian woman, distraught over being denied French citizenship, throws a terracotta mug at the *Mona Lisa*.

2012: Uriel Landeros spray paints a bull and writes “Conquista” with black spray paint over *Woman in a Red Armchair* by Pablo Picasso.



Hungarians stand over the toppled statue of Joseph Stalin on October 23, 1956

THOUGHTS ON PAINT & WALLS



I reprint these texts with hope that they will affirm or outrage. The first, a challenge to some anarchists' dismissal of graffiti, is from an old issue of the insurrectionary anarchist periodical *Willful Disobedience*. The second is text from a wheatpasted manifesto left behind by the Splasher, an individual or group who began vandalizing famous works of street art in New York City in 2006. Together, I believe they offer questions for anarchists and vandals alike. First though, I'll bring things to the present with some of my own thoughts.

I don't give a damn about the politics behind graffiti. I am happy to see my imprisoned friends' names on walls (a practice that anarchists in Bloomington sadly have abandoned in recent years); I am drawn to action to eliminate white supremacist graffiti when I see it. Otherwise, I am delighted by the proliferation of new tags, especially from those who seem to approach their crime playfully. As Bloomington seeks to legalize certain forms of graffiti as "street art" to bolster its image as a hip liberal oasis, there are those who don't bother to wait for permission before acting in the world. Whatever the content of their tags, I feel affinity with these vandals.

I love irrational vandalism. Tags thrown up every few feet without much

care for "craft." Screeds that defy logical understanding. The more *ugly* the tag, the more it places itself in conflict with the manicured, *boring* city and its legalized street art. I am strengthened by every *vain* defacement of local artists' "public art" (especially attempts to fuck up the bland, gentrifying excreta of certain punks and former anarchists in pay of the city).

Perhaps a new level of defiance is to be found in rejecting the symbolic altogether – abandoning words and images in favor of paint thrown haphazardly onto any surface that one despises. Local breweries, banks, condominiums, luxury cars, ATMs, police stations, art galleries, advertisements, security cameras, hip coffeeshops, vegan bakeries, Mayor John Hamilton: the possibilities are endless. Let's not forget that it took a year for them to clean the exterior of the jail after anonymous individuals splattered its façade with paint in January 2017. These actions won't be taken seriously by humorless "revolutionaries," but what's petty vandalism without the pettiness?

it's OK to destroy nice things,
A menagerie in revolt, a jungle, liberty

Their Own Game

It is easy to belittle taggers – those who choose to spray-paint initials or nicknames on walls to show that they've been there. Certainly, they could leave a message, an insurgent slogan, an explicit expression of rage or rebellion. Wouldn't that be more worthwhile? I used to be among those who made such complaints about taggers, putting them down for the lack of content in their graffiti. But one day, as I was walking through the city where I lived, I began to notice the places where taggers would leave their marks. I realized that although most taggers are not, by any means, insurgent anarchists, there are aspects of their activity that challenge some of the fundamental aspects of this society, and do so in a playful and adventurous way. They are playing their own game.

One of the most basic institutions of this society is exclusive property. Every space is the legally protected property of a particular person, institution or collectivity. When individuals use spaces that are not legally theirs for their own purposes without asking the legal owner's permission, it is considered a crime. This is what taggers do.

Tagging can be seen as an unconscious challenge to officially recognized property rights, to the law and to cops. So as not to delude ourselves though, it is necessary to be aware that some tagging is done by gangs who are seeking to establish their power and to claim a certain space as their exclusive property within the subcultural context of gang society. There is nothing the least bit insurgent, even in a latent, unconscious sense, in this gang usage of tagging. It is merely a subcultural reflection of the dominant culture's values. However, the majority of taggers either play solo or in tag teams which are not street gangs, but exist solely for the game of tagging.

And what a game! Late in the night, these adventurous vandals climb twelve-foot fences topped with razor wire. They scale vertical walls without ladders. They venture into subway tunnels and up on to billboards. All of this while having to keep an eye out for the cops and other upholders of the law and property rights. It is certainly a game of wits, strategy and creative imagination. It involves an energetic, practical defiance of the law and property rights. And it is a game that is played purely for the pleasure that is found in the risk of such practical defiance.

Those of us who have a con-

sciously insurgent perspective, who know that we want to destroy this society and its institutions, might do better to learn from these games rather than belittle them. Compared to the safe little backroom orgies and the street theater/performance art pieces that all too often seem to be the sum total of "insurgent" games played by anarchists, this game seems much more challenging, both to the institutions of society and for the players. It requires real courage and wits. The sorts of activities pursued by most anarchists to "challenge" the institutions of society indicate an underlying belief that these institutions are predominantly mental constructs that merely have to be argued away or symbolically exorcised. In tagging, the physical reality of these institutions is squarely faced and recognized as an essential aspect of what must be attacked. Not that the psychological aspects of these institutions are unreal, but they are an outgrowth of the physical basis of power. The energy, the courage, the adventurous spirit and the practical imagination of taggers

would be useful tools for insurgents, for those who willfully want to defy and destroy society in its totality. The combination of conscious insurgence with the playful spirit of tagging could lead to more adventurous and daring games, games of defiant attack on ever-greater levels.

Art: The Excrement of Action

A Dadaist once smashed a clock, dipped the pieces in ink, pressed the ink-soaked pieces against a sheet of paper and had it framed. His purpose was to criticize the modernist idealization of efficiency. Rather than inspiring the widespread smashing of clocks and the reevaluation of time in society, the piece of paper has become a sought-after commodity. The production of a representative organ (the ink-imprinted paper) for the action

(the smashing of the clock) guaranteed this outcome. Like an idealistic politician, the piece of paper, despite its creator's intent, can only represent, and it is for this reason that it instantly became a 'fetishized' object segregated from the action. Only in a culture obsessed with its own excrement are the by-products of action elevated above action itself.

Representation is the most elemental form of alienation. Art as representation is no exception. It is just another means by which our perceptions and desires are mediated. Art is the politician of our senses: it creates actors and an audience, agents and a mass. True creativity is the joyful destruction of this hierarchy; it is the unmediated actualization of desires. The passion for destruction is a creative passion. We are all capable of manifesting our desires directly, free of representation and commodification. We will continue manifesting ours by euthanizing your bourgeois fad.

FREE



JEREMY HAMMOND

Jeremy Hammond is an anarchist hacker serving 10 years in prison for leaking information about Strategic Forecasting, Inc. (Stratfor), a private intelligence firm engaged in spying at the behest of corporations and governments.

The documents, published on Wikileaks, show Stratfor's collaboration with corporate and state institutions against individuals and movements for change.

Corporate corruption, US government spying on foreign leaders, the Department of Homeland Security's report on Occupy Wall Street and its plans for infiltration, spying on activists in Bhopal following the DOW Chemical and Union Carbide gas disaster in 1984, and a hidden indictment against Wikileaks founder Julian Assange were all exposed by Jeremy's action.

In November 2013, Jeremy was

sentenced to ten years in federal prison. He has repeatedly been punished with long stays in solitary confinement for his outspoken beliefs and intransigent attitude. As Jeremy continues to struggle behind bars, let's give him all the support we can!

For more information:

FreeJeremy.net