



# Rolling Thunder

ISSUE NUMBER NINE / SPRING TWO-THOUSAND TEN / AN OPERATION OF THE CRIMETHINC, EX-WORKERS' COLLECTIVE

an anarchist journal of dangerous living

Jobs prevent us from working together,  
Schools from educating ourselves,  
Hospitals from healing ourselves,  
Governments from self-determination,  
Police from seeing that justice is done,  
Courts from sorting out our conflicts,  
Prisons from learning from our mistakes.  
Newspapers keep us informed about events  
Rather than involved in them,  
Ensuring that "public" is precisely that which excludes.

Only in resisting can we find each other  
And ourselves.

"If you truly want to understand  
something, try to change it."

—Kurt Lewin



# Table of Contents

## *Setting the Tone*

- 2 Introduction
- 4 Glossary of Terms
- 8 Masks, Gestures, Rupture

## *Breaking News*

- 14 Breaking the Frame:  
Anarchist Resistance to the G20
- 38 Coast to Coast Occupations:  
Inside the Campus Occupation Movement in the US
- 47 Pulling the Fire Alarm in the Marketplace of Ideas:  
Anti-Fascism and Liberal Backlash

## *Analysis*

- 59 Not Just Free Speech, but Freedom Itself:  
A Critique of Civil Liberties

## *From Our Overseas Correspondents*

- 65 The Smash EDO Campaign:  
How Single-Issue Campaigns Can Build Movements

## *Scene Reports*

- 78 Pittsburgh in Anarchism, Anarchism in Pittsburgh

## *Old news*

- 95 Anarchists Traveling through History:  
Kropotkin Escapes

## *Reviews*

- 102 The Autodidact's Revenge:  
*Anarchy Alive!* and *Politics Is Not a Banana*

## *And*

- 104 The Professor



You can watch people align themselves  
When trouble is in the air.  
Some prefer to be close to those  
At the top and others want to be  
Close to those at the bottom.  
It's a question of who frightens them  
More and whom they want to be like.

—Jenny Holzer

# “It’s not the rifle that you have

# barricade but the to hold on to.”

– José Buenaventura Durruti

Durruti meant this literally—it was the height of the Spanish Civil War, and he was arguing that anarchists had to hold onto their arms at all costs. They might lose an engagement, but so long as they kept their weapons they could go on fighting.

We can also read it as more general advice: *stick to your guns, but stay mobile*. If you want to take on capitalism and the state, you have to preserve your capacity to fight through all the confrontations, calamities, and compromises that await you. Holding territory isn’t nearly as important as the circulation of subversive currents throughout the entire social terrain. Don’t let your enemies surround you; don’t get trapped in private grudge matches with more powerful adversaries or in tactics that produce diminishing returns.

During the protests against the G20 summit in Pittsburgh, this meant turning away from the police lines around the conference center to make for other parts of the city. It could also mean rethinking where to take a stand in more general terms, adjusting strategies and frameworks to keep up with the times. It might even involve choosing to lose some battles in order to intensify conflict in the long run. Sometimes the risk is not that you will lose the barricade but that you will hold it while the struggle moves on without you.

Much of the material in this issue deals directly or indirectly with questions of legitimacy. There are many kinds of legitimacy: legitimacy accorded by the state, legitimacy in the eyes of outside observers who may intercede if they perceive an injustice, legitimacy in the eyes of potential comrades who will join you if you seem to have your act together. If nothing else, you have to view *your own* concerns and desires as legitimate in order to be able to act on them, and this is often the greatest challenge of all.

Like everything else, legitimacy accumulates unequally in capitalist society. Suggesting that anarchists should simply build up legitimacy in the public eye is akin to saying we should just save up enough money to buy ourselves an egalitarian utopia. Not only is this impossible—the whole reason money exists is

to make it impossible. The only kind of legitimacy we know is based in languages of exclusion, languages written to shut us out.

Yet like it or not, some kind of legitimacy is absolutely essential for going head to head with the state: if you have neither allies or visibility, if you can’t explain why you’re justified in stepping out of line, the powers that be have no incentive not to crush you outright.

Legitimacy can also circumscribe your options, however. Defending your right to march on free speech grounds may win you the grudging permission of the police, but it won’t make a case for why you would want to live in a world without them. Likewise, certain identities may make it easier to get away with things in a given context, but they often impose limits on what you can achieve. “Student” is a good example of this; “local” is another, “protester” yet another, “citizen” perhaps the most classic example of all.

As students, it may be possible to persuade a wide range of people that you are entitled to occupy a building on your campus in protest. But by framing yourselves as students, you determine the trajectory of your revolt; it makes sense for students to protest tuition hikes, but as soon as you start to fight for something not proper to your social category you’re back at square one. You also limit your relationships with allies: if your justification for why you are entitled to take over the street is that you live nearby, that rules out the assistance of outsiders who would otherwise be happy to help you defend it. This phenomenon plays out in countless other ways; those who wish to make thoroughgoing changes must ultimately destabilize class, identity, and legitimacy themselves.

Legitimacy is like any other kind of territory: the more you gain, the more you stand to lose. This can really tie your hands when it comes to picking the rifle over the barricade. Counterintuitively, the same group of people can sometimes be significantly more powerful when they identify themselves with a *less* legitimate category. As students, no one feels entitled to get too rowdy, not even the anarchists in a crowd: for the identity of “student” is associated with a certain docility, and the

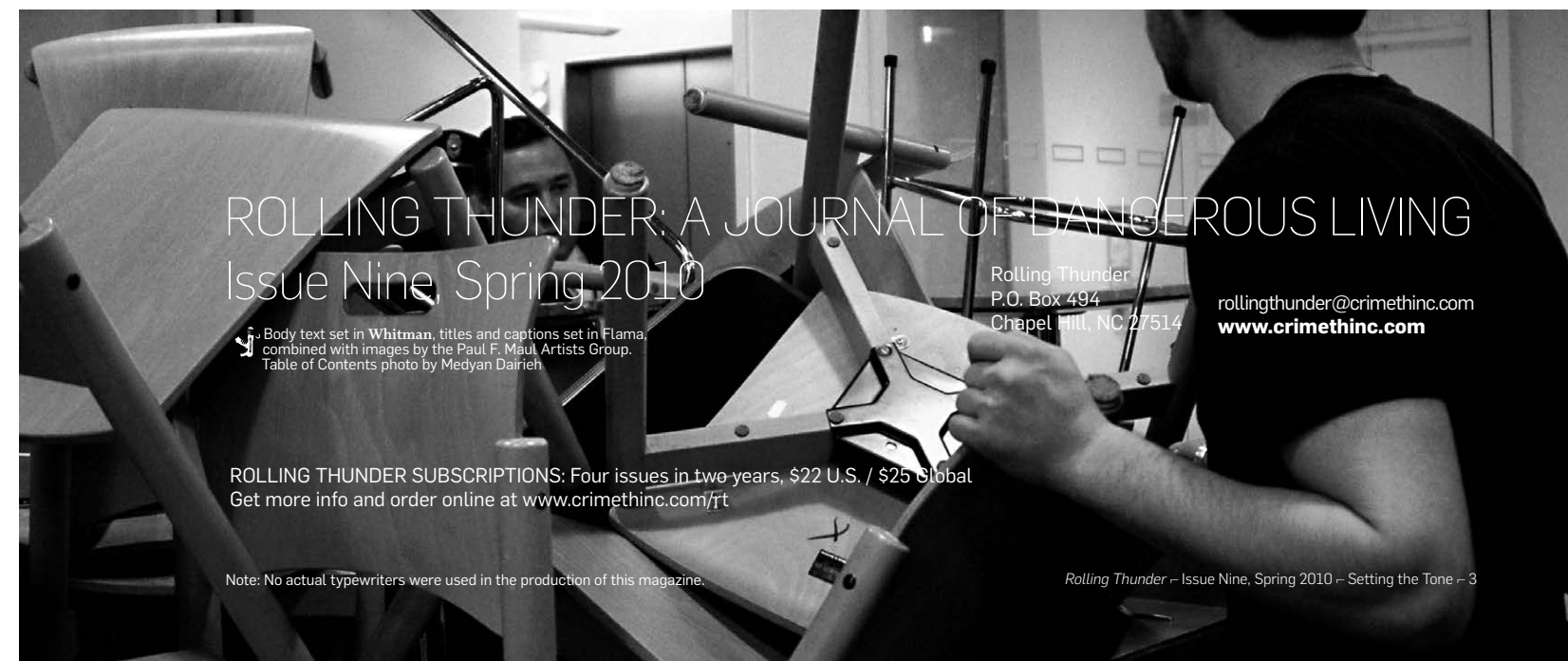
moment a person breaks that veneer she abandons the identity that validates her participation and risks discrediting the entire group. Conceiving of themselves as anarchists, however, the members of the same crowd suddenly have nothing to lose—on the contrary, the sky’s the limit.

Groups that go *beyond legitimacy* in this way can end up with more leverage on the authorities than those who play by the rules. But this leverage comes with all the dangers of legitimacy: it is yet another stake that must be risked before it comes to stake us down.

For good or for ill, *Rolling Thunder* has as much legitimacy as any publication revolutionary anarchists are making these days. As the publishers of *Days of War, Nights of Love*, we can’t afford to be haphazard with our scholarship; you can be sure that if it appears in these pages, we’ve done our utmost to confirm and

corroborate it. For fear of bogging down the reader in footnotes, we don’t always cite sources, but those who desire to learn more about the youth of Peter Kropotkin or the movements of police during the G20 should contact us.

Academia isn’t only exclusive because of the high cost of entry: the implication of all the painstaking research and assiduous editing is that the voices of those who are less learned or articulate are less worth listening to. Those are not values to reproduce in the anarchist movement. At the same time, the good thing about *blinging* is that it can raise morale in your community and challenge your comrades to expect more of themselves. We want people to read this and say to themselves *if they can publish a glossy magazine about fighting the cops, how much more can WE do?* We hope to do with legitimacy what we aspire to do with all the currencies produced by capitalist society: hijack it where we have to, and undermine it where we can.



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Rolling Thunder – Issue Nine, Spring 2010 – Setting the Tone – 3

**Addiction** ›

One pictures a strung-out cokehead or a shuddering junkie wandering the streets. But anyone familiar with the industry knows that *selling* is more habit-forming than using—and that goes for every other racket as well.

**Bling** ›

An expression for expensive, ostentatious jewelry or clothing that entered circulation via hip hop, expanding to cover status symbols of all kinds and the flaunting thereof. As Audre Lorde might have said, the master's jewels will never dismantle the

to the totality, I got it all, know what'm saying? Crazy Kabbalistic references and shit!"

"Aw, man, you don't understand any of those motherfuckers! You're just blingin! Seriously, what's any professor ever done to get you up out of your job at the café?"

**Blood Bank** ›

Is there any other kind?

**Capabilities** ›

One does not suffer nearly so much from one's inadequacies as from one's unfulfilled capabilities

**Carsick** ›

Sickened by the motion of a vehicle in which one is riding; on a larger scale, sickened by the motion of the vehicles in which everyone else rides (see *Global Warming*)

**Christmas** ›

An ancient pagan holiday occurring around the winter solstice, celebrating a variety of deities including sun gods, sons of God, and, most recently, Mammon

**Conviction** ›

A firmly held belief, or the quality of demonstrating that one is firmly convinced of what one believes; alternately, the legal consequences thereof

**Corner the Market** ›

Generally, it's the other way around

**Delegitimization** ›

"Self-proclaimed," "self-described," likewise "rambling." Of course, anyone with the attention span fostered by modern corporate media would find *War and Peace* rambling.

**Education** ›

Just as some liberals seem to think everyone could be a professor if only people would stay in school long enough (see *figure i.*), some radicals seem to think all that is lacking for revolution is for the masses to be sufficiently educated in radical theory. On the contrary, it is practice that teaches.

**Entrapment** ›

Scrawled by an FBI agent on a photograph of an inexperienced activist: "Suitable for framing"

**Freegan** ›

In the 1940s, needing a term to designate complete abstention from animal products, Donald Watson gutted "vegetarian" to coin the

word "vegan." In the 1990s, anticapitalists suspicious of the expanding market for "cruelty-free" commodities adjusted this neologism to "freegan" to describe total avoidance of exchange economics. But in a world still dominated by capitalism, many other marketplaces loom beyond the marketplace proper—the marketplace of ideas, for example, in which some self-described freegans decided they should sell the idea of not buying things.

Fast-forward a decade, and freeganism has been covered in dozens of newspapers, radio shows, business and fashion magazines, and television programs. Of course, in order to fit the story into the narrative of the corporate media, it is necessary to emphasize that freegans are neither homeless nor destitute: freeganism is a political statement, a canny improvement on bargain-hunting, or simply another lifestyle preference, but in any case nothing that would discomfit bourgeois viewers. No desperate expressions of need here! It turns out that even garbage is granted legitimacy and value sooner than the *people* thrown away by the capitalist system.

One can imagine an officer of the NYPD, having seen one of these news programs, accosting a homeless person rummaging in a trash can: "Hey—get outta there, you! Don't you know there are nice college students who depend on that for food?"

**Free Will** ›

Everyone who lives under capitalist democracy chooses to accept it of their own free will. Of course, "*Your money or your life!*" is a choice, too.

**Global Warming** ›

Who knew a few gas stations could turn the world into a gas chamber?

**Jargon** ›

The first refuge of a scoundrel

**Inevitability** ›

Neither death nor taxes!

**Irrefutability** ›

The hallmark of a useless point

**Left** ›

That is to say, gauche

**Leftism** ›

Causes without effects

**Leftist** ›

One ensconced in left field

**Libertarian** ›

In the United States, a partisan of all the freedom money can buy; everywhere else in the world, a partisan of all the freedom it can't

**Majority Rule** ›

A ruse to placate an otherwise unruly majority. The most stable structure for a society based on coercion is to promise power on a rotating basis to whomever can assemble a majority: this gives

*everyone* an incentive to maintain such a society, in hopes that they will get to wield that force themselves one day. (See *Democracy*)

**Materialism** ›

A value system prioritizing material possessions above all else. In certain ideological frameworks, this masquerades as a grandiose theory of history, complete with a messiah—a revolution brought on by the proper "material conditions"—promising the masses all the possessions they desire.

**Monoglot** ›

It's bad enough to know only one language—how much worse not even to know all of it!

**Noble Savage** ›

A myth invented by, and serving the interests of, savage nobles

**Nostalgia** ›

Ain't what it used to be

**Nouveau Riche** ›

"Waiter, I've had soup du jour, and *this is no soup du jour!*"

**Ontology** ›

The study of the nature of being. Who says academia is abstract?

**Past** ›

A contested territory obscured by forgetting, which conceals, and remembering, which transforms

**Patriarchy** ›

In the workplace, women start out as secretaries and are promoted to lovers; in wedlock, the process is reversed

**Privatize** ›

A word which, tellingly, has no opposite in the capitalist lexicon, "publicize" describing something else entirely

**Romance** ›

An airborne STI. Symptoms include increased sensitivity to sight, sound, and taste; decreased vulnerability to sleep deprivation and the elements; and general delirium, which in extreme cases can precipitate a complete reevaluation of priorities. Like all STIs, new outbreaks are feared by those in both monogamous and polyamorous relationships, and associated with all sorts of threatening possibilities. In bourgeois circles this fear has been expanded into a religious creed, characterized by a general suspicion of all intense or transformative experiences: stick to bland foods, sleep dreamlessly, and stay out of the rain.

**Screen** ›

A surface onto which pictures and movies are projected, or upon which data and images are displayed, e.g., on a television set or computer monitor; alternately, and perhaps not coincidentally, a device to block or conceal

**Smart Bomb** ›

Talk about a dumb idea!

## descent to the ninth circle of the Glossary of Terms



*figure i.*  
"What a pity—  
not enough education."

master's house. Hip hop is hardly the only milieu in which status symbols are glorified, unfortunately, although the symbols themselves vary widely from one context to another. For example, anarchists may find this term useful to diagnose their comrades' intellectual pretensions:

"My new zine cites, like, Hegel and Butler and Kristeva and Blanchot, too! From the singularity

# Word of the Issue: Entitlement

While the privileged generally feel entitled to do as they please regardless of the consequences for others, the oppressed often find it more difficult to justify asserting their own interests. Consequently, they sometimes contrive elaborate legitimizations of their desires in the terms of their oppressors.

Following the death of Tsar Ivan the Terrible in 1584, rule of Russia passed into the hands of the aristocrat Boris Godunov. All Ivan's children were dead by the end of the century; Dmitri, the youngest, died of a stab wound under suspicious circumstances in 1591.\* However, twelve years later, a young man appeared in the west who claimed to be Dmitri, saying he had escaped assassination and was returning to claim his rightful throne. Godunov's regime was widely hated, and supporters flocked to the standard of the new Dmitri; townspeople across southern Russia overthrew their local governments and declared allegiance to him, pinning all their hopes on his insurgency. After Godunov died in 1605, a great part of the armed forces changed sides; finally, the population of Moscow rose up and toppled the government, welcoming Dmitri as the new Tsar. The mother of the original Dmitri accepted him as her son, and many others vouched for his authenticity.

Less than a year later, Dmitri was assassinated in an aristocratic coup, and his body exhibited in Red Square. Yet announcements and letters continued to appear in the murdered Tsar's name, and the southern provinces returned to rebellion. An escaped slave named Bolotnikov, carrying a letter in Dmitri's handwriting proclaiming him commander-in-chief, took charge of the rebel forces; soon half the nation was in their hands, and they laid siege to Moscow. Dmitri himself did not appear, but captured rebels swore to the death that he was alive.

\*This marked the end of the dynasty founded by the legendary Rurik in the 9th century, though later Peter Kropotkin could trace his lineage to that chieftain. Kropotkin's fellow revolutionists teased that he had more right to the throne than Tsar Alexander II of the ruling Romanov family.

At length, the siege was broken, and Bolotnikov's forces were themselves besieged. In fall 1607, when they were on the verge of defeat, a man professing to be Dmitri appeared in the west, convening another army. Bolotnikov arranged to turn himself over to the authorities in return for his soldiers going free; he was imprisoned and murdered, but his men flocked to the new Dmitri, and soon Moscow was once again besieged.

The siege lasted for a year and a half. In 1608, Dmitri's wife arrived at the rebel camp and recognized the new Dmitri as her murdered husband. Even after this Dmitri was killed in December 1610, it was only a few months before another appeared. The unrest continued until Poland and Sweden invaded and the Russian ruling classes were finally able to consolidate control in the course of mobilizing a nationalist defense.

Many historians regard the string of Dmitris as nothing more than the repetition of a cynical ploy, but one could also interpret Tsar Dmitri as a collective identity, a myth any rebel could incarnate. For example, after Dmitri was assassinated in 1606, his friend Molchanov "became" Dmitri just long enough to inspire a new outbreak of resistance. Later that year, "Tsarevich Petr," a poor cobbler's son who assumed power among the rebels by identifying himself as a fictitious relative of the slain leader, nonetheless set out in search of him—even though Dmitri had been killed twice by then, and doubtless would have known that he had no nephew Petr! Likewise, when Petr was killed, a "Tsarevich Fedor" appeared at the head of 3000 Cossacks, claiming to be Petr's younger brother; it also turned out that the nonexistent Tsarevich had an uncle, "Tsarevich Ivan-Avgust." Dozens of other beggars, peasants, and escaped slaves became real or invented noblemen via this kind of transubstantiation, and—more strikingly—were accepted by their countrymen as such.

Perhaps, in such a stratified society, it was easier for an entire nation to convert to a sort of magical realism than for the oppressed and disaffected to rise up in their own name. As peasants and slaves, their agency was meaningless, illegitimate; but as the Tsar, or at least warriors in his service, they became literally entitled to it (*see figure ii.*). Despite their tribulations under the autocratic system, it came more naturally to found a struggle upon the impossible fantasy of a just, rightful Tsar than to reject Tsardom altogether.

All this begs the question—what Tsar is *not* an imposter? How does blood lineage, or divine right, or for that matter the electoral process, qualify a person to rule others? It may be that, as faith in the validity of the Tsar's power was itself supernatural, common Russians were open to further supernatural developments relating to the Tsar—especially if those happened

† In a surreal bid to undercut the cult of personality around the dead leader, the aristocrat who seized power after Tsar Dmitri's assassination presented the corpse of a dead child as the disinterred, miraculously preserved body of the original boy Dmitri, and ascribed additional miracles to the Tsarevich. He forced the Orthodox Church to grant sainthood to the Dmitri who had died in 1591, and made Dmitri's mother, who had so recently accepted Tsar Dmitri as her son, announce that this was her true son's body. Government forces were blessed in the name of "St. Dmitri" before going into battle; thus, in fall 1606, the rebels and the government faced off under the standards of two false, dead Dmitris.

to validate their own rebellious desires. On the other hand, some historians speculate that the first person to appear as the resurrected Dmitri was so persuasive because he had been raised from childhood to believe he was the rightful inheritor of the throne. What would it take to raise an entire people to feel similarly entitled to their agency, royal blood or no?

The idea of the rebel Tsar as a manifestation of divine authority among the common people, butchered by earthly authorities yet miraculously surviving, echoes the story of Christ. Indeed, this period of Russian history brings to mind the Anabaptist uprisings in Western Europe of the preceding century, in which peasants justified armed struggle in apocalyptic religious terms. Both upheavals attest to the power of myth to enable people to pass beyond self-imposed limits, but also reveal how mythologies framed in the rulers' terms impose limits of their own. Until the oppressed feel entitled to act for themselves without reference to divine ordainment, hereditary rights, legal statutes, humanitarian responsibilities, or grand historical narratives, they will only be able to borrow the paltry freedom of their oppressors.



figure ii.

I.

An ominous black stripe cuts through the shopping district: a crowd in identical masks and hoods. It passes from block to block, an abyss drawing everything to itself and leaving a vacuum in its wake.

Seen from afar, the masked ones seem to be erasing themselves, taking a stand against individuality, against communication. In a society in which everything is known, named, measured, and appraised, in which life is determined by résumés and credit histories and internet profiles, hiding one's identity is indeed tantamount to erasing oneself. Streetlights, background checks, gossip columns, and intelligence agencies conspire to drag everything into view; without an identity, one joins undocumented immigrants and anonymous corpses in mass graves.

All along, somewhere out of sight, something has been growing. At first it was barely a tremor, unidentifiable and inexpressible. But in time—and perhaps this was the most difficult threshold to cross—it became a secret: first shared between two people, then between pairs, gangs, networks, spokes-councils. Now it erupts into the public eye,

still inscrutable, illegible. Every continent has long been discovered, every star in the sky enumerated—yet at the heart of the empire the commonplace suddenly reappears, tauntingly concealed, flaunting its otherness.

Behind the curtain, the masked ones know each other well enough—they share another kind of transparency, without norms or measure. This is a confrontation between worlds, one hidden, the other insistently familiar. The old story goes that the invisible will become visible at the moment of its triumph—when the guerrillas finally pour, unmasked, into the city center. But if the powers that be can tear back the curtain to reveal the hidden world while it can only be viewed in the light of the prevailing ideology, that fairyland will evaporate before it can usurp reality.

Even more than they wish to bring outlaws to justice, the authorities long to tear away those masks—to show that there is no uncharted path that could lead away from the ordinary and mundane. The mask is seductive: it suggests unknowns, promises, threats. It is a chrysalis in which to become *something else*.

II.

No, you haven't understood anything! Clandestinity casts a spell, drawing in those who sample it deeper and deeper until they can never return. What begins as a clumsy, undefined, open clash concludes as a private grudge match between a closed vanguard and an all-powerful state. What can we do without the masks?

That always determines the trajectory of what we can do with them on. Perhaps it would be better to renounce them altogether.

III.

But you both misconstrue that which is masked as something outside and against the rest of society. On the contrary, masks do not signify contradiction or opposition; those who hide themselves do not necessarily serve subversive ends. The ruling powers often don masks to further their agenda—and what mask is thick enough to prevent that agenda from filtering through into the rebels who claim to oppose it? When people mask themselves to carry a program beyond the bounds of propriety, the masks may serve as much to protect them from acknowledging what they are doing as to disguise them from their enemies.

The visible and the invisible are two frequencies of power, like wavebands on a radio dial; control competes with subversion on both terrains. The subterranean world may be shaken by tremors, but it is mostly comprised of the foundations of the visible world, fixed and deep-rooted.



IV.

It is well known that the more power you have over a person, the less likely it is that she will be honest with you. One can know or control, never both. Yet from jealous husbands to surveillance states, people seek to obtain knowledge by pursuing more authoritarian power, rather than less.

The monotheists' God is the product of these fantasies taken to their natural conclusion: omniscient and all powerful, at once informant and chief of police. No bedroom, backstreet,

or heart is safe from His prying eyes. This myth does not seem to have habituated the public to full disclosure, however; and a populace used to concealing their sins from God can certainly slip them past mere mortals.

In every shopping district, on every sidewalk, bare faces mask unknown intentions. Scanning their countenances, an undercover policeman looks upon an entire nation of suspects, their purposes inscrutable, their interests opaque. There is no riot, no black-clad ribbon of wrath unfurling down Liberty Avenue; but the state sees every crowd as a masked mob in waiting.





I.  
Why windows?

Windows do not simply represent transparency—they are invisible barriers. Like so much in this society, they simultaneously present a spectacle and block the way to it. They display commodities we can never afford, status we will never attain, social strata we cannot hope to traverse. The gates of paradise are closed to us. To smash a window is to contest the boundaries between haves and have-nots, sacred and profane, fantasy and reality.

Swinging a hammer into a storefront, the vandal crosses this Rubicon as a mutinous army of one, declaring herself an implacable foe of the world that is: for there is no dallying with reformism once one has shown that one's program is *destruction*. Every shattering pane is a hymn to defiance, a cry in the darkness in hopes of an answering cry.

III.

And if it is indeed impossible—what then? To solve the riddle of the windows, we have to get to the bottom of what gesture *is*. What if gestures are not just symbols standing in for action, but are themselves the fabric of our lives, the terrain on which we fight?

"If our planet has seen some eighty billion people, it is difficult to suppose that every individual has had his or her own repertory of gestures. Arithmetically, it is simply impossible. Without the slightest doubt, there are far fewer gestures in the world than there are individuals. That finding leads us to a shocking conclusion: a gesture is more individual than an individual. We could put it in the form of an aphorism: many people, few gestures . . .

"A gesture cannot be regarded as the expression of an individual, as his creation (because no individual is capable of creating a fully original gesture, belonging to nobody else), nor can it even be regarded as that person's instrument; on the contrary, it is gestures that use us as their instruments, as their bearers and incarnations."

-Milan Kundera, *Immortality*

In this account, gestures are the real protagonists of history, and humanity is simply the medium through which they move, proliferate, and compete. Each gesture is coded with its own ethics and aesthetics, bearing them like DNA; we might even imagine dominant and recessive traits, natural selection.

Gestures appear timeless, yet they offer a means of making abstract values concrete in any given moment. Breaking a window is not just a symbolic protest against capitalist society, but

a way to step outside it, however temporarily. It may not always be "appropriate," but it gives the anticapitalist something to *do*.

To understand how persistent and seductive gestures are, we can study them in the microcosm of subculture: fashions that endure long after the political ideologies that spawned them, dance moves that spread like wildfire, slang terms implying critiques more precise than any academic treatise. These examples are easy to point out against the backdrop of the dominant culture, but *all* culture is made up of gestures—the most common ones are invisible precisely because of their ubiquity.

One can try to saddle gestures with objectives, to make them "strategic," but this may be a step in the wrong direction. Let's contrast gesture against strategy as an approach to revolutionary struggle.

Strategy focuses outward: the reference points by which to gauge success are external, waiting in a future that is always receding ahead. By contrast, gestures *confer* meaning—they contain meaning within themselves, instantaneous and intrinsic. With a gesture, one can render a life—whichever life, however humble—the center of the universe, a stage for timeless drama.

Strategy is predicated on efficacy, privileging product over process and control over chance. Yet the universe is infinite and ever-changing: no one can ever grasp the total context enough to craft a foolproof strategy. On the other hand, with or without the proper strategic acumen, individuals and groups can popularize *gestures* that take on lives of their own, perhaps precipitating dramatic upheavals when the time is ripe.

So what is more important—achieving carefully calculated objectives, or spreading the *practice* of smashing windows?

II.

But what does breaking a window have to do with liberation? Is it not simply another way to *make a statement*, to "take a stand" instead of actually seizing what we desire and defending it? If we are struggling against a world of falsehoods and superficiality, why spend ourselves in symbolic gestures? Or has that world imposed itself upon us so thoroughly that it is impossible to distinguish between concrete actions and symbolic gestures at all?



IV.

*Every means serves its own ends*: gestures have their own agendas, as it were, while our fragile hearts and bodies bear the consequences. Perhaps this is the meaning of the Greek conception of Hades, in which the shades of the dead repeat the same gestures into eternity: they are mortal beings held hostage by immortal acts. If gestures are the protagonists of history, what are *we*?

In the era of mediation and mass-production, in which every lived experience reappears immediately as a ghost shouting down reality, the gesture has become as external to us as any goal-oriented strategy. What was once a precious heirloom passed from one generation to the next is now mere pornography. We still let it play through us, but we no longer feel that we

are incarnating the absolute—the video screens have reduced everything to a reference.

What is the ultimate gesture of our era? Hijackers piloting airplanes into the World Trade Center. Multiplied into infinity, this image eclipsed our paltry human frames, blotting out our agency in its monstrous shadow and leaving its authors no more liberated than the rest of us.

Is this the battlefield on which to martyr ourselves? Have we given up entirely on the possibility that we could fight *for our own lives*, with the testimony of our nerves as the criteria of success, rather than the triumph of any ideology, program, or ghost?

I.

A week and a half later, the anarchist dreams that he is back in Pittsburgh. Pepper gas fills the air, punctuated by the sound of explosions and the crunch and ring of shattering glass. One of the canisters rolls to his feet, undischarged, and he picks it up. In the dream, it is cool to his touch. He senses that all he has to do to activate it is to throw it against something.

He walks away from the mêlée, the canister heavy in his hand. Without consciously articulating it to himself, he decides to extend the terrain of conflict by detonating the canister nearby, outside the zone of police violence. Block by block, he passes through successive settings as if in a film montage: children on a school playground, clerical workers filing in and out of office buildings, students lounging on the grass. Compared to the tumult he has just come from, the exaggerated placidity

of each scene makes them all seem unreal and distant. It is disquieting. Which one should he interrupt, which should he turn into a warzone? Where should he rupture the façade of reality?

Suddenly, he comes to himself. He is walking around with a tear gas canister, assessing everything as a potential target, looking at the world through the eyes of a police sergeant. Elsewhere on earth, armed clashes are as ordinary as shopping malls, without liberation being any closer.

Now he is marooned in a dream that is without sense. Yet he does not drop the canister; it is the only power he has.

II.

In the monotony of our daily lives, it's easy to forget that our relationship to reality is negotiable. Streets are for faceless traffic; crowds are impersonal assemblies of strangers studiously ignoring each other; windows are for exhibiting merchandise, or staring out of as we wait for shifts or classes to conclude; decorative stones outside banks or fast food franchises are inert objects without interest or possibility.

Suddenly all this is interrupted and the unknown opens before us: the world becomes a magical place. In these moments, we discover new organs within ourselves—or perhaps

they are not new, but simply atrophied, atavistic—and find we are adapted for an entirely different way of life than the routines to which we are so accustomed. It turns out we are creatures made for another world—and made *well* for it!—who are barely getting by in this one. Changing worlds, we shift from malaise and misery to weightless joy: finally, we are at home in our own skin. Charging down the street together rather than driving down it separately, fighting or outrunning police rather than submissively accepting their authority, we come to life.

No words can do justice to this experience, but it is real—one day of it is more real than a decade of rental contracts, traffic tickets, service work, and nights at the bar.





# BREAKING THE FRAME

## Anarchist Resistance to the G20

On September 24 and 25, 2009, the rulers of the twenty most powerful economies in the world—nineteen nations, and the European Union—met in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Dubbed the G20, this summit has recently come to prominence over the G8 summits that occasioned such violent conflicts in Genoa, Gleneagles, and Heiligendamm. The Obama administration announced that it chose Pittsburgh to highlight the city's "economic recovery" following the collapse of its manufacturing sector, implying that it presented a model for a world facing economic woes. Pittsburgh's sizable anarchist community saw this as an opportunity to offer a different model, based on grass-roots mutual aid and resistance.

The mobilization that followed was among the largest successful anarchist-organized protests the United States has seen in years. Does it indeed offer a model that could succeed elsewhere?

## Local Groundwork

It was already late May when anarchists learned that the G20 was coming to Pittsburgh. A general interest meeting the weekend of June 13-14 produced the Pittsburgh G20 Resistance Project, an anti-authoritarian organizing body promoting a diversity of tactics. The PGRP included working groups focused on media, legal and medical support, local and national outreach, and housing and other logistical issues; other working groups maintained a website, coordinated student participation, and hammered out action frameworks. In all, the PGRP comprised about forty people, many of whom had years of experience working together.

Significantly, those who did not maintain the trust of the rest of the group were not permitted to participate in the PGRP. In one case, a member of the action working group could not provide sufficient evidence that he was who he said he was, and actually heightened others' suspicions of him in the process; in another, a person answered questions before a grand jury against the wishes of his comrades. Excluding these individuals may have helped to protect the organizers from at least some forms of police surveillance and provocation.

## Action Framework

The action framework constructed by the PGRP was modeled on some of the precedents set by previous anarchist mobilizations, with one significant departure: they took it upon themselves to coordinate the primary action for the first day of the summit.

In most regions of the US, anarchist organizing had been successfully marginalized by liberal groups during the antiwar era. Anarchists carried out breakaway marches and other peripheral actions but repeatedly failed to take the initiative to determine the fundamental character of mass protests. In hopes of breaking this pattern, anarchists got started well over a year before the 2008 Republican National Convention, emerging as one of the major players in the organizing. Decentralized marches and blockades were called for the first day of the RNC, coinciding with a permitted march sponsored by antiwar activists. This decision was based partly on the reasoning that the most successful direct-action-oriented protests of the preceding decade had been coordinated to coincide with other events, spreading the police thin.

To set the tone for the G20 protests, the PGRP called for an unpermitted march on the first day of the summit. Pittsburgh's Anti-War Committee discussed scheduling its permitted march for Thursday as well, but some prominent participants stated that they were convinced that the story of the day on Thursday was bound to be the PGRP march. Rather than repeat the format of the 2008 RNC, the AWC chose to hold its march on Friday.

So it happened that the main event opening the G20 protests was organized primarily by anarchists. This was an ambitious gamble, and it made some out-of-town anarchists uneasy. It raised the stakes: if anarchists and their allies were solely responsible for the first day of action, they could hardly afford to "go it alone," failing to bring out other demographics. In fact, this approach

may have made some aspects of the mobilization easier; for example, liberals who might otherwise have attempted to discredit the PGRP were hesitant to do so, knowing that many members of their groups would be participating in Thursday's march.\*

The PGRP called for another action on Friday morning. As in the calls for autonomous actions at the 2004 Democratic and Republican National Conventions, they circulated a list of targets in Pittsburgh embodying various objectionable aspects of global capitalism. Some local organizers who were pessimistic about the potential of mass mobilizations saw the Friday call to action as a way to connect the G20 protests to local issues; for others, it was a fallback plan in case Thursday was a washout, and a way to draw attention to the targets through advance media coverage. Following the Friday morning actions, anarchists were encouraged to join an anti-authoritarian contingent in the permitted march.

## The Battle of the Story

Advance media coverage is the terrain in which police lay the groundwork to justify raids and violent repression. To the extent to which activists can counteract these smear campaigns, they can tie the hands of police—although the corporate media is hardly a neutral playing field.

The police started out with their usual scare tactics, announcing that anarchists posed a major threat to the city and throwing around the same spurious allegations about urine and feces that had circulated since the 1990s. They also attempted to blame a string of house robberies in Polish Hill on foes of the G20, and framed other random local events as evidence that anarchists were planning illegal activity. The groundlessness of many of these accusations eventually provoked a backlash even in the corporate media.

Anarchists didn't take this lying down. For example, two months before the summit, the Pittsburgh Coalition For Homeland Security, a partnership of public and private groups, announced a press conference for businesses and security personnel regarding security planning for the summit. Pittsburgh anarchists called for a protest at this event, using the opportunity to decry police misinformation and harassment. The event was canceled and never rescheduled; apparently the private sector participants were hesitant to be publicly associated with controversial police repression.

This minor event illustrates the importance of seizing the initiative to frame public discourse around repression. The first encounter in the streets often has a disproportionate influence on how the rest of a protest plays out—if people prevent police from making arrests or controlling their movements early on, this discourages officers from continuing to try to do so and inspires others to defend themselves. Likewise, framing police preparations as assaults on civil rights may have helped limit the repressive tactics the authorities were willing to employ later.

The PGRP organized a local outreach operation improving on the door-to-door efforts the RNC Welcoming Committee

\* Only a minority of liberal organizers saw themselves as at odds with the PGRP; many participated in or donated money to PGRP efforts.

had carried out in the Twin Cities. For \$400, they printed 10,000 copies of a newspaper in plain language connecting the G20 to local issues such as transit, war, and healthcare; this reached the majority of houses in Greenfield, Bloomfield, and Lawrenceville, among other neighborhoods. This approach took advantage of the G20 to build momentum that would last beyond the mobilization. It also aimed to cultivate community support and awareness, postulating that the safety of organizers and participants depended on these. For example, the convergence center was located in Greenfield, and it would be politically costly to raid it if the neighbors were sympathetic; likewise, the state would be more reluctant to make arrests and press conspiracy charges if the general public understood the motivations behind the protests. The majority of this door-to-door work was carried out by older community organizers, some of whom did not identify as anarchists.

The PGRP also did its best to coordinate a counterattack in the corporate media. One member gave dozens of on-camera interviews, repeating talking points consensed on by the media working group; a pseudonym was used by various members to reply to telephone and email interviews. While refuting police fabrications, representatives of the PGRP never shied away from the politics or intentions of the group; this may have helped legitimize Thursday's unpermitted march in some eyes.

Shortly before the demonstrations, the authorities were attempting to backpedal on their original story about anarchists coming to destroy Pittsburgh. The spin had gotten out of control, and the city government was eager to reassure businessmen and consumers that anarchists did not pose such a dramatic threat after all. This was the context in which PGRP spokespersons emphasized that the local population had nothing to fear from protesters, who would only be going after corporate and government targets. In the end, according to corporate media reports, barely 20% of the people who normally work in or travel through downtown did so during the summit.

Immediately after the demonstrations, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* admitted in the first sentence of a front-page article that anarchists "weren't stockpiling human waste to throw at police." This kind of honesty is almost unheard of in the world of corporate journalism. Other stories were comparably favorable, at least compared to the usual flood of mendacity.

It's possible that obtaining fairer coverage was easier this time around because, for once,

anarchists were part of a story the media wanted to tell. Corporate reporters generally have a story ready in advance to feed to interviewees, in order to make their own job as simple as possible; perhaps, in this case, anarchists happened to be useful for the spin journalists planned to put on the summit, with the recession on and discontent simmering. In any event, we can't count on being fairly represented by the corporate media in the future, even if others emulate the work of the PGRP.

## The Climate Convergence Fiasco

The G20 summit was booked in the David L. Lawrence Convention Center, promoted as "the world's first and largest green convention center." Meanwhile, as if to dramatize the connections between liberal governments, ecological devastation, and working class suffering, the International Coal Conference was scheduled to take place in Pittsburgh the three days immediately preceding the G20. In response, eco-activists conceived the Three Rivers Climate Convergence.

The idea was to bring together a broad array of groups concerned with climate change and environmental justice. With its history of industrialism and environmental racism, Pittsburgh is directly impacted by these issues; parts of Pennsylvania and nearby West Virginia are currently being decimated by mountaintop removal and other mining practices.

In the UK, a powerful social movement has grown up around climate change issues, organizing a series of "climate camps" to carry out direct action against those responsible for the destruction of the environment. The organizers of the Climate Convergence hoped to do something similar, establishing a permitted occupation from which actions might take place around the city. But the United States does not yet have anything comparable to the social movement behind the UK climate camps. The coalition that came together had little theoretical or tactical unity, little experience working together, and few connections to the local community. Over time, it became increasingly dominated by

- helmet
- goggles
- ski mask
- earplugs
- gloves (insulated for throwing back gas canisters)
- running shoes (black duct tape over brand logo)
- black sweatshirt and jeans
- motocross padding
- layer of civilian clothing
- black backpack
- hammer and projectiles (cleaned with rubbing alcohol to remove fingerprints)
- paint balloons (in ziplock bags)
- bandanna soaked in vinegar (in ziplock bag)
- unmarked map (memorize locations of targets, materials, and escape routes)
- water bottle, energy snacks
- first aid kit
- prepaid cell phone connected to comms system (no previous call history)

*Anarchists arrived in Pittsburgh ready for action.*

**The RNC Welcoming Committee had over a year and a half to prepare for the 2008 Republican National Convention; Pittsburgh anarchists had barely four months to prepare for the G20. Estimates of anarchist participation in the RNC protests vary, but most peak around 1000; at the spokescouncil the day before the action, something like 500 people were represented. At the spokescouncil the night before the G20 protests, perhaps 300 people were represented, provoking some distress; but the following day over 1000 people gathered at Arsenal Park for the unpermitted march.**

liberal NGOs who refused to countenance any kind of illegal activity. This proved especially problematic when the government refused to grant permits to the proposed climate camp, leaving organizers with no leverage on the city and no alternatives.

What had been intended to be a vibrant occupation ended up as a handful of people staffing two tents at the top of a hill in Schenley Park, until the Department of Public Works confiscated the tents and tables. They received practically no media coverage. Greenpeace still managed to drop a giant banner, but the opportunity to expand the G20 protests by tying them to a broader movement against climate change was utterly missed.

So much went well in Pittsburgh that it is easy to forget about this fiasco, but we can often learn more from failures than from victories. The lessons here are familiar ones. No amount of media attention or funding can substitute for a grass-roots base actually invested in taking action. Likewise, the state will only bargain with those strong enough to defy it: committing unconditionally to playing by the rules puts you at the mercy of those who make them. Finally, organizers shouldn't promise things they can't deliver, lest others be forced to clean up after them—for example, when PGRP organizers had to scramble to house protesters who had counted on staying at the climate camp.

### The Tension Mounts

The first out-of-town anarchists arrived in Pittsburgh apprehensively. The protests at the 2008 Democratic and Republican National

Conventions had been almost the only nationwide anarchist mass mobilizations in years, and they had hardly been unqualified successes. Many around the country seemed skeptical of mass mobilizations, including some who were going to Pittsburgh.

In the antiwar era that concluded with the 2008 DNC and RNC, it had been standard for police to allege that about 5% of expected protesters would be “bad apples,” and to craft their arrest estimates appropriately. But this time, while Pittsburgh police said they anticipated 3000 protesters, they announced that they expected to make up to 1000 arrests, ratcheting up the proportion of bad apples to 33%. Police arrest estimates in advance of the 2008 RNC had proved accurate—did that mean that practically every anarchist who attended the G20 protests could expect to be arrested?

On top of this, the story circulated that up to 200 “nonviolent” inmates were being released from Pittsburgh jails to make additional space for protesters. This was an advance victory for the mobilization, but it sounded ominous. Downtown Pittsburgh was practically a military occupation zone, with assault-rifle-wielding soldiers staffing roadblocks and helicopters circling overhead. Thousands of police and National Guard had been assembled from across the country. Tension was thick in the air.

The weekend before the summit, police harassment increased, with police paying visits in force to local collective houses thought to be occupied by anarchists. Several aggressive raids and preemptive arrests had preceded the 2008 RNC; this time, the police didn't force their way in or make arrests, but the visits still brought back bad memories. Police also repeatedly

detained and harassed the Seeds of Peace bus that was to help provide food to protesters.

Tuesday afternoon, there was a picnic for protesters at Friendship Park, a mile east of Arsenal Park. Numbers seemed low, though some locals insisted there would be many more by Thursday. It appeared that some planned buildup actions weren't coming together. The Climate Convergence had collapsed. No one knew what to expect next.

### Eve of the Storm

On Wednesday, September 23, anarchists and other protesters were scrambling to prepare for the following day. How many people would come to the unpermitted march scheduled to leave Arsenal Park at 2:30 p.m.? Would the police block the march in the park, or attack it as it proceeded southwest towards the site of the summit at the tip of the peninsula of downtown Pittsburgh?

Some people were concerned that the presumed march route was a disaster waiting to happen; the two-mile corridor between Arsenal Park and the convention center passed between a river and a cliff, offering only a couple parallel roads and long stretches without exits that seemed perfect for blocking in crowds. The area was sparsely populated, marked by empty lots surrounded by

barbed wire; a full twenty blocks separated the convergence point from the shopping district outside the convention center. Surely thousands of police would be able to contain and mass-arrest a march that made it far enough southwest towards the summit. On the other hand, locals argued strenuously against marching east away from the summit, on the grounds that this would lack clear messaging and could create tension with working-class residents of the neighborhoods any other route would have to pass through.

The geography of Pittsburgh is challenging—cliffs, steep hills, and gullies break up the city in such a way that there are few routes between neighborhoods. The northern part of central Pittsburgh, where the march was to begin, is sharply divided from the southern part, where many of the major universities and shopping districts are located. Any route, whether towards the summit or away from it, would involve a variety of risks. Some anarchists were only expecting a few hundred participants, a number that would be easy for the police to control.

Adding yet more suspense, Wednesday night's spokescouncil barely concluded in the midst of police intimidation; participants had to scatter as riot police and undercover agents surrounded the space, threatening a raid. All night helicopters and police cars roamed the city.

*“Must we stress once again that the G20 is here to safeguard your freedom?”*





Young anarchists in the permitted contingent in Friday's march.

## September 24, 2009

A student march arrived at Arsenal Park around 2 p.m.; by 2:30, the park had over a thousand people in it, a veritable sea of protesters dotted with black flags and banners. This was a considerably different scenario than some out-of-town participants had anticipated.

Who were all these people? A few hundred were militant anarchists from around the US, but a great number of them were Pittsburgh locals. Some of the latter were liberals and radicals who had developed relationships with anarchists in the Pittsburgh Organizing Group in its seven years of activity; some were students, out in greater numbers than expected because the school district cancelled classes during the summit; others were simply people who had stumbled upon the PGRP call to action. They came out despite the efforts of the government and corporate media to intimidate them and discredit anarchist organizers, and many stayed in the streets despite the waves of repression that ensued.

Once an unpermitted event reaches a certain critical mass of participants, everything changes. A crowd that extends further than a city block is much more difficult to pen in; even if police can pen them in, they may lack enough vehicles or maneuvering space to arrest and transport them all. A broad diversity of participants, such as generally exists in large crowds, can also discourage police violence. And while both police and protesters can lay concrete plans for an unpermitted march of up to a few hundred participants, past a certain threshold no plans can take into account all the unpredictable factors that result from so many people acting autonomously at once.

One might extend this metaphor further to describe movements as a whole. So long as they remain small, they can be predictable and limited; but past a certain point of expansion, their energy and diversity give rise to a feedback loop that produces more energy, diversity, and expansion. Anarchists in the US are not used to organizing events that draw more than 1000 participants; sometimes it even seems we hesitate to try, whether for fear of being immediately quarantined by the police or out of lack of imagination. This can contribute to our own self-marginalization. The experience of being together in such numbers at Arsenal Park and throughout the remainder of the day was unfamiliar and exciting.

### First Movement

As large as the crowd was, leaving the park still looked dicey—riot police were blocking it to the east on 40<sup>th</sup> Street, and it appeared they could move in to block 39<sup>th</sup> at any point. Shortly after 2:30, a small segment left the park, moving up 39<sup>th</sup> towards Penn and Liberty, the two parallel avenues leading toward the summit to the southwest and into the Bloomfield neighborhood to the east. The rest of the crowd slowly filled the street behind them.

As soon as the crowd reached the top of the hill, the divisions over the march route that had simmered over the previous days came to the fore. A small but spirited black bloc headed east toward the neighborhoods and shopping districts away from the summit, while others behind them shouted that they were going the wrong way and directed everyone southwest. Some of the latter shouted “Don’t take

the bait!”—perhaps alleging that the attempt to go east was a provocation. Realizing that they were about to go it alone, the bloc returned to the crowd moving towards the summit.

Minutes later, only a few blocks west of Arsenal, the march came up against a line of riot police. A prerecorded dispersal order could be heard playing over a loudspeaker, soon punctuated by the crack of pepper gas canisters; this eerie refrain was to repeat over and over throughout that day and the next, lending an Orwellian atmosphere to all confrontations with police. In such a large crowd, it was difficult for those towards the back to tell what was going on ahead; the sight and scent of pepper gas in the distance was enough to send many moving down a side alley. Some anarchists emerged from the alley with trash cans and a mobile dumpster. At the foot of the hill ahead of them was another line of riot police and military vehicles, shooting pepper gas and attempting to force them back with blasts from a sound cannon mounted on an armored car. This was a Long Range Acoustic Device (LRAD), a sonic weapon not previously used in the United States; it sounded something like a car alarm.\*

Imagine, if you will, gentle reader, the animist version of this story in which dumpsters, long accused of complicity in anarchist “lifestylism,” step out of their social role to join the social war. Free food, even distributed via programs like Food Not Bombs, is not enough—we want freedom itself, and the dumpster does too, and it gains momentum as it rolls down the hill, alone and magnificent, directly into a pair of oblivious policemen.

There followed a period of chaos, as various contingents attempted to make their way forward without being boxed in by police. This was further complicated by the chaotic atmosphere, the fact that many groups had already lost track of each other, and the unfamiliarity of many protesters with the terrain.

In such a high-pressure situation, decisions take place anarchically, and not necessarily in the best sense of the term. Neither voting—noxious as many of us hold it to be—nor consensus process are possible. Instead, it is as if the hundreds of people involved are collectively operating a Ouija board, upon which all their individual movements—conscious or unconscious—strain against or flow into each other, becoming something different and unfamiliar, even supernatural. A person or group can occasionally have agency, but this is often arbitrary—for example, when one person’s voice happens to be heard above the uproar: “GO LEFT!!!” That person may be well-informed, or he may be a police agent; usually, one hears so many conflicting instructions that it is impossible to choose rationally between them. The crowd surges to one side, then to another. One may have personal goals, but as the context is constantly shifting according to what others are doing and where they are going, it is often simply impossible to define and carry out a program of one’s own. This may explain the sensation of “losing oneself” described by rioters and psychology professors alike: it is simply a fast-paced microcosm of the way individuals struggle to make their own history as infinitesimal components of a much larger society.

\* As one well-known comedian reported, the LRAD was not particularly effective against anarchists, many of whom willingly subject themselves to similarly unpleasant noises at comparable volumes as a result of their musical tastes. It did contribute to a dramatic atmosphere, however, which may have helped participants in the march feel justified escalating their tactics.

The role of the stressful discussions that often take place before these events, then, cannot be to plan out exactly how they will go, but simply to familiarize the participants with some of the questions and possibilities.

### Second Movement

Protesters remained in the neighborhood for over an hour, never making it more than a few blocks further southwest, harried by police at every turn. At the very furthest, some managed to reach 32<sup>nd</sup> Street where it intersects Smallman and Penn; here, they met a final impenetrable line of riot police, which slowly forced them back as far as Friendship Avenue.

Another body of marchers, numbering 200 or more, moved more swiftly out of the area, returning east along smaller streets and soon ceasing to encounter police. Many low-income residents came out to watch and shout support from their doorsteps. The march emerged from the neighborhood onto Main Street, and shortly arrived on Liberty Avenue where it turns southeast into Bloomfield. One way to view the events of Thursday afternoon is as a process in which the idea of going east rather than west slowly gained legitimacy. At first, participants had rejected it outright as a violation of the goals of the march; now, this retreating group reluctantly accepted it as inevitable, though not particularly desirable.

As Liberty Avenue makes its way southeast through Bloomfield, it passes through a shopping district of small restaurants, bars, and banks. Although there were no police around, practically no property destruction occurred until a PNC bank on the north side of the street had its doors and ATM attacked. Some have attributed this restraint to participants’ desire to respect what locals had described as a working-class area.

Police cars eventually appeared at the back of the march; they did not act until the sirens of an ambulance approaching from the front were mistaken for police reinforcements, causing the crowd to panic and begin to disperse or move onto the sidewalk. The police seized the initiative, and the march was dispelled.

Meanwhile, in a hotel outside city limits, the comms office was being raided. Thanks to backup structures set up in other cities, however, the comms system continued to function.

### Third Movement

At this point, it was almost 4 p.m. Friendship Park had been hinted at in earlier discussions as a potential reconvergence point, and now a call went out over the Twitter system to regroup there. Those who had marched east down Liberty were already nearby and moved north and west to meet their comrades at the park, who were filtering in from the deadlock to the west.

Some of the latter had escaped from a confrontation at 38<sup>th</sup> and Mintwood, where riot police had attempted to trap them in an alley. Using banners, they had forced their way through the line in a shoving match that left them free but the banners in the hands of the enemy.

Soon the crowd at Friendship Park was hundreds strong. Some of those present had not expected the day's events to go as far as they already had. Now they were inspired by the experience of taking the streets together, but not yet satisfied.

In contrast to earlier in the day, the general consensus seemed to be that there was no sense in attempting to go west to the convention center, and that instead people should head south-east towards the plush shopping districts of Shadyside and Oakland; the G20 leaders would be gathering there soon too, at Schenley Park. This was still a risky proposition, as those neighborhoods were separated from Friendship Park by significant geographical barriers.

And the police were no longer concentrated to the west, either. Now they too were gathering at the park and in the surrounding area. Before they could gain control of the situation, the crowd set out due south towards the intersection of Millvale and Liberty. Past Liberty, Millvale spans a long bridge south into North Oakland; but such a bridge would offer an easy opportunity for police to trap the march, and a police line was already waiting at the intersection. The crowd continued east down Liberty, picking up where the march an hour prior had left off.

Speed was of the essence at this point, and for a short time the march outdistanced the police. Had the participants moved any slower, dire consequences would surely have ensued; had they moved faster, things might have turned out better. Despite this, there were still some who insisted on shouting "Walk!" when others, aware of the imminent danger, were yelling "MOVE!"

Riot police appeared in force at the intersection with Baum, blasting a dispersal order. The front of the march cut through the parking lot around them and onto Baum; those behind found the way blocked. On Powhattan, one black-clad protester was tackled by police but successfully unarrested by an unmasked man in sandals. Some in the front contingent doubled back to defend their comrade by pinning the attackers down under a rain of projectiles; officers responded with beanbag rounds, causing injuries. Meanwhile, a little further down Baum, protesters dragged a large section of chain-link fencing into the road to obstruct pursuit.

Seconds later, those who had passed the police blockade took off south again, now at a run. Around the corner, a Boston Market franchise appeared. Everyone's adrenaline was pumping from the police attack; it lost ten windows in a hail of rocks. Regrettably, customers could be seen inside fleeing the windows; no one was injured.

Now the bridge into North Oakland came into view, and the march crossed it at full speed, finally penetrating into the wealthier districts of Pittsburgh. A brand new Fidelity bank was waiting on the other side, scheduled to open the following Monday; its grand opening had to be delayed on account of its doors, windows, and ATM being destroyed. Aware that police were swooping in from all directions, the march split into smaller groups, ultimately dispersing and disappearing. Some participants continued south to Pittsburgh University, where the final clashes of the day were to occur.

Meanwhile, many of those who had been blocked at Baum made their way further down Liberty to Centre, then crossed back over to Baum, where the windows of a KFC and a BMW

dealership were smashed. They managed to reach Enfield Street, where police attacked them with pepper gas at the intersections with Baum and Centre. Widely circulated video footage from this area shows thugs in fatigues kidnapping a protester and forcing him into a car; this was one of very few snatch arrests, and it's noteworthy that police choreographed it to minimize the risk to officers.

The rest of the crowd managed to escape. Some made their way back to Bloomfield across the Millvale bridge, while others joined their comrades near Pittsburgh University. At this point in the afternoon, there had only been a handful of arrests.

For the following several hours, armored vehicles and riot police overran North Oakland, roving the streets and blocking off areas seemingly to no purpose. When a person experiences an allergic reaction, it is often not the poison that causes the negative effects so much as his body's reaction to it. Likewise, the relatively small actions of anarchists triggered a disproportionately disruptive police response. Everywhere an unpermitted march passed, lines of police cars and military vehicles followed; everywhere a window had been broken, traffic was halted by police blockades. All evening Pittsburgh locals could be heard on street corners and city buses decrying the police presence, the hassle of the summit, and the hypocrisy of their rulers.

## Fourth Movement

Less than a mile south of the final confrontation on Enfield, protesters were beginning to gather near the bridge to Schenley Park, where the Obamas were hosting dinner for other heads of state at Phipps conservatory. More and more people joined in over the following hours, and heavy-handed police repression ensued, including the usual electronic dispersal order and pepper gas; but this only attracted more protesters and onlookers, and soon the crowd numbered up to 1000. Reports describe students with t-shirts wrapped around their faces chanting "beer pong!" and "LET'S GO PITT!" as well as more explicitly political slogans.

Meanwhile, many participants in the day's protests had gathered nearby at the Public Health Auditorium at 5<sup>th</sup> and De Soto for a radical cabaret. The news came in during a particularly inspiring performance that the police were raiding the Wellness Center at which injured and traumatized protesters were being treated. It was later announced that the police had not actually raided the space, but only threatened it; regardless, at this point no one present would have been surprised by any outrage on the part of the police.

A Bash Back! march celebrating queer resistance had been called to depart from 5<sup>th</sup> and De Soto at 10 p.m.; at the spokesperson the preceding night, one organizer had emphasized that it was to be a "nonviolent" event. As people exited the Public Health auditorium, someone could be heard addressing the crowd, asking that no property destruction occur at least until the march reached Forbes Avenue. At first, this sounded like a plea to refrain from confrontational activity, perhaps the result of a compromise hashed out between disputing organizers; in fact, Forbes was only a block away.



Moments later, a black bloc over a hundred strong arrived at the intersection of Forbes and Atwood pushing half a dozen dumpsters. These were upended to block the single police van at the corner while the crowd proceeded north-east, smashing the windows of practically every corporate business in its path. Another dumpster was rolled further down the street and set alight in the intersection with Oakland Avenue.

We can imagine the atmosphere of those instants: the running figures, the explosions of shattering glass reverberating off the buildings, the dim streetlights on masked faces, the nearby sirens reminding everyone that militarized riot police were on their way from only a couple blocks' distance.

Pamela's Diner, Panera Bread, McDonalds, Bruegger's Bagels, Subway Sandwiches, Rite Aid, FedEx Kinko's, American Apparel, the Pitt Shop, and other businesses suffered damage. One dim-witted young man addressed participants in the march as "faggots" and was doused with pepper spray. The bloc moved north, encountering a police substation on which a particularly bitter revenge was exacted. Police vehicles were already in pursuit and presumably speeding ahead to surround the march; however, the terrain of the college district was too open, and too populated by civilians, for them to easily entrap their prey.

Some participants broke off from the march at this point, merging into the nearby crowd of students. Others cut through the university property across from Schenley Plaza, attacking an animal testing facility at 5<sup>th</sup> and Bellefield and proceeding as far as Craig Street, where Quizno's Subs, PNC Bank, Irish Design Center, BNY Mellon, and Citizens Bank were damaged before the bloc finally dispersed.

Immediately thereafter, the police issued another prerecorded dispersal order to the students in Schenley Plaza and around the so-called "Cathedral of Learning," then fired several dozen pepper gas canisters at the crowd. The following hours saw massive police occupation of the university area and ongoing clashes with students; officers attacked students attempting to flee into their residence halls and shot gas canisters onto dormitory balconies. As in St. Paul after the first day of the RNC, comparatively modest anarchist action provoked such a powerful police overreaction that the police ended up precipitating conflict with the public at large.

By midnight at the end of September 24, two thousand or more anarchists, students, and people of other walks of life had participated in unpermitted protests causing well over \$50,000 damage to corporations and police. There had been only sixty-six arrests.

*Confrontation at 37th Street and Butler, Thursday afternoon.*

We've retreated to a back street; a cacophony of sirens, gunshots, and explosions echoes off the walls ahead of us. With our experience, this isn't exactly frightening—it all seems to be happening in slow motion; but the irrationality of the authorities' behavior is unsettling. A tremendous cloud of white smoke is filling the air above the roof of the dormitory, and a familiar acrid scent is beginning to mingle with the sweet stench of pepper gas: is something on fire? Two more pepper gas canisters soar high into the night sky, trails of poison billowing behind them, and land on the same roof. It's like the Fourth of July, only with crying, bleeding college students fleeing beneath the fireworks.

### Friday Morning and Afternoon

The PGRP call for decentralized actions on Friday morning had an unintended effect: by Wednesday, a great number of the establishments on the list had boarded up their shop fronts and announced that they were closed for the week. This forced organizers to rethink the strategy, as it made little sense to hold actions at boarded-up targets. Some actions still occurred—including an Iraq Veterans Against the War march and actions outside a recruiting station—but it would have taken a great deal of street activity to have interrupted business as usual to the extent that the call to action did on its own.

The “decentralized actions” model was not held to be particularly successful at the 2004 DNC and RNC, and it's far from certain that it would have been a success in Pittsburgh if the preemptive response had not rendered action superfluous. Perhaps this model is at its strongest as a way to direct attention to local perpetrators of injustice and stretch the forces of the state thin, rather than as a way to bring people together in protest.

That afternoon, a raucous anarchist contingent swelled the march organized by the Anti-War Committee. The march drew thousands of people from a wide range of demographics; some said that it reminded them of the anti-globalization era, before such protests were homogenized under the anti-Bush banner. The fact that many of the participants had run in the streets the previous day lent an edge to

the atmosphere: for the moment, they were unmasked, accepting the lines of police that circumscribed the march—but they knew they needn't always accept them.

### Friday Night

Earlier Friday, a flier had circulated: “Go Pitt; Fuck the Police; 10 p.m., Schenley Plaza.” By ten o'clock, hundreds of people had gathered in and around the area. A small minority were avowed anarchists. Perhaps a greater proportion had participated somehow in the previous day's events, but the vast majority appeared simply to be curious students.

The university had sternly warned students to stay away, but this backfired, making the Plaza irresistible. Police and National Guard were already swarming the area in large formations; helicopters combed the ground with searchlights, intensifying the atmosphere of military occupation.

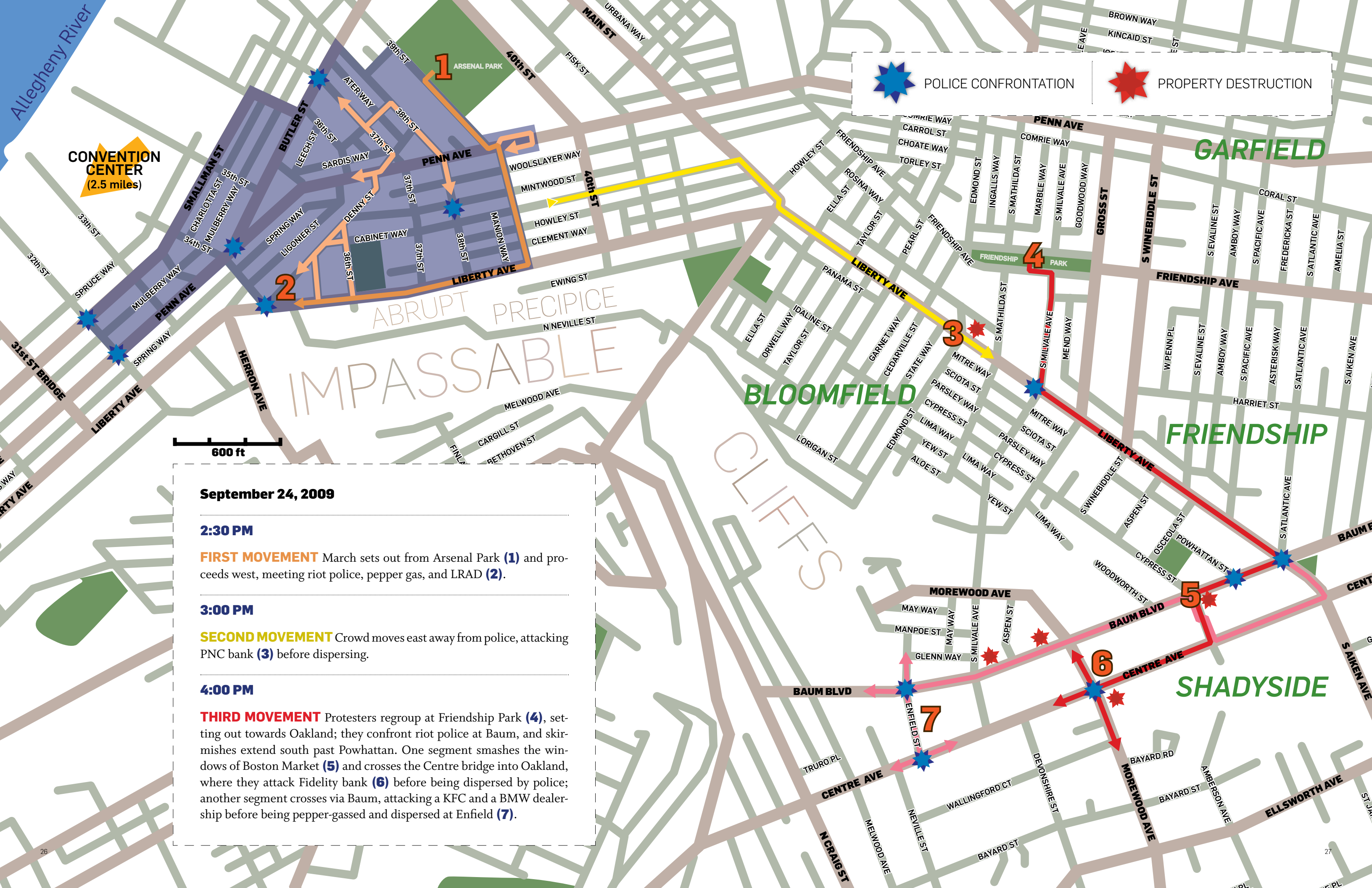
No protest ensued: no march, no banners, no chants,\* no confrontations or property destruction.† All the same, the police soon forcibly

\* A couple young people did attempt to get a chant off the ground—the old sports standby “Let's go, Pittsburgh, let's go!” One sweatshirted anarchist could be heard quietly singing along in the same cadence: “My life—makes no—sense at all!”

† With one exception: a communiqué later announced that, in the center of hundreds of riot police, anarchists somehow succeeded in dyeing the fountain in front of Schenley Plaza's Frick Fine Arts building blood red, in memory of Alexander Berkman's attack on Henry Clay Frick.



[Opposite]  
A student feeder march makes its way through Bloomfield on its way to Arsenal Park, passing the PNC bank that was later attacked; the crowd gathers in Arsenal Park.



 POLICE CONFRONTATION
  PROPERTY DESTRUCTION

**CONVENTION CENTER**  
 (2.5 miles)

600 ft

**September 24, 2009**

**2:30 PM**

**FIRST MOVEMENT** March sets out from Arsenal Park (1) and proceeds west, meeting riot police, pepper gas, and LRAD (2).

**3:00 PM**

**SECOND MOVEMENT** Crowd moves east away from police, attacking PNC bank (3) before dispersing.

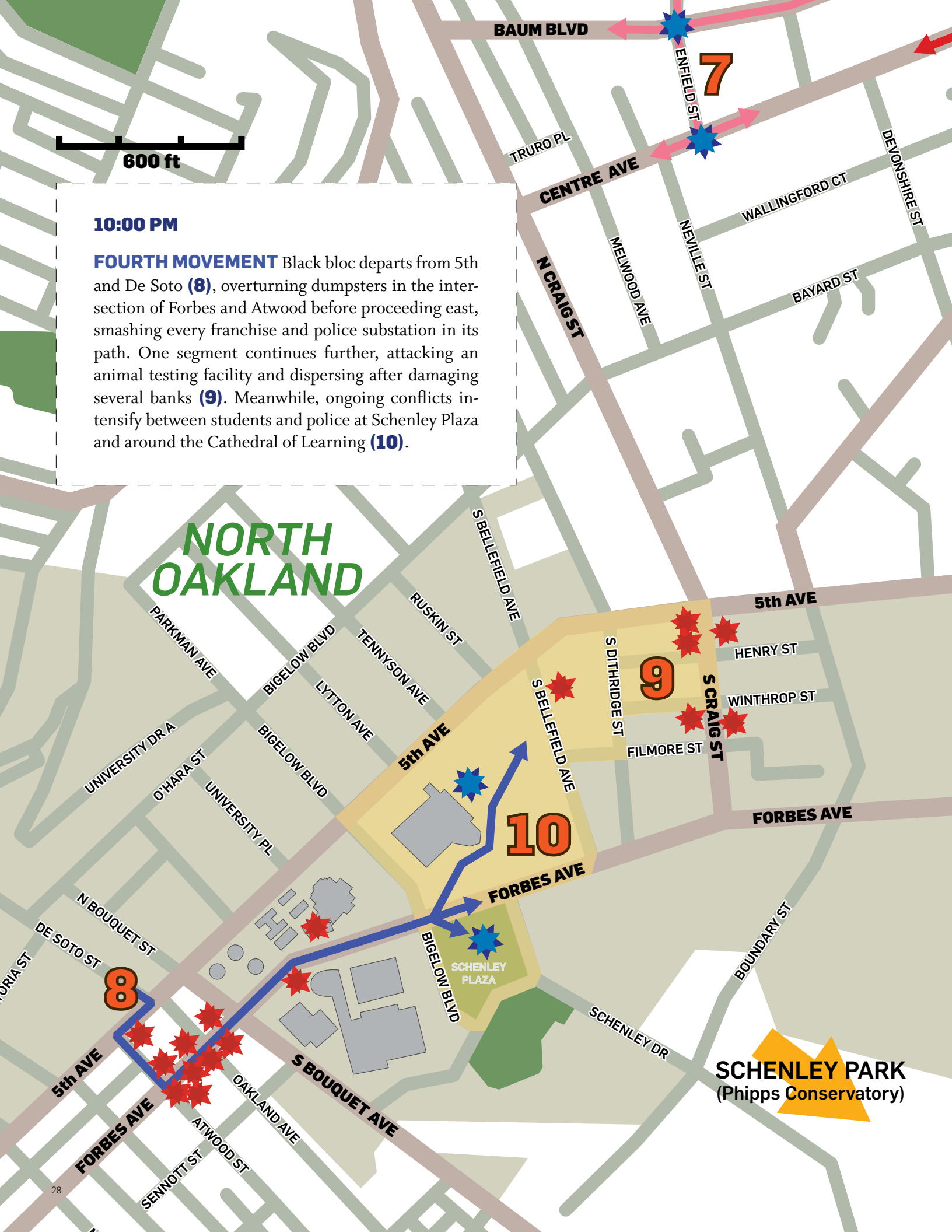
**4:00 PM**

**THIRD MOVEMENT** Protesters regroup at Friendship Park (4), setting out towards Oakland; they confront riot police at Baum, and skirmishes extend south past Powhattan. One segment smashes the windows of Boston Market (5) and crosses the Centre bridge into Oakland, where they attack Fidelity bank (6) before being dispersed by police; another segment crosses via Baum, attacking a KFC and a BMW dealership before being pepper-gassed and dispersed at Enfield (7).



10:00 PM

**FOURTH MOVEMENT** Black bloc departs from 5th and De Soto (8), overturning dumpsters in the intersection of Forbes and Atwood before proceeding east, smashing every franchise and police substation in its path. One segment continues further, attacking an animal testing facility and dispersing after damaging several banks (9). Meanwhile, ongoing conflicts intensify between students and police at Schenley Plaza and around the Cathedral of Learning (10).



The march spills out of Arsenal Park and onto 39th Street.

cleared the square. Not content with this, they began to shoot pepper gas canisters at spectators on the sidewalk across the street. Eventually, they advanced further, shooting pepper gas and projectiles at hapless, fleeing onlookers and beating and arresting anyone they could catch. This continued for hours; in the end, 110 people were arrested, mostly passers-by and medics who stayed behind to treat the injured.

According to Cindy Sheehan, the National Guard troops in Pittsburgh had recently returned from duty in Iraq. This may explain their behavior: they were pacifying Oakland the way they had pacified Baghdad and Fallujah. Despite years of police brutality and "Bring the War Home" rhetoric, witnessing this was downright dumbfounding. Anarchists always decry police repression, arguing that every use of coercive authority is illegitimate; but it is difficult to imagine how even a statist conservative could justify such an assault when there was no resistance to repress. The events of Friday night showed that the authorities can produce a "riot" simply by ordering people not to do something that they don't even realize they are doing; this is the same heavy-handed stupidity that helped generate the Iraqi resistance.

No outrage was capable of igniting resistance that night, however. The flier had cast the students as the protagonists in a struggle against

the police; some radicals came hoping to support them in this conflict, their hopes buoyed by the clashes that had taken place the previous evening. In fact, many of those involved in the G20 mobilization were Pitt students, including the PGRP media spokesperson—acting "as anarchists," they were capable of a great deal. Framed as "students," however, the social body that gathered Friday night was unable to defend itself. This underscores the foolishness of pinning one's hopes for resistance on another demographic, or even on others in one's own demographic. Those who wish to struggle against this society must cast themselves as protagonists in that struggle and find common cause with all who join in.

Some anarchists took the dim view that the students were carrying apathy to a sadomasochistic extreme, paradoxically asserting their right to be spectators of their own repression: "Why are you pepper-gassing us? We have the right to be here watching you pepper-gas us!" Conversely, one might argue that, by coming out in defiance of the decrees and threats of the university, the students were challenging their social roles—perhaps more so than the anarchists who were just there to do what anarchists always do. In that light, simply in showing up, the students were protesters: not politicized protesters like those who elaborated





*"By order of the City of Pittsburgh Chief Police, I hereby declare this to be an unlawful assembly. I order all those assembled to immediately disperse. You must leave the immediate vicinity. If you remain in this immediate vicinity, you will be in violation of the Pennsylvania Crimes Code. No matter what your purpose is, you must leave. If you do not disperse, you may be arrested and or subject to other police action. Other police action may include actual physical removal, the use of riot control agents, and or less lethal munitions which could cause risk of injury to those who remain."*

their critiques of the policies of the G20 into indymedia cameras, but protesters all the same against the authority of the school administration and the tedium of college life.

One might also say that the students were resisting in the way they knew best—by *being present* in an area they felt some ownership over. When the Steelers win the Super Bowl, students flood the streets and lawns, and the police don't interfere—but now the police were challenging their right to this territory. The frequently repeated "I live here!" could be heard as a declaration that students were entitled to "protest" in this way—although it also implicitly delegitimized out-of-town anarchists who might otherwise have helped defend the space.

For their part, though they set out to break up a presumed protest, the police had no method by which to identify protesters. They began by threatening everyone; those who did not immediately flee became protesters. They pepper-gassed everyone; those who covered their faces were protesters. They shot projectiles at anyone in view; those they struck were marked as protesters by their own blood. They charged anyone who remained on the street; those who ran away were protesters, and were chased, tackled, and beaten accordingly. All this illustrates how those serving authoritarian power can only see—and

thus produce—enemies wherever they look.

Following Thursday's clashes, it only took a single flier to provoke a full-scale police state. Once again we see the apparatus of repression causing more disruption than any protest: the tiny sting of the anarchist mosquito provokes an allergic reaction that can be disproportionately costly for the state. In some ways, the events of Friday night were strategically fortuitous: the police discrediting themselves could only help the cases of those who were arrested on Thursday.

It's possible to be overly optimistic about this phenomenon, however. Manifestations of the violence inherent in state power don't necessarily persuade people of the possibility or value of the anarchist alternative. It takes *action* to accomplish that.

In this regard, the invisibility—dare we say the mythological character—of actual anarchists Friday night was a loss of ground. Anarchists were at once everywhere and nowhere. Everywhere—or else why were the police attacking everyone?—yet nowhere, in that there was no explicitly anarchist presence. This indeterminacy implies a tremendous potential—*Are those people over there anarchists? Might I be one, myself?*—but usually ends up serving the interests of the state. As the underdogs, anarchists generally have to stay in the shadows for

security reasons; we can hardly speak honestly about our intentions in our own spokespersons, let alone to the public at large. We remain utopian ghosts, shadows pursuing something otherworldly, while the police prove again and again that *they* are the only reality, writing this on the skin of civilians in a Morse code of rubber bullets when need be.

This is why moments of visibility and togetherness like those on Thursday afternoon are so important. When enough of us join in action, we are no longer isolated lunatics pursuing will-o'-the-wisps; brought into reality, our dissident desires are legitimized in a such a way that we can finally believe in them, so that others will be able to as well. Suddenly, fighting capitalism is more realistic than knuckling under to it. Nothing makes more sense than pulling masks over our faces, linking arms, and charging our oppressors.

## What Went Right in Pittsburgh

Whenever a mobilization goes well—that is, about once a decade—every established organization and ideological faction hastens to explain how this confirms their pet theories or

tactical preferences. It should not be surprising, then, that as big-tent anarchists—"anarchists without adjectives"—our take is that the Pittsburgh G20 protests succeeded because the efforts, strategies, and strengths of a wide range of participants were integrated into a complementary whole.

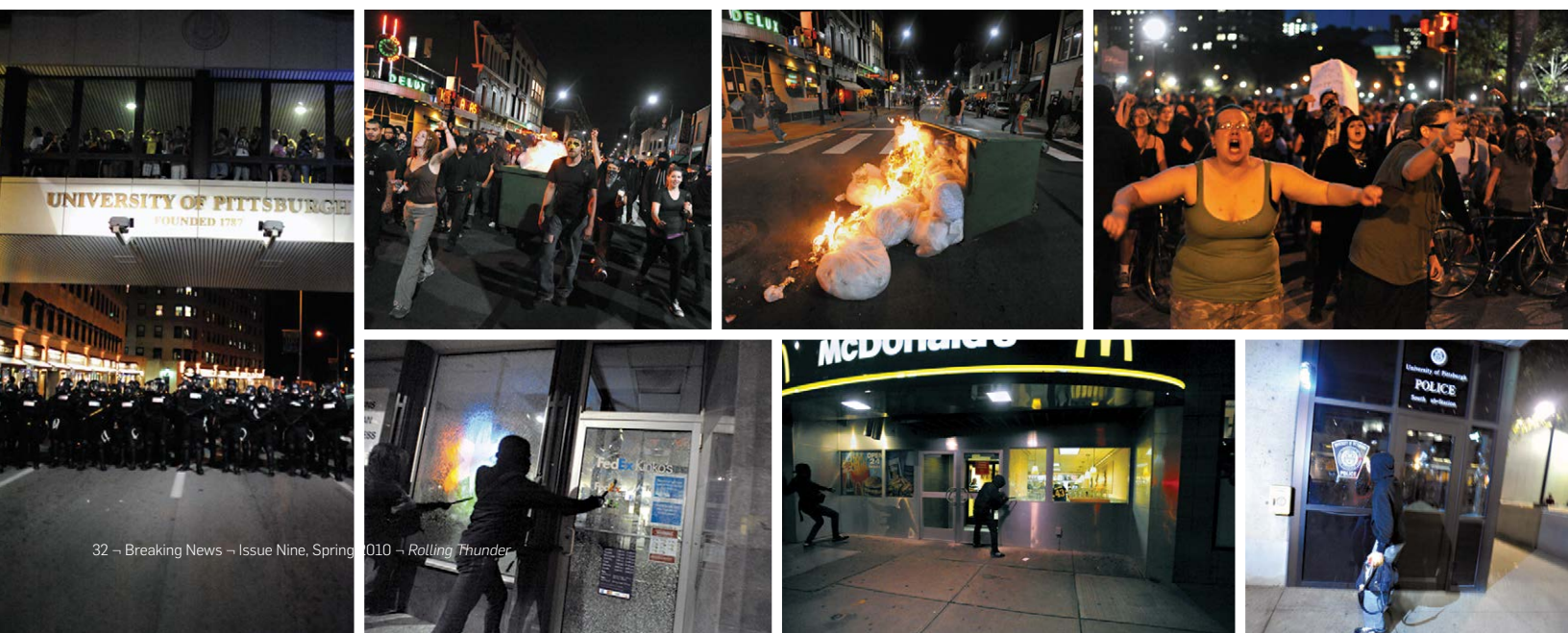
For once, everyone got what they wanted. Everybody from strident pacifists to dogmatic nihilists managed to contribute to something larger than themselves; everything else followed from this.

Community organizers won public support and turned out far more than the usual suspects; this made the streets safer for everyone and helped expand dialogue beyond the radical ghetto. Those who wanted to confront the summit itself marched toward it on Thursday and demonstrated in front of it Friday afternoon; this provided a political narrative for the mobilization. Black bloc anarchists who wanted to avoid the authorities in order to attack everyday manifestations of capital got their wish, damaging targets throughout the city. Those who wished to cast themselves as legitimate protesters whose voices were being suppressed by a police state had adequate opportunity to

*[Next Page]  
The anarchist contingent in Friday's permitted march; scenes of resistance, repression, and destruction around Pittsburgh University on Thursday evening.*

*Dumpsters had been potent anarchist symbols around the turn of the century, representing the reclamation of waste and the possibility of life beyond employment. In Pittsburgh, they returned to the spotlight, playing a prominent role in securing space and defending against police attacks.*





do so, and were joined by hundreds of students in a spectacle that could only erode the credibility of the authorities.

Meanwhile, anarchists gained credibility both by taking the initiative in organizing and by cooperating successfully with other groups. We can see the G20 mobilization as building on the precedents set by the 2008 RNC mobilization to establish the legitimacy of anarchist organizing in the public eye. Even those who only wish to fight police and destroy corporate property must acknowledge the importance of the outreach that involved so many people in the mobilization. Without this social body, it would have been easy for the police to repress isolated anarchists, and successful direct action would have occurred in a vacuum rather than in a social context in which it could be inspiring and infectious.

In positioning themselves to lay the groundwork for such outreach and coordination, long-running organizations like POG and the more recently established Greater Pittsburgh Anarchist Collective serve an essential role in the infrastructure of the anarchist movement. If we want to see large-scale mobilizations, there have to be groups with the capacity and credibility to organize them: groups everyone can trust to come through on their commitments, so people know they are not taking a great risk by showing up from out of town. This is not to say that every anarchist must organize in such a group, or that this is the most important form of anarchist organizing—but without at least a few of these, anarchists will be doomed to the periphery of protest movements, and may find it difficult to coordinate other large-scale forms of resistance as well.

All this said, had the PGRP turned out 1000 people for a march that simply ended up being dispersed or mass-arrested in the empty industrial zone southwest of Arsenal Park, it would not have been nearly as empowering as what happened. Autonomous anarchists making decisions outside the PGRP framework were essential to the success of the G20 protests.

Anarchists focused on conflict and property destruction have long fantasized about “Plan B”—the idea that, rather than attacking heavily defended symbolic manifestations of state and capital such as summit meetings, would-be rioters should appear where they are least expected in order to do more damage with impunity. This model notoriously failed at the 2007 anti-G8 mobilization in Germany, among other places. In theoretical terms, Plan B is an attempt to free direct action from the baggage of activism, to channel dissent into resistance rather than reactive rituals. At worst, the reasoning behind Plan B fails to take into account the social and psychological foundations of the successful street actions of the past decade, approaching rioting in purely militaristic terms. The social body behind the anarchist riots of recent memory has been bound together as much by the feeling of entitlement that comes from fighting an obvious external foe as by clandestine networks and general belligerence. Many people feel entitled to participate in such actions, or are impressed by them, because there are extenuating circumstances in the form of summits, trade agreements, police occupations, and so on—militant confrontation is predicated on a “state of exception” no less than it provokes the state to declare one. Clearly, we need to move beyond this reactive posture—but it may take more than a new *tactic* to do so.

In Pittsburgh, as out-of-town anarchists arrived and familiarized themselves with the terrain, some concluded that it would be disastrous to march towards the summit; this included some who had not previously been enthusiastic about Plan B. No one believed the march had any chance of reaching the convention center. If the point was simply to stage a confrontational protest, the empty corridor between Arsenal Park and the convention center was hardly the most opportune setting.

At the same time, as so many locals had been brought into the mobilization with the understanding that they were going to march on the G20, it was impossible to change plans without losing the social body of the march. PGRP organizers argued this at the spokescouncil, and this was further underscored when the body of the march refused to follow the black bloc at the front when it turned east away from the convention center on its way out of Arsenal Park. When the bloc turned back to rejoin the mass, the decision not to split the march was pivotal: because of this, when it proved impossible to make any headway toward the convention center, a great many more people headed east than had initially attempted to.

Had the entire march continued east at the outset rather than heading toward the convention center as promised, there would surely have been intense controversy afterwards, which might have seriously undermined Pittsburgh anarchists’ local credibility. Likewise, had the Plan B fantasy led to some clandestine action distant from the rest of the protesters, it might have set a dangerous precedent for that faction of the US anarchist movement, signifying a slide towards the logic of closed circles and armed struggle. Fortunately, the way things played out, everyone got to do what they wanted, and to do it *together*.

In the end, by blocking the route to the convention center, the police were the ones who forced marchers to turn around and head east. They can be held responsible for everything that happened next—the property destruction, the pepper-gassing of civilians, the disruption of business and traffic. However, the shift of the action eastward would not have occurred so decisively had autonomous anarchists not already discussed setting out in that direction.

Once the rest of the city was added to the terrain of struggle, it was a whole new ball game. Protesters were not simply chanting in isolation, but transforming the urban landscape according to a new logic. The police were not simply staffing a militarized zone far from the public eye, but interrupting the flows of business as usual. This was no longer protest as private grudge match, but a public event that affected everyone whether or not they had previously taken a side.

Everything that occurred in Oakland—the standoff with the police, the black bloc that decimated the business district, the police riot the following night—came as a surprise to practically everyone. On Wednesday, everybody from local organizers to out-of-town maniacs had agreed that Oakland would be impassable on account of the G20 leaders’ visit to Schenley Park. The extension of the demonstration into the city at large opened up possibilities that had been unimaginable.

If protest is essentially theater, anarchists were “breaking the fourth wall,” involving the audience in the play. There is a great

**At midnight, following Thursday's running battles, an announcement went out that police were having trouble getting fuel and were trying to get a tanker truck to come refill their Humvees. Another report claimed "police not responding to other calls: 'all units are in Oakland.'" Perhaps this is just more of the misinformation common to the Twitter era, but it also sounds like the first signs of the capitalist empire suffering from overextension as its resources run out.**

deal of talk about this in anarchist circles, but it rarely occurs on the transformative level everyone desires. It is ironic that the actions of black bloc anarchists were instrumental in bringing this about, in view of accusations that black bloc tactics alienate the public and isolate radicals. The local organizers had kept the social body of protesters together by insisting on heading towards the convention center, but it was the autonomous anarchists' movement away from the convention center that involved the rest of the city in the action.

The black bloc in Pittsburgh was particularly fierce by US standards; it wreaked considerable havoc despite being menaced by ten times as many police as the famous bloc at the Seattle WTO protests. It has been said that the demonstrations of the past decade have functioned as a sort of inoculation for the police state: without ever seriously threatening it, they have prompted it to develop a much more powerful immune system. Yet it may be that this police state has also produced a tougher breed of anarchist, too, the way that new strains of viruses evolve that are immune to existing vaccines. In Pittsburgh, whenever an opening appeared, anarchists poured into it—smashing windows by the dozen, showering projectiles upon police lines, and largely escaping unscathed.

### Legal Fallout

A total of 193 arrests occurred during the G20, the majority being random bystanders seized on Friday night. The police absurdly attempted to scapegoat David Japenga, one of the sixteen people charged with felonies, for over \$20,000 of damage; as of this writing, he still awaits trial. The PGRP legal working group has helped coordinate support for defendants, while students have formed the pressure group WHAP ("What Happened at Pitt?") and have been seen consistently at G20 fundraisers and antiwar actions.

The two people arrested in the comms space raid were initially charged with "hindering apprehension or prosecution, criminal use of a communication facility, and possessing

an instrument of crime,"\* presumably in hopes of setting a precedent to suppress the use of communications technology in future demonstrations. In the absence of leaders, comms is something the state can understand as a nerve center; the comms office was raided at the RNC as well, though the arrestees were released without charges.

A week after the G20, the Joint Terrorism Task Force carried out a 16-hour raid on the comms defendants' home, confiscating or destroying many of their belongings. The defendants responded with a spirited media campaign including high-profile magazine and radio interviews; less than a month later, the state of Pennsylvania dropped the charges against them. However, as of this writing, a grand jury is still investigating them for allegedly violating an antiquated interstate rioting law.

### Recession Repression?

The authorities assembled a force of nearly 5000 in Pittsburgh, including 2500 National Guard troops, 1200 state troopers, 875 Pittsburgh city police, and small groups from other agencies. It's significant that the National Guard comprised more than half of the total force; it may point to greater military involvement in domestic policing in the future. The original plan had been to utilize more police and fewer National Guard, but it appears that only the National Guard was available—perhaps a sign of overextension among our foes.

Police officers were brought in from as far away as Florida and Arizona. This gave local police the opportunity to blame misconduct on visiting officers, but it also meant that local authorities were hesitant to create situations in which individual police could get out of control—for example, when Miami PD attempted to storm the dormitories at Pitt University, only to be called off by a frantic university police chief.

The G20 was the first nationwide mass mobilization to occur since the onset of the recession. Just as diminishing economic

\* "Hindering apprehension" is a new one to us here. It sounds more like an existential condition than a crime—picture Woody Allen in some sex farce, awkwardly explaining to his mother that he's been suffering from hindering apprehension!

resources have halted the expansion of the prison-industrial complex at home and US military occupations overseas, they may limit the state's capacity to repress domestic dissent. Though there were plenty of officers in Pittsburgh, the city government was extremely short on funds; it could hardly afford the processing costs of mass arrests, let alone consequent lawsuits.

### Police Tactics and Strategy

Remember, up until 2 p.m. Thursday, many doubted the unpermitted march would even make it out of Arsenal Park. Things turned out better than expected, but it is bad news, not good news, when we fail to predict our foes' behavior accurately.

Let's look again at the context shaping the police strategy. The weeks before the G20 saw a pitched struggle in the city government as well as the media. The liberal community was pushing civil liberties issues, with the ACLU winning a lawsuit over the right to demonstrate; the City Council was divided, having struck down a mask ordinance despite pressure from police and presumably the federal government. One City Council member went

**"We're trying to thin out the innocent."**

—Pittsburgh University Police Chief Tim Delaney, quoted by corporate media reporter Rich Lord (we can't make this stuff up!)

so far as to attend the beginning of Thursday's unpermitted march; he had also showed up at the picnic at Friendship Park on Tuesday, and it may not have been coincidental that the police massing nearby disappeared immediately afterwards.

Meanwhile, police intelligence—oxymorons aside—seemed to be at an all-time low. With only a few months warning that the G20 was to occur in Pittsburgh, the authorities had considerably less time to infiltrate activist circles than they did before the 2008 RNC. They had already been tracking many PGRP organizers for years, and they continued physically tracking them during the summit; but it is possible that a lack of informants directly within organizing circles prevented the state from manufacturing incriminating statements that could offer pretexts for raids or conspiracy charges. The FBI did not repeat the despicable tactic of entrapping impressionable young activists that it had employed at the RNC, either.

Thursday afternoon: anarchists hail the horizon with a dumpster at the ready.



There are indications that the conspiracy charges brought against the organizers now known as the RNC 8 were not ordered by the federal government, but rather by overzealous Ramsey County authorities; the case has not gone well for the state thus far, which has already been compelled to drop the terrorism charges against them. This is another possible explanation of why no similar charges have been brought against PGRP organizers, whether or not the internal security practices of the PGRP were more effective than those of the RNC 8. Either way, it appears that the RNC 8 charges do not set an inexorable precedent for the future. Those who organize anarchist frameworks for mass mobilizations won't automatically be charged with felony conspiracy, though this is not to say it will never happen again. Much may still hinge on the outcome of the RNC 8 trial.

Without actionable intelligence on anarchist organizing, rank-and-file police focused on harassing subcultural spaces such as the Landslide Farm in the weeks before the summit. They were prepared to carry out raids—they hassled several collective houses, they threatened the convergence space and the Wellness Center, they located and raided the comms space—but they didn't dare go after organizers' or protesters' housing.

This may have been the result of a cost-benefit analysis. By that point, the city was attempting to downplay the negative impact of the G20 summit and the repressive policing surrounding it, and raids would have had the opposite effect. Meanwhile, protesters were not especially dependent on any one space. Although the lack of centralized housing for out-of-town protesters was inconvenient, it meant that no single police raid could significantly disrupt the mobilization. We will certainly see more police raids in the future, but it seems that the authorities concluded there was nothing to gain from carrying them out in Pittsburgh.

This brings us back to the afternoon of September 24. Police were out in force around Arsenal Park, with the rest of their numbers almost all positioned west of it. They planned to confront the crowd in this comparatively isolated area, peppergassing the working-class inhabitants of the neighborhood as well as the protesters. They may have been prepared to make mass arrests, but they didn't attempt to immediately. Instead, the police strategy rested on crowd control and dispersal: they intended to break up the crowd from a distance rather than engaging in hand-to-hand combat. The vision of 1000 people being beaten and arrested on the evening news was simply too much for local politicians to stomach, especially with some planning electoral campaigns.

The police don't seem to have placed many undercovers in the march. This must have been dictated by their strategy. Relying on distance weapons that affect everyone indiscriminately—pepper gas, LRADs, beanbag rounds—they could hardly fill the march with agents who would be endangered by these. The rarity of snatch arrests also indicates fears for the safety of officers in the vicinity of protesters, as police representatives have acknowledged in subsequent interviews.

A police strategy of crowd control and dispersal is convenient for anarchists in a variety of ways. Fewer arrests means higher morale coming out of the mobilization and less legal

support work afterwards; crowd control agents and “less lethal munitions” dramatize the oppressive nature of the police state, creating an atmosphere of social conflict. In North America, we rarely see police respond to anarchist demonstrations with this strategy; the Quebec City anti-FTAA protests of April 2001 are one of the only other recent examples. Presumably the authorities only adopt this approach when they are convinced that they are going to be dealing with a great number of protesters, at least some of whom are capable of self-defense. It was a significant victory to compel the police to adopt this strategy.

As has been seen at other mobilizations, the police were hesitant to confront the most militant elements; consequently, the latter suffered a great deal less state violence than peaceful protesters and hapless bystanders. As counterintuitive as it sounds, it is often safer at the front of the black bloc than at the back of a crowd of confused spectators. Similarly, though the police did not go after PGRP organizers, they mercilessly shut down the attempted climate convergence and harassed the unfortunate Seeds of Peace until the latter found a well-respected church to host them. When one is dealing with the police, obeying the law is meaningless: only *power* matters, whether it is based in street tactics or community ties.

Subsequent newspaper reports have shed some light on the failure of police to respond to the Bash Back! march that devastated the university district Thursday night. If these are to be believed, officers were powerless to respond because they had been assigned to guard the area around Phipps Conservatory where the G20 leaders were dining. It was extremely audacious to attack the shopping district only a couple blocks away, but coupled with speed and the element of surprise, audacity can pay off, especially in a terrain that lends itself to swift movement and dispersal. It's still surprising that police did not accompany the march from the very beginning. Perhaps they were overextended policing the rest of Oakland and keeping up with the disturbances around Schenley Plaza; or perhaps they believed the statement at the previous night's spokescouncil that the march would be “nonviolent.”

The same reports indicate that the authorities were crippled by the challenges of integrating officers from so many different departments into one command structure. This made it impossible to encrypt radio communications completely; police saw their orders appear moments later in Twitter reports, prompting them to shift to cell phone communication, which cannot have improved matters. If the actions of the black bloc at the RNC in St. Paul did not completely dispel the myth of the all-powerful police state, the G20 protests should finish the job.

## Room for Improvement

Many anarchists sat out the G20 protests, not expecting them to be successful or important. The few hundred who did come from out of town were able to accomplish a great deal, thanks largely to local participation; but the anarchist movement should be able to mobilize greater numbers for events like this. It needn't interrupt ongoing local organizing to take a few days off once a year for a mobilization. In another setting, a black bloc of three

# Perhaps the most important question is whether we can consolidate the progress we've made through the RNC and the G20 towards determining the format and character of protest in the United States.

hundred would simply not have been enough.

Many participants vastly overestimated the capabilities of the authorities in advance, perhaps in part because it had been so long since a successful mobilization on this scale. Thursday's events were a pleasant surprise, but it's never advantageous to misjudge the plans of the police. For example, at Wednesday night's spokescouncil, several dozen protesters agreed to do jail solidarity on the assumption that enough of them would be arrested that they would have some collective leverage. As it turned out, only a couple of them were arrested, leaving the few individuals who refused to give their names in jail high and dry.

In many ways, the anarchist movement is still haunted by the ghosts of the Miami FTAA and the St. Paul RNC. We can learn a lot from those examples, but fixating on the high-water marks of repression can be self-defeating. If anarchists maintain confrontational organizing, the state will increase the force it employs against us, but this cannot render us powerless—only our own fear and disorganization can do that. The battles that took place in Pittsburgh offer instructive examples of how outnumbered and outgunned protesters can nevertheless strike effective blows.

As in practically every other sphere of anarchist organizing, attrition remains one of our most serious problems. Very few of the participants in the G20 mobilization were involved in mobilizations around the turn of the century; if we don't retain more participants from this generation, we will have to relearn the same lessons and build up the same skillsets all over again in another decade or less.

Perhaps the most important question is whether we can consolidate the progress we've made through the RNC and the G20 towards determining the format and character of protest in the United States. It's not clear whether other anarchist communities will be able to replicate the achievements of their comrades in Minneapolis and Pittsburgh. In struggling to present alternatives to the docile and defeatist forms of protest currently viewed as legitimate, we are

going against the grain of political discourse in the US; if we succeed at this, it will change the shape of resistance movements in this country. Let's hope Pittsburgh was not an anomaly, but a step forward.

## The Broader Context

The same day the unpermitted march gathered at Arsenal Park in Pittsburgh, students and workers occupied the Graduate Student Commons at the University of California at Santa Cruz, while students at the New School in New York City shut down a talk by former Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge. These actions are at least as important and instructive as the G20 protests; we can stage a mass mobilization once a year, but we win or lose ground in the struggle against hierarchy in ongoing local engagements.

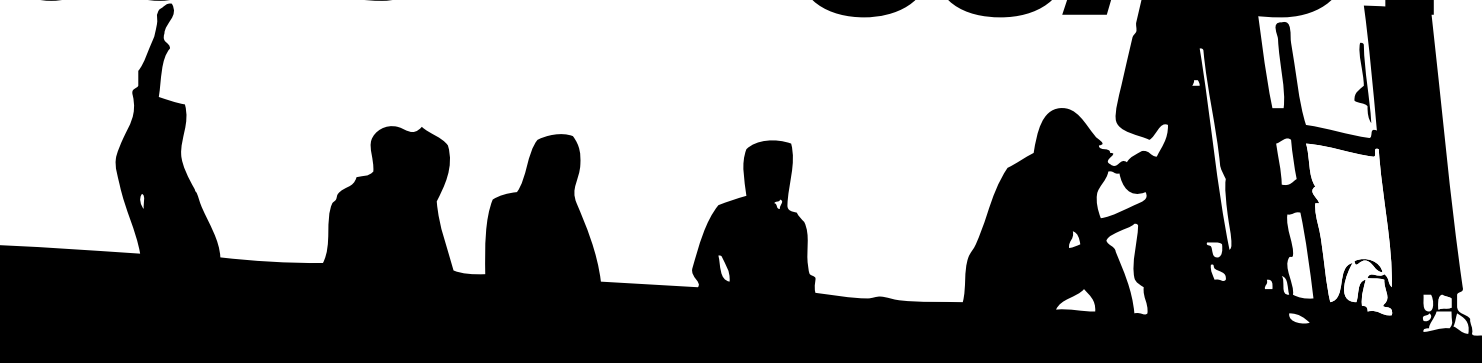
In that regard, the strategic lessons of Pittsburgh are no more important than the feeling of empowerment that participants took home with them. Hundreds more people now feel in their bodies that, should circumstances require, they can don masks and sweatshirts and become an unstoppable force.

All this may still miss the mark. In the midst of an economic crisis, when a great part of the population is struggling just to make ends meet, neither nationwide mobilizations nor local occupations will put food directly on the table. We need to popularize anarchist alternatives that can provide for daily-life survival needs; this is the field in which successful new models could be most contagious and transformative. Our success in this sphere will determine what we are capable of in every other context. Perhaps our next mobilization should be decentralized, taking place in every neighborhood around the country, offering people the opportunity to fight for their own lives in an immediate sense.

This is not to say we should hang up our black sweatshirts. They may be useful in that fight as well.

“The coming occupations will have no end in sight, and no means to resolve them.  
When that happens, we will finally be ready to abandon them.”  
—Preoccupied: *The Logic of Occupation*

# COAST TO COAST



## This is How We Learn, This is How We Fight


*A participant in the NYC Occupations*

IN DECEMBER 2008, the month of the Greek rebellion, the widely hated president of New York City's New School for Social Research fired the Provost and appointed himself. He also cut the library in half, shut down a building where students gathered, and raised tuition. When the Faculty came out with a vote of no-confidence in him on December 10, previously apathetic students joined those trained by summit-battles to take action. Standard campus activist SDS groups wanted to wait for the right time—"the movement is not ready," "we need more numbers." We thought otherwise.

After two grueling meetings, on December 16 at 8 p.m. thirty students and nonstudents took the first floor of 65 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, in the middle of Manhattan, blocking the exits with chairs, tables, and trash cans from the cafeteria. Within hours, hundreds of people came out in support, and students who until then had only read Hegel were fighting security guards with tables and blocking the streets outside. This lasted from Wednesday night to Friday morning. Authoritarian groups issued demands while autonomous groups conspired to bring in more people and expand the occupation. At key moments, against the formal consensus of some, friends outside were broken in with spectacular actions. A Greek solidarity march came by and livened up the party with a hundred more anarchists. The president was chased down the street to his home, and conceded to some of the demands soon after. We left with no repercussions, but bitter that the university still functioned at all.

After winter break, a plan was hatched to continue the struggle with a more daring action. With dozens of new people radicalized and hundreds of new supporters, we set our sights high: we wanted the whole fucking building. We announced our threat early: *April 1 we shut the school down unless the president resigns.* We distributed our analyses everywhere and continued minor escalations: illegal teach-ins, graffiti, vandalism, "open" occupations.

NYU joined the wave and occupied their student building in February, and we joined in with pleasure. After a massive street conflict outside and three days barricaded inside, we left with no charges. April 1 came and our plan was snatched, so we held off for another week until the NYC anarchist bookfair. They thought we'd given up, but we came in like thieves in the night and seized the whole building, all with only 19 people, students and nonstudents. This time the university wasn't playing around. More than two hundred police vehicles responded, along with helicopters, emergency units, and hordes of SWAT, JTTF, and other teams; they closed down three streets and shut down Union Square. It took them seven hours to chainsaw their way in. Our friends caused a conflict outside as a distraction, but those inside couldn't escape. The occupation ended before our supporters could start a riot, but the action sent shockwaves across the nation.

The following September, people at UC Santa Cruz took things up a notch, occupying a student center for a week with no demands and then seizing two massive buildings for over a week in November. UC Davis, UCLA, SFSU, and Berkeley have all been occupied since, raising the bar each time, and now it seems there are only two options left: shut down more universities with multiple occupations, or extend the struggle to the city and continue it there. 

# Inside the Campus Occupation Movement in the US OCCUPATIONS

## The Berkeley Rebellion: A Semester at Siege

*by Josh Wolf*

“There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part; you can't even passively take part, and you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all!”

Forty-five years after Mario Savio spoke those words on the steps of Sproul Hall\* at the University of California at Berkeley, a new student uprising broke out on the campus.

With the California state budget barely coming together, cuts to public education and fee increases for the state's public college systems became almost certain. State workers lost wages in the form of furloughs, or unpaid leave; others were laid off. The Regents of the University of California, a board consisting mostly of wealthy tycoons appointed by the governor, proposed raising student fees to help offset the budget cuts.

All this ignited strikes and protests throughout the state's public universities and community colleges in late September. At UC Berkeley, workers, professors, and students called for a strike on September 24. Organizers from the Associated Students, the American Association of University Professors, and a wide variety of other groups endorsed the one-day strike. On the appointed day, about 5000 people gathered on campus for a rally that transformed into a march through downtown Berkeley.

Not surprisingly, neither this nor numerous other demonstrations changed the minds of

\* Mario Savio (1942-1996) was a leader in the Berkeley Free Speech Movement. On December 2, 1964, Savio delivered a famous speech in front of Sproul Hall, which was the university's main administration building at the time.

the UC Regents, who were scheduled to approve a massive fee hike on November 19. In anticipation of this, students and workers began striking on several campuses the preceding day. In addition to the tuition hike, they were protesting the privatization of the public education system through increasing reliance on corporate money, rampant lay-offs, and the ongoing worker furloughs.

Two days later, after the regents approved the fee increases, about forty people slipped into UC Berkeley's Wheeler Hall before dawn and locked all the doors. Some of the occupiers knew each other and had been organizing together for months; others had essentially stumbled into the occupation after joining a march the day before. Most were university students. All expected the police would break down the doors early the next morning.

## The First Occupation of Wheeler Hall

The UC police discovered our occupation around 6 a.m.; it wasn't long before they figured out how to break in. Most of us were gathered on the second floor, but a few were securing the basement when we heard the commotion.

“They’re inside!” gasped a student who had just sprinted up the stairs, barely escaping arrest. Three behind him were not so lucky; we would soon learn that they had been charged with felony burglary.

He pulled back his shirt to reveal red marks from an officer’s baton. Someone slammed the door shut behind him and secured it.

While some participants had been planning to occupy a building before the semester started, others had only had a few minutes to prepare. The first and only meeting had taken place less than twelve hours earlier. It quickly became apparent the locks and chains people had brought wouldn’t be enough to adequately secure the doors. Searching the building, students found a stash of tables and wooden

minute. People pressed their bodies against the doors and held fast to the handles at each of the floor’s four entrances.

As a journalist, I tried at first to act as an “objective observer,” staying out of the action while my fellow students literally put their bodies between me and riot police. Later, a girl asked me to help her take a break; realizing how ridiculous it was to think I could remain an impartial observer in such a situation, I accepted a shift holding the door. I’m glad I did; when it came time to arrest the people inside, it made no difference to the police that I was there as a journalist with a police-issued press pass around my neck.

With the police separated from us by only a wooden door held by a handful of people, we realized that we were about to be hauled off to jail without even briefly interrupting the machine.

“Did anybody call the media?” A handful of laptops appeared from book bags and people raced to find the phone numbers of local TV stations. Another person began posting to indymedia, while others called their friends to tell them we were inside. One student copied down all our names and emergency contacts and emailed them to the National Lawyers Guild. Other students sat down to write up a list of demands.

We had all agreed before the occupation that one of the goals of our action would be to force the university to rehire thirty-eight janitors from the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), who had been laid off. Someone suggested we should demand amnesty for our friends who had been arrested earlier and were now facing felony charges. Why not ourselves, too? We stipulated that no one should be charged or face student disciplinary action for participating in the protest.

The small group added two more demands: that the university renew its lease with the Rochdale Co-op—it had been threatening to use the building for market-rate student housing—and that it enter negotiations in good faith to renew the leases of the predominantly minority-owned local businesses at the Bear’s Lair food court. While it was impossible to meet to reach consensus with the students spread out guarding the entrances, news of these demands quickly circulated and no one seemed to have any objections.

Later, many outsiders would ask why we didn’t demand that the administration roll back the fee hike. One of the occupiers responded

chairs with small desks attached. These seemed to wedge perfectly between the doors, which they then cinched shut with packing straps.

But the same setup hadn’t held for more than a few minutes downstairs. We were certain that police would come storming through any

## THOUGHTS FOR FUTURE OCCUPIERS

You don’t need to convince everyone before the occupation. Everyone knows the situation. You just need to start the party.

You don’t need a lot of people to start an occupation—at least ten, maybe less. All you need to do is hold it until people come. What goes on outside is more important than what goes on inside.

You don’t need a lot of time to prepare. We planned our first one in two days with twelve people. Just bring some locks and chains and take advantage of materials in the building.

When you take a building, don’t immediately hold a meeting. That’s a mistake. Start changing the space, preparing it, remodeling it to your desires.

An occupation must expand; otherwise, it dies.

There are hard, soft, open, and closed occupations. There are one-room, floor, building, and multiple-site occupations. Every occupation demands its own style.

Demands are unnecessary; it’s the action that counts.

If you know the occupation is going to end, escape early or end it with a riot. Anything else will wreck future possibilities.

Occupations are not enough—they must combine with other forms of action if they are to be meaningful in the future.

*Conclusions from the New School Occupations in New York City.*



that we had limited ourselves to making demands the Berkeley administration actually had the power to grant. This was a tactically sound decision, but not one we had made together. After months of meetings and protests, the participants were suddenly forced to make decisions quickly—sometimes independently—while fighting to keep the occupation alive.

As minutes turned to hours, spectators began to arrive outside Wheeler Hall. At first, it was just a lone student here and a news camera there; but soon a crowd coalesced and began to grow. A student picket line formed blocking the path to class. The AFSCME union reinforced the student picket; it eventually became a sit-down barricade, before being enveloped by the crowd.

Inside, we could hear the police banging away and pulling at the handles, but the doors held. “Whose university?” one person would yell.

And the halls would reverberate with the sound of forty determined voices: “Our university!”

At 9:13 a.m., Chancellor Robert Birgeneau sent out an email to the entire campus urging students, staff, and faculty to avoid Wheeler Hall

until further notice. Of course, the Chancellor’s communiqué only drew dozens more to the crowd, which had gathered outside the classroom window where some of us had congregated.

Acting as police liaison, one of the occupiers called the police to deliver our demands and discuss possible negotiations. The officer told her she would call back later. After some time had passed, the officer called back just to repeat that she’d call back later again.

The crowd continued to grow throughout the day. The police force increased as well, as officers from the Berkeley Police Department and deputies from the Alameda County Sheriff’s Office joined the UC Police in and around the building.

The police erected metal barricades around the perimeter of the building, and repeatedly attacked students who approached. An officer shattered the wrist of a student resting her hand on the barricade. Another officer shot a student in the stomach with a rubber bullet, and the police injured countless others with their batons. In response, students physically resisted attempts to bring more officers into

*Occupiers address supporters from the second floor of Wheeler Hall on November 20.*

the building and to control the crowds; some even fought off the police.

Eventually, the administration announced that they wanted to negotiate. We offered to parley on the public lawn outside the window, over the local radio station, or even privately on the phone, but the police chief demanded that we take down our barricades and let them in first.

We smelled a rat, and rejected the offer. Everyone continued holding the barricades as the afternoon passed and the crowd continued to grow. As it grew dark, one of us called out to ask if people would stay through the night. The crowd cheered: they were there to stay.

Shortly before 6 p.m., a deafening banging erupted at all the blocked doors at once. Were the police breaking through the doors with battering rams? Fear and uncertainty gripped us.

Before long, the group defending one of the entrances abandoned its post and ran to the classroom facing the window over the crowd. We had discussed retreating to this room when the police finally penetrated our defenses, so the crowd outside would witness their behavior while our cameras captured it from the inside.

Everyone had already scrambled into the room and had been sitting there, hands over heads, for some time when the police finally broke through the barricades. We watched in silence as they ran past the door, then came back to unlock it and let us know we were all under arrest.

But by now the crowd had grown to more than a thousand angry students, and every news camera, mainstream and independent, was turned on Wheeler Hall. The university realized it couldn't charge us with the felonies the police had doled out earlier that day. With the volatile crowd surrounding the building, the police didn't even take us to jail. Instead, they held us in the hallway and issued us a citation for misdemeanor trespassing, which the district attorney later dropped. We were then escorted out of Wheeler Hall into the glare of high-intensity spotlights and cheering crowds. It was a bit uncomfortable—we knew that it wasn't the forty-three of us who had made the occupation into such an important event, but the thousands outside.

This message was echoed by several others who had been inside the building, as we passed around a megaphone in front of an old tree at the edge of the crowd. There was revolution in the air, and we felt that we were making history.

## Growing Unrest

The next few weeks were punctuated by a series of actions. The Associated Students hosted a forum with the police to discuss the behavior of the police outside Wheeler Hall during the occupation. Rather than participate in a process that would never yield results, a student climbed onto a chair and delivered a verbal assault on the police, after which about thirty of us—ninety percent of the people inside—marched out to hold our own meeting.

On December 3, the anniversary of Mario Savio's famous Free Speech Movement address, the Associated Students once again attempted to diminish student power by holding a "non-political" commemoration of the speech. We set out to interrupt it, arguing that the Free Speech Movement was anything but apolitical and that there was still no free speech on campus. We arrived with fliers and banners. When people began taping banners to the wall of Sproul Hall, the police took them down and refused to give them back; this became less of a problem once the cameras arrived.

Veterans of the movement spoke alongside current students about past and present crises; everyone seemed to agree that the best way to commemorate the Free Speech Movement would be to have free speech. But at 1 p.m., the university-sanctioned hour of free speech came to an abrupt halt when the PA system was turned off without warning. A UC professor who had been involved in the Free Speech Movement as a student was in the middle of his sentence.

From the steps of Sproul, the group of fifty or more people marched around campus, ending at the Bear's Lair food court for a meeting. Unlike meetings earlier in the year, this one seemed to have a concrete direction and purpose.

When we'd barricaded the doors to Wheeler Hall on November 20, we had followed Savio's lead and thrown our bodies upon the gears, demonstrating that we had the power to make the machine stop. Now it was time to demonstrate that we also had the power to bring it to life.

## Live Week: Wheeler Hall is Re-Occupied

At Berkeley, the last week before finals is known as "dead week" because there are no classes scheduled, although some teachers hold class anyway. As many classrooms stand empty during the week while limited study space is



[Opposite]

Supporters outside the Wheeler Hall occupation; public artwork supporting the occupation movement.



Supporters outside the Wheeler Hall occupation.

available for students, we decided to return to Wheeler and transform it into an open occupation: *Live Week*.

We modeled our plan after the European occupations earlier in the year. We would not seal the doors with locks and chains, but would simply occupy the space with our bodies, demonstrating an alternative to the university system.

During the preparations for *Live Week*, some of the organizers who had been active earlier in the semester were noticeably absent. Many of the groups involved in the movement had met at a conference in late October to begin planning a “day of action” for the following March, and it seemed these people, many of whom were involved with campus socialist groups, felt our energy would be better spent working toward this future event.

After only a few planning meetings, we arrived Monday around 2:30 p.m. and set up an infoshop in the foyer. Students stopped to pick up a zine or cup of coffee as they left the review session in the auditorium; meanwhile, as the class dispersed, we assembled inside. Shortly before a UC professor began a lecture addressing the systemic problems in the public

education system, we were told that we had to leave the auditorium unless we were willing to rent it from the school.

We refused, and the lecture continued as scheduled. We shared a communal vegetarian meal a few students had prepared at a student co-op using donated food. After dinner, we were told again that we had to leave. Eventually the police showed up, trained their cameras on us, and informed us that if we did not leave we could be arrested or face student conduct charges. It was about 8 p.m., two hours before the building was scheduled to close.

We stayed and the police did nothing. Almost one hundred of us held the first general assembly of the occupation. Shortly before 11 p.m. the police returned with their cameras and repeated their formal order. There were more this time and it seemed possible that they would arrest us.

Officers took up posts at the doors to prevent more people from entering. Some people who didn’t want to risk arrest left, but most stayed, and efforts to prevent more people from coming in proved fruitless. Around midnight, the officers gave up trying to keep people out, and most of them left. We had won the battle.

Some people patrolled the space throughout the night in case the police returned. Others busied themselves cleaning up in preparation for classes to resume in the morning.

By the next morning, *Live Week* had become part of the university. The transformation extended beyond Wheeler Hall. It was subtle at first: students made eye contact with each other when they might not have before, exchanged a few more friendly hellos. Yet by reclaiming a building from the administration, we had begun to realize our potential. The awakening was contagious: students began to flock to Wheeler from across the university.

They didn’t come for the movement-building meetings. They didn’t come for the dance parties, rock concerts, and hip-hop shows. They didn’t even come for the free food. No, left with nowhere else to study late at night, the classrooms became a vibrant study hall—in fact, someone painted a banner reading “study hall” to indicate where students could find a quiet place to prepare for their exams.

At the meetings that took place after the occupation got started, activists questioned why we hadn’t drawn a bigger turnout. We had successfully held the building for multiple days, and yet there were so few of us. On the first night there had been over one hundred people at the general assembly, but now there were perhaps twenty. An additional fifty or sixty students were studying in the classrooms at any point throughout the night—but with tens of thousands of students on campus, where was everyone? Someone suggested we throw a concert with a big-name act to bring in people. Maybe *The Coup*?

The next day *Boots Riley of The Coup* was confirmed and fliers circulated promoting the show. Meanwhile, a debate developed over whether the occupation should continue after the Friday night show. Most people eventually agreed to clean up and clear out of the building before finals began on Saturday morning.

But early Friday, around 4:30 a.m., while all the occupiers were asleep or deep in their studies, the police raided the space. Officers handcuffed the doors shut to prevent anyone from leaving and woke everybody up to the news that they were under arrest.

At first, police told students that they didn’t need to get dressed and that they wouldn’t be hauled off to jail. But they changed their plans after marching the students, some in their boxers and bare feet, to a classroom in the basement.

After being charged with misdemeanor trespassing, the students were taken to Santa Rita, the main jail in Alameda County. Most weren’t released until late afternoon or early evening. Sixty-six people were arrested, forty-two of them students. Most of the non-students were people who live outdoors and had been invited inside Wheeler to escape the cold rain.

## Counterattack

Angered by the arrests and determined that the show must go on, a few organizers sent out an announcement that the concert was still happening and called for people to meet outside Wheeler Hall. After hours of trying unsuccessfully to find a venue, at the last minute someone convinced Casa Zimbabwe, an off-campus co-op north of campus, to host the show.

That night, dozens of activists from across the state converged outside Wheeler Hall in the pouring rain to show their support for the Berkeley rebellion. Some students came all the way from UCLA; others arrived from UC Santa Cruz, UC Davis, and San Francisco State. We marched across the dark campus to the co-op, where several bands performed in the underground garage, including *Boots Riley* with *Roberto Miguel* on guitar.

After the concert, some of the attendees donned black masks and headed back to campus to respond to that morning’s assault. About sixty people marched down Euclid Avenue, a street near the north side of campus, around 11 p.m. A few people kicked over newspaper stands and dragged them into the street. Others dragged them out of the road and put them back on the sidewalk. The chanting crowd turned and headed down the edge of campus along Hearst Avenue.

Someone lit a half dozen or more torches and handed them out as the crowd turned onto the paved path to University House, the chancellor’s on-campus home. As the crowd approached, the energy increased. A few individuals emerged from the sea of black, smashing the street lamps along the entryway to his house and overturning the planters in front of it. According to later reports, incendiary objects were thrown at the house and the windows were smashed out.

A police car roared up, sirens blaring and lights flashing, and the crowd scattered. The participants dropped their bandanas and quickly blended into the scattered groups of students walking through the rain. Other squad cars arrived from all directions as some continued to run, while others tried to walk away calmly.

Eight people were arrested that night. Their charges included rioting, threatening an education official, attempted burglary, attempted arson of an occupied building, felony vandalism, and assault with a deadly weapon on a police officer; UCPD alleged that when they reported to the scene, “things on fire” were thrown at their cars. The next day, governor Arnold Schwarzenegger described the march to the chancellor’s house as terrorism. The chancellor told the media that he and his wife had feared for their lives. Once again, the student movement at UC Berkeley was national news.

As it turned out, the police had only managed to capture the ones who decided not to run. The arrestees included a journalist who was documenting the events that night and several students and non-students who did not participate in the property destruction, according to witnesses. Held on over \$130,000 bail, many of the arrestees spent the weekend in jail waiting for arraignment. But the district attorney dropped all the charges, and they were released after their day in court.

While many in the student movement criticized the attack on the chancellor’s home, others defended it as a legitimate response to the terror the police had inflicted on the students arrested earlier that morning at the Wheeler occupation. Some students feared the movement would lose support now that protestors had turned to violence; others questioned whether the property damage at the chancellor’s home should be considered violence. They argued that the response seemed appropriate in view of the violence administered by the university against its own students.

In still other circles, it seemed that the attack itself wasn’t as offensive as the fact that students had acted autonomously.



"I believe that the university administration not only set the stage for a violent turn in protests by acts which have repeatedly raised tensions and undermined belief in its good will, but actually engaged in most of the violence that has occurred."

-Education professor Daniel Perlstein, after witnessing the events at the chancellor's house from his office window

"What makes those individuals think that they have the right to impose their political views on the entire group?" demanded a student in an email to a campus mailing list. "This hypocrisy must be intolerable to the ENTIRE group! We cannot allow that to happen again. If someone thinks that individuals taking unilateral action, without the consensus of the general assembly, is appropriate, then I place them in a category with (UC President Mark) Yudof."

While this appeared to be a minority perspective, many questioned whether the action outside the chancellor's home was tactically sound. They worried that if we wanted the administration to work with us to make the changes we demanded, this assault could hinder our goals. But others doubted we could win the war for public education without such skirmishes: unless we can threaten the status quo, what leverage do students have against the university?

These quarrels threatened to divide the movement, but students still came together for the court appearances and disciplinary hearings. About forty people gathered for an end-of-the-year picnic in People's Park before the students all scattered for winter break.

### Uncertain Horizons

On January 6, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger proposed a state constitutional amendment requiring the state budget to allocate at least ten percent of its funds to the state college system. He said the money should come from cuts to the state prisons.

Instead of scaling back draconian sentencing and setting nonviolent offenders free, however, Schwarzenegger suggested that the state could save money by privatizing the prisons. While students had demanded "books not bars" throughout the semester, no one was calling for privatization. The governor had hit upon a devious way to play students and prisoners against each other.

Most student activists wrote off the governor's announcement as hollow lip service. They expect that the powerful prison guards' union will probably be able to kill the proposal, and believe the suggestion that the state could save this money through privatization to be a pipe dream.

Despite everything, there is a tiny whiff of victory in the air. "Those protests on the UC campuses were the tipping point," the governor's chief of staff Susan Kennedy acknowledged in the *New York Times*. The *Times* neglected to mention that the last time the governor had addressed the UC protests he had described them as terrorism. While Kennedy did not suggest that it was the march to the Chancellor's home that prompted the governor to act, the combination of peaceful and confrontational organizing has historically proven to be a powerful recipe.

A mass mobilization is scheduled for March 4, 2010. Some have called for a general strike, and meetings are planned across the state's college campuses. But with more than a month of vacation between the two semesters, it remains uncertain what the student movement at Berkeley will look like when class resumes. The battle will continue, but will the alliance between workers, faculty, and students last through the new year?

A growing contingent has called for the front line to be moved from the universities to Sacramento, where the state legislature makes its decisions; another insists that the fight must remain based in the campuses. Following the governor's promise, some supporters have begun to withdraw from the movement. Others recognize that we must increase our focus on the prison-industrial complex, knowing full well that some state officials will construe this as undermining the future of public education. In any case, while Schwarzenegger's proposal does nothing to advance public education, his office's admission that he was swayed by the protests should help fuel the movement in the future.



# PULLING THE FIRE ALARM IN THE MARKETPLACE OF IDEAS

## Anti-Fascism and Liberal Backlash at UNC Chapel Hill

On April 14, 2009, a social conflict erupted on the University of North Carolina's campus, pitting a small fascist\* student group against an ad hoc coalition of students from the university and anarchists from across the state. Most of the anarchists who live around the university had been focusing on off-campus projects: prisoner support, covert service worker organizing, Really Really Free Markets, national mass mobilizations. Very little attention had been given to the university as a site of potential social conflict; instead it was viewed as a privileged

\* Though we refer to this group alternately as fascist or white supremacist, these are by no means interchangeable. In the US, white supremacy has maintained a particularly symbiotic relationship with the democratic state, giving overtly fascist movements a smaller foothold than in many parts of Europe. YWC employs elements of both a traditional fascist agenda and more standard US white supremacist rhetoric.

and apathetic social terrain better suited for petty theft than visible anarchist activity.†

The group that catalyzed this conflict, Youth for Western Civilization, was a new national organization with local chapters at a few campuses around the US. Like the national organization,

† In terms of activism or protest, UNC is a fairly conservative campus, lacking the history of militant civil rights activity and opposition to the Vietnam war shared by some US campuses. Although it is a public university, there are fewer private universities in the South, and UNC takes pride in its identity as an elite school. Some attribute this to the affluence of the student body, but money and conservative political pressure converge in this institution. It's written literally on the walls: many of the older buildings on UNC campus are named after prominent members of the KKK.

Many US anarchists doubt that universities here can be the fertile soil for rebellion that they sometimes are in Latin America and Europe. The social traditions and cultural context of US universities seem to be very different, and the lack of inter-generational continuity makes it difficult to gain ground.

“Diversity can be good in moderation—if what is being brought in is desirable. Most Americans don’t mind a little ethnic food, some Asian math whizzes, or a few Mariachi dancers—as long as these trends do not overwhelm the dominant culture . . . Even the Cuban immigrants, still preponderantly white, law-abiding, Republican-voting, affable people, are not desirable if they don’t assimilate. Perhaps a few Little Havanas are manageable in a huge country, just as many Americans may see a few isolated Chinatowns as an exotic novelty. The problem is when the Little Havanas become Big Havanas and the Chinatowns become Chinacities or even Chinastates.”

–*Marcus Epstein, Co-Founder of Youth for Western Civilization*

the local YWC group used thinly veiled language around heritage, identity, and cultural pride in Western civilization to hide a fairly obvious white supremacist agenda—their logo was Mussolini’s *fascis*, the original symbol of fascism. Though weak in numbers, YWC was powerful in resources: it was the brainchild of the Leadership Institute, a right-wing think tank based in Virginia with a national budget of \$12 million.

This was a comparatively small-scale conflict, but it has wide-reaching implications. It attracted national and international media attention around the issues of free speech, immigration, and anti-fascism, offering an instructive example of how anarchist ideas interact with liberal discourse about race in the supposedly “post-racial” era of the Obama presidency. It also offers lessons for anarchist students and others who find themselves reaching out to, working with, or pretending to be college students.

## The Campaign Begins . . .

Opposition to YWC at UNC began in April 2009, as students and non-students began doing research on the group and talking to friends about how to confront them. The group’s first event, a speaking engagement featuring former US Treasurer Bay Buchanan, went largely unnoticed, but conversations ensued immediately afterward about confronting their next event, at which anti-immigrant ex-congressman Tom Tancredo was to speak.

Opinions as to how to go about this were mixed. A mostly white liberal policy group called Coalition for College Access (CCA) hosted a

meeting attended by anarchists, members of Students for a Democratic Society,\* and many others, at which it was announced that at least some of those present intended to shut down the event entirely. Initially, the liberal group talked tentatively about how their intention to compile petitions and highlight diversity could work in conjunction with this idea, though they later backed away from such plans and eventually denounced the protest altogether. CCA also failed to mention the planned disruption to the Carolina Hispanic Association (CHISPA), a non-political Latino student group. This resulted in CHISPA attending the YWC event, planning to ask *hard questions* during the question-and-answer period at the end of Tancredo’s speech—which never happened.

Off-campus meetings of anarchists were similarly well-attended and haphazard. Several of these occurred shortly before the event, each with a different configuration of participants. In contrast to similar meetings in the past, these were characterized by an air of confidence: the participants fully expected to succeed in shutting the event down.

Hundreds of wheatpasted posters appeared around campus the night of April 13, denouncing YWC and urging people to protest Tancredo’s speech. Most were taken down before the event began, but the publicity had an effect. That night, April 14, the small auditorium in which Tancredo was to speak was filled beyond capacity, mostly by people curious and upset about the existence of a racist group on campus. In addition to small handbills encouraging audience members to coordinate their jeering and boos (e.g., “When Tancredo says America, everyone hiss like a cat!”), multiple teams of banner holders were prepared to hold up anti-racist banners across the front of the room. Outside the event, several student groups organized a well-attended march and rally. The liberal group had planned a Dance Party for Diversity on another part of campus, which dissolved as curious participants left to join the protest.

As soon as the president of YWC stood up to introduce Tancredo, who had yet to enter the room, total chaos ensued. He was immediately drowned out by people calling him a racist, while others banged on chairs and held

\* Unlike many SDS groups, Chapel Hill’s chapter of this organization is notoriously authoritarian, having been started by non-students from competing statist groups such as Freedom Road Socialist Organization and the Workers’ World Party. At UNC, SDS has largely devolved into a front group for Fight Imperialism Stand Together, itself a front group for Workers’ World.

loud conversations about the racist roots of Youth for Western Civilization. Soon a large crowd could be heard outside the building, clapping and pounding on the door, giving the room a tense atmosphere. Police were trying to prevent them from entering, but as the crowd pushed into the building, people inside the room started clapping and chanting with them.

Tancredo somehow snaked his way into the classroom, amid more boos. Scuffles with police could be heard from the hallway as students tried to force their way in after him. Two people unfurled a banner in front of Tancredo as the banging and clapping outside got louder. A cop grabbed one of the banner-holders, throwing her to the ground as he pushed her out through the doors. Tancredo tried to speak, but was inaudible over the screams of students in the hallway whom the police were pepper spraying and threatening with tasers. One person ran back and forth from the hallway to the classroom, yelling that cops were tasing students to protect a white supremacist, and that a medic was needed outside to treat a woman who had been maced while trying to escape the cloud of pepper spray filling the hallway.

At this point, two women from CHISPA declared that they were daughters of immigrants and asked people to let Tancredo speak, saying they wanted to have a dialogue with him. The crowd inside, though angry and confused, quieted down temporarily. Meanwhile, the crowd outside regrouped and marched to the rear of the building. Then another pair of audience members unfurled a second banner, reading “No one is illegal,” in front of Tancredo. Protesters outside started banging on the windows of the classroom, shattering a single pane of glass as screaming and booing broke out in the room once again. At this point, Tancredo’s bodyguard advised him to leave, and the chief of Chapel Hill police, who was running security for the event, told him it was over. As Tancredo fled the scene, with the gait of a terrified man pretending to be calm, thirty or more protesters chased him across the lawn. Cut off by police, they returned as other protesters, audience members, and reporters emerged from the building in a mix of victory, anger, embarrassment, and confusion. While a fire alarm sounded in the background, an impromptu rally took place with well over a hundred people dancing, holding banners, and debating.

## . . . The Campaign Continues

The events of April 14 were a national embarrassment for the university administration. Everyone from National Public Radio and CNN to several Mexican newspapers published stories on the protest. The next day, UNC Chancellor Holden Thorp sent a mass email to all students denouncing the actions and threatening to punish any individuals and groups involved. The campus newspaper, the *Daily Tar Heel*, refused to print a single statement supportive of the pro-

“White supremacist formations like the Youth for Western Civilization, the student group that invited Tancredo, should be confronted and denounced at every turn, and the students at UNC who participated in these protests should be esteemed as the heroic fighters for justice that they are.”  
–*Hatem Abudayyeh, the executive director of the American Arab Action Network in Chicago*

“I want to express how disappointed I am in what happened last night when former Congressman Tom Tancredo wasn’t able to speak when a protest got out of hand . . . Congressman Tancredo felt threatened and left without making his remarks . . . There’s a way to protest that respects free speech and allows people with opposing views to be heard. Here that’s often meant that groups protesting a speaker have displayed signs or banners, silently expressing their opinions while the speaker had his or her say. That didn’t happen last night . . . I called Mr. Tancredo today to apologize for how he was treated. In addition, our Department of Public Safety is investigating this incident. They will pursue criminal charges if any are warranted.”  
–*Chancellor Thorp’s email to all UNC students*

test, instead only quoting Chancellor Thorp, the police, and right-wing bystanders, despite having had the opportunity to interview hundreds of protesters and receiving dozens of letters to the editor. Ironically, in order to support the administration’s efforts to control the terms of the debate and frame the events as a violation of free speech, the DTH imposed a media blackout about the opposition to YWC and YWC’s connections to white power movements.†

The backlash on campus was tremendous. In spite of the white supremacist background of Youth for Western Civilization, the broad participation of students as well as many off-campus locals, and dozens of solidarity statements from immigrants’ rights groups across

† The night of April 14, the chairwoman of the board of the National Council of La Raza, a prominent civil rights organization, experienced a break-in at her house in nearby Durham; right-wing vigilantes left a message on her mirror condemning the demonstration. Despite all the coverage of the Tancredo protest, this received only a three-sentence mention in one newspaper in Raleigh.

[*Previous page*]  
*Angry students assemble outside the building where Tancredo tried to speak.*

the country, countless students swallowed the line presented by the administration and the press that the protest was simply a leftist mob silencing the free speech of a respectable conservative—*he was a congressman, after all*. The notion of the university as a “marketplace of ideas,” a sacred space in which all platforms and perspectives might compete freely and equally, and the premise that there are legitimate and illegitimate forms of protest—these became weapons with which the administration did its utmost to suppress enthusiasm for the action and silence dissent.

The Student Congress, the campus and city police departments, and the UNC administration sought to divide groups from each other and track down scapegoats. Officers made

phone calls to every member of SDS and to other radical organizers on campus, trying to determine who broke the window and who organized the demonstration. Despite this, the students were hanging tough, and everyone refused to talk. However, with many students afraid of arrests, honor court proceedings, and loss of financial aid, everyone was talking a lot less to each other as well.

As radical voices fell silent on campus, few spoke out against the depiction of Tancredo and YWC as victims whose right to free speech had been trampled. Some who had participated in confronting YWC seemed thoroughly confused, uncertain or even ashamed of their own success at shutting the event down. Leaders from groups like CHISPA, the Black Student Movement, and Coalition for College Access went so far as to join hands with YWC members to sing the college anthem in a televised press conference denouncing the protest a few days later.\*

On the night of April 20, less than a week after the Tancredo protest, delegates from student groups that had participated in the demonstration and anarchists from on and off campus met for a facilitated discussion to air their differing perspectives and grievances. Though this was cathartic for some, little was resolved. If nothing else, the event clarified that the participants were coming from radically different political perspectives. Many of the participants lacked an analysis of the importance of fighting fascism, the ways white supremacy can wear a democratic face, or the mechanisms by which the rhetoric of free speech can be used to suppress dissent. Some did not even understand the relationship between xenophobia and white supremacy.

This conversation was further complicated by the racial dynamics of power and privilege among those who opposed Tancredo. Although people of many races and ethnicities participated in the demonstration against YWC, the people who most vocally supported the victory against Tancredo at this meeting were white.† The leaders of various social groups of people of color on campus had denounced the demonstration, and members of the non-political Latino association at the meeting said they had felt silenced by those who opposed Tancredo and had been disappointed that they hadn't been

\* As is often the case, it was consistently the leadership of these groups that led this reaction, while many of their members continued to express enthusiasm for the protest.

† Several of the people of color involved in the campaign did not want to waste time sorting things out with strangers with whom they shared little political affinity when there was so much work to be done.

“We commend all of the students who stood up to the racist politics of Tom Tancredo and sent a clear, public message that there is no space for hate on their college campus . . . Those opposing the protesters will surely attempt to turn this incident into a debate on free speech . . . They will call upon the First Amendment to make a victim out of racist Tom Tancredo who seizes every opportunity he has to demonize undocumented immigrants . . . Not only is Tom Tancredo's presence at UNC alienating for a number of students, it gives his xenophobic platform legitimacy.”

—*LUCHA at Columbia University*

“We are deeply concerned that the so-called rights of Mr. Tancredo to spew hate speech seem more important to the administration of UNC Chapel Hill than the rights of our community to feel safe. Apparently, the administration feels that intimidating the Latin@ community is a protected form of speech. It is also concerning that your right to speak out against Mr. Tancredo is being judged by the administration as intolerant, when it is clearly Mr. Tancredo who is guilty of intolerance.”

—*Gabriela Lemus and Alikhan Salehi, Hispanic Outreach for Learning and Awareness, UNC Asheville*

“We stand in solidarity with you and completely support your protest against former congressman Tom Tancredo's talk at your campus. Tancredo represents the most racist and reactionary anti-immigrant views. His views and talks must be challenged and exposed wherever he speaks . . . Your action has given us more inspiration to continue our struggles knowing that we have your support and solidarity.”

—*Minnesota Immigrant Rights Action Coalition (MIRAc)*

“After my arrest, I began receiving emails from right-wingers and conservatives. There were dozens of pages on Stormfront and other right-wing blogs that discussed my conduct, my appearance (was I hot; did I look like a Jew?), and how they hoped I'd get what I deserved ('Ms. Koch, have your friends check out the names Kirsten Brydum, Eve Carson and Lauren Burk, all down for the cause. They can get a jump on making funeral arrangements.') Someone created a Metapedia page about me, and a video circulated that talked about how much I like 'Africans'—which featured photos of me and my black friends and photos of my travels to Africa.”

—*Haley Koch, UNC student*



able to have a dialogue with him. Members of this same group debated with a Black Student Movement member who was less critical of the disruption, arguing that the event “wasn't about race, it was about immigration.” At the end of the meeting, one non-student argued that while some people might be more directly threatened by Youth for Western Civilization than others, no one group or individual owned the struggle against fascism, and that people would and should continue to confront YWC wherever they tried to organize. Others still did not seem to see YWC as a racist group, and expressed no desire to stop their organizing.

As a result of these conflicts, some anarchist students involved in the first disruption dropped out of the campaign, citing concerns about relations with other student groups and the lack of support among groups of people of color, like CHISPA. This response seemed to come largely out of white guilt rather than a nuanced anti-racist analysis. It can be easy to be distracted by self-righteous liberals that oppose militant tactics when they happen to be people of color, instead of doing the work to engage with people of color who actually share your political orientation. For white people to legitimize one group as *the voice* of people of color was problematic, and it invisibilized

the people of color who were involved in the struggle against YWC, as well as those who supported it from afar.

Despite these complications, things continued to go badly for YWC. Every night, hundreds of posters appeared wheatpasted around campus, attempting to counter the media blackout and explain anti-racists' perspectives. A week later at YWC's next speaking event, ex-congressman Virgil Goode was also disrupted, this time by a dancing drag troupe, personal body alarms, shouting and booing, and a man holding a pink “FUCK RACISM” banner screaming “I'm a Southern working man, and I STILL think you're a racist!” Fire alarms went off in the three adjacent buildings, and students poured out onto the quad to see the spectacle. Six people were arrested at this event, all charged with disorderly conduct. While the speaker was not actually shut down, the event was a heavily-policed three-ring circus, at which anti-racists made it clear that no amount of police presence or media backlash would intimidate them into passivity.

The morning after this second protest, a student named Haley Koch was arrested outside of one of her classes and charged with “disrupting the peace at an educational institution” for her involvement in the Tancredo disruption

*After the crowd was temporarily quieted by protesters that wanted dialogue with Tancredo, anti-fascists mobilized a second round of attacks.*

# “White supremacy is not an *idea* that can be peaceably debated in a bubble on campus. It is a preexisting *reality*, maintained through violence every day in this country.”

—*Daily Tar Heel* “Special Anti-Racist Issue,” August 25, 2009

the previous week. Along with the arrests of six others the night before, Koch’s arrest galvanized support from on and off campus and resulted in the formation of a protesters’ defense committee.

While the six non-students arrested at the second YWC demonstration had their full names and home addresses published online in mainstream news sources the night of their arrests, right-wingers focused eerily on Haley Koch. As the only student arrestee, pictures and information about her abounded on social networking sites and elsewhere on the internet, making her a perfect target. Publicly denouncing YWC was necessary, but there are many dangers to being known as an anti-fascist, especially in the South, where white supremacists have often used vigilante violence rather than relying solely on the institutionalized violence of the police. Balancing the need for publicity against the importance of privacy can challenge even the best strategic planning.

## War on the Media, War on the Advisors

It was clear that between the end of the spring semester, the threat of more arrests, and the public backlash, the strategy of publicly disrupting YWC events could not continue indefinitely. At this point the campaign took on a more closed nature, shifting to focus on the aspects of YWC that seemed most vulnerable to sabotage. Comrades with experience in the animal rights movement were instrumental in this transition, researching the organization’s funding, founding members, and the faculty advisor it needed to remain a campus organization. Plans were set in motion to target

the group’s advisor, astronomy professor Chris Clemens, who seemed to be the weakest link politically and socially.

Around this time, DC Indymedia published news of the arrest and conviction of Marcus Epstein, who was one of Tancredo’s speechwriters as well as YWC’s first national vice-president and one of its founding members.\* In 2008, Epstein pled guilty to a hate crime in which he attacked an African-American woman in Washington, DC while screaming “nigger” in her face. The *Daily Tar Heel* refused to print this information, despite a constant barrage of letters to the editor.† Nevertheless, this story, combined with consistent propaganda efforts and the threat of future disruptions, caused Clemens to quit his post as advisor on June 16 before any protests were directed at him. Clemens said that YWC had become “a magnet for the radical left to come shut you down.” This was a major victory: according to university guidelines, if YWC couldn’t find a new advisor over the summer, the group would be officially disbanded.

Emboldened by this success and desiring revenge for the media blackout, anti-racists wrapped their own front page around copies of the campus paper on the first day of fall classes. This was a two-sided “*Special Anti-Racist Issue*” of the DTH, with stories detailing Epstein’s conviction and Clemens’ resignation and editorial pieces exposing the roles of liberalism and the

\* Though a wide variety of sources, including the Southern Poverty Law Center, Indymedia, the *Washington Post*, and finally even the *Daily Tar Heel*, have reported on Epstein’s connections to YWC, YWC’s supporters now claim that Epstein never had any connection to their organization.

† Links also surfaced that summer between Tancredo and the Minuteman vigilantes who broke into a home and murdered a man and his nine-year-old daughter in Ariaca, AZ near the Mexican border.

conception of the marketplace of ideas in legitimizing white supremacist discourse. Roughly 3000 of these were distributed, showing that anti-racists were organized and would continue their opposition to YWC.

That same day, it was announced that YWC had found a new advisor: an eccentric, 76-year-old retired psychology professor named Elliot Cramer. Adding a new twist to the campaign, Cramer was a good liberal committed to the right to free speech who claimed he only supported the group because he believed it had a right to exist. In a letter to the editor announcing his decision to serve as advisor to YWC, he wrote, “Although I am not sympathetic with most of their views, I think that they, like Haley Koch, should be allowed to peacefully express them, and I have offered to be their sponsor.” UNC students who were still involved with the campaign contacted Cramer to spell out YWC’s connections to white supremacist activity, in hopes that he would rescind his offer. But his position remained unchanged; he described himself as an “absolutist when it comes to free speech.”

Not surprisingly, Cramer’s prejudice could be found just underneath the liberal façade of supporting YWC based on the principle of equal access. He told student Haley Koch‡ that he was “not aware of a significant number of murders by white supremacists. Certainly it’s news when it happens, but the trend of such behaviors has been down for many years. I see YOU as being part of the climate of hate.” He also said, “racism doesn’t exist anymore. Racism was segregation, and that’s over!”

Meanwhile, the president of the YWC group at UNC had graduated over the summer, leaving the group with a new president, Nikhil Patel. Patel’s parents were from India, but had immigrated to the US from Zimbabwe. Patel reportedly disagreed with most of the positions advanced by YWC, but took over the group because the former president was one of his only friends. He was anxious about what his family would think of his involvement, but he, too, seemed to want to help YWC in the spirit of protecting the marketplace of ideas. “Censorship did not fly with me. I thought it would be nice to have a conservative point of view on

‡ After Koch’s arrest, Elliot Cramer began emailing her incessantly. He showed up at her court date. He asked reporters for her parents’ emails and phone numbers. He emailed people who had supported her openly in the papers. He forwarded email replies to her from people who wrote him supporting YWC. He invited her to dinner with him and the conservative speakers he brought to town. He harassed her at public forums and kept repeating that they were friends who had hung out.

campus just for the spirit of debate,” he said in the DTH. In a surreal turn of events, Youth for Western Civilization had become a moribund group kept alive only by liberal support.

Anti-racists quickly refocused their campaign on Cramer, printing a brochure about his support of white supremacists and planning further actions. The pamphlet, which contained the retired professor’s home address and encouraged people to contact him directly, provoked Cramer to overreact. He emailed both the media and Chancellor Thorp threatening to shoot any protesters who came to his home: “I have a Colt 45 and I know how to use it. I used to be able to hit a quarter at 50 feet 7 times out of 10.” In embarrassment,

“As [YWC President Nikhil Patel] points out, YWC rails against the imagined dangers of ‘radical multiculturalism’ and demands total assimilation of immigrant populations within their notion of what proper ‘culture’ is. How can one legitimately stand to try to lead an organization that states explicitly that it does not believe your life experience has value, but that your experience and culture is actually a threat to their own? [YWC] is an organized, student-run hate group that peddles gentlemanly racism and white supremacy. That’s not liberal bias talking, that comes from the organization’s mission, the messages it extols, and the speakers it sponsors.” —*Jamaal Green, Graduate Student, from a letter to the editor in the DTH*

the Chancellor forced Cramer to resign on September 17. Youth for Western Civilization, which had returned after the summer with hardly any remaining members, was once again without an advisor and at risk of dissolving.

Meanwhile, days before Cramer’s forced resignation, the five of those arrested in the spring protests who pled not guilty beat their charges in court. The defendants had researched the statute and successfully argued that their behavior, though well documented by police video footage, did not actually constitute disorderly conduct. To the dismay of the assistant district attorney and the administration, a legal precedent now existed legitimizing the raucous disruption of right-wing speakers on campus.

## The Administration Takes Sides

With no faculty advisor, few actual members, and a new president who had gone on record as opposing the national organization’s mission statement, the UNC YWC chapter seemed to be on its last legs. Only one thing could save it—the direct intervention of the university administration. This came soon, first with a \$3000 gift to the organization

from a private fund controlled by Chancellor Thorp himself, and then with the appointment of *three* new advisors who had been personally requested to take the positions in private meetings with Thorp.

The message was clear: if need be, all the financial and institutional resources of UNC would be engaged to assure that this fledgling right-wing organization survived. There were indications that the UNC administration was getting pressure from state government officials to straighten things out quickly. No amount of intimidation, home demonstrations, or strategic secondary targeting could win this campaign, at least not alone. On the other hand, the group was basically dead in the water, a corpse on life support.

Insofar as it was about destabilizing YWC, the campaign had been a complete success. Now anti-racists were no longer simply engaged in a battle with YWC, but had been forced into an all-out war with the university itself, in which they came up against one of the foundational myths of liberal democracy—the concept of the marketplace of ideas.

Despite the campaign's victories and the Chancellor's unprecedented financial support of a white supremacist group, few student groups had any interest in continuing a campaign against YWC. It seemed that the institutional apparatus of the university had successfully smothered the spark of dissent. This was apparent when YWC held its first public event of the semester in October 2009, a speaking engagement that was protested by theatrical performances but hardly disrupted at all. The event itself was a bust, with

more police than audience members in attendance, but while YWC was virtually destroyed, its opponents had failed to attract new allies or heighten social conflict on campus.

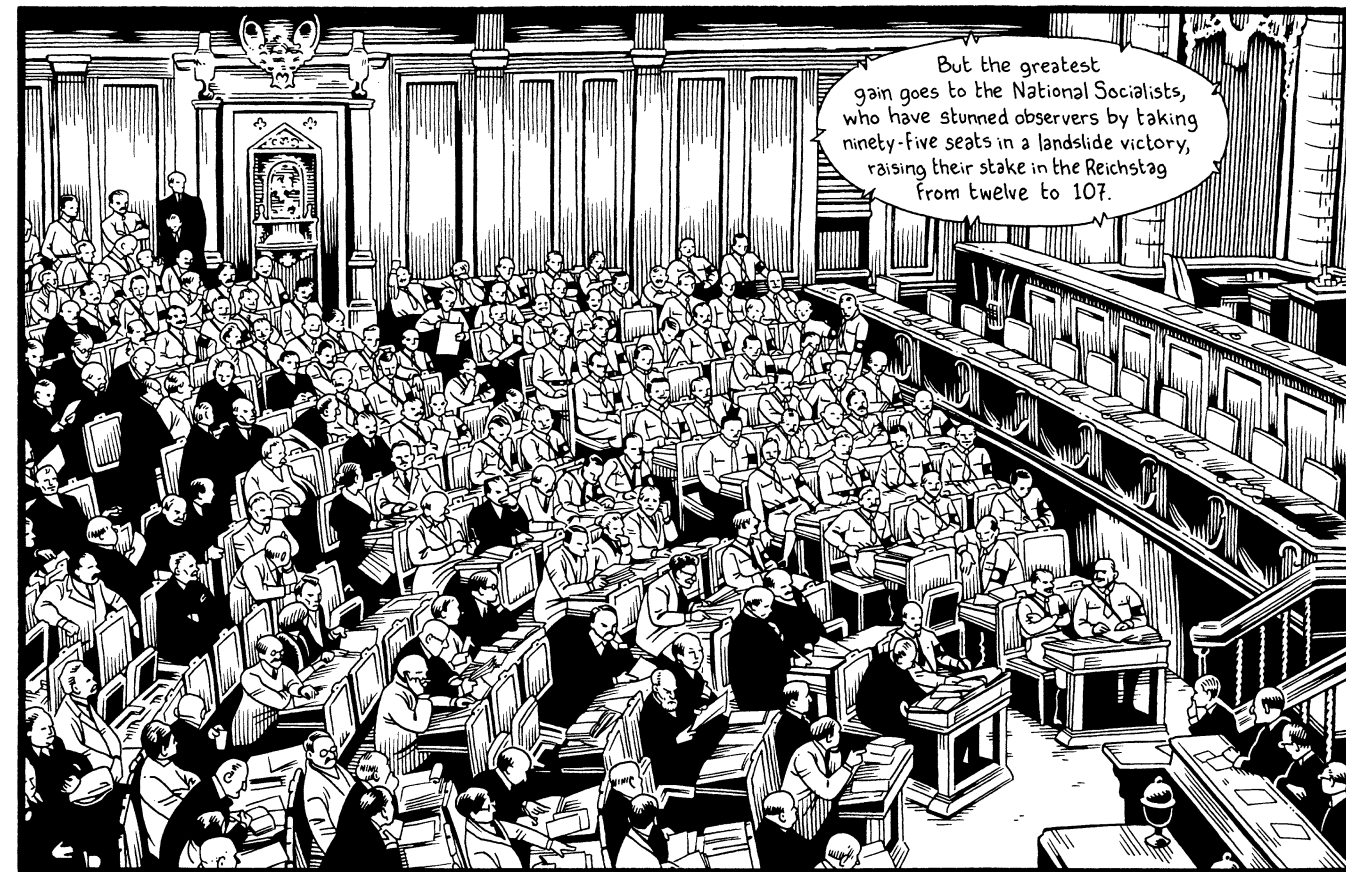
## What Went Wrong?

This has been a battle of many surprises. What was thought to be a one-off action in mid-April dragged out into an ongoing campaign, which brought one unforeseen victory after another even as allies dropped off in distraction, disillusion, or fear of repression. Every victory anarchists hoped would encourage other groups on campus only seemed to intimidate them further. Unlike campaigns that attempt to use a pattern of strategic tactical escalation, the fight against YWC had its biggest and most participatory action in the very beginning, leaving only those less intimidated by administrative repression to continue the campaign throughout the rest of the year.

One of the most challenging aspects of this campaign was that it took place almost solely on UNC's campus. Many of the student anarchists involved, as well as most of the non-student anarchists, had already given up on campus organizing and had few strong ties with other potential allies there. There was a lot of support from neighbors and church members in the mostly Black and Latino neighborhood where some anarchists live and fight against gentrification, as well as from the local community of mostly Mexican day-laborers. Although some anarchists were getting feedback and suggestions from these comrades, most of the latter did not feel that the campus was a place in which they had any agency.

In terms of on-campus politics, the effectiveness of administrative repression underscores a significant strategic mistake made by non-student anarchists. Non-student participants consistently underestimated the real or perceived threat that repressive apparatuses like Honor Court represented to many students. Perhaps because they were less vulnerable to this kind of repression, non-students didn't adequately factor in its potential effects on the overall sustainability of the campaign. Most of these threats proved groundless, as UNC and the assistant district attorney were incapable of successfully prosecuting even disorderly conduct charges. Still, at crucial times when students needed encouragement and reassurance, such affirmation didn't materialize.

Anarchists also should have been better prepared to counter the use of rhetoric about free speech to frame issues of legitimacy and propriety. Some now speculate that these debates



could have played out differently if people had covered campus in wheatpasted posters the night of the Tancredo protest debunking the myth of free speech, analyzing the power imbalances inherent in the venues of public communication, and articulating the importance of stopping white supremacist organizing before it starts. Rather than letting the university administration and its minions consolidate their position,\* anarchists should have been prepared to battle students' feelings of doubt, isolation, and fear. Later, when students saw the statements of solidarity that SDS gathered, many said it helped them to feel the widespread support for their protest and the importance of the campaign against YWC; perhaps anarchists should have provided this kind of support before the initial momentum dropped.

\* The liberal news media in Chapel Hill consistently used the rhetoric of free speech to delegitimize protesters while rebuking them for silencing Tancredo and other speakers. Only the campus conservative newspaper wrote anything questioning the group, stating, "YWC's national leadership, especially Epstein, are clearly associated with racist organizations. Considering this, as well as their penchant for revolutionary rhetoric, YWC's intentions are suspect." This was convenient for them, as it gave them an opportunity to present their own reactionary conservatism as a moderate position. The liberal media's agenda of legitimizing institutional supporters of white supremacy while delegitimizing protesters came out most chillingly in their insistence on describing that Elliot Cramer "jokingly said" that he would shoot protestors if they came to his house. Jokingly said.

There were competing ideological visions for what should have been prioritized in the campaign, however. Some hoped to develop good relationships with other students and build stronger campus activism; some were more interested in increasing the tension and conflict between the student body and the administration in general, seeing YWC as an arbitrary vehicle with which to do so. Many off-campus anarchists seemed primarily invested in swiftly destroying YWC so as to return to other, more long-term projects—but in retrospect it seems possible that focusing more on either of the previous two goals might have aided in that process.

After the initial action in mid-April, at least a couple of people dropped out of the campaign—some because of the threat of punishment from the university, others because of tensions with liberal and non-political groups led by people of color on campus. When some members of CHISPA described the fact that they had been unable to ask Tancredo questions as a form of being silenced, this created a complicated situation that many people did not know how to navigate: in shutting down a racist, right-wing bigot, members of a multi-racial crowd were made to feel racist.

This schism was probably avoidable, at least at first. Radicals' plans to disrupt the event were announced in meetings beforehand, specifically to avoid such a problem; had there been better

*A few choice excerpts from right-wing hate mail to student protestor Haley Koch:*

"Haley, I'm glad you got arrested you filthy kike. It's really a shame your ancestors didn't get whacked along with the other 1.2 million kikes who died under Nazi Germany. Cordially, Jim"

"I genuinely hope that she gets eaten by some of the Africans over there. I'm sorry folks, but that demented little lesbian is just too far gone to ever come back. On the plus side, at least she would be providing a good, solid meal to some of those noble, downtrodden Africans."

"With a woman like this, she really only has 1 ending. Honestly, how could a person be this deranged. She smiles now, but there is no other way for her life to go except to death from the way she lives. A WHITE woman cannot continue to surround herself with blacks and not expect the predictable to happen."

communication among student groups, CHISPA might have been able to plan for what occurred. Lack of communication with CHISPA about plans for the Tancredo protest can also be blamed on anarchists, however. Had relationships with CHISPA's less conservative members existed before the beginning of the campaign, a more collaborative strategy might have arisen. If nothing else, anarchists might have learned ahead of time who would be worthwhile allies and who would not. Instead, despite the enthusiasm of many people of color on campus including campus workers, the head of Minority Affairs in the student government, and individual members of BSM and CHISPA, the leadership of these groups maintained either silence or vocal opposition to efforts to shut down YWC. This situation underscores a common challenge in such conflicts: anarchists must work out how to form working relationships with the more radical members of a hierarchical group, while bypassing the obstacles posed by that group's internal structure.

Of course, it is possible that the division that occurred was inevitable, in view of the political differences between anarchists and CHISPA leaders. This forces us to ask some *hard questions* of our own. Would it have made sense for anarchists to take direction from the conservative leaders of a non-political Latino student group? How would the latter have felt about the wheatpasting and pamphlets and newspaper wrap so crucial to the resignation of YWC's advisors? Would they have liked to ask every speaker brought by YWC some hard questions, even if—or precisely in order that—this prevented others from using their preferred tactics? Are we simply to ask *hard questions* of those who benefit from their power over us until they acquiesce?

The division between the few who dropped out of the campaign and the majority who remained involved brought up important differences in perspective about the meaning of being an *ally*. Is an ally a white person who takes leadership from people of color, or one who acts in concert with people of color toward a mutually beneficial end? If it means the former, which people of color should such an ally take leadership from? Should white allies take leadership from those they disagree with politically\*? What does it mean to prioritize perspectives that come out of different lived experiences than your own? How can we balance these concerns?

Much of the discourse around being an ally† seems to presume a relationship of one-sided support, with one person or group following another's leadership. While there are certainly times where this makes sense, it is misleading to use the term ally to describe this relationship. In an alliance, the two parties support *each other* while maintaining their own self-determination and autonomy, and are bound together not by the relationship of leader and follower but by a *shared goal*. In other words, one cannot actually be the ally of a group or individual with whom one has no political affinity—and this means that one cannot be an ally to an entire demographic group, like people of color,

\* Editor's note: Don't forget about anarchist people of color. Even when we don't call ourselves anarchists, we are out there doing our own badass things. Sometimes if you think that no allies of a particular kind exist, you are not looking hard enough—or in an inviting enough way.

† According to one dictionary definition, allies are those who join together in “mutually supportive association... with a common purpose.” The word is derived from the Latin *alligare*, which means “to bind.”

who do not share a singular cohesive political or personal desire.

Anarchist vocabulary around leadership, solidarity, and the autonomy of interdependent social forces has proven desperately lacking in this regard. Rather than talking about leadership, anarchists should be developing the practice of organizing effectively with people who are differently impacted by the struggle. Anarchists should be learning to listen more to the voices of those who are institutionally and socially silenced, and evaluating how structural mechanisms in our organizing affect the likelihood of such people participating.

It is unfortunate that the students who were concerned about their relationships with CHISPA and other groups didn't find ways to strengthen those relationships while continuing to work to stop YWC. Perhaps they could have worked together with people from those groups to hold panels and forums about immigrants' rights and anti-fascism, or featuring radical people of color debunking myths about free speech. Perhaps students could have arranged opportunities for non-student anarchists to socialize with some of the more radical members of CHISPA. It was sad that some people simply opted out of the campaign; let's delve into these complicated issues, rather than just back away from them when they get difficult.

In the struggle against YWC, it initially seemed that other groups shared the goal of shutting it down. When it became apparent that this was not the case, that many other groups and individuals on campus believed in YWC's right to exist and wanted to have dialogue with them, the political terrain shifted. It is possible to blame this on anti-racists' failure to argue their case that YWC was, in fact, a racist organization. It is also possible that the predominantly liberal discourse on campus was simply incapable of recognizing an established, well-funded, politically legitimate group as white supremacist, given the connotations of covert violence and nighttime terror that this phrase still evokes in the South. It is certain that anti-racists initially underestimated the political legitimacy YWC was able to muster, a mistake that cost the campaign dearly.

## Evaluating Success

There were multiple overlapping goals within this campaign, influenced both by the divergent ideological perspectives of the participants and the different relationships those people had to campus life and student organizations. Evaluations of the campaign's success vary according to which of these goals one prioritizes.

If the goal was defeating YWC locally by discrediting them, disrupting their events, and destabilizing their infrastructure, the struggle was at least partially successful. While their local chapter is still holding events, they are widely discredited and have almost no membership. After losing their first president to graduation and having two advisors forced to resign, their second president drastically distanced himself from the national organization, publicly criticizing the national organization's objectives. He himself was forced to resign a couple months later under pressure from the Leadership Institute, which appointed a more appropriate—politically conservative and white—president in

early December 2009. When she graduates in spring 2010, it seems possible that the group will simply dissolve.

The struggle against YWC at UNC also disrupted their organizing on a national level. After the publicity from the first demonstration, Providence College refused to permit Tancredo to come speak; YWC has also been banned from becoming a student group at some universities. The national YWC leadership, as well as the right-wing think tank that gave birth to the group, have come under increased scrutiny as a result of this campaign. Their efforts to mainstream more explicitly racist anti-immigrant rhetoric have been hindered by the YWC fiasco. However, as of now YWC groups are still organizing on several college campuses.

If the goal was to strengthen activist networks on campus and foment antagonism towards Chancellor Thorp and his administration, the campaign can only be judged a failure. While it brought together anarchists who had not previously worked together, strengthening some working relationships, campus activism has gone into noticeable decline—and not because it has given way to a more subversive form. It is not clear if this is due to burnout resulting from the fight against YWC or something else entirely. Perhaps this decline has more to do with Obama's presidency, and the tremendous support he received on campus, than anything else.

In spite of anarchist interventions, it seems that UNC is no more ripe for rebellion now than it was before this struggle. While anarchists have learned from some of their mistakes, it remains to be seen whether the high turnover rate in campus activism inhibits the collective memory necessary for such learning, or if the majority of the student body see the presence of groups like YWC as a problem at all.

This last problem highlights another question: are UNC students any more likely now to *see* racism? At minimum, a struggle against a politically legitimized purveyor of white supremacist ideas ought to foster a more systemic analysis of racism—as opposed to one centered around personal prejudice, equal opportunity, and so on. Unfortunately, rather than explore the means by which white supremacist ideas are legitimized, the misconception that today racism is limited to that which is outside “legitimate politics,” or the inherently white supremacist implications of opposing immigrants and immigration, most students seemed to disengage entirely—denying the existence of racism in the age of Obama.

Some of this must be attributed to the unwillingness of students to accept the responsibility of confronting racism and privilege at a university founded alongside the institutions of Southern white supremacy. But anti-racists involved in the campaign also made choices that deprioritized spreading this kind of analysis in favor of the more quantitative and immediate goal of shutting down YWC. While propaganda efforts such as the posters and the newspaper wrap highlighted a systemic understanding of racism that went beyond the group being targeted, most tactical decisions were more single-minded. The conflict eventually became a private war between anarchists and YWC, while much of the student body grew deaf to



the accusations being thrown back and forth about racism and free speech. Perhaps this is a pitfall of applying SHAC-style tactics‡ in a different arena: while the tactics themselves can be effective, animal rights campaigns often deprioritize building popular support, promoting horizontal structures, or generalizing revolt—which may be essential in other contexts. The small home demonstrations, harassment of advisors or researchers, and small-scale private sabotage common in the animal rights and animal liberation movements can hardly be expected to foster a large-scale political shift on campus.

*Anti-fascists covered 3000 copies of the student-published newspaper with a special anti-racist edition newswrap.*

‡ Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) is an innovative animal liberation campaign utilizing secondary and tertiary targeting to shut down an animal testing corporation; their strategies and tactics are analyzed in *Rolling Thunder* #6.



"This is our culture—fight for it. This is our flag—pick it up.  
This is our country—take it back."  
—racist piece of shit Tom Tancredo

All the same, there are indications that at least some people were moved by anti-racists' efforts. After the beginning of the fall semester, the DTH was finally forced to begin printing letters to the editor supportive of the campaign. One such letter, written by a groundskeeper in response to a pro-YWC editorial scolding the protesters arrested the previous spring, concluded that:

"[The DTH] has become a rightist mouthpiece for the select few middle-class bluebloods that clearly populate its staff. We claim a due and just victory in spite of your threats. And, by the way, the 'Special Anti-Racist Issue' I read at the outset of this semester remains (and I suspect will remain) the best piece of journalism I pull out of a campus newspaper box this academic year."

Without more relationships on campus, it is difficult to know how many other people may have subtly shifted their attitudes around race, immigration, and direct action.

The failure of anarchists to spread rebellion and long-term opposition to YWC beyond their own preexisting networks is a consequence of choosing to deprioritize on-campus organizing. Though anarchists were able to put their diverse array of skills and enthusiasms to good use, and managed to see an unpopular campaign through to arguable success, they failed to generalize whatever internal conflict and antagonism already permeated campus. Whether this means anarchists should have better estimated their own capacity ahead of time and acted accordingly, or did the best they could with a bad situation, is hard to tell—but it provides lessons for those eager to provoke classroom rebellion worldwide.

With the economy in shambles and faith in electoral democracy dwindling, anarchism isn't the only alternative gaining a new foothold.

Fascism is on the rise. Find it in your town and destroy it.

# Not Just Free Speech, but Freedom Itself *A Critique of Civil Liberties*



Across the years, anarchists have defended freedom of speech. This is important in principle: in an anarchist vision of society, neither the state or any other entity should be able to determine what we can and cannot say. It's also important in practice: as a revolutionary minority frequently targeted for repression, we've consistently had our speeches, newspapers, websites, and marches attacked.

Free speech fights have figured in anarchist campaigns for a long time. The Industrial Workers of the World fought restrictions on pro-union soapboxing by flooding jails until cities were forced to change their ordinances. Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman passionately defended free speech in the US during World War I and in the Soviet Union after the Russian Revolution. During the Makhnovist resistance in the Ukraine and the Spanish Civil War in Catalonia, anarchist forces distinguished themselves from authoritarians both left and right by refusing to restrict the press. More recently the SHAC 7 case, in which animal rights activists were defined as terrorists simply for running a website advocating direct action, showed that speech can still bring us into conflict with the state.

But anti-authoritarians aren't the only ones who have taken up the banner of free speech. More recently, the right wing in the US has begun to argue that the failure to give conservative views an equal footing with liberal views constitutes a suppression of their free speech. By accusing "liberal" universities and media of suppressing conservative views—a laughable assertion, given the massive structures of power and funding advancing these—they use First Amendment discourse to promote reactionary agendas. Supposedly progressive campuses reveal their true colors as they mobilize institutional power to defend right-wing territory in the marketplace of ideas, going so far as to censor and intimidate opposition.

Extreme right and fascist organizations have jumped onto the free speech bandwagon as well. In the US, Anti-Racist Action and similar groups have been largely effective in disrupting their events and organizing efforts. Consequently, fascists now increasingly rely on the state to protect them, claiming that racist, anti-immigrant, and anti-gay organizing constitutes a form of legally protected speech—and within the framework of the ACLU, it does. Fascist groups that are prevented from publishing their material in most other industrialized democracies by laws restricting hate speech frequently publish it in the United States, where no such laws exist, and distribute it worldwide

from here. So in practice, state protection of the right to free expression aids fascist organizing.

If defending free speech has come to mean sponsoring wealthy right-wing politicians and enabling fascist recruiting, perhaps it is time for anarchists to reassess this principle.

## the rhetoric of free expression

There appears to be a broad consensus in the US political spectrum in favor of the right to free speech. While opponents may quibble over the limits, such as what constitutes obscenity, pundits from left to right agree that free speech is essential to American democracy.

Appeals to this tradition of unrestricted expression confer legitimacy on groups with views outside the mainstream, and both fascists and radicals capitalize on this. Lawyers often defend anarchist activity by referencing the First Amendment's provision preventing legislation restricting the press or peaceable assembly. We can find allies who will support us in free speech cases who would never support us out of a shared vision of taking direct action to create a world free of hierarchy. The rhetoric of free speech and First Amendment rights give us a common language with which to broaden our range of support and make our resistance more comprehensible to potential allies with whom we may build deeper connections over time.

But at what cost? This discourse of rights seems to imply that the state is necessary to protect us against itself, as if it is a sort of Jekyll and Hyde split personality that simultaneously attacks us with laws and police and prosecutors while defending us with laws and attorneys and judges. If we accept this metaphor, it should not be surprising to find that the more we attempt to strengthen the arm that defends us, the stronger the arm that attacks us will become.

Once freedom is defined as an assortment of rights granted by the state, it is easy to lose sight of the actual freedom those rights are meant to protect and focus instead on the rights themselves—implicitly accepting the legitimacy of the state. Thus, when we build visibility and support by using the rhetoric of rights, we may undercut the possibility of struggle against the state itself. We also open the door for the state to *impose* others' "rights" upon us.

**Despite the radical roots of organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union that advocate for state protection of free expression, this *form* of civil liberties empties the defense of free speech of any radical *content*, implying that only the state can properly guarantee our ability to express ourselves freely and thus reinforcing the power of the state above the right to free speech itself.**

## the civil liberties defense

In the US, many take it for granted that it is easier for the state to silence and isolate radicals in countries in which free speech is not legally protected. If this is true, who *wouldn't* want to strengthen legal protections on free speech?

In fact, in nations in which free speech is not legally protected, radicals are not always more isolated—on the contrary, the average person is sometimes *more* sympathetic to those in conflict with the state, as it is more difficult for the state to legitimize itself as the defender of liberty. Laws do not tie the hands of the state nearly so much as public opposition can; given the choice between legal rights and popular support, radicals are much better off with the latter.

One dictionary defines *civil liberty* as “the state of being subject only to laws established for the good of the community.” This sounds ideal to those who believe that laws enforced by hierarchical power can serve the “good of the community”—but who defines “the community” and what is good for it, if not those in power? In practice, the discourse of civil liberties enables the state to marginalize its foes: if there is a legitimate channel for every kind of expression, then those who refuse to play by the rules are clearly illegitimate. Thus we may read this definition the other way around: under “civil liberty,” all laws are *for the good of the community*, and any who challenge them must be *against it*.

Focusing on the right to free speech, we see only two protagonists, the individual and the state. Rather than letting ourselves be drawn into the debate about what the state should allow, anarchists should focus on a third protagonist—the general public. We win or lose *our* struggle on the terrain of how much sovereignty the populace at large is willing to cede to the state, how much intrusion it is willing to put up with. If we must speak of rights at all, rather than argue that we have the right to free speech let us simply assert that the state has *no* right to suppress us. Better yet, let's develop another language entirely.

## free speech and democracy . . .

The discourse of free speech in democracy presumes that no significant imbalances of power exist, and that the primary mechanism of change is rational discussion. In fact, a capitalist elite controls most resources, and power crystallizes upward along multiple axes of oppression. Against this configuration, it takes a lot more than speech alone to open the possibility of social change.

There can be no truly free speech except among equals—among parties who are not just equal before the law, but who have comparable access to resources and equal say in the world they share. Can an employee really be said to be as free to express herself as her boss, if the latter can take away her livelihood? Are two people equally free to express their views when one owns a news network and the other cannot even afford to photocopy fliers? In the US, where donations to political candidates legally constitute speech, the more money you have, the more “free

speech” you can exercise. As the slogan goes, freedom isn't free—and nowhere is that clearer than with speech.

Contrary to the propaganda of democracy, ideas alone have no intrinsic force. Our capacity to *act* on our beliefs, not just to express them, determines how much power we have. In this sense, the “marketplace of ideas” metaphor is strikingly apt: you need capital to participate, and the more you have, the greater your ability to enact the ideas you buy into. Just as the success of a few entrepreneurs and superstars is held up as proof that the free market rewards hard work and ingenuity, the myth of the marketplace of ideas suggests that the capitalist system persists because everyone—billionaire and bellboy alike—agrees it is the best *idea*.

## . . . so long as you don't *do* anything

But what if, despite the skewed playing field, someone manages to say something that threatens to destabilize the power structure? If history is any indication, it swiftly turns out that freedom of expression is not such a sacrosanct right after all. In practice, we are permitted free speech only insofar as expressing our views *changes nothing*. The premise that *speech alone* cannot be harmful implies that speech is precisely that which is ineffectual: therefore anything *effectual* is not included among one's rights.

During World War I, the Espionage Act criminalized any attempt to “cause insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny, [or] refusal of duty” or to obstruct recruiting for the armed forces. President Woodrow Wilson urged the bill's passage because he believed antiwar activity could undermine the US war effort. Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman were arrested under this law for printing anarchist literature that opposed the war. Likewise, the Anarchist Exclusion Act and the subsequent Immigration Act were used to deport or deny entry to any immigrant “who disbelieves in or who is opposed to all organized government.” Berkman, Goldman, and hundreds of other anarchists were deported under these acts. There are countless other examples showing that when speech can threaten the foundation of state power, even the most democratic government doesn't hesitate to suppress it.

Thus, when the state presents itself as the defender of free speech, we can be sure that this is because our rulers believe that allowing criticism will strengthen their position more than suppressing it could. Liberal philosopher and ACLU member Thomas Emerson saw that freedom of speech “can act as a kind of ‘safety valve’ to let off steam when people might otherwise be bent on revolution.” Therein lies the true purpose of the right to free speech in the US.

## not free speech, but freedom itself

Obviously, anarchists should not organize *against* free speech. But the stranglehold of the state on the discourse of free speech seems to set the terms of the debate: either we condone



The pitfalls of state-centered discourse about rights emerged in the debates around pornography and women's oppression in the 1970s and '80s. On one side, some feminists, recognizing the harm visited upon women by the pornography industry, allied with right-wing fundamentalists to advocate for the state to suppress sexual materials. On the other side, feminist "sex radicals" used free expression arguments that allied them with capitalist pornographers, challenging the role of the state in regulating sexuality but failing to confront the impact of misogynist pornography. The anarchist approach addressed the harm caused by pornography directly by taking action against exploitative producers and profiteers, without relying on the state either to restrict or defend "free expression." The Wimmin's Fire Brigade demonstrated this option by firebombing porn stores in Canada that refused to stop selling pornographic depictions of rape.

ensorship, or we condone state protection of our enemies and their right to organize against us and others. This results in paradoxes, such as radicals being accused of opposing freedom from shutting down a fascist speaker.

In contrast to state protection of KKK rallies and the like, there are models of free expression that neither depend upon the enforcement of rights from above nor sanction oppressive behavior. Anarchists might judge speech not as something fundamentally different from action, but as a *form of action*: when it harms others, when it reinforces hierarchies and injustices, we confront it the same way we would confront any other kind of abuse or oppression. This is simply self-defense.

When xenophobic politician Tom Tancredo comes to speak at a public university, his hefty honorarium is paid with tax money extorted from workers and given to universities so it will continue to circulate among the rich and powerful. Regardless of right-wing braying about the marginalization of conservative opinions, the fact that Tancredo is powerful enough to secure

lucrative speaking engagements indicates that his views are hardly suppressed. As a wealthy white citizen and public figure, his opportunity to express himself can't reasonably be compared to that of, say, the Latina immigrants he scapegoats in his political campaigns. If their voices and agency held equal weight, Tancredo could say whatever he wanted, but would be powerless to subject others to his schemes.

When we confront him directly rather than politely disagreeing, we're not attacking his right to express his opinions; we're confronting the power he wields over our lives through institutions built on violence, a power he means to extend by using speaking events to gain wealth, legitimacy, and recruits to his racist endeavors. This points to a political practice that does not reduce freedom to rights, but challenges the privileges of the state; that makes no false dichotomy between speech and action, but judges both by the same standards; that does not enable the state to frame itself as the defender of free speech, but asserts that we are the only ones who can defend and extend our own *freedom*.

# Less civil, more liberties!

# FREE SPEECH FAQ

*Stopping fascists from speaking makes you just as bad as them.*

You could just as easily say that *not* stopping fascists from speaking—giving them the opportunity to organize to impose their agenda on the rest of us—makes you as bad as them. If you care about freedom, don't stand idly by while people mobilize to take it away.

*Shouldn't we just ignore them? They want attention, and if we give it to them we're letting them win.*

Actually, fascists usually don't want to draw attention to their organizing; they do most of it in secret for fear that an outraged public will shut them down. They only organize public events to show potential recruits that they have power, and to try to legitimize their views as part of the political spectrum. By publicly opposing fascists, we make it clear to them—and more importantly, to anyone else interested in joining them—that they will not be able to consolidate power over us without a fight. Ignoring fascists only allows them to organize unhindered, and history shows that this can be very dangerous. Better we shut them down once and for all.

*The best way to defeat fascism is to let them express their views so that everyone can see how ignorant they are. We can refute them more effectively with ideas than force.*

People don't become fascists because they find their *ideas* persuasive; they become fascists for the same reason others become police officers or politicians: to wield *power* over other people. It's up to us to show that fascist organizing will not enable them to obtain this power, but will only result in public humiliation. That is the only way to cut off their source of potential recruits.

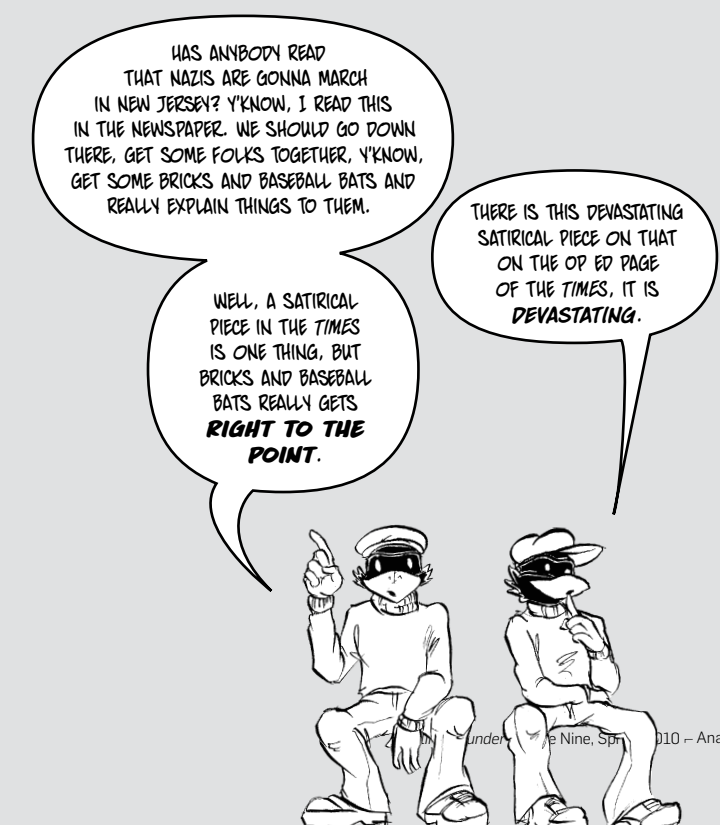
History has shown over and over that fascism is not defeated by ideas alone, but by popular self-defense. We're told that if all ideas are debated openly, the best one will win out, but this fails to account for the reality of unequal power.

Fascists can be very useful to those with power and privilege, who often supply them with copious resources; if they can secure more airtime and visibility for their ideas than we can, we would be fools to limit ourselves to that playing field. We can debate their ideas all day long, but if we don't prevent them from building the capacity to make them reality, it won't matter.

*Neo-Nazis are irrelevant; institutionalized racism poses the real threat today, not the extremists at the fringe.*

The bulk of racism takes place in subtle, everyday forms. But fascist visibility enables other right-wing groups to frame themselves as moderates, helping to legitimize the racist and xenophobic assumptions underlying their positions and the systems of power and privilege they defend. Taking a stand against fascists is an essential step toward discrediting the structures and values at the root of institutionalized racism.

Here and worldwide, fascists still terrorize and murder people because of racial, religious, and sexual difference. It's both naïve and



disrespectful to their victims to gloss over the past and present realities of fascist violence. Because fascists believe in acting directly to carry out their agenda rather than limiting themselves to the apparatus of representative democracy, they can be more dangerous proportionate to their numbers than other bigots. This makes it an especially high priority to deal with them swiftly.

*Free speech means protecting everyone's right to speak, including people you don't agree with. How would you like it if you had an unpopular opinion and other people were trying to silence you?*

We oppose fascists because of what they do, not what they say. We're not opposed to free speech; we're opposed to the fact that they advance an agenda of hate and terror. We have no power to censor them; thanks to the "neutrality" of the capitalist market, they continue to publish hate literature in print and the internet. But we will not let them come into our communities to build the power they need to enact their hatred.

The government and the police have never protected everyone's free speech equally, and never will. It is in their self-interest to repress views and actions that challenge existing power inequalities. They will spend hundreds of thousands of taxpayers' dollars on riot police, helicopters, and sharpshooters to defend a KKK rally, but if there's an anarchist rally the same police will be there to stop it, not to protect it.

Anarchists don't like being silenced by the state—but we don't want the state to define and manage our freedom, either. Unlike the ACLU, whose supposed defense of "freedom" leads them to support the KKK and others like them, we support self-defense and self-determination above all. What's the purpose of free speech, if not to foster a world free from oppression? Fascists oppose this vision; thus we oppose fascism by any means necessary.

*If fascists don't have a platform to express their views peacefully, it will drive them to increasingly violent means of expression.*

Fascists are only attempting to express their views "peacefully" in order to lay the groundwork for violent activity. Because fascists require a veneer of social legitimacy to be able to carry out their program, giving them a platform to speak opens the door to their being able to do physical harm to people. Public speech promoting ideologies of hate, whether or not you consider it violent on its own, always complements and correlates with violent actions. By affiliating themselves with movements and ideologies based on oppression and genocide, fascists show their intention to carry on these legacies of violence—but only if they can develop a base of support.

*Trying to suppress their voices will backfire by generating interest in them.*

Resistance to fascism doesn't increase interest in fascist views. If anything, liberals mobilizing to defend fascists on free speech grounds increases interest in their views by conferring legitimacy on them. This plays directly into their organizing goals, allowing them to drive a wedge between their opponents using free speech as a smokescreen. By tolerating racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia, so-called free speech advocates are complicit in the acts of terror fascist organizing makes possible.

*They have rights like everybody else.*

No one has the right to threaten our community with violence. Likewise, we reject the "right" of the government and police—who have more in common with fascists than they do with us—to decide for us when fascists have crossed the line from merely expressing themselves into posing an immediate threat. We will not abdicate our freedom to judge when and how to defend ourselves.



What started in 2004 as a dozen people banging pots and pans outside their local arms manufacturer has mushroomed into the UK's largest and most dynamic anti-militarist mobilization. Over the last five years, activists from SMASH EDO have shrugged off repeated attempts to shut down their campaign; last year, they mobilized thousands for the May Day Carnival Against War and Greed. Meanwhile, the pressure on the factory has been relentless.

*For the safety of the participants, most quotations are not attributed.  
More information: [www.smashedo.org.uk](http://www.smashedo.org.uk), [smashedo@riseup.net](mailto:smashedo@riseup.net), [www.schnews.org.uk](http://www.schnews.org.uk)*

“Every bomb that is dropped, every bullet that is fired in the name of this war of terror has to be made somewhere . . . and wherever that is, it can be resisted.”

—SMASH EDO, March 2004

“A crowd of 600, largely clad in red, many masked, surges uphill towards police lines, throwing crash barriers aside and using a sound system to batter their way through. Soon they’re inside the arms factory compound, and the windows start going in . . .”

—participant in the SMASH EDO Carnival  
Against the Arms Trade, June 2008

SMASH EDO is an anonymous, non-hierarchical, fluid campaign: as much a slogan as an organization. This amorphous nature, coupled with a complete rejection of negotiations with the authorities, has made it very difficult to repress. The goal is almost absurdly narrow—the closure of one weapons component factory in one town. But in the course of pursuing it, the campaign has incorporated a diversity of tactics and approaches—from leafleting to lockdowns, from installation art to rioting—and may have sown the seeds for a real challenge to the war machine.

SMASH EDO has never publicly identified itself as an anarchist campaign and has never nailed its colors to any particular political mast. It has often been compared—not least by the police and the weapons dealers themselves—to targeted animal rights campaigns such as SHAC.\* In contrast with those campaigns, however, participants have taken great pains to keep a low profile, albeit with mixed results. There are organizing meetings for major actions, but the left hand does not always know what the right hand is doing—a person who has devoted years to the campaign might still find out about an action from Indymedia.

Other campaigns generally depend on a public organizing group that starts with a firm idea of what they’re going to do and how they’re going to do it. SHAC’s assault on the share price of Huntingdon Life Sciences by any means necessary, including the deliberate cultivation of bad press, was extremely successful at first. They achieved some phenomenal results—but by the time we began our campaign against EDO, the state was passing new laws and taking advantage of the focus on one target to isolate and immobilize SHAC activists.

\* Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty, extensively discussed in *Rolling Thunder* #6.

By contrast, unable to rely on the level of militancy common amongst animal rights activists,† the SMASH EDO campaign has had to be more flexible. It took years for the animal rights movement to build up critical mass, starting from the struggle over live exports in the early 1990s. Half a decade later, SHAC’s predecessor, Save the Hillgrove Cats, could call monthly demonstrations in which thousands descended on a single cat farm near Oxford, pushing the policing bill into the millions. For reasons explained below, this was not an option for our campaign.

## EDO

But who the hell are EDO and why must they be smashed?

When the campaign began, EDO MBM was a subsidiary of the EDO Corporation—a US company that was a major supplier of Raytheon‡ as well as an arms manufacturer in its own right. In December 2007, EDO Corporation was purchased by the US arms conglomerate ITT. EDO MBM/ITT supply vital parts for the Paveway series of laser-guided bombs, which were the most used guided munitions in the aerial bombardment of Iraq. They also have designed a component for the bombing systems of F-15, F-16, and F-35 fighter aircraft; the US has supplied some of these to Israel, where they have been used against Palestinians. The Brighton factory also manufactures components for unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVS), which have been used in assassinations and raids by the US army in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Questioned by the local paper in 2004, David Jones, then the managing director of EDO, said that he was proud to support the war effort in Iraq. However, EDO has repeatedly denied that they knowingly supply equipment to Israel.

Finding out what EDO does has not always been easy; research has been an integral component of the campaign. Since Jones’ press statement fueled public anger, EDO have refused to make public statements and have removed pages from their website advertising that their weaponry is used by the Israeli air force. Several directors have resigned after being forced to give evidence in court about what the company produces.

ITT Corporation is one of the most powerful transnational companies in the world. During

† Historically, the animal rights movement has achieved the greatest militancy and willingness to use illegal tactics in the UK.

‡ A major defense contractor; the world’s leading producer of guided missiles.

the Second World War it owned 25% of Germany’s Focke-Wulf, builder of fighter aircraft for the Nazis, and ITT subsidiaries made cash payments to SS leader Heinrich Himmler. ITT memos and declassified CIA documents suggest that ITT attempted to fund Salvador Allende’s opponents in Chile and helped prepare the military coup that occurred there in 1973. In response, the Weather Underground and others bombed ITT offices in New York, Rome, Zurich, and London. EDO’s factory in Brighton is only one part of this powerful corporation.

## The Anti-War Movement in the UK

In 2003, the UK saw the largest antiwar movement in its history. On February 15, 2003, over a million people took to the streets to protest the relentless march towards the invasion of Iraq. Many were angry at the ease with which Britain had been signed on as a willing lieutenant in what was widely seen as blatant US imperialism. Across the country, large numbers of people who’d never taken a political stance got involved in the movement. The left, used to the muted response to previous wars of aggression in Afghanistan and Kosovo, was overwhelmed by this new influx.

But the public mood was characterized by disapproval rather than resistance. The left-liberal classes that formed the mass of the movement were reluctant to take direct action, instead accepting the tone set by the biggest antiwar group, the Stop the War Coalition. For reasons too tedious to go into here but depressingly familiar to anyone who has worked with organizations dominated by Trotskyite vanguardist parties, this coalition opted to rely on predictable marches in London. Even after these (admittedly enormous) demonstrations failed to alter the plans for war, the StWC continued to repeat them with diminishing returns. The most recent demonstration against the war in Afghanistan, on October 24, 2009, brought out a mere 10,000.

Others did resist the oncoming conflict more directly. Gloucestershire’s Fairford airbase is a launching pad for US stealth bombers and one of many parts of the UK that is effectively US sovereign territory. The mobilizations there drew participants intent on more forceful resistance; however, the state was able to muster thousands of police to keep them under control. In one instance, two men managed to enter the airfield and came within yards of damaging aircraft before they were caught. They were acquitted by a jury in 2007, demonstrating how antiwar sentiment pervaded the country.

## Brighton

Brighton is a seaside resort on the south coast of the UK with a radical reputation and a faint whiff of patchouli in the air. It was one of a handful of UK towns where antiwar activism wasn’t the sole preserve of the Stop the War Coalition. Instead, a coalition evolved under the name Sussex Action for Peace, involving everyone from the Quakers and trade unionists to the anarchists and the just plain awkward. A non-critical atmosphere developed, opening space for a diversity of tactics: everything from “Pancakes for Peace” to fence-cutting at Fairford Airbase.



“For months, we had been preparing, organizing, arguing about how to take to the streets and show our anger once the bombing started in Baghdad. We made flags and called samba bands, we leafleted at colleges and to schoolchildren, we held meetings with over a hundred people and fended off bizarre suggestions for a workers’ and soldiers’ soviet. We talked about tactics and dug out our gas masks. But for all our planning, the day itself was a triumph of creativity and motivation from the people of Brighton.

“On the day the bombing started, a group of us hiked up to the local school expecting to stand outside the gates encouraging a few to brave the anger of their teachers. Instead, when we

[Opposite]  
Activists locking down to block access to the arms factory.

[Previous]  
May Day 2009 in Brighton: traffic in the city was brought to a standstill as police and antiwar protesters clashed on the streets. As the march passed a McDonald’s, the tension came to a head; police struggled to regain control of the situation as rocks were hurled and protesters used large banners to push closer to the restaurant. At another point, protesters used a car welded out of sheets of metal to ram police officers intent on stopping the march from reaching the EDO MBM headquarters.



Keeping tabs on the coppers, May Day 2009.

got there, hundreds of children streamed past and took over the main roads laughing and running into town, stopping traffic and hurling eggs at banks. All day the streets stopped in the city. A group took on the symbols of capitalism, bringing down the American flag outside the American Express building and tearing it up.

“When the time for the mass assembly came, the ‘organizing collective’ gathered their flags and headed to the town center. However, a mass of 5000 people filled the streets, overflowing into the side roads. No one was leading this crowd anywhere; it had a chaotic dynamism. The band started and people swarmed through the city shutting down business as usual, anger palpable in the air.

“A group headed for the town hall with a ‘donated’ key card for entry. The plan was to occupy the town hall and start a ‘people’s council’ to plan future actions and resistance. When the crowd surged towards the doors, shoving the police and their pepper spray aside, high feelings took over and destruction and property damage

followed. One man got into the debating chamber balcony and danced high above the crowd shouting ‘No blood for oil!’ It felt like a shout from the city of Brighton at those who were taking us to war against our will.”

—BRIGHTON “STOP THE CITY—STOP THE WAR” PARTICIPANT, MARCH 2003

Of course, the initial invasion was accomplished within weeks. Soon, UK forces were committed to the occupation of Iraq and the momentum behind the antiwar movement was starting to fade.

“We wanted to draw attention to the fact that this war was not an act of irrational aggression carried out by a particularly stupid president but something planned for, and for some corporations a real money-maker. In effect, we wanted to take the war back to the factory floor. We couldn’t directly affect the course of the conflict in Iraq, but we could target the spear-carriers.”

—SMASH EDO, 2004

The discovery that one of those spear-carriers was EDO MBM, a company situated on a small industrial estate just a mile and a half from the city center, led to the formation of a new group. This was largely composed of the anarchist and direct-action-oriented wing of the rapidly shrinking Sussex Action for Peace.

“Our aim at the time was to take the fury at a war happening a thousand miles away and point out how the causes of that war were wrapped up in our everyday lives. The decision to target one factory has been controversial; we have been accused of diverting attention away from the real target, i.e., the government. Although EDO now has around 150 employees, they are a relatively minor link in the weapons supply chain. But we know this is how the arms trade functions. Weapons are not stand-alone devices; modern warfare is based on a series of weapons systems. The supply chain involves hundreds of small component manufacturers and EDO’s manufacture of bomb release mechanisms makes them vital accomplices in the mass aerial bombardments used by the powerful to cow uncooperative populations. It’s better to gain a small victory like this than suffer a series of magnificent defeats.”

—SMASH EDO, 2004

## We’ll Be Here until You’re Not

Actions kicked off in May 2004 with a rooftop occupation of the factory coordinated with a lockdown blocking access to the whole industrial estate. Regular and irregular noise demonstrations soon greeted the workers.

“Noise demos at the time consisted of a few people making noise outside the factory gates. We’d bang pots and pans, shout through megaphones, or slam the metal crash barrier that runs along the grass opposite the factory: anything to let the workers and their managers know what we thought of their business. At this stage [2004], we didn’t know how much the workforce knew about what EDO’s products were used for.”

—SMASH EDO ACTIVIST

The noise demos have continued as the regular backbeat of the campaign, occurring at least once a week.

The first year saw a lot of nighttime sabotage, with the undefended factory coming under regular attack. Windows were smashed, doors superglued, paint bombs thrown. The cooling fan systems in the rear of the factory sustained £45,000 damage in one assault. The factory’s managing directors awoke to find their neighborhoods plastered with fliers accusing them of complicity in civilian deaths. More humorously, both horse-shit and quick-drying concrete were dumped at the entrance. Nobody ever claimed responsibility for these actions, nor was anyone ever arrested; sporadic “pixie” actions like these still occur. The factory is now fenced off with twenty-four-hour security, razor wire, and CCTV.

Various groups, including the local Quakers, organized vigils outside the factory. Others, dressed in white overalls and masks and calling themselves the “Blix Block,” attempted to march into the factory to conduct a citizens’ weapons inspection.

## Injunction and Crackdown

The stakes were raised in March 2005 with a combined effort from Sussex Police and EDO MBM to shut down protests outside the factory by means of an injunction under the Protection from Harassment Act. Under this act, which was originally designed to protect individuals from stalkers, companies were able to secure tailor-made injunctions on the basis of very little evidence, enabling police to make arrests for things that would not normally be crimes. In this case, they tried to limit protests outside the factory to two and a half hours a week, in groups of no more than ten people with no noise amplification.

Prior to this, such injunctions had only been aimed at animal right campaigners, notably the SHAC campaign. The process in these cases allowed the companies to use evidence of illegal activity—some genuine, some concocted—to place limits on legal activity such as gathering for demonstrations, waving placards, or using megaphones. Subsequent court cases revealed that the police had drafted the terms of the injunction, supplied intelligence to company lawyers, and manufactured arrests to provide sufficient evidence to shut down the protests.

“This demonstrated clearly that it was the police’s intention to shut down the public face of the campaign. Isolated illegal activity they feel they can deal with—but they’re frightened of movements that can function both above and underground.”

This attempted repression showed how the War on Terror involved attacks on civil liberties at home alongside warfare abroad. Compulsory ID cards were introduced, as well as new laws clamping down on protest and dissent: for example, by an amendment to the Public Order Act, the number of people required to constitute an illegal gathering was reduced to two. But this backdrop of repression, along with the unpopularity of the war, enabled the campaign against EDO to gather publicity and public support. A central press number complete with a ready-to-go press spokesperson helped the campaign to compete with both the police and the corporation in the local media.

Ironically, the injunction provided the campaign with its first major publicity boost. “First, it showed us that we were having an effect: an international arms company had been forced to spend thousands on lawyers simply to prevent us from standing outside the gates. We also looked like the underdogs.”

A demonstration dubbed “THE BIG ONE,” called May 2005 in the wake of the first injunction hearing, drew a hundred and fifty outside the factory. Fighting broke out as police moved to arrest an eighty-year-old man, John Catt; eight people were arrested, targeted for being suspected organizers.

After a year of legal wrangling, EDO MBM was forced to drop the injunction case and pay all legal costs, including a handout of £34,000 to those who had defended themselves. It’s estimated that the whole case cost them upwards of £1 million, tipping them over into a loss that quarter and directly impacting their share price.

## Street Mobilizations

During the court case, an interim injunction prevented filming at the factory and enabled EDO's hired goons to intimidate demonstrators. Two campaigners were briefly remanded in Lewes prison. Despite this, the noise demonstrations and other actions continued.

*“The decision was made to take our struggle into town. We were fed up with being pushed around up at the factory.”* On August 13, 2005, around fifty people met in Brighton's main shopping precinct\* and tried to march to the Level, about a half-hour walk. *“The police response was spectacular: 150 cops, dogs, and a helicopter. The message couldn't have been clearer: you have no right to assemble without police permission.”*

Thus began a standoff with the authorities over the right to demonstrate, fought not only in the streets but in the local media as well. Successive town center demonstrations—one of which marched on the police station, forcing officers to form lines around their own headquarters—became enough of a headache for the police that harassment at the factory itself decreased.

## Smash EDO, the Media, and the Law

Can a small group of activists survive and get their message out without using the corporate media? Although huge advances have been made recently in alternative media, and SMASH EDO has been able to rely on coverage in Brighton's SchNEWS as well as Indymedia, the fact remains that the vast majority of people get their news—and hence form their opinions—from the mainstream press.

For the first nine months of the campaign, no one put out a press release at all. Like most of the anarchist movement, we regarded the press as part of the enemy. It was assumed that local press in particular would automatically parrot the police and corporate line. *“We knew that the press requires the names of spokespersons and that they would be depicted as organizers and leaders—that's just how it works.”*

But ignoring the media can be a dangerous gamble. A government-coordinated media onslaught against the animal rights movement has led to their effective isolation as a political force. The equation “animal rights = extremism” is repeated whenever the subject comes up, especially in left/liberal papers.

The state's strategy, with the police “anti-extremism” task force planting stories in the media, has been to isolate groups from the mainstream and then attack them with specially-crafted legislation. For example, demonstrations that would be legal in any other context can earn you a prison sentence if they're carried out against an “animal research establishment” as defined in the Serious Organized Crime and Police Act 2005. Sean Kirtley, whose conviction has since been quashed, spent sixteen months in jail simply for organizing demonstrations and updating a website for the STOP SEQUANI campaign. Mainstream civil rights groups have done nothing to protest this crackdown.

\* To convey a sense of scale for North American readers, this would probably fit into a single Wal-Mart.

The SHAC strategy was to use the press as a tool with which to inspire fear in their targets. At one national animal rights gathering, the press were only invited into one workshop—a self-defense class; footage of activists learning how to poke out people's eyes was duly broadcast. They paid for this outlaw image later. Meanwhile, campaigners against genetically modified crops were able to carry out “decontaminations” destroying crops worth tens of thousands of pounds, hitting the same pharmaceutical companies as the animal rights campaigners but without receiving the same level of repression. The crucial difference was that public opinion was more hostile to the forced introduction of GM foods.

The injunction forced the campaign's hand, in terms of dealing with the media and the legal system. At this point, there were perhaps twenty people involved in various aspects of the campaign. The injunction named fourteen individuals—basically everyone who had been arrested at the factory. It was clear that if the factory got the interim injunction they wanted, then the noise demonstrations that served as the public face of the campaign would be shut down. *“We didn't have huge numbers of militants to defy the injunction, the preferred option; neither was it practical to abandon the noise demos and rely on clandestine activity. If we wanted the campaign to continue, we were going to have to fight on the enemy's terrain.”*

The injunction cemented and centralized the campaign in unexpected ways. It was clear that a collective response was necessary—and a collective voice. The injunction, framed to deal with a centralized campaign like SHAC, referred to the defendants as SMASH EDO, and the campaign took on that name. Bearing in mind that there was no SMASH EDO party line, how should we write a press release or frame a defense? Who could speak for the campaign? Andrew Beckett was appointed spokesperson, to avoid the trap of promoting individuals as “organizers.” One man had already found that a description of himself as an organizer, which had appeared in the local news source *Argus*, was being used against him in court.

We've recently been criticized in the insurrectionalist publication 325 for relying on “mainstream” arguments in propaganda and in press releases: *“The language used to ‘justify’ the decommissioning of EDO offers a legitimate face of the law to the general public. However, this face is misleading, this façade implies that there is a society worth reasoning with, that democratic legitimacy itself will bring about social change and ‘justice,’ that adhering to some laws while others are manipulated by the State will gain a [sic] eventual positive outcome. This is in compliance with State-imposed hierarchies that exist within a capitalist framework and it is flawed and foolishly misguided.”*

It is true that success in those terms can come at a price. For example, as a group, we didn't care whether the war in Iraq was technically illegal or not. If the US/UK alliance had succeeded in conducting a legal war by securing a UN resolution, we would still have opposed the attacks. But in our press releases and propaganda, we refer to “this illegal and immoral war.” Is this a cheap shot or common-sense PR?

Likewise, our efforts to produce lowest-common-denominator propaganda, in hopes of pushing what had been a broad anti-war consensus towards direct action, have been criticized both in



and outside the group as mawkish. Images of injured children can be arresting, but they can also reinforce the idea that the primary evil of war is the death of the “innocent.” The killing of conscripted Iraqi militiamen is just as tragic, but we didn't put them on fliers.

Yet in order to appeal to an imagined Joe Public, it became necessary to go along with certain preconceptions. It's all very well to believe, as some of us do, that EDO/ITT's business would not be possible if *homo sapiens* had not built patriarchal militarism on the foundation of an inherently oppressive system of symbolic thought—but it's not easy to cram that into a two-minute radio interview. Sound bites are antithetical to political sophistication, but we needed to win the argument; “EDO kills kids for cash” is crude but effective tabloid sloganeering.

To win the legal battles, it was even more important to appear “mainstream,” at least in court. We had to fight the injunction case on grounds of civil liberties and human rights. For anarchists, this involved a degree of ideological contortion. The prospect of fighting the case on the grounds that atrocities were being committed in Iraq was ruled out by the judge early on, following an intervention by the Attorney General. *“We actually wanted to shut this factory down—we hadn't physically attacked workers and management as the company alleged, but they were*

*right in saying that we wanted to go beyond protest to action.”* To win the case, we had to take the “freedom to protest” angle.

“Freedom of expression is a right jealously guarded in English law”—these were the words of Judge Gross after the first phase of the injunction trial. This phrase was emphasized dramatically in subsequent press releases declaring victory. Given that what had happened was actually a massive restriction of our rights—we were allowed to demonstrate when we liked, but were confined to a narrow strip of grass across the road from the factory—we ran the risk of looking as if we accepted the court's jurisdiction. But a decision had to be made whether we wanted to proclaim a “victory” or a “defeat”—shades of grey don't work in the media.

We also had to appeal to the general public in order to resist the crackdown on our town center demonstrations. Once again we fell back on the language of rights. In a letter to the local paper, Andrew Beckett argued that we had the “right to march peacefully through our town.” In that sentence alone, we circumscribed our action, asserting “peaceful” aims for everyone who might come to the demonstration without consulting them. And why should we have more right to march through “our” town than any other?

*Taking the street, May Day 2009.*

Yet arguably, it was a success: the struggle between the campaign and the police was framed in terms that didn't require an extensive background in leftist theory, and the next demonstration, in December, drew 400 people. It was "peaceful," and we won the battle of public opinion over whether or not we should negotiate with the police. But we had run the risk of painting ourselves into a corner. If the authorities had stood back at this point and allowed us free rein, what would we have done? We had ended up in the position of being anarchists defending liberalism.

## Court in the Act

Once the campaign got going, the court cases came thick and fast. Different defendants have chosen to represent themselves different ways. Some have undertaken "accountable" actions such as lockdowns in order to present a "war crimes" defense, arguing that they acted illegally "to prevent a greater crime." This strategy implies that the court is a neutral arena, which it is not.

Despite this, activists have scored an impressive set of victories in the courts. Chris Bluemel was acquitted after admitting to punching a policeman in the face during the Carnival Against the Arms Trade, for example. However, it's worth considering how class privileges may have facilitated some of these victories. Chris, a music teacher, was able to call on his headmaster as a character witness; to prove his good faith and legitimacy, the latter mentioned that he had cancelled a meeting with a shadow government\* minister to attend court. This appeal to middle-class solidarity worked, but other defendants do not have such credentials.

## Lebanon and Palestine

As US and UK forces settled into the slog of occupation, attention shifted away from the air power used in the initial invasion. But EDO's equipment was still in use—for example, in the assault on Fallujah, and again in Somalia.

The Israeli air force was the next to embark on a major air strike campaign, using equipment supplied by US and UK arms companies including EDO. Summer 2006, war erupted in Lebanon and over a thousand civilians were killed in a matter of weeks. From the beginning, the SMASH EDO campaign had overlapped with the International Solidarity Movement in occupied Palestine.

"We were determined to show that the UK government and domestic arms suppliers were directly profiting from this war. We had to show solidarity with the Palestinian people."

Two men scaled the roof of the factory and unfurled a banner: "16 Children killed in Qana Lebanon, EDO profits from Murder." A few weeks later, activists chained to concrete blocks blocked the entrances, forcing EDO employees to break into their own factory.

\* In the UK, "shadow government" simply refers to the party not currently in power—in this case, the Conservatives.

## Cinemartyrdom

Following its early successes turning repression to advantage, the campaign received a new opportunity from Sussex Police. Local media collective SchNEWS produced a film entitled *On the Verge* charting the history of the struggle against EDO, and activists arranged a nationwide tour to raise awareness. The premiere was to be at Brighton's art-house cinema, the Duke of York's, on March 16, 2008.

Last-minute police intervention forced the cancellation of the film. The cinema was warned that violent activists might try to gain entry. The screening was hastily relocated to a nearby pub. The next day, the news came in that venues across the country had been visited by police and warned not to show the film on a variety of pretexts.

The tour went ahead regardless, and what had been a relatively minor activist film produced on a budget of less than £500 became national news. "A misguided piece of official hysteria" read the headline in the *Guardian*, the well-known left-liberal daily paper. Suddenly the campaign had "the film they tried to ban," and people flocked to see it. Over eighty screenings occurred in the UK; the film was also shown in Sydney, San Francisco, and Athens, and thousands downloaded it.

All this gave the campaign a national profile. The goal of the tour had been to build support for the forthcoming Carnival Against the Arms Trade—a strategic effort to move beyond the confines of affirming the right to rally and march. Up to then, the largest EDO demonstration had consisted of a few hundred people. On the Wednesday afternoon designated for the Carnival, over 800 turned up; many had traveled from around the country, having heard about SMASH EDO thanks to the attempted suppression of *On the Verge*.

## The Carnival Against the Arms Trade

This was not a passive crowd. The police had planned to confine people in a control pen down the road from the factory; but the pen was dismantled as the crowd pushed through police lines and then, gloriously, into the factory compound. As the windows started to go in and the managing director's SUV was trashed, the police responded with a baton charge and managed to clear the parking lot via a liberal use of pepper spray and dogs. The factory remained closed for the day.

The beauty of this event was that the UK activist movement, following successful police repression, had largely abandoned street confrontation. After the successes of June 18, 1999, when large parts of London's financial center were wrecked during the Carnival against Capitalism, police had devoted tremendous resources to cracking down on anarchic street gatherings. For many, this was their first experience of taking on the police and winning.

The next major demonstration, dubbed "Shut ITT" in reference to the fact that the company had recently changed hands, was attended by four separate police forces. Despite this, the crowd of 400 charged police lines at the base of Home Farm



Road, and a large number headed up into the woods behind the factory. The back of the factory was paint-bombed as police and protestors engaged in running skirmishes in the trees. Spokesperson Andrew Beckett reported, "We didn't let the police control events. We went where we wanted, when we wanted. All the police from four counties weren't able to stop us making our stand against EDO/ITT."

## The Decommissioning

On January 17, 2009—the last day of Operation Cast Lead, the Israeli attack on Gaza†—six activists broke into the arms manufacturers' factory armed with hammers, determined to carry out a "citizens' decommissioning" of the facility. They barricaded themselves inside and wreaked havoc for over an hour, causing up to £500,000 of damage before being arrested.

The trial, currently scheduled for May 2010, will focus attention on UK and US complicity in the continued repression of the Palestinian people. Before entering the factory, Elijah

† Editor's note: To convey the asymmetrical character of this "conflict," we'll confine ourselves to reporting the number of casualties: Palestinian deaths numbered between 1166 and 1440, depending on whether you believe the killers or the mourners, while everyone agrees 13 Israelis lost their lives—four of them killed by friendly fire.

Smith, one of the "decommissioners," explained his motivations: "I don't feel I'm going to do anything illegal tonight, but I'm going to go into an arms factory and smash it up to the best of my ability so that it cannot actually work or produce munitions... [which] have been provided to the Israeli army so that they can kill children." He is still in prison, remanded until trial.

## May Day, May Day!

The campaign's next mobilization, on May Day 2009, was its largest yet. Thousands of leaflets had been distributed across the UK. Just a month earlier, London had hosted the G20 summit. As expected, protests around the summit had been brutalized by police and contained through "kettling," in which lines of police surround and block a crowd from all sides. However, this time the police had murdered an innocent bystander, Ian Tomlinson. The authorities initially denied that officers had had any contact with him, then claimed falsely that they had been under a hail of bottles as they tried to resuscitate him. Days later, footage arrived at the *Guardian* that showed Metropolitan Police subjecting Tomlinson to a vicious and unprovoked attack. Suddenly police behavior at demonstrations was under unprecedented public scrutiny.

A riot van is vandalized and flares are set off as riot police and mounted police fight to split the march outside the McDonald's, May Day 2009.



Antiwar protesters clash with police, leaving some police injured, May Day 2009.

Historically, May Day is a day of resistance to capitalism and this time SMASH EDO propaganda was more explicit about the links between finance and the arms trade. “This was really our most ambitious effort to date. We published an anti-militarist list of targets around town, showing how Barclays, McDonald’s, and the like were investors in ITT.”

By now there were about thirty activists in Brighton working on the campaign and a network of supporters dotted around the country. A larger group of activists was able to seize and hold a squatted church in town as a convergence space.\* “We also organized first aid, and arrestee and trauma support. It’s vital for people to know that if they get nicked or injured the support is there.”

Following the lessons of earlier demonstrations, organizers decided not to publish the route or even the starting point of the May Day street party. Instead, demonstrators obtained updates by calling an information number or tuning to a pirate radio station set up for the day.

\*The building had been empty for some years. UK squatting law dictates that property possession cases are referred to a civil court, although cops regularly carry out illegal evictions.

On May first, over 1000 people turned out for the street party, creating a bizarre militant carnival atmosphere. A masked mob clad in black and red and armed with a dancing dragon made its way through town. As the mass marched through the town center, the army recruitment center was paint-bombed and a banner appeared high above Barclays, a major investor in the arms trade. Things came to a head as participants clashed with mounted police outside a McDonald’s, also an investor in ITT. The day ended with running skirmishes through the streets.

Since May Day, noise demonstrations and other direct actions have continued. A sequel to *On the Verge* is planned. SMASH EDO is also appealing for activists to take action against Barclays Bank, the New York Stock Exchange market maker for ITT. On the first day of action, there were seven separate pickets across England and Wales, Barclays Bank ATMs were glued shut in Brighton, and a six-foot-high anti-arms trade message appeared above a Barclays branch in Cambridge.

## How Has the SMASH EDO Campaign Sustained Momentum?

Some people have been with the campaign since its inception; others have left and then returned. It’s a relatively open movement; the weekly noise demonstrations offer a way to get involved and meet others. Gaining visibility makes it easier to build numbers.

The movement against the Iraq war has faded in terms of street marches, but there is still a mood of skepticism around British involvement in Afghanistan. Public opinion has also hardened against Israeli use of air power.

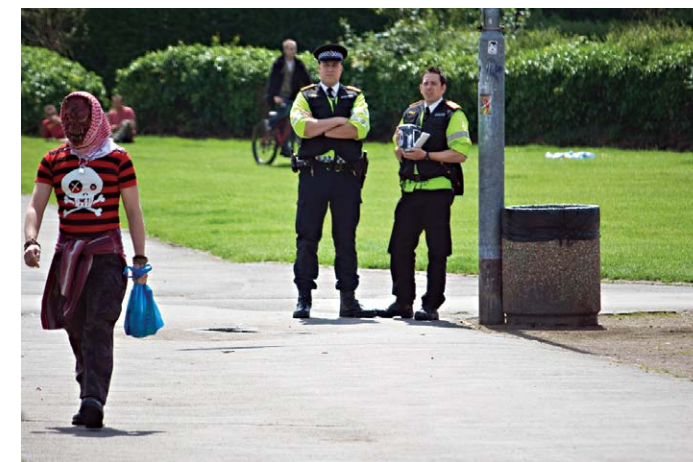
Hopefully the campaign is in its infancy and will successfully continue to push a radical line while resisting attempts to isolate it. There may be a danger in fixating on big spectaculars such as May Day at the expense of local and national outreach. As the campaign has engaged in more radical actions, the police have started a PR counter-offensive, pleading with us to be reasonable. Within the liberal framework of the “right to protest” that we adopted in the media, we’re stuck for an answer. Our inalienable right to smash windows doesn’t quite ring true.

“When people first started taking action against the factory, we were a bit of an ideological puzzle. The anarchist direct action mob seemed to file us under ‘ineffectual peaceniks,’ while the peace movement didn’t like our advocacy of a diversity of tactics rather than pacifism. The idea of taking on a single cog in the machine was borrowed from the UK’s high-profile animal rights campaigns, but it was combined with some of the old Reclaim the Streets carnival magic.”

“By concentrating on this one facility, we’ve managed to raise debate in the mainstream while maintaining a radical stance. Attacking a part of the system that is morally indefensible, we point out the rot than runs through the whole core. Time and again, the police have been forced to make public their role as bootboys for the corporations.”

“Victory is important to us... we’re going to shut this factory down. Since we started, they’ve already closed their smaller facility in Fishersgate and the number of employees has shrunk. But the development of an anti-militarist network around the country is equally important, rescuing the peace movement from obsolete, symbolic, and ineffective tactics. The Target Brimar campaign in Manchester and the Stop H&K protests in Nottingham are both welcome examples of this new mood of militancy.”

“There have been debates over whether what’s really needed is a victory over this one factory, which would ultimately give a whole movement something to celebrate, or the development





of a network. That's turned into a bit of a false dichotomy. The radicalization of the antiwar movement is what gives us the best chance of shutting down the factory."

"It's really what's needed to revitalize the whole antiwar movement: a network of local but mobile antiwar groups that plug away week after week in their part of the country, against their arms factory, military facility, or whatever, but are able to rely on support from like-minded individuals and campaigns around the country. We're not asking anyone to follow our model—what we've done has come out of specific set of circumstances. Our advice to anyone would be to stay flexible and seize opportunities when they appear."

### **Postscript**

On January 18, 2010, as we hurried this issue of *Rolling Thunder* towards print, over three hundred black-clad protesters descended on the EDO/ITT factory to commemorate last year's

bombing of Gaza. Meeting at Wild Park, the crowd carried symbolic coffins and a banner with a thousand handprints representing those who died during Israel's twenty-two-day assault. Most of the participants were fully masked up.

The demonstration marched to the junction of Home Farm Road, where the factory is situated, and split into two. Hundreds broke through police lines to pour up the hill into the woods behind EDO/ITT; another bloc remained at the intersection, blocking access to Home Farm Road, to read out some of the names of the people killed in Gaza. The first bloc of protesters made it to the rear of the factory, where some people breached the fence into the industrial estate.

After word circulated that the factory had been closed for the rest of the day, protesters proceeded to central Brighton, managing to outflank several police cordons. Around one hundred people tried to go on to Barclays Bank, but got kettled as riot police and horses flooded into North Laine.

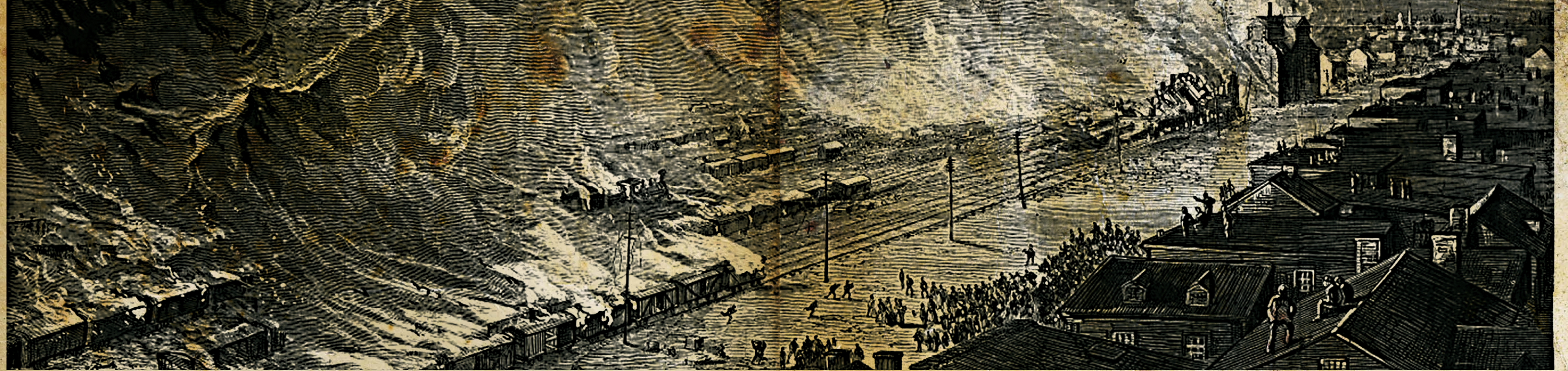
The struggle against EDO continues.

*[Opposite]  
Protesters take over the roundabout by the pier before the march breaks up at the May Day protest.*

*Protesters breaking through police lines to enter the woods behind the arms factory on January 18, 2010.*







# Anarchism in Pittsburgh,

“Join our ranks! Let the drum beat defiantly the roll of battle: ‘Workmen of all countries unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains, you have a world to win!’ . . . Tremble oppressors of the world! Not far beyond your purblind sight there dawns the scarlet and sable lights of the Judgment Day!”

—manifesto of the *International Working People’s Association*

IN THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES, immigrants fleeing persecution in Europe flooded into Western Pennsylvania in search of employment; many brought with them the anarchism of the poor and working-class people of their homelands. Primarily concentrated in their own ethnic enclaves and communicating in their native languages, they established social halls and newspapers to spread and live The Idea—anarchism.

“The hells of capitalism create the desperate; the desperate act—desperately!” said Voltairine de Cleyre, ruminating on the underlying causes of political assassination.\* Her words rang true for industrialized Pittsburgh. With nothing to sell but their labor, the poor faced off against titans of industry so wealthy that, in the words of robber baron Jay Gould, they could pay half the working class to kill the other half.

Pittsburgh’s history is filled with moments of grief, loss, triumph, and solidarity. The Great Railroad Strike of 1877 saw its most violent moments in Pittsburgh when the local National Guard refused to fight their neighbors and 600 bayonet-wielding troops were brought in from Philadelphia. The President of the Railroad Company pleaded publicly that strikers be given “a rifle diet for a few days.” Militiamen opened fire on large crowds—killing 20 people, including small children. The city erupted in response: all night fire filled the skies, while two dozen more perished in shoot-outs between residents and guards that left casualties on both sides. Residents burned 1200 freight cars, 104

engines, and 69 buildings. More troops flooded into the city and the strike was broken.

In 1883, the congress of the International Working People’s Association met in Pittsburgh, bringing together 45 delegates from 26 cities for a foundational meeting of the US anarchist movement. They produced a manifesto setting forth their goals, beginning with, “Destruction of the existing class rule, by all means, i.e. by energetic, relentless, revolutionary, and international action.” Upon its ruins, they intended to establish a truly free society based on mutual aid, in which production would be organized along cooperative lines for the benefit of society as a whole, and all would experience equality “without distinction to sex or race.”

In 1892 steel magnate Andrew Carnegie and manager Henry Clay Frick locked out workers at the Carnegie Steel Works in an attempt to break the union. In response, workers moved to occupy the fortified plant. Three hundred armed Pinkerton detectives attempted unsuccessfully to land by river barge and were confronted by thousands of workers and residents from throughout the region. After hours of battle by cannon, oil, and gunfire, the Pinkertons surrendered. Just as had occurred fifteen years earlier during the Great Railroad Strike, however, the National Guard was brought in and eventually the strike was crushed. This was the tragic story that compelled anarchist Alexander Berkman to travel to Pittsburgh for his unsuccessful attempt on Frick’s life.

For decades, the people of Western Pennsylvania worked, fought, and died in the mines, railway yards, and factories in

\* In this case, McKinley’s.

# Pittsburgh in Anarchism

epic confrontations with the corporations and government. At the time, these conflicts were often interpreted individually as victories or losses. But in the longer arc of history, they inculcated workers and their families with a sense of class struggle and solidarity that enabled them to play a major part in forcing the state to concede the right to unionize.

Anarchism remained alive and well in the early twentieth century. At its height, the 10,000-member Union of Russian Workers was the largest anarchist organization in North America. The Pittsburgh region was one of its strongholds, hosting five locals.

By the 1920s, however, anarchism had almost died out in western Pennsylvania, its candle all but extinguished by government repression during and after the First World War, the apparent success of the Bolsheviks in Russia, and the integration of second-generation immigrants into society. Yet the economic and social conditions that had produced it remained. These gave rise to a militant trade union movement that eventually made the city the birthplace of many important labor organizations, including the United Steelworkers, the AFL, the CIO, and the United Electrical Workers.

Class conflict continued on a massive scale through the bitter 1970s and ’80s, when the deindustrialization of the region began in earnest and movements of residents and workers attempted to save a vanishing way of life. When 5000 protesters took the streets during President Reagan’s visit in 1983 it was not an anomaly, but simply one of thousands of actions over the years that illustrated both the city’s fighting spirit and the futility of struggle against the forces aligned against it.

In the end, it wasn’t enough. Corporations bled plants dry by refusing to invest in new technology and used the profits to transfer production overseas. The policies of “free” trade became ascendant. An entire generation of workers was forced to flee the region in search of work, leaving their city, and often their

parents, behind. This “Pittsburgh Diaspora” scarred the city’s landscape and consciousness.

Time marched on, however, and things changed. Hospitals and universities grew to comprise the economic backbone of the Steel City. Young people began moving in and a host of new developments appeared, in the context of the 50-year-running population decline that has reduced the city population from 650,000 to 310,000. Anarchism found fertile conditions for its rebirth and eventually surpassed authoritarian socialist movements, vying with radical liberalism to be the primary oppositional force.

At the opening of 2010, Pittsburgh possesses one of the strongest and most active anarchist movements in the United States. Nestled at the junction of three rivers, the city and the anarchists who call it home find themselves in the midst of a continuing transition.

Presenting a broad overview of this movement demands a delicate balancing act. It’s not easy to walk the fine line between pride and hubris, to acknowledge the importance of events one didn’t organize or participate in, to take into account the perspectives of those who followed other roads while still speaking from direct experience.

Every story runs risks. At worst, a story can end up a mere check mark on the scorecard of those fighting for their particular ideology: a tale told to reaffirm beliefs, or else rejected outright if it raises too many questions. If a story deviates too far from the audience’s underlying assumptions about themselves and the world, it may not circulate at all. There is, however, an elemental truth within this: where we stand determines what we see, and often what we can’t see.

So this report is not the only story of Pittsburgh. It has its own biases and limitations. But we take our responsibility seriously, and this compels us to a humility that doesn’t shy away from drawing conclusions.



Pittsburgh is a rare example of a city in which the economic engine was destroyed while the social base remained largely intact. The tight-knit communities within the city's ethnic neighborhoods held at bay the extreme poverty and antisocial crime that took root in other rustbelt cities. Property values plummeted, unemployment soared, thousands of buildings and businesses were abandoned, but many neighborhoods remained stable. Some of the billions of dollars that industrial titans once extracted from workers' labor were bequeathed to foundations that continued their yearly bestowals. While jobs disappeared, the retired workers who remained collected comfortable pensions. The population aged and the city decayed. It became an open wilderness of possibility, offering a high quality of life at a low cost.

Modern anarchism in Pittsburgh is the story of a movement emerging in a context in which participants can test out a variety of theories on how best to build and destroy. New York City is defined by the contest for limited space; in Pittsburgh, space and the sense of possibility it nurtures have been plentiful. This has been a city where you could get by with a part-time job, where there have been plenty of places to squat; ten years ago you could purchase an old house for \$30,000. With 310,000 residents and tens of thousands of college students, there have always been people to reach out to in order to start new projects.

But this is increasingly a movement in transition. Economic forces are beginning to constrict physical space, and the emergence of anarchism as a visible force draws the attention of its adversaries. In Pittsburgh, anarchism is no longer a small scene but not quite a formidable power. Increasingly concentrated, but not yet rooted. Experienced, but mostly in forms of conflict that must evolve. We are thorns in the side of capitalism, but not yet a knife in its heart.

### MODERN ANTECEDENTS

Between the 1980s and the early 1990s, anarchism began to wake from its long slumber, emerging from within a growing punk subculture and a Catholic Left in which it maintained a tenuous presence.

The Pittsburgh-based punk band Aus Rotten began circulating *Rotten Propaganda*, a semi-regular anarchist broadsheet, and members played an integral role in the campaign to free Mumia Abu Jamal. Catholic Workers active

since the 1960s organized against Carnegie Mellon University's military work.

One of the earliest US chapters of Food Not Bombs began operating in Pittsburgh in 1994; it continues to this day. Justice for Jonny Gammage, a campaign to hold police accountable for murdering a 31-year-old black businessman, also included large mobilizations supported by anarchists. The campaign pressure eventually led to the creation of the Civilian Police Review Board, a hopelessly flawed attempt at reform that anarchists are now being forced to confront.

Starting around 1997, anarchists arriving in Pittsburgh from eastern cities helped spur new initiatives. This was apparent in March 1998, when 50 members of the Ku Klux Klan marched in front of the Allegheny Courthouse in downtown Pittsburgh. Two thousand people turned out in protest, including many from the local punk scene, and clashes broke out.

### THE GLOBAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT

The protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle, Washington in November 1999 had a profound local impact. Though few Pittsburghers attended, watching the events unfold from afar inspired a number of individuals to start organizing. The tremendous growth and diversification of the anarchist milieu since then can be traced back to the global justice movement bringing people together, often out of their respective subcultures, to push for broader change.

According to those active at the time, at the start of the new millennium the Pittsburgh anarchist movement was comprised of about fifty individuals, most of whom had ties to the punk scene; there were no explicitly anarchist organizations. Influenced by the do-it-yourself ethic of the punk milieu, participants focused on a variety of projects: silkscreening, publishing 'zines such as the *Street Ratbag*, banner drops and small-scale sabotage, street theater and humor.

As the reverberations of the WTO protests spread across the country, 40 people attended a "gathering of the dissidents" at The Mr. Robot Project, a volunteer-run venue providing an all-ages space since 1999. People who held political views but hadn't yet banded together to act on them found each other through this and other events. The summer of 2000 was a whirlwind for local anarchists; phone trees

*[Opposite, Top]  
At the 2008 "Cage the Recruiters" action, protesters marched to and through Carnegie Mellon University with the chain-link cage pictured here. The cage was used to lock down the entrance to CMU's administration building.*

*[Opposite, Bottom]  
The traditional piñata at POG's annual anarchist picnic. The smashing of tanks, police cars, and other symbols of oppression is enjoyed by kids of all ages.*

and e-mail lists were created for the first time in preparation for the IMF/World Bank protests in DC, and two dozen locals took part in confrontational protests at the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia. Pittsburgh's first significant contemporary anarchist group formed that fall, calling itself the WH@T collective. Individuals involved in and attracted to these efforts encountered radicals outside the punk scene and were exposed to new organizing models and frameworks.

One of the organizations they encountered was the Thomas Merton Center, a peace and justice organization established in 1972. The TMC acted as a hub for a wide spectrum of activity. The center was started by members of the Catholic Left resisting the Vietnam War; over time, it expanded its efforts to include anti-racist organizing, Central American solidarity, campaigns against nuclear weapons, and labor support. The TMC also acted as an incubator for a number of service institutions, such as food banks and soup kitchens, a chapter of Amnesty International, and a thrift shop serving the surrounding low-income neighborhood.

On Mayday 2001, coinciding with Reclaim the Streets actions in London, the WH@T collective held an RTS party in downtown Pittsburgh. The event was interrupted by police violence and arrests, and members worked to support the arrestees. Over the following months, participants drifted apart and the collective dissipated. Some went on to form projects such as the Big Idea Radical Bookstore, the Book 'Em books-to-prisoners program, and a local chapter of the radical cheerleaders called "Yinz Cheer."\*

Shortly after September 11, 2001, there was an explosion of antiwar activity. Meanwhile, the Thomas Merton Center was also beginning to attract a greater diversity of projects. New staff and volunteers, younger and with an anti-authoritarian bent, brought renewed energy to the space, promoting it as a resource center and information clearinghouse. Via the TMC, groups could get access to a wide range of organizing and publicity resources.†

While there are many "peace and justice" centers around the country, few have embraced a decentralized structure and anti-authoritarian processes. The result was a mutually beneficial alliance between people radicalized in the global justice and anti-war movements and a long-running institution with a base of supporters.

## POG ENTERS THE SCENE . . . AND THE SLAMMER

In summer of 2002, five friends—four of whom had grown up together—found themselves living together in Pittsburgh.

\* A nod to the regional vernacular: "yinz" is the plural form of "you" in "Pittsburghese."

† These included physical space, mailboxes, telephones, a fax machine, computers, internet access, web space, and a media contact list. Events were advertised on an electronic calendar that went out twice a week to subscribers and reporters; groups could also promote their efforts in a monthly newspaper with a circulation of 4000. In addition to this, the TMC could arrange student internships for academic credit, and extend non-profit status so groups could obtain tax-exempt donations. The last of these was especially handy for Food Not Bombs, which found it much easier to acquire food donations after it affiliated with the center.

Two had participated in the Seattle WTO protests, and three had been in Quebec City to demonstrate against the 2001 Free Trade Area of the Americas summit. They wanted to bring the same organizational and strategic principles to Pittsburgh that they'd witnessed in the global justice movement: consensus process, affinity groups, diversity of tactics, direct action, street anonymity, and rejection of single-issue organizing.

Failing to find a local group embodying these principles, they decided to start a new organization, the Pittsburgh October Group (POG). The group had nascent plans to mobilize for the next summit protest, the "People's Strike." The idea was to shut down Washington, DC in opposition to the meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank that coming October—hence the O in the acronym. When the meetings were moved to September, POG was quickly renamed the Pittsburgh Organizing Group. The group wanted to form a contingent to blockade an intersection alongside the other similar blockades expected to be in the works. POG called a meeting that attracted students from the surrounding colleges and universities, local punks, former WH@T members, and TMC organizers.

The original members of the group had experience with the organizing styles of the coastal convergences and lacked the baggage of traveling solely in punk or university contexts. After the initial meeting, members set up a website and wheatpasted over 3000 posters around Pittsburgh to advertise the protests. One unexpected result was that written discussions began to occur in the margins of the posters, causing the group to design new posters offering more empty space. The group also held workshops and organized an unsanctioned anti-IMF/WB street march through the Oakland neighborhood. Although only about 30 people attended, this was the first unpermitted street march in Pittsburgh since the police had attacked the RTS the previous year.

Seventy people caravanned to DC that September. The vast majority participated in blocking Constitution Avenue, then joined a snake march through the city, ending in Pershing Park—where they were arrested along with hundreds of other protesters.‡ The contingent from Pittsburgh represented about 20% of the arrests and 12% of the total participants in the People's Strike. This experience enabled some to form strong bonds; POG increased in size and stature.

## WHO IS AN ANARCHIST?

Although POG has always consisted predominantly of anarchists, it did not identify as an anarchist group until 2007, instead describing itself as "radical" or focused on "progressive social change." A significant factor in this was the misconception that non-anarchists wouldn't feel comfortable working in an explicitly anarchist group.

There is still debate in Pittsburgh about how useful the term anarchist is, and whether it makes sense for those who identify

‡ In order to thwart further actions, the police encircled the park and arrested almost 400 people without ever giving a dispersal order. Washington, DC has recently agreed to pay the arrestees a total of \$8.25 million to settle a class action lawsuit.



*Dumpsters have a long and storied history in Pittsburgh. Here, a dumpster celebrates a Steelers victory, facing off against the Pittsburgh Fire Department to defend locals' right to set fires in intersections.*

with its historical tradition or values to call themselves anarchists. Some groups that are largely comprised of anarchists, working towards a vision consistent with the basics of anarchism, prefer to describe themselves differently, only describing their internal process as anarchist. Arguments against the term generally center on the idea that it can alienate those we should be reaching out to, shutting down debate on account of preconceived notions about who anarchists are and what they believe.

Our experience, however, has been that the more individuals and groups have openly called themselves anarchists, the less stigma has been associated with the term. Today, it seems that people are engaging more and more readily with anarchist ideas and initiatives.

Local debates about wearing masks at protests have turned out similarly. Once anarchists began publicly defending why they were doing this, dialogue began taking place, and many of the older radicals and progressives who had expressed unease were won over to a pro-mask position—or at least accepted that our differing positions are a legitimate disagreement about goals and strategies. This openness to dialogue

has also exposed those for whom criticism of anarchism, masks, and other issues is primarily an attempt to marginalize anarchists for ideological reasons.

## WAR ABROAD, WAR AT HOME

After the People's Strike, it became increasingly clear that the Bush administration was preparing for a ground war in Iraq. POG began to focus on antiwar efforts, organizing the framework for the Pittsburgh Regional Anti-War Convergence in January 2003. The strategic thinking was that with so much propaganda about support for the war, a massive turnout at the convergence would dispel the illusion of pro-war consensus and open space for more militant actions in the future. By utilizing the convergence model developed in the global justice movement, organizers hoped to preserve an emphasis on diversity of tactics and thwart liberal attempts to suppress autonomous organizing. This largely succeeded, setting a precedent that helped prevent those wishing to marginalize anarchists from acquiring a stranglehold over antiwar activity in Pittsburgh.



One of many marches led by People Against Police Violence. This one passed from Freedom Corner in Pittsburgh's Hill District to the office of Pittsburgh District Attorney Stephen Zappala, notorious for his support and defense of police brutality.

Members and supporters of POG wheatpasted over 10,000 posters advertising the convergence—the group's largest outreach effort then or since. The poster didn't seek to convince anyone to oppose the war—rather, its boldness and ubiquity were intended to convey the impression that opposition to the war was already widespread, and to hype the event as having broad support. The convergence included street theater, concerts, medical and legal and direct action trainings, and other workshops. Three thousand people participated in a march for which POG was the primary organizer, and 5000 took part in events the following day. In conjunction with the Thomas Merton Center, the TMC Anti-War Committee, and others, POG had helped organize the largest antiwar events in Pittsburgh in over 30 years.

Throughout that spring, POG continued to take the lead in local antiwar resistance, organizing a series of well-attended rallies and unpermitted marches every other weekend from February to April. On March 16, over a thousand people marched through the East End, throwing street signs in the road and invading chain stores. The day the war began, March 20, a thousand people participated in a roving march through downtown. The TMC called for the event, asking POG to lead it and facilitate the crowd taking the streets. Rush

hour began early as government buildings shut down prematurely. The large turnout caught the police off guard; at first they allowed the march to proceed unimpeded, waiting until most had dispersed before violently arresting 150 people. Ten days later hundreds of marchers again took the streets, where they were attacked with pepper spray.

### INTERNAL DEBATES

When POG formed it had to confront a number of organizational and strategic questions: What is our long-term vision? How open should our group be? How much should we cooperate with liberals and authoritarian socialists, and if we do, how should that be structured? Does it ever make sense to talk to the police? What is the appropriate relationship to the media? How do we conduct outreach—and to whom? The conclusions members drew while organizing for the January convergence helped set local patterns, informing the structure of the convergence against the G20 seven years later.

With the war on, the most pressing question was what structure resistance would take. Many activists outside of POG wanted to see a centralized coalition model in which antiwar activity would be discussed and decided by

representatives of existing organizations. Some saw the TMC-connected Anti-War Committee as filling such a roll.

POG vehemently opposed this model, arguing that it would reduce diverse reasons for resistance, as well as which tactics were considered legitimate, to a lowest common denominator. They argued that those who supported structural social change and were open to tactics that were not state-sanctioned should organize among themselves first, then collaborate with others when it was mutually beneficial. The idea that radicals should control their own frameworks rather than become minorities in groups dominated by liberals and authoritarian socialists was criticized by some as “breaking unity.” But it proved to be a pivotal decision, paving the way for the growth of anarchist projects and ideas.

These debates about structure and collaboration foreshadowed nationwide tactical debates, in which some anarchists have argued it is only safe or effective to act publicly when the state's attention is diverted by liberal mobilizations. The implication is that anarchists lack the capacity to employ our preferred tactics without relying on another group's efforts. This debate never took off in Pittsburgh; after 2003 people could point to a number of large actions organized by anarchist-leaning groups.\*

Defeatism about our own capacity to organize mass action can be a self-fulfilling prophecy. It lets us off the hook from doing the kind of direct outreach that can bring us into contact with our neighbors or others outside our preexisting networks. It provides an opportunity for detractors to accuse us of not caring about the impact of our actions on others' efforts. In the long term, it is a losing strategy that fails to build power and isolates us from any type of social base in the community.

A key consequence of choosing to organize our own framework was that, rather than relying on rounding up friends for an anarchist contingent in a march, it was necessary to build support for anarchist-initiated mass actions publicly, whether via personal conversations with friends and neighbors or widely-distributed materials. This caused organizers to consider the effects of how, to whom, and for what purpose they were communicating.

### THE WAR ON THE WAR ON THE WAR

The formula for street actions that has served POG well over the years has been to pair “legal” events—rallies held at locations where no permits are needed, or in parks for which permits are acquired—with unsanctioned street demonstrations at which a diversity of tactics is welcome. This provides a safe space for people to gather and a platform to articulate the rationale for unsanctioned actions. In practice, it undercut some of the justifications for liberals to hold events at all, and undermined attempts to pigeonhole anarchists as troublemakers. Including speakers from other groups and viewpoints also helped build unity and support for radicals.

In spring 2003, an overwhelming majority of those who attended the state-sanctioned events joined in marching through

\* In the case of antiwar actions, Pittsburghers have taken the streets without a permit over a dozen times, yet only broke away from a permitted event organized by liberals on two occasions.

the streets afterwards. This refuted the argument often offered by liberals that most people would only participate in state-sanctioned events, as well as the allegation made by some radicals that participants in liberal marches were unwilling to do more. This approach also served to legitimize black blocs: at these marches, the masked contingent generally took the role of making it possible for the crowd to seize and hold the streets—and absorbed the brunt of the assault when police attempted to force people onto the sidewalk. The same pattern repeated itself at the G20 protests in 2009, when the support of the larger crowd and local residents for people wearing black surprised many out-of-town anarchists.

From the beginning, the police response to POG was characterized by confusion and vacillation. The cops faced an unfamiliar and disquieting combination of factors: tactics they had little experience with, a group with ever-changing membership that was willing to experiment, publicly announced frameworks for unpermitted actions combined with private planning, a large number of events of which a small proportion resulted in property damage, liaisons who worked with the corporate media but used it to denounce law enforcement rather than to emphasize how peaceful and law-abiding everyone was, and turnouts large enough that mass arrests weren't generally feasible. These factors combined to produce situations in which the police were often vastly over- or under-prepared. They lashed out with obvious, hot-headed brutality, or were forced to stand by and watch actions they couldn't control.

By April 2003, the police were devoting more and more resources to repression, while fair-weather antiwar protesters were drifting away. With so much happening so fast, organizers and participants lacked the opportunity to develop and implement new strategies. Consequently, antiwar street actions came to an end. In hindsight, it was a good time to slow down.

### IS THOMAS MERTON ROLLING IN HIS GRAVE?

Between late 2002 and late 2003, projects started by local anarchists began to call the Thomas Merton Center home. Book 'Em, the books-to-prisoners program, moved into the basement, while other Pittsburgh anarchists raised money through the TMC to travel to Chiapas, Colombia, and elsewhere in Latin America to work on indigenous sustainability projects.

There was a sudden swell of activity: the TMC went from supporting five projects to housing more than twenty-five. New alliances were forming and everyone seemed to be experimenting. This enabled people to develop their politics more deeply and expand participation in their groups, but it also caused many to evolve in different directions. At the time, some saw this as fragmentation; in retrospect, it was important for there to be space for new efforts to grow. Even when people grow apart, they often eventually reconverge and forge new ties.

Over time, many groups became increasingly locally focused, and the more open structure of the TMC created possibilities for synthesis. High-school students working with both the TMC and POG on mobilizations ended up forming PAPPY, a high-school



At the same time, the changes at the TMC and in the community at large were not well received by liberals who feared anarchists, or at least didn't understand them. Some longtime members of the center worried that the sudden growth was unsustainable. Others were uncomfortable with the change in atmosphere; TMC membership doubled, and the constant whirlwind of activity at the space meant an influx of strangers. Still other members feared that the decentralized structure and consensus process were not effective or viable. The concept of a diversity of tactics did not sit well with pacifists; many a TMC conversation degenerated into a diatribe on how Thomas Merton\* would be rolling over in his grave. Authoritarian socialists were seemingly always plotting ways to stop the anarchists and undermine staff members sympathetic to autonomous projects. There was also ageism against younger people, discrimination against those whose style of dress identified them with the punk subculture, and unease with explicitly queer activism and attempts to subvert traditional gender roles.

### THE QUEERS ARE COMING, THE QUEERS ARE COMING

One controversial effort was RESYST, formed in 2002: a radical queer project that sought to insert queer politics into traditional peace and justice work and to insert social justice concerns—critiques of war, the military, and neoliberal economic forces—into the assimilationist LGBT community. Members of RESYST presented workshops on class, privilege, gender, patriarchy, and militarism. They held film screenings, organized pink blocks in antiwar demos, and infiltrated the annual Pride Fest; they distributed literature critiquing capitalism and the state alongside calls to action from Gay Shame in San Francisco, and carried out street theater performances, such as a Spin the Missile/Bottle queer kiss-in against war and imperialism.

Some of the members helped start Project 1877, a community space in the same neighborhood as the TMC that folded a year later due to burnout, landlord trouble, and financial difficulties.

\* The TMC's namesake, Thomas Merton, was a Trappist monk celebrated by the Catholic Left for his efforts to bring together Eastern and Western spiritual traditions, alongside his writings on pacifism, racism and white privilege, and nuclear war. While named in his honor shortly after he passed away, the center's mission is not to carry on his work, specifically.

network active until 2004. Other high-school students formed a short-lived local chapter of Raise the Fist. As these students became more politically radical, some joined POG, and were later involved in the founding of the Landslide Community Farm project and the Greater Pittsburgh Anarchist Collective.

There was always tension between entrenched elements in both the anarchist milieu and the TMC, some of which persists to this day. At the time, POG was criticized by other anarchists, especially outside the city, for partnering with the TMC. Meanwhile, ageism was prevalent within POG, and participants could be dismissive of other activists, especially older ones.

*RESYST pink block infiltrating the 2005 Pride Parade. The official theme was "equality: no more, no less," which anarchists countered with "liberation: much more, no less." At the end of the march the puppet of Senator Santorum was set aflame, which sparked some fire in the hearts of liberal attendees who cheered and clapped while police declined to intervene.*

## The formula for street actions that has served POG well over the years has been to pair "legal" events—rallies held at locations where no permits are needed, or in parks for which permits are acquired—with unsanctioned street demonstrations at which a diversity of tactics is welcome.

While RESYST only lasted a few years, it expanded consciousness of queer struggles throughout the anarchist movement and demonstrated the potential of combining creativity with militant action. It showed that confrontation and cultural change are interconnected, and emphasized the bankruptcy of either one without the other. The end of RESYST didn't mark the end of explicitly queer organizing; Pittsburgh currently hosts a monthly queer dance party, Operation Sappho, and has seen a return of confrontational queer politics with the recently formed Bash Back! chapter.

### LEARNING TO PLAY WITH OTHERS

In 2001, two anti-authoritarians involved in the TMC instigated the formation of Save Our Transit, a group for public transit riders in the county. Over the next six years, the group fought against fare cuts, privatization, and reductions in service, while resisting the government's attempts to pit bus riders against bus drivers and staying independent from the professional class of paid NGO "organizers" who often dominate such efforts. When SOT held overnight campouts, marches, or actions targeting politicians, there was always a contingent of anarchists.

People Against Police Violence formed in December 2002 to organize responses to recent police killings. This group also attracted widespread anarchist support over its five years of marches and other activities. PAPV worked directly with the families of those victimized by the police; while it called for holding police accountable partially through the judicial system, it maintained a systemic critique of

state violence and always stood on the side of anarchists involved in confrontations with the authorities. For their part, anarchists provided numbers—and occasionally bucket drum brigades—at PAPV events, which were often difficult to get white liberals to attend. Their presence also gave PAPV leverage, making clear that there was support for escalating tactics.

The experience with SOT and PAPV taught an important lesson: sometimes those who don't identify as anarchists do a better job connecting with the poor and working class people with whom anarchists proclaim common cause. It demonstrated the value of engagement with other groups, especially grassroots efforts sometimes denigrated as single-issue politics or "activism." It also showed that worthwhile groups often appreciate partners who can offer resources and are honest about their politics. The relationships with these groups were mutually beneficial, but not entangling. Had anarchists who were not transit-dependent formally joined SOT en masse, they likely would have left in frustration over the group's focus on legislative work, or disruptively attempted to push the group into more familiar tactics.

### MEET ME IN MIAMI, AKA WHERE IS THE PADDED BLOC?

POG started out identifying with the global justice movement; yet as much of that movement became consumed by antiwar organizing, POG did not. When calls circulated to oppose the November 2003 Free Trade Area of the Americas summit in Miami, POG saw this as an opportunity to restore the balance between its

*[Next Page, Top] Iraq Veterans Against the War and antiwar activists linked up for a nationwide UPRISE tour in 2006 to counter military recruitment; in Pittsburgh, participants marched through Oakland, stopping at war profiteers and ROTC stations.*

*[Next Page, Bottom] Anarchists in action as more than 100 people take to the streets of Oakland on August 20, 2005. The black bloc allied with zombies; anarchists planned to shut down the military recruiting station and zombies tagged along, hoping to eat recruiters' brains.*



antiwar and global justice activities, and to make connections between local and global issues.

With the support of a few non-members, members of POG started an FTAA project at the TMC as an educational component to their mobilization. This enabled them to supplement their fundraising efforts and to work in coalition with those more comfortable with non-profits. The TMC arm of the effort solicited tax-deductible donations, held teach-ins, coordinated transportation for 100 people to Miami, and organized a rally with the United Steelworkers and liberal environmental groups that saw 150 people march downtown. POG turned out locals for more disruptive actions, preparing for a “padded block,” an armored contingent equipped to defend itself against police violence; it also hosted a regional gathering for anti-authoritarian collectives planning direct action.

Infamously, the padded block failed to materialize on the day of the protest. This was due to logistical issues: four passenger vans of fully padded people from Pittsburgh and Buffalo were unable to get into downtown due to flawed initial navigation and the cordon of roadblocks police had set up to seal off the gathering point. The scouts made it through because they left early, but the padded group failed to. After a half hour of trying to get through, they had to return to their hotel rooms and watch the unfolding events on TV. Participants gained valuable experience during the intensive planning process, but many experienced depression and burnout after the state crushed resistance in Miami. One lesson POG took from the ordeal was the importance of being able to pull off any action announced publicly.

## ANTI-WAR RESISTANCE EVOLVES

As the war continued unabated, the antiwar movement had to confront its own irrelevance. How long did it make sense to continue marching around in circles? Some gave up; some marched less in hopes that it would mean more when they did; others looked for ways to attack the system more directly.

In the United States, militarism pervades all aspects of society. But there are specific organs without which war cannot be waged: the military recruitment apparatus that enlists soldiers, the politicians who vote to continue funding it, the universities that provide much of the killing technology, the corporations that lobby for foreign policies that profit them.

POG’s antiwar activity evolved from street actions to sit-ins to targeting specific institutions and individuals. These campaigns involved a diversity of tactics complemented by one-off actions such as blockades, marches, and home demonstrations.

In 2004 there was a sit-in at Carnegie Mellon University, which receives hundreds of millions of dollars a year for war-related research and development. The following spring saw the beginning of a campaign targeting military recruitment in the city. To build momentum, the first actions were unannounced: blocking view of recruiters at CMU and linking arms in front of the main recruiting station to prevent recruiters from entering their offices. These were widely publicized, building broader interest. The first public rally mobilized 125 people; at a more

militant action two weeks later, police confronted protesters outside a successfully closed recruiting center, resulting in six arrests and the use of tasers and pepper spray.

The campaign continued until 2007, including over a hundred pickets outside the stations in Oakland, Shadyside, and downtown. Usually bi-weekly, these employed a variety of tactics, sometimes including banner drops or marches to CMU buildings. Half a dozen times the door to the station got smashed or covered in graffiti, either while people were present or, more often, after the group had left to snake march around. Although some saw the pickets as boring or pointless, they were the backbone of the campaign, providing an easy point of entry for new people to get involved and get to know each other. The regularity of the pickets lulled the police just enough so that the occasional autonomous action was successful; the police didn’t have the patience to devote hours every other week to sitting around waiting for something to happen. The campaign also included presentations and workshops in other cities, fliering at local high schools and elsewhere, pressure on businesses displaying military posters, wheatpasting, theft of military brochures and racks, and a conference bringing together counter-recruitment groups from around the country.

The group’s focus expanded with a call to barricade the National Robotics Engineering Center, a branch of CMU that develops robotic vehicles and weapons delivery systems for the U.S. Army and Marines. There was a public call for a 9 a.m. march to the facility on March 2, 2007; 50 people responded amid widespread skepticism that the event would succeed. But around 6 a.m., 25 people locked down the two main gates with tripods and lockboxes, sealing off the main access points and drawing a heavy—and perplexed—police presence. The action received considerable attention and embarrassed the police, who had brought in a Homeland Security “expert” on lockboxes to train their forces over the previous two weeks. The court case ended with no convictions and a “thank you” from the judge for taking action against the war.

The campaign ended following a month-long fast (“End War Fast!”) and encampment in front of the Oakland recruiting station throughout September 2007. This was logistically grueling, requiring multiple people staffing twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The city had denied permits, so holding the space meant facing daily harassment and occasional arrests. The encampment was located in the heart of the University of Pittsburgh campus; every night drunk college students filtered by, and sometimes fights broke out. By the end of the month, everyone was mentally and physically exhausted. The event succeeded in holding ground, but didn’t spark new attacks on recruitment.

One of the major mistakes made during the fast was not being quicker to exclude a disruptive person. This was partially due to the pressure the group was under to find participants; it indicates the danger of making compromises to gain resources. Historically, POG had maintained that just as people are excluded from membership if they do not adhere to certain principles of unity, so too should people be excluded if their conduct makes it impossible for the group to function.

**Our most successful actions have been the result of long-term strategic planning, which informs short-term tactics and strategies to create the conditions in which we can accomplish larger goals. By identifying the kinds of resistance our members are most excited about, we can choose tactics that will build the capacity for those efforts. This can help avoid a pitfall of much anarchist activity: the gulf between what we want to be doing and what we find ourselves doing, based on a perceived gap between current and necessary capacity.**

*[Opposite]*  
 In March 2007, POG and allies blockaded the National Robotics Engineering Center by means of lockdowns and a tripod. In the lead up to the action, the Pittsburgh Police brought in Homeland Security trainer Doug Cole for two weeks of officer training. Cole claimed to be an expert on tripods and other protester devices. After declining to take on the tripod, he spent two hours working with the city's emergency service workers to cut out 13 protesters locked down at the back gate.

After that, POG shifted its focus to explicitly anarchist events, often educational and cultural, while continuing singular actions. On the 2008 anniversary of the war, many on the Right took seriously POG's call to "cage recruiters." The recruiting station shut down and a large number of war supporters showed up outside the station to protect recruiters from "Leftist hordes" who never had any intention of showing up. Instead the group marched through CMU, disrupting buildings and locking down the front of the administration building with a chain-link "cage."

**PROPERTY DAMAGE AND THE NECESSITY OF CULTIVATING A RETALIATORY CAPACITY**

Property damage at specific targets has always been a valuable option in the toolbox of local anarchists. Consistent attacks can disrupt the façade of invulnerability that makes people feel powerless against their oppressors. Property destruction complemented the TMC campaign against Sky Bank\* and POG efforts

\* A labor solidarity campaign targeted Sky Bank for its connection to union-busting activities at Centre City Towers, where janitors were laid off during the holidays to bring in non-union workers.

against recruitment, and has often served as an autonomous response to state repression.

On April 3, 2007, Pittsburgh police sergeant Vollberg violently attacked a POG protest at a recruiting station in Shadyside after protesters attempted to take his picture. That night the exterior and interior of the station sustained an estimated \$10,000 in damage. While there were no claims of responsibility and no arrests, the media speculated that the attack was retaliation for the police actions. Nine days later, thirty people protested outside Vollberg's home, drawing further media attention. Several people also filed complaints with the Citizens Police Review Board; though those complaints went nowhere, they helped demonstrate the futility of the CPRB. These multifaceted responses delivered a clear message, ensuring the incident wouldn't embolden police or constrict space for future protests. While POG didn't plan the vandalism, it also didn't condemn it, despite an avalanche of pressure to do so. This principle of refusing to let egregious acts of repression go unanswered may be one of the reasons there seems to be more space for action in Pittsburgh and more restraint on the part of the authorities.

The question of whom to target and how is situational, of course. A self-proclaimed "progressive" politician who supports brutality

against anarchists won't care if a couple kids in black protest at his office; he might even consider it politically advantageous. On the other hand, he might be more concerned about five well-dressed young people approaching his constituents with well-crafted arguments exposing his attacks on civil liberties.

**TAKING SPACE**

A growing anarchist movement has produced an ever-expanding range of efforts in Pittsburgh, many of which are focused on acquiring and expanding literal and figurative space.

Some grew out of existing efforts. Pittsburgh Indymedia appeared in 2001, attracting widespread use as a discussion and reporting service on antiwar activities, then fell into disuse. Rustbelt Radio, initially a side project focusing on local community issues, grew into its current incarnation as a weekly radio show broadcast in Pittsburgh and West Virginia. During the G20, it was instrumental in the formation of the G-Infinity Radio project, which combined an impressive multimedia reporting interface with live on-the-air and streaming coverage of the protest. The code for the website was recently released and may portend a revival of the indymedia model.

The Greater Pittsburgh Anarchist Collective came together in 2008, bringing new perspective and fresh energy. Uniting individuals from previous efforts with newcomers, they opened a space, started a publication, and began organizing a variety of events from movie nights to protests. With a quasi-network model, GPAC functions as a collective and also serves as an umbrella for distinct efforts such as local chapters of Anti-Racist Action and Food Not Bombs.

There are spaces providing other forms of infrastructure, as well. The Landslide Community Farm project, a collective focused on sustainable living and providing food within the Hill District, acquired a couple lots of city land and is now into its second growing season. The Big Idea bookstore went from a distribution tabling at shows to its current incarnation in a rented storefront in Bloomfield.

**SPLITS AND INTRIGUE**

None of this is to say it's all roses, broken windows, and circle-a hearts on team anarchy. Every anarchist or anarchist-leaning group in Pittsburgh has seen an exodus of members at





*The Pittsburgh G20 Resistance Project convergence space. The PGRP did not allow corporate media inside the space except at group press conferences. Consequently, when local TV stations needed visuals, they were forced to present close-ups of the space's exterior—displaying the website address, educational materials, and anti-G20 t-shirts.*

some point, with accusations thrown back and forth among members and ex-members. One could waste a lot of ink trying to chronicle the personality conflicts, hookups and breakups, betrayals, splits, oppressive acts, failures to be accountable, and controversies that have beset Pittsburgh over the last decade.

The inevitable ebb and flow of groups and their fluid memberships is worth pondering, because it's not always easy to approach these immediate conflicts with a larger perspective in mind. The ways relationships end affect how our movements develop over the long term; beneath the veneer of formal groups and autonomous efforts, a web of personal relationships forms the foundation of the community.

Nothing ever stays the same; no matter how good a group process is or how accountable we strive to be, things change for a wide range of reasons, not least of which that people don't always get along. No single structure can encompass or represent all concerns and desires, and as individuals become more active and develop their ideas they often set out in new directions.

At our best, we've been able to move on when a tactic isn't working; to recognize when our participation in an effort is no longer satisfying our needs and be honest about it; to conclude campaigns with reflection and without shame before everyone burns out or drifts away; to say the difficult things that need to be said, confronting the internalized oppressions that are part of our socialization; to figure out who we can and can't work with in different capacities, and articulate this; to maintain communication between different circles through those who still trust one another. When we have succeeded, sometimes yesterday's failures and fragmentations have given rise to today's mutually supportive relationships.

### THE G-MEN COME TO TOWN

The mobilization against the G20 brought together the majority of local anarchists in a common aim. Current and former POG and GPAC members helped determine the structure of the

Pittsburgh G20 Resistance Project; the protests' success can be traced to some of the principles developed in previous Pittsburgh efforts. These include controlling our own framework, utilizing an organizational structure that allows varying levels of involvement, avoiding reliance on one subcultural base, building redundancy into all aspects of the organizing, utilizing a diversity of tactics, fighting the battle of the story, and taking our stand where we live.

Although they were regarded locally as a major success, the G20 protests were also a reminder of the inherent limitations of such reactive efforts. The transformation of our relationships in all facets of life is beyond the scope of rioting and protesting alone.

### WE'VE COME A LONG WAY BABY

So what now? Following the G20, there is a lot of self-reflection within groups and networks and an unprecedented reappraising of where to go from here.

Prior to the G20, POG was in a period of reassessment during which it didn't initiate any new efforts; but when the summit was announced, it threw itself into the mobilization. With its accumulated social connections and resources, the group remains well-positioned to initiate regular protests and direct actions. Whether it will continue to push into new ground and continue its tactical experimentation is an open question. It does not aspire to be a mass organization, and as the anarchist movement has broadened and expanded, POG has comprised less and less of it. As a public organization, it may not be best situated to take the initiative in illegal actions. At the same time, without the benefit of POG's contacts and credibility, few recent protests have attracted more than a couple dozen people, and unpermitted street events have been non-existent.

GPAC has just left its current space after a contentious falling out with the building's owners. If it manages to buy a space or find one with a similar rental arrangement, it will again confront an issue it has struggled with since its inception: How can a project that draws inspiration from the autonomous social centers of Europe, and the uncompromising militancy and anonymity emphasized in current insurrectionary anarchist thinking, act effectively while headquartered in a legal public space? The administrative challenges of running a space can easily consume a group, leaving little time for other avenues of attack.

Meanwhile, the Thomas Merton Center is selling its building, and plans to rent space

from the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation, a widely-despised "development" organization. With the re-entrenchment of more conservative forces at the center, its relationship to broader social movements—and anarchists in particular—seems to be fraying, perhaps beyond repair. For the first time in almost a decade, anarchists will be operating without the unified institutional support of the TMC. Change often offers opportunities, and it may be that other projects can acquire the former TMC or GPAC buildings, resulting in a gain of space and marking a new phase in the growth of projects such as the Big Idea bookstore.

### ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES

Pittsburgh's reputation as a hotbed of anarchist activity has been developing for a couple of years, and only increased after the G20. This designation is not without precedent, nor danger. Other cities, most famously Eugene, Oregon, have been portrayed as "Anarchy Central" by comrades and enemies alike. The identification of any particular area as a base of radical activity can easily lead to an escalating cycle of government harassment and repression, answered by increasingly militant and exclusive actions that leave most people on the sidelines.

Although no precise figures exist, it's clear that more and more anarchists are moving to Pittsburgh from other areas of the country. On one hand, this offers advantages. New arrivals lack the preexisting histories and animosities of longtime locals, and can sometimes move more

*As the Greek uprising of 2008 continued into 2009, local anarchists gathered in solidarity outside the Pittsburgh zone 2 police station. Fliers linked local police killings to the murder of Alexandros Grigoropoulos, calling for an intensification of struggle against the state.*





# KROPOTKIN ESCAPES

freely between social networks. Newcomers bring new skills and refreshing perspectives. There are risks and uncertainties too, however. The feeling of being part of a growing movement can make anarchists neglect building support among the local population. If, or when, the perceived momentum in Pittsburgh stalls, we may witness a reversal of the current process and an exodus to other scenes, resulting in a further weakening.

Psychologically, there is also the danger that locals will develop an overblown view of themselves, feeding on the attention. If we let our resistance consist primarily of utilizing a particular tactic, for example, it becomes easy to focus on that tactic's success at the expense of honestly appraising our actual strength and progress. When that happens, it becomes difficult to give the tactic up, despite its rising costs. The same can be said of those who see a particular group, network, or identity as the true face of anarchism in the city, a focus that can often hasten that subject's destruction.

Finally, it's possible that the fact that Pittsburgh has so many explicitly anarchist efforts has contributed to a dearth of autonomous actions outside of these organizations.

## POSSIBILITIES IN WHAT WE LACK

Rather than focusing exclusively on how to maintain and expand our existing efforts, perhaps we should consider how to push our struggle past the limitations of street protests, state-sanctioned spaces, and service projects.

As with all communities of resistance in North America, we desperately need autonomous public spaces in which to organize, demonstrate alternative ways of relating and coordinating, and contest state power. Perhaps a break with landlords and legality must occur if we are to take root for a protracted struggle that can't be neutralized by the forces of economic development. Similarly, while there are many spaces in which anarchists gather to socialize, they don't tend to be spaces we control; the overwhelming majority of our money is spent at businesses that don't seek to expand space for autonomous struggles.

Increasing geographic concentrations\* of anarchists offer the

\* Anarchists are clustered in six neighborhoods in Pittsburgh: Bloomfield, Garfield, Lawrenceville, Polish Hill, Oakland, and the North Side. In some of these, over thirty live within a six-block radius.

possibility of creating neighborhood-specific projects combining mutual aid with direct action against institutions. The possibilities are also expanding as more anarchists become rooted in the city. The perception that we might not be around for the long haul has been a major stumbling block to relationships with other communities. As time passes, this concern seems to be ebbing, leading to greater trust and closer working relationships. The recent creation of the East End Mutual Aid Association, an anarchist effort to work on neighborhood concerns, is an opportunity along these lines. Even one major victory—such as driving check-cashing joints out of our communities while establishing some type of micro-lending mutual-aid program in their place—could push a lot of residents from sympathy to active support.

The trajectory of anarchism in Pittsburgh has also left a void when it comes to workplace struggles. While the city has seen a few anarchist-driven campaigns around labor issues, we need a project that effectively merges campaigns around workplace struggles with direct action and worker self-organization, such as the Seattle Solidarity Network.

## THE FUTURE

If we attempt to extrapolate what will happen over the next ten years from where we are today, we will probably miss the mark entirely. Perhaps in hindsight this decade will seem like a flash in the pan, or perhaps we will enter a period of unprecedented social conflict. The prospect of anarchists contending with the state, corporations, and local institutions for control of space and resources on an equal level seems fantastically optimistic. Yet if you had asked any of us to predict the future ten years ago, we would probably have considered it equally unlikely that an anarchist group could bring 3000 people into the streets, that discussions about the merits of anarchism would be heard regularly in local coffee shops, or that the G20 protests could play out as they did in a city that hadn't seen a significant unsanctioned protest in years.

We look forward to a future that remains, as always, unwritten.

**PETER KROPOTKIN, PAGE TO TSAR** Alexander II, accompanies his liege to review the regiments of the St. Petersburg garrisons. The nineteen-year-old is distressed to see that the Tsar, whom he reveres as the liberator of the serfs and the best hope for reform, is utterly alone on this day; neither his aides-de-camp nor any of the men of his suite attend him. Alexander hastens past line after line of armed soldiers, his steps betraying anxiety, and Peter dashes along behind, ready to throw himself between the Tsar and any would-be assassin.

Peter finds the chief of police a safe distance from the conflagration and begs him for a fire engine. The chief is little help, but eventually Peter prevails upon the captain of a fire brigade to shift his men from the Ministry. Even then, no one will supply them with water without an order from on high. In desperation, Peter forces his way to the governor himself, who interrupts the young man's report: "Who sent you?"

"Nobody—the comrades," answers the page.

RT

The imperial procession is returning from the Nevá river. A peasant, bareheaded in the middle of winter, pushes through two lines of soldiers and drops to his knees in front of the Tsar. Tears streaming down his face, the old man holds out a petition: "Father, defend us!" Alexander flinches, then averts his eyes and strides past; his brother, the Grand Duke Constantine, does the same. Peter, following behind in his role as page, cannot help but accept the petition, knowing his superiors will throw it away and reprimand him. A second later, soldiers seize the peasant and drag him away.

Peter Kropotkin stands on the bank of the Amur, along which the exiled revolutionist Bakunin traveled only a few years earlier in his escape from Siberia. Tens of thousands of fallow deer are fording the river at its narrowest point. It is not yet November, but a chilly wind blows in the scientist's beard, and glittering sheets of ice are already floating towards Sakhalin; all the deer of this vast region, normally scattered in small groups, have assembled to cross to the lowlands before the route is buried under heavy snow.

RT

A tremendous fire has consumed the marketplace, menacing the Ministry of the Interior on one side and Peter's school on the other. The archives of the Ministry, where all the documents concerning the liberation of the serfs are kept, are in flames; leaves of burning paper fill the air, whirling in the darkening sky like rebel angels. Through the smoke, Peter sees an ominous sight: another fire has broken out in the timber yards across the canal. If the school catches fire, the National Library and the main street of St. Petersburg will be next; yet all the fire hoses are concentrated on the Ministry. The common people of the neighborhood are risking their lives in scorching heat, rushing flammable materials away from the spreading blaze, while the authorities are nowhere to be seen.



## A FEW LINKS RELATED TO ANARCHISM IN PITTSBURGH

Book 'Em – [www.thomasmertoncenter.org/bookem/](http://www.thomasmertoncenter.org/bookem/)

Free Ride – [www.freeridepgh.org](http://www.freeridepgh.org)

Critical Mass – [www.pghcriticalmass.org/](http://www.pghcriticalmass.org/)

Thomas Merton Center – [www.thomasmertoncenter.org](http://www.thomasmertoncenter.org)

FedUp! – [www.thomasmertoncenter.org/fedup/](http://www.thomasmertoncenter.org/fedup/)

East End Mutual-Aid Association – [www.eastendmutualaid.org](http://www.eastendmutualaid.org)

Bash Back! – [www.myspace.com/bashbackpgh](http://www.myspace.com/bashbackpgh)

The Big Idea Radical Bookstore – [www.thebigidea.org](http://www.thebigidea.org)

Pittsburgh Organizing Group – [www.organizepittsburgh.org](http://www.organizepittsburgh.org)

Greater P'burgh Anarchist Collective-Anti-Racist Action – [www.gpacattack.org](http://www.gpacattack.org)

Landslide Community Farm – [www.landslidecommunityfarm.org](http://www.landslidecommunityfarm.org)

Pittsburgh Indymedia/Rustbelt Radio – [www.indypgh.org](http://www.indypgh.org)

Food Not Bombs – <http://pgh-fnb.activeresistance.org/>

Pittsburgh Assn. for the Abolition of Vivisection – <http://pittaav.blogspot.com/>

Rusty Strings Collective – <http://www.rustystrings.org/>

Howling Mob Society – <http://howlingmobsociety.org/>



The collective intelligence of the animals astonishes the young scientist. His thoughts wander from the deer to the skills and customs of the peoples native to this region, and then to the communal settlements of religious dissidents that thrive here where state-organized colonization has failed. Under the spell of Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, Kropotkin has sought in vain across all Siberia for keen competition between creatures of the same species. In place of it, he has witnessed a thousand different manifestations of mutual support; perhaps the latter is a more decisive factor in survival than competition per se. The only exceptions he can think of are among his own people: bureaucracies that resist improvement, regimes that stifle their subjects, prisons that deform rather than reform.

RT

"And what of this new censorship policy?" Kropotkin's brother Sáša demands abruptly. The other guests exchange glances. "Everyone knows how terribly glum Alexander has been, pining for the days when he was 'the Liberator' and a band couldn't play 'God Save the Tsar' without being drowned out by hurrahs. I imagine Shuválov had to take him hunting to prevail upon him to sign it."

Kropotkin pictures the Tsar riding back from Nóvgorod attended by liveried hunters and merry courtiers and ballet girls, the chief of police beside him with a thick sheaf of paperwork and a pen—and on the back of the royal carriage, the carcass of a great bear, tongue lolling from its lifeless maw.

"What is your opinion of the cured fish?" one of the elder guests loudly inquires.

RT

On the way back to St. Petersburg, Kropotkin takes a detour through Kraków; there is no way that the books and newspapers he has gathered in Geneva will make it through customs, but he can't bear to part with them. All afternoon he roams the deserted city, wondering how one recognizes a smuggler, only to return to his hotel empty-handed. In despair, he asks the porter how to send a package across the border.

An hour later, they are concluding the deal. "How much will it cost?" Kropotkin finally asks.

"How much are you willing to pay?"

The naïve prince empties his entire purse onto the table, removing only a few coins for himself. "All this is yours. I will travel third class!"

"Wait, wait!" the smuggler and the porter exclaim in unison. "What do you take us for? A gentleman like you, travel third class! We are not highway robbers, but honest tradesmen!"

RT

They are the cream of Russian nobility: the Kornílov sisters, whose father is a wealthy manufacturer; the brilliant chemistry student Nicholas Chaikóvsky; prim Sofía Peróvskaja, daughter of the governor, who has rented the little house under an assumed name. Kropotkin guesses himself the oldest by a full decade.

Dmitri Klementz, the austere young dropout who vouched for him, is recounting the latest raid: "So I said, 'Why should you have to go through our books all over again each time? You could just make a list of them, and drop by once a month to see if they're still there. We could even help you update the list when we get new titles!'"

Kropotkin can barely wait to tell them that he is an accomplished smuggler; he has heard that they distribute subversive literature.

RT

Natalia Armfeld meets them at the door of the house where her wealthy family lives. Kropotkin and Chaikóvsky follow her inside, slipping off their boots and sheepskins. This is Kropotkin's first visit to the Moscow chapter; they are to discuss whether to continue reaching out to factory workers, or to shift their focus to the peasants of the countryside.

The room they enter is strangely familiar to the rebel prince. He lived here as a young boy, shortly after his mother passed away, when he and his brother were still waited on by serfs; now it hosts secret councils of revolutionaries.

RT

Six months later, in another house in Moscow where he had lived as a boy, Kropotkin is awakened to the news that a peasant is waiting outside to speak to him.

It is no peasant after all, but his comrade. "Stepniak! But you—"

"Escaped!" answers the cheerful fugitive. "We stopped in a village that was having its festival, and the guards stayed up drinking with the villagers. Rogachóv and I pretended to drink, too, putting our mouths up to the bowls without swallowing.

When everyone was going to sleep, a young farmer whispered to me that he would leave the gate unbolted. By sunrise we were twenty miles away!"

"And we thought we could keep you out of trouble by making you leave St. Petersburg!" Kropotkin embraces him. "Don't go back—we need you here." He recounts the past month of raids, arrests, and disappearances, describing the difficulties of meeting and the impact on their projects. "There's only a half-dozen of us left. We're trying to recruit new members to take over before they get us as well."

"And you? Are you going back?"

"I still have to present my report on glacial formations to the Geographic Society. Then I'll make for the Volga."

RT

Kropotkin arrives at the meeting of the Geographic Society with bags under his bloodshot eyes. With the exception of Serdiukóv, everyone has been arrested—all his comrades, all the students who ran errands for them, all the workers who came to hear them speak. Someone is bound to have cracked under interrogation. He was ready to deliver his report and fly, but the two Geological Societies, hearing that he was going to make the controversial claim that the polar ice cap extended as far as Middle Russia, delayed his report for a week so they could attend as well. He has not slept; every night, in a different part of the city, he has met the two new recruits to teach them lists of names and addresses, explain procedures, and review ciphers. Strangers have been prowling around his house, including one shady character who claimed to want to buy lumber from his treeless prairie estate; another bore a suspicious resemblance to one of the arrested workers.

Against all odds, the report is a success. "Ice cap or not, gentlemen," concludes St. Petersburg's leading geologist, "we must acknowledge that all we have hitherto said about the action of floating ice had no foundation in actual exploration." Kropotkin is nominated chairman of the physical geography section; there are handshakes all around.

Kropotkin knows he should slip out the back door and go directly underground, but he is so very tired—*let them take me*, he thinks, *so long as I sleep once more in my own bed*.

RT

He spends the next afternoon sorting his papers in front of the fireplace, the loose sheets twisting in the flames. At dusk, as he is locking his suitcase, the maid comes in and puts her hand on his arm: "You had better use the service staircase."

He hails the first cab by the gate; they are on Nevsky Prospekt, which he helped rescue from burning twelve years earlier, when he notices another cab galloping after them. Soon it pulls alongside, and Kropotkin is surprised to see the arrested worker leaning from it, motioning for him to stop. In one of those lapses of courage or reason that torment captured revolutionaries for the rest of their lives, Kropotkin instructs the driver to pull up to the curb. The instant they stop, they are surrounded by police.

RT

The interrogations begin at four in the morning, after his apartment has been reduced to wreckage. "Do you know a person by the name Nicholái Chaikóvsky?"

"I told you—until I am brought before a court where I can speak publically, I am not going to answer questions."

"I might as easily ask whether you know a person by the name Alexander Kropotkin!" threatens the prosecutor. "Will you deny knowing your own brother?"

"If you must continue asking such stupid questions, write 'No' as my answer to every one of them!" storms back the captured prince. "I am not going to answer a single one!"

During a break in the questioning, the guard approaches him. "What are you doing, sir?" he asks, with an air of concern. "You know that refusing to answer is practically admitting guilt."

At the end of the interrogation, Kropotkin has answered no questions, but the prosecutor has unknowingly answered one of his. None of his arrested comrades has turned informant: the government knows no more than the single traitorous worker can tell them.

RT

He wakes in the cell, disoriented and full of dread, and remains lying there on the edge of the unknown. Through the walls and ceiling and floor, he hears a quiet tapping—now close, now distant; now staccato, now answering in rapid succession. It seems to come from every direction at once. He tries in vain to decipher a rhythm or code.

RT

The sun is setting towards the Gulf of Finland, passing in and out of thick grey clouds; overhead, birds wheel against patches of blue sky. Kropotkin presses his face to the carriage window as they pass over the Nevá, wondering whether he will ever see it again.

They turn left into a dark arched passage: the gate of the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul. Here, Peter the Great tortured and murdered his son Alexei; here, Dostoevsky was dragged before a firing squad, only to be pardoned at the last moment; here, Bakunin lost his teeth, and Chernyshevsky wrote *What Is to Be Done?* Nechaev still languishes somewhere in its deepest pit. Ever since the Decembrists, the best and brightest of every generation have ended here, their dreams of liberation confined between clammy walls.

The cathedral within holds the remains of two centuries of Tsars: the lifeless bodies of the rulers interred beside the rebels' warm flesh. As a page, Kropotkin attended the funeral of the Tsar's mother there. Above the coffin, a tremendous gilt crown and purple mantle had been hung from the dome of the cathedral; they appeared to be gold and velvet, but in fact they were painted wood and cotton, and the coats of arms symbolizing the Russian Empire were mere cardboard. When the Grand Duke's son dropped a candle, a tremendous tongue of flame ran up



the mantle, consuming the coats of arms and threatening the crown at the very top.

Eleven knocks, twenty-four knocks, fifteen knocks; then a pause, and three knocks followed by thirty-three knocks. This is repeated over and over until the new inmate realizes the knocks count out each letter's place in the alphabet: *Kto vy? Who are you?*

For the past year, Kropotkin has endured in utter solitude, with only the books his brother has sent him and his daily exercise regimen to stave off deterioration. Now, following a new wave of arrests, the empty cells around him have filled up. His comrade Serdiukóv is on his left, and the two have long conversations in cipher; he also relates the story of the Paris Commune to a young neighbor. It takes a full week of tapping.

Two years of incarceration have taken their toll: scurvy, malnutrition, rheumatism, and

a series of debilitating illnesses. Kropotkin's brother has been exiled to Siberia; many of his fellow prisoners have died or lost their sanity, and he is approaching the end of his rope. Fearing that he too will die before the trial begins, the authorities transfer him to a hospital prison.

Here, with fresh air and a window that admits sunlight, he immediately begins to recover—if anything, too quickly, he fears. He takes great care to play the invalid. One afternoon, a guard whispers magic words to him: *"Ask to be taken out for a walk."*

The yard is three hundred paces long, and at the other end of it is a gate—an open gate. Beyond the sentry box, Kropotkin can see people and vehicles passing on the street.

He walks back and forth in a line perpendicular to the yard; a sentry accompanies him, five paces away, always between him and the gate. However, as nothing wearies a healthy man more than moving at a snail's pace, the sentry often drifts a few steps ahead. With a mathematician's eye, Kropotkin guesses that

if he bolts at such a moment, the guard will run toward him, rather than ahead to block his path; thus, while he will travel in a straight line, his pursuer will have to move in an arc, and it might be possible to retain his lead.

When he returns to his cell, he can barely steady his hands to scratch out a message to his comrades.

The flannel dressing gown will not do: it drags on the ground, and he is forced to carry the lower part over his arm the way courtly ladies carry their trains. But his captors will not permit him any other garment.

Between visits from the guard, he practices throwing it off in two swift movements. The guard passes his door, glancing in to see Kropotkin lying in his sickbed; a moment later he is on his feet, whipping the gown over his head and casting it away; another moment, and he is back in the bed, wearing the gown, ready for the guard's next pass.

The day comes—June 29, the day of St. Peter and St. Paul. The message is to be a single red balloon ascending into the sky. Kropotkin takes off his hat to show that he himself is ready; he hears the rumble of a carriage in the street and scans the horizon, heart pounding—but there is nothing. Finally, his time is up, and he is led back to his cell, convinced his comrades have been captured. He speculates gloomily that he will learn what happened from them when he is transferred back to the fortress to die.

Later, his friends will tell him that on that morning there was not a single red balloon for sale in all the markets of St. Petersburg. At length, an old one was obtained somehow from a child, but it no longer flew. In desperation, they bought a red rubber ball and attempted to inflate it with hydrogen; but when they released it, it floated only a few feet up, stopped just short of the top of the courtyard wall, and returned to earth. Finally, they tied it to the top of a woman's umbrella, and she walked back and forth on the street, holding the umbrella as high above her head as she could—but not high enough.

As it turned out, though, this was a stroke of luck. After Kropotkin's walk was over, when the carriage departed along the route that would have been used for his escape, it was stopped short by a line of carts.

"A present from your sister-in-law." The guard passes a small watch through the bars. Kropotkin goes to the window to watch the woman departing unhurriedly toward the boulevard; if she is the person he thinks she is, she is risking her life by stepping within those walls.

He examines the watch. At first, it seems unremarkable; but when he pries the case open, there is a tiny scrap of paper pressed against the clockwork. His hands tremble again as he decodes the cipher.

Two hours later, Kropotkin is led out for his walk—perhaps the last before transfer. Again, he hears a carriage on the boulevard; again, he takes off his cap. On cue, a distant violin takes up a cheerful melody. His heart is racing as he shambles slowly along the footpath. He glances at the soldier, taking in the man's powerful frame and the bayonet shining on the end of his rifle—and beyond him, across the yard, the open gate.

At the end of the path, he turns around; as usual, the soldier has drifted a few paces ahead. The time has come. He straightens his body and seizes the gown to throw it over his head—but the violin stops! He forces a cough and casts a furtive glance at the sentry, who seems none the wiser.

A quarter of an hour passes. Time is running out. Finally, a line of carts enter the gate one by one, parking at the other end of the yard.

The violinist resumes immediately, striking up a wild *marzka*. Kropotkin shuffles again to the end of the path, terrified that the music will cease once more before he reaches it. When he turns around, he sees that his attendant has fallen several paces behind: the guard is facing away, contemplating the peasants unloading the carts. There will never be another chance like this.

In a flash the dressing gown is on the ground and he is sprinting across the grass. At first he attempts to economize his strength, as it has been years since he has been able to run—but then the peasants drop their bundles and charge after him, shouting to attract the attention of the guard, who takes off in pursuit as well. Then he runs like a man possessed.

Behind him he hears the footsteps of the guard, the curses and panting breath as close as the pulse pounding in his ears. The soldier is swinging his bayonet, nearly grazing Kropotkin's skin; were he not so close, he would undoubtedly fell the fugitive with a bullet. Yet the prince somehow keeps a single step ahead of him, and the two cross the entire field this way.

Another sentry is posted at the gate of the hospital, directly across from the waiting carriage. Kropotkin and his pursuers are charging right towards him, but he is engaged in furious argument with a drunken peasant about a certain parasite of the human body:

"And did you know what a tremendous tail it has?"  
 "What, man, a *tail*?" scoffs the soldier. "That's enough of your tales!"

"It does, a tail! Under the microscope, it's this big!" He stretches out his arms as Kropotkin, the soldier, and the peasants come storming through the gate in a mad procession.

Ahead, Kropotkin sees the carriage, now only a leap and a bound away; but the coachman is facing away from him. Kropotkin almost shouts out his comrade's name, then catches himself and claps his hands. The coachman glances around and immediately rouses his horse, crying out, "Get in, quick, quick!" Kropotkin reaches the running board. His comrade is waving a revolver in the air: "Go, go! I'll kill you, you bastards!"

"Stop them! Get them!" But the horse is already galloping down the boulevard. Kropotkin's friend pushes an elegant

overcoat and top hat into his hands. They take the first turn so sharply that the carriage almost turns on its side, but the two men throw themselves inward, righting it. For an instant, they exchange a glance of disbelief.

Behind them, the gate of the prison is in an uproar. The officer of the guard has rushed out at the head of a detachment, but cannot regain his head to give orders. "Catch him! Chase him! Curse you, you imbeciles, I am ruined!" A man carrying a violin appears, asking everyone in turn what happened, who escaped, where he went, and what they think they will do. He takes special care to express his sympathy to the flustered officer.

An old peasant woman in the crowd plays Cassandra: "They're bound to make directly for Nevsky Prospekt. If you take these horses, you could easily intercept them." No one pays her any mind.

RT

Kropotkin and his comrade gallop all the way down Nevsky, finally pulling up at the Kornilov house to change clothes and shave off the fugitive's long beard. Then they ride out to the Gulf of Finland, where they watch the sun setting through the open sky toward the island town of Kronstadt.

Meanwhile, the police are raiding houses all over St. Petersburg in a desperate bid to recapture the escapee. They must find a place to hide out until it is late enough to go to the safehouse. "How about Donon?" his partner suggests, naming the city's most fashionable restaurant. "No one will think to look for you there!"

They pass through a brightly lit hall crowded with high society and take the room reserved for private parties. Kropotkin's comrades show up one by one, giddy and famished. The friends pass a joyous evening eating and drinking, telling old stories, and collapsing in laughter: "What, man, a tail?"

RT

Kropotkin had prepared himself by learning a little Swedish, in case one day he was forced to flee the country and take up residence elsewhere. On the steamer, he tries it out on a Norwegian professor, with little success.

"Why don't we simply speak in Norwegian?" asks the professor. "It seems you know some."

"You mean Swedish?" ventures the fugitive. "I speak Swedish, don't I?"

"I should say it is Norwegian; definitely not Swedish," answers his acquaintance. Dismayed, Kropotkin continues past Sweden all the way to England.

RT

Kropotkin summarizes a report about a Norwegian deep-sea expedition and submits it under a pseudonym to the English publication *Nature*, which he and his brother used to read in St. Petersburg. The editor invites him to become a regular contributor.

One day, the editor presents him with several books for review: they are his own works, *The Glacial Period* and *The Orography of Asia*. Even from Siberia, his brother, faithful to the last, has sent his books to their favorite journal for review.

Kropotkin stays awake all night agonizing about this moral predicament. It would be immoral to give his own books a positive review under false pretenses, and yet he cannot very well criticize them, either, as he still agrees with their premises. The next morning he calls upon the editor and sets the books upon his desk: "I am Peter Kropotkin."

RT

Back in Russia, Alexander II continues to vacillate between the roles of reformer and autocrat. He orders his minister to draw up plans for a national assembly, but never implements them, while the secret police carry out ever more draconian waves of arrests and executions.

The last survivors of Kropotkin's secret society are driven to desperate measures; locked in a private grudge match with the state, they give up on reaching the public and focus only on revenge. Two days after the arrest of her lover, Sofia Peróvskaia, the governor's daughter who helped found the group when she was still a teenager, coordinates a bombing attack that claims the Tsar's life. One of the bombers tearfully helps lift the dying Tsar onto a sleigh to the Winter Palace, where his blood paints the marble steps fire engine red.

Kropotkin, who once prepared to defend Alexander with his own body, writes that his death is simply the final act of a tragedy that has been written for two decades already.

RT

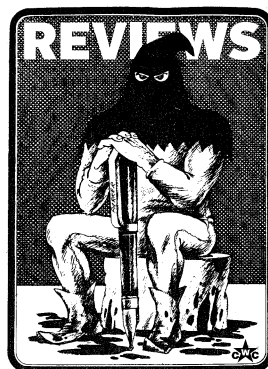
Sofia is hanged in downtown St. Petersburg with her lover and three comrades; ten thousand soldiers hold back ten times that many spectators. When his two terms in Siberia are finally over, Kropotkin's brother sends his wife and children back to Russia on one of the last steamers of the year, then shoots himself in the temple with a revolver, just as Serdiukóv had upon his release from prison. Natalia Armfeld dies in Siberia. Stepniak assassinates the chief of the secret police and miraculously escapes from Russia, only to be run over by a train. Even Kropotkin's cousin Dmitri, loyal to the Tsar to the end, is shot by revolutionaries on his way home from the theater.

Almost alone of all his contemporaries, Kropotkin escapes, witness to a time when the Russian ruling class rent itself asunder. He lives to see the Russian revolutionary movement do the same; his funeral in 1921, one month before the Kronstadt uprising, is the last gathering of anarchists permitted in Russia for 66 years.

"Men [sic] fight and lose the battle  
and the thing that they fought  
for comes about in spite of  
their defeat, and when it comes,  
turns out not to be what they  
mean, and other men have to fight  
for what they meant under  
another name."

—William Morris, *A Dream of John Ball*





## Anarchy Alive!

Anti-Authoritarian Politics  
from Practice to Theory

Uri Gordon

Pluto Press, 2008

## Politics Is Not a Banana

The Journal of Vulgar Discourse

The Institute for Experimental Freedom, 2009

[www.politicsisnotabanana.com](http://www.politicsisnotabanana.com)

Uri Gordon's *Anarchy Alive!* is an ambitious attempt to introduce contemporary anarchist ideas to a broader academic readership while putting the strengths of the scholarly tradition at the service of anarchist strategizing. As he emphasizes in the introduction, the anarchist

movement is already characterized by plenty of theorizing; this is simply an effort to translate it into this particular format. It's an unexpectedly good fit: who would have guessed that Wittgenstein's idea of "family resemblance" could be so useful for elucidating the anarchist conception of "domination" as a category? Unlike some treatises from the ivory tower, the text is eminently readable, and it's a relief to encounter theory that is neither dogmatic nor overly rhetorical.

It's possible to view *Anarchy Alive!* as part of the boom in anti-authoritarian academic publishing that followed the peak of the anti-globalization movement, when that generation of grad students finally finished their doctoral theses. Some of Gordon's points of reference, such as the People's

Global Action hallmarks, seem dated today. His points of inquiry, however, remain timely. What is anarchism—is it an existing social movement, the mores of that movement, or a timeless idea? What different kinds of power are there? What is violence, and when is it acceptable or advantageous? How about technology? The book concludes with a nuanced consideration of nationalism and solidarity, focusing on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict in Gordon's homeland.

In every chapter, Gordon lucidly defines his terms and breaks down complex concepts into their component parts. Although he engages

with broad topics, it's never difficult to tease out what his conclusions might imply in practice. In short, this is exactly the sort of book that the readers and editors of *Rolling Thunder* might hope to see from the anarchist movement.

RT

When I first tried to read Deleuze and Guattari, I despaired, then concluded that they were having a laugh at my expense: that their project must be to undermine the format of intellectual discourse by taking it to such extremes that it would collapse of its own weight. I was wrong, of course—whether or not they were taking themselves seriously, countless others have since—but perhaps the project I imagined is still possible.

Enter *Politics Is Not a Banana*, a collection of outré prose, pretentious theorizing, impenetrable translations, and dirty pictures. The *Vulgar* in the subtitle does not refer to the scatological passages scattered throughout so much as the social demographic at which the publication is aimed (from *vulgus*, "the common people"), though the editors presume that a common thread binds the two. Inside, we find provocative glorifications of friendship, rupture, "non-functional desire," "ethico-political practices," decadence, and destruction, in language ranging from gratuitously periphrastic to downright recondite.

The avant-garde often gives rise to strange bedfellows, as all the various partisans of the "new" end up bunking together on the frontier. In this case, the attempt to press hip sensibilities into the service of insurrection seems like something of a stretch. At best, the absurdity of the whole project gives the authors such license that they are capable of moments of unbridled invention. Like the works of Brener and Schurz, reviewed in a previous issue of this magazine, *Politics Is Not a Banana* is nothing if not unique.

Come to think of it, this makes a perfect counterpoint to Gordon's book. On one side, a European academic who prefers the Anglophone tradition, who looks to philosophy to clarify the challenges of acting outside the ivory tower; on the other, proletarians who fetishize continental abstraction, who take refuge from the dish room in heady theory and quote Agamben like they're flashing gaudy jewelry. The former brings the legitimacy of the academic approach to anarchism, complete with a fifteen-page fine-print bibliography—a somewhat awkward fit, though perhaps a *strategic* one. The latter hijack the status symbols of academic legitimacy, in a farce that ultimately calls *legitimacy itself* into question.

What if the authors crossed paths? It could happen—Uri has traveled the US promoting *Anarchy Alive!* Let's imagine the scene: a smoky apartment crowded with malnourished service workers, at which the publication of *Politics Is Not a Banana* is to be celebrated. Now picture Uri—forthright, gracious, and articulate—and

his hosts, the editors: the lumpen autodidact, self-consciously fashionable and eccentric, like a Russian nihilist in an off-Broadway Oscar Wilde production; the brilliant dropout, pursuing his higher education in the lower depths; the baristas, at once tender and ironic; the high-powered student activist so on top of things she even has time to slum it with the hoodlums.

Uri is excited at the opportunity to participate in the intellectual life of this provincial town: tonight they will *discuss, analyze, critique*. Other academics can only dream of being part of a lay community in which ideas are so highly prized! His hosts are similarly thrilled—an actual academic is taking them seriously!—though they maintain poker faces. When it is time to read aloud from the Little Pink Book, Uri volunteers, to the gratification of the author whose text he selects. He begins in a tone that would be appropriate in a lecture hall, but seems overblown here. Some eyes begin to glaze as he goes on and on:

“. . . What is lacking—what disrupts the oscillation—is the appropriated space and time that expands the isolated, shared-experience of rebels making an attack into that of a force-in-time and mutual recollection that expands beyond the boundaries of the genres . . .”

Finally he breaks off, suddenly disconsolate. “But why does it have to be so *obtuse*? And the hyphens—they're used to approximate German constructions, but this is an original text in *English!* I don't understand why you can't simply—!”

When it had seemed that the Israeli was pedantically declaiming the text, a very different story was actually playing out: his earnest heart was sinking in his chest as he struggled and failed to make head or tail of it. This was his

format, his specialty, and the words were familiar, but instead of enabling transparency they were being reduced to non-functional status symbols.

One local, a college graduate whose dismissive take on the authors is somewhat classist, attempts to address his concerns. “Look, Flavor Flav's clock doesn't have to work for it to have social significance that it's around his neck. Of course, nowadays MCs just sport bling,\* which is an inevitable risk of reappropriation—you start out trying to tell people what time it is, and end up perpetuating the values of the oppressor.”

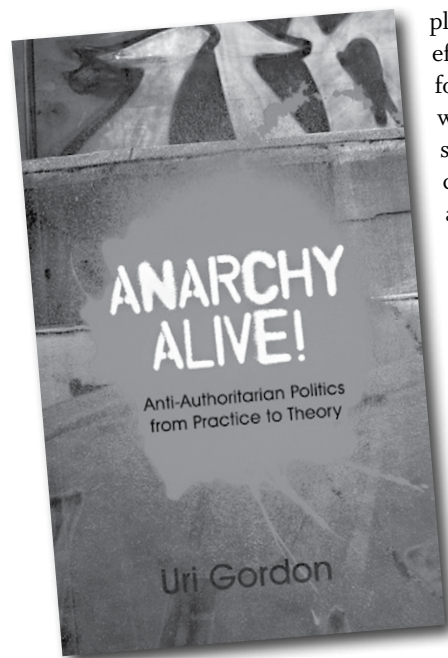
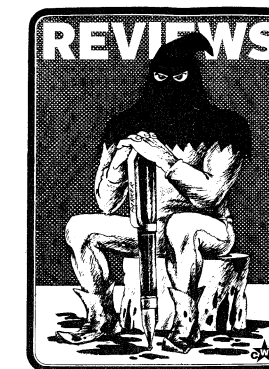
Perhaps if *Politics Is Not a Banana* is pushing the horizons, it is not so much by elaborating new theories as by vulgarizing the language of theorizing—emptying it of its previous meanings and exclusivity, so that *something else* may take place. For those who are deeply invested in analysis and communication, there's something ominous about this.

But one cannot accuse the authors of *not making sense* without seeming a little bit stodgy. *Of course* it doesn't make sense—does it seem like they were *trying* to make sense? This is clearly a work of pure hedonism, of people who enjoy thinking and writing for their own sake rather than as a means to an end. For good or for ill, in the long run pleasure is bound to be more seductive than even the most carefully thought out plan. A strategy is useless if no one wants to inhabit it. Revolutionary currents proliferate because they generate and indulge subversive *desires*, not because they are *persuasive*.

Of course, someone else masturbating can be really hot, or it can just make you really, really uncomfortable. It remains to be seen whether the self-indulgence of the contributors to *Politics Is Not a Banana* can become the pleasure of others.

\* See the glossary of terms, pp. 4-5.

On one side, a European academic who prefers the Anglophone tradition, who looks to philosophy to clarify the challenges of acting outside the ivory tower; on the other, proletarians who fetishize continental abstraction, who take refuge from the dish room in heady theory and quote Agamben like they're flashing gaudy jewelry.



Only when the National Guard has withdrawn do the students realize how long it has been since they saw the austere professor with the clipped tone. The young man who first led the exodus from her classroom now leads a small delegation in search of her.

They find her in her office, hysterically sweeping books off the shelves into the middle of the floor. “Teach, really, it’s OK,” soothes the young rebel, “there’ll still be a place for you. We still want you to share the things you know—you’ll just have to get used to treating us as equals.”

But the professor is inconsolable. “You idiots! Why didn’t you *burn it all down?*” she sobs.

“What? Burn what down? We’re not—”

“Everything—the classrooms, the bookstore, the cafeteria, this whole prison where I’ve *wasted my miserable life!* What a horrible farce! Can’t you see your children are going to end up here, learning your protocol and reading the same old histories through your new lens? They’ll sit in circles, being ‘equals,’ counting the minutes to lunch! How dare you—*how dare you!*”





298

