

A photograph of a protest scene. In the foreground, there is a large, intricate web of shattered glass, likely from a broken window or barrier. Behind the glass, a crowd of people is visible, some wearing dark clothing and others in red. A sign with the word "STOP" is partially visible in the background. The overall atmosphere is one of chaos and conflict.

Rolling Thunder

ISSUE NUMBER TEN / SUMMER TWO-THOUSAND TWELVE / A DESPERATE MEASURE OF THE CRIMETHINC, EX-WORKERS' COLLECTIVE

an anarchist journal of dangerous living

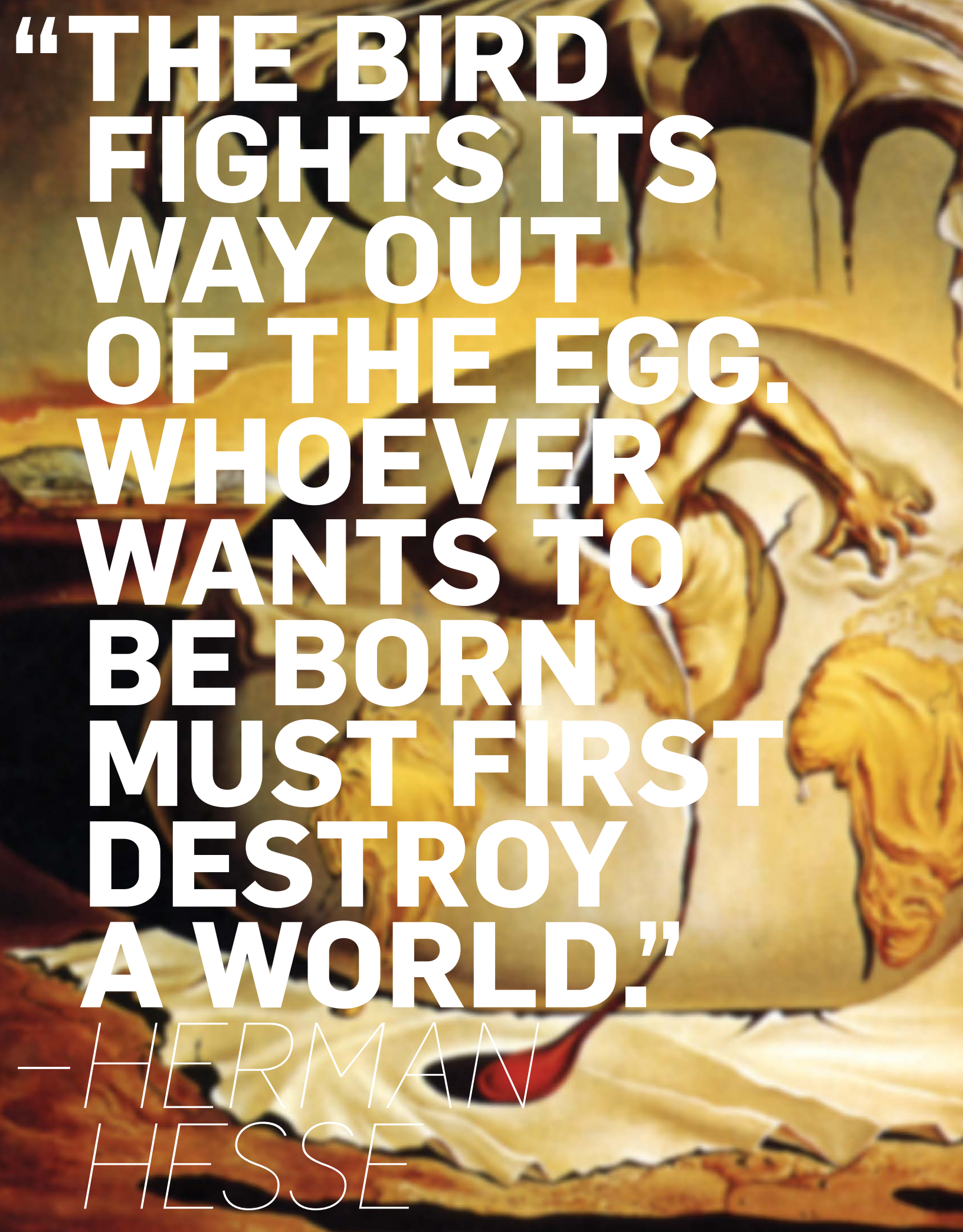
Last year's student protesters
Are this year's dropouts who can't afford tuition;
Last year's striking workers are this year's unemployed.

Who is more entitled to occupy a school
Than those who can't afford to attend it?
Who is more entitled to sabotage the economy
Than those for whom there are no jobs?

To survive, we have to fight from outside
Where more and more of us find ourselves:
Establishing a front at every margin,
Becoming the eye of every storm.

“What seems outrageous to one generation becomes a commonplace to the next.
You think this can't happen; but later, when it's history, no one will be surprised.”

—Jeanette Winterson



“THE BIRD
FIGHTS ITS
WAY OUT
OF THE EGG.
WHOEVER
WANTS TO
BE BORN
MUST FIRST
DESTROY
A WORLD.”

—HERMAN
HESSE



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At the moment of its collapse, the Empire will bury everything, really everything, under its ruins. Then what is the purpose of waiting? Isn't it better to go in search of the enemy and do everything possible to get rid of it?

—Chrissus and Odotheus, *Barbarians*

T H E B A C K S T O R Y

The narrative of this issue breaks off immediately before Occupy Wall Street pitched camp in Zuccotti Park on September 17, 2011, setting off a well-known chain of events. After three surprisingly quiet years of recession, the prayers of US anarchists were finally answered by a sudden populist groundswell with an anticapitalist streak, ostensibly based in the principles of horizontality and consensus inherited from the anti-globalization movement.

Having your wishes granted is a sort of punishment, as you have to suffer all their shortcomings. Were anarchists really prepared to find common cause with “99%” of the population, reactionary politics and all? Was “occupying everything” a sufficient long-term strategy? Who decided consensus process was the best decision-making model for arbitrarily convened assemblies of contrarians, undercover cops, the clinically insane, and anyone else who just happened along? And hadn’t we argued the violence/non-violence debate into the ground already?

In the months leading up to this outbreak, anarchists brainstormed about how to set it off, but not what to do next. Even as we predicted a cataclysm, we couldn’t seem to get beyond desperately invoking it to anticipate what the challenges would be. As usual, it was hard to take our own predictions seriously enough to follow them through to their logical conclusions.

But that’s another story, for another time. In the ensuing hubbub, many projects were suspended as anarchists scrambled to make the most of a window of opportunity that turned out to be brief indeed. Now that it has closed, we can get our bearings again.

The first order of business is to make sure we haven’t forgotten anything. Such crests of momentum tend to obscure everything

that came before them. Afterwards, it’s hard to reconstruct what people were doing and thinking that helped bring them about, and what *else* people were up to before the wave hit. Those who live through a high point of struggle often set about trying to repeat it immediately, usually with diminishing returns. It might make more sense to retrace our steps to the context that produced that high point and take one more look around.

For example, Occupy Seattle was able to carry out such exciting occupations and blockades because anarchists in the Puget Sound had already done so much to normalize insurrectionary tactics during the anti-police protests of early 2011. There are still countless cities across the US where this has not occurred; anarchists who live there must put that missing piece in place if they don’t want the next wave of momentum to catch them flat-footed.

On the other hand, while some strategies have already borne what fruit they have to offer—it will be years before anyone is enthusiastic about camping in public parks again—others that were abandoned still hold untapped potential. It seemed that black bloc tactics had reached their apogee at the Toronto G20 summit to be superseded by occupation, but they came back into vogue as the Occupy movement reached its limits. What other approaches have we set aside that are still ripe with possibility?

In our next issue, we’ll engage with the questions and opportunities that arose in the wake of the Occupy movement. Here, we study the events that preceded it from the other side of the eruptions they helped set off.

“If it is true that only the possible happens, then do something impossible, so that tomorrow it will be possible.”

—Tinto Brass, *l’Urlo*

A spark for every powder keg,
your fierce and tireless editors

“Anarchist discourse tried to shake readers’ inner fibers with histrionic, emotionally charged declarations: ‘Oh, bourgeois vampires! You, on one side, and Jesuitism on the other: you have robbed the people, condemning them to eternal suffering.’ Their penchant for inflamed discourse often led them to employ extravagant terminology and affected expressions that sometimes bordered on the incomprehensible. For instance: ‘An endless number of characteristic types mill around in the distended belly of the great cosmopolis’; or, ‘A shapeless protoplasm that only the Carlylian heroes or the pseudo-Nietzschean supermen could ferment or mold.’ Litvak has noted a similar tendency among Spanish anarchists—they tried to dignify their discourse with rarified jargon, even if at times they did not know what the words they were using meant.

—Juan Suriano, *Paradoxes of Utopia: Anarchist Culture and Politics in Buenos Aires, 1890-1910*

“Whoever knows he is deep, strives for clarity; whoever would like to appear deep to the crowd, strives for obscurity.”

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

For more on clarity and obscurity, we urge the earnest reader to consult George Orwell’s “Politics and the English Language.”

Accident ›

A statistical inevitability. Some nuclear power plants are built on fault lines, but every mine, dam, oil rig, and waste dump is founded upon a tacit acceptance of the worst case scenario. On a long enough timeline, everything that can go wrong will, however small the likelihood is from one day to the next. The responsible parties may wring their hands about Japan—and Haiti and the Gulf and New Orleans and Mexico City—but *accident is no accident*.

Adaptation ›

One develops skills according to one’s situation. The executive learns to give orders, the underling to avoid carrying them out; the prisoner becomes adept at doing time (see figure i.). The need to utilize one’s capabilities is more powerful in most human beings than the desire for pleasure (see *Desire*); for example, one of the forces that draws people back into abusive relationships is the

unconscious wish to continue making use of their finely honed skills for dealing with crises. What is more terrifying than the unknown, in which one must *become something else*—than uncertainty, in which one may blame oneself for things going badly because they really might have gone better? Thus human beings’ tremendous capacity for adaptation, though it kept us alive in Auschwitz and Biafra, can shackle us to an otherwise insufferable present.

On the other hand, when we have no choice but to adapt, it is certain that we will. If people survived in Auschwitz and Biafra, we could surely adjust to life without managers.

part x

Glossary of Terms

Adult ›

That is to say, obscene

Adventurism ›

The scandalous practice of *enjoying yourself* in the course of struggle

Agency ›

Until November 1999, few anarchists knew anything about the World Trade Organization or the International Monetary Fund. Shortly after the historic protests of 1999 and 2000, any punk or fellow-traveler could expound on their wrongdoings in greater detail than the average grad student. Feeling that one has some influence over an issue, even by proxy or association, makes one a great deal more interested in it. Activists usually begin by trying to educate the public in order to build up to taking action. Perhaps they’ve got it backwards.

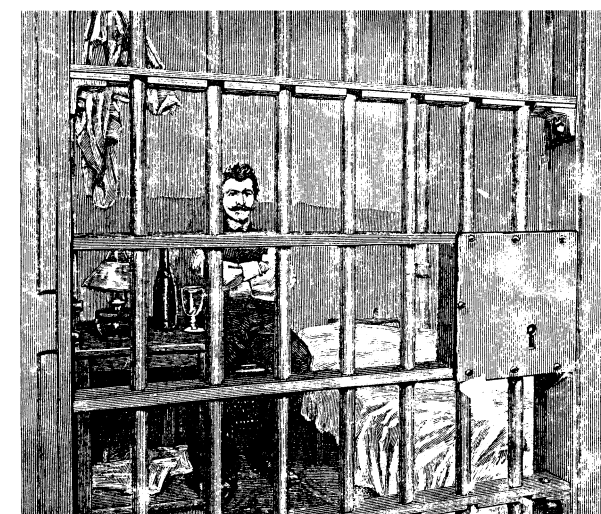


figure i.
“The instant you get out of prison you have the sense that you are leaving something dear to you. Why? Because you know that you are leaving a part of your life inside, because you spent some of your life there which, even if it was under terrible conditions, is still a part of you. And even if you lived it badly and suffered horribly, which is not always the case, it is always better than the nothing that your life is reduced to the moment it disappears.”
—Alfredo Bonanno

ROLLING THUNDER: A JOURNAL OF DANGEROUS LIVING
Issue Ten, Summer 2012

Body text set in Whitman, titles and captions set in Flama, combined with images by the Paul F. Maul Artists Group.

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Air Conditioning ›

The more you use it, the hotter it gets (see *Global Warming*)

Alleged ›

Like every weapon, doubt is most frequently wielded against those without power (see *Delegitimization*)

Alternatives ›

The equipment is sterilized, the patient is anesthetized, and the operation is about to begin when a man comes charging through the doors.

“WAIT!” shouts the intruder. “*Don’t operate!*”

“What the hell do you mean, ‘don’t operate,’” sputters the dumbfounded surgeon. “This woman’s life is on the line!”

“DON’T OPERATE!” repeats the hysterical man. “WHAT WILL YOU PUT IN PLACE OF THE TUMOR?”

Arbitrary ›

Pertaining to or resulting from arbitration

Author › In order to describe the world, he puts himself under voluntary house arrest

Bailout › In the words of Benito Mussolini, “Fascism should rightly be called Corporatism, as it is the merger of corporate and government power.” This neologism did not take off, however—probably because fascism is not the only political system based on such a merger.

Blood Diamond ›

Where did you *think* diamonds came from?

Bluff ›

Near the end of the Second World War, twice-decorated veteran Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was arrested for sending a letter mentioning “the moustached one,” which the censors took to designate Stalin himself. Young Aleksandr was sent to the Soviet prison labor camps along with millions of dissidents, supposed conspirators, prisoners of war, and hapless civilians.

After Solzhenitsyn and his fellow inmates had spent several strenuous months in forced labor, a guard distributed registration cards in a belated effort to sort out who all these prisoners were. One of the blanks on the form was marked “Trade or Profession.” Other inmates answered “tailor,” “barber,” or “cook” in hopes of obtaining a more advantageous position in the camps; but Solzhenitsyn, fed up altogether, scribbled in “nuclear physicist.”

This was during the Soviet race to discover the secret of the atomic bomb. Solzhenitsyn didn’t give the survey another thought, but a year and a half later a Black Maria arrived just for him. It took him to a *sharashka*, a special scientific research facility run by Ministry of State Security. He had never studied nuclear physics.

We can imagine Solzhenitsyn on the laboratory bench the following morning, beginning his first day of work under the watchful eyes of elite guards. Concealing his dismay, he whispers to the inmate beside him, “Are you a nuclear physicist?”

“Shh—*no*,” hisses back his new colleague. “But don’t worry—these morons have no idea what’s going on.”

Captive Audience ›

Once upon a time, this distinction was useful, as *some* audiences might properly disengage themselves if they so chose; but in the age of Facebook and Twitter, the qualifier has become practically redundant

Cardiologist ›

He knows how to maintain it, but not what it’s for

Civilization ›

The tendency of pedestrians to stop walking when they step onto an escalator

Common Sense ›

What is common becomes sense, but what is sensible does not necessarily become common

Conspiracy Theory ›

Like free enterprise, conspiracy can be good, theory can be good, but conspiracy theory is not so good

Critique ›

At first, one only recognizes particular instances to be worthy of critique; critique appears synonymous with rejection, implying deficiency in that which is critiqued. Over time, one discovers that *everything* warrants critique. This can produce cynicism: nothing is above reproach, nothing is pure, therefore nothing is worthwhile. But followed through to its logical conclusion, this insight inspires a profound optimism: if everything can be critiqued, then no matter how bleak things are, there is always a way to improve them.

Those who comprehend this can pass beyond the binary of approval and disapproval, striving to identify the conflicting currents within any subject of inquiry so as to take sides *inside* positions as well as *between* them.

Cultural ›

Of or pertaining to cults, large or small

Debate ›

An opportunity for mutual gain often mistaken for a competition, to the misfortune of all; as in economics, those who set out to win doom all to losing. Nothing is more precious to someone who wishes to sharpen her analysis and expand her perspectives than an intelligent person who disagrees with her.

A rhetorician can dominate an argument; a bore can win the field by attrition, if not persuasion; an ideologue can stop up his ears and perhaps also the brains of everyone in earshot. But if you wish to converse rather than compete, you have to shoulder the burden of trying to help your interlocutor make her argument, as well.

Delusion ›

A condition induced by reading Deleuze, as sadism is associated with the Marquis de Sade and masochism with Leopold von Sacher-Masoch

Desire ›

In evolutionary terms, human beings do not have desires in order that we might fulfill them and be happy, but as a force to propel us over obstacles. This is evident in the way desire increases in proportion to the difficulty of its object—a misfortune for most, but a tremendous boon to romantic poets.

Disappear ›

Not so long ago or far away, outspoken critics of the ruling order simply vanished. This was eventually deemed heavy-handed; today, more care is taken to make sure such critics do not appear in the first place.

Of course, when radicals don’t even attempt to make their case to the general public, secret arrests and executions are unnecessary: for all practical purposes, they are already *disappeared*.

Discovery ›

The process by which all that was previously known is forcibly erased (see *Colonization*)

Divorce ›

You never truly know someone until the two of you have been through a messy breakup (see *figure ii.*)

Downtown ›

“No one goes there anymore—it’s too crowded”

Eco-terrorism ›

A word coined by the Center for Defense of Free Enterprise. Just as those whose lands were stolen via violent conquest and violated treaties are “Indian givers,” those who would prevent the destruction of those lands are “eco-terrorists.”

Endurance ›

The anvil seems to be getting the worst of it, but the hammer breaks first

Escalate ›

An escalator is a machine that carries a person closer to Kingdom Come; practiced thoughtlessly, escalation can add up to the same thing

Fair ›

Short for fair-to-middling—that is to say, mediocre (see *Fair Trade, Fair Use*)

Ghetto ›

One can highlight the essential difference between fascism and capitalist democracy by contrasting the ways ghettos are established under the two systems. Under fascism, people

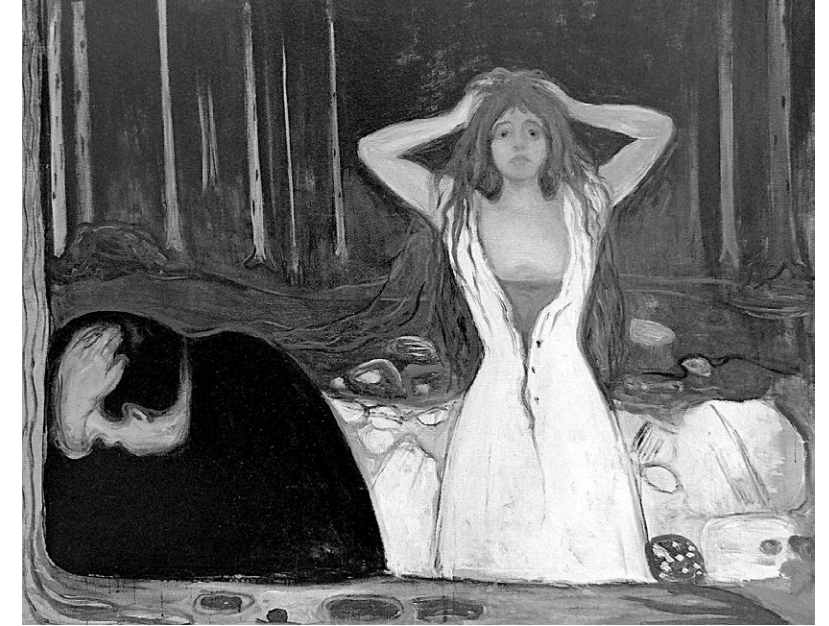


figure ii.
“Not how one soul comes close to another but how it moves away shows me their kinship and how much they belong together”
—Friedrich Nietzsche

are forced into ghettos by the state; under capitalism, people populate ghettos of their own free will, by choosing to be part of economically unsuccessful demographics.

Gift Shop ›

Yet another contradiction in terms—can even gift-giving be conscripted to capitalist ends?

Graveyard Shift ›

Capitalism puts some workers six feet under without even killing them

Guardian ›

That is to say, warden

Heartbeat ›

A disorder afflicting an otherwise healthy corpse

Highway Robbery ›

Once upon a time, independent businessmen would halt vehicles on country roads and demand a fee from the occupants; nowadays this industry has been nationalized (see *figure iii.*)

figure iii.





figure iv.

Homeland Security ›
They slaughter the original inhabitants, poison the soil and water, impose general amnesia, then call this *their* homeland!

Humanity ›
The most depreciated commodity

Hypochondria ›
“Oh my god—I’m afraid I’m coming down with—HYPOCHONDRIA!!”

Ideologue ›
Ideas get the proponents they deserve (see *Ideology*)

Immure ›
Surround with walls; imprison. Once upon a time, only convicts were said to be immured; today one rarely hears this word, perhaps because there are walls enough for all of us.

Inquisition ›
So long as power is concentrated in the hands of a few, inquiry is never impartial and disinterested, nor without consequences (see *figure iv.*)

Italics ›
A sure sign of an author whose writing is *slanted to the right*

Market Forces ›
Indeed it does

Marriage ›
Tying the Gordian knot (see *Divorce*)

Masterfully ›
The way a master would—which is to say, skillfully, of course (see *Poorly*)

Memory ›
Those who unearth long-lost memories while traveling discover that memory is not so much a static quantity as a dynamic relationship to the past triggered, and framed, by the present. One can only reconnect with the heritage of struggle in the process of struggle—as they knew in Aeneas’s day, ghosts require a blood sacrifice to take on flesh enough to speak.

Mercenary ›
That is to say, employee

Molotov Cocktail ›
A message in a bottle

Neutral ›
For all intents and purposes, dead (see *Neutralized*)

Peace Dividend ›
Among capitalists, even peace has to pay its own way

Print Media ›
A verb followed by an object, denoting the archaic practice of printing out text files rather than simply reading them on one’s computer screen

Pro-Life ›
Only the unborn have the right to live

Raison d’Etat ›
As the dictionary explains, “a purely political reason for action on the part of a ruler or government, especially where a departure from openness, justice, or honesty is involved.” It’s easy to see what sort of reason the state employs—but what is the state’s *raison d’être*?

Real Estate ›
As the crisis of 2008 showed, real estate isn’t any more “real” than any other investment; like all capitalist values, the value of property is socially constructed and can vanish in a crisis of faith at any time

Servility ›
A means of gaining the element of surprise

Sustainable Technology ›
One can also sustain injuries—at least up to a point

Target Market ›
A redundancy

Tautology ›
A statement of which one might say, in the vernacular, “It is what it is”

Thing ›
A monotonous event

Top-Down ›
Denoting a system in which actions are initiated at the top of a hierarchy. One might think the opposite to be “bottom-up,” but this still assumes an “up”; many grass-roots initiatives make this error, attempting to exert leverage through political channels rather than developing the power to achieve their goals autonomously. Better simply to topple pyramids than to attempt to defy gravity.

Twit ›
A silly or foolish person (see *Twitter*)

Venture Capital ›
In this society, capital appears to be the subject of history, acting upon human beings as if we were objects: it determines where we go and what we do, it even gets to have adventures, all at our expense

White Guilt ›
That much is obvious. The question is what you *do*.

White Lie ›
A harmless or trivial lie (see *Genocide*)

Writer’s Block ›
[Continued from issue 7] A peasant family finds a goose that lays golden eggs; everything goes swimmingly until, hoping to obtain all the gold at once, they slice open their benefactor and find—nothing. When an author treats herself as a sweatshop from which to extract the maximum yield, her creative faculties are bound to go on strike like any exploited workforce.

Words of the Issue: Extremism and Legitimacy

Extremism ›
A few years into the 21st century, Dutch corporate media ran a series of stories accusing the squatting movement of escalating violence and criminality. This was bewildering: twenty-five years earlier squatters had regularly engaged in pitched battles with police, but by the time of the news coverage the movement was comparatively tame and weak. In 2010, following up on the public relations work carried out by corporate journalists, the Dutch parliament made squatting illegal.

When the squatting movement was at its peak and thousands of people routinely participated in violent confrontations with the authorities, it was impossible to brand it “extremist” because so many people were involved that it was understood as a part of Dutch society. Ironically, it was the decline of “extremist” tactics and organizing that enabled the press to brand squatters extremists, paving the way for their formal criminalization. Faced with this smear campaign, the



only hope for the squatting movement would have been a resurgence of widespread participation in confrontational activity. This should serve as a warning to all who react to corporate slander by distancing themselves from militant organizing.

Legitimacy ›
As soon as the administration learns that one of the buildings has been occupied, the announcement goes out that the occupation is being carried out by *non-students*. At first, this seems like a clever move: in a campus-based struggle, non-student participants are likely to be seen as illegitimate.

In fact, the administration is making a dangerous gamble. By the end of the day, the crowd outside the occupied building has grown to over a thousand people. Does this mean that they didn’t hear the announcement, or that they don’t believe the administration—or that *they don’t care* if the occupiers are

non-students? If this sets a precedent legitimizing non-student occupations of campus buildings, it’ll be a whole new ball game.

Overture: The More Things Change . . .

Once, the basic building block of patriarchy was the nuclear family, and calling for its abolition was a radical demand. Now families are increasingly fragmented—yet has this fundamentally expanded women’s power or children’s autonomy?

Once, the mainstream media consisted of only a few television and radio channels. These have not only multiplied into infinity but are being supplanted by forms of media such as Facebook, Youtube, and Twitter. But has this done away with passive consumption? And how much more control over these formats do users really have, structurally speaking?

Once, movies represented the epitome of a society based on spectatorship; today, video games let us star in our own shoot-’em-up epics, and the video game industry does as much business as Hollywood. In an audience watching a movie, everyone is alone; the most you can do is boo if the storyline outrages you. In the new video games, on the other hand, you can interact with virtual versions of other players in real time. But is this greater *freedom*? Is it more *togetherness*?

Once, one could speak of a social and cultural mainstream, and subculture itself seemed subversive. Now “diversity” is at a premium for our rulers, and subculture is an essential motor of consumer society: the more identities, the more markets.

Once, people grew up in the same community as their parents and grandparents, and travel could be considered a destabilizing force interrupting static social and cultural configurations. Today, life is characterized by constant movement as people struggle to keep up with the demands of the market; in place of repressive configurations, we have permanent transience, universal atomization.

Once, laborers stayed at one workplace for years or decades, developing the social ties and common reference points that made old-fashioned unions possible. Today, employment is increasingly temporary and precarious, as more and more workers shift from factories and unions to service industry and compulsory flexibility.

Once, wage labor was a distinct sphere of life, and it was easy to recognize and rebel against the ways our productive potential was exploited. Now every aspect of existence is becoming “work” in the sense of activity that produces value in the capitalist economy: glancing at one’s email account, one increases the capital of those who sell advertisements. In place of distinct specialized roles in the capitalist economy, we increasingly see flexible, collective production of capital, much of which goes unpaid.

Once, the world was full of dictatorships in which power was plainly wielded from above and could be contested as such. Now these are giving way to democracies that appear to include more people in the political process, thus legitimizing the repressive powers of the state.

Once, the essential unit of state power was the nation, and nations competed among themselves to assert their individual interests. In the era of capitalist globalization, the interests of state power transcend national boundaries, and the dominant mode of conflict is not war but *policing*. This is occasionally employed against rogue nations, but continuously implemented against *people*.

Once, one could draw lines, however arbitrary, between the so-called First World and Third World. Today the First World and the Third World coexist in every metropolis, and white supremacy is administered in the United States by an African-American president.



Fighting *in the*

New Terrain

What's Changed since the 20th Century



IT SEEMS THAT EVEN WHEN YOU GET WHAT YOU WANT, YOU'RE NOT HAPPY.

THE POINT IS NOT TO CONDEMN THE FLOW OF HISTORY OR CARP THAT OUR INNOVATIONS HAVE BEEN STOLEN FROM US, BUT TO STUDY HOW SOME OF OUR OWN FORMS OF RESISTANCE HAVE BECOME PART OF THE WORLD WE ARE TRYING TO CHANGE.



At the turn of the century, we could only imagine anarchism as a desertion from an all-powerful social order.

A decade ago, as starry-eyed young maniacs, we published *Days of War, Nights of Love*, unexpectedly one of the best-selling anarchist books of the following decade.* Although controversial at the time, in retrospect it was fairly representative of what many anarchists were calling for: immediacy, decentralization, do-it-yourself resistance to capitalism. We added some more provocative elements: anonymity, plagiarism, crime, hedonism, the refusal of work, the delegitimization of history in favor of myth, the idea that revolutionary struggle could be a romantic adventure.

Our approach was shaped by a specific historical context. The Soviet bloc had recently collapsed and the impending political, economic, and ecological crises had yet to come into view; capitalist triumphalism was at its peak. We focused on undermining middle class values because they seemed to define everyone's aspirations; we presented anarchist struggle as an individual project because it was difficult to imagine anything else. As the anti-globalization movement gathered momentum in the US and gave way to the anti-war movement, we came to conceptualize struggle more collectively, though still as originating from a personal decision to oppose a firmly rooted status quo.

Today, much of what we proclaimed has become passé. As capitalism has shifted into a state of perpetual crisis and technological innovations have penetrated deeper into every aspect

of life, instability, decentralization, and anonymity have come to characterize our society without bringing the world of our dreams any closer.

Radicals often think they are out in a wasteland, disconnected from society, when in fact they are its cutting edge—though not necessarily moving towards the goals they espouse. As we argued in an earlier issue of this journal, resistance is the motor of history: it drives social, political, and technological developments, forcing the prevailing order to innovate constantly in order to outflank or absorb opposition. Thus we can contribute to tremendous transformations without ever achieving our object.

This is not to credit radicals with the agency to determine world events, so much as to assert that we often find ourselves unconsciously on their cusp. Measured against the infinities of history, all agency is infinitesimal—but the very notion of political theory presumes that it is still possible to utilize this agency meaningfully.

When we strategize for individual campaigns, we have to take care not to make demands that can be defused by partial reforms, lest our oppressors neutralize us by simply granting them. Some examples of easily co-opted radical programs are so obvious that it is practically vulgar to point them out: bicycle fetishism, “sustainable” technology, “buying local” and other forms of ethical consumerism, volunteer work that mitigates the suffering caused by global capitalism without challenging its roots.

But this phenomenon can also occur on a structural level. We should look at the ways we have called for broad social change that could take place without shaking the foundations of capitalism and hierarchy—so that next time our efforts can *take us all the way*.

* At the time, we had no idea the book would reach anyone at all. A fierce argument took place shortly before it went to print over whether to print 1000 or 1500 copies, which concluded with one CrimethInc. agent declaring that he would pay for the extra 500 copies himself and give them away. Instead, we went through fifteen printings over the next ten years; as of this writing, well over 60,000 print copies are in circulation, not counting the various translations.

Today it must become a line of flight out of a collapsing world.

Not Working— Did It Work?

The defining provocation of our early years was to take literally the Situationists' dictum *NEVER WORK*. A few of us decided to test out on our own skin whether this was actually possible. This bit of bravado showed all the genius of untutored youth, and all the perils. Though countless others had trodden this road before, for us it was as if we were the first primates to be shot into space. In any case, we were *doing* something, taking the dream of revolution seriously as a project one might initiate in one's own life *immediately*, with—as we used to say—an aristocratic disdain for consequences.

It's tempting to brush this off as mere performance art. Yet we have to understand it as an early attempt to answer the question that still faces would-be revolutionaries in the US and Western Europe: *What could interrupt our obedience?* Contemporary insurrectionists have attempted to ask this same question, though their answers have been equally limited. Neither voluntary unemployment nor gratuitous vandalism alone seem to be capable of jerking society into a revolutionary situation†. Despite everything, we stand by our initial hunch that it will take a *new way of living* to bring about such a situation; it's not just a matter of putting in enough hours at the same old tasks. The essential fabric of our society—the curtain that stands between us and another world—is above all the *good behavior* of exploited and excluded alike.

Within a decade, history rendered our experiment obsolete, perversely granting our demand for an unemployable class. US unemployment rates, alleged to be at 4% in the year 2000, have been well over twice that for three years now—only counting people known to be actively looking for work. More importantly, employment is increasingly temporary and precarious. The excess of consumer society once offered dropouts a certain margin of error; the economic crisis eroded this and gave a decidedly involuntary flavor to joblessness.

It turns out capitalism has no more use for us than we have for it. This doesn't just go for anarchist dropouts, but for millions of workers in the US. Despite the economic crisis, major corporations are reporting enormous earnings—but instead of using this income to hire more employees, they're investing in

† To be fair, the insurrectionist mantra of *attack* is more up to date than our boycott of wage labor. The latter presumed that the economy requires our participation; the former accepts that it does not, and focuses on interrupting it by other means.

foreign markets, purchasing new technology to reduce their need for employees, and paying out dividends to stockholders. As ready as the government is to bail them out, what's good for General Motors is not good for the country; the most profitable companies in the US right now are shifting both production and consumption to “developing markets” overseas.

In this context, dropout culture looks a bit like a voluntary austerity program; it's convenient for the wealthy if we reject consumer materialism, since there's not enough to go around anyway. In the late 20th century, when the majority of people identified with their jobs, refusing to pursue employment as self-realization expressed a rejection of capitalist values. Now erratic employment and identifi-



YESTERDAY'S DROPOUTS



TOMORROW'S DROPOUTS

cation with one's leisure activities rather than one's career path have been normalized as an economic position rather than a political one.

Capitalism is also incorporating our assertion that people should act according to their consciences instead of for a wage. In an economy full of opportunities to sell one's labor, it makes sense to emphasize the importance of other motivations for activity; in a precarious economy, being willing to work for free has different implications. The state increasingly relies on the same do-it-yourself ethic that once animated the punk underground to offset the deleterious effects of capitalism. It is cheaper to let environmentalists volunteer to clean up the BP oil spill than to pay employees to do this, for example. The same goes for Food Not Bombs if it functions as a charity program rather than a component of a revolutionary program.

Today the challenge is not to persuade people to refuse to sell their labor, but to demonstrate how a redundant class can survive and resist. Unemployment we have in abundance—we need to interrupt the processes that produce *poverty*.

New Technologies, Outmoded Strategies

In the second half of the 20th century, North American radicals based themselves in subcultural enclaves from which to launch assaults on mainstream society. The call for confrontational unemployment presumed a context of existing countercultural spaces in which people could invest themselves in *something else*.

The cultural landscape is different today; subculture itself functions differently. Thanks to new communications technology, it develops and spreads much faster, and is replaced just as quickly. Punk rock, for example, is no longer a secret society

into which high school students are initiated by classmates' mix tapes. It is still generated by the participants, but now as a consumer market mediated via impersonal venues such as message boards and downloading. It's no surprise if people are less personally invested in it: as easily as they discovered it, they can move on to something else. In a world composed of *information*, subculture no longer appears to be *outside* society, indicating a possible line of escape, but rather one of many zones within it, a mere matter of taste.

Meanwhile, the internet has transformed anonymity from the province of criminals and anarchists into a feature of everyday communication. Yet unexpectedly, it also fixes political identities and positions in place according to a new logic. The landscape of political discourse is mapped in advance by URLs;

The micro-economy of World of Warcraft resembles the derivatives market in that it is not tied to the "real" world and yet exerts disproportionate effects upon it. But we could also look at the video game industry as the next step in the evolution of drug cartels. Externally structured yet thoroughly participatory, video games can absorb players in an alternate reality in ways television and movies cannot, to a degree of complexity and control drugs cannot. While prisoners slave to produce profit from this virtual sphere, "free" users are indoctrinated to equate recreation with competition for abstract metrics of wealth and power. Accounting and trading now characterize leisure time as well as business. Even after the crash of the derivatives market in 2008, the old promise of capitalism reappears: if you can't own your own house after all, at least *your avatar* can!

New technologies are enabling this colonization to penetrate deeper physically as well as mentally. As of 2011, the new holder of the Guinness World Record for "fastest selling consumer electronics device" is Kinect, a video- and voice-activated interface that supersedes the keyboard in integrating us into the virtual. This offers corporations the potential to shape the conscious and unconscious movements of our whole bodies. When dance is not the free, open-ended exploration of space but a matter of matching a template imposed on the level of centimeters, there is nothing to distinguish it from the labor that takes place in factories and sweatshops. The only difference is that it does not produce an hourly wage, but a purely virtual reward—albeit equally standardized.

Today more than ever, the only way to realize the kind of play we celebrated in *Harbinger* a decade ago is to attack the forces that structure our lives. May the next generation lead the charge—it always falls to children to teach their parents how to play make-believe again.

—CrimethInc. Ex-Players' Collective

PLAYING THE GAME

"Play is not constrained by external demands—the player establishes her own goals and meanings in the course of acting. Play takes place in a condition of freedom—rather, it is the condition of freedom. In play, the individual interacts with the forces around her rather than reacting to them, creates the context for her actions as she acts rather than passively being shaped by the situation: it is thus that self-determination is possible."

—Harbinger #4, 2001

Prisoners at the Jixi labor camp in China, many locked up for "crimes against the state," are forced to work backbreaking twelve-hour shifts in coal mines.* This sort of slave labor has long been integral to capitalism. But an additional occupation is forced on them: by night, they have to "mine" currency in online games like World of Warcraft, facing corporeal punishment if they don't meet quotas. Their captors sell the virtual gold for real dollars and euros, cutting the prisoners no part of the pie. One ex-prisoner estimated that the traffic in game credits was more profitable than any of the manual labor in the camp. American and European gamers buy so many credits that it has become a \$2 billion industry regulated by the Chinese state.

What takes place in the Jixi camp is work, not play, but it tells us a lot about what work and play have become. The imperative of all work is to achieve more and more efficiency—but to what purpose? It is certainly not simply for the sake of producing material goods; it might not even be for amassing wealth so much as dominating human beings in their entirety, subsuming them into a power structure by force or seduction. Today this logic has colonized play no less than work.

* As reported by *The Guardian* in May 2011.



it's difficult to produce a mythology of collective power and transformation when every statement is already located in a known constellation. A poster on a wall could have been put up by anyone; it seems to indicate a general sentiment, even if it only represents one person's ideas. A statement on a website, on the other hand, appears in a world permanently segregated into ideological ghettos. The myth of CrimethInc. as a decentralized underground anyone could participate in inspired a great deal of activity until the topography of the internet slowly concentrated attention on a single webpage.

Thus the internet has simultaneously fulfilled and rendered obsolete the potential we saw in subculture and anonymity.* One could say the same of our advocacy of plagiarism; a decade ago we thought we were taking an extreme position against authorship and intellectual property when in fact we were barely ahead of the curve. The weeks we spent combing libraries for images to reuse foreshadowed a world in which practically everyone does the same thing with Google Image Search for their blogs. Conventional notions of authorship are being superseded by new forms of production such as crowdsourcing, in which tasks are outsourced to the general public. This points to a possible future in which free volunteer labor will be a major part of the economy—as a *part* of capitalism rather than an opposition to it.

Here we arrive at one of the most pernicious ways our wishes have been granted in form rather than content. Free distribution, once thought to demonstrate a radical alternative to capitalist models, is now taken for granted in a society in which the means of material production are still held hostage by capitalists†. Electronic formats lend themselves to free distribution of information; this forces those who produce material formats such as newspapers to give them away, too, or go out of business—to be

* This is not to say there is no more potential in anonymity or subculture. The internet offers new frontiers for offensive experiments in both. The online attacks carried out by the group Anonymous suggest an increasingly radical agenda; Lulzsec and similar groups have taken this further, explicitly espousing anarchism. But these attacks are dangerous precisely in that they challenge the ideological mapping of the internet by interrupting its compartmentalized topography. This shows how the front lines of information warfare have shifted from the streets, where almost anyone could take part, to a territory that is only accessible to those with considerable proficiency and resources.

† In the mid-1990s, the most radical do-it-yourself bands fantasized about being able to give away their records as a political statement; now every band practically *has* to give away music just to get started. While it appears at first glance that music is being decommodified, in fact musicians are being compelled to provide free labor that reinforces consumer dependence on new commodities such as computers and iPhones. Benefit records used to be able to raise significant quantities of money for political prisoners and other causes outside the logic of the exchange economy; today this is much more difficult. Thus free distribution can serve to concentrate capital in the hands of capitalists, undercutting the resistance strategies of the previous generation.



happy to work for free. Meanwhile, food, housing, and other necessities—not to mention the hardware required to access electronic formats—are as expensive as ever. This situation offers a certain amount of access to the dispossessed while benefiting those who already control vast resources; it is perfect for an era of high unemployment in which it will be necessary to placate the jobless *and make use of them*. It implies a future in which a wealthy elite will use free labor from a vast body of precarious and unemployed workers to maintain its power and their dependence.

This is all the more gruesome in that this free labor will be absolutely voluntary, and will appear to benefit the general public rather than the elite.

Perhaps the central contradiction of our age is that the new technologies and social forms horizontalize production and distribution of information, yet render us more dependent on corporate products.

Decentralizing Hierarchy: Participation as Subjugation

At the close of the 1990s, anarchists championed participation, decentralization, and individual agency. Building on our experiences in the do-it-yourself underground, we helped popularize the viral model, in which a format developed in one context could be reproduced worldwide. Exemplified by programs like Food Not Bombs and tactics such as the Black Bloc, this helped spread a particular anti-authoritarian culture from New York to New Zealand.

At the time, we were responding both to the limitations of the previous century's political and technological models and to emerging opportunities to transcend them. This put us

So while pundits professed surprise at the role Twitter, Facebook, and other social networking media played in the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere around the Middle East, we should not be surprised—that is exactly what they were originally designed for. The question is why they haven't been part of comparable upheavals in the US.

It seems that consumer culture has caught up to us, integrating our escape attempt into the maintenance of the spectacle we rejected and offering everyone else the opportunity to “escape” as well. Bored by unidirectional network television programming, the modern consumer can do her own programming, albeit still at a physical and emotional distance from her fellow viewers. Our longings for more agency and participation have been granted, but inside a framework still fundamentally determined by capitalism. The demand that everyone become a subject rather than an object has been realized: now we are the subjects administering our own alienation, fulfilling the Situationist dictum that the spectacle is not just the world of appearances but rather the social system in which human beings only interact as their prescribed roles.*

Even fascists are trying to get in on decentralization and autonomy. In Europe, “Autonomous Nationalists” have appropriated radical aesthetics and formats, utilizing anticapitalist rhetoric and black bloc tactics. This is not simply a matter of our enemies attempting to disguise themselves as us, though it certainly muddies the waters: it also indicates an ideological split in fascist circles as the younger generation attempts to update its organizational models for the 21st century. Fascists in the US and elsewhere are engaged in the same project under the paradoxical banner of “National Anarchism”; if they succeed in persuading the general public that anarchism is a form of fascism, our prospects will be bleak indeed.

What does it mean if fascists, the foremost proponents of hierarchy, can employ the decentralized structures we pioneered? The communist dictatorships of the 20th century taught us the consequences of using hierarchical means to pursue supposedly non-hierarchical ends. The 21st century may show us how supposedly non-hierarchical means can produce hierarchical ends.

Extrapolating from these developments and others, we might hypothesize that we are

* “The spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images.” —Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*

moving towards a situation in which the foundation of hierarchical society will not be permanent centralization of power, but the standardization of certain disempowering forms of socializing, decision-making, and values. These appear to spread spontaneously, though in fact they only appear desirable because of what is absent in the social context imposed on us.

But—decentralized hierarchies? This sounds like a Zen koan. Hierarchy is the concentration of power in the hands of a few. How can it be decentralized?

To make sense of this, let's go back to Foucault's conception of the panopticon. Jeremy Bentham designed the panopticon as a model to make prisons and workplaces more efficient; it is a circular building in which all the rooms open inward on a courtyard, so as to be viewed from a central observation tower. The inmates cannot see what goes on in the tower, but they know they may be under observation from it at any given moment, so they eventually internalize this surveillance and control. In a word, power sees without looking, while the observed look without seeing.

In the panopticon, power is already based in the periphery rather than the center, in that control is chiefly maintained by the inmates themselves.† Workers compete to be capitalists rather than establishing common cause as a class; fascists enforce oppressive relationships autonomously, without state oversight. Domination is not imposed from above but is a function of participation itself.

Simply to participate in society, we must accept the mediation of structures determined by forces outside our control. For example, our friendships increasingly pass through Facebook, cellular phones, and other technologies that map our activities and relationships for corporations as well as government intelligence; these formats also shape the content of the friendships themselves. The same goes for our economic activities: in place of simple poverty we have loans and credit ratings—we are not a class without property, but a class driven by debt. And once again, all this appears voluntary, or even as “progress.”

What does it look like to resist in this context? Everything seemed so much easier in 1917 when proletarians worldwide dreamed of storming the Winter Palace. Two generations later, the equivalent seemed to be taking over the headquarters of network television; this fantasy reappeared in Hollywood action movie *V for Vendetta* as recently as 2005. Now, it's increasingly obvious that global capitalism has no center, no heart through which to drive a stake. There are crucial nodes and infrastructures, but like Bentham's panopticon, domination is founded above all upon the docility of those at the periphery.

In fact, this development is a boon to anarchists, in that it closes the way to top-down forms of struggle. There are no shortcuts now, and no justifications for taking them—there will be no more “provisional” dictatorships. The authoritarian revolutions of the 20th century are behind us for good; if revolt is to break out, anarchist practices will have to spread.

† The inmate of the panopticon “assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.” —Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

Some have argued that in the absence of a center, when the aforementioned virus is much more dangerous than the frontal assault, the task is not so much to pick the correct target as to popularize a new way of fighting. If this has not yet occurred, maybe it is simply because anarchists have yet to develop an approach that strikes others as practical. When we demonstrate concrete solutions to the problems posed by the capitalist disaster, perhaps these will catch on.

But this is tricky. Such solutions have to resonate beyond any particular subculture in an era in which every innovation instantly generates and is contained by subculture. They must somehow refuse and interrupt the forms of participation essential to the maintenance of order, both the ones predicated on integration and the ones predicated on marginality. They have to provide for people's immediate needs while giving rise to insurgent desires leading elsewhere. And if we advance solutions that turn out not to address the root causes of our problems—as we did a decade ago—we will only inoculate the ruling order against this generation's resistance.

When it comes to contagious solutions, perhaps the Greek riots of 2008 during which all the banks were burned were less significant than the day-to-day practices in Greece of occupying buildings, seizing and redistributing food, and gathering publicly outside the logic of commerce. Or perhaps the riots were equally significant: not just as a material attack on the enemy but as a festival affirming a radically different way of being.

Destabilization of Society: Double or Nothing

In the 1990s, capitalism appeared eminently stable, if not unassailable. Anarchists fantasized about riots, catastrophes, and industrial collapse precisely because these seemed impossible—and because, in their absence, it appeared that they could only be a good thing.

All that changed starting in September 2001. A decade later, crises and catastrophes are all too familiar. The notion that the world is coming to an end is practically banal; who hasn't read a report about global warming and shrugged? The capitalist empire is obviously overextended and few still believe it is going to last forever. For now, however, it seems to be able to utilize these catastrophes to consolidate control, passing on the costs to the oppressed.‡

As globalization intensifies the distance between classes, some of the disparities between nations seem to be leveling out. Social support structures in Europe and the US are being dismantled just as economic growth shifts to China and India; National Guardsmen who served in Iraq are being deployed

‡ From 1945 to 1989 capitalism thrived by exploiting another ongoing catastrophe, the Cold War, in which a series of conflicts and crises threatened to end in nuclear Armageddon. Instability and the specter of the end of the world can be very useful to our rulers. We can imagine a future in which the repressive measures necessary to maintain industrial capitalism are justified on ecological grounds the same way that a generation ago the repressive measures necessary to maintain the democracy of the market were justified as protecting freedom.



“Autonomous Nationalists” are adopting anarchist aesthetics and organizing principles.

near the forefront of innovations that reshaped capitalist society. For example, TXTmob, the SMS text messaging program developed by the Institute for Applied Autonomy for protests at the Democratic and Republican National Conventions, served as a model for Twitter. Similarly, one can interpret the networks of the international do-it-yourself underground, formalized in guidebooks like *Book Your Own Fucking Life*, as forerunners of Myspace and Facebook. Meanwhile, the viral model is now best known for viral marketing.



Social peace is neither—fight back

in the US to maintain order during summit protests and natural disasters. This is consistent with the general trend away from static, spatialized hierarchies towards dynamic, decentralized means of maintaining inequalities. In this new context, 20th century notions about privilege and identity are increasingly simplistic.

Our enemies to the Right have already mobilized their reaction to the era of globalization and decentralization. We can see this from the Tea Party in the US to nationalist movements throughout Europe and religious fundamentalism worldwide. While Western Europe has agglomerated into the European Union, Eastern Europe has been Balkanized into dozens of nation-states teeming with fascists eager to capitalize on popular discontent. Religious fundamentalism is a comparatively recent phenomenon in the Middle East, having taken hold in the wake of failed secular “national liberation” movements as an exaggerated reaction to Western cultural imperialism. If we permit proponents of hierarchy to monopolize opposition to the prevailing order, anarchists will simply disappear from the stage of history.

Others are already disappearing from this stage. As the middle class erodes in Europe*, traditional Left parties are dying out with it, and far Right parties are taking all the ground they lose.

If the Left continues to recede into extinction, anarchism will be the only game left in town for radicals.† This will open

* Contrary to its mythology, the Left exists to defend the interests of the middle class, not the poor. The welfare programs of social democracy were established to appease the oppressed instead of granting them an equal say in society. Likewise, “sustainable” capitalism—tellingly, the latest cause to reinvigorate the Left—is more about sustaining capitalism than sustaining life on earth.

† If popular outrage continues to increase, we will probably see Leftist organizing revive, in part as a means of co-opting resistance. Shortly after we completed the original draft of this text, Left groups reappeared in the center of the occupation movements in Wisconsin, Spain, and Greece, channeling discontent into campaigns to change leadership.

a space in which we can make our case to all who have lost faith in political parties. But are we prepared to fight it out with global capitalism on our own, without allies? Escalating conflict is a gamble: as soon as we attract the attention of the state, we have to play double or nothing, attempting to mobilize enough popular support to outflank the inevitable counterattack. Every riot has to be followed by an even broader outreach campaign, not a retreat into the shadows—a tall order in the face of backlash and repression.

Perhaps it would be better if history were moving slowly enough that we had time to build up a massive popular movement. Unfortunately we may not have a choice in the matter. Ready or not, the instability we wished for is here; we will either change the world or perish with it.

So it is high time to dispense with strategies founded on the stasis of the status quo. At the same time, crisis keeps one locked in a perpetual present, reacting to constant stimuli rather than acting strategically. At our current capacity, we can do little to mitigate the effects of capitalist catastrophes. Our task is rather to set off *chain reactions of revolt*, creating opportunities for others to join us in struggle and keeping these spaces free of authoritarian dynamics. We should evaluate everything we undertake in this light.

In this context, it is more important than ever not to see *ourselves* as the protagonists of insurrection. The currently existing social body of anarchists in the US may be numerous enough to *catalyze* social upheavals, but not nearly numerous enough to carry them out. As a comrade from Void Network in Greece emphasizes, “We don’t make the insurrection. We do some organizing; *everyone* makes the insurrection.”

This will demand a lot from each of us. Ten thousand anarchists willing to go to the same lengths as Enric Duran‡, the patron saint of debt defaulters, could constitute a real force, seizing resources with which to establish alternative infrastructures and setting a public example of disobedience that could spread far and wide.§ *That* would bring “dropping out” up to date for the new era. It’s terrifying to imagine going to such lengths—but in a collapsing world, terror waits ahead whether we choose it or not.

Everyone who has participated in a black bloc knows it’s safest in the front. *Double or nothing.*

Conclusion: Forbidden Pleasures

But enough about strategy. There was one demand in *Days of War, Nights of Love* that could not be realized in any form under capitalism: the idea that unmediated life could be intense and joyous. We expressed this in our conception of resistance as a romantic adventure capable of fulfilling all the desires produced but never consummated by consumer society. Despite all the tribulation and heartbreak of the past decade, this challenge still lingers like hope at the bottom of Pandora’s box.

We still stand by this demand. We don’t resist simply out of duty or habit or thirst for vengeance, but because we want to *live fully*, to make the most of our limitless potential. We are anarchist revolutionaries because it seems there is no way to find out what that means without at least a little fighting. Likewise, we are not communists or Christians who put up with today’s degradations in hopes of future rewards; we believe that we unlock our potential in the course of revolt—*by means of it*—not afterwards when we reap its fruits.

As many hardships as it may entail, our struggle is a pursuit of joy—to be more precise, it is a way of generating new forms of joy. If we lose sight of this, no one else will join us, nor should they. *Enjoying ourselves* is not simply something we must do to be strategic, to win recruits; it is an infallible indication of whether or not we have anything to offer.¶

As austerity becomes the watchword of our rulers, the pleasures available on the market are increasingly ersatz. The turn to virtual reality is practically an admission that real life is not—cannot be—fulfilling. We should prove otherwise, discovering *forbidden pleasures* that point the way to another world.

‡ Between 2006 and 2008, Enric Duran took out 68 loans from a total of 39 banks with no guarantees or property as collateral—adding up to 492,000 Euros. On September 17, 2008, on the heels of the economic crisis, he announced that he had done so with no intention of repaying the loans, as a form of “financial civil disobedience,” and had funneled the money into anticapitalist organizing and propaganda efforts.

§ Now that God is dead, perhaps we can disbelieve *debt* out of existence—or even *money*, if enough of us treat it as a fiction.

¶ To put this another way, our subjection under capitalism is not so much a material condition as a psychological condition brought about by material means. Our forms of struggle should be prefigurative in that they should immediately contest this psychological condition as well as the means by which it is imposed.

Ironically, ten years ago this one sensible demand was the most controversial aspect of our program. Nothing makes people more defensive than the suggestion that they can and should enjoy themselves: this triggers all their shame at their failures to do so, all their resentment towards those they feel must be monopolizing pleasure, and a great deal of lingering Puritanism besides.

In *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, David Graeber speculates that

if one wishes to inspire ethnic hatred, the easiest way to do so is to concentrate on the bizarre, perverse ways in which the other group is assumed to pursue pleasure. If one wishes to emphasize commonality, the easiest way is to point out that they also feel pain.

This formula is tragically familiar to anyone who has witnessed radicals caricaturing each other. Declaring that you have experienced heavenly pleasure—especially in something that actually violates the regime of control, such as shoplifting or fighting police—is an invitation for others to heap scorn upon you. And perhaps this formula also explains why anarchists can come together when the state murders Brad Will or Alexis Grigoropoulos** but cannot set aside our differences to fight equally fiercely *for the living*.

Death mobilizes us, catalyzes us. The reminder of our own mortality liberates us, enabling us to act without fear—for nothing is more terrifying than the possibility that we *could* live out our dreams, that something is truly at stake in our lives. If only we knew that the world were ending, we would finally be able to risk everything—not just because we would have nothing to lose, but because *we would no longer have anything to win*.

But if we want to be anarchists, we are going to have to embrace the possibility that our dreams *can* come true—and fight accordingly. We are going to have to choose life over death for once, pleasure over pain. We are going to have to *begin*.



** As detailed in *Rolling Thunder* #4, anarchist and independent media reporter Brad Will was murdered by paramilitaries during the uprising in Oaxaca in 2006. The police murder of 15-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos set off the Greek insurrection of December 2008.



Nightmares of Capitalism, Pipe Dreams of Democracy

THE WORLD STRUGGLES TO WAKE, 2010-2011



The crisis continues. This isn't just a hiccup in the market, but a structural breakdown. A system driven by competition for ever-increasing profit can't run indefinitely; sooner or later everything that can be commodified has been drawn into the market, all the capital accumulates in a few hands, and the profits dry up.

Today the factories of every industry produce commodities more and more efficiently via automation that renders workers

increasingly redundant. The only way to profit on these commodities is to cut costs: to eliminate workers or pay them next to nothing. But without work or wages, people can't play their part as consumers. The only job openings are with the police, who wage a never-ending war on the population to control the poor and unemployed. This is why our world is overflowing with cheap shit, with human life cheapest of all.

As commodities get cheaper and consumers get poorer, how can capitalists continue making a profit? Credit was invented as a way for consumers to go on shopping even when they weren't paid living wages. When the sale of real goods can no longer produce profit, profits must be made on expected future returns—in other words, on speculation.

But like any house of cards, debt can't be built up forever—eventually someone calls it in. The house of cards collapsed under its own weight in 2008 when it became clear that the expected future returns could never materialize. Rather than



Anarchists were “occupying everything” long before Occupy Wall Street was a gleam in Adbusters founder Kalle Lasn’s eye.

reconsidering their faith in capitalism, the authorities are now gutting the last vestiges of the support structures established to pacify the old labor movement, feeding every last stick into the fire.

The financial crisis signals a deeper metaphysical crisis: this system, which perpetuated itself by creating unfulfillable emotional needs, cannot provide for the global population’s material needs either. The high rates of unemployment from Egypt to the US are not simply caused by the corruption of despots like Mubarak, nor the greed of specific capitalists; they are evidence that a system that never worked for us is on the verge of ceasing to work at all.

In response, some hope to resurrect social democracy. But wasn’t it social democracy that neutralized the resistance movements of the 20th century, while building up a state powerful

enough to impose the current inequalities? Democracy has always been the guardian of capitalism, giving the greatest possible number of people reason to invest themselves in hierarchies and coercive institutions, equating freedom with property rights. If capitalism is doomed, we need something altogether different—the truth is, we always did.

Capitalism won’t crumble overnight. Its rituals and values are so deeply ingrained in us that its demise could take generations, and it might give way to something even worse. If we want to have any influence over what comes next, we have to pose the right questions with the ways we fight and the narratives we propagate. Here we’ll trace the trajectory of popular struggles against austerity and capitalism around the world across 2010 and 2011, identifying their limitations so as to push further next time.

Pitfalls and Paradoxes: The Student Protests of March 4, 2010

The economic crisis that entered the public consciousness in 2008 prompted governments to inflict massive cutbacks on public education. The student movement that began in December 2008 with the occupation of the New School in New York City—itsself a private school—intensified with a series of protests and occupations throughout fall 2009, principally in California.* These culminated in nationwide demonstrations on March 4, 2010. The Bay Area was the epicenter of this day of action, with tens of thousands in the streets; but at this epicenter, the contradictions within the movement came into stark relief.

While anarchists had been at the forefront of the occupations, reformists took the lead in

* See *Rolling Thunder* #9.

organizing for March 4, planning a standard march and rally. They also attempted to seize control of the narrative. A week before the day of action, a dance party at UC Berkeley turned into a small-scale riot as students took the streets, mingling with non-students and defending themselves against police attacks. There were only two arrests, but afterwards liberals and leftists alleged that outside agitators were attempting to hijack the movement—a story some had been repeating for months, which has become all the more familiar since.

As in the anti-war movement seven years earlier, anarchists had largely limited themselves to escalating the *tactics* of the student movement. Most militant actions were organized informally, and there was neither an autonomous body for coordinating these nor a voice for them in the organizational structures of the larger movement. This opacity offered the element

The March 4 protests in the Bay Area (above, and opposite) marked the peak of the US student movement of 2009-2010—and capped it.

of surprise, but it ultimately enabled reformists to outflank radicals by dominating the public discourse and planning actions that were unfavorable for confrontation. Likewise, because anarchists weren't able to popularize a narrative identifying the student movement with the larger struggles of the disenfranchised, most people took it for granted that the point of the struggle was simply to get more funding for public education. Consequently, it was difficult to legitimize the participation of non-students except as passive "allies," let alone make a case for a struggle *against* government.

On March 4, a march of several thousands departed from Berkeley towards Oakland. Student organizing groups jockeyed with black-clad militants for the lead. The march joined younger students and teachers in downtown Oakland for a rally at which the usual speakers took turns at the podium. A breakaway march had been planned to depart from the rally, but one speaker took the stage to discourage anyone from participating, emphasizing that it would be illegal and dangerous. The word on the street was that radicals had established some sort of back-room deal with public organizers that the latter reneged on. Most people left after the rally, but a couple hundred eventually regrouped around a sound system and set out, managing to block the freeway before being mass-arrested. A fifteen-year-old student fell from the freeway when the police closed in, suffering serious head injuries and tragically confirming the speaker's warning.

Afterwards, there were declarations of victory and hysterical recriminations, but the student movement had passed its peak. Without the initiative of the militant participants driving the movement, the reformist wing drifted into hopeless attempts to influence politicians; momentum collapsed. The same pattern played out elsewhere in the country.

Anarchists have to find a starting place from which to act in a society in which few even understand our goals. This creates paradoxes such as joining a struggle for education in a country in which education has always been tied to the state. Participating in the student movement, anarchists risked legitimizing social structures, roles, and privileges they would otherwise set out to undermine. The student movement of 2009-2010 might have gone further if it had been reframed as a part of a larger struggle involving all who were losing or had already lost their positions in the economy—not to mention those who never had any in the first place. In any case, it set the stage for Occupy Oakland to do this in fall 2011.

Reaching Limits: May Day, 2010

On May Day, small but fierce anarchist demonstrations and attacks on property took place in many cities around the United States, notably including Santa Cruz, California and Asheville, North Carolina. Eleven people were arrested in Asheville, charged with conspiracy and other felonies and held on \$65,000 bail.

The arrests sent shockwaves of controversy throughout anarchist circles. One editorial entitled "What I would do with \$55,000" [sic] argued that it would be more strategic to leave the arrestees in prison and use the money to buy screen-printing equipment and pay the rent of social centers in Chicago. This is noxious indeed, but it showed how polarized the debate had become between partisans of infrastructure and confrontation, and how unfavorably insurrectionists had positioned themselves on the field of public discourse in advance of repression.

That question, raised in bad faith, still speaks to an important issue. What could anarchists do *offensively* with such an enormous sum of money? What would it mean to take the initiative, raising \$65,000 to advance a confrontational program intentionally rather than reactively? Divorced from a strategy that incorporates repression as a necessary phase, following a blind mantra of *attack* is like taking the first vulnerable piece you see in a chess game: it can set you up for crushing defeats. This leaves anarchists always on the back foot.

Four days later, well over 100,000 people gathered in Athens, Greece to protest government cutbacks and tax increases mandated by the European Union and International Monetary Fund. Wave after wave attempted to storm the parliament in Syntagma square; this was arguably the closest Greece had come to insurrection since the riots of December 2008. It came to an end when three people were killed in a fire irresponsibly started by rioters in a bank still staffed by employees.

Many believe that this tragedy prevented a potentially revolutionary situation from unfolding. It also inverted the narrative that had framed resistance in Greece since December 2008, associating murder with protesters rather than police. It takes ten thousand people ten years to legitimize militant struggle, and a single fool an hour to discredit it.

The mood was bleak afterwards on both sides of the Atlantic. While anarchists in the US bickered about the Asheville 11,



in Greece they debated about how anti-social tendencies had taken root and set the stage for the bank fire. Some still declared the worldwide actions at the beginning of May to be a success, but it's worth noting that few towns in the US hosted repeat events on May Day 2011.

When a strategy begins to produce diminishing or counterproductive returns, this is an opportunity to reevaluate and experiment. While the existing anarchist movement struggled to come to terms with the limits it had reached, new protagonists took the stage.

Anarchy in the UK: The Student Movement, November-December 2010

On November 10, 2010, the National Union of Students drew 52,000 people to London to protest an austerity bill that would raise the tuition cap from £3290 to £9000. As the main demonstration moved by Millbank Tower, a splinter group of hundreds, headed by no more than 30 black bloc anarchists, broke into the Tory Headquarters there. As they smashed windows, painted graffiti, and clashed with police, thousands of supporters gathered in the square outside, building a fire from their signs

and placards. It took the police hours to regain control. Helicopter footage showed the occupiers lining the railing on the roof of Millbank, papers blowing out over the crowd far below while smoke rose from the fire.

While individual anarchists were among the first into the building, none of the organized anarchist groups in the UK turned out in great numbers. The photos of suspects circulated by the police and media didn't show the faces of longtime militants but those of the nation's youth. The participants referenced the unrest sweeping the globe—"France, Greece, now here too"—but this marked the entry of a new generation into confrontation with the state.

The UK had been comparatively quiet for years. Previous protest campaigns had largely been organized by full-time activists; consequently, an activist subculture had emerged. This subculture helped to foster radical activity and infrastructure, but it was disconnected from the experiences and concerns of most of those suffering from capitalism.

The attack on Millbank ignited a wave of protests, walkouts, and other actions involving more than 100,000 people over the next two months.* Occupations occurred at schools throughout the country, serving as nerve centers

* This vindicates the call for anarchists to set off "chain reactions of revolt" that had appeared a few months earlier in the original draft of "Fighting in the New Terrain."

The attack on the Millbank Tower in London, November 10, 2010.



[Opposite] Street fighting in Greece drew in broader and broader swaths of the population, without being able to break the political deadlock.



to broaden and coordinate the movement. Several thousand young people converged in London again November 24 and 30; the police responded by surrounding and “kettling” demonstrators for hours. The movement peaked on December 9, with thousands participating in clashes in London while the British parliament passed the austerity package. Police kettled and viciously attacked protesters, sending one boy to the hospital in need of brain surgery; protesters defended themselves, smashed the windows of the Treasury and other buildings, and attacked a car bearing Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall.

In contrast to the US student movement, the disenfranchised took a primary role in these protests, often to the chagrin of “proper” student organizers. In one video clip from December 9, masked hooligans asserted, “We’re from the slums of London—how do they expect us to pay £9000 for uni fees?” Politicians and corporate media endeavored to drive a wedge between the different demographics that comprised the movement, but this diversity was its primary strength.

Activity tapered off after the bill passed. As in Greece in December 2008, the end of the year served as the closing of parentheses around a period of increased momentum.

The movement in the UK came on the heels of strikes and labor unrest throughout Spain and France; it coincided with a comparable student movement in Italy, culminating similarly on December 14 with fires and rioting outside the Italian Parliament during a controversial vote. Things were heating up.

New Fronts in Information Warfare: Wikileaks, Anonymous, Lulzsec

While austerity protests drew in wider and wider swaths of the population, the same thing was taking place online. After Wikileaks released classified documents from the Afghanistan and Iraq occupations and US diplomatic cables, several corporations broke off relations with the group, cutting off its access to funds. In response, Anonymous—an internet meme serving as an umbrella for collective action—orchestrated distributed denial of service attacks on many of these companies, shutting down their websites and attracting international attention.

CNN:
What’s the end goal for you?
What do you want to see happen as a result of Operation Payback?

Anon:
Personally? A utopian society.
This is just a new way to fight . . .

In the 20th century, the first wave of hackers had been motivated by curiosity and mischief; their successors pursued personal gain, working for criminal enterprises or security organizations—often in that order. Now, finally, it seemed that politicized hacking was coming into its own. Some of this attention may have been convenient for the US government, which was seeking to position itself for online crackdowns; but it also reflected the determination of online communities that existed by virtue of anonymity and free circulation of information to protect the necessary conditions of their existence.

While the culture of early Anonymous had been steeped in the adolescent humor and hostility of the message boards where it originated, by 2011 participants in this and similar projects frequently endorsed an anarchist agenda. For example, after targeting the Arizona Department of Public Safety, Lulzsec proclaimed, “We’re doing this not only because we are opposed to SB1070 and the racist Arizona police state, but because we want a world free from police, prisons and politicians altogether.”

Information heists can reveal the shady underside of the authorities, discrediting them while dispelling the myth of their invulnerability. The cables released by Wikileaks describing President Ben Ali’s pet tiger enjoying a luxurious diet while Tunisians starved stoked the flames of revolt in that country. But these attacks further a longer-term strategy, as well. Both 21st-century capitalism and the repressive apparatus that protects it depend on the circulation of information. Forcing corporations and governments to be cautious about how they share data cripples them.

And, lest we forget, Occupy Wall Street might never have caught on if Anonymous hadn’t endorsed it in August 2011.

[Opposite, top]
Outside the Millbank Tower occupation, protesters built a bonfire out of mass-produced political placards, signifying the end of mere petitioning.

[Opposite, bottom]
During a nationwide day of action on November 24, 2010, police kettled demonstrators in downtown London, trapping an empty police van in the midst of the crowd.

The Insurrection Comes: “Arab Spring,” December 2010-March 2011

No one was prepared for governments to begin toppling. The first to go was Tunisia. Demonstrations commenced after an impoverished street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire to protest his treatment by police; at first, these protests were marginal, but every attempt at repression fanned the flames until unions and even lawyers joined in. Turnouts only increased after Ben Ali fled the country on January 18.

The first massive demonstrations took place in Egypt a week later, organized by a coalition of predominantly youth groups. One of the most influential forums supporting these was a Facebook page called “We Are All Khaled Saeed,” named for a man murdered by police. The protests were violently repressed, and the government shut down internet and cell phone access throughout much of the country; but once again, this only spread and intensified the resistance. After clashes with the police left many police stations burnt to the ground along with the headquarters of the ruling party, demonstrators shifted towards strategic nonviolence rather than taking on the military directly. By early February, a great part of the country was participating in the revolt, despite hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries.

President Mubarak repeatedly offered to grant protesters’ demands, but always a step too late; as momentum increased, people gained the confidence to demand more and more, until they would only be satisfied with his departure. He finally resigned on February 11. The following weeks saw similar uprisings in Bahrain, Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere around the Middle East, and an all-out civil war that ultimately drove Gaddafi from Libya.

Although North Africa might seem far away, in a globalized world we shouldn’t be surprised by how familiar everything in this story is: unemployment and bitterness, actions organized by groups protesting police brutality, even college graduates working at coffee shops. There are no exotic overseas revolutions in the 21st century. Though these events dwarfed the riots in Greece and the student movement in England, they sprang from the same source and assumed similar forms. The waves of unrest that had washed Europe in the preceding years helped set a precedent for what it looked like to revolt, which North Africans pushed further than Europeans had imagined possible.

We can learn a lot about revolt in the 21st century from studying these events. The upheaval began at the margins—Tunisia is a relatively minor nation, while Egypt is the most populated in the Middle East—and at the social periphery, among the unemployed, the young, and the poor. It spread to all social classes and metropolitan centers, going on to exert influence worldwide. In a fully networked world, instability at the fringe can threaten power at the center.

These uprisings continued the experimentation with new technologies and decentralized organization that characterized the anti-globalization movement, showing that anonymous networking could initiate full-scale leaderless rebellions. As

information had become the lifeblood of capitalism,* rendering the internet the new global factory floor, these were its first workers’ councils—a new kind of collective intelligence enabling people to organize themselves directly without representation.

At the same time, if communications technology was essential to the uprising, it was because it *subverted* its conventional role in the West, bringing people together rather than enabling them to remain at a distance from one another. This is proven by the fact that the demonstrations only intensified when Mubarak shut down cell phone and internet service. The material infrastructure of the internet is still quite centralized; while it can be useful, it is a mistake to depend on it as long as it remains in capitalist hands.

Mubarak faced a no-win situation: if he left communications technologies running, they would be used against him, but taking them down provoked outrage and international solidarity. In the future, we can expect the authorities to suppress unrest by structuring and directing the flows of information rather than interrupting them. They already seem more adept at this in the US, where Facebook is not usually used to coordinate insurrections but as a space for atomized individuals to compete for social capital.

Although the North African upheavals involved labor unrest, they started outside the workplace and remained focused on public spaces like Cairo’s Tahrir Square. The old labor movement was predicated on the way the production process gave workers common experiences, just as the subcultural strategies that followed it were based on the common experiences consumers shared. In the era of precarity, in which the common condition that unites us is that we are all at the mercy of an economy that offers us no permanent role, it makes sense for the factory occupations of 1968 to be replaced with the seizure of public space. Likewise, police are to the unemployed what bosses are to workers; in countries where young people suffer astronomical unemployment, it’s not surprising that revolts begin with attacks on the police.

The drawback of starting from outside the workplace is that it can frame the object of the revolt in political rather than economic terms. While the revolts in North Africa were produced by economic conditions, they opposed themselves chiefly to the forms of government rather than the economic structures that produced these; in the end, they may have been limited by the absence of an alternate vision for human relations. Without this, people fell back on the traditional narratives of nationalism—as exemplified by Egyptian flags and the chant “Muslim! Christian! We are all Egyptian!”—and democracy. As often happens, the forms the rebellion assumed were far more radical than the demands it presented. As the Middle East continues to ferment and new traditions of resistance take root, we can hope that the vision implied by these forms will come into its own as an end as well as a means.

The peak of the so-called “Arab Spring” was followed by a

* Today, high-speed global communication is essential for coordinating the flows of capital, commodities, and speculation; this is how capitalists outflanked the old workers’ movements, shifting centers of production swiftly around the world to force laborers to compete to offer the cheapest labor. But every advance in repression produces a symmetrical advance in resistance tactics.



period of chaos that continues up to today. The state desperately needs people to distrust and fear each other; without this, it lacks its chief justification for existence. Just as Mubarak’s undercover police had posed as looters in order to justify a crackdown, outbreaks of ethnic violence have been convenient for those who wish to re-legitimize state power. Yet Tahrir Square has been re-occupied by demonstrators again and again; the ousting of Mubarak and Ben Ali was clearly only the beginning of a long struggle.

Egypt received the second most military aid from the US in the world, after Israel—\$1.3 billion a year. The tear gas canisters fired at demonstrators were inscribed “Made in the USA.” The oustings of Mubarak and later Gaddafi show that once things go far enough, military force is no longer a trump card; the military can hardly bomb its own cities. At the same time, to achieve more than a change of rulers, an insurrection has to spread into the ranks of the military and

beyond national borders. It’s unclear when we will cross this threshold, but nobody saw the Tunisian uprising coming, either.

Occupying the Capitol, Not Attacking Capital: Wisconsin, February-March 2011

On the heels of the Egyptian example, anti-austerity protests gathered steam even in the US. Four days after Mubarak stepped down, a line of people mobilized by the Teaching Assistants Association waited to address the Wisconsin state legislature about proposed budget cuts and anti-union legislation. When the hearing was closed for the night, the queue became an impromptu occupation, as those who hadn’t gotten to speak were reluctant to lose their places.

The Capitol building was occupied until March 3, becoming a rallying point for

EGYPT WAS A RIOT
Obama (recent supporter of Mubarak, February 11):
“Egyptians have inspired us, and they’ve done so by putting the lie to the idea that justice is best gained by violence... For Egypt, it was the moral force of nonviolence that bent the arc of history toward justice once more... I’m also confident that the same ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit that the young people of Egypt have shown in recent days can be harnessed to create new opportunity: jobs, businesses.”



unprecedented demonstrations. Teachers called in sick to work en masse, shutting down schools; anarchists and fellow travelers occupied a university building in Milwaukee in an attempt to spread the unrest; rumors circulated about a general strike.

On March 9, while Senate Democrats were absent in protest, Wisconsin's Republican Senators passed a part of the proposed austerity package—a bill stripping public-sector unions of collective bargaining rights. In response, thousands returned to the capitol building, pushing past state patrolmen to reoccupy it in defiance of the court order that had concluded the previous occupation.

The centrality of the capitol building throughout the protests shows how important it is for a movement to establish a relationship to physical place. Just as university occupations served as nerve centers during the December 2008 uprising in Greece, the capitol building offered a focal point for demonstrators to build momentum over a period of weeks and a site to converge in response to new developments. In a time of universal estrangement, when we can only congregate in spaces designed to make us shop or cheer for sports teams, common space itself has become radical and radicalizing.

This level of disruption was unusual for a quiet Midwestern state like Wisconsin. But once again, though the occupation assumed comparatively radical forms, it still limited itself to law-abiding democratic discourse. This created strange bedfellows for the protesters; for example, individual police officers expressed support for the occupation early on, though they later helped put a stop to it. This also paved the way for the Democratic Party to squander whatever momentum remained afterwards by channeling it into a doomed campaign to recall the governor.

However devious the Republicans' machinations, they passed the bill by democratic process, the same way countless other bills are passed. Although the protesters saw themselves as partisans of democracy, in forcing their way back into the capitol on March 9 they were essentially asserting that their illegal occupation of the building was more legitimate than Senators doing what they were elected to do in it. Unfortunately, this was never articulated; people were prepared to break the law, but not to cease believing in it. It speaks volumes about the function of the Left that liberal organizers entered the capitol illegally on March 9 just to persuade everyone else to leave with them.

Between February 15 and March 3, the original occupation of the capitol had been undermined one compromise at a time. First the police politely asked people not to be in one room; they were being so nice about everything, and weren't they on the same side? Then they gently asked people to vacate another room, and longtime organizers supported this, and so on—until the former occupiers found themselves out on the pavement, dumbfounded. This same process took only one night to play out again on March 9.

This underlines an important lesson: *the first compromise might as well be the last*. Whenever we concede anything, we set a precedent that will be repeated again and again, emboldening those for whom it is more convenient if we don't stand up for ourselves. If police didn't arrest demonstrators in the capitol, it



Anything we accomplish in the struggle against austerity, we accomplish in defiance of the authorities, in defiance of would-be leaders who would tame and direct our outrage, in defiance of union bureaucrats who don't dare call for a general strike even as they are stripped of all power.

was not because they supported the occupation, nor because demonstrators had the right to be in the building, but because the demonstrators had mobilized enough social power to force the authorities to back down. Politeness and obedience could only detract from this leverage.

In popular struggles, one role anarchists can play is to be the ones who refuse to yield. We can also pass on our hard-won analyses to less experienced protesters—for example, emphasizing that however personable individual police officers might seem, they cannot be trusted insofar as they *are police*.

To accomplish this, however, anarchists must be vocal and in the thick of things, not looking on from the margins as they were in Wisconsin. Anarchists of a more insurrectionist bent gravitated to the occupation in Milwaukee, which failed to pick up steam, while anarchists in Madison largely focused on providing infrastructure.* Offering resources can be a good way to connect with strangers; yet our task is not just to facilitate protests of any kind whatsoever, but to ensure that they threaten the power structure. To this end, we have to seize the initiative to organize actions as well as infrastructure—engaging the general public in the process, not just other anarchists. Clashes with the state will be more controversial than free meals and childcare, but this controversy has to play out if we are ever to get anywhere.

A common complaint from the more combative participants in the Madison occupation was that leftist organizations had already determined the character of the protest. Anarchists were afraid to act, fearing that they would simply be marginalized if they challenged the dominant narrative. In fact, there's nothing to lose in such circumstances, when for all intents

* This is not the first time anarchists have contributed their organizational skills to an essentially liberal protest. At the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York City, about 100,000 people participated in demonstrations; this included thousands of anarchists, many of whom limited themselves to logistical roles. Afterwards, this was recognized as a tremendous missed opportunity—hence the efforts to take the lead in planning actions at the 2008 Republican National Convention in St. Paul, Minnesota. These conventions are covered in *Rolling Thunder* issues #1 and 7.

and purposes anarchists are *already marginalized*. The solutions promoted by the Left don't point beyond the horizon of capitalism; even when they aren't utterly naïve, they serve to distract and neutralize those who desire real change. Where the field is split between left and right, we may as well disrupt this dichotomy by acting outside of it. Even if we fail, at least we broaden the terrain.

This brings up the larger question—what should be the *goal* of anti-austerity protests? In Wisconsin, most participants took it for granted that their goal was to stop the bill: in other words, to keep things the way they had been. This treats the financial crisis as if it were just an excuse dreamed up by greedy capitalists.

But from the capitalist perspective, austerity measures really are unavoidable; there's no other way to keep the system running. Elsewhere in the US, earnestly heartbroken Democrats were proposing similar measures for their own states—largely without opposition, thanks to the stupefying effect of the two-party system.

Capitalism is not a static condition but a dynamic process transforming the world. A protest can't freeze history. Even if one wave of cutbacks can be stopped, a thousand more assaults will follow. The state literally can't back down—the politicians have nowhere to go. This means that apparently realistic goals, such as blocking a particular budget or bill, are actually *less* realistic than attempting to change the entire system.

This was lost on many North American workers. Wisconsin teacher Peggy Kruse was quoted as saying, "Most teachers are more than happy to take the 18% pay cut, to do anything that will help get the state back and running. We're most concerned about the loss of collective bargaining rights." In other words, we'll concede anything—just don't take away our right to concede! Let Bill Gates keep his \$56 billion while we get pay cuts or pink slips, but don't touch the illusion that we *choose* this state of affairs.

Accepting defeat in advance correlates with a blind commitment to peaceful protest. Signs in Wisconsin read "FIGHT LIKE AN EGYPTIAN"—but Egyptian protesters burned down

[Opposite, top]
It's only "our" capital when we seize it.

[Opposite, bottom]
Protesters reoccupied the capitol building in Madison on March 9, 2011; by morning, liberal organizers had persuaded everyone to leave.

[Following page, clockwise]
The Plaza Occupation Movement of 2011 in Barcelona: new sectors of the population faced off with the police on May 27; a neighborhood assembly on May 25; May 19 in Plaça Catalunya, during the halcyon first days of the movement.



police stations. No amount of Obama doublespeak can render that *peaceful*.

If we shouldn't evaluate anti-austerity protests according to whether they thwart new legislation or how many people they draw to rallies, their *content* becomes the important question. Do they create new relationships between people, new ways of relating to material goods? Do they demonstrate values that point beyond capitalism? Do they produce new momentum, new ways of fighting, new *unruliness*?

The capitol building symbolized democracy, which is to say *collective participation in top-down control*. Occupying it implied that the people could be better stewards of democracy than their elected representatives. Insofar as workers behaved themselves even as their right to organize autonomously was stripped away, they proved this to be the case.

Like the student movement, the movement in Wisconsin stalled because it limited itself to opposing specific legislation affecting one demographic. Framed as a last-ditch effort to protect the privileges of state employees, it could only go so far; people of many walks of life got involved, but the narrative prevented them from taking the lead. Yet millions of workers without union jobs or state salaries were already suffering the same conditions the Republicans wanted to force on state employees. A movement involving all these different sectors of society as equal participants could have snowballed; it would also have been much more difficult to control. Spontaneous high school walkouts in February had hinted at this possibility, connecting the proposed cutbacks to the alienation of young people who had yet to be thrown at the mercy of the job market. Instead, the predominantly white union workers framed the protest as a matter of defending their own privileges, sidelining other demographics such as unemployed African-Americans in Milwaukee and thus dooming themselves to defeat.

It Spreads: The Plaza Occupation Movements, May-June 2011

The spell of occupation extended beyond Wisconsin—along with the spell of democracy. Real Democracy Now (appropriately abbreviated DRY in Spanish), a new group professing to be outside all existing political parties and ideologies, organized protests against austerity measures and political corruption around Spain on May 15; afterwards, the idea spread by Twitter to camp out in plazas in imitation of the Tahrir Square encampment. Organized around assemblies based on “direct democracy,” these occupations swiftly drew thousands of participants in many cities around Spain. Communists, anarchists, and partisans of various national liberation movements mingled with people of other walks of life, many of whom had not previously been involved in protests or considered themselves politically active.

By the countrywide elections the following weekend, hundreds of thousands of people had visited or participated in the occupations. Nearly half of the population abstained from voting, with blank ballots doubling to 5%.

“The time for indignation is over. Those who get indignant are already starting to bore us. Increasingly, they seem to us like the last guardians of a rotten system, a system without dignity, sustainability or credibility.

We don't have to get indignant anymore, we have to revolt. The next time 300,000 of us take to the streets, let's not go back home at the end of the day. Let's go with our sleeping bags, knowing that on that night we won't sleep in our beds.”

—Franco Berardi Bifo

On May 27, police arrived at the occupation in Barcelona to “clean up” the plaza. Tens of thousands converged to oppose them. Organizers attempted to impose a code of nonviolence, as they had in every proposal in the assemblies, but as the police attacked clashes broke out all the same. After a long battle, the occupiers forced the police to withdraw; over one hundred people were injured, many with broken bones.

In some cities the occupations signed on to the DRY manifesto from the outset, becoming ideologically homogenous; these occupations did not expand as much or last as long. The occupations that remained sites of contention for a range of ideas and approaches were much more vibrant and enduring. Nonetheless, by mid-June the plazas had emptied throughout the country, though in some cities neighborhood assemblies took their place. Because they did not mount an offensive on the state and private ownership of capital, there was no endgame for the occupations: they were exciting experiments in convergence and self-organization, but offered no obvious road forward.

Like the UK student movement, the plaza occupation movement marked the entry of new demographics into conflict with the state—including many from the disenfranchised middle class. These newcomers accepted some of the premises of long-time radicals, such as autonomy from political parties; in this regard, they went much further than protesters in Wisconsin had. At the same time, they brought many of their dogmas with them, including pacifism. Likewise, the myth of a better, purer democracy remained alive and well in the plazas. The central assemblies addressed demands to the government and monopolized legitimacy, if not power, in the occupations.

In Greece, plaza occupations inspired by the ones in Spain began on May 25. These lasted longer than the Spanish occupations, drawing hundreds of thousands at the high points. They built up to a 48-hour general strike on June 28-29 coinciding with the Greek parliament narrowly voting to accept the new austerity measures decreed by the European Union. In Greece as in Spain, the new refugees from the middle class brought pacifism with them alongside various brands of nationalism.



The UK riots, August 2011: Redistribution of power



Redistribution of wealth



Do-it-yourself class treachery

The pacifism threatened to divide the movement: as had occurred in the wake of the Toronto G20 protests and elsewhere, baseless conspiracy theories circulated that the “hooded ones” at the front of clashes with the police were actually somehow in league with the authorities. The nationalism was also ominous; although only a small minority in the occupations were out-and-out fascists, as the economic crisis worsens even mild nationalism may turn into xenophobia.

Despite these internal challenges, the general strike was marked by massive violent clashes with the police. For the first time since May 5, 2010, the insurgents who had risen up in December 2008—anarchists, anti-authoritarians, students, the underclass—were joined in the streets by the general public.

Anarchy in the UK, Take Two: Riots and Reaction, August 2011

A month later, Chile erupted in its wildest riots in years, with 874 people arrested in student protests against the privatized education system—the same day that Standard & Poor’s downgraded the United States credit rating. Immediately afterwards, riots broke out in the UK in response to the police murder of Mark Duggan. Far from subsiding, the unrest generated by the crisis seemed to be ricocheting back and forth across the globe.

The riots began on August 6 in London following protests in Duggan’s native Tottenham and spread swiftly around the country, intensifying in other cities after police clamped down in the capitol. These were the opposite of the plaza occupations: a single subset of society escalating its private war on police and private property, without narrative, demands, or illusions, and thus coming directly into conflict with the rest of society as a whole. Participation occurred chiefly along class rather than racial lines, with many groups being effectively multi-ethnic.

Altogether the riots inflicted around £200 million of damage, including widespread looting and arson. Once again, Twitter and Facebook were used to coordinate action on the ground, although the authorities took extensive advantage of this to arrest and prosecute participants. Five more people lost their lives in the disorder.

The UK riots followed close on the heels of the unsuccessful anti-austerity protests, showing the consequences of denying a generation any prospects within capitalism. The subsequent push to cut off rioters’ families from social services underscores how the riots formalized the emergence of an excluded class that will only be controlled through unbridled violence. The appearance of vigilantes during the riots, including fascist groups like the English Defense League, indicates the breadth of forms that violence will take.

In this context, it’s chilling how many people identified with the corporate media narrative demonizing the rioters, even turning out with brooms in a media stunt calculated to show that ordinary British people supported the continuation of law and order. If the British working class has any hope



Greece, June 2011

of defending itself against the next round of austerity measures and diminishing employment opportunities, this can only come from common cause between rioters and other elements of the exploited. The availability of the underclass as competition for employment is precisely what enables capitalists to keep wages and benefits down; in attempting to assert and defend their own privileges, obedient workers doom themselves to be the next on the chopping block. Of course, globally speaking, British workers have only recently begun to lose their comparative privileges, so perhaps it is not surprising that it is taking them some time to come to terms with their current condition.

The absence of effective anarchist initiatives immediately following the riots was not promising; history appeared to be racing ahead of anarchists just when it was most important for them to intervene in it. Treating class as a

kind of identity politics had not equipped the conservative majority of British anarchists for a world in which the most determinant struggles occur outside the workplace.

The Shape of Occupations to Come

In September 2011, protesters in North America finally hit upon a format that could spread, based on the models already tested elsewhere around the world. Occupy Wall Street caught on around the continent because it fulfilled conditions that could easily be deduced from earlier successes and failures worldwide. This suggests that studying the shortcomings of these precedents can also teach us how to improve on this success.

One obvious lesson is the importance of decision-making structures conducive to anarchist

A small fire demands constant tending.
A bonfire can be left alone.
A conflagration spreads.

action. Although we must not conflate the present with the past, we also shouldn't forget the lessons anarchists learned in the anti-globalization and anti-war movements: *converge, take the initiative, frame the narrative.*

At no point during the buildup to the protests of March 4, 2010 or the occupations in Wisconsin did anarchists establish an autonomous public organizing body to play a role such as the RNC Welcoming Committee played at the 2008 Republican National Convention or the PGRP played at the 2009 G20 in Pittsburgh. This was a strategic error that enabled liberal and authoritarian organizers to monopolize the public discourse around the protests and determine their character and conditions in advance. Without the leverage afforded by public organizing of our own, we can always expect to be hoodwinked and betrayed by those who don't share our opposition to hierarchical power.

The actions that go well for anarchists are likely to be the ones initiated by anarchists, or else in conjunction with others who respect anarchists' goals and autonomy. In such cases, anarchists are more likely to succeed in determining the character of events, choosing a terrain conducive to confrontation. This may explain why occupations and apparently "spontaneous" actions offered more space and opportunity to decentralized forms of resistance than large-scale events such as the permitted marches of March 4, 2010. Authoritarian and lowest-common-denominator organizations can more easily dominate the latter, both by literally laying the groundwork of what is to happen and by monopolizing legitimacy in the public eye by presenting themselves as representing the movement. So long as anarchists remain on the margins of liberal and authoritarian organizing, organizing breakaway marches and the like, the lack of initiative and "legitimacy" in the public eye will always impose structural limits on our efforts.

We need public, participatory calls and organizing structures, both to offer points of entry to everyone who might want to fight alongside us and to make it impossible for authoritarians to stifle revolt by arranging the battlefield to be unfavorable for it. Public organizing can complement other less public approaches, but often it's necessary to render them possible in the first place. Not surprisingly, the cities in which anarchists succeeded in carrying out inspiring actions as part of the Occupy movement—Oakland, Seattle, Saint Louis—were the ones in which they either had considerable leverage within the general assemblies or maintained their own anti-authoritarian caucuses.

As capitalism renders more and more people precarious or redundant, it will be harder and harder to fight from recognized *positions of legitimacy* within the system such as "workers" or "students." Last year's students fighting tuition hikes are this

year's dropouts; last year's workers fighting job cuts are this year's unemployed. We have to legitimize fighting from *outside*, establishing a new narrative of struggle. Who is more entitled to occupy a school than those who cannot afford to attend it? Who is more entitled to occupy a workplace than those who have already lost their jobs?

If we can accomplish this, we will neutralize the allegations of being "outside agitators" that are always raised against those who revolt. Better, we will transform every austerity conflict into an opportunity to connect with everyone else who has been thrown away by capitalism. Our goal should not be to protect the privileges of those who retain their jobs and enrollment, but to channel outrage about everything that capitalism has taken from all of us.

In addition to exacerbating the contradictions inherent in the financial crisis, we should undertake to make life in upheavals more pleasurable and robust than workaday life. Those who participate in wildcat strikes, blockades, and occupations should experience these as more exciting and fulfilling than their usual routines, to such an extent that it becomes possible to imagine life after capitalism. As many anarchists live in a permanent state of exclusion, making the best of it despite everything, we should be especially well-equipped to assist here.

In other words: the occupation is the goal, not just a means, and this should come to the fore in every outbreak of resistance.

Finally, we have to be tireless in our critique of democracy, as the alternative people in this society intuitively fall back on against the excesses of capitalism. The more unpopular this is, the more important it is that we do it. Private property and government are the two great sacred cows of our age—the ones for which our lives and the earth itself are being sacrificed—and challenging the ways they monopolize legitimacy is *one* project, not two. They are two heads of the same beast; they cannot be beaten separately.

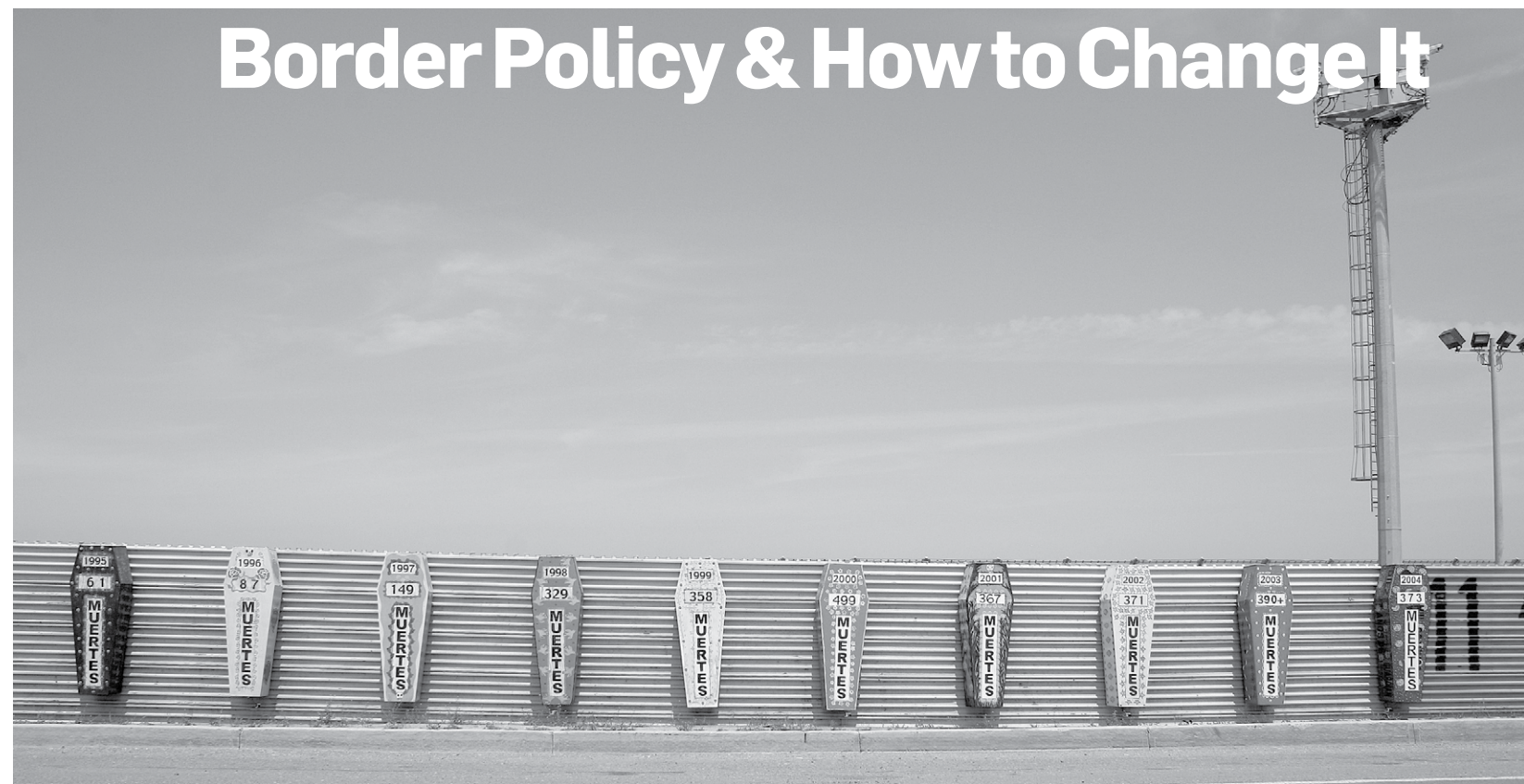
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“It was a symbolic battle—or more precisely, a frighteningly real and bloody fight over a symbolic location; the fight itself was the message.”
-a participant in the battle for the Egyptian Ministry of the Interior

DESIGNED TO KILL

Border Policy & How to Change It



[for everyone who didn't make it, and for everyone who did]

For several years now I've worked in the desert on the Mexican-American border with a group that provides humanitarian aid to migrants attempting to enter the United States—a journey that claims hundreds of lives every year. We've spent years mapping the trails that cross this desert. We walk the trails, find places to leave food and water along them, look for people in distress, and provide medical care when we run into someone who needs it. If the situation is bad enough, we can get an ambulance or helicopter to bring people to the hospital. We strive to act in accordance with the migrants' wishes at all times, and we

never call the Border Patrol on people who don't want to turn themselves in.

During this time I've been a part of many extraordinary situations and I've heard about many more. Some of the things I've seen have been truly heartwarming, and some of them have been deeply sad and wrong. I've seen people who were too weak to stand, too sick to hold down water, hurt too badly to continue, too scared to sleep, too sad for words, hopelessly lost, desperately hungry, literally dying of thirst, never going to be able to see their children again, vomiting blood, penniless in torn shoes two thousand miles from home,

This analysis is the work of an individual participant in No More Deaths, an organization that seeks to save lives by providing food, water, and medical aid to migrants entering the United States through the Arizona desert.

suffering from heat stroke, kidney damage, terrible blisters, wounds, hypothermia, post-traumatic stress, and just about every other tribulation you could possibly think of. I've been to places where people were robbed and raped and murdered; my friends have found bodies. In addition to bearing witness to others' suffering, I myself have fallen off of cliffs, torn my face open on barbed wire, run out of water, had guns pointed at me, been charged by bulls and circled by vultures, jumped over rattlesnakes, pulled pieces of cactus out of many different parts of my body with pliers, had to tear off my pants because they were full of fire ants, gotten gray hairs, and in general poured no small amount of my own sweat, blood, and tears into the thirsty desert.

There is nowhere on earth like the place where we work. It is beautiful beyond telling: harsh, vast, mountainous, remote, rugged, unforgiving, every cliché you can think of and more. I have been humbled countless times by the incredible selflessness and courage of the people I have met there, and I have been driven nearly out of my head with rage at the utterly heartless economic and political system that drives people to such lengths in order to provide for their families. Doing this work has given me a great deal of opportunity to observe how the border is

managed on a day-to-day basis, and hopefully some insight into the functions that it performs within global capitalism—the real objectives that it serves. I offer this essay as ammunition to anyone who still cares enough about anything to intervene when people around them are being treated like pieces of meat.

“Answer the question of who benefits or profits most directly from an action, event, or outcome and you always have the starting point for your analysis or investigation, and sometimes it will also give you the end point.”

– Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

The first thing that I want to make clear is that the atrocious suffering that happens on the border every day is not an accident. It is not a mistake and it is not the result of a misunderstanding. It is the predictable and intentional result of policies implemented at every level of government on both sides of the border. These policies have rational objectives

WE WERE DEEP IN THE MOUNTAINS near the border. There were seven of us. It was late afternoon and we had been walking all day. We were in a deep wash, approaching a very heavily used migrant trail, when someone shouted from the hill up above us. “HEY! HEY!” Three people came running down the hill at full speed, cutting through catclaw and cactus, and jumped into the wash. There was an older man, a younger man, and a teenage girl whose legs were covered with half dried scabs and bleeding cuts. The older man pulled a bible out of his pocket and threw it down open on a large rock in front of me. “PHILIPPIANS FOUR THIRTEEN!” he said, in English, pointing. “I CAN DO ANYTHING THROUGH THE POWER OF CHRIST WHICH STRENGTHENS ME!”

“What?”
All three spoke at once: “There were big dogs!” “They were biting people!” “They were pulling them down and biting them!” “They were screaming and they were biting them!”

“What? Wait! What?” I said.
“There were about thirty of us,” the girl explained in perfect English. “The migrants were waiting for us at the pass up there. They had dogs. They turned the dogs on us. They were biting people, and pulling them down, and biting them on the ground.

People were screaming and bleeding and running in every direction. We ran down the mountain. They shouted at us to stop but we kept running. I don't know if anyone else got away.”

“This was how long ago?” I asked her.
“Ten minutes.”
“Ten minutes!”
“Yeah, ten or fifteen.” The men nodded.
“We have to get the fuck out of here.”
“Yes,” she agreed.

The ten of us ran through the mountains. The older man would occasionally break out into song, sometimes Madonna, sometimes Beyonce, usually Shakira. “I'm on tonight! You know my hips don't lie!” He would pause periodically to demonstrate the veracity of this statement. “You know—Shakira! It helps to sing!” We passed a shrine where other migrants had left candles and bracelets and rosaries and offerings to the Virgin of Guadalupe. The younger man knelt, crossed himself, and said a prayer, nearly without breaking stride. After about two hours we stopped in a side canyon and dressed some of the girl's wounds.

“How old are you?” I asked her.
“Fifteen. I've lived in Oregon since I was two. What am I going to do in Mexico? I've never lived there. I don't have any people there. I haven't been able to get a

hold of my parents since I got deported. I'm just going to have to keep trying this until I make it.”

“She's very strong,” said the younger man.
“As for me,” the older man said, “it doesn't really matter. When I'm in Mexico I live on the street. I come here and I live on the street. It's all the same.”

“He's a nice guy,” said the girl. “There was a woman who was having a hard time keeping up. He carried her bag for her, and told us jokes and sang us songs.”

We stopped again at dark. They ate and ate, and the older man told stories. “We're going to keep going,” the younger man said at last. “We're going to get some sleep and leave when the moon comes up.”

“It's a very long way, and it's easy to get lost,” I told him. “Do you know how to get there?”

“I know exactly how to get there,” he said. We talked about the mountains and I could tell that he was telling the truth.

“Do you want to call your parents?” I asked the girl. “No, they'll just worry. I'll call them when I make it.” I don't know what happened to them. A few days later there was a small article in the paper about a large group of migrants being deported with dog bite wounds and needing treatment on the Mexican side.

and directly benefit identifiable sectors of the population of both countries. It may be evil, but it's not stupid. If this sounds a little shrill, let me tell you how I've seen this play out on the ground.

When I started working in the desert I began to notice some very peculiar things about the Border Patrol's operations there. They would do a lot of enforcement in some areas and very little in others, and this would not necessarily correspond to which areas were busy and which areas were slow. In fact, very often the enforcement would clearly be done in such a way that it would push traffic *into* rather than out of the busiest areas, where Border Patrol would keep a low profile until the very northern end of the route. At that point there would be a moderate amount of enforcement again, but not really what you would expect given the numbers of people that were moving through.

Then they started building lots of surveillance towers. But once again, the towers were not really built in the places where the traffic was heaviest—they were built on the edges of them. If anything, they seemed to be intent on forcing traffic into the busiest routes rather than out of them. What was happening?

Meanwhile, I was constantly meeting migrants whose groups had been split up by helicopters. The Border Patrol would fly over them a few feet off the ground, everybody would run in different directions, and soon there would be thirty people wandering lost across the desert in groups of two or three. What seemed particularly odd was that the Border Patrol often made no effort to actually apprehend these groups after breaking them up—they just flew away. Why?

And then there's this. Over the last few years, the organization I work for has developed a pretty comprehensive understanding of the area we cover, which at times has been one of the most heavily traveled sections of the entire border. We've formed a fairly clear picture of where traffic starts, where it goes, how it gets there, where it's busy and where it's slow at any given time, where the pinch points are, and so on. I honestly believe that if I worked for the Border Patrol I could basically point at a map and tell them how to shut down the whole sector. It's really not rocket science. Keep in mind that all of our work has been done by untrained civilian volunteers, armed with low-end GPS units, a few old trucks, run-of-the-mill mapping software, cheap cell phones with spotty service, and a very limited budget.



Does it seem logical that we could figure this stuff out while the government of the United States of America cannot, despite access to helicopters, unmanned drones, electronic sensors, fleets of well-maintained trucks, night vision systems, state-of-the-art communications and

Volunteers leaving water in the desert for migrants.



The challenges of the desert crossing.

First of all, it's as plain as day that the economy of the United States of America is dependent in no small part on the hyper-exploitation of undocumented labor. You know it's true, I know it's true, the Guatemalans that shovel the shit out of Lou Dobbs' horses' barn know it's true, but it is considered extremely taboo to mention this fact in public. Excuse me, but anyone with a modicum of common sense should be able to see that if the government were to actually build a two-thousand-mile-long Berlin Wall tonight and then somehow round up and deport every undocumented person in the country tomorrow, there would be massive and immediate disruption in the agriculture and animal exploitation industries, not to mention in everything related to construction—quite possibly leading to a serious breakdown in the national food distribution network and conceivably even famine. I'm not exaggerating. The people that write border policies are not fools. They understand this perfectly, even if your racist co-workers evidently do not. Regardless of what any politician or pundit says, I don't believe anyone is going to put a stop to illegal immigration as long as undocumented labor is needed to maintain the stability of the economic system. But this isn't good news to those of you who dislike seeing people treated like shit and then discarded like diapers, because what's more important is that this migration will continue to be managed and controlled.

The border is a sick farce with a deadly conclusion. The goal is to make entering the country without papers extremely dangerous, traumatizing, and expensive, but possible. The point isn't to deter people from coming—far from it. It is to ensure that when they do come, the threat of deportation will mean something very serious. It means spending a ton of money. It means risking your life to return. It means that you may never see your family again. This is supposed to provide American employers with a vast and disposable pool of labor that is kept vulnerable and therefore easy to exploit—and this in turn drives down wages for workers with American citizenship, which is why the old saw about the "illegals coming to our country and taking our jobs" is so convincing. Like many good lies, it's powerful because it omits the most important part of the truth.

Those who believe that immigration and border enforcement protect the jobs or wages of American workers are seriously misinterpreting the situation. Even if you limit the scope of your analysis to market-based behavior, it seems

clear that if undocumented workers were not subjected to such extraordinary risks and pressures they would act like anybody else and obtain the highest price for their labor that the market would bear. In fact, these same workers have proven themselves able time and again to struggle successfully for higher wages, despite having to overcome obstacles other workers do not face. But border and immigration enforcement drives down wages across the board—that's *the point of it*.

Here's another lead that is easy to follow: the recent wave of anti-immigrant hysteria sounded very similar to the anti-Muslim fear-mongering of five to ten years ago. It's easy to trace this to the mid-term elections. With the war in Iraq winding down, and in lieu of any recent successful domestic Al Qaeda attacks, the so-called immigration debate became the de facto national security issue for politicians to talk about.

The Republican strategy was pretty straightforward. They hoped to regain power by appealing to white fear, anxiety, guilt, and racism. The Democratic strategy was more nuanced. First, they blamed Republicans for lack of progress on immigration issues. They hoped that this would maintain the support of voters from immigrant communities. Second, they did not actually try to push any pro-immigrant measures. They hoped that this would avoid alienating anti-immigrant voters. Third, they ramped up deportations. The Obama administration deported almost 400,000 people in 2010, the most in a single year ever. Now they can use those numbers to emphasize their toughness on immigration. With these law and order credentials, the Democrats hoped to woo conservative voters before the last elections and in the next ones. Expect to see some version of this charade play out again in 2012, unless it's trumped by another war or major terrorist attack.

Here's one last clue: much of the legislation that becomes government policy is written by the corporations that stand to profit from it. Arizona's State Bill 1070, which among other things would require police to lock up anyone they stop who cannot show proof of having entered the country legally, was drafted in December 2009 at the Grand Hyatt hotel in Washington D.C. by officials of the billion-dollar Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), the largest private prison company in the country. This took place at a meeting of the American

Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a membership organization of state legislators and powerful corporations. The law, which was partially overturned but may still go into effect, could send hundreds of thousands of immigrants to prison, which would mean hundreds of millions of dollars in profits for the companies such as CCA that would be responsible for housing them. It almost goes without saying that it is not in this industry's interest to completely stop illegal immigration from happening; it is in their interest to let in enough people to fill their jails.

So who benefits from the death in the desert? In a broad sense, the entire ruling class does. That's pretty ugly. But that's not the whole story, not by any means. To tell that story we're going to need to back up a bit.

To start with, permit me to subject you to an extremely abbreviated history lesson, beginning with some very inconvenient truths. Like the rest of the Western Hemisphere, the land that is currently called the United States of America was stolen from its rightful inhabitants by European colonists through a well-documented orgy of bloodshed, massacre, treachery, and genocide of proportions so epic that they are arguably unprecedented in the thousands of often gruesome years of human history preceding them and unsurpassed in the hardly tranquil ones that followed. This monstrous crime has been in progress for over five hundred years, has never been atoned for in any meaningful way, and continues to be perpetrated to this day.

Everybody knows this, but nobody really likes to think too much about what it means. What it means is this: unless you're honest enough to admit that you think that might makes right as long as you're on the winning side, you have to acknowledge that the federal, local, and state governments of the United States of America, along with all of the agencies such as the Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement contained therein, are illegitimate institutions with no claim to legitimate authority whatsoever over the territory they currently govern. If anyone can show me an ethically, logically, or even legally sound way to disprove this statement, they're

WE WERE WALKING UP A SMALL CANYON. One of my companions was doing very loud and rather florid call outs: "¡COMPANERAS! ¡COMPANEROS! ¡NO TENGAN MIEDO! ¡TENEMOS AGUA, COMIDA, Y MEDICAMIENTOS! ¡SOMOS AMIGOS! ¡NO SOMOS LA MIGRA! ¡ESTAMOS AQUI PARA AYUDARLES! ¡SI NECESITAN CUALQUIER COSA: GRITENOS!" The great majority of the time no one is there to hear these call outs.

We turned a corner in the canyon, and there were about thirty-five people: men,

women, children, and teenagers, dressed in all blacks, browns, and desert tans, dead silent and taking up a very small amount of space. "Holy shit, um, did you hear us coming?"

"Yes, we heard you coming." It was very hot. We gave them lots of water, food, socks, and treated a number of blisters and sprained ankles. They were all from Guatemala. They said they had been together every step of the way. As we prepared to part ways, one of them handed us a large sack of money—pesos and dollars.

"Um, no, you don't understand, you don't have to give us any money, this is why we are here."

"No, you don't understand," he said. "We found this money at a shrine in the desert. We decided that it was not doing anybody any good there, so we took it. If the migra catches us they will take it from us, and it will never do anybody any good. We want you to take this money, and to use it to help other migrants." We carried out their wishes.

welcome to let me know, but I'm not going to lose any sleep waiting for this to happen.

It's important to start by framing the matter this way. Who are these people that claim to have jurisdiction over native land? What right do they have to be telling anybody where to go and when? If anyone has a right to decide who can and cannot pass through the territory that currently constitutes the Mexican-American border, it's the people whose ancestors have inhabited that land since time immemorial, not the descendants or institutions of the ones who colonized it. Most so-called illegal immigrants are closer to having a defensible claim to the continent they're traversing than most of the hypocrites who condemn and pursue them.

Now fast forward, for the sake of brevity, to January 1, 1994, the day that the North American Free Trade Agreement went into effect, and thousands of indigenous people in southeastern Mexico famously rose up in arms in response. Calling themselves Zapatistas after the Mexican revolutionary, these people predicted that this agreement would mark a final deathblow to their way of life if they failed to resist. Their analysis of the situation quickly proved exceedingly cogent, their ensuing project of indigenous autonomy has yet to be defeated, and their actions sparked an entire generation of resistance to global capitalism: a whole different story that is thankfully not over yet.

In addition to its ruinous effects on American industrial communities, NAFTA's aftermath in Mexican agricultural communities was truly catastrophic. As part of its preparation for the agreement, the Mexican government amended Article 27 of its own constitution to allow for the privatization of communally-held campesino and indigenous land. NAFTA then permitted heavily-subsidized American agribusiness giants like Cargill and Archer Daniels Midland to flood the Mexican market with cheap imports of corn and other agricultural products, undercutting nearly all small-scale Mexican farmers. Exactly as the Zapatistas predicted, this drove millions of rural Mexicans, many of whom were already living in desperate poverty, off the land and straight into the abyss. This in turn set off a massive wave of migration as millions and millions of people left their homes to find work in Mexican cities, in sweatshops primarily owned by American corporations in northern Mexico, and in the United States.

Within the year, the Clinton administration launched Operation Gatekeeper, a program that massively increased funding for Border Patrol operations in the San Diego sector of the border in California. The federal government greatly stepped up enforcement in this sector and built a fourteen-mile wall between San Diego and Tijuana. Operation Gatekeeper roughly marks the beginning of a two-decade-running process of ever-increasing border militarization that has continued steadily throughout the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations. This has meant that every year there are more Border Patrol agents, National Guardsmen, helicopters, fences, towers, checkpoints, sensors, guns, and dogs along the border. Understanding the nature of this militarization will go a long way towards clarifying what's actually happening and why.

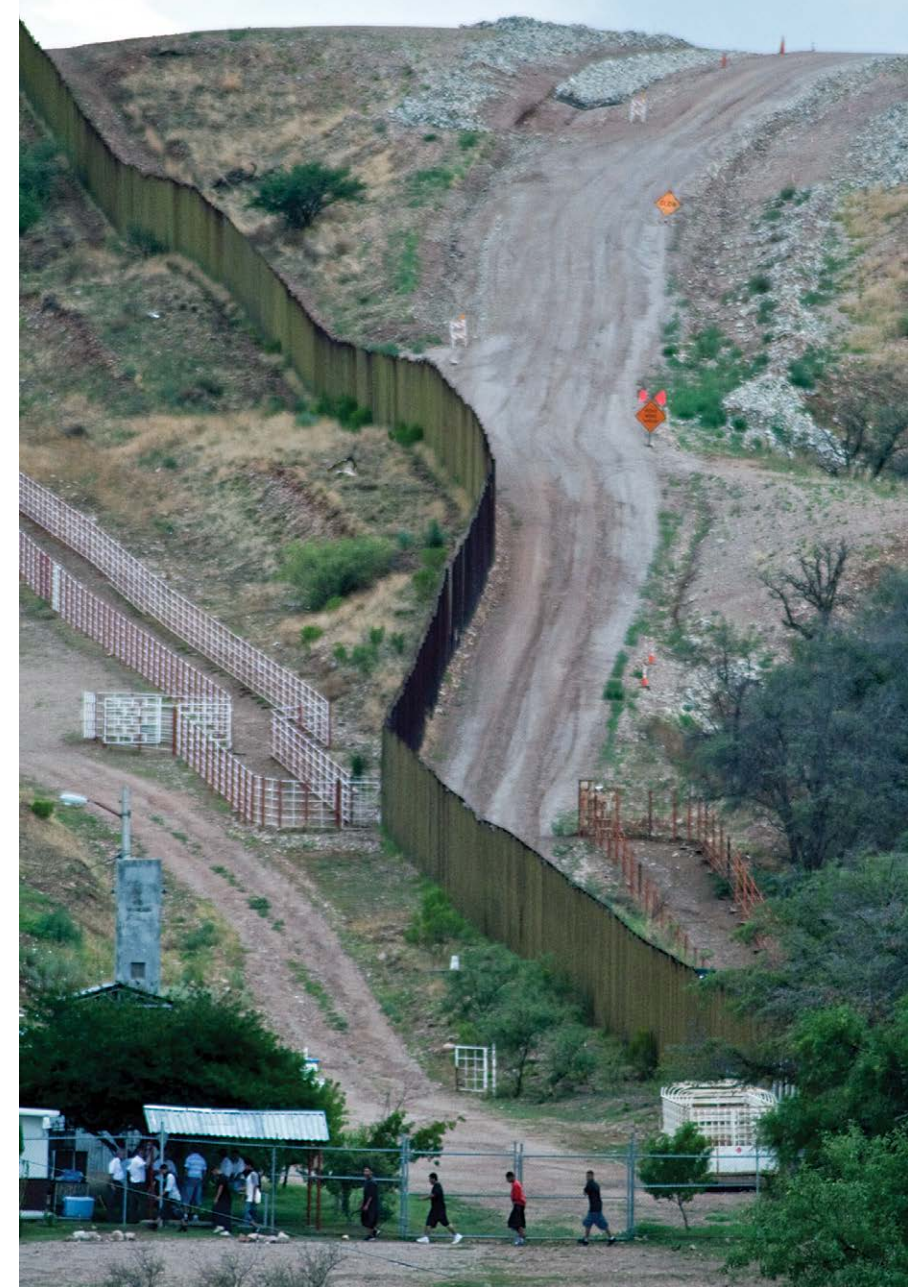
By all accounts I've ever heard, it used to be much easier to cross the border than it is now. Most people crossed into relatively safer urbanized areas such as San Diego, El Paso, or the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas. Starting with Operation Gatekeeper, the Border Patrol made it much more difficult to enter the country in these places; over the years, it has methodically pushed the traffic into the increasingly remote mountains and deserts beyond. Many thousands of people have died from heat, cold, sickness, injuries, hunger, and thirst as a direct result. At this point, I think, the game is reaching a bit of an endpoint. The government has pushed the traffic into the very deepest and deadliest pockets of the entire border, which is where they want it. This does not mean that the situation is completely static—the Border Patrol will clamp down on some of these pockets sometimes and ease up on others—but on the large scale, I think that it is more or less stable.

There have been several interesting byproducts of these changes. Many people used to come to work for a season, go back home, and return the next year. That's much less common now that getting into the country is such an ordeal. People come and generally stay as long as they can. Also, most people who crossed used to be men with families south of the border. There are many more women and children crossing now that it's no longer possible for many men in this position to work in the north without leaving their families behind for good. Finally, with the increase in internal deportations, there are many more people crossing now who have lived here for long

periods of time and are returning to their homes in the United States. This latter group faces a particularly fiendish dilemma if they run into trouble on the way. I have often heard people whose children live south of the border say things like "I thought I was going to die and all I could think about was my babies. It's better for me to go back home than to risk dying again." I have often heard people whose children live north of the border say things like "If I have to risk dying to get home to my babies, then I will."

As I hope I have made clear, a policy of pushing migrant traffic into extremely dangerous areas does not at all imply an actual intention to stop or even deter people from entering the country illegally. This complex and slightly perverse strategy has numerous compelling advantages. It allows politicians to look tough for the cameras while still providing the American economy with the farmworkers and meatpackers it depends on. It provides ample opportunities to swing huge government contracts to giant corporations: for example, to Wackenhut to transport migrants, to Corrections Corporation of America to detain them, to Boeing to build surveillance infrastructure. It justifies the hefty salaries of the 20,000 people who work for the Border Patrol. And it has other beneficiaries, who I will get to momentarily. On the whole, border militarization is best seen as a massive government pork and corporate welfare project that is possibly only surpassed in the last twenty years by the war in Iraq.

The outcome of this policy of has been most educational. Just as it used to be easier to cross the border, it also used to be a lot cheaper. This won't be surprising to anyone familiar with the laws of supply and demand. Any service will become more expensive if it becomes more difficult to provide, and the service of being smuggled across the border has certainly been a case study in this law. Prices rose and rose as the Border Patrol pushed people further and further from the cities and established more and more checkpoints that made the journey longer and longer, until at a certain point there was as much money to be made in moving people as there was in moving drugs. At that point, the cartels that already controlled the drug trade recognized an excellent business opportunity, muscled out the competition, and took over the game entirely. This dramatically transformed what had been a relatively low-key affair into a lucrative, highly centralized, and increasingly brutal industry with tens of billions of dollars at stake. There is no doubt



WE GOT A CALL FROM THE MEXICAN consulate. A man's family had contacted them. He had been missing for nine days. The last time anybody had seen him he was somewhere near a small body of water with a fractured rib. They thought that he was in our area somewhere. For about a week we searched and searched, but we never found him. His brother had papers. He came up, with a horse. He combed the desert on horseback for another week, and eventually found his brother's body.

Two weeks later a man came walking into camp. He was carrying an almost empty gallon jug of water with our markings on it in one hand, and a white shirt tied to a long stick in the other. He stuck the jug under my nose: "This water saved my life! I was praying to Jesus for water! I was sure I was going to die, and I found this water in the desert! I think Border Patrol leaves it on the trails for people!" "No, man," I said, "Border Patrol couldn't give a shit if people live or die.

We left that water." "Those bastards," he said. "I've been waving this flag at their helicopters for three days. They just fly on. When you want them they're nowhere to be seen, and when you don't—there they are." I checked the markings on the bottle. It had been dropped two weeks earlier, at an unusual location we had only gone to because we were looking for the man who died.

that these cartels are among the primary beneficiaries of American and Mexican drug, trade, and immigration policies since the end of the Cold War.

The border extends from the helicopters and walls that crisscross the desert to every home or workplace that might be raided by ICE anywhere across the country.

The rise of the cartels to a position of absolute dominance within a booming industry led, unsurprisingly, to a mass-based approach and an extraordinarily inhumane methodology. I have commonly heard them referred to as *pollo* networks, which means something like “meat herders” since *pollo* is the word for a dead chicken rather than a live one. This should offer some indication of the degree of care that these organizations tend to invest in each individual human life throughout the process of bringing people into the United States. I have seen groups of as many as fifty people—and heard about groups as large as a hundred—being driven quite literally like cattle across the desert, with the sick and wounded straggling behind and trying desperately to keep up. I have met people who were told that what is always at best an extremely demanding four to five day journey would take as little as twelve hours on foot, and countless more who were left behind to die by their guides without hesitation when they were for any reason no longer able to keep up.

As a result of border militarization, prices have risen now to the point that it costs around five thousand dollars for a Guatemalan to be brought into the United States through the networks, and about six thousand for Salvadorans. Fees for Mexicans vary widely, but they are far from cheap. You won't be surprised to hear that many people who wish to migrate do not actually have six thousand dollars lying around. The cartels have developed a variety of inventive solutions to this problem,

often involving kidnapping and indentured servitude. I've met people who spent years working in the United States simply to pay off their initial fee, some while held in conditions of outright bonded labor. I've met others who made it through the desert and were immediately held for ransom by the same groups that brought them in. The ones who were able to raise a few thousand dollars more were allowed to go. The ones who weren't able to were beaten for days and then driven back out to be left in the desert, where within minutes they were picked up for deportation by Border Patrol agents who clearly had some sort of working arrangement with the kidnapers. I'm not kidding. It's scandalous.

As bad as all this is, it still doesn't fully convey the depth of the cruelty that has characterized this era of government-sponsored cartel control. Rape and sexual assault of female migrants is absolutely endemic at every step of the process of migration. This has been greatly exacerbated by the actions of the government: by pushing the traffic out into the middle of nowhere, they have basically guaranteed that in order to enter the country women have to place themselves in situations where rape and sexual assault are extremely likely. In addition, the trails are frequented by groups of armed bandits who make their living targeting migrants. I believe that some of the bandits are employed by the cartels themselves, who are simply robbing their own clients, while others are freelancers taking advantage of an easy opportunity to prey on

ONE DAY WE MET THREE Central Americans. The Salvadoran had been traveling with his niece. He had promised his brother that he would take care of her. He had been carrying her bag when their group was split up by Border Patrol. He got separated from her in the chaos, she fell down, and they carried her away. He escaped with the two Hondurans. They younger one kept telling him that he had done all he could do. They had run out of food and water, and the older Honduran had a badly twisted knee. They had been utterly lost for four days and nights.

The Salvadoran had a cell phone, which got no service in the US. It was full of picture of places they had been and things that they had seen. “Look at this mountain!” he said. “We crossed it! It was so beautiful. We thought for sure that we were going to die.”

While they were recuperating he asked me how much it cost to fill up the tank of our truck. I told him usually about seventy-five bucks.

“Seventy five? Dollars?”

“Yeah,” I answered, assuming that he

thought that this was very expensive.

“How much would it cost in El Salvador?”

“A hundred and fifty, maybe two hundred.”

“Two hundred? Dollars? Jesus! How much do you make an hour there?”

“I was making eight dollars a day working construction when I left.” I got a pencil, and we did some math. After lengthy deliberations we determined that:

- 1) \$150-\$200 dollars a tank represents about twenty days of labor at \$8 a day.
- 2) I usually make about \$15 an hour, which is about \$120 a day.
- 3) This meant that a \$175 dollar tank of gas for the Salvadoran was as difficult to pay for as a \$2500 tank of gas would be for me.

“That's a problem,” I said.

“It's a very serious problem,” he agreed.

“They tied our currency to the dollar, and everything got incredibly expensive. It's just impossible to live there right now.”

A little later he found a laminated picture of a young girl in our kitchen. “Who is this?” he asked me.

“Um, she was abandoned by her guide. One of our volunteers found her body in the desert last winter. She was only fourteen.”

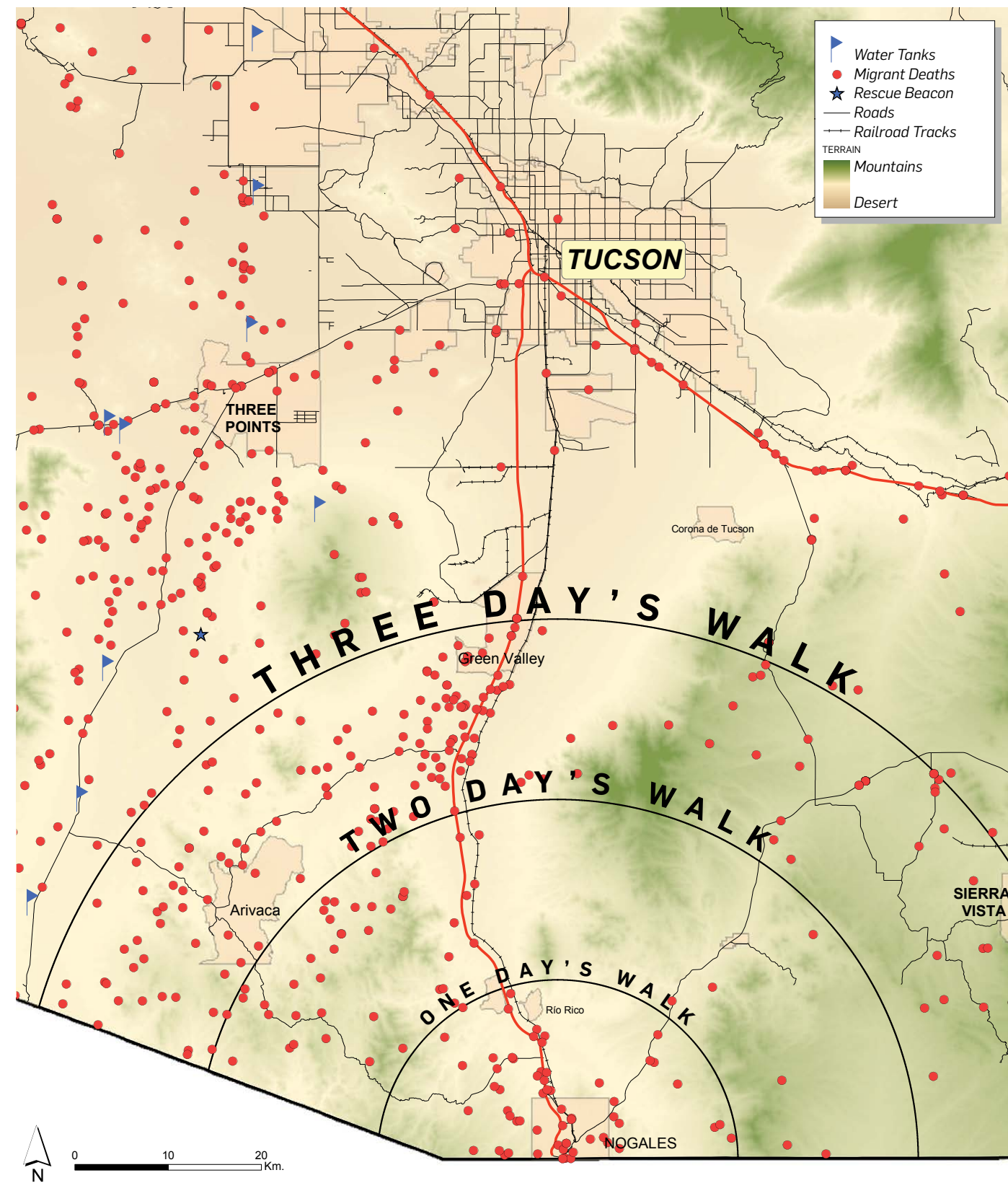
“Where was she from?”

“El Salvador.” He looked like he was going to cry. “How old is your niece?”

“Fourteen.” The younger Honduran put his arm around the Salvadoran's shoulders. “She was having a hard time keeping up. I thought I was going to have to carry her. It was dark. There were lights and screaming. Everybody was running every which way. She fell down and they grabbed her. I saw them carry her away. I ran. I don't know if she is safe. I don't know if I did the right thing.”

“I'm sorry,” I told him.

We ate together, and they left as the moon was coming up. The older Honduran had wrapped up his knee and taken a lot of painkillers. “No matter what happens,” the Salvadoran said, “we're not going to leave him. They're not going to get us. We're going to make it.” He called us a week later from his cousin's house in Utah. They had all made it out of the desert.



A map charting immigration routes into Arizona and deaths along the way, courtesy of humaneborders.org.

defenseless people who are often carrying their life savings in their pockets. Again, it is primarily because the government has pushed the traffic into the ends of the earth that these fuckers have been blessed with such favorable circumstances in which to ply their trade.

To be fair, I've also heard stories of low-level cartel members acting decently, compassionately, and even occasionally heroically. It's worth pointing out that the *guias*—the people who actually walk the groups through the desert to the other side of the checkpoints—are at the very bottom of the pecking order within the networks. Their lives are considered nearly as expendable as those of the migrants. Working in the desert has given me some appreciation for the fact that being a *guia* would be very stressful. They're supposed to bring large groups of people through harsh terrain where there is no potable water, usually either in the dark or in brutal heat, while being hunted by military types with guns and helicopters. Their bosses are probably not the kind of people you want to piss off. It's hardly surprising that *guias* are often unwilling to risk losing their whole group because one or two people can't keep up. The whole situation is just guaranteed to bring out the worst in someone. This is not to make excuses for them, or to absolve relatively powerless people of their personal responsibility for doing indefensible things. It is simply to say that most of the guilt has to be assigned to the powerful people whose actions have created this nightmare and who profit most directly from it.

Toward that end, it's important to understand the relationship between the governments and the cartels. Basically it is this: they need each other. They share similar interests. Perhaps it is most precise to say that in the United States the cartels need the government, while the government makes great use of the cartels. The cartels rely on the US government to keep the prices of their goods and services artificially high. The

government uses the cartels to justify funneling billions of dollars to the corporations whose interests they represent. On the Mexican side, meanwhile, it isn't realistic to talk about the government and the cartels as if they are separate entities. There, the government and the various cartels are fighting for control of the multi-billion dollar American drug and migration market. This ten-sided bloodbath has gotten progressively uglier since the Mexican federal government got involved in December of 2006, ending what had been a longstanding policy of non-engagement in intra-cartel violence and leading to tens of thousands of deaths.

Analysts sometime use term "Colombianization" to point out that the state of affairs in Mexico is starting to look a lot like that in Colombia. Perhaps the most striking similarity is in the increasingly sophisticated collusion between elements of the government and the cartels with which they are nominally at war. These connections run deep, and the influence runs in both directions. Los Zetas, arguably the most violent cartel in the country, was founded by members of the Airmobile Special Forces Group (GAFE), an elite division of the Mexican military established in 1994 to combat Zapatista rebels in Chiapas. Around that time, about 500 GAFE personnel received training by the United States Army's 7th Special Forces Group in Fort Bragg, NC for this purpose. Somewhere between 30 and 200 of these operatives then defected from the Mexican military to become hired guns, went on to provide security for the Gulf cartel—a well-established trafficking organization—and eventually split to form a cartel in their own right.

On a local and state level, bribery of police, mayors, judges, and other government officials by the cartels is extremely widespread. On the national level, there is strong evidence to suggest that the Mexican Army and federal government are favoring the Sinaloa cartel—the largest and richest in the nation—in hopes that they will eventually defeat their rivals and

ONE DAY MY COLLEAGUE and I drove way out into the middle of nowhere to drop water in the desert. Four days later it was time to check on it. On our way out to the spot we saw a man sitting by the side of the little dirt road. He had a ripped up piece of blanket tied around one knee. "How are you doing?" I asked him.

"Badly," he answered. "Look at this." He pulled up his pant leg to reveal a black, swollen, thoroughly broken ankle.

"That's bad," I said. "You need to go to the hospital."

"Yes," he said. "Look at this." He pulled his shirt aside.

"OH SHIT!" my colleague and I shouted in unison. He had a large open chest wound, bloody, half scabbed over and oozing pus. "You need to go to the hospital

right NOW! What happened?"

"Four nights ago I was walking with three other men through those mountains over there. I took a blind fall, ten or twelve feet over a cliff. I broke my ankle and sliced my chest open on a rock. They carried me down from there all through the night. In the morning we saw you drive by, but we were still too high, we couldn't get to the road in time. When we got here they left and said they were going to find help. I haven't seen them or anybody else since then."

"You've been here four days?" It had been well over a hundred degrees every day. "Have you had any food or water?"

"Food, no. A couple times a day I crawled over to that pond. I didn't want to get very far from the road in case someone drove by."

A hundred yards from the road there was a dried up cattle pond, at best an inch deep, mostly manure and sludge. There were about a dozen sets of drag marks where he had crawled between the pond and the road. We drove him to the ambulance. He was remarkably stoic about everything. I asked him if the bumpy road was hurting his ankle.

"No."

"Your chest?"

"No."

"You didn't get sick from the bad water?" I was sure that he would have died if he had.

"No." The ambulance took him to the hospital and I never heard from him again.

enter into a stable agreement with the government such as the ones enjoyed by their counterparts in Colombia.

So there is indeed a great deal of cartel infiltration of the Mexican security forces. This is common, although less widespread, on the American side as well. For instance, a large percentage of the drugs that are brought into the United States are driven into the ports of entry where they are waved through by corrupt Customs and Border Protection agents who know what vehicles to look for. In general, however, the arrangement on both sides of the border is not so crude that there always or even usually has to be direct personnel overlap between, say, the Corrections Corporation of America, the Border Patrol, the Gulf Cartel, and the Mexican Army. What's most important is that all of these organizations have interlocking interests, benefit from each other's activities, and generally act in a way that keeps the others in business. This unholy trinity of government, corporations, and organized crime—three ways of saying the same thing—is a formidable opponent to anyone who hopes to see the death in the desert end any time soon.

MY COLLEAGUE AND I were driving down the road. There were three men standing there—a young guy, an old guy, and a really big guy. "How are you doing?" I asked them.

"Not very good," said the young guy. "Our guide left us and we've been totally lost for days. We're exhausted and we can't go on any more. Can you just call the Border Patrol to come and pick us up?"

"Yeah, I can do that if you're sure that's what you want," I told him. "They drive this road all the time. I'm kind of surprised they haven't seen you yet."

"Yes, please call them. We don't want to do this anymore."

"You're sure?"

"Yes."

I called the Border Patrol and gave them our position. While we were waiting the young guy and the old guy sat close to each other, and the big guy laid himself down on the other side of the road with his arms behind his head and his feet propped up on a rock. It was clear that the young guy and the old guy were good friends, and that neither of them liked the big guy very much. They called him "Flacco," meaning "Skinny" or "Thin Man," which was not very nice since he decidedly was not. "That guy is an absolute bastard," said the young guy. "I hope I never see him again in my life."

A while later he asked my colleague if

he could use his phone. "My wife and baby daughter live in Los Angeles," he said. "I want to tell them that I'm OK." He took the phone and went off to make the call.

Ten minutes later he came back. Before leaving he had been calm and collected. Now he looked utterly distraught and had tears running down his face. "Fuck this!" he said. "I'm leaving. My baby is sick. She needs me. Where am I? How do I get out of here? Which way is north? Do you have any water I can take? Do you have any quarters?"

"Jesus!" I said. "I called the Border Patrol like an hour ago. They're going to be here any time. What do you want to do?"

"I'm getting out of here," he said.

The old guy came running up to him. "What's going on?" he asked. "Are you OK?"

"Carina is sick. She needs me. I'm going to see her."

"Wait, that's crazy," said the old guy. "How are you—"

"How far is it? Do you have any food?" the young guy asked me.

"I think it's a really bad idea for you to go by yourself," I told him. "You might die, and that wouldn't do your daughter any good. Maybe you should go back, rest, get with another group, and try again in a week or two."

He shook his head, still crying. "She

"You haven't heard our thunder yet!"

– slogan at a protest against SB1070

The corporate, governmental, and criminal elites that benefit from the suffering on the border are ruthless and powerful, but they are not gods. They aren't the only actors in this drama, and they don't have the situation completely under control. People make it through the desert because they are brave and resourceful, not just because the Border Patrol lets them. The trails themselves are extraordinary testaments to human ingenuity, weaving gracefully through canyons and over mountains with an unerring eye for direction and cover.

There are somewhere around twelve million undocumented people in this country. One thing that working in the desert has shown me is that they are not all the same. The migrants are not all angels, or devils, or victims. They are not passive objects that are acted upon by the world without acting in return. They are complex individuals who have chosen to take their lives into their own hands, and I have chosen to take their

might need an operation. It's going to be really expensive. I can't afford to pay to cross again. I don't have time to talk. They're coming." He started to walk toward the mountains.

The old guy looked at me, looked at him, looked at me again, and looked back at him. "Wait, Paco, OK, I'll go with you."

I stuffed as much food and water into their hands as I could. "Do you see those mountains way over there? Go that way. When you get close go towards those other ones. The freeway is over there. If you need help that's the only place you're going to find it. Do you have any money?" They both shook their heads. I gave them five dollars. It is the gospel truth that at that point in time it was the last five dollars to my name. They left.

Flacco had not stirred this whole time. "I don't like this one bit," my colleague told me. "You just called BP on three guys and they're going to get here and find one? That's not good."

"Yeah," I said. "Let's get out of here." I went to Flacco. "Um, we're gonna go," I told him. "Here's some more food and water. They always take a long time to come but they will get here. Just don't go anywhere, OK?"

"Sure, whatever," he said. We drove away, and I will never know what happened to any of them.



side as best I can. Sometimes it works out and sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes you beat the man and sometimes the man beats you.

The border doesn't end at the border, and the hardships that undocumented people face don't stop there either. The border cuts through every city and state; it cuts through many of our bodies. The line in the sand is neither the first twist nor the last of the meat grinder that global capitalism has prepared for people without papers. After making it across the border undocumented people enter a world in which they cannot legally earn money; they have compelling reasons not to call the ambulance, go to the hospital, get health or auto insurance, drive a vehicle, open a bank account, use a credit card, apply for a mortgage, sign a lease, or rely on any number of other options that people with citizenship can fall back on. If for any reason you have made it a practice to live a portion of your life off the books, you might be able to appreciate how hard it is to do this full-time in this society.

Illegal immigration is a legitimate form of resistance to the iniquities of global capitalism for millions of people worldwide. It may be indirect resistance, but it gets the goods. This functions in two principal ways. First, remittances from immigrant workers in the United States—many of them undocumented—to their families in Mexico totaled more than 21 billion dollars in 2010 alone. If you add up all the remittances from immigrant workers in the entire global north to all of their families in the entire global south, the total starts to look pretty significant. Even though it's filtered through a fine screen of work and exploitation, this money probably represents one of the largest redistributions of wealth from the rich to the poor in the entire course of human history. Second, south-to-north immigration, much of it illegal, is bringing about real demographic shifts in parts of the global north and particularly in the United States. This shift may eventually lead to meaningful social changes within this country, which could contribute to a somewhat more equitable restructuring of the global economic system, which would mitigate the tremendous disparity in wealth between the global north and south, which is what drives the migration in the first place.

It's certainly not a given that this latter hope will pan out. Generations of immigrants have moved from the margins into the mainstream of American society without radically changing its course. In fact this is exactly how settlers took

control of the land to begin with. Nonetheless, a distinctive feature of American history is that this pathway has generally been reserved for immigrants of European ancestry. It has not yet been proven that this country can assimilate or segregate the current influx of non-European immigrants without eventually undermining the foundation of white supremacy upon which it has been built.

This impending demographic change is a cause of real anxiety for some powerful Ameri-



cans, as well as many less powerful ones who have not managed to think all the way through its ramifications. My opinion is the sooner the better—because I believe that even a partial erosion of white supremacy in the United States is actually in the long-term self-interest of most “white” Americans such as myself. You can build a throne out of bayonets, but you can't sit on it long. Aside from the fact that subjugating other people is a rotten thing to do, it's not a very safe way to live. It's extraordinarily impressive that black people in the United States managed to break free from both slavery and Jim Crow without resorting to indiscriminate slaughter of white people on a grand scale. It certainly would have been understandable to do so, and it arguably would have been justified. I suspect that things would have been much uglier if there had not been at least a few white people who were willing to do the right thing. I don't know if I want to bet that the billions of people that are being pushed around the world today will be so restrained when it comes time to pay the piper on a global level. It seems better

A memorial erected by No More Deaths volunteers to pay homage to Mexican immigrants who passed away during their journey.

*[Opposite]
A group of recently deported migrants sleep over the border in Nogales, Mexico.*



"Vivir para ser libres o morir para dejar de ser esclavos": living to be free or dying to stop being slaves.

to get on the winning side while there still may be time.

In any case, the wheels are coming off the bus. We live on the same small planet as everybody else. The way of life we inherited has proven disastrous for the biosphere and for the long-term prospects of human survival within it. As others have pointed out before me, my generation is perhaps the first group of white Americans that not only have an ethical mandate to turn away from this path but also an urgent self-interest in doing so. Left unchecked the current arrangement is guaranteed to cannibalize what is left of our land base within our lifetimes and leave our children with nothing but the bones.

Admittedly, this is complicated. Groups of humans have subjugated other groups of humans and destroyed their own land bases since long before the social construct of whiteness ever existed, and it is clearly not only people of European ancestry who are capable of doing either of these things. White supremacy is not the only lynchpin holding this all together, but it is a significant one. At this point in time, I

don't think we can hope to stop the devastation of our planet without contesting the structures of white supremacy—or vice versa.

So the answer is not for white Americans to continue to defend the indefensible at the price of our souls, or to crawl into a hole and die. It is for those of us who fit that description to think carefully about where our allegiance really lies, and to find ways to act on it in materially meaningful ways. Believe it or not, there are examples throughout history of people who did just this—members of oppressor and colonizer groups who decided to throw in their lot with the colonized and oppressed. You can point to white people involved in the Underground Railroad during slavery, gentiles who sheltered Jews during the Holocaust, white Americans who took part in the civil rights movement, white South Africans who resisted Apartheid, Americans involved in the Sanctuary movement during the wars in Central America in the 1980s, and Israelis resisting the occupation of Palestine today, among others. It's a good story to be part of. Those of us who are positioned to do so should embrace it and be proud of it.

Our opponents will call us traitors, as if we support another government. In fact we have pledged our allegiance to something older and wiser than anything that any nation-state has to offer, and it is the apologists for the current order who have turned their backs and lost their way.

Working on the border has shown me time and again that you can't really extricate one part of the equation from all the other parts. Once you start untangling one thread you start to see how it's tied into the rest of the noose. The killings in Juarez will not end without structural change throughout Mexico, which will not happen without structural change in Colombia and the other cocaine-producing countries, which will not happen without structural change in the United States, and so on. You can reverse the order of these statements or add others and they will still be true. Fighting internal deportations and fighting border militarization are not two different things. This ultimately has global implications, but it is especially true in the case of Mexico, the United States, and their devil-child The Border. Nothing will get better on the border without things changing in both countries, and the problems in one country will not be solved without addressing the problems in the other.

Once, I asked this Oaxacan guy what he thought it would take to end the death in the desert. "Una revolucion binacional," he answered without hesitating. We laughed and laughed, because

of course that is impossible. It was probably impossible for the Egyptians and Tunisians, also.

New volunteers sometimes ask me what I think a just border policy would look like. I tell them that there is no such thing; it is a contradiction in terms. I am not interested in helping the authorities figure out how to fix the mess they've created. Ultimately the only hope for a solution to the border crisis lies in bringing about worldwide systemic change that ensures freedom of movement for all people, rejects the practice of state control over territory, honors indigenous autonomy and sovereignty, addresses the legacies of slavery and colonization, equalizes access to resources between the global north and the global south, and fundamentally changes human beings' relationship to the planet and all of the other forms of life that inhabit it. That's a tall order! Where to start?

The desert is not the only place, but it is one. The strength of our work is that there is no doubt we are having a tangible effect on the lives of individual people who find our water, our food, or us. I know a number of people I am certain would have died were it not for the resources that we had to offer, and a number more who made it back to their families that never would have been able to do so without meeting us. I don't say this to pat myself on the back, but to say that it is possible to start somewhere.

People sometimes lament the fact that it can feel like we are just serving as a band-aid. This word always aggravates me, because the

WE WENT DEEP INTO THE MOUNTAINS, deeper than we had ever been before. We thought that there was traffic going through there, but the area was so hard to get to that we had never been able to find out for sure. These were different mountains, and we didn't know them very well.

We reached the trail early in the morning of the second day. Within five minutes we ran into a migrant who was walking by himself. He looked tired but was in pretty good shape. He asked us how far he had to go. I had to tell him that I didn't really know. We gave him food and water. He went on by himself, and we kept going.

The trail was worse than any I had ever seen, and I had seen plenty of bad ones. It crossed five large canyons, dropping and climbing about two thousand feet each time. There were lots of signs of heavy use. We found a shrine on a ridge between two of these canyons, carefully tended with little grottos for different saints. We made slow progress, burned through most of our water by late afternoon, and it became clear that we could not make it back out to be picked up before dark.

We decided to drop down one more time and find somewhere to sleep.

As we approached the bottom we rounded a corner in the canyon near a large cave. My colleague and I stopped abruptly. "Oh fuck," he said. "That's fucked up. Cut that down." Someone had used quite a bit of rope to carefully hang a woman's bra and shorts from a tree in front of the cave at about the position where they would be located if there was a real person standing there. I could only guess that these clothes had belonged to someone who had been raped there, and that they had been left as a trophy or memento to the event by the person who had done it. I had heard reports and found evidence of this practice in other places before. I cut it down.

It was almost dark. We reached the bottom, backed into a side canyon, and slept inside a thick tangle of catclaw. One of my companions woke us up in the middle of the night, screaming at nothing.

The next day was far hotter than the one before. I had not seen this coming, as it was still early in the year. We had very little water left, and two more ridges to cross. By the time we climbed to the top of the

last ridge I was starting to get sick. I felt unusually weak, and my heart was beating much harder than it normally does. I lay down under a little tree to try to get out of the sun. I said something to one of my companions. They did not respond because they were a large rock.

"I'm sorry," I said, when I found them again. "I don't feel good. Please keep an eye on me." I walked the last miles down to the car in a daze without anything to drink. I kept thinking about the Gatorade that I had given the migrant, and wondering if he would be OK, and thinking that I wouldn't mind finding a gallon of water on the trail right about now. I thought about how I would feel if I didn't have a phone in my pocket, and a GPS around my neck, and friends by my side. There seemed to be bones everywhere: deer, coyote, rabbit, skunk, cattle.

"Now we walk through the valley of the shadow of death," one of my companions said. I had been working in the desert for years and was in excellent shape. It is amazing how fast anyone can deteriorate in the sun without water to drink.

stakes are too high and the metaphor is not strong enough. One life means a lot to the person that lives it. “Tourniquet,” I tell them, “you mean you don’t want us to just serve as a tourniquet.” Nevertheless, the weakness of our work is that we are always dealing with the symptoms and never the cause. I’m not certain that anything we’re doing is having much of an effect on the larger factors that cause so many people to end up in the desert in the first place. It can feel like we’re always cleaning up a mess we didn’t create, like we’re mending the damage the abusive drunken stepfather has done to the rest of the family. It’s better than nothing, but what really needs to happen is for the abuse to be stopped.

Many of the most effective types of direct action can end up looking like some version of damage control. The problem is that it’s easier to make attainable goals and quantify success when dealing with individuals than when dealing with a system. I can visualize the steps from A to Z of how to drop twenty-five gallons of water on a trail. When I wake up in the morning there is something that I can do that will move me towards that goal. I have a much harder time visualizing how to get Border Patrol out of the desert, and a harder time still imagining how to effectuate structural economic change on a global scale. It can be tempting to say that it’s better to succeed at what we can do than fail at what we can’t, but that’s just defeatism. I really don’t want to be doing these same water drops twenty-five years from now. So what should we do?

Thankfully, none of us have to do everything. It’s not my job to act like Moses and set the people free. That’s not how meaningful social change happens. I can do my best to help, but if the people are going to get free they are going to do it

themselves. I not only don’t have to—I simply can’t call the shots in other people’s struggles for liberation. I trust that the millions of people who are most directly affected by immigration and border enforcement will keep finding ways to combat it. There will almost certainly be things that white American citizens can do if we keep our ears to the ground. If my efforts in the desert are in any way contributing to 21 billion dollars moving from the rich to the poor, I’m happy.

With that caveat, dear reader, please allow me to address you directly. The death in the desert is not the only messed up thing in the world. But it is pretty bad, and it is very close to my heart. I would really like to see it end. I encourage you to find a way to get involved. I can’t tell you exactly how to do this. Coming to work in the desert is one way. There are many others. There are communities of undocumented people in nearly every part of the country. What is the situation in your area, and what might you have to offer? There are corporations that benefit from this whole catastrophe in nearly every part of the country, as well. What might you be able to do?

It has been suggested that in order to link systemic change with tangible goals we must find points of intervention in the system where we can apply power to leverage transformation. These points of intervention have been described as the point of production, the point of destruction, the point of consumption, the point of decision, and the point of assumption. It’s not perfect, but it’s as good a framework as any to use when thinking about how to intervene in this particular situation.

What might direct action at the point of production look like? Stalling the construction of new CCA facilities? What about

WE GOT A CALL FROM OUR NEIGHBORS. A man had crawled up to their door. He could barely stand or talk. He had not eaten or drunk water for three days, and he hadn’t urinated for a day and a half. It had been deadly hot. We tried to give him fluids, but he vomited immediately every time.

“This is really bad,” I told him. “You need an IV. We don’t have one here. You may have kidney damage. We can’t treat that. You need to go to the hospital. They will deport you after they treat you, but if you don’t I am really afraid that you might die.”

“No,” he said. “Don’t call them.”

“Please, I understand, but—”

“No. Don’t call them.”

“But—”

“No.” We laid him down. After several hours he managed to keep down a tiny amount of water. We nursed him through the night as best we could, giving him water every hour or so. By the morning he was able to hold it down without vomiting, and he finally urinated a little bit. He could

barely sit up, but he was able to talk again.

“I’ve never seen anyone so sick refuse to go to the hospital,” I said. “What happened to you?”

“I’ve lived in the states for eighteen years,” he told us. “I’ve never been in any trouble. I’ve never even gotten a parking ticket. My wife and I finally paid off our house. All my children are here. So are my grandchildren. For work I take care of elderly people. Six months ago I had an accident and I broke my back. I was in bed for nearly four months. I was working again, and I got pulled over. The policeman said that I didn’t use my turn signal. I’ve been here eighteen years and I never got pulled over once. I’ve always been very careful. They sent me to a detention facility. They kept me there for fifteen days, with chains on my hands and feet. They fed us peanut butter and crackers three times a day. I was shackled the whole time. They dropped me off across the border with nothing. I had nowhere to go. I hadn’t been there in so long. I left with a group

that night. They drove us way out into the desert. We walked for three days. I couldn’t keep up any longer. I’m not a young man any more. They left me out there with no food or water. I was by myself for three more days. I had no idea where I was. I drank dirty water from a cattle pond, and it made me even sicker. I was hearing voices and seeing things. When I saw that house up there I didn’t know if it was real or not. I kept walking towards it. I thought that I might have already died. I can’t do this again. My whole life is here. There is nothing for me in this world if I can’t make it back. If I die I die. This is my only chance. I have to keep trying.”

He recovered slowly. He called us a week after he left, from his house. A month later he and his wife sent down a huge package of shoes and food and clothing to give to other migrants. “I almost always stay inside,” he said. “I can’t afford to risk being sent back again. I suffered so much out there. I’m still healing. I know that I could never make it another time.”



at the point of destruction? Finding ways to interfere with BP/ICE operations or intervene in deportations? What about the point of consumption? Pressuring businesses to commit to non-compliance with anti-immigrant laws and organizing boycotts of ones that refuse? The point of decision? Interrupting meetings or legislative processes? What might direct action at the point of assumption look like? What lies and assumptions are used to justify dehumanizing immigrants? How might you be able to counter them? Do you have other ideas?

Direct action in the context of humanitarian aid in the desert is a relatively new field, all things considered. There are many tactics yet to be developed, and many others that have yet to exhaust their effectiveness. There is still much to learn and much that new people can offer. Most promisingly, the bi-national, cross-cultural, and inter-generational alliances that have been forged in the crucible of the border have yet to approach their full potential. Our ability to realize this potential will determine the extent of the success of our campaign to end migrant deaths in the desert, as well as whether that campaign ever develops into a deeper resistance to the systems at the root of the problem. They haven’t heard our thunder yet.

The desert is full of places that are sacred to me. There is the last place I saw Esteban, the place I found Alberto, the places where Claudia and Jose and Susana and Roberto died, Jamie’s rock, Yolanda’s hill and Alfredo’s tree. It is overwhelming for me to think that as many of the stories as I know—as many as anyone will ever know—it is just a drop in the bucket of all that has happened there. The objects that people leave behind are a constant reminder of this to me, a physical manifestation of all of the best and worst that human beings have to offer. I am not a particularly spiritual person, but the weight of these remnants is immense and often oppressive. I love the desert. It breaks my heart that it has played host to such terrible suffering. It gives me some solace to know that someday—even if it is only because there are no more human beings left on the planet—there will be no more United States, no more Mexico, no more helicopters, no more walls, no Border Patrol and no border. The plastic will break down, the memory of these things will fade, and the land will finally have a chance to heal under the blue sky and the merciless sun.

To investigate further: elenemigocomun.net / blackmesais.org
oodhamsolidarity.blogspot.com / solidarity-project.org
chaparratrespectsnoborders.blogspot.com / nomoredeaths.org
fresneverextinguished.blogspot.com

“Las paredes vueltas de lado son puentes.”
Walls turned sideways are bridges.
– graffiti on the south side of the Border Wall, Nogales, Sonora

APPENDIX: The Border Patrol



Allow me to add a couple of words about the Border Patrol. There is no government job that can be attained without a high school diploma that pays more than that of a Border Patrol agent. They are generally paid about \$45,000 a year their first year, \$55,000 their next two, and \$70,000 and up after that. They are not going around hungry.

I don't know how to convey the extent of the abuse that I have heard migrants report at the hands of these jokers. I have heard of agents beating, sexually abusing, and shooting people as well as throwing them into cactus, stealing their money, denying detainees food and water, deporting unaccompanied minors, driving around wildly with migrants chained in the back of trucks that look unmistakably like dogcatchers, and on and on. I've also heard numerous reports of Border Patrol seizing fifty pound bales of marijuana from drug smugglers and then either letting them go or processing them as regular migrants without drugs. What happened to the weed? Who knows!

Border Patrol is a lucrative business in and of itself, and part of that business entails exaggerating the danger of the job in order to milk taxpayers for more money. In my experience law enforcement personnel generally think that their work is really perilous, and that the world owes them a sincere debt of gratitude and a fat paycheck. It's interesting to note that since the organization's inception in 1904 there have been 111 Border Patrol agents who died in action, of which 40 were due to homicides. In 2010, out of 20,000 agents, two were killed and one died in a car accident. It is impossible to know how many migrants die crossing the border every year, but somewhere from the mid-hundreds to the low thousands is probably a good bet. If you actually crunch the numbers you will find that Border Patrol agents are also much safer than roofers, sanitation workers, truck drivers, sex workers, and any number of other people whose jobs are actually dangerous.

The other thing that any self-respecting Border Patrol agent will tell you is that they are protecting us from terrorists. This

begs the question of who "us" is. More human beings have lost their lives in the desert as a direct result of Border Patrol activity than in every Al-Qaeda attack on American soil combined—quite possibly more than would have died if every attack that the Border Patrol has had a hand in thwarting had been successful. The more important point is that as long as there is such outrageous global inequality Americans are never really going to be safe.

Many Border Patrol agents come from working class backgrounds and many are Hispanic. To be fair I will say that I have met some who treated migrants with respect. I will also say that in fact they do find people sometimes, that some of those people would surely have died otherwise, and that some agents can be nice enough people. The fact of the matter, though, is that it is rank-and-file Border Patrol agents that enforce the policies that cause all of the problems that I have wasted so many words trying to diagnose. No matter what they do individually, they will never be a part of the solution as long as they wear a uniform and carry a gun. They could put the cartels out of business and end the death in the desert tomorrow by simply going home.

I've heard too many apologies for the Border Patrol—that they are not the enemy and that they are subject to the same economic forces as the migrants and so on. I don't buy it. History is replete with examples of people who were willing to sell out their own people to save themselves. There were black slave drivers on the plantations, Jewish police in the ghetto, native scouts leading the Army after Crazy Horse, and now there are Hispanic Border Patrol agents in the desert. I'm sorry but I'm not impressed. I think that when people become willing accomplices in atrocities, they just don't deserve much sympathy.

Recently a friend of mine found the body of a woman who died of some combination of dehydration, sickness, exposure, and exhaustion within a quarter of a mile of reaching one of our largest supply drops—a place that I have personally serviced several hundred times in my life. She had passed through an

area where for months a few particularly hostile Border Patrol agents have consistently slashed our water bottles, popped the tops off our cans of beans so that they go rancid, and removed the blankets that we leave on the trails. As a result of these activities, we have had to move these drops around constantly, and stop dropping at what would otherwise be excellent locations because the supplies will almost surely be vandalized. I believe that more likely than not, before this woman died she either passed a drop that had been vandalized or a place where there would have been a drop if it were not for the actions of these agents. I believe that it is very likely that had she found

our supplies she would have survived long enough for us to find her. As far as I am concerned, the pieces of shit who are doing this are murderers and her blood is on their hands.

Border Patrol agents really are scared, even if right now they don't actually have much to worry about. You can see it in them. I guess fucking over other people every day of your life must do that to you. Personally it gives me great pleasure to be able to go unarmed daily to places that people with automatic weapons and body armor are terrified to set foot in. I have not made myself an enemy of the people—and in the long run that is going to keep me safer than them.



The desert is full of trash. Water bottles, tin cans, food wrappers, backpacks, blankets, shoes, socks, pants, shirts, hats, toilet paper... there must be hundreds of millions of tons of the stuff. Anti-immigrant types love to talk about it. This is not because they actually give a rat's ass about the environment, but because they hope to confuse people who sympathize with migrants. It's like Bush taking a sudden interest in the position of women in Afghan society ten years back. You don't hear these characters talk very much about the Border Wall obstructing wildlife migration patterns, or about the huge swaths of public land that are being leased out by the government to giant mining and ranching companies for a pittance, or about the depletion of the watershed as a result of cattle and urban sprawl.

Unlike these dirtbags I actually care about the desert and have done my best to clean it up. I have hauled countless truckloads of garbage out of there, which is more than almost anyone on the opposing side can say. I tell new volunteers that as soon as they've picked up their first bottle they've done more to deal with the problem than 99.99% of the Border Patrol agents, Fish and Wildlife officers, militia members, and armchair morons watching Glenn Beck on their TVs ever have or will. Border militarization has pushed migrant traffic into the wilderness, and consequently the wilderness is getting trashed. If you don't like that, we need to figure out some way to stop the border militarization.

Burning the Bridges They Are Building: Anarchist Strategies against Police in the Puget Sound, Winter 2011

Introduction

When I moved to Seattle many years after the infamous upheaval of 1999, I found almost no remnants of whatever had existed here. Certainly, I could find other anarchists, but for a long time I found myself in variations of the same conversation: *How do we reach each other? What are we doing? Why does nothing happen?*

And then, finally, I was with other anarchists in the street—friends and acquaintances, but others, too. *Who are all these people?* We were all in black masks. This was the first black bloc in Seattle in about a decade. Hundreds of posters all over town had announced a demonstration against police violence in the middle of Capitol Hill as part of the West Coast Days of Action Against State Violence April 8-9, 2010. The size of the demonstration was modest—probably around 80 people—but nearly half the crowd came en bloc.

Anarchists in the Puget Sound* had been inspired by recent events elsewhere: the Greek insurrection of December 2008, the riots following the murder of Oscar Grant in 2009 in Oakland, and, most recently, the disruptive demonstrations in Portland.

* The Puget Sound is a geographical region that contains Seattle and other cities, including Tacoma and Olympia. The larger demonstrations and actions of winter 2011 were centered in Seattle. However, stronger regional connections developed among anarchists in the Puget Sound during this period, and there was much collaboration between anarchists from different cities. The actions during this time in Seattle were not just the work of Seattle anarchists, but of anarchists from throughout the region.

These were significant to us for many reasons. Anarchists played an active and critical part in all of them; they showed that people can actively resist the violence of police; they revealed that when people act on their rage, they open a space in defiance of the violence of everyday life. In this space, new social relations come to be as the authority of the state and capital are challenged. These distant fires had stirred the flames in us, and we took the streets that day ready for a fight.

But if the mild clashes of April 9 set off any sparks, they didn't seem to catch in the moment. At one point, cops used their bikes as mobile barriers to push the crowd out of the street and onto the sidewalk. As a cop on a horse cornered the group, one demonstrator tossed a paint bomb right at the cop's head. Incredibly, the paint-filled light bulb bounced unbroken off the helmet of the dazed cop, whose only reaction was a look of dim confusion. The paint bomb broke harmlessly on the street in a red splatter. Worse, the blow didn't embolden the crowd. Instead, there was a collective gasp of shock: *I can't believe someone did that!*

In the end, the police cleared the streets, beating and arresting three demonstrators and capturing two others blocks away after they left. Despite the fact that the police had committed the only real violence, the five arrested faced charges including assaulting an officer and rioting. In addition, the local anti-authoritarian scene was soon parroting familiar



stereotypes: *those people ruined the protest for the rest of us; violence never solves anything.* I went home having experienced a harsh reminder of where I was. This wasn't Greece, or even Oakland, or even Portland. I lived in Seattle. The spell of social peace isn't broken here. *Nothing happens.*

Less than a year later, anarchists were in the streets in black masks again. But I wasn't lost in what I wished could happen. Something was happening. The occupied streets, the broken glass of police cruiser windows, the undercover forced out of the demonstration with a blow to the head, the smoke bombs hurled to keep horse cops at bay, the youth chanting "Eye for an eye, a pig's gotta die!"—Seattle was seeing revolt explode beyond the control of both managed protests and state repression. This wasn't an insurrection like Greece, or even a series of riots like Oakland. But for a brief period between January and March 2011, people broke years of inertia to interrupt the social peace. And, as in the struggles that had inspired us the preceding April, anarchists played a critical role in fueling the flames.

Violence, Counterattacks, and Counter-Information: A Brief Background to Anti-Police Tension in the Puget Sound

It would be an exaggeration to claim that anarchists are responsible for the most remarkable resistance to the police in the recent history of the Puget Sound. On the contrary, anarchists had no perceivable role in a string of unconnected attacks against police in 2009. For months, any casual reader of the mainstream media could learn that shots were being returned to cops and finding their targets.

Individual armed resistance to the police deserves analysis from anarchists, but falls outside of the scope of this article. I only have space here to mention the two most widely reported attacks:

The march of February 16, 2011. At the opening of 2010, Seattle was relatively quiet, but by 2012 it was known as a hotbed of US anarchism.

- On the night of October 22, four Seattle police vehicles were firebombed in the East Precinct parking lot. A little over a week later, on Halloween night, two officers parked in a residential area were ambushed with gunfire from a car. One of the two, Timothy Brenton, was killed; his partner returned fire but the assailant escaped. The next week, police shot and arrested Christopher Monfort after a neighbor reported that his car matched the description of the one used in the attack. Police also claimed to have found in his apartment an assault rifle matching the bullets used in the killing and bomb-making materials, as well as other materials linking him to the shooting and bombings.

- On the morning of November 29, a man named Maurice Clemmons walked into a cafe in Lakewood, Washington, where four police officers were working on laptops before their shift. Clemmons opened fire on the officers, killing them, but did not aim at any other customers or the two baristas. Police went on to militarize the neighborhood where Brenton was killed a month earlier, using armored vehicles to block roads and a robot to destroy a house where Clemmons was suspected of hiding. The police eventually found Clemmons early on the morning of December 1 and shot him dead.

These shootings took place in the midst of a string of high-profile instances of police violence:

- In May 2009, Christopher Sean Harris was chased down a street in Belltown by two cops. The cops had not identified themselves to Harris. Deputy Matthew Paul shoved Harris’ head into a wall and crushed it, resulting in a catastrophic brain injury that finally won Harris a \$10 million settlement after it came out that police had lied to paramedics about how Harris was injured. It is unlikely Harris will recover.

- In November 2009, 15-year-old Malika Calhoun was slammed into a wall and punched twice while being detained in a holding cell by King County Sherriff’s Deputy Paul Schene. Schene had already shot two people, killing one of them; the legal system ruled these shootings “justified.” Schene was later acquitted of all charges relating to his assault of Calhoun.

- On April 17, 2010, a group of Hispanic men were pulled over near Lake Union. Officer Shandy Cobane asserted: “I’m going to beat the fucking Mexican piss out of you homey. You feel me?” and stomped on one of the men as he lay complying on the ground. No charges were filed against Cobane.

- On June 14, 2010 Seattle cop Ian Walsh began harassing multiple young people attempting to cross Martin Luther King Jr. Way. When two young black women refused to passively accept his verbal and then physical aggression, he responded by punching one in the face and then arresting both.

The victims of these assaults were all attacked for petty defiance of authority—such as jaywalking—or without any reason at all. These incidents don’t indicate an increase in the violence

perpetrated by the police; the police have always been brutal. Rather, while the corporate media ignore or downplay police violence whenever possible, all these events were caught on video. When police are caught red-handed, even the complicit media can be forced to show their true face, lest their legitimacy be challenged by video websites.*

Rather than expose the growing tension between the population and the police, corporate media were careful to hide it behind a narrative of individual instances of “bad apple” police violence on one hand and the supposed insanity of Monfort and Clemmons on the other. In the *Seattle Times*, a spokesperson for the police called Brenton’s death an “act of terrorism.” A local Fox News affiliate alleged that a confidential source had reported that child porn was found on Monfort’s computer; no other news sources ran this information and the city never filed such charges. The *Seattle Times* also reported that Clemmons had previously been convicted of a felony child rape charge among other crimes. According to the *Times*, this was evidence of his deteriorating mental health—the only plausible reason one would take up arms against the police.

Clemmons never got a chance to speak for himself, but there’s no need to speculate about Monfort’s feelings. Monfort used his appearances in court and in the media to present a coherent critique. Despite surviving being shot in the head only to face the death penalty in prison, Monfort was calm, collected, and assertive—not at all the madman the media had presented. In particular, he decried officer Schene’s beating of Calhoun. In court, he read aloud a list of people killed by cops in Washington state. His courtroom statements became infamous; in another, he said, “We’ve had enough. The people will not take it any longer. We will not take it any longer. We’ll fight and we’re everywhere. You can’t see us coming.” He openly invoked the language of war.

The King County prosecutor recognized this, declaring that, in trying him with the arson and shooting, he was accusing Monfort of waging “his own personal war” against Seattle police. He wasn’t the only one capable of recognizing the significance of Monfort’s transgression. Many people cheer attacks against the police, as a result of day-to-day experiences of being abused by them. Although he was caught, Monfort had accomplished a deed many dream of carrying out. It’s difficult to gauge how widespread this sentiment is; it is often shouted down by the moral outrage of the good citizens who side with the police. On the blog for *The Stranger*, Seattle’s supposedly “alternative” weekly newspaper, moderators frantically erased any comments that implied an understanding of why people would attack police.

Liberal Reform and Social War

While the forces of order sought to isolate Monfort, anarchists set out to connect his acts—and individual instances of police violence—to the invisible war hidden by the façade of social

* In some places, authorities are moving to make it illegal to videotape police.

peace. At the previously mentioned demonstration against the police on April 9, 2010, anarchists distributed a leaflet titled “Some People Shoot Back,” which explained:

Almost none of the media coverage about Monfort mentioned the brutal beating of the 15-year-old girl, or the many other instances of police violence that motivated Monfort. This is because the media and the police work for the same power structure: a power structure that demands we all remain obedient while they rob us, exploit us, bully us, and lie to us, and then punish us with the utmost cruelty when we break one of their rules, or fight back. This is a system built on our misery. It is no coincidence that sometimes people snap, and do whatever they can to fight back against the agents of this system. To win just a moment of justice, a moment of vengeance. They are the bravest of us, the most honest.

Anarchists defended Monfort’s act and called for prison solidarity for him, insisting that all attacks on the police deserve support while also articulating that the struggle for freedom does not need more martyrs. The anarchist position of *social war* differs from Monfort’s war, even if there is a connection. As another leaflet put it,

What we want most is to fight strategically by cultivating our will to be free and then connecting with others committed to the same struggle: to create a world where cops are not welcome and where individual or systematic assaults on our friends and communities are met with full, sustainable expressions of our rage [...] We will not calm down as a war is waged against us. We do not seek to make peace with the police. We bring fuel to the fires.

But the dominant visible sentiment in Seattle did not embrace this. The fervor that followed Brenton’s death sent many running back to the side of the police. The *Seattle Times* ran a photo of pedestrians stopping to put their right hands over their hearts—Starbucks cups still firmly grasped in the left—as Brenton’s funeral procession drove by. The political climate of Seattle is largely liberal-progressive and produces much ideological incoherence—in this particular instance, moral outrage over out-of-control cops alongside an inability or unwillingness to understand the inherent brutality of the police, their place in the violence of capitalism and government, and their historical role and development. The liberal critique of police brutality demands reforms and reaffirms the role of authority in the same breath.

This cognitive dissonance was especially apparent in a clash between the union newspaper of Seattle police and the more liberal media of the city. *The Stranger* ran an article titled “What Some Seattle Cops Think the Problem Is.” The title itself is telling, as it reveals the reluctance of liberals to grapple with systems of violence, focusing instead on the opinions of the individual bad cops removed from their larger context. The article was about editorials written by officers in *The Guardian*,

the newspaper of the SPD’s union. These are surprisingly honest: cops refer to the citizens they police as “the enemy,” mocking community accountability efforts as “sideshowes” that “exist only for chiefs and sheriffs to provide an illusion of citizen accountability.” Anarchists affirm all of these statements. Liberals and progressives, on the other hand, value these sideshows because they understand the police as a social service. In their view, if public servants run afoul of civil society, they should be better managed. Comment after comment on *The Stranger’s* online article protested, “*But you work for us!*”

The Murder of John T. Williams

“All people seeking to be free find themselves in direct opposition to a system that is inherently violent and oppressive. The police deliberately use violence to control or kill off anyone who seeks to dismantle this power structure—or anyone already marginalized within it. We don’t want a friendlier police force. [...] We want to get out of control. We want a world without cops.”
—from the anarchist leaflet

John T. Williams Was Murdered by Seattle Cop Ian Birk

However liberals sought to avoid coming to terms with the unfolding war, one particular event forced their illusion to its limits. On Monday, August 30, Seattle cop Ian D. Birk shot and killed John Williams, a 50-year-old Native American man.

Seattle Police and mainstream media initially described the lethal attack as an example of a cop defending himself in a dangerous situation. Williams, they said, was “armed” with a knife and “advanced” on the officer who repeatedly demanded he drop the weapon before resorting to gunfire. This story quickly fell apart. In reality, Williams did not approach Birk at all. He was merely crossing the street on his way home from a park he frequented. He probably did not respond to Birk’s orders because he was partially deaf. The knife he was carrying was within the legal limit in Seattle; he had been using it to carve small totem poles—something he and his brothers had done for years. Only four seconds passed from the moment Birk exited his car to confront Williams to the fifth bullet he fired. Eventually it was revealed that the knife retrieved from the scene of the crime was found closed. There was no plausible explanation for the police to hide behind.

Anarchists acted with urgency to counteract the corporate media’s uncritical validation of Birk’s account of the killing. One informal group produced a condemnation of the killing hours after it occurred, before police had publicly released Williams’ identity. Anarchists organized a rally on September 3 on a high-traffic corner near a college campus and a busy part of town. Participants displayed anti-cop banners and passed out hundreds of leaflets explaining the situation to passersby, many of whom hadn’t known what happened or had believed the lies propagated in the media. The rally was followed by a short march to the precinct.

Eventually, the particularly egregious details of Williams’ death forced the mainstream media to tell the story of what truly



Street memorial to John T. Williams, murdered by police.

happened. They still looked for ways to justify the murder—for example, emphasizing Williams’ record of minor criminal convictions. But no attention was ever paid to the most shocking fact: Williams was only one of five people murdered by police in the Puget Sound that week:

- August 31, police shot to death David Charles Young, age 23, in Federal Way. Police opened fire on him on the basis of the supposed theft of a Ford F20 pickup truck. His father said: “He didn’t deserve to die. They murdered an unarmed man.”
- In Spanaway, on August 31, King Ramses Hoover, age 27, was tasered to death at a house where he was staying as a guest. While tasing Hoover, police put him in handcuffs and bound his feet. The cops later blamed his death on drugs—not electrocution.
- On September 3, Richard Sims was shot to death by Tacoma police. Police say he was wielding a knife, although witnesses disagree.
- On September 4, in Gold Bar, Adam Colliers, age 25, was tasered to death for “causing a disturbance.”

The First Assembly

Despite anarchists’ understanding of the role police play in capitalism, many felt totally unprepared for five murders in one week. Posters, banners, and leaflets seemed insignificant in the face of this escalating war. The killing spree was

unfolding so fast that by the time the story of one victim was on a leaflet, anarchists were back in front of the computer reading about another killing. In groups around kitchen tables, in bars, at cafés, and on buses, friends discussed what to do.

An informal anarchist collective made a public call for an anarchist assembly to address police violence on September 21. Many anarchists in the Puget Sound had never been to such an assembly. It was clear that local anarchists would need to experiment with the form—that the success of the assembly model elsewhere could not simply be duplicated in this context. The stated intention of the assembly was “to increase the level of joint activity, coordination, and face-to-face communication among already established anarchist networks.” The assembly was to be explicitly “not a space for the planning of events but rather [...] an opportunity for projects to be announced, for proposals to be stated, for connections to be made, deepened and expanded.” The call was addressed to anarchists, anti-authoritarians, and autonomists but was open to others as well, with some exceptions: “Arguments for police reform are not welcome at this assembly. If you choose to express good faith in this violent and oppressive system you will be asked to leave. The only requirement for attendance at this assembly is the desire for the total abolition of the dominant social order that commits violence against us—including the police force. To this end, political parties are unwelcome—including so-called ‘revolutionary’ ones.”

The assembly took place in three stages. First, participants presented ongoing projects contributing to the anti-police struggle. Then they analyzed and discussed the situation, focusing on concrete proposals for action, time for which was reserved in the third phase of the assembly. Emphasizing concrete proposals discouraged vague statements about what “should be done” as well as attempts to develop concrete plans *during* the assembly. Participants were expected to propose plans for action that they had prepared in advance and that they were committing to carrying out with whoever else was interested. The assembly closed with informal discussion among individuals and groups attracted to each other’s analysis and proposals—an opportunity to exchange information for future dates to flesh out plans.

The first assembly was a success, socially speaking. Around forty people participated and made new connections. However, very few of the plans proposed were carried out.

The Forces of Order and the Maintenance of Social Stability

Meanwhile, the forces that maintain order wasted no time springing into action. Before John T. Williams was even buried, several different entities were enacting schemes to make sure nothing got out of hand. Like anarchists, they recognized that during wild expressions of social rage, a space can open in which anything can happen—including the dismantling of their own tenuous grasp on power.

The city government’s strategy was designed to defuse conflict while granting killer cops impunity. Even the corporate media described the court proceedings initiated by officials as empty gestures. The Firearm Review Board found the shooting unjustified; the official legal inquest into the shooting found that the shooting was unjustified; the Seattle Police Department Office of Professional Accountability made motions to fire Birk from the force. Police chief John Diaz called Williams’ murder a “huge mistake” and admitted Birk should be “held accountable.” Later, the deputy chief called the shooting “egregious.” The effect was for those in power—city officials, the chief of police, and the rest of the Seattle Police Department—to publicly distance themselves from Birk, the “bad apple,” knowing that nothing worse than unemployment would befall him.

The long process provided a cooling period for the rage over Williams’ murder. While in Oakland the dates for killer cop Meshler’s verdict and sentencing were long anticipated and contributed to the mounting tension, the decision to not charge Birk at all came suddenly and unexpectedly in the middle of an otherwise ordinary week of political theatrics. City prosecutor Dan Satterberg, who made the decision to not charge Birk, brought a prop to his press conference—a blown-up excerpt from city law on a giant note card—to explain that, whatever one thought of the slaying, the law simply wasn’t written in such a way that the city could prosecute. “A jury would be compelled to find Officer Birk not guilty. There is no evidence to show malice. There’s no evidence to refute Officer Birk’s claim that he acted in good faith.”

City Mayor Mike McGinn held a press conference the next day to sternly but sadly nod his head in agreement: “I know the public finds the lack of action frustrating. So do I.” Eventually, the city paid \$1.5 million to the Williams family, with McGinn admitting that the point was to buy back “the trust of the community.” The only other state-sanctioned option was to undertake the hopeless task of trying to replace the politicians and laws. This is, after all, a democracy.

The Seattle Police Department had more plans for rebuilding their bridges to society. First, SPD established a direct line of communication to Williams’ family, giving them the personal cell number of a sergeant they were instructed to call with any concerns in the aftermath of their relative’s murder. According to a police spokesperson, this move was unprecedented in Seattle. In another novel tactic, the SPD leaders participated in a “restorative healing circle” influenced by Native traditions with Williams’ family members in an attempt to curb “fear and

mistrust” between the Native community and Seattle police. The police spokesperson explained this as an opportunity for the police department to apologize without affecting any legal outcome. The William’s family’s attorney described this meeting as a success, noting that the circle created a feeling of “connection.”

But what about the rest of the outraged populace? Might the police finally lose good citizens’ loyalty? Through organizations like the East Precinct Crime Prevention Coalition—whose mission statement explains that it exists to foster “partnerships among residents, schools, businesses/merchants, the Seattle Police Department, social service and government agencies”—SPD organized community forums for police spokespeople including Chief Diaz himself to speak with self-appointed representatives of society.

The media also stepped up efforts to maintain order. The same newspaper that had heightened tensions by publishing the secretive police union papers then sought to resolve that tension by implementing a pressure release valve. In January, *The Stranger* began promoting its own “police accountability forum” under the name “Where Do We Go From Here?” The event was little more than a press conference for SPD and their friends—the chief of police, the head of the police union, the mayor, a city council member, and the head of the police-controlled Office of Police Accountability. A lawyer in favor of filing charges against Birk and a representative from the ACLU were the wild cards on the panel. The lawyer was later reported to be the “harsh critic” of police on the panel; she called the police “unprofessional” and suggested that the SPD should list police infractions on its website. The police chief acknowledged that the website “needed work.” According to *The Stranger*, discourse following murders like Williams’ is often “brash, with little dialogue between the police, community members, and the officials empowered to make policy changes.”

Meanwhile, protests organized ostensibly to confront the violence of the SPD also functioned to prevent the situation from getting out of control. Most of these protests were organized by the John T. Williams Organizing Committee and the October 22nd Coalition.

The John T. Williams Organizing Committee was a coalition of various groups focused on winning small reforms in police department operations: cultural sensitivity trainings, policy changes, appointed liaisons with the Native community. They also asked that “consequences for Officer Birk may include loss of his job and badge but must at least take him off the streets until he has demonstrated he understands the newly instituted protocols developed in this process.” Their strategy was to work with city officials, as demonstrated by the committee’s decision to deliver their demands to a city council member along with a gift—an offering of peace. The Committee’s analysis of police violence indicated that they accepted the brutality of the larger system. They shied from the word murder, instead referring to Williams’ death as “a tragedy that could have and should have been avoided,” if police could “serve to increase public safety and peace in our community by employing a variety of de-escalation tactics with the greatest potential to avert violence against the public and the police.”

Despite apparent political differences, anarchists did attend Organizing Committee protests, bringing their own banners and leaflets and seeking to make connections with other angry groups and individuals. The primary significance of these protests was the involvement of John Williams’ family and other members of the Native community. His brother, Rick Williams, spoke at most Organizing Committee events; the Committee had moved to make sure the Williams’ family was on their side almost as fast as the politicians of the SPD had. Most of the other speakers at these rallies were mainstays from Seattle’s liberal-left NGO scene. These activists—some salaried—lectured the crowd on responsibility, civility, and non-violence. In a context where no violent tactics had yet been used except by police, this betrayed the activists’ fear of losing control of the situation. Their aim was to channel others’ anger into their strategy to achieve meager reforms—a strategy doomed to fail. As shown in Oakland and in Greece, the state only turns the legal system against murdering police to the extent that it fears an actual upheaval. But the managers of social revolt fear this as much as city officials do.

The other organizing group did not shy away from the language of social upheaval. They proudly announced *A revolution is what we need!* But their revolution stank of authoritarian politics. The October 22nd Coalition is a national organization that promotes annual protests against police brutality. From their website, it is difficult to discern who exactly is behind the group; but in Seattle, it is evident that O22 functions as a front group for the Revolutionary Communist Party—a Maoist cult of personality based around leader Bob Avakian, known for remorselessly capitalizing on unrest to swell their party ranks or at least sell a few newspapers. The revolution that they claim will solve the problem of police violence does not include the abolition of the police; it is merely a changing of heads of state authority.

Because the RCP’s agenda is to grow their so-called revolutionary party, they actively discourage revolt in the streets, which is always to be put off for some future, official Revolution under party management. Shortly after the murder of John T. Williams, O22 called for a protest to start at the intersection where he was killed. About seventy people gathered for speeches from Williams’ tearful and enraged relatives. The crowd then began to march on the sidewalk towards the nearby SPD West precinct. RCP members pushed their newspapers and used bullhorns to try to lead the crowd in chants for “justice.” A small but vocal group of anarchists began to shout those on bullhorns, and chants of *Cops, Pigs, Murderers!* and *No Justice! No Peace! Fuck the Police!* quickly became more popular with the crowd. The pace of the march picked up as it neared the precinct, and some participants took to the street. The energy had shifted from quiet mourning to palpable anger.

The precinct building appeared unguarded. For a moment, it seemed the crowd would charge it. However, the energy was headed off by a series of amplified speeches that turned the demonstration into an audience rather than an active group. Protest leaders implored the crowd not to be “violent” or “ignorant.” One speaker even suggested that the solution was for

police to use tasers* more often, or at least shoot people “in the knees” first. The anti-climax was a recorded speech from Bob Avakian played over the loudspeakers. The crowd quickly dwindled, and those who remained wore expressions of confusion and embarrassment.

Anarchists had been eager to push the limits of RCP-organized demonstrations in order to create new potential for revolt; but after this dismal experience, most were discouraged from even crashing O22 events. If nothing else, it was encouraging how dissatisfied everyone was with this kind of protest.

In January, O22 called another demonstration on the final day of the court’s inquest into the shooting, this time in the heart of downtown Seattle after dark. Fewer people gathered, including a very small group of anarchists with a banner and leaflets that criticized calls for justice and accountability:

The outcry for the prosecution of Ian Birk for murder—for the power of the law to bring down its heavy hands upon the murderer—reinforces state power. “Police accountability” is a contradiction of terms. The police are the overt, violent front of a war that is waged against us in innumerable ways. They maintain the social order as it exists: all of us below and one percent at the top. They are slave drivers of our everyday lives who uphold the interests of the elite. The police exist precisely to act without accountability. -*There is No Justice—Just Vengeance*

In contrast, members of the RCP were handing out glossy, yellow cards that read *COMMUNISM: Why We Need It*. One party member was rebuffed by a young man as she tried to hand a card to him. She responded in a tone betraying the memorization of talking points: “But what do you know about communism? Is the Soviet Union real communism? Is China?” He quickly fled the demonstration in exasperation.

The attempted management of the protest continued to tire the crowd throughout the evening. The strategy for the march, the event managers announced, was to proceed through busy areas in an attempt to draw more numbers. But no passersby paid attention to the small procession. After the crowd subverted the chants of those holding bullhorns—changing the answer following *What do we want? from Justice! to Dead cops!*—the sidewalk march throughout downtown was halted for a reminder: *This is a non-violent protest aimed at building a mass movement!* The anarchists very nearly left at this point—the course seemed set for as disheartening an outcome as the previous rally.

But something unexpected happened. As the march wandered through the crosswalk of a busy intersection, a woman—unknown to the anarchists, unaffiliated with the RCP, and holding only an umbrella—refused to leave the crosswalk. She blocked a city bus, which in turn blocked several lanes of traffic, which quickly backed up for blocks. While she stood there defiantly, she began to mock the other demonstrators for their passivity and cowardice. The few anarchists quickly joined her in the intersection. Next, a handful of street youth, known to

* Remember that several of the people murdered by police in the Puget Sound in the prior week were killed by tasers, not gunshots.

congregate on that corner, walked into the middle of the street and sat down. As one stepped off the sidewalk, another cautiously commented, eyeing the nearby cops, “Hey, I don’t want to be around here if something is gonna go down.”

His friend replied, “I don’t want to be around here unless something is gonna go down!” Talking to the anarchists, some of the youth explained that John Williams had been a friend of theirs, and that tonight they were ready to fight and go to jail in his honor.

Dismayed at their failure to corral the demonstrators and their anger, RCP members used their bullhorns to announce that this blockade was not the organizers’ intention and that anyone in the street could be arrested. But it was no use. Now passersby were interested in what was happening. Anarchists insisted that the bullhorns be passed around to allow anyone to speak out against the police. One woman came running from down the block and upon reaching the bullhorn announced, “I just want to say—fuck the police!”

Contrary to organizers’ misgivings, no one was arrested when the police arrived. In fact, the cops seemed at a loss. After repeatedly asking people to leave the street, they resorted to dragging people out of the clogged lanes of traffic. Incredibly, folks simply stood up and returned to the places they had been sitting. It seemed that, out of fear of further agitating the population, the authorities had ordered that force should not be used. The best the cops could do was to use their bodies to form a line, allowing one lane of traffic to remain open as the modest intersection occupation carried on for hours.

This showed that people were angry but had been bored by the innocuous and manipulative protests of reformists and authoritarians. Sadly, anarchists had allowed those groups to dominate the discourse surrounding police violence. And the hands of the police seemed bound—they were temporarily incapable of the repression they typically could exert. It was time to act swiftly.

The Second Assembly and the Emergent Strategy

While the so-called revolutionary wing of the managers of social revolt wanted to exploit a potentially explosive situation to expand their ranks, anarchists had no interest in exploiting anyone’s death to push a political program. This distinction is fundamental. Anarchists in the Puget Sound sought to act in solidarity with those resisting the violence of the police—not out of moral obligation, but because we recognize that our struggle is the same. We act on our own rage, for ourselves, against the forces of domination in our own lives. We don’t demand “justice” or “accountability”—we want total freedom. If we act according to our values, our actions will resonate with new comrades, whom we trust to act on their own values and analysis. We don’t offer a prescription; we don’t seek to control the explosion. We want to lay the detonator.

Like the forces of order, anarchists recognized the opening of a gulf between police and the rest of society. In contrast to them, we sought to deepen the divide. But we were unsure how to proceed;

our enemies had gotten the jump on us. When the call went out for the Second Assembly to Address the Problem of the Police, there was some skepticism. Few of the plans discussed at the previous assembly had materialized. An assembly is only a temporary, open space for comrades to shape ideas and strategies. The empty space of an assembly alone cannot generate energy and determination.

Nonetheless, the assembly was planned, in hopes that with more practice anarchists would learn to use this new tool. It followed the same form as the first assembly, and roughly the same number of people attended. Opening analysis focused on two points mentioned above: the managers of social order had not wasted any time getting the situation in order, but the police seemed to have their hands tied by their negative public image. Three strategies were presented: first, to subvert the orderly demonstrations organized by the October 22nd Coalition and steer them into a more conflictual direction; second, to confront the police wherever they attempted to keep ties to the society that was losing faith in them; and finally, for anarchists to organize their own demonstrations.

The assembly did not represent any constituted group or function as a formal decision-making body. There was no vote or attempt to reach consensus. Rather, a loose trajectory arose in an open discussion among comrades who tied their analysis to concrete proposals. Individuals were free to flesh out nuances and debate disagreements without pressure to resolve them. One advantage of this approach is that it produces mutual understandings of different and even conflicting positions. Individuals’ natural tendency to gravitate toward the analyses and proposals that resonate with them reinforces respect for a diversity of tactics. In hindsight, it’s easier to see how these different tactics proved mutually beneficial; what seemed like a series of different plans later revealed itself as a cohesive strategy.

The Strategy in Practice: Anarchist Action as a Destabilizing Force

Burning the Bridges They Are Building

“It happens every time an uncontrollable fire breaks out. The cowardly people who will talk with the police and work with the police come out into the light. Some snitch to the cops, some call them for protection, some lead us toward meetings where we can “talk it out.” Full of vain dreams that cops can be good, they bow their heads, take the side of the police. They, like all cops, live in fear and are ruled by fear.

They, like all cops, are the absolute enemy.”
– *The Police Are the Absolute Enemy*

The risk of calling for an anarchist presence at *The Stranger’s* police accountability forum was that anarchists might accidentally participate in the proposed dialogue. The forum was

organized precisely to invite the enraged to shape their rage into a civil, contained commentary; to present it to the panel of cops and politicians who would, in turn, regurgitate it as a new, improved justification for policing. Citizens would return home gutted with rage, knowing they tried, hoping they'd been heard.

There were two ways to avoid this trap: to present our call for the abolition of all police as something completely alien and hostile to the conversation unfolding within City Hall, and—with any luck—to destroy that conversation. We decided to try both.

The night of the forum, an explicitly anarchist manifestation gathered outside City Hall with banners, black flags, and leaflets. The banners read *Cops = Murderers, Judges = Executioners*, and *Police Violence Is Not an Accident—All Cops Are Bastards*. The leaflets were uncompromising, articulating the media's role in defending the function of police in the violence of capitalism. This group openly shunned dialogue with the police but communicated with other forum attendees.

Meanwhile, a handful of anarchists donned their best courtroom clothes and attended the forum with the intention of disrupting it. As the chief of police began to speak, one sharply dressed person after another stood up to interrupt him, bombarding him with epithets. The moderator meekly tried to quiet them, but couldn't. After this, many more from the audience who were not anarchists also refused to politely wait their turn to speak. Again and again, objections from the crowd derailed

the panelists. Many people walked out and encouraged others to do so. Banners and signs were displayed across the stage calling for the resignation of the chief and the jailing of Birk. The rows of uniformed police in attendance watched, powerless, as the fragile bridges to society their leaders were trying to build went up in flames. While anarchists were not behind all of this, their unhesitating defiance set the tone for the whole event.

The anarchists gathered outside decided to move their banners, chants, and leaflets inside. Bandanas went over faces, but there was a pause—no one wanted to be the first to step into City Hall. It was a regular participant from a Seattle workers' and tenants' organization, Seattle Solidarity Network*, who first stepped into the forum, unmasked. The skills learned in demand letter deliveries to the offices of crooked bosses and corrupt landlords had found a new use. The others followed, and chants of *Cops! Pigs! Murderers!* echoed off the high ceiling of the government building. The forum ground to a halt again. Police and security came running to block the mob, journalists to snap photographs. The situation was finally defused by John T. Williams' brother, Rick Williams, who announced, "I came here to listen to these people! Quiet!" Many of the disrupters were unsure of how to proceed. The media was poised to announce that anarchists were disrespecting the wishes of the Williams family. Some argued briefly with Rick Williams, but

* Seattle Solidarity Network is not explicitly anarchist but was founded by anarchists and operates on anarchist principles.

most simply filed out, tossing the remaining leaflets into the air behind them.

The anarchist critique had not appeared as merely one of many political viewpoints rationally competing for speaking time and new adherents, but rather as a weapon. When their enemies began to rationalize, the anarchists aimed this weapon, took a deep breath, and lodged it deep in the throat of dialogue itself. The conversation sputtered, gurgled, and collapsed. In the next week's print edition, the editors of *The Stranger* didn't so much as mention the failed attempt at conciliatory communication they had tried to orchestrate. Their competitors announced that the forum had been a "failure." The head of the police officers' union later complained in *The Guardian* that "people refused to be quiet!" Now, anarchists had to move to take advantage of their winded opponents—to deny them any opportunity to regain an air of dignity.

A Home Invasion and a Noise Demonstration

We have nothing to lose and everything to gain; them, quite the opposite. If they want us to be silent, we scream! If we are pushed, we push back. If they talk

of reform, we talk of destruction. If they want to "Ian Birk" us, we want to "Chris Monfort" them.

— *The Police Must Go*,

distributed the night of the noise demonstration

Just two nights after the crashing of the accountability forum, the cops struck back. Some anarchists who had been involved were having a party at their house when a cop car pulled up. An officer approached and stated he was looking for one of them in particular—an anti-police activist with a visible presence in several communities. The cop said he fit the description of a suspect wanted in a supposed burglary investigation. The comrade in question had slipped into the house before the cop approached, and the friends on the porch refused to allow the cop to enter.

The cop left, but returned a few minutes later with reinforcements. The party was continuing inside when suddenly the police forced their way in through the windows; they attacked the occupants of the house, punching one in the face, and arrested three on flimsy assault charges. As the man they came looking for was carried out, one cop yelled at him "I will Ian Birk you, motherfucker!"

Friends quickly arranged bail and jail support, and many people spent the day waiting at the jail for the arrestees to be released. When they still had not been released that night, anarchists called for a noise demonstration outside the jail.



A CHRONOLOGY OF ATTACKS AND SOLIDARITY ACTIONS

"Anarchists, now is not the time to fear the baton of a pig and slink into hiding. Now is the time to muster up courage, scheme evil plots, and seek revenge. This was not simply an attack against the police, this was a call to make every one of those motherfuckers pay dearly! Not just for beating a fellow rebel, but for the everyday management and misery these spineless bastards heave upon our backs. In the coming nights it is our deepest desire that others will take it upon themselves to launch a greater surge of aggression against the swine that fill our streets."

— from a communiqué claiming an attack on two police cars and a police substation in Olympia, WA, in solidarity with anarchists in Seattle

In addition to coordinating open revolt, anarchists in the Puget Sound also carried out clandestine attacks. While it takes a confident black bloc to break even a few windows at a demonstration and arrests will likely ensue, in the dead of night a handful of friends can wreak havoc on a target with relative ease. Public acts have advantages that covert acts lack; for example, a tactic is more likely to spread if it is demonstrated

in the midst of a crowd. But as long as care is taken to plan a careful getaway, dispose of evidence safely, and work only with trusted comrades, nighttime destruction entails fewer risks.*

No one believes that overthrowing capitalism is simply a matter of breaking enough windows. Windows are easily replaced, graffiti washed away. Like other tactics, covert action has to be evaluated as part of a larger strategy.

Anarchist intervention successfully altered the discourse of struggle in the Puget Sound, intensifying conflict and creating situations that were difficult for the forces of order to defuse. Clandestine attacks contributed directly to this: smashing the windows of a community police station is inherently difficult to co-opt, showing that anarchist struggle is fundamentally different from—and opposed to—reformist activism.

Such attacks also serve to broaden the terrain of the conflict. Public protests are the accepted territory of social movements; the police have crowd-control strategies to keep these under control. Striking where the authorities expect it least minimizes

* Of course, attacks are risks. Still, it's noteworthy that only a handful of people have been caught during attacks in the Puget Sound in recent years. Some of these had attempted particularly risky acts, such as smashing the windows of a police station in front of several witnesses. All of them faced felony charges and could hardly portray themselves as a non-violent protestors caught in the crossfire. But in each case, the prosecutor was eventually forced to reduce the charges to misdemeanors carrying sentences of community service. In comparison, arrests occurred at almost every demonstration and at one simple jail solidarity gathering, although most of these charges were dropped or never filed.

risk and maximizes the potential for destruction; if clandestine attacks are frequent, the police have to spread themselves thin, attempting to protect any place an attack might happen. Clever attacks can also be timed to coincide with other events—for example, the apparent sabotage of a gas line at the precinct coinciding with the beginning of the February 18 demonstration split the attention of the police. Likewise, the arson attack on a police station directly following a demonstration elsewhere in town exploited the fact that their attention was diverted.

By challenging the centrality of public demonstrations, anarchists reveal that the violence of capital and the state surrounds us at all times, and that the façade of social peace depends upon our willingness to participate. Every intact window and undamaged patrol car hides the reality of social war; each act of violence against order reveals it. Attacks on banks and other symbols of capitalism can broaden the scope of the struggle by revealing the relationships between apparently unconnected targets.

In the Puget Sound, the significance of attacks was explained in communiqués left at the scene or posted anonymously to the local anarchist news site, pugetsoundanarchists.org. As anarchist action gained notoriety, the site began to receive tremendous amounts of traffic. Eventually, the mainstream media would cover any attack posted, quoting communiqués and citing the webpage, which encouraged spectators to read anarchists in their own unapologetic words.

To everyone's surprise, about fifty people gathered—a larger crowd than the anarchist presence at any of the preceding demonstrations. Because the speaker system malfunctioned, the only noise was the sound of flag poles banging against walls and street signs and the screams and chants of the crowd. Nonetheless, the roar that assailed the concrete walls was tremendous. It was around 10 p.m.—lights out in the jail—but on several floors, the silhouettes of hands could be seen in the windows, waving back enthusiastically.

One cop car appeared. As the occupant exited the car to approach the mob, individuals ripped apart the grating of the jail guards' parking garage, flinging the bolts and hunks of metal at him. He returned to his car to call in backup and await instructions. As the noise continued, people began to smash nearby surveillance cameras.

Another police car arrived and tried to box the crowd in, but the demonstrators effortlessly walked around it, the cops inside afraid to face the group. The demonstration circled the jail a few times while more police cars arrived. Another officer attempted to approach the demonstration; a metal trash can was hurled at him, and he hastened back to his car. After half an hour, the demonstration suddenly dispersed, leaving the cops in their cars waiting obediently for orders. No one was arrested.

The three who had been beaten, threatened, and arrested were released the next day. The charges against them were dropped at their first court appearances.

The significance of the house invasion was clear: the police were threatened by those who wouldn't play the game of "accountability." Because of the swift response from anarchists, the cops' plan had backfired. That night many different crews from the Puget Sound, some of whom had never worked together before, discovered that they could face down the police—even on the enemy's home turf.

For the Attack: Subverting Submissive Protests

The crashing of the accountability forum heralded the end of dialogue with police and their apologists. The noise demonstration had forged new connections in the street. The next step was to set a new trajectory for the coming demonstrations.

Following the second assembly, the first opportunity was another protest called for by the October 22nd Coalition on February 12. Anarchists intended to take the streets and hold them; to find new comrades in struggle; to shun symbolic protest and actually attack the despised police; to push the tension in the city toward a point of rupture. This succeeded on all counts.

Inspired by the second assembly and by the previous week's noise demonstration, many anarchists attended. The black bloc gathering at the starting point of the demonstration grew until

For such attacks to spread, it is important that they be easy to imitate. Anarchists have carried out clandestine attacks in this region for years, but the frequency of these increased through February and March 2011. It's impossible to tell, but this seems to indicate that new people were taking up this approach. Covert attacks also serve to strengthen existing connections between anarchists, preparing them for future acts. As one communiqué put it, "These acts of sabotage not only allow us to lash out at the symbols of domination in our lives, but also serve as a means to forge bonds of trust and experience acting with one another."

Another communiqué added, "It is our hope that our struggles, and further, the struggles of all anti-authoritarians, will be mutually inspiring. The police have always used violence to uphold the institution of capitalism, and for that they should expect nothing less to be attacked." The geographic distribution of solidarity actions shows that comrades around the country felt inspired by what they saw here. When Seattle anarchists faced repression, destruction flared up elsewhere—spreading the revolt further and helping to stave off fatigue in Seattle.

It's interesting to note that the timeline of attacks lags behind the timeline of demonstrations. It isn't until after the largest demonstrations against the police that the attacks began. As the ability to pull off inspiring acts openly in the streets began to recede, the number and intensity of clandestine attacks increased. One should be careful not to confuse correlation with causation, however. It is not the case that anarchists in the Puget Sound,

faced with repression, have withdrawn from public activity to focus on desperate underground acts. On the contrary, the number of public actions and events has also increased since the peak of the anti-police struggle. The distinction between open acts and secretive attacks has also begun to blur; for example, on April 22, a group of anarchists attacked a bank in daylight on a busy commercial street, smashing almost all its windows, leaving leaflets, and disappearing before police could respond.

-February 18, Seattle, WA: Police report over their radios that a precinct must be evacuated because a gas line has been opened. The timing of the discovery coincides exactly with the starting time of that night's anti-police demonstration. Because no action claim ever surfaced and the mainstream media did not report on the event, it's unclear whether this was sabotage or mere coincidence.

-February 18, Seattle, WA: Following the large street demonstration, arson is used in an attack against a police substation in Seattle. This substation was a frequent target of anti-police vandals and was subsequently closed.

-February 27, Portland, OR: The windows are smashed out of a police substation.

-February 28, Portland, OR: Two banners are dropped in high-traffic areas, reading, "History tells us that the police

are the real criminals—stop them" and "The police are legalized terrorists—stop them."

-February 28, Tacoma, WA: A police department building is attacked. All its windows are smashed out and its façade stained with paint.

-Early March, Seattle, WA: Several *Stranger* newspaper boxes are burned.

-March 4, Seattle, WA: A Chase bank has its ATMs glued and its windows splashed with black paint. A communiqué explains, "This act of revenge was done not simply against the bank but against the police who protect the tortuous coils of capital."

-March 4, Olympia, WA: Two police cruisers and a police station are smashed up.

-March 14, Tacoma, WA: A police cruiser is vandalized with paint and glass etching cream.

-March 15, Olympia, WA: A police substation is firebombed.

-March 15, Santa Cruz, WA: A police cruiser is attacked with glass etching cream and its tires slashed.

-March 15, Vancouver, BC: A probation office is vandalized with anti-cop and anti-prison slogans. Pro-tourism signs are also obscured with paint.

-March 17, Montreal, Québec: Several vehicles belonging to the Public Security Ministry of Québec are doused in paint stripper and have their tires slashed.

-March 18, Philadelphia, PA: A bank's windows are smashed.

-March 20, Portland, OR: The windows and ATMs of a bank are destroyed and anti-police slogans are painted across the building. This is done in the presence of a police officer, who chooses not to engage.

-March 21, Montreal, Québec: Windows are smashed and paint is thrown on the walls of two security companies.



Turning point: the march of February 12, 2011, which witnessed the first smashing of a police cruiser window.



Fliers fill the air in the wake of the February 12 march.

it numbered between thirty and forty. Many participants carried black flags draped from thick hardwood dowels. The same anarchist banners reappeared, emphasizing that the events about to unfold were aimed at police and the justice system in its entirety.

This time, O22 organizers didn't have time to argue for demonstrators to stay on the sidewalk. As soon as the march began to move, the black bloc took the streets and others followed. Police had been quick to push around a similarly-sized bloc at the April 9 demonstration in 2010, but this time they kept their distance. While the April 9 bloc had seemed unsure of itself, on this day the black mass was animated by a palpable rage, screaming *Hate! Hate! Hate! The Hate inside of me! All cops are Bastards! A-C-A-B!* The rage was visibly reinforced; many in the bloc were carrying clubs of their own.*

The march moved quickly through downtown Seattle, heading first to the Pike Place Market, Seattle's busy open-air market. Anarchists had

* At one of the later demonstrations in March, to general amusement, a cop was overheard warning others: "Be careful. Those flagpoles aren't just... they're not just flagpoles. They're also... uh, sticks. Not unlike ours."

brought leaflets emblazoned with the headings "Police Are the Absolute Enemy" and "Justice Is Impossible—and So Are We". These were distributed by the thousands, both by passing them to people and by tossing them into the air. As it was a windy day, they spun like confetti around the demonstration, caught by the currents and carried far off. Some of them remained glued to the sidewalk by Seattle's regular rains, so the anarchist message lingered in the street days after the bodies in the demonstration had moved on.

The demonstrators moved from the market through downtown and up Capitol Hill toward the SPD's East Precinct. As they advanced, people ran to join from the sidewalks, grabbing anarchist leaflets and black flags to carry. Some announced that they had been friends of John Williams, aiming their rage against the rows of bike cops following along.

As the demonstrators approached the precinct, police cars fell in behind them. People dragged newspaper boxes and other debris into the street to hinder them. As at previous demonstrations, the momentum increased as the crowd neared the police station—but this time, it wouldn't be stifled.

As the bloc moved in on the precinct, officers stood by to guard it. Suddenly, an individual stepped forward and began banging a hammer on the windows of a parked police cruiser. It bounced harmlessly off the rear window; the next blow shattered the driver's-side window. The attacker then moved back into the bloc. For a second, the police stood still, in shock. Then, they came running in to snatch the window smasher. But as they closed in, several received quick jabs to the head from the sticks bearing black flags and fell back, stunned. More cops moved in, and the bloc dispersed.

February 16: No Charges for Birk

The individual who attacked the cruiser escaped,† though the image was dramatically captured by a local photographer and quickly proliferated throughout blogs, print, and news media. Although anarchists in the Puget Sound were critical of attempts to work with corporate media, the prominence of the image ensured that the shattering of the police window was heard by many who hadn't attended the demonstration. Anarchists had loudly announced the end of passive protest. But would anarchist action become only another spectacle, with most of those who cheered remaining on the sidelines? What could mobilize the rage of a dormant population?

In only a few days, anarchists got an opportunity to find out. On February 15, reports circulated that the next day the city prosecutor would announce that no charges were to be filed against Birk. If there was a moment for large-scale anti-police revolt, this was it. Anarchists needed to act quickly to announce a time and place for a large gathering that could go in any direction as the night unfolded. Any hesitation and the moment of conflict would be framed and constrained by the forces invested in maintaining social peace. At the time, there was much talk of the use of Facebook to spread the popular uprising in Egypt weeks earlier. Anarchists in the Puget Sound are understandably skeptical about social media tools; nonetheless, they decided that Facebook might be the best way to reach large numbers of strangers quickly.

The callout was posted to Facebook anonymously as an event page. It was carefully worded

† Officers did manage to grab two demonstrators at random. Both were charged with misdemeanor obstruction; the charges were later dismissed.



The march of February 16, 2011 drew almost ten times as many participants as any previous march.

so as to be as open to as many people as possible without compromising the anarchist analysis of the police. There was no call for self-restraint, no particular demands. The statement simply asked people to converge at 6 p.m. at Westlake Center, the closest thing to a public square in downtown Seattle and the starting point of many protests, in order to act on their rage. Overnight, the event page grew from 400 invites to over 8000. A commenter on the page asked, “Who is organizing this?”

Another responded, “At this point, we all are.”

Confirmed attendees online and actual bodies in the street are two different things. But as evening fell, it was clear that the night would be different than the small protests of the past. The John T. Williams Organizing Committee and October 22nd Coalition had both called for their own protests a bit earlier. Now, their numbers headed to Westlake to join the swelling mob. All the previous protests had drawn less than 100 participants. The crowd on February 16 was huge by comparison, although probably under 1000. It was hard to estimate the number because more people were still arriving as the march left the square, taking the street despite innumerable police on bikes and horses and in unmarked cars.

Marchers took over every lane of traffic. The black bloc was a massive, shifting shadow in the sea of bodies. Some people weaved in and out of the crowd, writing anti-cop slogans on street signs and walls with markers, unmasked but unconcerned about the cops pedaling nearby, powerless to intervene. The first stop for the demonstration was the intersection where Williams was murdered. After a moment of silence, anti-cop chants grew and grew, and again anarchist leaflets whirled through the air, saturating every inch of the crowd. One woman picked up a leaflet from the ground and remarked to a friend, “What are these anarchists about, anyway?”

Immediately, another demonstrator responded, “Here, read this,” handing her a leaflet entitled “Anarchists: What the Fuck Are They Doing?”

The demonstration snaked uphill toward the East Precinct that had been visited by protesters only days earlier. Suddenly, there was a division. The RCP organizers headed in the opposite direction of the masked anarchists and announced through their bullhorns that they would be leading the march back down to Westlake. The anarchists, they explained, were trying to bring the march to the precinct, where things would escalate; that it was dangerous, and people shouldn’t follow. For a moment, the demonstration froze between the two poles. Others, including high-school-aged radicals not in the black bloc, stood in the middle and began explaining the situation to the rest of the demonstrators. Like the anarchists, they had not come to walk in circles, but to act on their rage. The RCP, they explained, wanted to divide the march and keep it under their own control. As the crowd began to turn up the hill with the bloc, the RCP organizers could only meekly follow. Their monopoly on anti-police protests in Seattle was over.

On the way to the precinct, more anarchist leaflets were spread all over the Capitol Hill neighborhood. Some demonstrators tried to pull down the fences around construction sites to drag into the streets; others implored drivers and people on

buses to join them. As the crowd passed busy bars and cafés, demonstrators chanted, *Out of the bars! Into the streets!* But those crowded around tables and drinks were mostly content to watch through the windows, some flashing, of all things, peace signs. The demonstration moved on. *They can keep their bars. The streets are ours!*

As the demonstration came within a block of the precinct, a line of riot police came into view, blocking the way. The police were clearly scared of what might happen if hundreds of enraged demonstrators reached the station. The crowd didn’t try to change course, instead swelling into the intersection in front of the row of shields, clubs, and helmets. Tension rose. The crowd roared louder and louder, individuals fighting to the front of the mob to scream in the faces of cops who tried to maintain calm but visibly winced as some demonstrators yelled, “Chris Monfort was right!”

The crowd wanted to break through the line and swarm the precinct, but no one seemed prepared to. This was one error anarchists made that night: there were many flags, but not enough projectiles. If the paint bomb hurled on April 9, 2010 had been thrown on this night—followed by several more—there could have been an explosion. To be sure, this lack of material preparation was not the only limitation that kept the situation simmering rather than boiling over; few in the crowd had any experience fighting cops in the street. But many people were waiting for the first brick to be thrown.

Instead, the stalemate withered the energy of the mob, and differing thoughts as to how to proceed led to smaller groups splintering off and looking for busier streets to march down or other ways to approach the precinct. Ultimately, a dwindled march returned downtown and reoccupied the same intersection that had been blocked by a few people in January. People remained in the street as midnight approached; no one was arrested.

February 18: Birk’s Resignation Means Nothing

Whatever the limits of February 16, it was unlike any protests in the recent history of the Puget Sound. This brief flash of activity could not be the conclusion of the struggle. We felt compelled to maintain momentum and increase our material preparedness. Now that we knew there were sparks of discontent, we moved to lay tinder around them by setting a time and place, inviting as many people as we could, and staving off the extinguishing forces of social order. We had to create the same situation again—but this time bring gasoline to the flames.

An opportunity came immediately: the same day demonstrators had swarmed across the city, Ian Birk announced his resignation from SPD. Anarchists responded quickly with another anonymous and open call for a demonstration: “Another Rally at Westlake—Birk’s Resignation Means Nothing!”

Although only about half as many people turned out for the demonstration on February 18, the crowd was fiercer and more prepared to fight. The cops, too, seemed readier to clear

people out of the streets, but the demonstration proved capable of defending itself. This was partly due to the increased preparedness of the black bloc, but also because non-anarchist demonstrators were adopting black bloc tactics. While anarchists had previously been the only ones seeking to escalate things, on the 18th many others arrived with plans and masked faces. Many people brought their own black flags, so they were spread throughout the crowd rather than concentrated in the black bloc. One group of youth came wearing bandanas over their faces representing different gang affiliations but marched in a bloc, symbolizing their dedication to overcoming divisions in order to fight the police together.

At first, the demonstration passed through parts of downtown that previous protests had not visited. The crowd walked against traffic through streets clogged with cars, making it difficult for police to follow. Journalists tried to approach the black bloc with cameras but were chased off. The night was alight in the eerie red glow of the street flares carried and thrown by some demonstrators.

The mob didn’t wait for a line of riot cops like the one from two nights earlier to strike. Some masked demonstrators, not in black bloc attire, lobbed bottles at the police. Police reported that they had an undercover in the crowd near one of the bottle throwers, but he was afraid to act due to the militancy of the demonstration. Indeed, the undercover was discovered by members of the black bloc, struck in the head with a stick, and chased out.

A rock shattered through the back window of a police cruiser. The officer inside it jumped out in a panic, leaving the car to drive into the police van in front of it. The crowd cheered, some jumping up and down in celebration.

The police tried to cover their shame with a torrent of pepper spray, but the crowd wouldn’t relent. As cops on horseback began to charge the demonstrators, smoke bombs flew from the black bloc. The horses reared back and retreated; they wouldn’t cross the smoke. Demonstrators took advantage of the confusion to scatter and evade the police. Despite scattering, they were far from through.*

The youth marching in a bloc separate from the black bloc took it upon themselves to lead a charge back through downtown toward the jail, snaking around blocks to avoid the police. They had been inspired by the stories they had

* One person was arrested and charged with the breaking of the cruiser window; but without any evidence that he was involved, it seems unlikely the charges will stick.



Hundreds of people took the streets once again two days later, on February 18, if anything more eager for confrontation.



heard about anarchist noise demonstrations and wanted to create their own. Riot police formed a line to block the way, but this time the demonstrators forced their way through, despite more pepper spray. When they arrived at the jail and the noise demonstration commenced, the silhouettes of prisoners inside could be seen banging on the windows.

In the end, the demonstration followed the path of the march two days prior, up to the East Precinct only to be blocked by many riot police, and then up and down busy streets and eventually back down toward Westlake. A (perhaps former?) organizer for the John T. Williams Organizing was seen fearlessly taunting and yelling in the faces of riot cops and blocking busy lanes of traffic by himself. On the way, different groups that had splintered from the original demonstration rejoined it. At one point, members of the RCP began to try to lead the crowd in chants. Youths carrying black flags responded with their own chant: *Boring leader! Boring leader!*

Despite arrests and diminishing numbers in the street, the night's events had people feeling alive and afire. Demonstrators had proven that the unrest of February 16 wasn't a flash in the pan. What would happen if we just kept doing this?

February 26: Action Against the Police and the Prison World

Little more than a week passed before anarchists took to the streets again. This time the occasion was the February 26 and 27 West Coast Days of Action Against the Police and the Prison World They Maintain, called in solidarity with the struggle unfolding in Seattle.

In the weeks leading up to this, anarchists in the Puget Sound had increased coordination between different crews and cities, gained new comrades in the streets, increased their material preparedness for conflict, and held the streets in several successful mobilizations. People wanted to organize something bolder than a clandestine attack in the dead of night.

At 8 p.m., about two dozen people converged at the intersection where John Williams was murdered. Dressed in black with their faces masked, some cut down nearby construction fencing and threw it into the intersection, while others ran caution tape across the streets,

blocking traffic. Still others held black flags and a banner—*Cops Murder Everywhere! Bite Back!*—or painted anti-cop slogans on nearby walls and the street itself. Just as the event started, a police car happened to pull up to the intersection, escorting a prisoner to the nearby West Precinct. The cop stayed in his car but demanded that the intersection be unblocked. An individual responded by approaching the car and unloading the entirety of a fire extinguisher at it. The cop left the scene immediately.

Within minutes, more police cars arrived and the anarchists headed toward the Capitol Hill neighborhood, cruisers in tow. Incredibly, they managed to lose their police tails as they painted slogans on the walls, handed out and threw leaflets, and attacked the windows of retail shops and banks with sticks and paint bombs. As the cops closed in again on a busy commercial street, another fire extinguisher was let off to create a smokescreen, and the mob dispersed. The cops chased and managed to arrest three people, but never filed charges, likely due to a lack of evidence.

March 4: The Changing Terrain

Now the shape of demonstrations had been entirely transformed. As new groups adopted anarchist tactics, the momentum had no sign of slowing down.

The next call for a demonstration did not come from anarchists but from a group of teenagers who had started a new Seattle Cop Watch. The callout, posted to the local anarchist news site, used language similar to statements written by anarchists. It avoided calls for “justice” or “accountability”; it stated that the demonstration was against *police*, not police *brutality*. It was also the only callout to call explicitly for a black bloc. The group organizing the demonstration adopted the assembly model anarchists had developed to discuss plans and specifically invited anarchists they had met in the ongoing struggle.

Meanwhile, the SPD were paying careful attention to the role anarchists played in sharpening anti-police activity. Their previous, heavy-handed response—breaking into a local anarchist house and assaulting its occupants—had only kicked the hornet's nest. If they couldn't move to block the further proliferation of anarchist ideas and tactics, the situation would

[opposite]
By February 26, morale was high enough that even a group of a couple dozen was prepared to block traffic, destroy property, and confront police.

continue to spiral beyond their control. Thus began a combined effort from the police and other forces of social order to separate anarchists from the rest of demonstrators and crack down on them.

The February 26 action was nationally reported as a violent riot. Although anarchists delighted in hearing an hour of targeted attacks played up as part of “a coordinated effort to end capitalism and the Western way of life all over the globe,”* the media portrayal provided the police an opportunity to frame themselves as helpless victims of anarchist violence.† A few months later, in an attempt to curb militant demonstrations, the police in Denver used the excuse of a small firecracker being thrown at police to beat and arrest demonstrator Amelia Nicol, charging her with two counts of attempted murder of a police officer, criminal arson, possession and use of explosives, and inciting a riot. Similarly, in Seattle, a firework tossed at a police car was described in the media as if it were a bomb: “the explosion could have injured [the police] or other persons nearby.” The police had already portrayed themselves in the media as being “under siege.”

On March 3, a day before the demonstration, SPD spokesperson Sean Whitcomb addressed the press about anarchists. Anarchists, it turned out, had been the ones repressing people—not the police, who were strong proponents of civil rights: “It concerns us that certain people are trying to exercise their first amendment rights and are being marginalized by a well-organized group of a few people that are looking at this as an opportunity to commit wildness and mayhem.” While some amount of protesting is to be expected, things had simply gone too far: “We understand that there is a lot of anger and some amount of distrust [but] the Williams case is done. We’re not gonna let some anarchists destroy the city that we’re sworn to protect.”

Days earlier, mainstream media had widely reported that John Williams’ brother, Rick Williams, was denouncing the “violent” protestors: “I’m honored that a lot of people are touched, but sad that they are going overboard [...] If you want to protest, do it peacefully and honorably. Yelling at the police just disrespects yourself and it disrespects my brother.” Rich O’Neil, the president of the police union who had defended Ian Birk as “a good young officer” after Birk murdered John Williams, commended Rick Williams for being “reasonable.” The John T. Williams Organizing Committee, speaking for dozens of other organizations and purporting to speak for many activists, also issued a statement denouncing violence—not of the police, but of demonstrators. Their last organized rally was on February 19; their primary maneuvers at this rally were to distance themselves from the “violence” of the demonstrations of the last few days, and to encourage people to channel their anger into voting the city prosecutor out of office. After the city entered into settlement talks with the Williams family, the Organizing Committee did not call for any peaceful protests, either.

Those who continued to try to organize demonstrations faced more than the SPD anti-protest squad. Now that the groundwork

had been laid to justify repression, the SPD would spare no expense. It didn’t help that the divisive efforts of corporate media and activist groups had whittled down the numbers wanting to take to the streets; many, it seemed, had been convinced that the fight was over. As night fell on March 4, the scene unfolding at Westlake looked dire: there seemed to be at least two cops for every demonstrator. The cops invented reasons to harass anyone they could. Some busied themselves writing tickets for people smoking too close to the public park, or for tossing leaflets, or for not having their bike lights turned on. Others positioned their bikes as close as they could to people’s banners so no one else could read them. Horse and bike cops lined the streets so that when the march finally moved it couldn’t take the street. Unmarked cars circled the block.

Many people felt discouraged and began to leave. As they did, the police cornered one demonstrator with their horses, announcing that he was under arrest. As the rest of the crowd came running with cameras, the cops panicked and attacked. As the horses charged into the front of the crowd, more cops rode their bikes into the back of the crowd, trapping them. One demonstrator was punched repeatedly in the head by a cop on a horse, then thrown to the ground and piled on by several more cops. He was arrested and taken to jail on charges of assaulting an officer. Soon after, the rest of the crowd dispersed.

The only violence at the demonstration was carried out by police. Nonetheless, the media used the protest as another opportunity to justify the repression of demonstrators: “The protest was yet another display of violence in Seattle following the announcement that former Seattle Police Officer Ian Birk would not be charged for the shooting death of John T. Williams. The acts of violence are in contrast to desires of the Williams family, who have repeatedly spoken out against anarchists and violent protesters.”

The next day, sixteen people were surrounded by nearly two dozen police in cars and on bicycles as they left the jail after bailing their friend out. The cops insisted that they identify themselves; when they refused, six were arrested on suspicion of trespassing at the jail. This was a blatant attempt to identify demonstrators. The six spent the day in jail and were released that night. The charges were eventually dropped.

The Third Assembly

The terrain was changing rapidly. The previous courses of action no longer seemed adequate, and many people felt disheartened. Anarchists needed to look carefully at what was happening and reformulate.

The Third Assembly to Address the Problem of the Police took place a few days later on March 8. Unfortunately, participants failed to use the space to analyze how to counter our enemies’ most recent moves. This could have been for several reasons. First, the simple matter of fatigue: after a month of several actions a week, each involving material preparation, arrests, and days of jail support, many admitted that they were tired

and looking forward to taking a break. Many new faces did show up for the third assembly, promising fresh energy, but the conversation was more confused and meandering than in the past. There seemed to be general agreement that, as the last demonstration had been utterly suppressed, a new tactic must be tried, but the emphasis on concrete proposals for action had been lost. After an introductory summary of the preceding events and a short analysis of recent developments, the dialogue quickly filled with vague recommendations of what people *should* do. *What if we blockaded a highway? What if we occupied a politician’s office?* Because these ideas had not been developed before the assembly, and because no one was taking responsibility to actualize them, the assembly ended after everyone was tired of talking without having set any new course. The only proposal was for a demonstration that had already been planned for March 15. It would prove to be the last demonstration of this period.

In the final analysis, the third assembly might have failed to develop a coherent strategy simply because the anarchists in attendance either did not see the situation changing around them or could not theorize a way to proceed. If we were committed to shunning the media, and they were committed to misrepresenting us, how could we deal with their role in isolating us? If we had not already made the connections necessary to keep ourselves from being isolated, wasn’t it too late to make them now? If the dramatic acts of February 16, 18, and 26 had not inspired a continued street presence in March, what would be the effect of the dispiriting experience on March 4? It was not just the shrewd maneuvers of our enemies that ended the period of heightened struggle, but also our inability to counter them.

March 15: The Moment of Upheaval Ends; The Active Struggle Continues

Nevertheless, the effort of March 15 should not be regarded as a total failure. The plan introduced an international tradition of demonstrations against police brutality on this day to the Northwest. In Seattle, anarchists shifted the focus of the demonstration, announcing on posters around town:

Traditionally, the day is titled “International Day Against Police Brutality” but this definition is limiting. We are calling for a demonstration “Against the Police.” The brutality of the police is an inherent part of their role as the guard dogs of the bosses and the rich; it is not simply an abuse of power, but a symptom of power itself.

The callout emphasized that the struggle was bigger than any individual cop. Ian Birk and John Williams were not even mentioned. This strategically foregrounded the agency of the participants and their own rage against the police. As the poster explained, “taking to the streets on our own terms is a step toward building resistance to the police on a practical level.”

Despite the repression of March 4, many new people still showed up for the demonstration. One woman who had known John Williams was especially angry, holding a black flag throughout the march, yelling at the cops and banging it on the street in front of them. A few people from Seattle graffiti crews came; despite the heavy police presence, at least one took the opportunity to paint anti-cop slogans on the opulent walls of downtown.

Still, much of the 15th was a repeat of the unfortunate events of the 4th. Turnout was small, and police simply smothered the demonstration. Black bloc participants had decided ahead of time to play a defensive role, using reinforced banners and sticks to help hold the street when the police tried to push the crowd off it. But when the cops used their bikes as mobile barriers, anarchists were forced to join the rest of the crowd on the sidewalk. In frustration, most of the black bloc parted with the demonstration before it had even left downtown. The crowd then marched up the hill toward the East Precinct. By now the route had become routine. When it reached the precinct, a line of riot cops was waiting. The march moved up and down some of Capitol Hill’s busier streets, losing more participants along the way, until finally a small group gathered at a nearby park, still chanting slogans.

People felt dispirited. It seemed the old Seattle had returned—the Seattle of April 9, 2010, the Seattle where nothing happens. No one bothered to write a reportback about the 15th, and the frequency of callouts and assemblies dropped drastically.

Nonetheless, something concrete remained from the period of unrest. Days after the March 15 demonstration dispersed, leaving anti-cop leaflets scattered on the ground, posters adorned the walls of Seattle advertising a benefit dinner for all those arrested during anti-police demonstrations. The dinner was held at the new anti-authoritarian social space in Seattle, *Autonomia*. The dinner was crowded and new friends spoke excitedly about everything they had seen, about the photographs projected on the wall from all the demonstrations, about what would come next and the meaning of solidarity. Perhaps the poster said it best:

True solidarity is the recognition of your own struggle in the struggle of those suffering repression and then carried out through the continuity of that struggle; the maintenance of active revolt. The momentum that was born in the streets lives on even in the face of repression.

No Justice and No Resolution

The heightening of tensions in Seattle in winter 2011 didn’t constitute an insurrection or even widespread rioting. Nonetheless, it marked a qualitative break with normality. Those who favored the intensification of struggle faced off against the powerful forces of order. Anarchists in the Puget Sound were able to identify those forces as enemies and confront them as such, opening a space in which social upheaval could begin. Without the strategic involvement of anarchists, the situation would not have developed as it did.

* As reported on the Glenn Beck show.

† Seattle police had already described themselves as “under siege” of anti-cop sentiment.



By the final protest on March 15, 2011, the authorities had managed to regain control of the situation, temporarily reducing the open horizon of rupture to the usual private grudge match.

Yet anarchists and the new allies they found were unable to keep those moments of rupture open. It's important that we analyze soberly why this happened and what we could have done differently, rather than chalking it up to the inevitable death of temporary momentum. The police, whose hands had been tied by their leaders' fears of further antagonizing the public, regained their ability to use legitimized violence by conspiring with the forces that recuperate social struggles. When Rick Williams took the side of the city government against the enraged demonstrators—when the media set the stage on which the police could portray themselves as martyrs—when reformist and authoritarian groups announced that the fight was over or that anarchists were irresponsibly reckless or morally reprehensible, they conspired with the police to exclude the anarchist catalyst from the ongoing reaction.

Anarchists were right to openly oppose those recuperative forces. Had we been content to be a quiet, dissident voice—the civil conscience of the social organism respectfully shaking the bloody hand of an apologetic power—we would have been lost in the hollow discourse of accountability and reform. Instead, we broke that discourse like a cruiser window, and came out the other side with new friends who, like us, wanted to fight the cops—not talk with them.

Nonetheless, the blade cuts two ways, and our isolation contributed to the ending of this phase of struggle. By the time we realized what was happening, it was too late to form the connections we would have needed to keep the streets flooded. In retrospect, it would have been wise to hold at least one truly *general* assembly, open to the public at large.

Our experiments with the assembly form were essential to our success, and it was for

the best that these assemblies mostly focused on creating space for self-identified anarchists. But in addition to the explicitly anarchist assemblies, a more open assembly that invited non-anarchists would have provided an opportunity for anarchists to present their positions directly to others. This would have been more challenging than speaking with people who shared the same politics, but it would have been worth it. Even if differing positions were not reconciled, when the inevitable media backlash began many people would already have an understanding of who anarchists are and why we do what we do—derived from experience, rather than corporate media distortions.

As for our own media, anarchists were remarkably on point. PugetSoundAnarchists.org, a local website, exploded with analyses, calls for action, reportbacks, communiqués, and leaflets and posters for printing. This provided a center for online communication throughout the region. When the mainstream media reported on anarchists, they usually mentioned the website by name. Many people, hearing something shocking about rioting in Seattle, visited the site and read anarchist arguments for themselves. The production and dissemination of leaflets was entirely decentralized; several new leaflets appeared at every demonstration. After the black bloc grabbed many demonstrators' imaginations on February 16, for example, a leaflet appeared that explained, on one side, "Why We Wear Masks"—and on the other, "Tips for Rioting." At *The Stranger's* accountability forum, a leaflet announced "The End of Dialogue." When discourse centered on justice, anarchist leaflets exclaimed "Justice Is Impossible, and So Are We!"

This point is also critical: anarchists shunned the language of justice and accountability. By setting our sights on nothing less than total freedom, anarchists in the Puget Sound made our position inherently resistant to co-optation. Calls for accountability had already been reabsorbed into the system of domination—see, for example, community accountability forums.

A call for justice is always an appeal to authority. One form of justice would rely on the authority of the state to prosecute the perpetrator—but as anarchists, we must also oppose the justice system and its prisons. The vaguer model of justice—"social justice"—still relies on the moral authority of society, and remains easy for the state to assimilate. Consider, for example, the official response to the calls for justice following John T. Williams' murder. The SPD has unveiled

the friendly new face of repression: "justice-based policing," explicitly aimed at policing more efficiently by rebuilding trust between the police and society.

To act on one's desire for freedom or vengeance is another matter entirely. Such action is direct and predicated on no authority but one's own. As one reportback put it:

As anarchists we know we cannot find justice under the State and Capitalism. Instead, we seek vengeance. Vengeance for those whose lives can never be given back and vengeance for our own lives constrained by the tentacles of social control. We do not want a better system because, in fact, better only means more efficient for those who wish to kill and imprison us. We do not strive to reform those who love to see us on our knees. Instead we seek the total destruction of this system of domination, with our feet planted firmly on the ground.

– from *Reportback & Statements Regarding the February 12th Anti-Police Demo in Seattle*

Here in Seattle now, our feet remain firmly on the ground. We don't offer this analysis out of an inflated sense of the importance of last winter's events relative to struggles elsewhere, but in contrast to the dreary quiet of so many preceding gray Northwestern winters. Things are not the same here now. There is more cohesion, more drive, more energy. The frequency of attacks, information nights, and solidarity actions has increased. We've learned new skills, tactics, and strategies. And although there is a stillness in the summer air, we know that the social war continues. The next time it flares up, we'll be better prepared to feed the flames.

–Summer 2011

Further Reading

Pugetsoundanarchists.org
News for anarchists from the Puget Sound

Against the Police and the Prison World They Maintain: Communiqués from the Pacific Northwest January-March 2011
<http://pugetsoundanarchists.org/node/595>

Author's Addendum, 2012

I wrote this over a year ago; it describes events that occurred over a year and a half ago. The intervening time raises the question: were Seattle anarchists in fact “better prepared to feed the flames” of social war afterwards?

In fact, to write about the trajectory of anarchist activity since the end of this narrative, I would need twice as much time and space, and I would still inevitably leave out important situations. A list of highlights would have to include dozens of clandestine attacks, the occupations of multiple buildings, the construction and defense of an impressive street barricade during the port blockade of December 12, 2011, further experimentation with the assembly model, the establishment of a biweekly newspaper, the demise of one social center and the opening of another, the general expansion of anarchist social circles, the efforts leading up to May Day and the riot and demonstrations that day—and, unfortunately, numerous cases of repression and state violence against rebels. Anarchists have continued to constitute a force of their own in Seattle, repeatedly outwitting the police, destabilizing professional and amateur politicians, undermining the lie of social peace, and finding the pressure points to open space for new possibilities.

Furthermore, the actions I once described excitedly are modest compared to what anarchists in Seattle have been able to accomplish more recently. An easy example: the black blocs described in *Burning the Bridges* hit very few targets per demonstration and exhibited a bit of aimlessness and sloppiness in the street compared to the bloc's effort on May Day 2012, which wrecked an unknown number of targets (at least twenty) including a federal courthouse, outmaneuvered the uniformed police entirely, clobbered the undercover cops who tried to intervene, kept the media away with words and force, and disappeared expertly before the police regrouped in greater number.

Why, then, when there is so much more recent news, should *Rolling Thunder* dedicate pages to this old story? What is its remaining relevance?

The critical element of *Burning the Bridges* is that it describes a starting point. One of the most remarkable considerations when reviewing anarchists' contributions to social war in Seattle is that *none of this was happening only a few years ago*. In 2011, anarchists managed to collaborate autonomously in an entirely decentralized manner to create a new means of struggle in an environment where we had previously felt suffocated and ineffectual. *Burning the Bridges* is the story of the origin of the trajectory that shaped the events listed above. The short period it describes informed and influenced anarchist participation in last fall's occupations and is still evoked and dissected now in local discussions of how to continue interventions toward insurrection, despite general recognition that we have since accomplished things we

considered impossible in 2011. Of course, there are innumerable prehistories to this story—for example, anarchist involvement in the Port Militarization Resistance activity in Olympia and Tacoma in 2007—but anarchists here recognize that something new began in the early months of 2011.

That feeling should be familiar; for the last few years, anarchists throughout the US have been participating in a new wave of activity. I can't count the number of cities I never imagined had an anarchist population that issue regular communiqués and reportbacks today. Two beautiful texts that say so much have seemingly planted two simple slogans in many anarchists' minds: “The secret is to really begin” and “Find each other / Get going.” These phrases have meant so much to people because, in periods of uninterrupted social peace, it's difficult to imagine *how* to “begin” and “get going,” and the longer we postpone that ignition, the more urgent it becomes, and the more frustrated we feel. After experiencing the joy of *really beginning*, intentionally and with strategic consideration, I wanted to share with other would-be insurgents how Seattle anarchists discovered that secret.

That said, I never intended to write a guide to a “Seattle model” of anarchist activity. *Burning the Bridges* is the story of how Seattle anarchists *got going*. I wrote it with the hope that it would help others to get started. But where those trajectories lead is up to the rebels who know their cities, their friends and comrades, and their social contexts. This is why there is no “Seattle model” and why there will be no sequel to this essay, which still serves its intended purpose. For a more up-to-date view of the situation in Seattle, consult Pugetsoundanarchists.org.



Occupy Seattle participant in the West Coast Port Blockade, December 12, 2011



Scene Report: ANARCHISM IN CANADA

In the early morning hours of May 18, 2010, three black-clad figures darted out of a branch of Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) located in a trendy Ottawa shopping district; moments later the building was engulfed in flames.

News of the attack spread quickly through the corporate and alternative media, setting the tone for the looming G20 protests in Toronto: they would be militant, they would be confrontational, and they would be angry.

Although it stood out as a particularly brazen example of direct action, the RBC arson did not occur in a vacuum; that particular branch, along with countless others throughout the country, had already been subject to a campaign of targeted property destruction dating back as early as 2007. A major sponsor of the Vancouver Olympic Games and a central financier of the ecologically devastating Alberta Tar Sands megaproject, RBC was widely despised by those involved in the Indigenous sovereignty, environmental justice, and anticapitalist movements.

A video communiqué released by a group called the FFFC drew a direct link between the Vancouver Games and the upcoming G20 Summit; both events were taking place on stolen Indigenous land, were intimately connected to global capitalism, and were causing widespread social suffering and environmental devastation.

In 2010, Canadian anarchists and anti-authoritarians came together to mount a year of resistance that put Canadian anarchism on the map. But where did this resistance come from? How did it take shape, and what lessons can we draw from its example?

BACKSTORY 1: Canada's First Wave

The historical roots of Canadian anarchism date back to the early 20th century, with the appearance of revolutionary syndicalist trade unions such as the IWW and the OBU. Since its colonial beginnings, Canada's economy has been primarily based on natural resource extraction, and the country's relatively late push towards industrialization was geared towards this as well. Consequently, most early anarchist agitation emerged within the mining, lumber, dockworkers', and railroad industries. This culminated in several massive strikes, including general strikes in Vancouver (1918) and Winnipeg (1919).

The years following the First World War saw the arrival of a wave of immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe, many of whom brought with them a yearning for European-style social democracy, and a corresponding rise in labor and farming collectives. By 1932, these forces had coalesced into the creation of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF)—a social democratic political party that would later form the basis for the New Democratic Party (NDP). As it had in Europe, the post-World War II shift towards focusing on electoral politics heralded a precipitous decline in the influence of radical labor movements in Canada.

BACKSTORY 2: The Front de Libération du Québec, and the Rise of the Urban Guerrilla

During the 1960s, a new form of radical leftism burst onto the Canadian political stage: the Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ), an armed Marxist group that drew its inspiration

from the wave of national liberation struggles then sweeping Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The FLQ grew out of the Rally for National Independence (RIN), an early Québécois separatist party. Through a campaign of bombings, assassinations, kidnappings, and bank robberies, the group advocated armed insurrection against the Canadian government and the establishment of a workers' state in a liberated Québec.

The group's first attacks occurred on March 7, 1963, when three Montreal army barracks were hit with Molotov Cocktails. Over the next several months, the FLQ escalated their attacks, targeting several English-owned businesses, banks, railway lines, an army recruiting station, McGill University, and Loyola College. By June 1, all three of the original members had been arrested—though the FLQ itself was far from finished.

Over the course of the next seven years, FLQ cells carried out over 200 armed actions, including the attempted assassination of Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker and bombings of the Montreal Stock Exchange and the home of the city's mayor, Jean Drapeau. The group will always be best known, however, for carrying out the kidnappings that triggered a series of events known as “the October Crisis.”

The October Crisis

On October 5, 1970, two members of the FLQ's “Liberation Cell” kidnapped British Trade Commissioner James Cross; their demands included the release of twenty-three FLQ political prisoners, the identity of a police informant, and the airing of their manifesto on live state television. Three days later, the group's manifesto was read out live over all CBC television channels in Québec.

On October 10, members of the FLQ's “Chénier Cell” kidnapped Québec's Labour Minister Pierre Laporte. Over the next several days, support for negotiations with the kidnappers grew within the mainstream Québec separatist movement, and on October 14 the group issued a call for a student walkout. The following day,

There are a lot of bleeding hearts around who just don't like to see people with helmets and guns. All I can say is go and bleed.

— Pierre Elliot Trudeau, during the October Crisis

Premier Robert Bourassa invoked the National Defense Act and called in the Canadian army to support the police as 3000 students rallied in Montreal in support of the FLQ.

On October 16, with tanks and soldiers occupying the streets of Québec and the prospect of popular insurrection on the horizon, Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau imposed the War Measures Act. Originally created to sanction the internment of foreign nationals during the First World War, the invocation of the War Measures Act granted sweeping additional powers to the state and completely suspended habeus corpus. Responding to the Prime Minister's effective declaration of martial law, the Chénier Cell strangled Laporte and left his body in the trunk of a car abandoned at an airport just outside Montreal.

The October Crisis officially came to an end on December 3, 1970, when members of the Liberation Cell released Cross in exchange for safe passage to Cuba.

The Legacy of the FLQ

As a nationalist, Marxist-Leninist political organization, the goals of the FLQ were hardly anarchistic; nevertheless, they inspired a generation of anarchists with their insurrectionary tactics. Today, Québec is a primary hotspot of anarchism in Canada. Montreal hosts North America's largest anarchist book fair—accompanied by a month-long “festival of anarchy”—and its annual march against police brutality, held each year on March 15, perennially results in street fights with the police.

In 2004, a group calling itself the Internationalist Resistance Initiative (IRI) bombed a hydro generator located near the Québec/US border, timing the attack to coincide with George W. Bush's first visit to Canada. The same group also took credit for firebombing the car of a prominent oil executive in 2006, and most recently for bombing a military recruitment center near Trois-Rivières in July 2010. A communiqué issued following the

latter attack expressed the same disdain for Anglo-imperialism that characterized the earlier Québécois armed separatist camp: “The soldiers of the Canadian Army, let it be very clear, they are not ‘ours,’ they belong to the one to whom they foolishly pledge allegiance, Her Majesty Elisabeth II.”

BACKSTORY 3: Second Wave

Canadian anarchism got a boost in 1976 with the emergence of Open Road, a journal based out of Vancouver. A cultural anomaly when it first came out, Open Road effectively blended the do-it-yourself ethic of punk counterculture with the aesthetic professionalism of more popular publications—earning the nickname “the Rolling Stone of anarchism.”

Other publications soon followed, including Bulldozer, an influential anti-prison publication based in Toronto. One of the individuals involved in Bulldozer was Ann Hansen, who joined the project in 1980 upon returning to Canada from an extended stay in Europe. While in Europe, Hansen had spent six months studying urban guerrilla groups such as Germany's Red Army Faction (RAF), and had become heavily influenced by the Autonomists—the originators of contemporary black bloc tactics.

Direct Action

In the fall of 1980 Hansen travelled to Vancouver, where she moved in with two of her future co-conspirators, Brent Taylor and Doug Stewart. Together with local radicals Gerry Hannah and Julie Belmas the three began to experiment with small-scale actions, vandalizing the local headquarters of a mining company and the offices of the BC Ministry of the Environment. After Hannah and Belmas retreated to the Rocky Mountains, Hansen, Taylor, and Stewart stole a large cache of dynamite and a



For many, the maze of the struggle for Québécois sovereignty eventually led to anarchism.



One of the first publications in the resurgence of anarchism in Canada.

We got nowhere with words. Maybe someone up there in Ottawa will listen to exploding bombs.

— Front de Libération du Québec

We must make this an insecure and uninhabitable place for capitalists and their projects. This is the best contribution we can make towards protecting the earth and struggling for a liberated society.

— *Direct Action Communiqué, May 31, 1982*

collection of semi-automatic weapons and formed a clandestine organization, which they christened Direct Action.

On May 31, 1982, Direct Action carried out a bombing against the unfinished Cheekeye-Dunsmuir Hydro substation on Vancouver Island. The blast destroyed four hydro transformers, causing over \$5 million in damage. A communiqué issued to the media on June 14 claimed credit for the action; it explained that the group had attacked the facility to protest industrial expansion, which they accused of “raping and mutilating the earth” for over 200 years. That summer the militants, now reunited with Hannah and Belmas, stole a pickup truck and loaded it with explosives. Hansen, Taylor and Belmas then set off on a cross-country trip towards Toronto.

On October 14, a powerful explosion occurred just outside Litton Industries, a factory on the outskirts of Toronto that manufactured parts for US cruise missile guidance systems. The blast injured 10 people and caused nearly \$4 million in damage. Direct Action claimed responsibility and issued a communiqué contextualizing the bombing as a response to the resumption of the US/Soviet nuclear arms race and emphasizing the need to take up armed struggle against “the nuclear masters.” A second communiqué followed, apologizing for the injuries and suggesting that they were caused by the inaction of the security guards who had failed to heed the warning to evacuate the building.

Upon returning to Vancouver, members of the group began casing franchises of Red Hot Video, a movie chain that specialized in explicitly violent pornography. By now, they had attracted the attention of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), the Canadian equivalent to the FBI, who placed them under surveillance.

On November 22, three Red Hot Video outlets were fire-bombed by a group calling itself the Wimmin’s Fire Brigade; two Direct Action members—Hansen and Belmas—helped carry out the attacks. These arsons occurred within the context of a broader campaign being waged by more mainstream feminists against Red Hot Video; after the attacks, the chain was subject to widespread media attention, and many stores were run out of business.

On the morning of January 20, 1983, the members of Direct Action were arrested by the RCMP while traveling on the Sea-to-Sky Highway just south of Squamish. At their trial the following year, the five militants received sentences ranging from six years to life; upon receiving a sentence of life in prison, Ann Hansen threw a tomato at the judge.

The Lessons of Direct Action

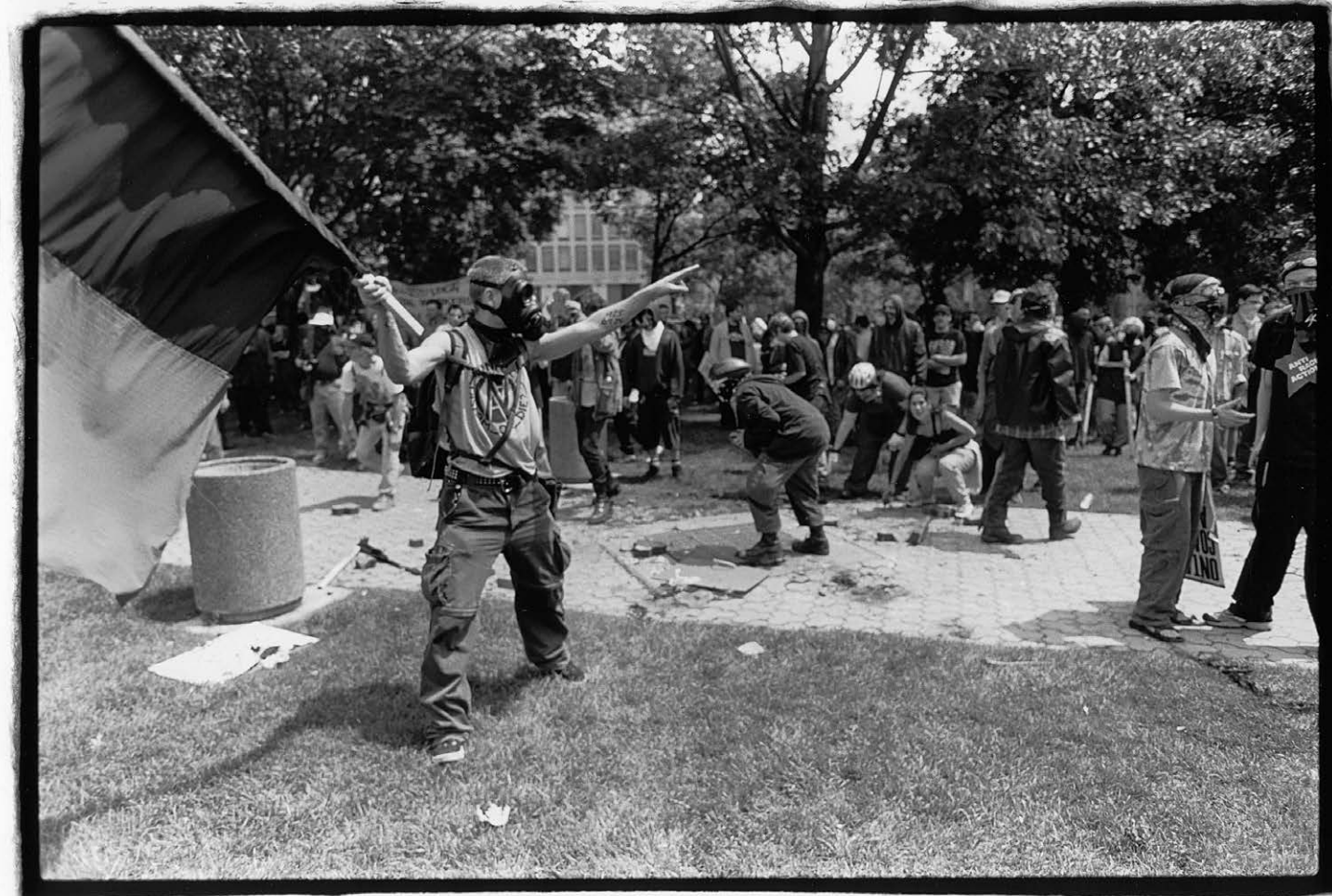
In the years following the Cheekeye-Dunsmuir bombing, green anarchism found a fertile home in British Columbia, much as it has in the US Pacific Northwest. The first Earth Liberation Front (ELF) action in North America was an arson carried out in 1995 against a wildlife museum in BC, and EnCana oil pipelines and infrastructure in the province have been bombed six times since October 2008. BC is also home to a chapter of Earth First! and a sizeable community of radical environmentalists heavily involved with forest defense work. The general opposition to development prevailing among anarchists on the west coast makes sense in light of the fact that much of the province’s natural ecology remains relatively intact, whereas Canada’s other major population centers have long since been robbed of their natural beauty and transformed into post-industrial cityscapes.

BACKSTORY 4: Anti-globalization, Anarchism, and the Canadian Context

A more recent headwater of the contemporary Canadian anarchist movement can be found in the anti-globalization era, a response to neoliberal policies at home, the spread of free trade agreements, and the expansion and intensification of IMF economic shock therapy across the globe. The mass mobilizations of the heyday of the anti-globalization movement radicalized a generation and popularized anarchist principles and practices, laying the foundations for many current anarchist projects.

Ontario Days of Action, 1995

With the election of Conservative Premier Mike Harris in 1995, a merciless neoliberal onslaught was unleashed upon Ontario residents; public spending was slashed, including a drastic reduction of social assistance rates. In response, a grassroots anti-poverty organization based in Toronto—the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP)—began working with the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) and other organizations to develop a collective opposition to the Harris government. This culminated in the “Ontario Days of Action,” a series of one-day general strikes in different Canadian cities. The Toronto Day of Action mobilized over 250,000 people. But despite such massive turnouts, the OFL leadership prevented the strikes from assuming a more confrontational character, and consequently failed to achieve any significant concessions.



Queen’s Park Riot, June 15, 2000.

Learning from the shortcomings of the Days of Action and their failure to challenge the Harris government, OCAP intensified its focus on “Direct Action Casework.” This involved supporting welfare claimants, picketing agencies and employers, squatting abandoned buildings, and fighting the criminalization of poverty.

Queen’s Park Riot, 2000

OCAP and other Toronto-based groups called for an action on June 15, 2000 to revitalize a “movement of generalized resistance.” A march of homeless people and their supporters arrived at Queens Park to demand that the government meet with them and address their concerns. The provincial government responded by mobilizing riot police. OCAP and its supporters met this provocation by fighting back, resulting in what became known as the “Queen’s Park Riot.” The riot engendered a new militancy amongst participants and local progressive organizations, resulting in the founding of the Ontario Common Front, a province-wide campaign of economic disruption.

Québec City, 2001

From April 20 to 22, 2001, Québec City hosted one of the largest demonstrations of the anti-globalization era. Over 50,000 people mobilized to oppose the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) ministerial, taking over the city core. Divided into green, yellow, and red protest zones according to anticipated levels of risk, the city was transformed into a veritable playground of resistance. Protesters tore down the security fence that surrounded the ministerial meeting and held their ground against police who utilized tear gas, water cannons, concussion grenades, and rubber bullets. One of the highlights of the weekend was a “Medieval Bloc” with a full-sized catapult that fired teddy bears at the lines of riot police.*

The demonstrations in Québec City were coordinated by the locally-based Summit of the Americas Welcoming Committee (CASA, in its French acronym) and the Montreal-based Anti-Capitalist Convergence (CLAC). In response to the criticisms of “summit hopping” following

* In response to the charge that such performance art was insufficiently militant, the participants explained that the teddy bears were infected with bubonic plague.



Tear gas filled the sky during the 2001 FTAA protests in Québec City.

the WTO protests in Seattle, the organizers emphasized a focus on long-term local organizing efforts; this model served as an inspiration for the Toronto Community Mobilization Network (TCMN), which helped to coordinate the protests against the 2010 G20 in Toronto with the assistance of a reconstituted CLAC.

The FTAA demonstrations in Québec City represented a high-water mark for the anti-globalization movement in North America. Four months later came the attacks of 9/11 and a shift in the political terrain: nationalistic backlash, anti-terror legislation, increased surveillance, and the diversion of many activists' energy into the ultimately ineffective liberal anti-war movement.

Kananaskis, 2002

On June 26 and 27, 2002, the 28th G8 Summit was held in the remote town of Kananaskis, Alberta. Due to the inaccessibility of the summit location, two demonstrations were organized: one in nearby Calgary and another in Ottawa. The Calgary demonstrations were a

bust: numbers were relatively small and confrontation was minimal, though many businesses closed for the duration of the summit.

The "Take the Capital" demonstrations in Ottawa fared better. Thousands descended upon the streets of downtown Ottawa for three days of creative actions including a No One is Illegal march, a demonstration at the US Embassy, and a large snake march. Perhaps the most noteworthy effort was an occupation; a handful of protestors broke into a local abandoned building that had sat vacant for over seven years, demanding a "use-it-or-lose-it" bylaw to convert unused buildings into social housing. The occupation lasted for a week under the banner, "Sick of Waiting? Occupy!"

Montebello, 2007

In August 2007, leaders from Mexico, the US, and Canada met in Montebello, Québec to discuss the future of the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP). An anticapitalist action camp was established in Montebello in early August to provide a space for protestors to stay,

raise awareness, and make plans. In addition to three days of actions in Montebello, protests also occurred in Ottawa and Montreal.

The Québec Provincial Police's use of agents provocateurs in Montebello generated tremendous controversy. Identified as undercover agents by participants in the black bloc and subsequently pointed out to labor leaders, three masked individuals holding rocks were accused of attempting to incite violence. Pacifists later used this incident to portray the actions of the black bloc during the Toronto G20 demonstrations as the work of police infiltrators.

BACKSTORY 5: Indigenous Influence

In the absence of a revolutionary Canadian labor movement, traditional notions of class warfare have been superseded in many anarchist circles by the narrative of Indigenous resistance to corporate development. As inhabitants of a nation built on a foundation of murder and theft, many anarchists in Canada feel an affinity with the communities most consistently targeted by capitalism: the First Nations of Turtle Island.

We can't do justice here to the story of European colonization and occupation, nor the ruthless campaigns of displacement and genocide that followed. We can only provide a brief overview of this process and highlight some of the stories of Indigenous resistance that have influenced Canada's contemporary anarchist movement.

First Contact

In 1534, Jacques Cartier landed on the shores of Gaspé Bay, in modern day Québec. In front of a small group of curious Haudenosaunee villagers, Cartier plunged a large wooden cross into the earth, claiming the "newly-discovered" territory in the name of France. In a cultural misunderstanding that had serious historical ramifications, the Huron-Iroquois word for village, "kanata," was mistakenly interpreted as the name of the newly discovered territory; thus, the name Canada was born out of a linguistic gaffe—and a centuries-long campaign of colonial displacement and genocide began.

The Arrival of the British

The pace and severity of the colonization of Turtle Island intensified with the establishment of the first British colony in 1607. Whereas

French settlers had largely been traders, pillaging the land's natural resources for export to European markets, the British settlers were farmers who pursued an aggressive policy of territorial expansion.

After their defeat in the Seven Years' War, France was forced to cede control of the majority of their North American colonies to the British Empire. To consolidate these gains and address the grievances of the tribes involved in Pontiac's Rebellion, King George III issued the Royal Proclamation of 1763, formalizing the borders of the British Dominion of North America and establishing a royal monopoly over all treaties negotiated with the country's First Nations.



During the 2001 FTAA, riot police used so much tear gas that it entered the ventilation system of the building hosting the summit, forcing the meetings to be temporarily suspended.

With power thus consolidated, the British initiated a process of forced assimilation ostensibly intended to "civilize" the nation's Indigenous inhabitants, leaving the business of territorial expansion to the monolithic Hudson's Bay Corporation (HBC)—to which the crown leased huge tracts of land extending to the Pacific Ocean. This policy of assimilation was codified in pre-confederate legislation such as the Gradual Civilization Act of 1857, which granted land and a small sum of money to "enfranchised" Natives deemed sufficiently socialized by their European colonizers. This process of enfranchisement, mandatory for all Indigenous males over the age of 21 capable of speaking, reading, and writing in French or English, included a renouncement of their Native status and tribal affiliations, the adoption of a European surname, and their recognition as "a regular British subject."

This policy was largely abandoned in 1879, following a report by Nicolas Flood Davin to sitting Prime Minister of Canada John A. MacDonald arguing that the adult Indigenous population had proven incapable of transitioning from their “present state of ignorance, superstition, and helplessness” to their imagined role as refined British subjects. Instead, the Davin Report recommended refocusing the government’s attention on “civilizing” Native children through a system of compulsory boarding schools administered by the church; thus the Canadian Residential School system was born.

The Residential Schools

From 1880 until the closure of the last federally-administered Residential School in 1990, the Canadian government presided over a network of Canadian indoctrination camps the stated goal of which was to “kill the Indian in the child.” To this end, generations of children were torn from their communities and thrown into Christian boarding schools, where harsh corporal punishment was inflicted on students caught speaking their native tongue. The absence of public oversight and the climate of racist impunity created the conditions for widespread sexual abuse at the hands of Roman Catholic and Anglican priests, leaving a legacy of trauma that persists among survivors of the Residential Schools to this day.

The cramped and squalid conditions of these schools were also an ideal breeding ground for disease. A 1906 report issued by Dr. P.H. Bryce, the chief Medical Inspector for the Department of Indian Affairs, attempted to shed light on these appalling conditions. It indicated that many of the schools had a mortality rate of 50%, with the majority of these deaths occurring within the child’s first year at the school; an addendum to the report, released in 1909, alleged that Native children were being purposefully exposed to tuberculosis and left to die by teachers and staff members.

Bryce was subsequently fired and his findings covered up. In 1920, federal legislation was introduced declaring attendance in the Residential School system compulsory for all Native children between the ages of 7 and 16. Attendance peaked in the 1930s; it only began to drop off in the 1950s, when the state took over administrative control of the schools and began the process of assimilating Native children into the regular public school system. The true history of the Residential Schools did not reach the consciousness of Canada’s settler population until the 1990s; to this day, most Canadians remain ignorant of it.

Indigenous Resurgence

The past two decades have witnessed a resurgence in Indigenous resistance to corporate developers and the Canadian state. Fed up with the reformism of the traditional left, many anarchists have turned for inspiration to this new wave of anti-colonial struggle. At a time when the ecological consequences of industrial capitalism have become impossible to ignore, Indigenous warriors, elders, women, and youth are widely respected for their bravery in opposing the destruction of their traditional land-bases.

Barriere Lake

The Algonquins of Barriere Lake are a small community of 400 people living in a remote area of unceded territory in northern Québec. Their strong sense of cultural identity is grounded in their customary form of self-governance, known as Mitchikanibikok Anishinabe Onakinakewin, and a traditional way of life in close connection to the land. Since 1989, they’ve waged a campaign of nonviolent direct action to halt logging and mining companies’ incursions into their ancestral hunting grounds—an area of over 10,000 square kilometres north of Ottawa. This struggle has largely taken the form of highway blockades and mass demonstrations; the police have frequently responded with tear gas and police batons. Their perseverance in the face of overt repression and efforts to undermine their traditional governing structure has inspired other First Nations communities and earned them the support of anarchists in Ottawa, Montreal, and Toronto.

The Oka Standoff

The Oka Crisis was a 79-day armed standoff in Oka, Québec between Canadian security forces and members of the Mohawk community of Kahnésatake. The dramatic events galvanized First Nations communities across the country, producing an outpouring of solidarity actions and economic disruption that brought Native land claims to the forefront of the national consciousness. The confrontation began on July 11, 1990 when a highway blockade that had halted the expansion of a golf course onto a Mohawk cemetery was attacked by members of the provincial Sûreté du Québec (SQ) with tear gas and flash grenades. Mohawk warriors responded with gunfire and a member of the SQ was killed in the resulting firefight. The SQ withdrew, leaving several police vehicles and a front-end loader behind; the Mohawks immediately put these to use, crushing and flipping over a police cruiser to fortify their barricade and emphasize that they weren’t messing around.

In solidarity, Mohawks from the nearby community of Kahn-awake blockaded the Mercier Bridge, a high-traffic corridor connecting the island of Montreal to its heavily populated southern suburbs of Châteauguay. This provoked widespread anger and rioting amongst the local settler population, prompting the Premier of Québec to call in the Canadian army in an effort to bring a speedy resolution to the standoff. After weeks toe to toe with the Royal 22nd Regiment, the Mohawk warriors unilaterally disarmed and strolled out of the pines where they had made their stand. The golf course was never expanded, and the actions of the Mohawks set a precedent for armed self-defence against colonial encroachment.

The Haudenosaunee of the Grand River Territory

On February 28, 2006, members of the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy occupied the proposed site of the Douglas Creek Estates residential complex near the town of Caledonia, Ontario, halting construction and bringing attention to a long-standing land claims dispute. In 1784, as reward for the Iroquois tribes

who fought alongside the British in the American Revolution, the Crown had granted the Haudenosaunee title over the Hal-dimand Tract—a geographical area extending six miles in both directions from the Grand River; today this territory encompasses many towns and cities in southern Ontario, including Caledonia, Paris, Brantford, Cambridge, Kitchener, and Waterloo. The Crown alleged that the Six Nations council agreed to sell this land in 1841, minus the territory that comprises the modern-day Six Nations reserve. Historical records show that representatives of Six Nations quickly petitioned against this surrender of their traditional land, claiming that they had only intended that it be made available for lease.

On April 20, members of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) stormed the Douglas Creek occupation site, tasing Native activists and arresting twenty-one people. Later that day, a large crowd from Six Nations retook the site, chased the OPP from the area, and erected barricades. The resulting tensions, known as the Caledonia Crisis, drew in many non-Native supporters from around southern Ontario, including anarchists from Guelph, Hamilton, Kitchener, Waterloo, London, and Toronto. Though the barricades have since come down, the Douglas Estates remain occupied, and activists from Six Nations continue to resist the colonization of their land; millions of dollars of construction has since been halted at proposed

development sites in Brantford, and a former police station on the Six Nations reservation was recently occupied and transformed into a youth center.

Looking Ahead

The direct action tactics employed by the Indigenous inhabitants of Turtle Island suggest new possibilities for Canadian anarchists as well. In December 2010, fifty-four First Nations bands in British Columbia announced their intention to block the proposed \$5.5 billion Northern Gateway Pipeline Project, which would transport oil from the Alberta Tar Sands through their traditional territories to tankers in the Pacific Ocean. Shortly before the G20 Summit in Toronto, First Nations communities threatened to blockade the 400-series highways that serve as the primary transportation arteries of Canada’s commercial hub; this would have paralysed the Summit and caused untold economic disruption. The government quickly capitulated to their demands, which included an exemption for First Nations from a newly planned Harmonized Sales Tax (HST).

Canada’s vast geography and transportation infrastructure are its economic Achilles Heel. Anarchists must learn from the success of our Native allies, who have shown how a relatively small group can exert powerful leverage by threatening economic disruption.

Indigenous Influence on Anarchist Struggles: Case Study – Guelph, ON

Guelph is a small city in southern Ontario that boasts a vibrant anarchist community. The city is rapidly being integrated into the metropolis of Toronto; sprawl and destruction of land is a daily reality that cannot be ignored. Since the early 2000s, anarchists in Guelph have been involved in anti-poverty and anti-police campaigns, numerous ELF actions, and countless clandestine acts of sabotage. The community boasts an active Anarchist Black Cross, the Fierce ‘n’ Fabulous radical queer crew, the Arrow Archive Zine Library, the Guelph Anarchist Reading Group, and a wealth of anarchist printing and distribution efforts.

In summer 2009, an occupation of Hanlon Creek on the edge of Guelph successfully delayed the construction of a business park on one of the last remaining old-growth forests in southern Ontario. This occupation was directly inspired by previous Indigenous land reclamations and anti-development campaigns. Public dissent had long been building against the project alongside disenchantment with democratic methods of change. In the early morning of July 27, approximately 50 individuals, mostly anarchists, took over the site and halted construction; for 19 days people held the land. An explicit goal of the occupation was to frame it as part of a broader anti-colonial struggle, foregrounding the theft of this land from its original inhabitants. Indigenous land defenders from across Ontario supported the struggle, including residents of Six Nations and the Mohawks of Tyendinaga.

The occupation also received public support from residents of Guelph. Farmers and neighbors dropped off food at the site and locals protested the development at City Hall; all this created a space for people to meet and share stories of struggle and solidarity. Hundreds came to participate in the occupation.

The occupation ended with construction being stopped for the season, as the development company was unable to meet their deadline. One positive outcome of the campaign was a declaration by members of the business class that Guelph was “unfriendly to business.” The city had to be bailed out by the federal government for \$600,000 to pay for the failed contract, and another larger development in the downtown had to be put on hold due to lack of funds.

The City of Guelph launched a \$5 million SLAPP (Strategic Litigation against Public Participation) lawsuit against five organizers as a deterrent to further action. The following year, many people prioritized the mobilization against the G20 in Toronto, and as a result construction went ahead as planned.

In hindsight, turning efforts towards organizing for a global summit rather than continuing to defend the land against development was not a strategically sound decision and resulted in a decline rather than a growth in the capacity of anarchists in Guelph.



Riot 2010 Part 1: The Vancouver Olympics

In 2007, the tag “Riot 2010” started appearing on mailboxes and the walls of back alleys all over Vancouver. It didn’t take a genius to figure out what it referred to: the Winter Olympics were coming to the city, despite massive public opposition.

In the years leading up to what the government had dubbed the “greenest games ever,” anarchists joined forces with Indigenous people and grassroots organizations to sound the alarm over the havoc the Olympic industry was wreaking on poor people and the biosphere.

In 2008, a group known as the Olympic Resistance Network (ORN) formed to contest the Games, using the media spectacle to broadcast an uncompromising critique of colonialism and capitalism. They accomplished this through high-profile direct actions and a relentless outreach campaign culminating in the first ever anti-Olympic convergence, timed to coincide with the Games.

Three important factors distinguished the Vancouver experience from more traditional anticapitalist convergences, such as protests against the summits of the World Bank and World Trade Organization (WTO).

First, the Olympics are popular the world over. The idea of amateur sportsmanship and the spirit of friendly competition among nations is a powerful myth obscuring the capitalist agenda of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). It was challenging to expose the nefarious agenda and history of the Games, and equally difficult to convince troublemakers to come to Vancouver to participate in actions against something seemingly as benign as figure skating.

Second, Indigenous sovereignty was the most prominent message of anti-Olympics organizing. “No Olympics on Stolen Native Land” was the rallying cry of the ORN. The venues and infrastructure of the Games, including highway expansion and multi-billion dollar megaprojects, were all built on unceded Coast Salish territory.

Finally, the NGO-industrial complex, big labor, and the NDP all stayed away from anti-Olympic organizing altogether. While those groups often bring numbers and resources to major convergences, they also bring their bureaucratic style of management and a weak analysis of the structures of oppression. Their absence gave more radical activists space to push an anticapitalist and anti-colonial agenda to the forefront.

A series of successful disruptions beginning in 2007 forced the Vancouver Olympic Organizing Committee (VANOC) to bring their pre-Olympic events indoors with heavy security. Sabotage and vandalism against sponsors, occupations and blockades at promotional events, and actions against the Olympic torch helped build momentum leading up to the main event. When February 2010 finally arrived, all the pieces were in place.

Background

In July 2003, the International Olympic Committee selected Vancouver as host city for the 2010 Winter Games. At this time, the Four Host First Nations corporation was established, comprised of government-funded band councils from the region. The co-option of Indigenous identity into the Olympics’ branding was a top priority for government and business, on account of the potential for disruption posed by Indigenous people. Olympic organizers also endeavored to exploit Indigenous culture through mascots, medal designs, and other imagery.

The first phase of the anti-Olympic campaign took place between 2002 and 2005, consisting of small rallies, forums, and a failed grassroots campaign for a “No” vote against the Games in a citywide plebiscite. During this period, struggles began to intensify around housing and homelessness, primarily in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DTES). This began with the 2002 campaign to turn the vacant Woodward’s department store into social housing, involving a week-long occupation of the building and a three-month tent city on its sidewalks.

In 2006, the campaign entered its second phase, characterized by larger militant protests and clandestine acts of vandalism and sabotage. This movement presented a radical critique of the Olympic industry as a whole, and expanded to a national level with solidarity actions and disruptions of Olympic events across the country, along with videos, speaking tours, newsletters,

conferences, workshops, and other educational campaigns. Over 30 public direct actions occurred, including squats, event disruptions, and blockades, and at least 60 acts of vandalism and sabotage were carried out. There were over 80 Olympics-related arrests in Vancouver and other cities between 2006 and 2010, almost all resulting from public actions. Some 27 more arrests occurred during the Games.

The anti-Olympic movement had a considerable impact on public discourse and the Olympic industry. Polls reported over 30 percent support for the anti-Olympic protests and over 70 percent agreement that the Olympics cost too much.* Pollsters were surprised by the massive unpopularity of the Games, which only arose after militant direct actions began in 2007.

Among the Indigenous groups involved in the campaign, the Native Youth Movement (NYM), Native 2010 Resistance, and Downtown Eastside Women’s Center Elders’ Council stand out. Secwepemc NYM participated in several anti-Olympic protests and conducted speaking tours in Eastern Canada and the US. Native 2010 Resistance was a short-lived Indigenous anti-Olympic group based out of Vancouver that organized rallies and an action in early 2008. The Elders’ Council was often at the forefront of protests.

After some previous efforts to establish an anti-Olympic organizing group in Vancouver, the Olympic Resistance Network (ORN) was established in the spring of 2008. It was comprised of radical grassroots organizations, including the Anti-Poverty Committee (APC), No One Is Illegal (NOII) and 2010 Games Watch, joined by several individual anarchist and Indigenous organizers. Other anarchists and Indigenous activists did not participate in ORN, choosing to organize autonomously. The Vancouver Media Co-op (VMC), which provided the best coverage of the anti-Olympic convergence in February 2010, originally began as a communications committee within the ORN.

In contrast to the ORN, a more reformist movement was comprised of NGO-type groups such as the Carnegie Community Action Project (CCAP), Pivot Legal Society (a “progressive” lawyer’s group in the DTES), Impact on Communities Coalition (IOCC), and others. These groups’ main strategy was to use the Olympics to promote their causes, relying on positive media coverage and lobbying for legal reforms. For these reasons, the reformists had little public interaction with the ORN and organized their own separate activities, including forums,

* The Canadian Press Harris-Decima survey.



rallies, an annual “Poverty Olympics,” and a “Poverty Torch Relay” just prior to the Games.

Advertisements were détourned to announce the buildup to the 2010 anti-Olympic riots.

Anti-Olympic Convergence, February 10-15, 2010

In fall 2007, organizers began calling for an anti-Olympic convergence February 10-15, 2010. The dates were announced by several Indigenous persons involved in anti-Olympics organizing during an intercontinental gathering organized by the Zapatistas and the National Indigenous Congress in Mexico. The organizing of this convergence was eventually taken up by the ORN.

Meanwhile, in preparation for the Olympics, the government established a \$1 billion security

apparatus with a force of 17,000 personnel. This included nearly 7000 police, 5000 soldiers, and over 5000 private security guards. Police, intelligence, military, Coast Guard, Border Services, and other agencies were placed under the control of a newly-established RCMP Integrated Security Unit (ISU).

Olympic Resistance Summit, February 10-11, 2010

The Resistance Summit was held in two venues in East Vancouver, located around the Commercial Drive area. Some 500 people attended training workshops, forums, and panels. Attendees came from across North America. Among the participants was an organizer from the 2006 anti-Olympic campaign in Turin, Italy, a member of the No Games Chicago coalition that successfully fought that city's bid for the 2018 Summer Games, and a delegation of Circassians, the Indigenous people of Sochi, Russia, where the 2014 Winter Games are to be held.

Anti-Torch Actions, February 12, 2010

Two anti-torch protests were organized for the final day of the torch relay, which was timed to conclude with the Opening Ceremonies of the 2010 Games. One protest was set for 9 a.m. at Victory Square in the DTES, another for 10 a.m. on Commercial Drive. These two neighborhoods were centers of opposition to the Olympics.

By 9:30, several hundred people had gathered at Victory Square; 150 of these were protesters. As the torch convoy approached, protesters surged into the intersection and blocked the street. Cops on motorcycles attempted to push through the crowd but were stopped by a mass of determined people. As 20-30 cops, including six horse-mounted officers, attempted to contain the crowd, the torch relay was diverted up a side street. Protesters ran across the park and up to the next block in an effort to block the torch runner. The convoy sped up and passed by several scheduled stops, until it reached Commercial Drive.

Gathering beforehand, some 200 protesters had blocked the intersection of Commercial Drive and Venables Street, dragging large rocks into the road and stringing barbed wire across it. Police didn't even bother bringing the convoy up Commercial, but instead diverted it down another main street several blocks away.

Upon hearing the relay had been rerouted, the protesters ran south on Commercial to prevent it from returning to the Drive. Several blocks down, the crowd ran into a line of mounted horse cops blocking the street, who were soon reinforced by more bike cops. Demonstrators chanted "Get those animals off those horses"; after a few minutes, the protesters ran through a nearby alley and bypassed the police line. They stopped at Commercial and First Avenue where they blocked traffic for the better part of an hour. These victories raised people's spirits and set the stage for the combative protest later that day.

Take Back Our City Rally, Opening Ceremonies, February 12, 2010

The "Take Back Our City" rally was primarily aimed at achieving as large a mobilization as possible. Because the ORN's militant approach had been exaggerated and demonized by the corporate media and the authorities, a separate coalition was established to organize the February 12 rally. This was the 2010 Welcoming Committee, initiated by ORN members but comprised of a larger coalition of over 50 groups, including many reformist and liberal organizations that would not work publicly with the ORN.

The Welcoming Committee established its own communications and logistics, and planned the program and route of the rally. It was promoted as a "family friendly" rally and march, starting at the Vancouver Art Gallery at 3 p.m. and then travelling to BC Place, site of the Opening Ceremonies—which were to begin at 6 p.m.

By 4:30, 5000 people had gathered at the Art Gallery. Speakers and performers regaled the crowd until it was time to march. Native elders, warriors, and drummers took the lead; a mob of reporters gathered at the front of the march as it proceeded towards BC Place. At a side street approaching the huge sports stadium, the protest met a line of Vancouver police, members of the Crowd Control Unit (CCU) in "soft hats"—without helmets or shields. As the elders pushed up against the police line, cops warned them that people were going to get hurt. At this point, the elders withdrew and the black bloc was requested to move to the front line.

Masked militants began pushing up against the police line, which was reinforced with more CCU officers, and then later by the RCMP. Another line of horse-mounted cops in riot gear appeared behind the lines of cops.

For nearly an hour, the two forces confronted each other. Militants threw projectiles into the police lines, including large plastic traffic pylons. The black bloc made several charges against the police line and seized hats, flashlights, and gloves from CCU officers. Three officers were injured, two of them by projectiles.

It was later learned that BC Premier Gordon Campbell and Indian Act chiefs from the collaborationist Four Host First Nations missed the national anthem and were late for the opening ceremonies because their bus was delayed by the protest.

Heart Attack, Saturday, February 13, 2010

The 2010 Heart Attack march was a daring plan to "clog the arteries of capitalism." The action was organized by militants from the ORN and promoted as an action in which a diversity of tactics would be respected.

Some 400 people gathered in Thornton Park at 8:30 a.m., including a black bloc 100 strong. At the park, the group practiced

basic maneuvers with flags, then proceeded down Main Street towards Hastings, eventually marching to the downtown business district. At this point, newspaper boxes and dumpsters were dragged into the street to delay police cars behind the protest, while spray paint appeared on walls, sidewalks, and vehicles.

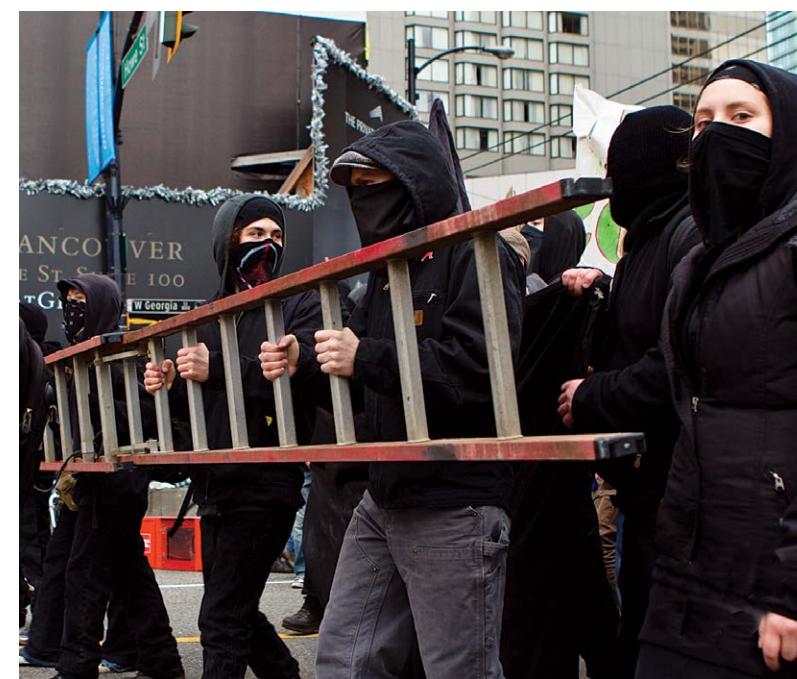
As the protest passed the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) department store at Georgia and Seymour, militants emerged from the black bloc and began smashing the store's plate-glass windows. HBC was targeted because of its role as an Olympics sponsor and its historical part in the colonization of Canada. Several windows were knocked in with metal chairs from a nearby café—as well as newspaper boxes and what appeared to be batteries in a sock. Red paint bombs were also thrown against some of the store's windows.

One block away, a newspaper box was thrown through the windows of a Toronto Dominion (TD) bank. By this time, the CCU was deployed and began following the protest as it proceeded to the West End, towards the Lion's Gate Bridge—its ultimate objective.

At Denman Street, the march ran into CCU agents accompanied by shooters carrying M4 carbines and less-lethal launchers; the officers began attacking protesters with batons. After some pushing and several de-arrests, the protest dispersed. Seven people were arrested; others would be arrested over the following days.

In one incident, as militants took shelter behind an electrical box to de-mask, a CTV camera operator approached and began filming. CTV was the official Canadian broadcaster of the Games, and had entered into a contract worth over \$300 million with the IOC. The next day, one of the militants confronted the camera operator and was arrested shortly after for assault. Another comrade was arrested two days later and charged with counseling mischief over \$5000.

The 2010 Heart Attack received widespread coverage—far more than the larger mobilization of the previous day. Footage of black-clad militants smashing out the windows of HBC appeared around the world. The action succeeded in its objective of disrupting business and clogging traffic: the Vancouver police themselves closed the Lion's Gate Bridge, a central artery between Vancouver and Whistler, positioning large numbers of CCU members across the access road. The bridge was not reopened until 11:30 a.m., with police and transit authorities claiming a "serious accident" had led to its



closure. Several hundred VANOC buses were delayed as a result.

The action became the most controversial of the entire anti-2010 campaign. Reformists and pacifists, some of whom had worked with the ORN, publicly denounced the black bloc. Among these was David Eby, a former Pivot lawyer who had become the executive director of the BC Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA), a state-funded civil rights "watchdog." Eby had previously defended many activists in the city, and in the BCCLA had worked with some ORN members in press conferences about police harassment and a lawsuit challenging new bylaws restricting signage and "free speech."

(Above) Protest at the Olympic Opening Ceremonies, February 12; (Below) black bloc at the Heart Attack march, February 13

A few days after denouncing the militants, Eby was pied during a public forum in East Vancouver. At the forum, Chris Shaw of 2010 Games Watch and Derrick O'Keefe of the anti-war group StopWar.ca and the news site Rabble.ca also denounced the black bloc actions.

Corporate media, police, and government officials immediately condemned the Heart Attack march, alleging that the legitimate protest had been hijacked by a “criminal element” comprised of anarchists from Ontario. Corporate media also reported on the controversy and portrayed the “movement” as having been split. In reality, of those who denounced the action, only Shaw had actually been involved in the radical anti-Olympic campaign.

Housing Rally, Anti-War March, Olympic Tent Village, February 15-28, 2010

The final day of the convergence had two themes: housing and war. In the afternoon, a rally began at Pigeon Park with the slogan “No More Empty Talk—No More Empty Lots! Homes Now!” Across the street, a 50-foot banner reading “Homes Now” was dropped from a nearby low-income tower. After some speeches and singing, the protesters marched to 58 West Hastings, a vacant lot owned by Concord Pacific, one of the main “developers” of condos in the DTES. VANOC had leased the site as a parking lot and surrounded it with chain-link fencing.

Participants immediately set up tents in the empty lot and established a medical aid station. Food Not Bombs provided food. The Olympic Tent Village was organized by the DEWC Power of Women Group, with assistance from a grassroots Christian group. Many radicals also helped out with security.

At 6 p.m., approximately 200 protesters gathered for an anti-war rally organized by StopWar.ca under the slogan “Do You Believe in Torture, War and Occupation, Theft of Indigenous Land? The Canadian Government Does,” mocking the 2010 Olympic slogan (Do You Believe?) and highlighting the ongoing Canadian Forces occupations of Afghanistan and Haiti.

The tent village remained for two weeks, organizing itself through daily meetings. By the end, 41 homeless people had been given housing by the city and BC Housing (a state agency). On the final night, as a continuation of the protest coinciding with the Olympic closing ceremonies, a rally blocked Hastings Street for twelve hours before a platoon of riot cops finally cleared the street. Even after the support organizations withdrew on February 28, the tent village continued until mid-March, when a court injunction ordered the removal of those who remained.

Aftermath

The anti-Olympics protests of 2010 prompted an immediate response from Ontario reformists such as Judy Rebick of

Rabble.ca, who denounced the actions of the black bloc and vowed that they would not be welcome at the G20 protests. This increased the pressure on militants in southern Ontario, and created tension within Toronto organizing around diversity of tactics.

After the Olympics, debates occurred in a variety of media as anarchists and their comrades counteracted criticism from liberals. These exchanges helped re-establish radical media in Canada as a force to be reckoned with. In the end, the anti-Olympic movement solidified bonds between grassroots activists in Vancouver and created strong nationwide networks of anarchists. These networks would soon reconverge in Toronto to make good on the slogan that still adorns the walls of East Vancouver: Riot 2010.

In the four months between the Vancouver Heart Attack action and the riots that transformed downtown Toronto into a phantasmagoria of burnt police cars, anticapitalist graffiti, and shattered windows, the country's corporate media was abuzz with one question: who were these black-clad hooligans and what were they up to?

Riot 2010 Part 2: The G20 Comes to Toronto

In December 2009, Canadian anarchists learned that, in addition to the G8 summit already scheduled to take place in Huntsville, Ontario, Prime Minister Stephen Harper had agreed to host a G20 summit; even more shocking was the announcement that the summit would be held in the heart of downtown Toronto—Canada's largest metropolis.

Many anarchists had viewed the G8 as a tactical nightmare. Huntsville, a quiet cottage town located in the scenic Muskoka Lakes region, lacked obvious symbolic targets; worse, its small-town geography increased the likelihood that demonstrators would easily be encircled and contained by security forces. Toronto, on the other hand—with its sprawling commercial district, multiple corporate headquarters, and wide city streets connected by an intricate network of alleyways—offered an ideal location for uncontrollable demonstrations.

The Toronto Community Mobilization Network (TCMN) soon emerged as an open network to bottomline the logistics of the counter-summit demonstrations. Activists of various ideological stripes filled its ranks, with anarchists well-represented in all the network's committees—including action, fundraising, communication, and legal support. The TCMN was assisted by members of the newly reconstituted CLAC 2010 in Montreal, which coordinated transportation for hundreds of activists from Québec and shared invaluable lessons from the 2001 anti-FTAA protests in Québec City.

Recognizing that the TCMN's mandate did not cover actual



action planning, anarchists from Toronto, Kitchener-Waterloo, Guelph, London, Hamilton, and other cities formed Southern Ontario Anarchist Resistance (SOAR). SOAR took on the task of organizing three high-risk actions: the “Get Off the Fence” breakaway march, an all-night roaming dance party dubbed “Saturday Night Fever,” and a day dedicated to autonomous actions. Some anarchists chose not to participate in SOAR directly, preferring to work in closed affinity groups.

The G8/G20 security operation involved 19,000 security personnel: 10,000 cops, 4,000 military, and 5,000 private security guards. It was billed as the largest such operation in Canadian history, costing approximately \$1.2 billion. A six-mile security fence was erected around the downtown core of Toronto where the G20 leaders and their delegates were to meet.

Days of Action

Street actions against the G8 and G20 began in Toronto on Monday, June 21. The first event, billed as an anti-poverty march, drew about two

hundred people and involved a brief occupation of an Esso gas station and a demonstration outside the Children's Aid Society (CAS). The Tuesday march focused on queer resistance to the G20, while a march targeting banks and corporations from Canada's extractive industries took place on Wednesday. Thursday's rally for Indigenous rights grew to over 1,000 people.

The slogan for the march on Friday, June 25 was “Justice for Our Communities.” Planned by a coalition of grassroots organizations including OCAP and NOII, it was billed as a combined march, block party, and tent city. Organizers had conducted extensive outreach in marginalized communities throughout Toronto in an effort to make the event properly representative of the diversity of struggles going on in the city. At this point hundreds of protesters were arriving every hour on buses from Ontario and Québec.

The demonstration began at noon in Allan Gardens, near the intersection of Sherbourne and Gerrard. This park, located in the downtown east end, was chosen for its storied history; in addition to hosting massive labor rallies

A police car burns in downtown Toronto during the Get Off the Fence march against the G20 summit.

“Shattered banks and police cars engulfed in flames, far from being a scene of carnage, are truly beautiful things. They mark a crack in the façade, a weakness in the dam that attempts to hold us from bursting through in an expression our overflowing love and rage, waves that nourish our communities in expressions of true freedom.”

— The SOAR Communiqué: In “Carnage,” We Find Beauty

A civilian dances on a burnt police car in the wake of the black bloc march through downtown Toronto, June 26, 2010.



in the 1930s, it had been the site of a rally of the Canadian Nazi Party that sparked a popular riot on May 30, 1965.

On the day of the march, a cordon of bike cops and uniformed officers was established around the park's perimeter. Initially, police stopped and attempted to search everyone arriving, checking bags and seizing banners, flag poles, goggles and other protective gear. Several people challenged the searches on the way into the park. Shortly after these incidents captured the attention of nearby media, police stopped conducting searches.

A number of anarchists had come prepared to march in full black bloc regalia, but without the intention of initiating conflict with the police or damaging property. The intention was to show solidarity with the struggles of migrants and other marginalized groups and to get a feel for acting collectively. The bloc was initially small, around 30-40 people, but swelled to perhaps double that during the march. The entire demonstration involved 3000-4000 participants, including unions, students, seniors, communists, Indigenous people, and advocates of a variety of national liberation struggles.

By the time the march reached the downtown core, police had put on their riot helmets. Just past Yonge and College streets, they made their first arrest of the day—a young deaf man of color, who was arrested for failing to obey a verbal command and jailed without access to ASL interpretation services.

After marching through downtown for several hours, the crowd began to peter out around University Avenue and Dundas Street. Some of the demonstrators returned to Allan Gardens to participate in a dance party and temporary tent city; others rushed to the SOAR spokescouncil to discuss the next day's action.

Get Off the Fence: Saturday, June 26

The "People First: We Deserve Better" rally called for early Saturday afternoon by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and various other labor organizations and civil NGOs was the largest demonstration of the G20, with upwards of 40,000 participants. SOAR had called for a "Get Off The Fence" action, vaguely promoted as a sort of breakaway march that would attempt to get to the fence surrounding the summit. Many plans for coordinating actions on Saturday were presented and scrapped during heated debate at the Friday night spokescouncil. The meeting ended with the consensus that there would be no plan, which produced cheers and applause.

The route of the "People First" march was worked out in coordination with police. It began in Queen's Park, proceeded south down University Avenue to Queen Street, then west to Spadina Avenue, north to College, and finally back to the established "protest zone" in the park. It was routed to turn back a full six blocks from the security fence.

As anarchists arrived in Queen's Park and coalesced into a bloc of 100-150, they learned that a section of radical unionists and a contingent with NOII flags also wished to break off from the main march and head south towards the fence. Despite this, things looked pretty bleak. Anarchists with street experience

"Anarchists essentially outsmarted the extensive security plan by taking advantage of vulnerable parts of the city while police officers were focused on the large demonstration and the summit perimeter."

-AP News Report



worried about the small size of the bloc and its relative disorganization—there were no scouts or communications teams to speak of and not many flags or banners.

Many concerns had been voiced in the months leading up to the G20 that a march toward the fence on Saturday was a veritable suicide mission. A number of trustworthy comrades whose presence would have bolstered the bloc chose not to attend for fear of being arrested and missing the anarchist-organized anti-prison demonstration scheduled for the following day. It had also been suggested that the CLC would be antagonistic towards anarchists and would use union marshals to force them to the back of the march—thus making it impossible for them to draw support from the crowd to break away.

As the march got moving, however, the bloc entered the middle of the larger group with-

less privilege and focus instead on establishing stronger bonds with others who are willing to fight the systems of state control.

After it became clear that this line of riot cops was heavily reinforced, the crowd returned to Queen Street and continued to march west to Spadina. During this time the main bloc merged with another smaller black bloc that had been moving separately in the march, and numbers swelled to around 200. When the march arrived at Spadina, another charge south was attempted, this time with the NOII contingent and sections of the black bloc rushing together. After another standoff, from which many returned bloodied by police batons, the crowd lingered at the intersection of Queen and Spadina. This was the point from which the People First march turned north to return to Queen's Park and the "free speech" protest pen. Many members of the march lingered, curious to see if anything else was going to happen.

There was much debate about which direction to go—both within the black bloc and between the bloc and other groups. Some thought another charge should be made to the police line, while others argued that the bloc should keep marching further west. At various points, black bloc participants argued with others from NOII about whether the point of the march was to try to reach the fence or to go wherever necessary in order to remain active on the streets of Toronto. At a critical moment, many in the black bloc were chanting "West on Queen! West on Queen!" in an attempt to steer the demo away from the convention center hosting the G20 and towards a trendy shopping district.

Yet after heated debate, everyone agreed to double back and proceed east along Queen Street. The bloc was convinced to head in the general direction of the convention center and the financial district, though many felt this would prove to be a tactical mistake. Supporters outside of the black bloc had heard from scouts and runners that the way east was clear of riot police, and in the end the bloc listened to their advice. This was perhaps the defining moment, determining all that followed.

Since the rest of the permitted march had continued north past Spadina and Queen, the way remained open behind the crowd: surprisingly, the cops had not moved in to block the street off yet, likely busy fortifying their positions on every street going south. The crowd that had lingered began to move east, and the black bloc finally cohered and ran to the front of this group. It seemed the numbers of the bloc

out conflict. The idea circulated that the bloc would join other contingents when they tried to head south.

After marching down University Avenue and west on Queen Street, a section of the protest headed by NOII flags turned at John Street and dashed south. At this point, the black bloc was behind and somewhat isolated from this group, but did eventually move to support them. The surging crowd made it some distance down John Street but was quickly stopped by lines of riot cops. While anarchists had debated for hours about how to avoid putting "regular protestors" and those with uncertain citizenship status at risk with confrontational tactics, it was actually a group of mostly people of color, migrants, and their allies who first charged the police. Perhaps in the future, anarchists can stop trying to "look after" those they believe have



Casting a spell: "G20, you and me, Bay Street blazing," hip-hop duo Test Their Logic promised in their "Crash the Meeting" video promoting the protests in Toronto. Bay Street is Canada's equivalent of Wall Street; until summer 2010, the idea that a few protesters could set it on fire in the face of 19,000 security personnel with a budget of a billion dollars seemed absurd. But sure enough, come June 26, Bay Street burned. Sometimes all it takes is for a couple people to believe in something for others to join in, ushering it into reality.



had swelled again to 200-300, with anywhere from 400-800 other protestors also marching east. At this point, the bloc came upon a police cruiser, caught unawares by the decision to double back. There was a single officer inside; the windows of the car were smashed and the hood was stamped on while the officer looked out in horror. This attack was met with cheers and shouts of encouragement from the bloc and the rest of the march, boosting morale and making it clear that the crowd would support militant tactics. After the windows of the car had been smashed, a group of police ran in to rescue the trapped officer before quickly and clumsily withdrawing. The officers were visibly shaken and unsure how to proceed.

By this time the bloc had travelled many blocks from the rest of the labor march; anyone uncomfortable with confrontational street tactics had had enough time to return north.

As the bloc continued down Queen Street, the windows of many stores and buildings were smashed, including a Nike store, a Starbucks, and the Gap. The windows of a government building housing an immigration office were

also destroyed, as was a CTV van. The march was moving quickly at this point, surprised that the way east was clear.

As the crowd arrived at Bay Street—the central artery of Toronto's financial district and the Canadian equivalent of Wall Street—antagonisms flared again between the black bloc, the NOII contingent, and others. The suggestion was again made to go south; many comrades were convinced that this would mean marching into an area where it would be easy for the police to surround the bloc. At one point a physical altercation almost erupted between individuals from the two groups. Ultimately, however, as the crowd filled the intersection of Queen and Bay, the bloc once again listened to those who wanted to go south and moved in that direction.

The attacks against property continued. At Bay and King Street a massive window complex of a Bank of Montreal was attacked; a hammer thrown through the air stuck into the pane like a hatchet thrown into a wall, creating a beautiful spiderweb of splintered glass. A black-clad militant ran up and pulled it out to use again.

Anarchists demolished the storefront displays of Toronto's downtown shopping district, expressing a total rejection of the glorification of commodities over human life.

Officers had abandoned a police car at this intersection; it immediately lost its windows. This attack seemed to slow the march as many stopped to observe the destruction. There was now a gap between the front section that had passed through the intersection and a much larger group still on the other side. There were only a few cops following the back of the march, as the majority of the police force was still busy fortifying their southern lines for an anticipated attack. At this point, the security fence was visible a block and a half away; those in front waited for the rest of the bloc to catch up and hurriedly attempted to plan some sort of attack on the fence. Unfortunately, no one had really expected to get this close, and it didn't seem as though anything could be done to breach the perimeter with the resources on hand.

As the bloc gathered, many screamed to push further south. The sounds of breaking glass filled the air from every direction. Lines of riot cops poured into the intersection of Bay and Front Street, and the bloc moved back towards King. The now iconic torching of the first police car took place at some point during this back and forth, and it seemed to scare police off for a good few minutes. Around this time, a second police cruiser pulled into the intersection—but it was quickly abandoned, as the four officers inside realized that they were dangerously outnumbered. These officers fled on foot as their cruiser was immediately swarmed, smashed, and lit on fire. Witnesses reported that they had never before seen such a significant force of police acting as fearful as they did at this moment.

This didn't last long, however, and the bloc became boxed in on Bay Street as it attempted to retreat north. Fortunately, at just the right moment, people charged the northeast corner of the intersection of Bay and King. Perhaps because two of their cruisers were burning behind them and hundreds of dangerous anarchists were hurtling screaming towards them, the line of riot police retreated, stumbling backwards, and let the crowd through.

The bloc continued east on King, then turned north at the next intersection onto Yonge Street—Toronto's renowned shopping strip. The property destruction continued as many more banks and corporate chains were attacked. Other targets included a leather store, a jewelry shop, and a pornography store. As the destruction continued, anarchists became bolder and began stepping into the smashed storefronts, removing furniture and looting a Bell Canada outlet of cell phones—many of which were smashed on the ground. American Apparel, a clothing store that bills itself as anti-sweatshop but employs non-status immigrants in sweatshop conditions in South Central Los Angeles, had its windows smashed and shit smeared on its merchandise before its mannequins were taken out, dismembered, and used as projectiles to attack the neighboring strip club. At this point it became impossible to keep up with the number of banks and corporate chains attacked. The devastation went so far that some later claimed that it was the largest example of property destruction ever carried out by anarchists in North America; media reports have subsequently estimated the cost of the damages at over \$3 million.*

* Editors' note: Some sources allege that property destruction totaled \$3 million or more at the 1999 World Trade Organization protests in Seattle; the Earth Liberation Front arson at the Vail ski resort in 1998 was estimated at \$12 million.

At College and Yonge, the crowd arrived at Police Headquarters. Rocks and bricks were thrown at the riot police deployed in front of the building. These were the first police encountered since the crowd left the intersection at Bay and King.

As the march continued west on College Street and neared Queen's Park, the windows of an unmarked police minivan in an intersection were smashed, while across the street a platoon of riot cops advanced, gunners moving into position to counter anyone who approached them. They shot several "muzzle blasts" of talcum powder mixed with tear gas and a small wafer-like projectile.

The black bloc dispersed at this point, forming a circle inside which members removed their black clothing and protective gear. While some anarchists filed back into the park, excitedly discussing the day's events, most left the area, not wanting to be arrested before they could participate in the anticipated Saturday Night Fever roaming dance party.

After the bloc's quick dispersal, security forces moved in on crowds of largely peaceful protesters to exact revenge. Meanwhile, after witnessing footage of the riots on television, a large crowd had begun to coalesce at Queen and Spadina, where the Get Off the Fence contingent had initiated its path of destruction. With no police in the immediate vicinity and a general state of lawlessness prevailing in the city, several unmasked individuals used this opportunity to light one of the previously damaged police cars on fire after playing with its sound system and pulling a stack of police documents from the car's trunk. With few experienced militants left on the streets to caution against carrying out such attacks without proper attire, most of these individuals were later identified through footage captured by CCTV cameras and, in some cases, given harsh prison sentences.

Throughout the day, the destruction and burning of police cruisers was broadcast live on local news, with a frantic anchor saying, "I don't understand where the police are and how they could let this happen!" Against the idea that the police permitted this to happen, witnesses argue that they were stretched thin across the city and were focused on dispersing and arresting any crowds they perceived to be linked to the black bloc. It took them a few more hours to clear Queen Street, which they eventually did.

The mass arrests began Saturday afternoon, with arrestees brought to a temporary jail set up in a former movie set in the eastern part of the city. As the night progressed, many crowds spontaneously formed only to be viciously attacked by police; snatch squads started to round up anyone who looked like an anarchist or a protester. The Saturday Night Fever event planned for that evening was cancelled, as almost all of the organizers were now behind bars.

At this point, coordination among anarchists severely broke down, and the lack of a communications team or anything resembling a unified twitter update feed meant that most were spread out and isolated throughout the city, unsure of what was going on and unable to amass in significant numbers to accomplish more during this volatile situation.

The Party's Over: Sunday, June 27

The next morning began with a raid at a residence building on the University of Toronto campus. Seventy activists were arrested, many of whom were visiting from Québec. Their charges were later dropped when it emerged that the police did not have a proper warrant to enter the building.

At 10 a.m., a jail solidarity rally gathered at a park near the temporary detention center on Eastern Avenue. Shortly after the demonstrators arrived, riot cops were deployed and snatch squads began grabbing people from the crowd and throwing them into unmarked minivans. Officers committed violent assaults during many of these arrests, and fired tear gas at the crowd. Demonstrators retreated to Queen Street East, where many were rounded up and mass-arrested.

At 3:30 p.m., police stopped a bus with Québec license plates. They detained fifty people and arrested ten. A bomb squad was called in to search the bus. Throughout the day, police continued to board transit vehicles and randomly stop people walking in the downtown area, searching for anyone wearing black or who appeared to be a protester.

Despite this climate of intense repression, many anarchists attempted to gather for the Fire Works For Prisons noise demonstration, planned for 5 p.m. Police snatch squads detained everyone in the surrounding neighborhood who had black clothing with them or who attempted to flee. They succeeded in preventing anyone from amassing at the proposed meeting point, and it seemed to those scouting the neighborhood that at least a few affinity groups had been completely rounded up while most others had one or two people from their groups detained. The police effectively canceled the demonstration.

In the late afternoon, police surrounded the TCMN convergence space, a red and black building in the working class neighborhood of Parkdale where free meals and childcare were being provided. Soon after, a crowd of people who had heard about the siege began to form and march west to confront the police. By 7 p.m. the cops had kettled about 300 people at Queen and Spadina, including many confused bystanders. At this point a torrential storm opened up; many of those kettled were

Guard: Man, what did you do that they put you down here?

Testament: Me? I didn't do *nothin*.

Guard: Well, you must have done *something*. Everybody who did nothing is in the normal holding area.

Testament: Naw, seriously, this is a big misunderstanding. I'm just, like, a musician . . .

Guard: Oh *shit!* You're one of those rapper guys!

Testament: Yeah, that's—wait, how do you know about that?

Guard: Dude, you're like the *ace of spades* in this shit! Everybody's been talking about you and watching the video. A lot of them are talking shit, but I'll be honest with you, that song was pretty fucking brave. I grew up in Scarborough—I've been listening to hip-hop all my life, but your shit is different.

Testament: Oh man, please don't tell me I'm the ace of spades. You sayin there's a deck of cards with targets on them? Wait, you really liked the song?

Guard: Yeah, it was the shit. This place is fucked up, eh?

Testament: You're telling me? I'm the one in cuffs goin to get strip-searched.

Guard: Yeah, you should write a song about this when you get out and call it Torontonamo! Oh, and give me a shout out!

Testament: Yo man, I ain't even had anything to eat now in like 18 hours, they keep giving me processed cheese sandwiches on buttered white bread even though they know I'm vegan.

Guard: What? They gotta feed you—you're the ace of spades! I'll look into it.

Testament: Please stop calling me the ace of spades.

forced to stand in the rain for almost three hours before being mass-arrested.

Beginning Sunday afternoon, prisoners were released from the temporary detention center, some without shoes and others without their personal belongings. All described having been held in cold, cramped wire cages and having been forced to share toilets with no doors. Women and trans individuals reported threats of rape and sexual harassment, while others were forcibly strip-searched in front of male police officers. Many arrestees were denied access to legal counsel for well over 24 hours, in violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.



By Sunday, June 27, the police were attacking and mass-arresting perceived protesters throughout Toronto.

Legal Fallout

In the early morning hours of June 26, members of the Toronto Police Service's "Guns and Gangs" unit battered down the doors of two Toronto houses and arrested four members of SOAR at gunpoint. Over the following hours, a dozen more individuals were snatched up: some grabbed off the street, others stopped in vehicles. It soon emerged that these arrests were the result of evidence gathered by two undercover police agents who had infiltrated various anarchist organizations in the region—including AW@L (Anti-War at Laurier), the TCMN, and SOAR itself—as part of a Joint Intelligence Task Force operation.

These two agents, who had operated under the names "Khalid Mohammed" [legal name Bindo Showan] and "Brenda Doughtry" [legal name Brenda Carey], were well-known within anarchist circles. "Khalid" had been active in SOAR until members of his affinity group became concerned about his erratic behavior and

asked him to stop attending meetings. His early efforts to promote violent and reckless actions had raised the suspicions of activists in Guelph, where he had earlier attempted to infiltrate the city's tight-knit anarchist community. After relocating to Kitchener-Waterloo, "Khalid" changed his strategy and began offering free rides, beer, and material support to members of AW@L. He also began to pit activists from different cities against one another by spreading rumors and playing up perceived divisions based on race, class, and theoretical disagreements. Unfortunately, a lack of forthright communication between anarchists in Guelph and Kitchener-Waterloo allowed him to gain a position of trust, which he used to gather a great deal of evidence against the alleged G20 "ringleaders." Much of this was exaggerated and taken out of context by the Crown Attorney in an effort to paint these individuals as violent terrorists.

Unlike "Khalid," "Brenda" was far more effective in evading suspicion; the announcement of her betrayal came as a shock to everyone. Based

out of Guelph, "Brenda" was actively involved in the planning of the G20 protests; at the time of her disappearance she was a registered legal observer with the Movement Defence Committee (MDC), in addition to sitting on both the Fundraising and Action committees of the TCMN. To top things off, she also attended SOAR meetings, and even shared an apartment with one of the alleged "ringleaders," Mandy Hiscocks.

The police infiltration had devastating effects on anarchist organizing in southern Ontario. The actions of "Khalid" and "Brenda" led to the arrest of some of the region's most dedicated activists. These arrests and the strict conditions that accompanied them had the intended effect of tearing SOAR apart and dealt a significant blow to efforts to create a regional network of anarchist militants.

The majority of the 1090 arrested during the G20 weekend were released by June 28, 2010; only 320 were charged. Charges included burning police cars, assaulting police, carrying weapons, criminal association, and mischief. Of those who remained in jail, eighteen were accused of being "ringleaders" and charged with multiple counts of conspiracy, facing sentences of up to ten years.

The majority of those charged with conspiracy were active within SOAR, though not all: Pat Cadorette and Jaggi Singh, both charged with several counts, were members of CLAC involved with anti-G20 organizing in Montreal. In May of 2011, in exchange for his conspiracy charges being dropped, Singh agreed to plead guilty to counseling to commit indictable mischief—referring to a NOII press conference held on June 24 at which he stated that the security fence was illegitimate and should be torn down. The plea bargain also included the precondition that he not be called to testify against any of his co-accused. On June 21, 2011, he was sentenced to time already served.*

Syed Hussan, a respected organizer with NOII and the TCMN, was arrested on the morning of June 26 as he was getting into a taxi. During the lead-up to the G20 counter-demonstrations, Hussan had served as a central figure on the TCMN's communications committee. If found guilty, he faced deportation to Pakistan.

Darius Mirshahi and Chris Bowen, better known by their hip-hop monikers Testament and Illogik, were both arrested on the morning of June 27 and charged with conspiracy to commit mischief—a separate conspiracy from the 18 co-accused—as well as masking with intent to commit a criminal act and counseling to commit mischief. This latter charge was tied to their popular music video "Crash the Meeting," which the Crown attempted to blame for much of the destruction that occurred during the Get Off the Fence march. After five months of non-association

* Singh had been charged in connection with the 1997 APEC summit, the 2000 G20 summit in Montreal, the 2001 FTAA summit in Québec City, and the WTO meetings in Montreal in 2003, and many other protests; as a known and unrepentant anarchist organizer, it had long been a cliché for police to single him out for arrest. Almost all of these trials ended in "not guilty" verdicts. While other conspiracy defendants had been seized in pre-dawn raids before the G20 protests, Jaggi participated in the weekend's events, then gave an interview to the journalist of his choice and took a week to assist other arrestees before setting his affairs in order and turning himself in to the police.

conditions that prevented them from performing, composing music, or even speaking together, their charges were stayed for lack of evidence.

Eric Lankin, the last of the SOAR accused to be held in custody, was finally granted bail on September 3 after two denials. Alleged SOAR "ringleader" Alex Hundert, initially released on July 19, was rearrested on September 18; prosecutors accused him of breaching his "no demonstration" condition by speaking on public panels at the University of Waterloo and Ryerson University. He was released from prison with extremely restrictive conditions in mid-October, including an unprecedented ban on "publicly expressing a political opinion," only to be re-arrested soon after for alleged intimidation of the Crown Attorney. He was released again on January 24, 2011, and remained under limited house arrest for many months.

On September 29, Jaroslava Avila, an anarchist and Mapuche activist studying political science at the University of Toronto, became the last of the co-accused to be arrested. Her charges were dropped three months later.

Following the G20 riots, police circulated a "most wanted" list, including photos of many individuals who participated in the later attacks against the cruisers left at Spadina and Queen. Dozens of people were identified in this manner and turned themselves in or were arrested. Additional arrests occurred through August and into September, primarily in Ontario but also in Québec and BC. Some officials hinted that anarchists from New York had been identified and would be charged, but this never panned out.

One of those later identified through photographic evidence was Kelly Pflug-Back, a community organizer from Guelph. The Crown absurdly accused Kelly of being the on-the-ground "leader of the black bloc." After pleading guilty to seven counts of Mischief and Disguise with Intent, she was sentenced on July 19, 2012 to eleven months in prison, plus time served.

Another individual charged with participating in black bloc actions was Ryan Rainville, an Indigenous anarchist. After three months in prison, he was released under strict house arrest to a Native spiritual healing center in Toronto. Rainville eventually pled guilty to three counts of Mischief Over \$5000 and Breach of Peace, but contested the charges of assault and obstructing police that had been pressed as a result of the presence of a police officer inside one of the vehicles he admitted vandalizing. He repeatedly defended his actions in the courtroom, vowing struggle against all forms of oppression and drawing a distinction between violence against property and the systemic violence of capitalism.

In mid-June, three individuals were arrested for the arson of the Ottawa RBC. Charges against two of them were later stayed for lack of evidence. On December 7, 2010, a judge sentenced the third individual, Roger Clement, to three and a half years. Asked by the court if he would like to take the opportunity to apologize, Clement refused to do so. Instead, he offered a humble apology to his friends and family for the inconvenience he had caused them, and for the fact that the money that would be used to incarcerate him was not being spent on something more worthwhile.

The seventeen individuals still facing conspiracy charges finally resolved their cases on November 22, 2011 without setting a legal precedent for conspiracy convictions related to demonstration organizing. Six accepted plea deals in return for the others having their charges withdrawn. Alex Hundert and Mandy Hiscocks pled to one count of counseling mischief over \$5000 and one count of counseling to obstruct police; Leah Henderson, Peter Hopperton, Erik Lankin, and Adam Lewis pled to a single count of counseling mischief over \$5000. Their sentences ranged from six to eighteen months. The seventeen released a collective statement proclaiming “We emerge united and in solidarity.”

The Lessons of 2010

For many, the now-iconic images of squad cars burning in the heart of Canada’s financial district were an exhilarating validation of the Riot 2010 slogan. Short of an attack on Parliament Hill, one would be hard pressed to imagine a more vivid symbol of anarchist struggle against the Canadian state.

Yet, while at most summits in recent memory it was considered a victory to smash up a shopping district and disappear, Toronto seemed to present a situation in which generalized street fighting and securing of areas of the city with barricades could have been possible if anarchists had stayed in better communication with each other and the crowds of supportive protestors and hooligans. The fact that this did not occur illustrates strategic errors in the buildup to the summit, not to mention the absence of an effective communications structure.

In hindsight, anarchists in Ontario may have been held hostage by their own ambitions. SOAR worked so hard to prepare a full weekend of anarchist actions that they were unprepared when the Get Off the Fence march opened the possibility of general upheaval. Some longtime anarchists didn’t even attend, saving themselves for what they believed were more promising

events—none of which ever happened precisely because of the success of the Get Off the Fence action. At a crucial moment, when the police were on the defensive and anarchists had every opportunity to push further into uncharted territory, anarchists abandoned the streets in order to prepare for the Saturday Night Fever mobile dance party. There is something to be said for quitting while you’re ahead—and without a communications structure, this may have been the best choice. But this was the turning point that allowed the police to regain the upper hand and thwart all of SOAR’s further plans. Saturday’s events show that sometimes anarchists’ aspirations are only limited by their inability to imagine that they will succeed.

RT

The mobilizations of 2010 helped create a new political climate in Canada that many anarchists found challenging to come to terms with. Following the Toronto G20, many comrades were forced to navigate crippling non-association clauses that barred them from planning or attending public demonstrations. Much time and energy was spent raising money for legal costs and court support.

This enabled non-anarchists to frame the public discourse about the actions of the police in Toronto. Liberals, social democrats and right-wing libertarians presented the events of the G20 as exceptional; instead of channeling public indignation towards a deeper understanding of the need for real change, they focused on seeking minor reforms, often through fruitless calls for public inquiries and rallies demanding that police “respect civil rights.”

Immediately after the G20, conspiracy theorists began to circulate rumors that the black bloc was orchestrated by undercover police officers as a justification to crack down on peaceful protestors. These accusations, based on a superficial understanding of the use of agent provocateurs in the Montebello protests of 2007, spread quickly among a population so

Riot 2010 may go down in history as the last climax of the mass-mobilization era. In the mass mobilization model, people who shared ideological common ground converged in one location opposite a convergence of their foes, concentrating a global rivalry into one flashpoint. Since the Toronto G20, anarchists have shifted to a new model, participating in diffuse social upheavals originating in common conditions rather than political positions—spreading the clash throughout society rather than concentrating it in one location.

deeply conditioned by the dogmas of nonviolence and state omnipotence that it could not imagine how a few hundred anarchists could get the better of the authorities. Some conspiracy theorists went so far as to claim that the burning police cars were Hollywood props, while others suggested that the vehicles were left as “bait”—implying that those who lit them on fire were playing into a trap.

Unfortunately, these misconceptions still linger in some circles. Anarchists produced comprehensive analyses debunking them, but failed to disseminate these widely beyond activist alternative media. In the immediate aftermath of the G20, much of the anarchist community was reeling from arrests or keeping a low profile in hopes of avoiding further repression. In hindsight, it was a grave mistake to remain silent during this period. At this crucial moment, anarchists could have used their new visibility to build on their successes and deal a critical blow to pacifist hegemony.

The View from 2012

Canadian anarchists learned some hard lessons from the RCMP-led Joint Intelligence Group operation carried out in the year and a half leading up to the Olympics and G20. Freedom of Information requests filed by independent journalists subsequently revealed the presence of no less than twelve undercover police operatives across the country participating in this operation—most of whom still have not been identified. As the initial shock of “Khalid”’s and “Brenda”’s betrayal wore off, Canadian anarchists moved to re-establish informal regional and national networks, armed with a more nuanced understanding of police surveillance and infiltration tactics.

Many of our comrades have completed the prison sentences they incurred as a result of the 2010 protests, while others are still involved in the legal process. Mandy Hiscocks and Alex Hundert, both currently incarcerated, are focusing on organizing within the prison system, and have shared their experiences through blogs maintained by outside supporters.

Although the iconic images of burning police cars in downtown Toronto were inspiring to anarchists and anti-authoritarians, the same can’t necessarily be said of other segments of Canadian society. Anarchists active in the Occupy movement had to deal with the conspiracy claims popularized by so-called “info-warrior” types in addition to the perils of being singled out by



liberals and right-wingers intent on cooperating with police. This was not unique to Canada—a similar dynamic played out in Occupy camps in the US—but whereas elsewhere, antagonisms flared between participants who adopted differing tactics, in Toronto anarchists were viewed skeptically before the occupations even began.

As the dust settles on Riot 2010, its high points have been eclipsed by the massive Québec student strikes of 2012. This movement, largely propelled by the anarcho-syndicalist student group ASSÉ, indicates an exciting new direction for anarchist organizing. Just as the Toronto G20 summit heralded the arrival of the “age of austerity,” the Québec student movement implies a new phase of struggle. We can anticipate a period of intensifying class warfare in which we will have to contend with the increasing repression that will doubtless accompany the downward spiral of capitalism.

One of the long-term effects of the G20 protests was to fix the black bloc in the North American imagination, ensuring that it would appear again during the Occupy movement of 2011 and beyond.

Editors' Postscript

For most of the organizing leading up to the riots of 2010, the protests at the Olympics were the only goal; yet the G20 protests arguably eclipsed these. This shows how a protracted buildup campaign grounded in multiple communities can create momentum extending far beyond the original objective. At the same time, it's worth reflecting on the intelligence error that led anarchists to underestimate the Get Off the Fence march. This tells us a lot about the current global context and what strategies are likely to be most effective.

Until 2009, it seemed to make sense for anarchists to cast ourselves as the protagonists in struggles with the state; this set realistic goals in a time of low social conflict. Today, however, more and more people are drifting toward open revolt, while the state is scrambling to pick off its enemies before the next crisis. Even before the Occupy movement, the confrontational demonstrations at both the Pittsburgh and Toronto G20 protests drew more participants from the general public than expected. In this context, rather than planning what "we" should do, we should focus on creating situations in which *everyone* can get out of control. This is especially pressing as the authorities identify anarchists as enemy #1.

Anarchists in Ontario spent months laying plans that never panned out, exposing themselves to massive conspiracy charges for actions they never got to participate in. Yet the riots took place regardless of the arrests of supposed ringleaders; in fact, the final nail in the coffin of the original SOAR plans was the readiness of average participants in the Get Off the Fence march to escalate beyond all expectations. Given the wide range of participants in this

escalation and the negative consequences for those unfamiliar with proper security practices, it might have been wiser to invest more energy in educating the general public about resistance tactics and less in laying "secret" plans.

An effective communications system might have enabled anarchists to respond more swiftly and flexibly to the developments of that Saturday, but this points to a more fundamental issue. In the information age, the structures that channel communication are the most determinant factor in struggle. The flows of information create the social formations that preserve or interrupt the status quo; everything depends on whether we can establish subversive connections and currents. This goes not only for Twitter feeds and independent media co-ops, but also for the relations between black-bloc anarchists and groups like No One Is Illegal—not to mention angry civilians without political affiliations.

In the mass mobilization model, people who share ideological common ground converge in one location opposite a convergence of their foes, concentrating a global rivalry into one flashpoint. Since the Toronto G20, anarchists worldwide have shifted to a new model, participating in diffuse social upheavals that originate in common conditions rather than political positions. This spreads the clash throughout society rather than concentrating it in one location. Now that this approach has caught on in North America with the occupation movement, Riot 2010 may go down in history as the last climax of the mass-mobilization era. It's up to us to distill the worthwhile lessons of that era to pass on to the next one.

Kurt Wilckens: "Revenge Is Unworthy of an Anarchist"

To understand the story of Kurt Wilckens, we have to situate it in the context of the massive social conflicts that rocked Argentina at the beginning of the 20th century. For a time, new immigrants comprised a considerable portion of the Argentine working class; in effect, Europe was exporting its troublemakers to the so-called New World.

Consequently, the anarchist movement in Argentina during this period was arguably the most popular in the history of the Americas, becoming the dominant force in the broader labor movement. In Buenos Aires, a city of less than one million, illegal May Day demonstrations drew up to 70,000 participants and repeatedly resulted in gun battles with police.

In January 1919, clashes erupted during the funeral procession for five workers who had been killed in a shootout with police during a strike; these spread throughout the city and touched off a general strike. In retaliation, the government declared martial law and turned a blind eye while the far-right Argentine Patriotic League carried out anti-Jewish pogroms. Several hundred were killed and thousands injured during what came to be referred to as *la Semana Trágica*, the Tragic Week; afterwards many thousands were imprisoned or deported.

The following year, anarchists initiated major labor struggles in the wool industry in Patagonia, the southernmost region of Argentina. These intensified until the end of 1921, when lieutenant colonel Héctor Benigno Varela led a detachment of the army to put down the unrest—ultimately killing 1500 workers. Upon his return to Buenos Aires, Varela was fêted by the Argentine Patriotic League, while employers in Patagonia announced the lowering of all wages by a third.

Like countless others, Kurt Wilckens had come to the New World looking for work. First he ventured to the United States, where he worked at a fish factory and then in the mines of Arizona. He was finally deported to Germany, arriving near the end of the series of unsuccessful revolts following the First World War and leaving again quickly for the West—this time to Argentina.

As an admirer of Tolstoy—and a vegetarian teetotaler, like many other anarchists then and now—Wilckens was opposed to violence. But he could not remain passive in the face of the massacre in Patagonia. He resolved to kill Varela and sought the assistance of anarchists more experienced in clandestine activity to prepare a bomb.

When he finally caught Varela outside his home and threw the bomb at him, a ten-year-old girl suddenly appeared between them. Wilckens shielded her body from the blast with his own, sustaining injuries that prevented him from escaping. He refused to give the police any information, claiming sole responsibility for the attack.

Months later, Wilckens was shot to death in his prison cell by Varela's nephew, Ernesto Pérez Millán Temperley—a member of the Argentine Patriotic League who had participated in the

massacre in Patagonia. The murderer pled insanity and was given a comfortable place in a psychiatric hospital.

He was not safe there, however. A former professor of Russian extraction, Germán Boris Wladimirovich had veered towards anarchism after breaking with Lenin at the Socialist Congress in Geneva in 1904. He was serving time in Ushuaia prison in Buenos Aires for an armed robbery intended to finance anarchist publishing when he heard about Wilckens' killing and determined to avenge it.

The Russian began to feign fits of madness and eventually succeeded in getting himself transferred to the same psychiatric hospital. Comrades smuggled a gun in to him, but he couldn't get access to Wilckens' killer, who was housed in more luxurious quarters than the common prisoners. However, Wladimirovich made the acquaintance of another patient, Esteban Lucich—an immigrant from Dubrovnik with anarcho-syndicalist sympathies, the only one of the three who was there on account of actual mental illness.

Lucich was permitted to move freely about the asylum. So it was that, encouraged by his friend, he visited Pérez Millán's room and shot him fatally, paying back blood for blood... for blood... for blood.

In reflecting on this succession of killings, we should remember Wilckens' own words: "*But revenge is unworthy of an anarchist! Tomorrow, our tomorrow, does not affirm quarrels, crime, or lies.*" Wilckens refused the Christian moralism that frames justice as payment for sins, yet concluded that he had to take action all the same.

His example remains instructive today. It may be necessary to take up arms against those who oppress and coerce; it may even be necessary to take their lives—certainly they do not shrink from taking ours. But generally speaking, at the very moment it becomes possible to slaughter one's adversaries wholesale, this becomes not only unnecessary but extremely dangerous. It is understandable to desire vengeance—faced with the brutality of our oppressors, it is almost inhuman not to—but insofar as we are guided by this desire rather than our desire for a better world, we betray our ideals. As soon as we feel entitled to carry out slaughters of our own, we become like the Bolsheviks who, seizing power, went on executing and imprisoning their perceived enemies until they had eaten themselves alive. Revolutionaries who fail this test become a counter-revolution unto themselves.

We have to fight; in the end, we may have to kill. But let us do so with humility, never accustoming ourselves to bloodshed, so we do not poison the future we carry within us.

For further reading about these and other events in the history of Argentine anarchism, seek out the works of Osvaldo Bayer.

Artwork by Berliac: berliac.com

MOST ARE FAMILIAR WITH COLONEL VARELA'S STORY, MURDERER OF 1500 WORKERS IN THE ARGENTINEAN PATAGONIA. BUT FEW KNOW THE STORY OF HIS EXECUTIONER.

Kurt Wilckens

A NON-FICTION COMIC / BY BERLIAC

BORN IN BRAMSTEDT, GERMANY, TO A MIDDLE-CLASS FAMILY, IN 1910 HE TRAVELED TO THE UNITED STATES, WHERE HE BECAME ACQUAINTED WITH TOLSTOY'S IDEAS.

AFTER COUNTLESS ESCAPES FROM SEVERAL PRISONS, HE IS FINALLY DEPORTED IN MARCH OF THE SAME YEAR.

UPON REFUSING HIS INHERITANCE, IN 1920 HE SET SAIL FOR BUENOS AIRES, LURED BY RUMORS OF A SUPPOSED UPRISING OF A WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT.

HE MET MAURICIO GUTMAN IN THE CAFE "LA BRASILEÑA", WHO PRESENTED HIMSELF AS AN "INTELLECTUAL COMRADE".



HE TURNED OUT TO BE A POLICEMAN, AND ARRESTED WILCKENS AFTER THE LATTER SHOWED HIM A NEWSPAPER CLIPPING PROCLAIMING HIM THE "MOST DANGEROUS RED IN THE WEST".

DURING HIS FOUR MONTHS IN PRISON HE READ ABOUT THE PATAGONIAN MASSACRE, ORCHESTRATED BY VARELA.



ONCE OUT OF PRISON, IN MARCH OF 1922, HE DECIDED TO "EXECUTE VARELA TO KEEP HIM FROM CAUSING MORE BLOODSHED".

ANDRÉS VÁSQUEZ PAREDES HELPED HIM MANUFACTURE THE BOMB.

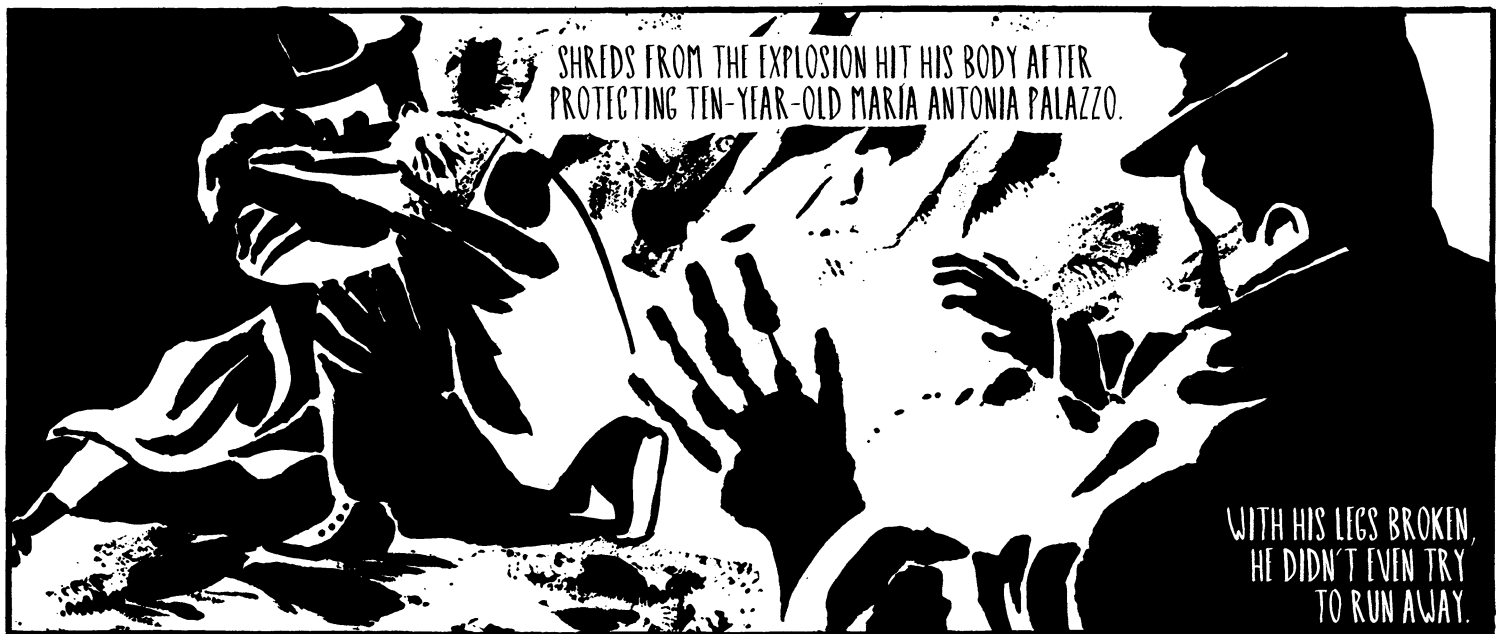


THE TESTING OF THE BOMB TOOK PLACE NEAR THE BARRACAS BRIDGE.



HE WAITED OUTSIDE THE DICTATOR'S HOUSE FOR 15 DAYS

BUT WITH INNOCENT BYSTANDERS HE WAS INCAPABLE OF GOING THROUGH WITH HIS PLAN.



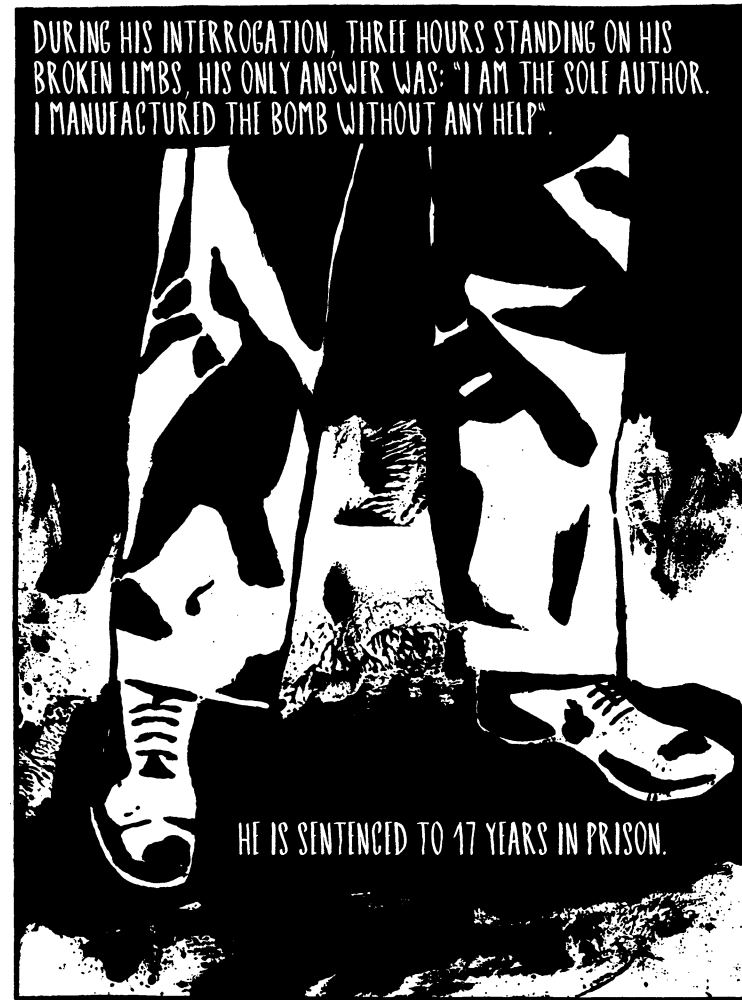
SHREDS FROM THE EXPLOSION HIT HIS BODY AFTER PROTECTING TEN-YEAR-OLD MARIA ANTONIA PALAZZO.

WITH HIS LEGS BROKEN, HE DIDN'T EVEN TRY TO RUN AWAY.



HE STILL MADE SURE TO FINISH WHAT HE HAD STARTED.

FIVE SHOTS AT POINT-BLANK PROVED SUFFICIENT.



DURING HIS INTERROGATION, THREE HOURS STANDING ON HIS BROKEN LIMBS, HIS ONLY ANSWER WAS: "I AM THE SOLE AUTHOR. I MANUFACTURED THE BOMB WITHOUT ANY HELP".

HE IS SENTENCED TO 17 YEARS IN PRISON.



IN THE NIGHT OF JUNE 15TH, 1923, TORGE PEREZ MILLAN TEMPERLEY, VARILA'S NEPHEW, WALKS HIS WAY THROUGH THE PAVILION DISGUISED AS A GUARD.

HE ENTERS THE CELL AND SAYS: "IS THAT YOU, WILCKENS?"



"JA WOHL" IS THE ANARCHIST'S RESPONSE.

THE BULLET PIERCES THROUGH THE PRISONER'S RIGHT LUNG AND EXITS THROUGH HIS BACK.

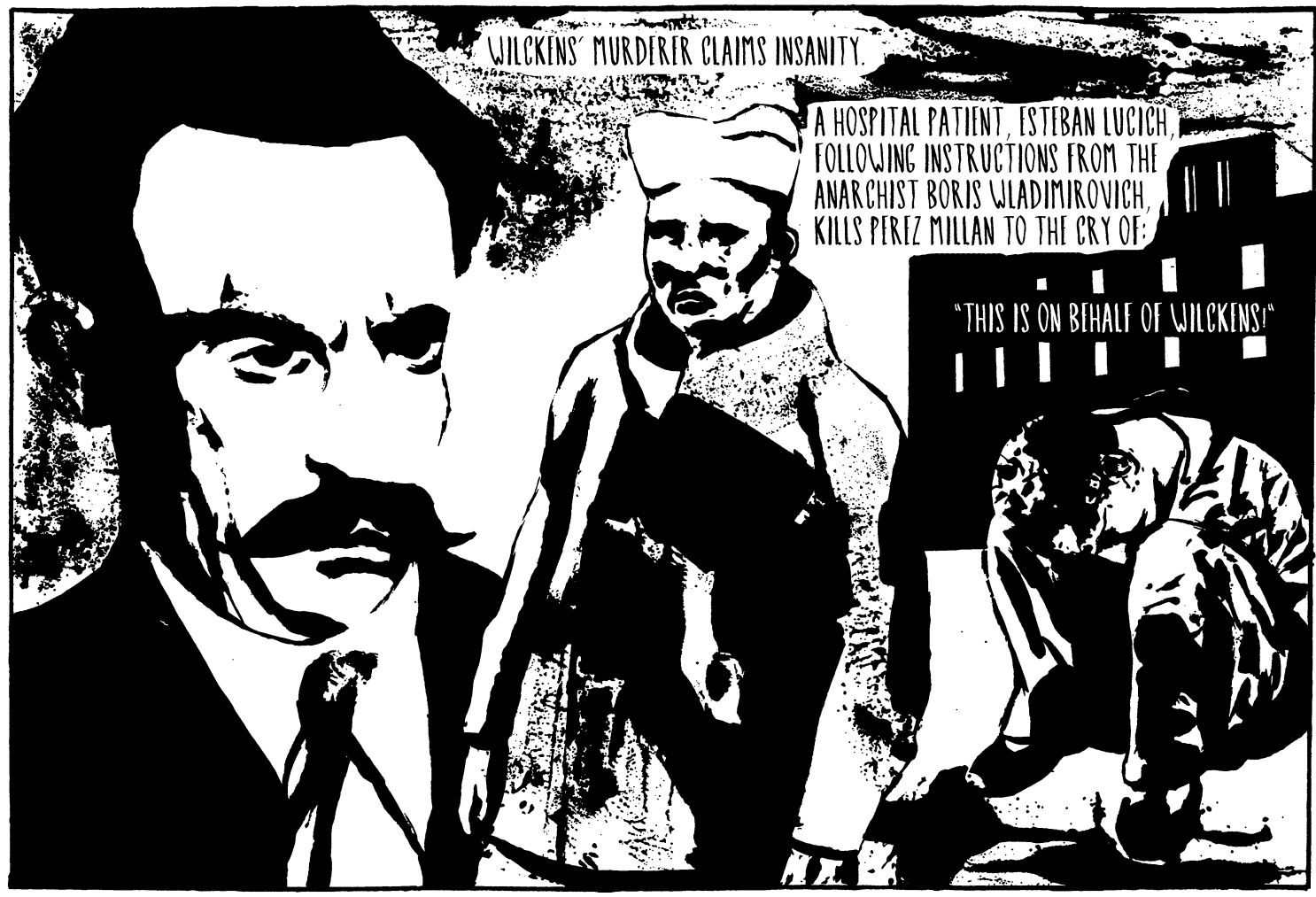
WILCKENS DIES INSTANTLY.



A FEW DAYS LATER, FOR ONE OF THE FEW TIMES IN THE HISTORY OF ARGENTINA, AN INDEFINITE GENERAL STRIKE IS DECLARED.

REPRESSION IS QUICK TO COME: 163 ARRESTED, 17 BADLY WOUNDED.

TWO PEOPLE, ONE POLICEMAN AND A HORSE DIE.



WILCKENS' MURDERER CLAIMS INSANITY.

A HOSPITAL PATIENT, ESTEBAN LUCICH, FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE ANARCHIST BORIS WLADIMIROVICH, KILLS PEREZ MILLAN TO THE CRY OF:

"THIS IS ON BEHALF OF WILCKENS!"



Kurt Wilckens ha muerto. Fué asesinado en la sombra, envuelto en la quietud silenciosa. Así matan los cobardes. los aborrecidos.

LA PROTESTA
DIARIO DE LA MAÑANA
Calle Telégrafos 871, Buenos Aires

Wilckens fué asesinado en la Prisión Nacional



Kurt Wilckens

AS EXPECTED, THE PRO-GOVERNMENT PRESS OF THE TIME STOOD BY THE OFFICER. HOWEVER, THERE WAS NO SHORTAGE OF LIBERTARIAN PAMPHLETS CHEERING FOR WILCKENS' HEROIC ACT, ALL THE WAY TO HIS NATIVE GERMANY.

protesta en KUR

La burguesía y sus secuaces riendo de su obra destructora y ruinosa en la clase obrera.

SOCIEDAD DE RESISTENCIA
O-Mozosy Anexos de la Capital
Secretaría Tacuarí 659

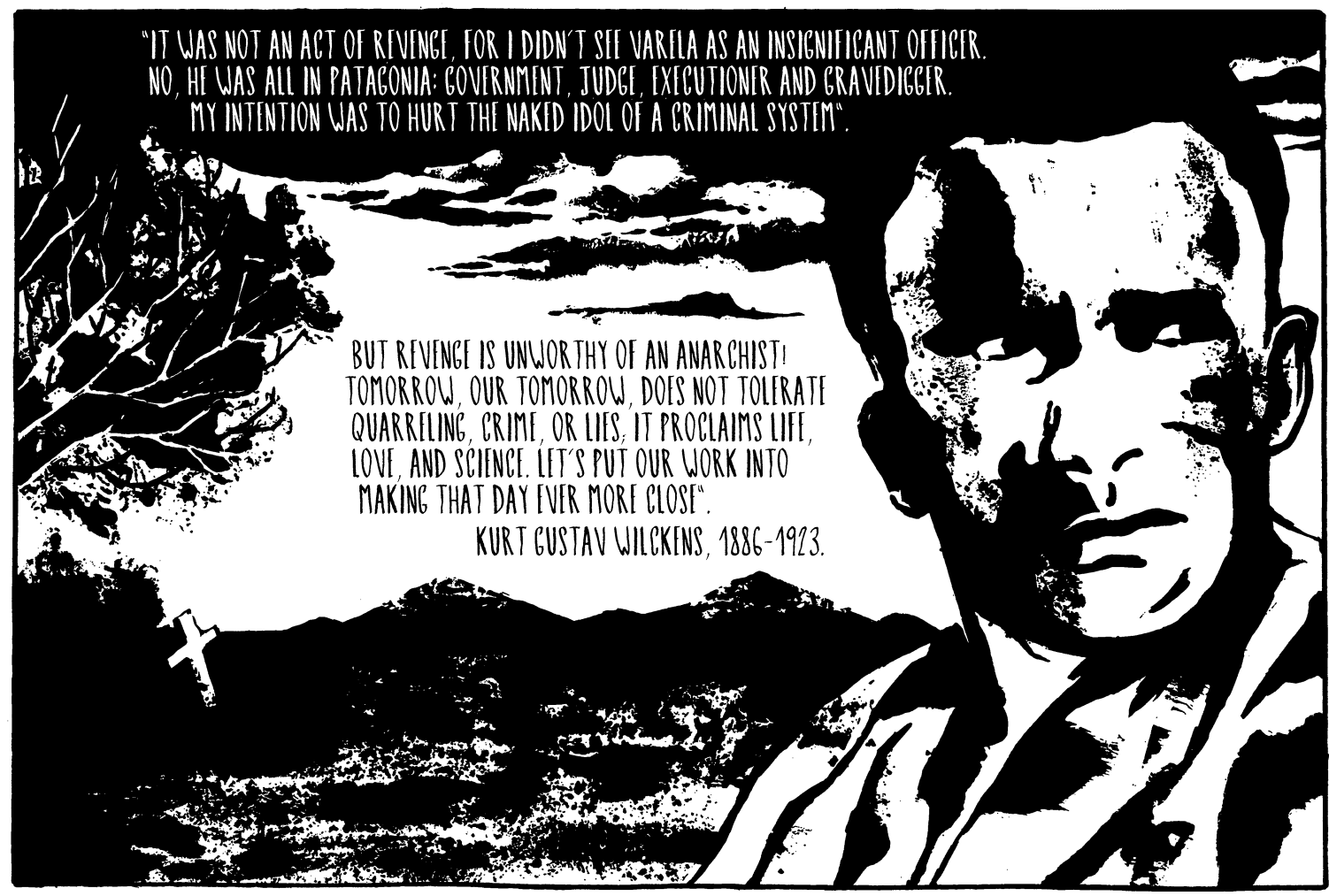
¡A la huelga!

Declaración de la huelga general — El camarada Kurt Wilckens, vencedor de las víctimas de la Patagonia, asesinado en la Prisión Nacional, por la burguesía.

KURT WILCKENS

Federación Obrera de Patagonia
AL PUEBLO TRABAJADOR

Compañeros:—Kurt G. Wilckens, ha sido atrozmente asesinado en la penitenciaría nacional; nuestra voz es de protesta.



"IT WAS NOT AN ACT OF REVENGE, FOR I DIDN'T SEE VARELA AS AN INSIGNIFICANT OFFICER. NO, HE WAS ALL IN PATAGONIA: GOVERNMENT, JUDGE, EXECUTIONER AND GRAVEDIGGER. MY INTENTION WAS TO HURT THE NAKED IDOL OF A CRIMINAL SYSTEM"

BUT REVENGE IS UNWORTHY OF AN ANARCHIST! TOMORROW, OUR TOMORROW, DOES NOT TOLERATE QUARRILING, CRIME, OR LIES, IT PROCLAIMS LIFE, LOVE, AND SCIENCE. LET'S PUT OUR WORK INTO MAKING THAT DAY EVER MORE CLOSE"

KURT GUSTAV WILCKENS, 1886-1923.



WE ARE ALL OUTSIDE AGITATORS

Everyone knows what happened next. The occupation that began awkwardly in Manhattan sparked hundreds around the continent; indeed, the best thing about the pacifist-dominated Occupy Wall Street was its function as a myth that enabled a wide range of people to imagine that the resistance movements they desired were possible. In the Bay Area, anarchists frustrated by how Occupy San Francisco mirrored some of the shortcomings of the New York occupation made sure that Occupy Oakland had a different character.

Occupy Oakland raised the bar, establishing a police-free zone and supporting a diversity of tactics. The city government reacted by brutally evicting the Oakland encampment, but this only galvanized more momentum. The nationwide movement arguably peaked on November 2, when thousands shut down the Port of Oakland in response, alongside black bloc property destruction and a building occupation that inspired similar efforts around the country. The state drew the line at this, answering with rapidly escalating violence; most of the major encampments were evicted within the next two weeks.

By the end of 2011, the context of anticapitalist struggle in the US had expanded dramatically. But the horizon was no longer open: though many battles were still to be fought, all the pieces were on the chessboard, at least for that round. The Occupy movement began its long, slow demise, with the demonstrations of May Day 2012 showing that only anarchists—largely concentrated on the West Coast—had maintained momentum. Overseas, the massive street fighting in Barcelona during the Spanish general strike of March 29, 2012 demonstrated that the pacifism of the plaza occupations had been a temporary phase there, as well.

One year's innovations are the next year's limitations.* Often, in places where the movement had crossed a new threshold, it subsequently remained suspended at that point of development, limited by the same structures that had enabled it to advance. After the occupation of the capitol in Madison, the movement in Wisconsin never caught up to what followed in New York, just as Occupy Wall Street never matched the intensity of Occupy Oakland. In February 2012, after one of the last major Occupy Oakland actions, a student strike in Montreal set off months of even more intense conflict across the Canadian border. As the shock waves of upheaval ricochet back and forth across the continent, those who have not yet played a starring role in this story—the *outsiders*—may be the ones to write the next chapter.

RT

The Occupy model broke the impasse that had stymied anarchists torn between risking conspiracy charges for public organizing and risking isolation in covert activity. It offered a

* For example, the emphasis on tactical nonviolence that had attracted a diverse social body to Occupy Wall Street became an obstacle to keeping the streets when repression escalated.

participatory organizing space, superseding the summit model for confrontation by drawing in wider swaths of the population to fight on their home turf. At the same time, the challenges anarchists posed to this space by acting outside of it served to keep it vibrant. Without autonomous action always pushing things further, consensus process would have limited the range of possibilities to the lowest common denominator, reducing the stakes of the struggle. Wherever this challenge was missing, the general assemblies emptied out quickly. Anarchists have long been smeared as outside agitators; it was precisely *outside agitation* that sustained the occupation movement.

In basing itself in public spaces—outside the workplace, and outside subculture—the Occupy movement caught up to an era in which few people have fixed economic or social positions to defend. From Dayton to Dakar, deregulation and digitization have swept us into a global pool of fluid labor; many of us need to find a new job every year, if not every week. This vulnerability—the consequence of being expendable as far as the economy is concerned—is the common thread that connects baristas and sex workers in the US with the one billion people who live in favelas and shantytowns worldwide.

This explains why the occupations peaked with a port blockade: the only weapon left to a superfluous class is *interruption*. The blockades of November 2 and December 12, 2011 were controversial because they bypassed labor unions, but those unions are the dying holdovers of a bygone era of peace treaties between capitalists and workers. To get any leverage today, we all have to become *outside agitators*.

RT

As the crisis goes on and more people lose their previous positions in society, traditional struggles will collapse, but the disenfranchised will pour into every struggle that creates new commons. Yet these commons can only survive as long as they spread: we can only defend ourselves *offensively*.

Forget about going back to the old days—there can be no more peace treaties between classes when even governments are scrambling to keep up with the accelerating effects of capitalism. Forget about fighting to preserve your economic role and privileges—the only hope is to legitimize common resistance from outside them, *against* them. Forget about strategies based on incremental victories, radicalizing our demands as people build up a taste for winning—today it's easier to topple governments than to reform them. We have to popularize new ways of fighting that create social bodies outside all capitalist roles, that can one day put an end to capitalism itself.

Much of what is covered in this issue was unthinkable only three years ago. If we want to be realistic, let's plan to be doing the unthinkable three years from now. The wolves are at the door. Let's be the barbarians at the gates.



WHEN IN ROME, DO AS THE VANDALS DO

**DON'T
FORGET
WHO YOU
ARE
DON'T
FORGET
WHAT
YOU'RE
HERE TO
DO**

