

# RETURN FIRE

*wide-ranging anarchist anthologies, submissions, translations & editorials since 2013, from the British Isles & beyond*

**Anarchism in the North East and Beyond**  
(introducing the Beautiful Idea afresh)

**23 Theses Concerning Revolt**  
(how can we stop defeating ourselves each time?)

**'Dispassion and Timelessness'**  
(identify the practices of dominator ecology)

**The Fight in Catalunya**  
(what's at stake in a messy and contradictory movement)

**'Wearing the Scars Inside'**  
(provocation from the margins)

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(rounding up the previous phase of struggle across the pond)

**Rebellion Extinction**  
(don't believe the hype...)

**Green Capital and Environmental "Leaders" Won't Save Us**  
(review: Jeff Gibbs' Planet of the Humans)

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(text by prisoners & repression news)

**Memory as a Weapon**  
(continuities from the meeting of worlds to this day)

**Skills and Sabotage**  
(a return to the body through subverting public space)

**Poems for Love, Loss and War**

**Ghosts of the Land**  
(a seasonal song for connection, mourning, and resolve)

...and more!

## VOLUME 6, CHAPTER I

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# ANARCHISM IN THE NORTH EAST & BEYOND

## – the fight for freedom, autonomy, & life

[ed. – We print this founding statement from a currently-active English anarchist crew; not because we think there's a lack for yet another organisation (after all, to us organisations are best when they arise directly in the course of a struggle and strictly to self-organise for that struggle's requirements, though we try not to think too dogmatically about this), but because we found it a more vibrant and exciting perception of anarchy than that which formal organisations are generally known for in the British context. Despite our obvious differences regarding the desirability of "a new civilisation" or the chances of its qualitative superiority to the present one, we wish the group luck in their more immediate efforts!]

I shall start this off with a great quote, and move forward from there:  
*"Anarchism is the revolutionary idea that no one is more qualified than you are to decide what your life will be."*

Put so simply, it's easy to understand why we exist as a group. Anarchism is about self-determination and the autonomy that is so missed in modern society, and this group was born from that very autonomy.

**In some moments, in this insane world, anarchy appears in fragments, whispering of hidden lives that beckon from within this one:** those hours you spend with your best friends after work, the remains of a poster pasted on an alley wall, that instant during making love when you are neither male nor female, fat nor skinny, rich nor poor. **In other moments, that insanity is the exception, the fragment, and anarchy is simply the world we live.** One hundred thousand of us can found a new civilization, one hundred can transform a city, two can write the bedtime stories our children have been waiting to hear – and sow the seeds for millions to come. When one of us defies the protection racket of public opinion and



"necessity" and drops everything to live as she has dreamed, the whole world receives the gift of that freedom. When we fill the streets to dance and blow fire, we can remember with our bodies that we deserve such dances and such space for them. When the ski resorts burn [ed. – see **Return Fire vol.4 pg79**] and department store windows shatter, for a moment "private property" is neither private nor property – and we create new relations between ourselves and a cosmos that is suddenly ours, and

new, once more. If we risk our lives, it is because we know *only by doing so can we make them our own.*

Anarchism isn't about destroying all for the sake of that destruction, it is about destroying what destroys us, and creating a new way of life that both liberates us as individuals and as a collective, for both are the same.

### Why in the North East?

Here's another great quote: *"These days it can be difficult, even terrifying, to be an anarchist. You*

*may well be one of those people who hides their anarchism, at least in certain situations, lest others (equally scared, and probably by the same things) accuse you of being too idealistic or "irresponsible" – as if politely burying the planet in garbage isn't! You shouldn't be so timid – you are not alone. There are millions of us waiting for you to make yourself known, ready to love you and laugh with you and fight at your side for a better world. Follow your heart to the places we will meet. Please don't be too late."*

North East Anarchist Group aims to be one of those "Places", and everyone within NEAG was once that person, trying to find other's to work together with towards a similar goal, with that goal being "something better than this". We created the group because we

recognised that there was little organisation in our own areas, and just as Anarchists should do, we arose to the challenge. If you are interested in organising with us, then let us know. *"Please don't be too late".*

### What does Anarchism mean to us?

It means figuring out how to work together to meet our individual needs, working with each other rather than "for" or against each other; and when this is impossible, it means preferring strife to submission and domination. It means not valuing any system or ideology above the people it purports to serve, not valuing anything theoretical above the real things in this world. It means being faithful to real human beings (and animals, and ecosystems), fighting for ourselves and beside each other, not out of "responsibility," not for "causes" or other intangible concepts. It means denying that there is any universal standard of truth, aesthetics, or morality, and contesting wherever it appears the doctrine that life is essentially one-dimensional [ed. – see **23 Theses Concerning Revolt**].

It means not forcing your desires and experiences into a hierarchical order, but acknowledging and embracing all of them, accepting yourself.

It means not trying to compel the self to abide by any external laws, not trying to restrict your emotions to the sensible or the practical or the "political," not pushing your instincts and passions into boxes: **for there is no cage large enough to accommodate the human soul in all its flights, all its heights and depths.** It means seeking a way of life which gives free play to all your conflicting inclinations in the process of continuously challenging and transforming them.

It means not privileging any one moment of life over the others – not languishing in nostalgia for the good old days, or waiting for tomorrow (or, for that matter, for "the" Revolution!) for real life to begin, but seizing and creating it in every instant. Yes, of course it means treasuring memories and planning for the future – it also means remembering there is no time happiness, resistance, life ever happens but **NOW, NOW, NOW!**

It means refusing to put the responsibility for your life in anyone else's hands, whether that be parents, lovers, employers, or society itself. It means taking the pursuit of meaning and joy in your life upon your own shoulders.

*Above all, it means not accepting this or any manifesto or definition as it is, but making and remaking it for yourself.*

This world will never change until we dare to live free, to share everything, to spread anarchy!

## 23 THESES CONCERNING REVOLT



[ed. – A text published by Distri Josep Gardenyes, which was formed "to share and disseminate texts that we consider to be of strategic importance in the current struggles". Josep Gardenyes, who they took their name from, was one of the anarchist 'uncontrollables' executed in Barcelona during 1936 by anarcho-bureaucrats of the C.N.T. during their treacherous spell within the 'revolutionary' government (see **Memory as a Weapon; 'These Women Refused to Sacrifice'**) despite him fighting hard on the barricades. The accounts differ, but it seems that his shooting was because of bringing 'disrepute' to the 'official' anarchists by looting jewelry from an abandoned shop, or being part of groups expropriating grocery stores while bearing anarchist insignia; either of which should have resonances for the disgraceful attitude of certain U.K. anarchists during the riots and looting of 2011 (see **Return Fire vol.1 pg61**), or for that matter the demonisation of the looters during the eruptive uprisings in the U.S.A. this summer sparked by yet more murders of Afro-Americans by the police... Another account holds that Gardenyes was killed for taking vengeance on police spies from the time of the previous dictatorship in the Spanish state. As Distri Josep Gardenyes point out, "[w]ith the memory of our failures, we can stop betraying ourselves, and attack the spirit of domination wherever it is to be found."]

**1. The multiple defeats suffered by Western rebels, in which we lose by winning, come from the fact that we are not aware that we were the first colonized.**

We assaulted the Winter Palace [ed. – in *Russia, 1917*], but replaced the Tsar with a bureaucracy too extensive to put up against the wall. We took Barcelona after the fascist coup and then we boasted of having increased production [ed. – see **Memory as a Weapon; 'These Women Refused to Sacrifice'**]. We burned all the banks and attacked all the police stations in Athens [ed. – see **Return Fire vol.1 pg17**] and then we didn't know what else to do. When we stand in solidarity from time to time, with

certain indigenous struggles, we find it very beautiful that they have an intimate connection with the land, but we do not ask ourselves why we lack it. We assume the myth of progress, or question it from a mere technological point of view, instead of understanding that history is not linear and that the power of the State is not always increasing, but on several occasions, in the past, we were close to destroying it and that the current forms that power has taken are the response to our struggles. How to explain that the price of bread, poverty and hunger increased sharply (after centuries of low and stable figures) from the sixteenth century, just when Europe was flooded with riches stolen from the Americas? How to understand that in the Middle Ages women had access to land, to inheritance and to almost all trades, and that animals were considered as members of the community<sup>1</sup>; and yet, from the Enlightenment onward, women became totally dependent on men, and it was believed that animals could not even feel pain? How to understand that democratic evolution began in Runnymede in 1215, when the English aristocracy beat their king, the institutionalization by force of arms of the concept of rights and the idea of a broader participation in the

1 ed. – “In his preface to *The New Ecological Order* (1995), the French philosopher, Luc Ferry, narrates an extraordinary tale of legal proceedings, in the year 1545, against a colony of weevils. The villagers of Saint-Julien, in France, sought ‘appropriate measures’ to demand the expulsion of the beasts from their vineyards, but it was argued that, as ‘creatures of God’, the animals possessed the same rights to consume plant life as the residents. The villagers (who lost their case) were required to sincerely repent, through prayer, tithes, and processions around the vineyards, followed by further devotions and penitence. All of this was designed to put right their error in the eyes of God. The weevils vacated and the matter ended, only to be brought again to the courts some forty-two years later; however, it appears that the villagers lost, once again. Not only did the judge order the vicar to re-apply the ordonnance (penalty) of 1546, but a compromise was suggested in which the weevils were to be leased ‘a location of sufficient pasture, outside of the disputed vineyards of Saint-Julien’.

Ferry does not give a final conclusion to this matter, but he discusses similar cases involving larvae (who won), leeches (who were ultimately cursed to evacuate by the bishop of Lausanne), dolphins (excommunicated from Marseille, for clogging the port), rats (who also triumphed), and beetles (case dismissed, due to their young age and the diminutiveness of their bodies). What is fascinating about these cases is how Ferry captures a transitional moment in history that is rarely presented so clearly. His preface is a reminder that, for a certain period in European history, there was the possibility to think of other species in a manner which afforded them agency and equated their rights with those of human beings. Now, as Ferry laments, only humans are ‘worthy of a trial’ and nature is a ‘dead letter’” (More Than Stories, More Than Myths).

project of government? How to understand the hundred thousand peasants, workers and artisans killed in the German-speaking lands in the year 1525, after revolting in a rebellion that lynched thousands of priests, bishops, knights and nobles, and how to understand the merchants who initially encouraged their rebellion and then betrayed it?<sup>2</sup> In the first century of world colonization, they let very few Europeans live in the colonies, and these were businessmen and thugs of the police class who were betraying, torturing and repressing us during our

2 ed. – “European civilization has historically demonstrated a much higher tolerance for authoritarianism than the egalitarian societies described in the survey. Yet as the political and economic systems that would become the modern state and capitalism were developing in Europe, there were a number of rebellions that demonstrate that even here authority was an imposition. One of the greatest of these rebellions was the Peasants War. In 1524 and 1525, as many as 300,000 peasant insurgents, joined by townsfolk and some lesser nobility, rose up against the property owners and church hierarchy in a war that left about 100,000 people dead throughout Bavaria, Saxony, Thüringen, Schwaben, Alsace, as well as parts of what are now Switzerland and Austria. The princes and clergy of the Holy Roman Empire had been steadily increasing taxes to pay for rising administrative and military costs, as government became more top-heavy. The artesans and workers of the towns were affected by these taxes, but the peasants received the heaviest burden. To increase their power and their revenue, princes forced free peasants into serfdom, and resurrected Roman Civil law, which instituted private ownership of land, something of a step backwards from the feudal system in which the land was a trust between peasant and lord that involved rights and obligations.

Meanwhile, elements of the old feudal hierarchy, such as the knighthood and the clergy, were becoming obsolete, and conflicted with other elements of the ruling class. The new burgher mercantile class, as well as many progressive princes, opposed the privileges of the clergy and the conservative structure of the Catholic church. A new, less centralized structure that could base power in councils in the towns and cities, such as the system proposed by Martin Luther, would allow the new political class to ascend.

In the years immediately prior to the War, a number of Anabaptist prophets began travelling around the region espousing revolutionary ideas against political authority, church doctrine, and even against the reforms of Martin Luther. These people included Thomas Dreschel, Nicolas Storch, Mark Thomas Stübner, and most famously, Thomas Müntzer. Some of them argued for total religious freedom, the end of non-voluntary baptism, and the abolition of government on earth. Needless to say they were persecuted by Catholic authorities and by supporters of Luther and banned from many cities, but they continued to travel around Bohemia, Bavaria, and Switzerland, winning supporters and stoking peasant rebelliousness.

In 1524, peasants and urban workers met in the Schwarzwald region of Germany and drafted the 12

frequent revolts, just as they tortured and murdered the indigenous rebels. And in later centuries, the new centralized state enacted several laws to prohibit Europeans from mixing or sympathizing with indigenous people or enslaved Africans. Because during those same centuries, they were completing the process of colonizing us, of destroying our ties with the earth and with the community of living beings that make up the world, and of making us forget all that we have lost. **We have lost and forgotten these links to such an extent that in classic anarchist**

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Articles of the Black Forest, and the movement they created quickly spread. The articles, with Biblical references used as justification, called for the abolition of serfdom and the freedom of all people; the municipal power for people to elect and remove preachers; the abolition of taxes on cattle and inheritance; a prohibition on the privilege of the nobility to arbitrarily raise taxes; free access to water, hunting, fishing, and the forests; and the restoration of communal lands expropriated by the nobility. Another text printed and circulated in massive quantity by the insurgents was the Bundesordnung, the federal order, which expounded a model social order based on federated municipalities. Less literate elements of the movement were even more radical, as judged by their actions and the folklore they left behind; their goal was to wipe the nobility off the face of the earth and institute a mysticist utopia then and there.

Social tension increased throughout the year, as authorities tried to prevent outright rebellion by suppressing rural gatherings such as popular festivals and weddings. In August 1524, the situation finally erupted at Stühlingen in the Black Forest region. A countess demanded that the peasants render her a special harvest on a church holiday. Instead the peasants refused to pay all taxes and formed an army of 1200 people, under the leadership of a former mercenary, Hans Müller. They marched to the town of Waldshut and were joined by the townspeople, and then marched on the castle at Stühlingen and besieged it. Realizing they needed some kind of military structure, they decided to elect their own captains, sergeants, and corporals. In September they defended themselves from a Hapsburg army in an indecisive battle, and subsequently refused to lay down their arms and beg pardon when entreated to do so. That autumn peasant strikes, refusals to pay tithes, and rebellions broke out throughout the region, as peasants extended their politics from individual complaints to a unified rejection of the feudal system as a whole.

With the spring thaw of 1525, fighting resumed with a ferocity. The peasant armies seized cities and executed large numbers of clergy and nobility. But in February the Schwabian League, an alliance of nobility and clergy in the region, achieved a victory in Italy, where they had been fighting on behalf of Charles V, and were able to bring their troops home and devote them to crushing the peasants. Meanwhile Martin Luther, the burghers, and the progressive princes withdrew all their support and called for the annihilation of the revolutionary peasants; they wanted to reform the system, not to destroy it, and the uprising had already sufficiently destabilized the power structure. Finally on May 15, 1525, the main

**texts we find the same rationalist proposal to replace the capitalist war of all-against-all with the socialist war of "all against nature"; we find a technological and rationalist utopia formed by happy workers who have taken over their factories and perfected the architecture of their controlled environment.** You can read this story of colonization in the work of Silvia Federici [*ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg93*], Rediker and Linebaugh [*ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg90*], or Luther Blisset [*ed. – see Return Fire vol.5 pg124*]. But, even more clearly, you can read it inscribed in the current social fabric. It is present in the empty streets, which they enclose with permits and behavioral ordinances as before they enclosed the communal lands, reinstating the Roman laws that turned the land into something that could be sold. It is present in police torture and the campaigns of repression, which we call "witch hunts," remembering without remembering the bloody process that broke peasant solidarity and prohibited the self-knowledge of bodies, traditional medicine, abortion and contraception, trying to turn women into factories for the increase of the population and as a basis to invisibly feed the new wage labor. **It is also present in our struggles, but only half-heartedly.** We remember the Paris Commune and May Day, without remembering why [*ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg87*]. The "Commune" was above all a reference to the importance of the communes in the imaginary (that is, the connection between their actuality and their utopia) of the peasants of the Middle Ages. And May Day, which falls halfway between the equinox and the solstice, was a spring festival and a day of play and revolt linked to a tradition of resistance against Christianity and the aristocracy. In 1886 the immigrant workers from Europe [in the U.S.] still remembered the transcendence of the day and for that reason they organized the general strike on this date, later recorded in history for the events in Chicago. Without knowing it, we continue in a struggle that is not only 150 years old, but we are not able to win because in the end we always adopt the visions and objectives of the system that originally colonized us and then stole the memory of defeat, foisting upon us a culture of slaves and a concept of freedom typical of a machine, a mere tool that belongs to another and that exists to carry out the projects of another. In the end, we always betray ourselves.

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peasant army was decisively defeated at Frankenhausen; Müntzer and other influential leaders were seized and executed, and the rebellion was put down. However, over the following years the Anabaptist movement spread throughout Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, and peasant revolts continued to break out, in the hopes that one day the church and the state would be destroyed for good" (Anarchy Works).

## 2. Production is primarily an instrument of control.

Therefore, talking about self-management or worker control of production is the same as talking about the appropriation of state power or talking about the proletarian dictatorship. Production – that is, the capitalist system that manages life through the creation and distribution of commodities and commodified relationships – is not and never was a mere method of increasing the profits of the bourgeoisie, but is and always was an emergency response to a crisis of social control. The failure of the feudal system because of peasant resistance forced the nascent bourgeoisie to ally with the most dynamic part of the old hierarchy to create a new state capable of establishing biopower [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.5 pg47*], as Silvia Federici explains; a State capable of enclosing and taking land from the people, turning women into domestic workers, responsible for reproducing labor power, and converting men into masculinized workers, who would enter the workshops and then the factories to produce value. Letting them have contact with the land or allowing them to create things autonomously and take away the surplus would have allowed them to develop an imaginary of the commune (as they did under the feudal system), that is, a horizon that frames other possibilities of freedom, of mutual aid; of the "World Turned Upside Down" of the heretics. **The ruling classes had to take away their contact with the earth, with their creations, with the world and discipline them to move in a plane of pure abstract values, not only to extract more profits and to fill even more pockets, but also to survive as a class, to avoid the total revolution that was being forged after centuries of rebellions of peasants, artisans, urban workers and heretics, and they had to push the colonization of the rest of the world to pay the debts of the increasingly high expenses generated by the permanent armies and the new techniques of repression.** They never managed to destroy the commune completely (just as it never existed, *tout court*, in European history, at least not as it existed in a past that has been completely forgotten). This commune survived in the imaginary and constantly re-emerged. When women were removed from public life and confined to the private sphere, they opened gaps in it to create new communes; for example, if we interpret the spontaneous meetings around the laundries as an improvised agora. There are still attempts to destroy the new communes: with household appliances and civic prohibitions against hanging clothes out to dry "on streets or in public spaces". You can see more clearly what production is when you understand its preconditions. Primitive

accumulation [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.2 pg96*], contrary to [Karl] Marx's strictest hypothesis, was achieved only through institutions such as the Inquisition, the witch-hunt, and the "Bloody Laws," by which a million people were tortured and killed during three centuries, especially independent women, men who showed solidarity with them, vagabonds, homosexuals and heretics (most of whom were revolutionaries who spoke of a world without classes, without priests, without marriages and without private property). Through this process the collectivities of women were destroyed, enabling the creation of a stronger patriarchy (the chaos and cultural mobility produced after the fall of the Roman Empire had resulted in a weakening of it) and thus a powerful division among the exploited. A category of unvalued work was created (the feminized work since then associated with the private sphere: to raise and nourish the future labor force) without which capitalism would never have been possible. The subsequent enclosing of the land was made possible and police techniques were developed that are still in force. To speak of an economic sphere, as if it were a natural category, is absurd, since the economic only exists thanks to a great state violence that fractured the social into two parts: the economic and the political.

## 3. The bourgeois and proletarian classes do not exist.

Or rather, they exist – given that identities exist precisely when they are believed to exist – but being so, such classes do not matter. The proletarian class died adopting bourgeois culture and the bourgeois class sacrificed itself, Christ-like, to be eternal and universal, to become a unifying culture represented in the new non-subject, the consumer. It does not suit capitalism that anything belongs to anyone. Property, understood in a classical way, is a condition too stable for the taste of Capital. It is more interested in the relationship based on managing, because in such a relationship the power does not reside in the one who manages, but in the disciplined movement of goods, activities and managed people. (An unused farm belongs to the owner all the same, but a manager who does not manage will be replaced by another who will better follow the abstract logic of the system). Thus, an apparatus, using the term of [Giorgio] Agamben, does not render any autonomy to its leaders but rewards all the citizens of its regime for moving and behaving according to the rules suggested by the flow of the apparatus, conditioning them to manage their own obedience without forcing the apparatus to show the annihilating power it possesses. In this way class society – which implied an obvious conflict and the need for frequent use of the annihilating powers to exercise control – has

been replaced by a society of flows, in which the environment itself and the space between beings is constructed to reward obedient mobility and thus minimize and hinder social conflict. Today all belong to the ruling class who look at their own lives from above [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.5 pg38*].

#### **4. Reality is polycentric.**

Scientific rationalism has been, among other things, a religion, and it is more effective than Christianity in guaranteeing social control. The advantage it has is a greater capacity for self-criticism and, thus, greater possibilities of changing the governing structures in the face of popular defiance or disillusion. Finally the scientists at the service of our rulers had to admit, not only that the earth was not the center of the universe, but also that the universe had no center, and that space itself is something that moves, expands and contracts. However, science as a religion continues to promote the idea of objectivity, despite having found that objectivity does not exist either. Objectivity, above all, is a metaphysical operation that makes us contemplate our own lives from above, which makes us wonder how the economy should be deployed and how society should be organized instead of "what am I going to do within the world to meet my needs and fulfill my wishes with others?" For the system, disciplining worldviews is essential precisely because reality is polycentric and if we assume this truth with all its consequences, they will have lost the ideological war. By contemplating our lives from above, we share the *Weltanschauung* – the way of seeing the world – of the system that dominates us. Contemplating our lives from above is a non-ecstatic substitute for the deeply ecstatic extracorporeal experiences that formed an important part of the spirituality of pre-colonized societies (including European ones before Christianity) by providing people, through magical plants, ritual or meditation, the possibility of connecting with the world on the metaphysical level, and thus making the domination that occurs through alienation impossible.

#### **5. The anarchist strategy is simply to decide what to do, at all times, with the relationships and forces that we have at our disposal.**

As such, it is totally different from military strategy, whose starting point is an ideal and abstract plan, and a point of view from above that is like a map with a set of resources deployed atop. All military strategy is to impose an ideal plan on the map that

represents reality. Anarchy, not as a revolutionary movement, but as a multifaceted reality of rebellion and permanent creation, is based on the free initiative of every member of society; in the idea that we all contemplate social problems with our own eyes, and not from above. **Many of the divisions that have affected the anarchists with the passing of the decades have been revealed as totally incoherent with the ideal of anarchy, because they are based on the pretension of creating a compulsory unity.** I am referring to the complaint that one is not following the plan, that one is not doing with her resources what she should do. If we do not intend to make a military campaign, we must refuse to see the revolution as something organized according to a unified plan, as if it were a game of Risk. We are not looking down from above, giving orders. We are here, in the midst of a beautiful chaos that our enemies always try to organize. We will be stronger than ever if we learn to triumph in this chaos, to move in the network of our own relationships, to communicate horizontally or circularly, to use only what really is ours and to influence others, to understand that not everyone is going to act as we act; that is the beauty of rebellion, and our effectiveness in it does not lie in making the whole world equal, but in devising the best way to relate in a complementary way to those who are different and follow different paths.

#### **6. The Western individual is unworldly.**

It is a mysterious body and one can never know how it works. They guarantee it survival with what they call "rights," which allow them to buy and sell the land, and prohibit others from basic needs. They allow it free speech (it is not supposed to be able to do it organically, with its own mouth, without this concession); but they do not allow you to make your words in the form of decisions and transform them into actions. The rights of the Western individual do





not allow another person to inject toxins into their lungs, but they do allow them to cut the forest or drain the swamp that produces their oxygen, which obviously would have a similar effect on us, the individuals of the world. The respiratory system for living beings is collective and consists of a multitude of lungs, leaves, bacteria and other organisms. But it follows that the Western individual only exists within its own body, since its rights do not extend beyond its skin. Although the Western individual cannot be understood as a living being, it has certain advantages; among them that it is extremely mobile. Because all its roots and relationships can be canceled through a simple monetary operation, it can be moved from one place to another with ease: from the countryside to the city, from Africa to the Caribbean, or from the uterus to the school, and from there to the factory, the prison, the hospital and the cemetery. It is not necessary to say – because it is obvious and only a very advanced religious complex of scientific rationalism could make one forget – that unlike the Western individual, the individual of the world is not an isolated body, a subject that realizes verbs against objects scattered in a static and empty space<sup>3</sup>, but the individual of the world, the one who

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3 ed. – “Although ecology may be treated as a science, its greater and overriding wisdom is universal.

That wisdom can be approached mathematically or chemically, or it can be danced or told as myth. It has been embodied in widely scattered, economically different cultures. It is manifest, for example, among pre-Classical Greeks, in Navajo religion and social orientation, in Romantic poetry of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in Chinese landscape painting of the eleventh century, in current Whiteheadian philosophy, in Zen Buddhism, in the worldview of the cult of the Cretan Great Mother, in the ceremonials of the Bushman hunters, and in the medieval Christian metaphysics of light. What is common among all of them is a deep sense of engagement with the landscape, with profound connections to surroundings and to natural processes central to all life.

It is difficult in our language even to describe that sense. English becomes imprecise or mystical – and therefore suspicious – as it struggles with “process” thought. Its noun and verb organization shapes a divided world of static *doers* separate from the *doing*. It belongs to an idiom of social hierarchy to which all nature is made to mimic man. The living world is perceived in that idiom as an upright ladder, a “great chain of being,” [ed. – see **Return Fire vol.4 pg95**] an image that seems at first ecological but is basically rigid, linear, condescending, lacking humility and love of otherness.

We are all familiar from childhood with its classification of everything on a scale from the lowest to the highest: inanimate matter – vegetative life – lower animals – higher animals – humankind – angels – gods. It ranks animals themselves in categories of increasing good: the viscous and lowly parasites, pathogens, and predators – the filthy decay and scavenging organisms – indifferent wild or merely useless forms – good, tame

struggles, exists from their relationships. Their body, their being, their essence, are exactly the set of networks that coincide in them, the relations they have with the world. The most serious assault committed by the system we are fighting is to make the world disappear, the chaotic network of relationships that is the only terrain on which we can live.

## 7. Capitalism wants us to survive.

In some regions of the world, during certain times – even the current one – capitalism needs to use genocide: but capitalist genocide has been essential to inaugurate biopower; that is to say, the power that is proper to the system of guaranteeing survival is based on an annihilating and homicidal power that has been necessary to destroy and suppress self-sufficiency and make us dependent on capitalism. And capitalism wants and needs us to survive and multiply. In fact, capitalism was formed from the Black Death, during which a third of the population of Europe died, causing a crisis for the elites. With the shortage of labor and the abundance of empty land, the peasants gained much strength in relation to their oppressors. They could escape from the feudal system and get their own land, and through work they could demand salaries three times higher than in previous decades. And all in a context of the forceful growth of rebellions that often ended with priests and

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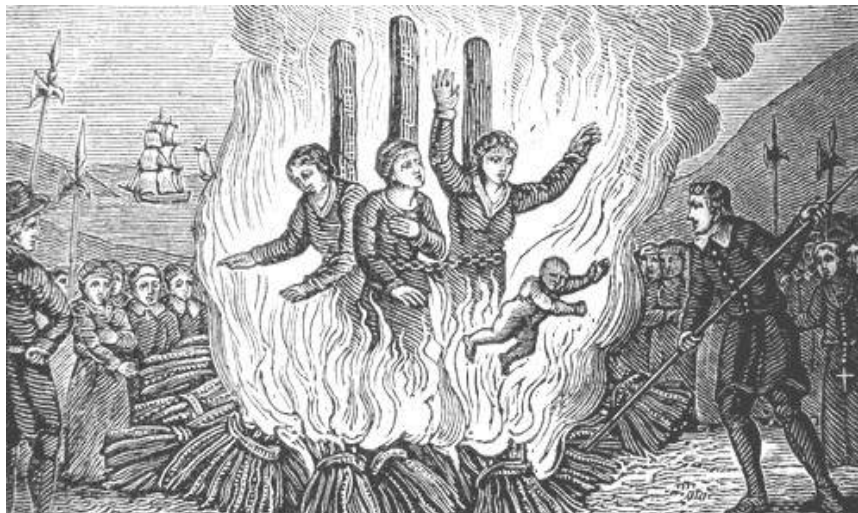
creatures – and virtuous beasts domesticated for human service. It shadows the great man-centered political scheme upon the world, derived from the ordered ascendancy from parishioners to clerics to bishops to cardinals to popes, or in a secular form from criminals to proletarians to aldermen to mayors to senators to presidents.

And so is nature pigeonholed. The sardonic phrase “the place of nature in man's world” offers, tongue-in-cheek, a clever footing for confronting a world made in man's image and conforming to words. It satirizes the prevailing philosophy of antinature and human omniscience. It is possible because of an attitude which – like ecology – has ancient roots, but whose modern form was shaped when [Thomas] Aquinas reconciled Aristotelian homocentrism with Judeo-Christian dogma. In a later setting of machine technology, puritanical capitalism, and an urban ethos it carves its own version of reality in the landscape, like a schoolboy initialing a tree. For such a philosophy nothing in nature has inherent merit. As one professor recently put it, “*The only reason anything is done on this earth is for people. Did the river, winds, animals, rocks, or dust ever consider my wishes or needs? Surely, we do all our acts in an earthly environment, but I have never had a tree, valley, mountain, or flower thank me for preserving it.*” This view carries great force, epitomized in history by Bacon [ed. – see **Return Fire vol.3 pg27**], Descartes [ed. – see **Return Fire vol.5 pg71**], Hegel [ed. – see **Return Fire vol.4 pg48**], Hobbes [ed. – see **Return Fire vol.4 pg20**], and Marx” (Ecology & Man: A Viewpoint).

nobles lynched. As a desperate response, the new bourgeoisie and the Protestants (the half-heretics, that is, the reformists), who had already managed to weaken the old system by opening space for their ascent, allied with the aristocracy and transformed wages into the new instrument of domination, putting the land on sale and thus abolishing self-sufficiency; inaugurating speculation and raising the prices of bread and other necessities; provoking three centuries of hunger and misery. Meanwhile, the legal systems and the churches (both Catholic and Protestant) adopted several measures to force a constant increase of the population, criminalizing contraception, abortion and homosexuality, and replacing a tradition of midwives and autonomous births by a masculine medical profession. Capitalism guaranteed survival to prohibit life. From this contradiction arise many struggles that in their beginning confront capitalism, but once they manage to survive or improve physical conditions, they allow themselves to be co-opted by capitalism itself, claiming some ends that are better suited to capitalism than to the subversive project of making the world reappear. **You can not criticize the measures people use to achieve their survival, unless they steal from their neighbors or adopt a discourse of solidarity and end up stealing the future from their grandchildren, who will suffer an even greater misery because of the crisis that capitalism always generates as long as we do not destroy it. But neither can a struggle that does not go beyond survival be called revolutionary.** What is revolutionary is only that which demands more than survival, which demands life. Such a fact creates another contradiction: fighting for life makes survival more difficult.

## 8. Monothematic activism is capitalist alienation in the field of struggle.

If a campaign against war or against deportations is the only event that manifests a social conflict, we should be there. But while we only understand each other as political subjects, while our facility to participate in a demonstration works as a substitute for the facility of speaking with neighbors and with co-workers, and thus develop a social intuition that enables us to perceive forms of social conflict also more opaque to the press and the State, we will be isolated, because the terrain of politics in capitalist society is a scenario of alienated combat. The farce is that all isolated miseries are one misery. Dividing our rage into themes makes it easier for the State to propose reforms. We have to move always in the



network of conflicts that exist in our society, but without letting the discursive construction of such conflicts stop us from imagining the conflict that we bring with us or the ability to recognize conflicts that for the Spectacle are unrecognizable.

## 9. Revolt is the rebirth of society.

It is not a line or a movement, even if it involves a lot of movement. It cannot be another revolution that imposes a vision of society, but must be the destruction of every obstacle to breathing freely and to the qualitative growth of society. **The question "by what vision or plan will society be organized after capitalism?" is a covertly dogmatic operation that is really asking: "What visions and plans are going to be repressed in this new society?"**

Society is an intelligent and self-organizing organism, as long as we are all making plans, communicating visions, taking initiatives. Society needs all our creative energy to overcome the coma to which it is subjected, and to be reborn and live. That's why we talk about permanent revolt. It is not because we see ourselves as a permanent nihilist vanguard or that, a thousand years after having strangled the last policeman with the guts of the last bureaucrat, we imagine ourselves still forming a Black Bloc and smashing shop windows, but because we understand revolt as the chaotic condition of a healthy society, a permanently creative and regenerative cycle without restrictions, like springtime and its explosion of new initiatives and projects born from the corpses of old achievements.

## 10. We are the first weeds.

Both revolt and society are an ecosystem. You could say that the first weeds are the most important to break the concrete and turn dead soil into a place of abundance. But weeds, obviously, will not form this abundance by themselves. The smallest or fastest growing plants are usually those that can detoxify the earth and not those that can take best advantage of healthy land. Even in a forest, the first generation trees are not the ones that will form the same forest

after two or three generations without the interruption of the axe or saw. **Soon the first weeds reach a limit in their reproduction. Taking this into account, the first rebels should recognize that our task is not to create more weeds – more rebels like us – but to break the concrete to provide space and healthy soil for other totally different species, types of rebels and living beings that do not look like us.** So the strategic question would not be how we can get more people into our social center, but how can we make our social center interrupt normality in the neighborhood or strengthen other nascent expressions of rebellion (without forgetting the peremptory need to nourish our own rebellion and sustain ourselves in it)?

### **11. The rebel's main motto, the strategic axis of the insurgent, is "society against the State."**

The anthropological phenomenon that Pierre Clastres expressed with these words frames the hidden secret of the State and the current dynamics in which we fight. The State always tries to obscure the differences between itself and society. It pretends to be our defender, our teacher, our father, our mother, even to be ourselves. But it is not society. What they parade as a society is nothing more than the market, and the market, in its ideal form, is society completely dominated, comatose, unconscious. In every situation we have to show the distance between the system and us, between our roles as workers and our bodies, needs and desires. As soon as society has any form of independent existence, the State becomes afraid and minimizes its indignities and aggressions. Let us build up the strength of society and point to the State as a parasite and usurper. The only thing that is strong enough to destroy the State (and not seize it, as the Socialists do) is an awakening society, as was seen in Greece, in Albania, in Argentina or in Kabylia; and the only possibility the State has to impose itself again is to convince society to disarm, to return home, to return to sleep. In Greece they did it with television and the spectacle of the crisis; in Albania they did it with a radical change of government; in Argentina they did it with Peronism [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.5 pg60*]; in Kabylia they are doing it with NGOs and political participation. In no case was the repressive violence of the State sufficient. Thus we see that co-optation is the other hand of the State, but it can only work if many people see the State as their own and not as a totally alien parasite.

### **12. Without knowing where we came from, we can not know where we are going.**

For this reason, cultivating historical memory is one of the most important tasks of the insurgent.

Historical memory is a root that connects us with the strength of thousands of ghosts of past struggles. As Walter Benjamin said, we do not fight to improve the lives of our children and our grandchildren, but to avenge those ghosts. Historical memory gives us the knowledge of a thousand years of rebellion. It gives us the patience and perspective to survive repression, knowing that our lives, although they are a reason to fight for everything and against everything, are only drops in a sea of resistance; that we have been fighting for more than a thousand years and even if we die in prison, the struggle continues; that dying is nothing more than going back to the world they intend to make disappear. It gives us an awareness of the existing antagonism against the system from its origins. Only a people with little historical memory, who do not understand how the system we fight against began, could consider the possibility of being their own bosses in the factories or forming their own party in the government as a victory.

### **13. Against the isolation imposed by the system, our strength lies in starting from visibility and gaining presence.**

The theory of opacity (proposed by the Invisible Committee [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.3 pg58*] and some Situationists) is valid insofar as a refusal to enter into dialogue with power (the press, the Academy) or the Spectacle. But avoiding visibility is suicide in a time of widespread alienation. Visibility is the first instrument to communicate with society and influence its controlled reality. It is achieved through posters, stickers, graffiti, social centers, public events, demonstrations, street theater, broken glass, sabotage in sites with a large circulation of people and illegal actions in broad daylight. They work as signals of disorder, as A.G. Schwarz explains [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.1 pg18*], wearing away the illusion of social peace necessary for the functioning of democracy. With this visibility, it is not necessary to convince anyone or change their opinions, because, under capitalism, opinions are not the cause of people's actions, but their alibi. The behavior of people is coerced and opinions are adapted to soften the schizophrenia of living against oneself. The psycho-emotional reality of capitalism is a cognitive dissonance. For that reason, many people like social centers, but never enter them to participate because participation in a social struggle involves admitting that one is a slave. Visibility finds its importance in making known that we exist and thus, changing the spectrum of what is possible in the mind and imagination of society. Recognizing that there are anarchists, they will have to reformulate their opinions to respond to the criticisms we represent, and although opinions do not change in themselves, they



will have changed their position orienting it towards us and not towards the center of the spectrum of official discourses. That already supposes a big success. **Once, by visibility, our existence is undeniable, we will move towards presence.** Manifesting as a social force, capable of altering the symbolic reality of the Spectacle and breaking social peace, we participate in all social conflicts, providing new discourses, values and tools of struggle, awakening solidarity and strengthening the ability to survive repression. Presence is visibility endowed with a material force, a social intuition, and a strategic positioning within all conflict and struggle within our reach. Currently (in 2011),<sup>4</sup> the most important battle is the fight against the enclosure of the streets. It is already very late, but if we totally lose public space, it will be extremely difficult to have the slightest presence in society, because then society will not exist, only the market. The sterile criticism against political ghettos stems from the lack of recognition that society itself is disappearing. The ghettos are the most resistant bubbles. The more conscious criticism would be: why the hell are we focusing our energies on occupying closed spaces just at a time when the State wants to expropriate us from the street to finish enclosing public spaces?



Police robot checking documents, Tunisia, 2020

#### 14. Every moment is the right time to develop the ability to attack with agility and ease.

The first responses to a rupture are the most important, those that have the possibility of influencing everything that follows and thus changing the narrative. If we do not develop the possibility of attacking before a rupture, without going through endless assemblies and months of preparation, we lose the most important opportunity that there may be

4 In 2010, the Spanish state was accelerating the enclosure, privatization, and regulation of public space, for example punishing non-permitted meetings, protests, and gatherings while giving over all plazas and sidewalks to increasingly expensive bars. Shortly after this text was published, the 15M movement [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.5 pg45*] constituted a massive popular reappropriation of public space, thwarting the State's attempts to assert control. The riotous general strike in spring of 2012 constituted a recovery of the ability to go on the attack and forcibly push back the police. The subsequent ability of social movements to make free use of public space was a foundation to all the powerful movements that followed.

to create new possibilities of response by the whole society faced with a rupture or crisis. If attacks are not made at the "inappropriate" times, the appropriate time will never come. Making the attacks visible contradicts the consensus on social peace and changes the image of what's normal and possible, giving the idea of the existence of new tools and stronger responses that anyone can use and carry out during a moment of revolt. Meanwhile, **attacking the system is a step towards returning to inhabit our own bodies, acting out rage instead of swallowing it, instead of disciplining our feelings and instincts as would the ideal man proposed by Cartesian philosophy** [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.5 pg71*]. The attacks also separate us from the citizens; they point us out as different creatures, as barbarians. That is why it is also important that struggles have their antisocial side, capable of challenging and stoking the hostility of the Good, of the Normal – that is, those who follow imposed norms – because a distinction between class society and a society of relationships is that currently it is not possible to attack the system without bothering normal people; they are not our enemies but they reproduce the enemy, which is normality. The trick is to make attacks that serve as an invitation to others to be accomplices of our illegality, whether sympathetic or smiling, offering their support or going out on the street.

#### 15. The passion for destruction must be a creative passion.

The pleasure of the revolt, the insurrectional strategy and the need to survive while we fight, demand that we carry out a practice of free creation linked to our destructive activity. Total criticism and the desire to destroy oppression from its roots often lead to a theory and practice of total negation. The *compañeros*<sup>5</sup> who carry out a practice of total negation also play an important role and it is useless for us to lament how "bad" they are. Above all, it is important to be aware that the practice of total negation does not constitute a "danger" to the revolutionaries who style themselves as the responsible ones (but in fact, it is these responsible revolutionaries who are a danger to the revolution). Rather, this practice involves a simple and lamentable lack of imagination. "Unfortunate" because the imaginary may be the most important ground for the struggle for freedom. If someone cannot find anything in this world, in this society, worthy of being protected, of being returned to life, it is because that person is totally alienated; a fairly common condition. Several Aymara [ed. – see *Yarwar's Story*] and Mapuche [ed. – see *Return*

5 ed. – Somewhere between friends, colleagues, affines and comrades: no direct English equivalent exists.

**Fire vol.5 pg56]** comrades consider anarchists as their best allies, but criticize them for their lack of connection to the earth and for being focused on negation, when for them the struggle is also a process of defending their roots and free creation (which entails the destruction, as a contingent activity, of any obstacle to such creation). We do not talk about "counter-power", nor do we intend to create an infrastructure that will replace the existing infrastructure. If we think of victory as the physical realization of our projects, we will adopt a conservative stance, trying to save or protect those projects and losing what constitutes their greatest value: our creative projects are useful when they nourish our ability to attack and survive the repression, when they are like offensive bases to recover our lives that have been stolen, when they connect us with the earth, with society and with a force that is more powerful than fear and obedience. If we use them offensively, we will physically lose much of what we create, but that is good, because they serve not to be conserved, but to teach us new skills and to express visions of new possible worlds to society. The State co-opts the "positive" projects when, with the stick and the carrot, it convinces them to detach themselves from the destructive activity and clean up their image. We have to do the opposite: so that every community garden has murals of the combatants and the prisoners; so that the means of counter-information speak of sabotage; so that any squat in the mountains or rural project retains its connections with the struggles; so that the neighborhood assemblies are places where we honestly express our visions of another world.

#### **16. Against their isolation and repression, we must intensify the existence of deep networks with a high level of connectivity.**

Repression is an enclosure. To overcome it, it is necessary to extend our affective, material and solidaritarian connections beyond their divisions, be they the police and black lists or the discursive and cultural categories that they create to fit us inside a democratic plurality. The "theory of chaos" and "the theory of complexity" show that networks are stronger than hierarchies (that is why the gringo army developed internet, to create a decentralized communication network capable of surviving a nuclear war in a way their command hierarchies were not – and precisely because of that decentralization now they cannot control it). The networks are strong when they have high connectivity, when each unit has a multitude of connections instead of when there are a few nodes through which all connections pass. And for our purposes we need deep connections. We are not looking for more friends to add on Facebook (in fact, Facebook started with an investment from the

CIA, which wanted to investigate social networks, because their hierarchical minds did not quite understand them). We are looking for accomplices for subversive projects, attempts to communalize the land, networks of mutual support and combative solidarity. In this network, then, we need to develop friendships and relationships based on values of trust, courage (before the enemy and also in the face of criticism or conflict with *compañeros*), respect for differences and the heterogeneity of struggles, affection and care and active solidarity. Therefore, superficial relationships or fairweather friends do not work for us; friendship is revolutionary.

#### **17. The hardest and most neglected task, in a vanished world, is to appear in the lives of others.**

The fact that we form a political ghetto – although it is our responsibility to leave it – is not due to our own attitudes (both social and anti-social rebels have their own corner isolated from others), but the powerful effort that the system makes to isolate the whole world. If we have a network of thirty friends, we are already less socially isolated than the regular normalized person who does not even have ten trusted friends. We will only be isolated from the televised reality that nourishes the loneliness of others. But that discrepancy between realities makes it almost impossible to talk to normal people. Having different relationships to those generated by the system, we have different languages. When the land was expropriated, that is to say, when the world disappeared, it was still possible to meet with others because the same relationship was shared with the system of production. But today the system of production is different from the industrial age and the shared condition is isolation, metaphysical exile. It is as if all of us had disappeared from the neighborhoods and workplaces at the same time and now we only see clothing mannequins, shopping bags and well-made curriculums walking the streets. All this new communication technology only makes it impossible to meet [*ed. – see the supplement to Return Fire vol.3; Caught in the Net*]. There are anarchist struggles that develop and spread new techniques of attacking, new models of creative projects, new theories and ideas. There is none that does the same with tactics to appear in the lives of others, to break with isolation and to form strong relationships with normal people – people from ghettos even less powerful than ours – which would be the first step to rebuild that lost community.

#### **18. Imagination is not a luxury or a child's game, but access to an essential terrain of struggle, land to reoccupy, and the only one on which we have an advantage.**

A very important part of capitalism is the cultural industry. The task of recuperating desires and rebellious stories is a constant task of democratic counterinsurgency. During centuries of defeat, our rebellious heritage survived on the imaginary terrain, where they could never annihilate us. Outside Western civilization, magic is a fact. A universal aspect of colonization has been the infantilization of the imaginary world. The existence of the real world demands the existence of the imaginary world. Capitalism cannot destroy the imaginary world, but it can expropriate it from us, minimize it, weaken the connection between the two worlds so that we do not travel from one to another, so that we have unrealized desires, so that visions seem like nonsense, so that we don't imagine the real world in other ways, so that disillusionment with the real world is explained through neurochemicals and treated with psychotropic drugs (as we become even more like machines). To overcome capitalism, and even to fight as coherent rebels, it is essential to reappropriate the connection with the imaginary world and the ability to imagine; to spread visions; to realize desires; build a bridge between the two worlds.

#### **19. If the world has center, it is there where we lose.**

The center is the cage where they trap us. Society, like the universe, has no center, because space itself moves, because the world itself is alive and is also a protagonist in events. The State was born at the central point of society. It was created in a space in which decisions had more validity, it deceived society by centralizing all discussions and conversations in a single assembly. This took centuries, but little by little it privatized this assembly and only when it had disciplined us enough to support its project of total control, began to allow us to participate in that assembly (first to the rich, then to white men, then to all men, and later to the women...). That is why we reject not only dialogue with the powerful but also any single resolution of the problems of society, any homogeneous plan or consensual agreement.

#### **20. Ruptures cannot be planned, but they can be encouraged and extended; that is our most delicate task.**

By creating signals of disorder and new methods of attack, we increase the likelihood of breakdowns and that these, in turn, are more powerful. But we do not determine the ruptures. **However, the libertarian insurgents have a very important role in the ruptures: to neutralize movement politicians and sabotage their attempt to lead the rupture, to turn it into a demand, to make it understandable to power (through the press, universities or professional activists).** In any given rupture, it is

possible to spread new visions, point out new targets and objectives, popularize new weapons. A person with a hammer can provide stones to a whole demonstration, if the people in the demonstration are already angry. A group of people with the ability to organize more attacks to create a second and a third riot, can extend the rupture. When a riot goes to bed dreaming of all the attacks that will be carried out again in the morning, the insurrection has arrived.

#### **21. Insurrections only extend to the extent that society can nourish them.**

Understood in this way, insurrections are an index of the health of society, an attempt to awaken. Will it have the strength to revolt for one, two, three days? Two weeks? It has to do with the forces of the people, with their ability to imagine another life, with the depth of their roots, if they hate all authority or only the police or only the party in government. An outbreak of weeds can cause a new crack in the concrete, a small break, but beyond that it does not go further.

#### **22. The next step of the revolt, after which we can only speculate, is the destruction of normality.**

There will be no turning back once the state has lost its mask of social peace, when society has realized its creative as well as destructive forces. Then the rebellious imagination will be alive and animated, and everyone will have visions of what "tomorrow" means. We will go from fighting to get out our rage to fighting to realize our desires. It is not known if we will have to face military occupation and the possibility of guerrilla conflict or if the State will fall, weakened by the crises and by so many years of self-deception and softer methods than those that are to come.

#### **23. We will probably never win, although it is true that we will never lose.**

The system has chosen an impossible project, which is total control. They will never attain it. They can not prevent their walls from falling, their slaves rebelling and spitting in their faces. Building the walls more quickly, they provoke more rebellion. Even if they perfect a machinery of repression, all the same the earth, and then the sun, will die in time, and the universe will continue in its nihilistic beauty without the slightest trace of these tyrants and their ruins. We have to rejoice for the certainty that even if we end up in jail, dead or overcome, a comfortable life without defeat is worth nothing compared to a life fighting for freedom, a life in love with the world, embraced by a warm network of relationships of solidarity, with the feeling both erotic and familiar to have roots in the earth, to be bigger than what one is, to be part of a collectivity of bodies within a terrible dance that can only be understood from within.



# 'DISPASSION & TIMELESSNESS'

[ed. – This is an extract from a series of articles written by the group *Knowing the Land is Resistance*, based in the part of Turtle Island (so-called 'North America') dominated by the Canadian State, and more specifically rooted in its province of Ontario. The collection is available as 'Towards an Anarchist Ecology' and is, like all of their work, highly recommended for its potent blend of joy, embodiment, wonder, caution and historical memory that it brings to the eponymous task: search for that zine for their vision of an anti-colonial and anarchist knowing of the land. The topic of this extract, what they term 'dominator ecology', is the opposite: a form of ecologism, often in open collaboration with ecocidal developments, that we are confronted with all too often in ecological struggles (one thinks of the 'wildlife rehabilitation' that we've seen at sites of mega-developments in recent years in England (see *Return Fire* vol.1 pg67), France (see *Return Fire* vol.1 pg81) and Germany (see *Return Fire* vol.3 pg91); not to mention their initial 'site evaluations' at everything from migrant prison to nuclear facility construction), and beneath it the constant scientific paradigm that enables and excuses the ongoing administration of the capitalist-industrial present (see *Return Fire* vol.5 pg33). However, with the latter in mind, we would strongly disagree with these authors uncharacteristic conflation of "astronauts [seeing] the earth from space and traditional earth-based cultures [describing] an understanding of connectedness and whole-systems"; the difference in which should be touched upon in an upcoming *Return Fire* book release. Regardless, the following might help us articulate just how different an anarchist realisation of our relation to the world must be from that of dominator ecology.]

To more clearly understand the practice of dominator ecology, let's consider some questions about it:

**What are the questions asked?**

**What are the tools used?**

**What kinds of answers are valued?**

**What kinds of lessons are drawn from those answers?**

**And at whose service is all this done?**

*What are the questions asked?* What is the safe level of arsenic or cesium in a waterway? When will a certain population of fish collapse? How can we mitigate the effects of fertilizer runoff? How do we manage this woodlot for maximum productivity? The questions asked by dominator ecology take the needs of the economy as primary. Modern industrial techno-civilization is the assumption behind the questions it asks, and the wild then becomes a variable to be managed. Often, even if an ecological study's questions are well intentioned, their findings will be used to justify certain levels of destruction anyways.

*What are the tools used?* Cells under microscopes, genetic mapping, soil and water laboratory tests, radio tracking bands on the legs of birds, satellite arrays for measuring global warming... The use of sophisticated technology in dominator ecology often goes unquestioned. However, the choice of tools we use in our inquiry are not determined by the inherent value of the

tools themselves, but by the kinds of questions we choose to ask and the kinds of answers we decide to value. Using expensive, specialized technology means that the observations and therefore the conclusions arising from them are unverifiable for anyone who does not have access to that technology. It becomes a way of situating ecological knowledge as fundamentally out of reach of everyone but a class of professionals who usually work for universities or governments.

Scientific inquiry is, at its root, egalitarian, since it just means observation, experiment, and critical thinking. There are many ways of observing and many ways of reaching the same

conclusions and developing a sophisticated knowledge of the earth. Both astronauts who sees the earth from space and traditional earth-based cultures describe an understanding of connectedness and whole-systems. What we want to bring up here is that privileging high-tech ways of knowing is one way that dominator ecology becomes authoritarian and inaccessible to most.



*What kinds of answers are valued?*

Primarily data, statistics, and anything numerical. Dominator ecology is reductive, seeking simple causal relationships, on the cellular or chemical level if possible (privileging the use of high-tech tools). This reductiveness becomes a way

to deflect blame away from destructive practices, because it is difficult to attribute a specific cause to an environmental problem, or to definitively prove that something is damaging the health of an ecosystem of watershed.

An example of this is when, in the summer of 2012, all the fish died in Hamilton's Red Hill creek, and this was followed by a brief flurry of research that all went to prove that the cause was unknown; however, this is the same Red Hill creek that recently had a massive highway built along its whole length. **The degree to which such a development reduced the creek's resiliency is not quantifiable and didn't turn up in any chemical testing of the water.**

In other situations, like in the case of the collapse of the commercial fishery in Lake Erie, this reductive thinking means that the causes of problems are identified very narrowly (blame the lampreys). This narrow identification of the problem then leads to managerial, short-sighted solutions (poison the creeks where the Lampreys spawn every year forever). Which leads us to...

*What kinds of lessons are drawn from those answers?* As we said, the questions asked by dominator ecology take the needs of the economy as given, and the answers they value are reductive and very narrowly defined. This leads to managerial answers. The natural world is viewed as just a collection of resources, and so the dynamic ecological relationships need to be understood only so far as to properly manage those resources for continued exploitation.



**Dominator ecology seeks to be dispassionate, neutral, dehumanized, and so it situates itself as essentially apart from and not deeply affected by the subject matter, which is the network of life itself. This means that those who do feel the destruction of the land on a**

**personal level – namely Indigenous communities – are excluded from consideration because passion is considered bias, which is of course ‘unscientific’. This rationale has also been used to exclude or marginalize the voices of women.**

Because dominator ecology seeks to manage ecosystems, it focuses on how to act on them in the present, regardless of how much stress that system has endured over the last few hundred years. This means it seeks to understand a present moment separate from its past and without a future. To illustrate these tendencies towards dispassion and timelessness, here's a quote from an essay entitled "A Historical Perspective on High Quality Wildlife Habitats" by Ian D. Thompson, from the book, *Ontario's Old Growth Forests*:

"Unfortunately, with each passing generation, society loses some of its ability to see or understand which habitats are superior because of cumulative changes over time across landscapes. Each succeeding generation only perceives the world as they see it, not as it once was, and unfortunately our collective memories are short. [I]n the late 1960's in Montreal, the best black duck habitat (i.e. high duck density and highly successful breeding) was an area southeast of the city known as Nun's Island. Nun's Island is now home to high-rise apartments and high-priced condominiums but not ducks; such has been progress in the world. [...] Now, the best black duck habitat anywhere in

Quebec is elsewhere, maybe on Isle Verte, or perhaps in the boreal beaver ponds, but the black duck population is poorer for the loss.

[W]hen we think of grizzly bears, we think of uninhabited mountain ranges with meadows and river valleys where humans rarely travel. But if we read history, we know that grizzly bears once inhabited the great plains and foothills of Canada and the United States, where the amount of prey alone (huge herds of bison along with deer and antelope) would indicate that this habitat was far superior than the mountains to which the bears are now relegated. Humans eliminated the bears from these prime areas and so history has altered our perception of what high quality grizzly bear habitat really is."

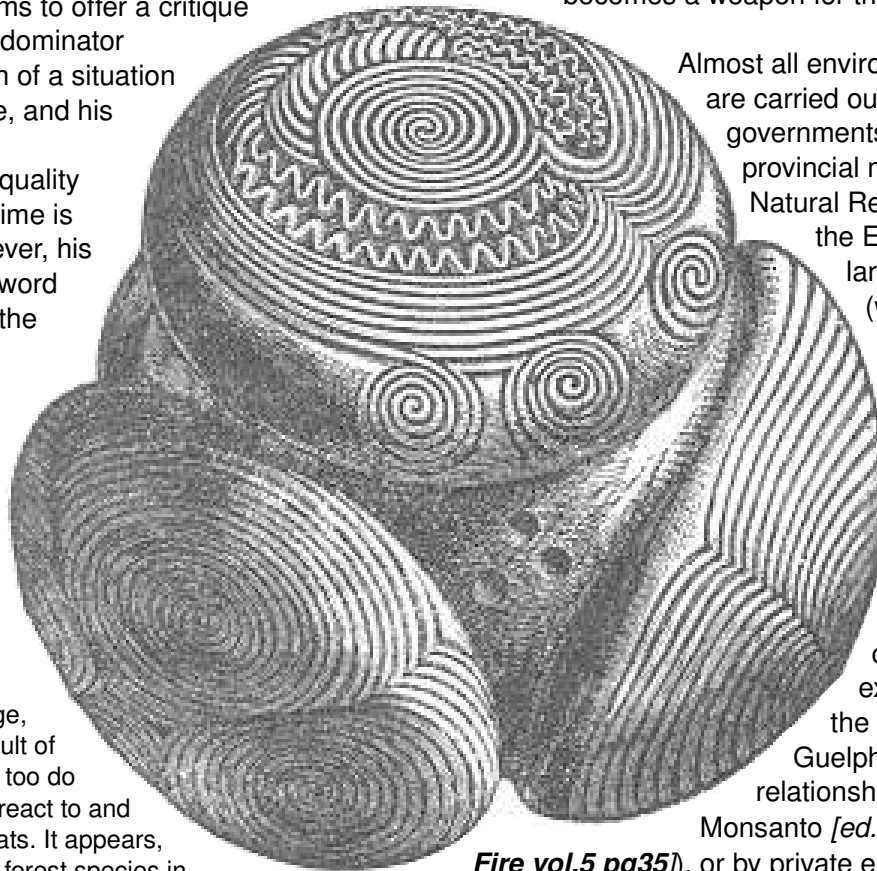
So far, Thompson seems to offer a critique of the timelessness of dominator ecology, the separation of a situation from its past and future, and his analysis of how our understanding of high quality habitat weakens over time is quite interesting. However, his use of the ambiguous word "changes" to describe the massive campaign of genocide and destruction that continues to be waged against Turtle Island, its peoples, and its creatures foreshadows some absurd conclusions. He continues:

"As habitats change, invariably as a result of human activity, so too do the ways animals react to and use the new habitats. It appears, at least, that most forest species in Canada are able to adapt to these changes, as no species has gone extinct solely as a result of forest management. Animals in many situations seem capable of adapting to changed habitat conditions by learning behaviours appropriate to living in the new conditions, if the change is neither too extensive nor too dramatic. On the other hand, we have not completed the first cycle of logging in Canadian forests and so it is too early to draw conclusions with respect to species survivorship in the long term. Certainly some species have not adapted well to habitats created by logging and their populations have declined as a result."

**In an amazing feat of verbiage, Thomson manages to conclude that clearcuts creates habitats, animals can find ways to deal with it, and its too early to draw any other conclusions.**

Even when the past is considered by dominator ecology, it is looked at so narrowly that it becomes impossible to say anything meaningful, which is also a form of timelessness. This timelessness also conveniently eliminates Indigenous peoples' relationships to and knowledge of the land, and wraps the whole process of colonialism – including genocide and ecocide – into the sanitized word "changes".

*And at whose service is this done?* The science of ecology is not neutral – there are some serious power dynamics at play, and so the discipline itself becomes a weapon for the powerful.



Almost all environmental studies are carried out by governments (the federal or provincial ministries of Natural Resources or of the Environment), by large corporations (who seek to profit from so-called natural resources), by universities (whose work is invariably funded by both the state and the corporations, an example being the University of Guelph's cozy relationship with

Monsanto [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.5 pg35*]), or by private environmental assessment firms who are contracted by one of the above.

Many development projects in Ontario are subject to an environmental assessment, whose purpose is to demonstrate that whatever the project is, it will either have no negative effect on the wild or that the effect can be mediated, for instance by building an artificial wetland to capture runoff from a new suburb development. Of course, this process greatly favours those able to pay for ecological expertise, who then get to choose what questions are asked and what answers are presented.



Ecological expertise is inaccessible – the financial cost of a degree or an environmental assessment is a huge barrier, as is the narrow, professionalized discourse of the industry. Even NGOs like Greenpeace and the Sierra Club use that discourse to gain legitimacy. Those who can't afford the expertise are excluded. **But even if more voices**

**were included, dominator ecology is a rigged game from the start**, because its starting assumption is that economic and industrial and civilized growth are necessary and the wild needs to be managed to accommodate them.

## (UN)STAKING THEIR CLAIM

As the deep yellow moon rose we moved deeper into the swamp, past the sweet smells of lilacs and greens and rich earth. Lulled by the moonlight and our headlamps reflecting on the pale survey stakes against the surrounding darkness that marked out Enbridge's proposed new gas pipeline in Flamborough [ed. – in Ontario, Canada]. One by one we pulled nearly 10 kilometres of stakes, tossing them to the side to be reclaimed by the bush.

Shoulder high ferns, giant beetles, yipping coyotes & singing frogs were just some of the other beauty the swamp had to offer us that evening.

Splitting into small teams and armed with headlamps and hiking boots we traversed nearly the entire length of the proposed gas pipeline, aiming to cost Enbridge time, money, and send a message: **We will resist this pipeline. It will not be built.**

Enbridge's proposed pipeline route stretches between Valens Road and east of Highway 6 between Safari Road and Concession 8 through the heart of the Beverly Swamp, designated a Class 1 provincial wetland and an environmentally significant area. Their proposal is for the shortest, most destructive pipeline in so-called southern Ontario. Crossing three watersheds, it will require a 28 metre wide swath of forest and swamp to be cut, drained and destroyed, and a 2.5 metre trench to be excavated by

hoe-rams and blasted with explosives.

In addition to local impacts and serious risks, **this new line is intended to be used as a workaround to fracking moratoriums in the U.S.** The consequences of fracking are so significant that it was recently determined fracked gas can be as or more destructive to our environment and atmosphere than burning coal. Fracking involves injecting high-pressure water, sand, and proprietary chemicals to fracture the earth and release gas. The process has been shown to disrupt ecosystems, cause earthquakes, destroy bedrock, and poison ground & surface water.

The choice to resist this pipeline is easy, even if nighttime hikes in wild places aren't; it was an honour to visit this wild and semi-wild place under the moonlight. Everyone made it out safe, in good spirits, and having removed stakes over an estimated 70% of the route.

COVID or not, resistance to pipelines across Turtle Island is still needed.

Pipeline projects throughout Turtle Island risk lives – of people, animals, birds – and even beautiful, shoulder high ferns. The struggle for racial justice has shown us that we can – and are willing – to take risk when lives are at stake. We must. As the state encourages companies to build and finish their pipelines while they keep us under lockdown; as companies continue to build and

introduce hundreds of people and potential viruses into remote Indigenous communities; as officials piece together legislation that will expropriate Indigenous lands, disregard sovereignty and send land defenders to jail, we must resist.

It is time to transition from COVID crisis management back in to building and growing resistance. Pipelines especially offer many opportunities to engage in distanced resistance: Companies, contractors, equipment, surveys – and of course, state infrastructure.

*In solidarity with those burning pipeline equipment and police stations,*

**– The Beasts of Beverly.**

*Much of the area around and including the Beverly Swamp was logged and drained for farmland by the mid 1800's. The beginnings of human destruction in this area changed the habitat forever, pushing all kinds of wild life including black bears from the area. Around 1910, after decades without locals seeing bears or indications of bears, one mysteriously reappeared, prowling the swamp and adjacent farmlands. That bear – known as the Beast of Beverly – eluded hunters until a group hunt with men and dogs to flush the swamp was decided upon. The story of its death has never been shared. We are the echoes of that beast, hunted and killed by small men of fear. By those who did not know enough to honour and welcome the bear as an indication of how the land should be; wild & free.*

# THE FIGHT IN CATALUNYA

## – independence or self-determination?



*[ed. – A tactics-rich report from October of last year, hot from a significant moment in the groundswell of worldwide battles from Hong Kong to the United States against – among other things – police control and securitisation (see **Calling It Terror**) that has led this year to be so explosive; a topic that will be expanded upon in the next chapter of this volume of Return Fire. It also highlights how the objectives and self-understanding of social movements are often in a state of dynamism: in this case the independence movements in Catalunya for secession from the Spanish State, but we could also think of the battle within the anti-austerity Gilet Jaunes (Yellow Vests) movements in France and beyond between reactionary and anti-capitalist/anti-statist/anti-racist elements, pointing towards the necessity for anarchists to be prepared to get stuck in to the messy and impure moments of social contagion that are proliferating these days, without a demand for purity but without abandoning the arms of critique or retreating to populist appeals. One final note: as the text begins with mention of vehicle-based attacks on demonstrations (something we have seen again repeatedly throughout this year by right-wingers or cops themselves during revolts), it's worth linking to this Twitter thread of a trusted comrade detailing the manufacture and correct deployment of caltrops to disable vehicles in such a scenario: [twitter.com/PeterGelderloos/status/1305951236336898056?p=v](https://twitter.com/PeterGelderloos/status/1305951236336898056?p=v) ]*

We've just experienced the heaviest rioting in Catalunya since the 1970s. Six nights straight, starting Monday, October 14. It's Sunday night now. Reports are coming in of a barricade on fire in Girona, so make that seven nights.

According to one journalist, 1044 dumpsters burnt, 358 city trash cans ripped out of place, and 6400 square meters of asphalt burnt. And that's just in Barcelona.

A fascist – or just a good citizen – ran over two people in a highway blockade near Mataró. Earlier in the week, cops ran over two protesters with their riot van in Tarragona, then got out and beat one of them. We've had a few hit by cars this week. There's a comrade in critical condition

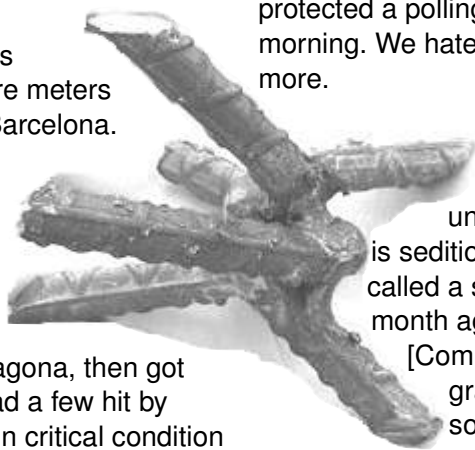
in the hospital right now; cops hit her in the head. A cop in critical condition, too, shot in the head with a slingshot Friday night; the steel ball broke his helmet. He had spent the week shooting and beating people who didn't have any protection. Fucker never thought the tables would turn.

In addition to the highway blockades, there are still big protests in Barcelona, roads blocked. It's mostly peaceful at this point. The media have been trying to sound the death knell of the uprising for days now, and more independent twitter accounts are getting shut down. It could start up again at any moment; it hasn't really ended. For now, the state hasn't instituted martial law, though the conservative government of the Madrid region wants to ban all pro-independence rallies there. There are supposed to be clear sides, remember? Spain vs. Catalunya. But those aren't the lines of this conflict.

### What's It All About?

On Monday, the *Tribunal Supremo* gave seven politicians and two mainstream activist leaders prison sentences of 9-13 years apiece for organizing the independence referendum of October 1, 2017.

Sedition. Several more people in exile would likely receive the same sentences. Fuck politicians and these politicians in particular: they were fine running a prison system while they were in charge, and in 2017 they preferred sabotaging the independence movement with the straitjacket of pacifism to losing control of it. My friends and I protected a polling station, starting at 5 in the morning. We hate voting, but we hate the cops even more.



Regardless, this one trial wasn't the sole focus of the upheaval. The unions said if organizing a referendum is sedition, any protest could be, so they called a strike for the end of the week. And a month ago, seven members of the CDR [Committees to Defend the Republic, grassroots pro-independence and sometimes anti-capitalist assemblies

formed in 2017] were arrested and accused of terrorism. They're still locked up. We have our reservations, but we're on the side of people fighting against repression and for freedom, always. **So the liberal idea of self-determination is contradictory nonsense? Definitely, but that's a long conversation and we're still in the middle of it. A barricade in the street? It's a good figure of speech. Metaphor, comparison? Spell? This is what we mean by self-determination.**

By Wednesday, lots of people in the streets were calling for the resignation of the whole Catalan government [which has been pro-independence throughout the last several elections]. Pro-independence politicians have been insulted and ejected from demonstrations. Meanwhile, *el Cercle de l'Economia*, a think tank representing a large part of the Catalan bourgeoisie, is pointing out that the crisis has political roots, stemming from Madrid's attempts to reduce Catalan autonomy going back a decade, and they re-emphasize their proposals for more self-government and better financing... within the Spanish state. Their top priority is to put an end to the rioting, so if nationalism means an interclass alliance on the basis of putative ethno-linguistic sameness, this isn't exactly that. The bourgeoisie have been against the movement for a while now.

It's Sunday, and a new week is about to start. Whether they are rioters or unlucky bystanders, 28 people are sitting in prison with no option of paying bail, beginning the two-year wait until trial; 194 people have been arrested. Fully 590 people have been reported injured, but a lot of us don't go to the official medics, so the true number is surely two or three times higher.

There's a new blockade at *la Jonquera*, the principle highway connection between the French and Spanish parts of Catalunya. It's maintained by 500 people, way out in the Pyrenees mountains. Earlier in the week, they blocked the road for 30 hours, drilling rebar into the asphalt and putting plastic bottles on top to make them visible. A group of *gilet jaunes* came to blockade the other side of the border. When the former blockade got cleared away, a group of truckers decided to make a blockade. Truckers!

The *Audiencia Nacional* has started investigating *Tsunami Democràtic*, the nonviolent platform that organized the airport protests, for terrorism. They just don't learn. This whole uprising was sparked by repression.

Already on Monday, things started to get out of control with the blockades at the airport, the highways, and on train lines. There was too much

chaos, spread out too widely, for the police and the political parties to control it all. Tuesday, the blockades continued, but that night rioting broke out in all four provincial capitals – Barcelona, Girona, Lleida, and Tarragona. Wednesday, the National Assembly of Catalunya (ANC)<sup>1</sup> continued with their plan for marches departing from five different cities in the farthest reaches of Catalunya to converge on Barcelona on Friday. The distance they would cross was 100 km in some cases. This plan was pacifist and pacifying, aimed at just tiring people out – but they didn't go home, they blocked all the highways, god bless 'em.

Wednesday night, there was even heavier rioting, even in some smaller cities. When the police charged hard and laid out left and right, people didn't like that. There were more burning barricades. Catalan politicians started saying it was the work of infiltrators, circulating bogus stories on social media about *encaputxats* [masked ones] getting envelopes full of cash. I'm still waiting for my envelope, Torra, you stingy Catalan prick! [Quim Torra is a member of the Parliament of Catalonia and the current president of the Government of Catalonia. This appears to be a play on the stereotype of Catalans being stingy.]

On Thursday, the rioting in Barcelona lasted till 6 in the morning. It also continued in the other capitals. Protests took place in solidarity with Catalunya in Madrid, Donostia, Granada, and València. Fascists marched for Spanish unity, too; there were clashes in Madrid and València. They caught an anti-fascist in Barcelona and beat him badly. Another Nazi tried to knife some protesters; he was disarmed, stomped, and left in a coma.

On Friday, 500,000 protesters converged in Barcelona. Shortly after they arrived, the ANC cancelled the march. I heard some people complaining, "The Assembly calls it off, and everyone goes home," even as they dutifully headed for the metro. **All across the city, street after street, the asphalt was fire-scarred. Where haven't the rioters been, this week?** I picked my way through the crowd at *Jardinet*s to meet up with the group with YPG flags, the Rojava solidarity demo [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.3 pg97*]. The Kurdish movement has long supported Catalan independence and Catalunya has been a hub of support for Rojava and democratic confederalism, though the latter is much easier to co-opt in Europe. For its part, Turkey hasn't been

1 The National Assembly of Catalunya (ANC) is a large pro-independence civil society organization. Their former leader got up on a police van at a moment of maximum tension two years ago and convinced the crowds to quit the streets. He is now serving a 9-year prison sentence for sedition.

interested in co-opting, only annihilating.

The march managed to start off through the dense crowds, chanting and wrecking a couple BBVA's [a bank heavily invested in Turkey].

Then it was done. *Passeig de Gràcia* was packed all the way down to Plaça Catalunya. One block over, Pau Claris was full all the way to Plaça Urquinaona, at the top of Via Laietana, which was guarded by riot cops. Plenty of those people were trying to get down there. The sun hadn't even set and it was a war zone.

The cops were holding a corner, shooting rubber bullets, and people were responding with stones. People would run when the cops made a particularly strong assault, but then immediately poured back in, edging closer and closer. Barricades went up, increasing in complexity and effectiveness. Every couple minutes, the cops would shoot off a few rounds of tear gas. People would extinguish them in seconds. The cops had to be conservative with their ammunition; after the previous night, they knew they could run out – and that the crowd won't be merciful. Each gunner was easily shooting off 100-200 rubber bullets and 50-100 canisters of tear gas a night. Added up along an entire police line, that makes for a fierce barrage, but it barely slowed the crowd down.

Early on Friday night, things were a bit awkward. Behind the front line, there were huge crowds of young people hanging out, eager to be close to the action, but not entirely sure that a riot is a good thing. Consequently, the rioters stayed with their own, breaking up rocks at the front, directly in the line of fire. If you tried breaking up the paving stones 20 meters back, where it made sense to do it strategically, a circle of gawkers would form, many filming, asking, "what are you doing?"

**Let's set the scene.** There are all sorts of people here – mostly young, but some older. Many people have Catalan flags, plenty are speaking Spanish, some are tourists. Some are clad all in black, some have no masks at all. Of all the arrestees so far, only two have belonged to an independence organization or party, though of course the CDR has no formal membership. Some people question the necessity of

the property destruction that is taking place; one has to explain, "rocks are needed up front." No one questions the attacks on the police – they are the common enemy. Too many years of getting beaten, of peaceful protests and things staying the same.

**"Forces of occupation, out!" is one of the common chants, and it is hurled against *mossos* [Catalan police] and *nacionales* [Spanish police] with no distinction, although people chase after the vans of *nacionales* with a special fervor.** Their presence in the streets here is hatefully symbolic:

whereas the *mossos* live and work here year round, the Spanish cops were sent in just to repress the movement. They're the ones who beat up people's grandmothers for voting in 2017.



The Spanish flag is like a red banner, taunting the bull. it provokes a special reaction, but all cops are targets, and the *mossos* are getting their share. Their more quotidian presence is no advantage: just the week before this all started, they were beating up people who were trying to stop evictions in the Raval and Poble-sec neighborhoods. Hundreds of people were there, thousands of neighbors saw it, everyone saw the videos.

**In the hinterland, behind the escalating combat, people are calm, enjoying the liberated space, building ever more complex barricades, occasionally pulling another dumpster to the front to serve as fuel for the fire. I pass some of the biggest barricades I've ever seen. Several banks are trashed, while others are oddly untouched. I glimpse what becomes my favorite graffito of the night: "Violent fags seeking revenge." Another is also spot on: "in the riots, we aren't so alone." It's true: people take care of each other.**

There's a lower street that angles back up to the police position at the bottom of the Plaça. If we take it, the crowd can flank the cops battling it out at close quarters at Urquinaona. A line of riot police holds the

top of the street. The approach is 100 meters, under fire the whole way. People start picking their way up the sides, leapfrogging from doorway to doorway to get into throwing range, while one comrade keeps blinding the cops with a laser. The combat grows intense. Projectiles whizz by. People wince or fall when they're hit, go limping back. Some old guy in an anarchist militia hat, 1936-style, stands in the middle of the road, taunting the police, magically unscathed. When you run out of rocks, you have to scramble, doorway to doorway, back to the mouth of the street.

As the assault intensifies, the police counterattack. A column of riot vans charges down the street and people scatter, but as soon as the vans turn, people charge right back in. This happens over and over. Each time, the vans get to an intersection and they have to choose – they can only pursue one group. As soon as they turn or go straight, everyone who ran in the other two directions starts chasing the cops, pounding on the vans. At this point, all the vans are damaged.

It's too dangerous for the cops to get out of the vans like they used to do. There are too many people, too angry. They'd get stomped. We'd *love* for them to get out of the vans. What sorts of goodies might be found inside?

The cops have retaken the dumpsters that people pulled across the lower street, which afforded a protected vantage point within easy throwing distance. They pull the dumpsters out of the way. It's a naked approach again, all one hundred meters of it. People go back to trying.

Suddenly, a group in black is pulling their injured comrade back down the street, calling for medics. Something is wrong. We help them get to a clear spot. I know we shouldn't crowd them, but I want to slip in, just for one second, to see if they're all right. A cameraman is going in: I duck in to push him away, and while I'm close, I look. Hit in the face. Eyeball exploded. The medic's hands are already covered in blood. I turn to my buddy. We'll stay here, help keep the area clear – and if the cops charge again, we won't move. No retreat. After what feels like a long time, the ambulance comes. Some reports say four people have had their eyes shot out this week. Other reports place the number at seven.

**Back at the Plaça, there's a burning barricade on the corner and people have sacked a restaurant terrace for the big cloth umbrellas, which they expertly place over a barricade just 10 meters from the police position. Now people can throw from a perfect distance, completely protected.** The quarries for preparing projectiles have been set

up where they should be, out of the way. People have fashioned tools to lift up the paving stones and the huge fire at the secondary barricade is burning off most of the tear gas. The cops are now pinned under a barrage of hundreds of stones a minute, not to mention the occasional discreet throw from a balcony. How many tons of stone will be thrown at them in the course of this night?

The collective intelligence of the crowd has increased exponentially. People have reconstructed the street so everyone is as safe as possible, so people can approach close to the cops and put them in constant danger. There's a constant supply of ammunition and the whole crowd is protected from van charges from the rear. What a difference from just one hour ago. The cops are starting to get traumatized as more of them are injured. We're no longer the victims. We're winning.

Street after street, the fires are growing bigger, reaching as high as the third floor. In Gràcia, this caused some problems with neighbors, who practically had flames scorching their balconies. But here around Urquinaona, right in the center, Airbnb has already destroyed the neighborhood; many of the buildings are empty. Who cares if tourists can't get to their cheap apartments? They stole those houses from the people who lived here.

It's not entirely empty, though. At the moment of maximum conflict, an older couple, faces drawn, walk with a tense step past the rioters, towards the police line, which doesn't stop shooting. I peek around the corner to watch. It looks like they make it to the door of their apartment without getting hit.

A little later, on the lower street, I take in a sight that stays with me. There are no more dumpsters providing cover in the middle of the street. Three young people have pulled a couple mopeds from their parking spots to fashion a makeshift barricade. They're crouching down, just 15 meters from the police position, farther forward than those of us taking cover in the doorways. Two of them are masked, but the third, a teenage girl, has nothing in the way of protective clothing. All the same, she keeps straightening up, exposed to police fire, to throw more objects. If only she'd cover her face! Some people make a mad dash from cover to leave the three another pile of stones. People take care of one another as best they can.

This fighting continues for more than four hours. **It's not as long as Thursday night, but far more intense, with more people and better technique.** Only after repeated van charges and heavy assaults have hammered away at the crowds on Urquinaona –



and after many people have slipped away due to exhaustion, injuries, or just plain satisfaction – do the police bring out their celebrated new weapon, a water cannon mounted on a tank. They make a video showing the tank advancing and extinguishing some burning barricades, but in practice it's not as decisive as all that. They keep it in reserve until late in the night, only using it with massive police backup, and only after many people have already surrendered the plaza.



I can imagine the cops had a directive from the very top: use it, but under no circumstances let demonstrators destroy it. The crowds would have loved to tear that thing apart.

Friday is a high point, but it's not the end. The police deploy some innovations on Saturday. They have a cordon of good citizens forming between their lines and the demonstrators at Plaça Urquinaona that helps to keep things peaceful. **How quickly the pacifists agree to serve the forces of repression when people stop obeying them! No one prevented them from doing their peaceful marches, but they're incapable of accepting any difference or multiplicity of opinion – much like the state itself.**

And they don't accomplish anything. They killed the movement in 2017 – and while it's true that this week of fighting won't break apart the Spanish state, in these very same days, we've seen how people fighting fiercely in the streets have defeated austerity measures in Ecuador, Chile, and Lebanon. Saturday in Catalunya isn't a total bust, though. There are still riots in the Raval and Gràcia neighborhoods as well as in some other cities, much as the corporate media try to play that down.

Sunday is definitely calmer, but still people don't give up. In Girona, 1000 people surround the courthouse, trying to block the judges from sending the arrested to pretrial detention.

We don't know what will happen next. **Society has been divided and the line does not trace any**

**national or linguistic divide. It separates people on the basis of their chosen relation to social control: those who support the police and those who oppose them.** Some people still talk about democracy, but they mean opposite things. They're willing to shoot down helicopters to attain it – or willing to run over protesters and beat up old folks to preserve it. Some of the former people will eventually have to acknowledge that what they actually want is anarchy; some of the latter may admit that what they really favor is fascism. But for the most part, things will remain muddled and equivocal – and we anarchists will do our best to develop and share clear visions of the enemy, clear lines of flight, lines of attack.

**In any case, many, many thousands of people have experienced something they'll never forget. Most of them will not join us in our projects and conspiracies over the next few months, but some will, and we've got to learn how to grow and share with them as they share with us.**

The rest, they'll still be there, and we'll meet in the streets once again. These are not calm times that lie ahead of us.

### Monday Update

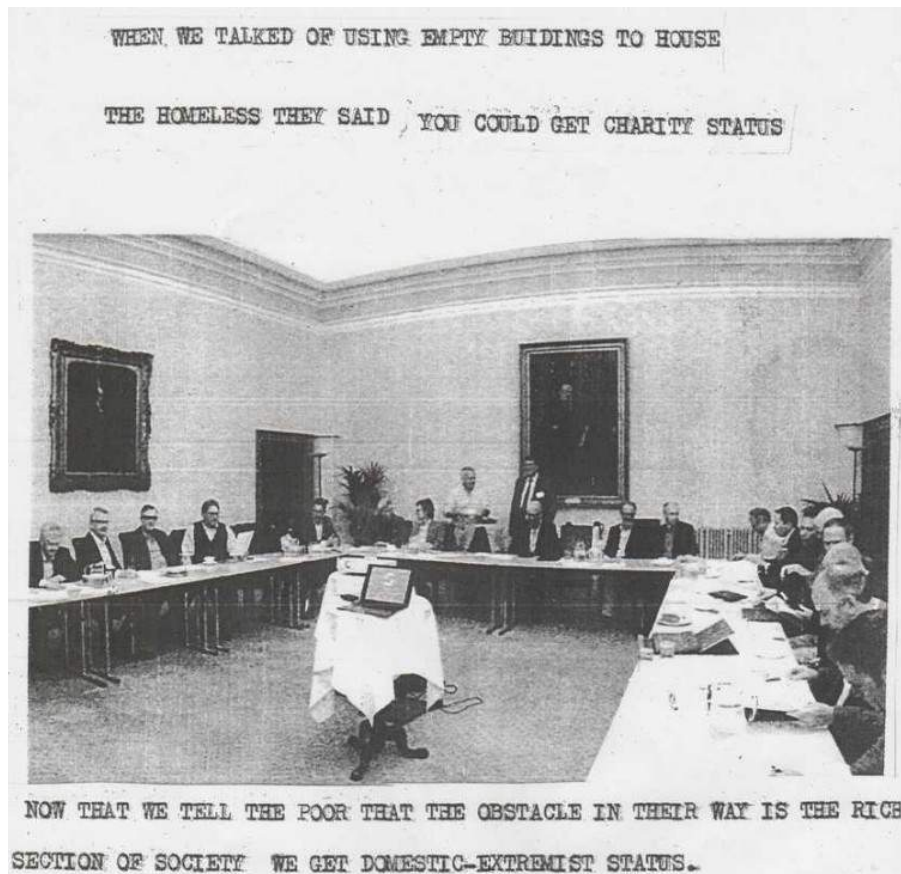
There are protests today outside jails and courthouses. Two of the detainees were sent to migrant detention. The cops have announced the arrest of a youth accused of shooting fireworks at the police helicopter on Wednesday. He has been charged with attempted murder, public disorder, and assaulting authority. This struggle will not end any time soon.

Meanwhile, in one small town outside Barcelona, masked individuals set fire to a couple police cars right outside the station. In a small village on the coast, some people pelted a cop with stones as he was driving away from the station in his private car. In both cases, the targets were *mossos*, the Catalan police.

Our overlords are also in the news. P. Sánchez, Socialist president of Spain, comes to Barcelona, but refuses to meet with the President of the *Generalitat* [the Catalan semi-autonomous government]. Dialogue is impossible. Not even the leaders of democracy are trying to fix the situation, if it means looking weak in front of their imagined voters.

The whole circus tent is falling down.

## 'WEARING THE SCARS INSIDE'



[ed. – Extracted from the art collage zine 'Step into the Unknown', which you can see in its full glory at [325.nostate.net/2018/10/12/pdf-step-into-the-unknown-zine-uk](http://325.nostate.net/2018/10/12/pdf-step-into-the-unknown-zine-uk) (printing to read is recommended). Our apologies to the author for any changes from the original spelling that occurred during our transcription.]

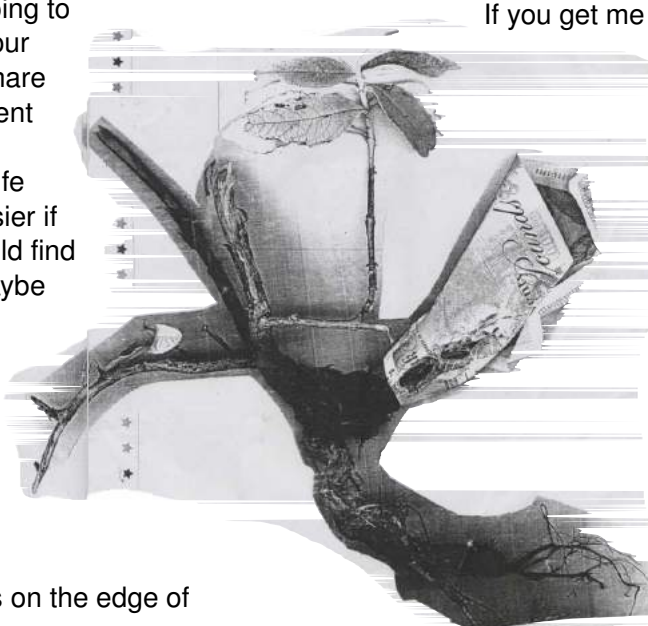
As an anarchist my feelings are not of detachment, I don't think with the politics that I have that I can easily divorce them from the personal, our emotional make-ups are going to be different depending on our life experiences, we may share some goals but carry different baggage, so how we go forward & jump hurdles in life will differ so it would be easier if politically close friends would find the patience to see that maybe we can't all be one happy family – some of us never had the faith, the social skill set in the first place to ever believe the tribe was the best team-spirit & all that!

Where we feel most alive is on the edge of

anarchism, the edge of society, in the margins, lonely but true.

I'm not in any position (if there is) to say that my brand of freedom that I'm reaching for is any better than the next guy's, but even with my narrow glimpse view back into history I find it easy to relate to those who were prepared to shove to better their lot, but some fluke I've become someone who is unable to swallow passively like some hand-reared lamb, if this offends others then that's just tough, if you're left with a bad taste in your mouth you're just gunna have to get used to it.

**I suppose it depends on whether you wear a badge or a scar to define who you are, when it comes to the crunch & things get tough all the tattoos in the world ain't gunna save you, of course if you stay real cool you can change or ditch the badge or even have a skin-graft, but this option is not open to those wearing the scars inside.**



If you get me wrong & don't understand then the fault belongs with me, my inability to communicate effectively, I can find it difficult to talk to people especially when I can't see their teeth, do they have any bite, are they prepared to push?, are they a different breed? Have they evolved into something pliable & tame, accustomed to being shat on?!

[...] No-one's going to particularly like what I'm about to write, but here goes! (What the fuck.) I'm

cynical but also optimistic, I have a gut feeling that people who very much would like to save their own asses are dressing it up as the new cutting edge & at the frontline of conflict, subsistence-farming, back to the land romanticizing the good life: Richard Briars & Penelope Keith, the idea the economy is going to crash and in 3 weeks there will be no food on the shelves of the supermarkets but these people's mind-sets keep them a million miles away from the millions who can't achieve off-grid living, I like the idea of independence, I **recognize the importance of constructing a kind of mental infrastructure to fall back on in times of hardship, but not a single treasure that could be held to ransom**, but some of these home-steaders seem to like surrounding themselves with expensive bespoke gizmo's of a by-gone-age & hiding away from the common plebs, the nearest they've got to a social revolution was 10 years ago when they chucked a petrol-bomb in a wet-dream, what they cum in their pants about nowadays is the possibility of a weekend away lodging in a refurbished windmill, roll out the sourdough!



A garden in the frame of a smashed advertisement display, Chile, 2020: "We destroy this world to create a better one"

**[...] I dance on other people's shattered dreams to the sound of ram-raiding cars reversing, the sound of my unheard words fall on the graves of unsung heroes.**

Over time I've learned not to give a shit so to be able to travel forward, the buildings crumbling due to the expanding roots of invasive plants give me the

inspiration to seed-bomb.

I've kissed my ass goodbye



because continuously guarding it became such a bind[...] Allocation of time, breaking out of what is comfortable, living on the edge of your comfort-zone, seeing with your own eyes what is possible, being brave enough to push stigma aside, fight dirty.

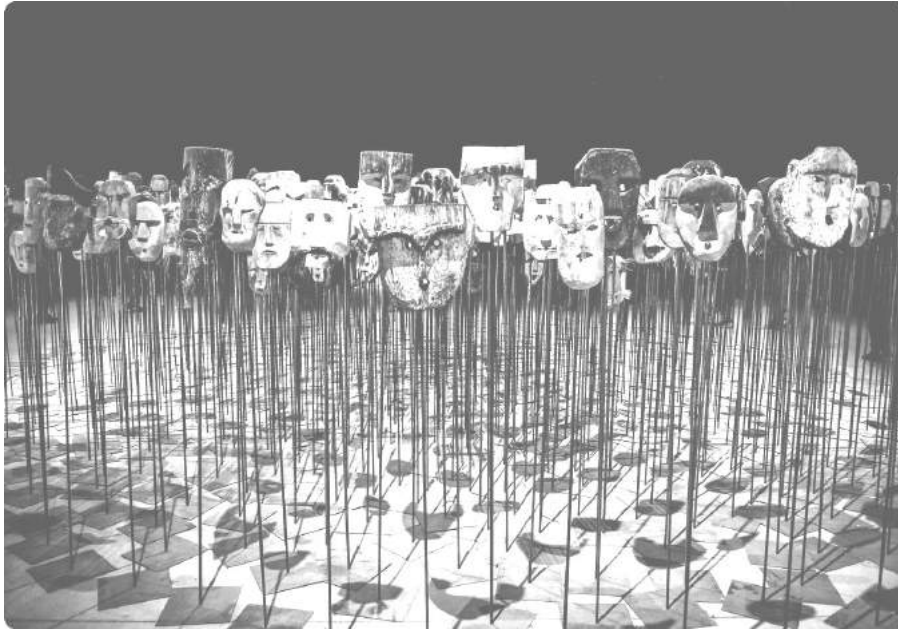
The smaller groups makes you aware as there is no crowd to hide behind or in, it becomes acutely obvious to you where your limitations and weaknesses lie, any short-comings are far quicker exposed, you are relied upon so you have to be responsible & stay honest & solid.

**[...] When I was a teenager the government taught me how to cut down trees with health & safety in mind, I used this skill to take down advertising boards in my 20's.** Recently I visited the part of the country I grew-up in, like a lot of places it's being developed, I saw the new roads where industry might take root, but then I saw opportunities from a different angle, unheaval where weeds flourish – faster growers than cultivated plants, survivors shooting up from surprising places, stop-over gaps in concrete landscape, holes that the new infrastructure unintentionally made, shelter for fugitives.





## 'IT DEPENDS ON ALL OF US'



[ed. – We present this interview, conducted early last year by the Spanish-language site *A Las Barricadas*, releasing it now in what may or may not be last days of Donald Trump's U.S. presidency. Intended for those of us viewing events on that continent from afar, this provides a good look at the dynamics set off after the 2016 election and ongoing struggles which have led to wide-spread social unrest (the return of the anti-police riots that the interviewee notes below had subsided at the time of this interview) and looming threat of civil war that the so-called "United States" now face.]

We spoke broadly with Peter Gelderloos, activist of North American origin based in Spain. Peter is the author of numerous articles, especially analytical accounts about the processes he knows. For example he was very prolific explaining the process of the 15M [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.5 pg38*] to the English-speaking public, in a way that part of the lessons that he got from the Iberian process could be moved to the Occupy movement. Additionally, he is the author of various books, namely *Anarchy Works* and *How Non-Violence Protects the State* among others.

With this interview we intend to get a closer look at the United States society in the Trump era. We want to learn how social movements are facing the reactionary offensive that the world is living through and what resistances are rising up right now. Likewise, from the resistances there's been growing a very dynamic anarchist and revolutionary movement, each day more entrenched in new territories of that country the size of a continent. Transformative movements, as is logical, present new challenges, suffer menaces, so we will try to get him to introduce them to us. We also touch upon the debate about identities that is at its peak on the Left.

We hope this interview is of interest.

**ALB:** The arrival of Donald Trump to the White House has changed everything. As for the causes of his triumph, there has been talk of the rise of the Tea-Party [ed. – *conservative populists*] and then of the alt-right, of the crisis of the "white man", of the frustration of the peripheral working class and the rural world... Do you think there is another factor that is often not mentioned? In the end there was also a very large percentage of women and immigrants that voted for him. And at the same time, there was great voter abstention. What can you contribute?

**Peter:** There are other key factors. Trump had an ideal opponent (for him) [ed. – *Hillary Clinton of the Democratic Party*]. A professional politician who generates equal parts of hatred and apathy and who thought that it would suffice to take control of the Democratic Party and marginalize her opponents to the candidature. Also, Clinton comes from the conservative wing of the party, so she wasn't capable of inspiring the people most horrified by Trump.

Trump didn't win any majority. Less than 19% of the country and 26% of the possible voters voted for him. He won the election in great part thanks to the support of the multi-millionaire Mercer family, also the architect of the unexpected victory of Brexit. They used new algorithms – along with the capacity that Facebook allowed of targeting publicity to the most susceptible individuals to it – to design a much more effective propaganda campaign. With less money, they could reach almost exclusively the people that were vulnerable to his misogynist and xenophobic campaign, and this only in the districts or states that were important to win the election. **It was a turning point as far as it showed that now social media platforms like Facebook are more powerful than traditional media like newspapers and television. That's the last nail in the coffin of mass society. Atomized society is ruled by algorithms.**

What happened was the right was the first in applying this knowledge to



electoral campaigns (but it also didn't hurt him that the commercial press gifted him so much free publicity, due to its attraction to controversy.)

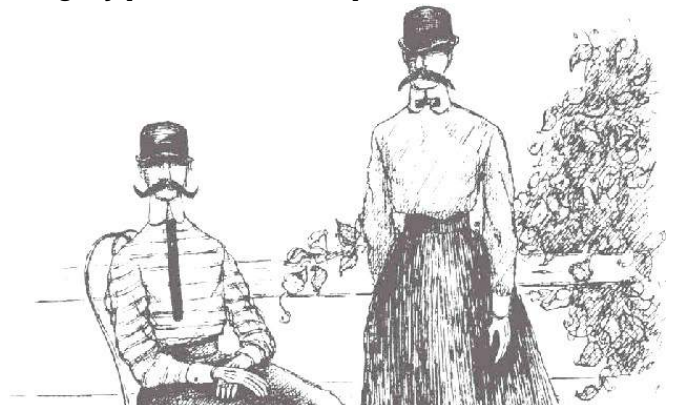
You ask about the women and immigrants that voted for him. The explicit misogyny of Trump was a very important factor to win the loyalty of the minority that voted for him. Conservatism has always been motivated by the obligation to defend the structures of privilege. Through this ideology, the privileges of a society are mobilized through victimization: when a person with social privileges feels attacked because their privileges have been questioned, their high status excluding others.

**Contrary to this, the Left tries to make privilege and oppression something more inclusive: preserve structures of domination in the face of an increasing resistance, through a strategy of inclusion and equality. Formal education for the “minorities” so that they too can ascend in – and defend – the patriarchal and colonial structures of capitalism and the State. Normally, the Right makes no distinction between the reformists and the revolutionaries. They are all represented as menaces to the good order of society (“good order,” for these people, means hierarchy).**

It turns out that there are a lot of right-wing women. It should not surprise us, but we're living in an epoch in which identity labels are becoming substitute for any content. Feminist is confused with being a woman, as if any person vindicating their identity – an identity given by the current system – were fighting against patriarchy. A woman can have many motives to defend a system of privilege and oppression. Feeling culturally identified with Western society, trying to climb the economic ladder, the need of white women to attack racialized women or even the desire of someone screwed over by patriarchy to settle scores, but instead of attacking those with most power, they do the easy and cowardly thing of attacking other oppressed persons. **In a single society, the different axis of oppression tend to show up as a “pack.” They constitute the social structure in its totality.** So white women, rich women, Christian women, homophobic and transphobic women or simply women who feel Western have motives to identify with the totality of the social “order”, even with patriarchal values. But it's interesting that right-wing women (politicians and in the press) that win a lot of

social power speaking in favor of patriarchy almost never behave like traditional women. They are eloquent, aggressive, independent. In a way, they're rebels, even if it's a counter-revolutionary rebellion.

Also, every oppressive system needs the participation of the oppressed people. Women are not weak and patriarchy would have never been able to reproduce without their inclusion. This has been achieved with a very great deal of violence, but also through certain rewards and above all through an essentialist construction of gender categories, so that people identify with their categories and therefore identify with the system itself. **We must not forget that the most extreme violence has been aimed against the people who rejected their identitarian category** [ed. – see *Ghosts*].



The support for Trump by part of the immigrants is much easier to explain. They come from countries with the same structures and racialized histories as the United States. Many were racists in the countries of origin. In USA they become even more racist as a mechanism of integration. In the same manner, immigrants from Ireland, Italy and Eastern Europe in other epochs won their right to exist, attacking the blacks, the indigenous, the recently arrived and the poorly-integrated. Many nationalist movements – in Europe as well – have had an important support by immigrants.

A last observation that seems important to me is that Trump didn't have the support of the most powerful and intelligent sectors of North American capitalism. The consensus of the elite that has ruled for decades has broken. The rich that supported Trump – they weren't few – were from sectors that didn't have any strategy in how to resolve the ever greater crises that are menacing power. They represent an antiquated sector that was only capable of reacting in the face of the questioning of their supremacy that is occurring in many spheres of society. They weren't even capable of recognizing the structures on which their riches depend on.

Contrary to that, the technological sector – Silicon Valley – along with the great majority of corporations



of strategic importance have been vehemently critical of Trump from day one. In the first months of Trump's administration, we could see how it was when the ruling classes themselves were in conflict.

But in the last two years [*ed. – the first two of his presidency*], Trump has shown that he is an idiot and limitless megalomaniac. A typical right-wing populist that takes advantage of offensive speeches while he protects the same interests as always, that is not even capable of recognizing what the interests of the State are. It seems he has definitively ended the global hegemony of USA. Therefore, a new consensus has been created of the elites against Trump.

**ALB: How is society changing in the era of Trump? If there a face-off of ways of understanding the world between liberals and “trumpists”?**

**Peter:** More people are talking of and in deeper ways of topics related to racism and sexism. There exists a very strong polarization between Right and Left without any possibility – at the moment – of a social consensus or a centrist position. In various moments in these last two years, it hasn't seemed exaggerated at all to talk of the possibility of a civil war.

The Right is divided between more numerous parts that don't hide their extremism, don't have qualms about embracing openly racist positions or in joining up with fascists; and another part that has institutional power that still wants to disguise conservatism like something respectable and human. In regards to the Democratic Party, their center now has to pretend to be progressive and the progressives are doing everything possible to capture the new wave of radical sensibilities and thoughts that are sweeping the country. For the first time in decades, they speak of socialism, of universal and free education and healthcare, of deep transformations to face climate change. And in great part the press is diffusing criticisms about the sexism and racism that go beyond institutional equality and “color blindness” of yesteryear. “Rape culture,” “white privilege,” “cultural appropriation,” “non-binary,” “toxic masculinity” and others are already terms adopted by the dominant media of the country.

The press and other institutions of opinion and culture production are almost entirely on the side of the Left, as much centrist as well as progressive. The dominant currents are attempting to renew egalitarian discourses, for example by reducing anti-racism to an obligation to be kind and clean oneself of prejudices.

**But since it's a moment of paradigm shift in which the media of opinion and culture**

**production are living a transformation that's difficult to understand, also there's quite a lot of space for more radical perspectives.** It seems that in these moments the clearest signal for distinguishing between recuperation and subversion hinges on integration. If you're an integrationist, you can make very radical critiques about racism, sexism, or institutional transphobia, with the objective of integrating these new subjectivities into the capitalist system. What's not being talked about is the afro-pessimism of James Baldwin and others, anti-colonialism as a rejection of the mere existence of the USA, queer in its original sense as negation of sexual and gender identities instead of queer as dance club and Tinder... These perspectives keep on being as invisible as in the years in which there couldn't even be an openly lesbian or gay person on television, except maybe a comedian.

At the same time that the press displays much overture towards radical but integrationist critiques, it also makes heroes out of the conservatives that break away from Trump's populism, they make a gala out of the norms of good political behavior and look for agreements and consensus with their political adversaries instead of chasing after those spectacular wars favored by Trump and the most extreme Republicans. When the right-wing politicians [John] McCain and [George W.] Bush died – the two war-like racists responsible for the murder of many racialized persons in other countries – the media which are generally center-left reacted as if Jesus or John Lennon had died.

**ALB: We'd like you to tell us about some of the social struggles that are shaking the USA in these moments.**

The strikes and riots in the prisons have been extremely important, not just because they've managed to carry them out despite exorbitant security measures, but also because it's a fight that affects many millions of people. And many of the strongest protests have occurred in the most conservative zones of the country. Some went much further than a strike: there have been prison occupations and dead guards. Now, I don't think it's any coincidence that this past year, in spite of Republican control of the three branches of the government, a legislative project was pushed forward that would reduce the penitentiary population and would open the path to decriminalization of many “victimless crimes”.

**The history of this movement is very interesting.** An influence were the reading groups established by prisoners in many prisons after years of contact with anarchist groups from the outside of the prisons that

during decades – without exaggerating – worked tirelessly sending books to any prisoner that asked for it. We're speaking of dozens of thousands of books gathered by projects that could have been dismissed as "social workers", that had nothing romantic about them but that were committed to the hard work of making sure that the most neglected population of the country had the necessary resources to sharpen their minds and feel the warmth of solidarity.

It must be said that many of the people accused of violent acts in the recent riots are facing trials.

Another struggle of very great importance is that of immigrants and the people in solidarity with them. In the first month of Trump's presidency, they occupied and blocked all the airports of the country to stop the prohibition of the entrance of people from Muslim countries. It was the first protest of this kind and scale in history, and it worked (and anarchists played a key role in converting peaceful protests outside the airports into aggressive blockades that invaded the airports).

This movement has changed according to circumstances. With the controversy about the detention of minors (although this also happened during Obama's government<sup>1</sup>), many anarchists and other started to occupy ICE [Immigration & Customs Enforcement] offices (*la Migra*). There's also been many attempts by immigrant communities and those in solidarity to stop raids and evictions.

Anti-fascism has also been growing since Trump's victory. In part, there has been a reduction in anti-police revolts, and that for me were more radical and were directed at the foundations of state power. Very many people have directed their energies towards small far-right groups that don't even represent nor have a connection with the hegemonic practices and ideologies of the State nowadays. **It makes me very uncomfortable when our comrades are sharing the same discourse that the executive bosses of Google or Amazon, who have also positioned themselves against fascists.**

**On the other hand, anti-fascism in the USA has almost totally been constructed by anarchists.**

Before Trump, there was almost no existence of anti-fascists because there was almost no existence of

fascist groups. The Yankee far-right was much more decentralized, it existed much more as a complement and not as an adversary of the existent party of the Right, due to the historical structure of North American capitalism. But the role of anarchists has meant that anti-fascism has been almost 100% anti-authoritarian: it has been a practice of community self-defense, of vigilance, of diffusion and of attack, nothing more. It has avoided the macho, leftist and Stalinist traits that have been abundant in many parts of Europe.

But being anti-fascism, it's very vulnerable to recuperation by the Left. Nowadays, the great majority of North American capitalists are anti-fascists. They prefer forms of racism and control much more subtle than those that fascism can provide. **The Democratic Party is also anti-fascist and in the 2020 elections it will take advantage of the sentiments of total rejection towards Trump and the racist groups that have been generated in these years.** The authoritarian Left has taken advantage of the anti-fascist umbrella. For the first time in a long time, the flag of the hammer and the sickle – a symbol that represents oppression and murder against the popular classes as much as the swastika – appear at demos and people don't throw them out.



Authoritarian communist butchers of the 20th century; Joseph Stalin (see *Memory as a Weapon*; *Indigenism & its Enemies*), Fidel Castro, Lenin, Mao Zedong (see *'The Position of the Excluded'*), and ideologue Karl Marx (see *Return Fire* vol.5 pg9): "One hundred million dead... and counting. Party on!"

And so, the majority of the structures, the hours and hours of surveillance and doxxing, the security workshops on the internet and in the streets, the armed escorts, the people trading blows with the Nazis, the experiences in solidarity and anti-repression resources for the inevitable detentions... all these things come from libertarian spaces; if not from explicitly anarchist people, from anti-authoritarian people, including many activists from racialized communities. But on many occasions it has been the authoritarian groups, from the Democratic Party to even small Maoist sects, that have taken

1 ed. – In fact, this previous president (Barack Obama of the Democratic Party) deported more people during the duration of his administration than the previous nineteen presidents combined.

advantage of all this (for example by winning a lot of money through crowdfunding after cases of repression or violent attacks and then not sharing this money with any of the victims of repression). And these groups are growing quite a lot.

The good thing about all this is that people are winning against the Nazis, in spite of their protection by police and by the biggest television channel in the country. They haven't managed to come together in many parts of the country, nor to organize demos. This is thanks to the attacks with fists and baseball bats; the public presence of armed formations (which is legal in the USA); boycotts at their meet-ups in university campuses; propaganda through posters, stickers, graffiti, banners and our counter-information media; demonstrations, vigils and riots; work in coalition with other anti-racist people; and all the necessary research to reveal their identities and afterwards exposing them to ostracism by contacting their neighbors, employers, landlords, etc. **Another good thing is that at last pacifists have realized that the Black Bloc was right, that they need our structures and practices of self-defense [ed. – see *The Siege of the Third Precinct in Minneapolis*], and that struggles aren't a walk in the park but that they're dangerous (if we're doing it right).** What happens is that the majority had already forgotten that even Martin Luther King was armed.

And lastly, I'll mention the struggles against the oil and gas pipelines. The resistance in Standing Rock [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.4 pg16*] – it wasn't an occupation, because, it being indigenous land, the occupying force were the police and the workers – was very important. In the beginning they won the cancellation of the oil pipeline, but one of the first actions of Trump was ordering that the construction was completed. Nonetheless, the resistance inspired a dozen of encampments against other pipelines and similar projects and considerably raised the budget cost for their construction. Some projects were cancelled as soon as there was an announcement of starting a resistance encampment. Others continue in battle, like in West Virginia and Louisiana.

But in these moments, the strongest fight against a pipeline is being waged the territory of the Wet'suwet'en. Legally, they're located in the western province of Canada, but indigenous resistance does not recognize borders that were imposed by



Injunction paperwork tossed into the flames on the barricade in the face of an armed raid by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and pipeline workers invading Unist'ot'en territory, January 2020

colonizers and the influence between Standing Rock and a few other encampments is more than clear. Currently, in many places there are blockades being carried out and other actions in solidarity.

The context is that in North America is undergoing an aggressive expansion of the exploitation of fossil fuels that is totally integrated between Canada and USA at the financial and infrastructural level.

**ALB: Is there an uptick in syndicalist or self-organized worker action?**

**Peter:** Yes, the IWW [ed. – *Industrial Workers of the World; previously a major force in 19th and early 20th century struggles and with much anarchist participation*] is growing quite a lot and they've won some labor conflicts through the organization of workers (normally in rather small places of work like restaurants), solidarity, strikes and public harassment. Same with the Solidarity Networks, the model which inspired the mutual aid groups here on the [Iberian] Peninsula.

Nonetheless, they're still anecdotal cases in a situation defined by the generalized decomposition of the working class as such. Out of those the few exceptions would be the teacher strikes – illegal in some states and partly on the margins of unions – that began some states like West Virginia and Kentucky and won some of their demands. Just now another teacher's strike has ended in Los Angeles. **It's a sign that syndicalist actions could regain strengths in some sectors, but I think that robotization has already ended that possibility in the majority of the industrial sector. And for it to take place in the service sector, there would have to be seen an immense change in society.** Generally, during the last decade, the strongest

economic actions have been realized through sabotage and above all by blockages from the outside, not through organizing workers.

That's also the case with the IWW. The bulk of their action and their new wave of participation is directly related not with labor conflicts, but with its role in anti-fascist mobilization and prisoner support campaigns.

I've known of a few cases of informal resistance in Amazon's warehouses, an important sector in the new economy. It's all about small sabotages, the development and spread of tricks to evade the system of total control of the workers. I've not heard of a more robust action like strikes, like there has been in a couple of European countries where the Amazon model is met with more resistance.

**ALB: The Women's March against Trump in 2017 was huge; did this represent a rebirth of self-organized feminism? Or was it in the hands of liberal women? Does an autonomous feminism exist in these times of hegemonic machismo (one only has to look at what type of TV series and cartoons come to us from there)?**

**Peter:** The Women's March was a successful attempt by the Democrat Party to capture a great part of the rejection of Trump. I'd say that machismo is not hegemonic there. All of the press except for a single television channel has been constantly paying attention to all the micro-machismos in each of Trump's speeches, it was the press and the institutional society who launched #MeToo as a great movement. Yes, the Right managed to appoint a judge to the Supreme Court who was accused of multiple counts of misogynist aggression, but his candidature provoked a great public conversation in which the majority position was analyzing how men can use power to silence the assaulted persons. The judge won the process in the end only because the Republican Party still controlled the two houses of the legislature. Their support of the aggressor was one of the factors which lead to them losing one of the houses.

It must be understood that the Right has a declining support base, but the Republican Party is capable of sometimes winning a majority in government because they've rigged the electoral system and done gerrymandering [manipulating district boundaries to a party's advantage] very effectively. In various states, they keep the half of the posts in spite of only winning 40% of the votes (compared to 55% for the Democrats, for example). Another factor is that Facebook and Youtube give much more of a platform to very fringe positions

when they're from the far-right (especially if they're undercover right-wingers, misogynists and anti-leftists instead of explicit fascists). These are two structural factors that give quite a lot of power to the Right. But the Right is not hegemonic, it lost the culture war.

The new hegemony is still being sketched out, it's still unresolved. Obviously it's still a patriarchal society, but one that no longer tolerates openly macho attitudes. Machismo as a doctrine of supremacy has been replaced by egalitarianism inside supposedly neutral structures that are actually of patriarchal origin. Some ideologies that are gaining majoritarian positions with institutional support are the feminism of equality, trans-integrationism, the transformation of the queer – that has its origins in subversive practices, in being an anti-identity – into another consumerist identity protected by laws.

All of this is a very complicated matter. What is the relationship between a system of values that rejects prejudices and oppressions of the past-present, and the oppressive institutions that know very well how to manipulate society to get away with what they want? It can't be denied that the feminist, queer and trans movements have had a key role in changing the opinions and the conscience regarding questions of gender. We should not undervalue the fact that the comments that normalize rape or stigmatize any person that is not cis [*ed. – i.e., who doesn't identify with the sex they were assigned at birth*] and heterosexual are already badly looked upon by almost everyone and result in grave consequences when public personalities voice them. These changes in perception can facilitate the growth of many autonomous struggles, but normally they end up absorbing and institutionalizing a part of said struggles while taking away the urgency or the polarization that animated their more radical visions and their awareness that the realization of their goals would mean the destruction of this current society.

**ALB: Another focus of resistance has recently been mutual aid in solidarity, in the face of big natural catastrophes. It's an evident case of going where the State can't (and doesn't want) to reach, like Puerto Rico and others before (Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Sandy [*ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg31*]...). Can you go over what kind of people are involved in those projects?**

**Peter:** In 2005, hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and the incompetent and racist response by the State was evident. Anarchists from elsewhere and ex-Black Panthers and community activists from New Orleans set up some quick responses of

support, rescue and medical first aid. A couple of these initiatives lasted and generated an important infrastructure for what is often forgotten in these disasters: long term support and organized resistance against the inevitable attempts by the capitalists and the government to take advantage of the resulting weakness of the neighborhoods. For example the “gentrification by God” that took place in New Orleans.

Many anarchists went by there, a lot has been said and written about the model and suddenly in the last two years, there has been a boom as a very frequent activity in anarchist circles: “mutual aid disaster relief” or “rescue through mutual aid”. Campaigns have been organized in agile and quick ways in the case of hurricanes, floods and forest fires.

**It may surprise people living outside the USA that know it as the richest country in the world, but the majority of the country has very bad infrastructure – worse than than in Europe, for example – and very extreme poverty. It makes total sense, given that it's a country in which capitalism faces very few limitations.** Furthermore, North America is suffering especially grave consequences due to climate change. More and stronger hurricanes each year, fires in California in 2018 that destroyed 767.000ha. of forest, that would be like one fourth of the surface of Catalunya. It would be poetic justice, but – of course – those that suffer are the poor and other species.

The responses in solidarity have been important, because they tend to be more agile and effective – especially from the perspective of poor people – than state responses, that prove that the State will not protect us from climate change and also help us understand that these disasters are not natural, they are aggravated by social and economic problems like pollution, poverty, bad construction, capitalist urbanism, the destruction of the integral habitats that used to protect communities in the cases of fires and hurricanes before capitalism.

They're also good preparation. Often during catastrophic disasters you can see a polarization. There occurs as much a collapse in state power, as a totalitarianism under states of emergency. Learning to survive amidst chaos, generalizing the measures for

collective survival in solidarity and subverting state control would be very necessary activities if the entangled and synergistic crises of capitalism, of democracy and of the environment blow up at once.

**ALB: In a society as atomized as the USA, how can community be built? Is there a community that lasts through time? One of the problems endemic to the Leftists over there has been the great instability of the people, moving to various cities throughout their lives. This is very noticeable in the activism. Are the Leftists**

**reaching out to the community? Or maybe on the contrary, the boom of Trump has come because the communities have politicized towards the Right because the Left did not exist there (or it was centered in the cities)? Is it so?**

**Peter:** In the United States, communities don't exist, with very few exceptions and almost always between racialized people. Capitalism is permanently mobilizing to make sure no one grows roots. I

would say that is the main problem that doesn't permit the possibility of revolutionary movements there.

The United States is a settler state, a state of colonizers like Canada, Argentina, Australia. In societies of this type, I'd say that it's impossible to speak of revolution without destroying whiteness, because in these countries capitalism only managed to be installed through the invention of the white race.

The hyper-atomization typical of there depends on the unlimited mobilization of capitalism, which depends on whiteness and colonization as a continuous process. None of these elements can be touched without touching the others.

**ALB: Speak to us about the state of the anarchist movement in the USA. There's been an evident growth in the last years. We could always see its more spectacular face from here: disruptions, black blocks... Does North American anarchism have any possibilities of growing roots in any particular social body?**

**Peter:** I'd say that currently in almost every movement and evermore sectors of the population, but social alienation makes any rooting very difficult. I believe that the main question is if the integrationist





tendency wins in the upcoming years, which would favor the institutional Left, or the rupture-ist tendency wins, within which anarchism is increasingly serving as a pole.

**ALB: Which new groups or anarchist scenes have emerged recently that are worth mentioning? Recently we've seen RAM, Indigenous Anarchist Federation, or the support groups for Rojava and the Kurdish struggle.**

**Peter:** I think you just named them!

The Revolutionary Anarchist Movement [*transl. – sic; Peter is referring to the Revolutionary Abolitionist Movement, ALB erroneously links to Revolutionary Action Movement*] is a formal group that centers anti-racism in their analysis and the support of pro-prisoner and counter-police struggles. Increasingly there's more affinity between indigenous and anarchist struggles, with more traditional indigenous fighters also adopting some identification with anarchism [*ed. – see Indigenous Anarchist Convergence – Report Back*], and increasingly there's more non-indigenous anarchists letting themselves be influenced by indigenous concepts and practices. There's also quite a lot of organized support in solidarity of the Kurdish people. Lastly, one could name the Black Rose / Rosa Negra federation, a bilingual platformist organization. But most of the movement in the country keeps on being either informal or linked to concrete local projects instead of agglomerating organizations.

**ALB: One of the current debates on the Left in the West is class vs identity. Identity politics are deeply seated among the North American Left. How can one build an ample subject capable of defeating the big (and super-armed) elites?**

**Peter:** There's a lot of debate with respect to that topic, given that the Left has taken advantage of a watered down anti-racism and feminism to attempt to change the masks of power while protecting its own structures. The identity politics that serve state power are essentialist and representative.

Instead of subverting the categorical lines between people, they reinforce them, insisting that each person's identity labels tell us more about that person than their personal experiences and their actions. And in each fiefdom, there are grassroots politicians to speak in name of the totality of their category. These people are almost always university students and somehow have more power than many of the people of their category, but that power was granted by a social axis that's not often spoken of and that's not so visible, like for example formal education or family circumstances.

Identity politics as such and how I've described them are abundant in the university world and in NGOs, but also impact anarchist spaces. On one hand that's because many anarchists are university students or work for NGOs when they distance themselves from more radical ideas or they begin to need more economic stability. On the other hand it's because many anarchists participated in the development of discourses and practices against police racism or gender violence (to name two examples) which are then reappropriated by the institutional Left and transformed into practices which can be compatible with the judicial system and the logic of forgiveness and reform towards institutions and control or punishment towards people.

The fact that now the extreme Right has appropriated a lot of techniques from identity politics to create an “identity politics for white people” has shown to a lot of people that there's nothing radical about essentialism, that in fact it's also a foundation of fascism, of nationalism, of patriarchy itself. But people forget very quickly.

Look at how the Negri-ist Leftist position [*transl. – referring to Toni Negri*] – that neo-liberalism constituted an assault to the sovereignty of the nation-states – was captured and utilized with more effectiveness by the far-right. But nowadays the Left keeps on going with the lie that capitalism is counterpoised to the State or has surpassed the State because they have an ideological interest in covering up all their failed alliances with state power during the last two centuries and thus convincing people to once again go to the polls or to await a Blanquist-Leninist<sup>2</sup> revolution.

In the same manner, identity politics has interested defenders because it generates unquestionable positions of power within a movement. **But, to be honest, one must recognize that there doesn't**

2 Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, better known as Lenin, headed Soviet Russia 1917-1924 and the Soviet Union 1922-1924, developing a variant of Marxism known as Marxist-Leninism and establishing a one-party totalitarian state. In this so-called “workers’ dictatorship”, Lenin was inspired by earlier French socialist Louis Auguste Blanqui who had bid to dominate revolutionary moments in his day and treated the multitude of those subjected by the system as existing only to be led by an elite of revolutionaries, as a supposedly “transitional” stage following revolution before handing power back to the people. The experience of the Soviet Union (as well as North Korea, Cuba, China...) shows just how likely this “transition” is to actually pass and not just become the new status quo. Blanqui was admired by aspiring statist of various types; Benito Mussolini, before becoming the dictator of Italy, founded a fascist paper *Il Popolo d'Italia* with a Blanqui quote on its masthead: “He who has iron, has bread”.

**exist any conflict between the concept of class warfare and identity politics.** The analysis parting from belonging to different economic classes was the first identity politics and it's not difficult to find Leninist pseudo-arguments or from even Marx himself that deny a critical interlocutor of any legitimacy, labeling their position as "petit-bourgeois" or as "lumpen" [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.5 pg11*].

Nowadays, identity politics don't speak so much of class because they've positioned themselves as alternatives to the workerist Left and unions. Currently it's a university practice and pro-capitalist; it's the feminism or the anti-racism of those that are making a career or preparing the electoral campaign and it benefits them to exploit the struggles of the common folk on the streets. But in any moment it's capable of reappropriating class discourses to clean up their image if that lack starts to become more criticized.

"As far as critiques of inequality relate to gender, race, and other axes of oppression tied to many of the social conflicts that undermine democratic peace, equality feminism and equality anti-racism have already triumphed. The former has modified dominant conceptions of gender, reinforcing binaries but *empowering* people to understand gender as yet another consumer choice of self-expression. They are on the way to fully integrating all identities within a patriarchal, white supremacist mode. By nominally rejecting the exercises of paramilitary power that have historically been necessary to maintain social hierarchies (e.g., rape, lynchings), they can finally *share out* the behaviors and privileges previously reserved for heterosexual white men. In practice, equality means that everyone gets to act like the normative white male, once that normative subject is *demobilized* and its paramilitary functions are reabsorbed by professional bodies like the police, the medical establishment, advertising agencies, and so on. Such a practice of equality neutralizes the threat that feminist and anti-colonial movements have posed to capitalism and the State. The only way out of this is to relate non-normative bodies with practices that are inherently subversive, rather than with identity labels that can be recuperated (essentialism). We don't criticize the State because there are not enough women leading it, but because it has always been patriarchal; not because its leaders are racists, but because the State itself is a colonial imposition, and colonialism will be alive in one form or another until the State is abolished. Such a view requires putting more emphasis on historical continuities of oppression rather than tokenistic indicators of oppression in the present moment."

– *Diagnostic of the Future*

## ALB: To conclude... is revolution possible in the USA?

In the next 5 years, I think most likely thing is a strong growth of the institutional Left and the continuation of the current development of technological dystopia.

Another eventuality, with quite a lot less likelihood but not outside of the possible, would be a civil war between racists and anti-racists.

The good thing is that revolution is always possible. The sad thing is that it depends on all of us, and nowadays, people raised in consumerist societies and socialized in the virtual environment of Facebook and Twitter aren't even capable of taking care of their own people. There's a lot of accumulated rage, so I see it as totally possible that an insurrection decides to burn it all. But for the moment I don't see that we're very capable of building something different to the shit that we know. I'll just as easily change my opinion when in the resolution of our conflicts, we learn to heal collectively instead of resorting to wishful thinking, to "this is an individual and private problem", to ghosting those who have dared to criticize us, or to the reproduction of judicial and Christian logic.



## INDIGENOUS ANARCHIST CONVERGENCE – REPORT BACK

*"For what it is worth we will have to establish a way to live that is both indigenous, which is to say of the land that we are actually on, and anarchist, which is to say without authoritarian constraint."* – Aragorn!

*"My ancestors wanted autonomy and I want that too."* – JD

*"We have lived here long before the US government, and we will continue to live here long after it is gone."* – Diné relocation resister.

Kinlani/Flagstaff, AZ [so-called 'U.S.A.']] — More than 120 participants and over 30 groups and organizations converged at Táala Hooghan Infoshop

to discuss, debate, and share their perspectives on *Indigenous Anarchism*.

The initial call-out for the [2019] convergence stated, “...we call for those also seeking a fulfilling life free from domination, coercion, & exploitation to gather around this fire. For those sickened by fascinations with dead white-men’s thoughts (and their academies and their laws), reformist & reactionary “decolonial activisms”, and the uninspired merry-go-round of leftist politics as a whole. For all those ungovernable forces of Nature...”

Though leftist reactions were often replicated and much time was spent with well rehearsed presentations, the primary goals of coming together and interrogating the propositions of Indigenous Anarchism were fulfilled. We were also able to coordinate this gathering with a budget of less than \$800 (thanks to everyone online who donated!) as we relied heavily on the mutual aid from many of our relatives in Kinlani who cooked, donated food, opened up their homes, and volunteered to support. In those terms the convergence could be counted as a success, but what we share in this report back should not be viewed as a celebration. **This is no way represents everything that was discussed, challenged, debated, or expressed. Perhaps this incomplete offering written from memory, limited recordings, and scrapped together notes, should be seen more as fragments of stones which we can sharpen ourselves on.**

When we put the date out for the Indigenous Anarchist Convergence (IAC) we had a focus set on a regional dialogue that would be shaped primarily by those who were fairly familiar with the ideas we’ve been working on, we did not anticipate the overwhelming response from people throughout the so-called US. We also specifically invited those few voices who we’ve read or directly talked with in great length about Indigenous Anarchism (some who couldn’t make it), and with that we knew we were inviting controversial people and that the potential for pushback was serious. The schedule was planned as one track and packed with discussions and workshops. Though each session was given substantial time (some over two hours), we shifted, waited, and went overtime as these functions inevitably do.

A preliminary gathering was held at Big Mountain hosted by Louise Benally and her family who have been resisting forced relocation by remaining on their ancestral homelands. This area has been declared the Sovereign Diné Nation by the residents who assert their autonomy free from US and tribal government control. Though only a few participants from the

convergence attended, the connections and discussions (primarily in Diné bizaad [*ed. – a Diné indigenous language*]), addressed land-based struggles, climate change, coal mining, traditional medicines, and autonomy.

The gathering also became a celebration of the shutdown of Navajo Generating Station, a coal fired power plant operating in the region, which ran its last train of coal just the day before. Diné elder matriarchs Rena Babbit Lane & Ruth Baikedy joined the next day as John Benally shared an herb walk then addressed the geo-politics of the so-called Navajo-Hopi [*ed. – inter-tribal*] Land dispute. Overall the preliminary gathering, which was held at a traditional hogan [*ed. – Diné dwelling*] with no running water or electricity, demonstrated the strength and resolve of traditional ways of life that are the backbone of the autonomous resistance at Big Mountain.

On Friday evening at Táala Hooghan infoshop, the convergence started with a prayer by traditional practitioner Jones Benally that connected the gathering to the sacred mountains within which we were welcoming everyone.

A statement was made that “this gathering is going to be messy, mistakes will be made, yet we are excited with that and what possibilities may come from this. Though this convergence may be premature and we may not have the entire capacity to host, we did not want to wait for this to happen, we wanted to push the conversations forward so that we can intervene in the current shitty political realities we face in more direct and effective ways. **We also do not want you to participate expecting this convergence to be an annual affair, as we would then face the trap of Indigenous anarchism being defined by our context and our terms, we know this gathering would look very different if it were to be held in your lands and that you would do some things very differently than us.** We would offer that the next convergence be hosted elsewhere so please think about that while being here.” A statement was also issued that the infoshop could not guarantee it was a safe space, but that it should be viewed as a threatening space to all forms of oppressive behaviors and that known abusers, particularly perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence, would be kicked out of the gathering.

On the Indigenous front there were several distinct tensions addressed. Discussions on “good vs bad traditionalism” including a challenge to “not romanticize a pre-contact utopia” with a primary focus on gender were prevalent throughout the weekend.

On the panel “Locating an Indigenous Anarchism”, Chris Finley stated, “I want to make sure that Indigenous queer people, two spirit people are sacred people. Queerness is not a result of colonization, that idea is fucked up. I want to make sure that we are sacred parts of our community. One of the things that we can do, while the settlers get their shit together, is work on homophobia in our communities, because that is a huge part of how the settler state maintains power, and these are things that we can work on now.”

Brandon Benallie, of Ké’ Infoshop stated, “Traditionalism is not the same as our life ways. Traditionalism is like a museum piece that sits on a shelf and gets old, whereas our life ways are accumulating knowledge and always growing, it’s the people getting old who don’t want to grow.” Another question was “how do we address movement-policing elders or the elders who tell us go back to camp?” This primarily related to experiences in Standing Rock [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.4 pg16*] where elders held people back at the frontlines. **Anecdotes were shared that provided no clear tactic other than recognizing that there are “elders and those who get older,” and it’s our challenge to understand how to address that dynamic based upon the situations in our communities.** Julie Richards aka MAMA Julz, a water protector from the Mothers Against Meth Alliance, stated, “I want to be one of those elders who still locks down on the front lines to save our lands and future generations.”

Identity politics [ed. – see *'It Depends on All of Us'*] was also prevalent, including an assertion of the lack of centering of trans & afro-Indigenous voices. Issues of identify policing were challenged specifically with so-called “white passing” Indigenous Peoples. This brought up questions of settler colonial attempts at “paper genocide.” An afro-Indigenous trans person voiced that their struggle was one in which they are, “hated by society and the people you fight for.” Multiple calls were made to ensure that organizing spaces center trans and afro-Indigenous voices. Calls were also made to confront anti-blackness

in Indigenous organizing (such as cooptation of Black Lives Matter by Native Lives Matter) and to ensure inclusivity in the movement to stop Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (#mmiw) by adding #mmiwgts to include trans and two spirit relatives who face further disproportionate hetero-patriarchal violence.

**Land and place were central to nearly all conversations** though some points were made that, “If Indigenous means of the earth, who is not an Indigenous anarchist?” and a concern that use of the term “turtle island” was too limiting or exclusive of a term. These tensions led some participating Diné and other Indigenous Peoples to clarify that their anarchism is a specific tendency due to their distinct cultural contexts.

The term “decolonization” seemed to have a heavier weight in the midst of these discussions as it was used very sparingly. Though in some ways the “decolonial” dynamics played out much as they do in other circles. **The term “decolonization” is used in both radical and liberal spaces as an empty rhetorical buzzword**, this is quite often seen in performative “land acknowledgements” when it should be meaningfully used with and in respect to the Indigenous Peoples’ whose lands we are on. That dynamic was most clear from those who came to the convergence from large cities. In some ways their contexts felt distant and alienating, which is a dynamic we usually brace ourselves to face from academics, so it was concerning though not surprising in relation to the space and ways in which our cultural protocols were ignored and in some ways disrespected.



12.10.20: Banner in Kinlání ('Flagstaff, Arizona') at Indigenous Peoples' Day of Rage Against Colonialism (countering the assimilationist rhetoric of Indigenous Peoples' Day), with demonstrations across Turtle Island from 'Nova Scotia' to Hawai'i and from 'Florida' to 'British Columbia'; the demonstration disrupted traffic in the congested downtown touristic zone, barricaded streets, lit fireworks and confronted cops, paintbombing gentrifiers' windows and the City Hall, intervening to protect those threatened with arrest on the first Indigenous Peoples' Day recognised by Arizona politicians

JD from so-called Canada spoke to the current “reconciliatory” efforts by the state to address genocide of Indigenous Peoples and addressed how “there can be no reconciliation that recognizes the self-determination of Indigenous peoples so long as the state of Canada exists... My ancestors wanted autonomy and I want that too.”

On the anarchist front there

surprisingly seemed to be less disagreement. Much of the emphasis was put on an Indigenous anarchism as a unique radical anti-colonial tendency antagonistic towards the European orientation of the term.

**Observations were shared regarding how the concepts of mutual aid, non-hierarchical social relations, and direct action were already embedded in many, though not all, of our distinct Indigenous knowledge systems, and that state-based revolutionary strategies, like socialism and communism, are inherently anti-Indigenous.**

Though there was not a cohesive agreement, a tendency expressed was that anarchism is a tool or position with which we can use to distinguish ourselves and efforts from liberal and leftist-produced settler colonial politics (primarily reformism and Marxism and its “tangents”). Little time was wasted reacting to white anarchist identity, which was perhaps the primary reason the Anarchist People of Color (APOC) position welcoming Indigenous, Black, and Brown People was invoked.

Chris Finley shared their experiences coming to anarchism through the punk-rock scene and arriving at a place of Indigenous feminist anarchism, “...I came back to anarchy because I want to know not just what I am against, because I knew this shit was fucked up, but what I wanted to be for and who I wanted to be with in that for. That’s a difficult question, I am colonized, it’s really hard for us to think of something outside of this so we need other people and to help us through that and to imagine those things together.”

A zine titled, “*Autonomously and with Conviction: A Métis Refusal of State-Led Reconciliation*” that was distributed at the event asserted, “Anarchism is a political philosophy – some might say a beautiful idea – that believes in self-governed societies based on voluntary association with one another. It advocates for non-hierarchical decision-making, direct participation in those decisions by affected communities, and autonomy for all living persons.

**Furthermore, it leaves space for the valuation of non-human entities beyond their monetary worth or usefulness to human beings.** My Indigenous teachings have communicated to me that our communities are important, but so are we as individuals. Traditional ways saw decision making as a participatory process, based on consensus, where communities made choices together. My teachings tell me that the land can offer us what we need, but never to take more than that. I see these ideas as fundamentally compatible. **I’d like to see an anarchy of my people and the anarchy of settlers (also my people) enacted here together, side by side.** With an equal distribution of power, each

pursuing healthy relationships, acting from their own ideas and history. Just as the Two Row<sup>3</sup> imagined. I would like to see the centralized state of Canada dismantled. I’d like to see communities take up the responsibility of organizing themselves in the absence of said central authority.”

Louise Benally spoke to her experiences resisting forced relocation on Big Mountain and calling for further action to take down all these systems that are destroying Mother Earth. Louise stated that anarchism is “about action, you believe in yourself, you believe in what you’re going to speak about, you believe in what you’re doing, you’re not bound by a group or governmental entity, you do what you have to do. **I believe in the earth and the spirits that work within the earth, that is where I first go. Working with and through nature, that is the only thing that I have faith in, I don’t trust any system because it has never done anything for me. I don’t practice christianity, that is not something that I understand.** I don’t base my ways on that, I don’t believe in the US government because that is just about destruction of a culture and consumption of culture.”

The panel “Locating an Indigenous Anarchism” was named after Aragorn!’s zine<sup>4</sup> that was published in 2005, from which he read a section of and provided a definition of Indigenous anarchism, “For what it is worth we will have to establish a way to live that is both indigenous, which is to say of the land that we are actually on, and anarchist, which is to say without authoritarian constraint.” Aragorn! stated, “On the one hand I have a very big problem with hyphenated anarchism, when people refer to themselves as anarchist and *blank*, they really mean the blank and the anarchism is a secondary concern. I’ve always seen seen anarchism and indigeneity as being synonymous terms. For me the idea of an anarchism that isn’t placed right here, never made sense. The idea of anarchism as a set of western enlightenment values that somehow we learned in school or something never made sense to me. One of the concerns I have about this weekend, is that sometimes our enthusiasm is more our concern and more the way that we communicate ourselves and our

3 ed. – The Two Row Wampum belt is record of the first agreement between 17<sup>th</sup> century Europeans and indigenous peoples on Turtle Island (specifically the Haudenosaunee); featuring two rows of purple beads signifying the parallel journeys of the Haudenosaunee canoe alongside a European ship. The agreement outlines a mutual, three-part commitment to friendship, peace between peoples, and living in parallel forever (as long as the grass is green, as long as the rivers flow downhill and as long as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west). Needless to say, the commitment was not honoured by the European powers.



ideas than anything else, and in the case of something as important as this idea, this idea of a land based politics that is huge in size, I don't want this to turn into politics as usual. I say that knowing that that's going to be a challenge when it comes up in details."

After reading the excerpt from "Locating an Indigenous Anarchism" Aragorn! emphasized, "For me those are the only terms that matter, 'authoritarian constraint' and 'place.'"

The Against Settler Colonial Politics panel on Sunday further asserted that, "anarchism is in fact something we can define ourselves," The panel also referenced Russell Mean's statement "For America To Live Europe Must Die" as an eloquent Indigenous response to the proposition of Marxist authoritarianism. A zine titled, "Marxism and it's Tangents... for anarchists," was distributed that stated, "...because sometimes people are not really on our team." Some of the Q&A had push-back regarding a "need for leftist unity" and not to perpetuate "european-based leftist disputes," to that responses were made that we "should be honest about leftist politics, that the conclusions of communism and socialism are anti-Indigenous." A panelist asked the question, "are we criticizing authoritarianism or european dogma?" A sheet titled, "the Red Flags of Red Fasc(ists)" listing authoritarian leftist front groups was shared by a persxn who was at La Conxa in so-called LA when it was attacked by a Maoist group<sup>4</sup>.

On the organizing/activism/struggle front, there were many workshops proposed about border struggles which were the primary focus of action against attacks on Indigenous lands and Peoples for the convergence. The O'odham Anti-Border Collective shared their strategies to maintain their ways of life

4 ed. – Members of 'Defend Boyle Heights' failed to enter the organising space, pepper-spraying those who thwarted their masked attack, during an anti-repression workshop they labelled 'counter-revolutionary' on July 31st 2019.



12.10.20: Families from all O'odham nations (Hia Ced O'odham, Tohono O'odham, and Akimel O'odham) demonstrate at a border patrol checkpoint on unceded land, against border wall construction and militarization which has destroyed sacred land, water and burial sites; Border Patrol, Arizona State Troopers and Department of Public Safety attack, hitting at least one O'odham in prayer in the chest with rubber bullets and arresting at least eight, ordering people with vulnerable health out of their vehicles then tear gassing them and abducting the kids

despite ongoing occupation, borders, and barriers on their traditional homelands [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.3 pg67*]. On the Autonomous Organizing Against Borders panel, an organizer from so-called El Paso addressed how their community is responding to white supremacist attacks while they're facing

extreme state repression. **They also shared how a radical community center was undermined by "the subtle forms of white supremacy that invade and co-opt our spaces." They railed against "non-profit liberal power wielding mechanisms," and asserted that, "we're not here to ask for reform. The law is killing our people."**

Another organizer from occupied Tongva lands so-called Los Angeles discussed their work directly supporting migrant folx held in concentration camps. The organizer received a call from a trans migrant person being held in one of the concentration camps and put them on the microphone. The conversation was emotional and raw with the tension of these struggles filling every corner of the room.

On the "Solidarity Means Action, Anti-colonial-Struggle Means Attack!" panel MAMA Julz stated that, "Prayer and action go hand in hand, I've always stood on that. If we're sitting there in prayers and there's no-one out there then nothing is going to get done. Our ancestors want us to meet them half-way. No matter how scary it gets, remember that as long as we're fighting for the people and mother earth in a good way, we're always going to be protected. If you believe you can shut shit down, shut shit down, but pray first."

Leona Morgan from Diné No Nukes and Haul No! spoke about fighting nuclear colonialism which has left thousands of abandoned uranium mines and spread cancer throughout Indigenous Lands. She stated that "70% of uranium comes from Indigenous lands" and that current proposals call for bringing all the nuclear waste from throughout the "US" into New Mexico effectively creating a "national sacrifice zone."

**They're saying here is that nuclear power is a 'clean' solution to global warming while we are the ones getting cancer, were the ones that have our water, plants, and food sources contaminated."**

She looked towards international anti-nuke direct action movements that are stopping uranium shipments and called for support, "We may need to do that here."

Klee Benally from Protect the Peaks and an organizer of the convergence provided an overview of the struggle and failures to stop the desecration of the holy San Francisco Peaks, which is located just outside of Kinlani/Flagstaff. A ski resort has been allowed by the Forest Service to make fake snow out of millions of gallons of treated sewage on the mountain. Klee stated, "Settler colonial laws were never designed to benefit Indigenous peoples' ways of life, they were designed to destroy them. **To be more effective we need to be honest with ourselves and understand how Standing Rock was strategic failure in that it didn't stop the pipeline, of course it was a social and cultural success, but we need to be critical in real-time about these struggles so we can be more effective. If we don't talk about our failures how can we learn?"**

On Sunday evening, before everyone started sharing their contact info, before dinner and after a lecture, we stopped and decided not to end in accordance with our traditional protocol.

An organizer for the convergence wrote in another report back, "Somewhere at the gathering, I expected to be in the presence of indigenous anarchism. I did not know if indigenous anarchism was the fire we would gather around, if it was the individuals converging, or if it was an empty space where individuals were to ignite the flames. It's safe to say, my expectations were met. I witnessed an indigenous anarchism but it was unfamiliar to me, a Diné anarchist.... **The potential I have discovered at the convergence is the particulars of Diné anarchy. Fires made from crystal and fires made from turquoise. Fires bright enough to find the light of other Diné anarchists in this dark world I find myself in. A world sickened from the industrialization of civilized humans whose culture of control and**

**destruction forces all living things to adopt, adapt, or die.** I suggest that Diné anarchy offers the addition of a choice to attack. An assault on our enemy that weakens their grip on, not only our glittering world, but the worlds of others. An opportunity for the anarchy of Ndee, of O'odham, and so on, to exact revenge on their colonizers. Until all that's left for Diné anarchists is to dissuade the endorsements of the next idol expecting our obedience." [ed. – *The full text, 'Fire Walk With Me – a report back from the indigenous anarchist convergence', also contains important criticisms of leftist elements present at the convergence, and could be fruitfully read alongside the present piece.*]

**For the moment we see Indigenous Anarchism as a reference point, but this term is so broad that for all it could encompass it also stifles. We're not interested in re-engineering social arrangements, we're interested in inspired formations, agitations, interventions, and acts towards total liberation. From our perspective, at the base of Do'koo'osliid, we see more use in building contextual understandings deeply rooted in our sacred lands and teachings. This places us in some ways at odds with a flattening that the larger emergent force of Indigenous Anarchism would have. As Aragorn! stated, "Indigenous anarchism is a politics that has yet to be written and maybe that is a good thing."**

For now we will continue to agitate, organize, write, discuss, and provoke to further radical autonomous/anti-authoritarian Indigenous tendencies towards total liberation.



June 2020: a youth of the Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo dances where a statue of Juan de Oñate (who ordered the massacre of 800 Acoma people and amputation of the right feet of 24 captive Acoma warriors) once stood in so-called 'New Mexico'

# REBELLION EXTINCTION

## – a capitalist scam to hijack our resistance

*led. – As environmentalist populists Extinction Rebellion (XR) prepare to begin street-level interventions and assorted political theatre again after the enforced spell of broad inactivity during the outbreak of COVID-19, it seems as good a time as ever to share one of the shorter and more succinct exposes of the organisation and its backers that appeared last year.*

*We picked this up from Enough 14, who are reposting it from its source, Winter Oak (who also produce The Acorn web-bulletin), and have left in their additional note. We share the author's hope that the doubtlessly-sincere people among those who have joined or otherwise aligned themselves with the organisation (totally allergic to any mention of capitalism, let alone the State and techno-industrial society) will see through them, before wasting too much time in an environment of total and deliberate amnesia as to previous struggles and their hard lessons, an environment with more solidarity and affinity for the police (and self-policing through a strict code of non-violence) than they do for indigenous, ecological and anti-capitalist revolutionaries.*

*But criticism is very much needed: rather than being just another liberal, pacifist mob, XR are mobilising huge resources to divert the previously-floundering 'climate movement' and a new generation of youth into the arms of so-called 'green capitalism' and the extension of State power – the same States who have developed, produced and defended the ecocidal machinery that this author notes to be threatening "life on earth" (as we know it, at least) – through the declaration of a State of Emergency for the climate...*

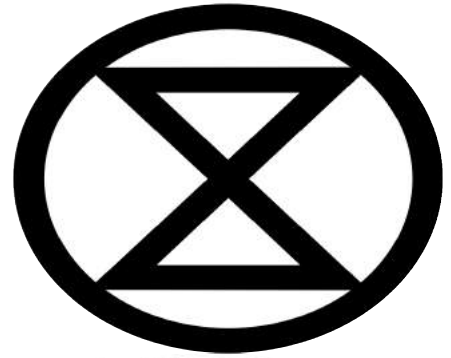
*Connecting this charade of an environmental movement with the capitalist restructuring underway and immanent is doubtless one of the biggest challenges today for social movements and autonomous actors who wish to intervene without their energies being captured and redirected, as has been touched on previously in these pages (see **Return Fire vol.5 pg10**). The fact that world leaders like the U.K.'s Boris Johnson, Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro, or the U.S.A.'s Donald Trump currently seem more interested in the take-the-money-and-run approach, ramping up fossil fuel extraction and riding roughshod over previous environmental restrictions (however flimsy), cannot obscure the fact that, to survive with their wealth and power intact, many capitalists are very clear about the scale and pace of changes that must take place to prevent their system from going under; and now comes a stage-managed 'rebellion' ready to demand exactly that. (Actually, the binary is false; as comrades and others have been at pains to point out, industrial so-called 'renewable energy' is heavily-dependent on fossil-fuel energy and infrastructure at almost all stages of production and distribution: see **Green Capital & Environmental "Leaders"***

***Won't Save Us.**) Already, XR are moving in to try to control pre-existing struggles here in the UK; see **Stop HS2 & Extinction Rebellion**.*

*Only those willfully blind to the past (or even existence!) of radical environmentalism on these isles such as the anti-roads movements of the 1990's and 2000's (see **Return Fire vol.4 pg88**) could, to follow with an example brought up in the article below, consider a victory to be electric cars – their components to be supplied with tin, copper and the metal called the "new gasoline" by multinational investment and finance firm Goldman Sachs, lithium, partly by re-opening extraction on the Cornish coast already scarred by a previous phase of intensive mining that still bleeds out toxins into the sea and land – running silently along that exact same road infrastructure. Yet this is exactly the kind of double-speak that green capitalism thrives upon, and as within the European Union members like France and Germany will be using funds allocated to COVID-19 'virus recovery' to accelerate the transition to electric cars, their recuperation of our previous struggles is almost too perfect. Meanwhile, (potential) rebels in XR are identified and profiled by the State.*

*Unless... we find that there remains an underbelly of the environmental movement, not interested in being (eco-)citizens nor (eco-)consumers, but rather living beings amongst their kind of many hues and shapes, and an impenetrable culture of resistance against the hyper-engineered reality of exploitation they seek to make ever-more-delusionally 'sustainable'...]*

# Exclusive



# Ridiculous

When Extinction Rebellion first burst into action in the UK last November, it felt as if something was finally going to change.

Their high-profile arrival on the political scene had a noticeable effect on awareness of environmental issues and gave people permission to speak more freely than before about our society and its relationship to nature.

Yes, there were many criticisms of XR tactics and language from the likes of the new Green Anti-Capitalist Front and activist Emily Apple.

But when this month's big week of action in London got underway, with Waterloo Bridge and Oxford Circus blocked and Marble Arch occupied, it felt as if something important and radical was happening.

And perhaps it was, because, presumably, the vast majority of those who turned out, including the nearly 1,000 who were arrested, genuinely believe that our civilization needs to change course if life on this earth is to survive.

**But the integrity of XR as an organisation was dealt a fatal blow on Easter Monday, when its Twitter account started plugging links to a new website called XR Business, which had been announced in a letter to *The Times*.**

Among the signatories was Gail Bradbrook, director and shareholder of Compassionate Revolution Ltd and Holding Group member of XR. **This is just not some separate support group, but an intrinsic part of the XR apparatus.**



The very existence of the site was bad enough, but the home page was (and is) hideous. A corporate satellite view of Europe lit up like a Christmas tree. What sort of environmental movement would choose such imagery?

We should have seen this coming. We had, after all, already read investigative journalist Cory Morningstar's excellent digging into the "climate change" industry on her *Wrong Kind of Green* blog (Note: Cory Morningstar is highly controversial among activists, *Enough 14*).

But somehow we wanted to give XR the benefit of the doubt and even naively plugged the London protests in our last bulletin.

The XR Business site, however, is a declaration of Rebellion Extinction. This is now officially an ex-Rebellion, shorn of all pretence of radicalism.

Instead, what we find is a list of "business leaders" who have identified environmental catastrophe as yet another get-rich opportunity.

And they are prepared to hijack and exploit people's real love for life and nature in order to push their profiteering agenda.

First name on the list of these so-called "leaders" is Seb Beloe, partner at WHEB.

WHEB describes itself as "a positive impact investor focused on the opportunities created by the transition to a low carbon and sustainable global economy".

It adds: "We focus on nine sustainable investment themes with strong growth characteristics, derived from providing solutions to major social and environmental challenges".

On a page headed "thought leadership" WHEB announces that it is "actively involved" in organisations "at the leading edge of sustainable and responsible investment".

These include the Global Impact Investing Network, which explains in turn on its website that it brings together "impact investors and intermediaries who have the capacity to invest and intervene at scale, making multi-million dollar investments and aggregating funds large enough to access institutional capital".

Another XR "business leader" is Amy Clarke, co-founder of Tribe Impact Capital LLP, which boasts the snappy tagline "A New Wealth Order".

Clarke is very proud of having "spent time" at investment firm EY ("helping clients embrace industry disruption as an opportunity"), PwC (PricewaterhouseCoopers), Microsoft, and the Bank of America. Needless to say, Tribe Impact Capital shows little interest in challenging capitalism (the clue is in the name!) or in calling for degrowth. Its goal is, rather, "long-term positive impact and growth for everyone".

**XR "business leaders" John Elkington and Louise Kjellerup Roper, come from Volans Ventures Ltd. They are involved in the Tomorrow's Capitalism Inquiry backed by companies like Aviva Investors, The Body Shop International, Covestro, and Unilever, the massive transnational consumer goods company.**

Paul Polman, until recently CEO of Unilever plc, is also on the XR roll of honour, in fact.

And Jeremy Leggett, very active in promoting XR Business online, is founder and director of Solarcentury Ltd, which names Unilever as one of its "partners".

Another XR business groupie is Jake Hayman, whose Ten Years' Time programme "is tailored for the next generation of high-net worth families who are looking to invest capital into ambitious new ideas rather than following the crowd to safe ground".

It's that c-word word again!

Another XR Business enthusiast for "green" technology is Samer Salty, co-founder and managing partner of the infrastructure and private equity fund manager, Zouk Capital LLP.

Its site tells us:

"Zouk's infrastructure strategy capitalises on the global shift to greater sustainability.

"The fund targets a diverse range of sectors across Europe, including emerging utility-scale battery storage projects as well as wind, solar, waste-to-energy, electric vehicles and geothermal".

It was announced in February 2019 that Zouk is entering into exclusive negotiations to manage the UK Government's £400m CIIF investment fund aimed at helping to increase the uptake of electric vehicles in the UK.

No vested interests involved there, then, nor with XR supporter Michael F. H. Bonte-Friedheim, CEO and founding partner of NextEnergy Capital, "the leading international solar investment and asset manager".

XR Business also boasts the support of Tomas Carruthers, CEO of Project Heather:

"We're building a stock exchange for the 21st century. It's time to add 'impact' to 'risk and reward'".

The key to understanding the XR phenomenon comes perhaps from its business backers Charmian Love and Amanda Feldman.

They are co-founders of Heliotropy Ltd, terming themselves "Builders of a brighter future".

On the surface everything seems yummy and wholesome. Explaining its name, the site says:

"Heliotropy is a phenomenon in nature where certain plants (or parts, like flowers) grow in response to the stimulus of sunlight, so that they turn to face the sun.

"We believe humans are similarly motivated by the power of heliotropy. We will grow taller, faster and stronger when motivated by light, warmth and positivity, rather than fear and despair".

Heliotropy says it is all about "Mobilising Movements". It declares:

"Today's problems are interconnected, and movements must join forces to solve them. We are convening emerging leaders from

global movements to imagine new ways of collaborating".

But Heliotropy is a microcosm for the world of XR as a whole. Beneath the nicey-nicey surface lurks something rather nasty-nasty.

If you click on the section entitled "Reimagining Corporate Capital" you are taken to a site called Corporate Impact X.

This explains: "Corporate Impact X is a practitioner-led project designed to support corporations in developing high impact venturing, collaboration and investment strategies".

It offers a report called "Investing Breakthrough: Corporate Venture Capital". Sadly the link does not work properly, though it does point the would-be investor towards Volans, the aforementioned buddies of XR, Tomorrow's Capitalism and Unilever.

The link to a second report, "Beyond the B1nary – Delivering Profits and Purpose Through Corporate Venturing" does work.

The "Thank You for Reading" section here is extremely revealing:

"Thank you to Elizabeth Boggs Davidsen of the Multilateral Investment Fund (MIF), of the Inter-American Development Bank Group, for managing this project and to the Inclusive Business Action Network (IBAN), a global partnership implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) for providing the funding. We are grateful for the support of Global Corporate Venturing and Saïd Business School, Oxford University".

It adds that the project was developed and delivered by Charmian Love (CorporateImpactX), whose email is given as charmian@corporateimpactx.com

Just to be clear, this is Charmian Love of the fluffy-sounding Heliotropy Ltd, who is one of XR's select band of business leaders.

**It should be clear to anyone who has taken a look at the snarling capitalist agenda behind XR's smiley eco-mask that they are not to be trusted.**

If the movement is as democratic as it claims to be, it may still be possible for genuine environmentalists to wrest control of XR. Who knows?

Otherwise, decent people should get out as fast as they can and form new networks of resistance which fight to bring down the ecocidal industrial capitalist system, rather than to prop it up.

As the eco-activist Judi Bari put it:

"There is no such thing as green capitalism. Serious ecologists must be revolutionaries".

**"THE ARRESTS AREN'T HAPPENING QUICKLY ENOUGH"**



[ed. – Drawn from 'Extinction Rebellion: Not the Struggle we Need, Pt. 1']

In a now-famous video shot at the London bridge blocking protest in November 2018 (which launched XR into public consciousness), founder Roger Hallam is seen organising protesters on London's Lambeth Bridge. After corralling protesters into the centre of the carriageway, he tells a Police Liaison Officer that 'we don't really want to block the roads', and complains to this cop that 'the arrests aren't happening quickly enough'. **He even suggests the police hire buses so they can ferry arrestees away (a tactic gladly adopted at XR's April 2019 protests).** Hallam makes clear the logic behind this tactic in an article for *The Guardian*:

...only through disruption, the breaking of laws, do you get the attention you need[...] only through sacrifice – the willingness to be arrested and go to prison – do people take seriously what you are saying. [And] only through being respectful to ourselves, the public and the police, do we change the hearts and minds of our opponents.

XR leaders are more than respectful to the police. They actively assist them in making arrests and the courts in securing convictions. For example, they spread word of Section 14 orders placing limits on protest: people can only be prosecuted for breaking one of these if they were aware of its existence. Such tactics seem to be working: the Metropolitan Police arrested around 1,100 people at XR's April 2019 protest, announced it was looking to pass details of all of them to the Crown Prosecution Service, and these cases are now being brought to court.

[...] One of the most prominent Camps for Climate Justice took place during the 2009 protests against the G20 Summit in London. During these protests, the police used 25 undercover officers, at least some of whom acted as agent provocateurs, instigated brutal and illegal kettling, assaulted numerous protesters, and 'unlawfully' killed Ian Tomlinson, a newspaper seller walking through (but not participating in) the protests. He died of a heart attack after being attacked with a baton by police officer Simon Harwood, who had already committed acts of brutality that day and had previously been subject to ten complaints about his conduct in twelve years of policing. That he was allowed to continue policing in light of these complaints – one of which had led to his resignation from Surrey Police prior to joining the Met [ed. – *Metropolitan Police; responsible for the London area*] – makes clear that he was not simply a 'bad apple', but a violent thug enabled by a violent system. The police continued to defend Harwood after Tomlinson's death, which they blamed on 'violent protesters' until video they attempted to suppress showed otherwise.

In the wake of subsequent bad publicity, Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary (supposedly independent, but close to the police and at the time led by a former police officer) produced a report advocating that the police take an ostensibly more friendly approach to policing protests. One element of this was the introduction of 'Police Liaison Officers' (PLOs). To protesters on the ground, these often appear as friendly, chatty cops who are genuinely taking an interest in what you're doing and why you're doing it. **Indeed, it's one of these officers Hallam talks to in the Lambeth Bridge video referenced above, and to whom we assume he refers when he speaks of a 'professional team of guys who go to social protests'.** Yet as Netpol note, the primary function of PLOs is to gather information on protests, which is then used to help the police plan their (often brutal) response. They will also often spread disinformation designed to reduce the effectiveness of or end a protest, or get protesters arrested. At the 2014 protests against fracking [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.4 pg14*] at Balcombe in Sussex, police admitted that evidence gathered by PLOs helped them repress the escalation of protest. PLOs have also been used to harass activists at their homes. Effective Legal Observers on the ground at protests can inform people about their true role, but XR's 'inadequately' trained Observers are passing information to the police themselves and are potentially 'worse than [there being] no legal observers' [ed. – *Statement on Extinction Rebellion, by the Green & Black Cross defendant support group*].



[...] Experiences of arrest, meanwhile, are often far from the monastically epiphanous experience touted by XR. Arrestees are frequently held for as long as possible without charge, with hours of isolation and discomfort in a cell broken only by an interview. These interviews are used both to gather intelligence on the protest and to see if information can be extracted which might lead to a prosecution. **In encouraging arrestees to chat with officers about their intentions, XR are placing them and others at serious risk of prosecution:** far more sensible advice is offered by Netpol and [the Green & Black Cross], the latter of whom note that there is ‘no such thing as a friendly chat with a police officer. Everything you say can and will likely be used as evidence’.

This is backed up by [an] important twitter thread by Ben Smoke, who was charged with a Terror offence after halting a deportation charter flight in 2017. The police will also gather further evidence from any electronic devices you have on you at your time of arrest, often refusing to return them without good reason for months at a time. This will include contacts, meaning that the police gain information even about people who have not been arrested. **XR’s refusal to use encrypted messaging services when discussing actions will aid them in this significantly.**

The state’s weaponization of time is then extended where bail is granted (often with ludicrously draconian conditions attached), when activists are released far from home in the small hours of the morning and, where prosecution follows, in awaiting trial and court proceedings. At the time of their last action, XR were claiming that if you plead not guilty to any charges on a court appearance you can only be held on remand for ‘about 14 days at the maximum.’ This is wrong: you can be held on remand until trial, which may be months away. [...] Astonishingly, XR’s publicly available information contains no reference to ongoing support for those charged or convicted, and an internal XR bulletin has revealed that XR’s leaders have, to consternation from local groups, decided not to spend any of XR’s (considerable) funds on providing legal support.

[...] Even where no charge is made, the police will have gathered significant amounts of data from each arrest: additions to ‘domestic extremism’ databases, the storage of DNA, and the sharing of information with forces around the country. Not only may this lead to intimidation of the kind detailed above, but it will also make the policing (and pressing of charges) of subsequent protests easier: ramifications for the long-term future...

## GREEN CAPITAL & ENVIRONMENTAL “LEADERS” WON’T SAVE US

*Despite its serious flaws, Jeff Gibbs’s documentary Planet of the Humans powerfully exposes how optimism for “renewable energy” transitions is misplaced, and how mainstream environmentalism is becoming a force for green capitalism.*



**People are outraged!** Jeffery Gibbs’s new documentary, *Planet of the Humans* – co-produced by Michael Moore and Ozzie Zehner – has shocked and awed “progressive” critics, fuelling a steady stream of outcry. “It is truly demoralizing how much damage this film has done at a moment when many are ready for deep change,” exclaims Naomi Klein on Twitter.

Much of the concern voiced is correct, yet it detracts away from two fundamental messages: “renewable energy” is dependent on extreme mineral and hydrocarbon extraction, and mainstream environmentalism has “sold out.” This, in many ways, is old news for political ecologists, especially those involved in environmental conflicts concerning wind power, hydroelectric dams and mineral extraction development, yet the pandemonium generated by this film deserves some clarification.

### Important Criticisms: Caveat

The documentary has some foundational flaws. It underestimates the efficiency and capacity of wind and solar technologies. The data is old and the range of people interviewed limited. More damaging, however, is their discussion of population. Yes, population is an issue, and *voluntary* initiatives to control it are adopted by some environmentalists (for instance, degrowth advocates). Yet, modes of consumption and production will always be the determining factors for how populations will articulate catastrophic ecological and climatic impacts.

The problem with the “overpopulation” narrative is that it condemns *all of humanity* for the present socio-ecological situation. Even if, later in the documentary, corporations, financial consultants and their “environmental movement” collaborators become the main focus of critique, the directors largely neglect class, race, and gender as issues related to environmental degradation.

At the same time, the film forgets the socio-ecological values of different groups. It overwrites the variegated agency of (a “pluriverse” of) people, positioning Indigenous land defenders at war with extraction in the background, and not acknowledging in any way their different socio-ecological practices and relationships. The lack of clarity surrounding these issues, or the missing explicit support for environmental struggles against green capitalism and extraction is damaging, ultimately taking away from issues that deserve popular acknowledgment in the film.

### So-called Renewable Energy

The outraged critics need to realize that the distinction between fossil fuels and so-called renewable energy is exaggerated. Every aspect of so-called renewable energy requires hydrocarbons and hydrocarbon-based facilities for equipment construction and operation; mining; processing, manufacturing, transportation and the security personnel to enforce land control for these projects. Hence, I proposed the term “fossil fuel+” as a replacement for the inaccurate concept of “renewable energy.”

Ethnographic research investigating natural resource extraction for fossil fuel+ systems remain insightful in this regard. Modelling studies, however, have exposed the seriousness of resource extraction and waste for fossil fuel+ systems. Drawing on a World Bank report, Jason Hickel estimates that making 2050 renewable energy targets will require mining “34 million metric tons of copper, 40 million tons of lead, 50 million tons of zinc, 162 million tons of aluminium, and no less than 4.8 billion tons of iron.”

This also includes increases in other minerals essential to solar, wind and battery technologies over the same period: 35-70% neodymium, 38-105% in silver, 920% in indium, 2,700% increases in lithium and is compounded with further increases (70%) with the promotion of electric vehicles.

Moreover, Benjamin Sovacool and colleagues calculate a single 3.1 MW wind turbine creates “772 to 1807 tons of landfill waste, 40 to 85 tons of waste sent for incineration and about 7.3 tons of e-waste per unit.” This does not even account for mineral

processing, component manufacturing, transportation or provisions for security personnel to facilitate security operations of “renewable energy” extraction sites or development sites. Remember: “It takes 500,000 gallons of water to produce a single ton of lithium.”

Critics of the film declare to speak in the name of science. Yet this is a question of research design and methodology. Fossil fuel+ projects are frequently justified by carbon accounting and modelling practices imbued with capitalist ideologies and technological utopianism, which – more to the point – are separated from the political contexts, neglect various forms of pollution (e.g., industrial wastes), local struggles and violence emanating from “green” and corresponding mining projects that animate fossil fuel+ development.

### Corporate Environmentalism

Land defenders are well aware of corporate co-optation of environmental struggles. Jeff Gibbs and colleagues are correct to highlight these connections as this problem has only intensified. Submedia.tv released a documentary nearly 10 years ago demonstrating at length the problem of environmental NGOs co-opting struggles and marginalizing land defenders. This segment, moreover, documented the connection between large environmental NGOs, such as Greenpeace and Sierra Club, and their staff going to work in mineral extraction and timber industries. Does anyone remember how, in 2014, Greenpeace lost £3 million in currency speculation? The proclaimed mission and actions of environmental NGOs frequently do not add up.

The “NGOization” of struggle has emerged as a body of literature. Meanwhile, Cory Morningstar [*ed. – see **Rebellion Extinction***] updated the connection of green capitalists, “climate youth leaders” and the new (corporate) environmental movement, charting trends and issues many ignore or fail to understand. *Planet of the Humans* documents a small piece of this compared to Morningstar’s work, focusing primarily on Al Gore, Bill McKibben and their financial managers and partners.

While Al Gore is no surprise, some film reviewers suggest Bill McKibben’s exposé was startling, if not personally offensive. “I have never taken a penny from green energy companies or mutual funds or anyone else with a role in these fights,” explains McKibben in a Rolling Stone interview, “I’ve never been paid by environmental groups either, not even 350.org, which I founded and which I’ve given all I have to give.”

The film presents some damaging evidence. For instance, it shows McKibben sitting on a panel at the “Investors and Environmentalists Sustainable Proposal,” discussing a “40-50 trillion ‘green energy fund’” with The World Resource Institutes’ David Blood, who “spent 18 years at Goldman Sachs including serving as CEO of Goldman Sachs Asset Management.” Moreover, 350.org’s collaboration with the “Green Century Funds” makes a clear connection to how manufactured or self-styled “environmental leaders” (see 1:15:14) are clearly in bed with green capitalism and efforts to financialize nature [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.3 pg9*].

The No Deal for Nature Campaign is particularly relevant in this regard. The exposé of corporate environmentalism and collaborative efforts to financialize nature holds. The film highlights the timeless issues of “leaders,” but also how single-issue campaigning – built on carbon accounting and narrowing its focus to “fossil fuels” – disables itself from holistic assessments and offers itself to the construction of a “green” or “climate” economy their movement leaders are invested in promoting.

## Conclusion

The film deserves both hostility and love. Hostility for carelessly discussing population issues, homogenizing different people – a socio-ecological-cultural flattening – and lacking, even in passing, respect for those fighting the mines, energy factories and politicians small and large, formal and informal. The film would have benefited from a more refined scope and tighter narrative, with a greater diversity of participants, from Indigenous groups struggling against fossil fuel+ projects, to political ecologists and environmental anthropologists.

Yet the film also deserves love, as it highlights a neglected and sensitive issue for many: how the (mainstream) “environmental movement” has been corporatized, how its actions are not working, and how “renewable energy”/fossil fuel+ systems are not ecologically sustainable. The film is correct to publicize these issues, even if most popular media outlets are having a less than intelligent conversation about the contested issues within the film. Instead of writing the film off as “demoralizing”, it should resituate one’s hopes and realities concerning environmental struggle.

Concern has also been voiced about the film “dividing” the environmental movement. But the movement is already divided, to the extent that environmental “leaders” are divided from their “flock”, and “light” green (capitalist) movements try to extinguish or recuperate “dark” green radical critique and action. Autonomous, horizontal and leaderless

resistance akin to the multiplicity of land struggles taking place across the world, should be what climate activists gain inspiration from – not McKibben or Gore. Earth First!, for instance – not without its critiques<sup>1</sup> – represents an alternative mass-organizational model, discarding leaders and dedicated to organizing discussion space and direct action.

Those shocked by Planet of the Humans’ revelations concerning “renewable energy” and environmental movement “leaders” are either unfamiliar with the boundless treachery of capitalist society or have yet to commit themselves to fighting the capture, domestication and exploitation of human and nonhuman resources near and far.

## REJECTING ECO-IMPOSTOR DEVELOPMENTS

**27.03.19, Madrid, Spain:** *Two vehicles of ‘E-Move’ and ‘Car to Go’, municipally-funded car-share firms of the type increasingly targeted by anarchists for their green-washing, are set on fire.* “What did the victory of ‘Ahora Madrid’ [a list of candidates including Podemos, ecologists, a part of Izquierda Unida and Ganemos] bring about? Inclusive traffic lights, a string of media procedures camouflaged as progressive environmentalism, more evictions, trials against occupied places, municipal cops who persecute and abuse migrants, more police controls, video-surveillance, celebrations and big events sponsored by big companies, such as ‘Orgullo’ [world pride Madrid], maxi-urban businesses that consecrate the inseparable union between State and capitalism, such as the Chamartín operation, gentrified neighbourhoods made ready for tourists and capitalist speculation, with the consequent expulsion of the inhabitants and living conditions made even more precarious in a system based on exploitation and submission. And all this is infested by the flourishing of many eco companies, ‘green corridors’, recreation centres totally controlled and under surveillance for the progress of the middle class, such as ‘Matadero’ [a contemporary recreation centre], the ideology of recycling and other European state eco-measures; the goal is that of concealing the fact that cities, as centres of the administration of capital and power, are monsters that devastate people, destroy the earth and the environment, and are unsustainable on all levels for everything that is not capitalist development [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.3 pg55*]. [...] Here technology plays a particular role, once again embellished with a touch of ideology of progress, efficiency and eco management: the smart city [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.3 pg31*] as a project of city where information and databases are at the service of companies and the State, at the service of the market and control. To talk about Smart City means to talk about intelligent gas and electricity meters [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.4 pg36*], which can determine for what and in what way electricity is used, cameras on M30 [Madrid ring-road] and in Lavapiés [a square in the old town of Madrid], and of course all the companies sponsored by the municipality, such as ‘Bicimad’, ‘E-Move’ and ‘Car To Go’: to attack one of its part means to attack the whole logic based on control and consumerism branded as the only ways of life.”

1 [theanarchistlibrary.org/library/s-t-the-issues-are-not-the-issue](http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/s-t-the-issues-are-not-the-issue)



plastics using a 5-litre can (oil/petrol mixture)  
– exit to the threshold, ignition (lighter)  
– withdrawal to a safe place

We used this method, in no way considering that we acted in the best possible way. We want to share it with anyone who wants to take it and reproduce the attack."

**11.07.17, San Dionisio del Mar, Mexico:** *Heavy machinery, being used to dredge Copalito beach in preparation for a wind-farm, burned by locals in defence of the species of the lagoon and against the impact on their pre- and post-colonial fishing lifeway. The local General Assembly stated they will not permit the installation of "one more extractivist project".*

**March 2017, France:** "How to speak about sustainable investment to this wild boar? To this orphan doe about recycling toxic waste? How to say to the disfigured mountain that it was worth it, that we really needed this 4-lane highway interchange? How to sincerely reassure these thousands of exsanguinated trees piled up like in mass grave? These confused and disoriented birds and bats who are driven crazy so that wifi passes everywhere in 4G [ed. – and now 5G; see *The 5G Net*]? Does this lonely starving wolf give a fuck if you recycle your rubbish? What did this baby fox corpse think about progress, in your opinion? The few places where we felt good, you razed them to the ground to create fields, vineyards and Ikea's furniture. The bush, you destroyed it into small pieces for your trucks to go faster. The mountain you pierced it in all parts to avoid walking in between two ski runs and then you impaled with windmills what was left of the cadaver, to have a clean conscience. [...] And what about us in the middle of this? This world sentences us to die by starving or boredom. We should be complicit of our own alienation. We should be subjected. After all, there's champion's league and elections on TV. We should accept to be either girl or boy [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.3 pg46*], and accept all the bullshit and morals that comes with. We should be docile and grateful. We've got benefits and medicine. If we want to change society, we have petitions, freedom of speech, citizen demonstrations and public opinion. What do we complain about? We should be reasonable, patient, and rational, for our own good. And if problems overwhelm us, we still can get high on drugs to forget that, according to where we were born, we become, with more or less violence, slaves. That anyway nothing changes and there is no choice. But these days, we've made some choice: We chose to attack the Liotard company, who destroy rivers, mountains, trees, wildlife and flora, while enacting green-washing and participative recycling. To do so, we set 6 arson devices (1.5-litre bottle filled up with petrol and pieces of candles, some firestarter bricks tied with wire as an easy-to-make delayer) under 6 different heavyweight trucks. We also sabotaged one excavator and put several firestarters under a car of the company. Unfortunately, we've been seen and surprised by a security guy, and we haven't had the time to light the fires." Signed, 'Never-Again-Without-Pepperspray Incorporation'. "We also made the choice to attack a relay pylon with the same devices put in between cables and electrical boxes. This time a beautiful fire was growing up through the cable when we left."



**Southern Spain: in Cadiz alone, more than 2,000 birds killed by wind-farm blades as of 2014**

**15.11.15, southern Chile: Mapuche** [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.3 pg59*] *saboteurs deploy incendiary devices against the installations of a hydro-electric centre, leaving graffiti against the presence of various energy corporations on their territories.*

**11.06.15, Brussels, Belgium:** *Fire rages at the site of Greenbizz, a business centre for the so-called "green technology" sector, leading to serious damage; arson is obvious. Comrades of the area note that "this ambitious project, funded by the EU and carried out by BAM construction company, notorious prison builder, will certainly be delayed".*

**November 2014, Bristol, U.K.:** "Bristol will hold the status of European Green Capital for next year. As if anyone would have believed there was any intention of facing up to the carnage wrought by the capitalist ideology of economic growth, of course the ecological double-speak (war is peace, cities are green, etc.) covers the bosses' glee as the title attracts extra investment to the growing 'green' economy and its hangers-on – while the biodiversity crisis ploughs ahead unchecked. [W]e'll let loose on the green-washing charade and the capital interests behind it, not at the self-congratulatory ceremonies but at the places they do their daily business, and here in the street, where the values and norms of this civilisation are reproduced." *Arson of a GDF vehicle*, "who work towards the new nuclear reactor not far away at Hinkley Point on top of other nuclear projects in many countries[, and] design technologies which attempt to disguise industrial capitalism as sustainable development[...]" [W]e then also burned an audacious 4x4, two luxury sports cars, and a vehicle of [ed. – security firm] OCS [...] Anarchy crosses the path of the industrialists. Another destruction is possible."

**January 2013, Cornwall & Devon, U.K.:** *Two wind turbines, 18 miles apart across the county border, collapsed in high winds; bolts were discovered missing at their bases. There had been prominent opposition to the turbines' installation.*

**March 2012, Rome, Italy:** "With a homemade incendiary device of 5 liters of flammable liquid with a fuse ignition, we have set fire to the Punto Enel Green Power in Frascati, with the business being destroyed by the flame. [...] ENEL, in addition to pushing for nuclear power, is co-responsible for the repressive activities and expropriations around the whole

world for constructing structures of domination of "resources" like the hydroelectric project of the EGP Enel Green Power "Palo Viejo" in Quiché, in Guatemala. Expropriating the earth, massive military presence, repression and violence are normal practices of government and authority at the service of corporations..."

**22.06.11, Jahroma valley, Russia:** *Eco-anarchists of the Earth Liberation Front arson a 'green' development.* "This place is one of the most beautiful natural landscapes in Moscow region, and as it happens so often – some rich thieves try to damage and to built their houses there. It was planned to build an "elite eco-village Ilyinskoe-Edelweiss". A large plot of valley was fenced in and one demonstrative cottage for potential consumers was constructed. So, last night we have turned it into dust!"



# REBELS BEHIND BARS

– text by prisoners & repression news

## 'This Latest Chapter of This Story' (Chile)

On Friday, July 24, police in Santiago, Chile raided three homes and arrested two anarchists, Monica Caballero and Francisco Solar, over their alleged connection to four incendiary devices placed over the last year:

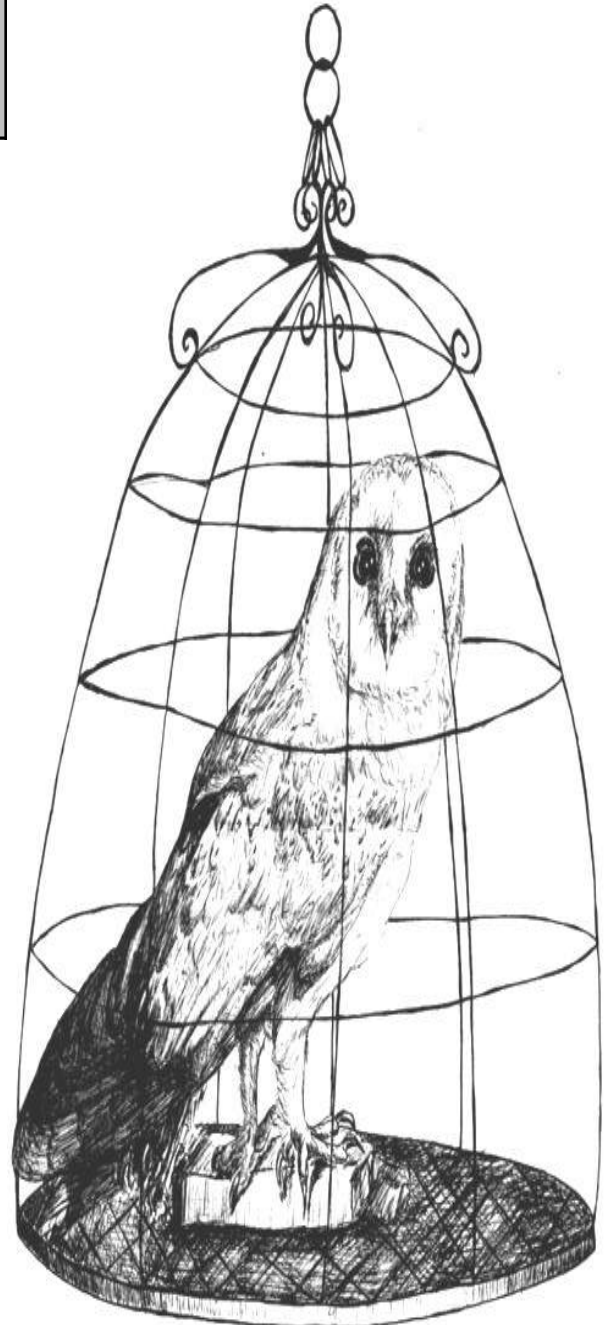
- One on July 25, 2019 that was sent to the Quiñenco office of Rodrigo Hinzpeter, the former Minister of the Interior.
- One that exploded on February 27, 2020, injuring several police officers at the Huechuraba police station in Santiago.
- Two devices also placed on February 27 in the Tánica building in the posh Vitacura neighborhood of Santiago.

The Coordinadora 18 de Octubre, Santiago's main organ of support for prisoners from the October 18, 2019 rebellion in Chile, released the following statement on the day of their arrests:

From the Coordinadora 18 de Octubre, for the freedom of political prisoners, we express our deepest support and solidarity with our compañerxs Francisco Solar and Mónica Caballero, who were arrested in morning home raids coordinated by the state, carried out by the OS-9 squad of carabineros, and to be prosecuted by Santiago's Metropolitana Sur state attorney's office.

We repudiate and will make visible the permanent nature of the political persecution carried out against the defendants for rising up in social struggle as anti-authoritarians. Like many others before them, they are the latest victims of a systematic reprisal that is not limited to the two of them, but rather intends to impact everyone and anyone that, since the beginning of the October 18 revolt, has demonstrated against the apparatus of power and struggled for dignity. It is in that spirit that we worry for the safety and wellbeing of our comrades behind bars.

Despite the incomplete nature of details about their current case, it is important to note that as of today (Friday, July 24) there have been three home raids, while at the same time the state is working to update a new intelligence law.



Artwork by Monica posted out from her cell

Last but not least, we uphold our rejection of the bourgeois media's treatment of this developing story. Once more, as they have done throughout history, the bourgeois media puts itself at the service of the state apparatus, collaborating incisively in the criminalization of protest.

**LOVE AND STRENGTH TO MÓNICA AND FRANCISCO**

**FREEDOM FOR ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS"**

Monica and Francisco have already been charged in two previous such cases. In 2010, the two were arrested in the notorious Caso Bombas I [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.1 pg73*] along with a dozen more

defendants. Together, they were accused of placing bombs around Santiago. Although Monica, Francisco, and all of their codefendants were eventually absolved of all charges in 2012, the repression took a grievous toll on the anarchist movement of that era, which had been based around openly squatted social centers.

The following year, Monica and Francisco were arrested in Spain and charged under anti-terrorism legislation for the alleged October 2, 2013 bombing of the Basilica del Pilar Church in Zaragoza [ed. – see **Return Fire vol.2 pg80**]. The two were sentenced to twelve years in Spanish Prisons, but after the defense took the case to Spain's Audiencia Nacional (Spain's supreme court), their sentence was commuted to deportation. In March 2017, Monica and Francisco returned to Chile.

Whether these charges stick or not, this latest chapter of this story illustrates how the struggle against state violence takes place on a global stage. We see Monica and Francisco alongside the tens of thousands of people who have been arrested in the United States since the murder of George Floyd, and the millions worldwide who are targeted in similar movements.

### The Rebellion in Chile

As the Coordinadora 18 de Octubre statement emphasizes, Monica and Francisco's current case is an escalation in an already months-long campaign of repression against the revolt that rocked Chile starting in 2019. The revolt saw riots against police weekly – and sometimes daily. In the course of months of struggle, the demonstrators refined their protective gear, strategies, tactics, and forms of organization; at times, they overwhelmed and outlasted the police.

Neighborhood and affinity-based assemblies popped up around the city to coordinate people's basic needs as well as propaganda, popular education, and cultural activities including concerts and theater. **Statues memorializing murderous colonizers fell alongside the president's approval ratings; children adopted protest anthems in place of traditional children's rhymes. Unions, social organizations, and non-profits called for demonstrations – but they could not control them.** The movement was largely decentralized and leaderless.

For a more in-depth anarchist appraisal of the revolt, we recommend the analysis by the Kalinov Most collective, "More than Two Months of Revolt against the Chilean State: First Impressions, Instinctive Predictions, and Non-Negotiables". The October 18

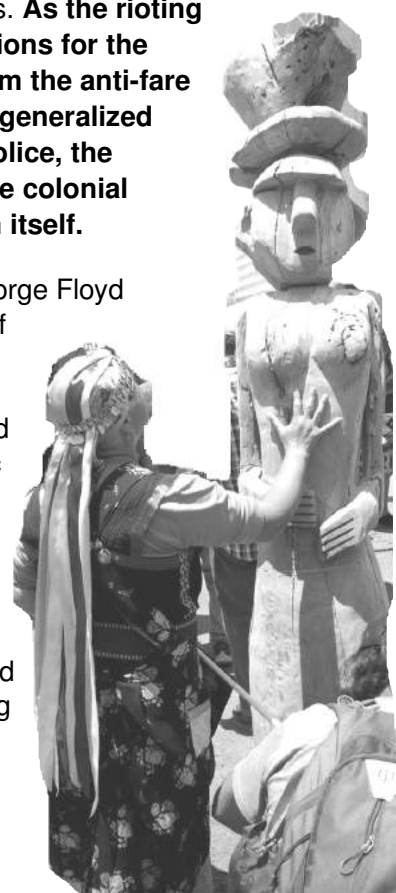
revolt was too complex and widespread to summarize easily, but it is worth drawing some parallels with what is unfolding in the United States right now.

Like the George Floyd rebellion [ed. – see **The Siege of the Third Precinct in Minneapolis**], the revolt in Chile began in response to the circulation of shocking images of police violence. During the week before the revolt got underway, high-school students in Santiago were demonstrating against a fare hike by storming subway stations and opening the turnstiles, allowing commuters to ride for free. Footage of the police attacking young students went viral, spreading anger at the police throughout Santiago. The ensuing week of martial law left over 20 people dead, further stoking popular anger.

Like the George Floyd rebellion in Minneapolis, the revolt in Chile started in one city – Santiago – but soon spread all over the country, generalizing beyond demands around the immediate case that sparked the rebellion. October 18, 2019 saw the burning of multiple metro stations, buses, grocery stores, and the city's electrical company. Spontaneous, cooperative looting spread throughout the city. There were scenes of looters taking televisions and other brand new luxury items and joyously pitching them into burning barricades. In less than 24 hours, the demonstrations spread to Valparaiso, Concepción, and other major cities. **As the rioting spread, the motivations for the revolt expanded from the anti-fare hike campaign to a generalized opposition to the police, the constitution, and the colonial legacy of the nation itself.**

In contrast to the George Floyd uprising, the arrival of COVID-19 in Chile quelled the riots – whereas in the United States, the pandemic set the stage for the uprising, as the economic stress of surviving the worst unemployment in decades compounded the fear of an ongoing authoritarian crackdown and the government brazenly abandoned the vast majority of the population to an early death.

However, in both



A domomamüll, a Mapuche (see **Return Fire vol.5 pg56**) wooden statue, erected in Santiago's Plaza Dignidad, Chile, 03.12.20

Chile and the United States, an interruption in the normal functioning of capitalism opened up time, energy, and anger that fueled the unrest. It is difficult to overstate how disruptive the collapse of Santiago's public transportation was for the functioning of the economy in Chile – not to mention a week of martial law.

Just as states can learn from each other's strategies, movements for freedom can learn from each other as well. [...] **The case against Monica and Francisco in Chile offers a glimpse into a possible future following the ongoing anti-police revolts.** We can be certain that the United States government has paid close attention to the strategies that governments like France, Hong Kong, and Chile have used to quell rebellions within their borders. When a democratic state like Chile succeeds in employing a strategy of repression, that represents a step forward for every other democratic government that also aims to subdue its population.

## **The One Spectacle that Continues Despite Viruses & Lockdowns** (Belgium)

*[continued from Return Fire vol.4 pg68; as the following text mentions, in May 2019 all 12 anarchists were acquitted, but the prosecution appealed]*

While the cultural sector is still debating social distancing restrictions with whatever politician appears to be in charge, one venue keeps on hosting its spectacles in spite of everyone. So we are disgusted to announce to you the upcoming theatrical performance taking place on the 8th and 9th of October 2020 in the Palais de Justice in Brussels (that Moloch built on top of the proletarian Marolles and adored by many authoritarians for its oppressive bombast).

Since it concerns an appeal case there will be no original content, alas! But be prepared for the rerun of unbelievable acts by the magician and prosecutor Malagnini. Watch as he just needs to add one person to another to create the illusion of an organization, while putting one accusation he just came up with on the table to suddenly find yourself faced with a criminal organization. (His previous act where he would demonstrate the existence of a terrorist organization got cancelled after even the managers of the venue thought of it as too far fetched.) Stand in amazement how fireworks in solidarity with locked-up immigrants gets twisted to fit the incredible story of an arson attack against those same people. Be blown

off your feet by how the simple fact that there is no proof is, in fact... the proof. (Of course, since the *modus operandi* of the accused is that they remain unidentifiable. A proven hypothesis because we could not identify them. Aha!) Wait with anguish for the appearance on stage of the magician's assistant and investigative magistrate Panou. See how she is able (is she though?) to explain that an investigation going out on a fishing expedition to find accusations against persons is not at all proactive (gathering intelligence in view of deeds that didn't happen yet or are unknown) but indeed reactive (starting from specific acts to identify their authors). (Yes, your honour, a proactive investigation would have been illegal under the circumstances. But! Somewhere, at some moment, something happened. So! It is a reactive investigation, in hindsight...)

**This is only a small and bitter taste of the infamous show that is already going on in Belgium since 2009 in the police departments and since 2016 in the juridical corridors.** A show that distorts years of struggles and combative bounds against deportations, prisons, borders and other institutions of this oppressive society. We know that our individual lives and collective experiences will never fit their narrative, even if the collaborators in the rewriting of this clueless plot are eager to unveil their culprits to the audience.

So we invite you to do as you please on the 8th and 9th of October (the accused will do the same).

*We'll speak,  
– Anarchists concerned (more or less)  
by current events in Brussels, but not exclusively.*

P.S. A verdict will be expected in the month following the pitiful event.

### **ON THE OUT – PRISONERS RELEASED**

Nero (Germany)  
*[see Return Fire vol.5 pg84]*

Tamara Sol Farias Vergara (Chile)  
*[see Return Fire vol.3 pg81]*

Nikos Romanos (Greece)  
*[see Return Fire vol.1 pg75]*

Freddy Fuentesvilla (Chile)  
*[see Return Fire vol.3 pg52]*

Ilya Romanov (Russia)  
*[see Return Fire vol.5 pg86]*



# MEMORY AS A WEAPON

## Indigenism & its Enemies

*[ed. – We present this article, originally written – under pseudonym – by David Watson in the journal Fifth Estate (#306), as a timely reminder of the legacy of leftism's sometime-dalliance with indigeneity; and even the formation of the latter in the nation-building projects of various States in Abya Yala (the term for the lands of the Guna people that is currently claimed by Colombian and Panaman governments, but which is used by some indigenous peoples more broadly to describe the 'Americas', similar to Turtle Island in other tongues). On top of the dividing line (that this piece also leads us to) that we believe must be drawn between such discourses and our own engagements with indigeneity, it's worth noting that since the following was written contemporary discourses around "development" have become more advanced and subtle, while still conveying the same racist progressivism; that the "new and critical anthropology" called for in the article has arrived, without disturbing many of the same dynamics described here... This is not the first time we have written of the Left's deep implication in colonialism (see the companion piece to **Return Fire vol.3; Colonisation**) and it won't be the last. So as to hear directly from some of the survivors of those who (ironically) perhaps are spoken of by David in too much of an "anthropological voice", we've affixed the words of an indigenous Aymara anarchist to the end of the essay; collected during a solidarity trip undertaken across Abya Yala by anarchists and collated alongside other valuable reflections at [chileboliviawalmapu.wordpress.com](http://chileboliviawalmapu.wordpress.com). Finally, although David himself calls attention early on to his specific meaning, the use of the objectionable term 'primitive' in what follows is linked to the discourse of anarcho-primitivism (see **Return Fire vol.4 pg92**) – a line of thinking inflecting this piece and which David contributed much to during the era this was written, but eventually distanced himself from – and not to racialised evolutionary narratives.]*

*indigenous, adj. 1. Occurring or living naturally in an area; not introduced; native. 2. Intrinsic; innate. [From Latin indigena, native. See indigene.]*

Indigenism, which begins as a defense of the Indian within western political and literary discourse, ends as a form of conquest, the final assault of civilization on prehistory.

*"Again, you say, why do you not become civilized? We do not want your civilization!"*  
– Crazy Horse

History too often resembles a tragedy of destiny in which humanity, unaware of the forces in which it is enmeshed, starts out like Oedipus on the road to Thebes<sup>1</sup> in search of its identity only to find at its destination that it has fulfilled a mission which is alien to its original intention. Protagonists of an historical movement seem to ironically transform themselves

1 ed. – In the ancient Athenian tragedy, Oedipus unwittingly fulfils a prophecy, while trying to resolve a predicament threatening the city of Thebes and the life of its king; only to discover that the killer is he himself.

into its puppets, and the general expression of their activities into the palimpsest of ideology.

Ideology is a false translation of the world; not only does it mask the forces which gave birth to it, but as it becomes a determining force in events, it mystifies the developments which it symbolically anticipates. In this way, what are taken as the instruments of liberation betray the user; the replies of the Sphinx<sup>2</sup> become another, more compelling enigma. Every attempt to escape the labyrinth seems to draw us deeper into it. History comes to appear to be a terrible joke, a series of double meanings in which ideology turns every relation on its head, calls everything by the name of its own negation. If before the advent of history, "The world was so recent that many things lacked names,"<sup>3</sup> with the establishment of historical linear time, of development and mechanization, of measurement and valorization, the world was falsified. Whole worlds were transformed into cargo, into value. What remains is the motion of history, the code and

- 2 ed. – Upon Oedipus' arrival in Thebes, the Sphinx (a mythic beast with a woman's head and breast, a lioness' body, and an eagle's wings) poses him a riddle: upon solving it he frees the city from the Sphinx and wins Jocasta in marriage, not realising her to be his mother; once again confirming the prophecy of the tale.
- 3 Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *100 Years of Solitude*. A brief note on language in this article: Many words have ambiguous and culturally charged meanings: Indian, indigene, modern, primitive, civilization. A careful reading should take into account the textual meaning and the use of these words in the article. The problem with the words "native," or "indigene," from the Spanish indigene, for example, is that they replace the diversity and the myriad experiences of the peoples of America with a false homogenous category which includes them all within one group. The word "primitive" is another culturally charged term which implies a lack of complexity or interrelatedness on the one hand, and the existence of a scale of development from "primitive" to "advanced," on the other. Though I tend to use them interchangeably at times, there were cultures indigenous to the Americas which were statist authoritarian cultures, such as the Aztec and the Inca empires, so there are important differences. I use primitive to mean exclusively non-rational, non-economic, small-scale, communal and tribal cultures. These could also be described as "inhabitory" cultures, which have found a specific mode of life in harmony with the surrounding ecosystem, whose peoples have a sense of place, and a direct sense of relation to the whole land. See Gary Snyder's *The Old Ways*. If so-called primitive cultures have been considered prehistorical, then the reader must also note the slight differentiation in my use of the word "history," at times in a "neutral," commonly accepted manner, as a sum of human events, but at other times as events which take place in the historical and economic realm, after the emergence of state societies and relations of domination, and particularly with the growth and triumph of technological civilization.

language of development, the ideology of modernization.

The history of Latin America, like universal history, is a series of such events of ambivalent meaning. Octavio Paz, in his seminal book on the Mexican mind, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, observes the working of these ironies,

pointing out the difficulty of interpreting them “because, once again, ideas disguise reality instead of clarifying it.” He points out how the Aztec political unification in Mexico facilitated the political and cultural (apart from the military) conquest. Also, he observes that the imperial and combative messianic Catholicism of Counter-Reformation Spain, which was the ideology, or a major component of the ideology of discovery and conquest of America, reached its apogee in the New World in the moment of its decadence in Europe: spreading out over new lands “at the very moment it had ceased to be creative.”

Latin American independence, beginning in the early 19th century, comes about slowly and through a series of ironies; most notably, the desire to create a new experience based on the realities of the American continent is transformed into a series of foreign imitations of French and English, classical, Jacobin<sup>4</sup>, North American, and later, Soviet models. All of these – with certain superficial variations – are a negation and a refusal of the indigenous, American world. At the same time, they are a single model, the Western model, that is to say, the model of capitalist industrial development. There is only one model, just as there is only one history, and the entire historical world follows it: that of industrialism and mechanization, the formation of the national state and the centralization of power, the accumulation of capital, the massification of life and the obliteration of the ancient communities, the universal bureaucratization, and the extermination of idiosyncratic, “pre-capitalist” peoples, that is to say,

4 ed. – The most influential republican, anti-royalist political club during 1789's French Revolution. The period of its political ascendancy includes the Reign of Terror, during which time well over ten thousand people were put on trial and executed in France, many for 'political crimes'.



the indigene, the Other.

### Communities of Western Europe Obliterated

This universal process, this road to Thebes, is progress, the runaway of capital, permanent conquest. This process of universalization, this organization

of the world under a single social system, is ironically incarnated in a series of profound ruptures. Cartesian logic [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.5 pg71*] proclaims the world a separate, inanimate entity to be manipulated and exploited, reflecting the emerging process of mechanization and alienation of human activity in the factory system. The internal psychic repression necessary to rationalize society and assure labor discipline in order to develop capitalism is mirrored in the external suppression of natural communities and economies and the enslavement of indigenous peoples both in Europe and in the colonies.

Forgetting the wisdom of prehistory, humanity surrenders to the dance macabre of production, transforming a world once filled with myth and spirit into a quarry of surplus value and economic necessity. As the little communities of Western Europe were obliterated by the forces of capital accumulation, the remnants and survivors were driven over the seas to perpetuate the same process on the indigenes of the Americas and elsewhere.

This process was psychic and internal as well as external and military. As Sylvia Wynter has said,

As western man ‘pacified’ New World nature, eliminated the ‘savage,’ penned them up in reservations, he did the same with whole areas of his Being. Indeed, it would be difficult to explain the extraordinary nature of his ferocity if we did not see that it was, first of all, a ferocity also wrought, in psychic terms, upon himself.<sup>5</sup>

Emerging capital accumulation and mechanization, through its agents, the bourgeois capitalists,

5 Sylvia Wynter, “Ethno or Socio Poetics,” in *Alcheringa: A First International Symposium*, 1976.



repressed the remnants of community in their midst as they expanded overseas to new territories. The image of the master and the slave was repeated in brushstrokes of continental dimensions in the relations between the colonizing countries and the conquered areas. The result was a world cleft into two distinct sectors: that which was already conquered and integrated into the “world economy” and history, and that left to be conquered, which is to say, in the words of the first conscious agents of capital in Latin America in the early decades of the nineteenth century, civilization and barbarism.

### All Contact A Contagion

Latin American history is an oscillation between two approaches to this problem, one of denying its otherness, the indigenous self and culture to search for foreign models; and one of searching for its roots and fundamental identity within the indigenous in order to oppose foreign domination and local oppression. The newcomers begin by completely negating the Indian (and continue to do so wherever the forces of capital are powerful and the native populations small and scattered). Later, in countries with great Indian majorities such as Peru and Ecuador, revolutionaries like Jose Carlos Mariategui (1895-1930) come to identify with the indigenous peoples as a key figure of liberation. But both represent moments within the same cycle: that of development, that of capital. The subjectivity of the Indian – whose universe is equally undermined by the encroachments of civilization in its hideous oppressive form or in its “progressive,” reformist variety – continues in profound silence. Later still, indigenist anthropology, representing a sincere attempt to understand the indigene and even a strong identification with the indigenous peoples will come to play a central role in their incorporation into western civilization, which is to say, their eclipse. All contact becomes a form of contagion.

Indigenism, which begins as a defense of the Indian within western political and literary discourse, ends as a form of conquest, the final assault of civilization on prehistory. Just as Marxism [*ed. – see Return Fire vol.5 pg9*], which begins as a “merciless criticism of all things” and an explication of Capital, came to metamorphose into the secular state religion of modern state capitalist regimes and the ideology of capital accumulation in the bureaucratic totalitarian regimes of the East; just as “scientific management” and the expansion of mechanization, which were perceived by their originators such as Frederick Taylor as signaling improvements in the lives of workers, resulted in becoming central factors in the absolute degradation of their lives and labor; just as the freedoms and ideals of the bourgeois revolutionaries came to mean the freedom to exploit

and to be exploited, the freedom to become things within the universal exchange of commodities; the “idea” becomes its concrete historical negation, and the triumph of the ideology of Indigenism signals the disappearance of the indigene as a distinct being. The Indian becomes, (assuming he [*sic*] survives at all) like all of us today, incorporated into civilization, a carrier of the plague of progress, an atom of capital, orphaned and solitary.

### Civilization & Barbarism

It is useful to distinguish the Conquest as it is normally understood from the conquest of capital which was to come later. In reality, the Spanish conquistadores only prepared the terrain for the capitalist conquest, in a sense just as the political unification of the Aztec empire laid the basis for the arrival and precipitous triumph of the Spaniards. Spanish colonial civilization under the viceroyalty was almost as rotten and feeble as the Aztec had been, and collapsed almost as rapidly beneath the assault of Dutch and English commerce and French militarism. In the chaotic period following the wars of independence in Latin America, young liberal revolutionaries the likes of Juan Batista Alberdi (1810-1884) and Domingo F. Sarmiento (1811-1888) in Argentina, came to embody a rejection of that civilization and a search for new models to create capitalism in the new nations.<sup>6</sup>

It is Alberdi who represents most completely the spirit of capital. Man of action, nothing of the romantic in him, not even a particle of the ambivalence which would characterize the young Sarmiento, he doesn’t speak “in the language of the poet, but in the language of the economist.” In Alberdi the unrestrained desire to drag the country out of its “backward conditions” reaches feverish heights. He consciously lays out the necessary method for creating or attracting capital to the country, consistently associating it with the crushing and extermination of the indigenous tribes. For him, development is an open war without quarter against those obstacles, and capital is a “magic wand,” “the

6 Alberdi and Sarmiento played important roles in the period of national unification in Argentina after the independence struggles at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Alberdi helped formulate the constitution of Argentina; his comments here come from his work *Bases y puntos de partida para la constitucion de la Republica Argentina* (Foundations and Points of Departure for the Constitution of the Argentine Republic). He was also a signer of the Constitution, a senator, and a diplomat. Sarmiento, like Alberdi, took part in the struggle against the dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas; he was a journalist, educator and politician. He was also a governor, a minister to Chile, Peru, and the U.S., President of Argentina during 1868-1874, a senator, minister of the interior, and national superintendent of schools.

heroic agent called upon to civilize this deserted continent."

Alberdi identifies material "backwardness" with wilderness and wilderness with barbarism. **The insecurity that he feels before the Argentine pampa is striking. It must be combated, dominated. His is the insecurity and restlessness of the Cartesian mentality before nature. He takes the practical application of science seriously, translating Descartes' future vision of humanity as "the lords and possessors of nature" into a political program, defending the practical sciences and techniques of mechanization which he admires so much in the English, as those which are necessary "to conquer this selvatic nature which dominates us everywhere, being the principal mission of our present culture that of converting and defeating it."**

According to Alberdi, the development of the nation demands two elements: capital and population, and in particular the population of northern European Protestant countries which embody the economic spirit of capitalism. The Indian and the gaucho<sup>7</sup> are, on the other hand, a nullity, an obstacle which should be eradicated as soon as possible. For Alberdi, "populating" Argentina meant to depopulate it of Indians, to annihilate the Other. "The Indian does not figure nor does he make up a part within our political and civil society," he declares. "Even America itself is a European discovery." And he adds, "In America, all of that which is not European is barbarian: there is no other division but this: first, the indigenous, that is to say, the savage; secondly, the European, that is, us."

## The "Great Hypocrisy"

Other currents in the same period and the period to follow attacked this inhuman vision, for example the Chilean

Francisco Bilbao, who in 1863 censures severely "the great 'hypocrisy in veiling all of the crimes and aggressions with the word civilization,'" and the "prostitution of the word," by which "the civilized demand the extermination of the Indians and the gauchos." "What a beautiful civilization," he writes the following year, "that which delivers slavery and shame on the railroad!"

In the liberal humanist vision of Bilbao, civilization is a two-edged sword, and science, industry and commerce "can produce good and evil." Manuel Gonzalez Prada (1848-1918), from Peru, where the Indians represent a majority of the population, treats the question in the same manner. He attacks the notion of civilization and barbarism as a convenient slogan which assures the whites of their supposed racial superiority "and therefore their right to monopolize the government of the planet." He criticizes the positivist ethnology of his day which provides facts without scientific foundations "in order to whitewash the negligence of the government and the inhumanity of the exploiters." These pessimists, he continues, "mark a defamatory stigma on the forehead of the Indian: they accuse him [*sic*] of being an impediment to civilization." But, he asks, "Let us see what is understood by civilization," and answers by saying that "it consists in having transformed the struggle of man against man into a mutual consent in life." He reverses the common formula, saying,

"Where there is no justice, mercy, nor benevolence, there is no civilization; where the struggle for life is declared social law, barbarism reigns."

José Martí (1853-1895) also takes up the battle, aiming his attacks at the mature Sarmiento, when he says, in 1884, that the Conquest destroyed great civilizations in the bud, "an historical misfortune and a natural crime," declaring, "The conquerors robbed a page from the universe!" But defending the indigenous world and

reversing the terms of the question for moral reasons, could not stop the wheel of progress. The fact is that "real existing civilization," to borrow a phrase from Brezhnev, was not an ideal in the minds of the humanitarians, but a social and historical reality. This is why Sarmiento speaks in the voice of capital when he responds to his critics in the course of the debates, in 1883:



Mural in the headquarters of the F.O.I.N. labour federation that represented the Runa communities of Napo Province of Ecuador during the 1980's, "to make brutes into men, and men into Christians"

7 ed. – The gaucho is a cowboy-like figure in Latin America (with regional variations): but, unlike North America's cowboy with their Anglo taboo on 'cross-breeding', the figure of the gaucho is usually mestizo i.e. of mixed European and indigenous descent. Those of the great plains of Argentina and Uruguay are especially remembered as outlaws of the 18th and 19th centuries.

It is perhaps unjust to exterminate savages, suffocate nascent civilizations, conquer peoples in possession of a privileged land, but thanks to this injustice, America, instead of remaining abandoned to the savages incapable of progress, is occupied by the Caucasian race, the, most perfect, the most intelligent, the most beautiful, and the most progressive that inhabits the earth... Thus, the population of the world is subject to revolutions which recognize immutable laws; the strong races exterminate the weak ones, the civilized peoples dispossess the savages.

The words of Sarmiento make it very clear that civilization has received the name that it deserves.

## The “Problem of the Indian”: Socialist Indigenism

The indigenist current begins as a literary tendency and reflects a new turn towards native American values by the Latin American intelligentsia and a repudiation of the slavish imitation of foreign literary and political models which characterizes the late modernista movements of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. But it becomes a social and political preoccupation, particularly due to the influence of Gonzalez Prada, who attacks the oppression and servitude of the Indians, observing, “The Indian will redeem himself [*sic*] by the mercy of his own efforts, and not by the humanization of his oppressors.” In the same essay he clarifies what kind of efforts he means: “If the Indian were to use all of the money that he wastes in alcohol and celebrations for rifles and ammunition, if in a corner of his hut or in an opening in the rocks he were to hide a weapon, he would change his conditions, making his life and his property respected.”<sup>8</sup>

But it is in the figure of José Carlos Mariátegui that the indigenist movement encounters its most sophisticated spokesman, and it is he who influences most the development and the intellectual formation of the new revolutionary generations in Peru. Inspired by the revolutions in Mexico and Russia in the second decade of the 20th century, he denounces the Peruvian oligarchy and identifies the problem of Peru as precisely the problem of the Indian, and the problem of the Indian as a social-economic problem.

Mariátegui’s criticism, though containing revolutionary elements for its time, remains within the current of the Communist Third International (with which he affiliated, though despite claims to the contrary, he

did not found the Communist Party in Peru).<sup>9</sup> The program of Stalin’s Comintern<sup>10</sup> proposed national revolutions in the colonies and socialist uprisings in the metropolis. Mariátegui’s idea of revolutionary praxis was tripartite: no cooperation with the bourgeois-liberal order, necessity of a “myth” to guide and strengthen the masses on the road to revolution, and the important role of an audacious minority of intellectuals who would direct the revolution. The ideas of Mariátegui conform with other anti-colonialist outlooks: nationalism, some variation of socialism, national industrial development and the creation of a modern secular society which would at the same time conserve the native values – in other words, they contain all the components of the ideology of emerging capital throughout the “underdeveloped” neo-colonial world.

For Mariátegui, the problems of Peru are historical and economic. The problem of the Indian has its roots in the system of land tenure, and any other explanation is a sterile theoretical exercise or a conscious obfuscation. The Indian question is at bottom the question of feudalism. In order to resolve it, servitude must be liquidated, but “Servitude... cannot be abolished unless the latifundium<sup>11</sup> is abolished.” It is a class question, and its resolution is to be found in the class struggle.

His collection of essays, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, is reminiscent of Lenin’s [*ed. – see ‘It Depends on All of Us’*] *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, in its criticism of feudalism, and its analysis of the relative backwardness of the Peruvian bourgeoisie. But what is most notable is his recognition of the enduring remnants of primitive communist economy in the indigenous communities: “Underneath the feudal economy inherited from the colonial period, vestiges of the indigenous communal economy can still be found in the sierra.”

The idealization of Inca civilization is the point of departure for Mariátegui’s indigenism. His defense of

8 Gonzalez Prada is an extremely interesting figure. Atheist, anarchist, naturalist, partisan of the Indian and the worker, he once described Marx as “one of the greatest social agitators of the nineteenth century,” but his preferences lay with Kropotkin [*ed. – see Return Fire vol.4 pg92*].

9 A decent biography and treatment of Mariátegui’s ideas can be found in *Revolution in Peru: Mariátegui and the Myth*, by John M. Baines.

10 ed. – Ioseb Besarionis dze Jughashvili, as the Georgian dictator of the Soviet Union from the 1930’s to the 1950’s better known by his Russianised name Stalin, headed the Comintern (Communist International) but later dissolved it to keep Western capitalist powers like the U.S. and U.K. on-side towards the end of the Second World War.

11 ed. – Large plots of privatised land worked by slaves, latifundia were the closest approximation to industrialized agriculture in Antiquity, and the latifundium model was adopted by European colonial powers. To this day the agricultural landscape in much of the world is still accurately described as a latifundia system, with or without outright slavery (and, in many cases, with).

the Indian of the present is based on the glory of the past and an anticipation of the future seen by way of his concept of ancient "Quechua socialism." The confusion that he suffers in identifying the communism of the village community with the military-priestly state which appropriated the products of its labor, anticipates the modern Marxist mystification of the relations of production under bureaucratic totalitarian collectivized capital. Mariátegui cites the book of Cesar Antonio Ugarte, *Bosquejo de la historia economica del Peru*, to describe the ancient communities: Collective ownership of farmland by the *ayllu* or group of related families, although the property was divided into individual and non-transferable lots collective ownership of waters, pasture, and woodlands by the *marca* or tribe, or the federation of *ayllus* settled around a village; cooperative labor, individual allotment of harvests and produce. He argues that this system coexisted with the colonial economy of the viceroyalty as a remnant of Inca Socialism, but does not even consider the possibility that this primitive communist agrarian community could have also coexisted with the Inca empire, in this way confusing the exploitative political structure with the society at the base. **Umberto Melotti has pointed out that this misconception of "Inca Socialism" was widespread, particularly among Third World revolutionaries who tried to discover an ancient socialist society in the pre-conquest civilizations of Asia, Africa and Latin America.** Melotti writes,

In the historical experience of the West, classes happen to be tied to private ownership of the means of production. Wherever these forms of private ownership are absent, there is a naive tendency to believe that exploitation and social classes do not exist. Caught in this type of reasoning, there are some who view as socialist even ancient societies of oriental despotism founded on the Asiatic mode of production... However, exploitation and classes in no way depend on the existence of private ownership in a juridical-formal sense, but antagonistic relations of production.<sup>12</sup>

The fatal confusion that Mariátegui suffers in identifying the Inca state with the social relations

12 See Umberto Melotti, "Socialism and Bureaucratic Collectivism in the Third World," in *Telos* No. 43. Wittfogel's and others' theories of "Asiatic despotism" may obscure more than they clarify in the long run. Using modern terms of comparison to categorize what were undoubtedly very diverse societies in Egypt, China, Peru and elsewhere leads to many problems which lie beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that their contribution is to emphasize the enormous gulf between formal juridical property relations and the true relations of domination.

within the Indian communities that it exploited, demonstrates the defect in his notion of communism and his incapacity to defend the Indian against the permanent conquest of civilization. **Indeed, he does not even criticize the colonial regime for destroying the community but, on the contrary, because it simply did not replace it with "superior forms":**

Colonization unquestionably must bear the responsibility for the disappearance of this communist economy, together with the culture it nourished, not because it destroyed autochthonous forms but because it brought no superior substitutes. The colonial regime disrupted and demolished the Inca agrarian economy without replacing it with an economy of higher yields.

Later, in terminology characterized by its Marxist cynicism towards "abstract" or "sentimental" human values, he denounces the latifundium because it "is unable to create wealth or progress," because it is "constitutionally incapable of technical progress." Mariátegui comes out against the national bourgeoisie because it is unable to construct modern capitalism. This constitutes his indigenism: technical progress and greater yields. He doesn't criticize social domination, claiming that "Inca communism... cannot be negated or disparaged for having developed under the autocratic regime of the Incas," but on the contrary praises despotism and forced labor as socialist models. The hated system of the *mita* or forced road construction, which the Indian regards as a weapon of the landowner, under the Inca regime results in being "a compulsory public service, entirely compatible with the principles of modern socialism." Nor will he admit that the Inca hierarchy exploited the fruits of labor of the village communities. By means of an absurd mechanistic logic, he reasons that since the Inca system was a form of socialism, and since socialism is not exploitative, the wealth that constituted the state deposits had to be some kind of a general fund for the welfare of the people, "a typically and singularly socialist provision."

In the outlook of Mariátegui the Indian comes to be mere cannon fodder for the revolution which the modern princes like himself will direct. He concurs with the statement made by another writer that the "Indian proletariat awaits its Lenin;" and as John Baines has pointed out, it is evident that Mariátegui intended to be that Lenin. He pays lip service to the notion that the liberation of the Indians must be the work of the Indians themselves, but qualifies this statement with the notion of the necessity of urban intellectual leadership. And the project of this class in the "underdeveloped" world has always been the

project of capital, but in a much more efficient form than that of the enfeebled, servile bourgeoisie of the neo-colonies: that of industrialization and mechanization, formation of the national state, massification, proletarianization, regimentation and accumulation of capital under the iron fist of a socialist-military regime.<sup>13</sup> **Mariátegui faults the bourgeoisie mainly for failing to accomplish this “historical task,” and realizes that it will take socialism to do the job: “The surprise of capitalism’s advocates will be extraordinary when they learn that the function of socialism in the governing of the nation according to its historic course and direction will be in large measures that of realizing capitalism – that is to say, the still historically vital possibilities – in the sense that it is suitable to the interests of social progress.”** The modern princes, of course, will decide what is “suitable” for social progress, and what is in the interest of the revolutionary state. State capitalism, or bureaucratic collectivism (there is no need to quibble over the terms) will be the result.

**Thus it should come as no surprise that the revolutionary government of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua has already intervened in autonomous indigenous groups, arresting leaders of the Miskita, Sumu and Rama peoples, attempting to continue a project of the Somoza government to build a highway through that region against the wishes of the native peoples, and accusing their opponents of being CIA-instigated. The Sandinistas, however, would agree with Mariátegui, who writes, “A centralized network of highways and railroads is as indispensable to industry as it is to trade.”<sup>14</sup>**

13 Hence, the Marxist cliché that the “petty bourgeoisie has no characteristic mode of production,” and that therefore a regime is either bourgeois or proletarian, is incoherent. Modern history has demonstrated that it is the petty bourgeois Jacobin intellectuals, and later the managerial technocrats, who have come to power everywhere in the “developing world,” from Lenin’s party to various “revolutionary” military and party regimes across the globe.

14 See *Akwesasne Notes*, Vol. 13, No. 7, Early Spring 1981. The Sandinistas also agree with the military President of Brazil, General Emilio Garrastazu Medici, who

The vision of Mariátegui is thoroughly state capitalist and productionist. His vision is that of capital, his dream that of Lenin. “Lenin dreamed of the day his entire country would have electric power... Neither the bourgeoisie nor the proletariat can conceive of a civilization that is not based on industry.” His reduction of the problem of the Indian to simple economic factors ends by reducing the crisis which all humanity confronts to...the electrification of the country. He follows the road of Alberdi, which is the road of mechanization and progress, and the inevitable annihilation of the primitive community – be it by private or state capital. Both variants reduce the human being to an object. Beneath the veil of indigenist ideology, this Leninist defense of the Indian serves as a Trojan Horse for civilization and for capital. Socialism, too, has earned the title that it deserves.



Recent uprising in Nicaragua against the socialist government of Daniel Ortega (latest heir of the Sandinista 'revolutionaries'), including against his support for ongoing displacement of indigenous and Afro-Caribbean peoples for agri-business and an ecocidal canal mega-project

## **Beginning of the End: Indigenism & Anthropology**

In reality Mariátegui and his contemporaries in the Indigenist movement did not study the Indian of their day. Within the tendency to idealize the indigenous civilizations of the pre-conquest era lay a temptation to look down upon the Indians of the present. The Peruvian anthropologist José Maria Arguedas criticized this idealization as a “monstrous contradiction,” basing his defense of the Indian on the present-day conditions of the community (his work was done in the ‘fifties and early ‘sixties), and upon

proclaimed in 1970 at the inauguration of construction on the Trans-Amazon Highway, “The initial problem of the Amazon is to really get to know it. To do so, it is vital to make it more accessible and more open. Thus the policy of my government is directed primarily to the undertaking of a gigantic integration program with the two-fold objective of exploration and settlement.” (Quoted in *Victims of the Miracle: Development and the Indians of Brazil*, by Shelton H. Davis, Cambridge University Press, 1977.)



the process of mestizaje, that is, the crossbreeding of Indian, black and European races and their respective cultures.

Indigenist anthropology is a closer and more sympathetic approach to the Indians, seeing them as more human, more complete, more autonomous. It reflects a general respect for their way of looking at the world and a genuine interest in preserving and defending their way of life from the encroachments of western technological civilization. For the sympathetic anthropologist, the Indians are not reduced to mere ciphers of the historic process as they were for the anti-imperialist theoreticians of the 'thirties. But anthropology, being primarily a system of comparison which starts from the pseudo-objective "superiority" of modern scientific civilization, has come to signify for the indigene what the early theoretical tracts of agriculture meant in terms of the ultimate mechanization of that activity: it describes, catalogues and tags a society which is being torn asunder. Claude Levi-Strauss wrote in the conclusion of his *Tristes Tropiques*, "When we make an effort to understand, we destroy the object of our attachment, substituting another whose nature is very different." Anthropology intuitively understands the indigenous world at the moment of its disappearance.<sup>15</sup>

### **Anthropology Carries the Contagion**

Anthropology has also in general failed to turn its own methods of analysis on the civilization which spawned it; nor has it offered insights to the people that it studied into the nature of the juggernaut which threatens their existence. It has carried the contagion, has been reduced to describing the dolorous results of the clash of cultures and the furious assault of civilization, and to softening these effects as best it

<sup>15</sup> Anthropology, of course, is a contradictory movement, and though it has played a role in conquest, much admirable work has been done by anthropologists, particularly in exposing the destruction of indigenous and primitive worlds and in making us aware that another world exists beyond this modern life. But the unhappy fact remains that they have spread the disease wherever they have gone. The example of the great Brazilian humanitarian and defender of the Indians in the nineteenth century, Candido Mariano da Silva Rondon, who founded the Indian Protection Service (SPI) in the first part of this century, shows the chasm between the intentions of the anthropologists and the results of their activities. Davis points out in his book *Victims of the Miracle*, "The SPI tried to mediate in these encounters [between settlers and natives] by establishing Indian posts in several areas, but more often than not Indian agents were ineffective in holding back settlers and in influencing state governments to provide legal titles for Indian lands. As a result, in almost every area of Brazil where the SPI functioned, Indians were wiped out by disease or became marginalized ethnic populations on minuscule parcels of land."

can, when it can. When Arguedas, for example, points to the "new unity" of the mestizaje and the incorporation of the Indians into the modern world by the "more and more intense link between the regions and provinces of Peru, and between the nation and the world," the process of destruction can be clearly seen.

Arguedas centers his approach to the question on two levels: the capacity of the "economically strong" community to resist total westernization while at the same time incorporating western elements within its experience, and the mestizaje, which serves as a sort of defensive "antibody" in order to avoid the brutal destruction of the original culture. He argues a flexibility and a vigor in the culture based on a long and profound history and a permanence which the nomadic tribes were not considered to have. The settled Quechua and Aymara cultures of the Andes absorbed the plants and the exotic beasts of the Spaniards in their life and their art, just as they adopted the musical instruments and religion. According to Arguedas, who fails to understand that modern technology is a form of social relations and a culture which admits no other, these cultures can even adopt advanced methods of technology such as radio and television without losing their roots by way of cultural syncretism: "The very elements of western civilization were converted into forces of support of the invaded culture, because the latter conserved in all its integrity its fundamental base." He praises the Hispanicisms and the changes they wrought as enrichments of indigenous music and art.

It is "economic independence" and the mestizaje, according to Arguedas, which have made it possible for some communities to avoid the implantation of servitude. In these communities, "a class of merchant mestizos has formed, an active relationship of cooperation has been established between the merchant mestizos and the Indians," while in communities which are economically poor and dependent, "a strong hostility exists on the part of the Indians against the masters and the mestizos" In the economically independent communities "there is no conflict between the economy of the traders and that of the Indians".

The communities most integrated into the national economy are those in which this situation is most notable. In these communities, "the development of the economic potential of the Indians as a consequence of the exchange with the coast, and the change that this very contact has wrought on the mentality of the landowners, which has been converted from a conservative and seigniorial attitude into that of an industrial and entrepreneurial type, has caused the Indians and mestizos, and even land

owners, to dedicate themselves to business and competition.”

## Primitive Communism & the Colonial Economy

Arguedas is essentially describing two moments within the same motion of capital: the brutalizing, original form which enslaves the local population in order to extract every ounce of blood from them for profit (which Mariátegui had exposed as ultimately unproductive and anti-progressive), and that which is more advanced, more “progressive,” which results in the deeper penetration of capitalist techniques and relations into the community. Both represent forms of dependence, the mercantilism of one community just as much as the servitude of the other. Economic “strength” facilitates a community’s integration into capital. He is not at all convincing when he claims that this “economic independence” assures the transmission of cultural values to the younger generations. His description of the crisis which the seigniorial classes are suffering before westernization, and the crisis that the mestizo who has recently emerged from the Indian community suffers, indicates that the so-called independence brings about the disappearance of the Indian and his world perhaps even more rapidly than servitude.

In the strong communities such as Chaupi and Puquio, he reports, prosperity has made possible the realization of many public works, schools and urban developments, such that in 1955 the Indians complained “of the hundreds of donated payless work days which they considered an excessive quota, while the mestizos had only contributed some few hundred soles (Peruvian currency) for the purchase of materials.” This is the description of “a cultural change brought on by the growth of commerce and the direct contact with the cities of the coast,” by which the mestizos come to be the “leaders” of the community and the Indians the proletarians – or rather, it is the description of the disintegration of that primitive communist community which had been praised by Mariátegui.

The primitive communism of the Quechua and Aymara was able to co-exist with the colonial economy because this economy was too weak to intervene in them. The “formal” domination of backward, “underdeveloped” Peruvian capital was not able to penetrate into these communities; with the greater linking of world, national and local economies comes the “real” domination of capital, the penetration of the economy into even the most isolated communities, and the destruction of the last vestiges of primitive community.

Arguedas mentions the bitterness with which the old Indians complain of the “extreme difference between the conduct and the ideals of the young members of the community and those of the old people.” The mestizo, on the other hand, identifies with the western culture, “having turned into an individual who really participates in our [modern] culture.” It is necessary and important to underline that servitude and desperation reign in the poor, “economically weak” communities. The Indian community finds itself in this dilemma, but prosperity does not save it either. Arguedas: “It is considered that within twenty years there will be no Indians in Puquio and the calculation seems very realistic to us.”

In 1951 Arguedas described the effects of the invasion of western industrial culture in the area of Huamanga (Ayacucho). The landowning class of Huamanga, famous for its virtuosity in traditional music, was now suffering a situation of chaos, “from an unbalanced mental state,” due to the penetration of western jazz, dancing and fashions, and the subsequent negation of traditional culture by the younger generations. In that period Arguedas did not detect such insecurity among the mestizos, but tourism was just becoming a factor in the economy of the region and the influence of modern culture could not have done anything but continue growing. This occurred thirty years ago [*ed. – now closer to seventy*]. One can imagine the changes which have taken place since then!

The indigenist anthropologists find themselves caught between the dominant invading culture and the indigenous cultures which are in the process of disintegration, or which are about to feel the effects of the invasion. Luis Villoro treats this problem in his book *Los grandes momentos del indigenismo en Mexico* (Great Moments of Indigenism in Mexico, 1950), particularly within his discussion of the works of the indigenist anthropologist Manuel M. Gamio.

**The contradictions within modern anthropology are rapidly revealed by this discussion. According to Villoro, Gamio’s confrontation with Indian culture presents him with a contradictory demand: “on the one hand that which is proper and original to the aborigine must be conserved, while on the other hand it is indispensable to draw him [*sic*] closer to us, make him progress so that he will abandon his harmful estrangement.”**

The problem is, naturally, how to defend the particularity of the Indian while allowing him to “progress” and enjoy the benefits of civilization. “The demand for particularity,” observes Villoro, “seems to clash irremissibly with the demands of progress.” How to resolve the problem? Gamio explains that this

depends on the “cultural territories” which are in question. If it is a matter of art, then there should be absolute liberty and autonomy for the primitive. But if scientific or medical matters are in question, or “practical utility,” “we should substitute in every base the backward materials of the indigene for western materials.” This substitution looks only for the destruction, Villoro adds, “of that which is backward and harmful.”

The paternalism of the anthropologists who decide for the Indians what is necessary for their “progress” and what is worthy of being preserved is obvious, if the manner in which they are going to accomplish the preservation of what is “proper” while destroying that which is “harmful” is not. They seem not to question whether it is possible to commit such violence against one area of a culture without undermining the rest – a violence not only in the separation of cultural elements which are organically linked to a whole vision, but in the contempt revealed by the arbitrary and automatic exercise of authority by the scientists over the indigenous community, an authority strikingly reminiscent of that of the missionaries and the exploiters. “The Indian,” says Gamio, “cannot be incorporated into modern civilization in a single stroke any more than the child can reach adulthood overnight.” For these anthropologists, the primitive is a child who lacks the guidance of modern man, who with his Cartesian scientific method and industrial progress will lead him to the universal destiny of civilization and the universal will of history. Not surprising that many of the Mexican Indian tribes are “backward,” and miserable – they have enjoyed nearly five centuries of civilization!

### “Intense and Rapid Changes”

The traditional anthropologists are concerned with the conservation of aboriginal art and handicrafts. Gamio expresses indignation, for example, at the “fordization” (or mass production and distribution techniques) [*ed. – in reference to the highly-influential mid-20th-century policies of American car manufacturers Ford; see **Return Fire vol.5 pg98***] of indigenous artifacts, but he does not realize that whatever the particular forms of the art may be, it is this very contact with civilization which “fordizes” art, which mechanizes and regiments its production and transforms it into a commodity.

This process of “fordization” is the substitution of indigenous “backward materials” (non-economic production for use) for western methods, which Gamio had demanded in other fields of human activity.

By 1966, however, many anthropologists come to see the urgency of the problem. Arguedas, before the

34th Congress of Americanists, describes the avalanche of western culture (which is to say, the culture of capital), speaking of ethnic groups, which, “due to the penetration of so-called western culture, are subject to a process of change so violent that they risk disappearing.” He points out the situation in Peru as an example of “intense and rapid changes” which threaten even “less vulnerable” cultures such as the Quechua and Aymara, changes that “are taking directions which are still confusing”. He blames the greater contact with the cities as well as the disdain for traditional values and the incursion of western fashions and culture, and concludes that ethnological studies are of “great urgency...because ancient codes of conduct, forms of artistic expression, agricultural techniques, and knowledge in every field of human activity are being forgotten.”

If westernization is inevitable, if it is the only road for the indigenous peoples, the anthropologists, who most wish to defend them, in many cases become the administrators of their surrender. Anthropology is reduced to a mere description, an inventory of the eclipse of its object.



The National Museum, Brazil's oldest scientific institution and one of the few with 'authentic-style' European architecture, burns down, eliciting much hand-wringing over the lost of records made of indigenous peoples; ten years earlier a deliberate fire destroyed an actual indigenous community nearby, without similar outcry

### Where Are We Going?

In Mexico and in Peru indigenism and mestizaje, the notion of the “cosmic race,” became elements of state ideology in the process of developing national capital. While in many cases, mestizo leaders and representatives have inherited the indigenist mantle, and even occasionally positions of government, the ancient community has gone through such destructive transformations that there is no one left who can even remember the old ways.

Individuals as well as communities have succumbed to the economy and the state; in many cases, representatives appointed by the state lease or sell off tribal lands, or become the administrators of industrial exploitation and the agents of development, or agents of Christian churches or bureaucrats of western political parties. Indigenism becomes a form

of nationalism in many cases, which reflects the extinction of the innumerable little communities and their diverse ways of being.

**The permanent conquest of capital seems like an hourglass, drawing the particles of sand irrevocably downward into time, into history. We are all drawn through that vortex, are all reduced to the same being, vagabond, solitary, proletarian fragments. What defense, when so often the forms of resistance betray us? How to oppose this inertia towards the abyss? We, who are the exiles of a remote and vague age, are already in the labyrinth. We continue wandering in our technological desert. There is no turning back on this “trail of tears”<sup>16</sup> once the journey is commenced. If we cannot return to that which we were, what shall we become?**

We who went before are only domesticated primitives, and the primitive is our otherness. According to Arguedas, the Indian “does not aspire to any of the characteristic forms of modern life; he is never a regular consumer; he presents himself as an obscure obstacle to our economy.” And Villoro notes the “pre-logical” mentality of the Indian, “that has not been able to assimilate the categories of a logical mentality.” Which is to say that the primitives have not surrendered totally to the categories of economic necessity nor to the Cartesian cognition which uproots us from the universe. They remain an integral element in a living universe, a universe threatened by industrial society, unraveled by progress.

Octavio Paz has observed the gravity of the situation for the Mexican, but the preoccupation is universal. “Nothing,” he writes in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*,

16 ed. – The Trail of Tears was a series of forced relocations of approximately 60,000 indigenous people (from their ancestral homelands in the south-east of the ‘United States’ to areas to the west of the Mississippi River that had been designated as ‘Indian Territory’) between 1830 and 1850 by the United States government. Thousands starved or died of exposure or disease before reaching their destinations, or shortly after.

“except a historical change, daily more remote and unlikely, can prevent the Mexican – who is still a problem, an enigmatic figure – from becoming one more abstraction.” Arguedas makes use of a different metaphor, but the idea is the same when he speaks of “the methods of reducing [the indigenes] to the condition of simple instruments.”

### **Both Modern & Primitive Worlds Threatened**

But if it is true that indigenous society is threatened with destruction by modern civilization, modern society is no less threatened by the same forces – by the pulverization of the natural and human terrain, the homogenization and urbanization of the environment, the degradation of the soil and the poisoning of the water and air, by the generalized inertia towards the abyss of nuclear holocaust. It is astonishing to see the condescension of the modern outlook which by means of its scientific mystifications sees the primitive as the confused and vacillating object of historical forces, while the modern world is disintegrating and threatens to be annihilated within a matter of moments. Modern subjectivity remains no less confused than the peoples of the Brazilian rain forest: the powers it faces seem just as irresistible, just as gargantuan as the deadly magic of western civilization must seem to the primitives. And this should not be surprising: it is the very same deadly magic.

**As long as indigenism remains within the categories of civilization – either as a nationalist political program to mobilize people for industrial development, or as a specialized, alienated study by scientific experts of disappearing peoples – it will remain an element of conquest and annihilation rather than one of defense.** The true values of indigenism and primitivism are transcultural; we must become indigenes once again. Indigenism must become a form of post-modernity, a post-modern self-consciousness. We must see ourselves as part of a continuum which begins in the paleolith, recognize ourselves as the children of the conquered. In this way we can oppose the thrust of this civilization, oppose the “revolutionary ideals” which are only more advanced forms of the plague, oppose the process of automatic mechanization and the reduction of human problems to technical dimensions.

We can only begin by confronting the otherness in ourselves, and in this way perhaps we can commune with the primitive universe without destroying it. If we allow the cycle of capital to be completed and all of the primitive, nomadic, non-Cartesian peoples to be

destroyed or conquered, we will see irrevocably destroyed a part of ourselves. We will have lost any ability to know how much we have actually lost. Wildness, and not civilization, must become our cultural model. To paraphrase Wendell Berry, only if we know how we were can we tell how we are. Modern technological civilization, by uprooting every last tribe of natural peoples, will set us all permanently adrift. As Paz has pointed out,

The extinction of every marginal society and each ethnic and cultural difference signifies the extinction of one possibility for survival of the entire species. With each society that disappears – destroyed or devoured by industrial civilization – a human possibility disappears, not only a past and a present, but a future.<sup>17</sup>

A new and critical anthropology, a new critique, a new “planetary indigenism,” can only signify a qualitative break with civilization, with modern technological social relations, and must signify a reconciliation with prehistory. It will take its poetry not only from the future, but also from a distant past which is here among us, in the marginal territories where primitives still live the great genetic ceremony of the organic universe, and also within ourselves; a past and a future in which modern and primitive will be reconciled in the search for human possibilities beyond everything that we have imagined. For the primitive, it will be an exploration, and a refusal, a resistance against modernization. **For the modern, it must first of all be a defense of every little community, every ecological niche, every single possibility; it must be a resistance against the categories of capital and its ideology of technological progress, a refusal to become “mere instruments,” a repudiation of the odious temptation to rationalize the world; it must be a struggle for solidarity and a renewal of community; and finally, it must be an exploration, too, of the non-logical optic which is magic and poetry, an exploration of human possibilities, of the wisdom which resides in dreams.** Levi-Strauss writes in *Tristes Tropiques*, “The sources of strength on which our remote ancestors drew are present also in ourselves,” and he adds, quoting [Jean-Jaques] Rousseau: “The golden age which blind superstition situated behind or ahead of us **IS IN US.**”

– P. Solis

*Detroit/Karontaen, May 1981*

17 Quoted in an interview in *Re/Search*, 20 Romolo B, San Francisco, Cal 94133.

“I think that the left is in a terminal crisis. The idea of absorbing feminist, environmentalist, animalist, indigenous and other struggles, so as to reinvent itself, is a failed idea because they incorporate these struggles without changing the paradigm and without being willing to deepen the debate. They make offers to all of these movements so as to legitimise themselves, from a perspective that has expired with the twentieth century. Today it no longer holds. It is not makeup that is missing, but the need to invent new methods, new organisational paradigms.

It is necessary to formulate utopias and unleash political practices where they come together collectively. As far as I am concerned, the definitions of left and right do not serve me, not because of neutrality, but because of they have expired and because they induce us into a simplistic binary logic. The [Bolivian] right has opted for a fascist proposal and is feeding upon a delirious, fanatical Christian discourse that reads the Bible literally and openly proposes a theocracy. In the case of the [Bolivian] left, it has become a mere scenario for what is possible, something that differs very little from the right, that has no proposal against neoliberalism and that constantly needs to use the ideas that we in the social movements produce to be able to say something and to negotiate these ideas, casually mutilating them in the event. This pendulum doesn’t interest me, and nor the logic of the lesser evil.”

– *Indian Women, Whores & Lesbians:*  
interview with María Galindo

## YAWAR'S STORY

*A few days after arriving in El Alto [so-called 'Bolivia'] we meet Yawar, an Aymara storyteller, grandfather, and puruma. He invites us to stay with him, so we move out of Casa COMPA and pitch a tent on his little plot of land, where he is preparing a garden and a not-school.*



The Aymara people have been living in what they now call Bolivia for thousands of years, at least 4 or 5 centuries since before the start of the current counting, the Gregorian calendar. We’re older than the Inca. We’ve always been agriculturalists, growing potatoes, quinoa, herding llamas. Starting many centuries ago, the Aymara started to build a great city, called Tiwanaku. We had developed our own

literature, our own science, our own astronomy, a great civilization. **Now the Aymara are not one single people. We've never been centralized.** Traditionally we organize in *ayllu*, who live together in a community and are all related. Then a constellation of hundreds of *ayllu* organize together in a *marca*. The Aymara nation consists of many *marca*, and those who live in one region speak differently from those who live in another. We also have many gods. Each *ayllu* has its *wak'a*, which is a sacred place where the energy of the earth flows especially strong. We make offerings, asking them to provide for us. Here in my garden I have an *illa*, which is like an amulet. See, when I come in, I give it a little bit of alcohol. And here is the *chakana*, oriented to the four directions, the different winds. This started with agriculture. Before, the hunter-gatherers didn't have to pay as much attention to these natural cycles, but the agriculturalists were dependent on the rain, on the soil, on a whole process of months of cultivation to feed themselves for the year. So they began to take care of the gods, in a spirit of reciprocity.

When they started to build their great civilization, this required centralization. Different *marca* were brought together, the lands of different communities were absorbed. This was done largely by the shamans. The shamans of more powerful gods became more powerful. Eventually, they developed a theocracy, and centralized the religion under one God, the Sun God. The Aymara have always worshipped *Pachamama*, Mother Earth. *Pacha* is earth, but also space, and time. But as they were building the city of Tiwanaku, between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries on the Gregorian calendar, they centralized religion and political power, under the Sun God.

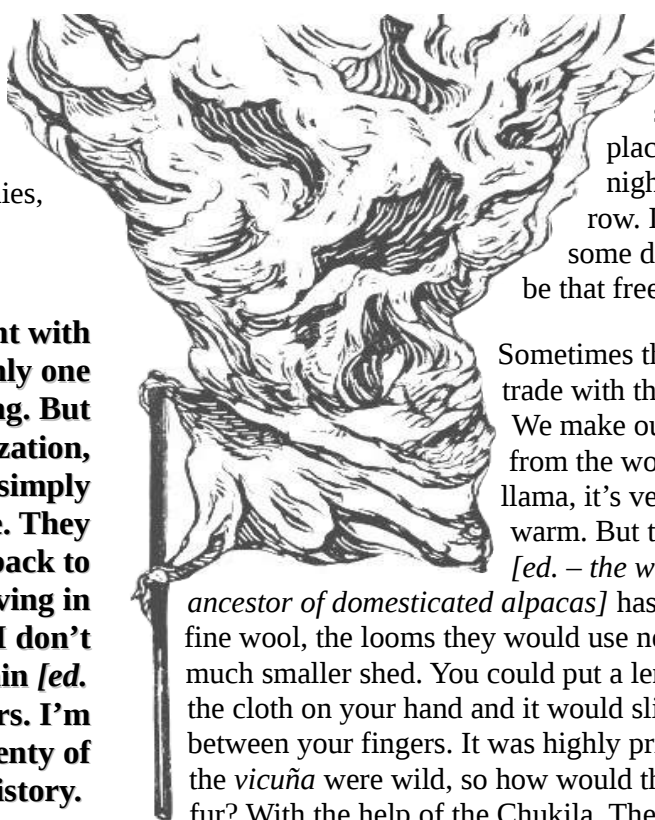
Many Aymara are inflexible, rigid, when it comes to religion. They turn rites into ceremonies, and then you have specialized priests. This is something I fight against.

**The Aymara engaged in this experiment with centralization, they tried worshipping only one God, and all the other gods were crying. But then we decided we didn't want centralization, we didn't want a state. So the people simply abandoned it. Tiwanaku is incomplete. They left it unfinished and went back to worshipping all their gods and living in decentralized *ayllu*. So as an anarchist I don't need stories from Europe, about Bakunin [ed. – see *Return Fire* vol.4 pg97], the workers. I'm not a worker, I don't work. I can find plenty of stories of rebellion in my own history.**

After the Aymara abandoned Tiwanaku, there were hundreds of years of anarchy, a wonderful time in our history. There was no state, no market. The old paths, going all across the continent, remained in existence, and people traded things, but it wasn't for war, it wasn't for profit. They called it the *capacñan*. *Capac* means wisdom, the kind that comes from the elders, and *ñan* is a path. So people would travel all around what they're calling "South America" simply to learn. To trade stories. To meet with other cultures. To grow wiser. It was a beautiful time.

The Inca came later. They were a group of Quechua. They resurrected this myth of the Sun God, and thought of themselves as descendents of the Sun. They created an empire that went all the way from Venezuela to Chile. They weren't so obsessed with war though. They had an army, but first they would send people, like diplomats, to the communities on their border, to the *wak'a*, the sacred places, and make offerings, and invite them to incorporate into the Inca empire. **But many people didn't want to be integrated.** Some of the Aymara, also the Guaraní, different hunter-gatherer peoples living in the jungles, very anti-authoritarian.

During the centuries after Tiwanaku, there were also the Chukila. They were hunter-gatherers. For me they were the first libertarians. They saw agriculture all around them, they could have started farming if they had wanted to, but they decided to remain hunter-gatherers, living up in the mountains, hunting guanaco [ed. – closely related to the llama]. Nomads.



Never sleeping in the same place two nights in a row. I hope some day I can be that free!

Sometimes they would trade with the Aymara. We make our cloths from the wool of the llama, it's very thick, warm. But the *vicuña* [ed. – the wild ancestor of domesticated alpacas] has such a fine wool, the looms they would use needed a much smaller shed. You could put a length of the cloth on your hand and it would slip between your fingers. It was highly prized. But the *vicuña* were wild, so how would they get the fur? With the help of the Chukila. They would



take their flutes and play music, and the *vicuña* would fall in love with them, and then the Chukila along with Aymara people from the villages would make a circle, a corral, around the *vicuña*. They would kill one as a sacrifice, and then shear the others, and let them out of the circle.

Look at this cloth here. Two colors, the light and the dark. Masculine and feminine. Everything in the universe is feminine or masculine. The earth is feminine, the sun is masculine. **For me, that mountain there is feminine, I call her grandmother. For others, the hills are masculine.** Notice that with these two colors, the light part has a dark border, and the dark part has a light border. With us, the other is always included, it's never excluded.

Living in a community can be very oppressive. You have to get married, have children, act a certain way. If you're not married, you're not considered a person. But traditionally there would be roles for people who didn't fit in. There were always people on the margins. **There were the *kéwa*, what now we might call homosexuals. They were respected, important. When there were fights or disputes, especially fights between a husband and wife, they would call the *kéwa* to mediate the dispute.** It was thought that they had both the feminine side and masculine side, in equilibrium, inside themselves, so they could understand both sides.

It's pretty clear that there needs to be a *pachakuti*, a revolution, when the order of the whole world changes. But it will be the women who do it. It needs to be a feminine revolution. The masculine revolutions failed. The USSR, Cuba, all masculine revolutions. That's not how it's going to be this time. The women know better, they understand how it needs to happen. Me, I try to listen to my feminine side more.

Evo [ed. – Evo Morales, Bolivian 'indigenous president' who effectively institutionalised and pacified social movements, only recently deposed by a right-wing coup] is just another macho revolutionary. That's what's wrong with him. Since he's been president, he's opened how many football stadiums, but not one school! Did you know, he's single. Not married! How could he possibly be a good leader? The leader is not one, it is a pair, male and female, balanced. At the end of the day they go home and argue about all the different decisions, and he gets her perspective and can form more balanced ideas. That's how it traditionally works. **But Evo, he's just a macho. Just like everyone else, he's swallowed the lie of development, of progress. What a joke.** They talk about poverty. They'll look at

someone living high on the *altiplano* [ed. – widest point of the Andes mountains, and most extensive high plateau on earth outside Tibet], far from everything, in a little brick house, and say, "how poor that person is!" But those people make their own clothes, grow their own food. People in the cities don't know how to do that. Who's poor? Progress. Ha!

Do you see those hills there? The cliff? It's beautiful, yes, but that's all from erosion.<sup>18</sup> It used to be covered in trees, but with colonization, they cut them all down. The Aymara knew how to mine gold and silver, they conducted some mining, but with the colonizers it was much more, and they cut down the trees to fuel the furnaces and melt the metals. The trees were almost wiped out, and then they started to come back. Just in time for the railroad. The best fuel for the trains was the charcoal from the *kewiña*, the native tree here. I've planted a couple in my garden. This one is a year old. In five years, it will only be up to here, up to my waist. But just wait: I can show you pictures of old *kewiña*, high in the mountains, they're immense, unbelievably tall and broad, five hundred years old.

The colonizers planted pine and eucalyptus, exotic species that take up all the water, and they call it a forest. It's terrible. That's why the whole mountainside is eroded.

Up on that mountain pass is where they caught Tupac Katari<sup>19</sup> in 1781. He was fighting the Spanish, and going to the Yungas, and he was betrayed and captured there, and then executed. I ask the young Aymara in the neighborhood if they know where Tupac was captured, and none of them do. I try to teach the children, and tell them stories. Too much

18 From an update from the comrades who collected this story: "Yawar's not-school, or purumpacha, was destroyed by a landslide, along with most of the neighborhood of Callapa, built precariously on an erosion-prone hillside. The traditional adobe structures, he noted wryly, survived the destruction better than the modern brick and cement houses. But as the neighbors have rebuilt, they have requested government or NGO money and opted for paved roads instead of gardens, to Yawar's disappointment. Subsequently, he lost a volunteer position teaching art and indigenous Andean culture to children after the mothers demanded his ouster. "We don't want our children to have an imagination," said one mother. "We want them to get jobs." Long live the new Bolivia" (A Lot Can Happen in Three Years).

19 During a major insurrection in colonial-era Upper Peru (now Bolivia), laying siege to La Paz for six months. Born Julián Apasa, he took the name Tupac Katari to honor two earlier rebel leaders: Tomás Katari, and Túpac Amaru II, executed by the Spanish in 1572. His wife Bartolina Sisa and his sister Gregoria Apaza participated in the rebellion by his side. It was ultimately put down by Spanish loyalists and Katari was executed by quartering.

education, that's the problem. They get sent to school, and it destroys their brains. The children like me, and because I get along well with the children, I'm okay with the parents, even though I don't work.

Did you know the llamas taught us about astronomy? The people near the salt flats of Uyuni would make caravans, bringing salt to the Yungas. They would load up a great big line of a hundred llamas with a block of salt on each side. The journey would take a month or two, they would go once a year, it was a big occasion. A certain llama, sort of like the chief, would lead the caravan. People had noticed that the llamas would never get lost, when going over the salt flats, over the mountains and the *altiplano*. At night the head driver would go to the chief llama and see how he was always looking up at the sky, watching the stars. What are you looking at, llama? They found the stars in the eyes of the llamas. After that, we began to look at the stars, and learn how to navigate by them. We were vegetarian, then. We drank the milk of the llamas but we would never kill them.

**Nowadays, we've forgotten lots of our history.** The ground gets covered in cement, and people lose their connection with Pachamama. It's because the Aymara just want to be gringos. They want a car, status. With Evo, the roads of this neighborhood got paved. Before it was just dirt. Now the people here are proud of their paved road. That's why I'm starting this garden. I'll bring the children here, teach them about the earth, tell them stories. The old people still remember our history, so we have to share that.

There's still a strong tradition of rebellion among the Aymara. Like the Gas War in 2003,<sup>20</sup> they rose up. Dispersed power, just like before. They also kicked out Goni [ed. – then president]. He had to flee in a helicopter. He's living in the US now. We've kicked out other presidents as well. Dispersing power. But then after these incredible uprisings, people calm down again and everything goes back to how it was before. People aren't so daring, in the meantime.

We don't have anarchist prisoners here. There's not really an anarchist offensive.<sup>21</sup> In my mind anarchism

20 ed. – Social struggles over the exploitation of natural gas resources (traced to Bolivia's colonisation since the 15th century and the subsequent exploitation such as the mines of Potosí) as well as against coca eradication policies, corruption and violent military responses against strikes, and closely following earlier conflict against privatisation of water; Evo Morales rode these movements into power after they had brought the country to a standstill with strikes and blockades by indigenous and labour groups, before a massacre by the military in October 2003.

21 ed. – Note that this story was recorded before the events of 2011-2012: see **Return Fire vol.2 pg68**

is an urban phenomenon. Here in Bolivia we have anarcho-syndicalists who are just academics, talking about theory. How can you be an anarcho-syndicalist if you're not working? Then there's the anarcho-punks, all very young, in it for just a few years and then they move on. The older ones, the anarcho-syndicalists, say, "Come here, we'll teach you everything you need to know. We have the best theories." And the anarcho-punks tell them to fuck off. They're very influenced by John Zerzan [ed. – see **Return Fire vol.4 pg76**], Hakim Bey [ed. – see **'Thrown Out of the Troika of History to the Wolves of Memory'**], they believe in total liberty, but after a few years they give up.

**Right now, we're in a moment of learning, telling stories, recovering our history. We're looking for libertarian roots in our own culture. It's a long process, but soon we'll find it. Soon we'll be ready.**

There's a word in Aymara, "*puruma*." When I found this word, I was very excited. It means "those who live without king or law." Yes! That's me! "Those who live without electricity or police." Electricity or police. You see, it was a Spaniard who translated Aymara into Spanish, and he brought his own cultural views with him, his eurocentrism. King, police, we didn't have those things. But still you can see, *puruma* is a very good word to describe us. I often call myself an anarchist, but really I'm *puruma*. We have our own libertarian traditions, we don't need to identify with a European workers' movement. Anyways, I'm against work. In Aymara, in Quechua, in Mapudungun, none of these languages had a word for work. There was effort, creation. But work creates capital. If we all stop working, Capital will collapse.

It's very prestigious to identify as an anarchist right now. After Seattle [ed. – see **Return Fire vol.4 pg80**], the G8 [ed. – see **Return Fire vol.2 pg68**]. The social movements that have nearly brought down neoliberalism are not Marxist-Leninist groups like in the past, they're largely anarchist groups. **It's not so prestigious to be *puruma*. We don't belong to a global family like the anarchists do. But I'm trying, little by little, to spread the term.**

I think it makes more sense for us. Anarchism, it's against the state, against the market, and that's all very good, but there needs to be more than destruction. Permanent creation, that's what I believe in. And we're creating our struggle, recreating our people and our history, little by little.

# SKILLS & SABOTAGE

*"Holy cats!" cried Horace, goggle-eyed to think of others carrying on the way he did. "Would they ever make trouble and stop the traffic!"*



Horace, the central character in Paul Goodman's 1977 novel *The Empire City*, is receiving a lecture from an older friend, Mynheer, about the possibility of a sort of 'school without walls', where children roam the streets with a teacher-shepherd to do their learning un-separated from the real, adult world. Horace's own (informal) approach to education has been precisely this: to avoid school at all costs and to educate himself through what and who is available on the city streets. Mynheer's lecture continues:

*"Fundamentally our kids must learn two things: Skills and Sabotage. Let me explain. We have here a great City and a vast culture. It must be maintained as a whole; it can and must be improved piecemeal (...) At the same time it is a vast corporate organisation (...): therefore, in order to prevent being swallowed up by it or stamped by it, in order to acquire and preserve a habit of freedom, a kid must learn to circumvent it and sabotage it at any needful point as occasion arises."*

To which Horace interjects:

*"Wait up! Wait up! Ain't this a contradiction? On the one hand, you gotta love an' serve 'em; on the other hand you gotta kick 'em in the shins. Does it make sense to you?"*

And Mynheer concludes:

*"There's nothing in what you say young man. In the Empire City these two attitudes come to the same thing: if you persist in honest service, you will soon be engaging in sabotage. Do you follow that?"*

This tension has always resonated for me. I am going to unpack this idea of skills and sabotage through examples of play in the public realm. **If the public realm is largely organised according to the calculative logic of the financial market, and if**

**play is often organised according to an emotional type of reason embedded in experience and human relationship, a conflict is likely to occur.**

An area that is excellent for ball games but where priority is given to the car is an example we can all imagine. Painting a pair of goal posts on the wall is a relatively small act of defiance and might not constitute an enormous challenge to authority but does perhaps represent an exciting moment for those involved. They knew they were breaking a rule but they did it anyway because they felt their claim to the space was valid too. **These are the moments where our actions are connected to our feelings and where we might have experienced the world coming sharply into focus.** The unsanctioned goal posts do not completely reorganise a space in the interests of its child or teenage users, but they do make visible an alternative experience of that space and in turn may affect the way those involved see themselves as agents within their immediate environment. I understand these sort of moments a bit like touchstones – like memories we come back to – to remind us of how a different way of organising things might feel.

*Rope Swings* was a project I started in 2017 with Andrew Gillman that involved the installation of unsanctioned rope swings in public spaces, mostly in London. It's the way this project was confrontational at the same time as *really* joyful that connects it, for me, with the idea of skills and sabotage. We knew from the outset that rope swings would be a good device for disrupting the rules and conventions of public space, because rope swings are fun and you can't say they're not; however the importance of the connection between the experience of the swings and a critical awareness of public space only became clear as we went along and saw how other people responded. You feel a bodily freedom by jumping and swinging. It's exhilarating, everything tips up, you're upside-down. **Then all of a sudden, all the rules and norms and possibilities of what happens are also up in the air: you do not have permission to do this activity here, but it's happening anyway and it feels good.** The rope swings made the normally intangible rules of public space *felt* by breaking them.

The emotional, experiential and physical connection to something, the experience of joy, opened up possibilities for criticality, for a questioning of public spaces, and the conventions, rules and controls that exist within them. People were passionate about the rope swings, they were ready to defend them and questioned why rope swings like these weren't

allowed in public spaces.<sup>1</sup> Like the goal posts, the rope swings do not represent a seismic change or rupture, but the shared experiences had ripple-effects beyond the actual swinging-moment.

Audre Lorde's discussion of the erotic is useful here as she offers us a language and context for thinking about the importance of an emotional type of reasoning. Lorde points out that *feeling* is something vital and transformative. In the experience of something deep and brilliant and strong – and such an experience is often amplified by being shared with others – we are forced to confront its absence in other areas of life and to recognise the ways in which our lives are sometimes organised to restrict these unexchangeable, uncompetitive, inefficient, passionate types of logic. Lorde writes:

*"Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning in our lives. And this is a grave responsibility, projected from within each of us, not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected."*  
(Sister Outsider)

There isn't space here to discuss more examples of the games, adventures and self-set challenges of children, young people, and occasionally adults, that reorganise the environment according to their own logic, but we can all think of a bunch more. This reorganising process inevitably disrupts the conventional order of a space and this is the moment of something creative and confrontational – the moment for *skills and sabotage*. **I think of these moments as ones where we can drive a jemmy<sup>2</sup> into reality and lever it open to catch a glimpse of a world that is TEEMING, where ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN** (J. Cage, *Silence*, 1978). The possibility here is in fact enormous and shatters any belief that a competitive society based on principles of efficiency is something natural. These moments of conflict are obviously never tidily resolved, and there is no replicable road map for navigating the contradictions of a neoliberal context, but it begins with this on-going struggle to confront reality: to see and communicate how things could be understood and organised by a different sort of logic.

1 It's a slightly different discussion, but this project lost much of its traction when we reconfigured it in a gallery setting. In public, as an unauthored intervention, it operated with powerful simplicity to disrupt and confront its environment, inviting others to engage actively in that political act. Once reconfigured to operate within the gallery space, despite all our best intentions, it no longer offered the same clarity or politicality (too much ARTY, not enough FIERY).

2 Small and handy crowbar traditionally used to force open windows or doors.

## POEMS FOR LOVE, LOSS & WAR

### racist

he was a big guy, chicano, bisexual  
nice as folks come  
didn't smoke but bummed for his friends,  
kill whitey patch on his knee.

he chuckled at a rape joke once  
and has been raped himself  
but people don't disclaim that  
when they painfully laugh.

so a white woman turns on him  
there is nothing funny about rape.

she calls him a straight white male  
who would therefore never have to deal with rape.  
the only word she got right was male.

he calls her sexist.  
she learns that he is chicano  
and her story changes.  
she explains that in the same way  
that he, chicano, couldn't be racist  
against her, white  
she, woman, couldn't be sexist against him,  
male.

"I was raised a racist," he replies,  
"by militant chicano seperatists."  
with her choice anti-racist views  
she had denied the struggles he had  
against his own internalized racial  
bigotry.

but that's okay, because later he became  
too racist against us good white folks  
or something  
and we had to kick him out.

– from 'Burning the Anarchist Bible: Cynical Poetry  
for Those Fed Up with Dogma'



# GHOSTS OF THE LAND

## – Samhain musings

*"Yea, she hath passed hereby, and blessed the sheaves,  
And the great garths, and stacks, and quiet farms,  
And all the tawny, and the crimson leaves.  
Yea, she hath passed with poppies in her arms,  
Under the star of dusk, through stealing mist,  
And blessed the earth, and gone, while no man wist."  
– Frederick Manning, Kore*



Samhain<sup>1</sup> approaches. We enter the dark. Some hate the passing of the summer but I am ready, though summer already feels like a distant memory. A Ghost. We find ourselves in the twilight of the year, in autumn and already dusk has fallen. We stand on the brink of nightfall and as we head towards Samhain we find ourselves in that liminal time and space where the ghosts feel closer, the nights colder and darker, our moods a little more melancholic. I love these days, this time of year when nature sheds that which no longer serves and shows us the beauty that can be found in doing so.

And so my attention turns to ghosts. To the spirits of those that have left this realm or whatever you want to call it. The veil thins. The spirits abound, gossamer thin but there and I wander the land where I live, seeing the ghosts of the past, feeling the shadows of those will soon pass and losing myself in my stormy thoughts.

As I walk the dog on this damp grey day, on land that is soon to be lost to the gentrification and 'progress' that society demands, I can't help but feel a sadness at the hopelessness of it all. The sky is a blanket of clouds, thick and grey and low. The air is damp, the kind of damp where you don't really know whether it's raining or not and if you live anywhere in the British isles, you'll know what I mean. It isn't cold though,

and still the colours of autumn and the fresh air make me feel somewhat better but there is still, lurking just beneath the surface, a mourning for that which will be lost. **The ghosts of this land haunt me already.**

*"With slow, reluctant feet, and weary eyes,  
And eye-lids heavy with the coming sleep,  
With small breasts lifted up in stress of sighs,  
She passed, as shadows pass, among the sheep;  
While the earth dreamed, and only I was ware  
Of that faint fragrance blown from her soft hair."  
– Frederick Manning, Kore*

I've written before about the loss of land my community faces, and the signs of that impending loss greet me like angry welts. **The diggers have been and gone, testing the land, checking the foundation of where the proposed building will take place. The field is littered with mounds caused by the scraping away of the earth and the rapid and untidy efforts to refill what was taken.**

The community cannot wait for their new boxy homes, poorly built and squashed in on land that should belong to the community. And no matter what I feel about it, I understand the allure of new homes and money, blood money I call it, paid in compensation for the upheaval caused to peoples lives. Really, it is little more than a bribe. To the poor (and most of us here are), the money is tempting. It doesn't matter that it will soon be spent, no doubt on shit that isn't really needed (but that's their business and I don't judge them too harshly). We've been promised a better quality of life, as though the building of new homes will make the poverty that abounds here disappear. But it's not just homes for the community either, they'll be a mix of homes, the poor alongside the not-so-poor. Land is a commodity.

**But what will really be lost is the outdoor space that we have. Gardens will be smaller, the field will be reduced by a third, at least for now though I don't doubt that once the threshold of building there has been crossed, the floodgates will open until the space dwindles away and is lost altogether. Mature trees, flora and fauna. All gone. Covered in concrete, only the ghost of what it once was remaining.**

Like I said, the ghosts already haunt me.

And yet, in the same town, the divide is quite striking, for the prospect of building threatens another beauty

1 ed. – Part of the cross quarter calendar (of the festivals of Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasadh and Samhain), developed in Celtic Gaul in the first millennium B.C. and probably used in Britain since this time too. It is practiced from a dusk of around October 31st and traditionally lasted three days.

spot, another place where people have free access to the land. And getting outside, spending time out in nature is good for the body, mind and soul, we are all a part of it after all.

The local community has rallied round and formed an action group to save this space. And I am glad, and am a part of that group for I'll try to save as many of the wild spaces we have left. But there isn't a council estate that borders this land. The people here aren't looked down upon, seen as the lowest of the low. They are not so poor, not so easily swayed with false promises of prosperity, not so easily bought with money that will soon be swallowed up by the simple process of moving.

But even as I'm pleased with the group effort of trying to save the place, the ghost of what may be lingers somewhere not too far away, close enough to be felt.

*"The land lay steeped in peace of silent dreams;  
There was no sound amid the sacred boughs.  
Nor any mournful music in her streams:  
Only I saw the shadow on her brows,  
Only I knew her for the yearly slain,  
And wept, and weep until she come again."  
— Frederick Manning, Kore*

**Where I live is not special and the issues affecting this small town are occurring everywhere in the world.** The machine of Capitalism calls for progression, for the gentrification of those working class areas and as lovely as the dream may be presented, it is just that. The poor are ever pushed out, marginalised, mocked and looked down upon. The land is seen as wasteland unless something can be built there. Nature is being lost and with it the rights of people to access it. Like I already said, we are a part of nature and when we are separated from it, we suffer. We become like living ghosts, shades living half lives.

The antidote? I don't know, but I do know one thing,



and that is that we must link up. We must overcome the superficial divides that separate us, that keep us closed in our own little groups, our own small echo chambers. I think more people are becoming aware of just how important nature and those few remaining wild spaces are, not only for us but for those other beings we share this world with. I can feel the animist [ed. — see **Return Fire vol.4 pg41**] revolution beginning as more people

come to experience the spirit of the land, feel it connect with our own selves. Of course not everyone will consider themselves an animist, many will not understand the meaning of the word, but they know that when they are out in nature, they feel better.

**They feel.** The spirit of place seeps into their bones, mingles with their own spirits and elevates them. They may not be able to find the words to aptly describe this feeling, but they still feel it.

Ghosts have been on my mind lately. As an animist, the spirit of the great forests that once covered these lands remain, but I don't want to walk among the ghosts of what was, not when we can save what we have left before it too passes and is lost.





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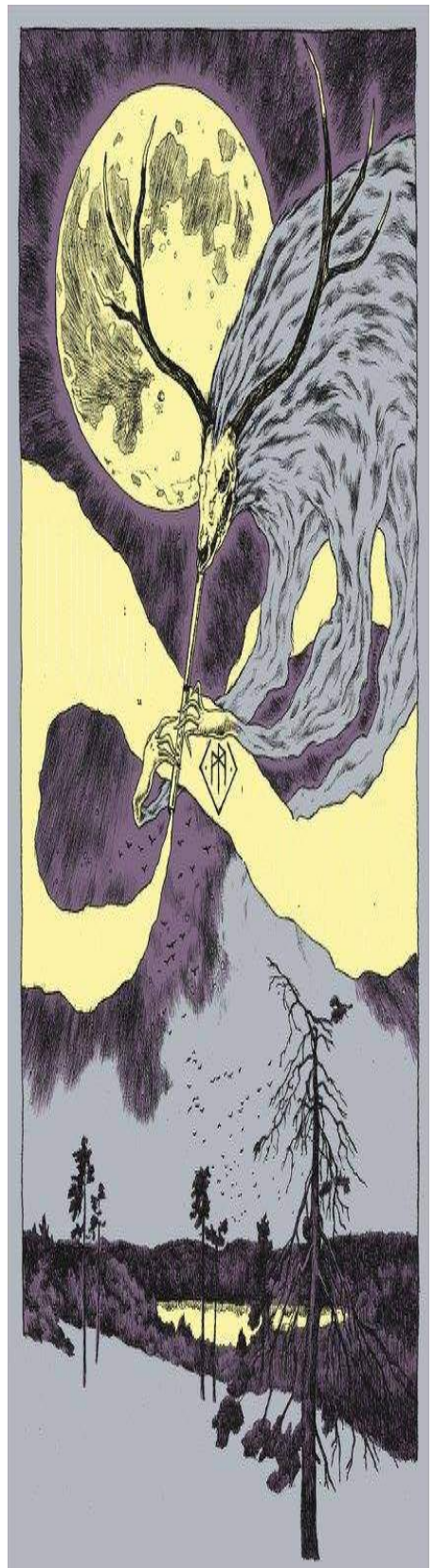
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