

Ashen Ruins

**Against the Corpse
Machine: Defining A
Post-Leftist Anarchist
Critique of Violence**

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What's the Problem?

Sometimes anarchists are slow learners. Disregarding the famous, definitive and prognostic Marx-Bakunin split in the First International near the end of the 19th century, anarchists overall have continued to cling to the obsolete notion that anarchy is best situated within the otherwise statist Leftist milieu, despite the bourgeois democratic origins of the Left-Right spectrum. Since then communists and Marxists, liberals and conservatives alike have had us right where they want us — and it's shown in our history. In continuing to view ourselves as Leftists, despite the glaring contradictions in such a stance, we have naturally relegated ourselves to the role of critic within larger movements, and often found ourselves either marching towards goals which stand in direct opposition to our own interests or suckered by counter-revolutionary appeals to anti-fascist or anti-capitalist unity.

The anarchist, as Leftist, swims in a sea of contradictions, much of which derives from our passive acceptance of the grip that Leftists have over the political dialogue, both in terminology and in the framing of issues. In conceding to them the underlying territory of debate, North American anarchists have historically been forced into reactionary roles, arguing for nonsensical nuanced points or for means over outcomes. Until we are able to break this cycle and forge an independent critique that reflects our own ends, we are doomed to replay the past. If our goal is genuine revolution (and why settle for less?), then Leftism, and the hold it has over our discourse must be rejected. Similarly, we must also confront within our movement the privileges that make the Leftist dialogue attractive. While there are many aspects of Leftism with which anarchy comes into conflict (critiques — or lack thereof — of technology, progress, sexism, hierarchy, statism, white supremacy, etc., all of which need to be evaluated on their own merits), one in particular deserves special attention: violence. Violence must never be romanticized or fetishized, and resorting to violence should not be a casual decision, tactically, strategically or personally. However, the current dominant anarchist critique shares much too much common ground, not incidentally, with that of the Statists and Leftists, which may as well be the standards of the capitalist and the politician for all the difference it makes. As such these standards deserve careful — and skeptical — scrutiny.

Rather than reflecting a genuinely unique perspective, the current anarchist critique of violence is clouded by Statist assumptions and middle class fears. The rise of the primitivist critique of society, and the linkage that critique makes between early human societies and our own, provides not only a great example for anarchists to point to of the practicality of anarchist values, but it also allows us the opportunity to finally remove ourselves from under the shadow of the State and capitalism and to forge an independent vision that is not reactionarily anti-Statist, but rather, presents a positive stateless alternative that is informed by human experience before the rise of the State as well as our experience after it. In this sense Statism is reactionary. However, this is not a nuanced argument, nor is it mere semantics. As long as anarchy remains reactionary, there is little hope that we will have a chance of creating a society much different from the one in which we already live (throw in a little worker's control here, a few neighborhood assemblies there, federate, federate, federate — industrial democracy, bourgeois democracy). Refusing to confront and reconcile the effect anarchism's modern industrial origins has had on its vision (likewise the Bo-

hemian middle class current gaining popularity), as well as failing to appreciate the opportunities presented by taking a serious look at the Primitivist critique (are you paying attention anarcho-syndicalists?), will surely spell failure just as quickly as joining the government did in Spain '36 (anarcho-syndicalists, are you still listening?). Part of this transition means that anarchists must reconcile our own violent past with our vision of the future society and reject the hold that Leftism, Statism and privilege has over the debate. Realistically, it may mean breaking with some of the more Leftist influenced strains of anarchism, like anarcho-syndicalism, which probably deserves to remain on the Left, and has a vision that still looks too much like the shell of the old world it claims to want to supplant (plus, the One Big Union looks a lot like One Big State, and I have little faith either will whither away). Much of the critique of breaking with the Left will be quite useful in evaluating anarcho-syndicalism, however that is beyond the scope of this essay. The weight of their history and critiques, however, may turn out to be our cement shoes in the end if we fail to evaluate them honestly and critically.

The anarchist as reactionary is clearly illustrated by the continuing debate over violence. Not unlike the capitalist press, we anarchists have never come to terms with our violent history. With the rise of anarchy as a growing force, the stereotype of the anarchist as a violent disturber of public order has again been raised and reinforced by the media, government and within the larger affiliated movement itself in an effort to discredit and marginalize us. Again and again, anarchists are forced to make nuanced arguments about how “property destruction is not violence” and that “the real violent element is the police”, despite the fact that these arguments are not getting through and without recognizing their defensive nature. Do anarchists really eschew violence? Not at all. The violence/non-violence dichotomy is a false one, but playing into it effectively prevents us from forging our own strategies and distinct vision of society.

Rather than making the point that violence is often necessary and even appropriate within the struggle, we have allowed the moralizing Leftists and liberals to control the dialogue and to impose their own hypocritical standards of violence on us. It should not be forgotten that Leftists inherently believe in the legitimacy of the State, support its monopoly on violence and largely (and rightly) see violent opposition to the State or capitalism as repudiations of this presumption, particularly when it comes from anarchists, who obviously seek its absolute destruction. Implicitly recognizing the right of some to rule over others, Leftists seek to “speak truth to power”, not to smash it. Even Leftists who support armed struggle are in truth merely extreme examples of the overall trend within Leftism as a whole; while they may approve of violence as a means of struggle for their particular group or faction, in the end they seek to reconstitute the State’s monopoly of force — in their hands, or that of their party (where, presumably, we are to believe they will utilize it more justly). In this sense they are very much within the “burn the village in order to save it” political tradition — a tradition with which, like fascism, the State is clearly quite comfortable. The skepticism with which most anarchists view these groups’ commitments to post-revolutionary non-violence is certainly justified. It also should not be forgotten that even revolutionary Marxist groups do not reject electoral politics as legitimate vehicles for change. In many ways this validates the anarchist critique of the State: revolutionary Leftists do not see violent change as an exception to their otherwise non-violent politics. Instead, their

violent revolutionary politics should more properly be viewed as a natural extension of the unspoken (by Leftists) acknowledgement of the violence inherent in the State. In fact, many “revolutionary” Marxists and communists acknowledge this, claiming that the State must be preserved, temporarily, of course, so that it may utilize its monopoly of violence to attack counter-revolutionaries (guess who they are?) and, paradoxically, preserve the revolution so that the State can then wither away. The revolutionary black anarchist, Kuwasi Balagoon, put it this way in his classic essay, “Anarchy Can’t fight Alone”:

... the goals of anarchy don’t include replacing one ruling class with another, neither in the guise of a fairer boss or as a party. This is key because this is what separates anarchist revolutionaries from Maoist, socialist and nationalist revolutionaries who from the onset do not embrace complete revolution. They cannot envision a truly free and equalitarian society and must to some extent embrace the socialization process that makes exploitation and oppression possible and prevalent in the first place.

Therefore, since the aims of the Left involve mere changes in leadership, they cannot be legitimately considered revolutionary. Why, then, if our goals are opposed, should we allow their moral rubric to be imposed upon us? Instead of claiming that smashing a window isn’t violent — a point that average people reject out of common sense (and therefore makes me wonder about the common sense of some anarchists) — why don’t we drop the semantics and admit that, yes, it’s very clearly violent and then make a case for it? Do we consider the Israeli bulldozing of Palestinian homes non-violent? If, on the other hand, smashing a window is merely a symbolic act, but not violent, what message are we trying to send? With smashing a window thus set as the absolute limit of appropriate dissent, aren’t we really making the absurdly contradictory point that this violent system must be opposed through a variety of tactics, up to and including smashing a window (which is not violent, by the way). But no further. Is this the limit, then, of our resistance? What a sad comment on our motivations, if non-violence is the furthest frontier of our rage in the face of this corpse machine, America.

What do we do then, once anarchists or, more realistically, everyday folk do start picking up rocks (or other weapons) and using them against cops? In the case of average people engaged in revolt, what will distinguish our moralizing denunciations from those of the Leftists and the State? When this happens with anarchists (much less frequently, of course), Leftists and liberals point fingers and, in response, anarchist comrades will go to great lengths to explain how the poor anarchists were merely defending themselves. But let’s examine the logic of this point: must we always be on the defensive then? Are we perpetual victims? Or is it more likely, as Alfredo Bonnano pointed out in his essay, *Armed Joy*, that we have created an ideological construct which does not allow us to see ourselves as instigators of conflict?

One fine morning during a peaceful demonstration the police start shooting. The structure reacts, comrades shoot too, policemen fall. Anathema! It was a peaceful demonstration. For it to have degenerated into individual guerrilla actions there must have been a provocation. Nothing can go beyond the perfect framework of our ideological organization as it is not just a ‘part’ of reality, but is ‘all’ reality.

We cannot perceive ourselves as acting first nor of seizing the initiative once we are attacked. What, then, are the implications of this? Pacification. Reac-

tion. Can revolution realistically be touted as one of our goals as long as this construct holds sway? Even when anarchists are not condemning the use of violence, we're usually the last to know when it's going to be used. Take for instance the recent uprising in Cincinnati. How come in an anarchist movement that's bigger than it's been in decades (maybe longer), the best we can do is make a token showing when the shit hits the fan? The bulk of our participation was limited to either watching on TV (or the Internet — the Spectacle adapts with technology) or writing papers after the fact lamenting the lack of anarchist participation. Clearly busing white anarchists in from the suburbs is probably not the best way to support such revolts (as long as anarchists remain outsiders, that is). However, the fact that anarchist participation was negligible speaks volumes. Of course, there are plenty of ways that white anarchists can tie up police and support such revolts without actually driving into non-white rebelling neighborhoods. How come white anarchists, who can be so creative when it comes to the letter-number road protests, (lock-downs, street theater, property destruction, Black Blocs, molotovs) are at a complete loss when this kind of thing happens? It isn't timing, believe me. If we hope to change this we must examine and root out the source of our reluctance.

Setting aside the pure hilarity of permitting the Left or Statists to act as the moral authority on violence, or anything else, the contradictions of the Leftist-influenced stance on violence takes on racist undertones when we consider that anarchists often support violent struggles in the Third World. This raises the troubling conclusion that anarchists, like the rest of our self-proclaimed Leftist "comrades", are really just a bunch of racist NIMBY's[1] who, while supporting the violent struggles of non-white people abroad, fear its implications at home (Chiapas but not here; East Timor but not here; Colombia but not here, etc). In fact, many North American Leftists strongly condemn the State's increasing war against the FARC and other violent authoritarian communist groups while effectively blaming the anarchists here in America for the police repression at mass actions. Until the World Economic Forum protest in New York and the September 11th attacks weeded most of them out, the Left has claimed exclusive ownership over the major protests, while the presence of unruly anarchists has elicited much hand-wringing concern from them, especially when anarchists steal the show with their violent antics (which, by the way, not once causes the least bit of introspection among Leftists about why their politics and tactics are just so damn uninteresting in the first place). And yet one senses that, as the *Village Voice* put it recently in their story, "Keepers of the Flame", that "anarchism has now become 'the pole that everyone revolves around,' much as Marxism was in the '60s. In other words, even young activists who don't identify as anarchists have to position themselves in relation to its values." This creates the conundrum of anarchism as both the black sheep and the heart of the movement. This seems like quite a perplexing situation until we start to think of it within the overall eclipse of the Left in North America. Perhaps the Left senses its own impending irrelevancy. But then anarchists are hardly alone in the contempt they receive from the Left. When it comes to issues of race, which in America is basically just code for class anyhow, the American Left has historically ignored at best — or at worst, undermined — the struggles of non-white people in the U.S. As one case in a much larger point, Noel Ignatiev remarks on this particular historical American Leftist myopia in his essay, *Introduction to the United States: An Autonomist Political History*. The whole essay should be

essential reading, but one section dealing with the Left's refusal to join the fight against the end of Reconstruction makes the point quite well:

So it was that New York in 1871 witnessed a march of 20,000, demonstrating solidarity with the workers of Paris, 20,000 radicals who were able to look across the ocean to the Paris Commune but were unable to look five hundred miles to the South. . .

The Civil Rights movement of the 60's was the one real highpoint for the Left when it came to race, if we are to believe their own mythology. And yet, a more careful look at that struggle shows again the failure of the Left when it came to attacking white supremacy. Further, we often forget that the anti-war movement and the Civil Rights movements were not one and the same. The truth is, the black anti-war refrain, "No Vietnamese ever called me nigger," had little resonance with the bulk of the Left, despite the Leftist mythology that now dominates such discourse. Meanwhile most blacks in America quite clearly understood the link between their oppression by the white supremacist system at home and the colonial oppression of non-whites abroad in ways the white Left never did. Eventually, the white Left fell away disillusioned before the war was even over, leaving the Black Panthers and other non-white radical groups in ruins thanks to COINTELPRO and their own internal personal and structural flaws (a point which many anarchists fail to realize but should not be afraid to make). Chris Crass does a good job highlighting the different methods of organizing in his essay, *Looking to the Light of Freedom: Lessons from the Civil Rights Movement and Thoughts on Anarchist Organizing*. He discusses the case of Ella Baker, civil rights organizer, and the resistance she encountered attempting to organize horizontally rather than hierarchically as the bulk of the Left wanted. In her days working for the NAACP and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, headed by Martin Luther King, she encountered sexism, cults of personality and top-down organizational structures that actively discouraged grassroots organizing. And, of course, that is one of anarchism's main critiques of the Left — its organizing style. But while the Left in general failed to get the link between the imperialist war abroad and civil rights at home, it was painfully clear to Black America. Writing at that time, Charles Ross commented,

No black man should fight in Vietnam. No white man should fight in Vietnam; but definitely no black man. . . here is a man, who is already in slavery, . . . going somewhere to fight for the freedom of somebody else. If a black man is going to fight anywhere, he ought to be fighting in Africa, Mississippi, or Columbus.

Most white Leftists were much more involved in the anti-war movement than they were in the fight for civil rights, which echoes Ignatiev's earlier point. Again, it's useful to look to Ignatiev for a description of that era, especially its end:

"The process in the white movement was quite different: there the students had hurled themselves at the walls of power, to no apparent avail — the war was still going on. Never able to recognize the Black struggle as their own cause, unable to develop an approach to the white worker, the majority of white student radicals turned away from radicalism."

Of course, its not just winners who write history, it's also written by defeated, but surviving institutions, so the story that the Left tells itself about that era serves its own interests. Even in retreat, the Left's version of the Civil

Rights struggle and anti-war movement plays up the roles of white students and leaders, while ignoring the contributions of everyday people and, interestingly, the Vietnamese people entirely, who became mere landscape — background — to the white settler mind, both student and soldier. To hear the Left tell it, the war was stopped by white students, presumably splitting their time between their classes, fighting against the war and for civil rights, while the Vietnamese people, suffering well over a million deaths, played mere supporting roles hardly worthy of credit. Ward Churchill does a good number on this presumption in his book *Pacifism As Pathology*, where he writes,

“... as always, it was the armed struggle waged by the Vietnamese themselves — without the pretense of systematic support from American pacifists — which finally forced the war to a close...”

As Churchill points out, that kind of patronizing revisionism is something that anarchy would surely do better without.

Among Leftists in North America it is generally accepted that the in-your-face attitude of anarchists will lead to widespread repression of the Left, effectively reversing their position on violence as it applies overseas. In fact, what is more likely the case is that the aggressive tactics of the anarchists have legitimized the more reformist center in the eyes of the State, which is already recruiting willing accomplices amongst the Left to a “seat at the table”. Groups like Global Exchange and celebrities like U2’s Bono (featured recently in a *Time* magazine cover story, “Can Bono Save the World?”) are already lining up, while the media, capitalist lapdogs that they are, have continued their quest to deliver our heads on platters to the new “anti-terrorist” regime. On the international scene, fearing for their legitimacy in the eyes of world power brokers, the World Social Forum in Puerto Allegro recently excluded “violent” anarchists where, presumably, they would have rubbed shoulders with French and other government officials famous for their advocacy of non-violence in places like Algiers, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. Of course, the irony was lost on the Statist organizers. On the ground this Leftist/State symbiosis reveals itself in “radical” peace police linking arms to protect Starbucks from the rampaging Black Bloc or co-operating in pointing out and apprehending property-destroying anarchists for the police. This is a strategic point that anarchists ought to consider carefully. However it seems likely that the solution is not to back off violent tactics, but rather to continue to push the Left into increasingly ridiculous and conciliatory positions with regards to the State so as to remove the illusion of separateness that surrounds them. The Left is still very much a part of the State system — they validate each other the same way that unions validate capitalism and placate workers; that is, continued escalation of tactics will reveal them as the peas of the same pod that they really are. Just as the Left is an integral part of the system, so then are anarchists who continue to support the Left. In this context, then, isn’t the continued insistence by some that property destruction is not violent really just an attempt to corral anarchists into relationships with the Left that do not threaten its overall reformist goals and bankrupt values?

But are anarchists afraid, like Leftists, that if the violence genie is let out of the bottle then those with a real interest in change will run amok, perhaps taking the whole bankrupt system down once and for all, along with the white supremacy and other attendant privileges which underpin it? This strikes me as distressingly reminiscent of the classic “mob rule” arguments with which rich white men defended their privileged power in the face of 19th and 20th Century

reforms that expanded the franchise to women, Blacks and non-propertied white males (and many suffragettes, it should not be forgotten, justified extending the vote to white women in white supremacist terms in order to counteract the influence of non-white males). But this characterization really becomes quite fitting once we begin to reconceive the Left and the State as complementary rather than oppositional entities. Given the dominance of white, middle-class, college-degreed (or soon-to-be degreed) men in the North American anarchist movement — who probably have good reason to fear a broad revolution, by the way — this hardly seems like an inappropriate conclusion to draw. Especially given the lackadaisical attitude most white, male anarchists take towards confronting or putting their privileges on the line. As privileged folks, do white, middle or upper class anarchists presume that their example leads the way for oppressed people, and, if so, then how does this differ from the white savior notions that drive liberal and Leftist do-good-ism? This assumption is pure vanguardism and refuses to recognize the constantly existing violent resistance occurring all around us. Not to mention the fact that it exhibits an ostrich-like ability to ignore the everyday violence which confronts the poor, especially the non-white poor in this country. The only way out of this predicament is finally to recognize the logical conclusions of our own arguments, and that means entirely rejecting the bullshit violence/non-violence debate, and Leftism along with it.

Our Violent Anarchist History

Let's face it, anarchist history was often very violent. Bombs were thrown, clergy were killed, fascists were shot, industrialists were stabbed, politicians were assassinated and police were attacked, often with massive support and even participation from non-anarchist poor people. Violent acts, by themselves, do not necessarily alienate people. Voting alienates people — ask the more than half of Americans who don't vote. Protests alienate the people — ask the vast majority who don't attend. Rather than feeling overwhelmed by the impotence of Leftism, let's look around us for the signs of everyday struggle and see what there is to support. Let's see what the Statists and liberals are afraid to acknowledge or support. Let's evaluate the differences between the anarchists of yesteryear and those of today.

For one, anarchists of days gone by did not allow their often-violent tactics to be defined by the rest of the left. Part of the reason why is because they clearly situated themselves among the oppressed and saw their struggles as coming from solidly within it. Many anarchists, among them Emma Goldman, Errico Malatesta, Lucy Parsons and Luigi Galleani, advocated the full range of violence, from the affinity group of the “propaganda by the deed” anarchists at the turn of the century to the more broad-based insurrections in Spain before and during the Civil War (the anarchists called them the “highschools of the revolution” — i.e. practice for the big one). The CNT, for all its flaws still the self-professed mass vehicle for anarchist revolution in Spain, declared in its program of May 1936,

Once the violent aspect of the revolution has ended, we will abolish: private property, the State, the principle of authority, and consequently, the classes that divide men into exploiters and exploited, oppressors and oppressed.

Expressing a similar sentiment, yet more to the point is the declaration of Haymarket martyr Louis Lingg, upon being sentenced to death: “If they use canons against us, we shall use dynamite against them.” Likewise, anarchists like Santo Caserio expressed similar sentiments when they physically attacked politicians and capitalists. “Long live the revolution! Long live anarchy!” shouted Caserio as he stabbed, assassinating, the President of France. “Death to bourgeois society! Long live anarchy!” exclaimed August Vaillant at his execution for throwing a bomb at the French Chamber of Deputies in 1894. Mario Buda, protesting the indictment of Sacco and Vanzetti, bombed Wall Street, killing 30, wounding hundreds more and doing \$2 million damage (including blowing up the office of the notorious capitalist J.P. Morgan). Alexander Berkman, attempted assassin of that strikebreaker, Frick, most memorably wrote in *Mother Earth*,

“Has a single step been made on the road of progress without violence and bloodshed? Has capital ever granted concessions without being forced to it? Has labor won ought but defeat and humiliation in the arena of legality? Away with deceit and cant! As long as you uphold the capitalist system of murder and robbery, just so long will labor resort to violence to wrest better terms. And the sooner we gain the courage to face the situation honestly, the speedier will come the day when the arch-crime of the centuries — Capitalism — the source and breeder of all other crime and violence, will be abolished and the way cleared for a society based on the solidarity of interests, where brotherhood and humanity will become a reality. . . .”

Yohann Most wrote in *The Social Monster* that, “The anarchists. . . have no lust for murder and incendiarism. But they carry on a revolutionary agitation because they know that the power of a privileged class has never yet been broken by peaceable means.” Echoing that sentiment, Errico Malatesta said,

There may be cases where passive resistance is an effective weapon, and it would then obviously be the best of weapons, since it would be the most economical in human suffering. But more often than not, to profess passive resistance only serves to reassure the oppressors against their fear of rebellion, and thus it betrays the cause of the oppressed.

Along similar lines, several years later he reaffirmed that sentiment, writing in *La Question Sociale*, the most influential Italian-American Anarchist newspaper in America at the time (later edited by Galleani),

We want to expropriate the property-owning class, and with violence, since it is with violence that they hold onto social wealth and use it to exploit the working class. Not because freedom is a good thing for the future, but because it is a good thing at all times, today as well as tomorrow. The property owners, by denying us the means of exercising our freedom, in effect take it away from us.

We want to overthrow the government, all governments — and overthrow them with violence since it is by the use of violence that they force us to obey — and, once again. . . because governments are the negation of freedom and it is not possible to be free without being rid of them.

By force we want to deprive the priests of their privileges, because with the privileges, secured by the power of the State, they deny others the right, that is, the means, of equal freedom to propagate their ideas and beliefs.

While they never really succeeded in creating the broad popular support it takes to stave off the State’s suppression, the anarchists of yore at least did not

suffer the schizophrenic second-guessing that bedevils many modern anarchists' actions (and rightly so, given the relative privilege of many anarchists). In reading the writings of 19th and early 20th century Italian and Jewish anarchists one gets the sense that the role of violence in struggle has never been so generally held in ill-regard as it is among anarchist today. While violence has never been uncontroversial, Paul Arvich writes in his book, *Anarchist Portraits*, quoting Joseph Cohen, that after Berkman's attack on Frick, "[his] name became 'a kind of talisman, a source of inspiration and encouragement.'" Some anarchists were, of course, alienated by propaganda by the deed but, Most, Galleani and Malatesta, all open supporters of insurrection and propaganda by the deed, should rightly be considered the most influential writers among Jewish and Italian anarchists at the time.

In Spain during the Revolution anarchists like Buenaventura Durutti and Sabate frequently used violence, and Nestor Makhno's peasant army did not shy from its use either. Anarchist illegalists in France and Argentina provide a powerfully revolutionary contrast to present-day CrimethInc. as they frequently used violence to further their liberatory desires and to refuse the authoritarian rule of the State that sought to curb them. Despite a creeping tendency towards vanguardism, and because, as Jews and Italians, they existed in many ways outside the social construct of whiteness (which, at the height of American anarchism, did not yet include them), they did not feel the alienation that many privileged modern day anarchists feel towards the genuinely oppressed. However, this should not be taken as a full endorsement of their worldview because, as Ignatiev noted, that support did have serious failures when it came to recognizing and supporting the struggles of people of color. At the same time, that should not be construed as a failure of their view of violence.

“The People” are Alienated by Violence and Other Myths

The dirty little secret that many anarchists and Leftists alike are trying desperately to avoid exposing is that violent actions often have a mass base of support (consider popular support for the many late 20th and early 21st Century wars and the death penalty as but two obvious mainstream socially acceptable examples), but that anarchists today have failed to maintain their place within this base. Hence the ease with which the Left has subsumed and co-opted our energies and at the same time foreshadowing the ease with which the State will bring its violence to bear on us, likely accompanied by hardly a whimper of dissent from the amongst the poor, for whom our actions often have little relevance, regardless of our grand pronouncements to the contrary. What's particularly troubling — for anarchists, that is — is that all this is despite the fact that poor folk kill police, rob banks, shoot politicians and attack capitalists (and their proxies) relatively frequently, and with much quiet support from oppressed people across the country. Much of the reason for this disconnect is the privileged way anarchists have continued to locate themselves within the Leftist tradition, unlike the majority of the poor who have quietly opted out of both the Left and the Right, along with electoral and union politics in general (largely for the same reasons). When did anarchists start believing the inher-

ently conservative Leftist lie that “now is not the time”, that non-violence is the only legitimate method of social change or that “the people are alienated by violence,” especially given the massive evidence to the contrary? Rejecting the millenarianism of Marxism, anarchists have always insisted that any time could be the right time.

But the preponderance of privilege within our movement has created the curious new role of anarchist as conservative. As such, we have left the poor without anyone to support their far-ranging, if isolated, resistance. Even in times of class retreat, there is resistance. Unfortunately for those seeking the validation that official organizations give to a movement (it provides something to join or follow — thus alleviating the peculiarly anarchist dilemma of being among the first on the ground — which requires sacrifice, listening and supportive skills that many anarchists do not have), unorganized resistance is happening all around us. This decentralized resistance is in many ways a positive development for anarchists who have a critique of mass organizations and the co-optive, disciplining and conservatizing roles that unions, parties, revolutionary federations and other organizations play in revolutionary times. Imagine for a second, what a mass, decentralized revolt, unmediated by either party or union would look like, not to mention the threat that it would pose to the prevailing order.

The failures of revolutions have been many, however, a great deal of the blame can be placed on the fact that they were co-optible in the first place, and that argument is really about structure. The struggle of the revolutionary element has always been twofold: against the present regime and also against the opportunists who seek to control them (even within their own organizations). We are not conservatives — what stake do we have in the prevailing social order? Eschewing the vanguard, anarchists have always recognized that it was average people who would make the revolution. It is possible and desirable to create a praxis that encourages this type of decentralized, unofficial organization.

Unlike the party, union or revolutionary federation, the affinity group is the organizational model of criminal, conspirator, street protestor, FAI saboteur and ELF midnight gardener alike, and this overlap makes it a natural choice for the basic unit of revolutionary action. In fact, it’s probably the most natural form of class resistance, in addition to being the type least conducive to co-optation, the democratic model quickest to act, the least likely to become bogged down in procedure and the most likely to create the kind of broad, sweeping destruction that a modern social revolution would require. All that’s lacking for “anti-organizational”/insurrectionist anarchists is a genuine recognition of the central role of white supremacy in America and a commitment to attack it. Where are the ELF attacks against environmental racism? The ELF is listed as public enemy number one by the FBI, and yet its existence goes largely unnoticed by poor communities of color because for them it is largely irrelevant. The burden is on the ELF to bridge that gap. The only paradigm within which most environmentalists are able to conceive people of color is the imperialist one. They have no critique of race within the American context. That is, the only space environmentalists have for them is as indigenous people struggling in far off places against forces largely beyond anyone’s (re: white people’s) control (at the extreme end, appropriate actions include boycotts or informative leafleting to help raise awareness for more concerted non-violent action). If you do not fit that definition, you may as well not exist for the environmental movement. Similarly, American insurrectionists cannot expect

to simply transfer wholesale the writings and ideas of the great Italian insurrectionists without seriously considering the role that white supremacy plays in the maintenance of the American State. To do so is to create a fantasy world just as illusory as that of the environmentalists.

However, not only are most anarchists unwilling to take part in such acts themselves, but many are unwilling to support them when even regular, officially non-politicized people carry them out — even when those acts demonstrate an inherent, though mostly unarticulated, class consciousness. Where is the anarchist support for the non-political, poor bank robber? What happened to the “class heroes”, as Utah Phillips’ mother used to call them, that we used to celebrate and mythologize? Why do we on one hand decry those who seek to speak for the people and at the same time refuse to recognize when non-politicized people, refusing the mediation of both party and union, strike back at their oppressors? Is it because we ourselves feel unable to act and therefore cannot support it when others do? Can it also be that we have fallen into the Leftist habit of viewing as illegitimate (read: dangerously uncontrollable) any resistance that is not organized or directed (read as “mediated”) by a formal association of some kind? What of the wildcat strike? Do anarchists refuse to support these acts of independence? What of riots? Don’t we often support these un-organized rampages against authority? Don’t we support affinity group actions?

The argument I hear most frequently is that “the people” will be alienated by violence. Left unspoken is the fact that the “people” referred to are usually the middle and upper classes. For instance, I once sat in on a nonviolence workshop at a globalization conference in Colorado in which a very enthusiastic young woman broke society down into a spectrum. The poor, she conceded, were not alienated by violence (a stunning revelation in its own right). But the middle- and upper-class people — whom she characterized as “those people who watch the news and read the paper” — those people were alienated by the images of violence they saw at big demos. She was just one example among many. Biased by their middle class baggage, many anarchists, like their Leftist counterparts, view the politically aware class as synonymous not with the poor but with the upper classes. Used to using the State’s capitalist barometers of political awareness (voting, union membership, reading the *New York Times* or even the local paper, etc), and therefore paying too much attention to them as social indicators (getting favorable media coverage, organizing a shop, etc., become ends in their own right), many anarchists’ politics are completely patronizing to the poor — neglecting entirely not only the history of insurrections and revolutions, but also one of the key foundations of anarchy: that the people are the best determiners of their own fate. Paraphrasing an anarchist of yore: if I’m smart enough to choose my leader then I’m smart enough not to be led, nor to need leading. Of course that does not reflect well on Leftists, given their never-ending supply of wanna-be leaders.

The growing split between anarchists’ middle class perspectives and anarchy’s classical class analysis has given rise to all sorts of Bohemian strains, of which CrimethInc. is only one prominent example. Increasingly, class analysis has been dropped entirely from many anarchists critique, who focus instead on lifestyle issues and hippy-style drop-out, “feel good” politics. Thanks to CrimethInc., drop-out, white privilege, middle-class, poverty-fetishizing road festival vacations masquerade as revolutionary strategy as almost all references to class

and race are stripped away by their post-modern teen rebellion vision and, with it, all potentialities for long-term liberation. As a result society is reduced not to the conflict between exploiter and exploited, oppressed and oppressor, but rather to the tension between fun times and bummers, boredom and excitement.

Applying this analysis, we are left to rebelling for its own sake (isn't it fun?), rather than fighting to permanently remove the conditions of our oppression. But how long until anarchy becomes boring (and where does that leave CrimethInc.'s comrades fighting for real change?)? CrimethInc. is the new hippy movement, too focused on its own spoiled-kid good-time to seriously consider itself revolutionary (or even to consider revolution, to mimic the Situationists and turn the phrase on its head). A constant quest for fun will not bring down capitalism and the State, and fire dancing is not a revolutionary strategy (and neither is dumpster diving). Such things validate — not challenge — capitalism and the State and offer no paths to long term liberation. Living off the excess of capitalism requires that capitalism continue, and eventually they'll lock up all the dumpsters anyhow. It pretends to liberate but really just breeds dependence.

Meanwhile, the scams all go away, one by one, as no one realizes that it's the exercising of white privilege that makes it possible in the first place to expect to travel from city to city, shoplifting and scamming, without attracting the suspicious eye of security guards, cops and store managers. CrimethInc. does not challenge white supremacy; it wallows in it. Anarchists need to recognize that our role is not to exercise privilege to extricate ourselves from capitalism at the expense of everyone else, but rather to dedicate ourselves to kicking the whole damn system over in solidarity of those without it. After all, it is not the privileged that will make revolution. Opting out without committing oneself to actively challenging capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy and the State is to sell out just as surely as taking that 9 to 5 job.

We cannot evolve ourselves out of capitalism, nor can we drop out until it collapses. To think so is to be criminally naive and to ignore the core of the anarchist critique of the State: the chief business of the State, as Alexander Berkman said, is murder. It also ignores one of the main differences between anarchism and Marxism. Marxists believe that Capitalism is one stage on the inevitable road to socialism and that one must be allowed to play itself out until the other can come about. But, anarchists do not believe such millenarian hogwash. The State and capitalism must be brought down — they will not simply collapse on their own. Or at least, we need not wait for them to, in any case, since they could churn on for centuries more. Considering the historical failure of white people — even white working class people — to recognize that their lot is best thrown in with revolutionary poor non-whites, the State is probably quite content to have white, middle class kids drop out in relatively small numbers, for a period of time (especially if it means they won't be joining their comrades in the broader struggle). We should not forget that counter-culture validates, and is in reaction to (that is, not independent of), the dominant culture in many ways. However, in the end, the State will use violence if it is threatened, even against white kids (as shocking as that may seem). Only middle and upper class white kids refuse to understand this. Everyone else is quite familiar with the violence of the State. The privilege of middle class dropouts shields them from this truth.

The perfect example of the failure of the dropout strategy is the illicit drug

trade. Many black and brown poor people live in ghettos and barrios with 30 percent unemployment or more, which forces many of them to opt out of legal capitalism by selling drugs (among other illegal activities). It is worth noting that this is not a choice, like it is for white, middle class kids. So, what happens to these people? Are there work-free, cop-free paradises in our inner cities? Of course not. The State has criminalized these activities precisely because poor black people in particular have always been the primary threat to the white upper class in terms of revolutionary potential. In this sense, forcing these communities into opting out is a form of social control enacted by the State to keep poor blacks, and others, in line. To the extent that white middle class kids are allowed or even encouraged to drop out is exactly because such behavior is not a threat to the State.

So, since CrimethInc.'s dropout culture does not pose any real threat to capitalism, it's really just another way to validate it. CrimethInc. does not live its values in opposition to Capitalism; it lives them precisely because of capitalism. Flipping through their first book speaks volumes. One is hard pressed to find a single non-white face in any of the images or photos. And there is hardly any mention of race at all. This is no coincidence. The white middle class has historically failed to understand the way that race and class interact in this society. In fact, much of its social position (including that of much of the white working class) is derived from the surplus value extracted from non-whites, particularly blacks, handed down to them by the capitalists in order to buy their complacency and complicity in the exploitation of everyone, including themselves, ironically. There's no reason to expect, given CrimethInc.'s close relationship to that class, that they would reflect different values, and this explains a lot. In this sense, isn't CrimethInc.'s dumpstering and petty theft just another way of profiting from the oppression of non-whites and the poor rather than a way to attack that system of oppression in solidarity with them? To point out another irony, doesn't the ethic of the dumpster diver really bring him/her in conflict with those who seek to oppose Capitalism and its wastefulness just the same as it comes in conflict with the manager who locks the dumpster?

Alfredo Bonnano offers a good alternative to CrimethInc. He vehemently opposes work, but he recognizes the importance of bringing direct class war to the oppressor. His words are inflammatory and action-oriented, as in "Armed Joy":

People are tired of meetings, the classics, pointless marches, theoretical discussions that split hairs in four, infinite delays, the monotony and poverty of certain political analyses. They prefer to make love, smoke, listen to music, go for walks, sleep, laugh, play, kill policemen, lame journalists, blow up barracks. Anathema! The struggle is only legitimate when it is comprehensible to the leaders of the revolution. Otherwise, there being a risk that they might let the situation go beyond their control, there must have been a provocation.

Hurry comrade, shoot the policeman, the judge, the boss. Now, before a new police prevents you.

Hurry to say No, before the new repression convinces you that saying no is useless, mad, and that you should accept the hospitality of the mental asylum.

Hurry to attack capital, before a new ideology makes it sacred to you.

Hurry to refuse work before some new sophist tells you yet again that work makes you free.

Hurry to play. Hurry to arm yourself.

This statement stands in stark contrast to, even if it parallels at times, CrimethInc.'s essay that starts off, "Your politics are boring as fuck", with all it's appeals to drop out and leave behind any illusions of physically challenging the State and capitalism. It's advice? "Enjoy yourselves! There is never any excuse for being bored. . . or boring!" The CrimethInc. book, *Evasion*, says on its back cover, "Homelessness. Unemployment. Poverty. If you're not having fun, you're not doing it right", which screams of privilege (and sounds a lot like a Hollywood script to me — and the parallels between this and the white supremacist, Reaganite, "color blind", pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps vision of capitalism are truly disturbing). And, lastly, the response to its publication couldn't be more different than that which greeted *Armed Joy* (*Evasion* is appearing on library shelves while Bonanno did time in prison just for writing his essay). In this context CrimethInc.'s bold claim that "Our lives are our weapons" stands as sad and pathetic, which is how it should be.

Bonnano points out that, for instance, while it is true that the State is a social relation, and that it depends on all of us upholding it to continue, at the same time it is a concrete thing that can be attacked and made not to work. For instance, the police clearly depend on everyone believing that we need them (i.e., calling them, voting for law and order politicians, etc.), but at the same time, the police do operate out of very real places in space and time and have a hierarchical and centralized structure which has real weaknesses. That is, while I have an obligation to opt out by refusing to support or work with police, I also have an obligation to recognize that blowing up the police station will have a very real effect on the ability of the police to organize, especially if timed correctly (to use a common example). Like CrimethInc., Bonanno is anti-work, but he recognizes that it is not enough to merely reject work and the unions, clergy, parties and capitalists that glorify and depend on it. Refusal is part of the strategy, but physically attacking it is the other part. For example, the Contra war against the Sandinistas is an extreme, terroristic, right-wing application of this idea — the physical foundation of the Nicaraguan State was attacked, until it simply did not run. Certainly anarchists would not apply this theory of warfare in the same way, but it is a lesson worth learning, nonetheless (it is unlikely, of course, that anarchists would target people merely because of their profession — except, of course, cops and politicians). In France during the height of the illegalist and "propaganda by the deed" anarchism, often all it took was for workers to whistle on the shop floor the songs exalting the past assassinations of capitalists to exact concessions from weak-kneed bosses. The Bonnot Gang and other individualist anarchists robbed banks and battled cops, all driven by their own egos (in the Stirner sense). As mentioned before, Sabate and Durutti did the same in the Spanish Revolution, although not for the same reasons (though the common ground is interesting). These are examples worth remembering, even if not worth duplicating.

Some will inevitably bring up the example of terrorism, but I think it is important to realize that in an anarchist world without morality, it is ethics that will define our actions. That is, as with our critique of law, we cannot attempt to create a category before hand into which we will dump all future actions. And the conditions on actions aimed at liberation should be defined by the oppressed, not the oppressor. Anarchism requires active participation in decision-making, and as such all possibilities must be evaluated on their own merits — that is, according to each particular circumstance. Terrorism is very

much in the eye of the beholder, a point that many people would be willing to concede — to a point. That is, we should remember that Denmark Vessey’s planned slave insurrection intended to kill every single white person, including women and children. In his mind, all the white oppressors, both current and future, had to be wiped out. We may view this as terrorism now, but we should evaluate why very carefully. Is it because we are against violence, or is it because under his analysis of race in America we are embarrassed to find that many of us are oppressors? Columbine and the school shooting in Germany, in which 13 teachers were killed, again cloud the issue of terrorism. Generally, classmates and teachers would not be considered legitimate targets for violence — although as I mentioned, the Contras targeted them and anarchists in the past targeted capitalists and politicians, often for deterrent effect. However, it is not hard to understand how one could perceive of teachers and school bullies as oppressors to whom a negative example is worth providing to deter future oppression. It is likewise not difficult to understand how a Third World peasant farmer might consider all Americans enemies by the nature of their First World lifestyles. These are matters for anarchist ethics and it is not useful to lump them into preconceived categories for easy digestion. To do so is a cop-out.

Certainly many of these Bohemian-anarchists raise some important issues, and the flaw of many self-described anarchists like Murray Bookchin has been their failure to appreciate that the dichotomy between providing for oneself and building a class-focused revolution is in fact a false one. Likewise, the Primitivist critique of the “totality”, while a useful tool for evaluating the techno-post-industrial First World, certainly seems a bit too “cart before the horse” for a movement that has not yet addressed patriarchy and white supremacy. A cynical person might perceive it as an attempt to sidestep those issues uncomfortable to whites and males (just as the New Left did in its day). In this sense, periodicals like *Species Traitor* seem a bit premature given that we have yet to deal seriously with whiteness on any major scale. And, even just speaking tactically, it’s hard to imagine what a human/animal common front united against civilization would even look like, much less how such a thing would be organized. Given the necessity of being the voice for the voiceless when it comes to animal and Earth liberation, and also considering that in such struggles the revolutionary subject (animals, the “earth”) cannot speak for itself or talk back — much less participate in its own liberation — the parallels between such movements and the white savior complex become disturbingly clear. In many ways, such organizing represents the ultimate playground for white activists because it does not challenge their privileges or comfort zones in the least.

On the other side of the coin, many anarchists have focused too much on a few tactics and discounted the rest as not revolutionary at all. Community gardens and other attempts at self-sufficiency and real-world application of anarchist values are often snobbishly rejected by some anarchists whose vision of the world, lacking a commitment to localized production, looks strikingly similar to the globalized world we already see around us. Many times what is discounted out of hand as “lifestylism” is really just small scale revolutionary acts that are not yet contextualized within a larger struggle. That is, guerilla gardens ought to be defended like they are revolutionary, not temporary, acts of defiance. And that’s how they ought to be conceived. Gardens are no more non-violent than the cops and corporates who are going to come and bulldoze it. Guerilla gardens are expropriations, and does anyone believe that expro-

priations are non-violent? It's worth quoting Balagoon again (this time from his *Brinks Trial Opening Statement*): "Expropriation is an act of war carried out by every revolutionary army in history." While he was talking about bank robbery, the link between Balagoon's point and that below of Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin's Anarchism and the Black Revolution is obvious; it's hard to imagine how a truly free society could ever exist without procuring the bulk of its needs from the region it's in, and such acts should not be taken lightly. Looked at this way, the abolition of work fits nicely into this revolutionary strategy, as such concerns cannot be left until after the revolution. In fact, the affinity group does well at providing a revolutionary context for such actions. Formal organizations view such affinity group actions as counter-revolutionary — that is, uncontrollable rebellions against their authority. And that, of course, is one of the few things they get right. But, at the same time, we should not delude ourselves into believing the evolutionist myth that we can all withdraw from the capitalist system without the State utilizing its monopoly on violence to force us back in line. As mentioned, Ervin's book *Anarchism and the Black Revolution*, refutes that false dichotomy, pointing out that

[t]he idea behind a mass commune is to create a dual power structure as a counter to the government, under conditions, which exist now. In fact, Anarchists believe the first step towards self-determination and the Social revolution is Black control of the Black community. This means that Black people must form and unify their own organizations of struggle, take control of the existing Black communities and all the institutions within them, and conduct a consistent fight to overcome every form of economic, political and cultural servitude, and any system of racial and class inequality which is the product of this racist Capitalist society. . .

. . . The commune is the staging ground for the Black revolutionary struggle. For instance, Black people should refuse to pay taxes to the racist government, should boycott the Capitalist corporations, should lead a Black General Strike all over the country, and should engage in an insurrection to drive the police out and win a liberated zone.

Clearly Ervin did not see such struggles as pointless. Instead, he clearly saw them rooted within the larger struggle, as evident by his linking of the creation of the commune to the cop-clearing insurrection he envisioned. He saw the building of the commune and self-sufficiency as the power base from which the violent revolution would be launched, not as a distraction to that end.

Putting this back in the context of violence and, said more bluntly — even if they were, who cares if the middle and upper classes are alienated by violence? They already had their violent revolution and we're living in it right now. It churns on every day. Further, the whole notion that the middle and upper classes are alienated by violence is completely false. As mentioned above, they support violence all the time, whether it is strikebreaking, police brutality, prisons, war, sanctions or capital punishment. What they really oppose is violence directed at dislodging them and their privileges. And, in saying that, have we finally revealed a bit about many Leftists' and anarchists' true objections and sympathies as well? William Meyers writes in his essay, *Non-Violence and its Violent Consequences*, that, "The only times the corporate media is against violence is when it does not serve the greater ends of corporations." While he's talking about the media, we could just as well substitute "middle and upper classes" and "the State" in the obvious places and it would still ring just as

true. The question is not about violence, then, but about whether we have helped support and create a political climate of resistance among the poor that will back such action. That is, have we overcome the alienation and atomization of modern, post-industrial life in America, which leaves each American suffering or resisting in solitude or small affinity groups, unaware that such sentiments are broadly shared?

Take for instance the case of the woman in New York who, upon being visited by an armed police officer serving her with an eviction notice, attacked him, knocked him down several flights of stairs and then set him on fire. Where was the support from the anarchist community for this woman? Her actions were clearly defensible. This was not the first time that an officer serving an eviction had been killed in NY, and it was certainly not the first time that such an officer had been attacked and, in fact, these officers are armed for precisely this reason. Some may be turned off by the brutal method of execution, but surely that reflects back on the system that pushed this woman to such extremes. But, if she had non-violently resisted her eviction, would anarchists then have come to her aid? Further, given our general alienation from real struggle, would we have even noticed at all had she resisted non-violently? It's unlikely that without the violence the media would have covered it at all. In this sense, an argument against violence in this case is very similar to the one's Leftists make about our rowdy behavior at protests. They think of it as a distraction, but the fact is that without it the media doesn't cover these events at all (i.e., they get bumped on the evening news by a water-skiing hamster or some other pressing story). And, because of the nature of the capitalist media, little of substance comes out in terms of message no matter what we do. It's like they say, it doesn't matter what you wear on the radio or what you say on TV. It is unlikely that any point worth making could be articulated through the media anyhow. But, this leads one to ask under what circumstances would we have supported this woman? What if she had first (or after) issued a dense manifesto loaded with archaic Leftist phrases and invectives (or a condemnation of the same) in a widely distributed anarchist journal or prominent national daily newspaper? What if her entire apartment complex had resisted together? Isn't it the nature of our atomized lives that such resistance will certainly appear as seemingly isolated acts of resistance, at least at first? Absent a mass movement, isn't this the nature of the beast? And doesn't treating them as such play right into the hands of those who would rather keep things that way?

Instead of support, what I heard was condemnation, although, in fairness, most anarchists failed to notice at all. Some claimed she ought not to have used violence. Some claimed she ought to have taken a lesson from the un-evictions of the 30's. In those days whole communities met the authorities en masse outside the tenements and forcibly moved evictees back into their apartments (of course, the threat of violence implicit in a mass of people confronting a few officials of the State was ignored, as it always is by pacifists and non-violence advocates — unless that mass is marching on a Starbucks, that is). But what if the structure for such a fight is not yet in place? How can she expect to organize an un-eviction if there isn't even an informal tenants union? Should she then have caved in? Mustn't there always be a first to resist (not that she was the first — we anarchists shouldn't get off that easy)? And wouldn't we do well to remember that in this case the victim was not the agent of the State who came to evict her: it was the tenant. To treat it otherwise would be a

curious reversal of our class analysis. Are we, in denying her the right to use whatever force she deems necessary to defend her home, also potentially denying the lightning strike that sparks the forest fire? Or, more likely, aren't we really just showing how off guard anarchists will be caught when something really does set off general insurrection? Incidents like these have sparked uprisings many times in U.S. history.

There have been some who have argued in a variety of ways, most notably and recently in the Rock Block Collective's *Stick it to the Manarchy*, that violence is masculine, and that it marginalizes and alienates women and other less privileged people by its "uncompromising" attitude. "Manarchy," is defined in the document as, "[a]ggressive, competitive behavior within the anarchist movement that is frighteningly reminiscent of historically oppressive male gender roles." They give their take on violence, claiming that taking an aggressive stand towards authority and capitalism (the capitalists and their minions, they somehow forget, are the *truly* privileged ones, after all), "... means that many women, people of color, the young and elderly, and the economically disadvantaged do not have what it takes to participate in the manarchist revolution." Not only does this show a startling lack of appreciation for the history of working class revolutions that, after all, are made by the disadvantaged — it also fails to appreciate the history of revolt within communities of color and by women and in many ways paints women as the same dainty emotional creatures as do the sexist defenders of male-dominated politics. Is it perhaps possible that modern Leftist feminists have finally found common ground with the patriarchs in their joint attack on violence as contrary to women's more noble, innate nurturing and mothering instincts?

Suffragettes rioted on many occasions, burning churches, attacking officials, battling cops and destroying property. It is more convenient to the Statist argument to forget that on more than one occasion national monuments, theaters and government offices shut down, and downtown shops were boarded up to protect them not from rampaging black-clad youths, but from the attacks of violent stone-throwing Suffragettes. Likewise forgotten are the Bolivian women who strapped dynamite to their bodies and seized government buildings or the courageous old women who stood strong just recently against whip-wielding Argentine police. And what of the women of the BLA and Weather Underground? What of Diane Oughton, blown up with two comrades when the bombs they were making accidentally detonated? What of the Wimmin's Fire Brigade? Are we to believe that any time a woman acts aggressively that she is male-identified? Granted, the "Manarchist" document does not explicitly use this term, but it may as well, given the way that it's used by self-appointed non-violence and pacifist authorities in the larger movement to marginalize women who are out of their control or make them uncomfortable. Rather than claiming that violence goes against women's nature, isn't a better explanation of the underrepresentation of women in armed groups the patriarchal system of privileges and exclusion that dominates society, and our own groups, in general?

Also dissenting from the self-proclaimed feminist mainstream is Laina Tanglewood in her article, "Against the Masculinization of Militancy". She says,

Some recent "feminist" critiques of anarchism have condemned militancy as being sexist and non-inclusive to women. It was claimed that on-the-street aggressive behavior of Black Bloc members — such as property destruction and confronting the pigs — is sexist because it excludes women. This idea is actually

the sexist one. Instead of condemning the black bloc men and ignoring the black bloc women, both women and men who want to fight should be welcome and encouraged to do so while those (male and female) who do not feel comfortable taking such risks can engage in a variety of other activities.

Again, as Tanglewood points out, much of this argument hinges on the already addressed falsehood that violence alienates and that non-violence is inclusive. But, the Leftist/Statist myth of social change, exacted non-violently or handed down from on high by benevolent leaders, falls apart upon even cursory examination (and despite the dogged insistence of the left). It's not the threat that mobs, once massed by the hundreds of thousands in the streets, will attack the polling booths, ballots in hand, that terrifies the ruling class in revolutionary times.

In fact, the masculinization of violence, with its unstated sexist concomitant, the feminization of passivity, really owes more to the presumptions of those whose notion of change does not include revolution or the annihilation of the State. If the government is viewed as at least potentially responsive, and necessary, as the Leftists and Statists believe, then of what use are violent tactics? Petitioning, voting and non-violent civil disobedience ought to do the job. Clearly anarchists refute most of these tactics as avenues for radical change, else why not pick up a ballot or petition and head down towards the local legislature (where one is sure to run into many, many poor and disenfranchised folk)? Mainstream and Leftist feminism has a vested ideological interest in maintaining the State, so why should we adopt its values with regards to violence? Their critiques do not include the State, and often not even capitalism, except when it comes to the gender of those in charge or on our money. As philosophies rooted in capitalism and interested in advancement — not leveling — they require the maintenance of the State to protect the privileges of capitalist women just as much as male capitalists. These privileges may be relative in comparison to rich males' accumulated wealth and power, but Leftist feminism is interested in a more equal sharing of power among elites (i.e., half of all bosses and presidents should be women) not an attack on these inequalities as they exist in society in general. Rejecting kings in favor of queens is not compromise that anarchists should be willing to make. And yet this is precisely the logical end that we come to when we trace back the assumptions inherent in the violence-as-masculine argument. Uttering what must be blasphemy to conventional feminists, Tanglewood ends her essay this way: "Come the revolution, women will be (as women have historically) physically fighting oppression." The truth is, rather than being a call for a diversity of tactics in confronting the State, nonviolence is in actuality a call for the pacification of revolt, with all the obvious implications for revolution.

Even more off base are the claims that violence by anarchists alienates and excludes people of color. This would perhaps be true if anarchists continue to refuse to confront their overwhelming privilege in comparison to most non-white people. That is, violence imposed from outside an oppressed group fighting for revolutionary change, regardless of whether the perpetrator is the cops, the Klan or a group of well-meaning privileged activists, is clearly not only undemocratic and un-anarchist, but is counterproductive as well. However, this is not a reason to attack violence as a means of creating change. Rather it is an argument for many anarchists to reflect on their privilege and to consider why it is that they find themselves outside this struggle. Or, perhaps its an argument for white,

privileged anarchists to give up their vanguardist white savior pipe dreams of leading (or saving) from the suburbs the black (or brown) revolution in the ghetto. Such illusions must be seen as what they are, conservative attempts to head off a genuine revolution that would threaten white privilege. What anarchists are really lamenting, in accepting the Statist's terms of debate, is their own alienation from the struggle. In this sense, anarchists very often are, in fact, an outside group that ought seriously to consider every action and its implications for the oppressed. However, an anarchist movement solidly situated within and in supportive roles with regards to the oppressed would face no such schizophrenia.

But even a cursory look at history shows that communities of color throughout American history have often employed violence. Many white anarchists have yet fully to understand that the class struggle in America is very much a racial issue. J. Sakai, in an interview entitled *When Race Burns Class*, said, "Why should it be so hard to understand that capitalism, which practically wants to barcode our assholes, has always found it convenient to color-code its classes?" And yet many North American anarchists have not yet taken up either active support of the struggles of people of color nor the fight against white supremacy in the white community. Nearing the end of the last century, Kuwasi Balagoon, again writing in his seminal essay, *Anarchy Can't Fight Alone*, said,

We permit people of other ideologies to define Anarchy rather than bring our views to the masses and provide models to show the contrary. We permit corporations to not only lay off workers and to threaten the balance of workers while cutting their salaries, but to poison the air and water to boot. We permit the police, Klan and cops to terrorize whatever sector of the population they wish without repaying them back in any kind. In short, by not engaging in organizing and delivering war to the oppressors we become anarchists in name only.

Black Panther Party co-founder, Bobby Seale, discussing the rise of the armed BPP and the shocking effect it had on white Americans, said,

We [were] a broke little organization with a number of shotguns, a very weak treasury and worried about how to pay the rent...but white America...[was] saying, 'Niggers with guns.' It's like a fear. I mean they [didn't] even have to say it. Their faces said it: 'There's just too many niggers with guns.' It's like they know that they've oppressed us and now here we've organized with guns. It's a new step. I mean, it's symbolic that, 'oh, they're not going to be non-violent anymore.'

Innumerable full-scale slave insurrections, along with even more planned but betrayed revolts fill our history (Denmark Vesey, Gabriel Prosser, and Nat Turner are but a few). Herbert Aptheker, in his book *American Negro Slave Revolts*, catalogs hundreds of such uprisings. Balagoon writes:

"Throughout slavery there were numerous rebellions and conspiracies to rebel, and laws were enacted against it, defining rebellion as criminal...there were over 250 slave revolts during these 300 years of slavery, and countless cases of arson and poisoning."

The violent revolts of black people continue today, with uprisings in L.A. and Cincinnati among the more prominent and recent. And they continue to strike fear into the hearts of the white supremacist elite in America, as well as the white middle and even working class, thus betraying where the true loyalties of these classes lie in this system that has built the white standard of living at

practically all economic levels on the exploitation of non-white labor and the theft of their land. This fact has formed a white-skin bond between the rich white ruling elite and even poor whites, and is a point on which any serious revolutionary strategy will surely turn.

Indigenous people fought a desperate and violent war, lasting centuries, that has never really ended (witness Pine Ridge, Wounded Knee, among others). Again, Ward Churchill, indigenous activist, makes the case for revolutionary violence quite clearly in *Pacifism as Pathology*. The fact that these struggles have failed to achieve their goals reflects not the failure of violence as a tactic, but rather the lack of support for them among whites who, rather than join the struggles of the oppressed, have every time overwhelmingly chosen instead to throw their lot in with America's white supremacist government and capitalist elite, themselves clearly reliant for legitimacy on violence and the mythology of the State as the guardian of rights to justify their rule. In so doing, of course, poor whites selfishly maintain all the rights and privileges from which they — and many anarchists — benefit. The argument over violence, it turns out, is really just an argument over privilege and vested interests masquerading as tactics. This is another point of which North American anarchists in particular ought to take careful note.

The Case of Mumia

Unlike Kuwasi Balagoon, whose first-hand defense of violent expropriation is so moving, the obfuscation that is the hallmark of Mumia's case is a good example of the effects Leftism and privilege has had on anarchist discourse. The fetishizing of Mumia abu Jamal, particularly among anarchists has always troubled me a great deal. I have often found it quite amazing the way anarchists will argue till they're blue in the face about how Mumia is innocent and the poor victim of a cruel frame-up. What's more, his innocence is often the lynchpin of their argument. Discussions framed this way usually wind up centering around evidence, court rulings, precedent, the relationships of various parties to various other parties (as with Judge Sabo's relationship to the Fraternal Order of Police) and other seemingly important details. While I can see why these details are interesting to liberals and progressives, who maintain, despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the idiotic belief that the system can work if we just get the right people in there (for them, the nagging suspicion that it can't goes a long way towards explaining their constant state of moral outrage and amazement). However, when did anarchists start having such faith in the system? Do we really believe that Mumia would have gotten justice had his judge been someone less directly affiliated with the police? Certainly we haven't forgotten that the same legislature pays both judge and prosecutor, have we (and warden and cop, if we want to get right down to it)? There is a name for this type of thinking. It's called the bad apple theory. The press uses it to explain "bad" cops all the time. As anarchists, we don't believe that there can be good cops, do we? Doesn't the nature of the job preclude this, and doesn't thinking this come into conflict with our critique, as anarchists, of the State and, in particular, the [in]justice system?

As anarchists, when we start using the concepts of "guilty" and "innocent" in these contexts (that is, adopting and in the process validating the State's

loaded terminology) we not only concede the territory of debate, we also become unable to make the larger critique of the [in]justice system as a whole — that it’s incapable of delivering justice, no matter how many trials one gets (merely having to stand trial, with all the costs and potential meantime no-bail imprisonment that come with it, is in itself an injustice). As anarchists, this is a unique and crucial element of our critique of society — and one with which many non-politicized non-anarchists agree, by the way.

Put more bluntly: Who cares if Mumia is innocent or guilty? Isn’t it a tragedy either way? Even if we take the state of Pennsylvania’s case at face value — that Mumia came upon a cop stopping (and probably harassing) his brother, and then shot the cop, what objection do we as anarchists have to this? Wouldn’t it be a potentially much more radicalizing point to say that we think Mumia probably did kill that cop and that we support him for it. People shoot cops all the time — there is a lot of anger against the State and its agents. Isn’t this a good thing from our perspective and something to be encouraged and built upon? The fact is, there are tons of non-anarchists who quietly smile to themselves when a cop gets it. The limits of the hedging Leftist critique also reveals the limits of their commitment to real change.

Mumia’s own assertions of innocence certainly elicit much sympathy, and rightly so. But these proclamations must be seen as reflecting his own particular situation, and we must recognize that that’s not necessarily the same as ours. Mumia needs to convince the State the he is innocent because he has chosen that as a strategy and, more importantly, because there is not a serious revolutionary movement in America right now that could free him by other means. However, that does not mean that the strategy of the broader movement must be the same. We can want him freed by any means necessary, but we should not hinge our support of him on such minute details as innocence or guilt. Likewise, if he is “proven” by the State’s standards to be innocent, that doesn’t necessarily mean that he did not kill that cop.

Further, in applying our own critique, we are able to broaden the debate and at the same time make an end run around the pointless banter of both Left and Right. The point isn’t that there’s one person on death row, it’s that anyone is on death row. The point isn’t that one innocent person is in prison, it’s that we reject that entire idea — no one deserves prison; everyone should be free, regardless of how the State labels them, cop-killer or not.

Why do non-pacifist anarchists have such a weak heart when it comes to contemporary violence? If we recognize that violence has been a tool of many of our forebears and an integral part of past struggles, why do we shy away from endorsing it when working people, the poor and other oppressed groups do it now? In this sense, many of the so-called “criminal class” (again, that is the language of the state, with many implications) are far beyond anarchists in terms of their willingness to struggle, violently if need be, in a system which looks for any reason to lock them up from the time they are born. Many of the poor live outlaw lives from the day they are born — and many Mexican immigrants in this country are illegal simply for being in the U.S. And, while not officially illegal anymore, Black folks in this country certainly suffer a defacto criminalization that follows them through life. This reflects on the relative privilege of many anarchists, most of whom have the distinct choice of whether to face off with the cops, and goes a long way towards explaining why we have a hard time being relevant to the struggles of the oppressed. One wonders, if their struggles

were organized into federations or if cop-killers used our insular jargon (e.g., “affinity group”, “spokescouncil”), would we then find them valid and worthy of our support?

Unfortunately, making comments in favor of this type of thing are viewed within the anarchist community as dangerous and a certain amount of self- and group-censorship is applied to those who express such thoughts. When that happens we look a lot like the wishy-washy liberals who try to silence anarchists at meetings or who denounce the Black Bloc or anarchists in general as too aggressive (“it will overshadow the message”, is a common complaint); we know they’re really just scared of losing control of events and the dialogue. It also smacks of a more passive-aggressive version of the “now is not the time” argument that liberals and Leftists who, lacking a true commitment to kick the whole damn system over, constantly preach to those who dare doubt the munificent counsel of the ever-learned Left. While such censorship is usually justified on security culture grounds (wrongly), they seem to me more accurately to derive from the unacknowledged white supremacist and vanguardist assumptions which underlie the middle class anarchist critique.

As discussed previously, there is a clear difference between the “propaganda by the deed” revolutionary anarchists of years long gone and people like Mumia. They were largely white by contemporary standards and therefore do not challenge white anarchists’ latent white supremacist notions. That is, Alexander Berkman stabbing Frick does not threaten contemporary white anarchists’ *weltanschauung* — he was a fellow white anarchist (or at least they can create a revisionist history that defines him as such). Therefore, when it’s good ol’, long-dead Berkman, who fits into the modern construct of whiteness (attacking a symbol of capitalism, one of the few oppressions that white, male anarchists regularly encounter), it’s something that anarchists can support (although, as mentioned previously, there is a strong current in anarchy today that even attempts to distance itself from that). However, when it’s Mumia, a black man, white anarchists instinctively retreat to the machinations of the white supremacist State for validation. White anarchists have a hard time supporting him, as a black man killing a white man (and a cop, defender of the color line, at that), unless he receives the State’s stamp of approval: innocent. How is this kind of behavior different from white jurors many times greater zeal in handing down death penalties when blacks transgress the traditional color caste and kill whites? The relationship seems clear enough. As with all reactionary positions, this presumption reveals as much about us as about the object of our condemnation.

Another weakness is, despite all our loud denunciations of vanguardism, we are also uncomfortable with the idea of a revolution moving ahead without us, and we are too busy with our nuanced arguments to take the time to look around and see what sorts of anti-white supremacist, anti-State, anti-patriarchal, anti-capitalist, anti-work, anti-tech struggles are happening all around us. More experience and less theory, how about? Or at least equal parts... Too many anarchists still adhere to the notion that, despite not being terribly oppressed themselves, that their particular notion of revolution is the one true way, however ill-informed it may be. Too many contemporary anarchists dogmatically adhere to a revolutionary plan that elevates workplace organizing over other forms of community organizing (which might have to deal with uncomfortable issues like white supremacy). Police brutality organizing is pooh-pooh’ed as a

distraction, or at least, less important than workplace organizing. Currently anti-police brutality organizing (among other strategies), which directly confronts white supremacy, Statism and capitalism, is subordinated to the struggle in the workplace which, despite its failure to produce revolutionary fruit in over a hundred years (and the increasing emptiness and irrelevance with which most people view their work), still is presumed to be paramount in revolutionary strategy for anarchists. What if, instead, workplace organizing supported anti-police brutality organizing, rather than the other way around? Flipping this formula on its head might inject the kind of fresh energy into our movement that could really begin to produce results. Isn't police brutality organizing the kind of thing that workers, zero-workers, the unemployed, the community in general and those in the underground economy can all agree on? And couldn't increased militancy in community defense translate to the workplace? Couldn't the ideas of community self-defense (especially when done in an affinity group style) be very easily, and flexibly, rooted to an anarchist critique that included collectivization of the workplace? Couldn't it also very easily translate, if properly conceptualized and trained, to community militias that could drive the cops out of our communities, thus leaving no one to oppose our attacks on and re-organization of the capitalists' property? We need to re-evaluate the way we, as anarchists, prioritize our struggles. As North American anarchists, rather than trying to fit a 19th century European revolutionary, work-centered, anarchist model over our current situation, we ought to be looking hard for where the struggle presently is taking place, however disorganized and small. That is, we should be asking ourselves how the struggle currently manifests itself within our society (not Spain 1936, for instance, and for fucksake not the Paris Commune), and attempting to encourage within it the libertarian elements we find there. Certainly there is something to be learned from past struggles. However, too many anarchists are historians, not revolutionaries. A revolutionary is someone who appreciates the past yet seeks to overthrow the present in the interest of the future. We are not prisoners of history and neither can we re-fight the Paris Commune.

If our goal is revolution, then we must encourage society's insurrectionist tendencies, including considering support for bank robbers to cop killers to black market escapes from work. Organizing in small, unofficial bands based on common goals and outlook should be encouraged. To do otherwise is to cave in to bourgeois tendencies. Clearly some brands of anarchy, particularly Leftism and anarcho-syndicalism, have little relevance in today's society (although there is something of value to be taken from both — like a general strike not to seize but rather to abandon the means of production, such that they are in post-industrial America). However, a commitment to rejecting either/or dichotomies and petty ideological rivalries must be combined with a eyes-wide-open appreciation for the current state of the struggle outside our inward and backward looking anarchist community (and even the political community in general). Forging a coherent and relevant message must be our priority, and that must be tied to a commitment to leave in the dustbin of history the tired-old Leftist organizations and methods that have failed us in the past. Moving in that direction will allow us to re-conceptualize ourselves so that, rather than being a part of, or drawing our membership (in the loosest possible sense of the word) from the Left, we re-situate ourselves within the larger, spontaneous struggle that surrounds us daily (and of which we ought to be a part). The Left is its own willing executioner

and anarchists should neither stay their hand towards this end nor resurrect them after they've finished themselves off. Our continued association within its tradition can only serve to prolong its life; if the rise of Leftism were conducive to successful anarchist revolutions, we'd have ample evidence of it by now. It's time to try something different. The Left and anarchy must be de-linked as soon as possible.

Mean Ends

Another way that Leftists attempt to undermine an independent anarchist critique of violence is through the claim that the ends and the means are the same, and that if we want a non-violent world, we must utilize non-violent means. Not only is this ridiculous coming from Statists, whose goals are anything but non-violent. But who says that anarchists want a non-violent society, anyway? Violence is inherent in nature, why should we presume to be able to eliminate it in ourselves? While clearly there was violence before the rise of the State, the Leftist presumption is based on the false belief that the human world before its benevolent ascendancy was violent and brutish. This begs the question, if it was so, why did it take so long for primitive people to invent the State? These presumptions are those of Hobbes, and the defense of the State that he makes in his book, *Leviathan*, written in the 17th Century, differs little from that made today by his political progeny (which shows how little their game has changed since then):

... without a common power to keep them all in awe... every man is enemy to every man, the same consequent to the time wherein men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

The anarchist knows that this is not the case, however, and that all the presumptions that flow from it are similarly flawed. Of course, we ought to rid ourselves of the equally naïve notion that violence can be completely eliminated.

The fact is, sometimes violence is an appropriate means of dealing with a problem, political or not. The victim kills her rapist in the act. Two people with a grudge duke it out. A bomb goes off at a government or corporate building. Who's to say that these are inappropriate methods of dealing with problems? Not every dispute needs to be mediated or moderated by an outside force. Isn't this principle, too, at the core of the anarchist critique? While ends and means are both important, many anarchists today fetishize the means, ignoring entirely the fact that different means, while not justified by the ends, can have different outcomes, some of which are more desirable than others. Simply because we have created a category ("violence") into which we have arbitrarily lumped all sorts of dis-similar actions (everything from fistfights to fusion bombs) does not mean that we are off the hook when it comes to evaluating their usefulness and place in society. Further, all sorts of things that probably could just as

well be considered violent have been left out, and each omission reflects specific value judgments in its own right. “Self-defense”, fishing, a bug smashed on the windshield of a speeding car, carpal tunnel syndrome, a worker buried under a load of bricks at work, pumping gas into your car that was taken from a pipeline in Colombia so you can go to work, an ant squashed underfoot, a car crash, and a white blood cell devouring a virus are all examples of actions that are not generally considered violent, despite the quite reasonable case that could be made for qualifying them as such.

Looking at primitive societies, we see a variety of methods of dealing with the issue of violence, but one thing we don’t see is a Hobbsian war of all against all. Ironically, it’s not until the rise of the State that we see this. Just as fascism’s jackboot and open State-industry collaboration reflects the extreme, last-ditch capitalist defense of wealth, conflicts such as the wars in Afghanistan, Somalia and other similar “lawless” places need to be recognized for what they really are: contests for State power. As such we should not be surprised that both exhibit the most despicable and vile aspects of each system. But such struggles are not examples of anarchy as anarchists mean it, nor as things were before the rise of the State. Pierre Claustre, in his book *The Archeology of Violence*, lists ritualized warfare, duels and feuds as among the violent ways that early anarchic humans solved problems and redistributed power. More importantly, such means were often fundamental to the maintenance of delicate balances of power between tribes and within regions. For instance, the Iroquois League, while exhibiting many of the traits of an anarchist society, was made up of several very violent tribes, among them the Mohawks, whose name literally meant “cannibal”. That is, violence, while perhaps being a rarity, should not be considered as separate to creating and preserving an egalitarian society. Rather, the evidence seems to suggest that it could quite possibly be a very necessary requirement. So, while we do see violence before the rise of the State, we do not see cutthroat societies in which “everyone for him/herself” rules. In fact, as Claustre notes,

What, in this case, would be the principal result of war of all against all? It would institute precisely the political relationship that primitive society works constantly to prevent; the war of all against all would lead to the establishment of domination and power that the victor could forcibly exercise over the vanquished.

So, we see that, far from being utopian societies of peace and love, primitive societies had many outlets and uses for violence. However, at the same time, they were not the nasty, violent and brutish communities Hobbes imagined. Said another way, while a non-violent anarchist world would indeed be an unattainable utopia, non-violent Statism remains the real utopian vision — never to be realized because of the violence, unstoppable and massive in scale, inherent in the State. The world preceding the ascendancy of the State was not a non-violent one. But, because the State is capable of violence on a much more massive scale, it was a much less violent one. If we seek a world without judges, cops, courts and prisons, we must recognize all sorts of ways of resolving disputes, including those that do not require or ask for mediation. We must also recognize the possibility that such violence may be crucial to such a society’s continued existence. P.M., in his classic anarchist book, *Bolo’Bolo* lays out a vision of a future anarchist society. In it he not only acknowledges the reality of violence, he incorporates it directly into the society by reviving the notion

of the duel as a dispute resolution mechanism. Interestingly, P.M. also makes another case for the continued existence of violence in an anarchist society.

There are no humanist, liberal or democratic laws or rules about the content of *nimas* [common socio/political/cultural backgrounds] and there is no State to enforce them. Nobody can prevent a *bolo* [community] from committing mass suicide, dying of drug experiments, driving itself into madness or being unhappy under a violent regime. *Bolos* with a bandit-*nima* could terrorize whole regions or continents, as the Huns or Vikings did. Freedom and adventure, generalized terrorism, the law of the club, raids, tribal wars, vendettas, plundering — everything goes.

This vision perhaps goes a bit further than many anarchists would be willing to concede, but P.M. clearly has a realistic appreciation for the fact that in a truly anarchist society, not all anarchist values will be universally adopted, whether because the revolution will not occur simultaneously everywhere, or in the same way, or because some people may decide simply to opt out of an anarchist society (blasphemy, I know). Pre-State societies have shown a wide range of attitudes towards violence: from human sacrifices, warfare and cannibalism on one hand to raw foodism and peaceful co-existence on the other — it is unlikely that an anarchist world would ever settle on just one standard (and what a bland and boring world that would be if they did). That goes for private property as well as violence — while we want to abolish it, it's unlikely that absolute abolition would come immediately, everywhere (and who says we have to wait?). There are many ways that societies deal with property; even traditional anarchism has come up with several different models. And, of course, despite our most persuasive arguments, some communities may simply choose to keep it anyway, although I sincerely doubt anyone could maintain it on any large scale without the State (it amazes me how some dogmatic anarchists' visions rival the McDonald-ization of globalization in the uniformity of the structure they imagine for the post-revolutionary world). This is particularly obvious with the Platformists, for instance, who seem to have spent a whole lot of time planning out to very minute details the shape of their ideal post-revolutionary world. In all likelihood, such planning will probably turn out to be in inverse proportion to the relevance such plans will actually have when the revolution comes, however.

It seems common-sensical, but clearly agrarian Third-World anarchism will not much resemble the anarchy of the post-industrial North or the newly industrialized South — much to the dismay of both Primitivist moralizers and anarcho-sindicalist historians, I'm sure. The anarchy of the Black revolution in America may seriously differ from that of the indigenous peoples of Central America (and when it comes, white America better be prepared to join in or get the hell out of the way, that's for sure). But the point is not that we are busy constructing a world free of violence, but rather that we are building a world that recognizes and is more in tune with violence, although on an infinitely smaller and personal scale than that with which we are accustomed to under the State. P.M. points out that this diversity does not prevent anarchist communities from actively undermining or sanctioning those who choose to live in ways destructive to others, nor from encouraging and harboring runaways from such societies. It merely presents a case in which the anarchist revolution is at once decentralized and in constant struggle with both itself and outsiders, and where that struggle may in fact be integral to its continued existence. Such a

society would be in constant revolt against itself (anyone remember Jefferson’s “tree of liberty”?).

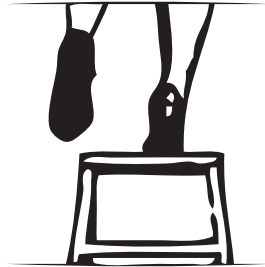
However, one need not go as far as P.M. to understand the point he is making. As anarchists, our critique has generally been that the State is the largest perpetrator of violence, not that violence can be eliminated altogether. Just as simply because we believe co-operation is the prime motivator for human beings in dealing with others, doesn’t mean that this will be the case in all places and at all times. It is the Leftist and privileged belief in the benevolent State that has tainted our vision. And it is their record, ample and there for all to see, which ought to be defended — not that of anarchy. The burden of proof is on the Statists, not the anarchists. The fact that they have successfully kept us on the defensive, cleverly distracting everyone from their own genocidal and imperialist past, shows the degree to which we have become trapped in a no-win argument. It’s time to change the terms of the debate.

A frank re-evaluation of our positions on violence could address the biggest complaint that those unfamiliar with anarchy make: what about violence? Rather than being forced into the reactionary position of declaring that the anarchist utopia will be a peaceful one, we should state the obvious: No, an anarchist world will not be free from violence, and neither will be the transition between capitalism and anarchy. But, in the end it will certainly be a much less violent world, what with the elimination of the state, the death of capitalism, the sharing of wealth, the re-evaluation of work and technology, and all the rest. Further, the values of co-operation and mutual aid that underpin anarchy will certainly serve to create a different climate from the cutthroat competition and envy of capitalism. This will further reduce the likelihood that people will resort to violence to solve their problems. However, that does not mean that there will be no violence. It is probably likely that violence itself can never be eliminated; nor, perhaps, should we want to do so if we are interested in building well-functioning stateless societies.

In fact, the idea of non-violence itself is a construction that serves specific ends. Just like the myth that “you can’t fight city hall”, its conclusions are conservative, restraining action rather than encouraging it. Further, framing the debate this way not only makes us look utopian, it also serves to funnel dissent into other so-called “legitimate” or “approved” channels, which also coincidentally validate the State, elections, power, authority and white supremacy. It also serves the interests of those who choose to make those their fields of battle (on which we are severely disadvantaged, it should be remembered). Stepping out of this ideological trap will permit us to determine our own path, rather than to have it dictated to us by those who seek to co-opt, marginalize or criminalize us. No longer defined in reaction to Statism by ending its defacto (and lazy) association with the rest of the Left, anarchy could finally pro-actively define itself...and making this distinction brings us one step closer to framing a consistent, and realistic anarchist set of politics, which is a clear pre-requisite for any anti-capitalist, anti-State revolution aimed at total liberation. It will also allow us to get down to the serious work of supporting and constructing a truly broad-based, diverse, anarchist movement, and of presenting an attainable and realistic vision for the world that is quite different from the current one, but yet one that remains attainable and realistic — and one that can successfully challenge and bring down the State and capitalism once and for all.

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October 17, 2009



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<http://theanarchistlibrary.org>
Author: Ashen Ruins
Title: Against the Corpse Machine: Defining
A Post-Leftist Anarchist Critique of Violence
Publication date: 2002

Retrieved on July 19, 2009 from http://www.infoshop.org/rants/corpse_last.html
(‘Ashen Ruins’ = ‘Necrotic State’)