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We Keep Us Dangerous

January 23, 2022

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# Against the Liberal Creep

We Keep Us Dangerous

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It is the responsibility of free men to trust and to celebrate what is constant—birth, struggle, and death are constant, and so is love, though we may not always think so—and to apprehend the nature of change, to be able and willing to change. I speak of change not on the surface but in the depths—change in the sense of renewal.

But renewal becomes impossible if one supposes things to be constant that are not—safety, for example, or money, or power. One clings then to chimeras, by which one can only be betrayed, and the entire hope—the entire possibility—of freedom disappears.

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

From calling for US imperial intervention in Syria to voting for Bernie, the liberal creep within anarchy in the so-called United States in recent years has been a truly disgraceful phenomenon. The pandemic has exponentially metastasized this

cancer with supposed anarchists adopting the talking points of the liberal State wholesale and uncritically, especially with regards to the primacy at all costs of a vague and unspecified “safety.” In this house, however, we believe that science is biopolitical and that there is more to life than the mere fact of biological survival.

Anarchy says that we can have both freedom and solidarity without sacrificing one for the other. Liberalism invokes solidarity to take our freedom and freedom to break our solidarity. The liberal places faith in the social contract, in the transfer of the power over life and death from the monarch to the citizenry, in everyone “playing their part” while abdicating any sense of true agency: the Panoptic policing of each by all, casting one’s ballot, staying at home and letting the non-citizens do all the work, flattening the curve. This system is rapidly collapsing, yet all too many cling to its shattered timbers, complaining indignantly that the State isn’t doing *enough* to protect us.

If the betrayal of the Spanish Revolution in 1937 by “anarchist” ministers in the government teaches us anything, it is that anarchists are not immune to the logic of the state of exception. There is always a crisis or emergency (the war, the pandemic, etc.) that can be invoked to “temporarily” suspend our liberatory values “for the greater good.” It’s increasingly obvious that climate change will be the next crisis to be used in this way by the authoritarians. The only way to avoid this is to be consistent in our ethics. Antifascism without anti-liberalism—that is to say, thorough and principled anti-statism—is a dead end. Fasces flank the podium in the House of Representatives, representing, as they did in the Roman Republic, the power of the Republic’s elected officials to punish and kill. Liberalism and fascism quite literally come from the same roots.

It is no wonder that the conspiracist right sees “ANTIFA” as the militant wing of the Democratic Party. At first glance, this seems absurd. Then we take a look at what passes for anarchist discourse and practice these days and, unfortunately, it starts

Conspiracy means to breathe together.  
Liberals: do us a favor and shoot yourself.  
Long live anarchy!

reacted with temporary rent forgiveness and eviction moratoriums. This was a clever move on their part. They showed themselves to be flexible in the *content* of their actions, as long as the means and ends took power away from the proletariat and returned it to the guarantor of the social contract...the State. Thus, rent strikes were replaced with rent forgiveness, workplace desertion with mandatory shutdowns, looting and theft with stimulus and unemployment checks (with limited success, as highly sensationalized accounts of organized looting caravans in California have shown). The liberal State showed itself willing to temporarily shut down the economy, *as long as it's them doing it and not us*. In the struggle to destroy the existent and usher in truly new worlds, *how* something is done is more important than *what* is done. Unlike the expansion of authoritarian power through the state of emergency, of course, we all know that these bread crumbs (like the stimulus checks of yesteryear) are truly temporary. We should oppose all government mandates on principle, but also because they are the liberal strategy to get us back to work. Our takeaway from the recuperation of all the innovative and ingenious forms of refusal and desertion that emerged during the pandemic should not be to celebrate that anarchists did "something," it should be to admit to ourselves that we did not aim high enough. Demand nothing, take everything.

On the whole, anarchists in the United States will be wholly unprepared to meaningfully intervene within a phenomenon similar to the Canadian trucker convoy happening here, even though we have had years to anticipate and prepare for such an obvious eventuality. The strategies and tactics used in the antifascist struggles of recent memory will not work as well when the fascists embed themselves within a larger mass movement...just as anarchists have been doing for decades. The trick will be to isolate the fascist elements and offer a truly liberatory alternative, not to indignantly moralize about how the whole movement is fascist.

to make more sense. The average anarchist household in the United States has been as self-repressed, moralistic, and law-abiding as a Biden/Harris one. Anarchists write articles about how anarchists in other countries have "questioned mandates that do not make sense," as if not questioning government mandates that supposedly *do* make sense is in any way a viable anarchist position. We have shamefully ceded the anti-State narrative to the right, without even putting up a fight.

Collectively, anarchists in the United States have taken no meaningfully visible action against the State's inevitably-permanent extension of its emergency powers or the massive transfer of wealth to the techno-capitalist class and its dystopian restructuring of society. In pointing this out, however, voluntary association and autonomy remain our guiding principles: those who would ban masks are as authoritarian as those who would mandate them. But it is the latter who are in power, and anarchy means nothing if not "no rulers."

There was a moment, however, when the crisis *was* taken advantage of: the George Floyd insurrection exploded through, in spite of, and against the dull and empty time of the lockdowns, the curfews, and the stay-at-home orders. The insurgent proletariat showed the world that there is no vaccine for the contagion called freedom.

In a world where we are faced with a global pandemic and a precarious future, we have to come to grips with the fact that the world is not safe, and there is not a possibility of a perfect "safe place." Security and safety have always been lies sold by the State and ruling class for the expense of freedom and the inevitable creation and oppression of the "other." The logic of staying home to keep a "community" safe, while ordering your groceries online, or shopping on Amazon, quickly begins to mirror the logic of a closed US border to non-vaccinated immigrants and travelers, all in the name of safety and limiting the spread. The banning of non-vaccinated immigrants created

a better border wall than Trump could ever have imagined, and was met with silence.

There will not be an end to the crises. There will be another pandemic, or the continuing apocalypse that is climate change, and to each of these moments, the State, technocrats, and ruling class will always claim to offer the path towards a safer and more stable world. And some people will always believe it, choosing their own personal safety and stability over whomever else is excluded from that promise, as long as their place in the global hierarchy is high enough. Anarchy has never promised the delusion of safety, it is the beautiful idea of freedom and self-determination. Let's strive to make this world as dangerous as we can for our enemies. We keep us dangerous.

The slogan "we keep us safe" implies that we share the same professed ends as the State—safety—but disagree on means, that we think that they aren't doing enough or that we can do a better job. There is, however, always an inseparability between ends and means. If the goal is safety, then the safest means are necessarily the best. The logical conclusion is that if a sufficiently socially democratic State proved itself more effective at guaranteeing safety than either autonomous efforts or the current regime, it would deserve "our" support.

By contrast, if our goal is total liberation, then our means must be equally liberatory. We do not share the same goals as the State that we can somehow achieve better. We have fundamentally opposed goals. Anarchy is not social democracy with black hoodies. Nor, to us, does "freedom" mean re-opening the economy, as it does to the petit bourgeoisie. Using our enemies' definitions of victory means that we have already lost. We do not want to manage the economy, safely or otherwise: we want to destroy it utterly. We do not want to solve the crises of capitalism: we want to introduce and participate in its final crisis. We do not want to guarantee safety and security: we want to

live free and burn every prison, most fundamentally the invisible one in our minds which creates all the others.

The situation within the United States took a particularly American approach to COVID. The State has been able to take a completely hands off approach to dealing with the pandemic while simultaneously outsourcing the biopolitical control it wishes to exert onto its population. The State not only has no desire to actually assist in helping people through this moment, as clearly seen by the pathetic gestures of aid, whether that be a performative stimulus check or a temporary hold on evictions only to come back with a stronger force, but it also knows that it is completely unable to actually enforce any mandates or social control without instigating a mass uprising. But was able to outsource the biopolitical control onto the individual. While the State literally left everyone to die of COVID or die from poverty, it put the entire responsibility of ending the pandemic on the individual. It was up to you to work from home, to volunteer your location and social networks for contact tracing, and to punish and report anyone who strayed from this logic. Because those who didn't follow this logic were the ones who were fueling the virus. And many leftists and radicals took this to heart, shaming people online for diverging from these rules, even when they blatantly made no "sense" even by epidemiological principles. In many ways, the State is still unable to enforce any sort of mandates in the US, but that does not stop liberals and some leftists from continuing to call for harsher restrictions or demonizing anyone who breaks from this track. All the while, the ruling class and technocrats continue to reap the benefits of the death while having a facade of a moral high ground.

The ability of the State to outsource and individualize policing went hand in hand with its recuperation of forms of proletarian struggle such as the rent strike. Initially caught off guard by the spontaneous wave of tenants across the country refusing to pay their parasitic exploiters, the liberals quickly