

# **Distant Tower, Local Shadow**

**an anarchist in Secularism Cross City reflects on the local movement for a free  
Palestine since October 7, 2023**

Anonymous

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*I guess it's an e-zine now...*

*Thanks a great deal to those who helped me put it out in the world. I hope it will prove useful, to at least someone, in the dark days ahead. (It's literally a week before winter solstice as I write this so I'm not even being dramatic.)*

*You will see (at least) one erroneous claim in this article. It is marked with an asterisk, like this.\* The line was initially written before the United Nations general assembly vote calling for an immediate ceasefire on December 13. It turns out I was wrong, Canada will do that.*

*Most of this was written before November 15. It took a long time for it to get finished and polished up. It is by no means meant to amount to a "final position" on anything. The principal audience I have in mind are the people in my life, mostly anarchists or at least familiar with one anarchist scene or another in the Montréal area, with whom I sometimes find myself sharing space when people get together to talk about what is to be done, how it is to be done, etc.*

*My second audience is everyone participating in the Palestinian solidarity (Palsol), pro-Palestinian, and/or #FreePalestine movement as it exists in this city and region. This text is obviously not very accessible to a lot of people in that larger movement, but I hope it isn't impenetrable, either. I owe these readers an actual anarchist analysis. It may not be a very good analysis (I guarantee someone thinks it is not a very good analysis), but it is rooted, not in an impulse towards promiscuous and performative solidarity, but anarchist reflections on the history of social movements in this city and anarchist perspectives on how to achieve anarchy, which presumably includes a free Palestine.*

*Events have kept on happening. On December 26, Boxing Day, people protested at malls in Montréal and Laval. 2024 is right around the corner, and on the world stage, I expect we will see further geopolitical breakdown, perhaps to a point that is unimaginable to most of us in the present moment. I don't think that it's crystal ball stuff to say the war in Palestine, in what a lot of Christians might think of as the Holy Land, will proceed, and that that will continue to motivate demonstrations and more disruptive actions here. I hope anarchists will figure out a way to usefully stay engaged not only with this movement, but also with the larger society—making the case for anarchy, the end of Canada, Israel, and all other states, and also taking action that concretely moves us in that direction.*

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A little over two years ago, I wrote a short article called "Noise, Flags, and Fists: Reflections on a Weekend in Downtown Montréal". I present here the first paragraph in its entirety:

Since May 6 of this year [2021], apparently first with respect to the Sheikh Jarrah property dispute, there has been an intercommunal conflict between neighbours in ethnically mixed urban parts of occupied Palestine, from Jerusalem to Jaffa and beyond. Consequently, there has been an uneven exchange of bombs and rockets between the Israeli state and Hamas, the latter being the state authority in the small territory of Gaza. Where things will go in Palestine, I cannot say. I don't pretend to have more than a Wikipedia-level understanding of the situation. I do not speak the relevant languages and am not trying to follow the news too closely anyway.

I think most of the analysis in the original holds up, but what you are reading now is, I suppose, the necessary sequel for 2023—and for a second time, I do not want to be detained by the move-by-move, the daily events, in Palestine. I have a more definite idea, today, that is based on a pretty

bleak understanding of geopolitical reality, and not the hopeful message (“from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free”) that people are chanting in the streets. But what I think about the situation *in Palestine* is really without much value. No one over there gives a single fuck about what some anarchist in Montréal thinks about anything.

If I have anything to contribute to the current moment, to any worthwhile project of alleviating suffering or realizing a minimally humane future (never mind, I dunno, achieving anarchy), it will be based on analyzing what is happening here, in Montréal, and how people much like myself (but, of course, never *exactly* like myself) might engage with the solidarity movement that has made so much happen *here* (in Montréal as well as across North America and the world) over the last several weeks.

About myself: I am a white guy living in Canada. I mention this first because race is a pretty good candidate for being *the* defining character of political order in North America (that is, the dominant culture of the settler societies of the United States and Canada). With respect to local concerns, especially the linguistic situation and the political scene, I am an immigrant to Montréal and “Québec society” (albeit an immigrant already bestowed with Canadian citizenship, so not subject to the federal state’s anti-migration policies), I am an anglophone, and I am an anarchist. I do not speak Arabic and I don’t have very close relationships, on the whole, with people who can speak that language. All of this places me outside of Palsol as it exists in Montréal, which is a movement principally of people of colour, in which white people are a small minority, possibly outnumbered by participants whose family roots are principally in South Asia, Africa, Latin America, or communities indigenous to this continent. As regards people like me, urbanite descendants of European settlers who arrived before (arbitrarily) 1950, I am additionally a minority because—whereas lots of these folks are normal social democrats, in the Lenin(-Trotsky-Mao) fandom, or simply Christians who think they’re leftists and/or revolutionaries—I am not any of those things.

## **Civility and direct action**

The activity of the local Palsol movement has been overwhelmingly civil since October 7. What I mean is that what has happened has been, for the most part, remarkably nonviolent. There has been no indication that local actions aimed at intimidating Jews are widely supported in the movement except by a probable minority of certain bad actors and/or idiots.

The local chapter of the Palestinian Youth Movement (henceforth PYM) has been at the forefront of most of the big events here. They are an international political organization (North America-wide and with at least some chapters in Europe and elsewhere) with some kind of non-profit structure, and they have been around since at least 2021. PYM marshals in Montréal have done their best, as far as I have seen between October 13 to November 4 (when I last made it out to a big demonstration), to prevent youth from smashing, or even merely tagging, the windows of corporate buildings. Direct action at the big events has, thus far, mostly taken the form of blocking doors and sit-ins. In other words, these have *not* been drastically kinetic attacks against people or structures. It is quite clear to me, from where I stand with respect to the movement, that most participants are not particularly interested in direct action—or at least not in doing it themselves.

On November 4, PYM-associated marshals, who had previously acted to prevent people from getting close to Westmount Square (whose lower windows were smashed in 2021) were vastly outnumbered. The police did not have a cordon between the crowd and the building. If, the crowd or even a large number of people had really wanted to smash the glass at the Nouvelle Maison du Radio-Canada, they could have done so. But that's not what happened. Despite a small amount of hectic energy at the front, a little graffiti and bright light, it was basically a family event, with most of the politically conscious adults probably liberal democrats of one kind or another. Keep in mind, too, that the babies, grandparents, aunts, and uncles had to be *marshaled* from Dorchester Square to where a "symbolically important" but nevertheless non-comprehensively disruptive direct action was taking place, pulled off by a predominantly Jewish cohort of activists.

There are elements within Palsol, of course, that are less inclined to civility, less beholden to it. I will not dwell on these elements, but it is worth noting that I offered a way for anarchists to understand this element in demographic and affective terms in 2021, which was based on my own observations then and in other riotous moments during the time that I've lived here. The present moment, it seems to me, offers fewer obvious opportunities (and let's be clear: they were only scarcely available in 2021 as well!) for anything but the most charismatic, energetic, and socially intelligent of anarchists (insert your stereotype here) to make much headway in establishing a productive relationship with that element (blacker, browner, poorer, possibly less gay and okay with being that way, and very often teenage boys, which in 2023 means often means conspiracy theorists and male chauvinists)—and this is before considering whether or not, even for those best-positioned to do so, this is actually the best place for "anarchists" or "you personally" to invest energy anyway.

## The war is not going anywhere

And how different this comes off versus the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. To my mind, this is because compared to 2022, we are actually one step further into a process that I think it might actually be worth calling World War III (or, if you like a more Zapatista-inspired formulation, World War V or even VI).

Just about two years ago (yes, it is that recent!), it took less than a month for most of society to move on and for pro-Ukrainian and/or anti-Russian demonstrations to cease to be anything but the weekend pastime of a very small cohort, notably including some local anarchists.

Why?

In Montréal, sentiment in favour of the Russian invasion of Ukraine was relatively marginal, and there have only ever been a small number of people (such as local Montréal political celebrity Yves Engler) who are personally animated to "confront the narrative" on this topic offered by, say, the CBC, *The Globe and Mail*, the Canadian government, and many an individual journalist with a pro-establishment bias. The thing is, Canada (fake concept but whatever) is actually broadly speaking more pro-Ukrainian, at the level of both the population and the government, than the society to the south. For reasons that shall not detain us, this is principally because of the electorally important and propertied constituency of middle-class Ukrainian-Canadians.

With respect to the Palestinian national cause, however, it's different. Many Canadians, and more so those who possess citizenship and detached homes—the people for whom this country is built—don't really have a fulsome concept of Palestinians *at all*. In many areas, many institutions,

many constituencies, popular sympathy lies with the (Zionist?) oppressor. Otherwise, the most common attitude probably remains indifference, even if there is obviously more pro-Palestinian sentiment in North American society, and more so the big multiethnic cities such as Montréal, than there probably ever has been before.

## An (almost brief) aside: Zionism

When other people use the word “Zionist” in their slogans, their speeches, and their blog posts, I don’t consider that a very good choice, most of the time. Sometimes it is apparent to me that a person, for instance, is really just seething at Jews, that they are using code words that they (correctly, at least some extent) believe will conceal the true meaning of what they are saying. Other times, what I infer is going on is less calculating, yet just as dangerous: they don’t themselves know the difference between a “Zionist” and a “Jew” (or, additionally, an “Israeli”). Finally, even when people actually do know what they are talking about and what they are talking about is both real and a grave problem, it still seems like the word “Zionist” has put the emphasis of the critique in the wrong place. It’s dissonant.

I have, myself, used the word “Zionist” in past writings, and certainly in conversations with friends, and I hope I have always been clear as to what I meant when I did—but I expect not! I blather on, as much as anyone, about stuff I have no business talking about. So, just in case anyone was wondering, I think there is, in *practice* if not in *theory*, an irresolvable conflict between a project of Palestinian national self-determination, in whatever form, and the project of what I could call *Actually Existing Zionism*, but which I would rather just call Israel.

This preference of mine, for the word “Israel”, is not altogether unproblematic, of course. Perhaps the reader does not know that the word “Israel” has a range of semantic meanings in Jewish discourse, and is often used as a placeholder word in prayer, for instance, to refer to Jewish people (usually as a people). It’s a semantic tripwire, in other words, in the same way that blustering about “China” and “Mexico” might be absent any specification as to whether I am referring to the *government*, the *people*, or something more mercurial like, say, the *culture*, the *civilization*. It seems all too easy to start off by expressing legitimate outrage at atrocities that the Israeli state is committing in Palestine, atrocities that are indeed perpetrated by Jews (and some Druze, some ex-Soviet citizens who pretended to be Jews and/or their Israel-born children, some self-styled Zionist’s spouse eager to join the tribe, etc.—why even mention ethnicity, tho?), and find yourself falling face-flat into antisemitism.

This, in turn, provokes the impulse to just say, *I guess I’m just gonna not worry about being antisemitic, they’re gonna call me antisemitic anyway*. But that impulse is a mistake.

If you stop caring about whether or not you are antisemitic, you will probably be... antisemitic. The exact boundaries of what is antisemitic and what is not are going to remain a matter of subjective opinion for the foreseeable future—and it is important, I think, to oppose those who aim to close that discussion by fiat, for example those who wish to see governments and other powerful, socially coercive institutions adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s definition and make it *official*. But if we’re actually trying to stay relevant in our own society, to make our movements more powerful and achieve something like a revolution, then it is a strategic imperative that we don’t take a cavalier approach to antisemitism. Even if we assume (an ass of you and me, etc.) that a lot of the people who are “most affected” (fuck this banal cliché) by

antisemitism have *bad politics about Israel* (!) and/or about literally anything else, the risks to our comrades *who are also affected by antisemitism*, of any kind, are more pressing. But additionally, antisemitism and like problems (Islamophobia, all the forms of racism and prejudice that don't get their own word in the English language, etc.) are also strategic blunders. They have no tactical benefit for anything, neither for a project of national liberation (if you care about that) nor for anarchy.

For my part—outside of discussions where the people talking know what they're talking about, which mostly means Jews (who, to be clear, also need to argue about Zionism with one another without schlubs like you or I sticking our noses in it too much)—I consider “Zionists” sort of problematic language. This is not a categorical condemnation of those who use that language. The way I see it, the vocabulary is simply itself confusing, arcane. Zion? Semites? Not everyone went to Bible study or linguistics school. The vocab's density naturally gives rise to the kind of conspiratorial thinking that people will already gladly indulge in when it comes to their adversaries, be that their bitch ex-girlfriend or that cheating [yikes!] who lives down the street. A lot of people in a lot of countries, and including more than a handful of bozos in the Montréal region, perceive that their adversaries are some vague amalgam of Jews, Zionists, Israelis. So a lot of Jews if not all Jews; more or less all Zionists; any Israelis who aren't anti-Israeli. And that mixes explosively with a particularly potent strain of thought in Christian civilization.

There are only a very few people involved in pro-Palestinian movements—or involved in any other movement where anarchists might walk with others—who actually lack the conceptual tools they need to come to a fulsome view of who, and what, the Real Enemy is (probably something like “capitalism”). But a lot of people do lack for other things.

For instance, patience. Who has the time to nearly 15,000 words on this stuff by some guy who can't write?

Access to scholarship and good accounts of history are another thing.

Perhaps most importantly, a lot of people don't have the same sensitivities to language that is characteristic of both liberals and bad faith critics.

Once, when I was locked up after a mass arrest at a big protest, I shared space in the jail with a random citizen, probably someone we'd've called “bourgeois” in 1875, who had been picked up too—wrong place, wrong time, and definitely wrong attitude. In the jail cell, he called the cops “faggots” a lot. When a fellow arrestee asked him to stop using that kind of language, because it was homophobic, he defended himself by saying that he would love to live in the gay part of town because it was actually very clean. Obviously this guy was some kind of homophobe, but I doubted very much that he was, like, an anti-LGBT Crusader who, by 2023, would believe that Donald the Trump is herald of the Storm. It was annoying because it was loud and repetitive, but I didn't feel particularly queerbashed or in danger because of what he was yelling at the cops. I was much more afraid of the cops and I figured, well, if this guy stays in my life, I will eventually have the conversation with him. But I didn't expect him to stay in my life for long.

Respect to this guy, frankly, for being angry and expressing it, even in his bougie problematic way. I too have indulged in arguing with and yelling at cops who've just arrested me (and it would be irresponsible to recommend it, because talking to cops in any form is how you get into trouble). But I wasn't the only queer in jail that day, so kudos, too, to buddy who got him to shut up. Anyone in that cell with us was the person whose needs we needed to prioritize, not this random guy's feelings that he should be able to yell at anyone exactly what he wants, as he wants.

I would caution anarchists, and especially those who aren't Jewish (fuck a hard and fast rule, but still), from using the word "Zionist" very often, or at all, in their public discourse. In spite of the glimmering uniqueness of the concept, its history (shout out Theodore Herzl, you really went nutso with this one), and related topics (the Holy Land, the way that the history intersects with larger sagas of history like the Cold War, the War on Terrorism, whether or not there is a "clash of civilizations" going on), I think anarchists would do best to properly contextualize Zionism as nothing more than one nationalist creed among many, connected to a national state project that is one among many—and that should be enough to provide the basic elements to any analysis of the political situation over there.

*[Okay, but what about Palestinians? Is there a risk here of asking Palestinians to lose one of the tools they have to describe their own oppression? The obvious counterargument to what you're saying is, Why should Jews get to define the term "Zionism" any more than the people who suffer under it?—ed.]*

I don't expect anyone to do anything I say—and I respect that "Zionist" has a range of meanings, some less problematic than others, in non-anarchist discourse—but I do think there is a strategic deficit, in our local context, to writing "Zionist consulate" instead of "Israeli consulate" on a poster for a weekend demonstration, to give just one example. Of course, if there are Palestinian anarchists and/or their friends (and their "allies") who have been active these past few months in the Montréal movement, who disagree with me about this, I do want to know what they have to say. As it stands for 2024, however, I'm just not sure the argument is finished with respect to how useful it is to make anti-Zionism (as opposed to *opposition to ongoing on-air genocide*) central to anarchist struggle in this city. Δ]

This will be a hard pill to swallow, and I can already hear a very sober, very secular objection, namely that the Israeli state and/or the situation in Palestine is important to a degree that other regimes, other situations, are not. Numerous superlatives get conjoined to any discussion on this matter: the world's largest open air prison, the closest ally of the United States, the most advanced military and surveillance technology, a laboratory for repression like no other, the hinge upon which the whole of world imperialism is seated. Yet I have to maintain that, here in Montréal, these generalities about the larger world situation do not change very much about how much anarchists (or you personally) should—or should not—engage with the conflict as it is actually playing out in our social context.

Frankly, the way I see it, the less that (most) anarchists and their friends think about "Israel" and "Zionism", the better. Thinking about these concepts, which are comprehensively foreign to the experience of most people in Montréal and only conceivable through analogy (to local and secular evils like colonialism or, even less productively, the religious and paranoid evils that we can read about in the writings of long dead clerics, spies, and yes, revolutionaries), risks people getting caught up in a momentum that is not their own. Because—however useful anarchist involvement might be for achieving the goals of however valid a movement—I do not think this is the role of anarchists. It is better for us to think about our region, and how we can undermine, from here, the prevailing order of states (per Perlman's appropriation, the Waste Land) in which Israel is simply a small part of a hellish whole.



*[This completely excludes Palestinian anarchists & also other Arab anarchists (and also honestly a lot of Jewish anarchists) who have real material & personal ties to That Place. I know we disagree about internationalism and stuff, but this is gonna sound kinda silly to a lot of folks with more personal stakes in that region. Like who is your actual audience here?—ed.*

The majority (of anarchists) in our region, who don't have such connections. △]

## **Striking a blow against—Israel? or something bigger?**

About a year ago, there were demonstrations in Montréal (and many other places around the world, of course) against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Stephen Harper was still prime minister when Ottawa cut relations with Tehran 11 years ago. There is no Iranian consulate in Montréal, just various Iranians (ahem, people of Iranian descent), a certain number of them propertied Canadian citizens. There are no (obvious) business connections between Iran and Montréal, either. The intercontinental capitalist economy is complicated and difficult for capitalist states to police (when they even bother trying), so I am sure there is some Iranian in Iran who makes a little money thanks to commerce in Montréal. That being said, the public business environment here is not friendly, and any company that involves itself with *Iran* certainly won't be able to access the far more important market of the United States. The Islamic Republic and the U.S. have been fighting a mostly cold war since the ayatollahs overthrew the U.S.-backed monarchy in Iran, the Pahlavi dynastic regime, nearly 50 years ago. Israel, quite naturally, has been involved in all of this since about the beginning, but that is beside the point.

Canada, in 2023, is a diplomatic ally of the United States and Israel. As a settler colony (but maybe not *because* it is a settler colony?), Canadian governments tend to walk in an even tighter ideological lockstep with other settler colonies than they do with governments in those European and Asian littoral countries that might otherwise factor into some conception of “the First World”. Whereas Brunei, Malaysia, the U.A.E., Qatar, France, and Spain will all occasionally criticize Israeli (and U.S.) policy in a moment like this, Canada's just not going to do that.\* The fact of Trudeau's have-it-both-ways sputtering, which got Netanyahu posting at him, does not change my mind.

Anyway, back to the anti-Iranian protests. The thing about them is that, well, there are no targets anywhere in Canada (not just Montréal, but *Canada*) where one can directly attack, or even noisily protest, the Iranian government. We do not know where the Iranian espionage agents, if there are any, are shackled up. We do not even know where the pro-Iranian shills live (and I don't want to know, because I'd be tempted to do something stupid). At least when the pro-Ukrainians want to *do something* a little more they kinetic (and I think this is a natural human response), they have the Russian consulate on Mount Royal and the occasional publicly announced peace rally featuring Yves Engler.

The demonstrations for “woman, life, freedom” in Montréal were not without value—but I think that, with regard to the struggle in Iran, they likely made the people there feel what I felt when I learned that, in 2012, there was a “red square” demonstration happening in New York City, in Toronto, in Zurich. To be clear, I felt nothing. At most, it was *cool*, and apparently some people were hyped up by it. But, what did it do for us?

There is at least one place in Montréal where someone pro-Palestinian might expect to find employees of the Israeli government and righteously grapple them—the Israeli consulate. It’s a few stories up at Westmount Square but it’s conceivable. Additionally, there are many well-documented linkages between local Montréal firms and not only Israel writ large, but specifically the Israeli military and its industries of repression. Single-issue activism using direct action and targeting “Israel”, the state and the settler-colonial project, is ontologically possible without leaving the island of Montréal. People can do more than grieve together and lobby the diplomats and political executives who determine “foreign policy”. They can actually, and more or less directly, attack the (specifically Israeli) war machine, even in a small way.

However, it is worth asking—why? I personally believe it is worth it just to do it, simply as a *gesture*, but I also think we ought to reflect on how little anarchists in Montréal have similarly endeavoured to directly attack other foreign governments. It certainly *has* happened: the Russian consulate, the Greek consulate, maybe a local fundraiser and social gathering for a French political party that exercises state power. But it’s rare.

I am heartened by attacks (preferably not against people, but against the economy) that, I believe, really do slow down the genocide and make the support of Israel’s just war by the Canadian state and Canadian industry more costly than anticipated. But, I personally don’t need the theme, namely “free Palestine”, to love the attacks, *which are worthwhile in themselves*. Perhaps this is very above-it-all and Stirnerian, but it seems to me that the greater value of Free Palestine-themed militancy in Montréal, however modest it is, is that it is militancy, and not that it is for a free Palestine. The best hope for everyone lies in attacks on the capitalist system, attacks that somehow multiply and succeed and usher in a new world. I don’t have my hopes up, and I think there are several procedural questions better left to people smarter and less jaded than myself, but I am certain that anarchists ought to be in the thick of it with whatever movements are presently pushing for a jailbreak from any prison—and Gaza certainly is a big prison.

We ought to walk with these movements, and that could look like marching along with Palestinian but mostly non-Palestinian, pro-Palestinian folks—but also challenging them to sharpen their analysis. It could look like supporting initiatives that emerge from the hard core of that movement—or taking our own initiatives, *around* the movement if not *in* it.

This is a universal prescription. It’s what I believed with respect to both the Freedom Convoy movement and the student strike of 2012. It is also what I believe of demonstrations on international themes of the kind that, more and more, make up the tapestry of political conflict in urban Canada.

In 2022, I thought simply showing up to the occupation in Ottawa was at least an *idea*, and not necessarily just a reflex. But it was not a very *good* idea. I thought at the time that showing a little more protagonism in the emergent project of negating the U.S.-Canada border, perhaps by organizing our own occupation, could have been more fruitful, if not necessarily realistic given anarchists’ capacities at the time—but unfortunately Russo-Ukrainian War phase II started up and helped to undercut that possibility.

Regarding 2012, I have more to say, but the most important takeaway is that the strategic imperative of sustaining the strike movement, *which was never a revolutionary movement*, was a pretty good guideline to follow in the spring. Later on, though, in the summer, it became something of a straitjacket on our imaginations—and by fall, the state had decisively regained control of the situation.

At some point, the interests of the student movement, principally defined by its social-democratic and Québécois nationalist character, diverged sharply from what revolution-minded anarchists in this city were trying to do.

## Antisemitism

Before there were many anarchists in Russia, there were socialists, and what they believed was pretty different from the Marxist socialists that would become associated with Russia later. There are whole decades when what was happening in that country was a little more Christian and, frankly, a little more alien. For instance, there was the “to the people” movement of the 1860s, the narodniks.

A mistake that some of the narodniks made, for the record, is believing that pogroms against Jews—a popular activity, traditional even, in rural Russia, just as it had been elsewhere in Europe for hundreds of years previous—were somehow worth supporting, that a productive revolutionary alliance was possible between politically educated, literate activists from largely noble backgrounds and with underground connections, on the one hand, and the random people who lived in whichever comprehensively rustic locale. This would have to be a topic for another time, but it is important to know that it *failed* (it did not achieve socialist revolution) and that it was also a bad idea. Alas, the memory of this stupidity haunts the present, helping to make coherent an anti-revolutionary impulse among Jews even today.

*[Except for all those Jews that embraced revolution as their best hope to get free, y’know? Especially with regard to the Russian Empire, but also here in the New World in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.—ed.*

For sure, but a lot of Jews—like a lot of people of all ethnicities, as far as I can tell (shout out Colombians)—are categorically opposed to revolution, and certain histories are often cited as to why revolution doesn’t work in general or why it doesn’t work for “people like us”. Δ]

I liked “10 Anarchist Theses on Palestine Solidarity in the United States”. It said a lot of what I had wanted to say, better than I could (and sooner too). I think it’s worth your time more than most other communiqués are—especially for friends who are, like, lost a bit—because it is quite orientating towards aspects of the situation that anarchists should be concentrating upon. But, I do have at least one problem with it, and that’s thesis #9. Before prescribing the “first step” for the Palsol movement (namely, to “make its position clear on Black liberation”), it reads as follows:

The ability of the Al-Aqsa Flood operation to overwhelm and overextend (if only for a moment) the Israeli State shows that the imperialist powers are not all powerful. The breaking of the Gaza wall is reminiscent of the destruction of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Precinct in Minneapolis. The struggle in Palestine should be a constant inspiration for us here in the United States.

I think this is kind of batshit (and this is hardly the most batshit take out there, far from it, which is a credit to the writers, who are at least trying to be serious and well-considered).

First off, I like to think that, before October 7, I was not personally convinced that Israel and/or other states were *literally* all powerful and immutable. Maybe it changed something, for someone, to see the colonizer bleed, but—are not we, the readers of anarchist counterinfo sites and/or people who’ve been at this more than a year or two, a little more mature than that?

The next thing is that Al-Aqsa Flood, a military operation carried out by... definitely not anarchists, simply has inspired people—so why this talk of “should”?

For myself, I think the struggle in Palestine *should* be a constant inspiration, *but that requires inspiring things to be happening in the course of that struggle*. Personally, I was not inspired by October 7. On the day itself, it just made me sad because I knew that more people were going to die, and it made me worried for people I know (and if you must know, I know more than Jews than Palestinians).

Now, if you delight in settlers, by one definition or another, bleeding and dying, then of course October 7, 2023, provided that in spades—but what I’m saying is, if that’s not where you’re at, it sparked different emotions.

I’m not writing this to scold anyone. Given the context of Israeli policy towards Palestinians has meant, and the larger context of how Israel fits into the nightmare of (among other things) U.S. imperial hegemony, it is pretty understandable—if not laudable—when people who identify with Palestinians more than I do to thought “yeah, get their ass” when they first saw the Hamas attack (and really, a refracted view of the attack, focusing for instance on the images of bulldozers and people driving through holes cut through in the barrier). Most people in most countries, and even a whole lot of people in Montréal, don’t know any Jews as *friends*, they certainly don’t know any “Zionists”, and so, if they stumble into the Geopolitical Events Fandom and they end up rooting for team Palestine, what they say will probably suck. Certainly in a different way than people supporting team Israel, but it’s still not helpful and *it’s not worth worrying much about, either*.

On March 11, 2004, after coordinated bombings on the Madrid commuter train network that killed nearly 200 people, Aragorn! of the Bay Area wrote “what [he] wish[ed he] had said on September 12, 2001”, from which I quote:

I am not going to tell you about how my eyes are running with tears because of all the children who will not be coming home to parents tonight. My eyes are dry. They are not dry because of the greater crimes of [Western] governments. Sure, their crimes are legend, but if I were to cry today about this one crime, what possible chance could I have to ever stop crying. This is the world I live in. If I am not going to burn myself to ash, I have to deal with yet another headline about consequences as exactly what it is—people died in the course of a total war where one side has very few options at its disposal with which to attack domination. [...]

I don’t want to endorse, exactly, what A! said in 2004; I think a lot of his view is based on a bad reading of history. But, emotionally, this is where I’ve been at with October 7, personally. I don’t have it in me to care about what happened in the same way that some people in my life (and certainly many, many more who aren’t in my life!) cared about it.

This attitude, I think, serves anarchists better than the attitude of “drinking from the mug labeled ‘Zionist tears’” edgy internet meme bullshit—performative callousness for a parasocial audience, when it’s not glee about dead, kidnapped, widowed, and orphaned Israelis (and a lot

of people from Southeast Asia too), again for a parasocial audience. This holds true even if we acknowledge that there has been some fudging of the numbers by this war's very large PR machine, in plenty of cases working pro bono or on the non-Israeli taxpayer's dime. Israelis are not Netanyahu. They are not the ultranationalists who pay good money to have kids sing a fucked-up song. They are people like you and I, and people like the Palestinians. Though they have nicer living conditions than the Palestinians do, and of course, they are under enormous pressure at every level to conform with the prevailing ultranationalism (which makes the story of those who refuse to serve in the IDF, such as most recently 18-year-old Tal Mitnick, all the more inspiring).

Acknowledging Israeli society's ultranationalist character doesn't need to mean dehumanizing anyone or dreaming about murdering them. That mentality, and certainly any ideology that would sanctify such action, only has value for *soldiers*, who may be told by their commanders that they are going to kill people today (and they might as well have a good time doing it, after all it's a just cause). I'm an anarchist, not a soldier—and I don't wish a soldier's fate upon anyone.

## **Interlude: Fredy Perlman**

In "The Continuing Appeal of Nationalism" (1984), F.P. wrote the following:

The varied utopias of poets and dreamers and the numerous "mythologies of the proletariat" have also failed; they have not proven themselves in practice; they have been nothing but hot air, pipe dreams, pies in the sky; the actual proletariat has been as racist as the bosses and the police. [...]

The idea that an understanding of the genocide, that a memory of the holocausts, can only lead people to want to dismantle the system, is erroneous. The continuing appeal of nationalism suggests that the opposite is truer, namely that an understanding of genocide has led people to mobilize genocidal armies, that the memory of holocausts has led people to perpetrate holocausts. The sensitive poets who remembered the loss, the researchers who documented it, have been like the pure scientists who discovered the structure of the atom. Applied scientists used the discovery to split the atom's nucleus, to produce weapons which can split every atom's nucleus; Nationalists used the poetry to split and fuse human populations, to mobilize genocidal armies, to perpetrate new holocausts.

No doubt F.P., a child survivor of the Holocaust, had Israel chief in mind as an example of colonization and nationalism with various left-wing bona fides, as well as the hammer-and-sickle wavers in the streets of his own adopted country, the Great Lakes region of Turtle Island.

## **People's movements**

There is no barrier to entry for the populist movements, be they left populist or right populist, that have taken streets in Montréal since at least 2011. Some people may never join the erudite ranks of anarchists and many university-age activist cohorts—characterized by their long texts and overextended vocabularies, among other things—but they can join "the movement". It's cool, and a credit to antifa, that a well-known Nazi was identified and expelled from the Palsol demo

on November 4, but there are definitely other people present with views that are, well, kinda not up to snuff, and we just don't know about it because they're not well-known Nazi clowns. My point is that the presence of these unsavoury elements, *which exist in every social movement* and indeed *everywhere in society*, do not in themselves constitute a reason that anarchists should not walk with the movement, either to check it out, to make connections, to spread ideas, or to do something else that is strategically advantageous. And indeed, if we did fear anti-Jewish pogroms in the local context (and as far as I'm concerned, they are not yet conceivable), that would necessitate a very close engagement indeed, in order to outmaneuver those factions that would seek to steer the local Palsol movement in such a direction.

Remember these episodes from the last decade or so: the sad and chilly camp/circus of Occupy Montréal; the neighbourhood assemblies that arose in 2012, mostly fading away soon after; the Freedom Convoy just over in Ottawa, in its own way; the march at the Olympic Stadium on May 1, 2021, or any of the other anti-mask, anti-vaccine demonstrations that snaked through Montréal's streets in those days. Everyone who was weird enough to come, did so. I personally don't think that the same is *likely* in the future of local Palsol, given the prominence of NGOs and disciplined reformists of all types (Leninists, Islamists, New Agers), but if it were to generalize—if it were too big for the police to control—we also wouldn't be able to police it ourselves.

Prejudice and contempt towards Jews, often mixed in with other conspiracy theories, are still widespread in North America. Certainly Montréal has plenty of this shit. It was present at Occupy Montréal in 2011 and, quite naturally given what the issue is, it is also present in the pro-Palestinian movement today. It absolutely does not *define* the movement, as North Atlantic rightists and Israeli government officials insist, but it is a problem—and what it is the strategic logic in refusing to acknowledge that there is, has been at the past, or may in the future, be antisemitism in the pro-Palestinian movement?

I don't really believe the pro-Palestinian movement is “the people”—but if I did, well, that would *not* be to its credit. If I could allow myself to take seriously the idea of these masses as some coherent collectivity, I would think that the people had been failed, constantly, so it is not surprising that the people are often misinformed about history and the problems of the world... which might mean they are antisemitic. And, for that matter, Islamophobic, if we are talking about Québec and plenty of other places across this continent.

But I don't think about “the people”. I think about individuals, with their own lives, who could think or believe anything, and could potentially even go against the direction of the larger society.

## **Where do we lob the bricks?**

I don't have much to say here about direct action, other than that there is a difference between doing things, even spectacular and ostentatiously illegal things, in order to achieve a change in the Canadian government's diplomatic stance and/or its military export policy, and doing things that disrupt the commercial activity and/or destroy the property of manufacturers and exporters that directly feed into the Israeli war machine.

The latter is direct action. The former is lobbying with bricks.

A close analysis of the rhetoric coming from North Atlantic governments is not worth writing, but over time, what major leaders have been saying has been gradually changing and it is

trending more critical of Israel, more ostensibly supportive of Palestinians. This is clearly an example of the movement achieving some kind of results, slow and too feeble as they may seem to be. Lobbying with bricks worked in 2003, to some degree at least, in terms of discouraging several countries, Canada included, from joining in with the invasion force for Iraq. The Madrid train bombings, too, can be considered another form of the same strategy; days after A! wrote that “revolutionaries, of every stripe, have been remarkably, consistently, wrong about the consequences of their behavior,” the newly elected government in Spain announced that its military would withdraw from Iraq.

The method clearly works well enough within its own strategic paradigm. It does not work *totally*, but that is because, in real-world macrostrategic terms, *no one actually knows what the effects of their actions are going to be*. All anyone can do is calculate, predict, and (if we like) hedge. Yet, clearly, lobbying with bricks (spray paint, lockdowns, traffic disruptions, port blockades, school occupations, and threats to do more of the same and worse, seemingly enjoying the supportive of a larger movement that, gasp, might vote out a government) can move the needle towards one binary outcome or another.

“Lobbying with bricks” is a phrase I first heard with respect to the student movement in Québec—and this was in the period before 2012, when at least people believed that that the student strike of 2005 represented the very height that a 21<sup>st</sup>-century student movement in Québec was ever likely to reach.

The strategy, up to then, had worked: the student movement in Québec had effectively lobbied the government over the decades (certainly in comparison to students in anglophone provinces and the United States) and won the best deal for students in North America. It is worth noting, too, that ASSÉ was founded in 2003, that many student activists also organized and participated in demonstrations against the Iraq War. Canada’s military did not join up with the Bush-Blair crusade to topple Saddam and occupy Baghdad. That’s not nothing, if it really was the movement in the streets of Montréal and other cities that made that happen (rather than just Chrétien being a hippy). War, occupation, and counterinsurgency are all, to some degree, a numbers game, *and Canadian forces were not on the ground in Iraq*. Additionally, while resistance to the war in Canada was obviously pathetic overall (with unionized factory workers in southern Ontario gladly manufacturing tank parts for the U.S. military, for instance), in Montréal and the surrounding area, windows were smashed, slogans were spray painted, and I’m pretty sure some even Maoists lit something on fire and wrote a communiqué about it. Tame as it may seem in retrospect to us, sitting governments are sometimes scared of this sort of stuff, especially in a place like Québec (electorally important within Canada) where there is a long, somewhat complicated history of popular skepticism towards North Atlantic countries’ next big transoceanic military adventure.

The Palsol movement here, largely led by students as well as former student activists, is presently lobbying the Canadian government with bricks; there is no effort to lobby the Israeli government, and very little to bother even the ultimately consequential U.S. government, which may actually have a number of interests, both critical and minor, in our local context.

I expect students, ex-students, and long-term campus hang-arounds were, as a cohort, well-represented at the November 16 bridge blockade, the shutdown of the rails in Pointe-Saint-Charles on December 1, and indeed during the much larger PYM-organized demonstration that blocked the exit from Autoroute 10 on December 2. Actions like these piss a lot off commuters off, and for that reason, I think this specific kind of action is at least *a little bit* ill-advised in the present moment. That, however, is just my no-one-cares opinion—and besides, they *are* disrupt-

tive to the normal functioning of the capitalist economy, and that can cause crises (perhaps only small ones, but those can grow bigger) for important economic and political players. Kudos for that.

A lot of my friends talk about cycles—and recently people have been talking about the current cycle coming to an end, for example as an outcome of repression. It seems to me, however, that this little episode still has a lot of runway to it, whether anarchists would consciously try to be involved in the Palsol movement or not. The war is set to continue and it will continue to outrage people, so demonstrations and other expressions of rage and grief will continue. Additionally, since December 2, we can imagine that the PYM is moderately escalating its tactics after seeming, for a long time, like a force for conservatism and civility in the streets.

Diplomatic stance and military export policy—these are the targets of the Palsol movement in Montréal and Canada, just as spending on education, by the provincial government, was the target of the 2012 movement. The fact that many if not most of the people involved in direct action against the economy, or against particular sites determined to be concretely important to the war machine, have a different idea about what they are trying to do and why, does not change the fact that a liberal-democratic and “realist” consciousness prevails about what is possible and what is practically worthwhile. I don’t have much to say about this, except that anarchists (or those of us who are aiming for a social revolution) ought to engage with movements that actually exist in our society rather than waiting for a more comprehensively revolutionary consciousness to emerge.

It is clear enough, too, that the space of the movement is, in its own ways, *affectively transformative* in the same ways that any other protest wave in Montréal ever is. This will become doubly true now as the repression ramps up.

All of this amounts to a good reason for anarchists to be present in this movement. However, I do not believe tailing the movement amounts to much of a strategy. If I insist that “we” (whoever we are!) *should* participate, I mean that in the same way that we also *should* be talking to our neighbours about the value of a rent strike, providing accommodations for people who don’t have status, and spending our weekends smashing cameras. These are good ideas, but whether or not they are realistic, for you or me or anyone else, is kind of a different question altogether.

In other words, I have no prescriptions for useful activities. Anarchists are all different people, occupying different positions in the economy, more or less conversant or at home in certain crowds. It seems obvious to me, however, that local Arabic-speaking anarchists have a lot more to contribute to Palsol as it already exists, in a straightforward sense, than I probably do—and thanks to their familiarity with it, they are less likely to romanticize it or fear saying the wrong thing when they criticize it (and critique is definitely valuable). Ideally we’d let the Arabic-speaking anarchists do all the talking, but they are a minority in the local anarchist movement, there are certainly fewer of whichever tendency (a nihilist and a syndicalist walk into a bar...), and the project of the rest of us schlubs going out and trying to recruit a few dozen more is, um, weird as fuck. This leaves most anarchists on the outside, then, of a movement that is led principally by Palestinian youth (and/or various besties: Algerian, Haitian, Pakistani, etc.), in which French and English are not the only languages of influential political discourse, in which the average participant can look us once over or hear us speak and not really give a fuck about what we have to say as soon as we get even slightly critical.

This situation, then, is not so different from the position of an anarchist who couldn’t speak French in 2012, but the problems are of a different magnitude. Most people in Montréal, and most



anarchists certainly, don't really have our own space, our own stake, within the pro-Palestinian movement; the Palestinian national cause is not our own. Some have argued that freedom for Palestinians will free the rest of us, and I *kind of* buy that, but only insofar as the struggle for Palestinians' freedom is a struggle against prison society, against the Waste Land. Great, but, if that's the case, this is my movement—which means I have to be to be honest when I have tactical disagreements with someone else.

But... it's not my movement, is it? I certainly don't feel like it is!

An important difference is that, unlike 2012, when the ethnic character of the adversary was nearly identical to the ethnic character of the protagonists (Québ-on-Québ violence), the pro-Palestinian movement is anti-Jewish to the extent that there is an adversarial social movement in Montréal that is "Zionist"—and the majority of people who will regularly come out to pro-Israeli demonstrations here, who will speak out in defense of Israel's ongoing ground invasion, who have been putting up **KIDNAPPED** posters and other forms of propaganda that serve a pro-Israeli narrative since at least 2021 in fact, are Jewish. Hence, whenever there is next some conflict in the streets (when there are fisticuffs), it will typically look like countable Jewish people fighting together against countable non-Jewish people, *and that's typically what it will be*, no matter how many anti-Zionist Jewish comrades we can round up.

Montréal knows ethnic tension, even if the history of violence among white settlers was mostly limited to bombings of property, not killings. (If this seems such a charming contrast to violence anywhere in the former Soviet Union, the former Yugoslavia, Africa, or indeed Palestine over the last 30 years, please note the last major instance of race riots in the Montréal context in 1990 during the Defense of the Pines, the so-called "Oka Crisis".) In this city's popular history, anglo-franco divisions are usually at the fore, but Jews have been a major factor in Montréal's ethnic politics for at least a century—and perhaps a critical public screening of *The Apprenticeship of Dudley Kravitz* (1974) would be edifying, for some, in the current moment.

My point is that important that there is a cultural substrate in Montréal, and in Québec and Canada both, and this substrate interfaces dangerously with certain objective facts. Such facts include: many Canadian Jewish institutions, from synagogues to grocery stores (as well as some anarchists' dads), actually do "support Israel" in one way or another. This is, to be clear, a bad thing, and I don't want to suggest that it is ethically irrelevant. It is simply the case that I am skeptical that zealous attention to the consumer habits of Jews by non-Jews will be anything but a recipe for disaster. I think it is unlikely to help achieve a free Palestine in any meaningful sense. I also think that commercial targets (like Scotiabank and Indigo) are worth going after in a way that, well, a synagogue with a politically questionable billboard out front is not (even if that synagogue is in a high-income neighbourhood). Because otherwise, where do we draw the line on what "supporting Israel" means? Or what kind of consequences it should magnetize?

I didn't like the poster I saw in the hallway of a synagogue once, promoting tourism in the Negev desert, showing off two blonde people with big backpacks. But... ok? There are many hallways with shitty posters in them in this world. There are many ghouls who yell at strangers and there are many cousins and old university friends with bad politics. This is the small stuff, and I can't bear the burden of hating people because they are on the wrong side of history. Low-stakes forms of complicity with the existent, which may mean whichever conservative community, is not worth the emotional energy. Hence, unless your chosen strategic method for anarchy and/or a free Palestine includes a commitment to some pretty serious violence—like you're taking

a page from Czolgosz and Schwarzbard (or, in a different register, the commandos of Al-Aqsa Flood)—there is no reason to be a zealot.

As the posters you can see around Montréal campuses these days tell us, 2012 was a movement borne of a much longer history of student strikes in Québec, dating back to 1968. What that means is that, during that lovely season a little more 11 years ago, there was already a history to draw on. So, what history does Palsol in Montréal have to draw on? Well, there are movements for civil rights, both in Montréal and elsewhere; certainly the Palestine solidarity movement of 2023 bears similarities to Black Lives Matter as it manifested itself in the years between 2014 and 2020. There is also the example set by a variety of armed groups that have operated overseas during the last 30 years, largely theocratic, that have been at war what they have, very often, understood as a Christian-Zionist (and in the past, Soviet atheist) alliance.

But what I think that is really the most important, for more people in our society, is the tradition of thinking about Jews and/or using Jews as rhetorical objects, of articulating political quandaries through examination of various (often poorly understood) Jewish case studies. This discourse is passed on as part of a folk movement, one that has rarely needed any kind of consciously *political* dimension in order to attract believers and repeaters. So too the social technology of scapegoating, which in the present day may look like Jews holding the bag for the entire history of white supremacy and European colonialism.

[*This is the MOST important thing right now???*—ed.]

No, I definitely got carried away. △]

A different view, from analogy: I never hated “French” people, as we called francophones where I was growing up—but my hometown didn’t have too many. When I went to college in a slightly bigger place near where I grew up, I met people who had had more daily interactions with francophones throughout their lives. As a rule, they detested francophones. Like, a lot, and quite a bit more than in my town, only a few hours further into the land of all anglophones. This was in a place where francophones were usually not landlords, usually not bosses, usually not politicians, usually not wealthy clients living in high price tag urban neighbourhoods, in other words usually not assholes whose shit some of us covet and/or who we think might be “doing a bad job”.

Montréal, in contrast, seems like a powder keg. Jews, and some Jews more than others, are in danger because some of their neighbours, employees, tenants, and violently antisemitic fellow family members also hate their guts, even *before* we think about Israel.

I like lobbying with bricks, well enough at least, when the target is the Canadian government and the Laurentian elite, e.g. the richest of the rich, denizens of the glitziest addresses in and around Toronto, Ottawa, Montréal, Charlevoix, and the Muskokas. Fuck a Scotiabank gala in other words. But, I wouldn’t advocate literal bricks most of the time. When and if I would, with respect to Jewish institutions (I’d name a few, but it doesn’t seem prudent), I’d personally prefer to see Jews doing the lobbying—and in broad daylight, too. They can wear keffiyehs if they want to. But yeah, at night, anonymously, with threatening letters to boot, it’s not cool, and it’s probably important for anarchists (the multiethnic lot of us) to say, loudly and clearly to our Jewish neighbours (even those who are sympathetic to extremely yawntime nationalistic versions of Jewish history for children and dads), *that we will never think it’s cool*.

Not even because a synagogue is a “sacred space” or something, but because intimidating Jews *is not useful*. Like, at all! For anything! Except scratching an itch that, I’m gonna just hazard to say, you’re better off not scratching. Maybe talk to a friend about that one.

*[Okay, but the anonymous night attacks have not clearly come from the Palsol movement... Not to say they’re unrelated, but I’d just be careful to conflate them... And folks within the movement (at least some) have in fact spoken out against those attacks.—ed.*

If we’re talking about provocations that more closely resemble a bag of flaming dog poop left on someone’s front stoop, however, that shit is also happening to Jews in Montréal—and the motivations, both political and emotional, are similar whether the attack is serious/violent or moronic/infantile. Of course, what’s been happening to Palestinians, Muslims, and people who are just brown, who speak up on behalf of the Palestinian cause, has actually been worse (more widespread and awful), but what I’m getting at applies in both situations. Anarchists should be able to say, We don’t think it’s cool, whatever the gravity of the situation.△]

All of us should be engaged in a local struggle against everyone who oppresses us and exploits us *here*, which very much may mean people of your own ethnicity (unless you’re from a gold star never-oppressed-anyone ethnicity, congrats by the way), people of the dominant ethnic group (shout out to Québs, love y’all), and people of various ethnic minorities who end up collecting our rent, micromanaging us in this workplace, or not letting us do drugs in sight of their back alley balconies (shout out to Sikhs, Chinese people, Iranians, Portuguese people, East Europeans, and the LGBT community, fuck the homeowners). If such a struggle could generalize *and blossom into a social revolution* (perhaps in the context of a larger breakdown of geopolitical order and/or other social revolutions breaking out elsewhere), that would probably amount to something that looks like an “ethical foreign policy” among various other things.

The Montréal economy would not only secede, at least to a very large degree, from an entanglement with Israeli firms, but also with firms in capitalist countries the world over. Scientific research with practical applications for the development of weapons at local universities would cease. I presume we’d try to grow as much of our food as possible, and maybe Sabra hummus would be less present on local grocery shelves as a natural result of that, but so too Chilean wine, Canadian crude, Congolese metals.

Perhaps a few bricks need to be thrown in order to get where I’m aiming at. I do not think entrenched power concedes without a fight, that’s for sure. It is important to note that, in a still substantially Jewish city (of course, the population was once larger), that may mean fighting with a Jewish land developer or a local International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance booster once in awhile—and somehow we need to be able to do that without signaling, perhaps accidentally, that we think such a person needs to be murdered. The guillotine imagery used in anti-capitalist stuff here circa 15 years ago dances in my mind, and so too the image I have of pogroms in Eastern Europe in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and earlier, anti-Manchu pogroms in Qing Dynasty China in the same period, or later anti-Chinese pogroms in Indonesia, anti-Muslim pogroms in India, and other killing fields from Vietnam to Biafra.

*Killing people indiscriminately does not work for anarchy*—and even killing people very discriminately, like a targeted assassination of the tsar, still doesn’t have the intended effect most of

the time. This is old news. We've known it awhile. More recent challenges to the contrary, from the eco-extremists say, have been unconvincing.

I will laugh when my Jewish landlord cries tears because I'm on a rent strike that will win because fuck him—but I will not laugh, never mind join in, when people light his house on fire with him in it. If this doesn't seem very likely, well, it is my persistent belief that paradigms can change quickly and many presumed constants in our world are bound to change quickly again. I believe It Could Happen Here. I believe that a global famine, say, or another pandemic, or another major geopolitical crisis (Taiwan?), or simply some kind of completely unprecedented event (of the kind that are becoming more and more likely), could interface with ethnic violence that will not be liberating, in the final instance, but simply revolution-burying.

Some of my positions, I think, are a bit irreconcilable. Do I think it is cool to shoplift from Indigo? Clearly yes, because I have done it. Do I think it is cool to hurt the CEO in other ways? I don't know! I probably do, on some level. I am pretty sure she sucks. (Prove me wrong, stranger!) What if I "found out" (rather than "made an educated guess") that she and my landlord, someone else who sucks (because he is my landlord), are in some sense or another both supportive of Israel? Well, that would probably justify some of my worst impulses.

This logic leads inevitably to violence, of the kind that is both negative for me, the perpetrator (because I might go to jail and I, or my associates, might be subjected to various forms of vengeance), and of course the individuals who I will have attacked (or hell, even threatened to attack). But even more importantly, it also diminishes the chance of a social revolution (anytime soon) that could consign to history the hellish present.

I'd rather just convince Jews, one by one if necessary, that Israel is tacky, lame, dusty, and hot, that they should actually live in cold Montréal or German Berlin instead, and by the way, um, Israel is on the wrong side of history so please smarten up if you haven't yet. But better than me saying this stuff, I'd prefer to leave that to my Jewish friends, who presumably aren't gonna come off as Nazi-esque as myself in the eyes of Zeyde and Bubby.

As for me, I'll write things—and perhaps I'll come to the direct action, if I think it'll help materially, not just symbolically.

## **The Holy Land is not holy, it's just land**

Individuals are, of course, shaped by their social context. So, what is the social context of someone who grows up as a citizen in a settler colony? Especially one who grows up on the front lines of conflict with a resentful subject people? It can't be surprising that, in a hundred ways, Israelis have become fascists. Robustly democratic Israel (remember: Athens, the classical example of democracy, was a democracy only for its citizens) has not seen a *complete* purge of its leftists and its anarchists, but these movements are marginal in a context where even left-liberal and social-democratic forces are completely sidelined politically, lacking any influence on the direction of state policy or the progression of history. Those inclined to direct action against the war machine, or even mere boycott and dropout lifestyle, are even more marginal (and often in jail because they refused to be a part of the IDF); many leave the country.

For all the horror of Al-Aqsa Flood (made intentionally spectacular for propaganda broadcast, because the intention was clearly to provoke Israel into a clumsy and costly revenge operation, as well as to inspire similar actions around the world), the murdered, kidnapped, and displaced

all make up a much smaller fraction of the Israeli population as a whole than those same groups within the Gaza territory. This is before we even consider the larger temporal context of the Nakba, the 1967 war, and resistance to normalization from all echelons of Palestinian society since the First Intifada onward. It is not surprising that Israel has been disrupted (school is out, for example), but nor is it surprising that commodities are still flowing and essential jobs are still being done. Yet, the situation on the ground could change on a dime. I am not making bets, but surely we should be prepared for a rapid paradigm shift of the kind that has become increasingly common in recent years. Geopolitical instability is the order of the day. As the Red Sea crisis expands, it is reasonably likely that a larger war could still break out between Israel and many of its neighbours. It is hard to imagine that death, injury, and loss of comfort and safety in Israel would equal that of Gaza (especially given that Gaza would no doubt be pummeled even harder in this scenario), but the pain would certainly increase in the event.

Regardless of what happens in the next weeks or months, I believe that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be resolved, *eventually*, in one of three ways: a more general war as described above, in which the Israeli state is destroyed and/or a place like Cairo, Tehran, or Mecca is nuked; decolonization; or some kind of techno-apocalyptic scenario in which this petty bullshit is made a lot less relevant to everyone and anyone as, for instance, the oceans and then the air turn to literal poison.

Let's talk about decolonization.

Without even mentioning all the famous pro-Israel lobby organizations, it is alleged by rightists like Elon Musk (who is also, not that paradoxically, an antisemite) and Suella Braverman that calls for "decolonization", as well as the slogan "from the river to the sea", indicate a desire to ethnically cleanse Jews from the land of Palestine.

I don't like the sound of "ethnic cleansing". It makes me think of the massacres of Bosniaks in the 1990s—and that is when this verbiage first came to prominence—and indeed of what settlers have been doing for years in the West Bank. But I can't help but notice that, well, ethnic cleansing has pretty much been happening somewhere for my entire life, and somehow, some way, I always failed to care. Would that I am a better person, but I am not. And, if I can't shed a tear for people killed today, I am less able to get weepy about obscure events from the past.

The past is also a place in which October 7 now rests.

Over 200 years ago, Haiti was ethnically cleansed of its French inhabitants in massacres that, in their ruthlessness, were not unlike what happened on October 7.

In Eastern Europe (which includes Greece), many people live in places that were once home to large urban Jewish communities. The same is true of many people living today in North African and Southwest Asian countries, from Tunisia to Iraq; the Jewish populations of these places disappeared in the 1940s and '50s as they became the targets of locals' rage, which was a boon for the newly independent Israeli polity. Ethnic German across Europe communities were also ethnically cleansed in the aftermath of World War II, while in the heartlands of the Soviet Union, which collapsed in 1991, those subjected to Stalin-era policies on national minorities would later fight wars that included commitment to the nation-state concept, that is an Armenia for Armenians, an Azerbaijan for Azeris, a Chechnya for Chechens, and so on.

We could argue that whites were ethnically cleansed in Zimbabwe after the victory of the anti-colonial forces in the 1980s, too, which is to say a variety of factors (the victory of the local anti-colonial forces, for one) made living where they live, on land that their ancestors had taken out of the control of the locals (whom they had often killed with their more advanced

European guns), less comfortable for them than it had been up to then. Many “Rhodesians” as they called themselves (named after the principal architect of the British colonization of Africa, Cecil Rhodes) felt compelled to sell their land, possibly not for the price they would have wanted, and then immigrate to countries such as England, Australia, the United States, and Canada.

I haven’t yet heard anyone claiming that Jews are undergoing “ethnic cleansing” in modern France, but many of them have moved away since the Daesh-associated Hypercacher massacre of 2015 and similar attacks, to places like England, Québec, and Israel. We can see in the French example a combination of diffuse social pressure and targeted violence that the authorities, diplomatically and ideologically on the same page as Israel most of the time, are nevertheless unable to stop. At the same time, the violence has justified the expansion and entrenchment of a police state in France.

Finally, what is the phenomenon of gentrification, if not ethnic cleansing by less *overtly* violent means? Except when the means are indeed *also* overtly violent, as in the gentrification of East Jerusalem.

Rather than focusing on what to call what is happening *over there*, or what kinds of violence (which are scary and hard to always rationally contemplate) might break out here or anywhere as a result of any further *events*, it is worth considering on what some of the anticipated violence—in the form of general war, or anti-colonial resistance in all its myriad forms—will imply. One thing, that seems pertinent to me, is movement. When things get uncomfortable, if enough people have the means to leave, at least some of them will.

Where will people leaving the chaos go? And what do we believe will happen to them?

On October 29, a very confusing incident in Dagestan was reported out. Evidently, locals had tried to lynch, I guess, the passengers on a plane arriving from Tel Aviv, and there had been other antisemitic incidents in the North Caucasus. The details do not matter much to me; I bring it up because this is a good example of something that I hope does not happen in Montréal. If people are leaving Israel, *fine*. Sometimes people need to leave where they are and they have the means to do so. The relevant questions are, Where will they be housed? Does our society have the means to accommodate the people fleeing, and if it does, then what obstacles exist that prevent the adequate provisioning of resources to new arrivals?

*[This section makes it sound a bit like those primarily at risk of ethnic cleansing are Israeli Jews rather than Gazans and that we need to mostly think about accommodating hypothetical Israeli refugees rather than actually existing Palestinian refugees.—ed.*

It should go without saying that the more likely event in Dorval is a plane of refugees arriving from Palestine, or perhaps folks from Lebanon fleeing an expanded Middle Eastern war. △]

These questions preempt my worries about certain classes of refugees being unduly privileged by a racist Canadian immigration policy, for reasons that are too banal to list out. Like, to be clear, *of course* it is terrible that Canada’s policy (in the 2020s, not the 1920s) will favour Ukrainians and Israelis unduly over Africans, Asians (including Southwest Asians), and people from the southern part of our own hemisphere, but I am not principally concerned with changing that policy *because that is actually outside of my power*. I can lobby the government—by brick through bank window or by letter to parliamentary representative—to open the border completely to everyone, but that is a call that government executives are going to make about *their* policy. I can (try to) influence

the decision with my actions, but I can't *make* the decision (without getting elected to power myself).

What actually is in my power, as an irrelevant schmuck living in Montréal, is how I respond to what has happened already, what is happening right now, and what may happen perhaps sooner than I would anticipate.

For instance, consider this question: where the hell do people living in Palestine, be they Israeli, Palestinian, or something else, actually physically go? Assuming they don't go wither in the desert, as Netanyahu's governments plans for the Gazans, they *might* do as mostly anti-war, anti-Putin Russians have done in Georgia since 2022: move to a relatively prosperous and peaceful place, perhaps Montréal, and crowd locals out of their own spaces and drive up prices, potentially inflaming pre-existing local ethnic tensions. If the new arrivals are broke or close to it, they *might* receive government money and general societal good will in their new surroundings. Or, if the government coffers are just about depleted, as seems to be the case in the Canadian instance, it may be presumed that citizen taxpayers will not put up with paying the refugees' living expenses. Hence we can imagine that, under a Poilievre government for example, Israelis will be expected to pay their own way and Palestinians won't be let in at all.

All this shit is unpleasant and, frankly, it's hopeless. Canada's immigration policy is, and always has been, vile. Racism and the myths that reinforce it are omnipresent. Someone is going to be prime minister, and he (probably he) will not be a just philosopher-king (the authority of which anarchists would reject anyhow). So, I want to keep the eye on what anarchists in Montréal can actually affect—and, to the extent it matters, to keep our eyes focused squarely on what the *central* issues are in Palestine and, in fact, anywhere else.

People need housing in order to live, and there's not enough of it; what does exist is controlled by rent seekers who are also often racists. Access to land, and to resources, necessary to provide housing, are restricted to some—citizens of certain countries, and generally those with *full* citizenship. Crises of unemployment, of homelessness, of insecurity, are addressed by governments with prisons, police, and punishing military options. A victory for "the people" on any of these fronts, in any country, would in theory if not necessarily in practice help "the people" everywhere. How can we help to make that happen?

## **Foreign affairs, foreign to (y)our experience**

A friend who attends Concordia University, who goes to the downtown campus several times a week, tells me that even there, famous around the world as a North American campus that has been particularly rocked by the conflict, what is happening barely affects him. I don't doubt that this is true. But of course, his experience is not universal. I live in the same city as he does, and on a hundred fronts—when I look at socials (I know I shouldn't but I do), when I look at posters on my street (a more wholesome and outdoorsy pastime), when I talk to friends of mine who are also anarchists, when I talk to friends of mine who are also Concordia students, when I think about what is fruitful to do *in this moment, in this place*—the conflict can't be ignored. (Okay, it couldn't be ignored until Christmas rolled up.)

I don't want to make too clean a distinction between the emotional dimension and the physical dimension. In the wider context of our region (about 4 million people in 2023), the tens of thousands, not yet hundreds of thousands of people, who have come out into the streets are still

a small minority—and yet, in absolute terms, they have been doing the most disruptive shit in the streets for awhile. The sheer number of participants probably rivals, if not surpasses, the Shut Down Canada movement of early 2020, which also saw action in Montréal that was inspired, first and foremost, by a developing political situation in a distant land (albeit elsewhere on our continent). Most people involved on the Palsol side are not there for any crass financial reason, either, although let's acknowledge that we might have to ask questions about the keffiyeh and Palestinian flag seller someday. In most cases, local pro-Palestinian folks have actual family connections, they have some kind of pan-national affiliation, they are a well-meaning humanist and/or communist of some kind, or they are a combination thereof, and that is what makes them identify with Palestinians in Palestine. Some kind of *love*, then, is certainly a more important factor in motivating people to walk with the Palsol movement than *rage* or *hatred*.

This is, incidentally, also true of people on the other side (whom I expect I, and perhaps you, will have to confront physically at some point sooner or later). At least one or two people in Montréal probably owns a property they'd like to retire to in the Galilee. The reason that person bought that condo is as emotional as the reason I chose to move to Montréal as a young person, and it probably has to do with love, with memory of love. And one component of love is connection. In a world in which ethnicity and religion have an iron grip on human imagination, most Montréalers, and certainly most of the anarchists here, don't have that same kind of connection that can become a nationalist kind of love, be it Zionist or Palestinian, be it on the wrong side of history or the right.

And maybe that's okay? To be aloof often offers a better perspective.

## **Alerta! Alerta!**

When love interfaces with a zero game logic of fighting for land, for scarce resources, people kill each other. And people *here* have the potential to feel just as strongly about this stuff as anyone.

Obviously it's on a different magnitude from the dazzling *there* of Palestine, or the curious *then* of 2021 when maybe there was something that looked like a riot here in Montréal if you just squinted right (and you had never been to a real riot). But it is really happening, right now—in a world that is increasingly unstable, in an economy that is increasingly depleted, generating widespread desperation and chaos.

In our region, some commuters have been blocked in traffic. Some protesters have been arrested; there have been house raids in Toronto and much hubbub about a teenager arrested on terrorism charges in Ottawa. Some janitors at Jewish institutions had to address bullet holes and SPVM investigations during their work shift. *The war is ongoing*. Palsol is too big to suppress, but the local pro-Israeli camp is also large; while it is not yet organized into much of a street movement, it certainly has the potential to do so.

Hence, I suspect we're presently experiencing something more analogous to spring 2011 than spring 2012. We shouldn't underestimate just how big this thing could get, even locally.



## A round-up of other areas of possible examination

1. Circa 2010, cops in Hamilton politically persecuted anarchists *as such* because it was alleged that their ideology, by definition, was anti-police—and I guess they felt, almost reasonably, that police are a protected class (because after all, they are a protected class, literally protected from prosecution in most cases for being unnecessarily violent). The very language of anti-hatred should be critically examined, and rejected, by anarchists. It would be fruitful to study how this discourse was used to redirect energy away from a critique of the French state and global inequities and exclusively towards the (obviously necessary) critique of the Front national and other “fascist” (more precisely, rightist and politically or subculturally “extreme”) elements in French society. It would also be fruitful to analyze the compromised position of an organization like Anti-Hate Canada, which is government-subsidized, and try to get people to think critically about which political rivals the incumbent government in Canada is willing to cast as hateful, why they do it, and how similar strategies can be used against social movements of all kinds, including our own and ones we broadly support.
2. The ubiquity of social surveillance in the current moment, and the fading of a pandemic masked sociality into which criminality (which is among the politically valuable components of any social movement in history, and in some cases the only thing that’s good about it) could easily fade, requires serious analysis. I personally don’t feel like educating people in the Palestine solidarity movement about shit—not unless they care to ask me. But, others perhaps feel differently, and maybe they be more influential in arguing their points. Perhaps not to boomers and liberal democrats, but to hools and chill and/or vaguely radical people.
3. Palestinian flags everywhere are corny as shit. I don’t think it should be cancelable (shout out Berlin/the German scene, what the fuck lol), but a national flag is a national flag. If you are literally trying to pretend that you are Palestinian (not what I would do, but I lie about being East European and francophone all the time, so who am I to judge), that’s one thing. But if you’re an anarchist, and incidentally also not (even) Palestinian... uh, does that compute? I think this might be performative. I think keffiyehs (which are not national flags) look pretty cool and I might get one someday, but seriously, what’s the point of telling the whole world “I am an anarchist” (literally never-heard-of-repression energy) and then waving a national flag. This just confuses people, or it makes you look like *you* are confused. (“Um, how can an *anarchist* support *Palestine* which is a...” We can expect this line of questioning as much from a fellow demonstrator in the free Palestine march as much as from someone’s white Canadian conservative dad, although the fellow demonstrator may be polite enough that he won’t say it publicly.)
4. I was never a Rojava guy, and I must admit, I have lost track of events there in recent years. As far as I know, people still live there—and I want to hope that they have at least a few good things going on there, and it’s not too fucked up. The reason I bring it up is because Rojava, even if it was not utopia, had a few good things going on at the height of the revolution. Principal among these was that the flourishing of cultural production in the Kurdish language was almost never paired with a chauvinistic idea of Kurdistan for the Kurds; this

was in sharp contrast to solidarity movements in the West that emphasized, and fetishized, a specifically Kurdish character to what has long officially been called North and East Syria. Whatever else you want to say about it, Öcalanism and/or democratic confederalism, as executed in the Rojava experiment, included very cogent critiques of national states, which is to say of categories like ethnicity and nationality, and their concrete expressions in law and technique as passports, borders, citizenship. Working out how one could apply a similar approach to the land of Palestine, historically always polyglot and multifaith, is a task best left to people presently living in Palestine. For us here in Montréal, however, it provides a potentially useful framework for our comparably diverse region, itself riven by conflict (from time to time) between different indigenous, settler, diasporic, and civic nationalisms. It also provides us a useful way to imagine what we think we would like to see in any other place.

5. As far as geopolitics goes (and I do think it's helpful for anarchists to have a good grasp of what's coming down the pipeline), the relationship between Armenia and Azerbaijan may need a little more attention from anarchists. In 2020, Armenia lost a war to Azerbaijan, which ended when Russia, very late, intervened and helped to impose a very bad deal on the Armenians. In September of 2023, in a one-day operation, Azerbaijan, a close ally of Turkey and a client of the Israeli military technology industry, invaded Artsakh without Russian "peacekeepers" stationed in the region intervening. Artsakh, of course, was itself ethnically cleansed of Azeris decades earlier. The Armenians definitely did massacre a few hundreds (probably not a few thousands) of people during the break-up of the Soviet Union and the early 1990s—and yet the majority of people left voluntarily, despite the fact that may not have had anywhere else to go. In the present day, Azerbaijan's president uses the term "Western Azerbaijan" to refer to the entire territory of the Republic of Armenia, not just the land occupied by a supposedly independent Artsakh; and this in a situation where Russia, Armenia's military protector, is no longer willing or able to intervene in its defense, while Azerbaijan has emerged as both well-armed and well-connected. Some Israeli officials must have felt emboldened by Azerbaijan's decisive annihilation of a perceived demographic and military problem through the use of ruthlessly applied kinetic force, mere weeks before Al-Aqsa Flood, a military operation that certain echelons of the Israeli security state knew Hamas had been planning, was executed with stunning success.

## **Back to Earth**

I recently spoke to a friend who said she felt bad for not going to the FLIP demos, and that she was going to try to attend on Saturday, December 2. A Palsol demo was planned for the same day, as had been the case for every weekend since October 7 (up to at least the week of December 4, when I wrote this line). My friend said she felt that her attendance at a demonstration against Bill 31 might be more helpful than at the Palestine one. In her words, the war is going to happen whatever she does.

I'm not convinced that this is right way to think about these things. Our actions have effects; we can contribute to a movement that really can stop the genocide in Gaza—and preferably in such a way that we can head off horror in our local (or continental) context, of the kind that either 2024 or 2025 is likely to bring. The pertinent questions, for me, are how anarchists can

build power so that we have the capacity to be influential in local social movements to come, without burning ourselves out and leaving ourselves weaker in the longer term.  $\Delta$

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