

The Creeker Companion Vol 1

Anonymous

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Introduction

This has been put together as a sort of companion reader to those who spent time at the Fairy Creek blockade and perhaps are seeing the world with new eyes, as well as to those who have read Creeker Volume 1, or folks anywhere involved in land defence. Covering a variety of topics, some of the pieces gathered here are intended to help with the background context, both for those who didn't follow the Fairy Creek blockade early on, or are unfamiliar with some of the history on southern Vancouver Island around anti-logging/indigenous sovereignty. There are sections from the Smash Teal Jones zine of 2016 when land defenders fought Teal Jones in the Walbran, as well as an interview with a land defender from early on in the Fairy Creek Blockade. Following that is a piece that was released in January 2021, long before the blockade reached critical mass. Some pieces act as a sort of intervention, some simply to broaden the frame of reference. They speak to the longstanding debates between reformism and something more radical, pacifism and something more militant, security culture, cancel culture, and being a settler on indigenous land. The writings here have been gathered from various sources. Some were left intact, some have had sections and footnotes removed to save space.

Resistance & Rabble Rousing

Late July 2016: Hundreds of people gather at Kaxi:ks (Big River) for a Convergence at the bridge over the river in the Heart of the Walbran (pictured below). This marks 25 years since the last major battle to defend this sacred place, and renews fighting spirits for the coming conflict. Pacheedaht elder Bill Jones and the family of deceased Pacheedaht warrior Harriet Nahanee are there to dedicate a new trail into one of the proposed cutblocks.

The MC opens the event by boldly stating that anarchists were instrumental in kicking off resistance in 1991 and that indigenous people and settlers working together have the power to defeat Teal Jones.

Summer 2016 sees a steady increase in visitors to the valley, banner drops in various locations, and strategizing for future confrontation with the enemy. To date one of the cutblocks in the Heart of the Walbran has been approved, so the threat of devastation is very real.

Late 2015/Early 2016: A permanent camp is established in the Heart of the Walbran. At least one person is arrested for violating a court injunction granting Teal Jones a buffer zone around nearby logging (the injunction has since expired). Blockaders also temporarily prevent the logging trucks from unloading at Teal Jones' Duke Point Log Sort in Nanaimo.

Late 2014: News breaks that Teal Jones has applied for large clearcuts throughout the Central Walbran ancient forest.

Teal Jones logs near the Heart of the Walbran. Like pretty much all scum-sucking capitalists these days, Teal Jones claims to be "environmentally responsible" and fully in compliance with the government's hollowed out, bullshit environmental regulations, a farce which only serves to legitimize genocide and give it a friendlier face. We won't insult anyone's intelligence or waste time picking apart the multitude of blatant lies in these pathetic attempts to market "sustainable logging".

Central Walbran Ancient Forest is also home to species at risk including marbled murrelets, Queen Charlotte goshawks, red-legged frogs, Vaux's swifts, and Keen's longeared myotis, as well as cougars, wolves, black bears, elk, black-tailed deer, steelhead, and coho salmon.

This valley has been lovingly cared for by generations of people, and for such a wild and grandiose place, it has a warm and inviting charm... and a feeling of having been inhabited and cherished. A place where one can do just about anything they could desire such as camp communally, dip in emerald swimming holes, wander breathtaking trails, hunt for karst caves, or just hide away somewhere in the vastness of it all.

Resignation is death. Resistance is life.

The secret is to really begin...

Five months of direct action disrupt old growth logging on so-called Vancouver Island

January 10, 2021, Unceded Pacheedaht Territory:

The San Juan River, flowing into the Pacific Ocean on the southwest coast of Vancouver Island, feels different than most island rivers. This majestic coastal river ecosystem is of a scale one is more accustomed to seeing on the mainland. The meandering braids of the broad estuarine area it shares with the smaller Gordon River, sometimes cloaked in mist that hides the mountains of the surrounding valleys, are home to everything from salmon and steelhead to giant green sturgeon. The area around the watershed is also home to the biggest trees still standing in so-called Canada, such as the Cheewhat Cedar, the San Juan Spruce and the Red Creek Fir.

Since August 10, 2020, grassroots blockades have continuously defended the headwaters of Ada'itsx (Fairy Creek) – the last unlogged tributary of the San Juan – from being clearcut by Teal Jones Group and its contractors. This is the longest

sustained direct action of its kind in this region since the infamous Bear Mountain treesit in Langford (2007–2008).

Resistance to logging in Pacheedaht Territory goes back decades. The coming summer will mark 30 years since the “Hot Summer” of 1991, when Indigenous warriors like Harriet Nahanee and settler anarchists began a successful defense of ancient forests in Kax:iks (aka The Walbran). Pacheedaht elder Bill Jones has welcomed the current blockades, and shared his desire to see a memorial to victims of the genocidal smallpox epidemic, and a hunting cabin built on site as part of Fairy Creek's long term protection. Tla-o-qui-aht elder Joe Martin (veteran of the first logging blockade in so-called British Columbia, on so-called Meares Island in the mid-1980s) has also visited the blockades with members of his family to show support.

Grassroots land defenders observing the area in July 2020 discovered the imminent blasting of new roads into Fairy Creek. Fed up with seeing the equivalent of 32 soccer fields of ancient forest logged every day, on an island with only 1%-3% of lowelevation, high-biodiversity rainforests remaining, an informal collective of people from across the island established a blockade where the road building contractor (Stone Pacific) was about to crest a ridge into the west side of the Fairy Creek watershed. One week later, a second blockade was established defending the eastern approaches to Fairy Creek, and contiguous remnants of ancient forest.

In the weeks and months since then, with intel that corporations like Teal Jones use advanced analytics software to re-route around such obstructions to continue extracting profits from the

landbase, pop-up blockades have successfully disrupted road building and old growth logging at other nearby hotspots and chokepoints, such as Edinburgh Mountain, Bugaboo Creek, Camper Creek, and Eden Grove. As of this writing, the Eden Grove blockade has remained continuously occupied since mid-December.

Solidarity actions have broadened the frontlines from the wilder west side of the island to the more industrialized east side, where the Rainforest Flying Squad and Extinction Rebellion have blocked old growth log trucks on the Trans Canada Highway, as well as at the ports in Nanaimo and Ladysmith, resulting in the only blockade-related arrests to date. A video report of one such action was removed from the CHEK News (corporate media) website a couple hours after it was broadcast and posted. Some participants in this growing movement have experienced police harassment near their homes prior to such actions, and trucks loaded with old growth logs were seen being escorted by police cruisers from felling areas on the west side of the island, to east side ports on at least one occasion.

Some of these actions have targeted Western Forest Products (WFP) in addition to Teal Jones. WFP holds the majority of Tree Farm Licenses (TFLs) on Vancouver Island, devastating the land with clearcuts while devastating its workers, who went on strike for 8 months from July 2019 to February 2020. Teal Jones has stated its intention to completely destroy the remaining old growth forest in TFL 46 (which largely impedes on Pacheedaht Territory), while the Ocean Wolves of Caycuse have stated their intention to disrupt old growth logging in neighbouring Ditidaht Territory.

Anarchists have contributed in various ways, including autonomously felling trees and locking gates to block active logging roads. The loudest voices in the movement are largely liberal and reformist, and therefore vulnerable to recuperation by politicians and BC's highly collaborationist and parasitic environmental NGOs. Some NGOs have predictably tried to piggyback on the success of the blockades to fundraise for their lobbying campaigns, which divert people and resources away from grassroots action. Nevertheless, the blockades and other actions have so far remained grassroots and autonomous, even while receiving celebrity endorsements and bolstering demands to end old growth logging by the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. The utter and abject failure of NGOs to have any material effect on the liquidation of forests in so-called BC is a major reason why these blockades have attracted so much support.

Anyone familiar with the history of resistance to logging in so-called BC, knows that in recent years, resistance, while successful at times, has been mostly rather sporadic and small in scale. But the spectre of the widespread "war in the woods" (c. 1985–2005) flaring up again haunts the colonial state, with tension in the air at times as thick as smoke from wildfires that are increasingly common even in these coastal rainforests, which are some of the wettest places on earth.

While an estimated 500 people have visited or participated in the blockades at some point over the last 5 months, the Fairy Creek and Eden Grove blockades are currently requesting visitors by invitation only, due to harsh COVID-19 restrictions recently enacted by the provincial government. Affinity groups can take action elsewhere in TFL 46 or against Teal Jones at any of its operations on Turtle Island, including its headquarters in Kwantlen Territory (North Surrey).

Co-opting the Radical Instinct: A Warning

By Tom Hayden (2000)

I think that you all might want to know something about how the other side sees you. There's a study done by the Cattlemen's Society. Now, you may think they're an irrelevant, marginal group, but they're quite crucial to the frontier mentality that built this great country on the backs of the native people. They are a big special interest group, and they pay good money to find out who these activists are. A few years ago they did a study. The question was: How do we contain and stop this direct action movement? It wasn't called the direct action movement then; it was the civil disobedience movement, the protesters, the environmentalists, all the rabble that they were concerned about at the time.

They created a chart. At one end were the radicals, defined as people who believe that the system itself has to be changed. A radical would be anybody who understands that globalization is a system with many fronts and many issues. Their prescription for the radicals was to isolate and discredit them, not because there was something inherently radical in their behavior, but because they were pointing out that it was a system. So, the first goal, they said, was to discredit the radical analysis.

The second group on the spectrum were the idealists. These are people who want to give the system a chance. They believe in the same social justice values that the radicals do, but they're idealistic; they don't have a cold, cynical view that nothing is possible under the system. So, it's extremely important, the study said, that the idealists don't become radicals. In order to keep this from happening, you raise the stakes of radicalism so that people are afraid to become radical, because they then get smeared, discredited, and worse. You have to give the idealists occasional victories in order to keep their hope in the system alive.

Third on this continuum came the pragmatists. The pragmatists are former idealists who've won some victories, who start to believe that the system works. So, they said, it's extremely important for the idealists to have victories — not because of justice, but because that way they become pragmatists. And you want the pragmatists to be able to say: See? The system works. Be pragmatic. And the final part of the spectrum — the culmination of your future, if you follow this plan — is that you can become an opportunist. An opportunist is a former pragmatist. An opportunist, they said, is a pragmatist who gets attracted to the money, the glamour, the status, and the power. And then they had a whole workshop on how this could be done. How to discredit the radicals, cultivate the idealists, make them pragmatists, and then find the opportunists among the pragmatists. And there you have the story of my generation, the 60s generation.

You have millions of people who have radical instincts but little expectation, who have lowered their expectation. You have millions of people who are former idealists who have become pragmatists. And you have plenty of people who are opportunist. My question is: How can you break this cycle? It's the most important cycle to break. You can't break the cycle of poverty; you can't break the cycle of violence; you can't break the cycle of corporate expansion; you can't break the cycle of the arms race; you can't break the cycle of imprisonment, if you don't break the cycle by which radicals are isolated, idealists are turned into pragmatists, and pragmatists into opportunists. I have not found an answer to this problem, but I'm here to tell you it is the problem. And you are its answer.

Toronto and Vancouver: On Legitimate and Illegitimate Protest

By Nora Samara (2010)

This piece grows out of dialogue with many community members between the Vancouver Olympics in February and the Toronto G8/G20 in June 2010. It needs saying.

I am writing this for friends who believe that direct action tactics — namely property damage — ‘overshadow’ the messages of our movement. I have had so many of these conversations that clearly there is a will and a need to make these points public. [...]

My pacifism can — must — coexist with your militancy if we are to achieve any of our goals

The thing is that my basic nature is to prefer to avoid physical confrontation. For my own spiritual reasons, as well as straight up fear of being hit on the head or penned in by police, I tend to feel in my gut the same way as many of these voices do who are unhappy with direct action, particularly of the smashy variety — scared, overwhelmed, afraid of the police, and preferring for my own ethical reasons to be gentle in my actions.

At the same time, speaking out of care for and friendships with many people who have thought through their choice of tactics and who may intentionally use direct action strategies as one set in a large and varied toolbox — I can say that in fact, many of those members of our communities who choose to use these strategies are some of the least violent and most responsible, loving people I know in how they choose to live their lives.

If I were trapped on a desert island a la Lord of the Flies, and had to figure out how to survive collectively, share our food and set up a new society, these are the folks I’d want there with me.

They’re the ones with the concrete skills in collective decision making and the respect for life that would make me feel the most cared for and safe.

They’re the ones who would make sure no one else gobbled up my share of the food, and the ones who would make sure everyone else had a safe place to sleep before they hit the sack themselves, and who would be the first and most willing to take their turn on watch.

They’re the ones *least* likely to put pig heads on sticks and kill each other with conch shells.

I can’t speak for any specific actions out on the streets because I’m not there, and I imagine the facts on the ground are mixed — but — if the people I know personally who support direct action are any example, when it is done well, it is not ‘wanton destruction’ but comes out of a long, deep, intelligent and educated commitment to larger global social justice movements. Contrary to media images or popular perceptions, many who use black bloc tactics across the country do act directly out of communities.

If people here glorify the Zapatistas which a lot of northern progressives tend to do), then how can we villify people who use the same tactics for the same purposes here?

I think these moments of crisis, and those who create them, help us reach each other in a more genuine way through the haze and bubble wrap of consumerism in which north americans are encouraged to live.

The police, the state, and the corporate media want to separate us into:

‘Legitimate’ protestors: those thousands who walk in incredible numbers with passion and banners — who can be ignored and have arguably little effect — on their own — because the current dominant culture in media and government — i.e. government by elites for elites, and the rest of us can eat cake — no longer takes any notice of expressions of democratic will: [link to G20 video of 25,000 people marching, unreported by media]. Remember the enormous peaceful

demonstrations in 2003 when the US stepped up bombing in Iraq? All over the world, we marched and sang in the hundreds of thousands as the bombs dropped, and it achieved not a thing.

and 'Illegitimate' protestors: those who actually challenge the system, those who recognize that marches may – may – have worked in the 1960s but they no longer work today. In fact, I'm not sure they are what really brought about change in the 60s either if you look at the civil rights movement, the black panthers, etc. in successful social change movements, there was always a more militant wing of the movement that helped make the 'peaceful' events have more weight and effect. And in very concrete terms, when property damage is successful in the financial costs it garners, it can make business-as-usual no longer profitable and thus save lives and ecosystems.

Basically the 'legitimate/illegitimate' labels work to separate us from one another, and the commercial media laps it right up.

Unity in Diversity means space for *genuine* diversity

The thing is we live in a world with so many different kinds of people in it... and I don't think my personal preference for slow gentle movement needs to overwrite other people's need for direct, militant resistance.

Do our discomforts with one another's choices about how to resist mean that we have to all resist in the same ways? Would we ever want to live in a world, or be part of a movement, in which there is one uniform party line that we all have to buy into (i.e. only one kind of resistance is allowed, only slow, gentle resistance... or only militant resistance)?

In a conflict with someone or something much, much more powerful... when people live their daily lives in fear... sometimes we may need to be free to scream and yell or be really really firm and not allow ourselves to get trampled because that is asserting freedom from the fear that people live with normally – the fear people live with when we all act like everything is fine. Particularly for the people whose livelihoods, lands, and cultures are on the line.

The quiet daily system of aggression is more frightening when people let it poison our bodies and spirits quietly and while acting nice then it is when people are free/liberated to speak the truth – the full truth- about systems of power – even if that means a few inanimate objects get destroyed.

For those who feel strengthened and liberated by speaking out and refusing to be afraid, I think power to them – it's not my way, at least, not right now – and that's fine with them and fine with me.

At this point, while I have a personal (maybe spiritual, maybe self-preservation) discomfort with militancy, so long as it is against inanimate objects, I don't see these things (direct action vs. gentle protest) as in opposition – I see them as complimentary.

And I see them both as profoundly loving and profoundly hopeful.

My gentle approach achieves certain kinds of things, such as the sympathy of middle and upper middle class people who want change without 'plowing the ground' – and there are other things it simply can't do – and I recognize its limitations.

I depend on people with the stomach for more direct action to take those risks. And they do take risks for things I care about, often behind the scenes: when asked to do so, they routinely protect our family-friendly rallies from violent police provocation; when the state attacks, they de-arrest people; this tactic can get innocent people out of police kettling like we've seen recently in NYC; and when people who are not normally safe from police (such as homeless folks and

indigenous folks) request it, the bloc employs skills at de-escalating standoffs with police, and protects against police takedowns of community events.

And in its most visible role, while it makes me uncomfortable, the black bloc tactic also pushes the neoliberal state to recognize that there is only so far the corporate elite can push the population.

There is only so far the corporate elite can steal from us, repress Indigenous peoples and continue to colonize land, destroy our planet and our ecosystems, erode all of our human and civil rights, take apart our social safety net, and repress or ignore us when we speak up.

There is only so far that inequality between the wealthy and the poor can go, before unrest becomes widespread, and this is an important message for governments and the corporate elite to hear.

I remember how it felt to be part of an enormous demonstration against the war and then realize that our governments were going to go ahead and bomb anyway.

I remember the feeling of hopelessness and powerlessness watching unspeakably, unthinkable horrible things happen and knowing that no matter how many hundreds of thousands of us take to the streets, we would achieve a tiny blip in the corporate media world, and absolutely nothing in the world of international capital and colonial domination.

When you ignore us, and allow only ineffective marches in Green Zones to be ‘legitimate’, as you dismantle everything we care about and expand your destruction of our cultures, of civil society, and of the planet, yes, eventually more and more people will resist.

Those who choose direct action tactics are standing their ground and speaking the truth to power, at great personal cost. For taking a stand, and for their work to protect people in our communities, I owe them both my honesty and my support.

Instead of denouncements, we need to strengthen dialogue and the capacity to work together, because diversity of tactics is a two-way street.

Instead of denouncing the strategy as a whole, we can strengthen the capacity of the bloc to respond to the needs of the larger protest, as it often does. The tactic was initially conceived not as a property-destruction machine, but as a protective strategy that could break out of police lines like the one we saw in Toronto when the police penned people in for hours at a major downtown intersection. From what I’ve seen people with more experience and understanding about the purpose of a black bloc tactic – the capacity for mass thought-out action – know how to use it to protect and work with the larger protest. In Vancouver, at the large peaceful protest on one of the last nights, I watched as Indigenous elders called up the bloc to get between them and the police line, to protect the elders and allow them to continue to sing and drum. We all know how the police treat native people in this country, especially those who stand up. The bloc was responsive to the desires of the elders in that case, and it was inspiring and protective.

Two friends reminded me yesterday that people using black bloc strategies created a sense of safety for them at events during the past year. This is the best and original purpose of the tactic and one we don’t hear about in the corporate media.

One woman said that when the police were attacking people in Toronto, she felt much safer seeing the ‘de-arrests’ and protection from police beatings that people in black were able to provide to her and those around her.

Another reminded me that the Vancouver Olympic Tent Village was such a success in part because this same skill set meant we had enough of us around who could tell the police they

weren't welcome there — and succeed in keeping police out by de-escalating the very real police violence that threatened the peaceful Tent Village many times.

And, of course, in Montebello, the police provocateurs were the ones with rocks in their hands, acting against the agreement of protest organizers — protest organizers who included those in black bloc. We need to remember that those who use black bloc when appropriate also organize and attend and help at other protests.

What we need, always, are clear indications of when and where these tactics are going to take place, and the capacity to build community agreements about what takes place when and where, so that we can intentionally either watch, help build the crowd if we choose to do so, or stay away from that day or that part of things.

This way, when undercover police enter our peaceful protests with rocks in their hands, we'll have the support we need to expose them and carry on with the intended action of the day.

When the dialogue and lines of communication between organizers is strong and clear and nourished, all these tactics can play powerful complimentary roles, and we can each respect the call for different kinds of actions.

I think the reason people don't see the value of direct action is because of media and official PR spin. I'm not suggesting that any of us are fools who suck up what's in the news, but rather that we don't have access to a lot of information, sometimes don't even have access to the very people in our communities — in the sense of what doesn't get heard, what doesn't get covered, what is downplayed or ignored... what daily regular violence is ignored.

Keep in mind when you denounce people in public settings that we are profoundly surveilled, and that the police want to create mistrust in our movement. When you publicly denounce the strategy as a whole, you're playing into the hands of these police, and you're also denouncing the people who brought you many of the things you probably value over the past years.

Protecting people from police brutality, de-escalating tensions when police try to attack vulnerable communities, and exposing police provocateurs at our rallies: these are all the same sets of skills and they're darn useful. Not only that — the people wearing black may also be the same people who cooked your food, babysat your kids, found you a place to sleep, or sat outside the jail when you got arrested for breach.

Most importantly, the state wants to know that it can attack community organizers and take them away from us and put them in jail.

If you denounce parts of the movement in public, then the state will be able to take and keep organizers. If you stand in solidarity even with those you disagree with, recognizing that we are part of a larger movement and that solidarity is a two-way street, the state will be unable to keep community organizers in jail, because as we saw several times, a mass show of support, and support by prominent people, makes plain the politically motivated, malicious nature of targeted roundups of organizers, and makes the state back down and let people go.

What's the Difference Between Dialogue and Denouncement?

Regardless of your agreement or disagreement in community meetings, in private, in planning sessions, when it comes time to choose what to say in public, steer the conversation towards the real injustice, because if you don't, you turn the full force of the state against other community organizers. In other words, *we need room for internal debate and dialogue, and we need full support of those in jail* — which means we need to recognize just how dangerous public denouncements are, and recognize who gets hurt by them when *we're dealing with state power and not only*

with each other. That carefulness about where we put our words makes the difference between dialogue and denouncement.

Rather than turning the dominant opinion, and the full force of the state, against vulnerable people who take these risks to speak truth to power, even those who may destroy symbols — symbols! A Starbucks or Hudson’s Bay window is not alive; it is a potent symbol — while people’s faces, bodies, lands, and freedoms are being smashed... I prefer to use the conversations as opportunities to build mass movements. Don’t let the media trick us into blaming each other.

The protesters in jail deserve kindness and support, whether we share their strategies or not. Let’s get them out and be clear in our wholehearted support, and then when we’ve got them back in our communities and in our arms and around our dinner tables, and out of the arms of the state, then let’s strengthen our ability to make space for and complement each other’s approaches — both our gentler approaches and our more assertive ones.

Vancouver

Here in Vancouver, where I live, many people I care about were involved in a direct action in February against a corporate sponsor of the Olympics games — Hudson’s Bay. After the fact, I heard a lot of pain, fear, and confusion from many around me who are struggling with a perceived rift in the global justice movement: a rift between those who want to protest using only gentle tactics such as marches, singing, and sit-ins, and those who want to protest by actively fighting back against the ever-growing police repression in our lives, and by destroying symbols of corporate domination and colonization such as the windows of massive corporations.

I heard from members of the community choir that I sang in at the demos, for instance, that the direct action tactics ‘overshadowed’ the message of what I’m going to call ‘gentle’ protestors.

In response, I can’t help but note that, if those I know are any example, the people who used direct action strategies in Vancouver are very committed to social change, and spent countless hours organizing things including the direct action ‘heart attack’ march but also the tent city, the Women’s March (Indigenous women in Vancouver’s downtown eastside), and the general flag-waving puppeted facepainted large demonstrations.

The behind-the-scenes relationships can look very different — much more cooperative, organized, meaningful and respectful — than media portrayals or even the way events might look to people who just show up for a demo without coming to the meetings beforehand to find out what’s planned and how and why. I find it divisive to separate out and demonize those ‘bad’ protestors from us ‘good’ protestors, when really we’re all the same people doing different work on different days... particularly since the media and police want to make that distinction.

I wonder, given the history of agitation for social change, which always includes direct physical struggle of some sort or another, whether it’s helping anyone to replicate that division of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ forms of protest against oppression.

As my choir director noted, had the result in the mainstream media been better — for instance, had there been an actual discussion of the real issues in the mainstream media — then those who were so upset about how things turned out in Vancouver (people injured and in jail, protestors branded as thugs, media even less sympathetic) would have been cheering the physical tactics of the direct action folks as part of the reason for success. Anyone who attempted to protest the

Olympics at all knows that mainstream perspectives had already decided that the protesters were just a bunch of grumps and killjoys.

It is very easy to scapegoat and blame each other within a movement that is striving to be heard by larger forces who so easily manipulate the message: “Good” protesters and “bad” protesters.

and Toronto

In Toronto, as I write this, the people who have been breaking things are not harming anything alive — they are attacking symbols rather than life — while the corporate status quo is daily harming/killing/destroying not only individual lives but whole ecosystems as a daily matter of course.

As a recent update stated: ‘While the media focuses on its predictable ritual of scapegoating protestors, tens of thousands of labour, anti war, migrant justice, Indigenous solidarity, anarchist, environmental justice, anti-oppression, anti capitalist, socialist, student, and community-based activists took to the streets to expose and confront the violent policies of the criminal G20. The reasons they did so — Indigenous self determination; environmental justice; a world free of militarization; income equity and community control over resources; migrant justice; gender, queer, disability, and reproductive rights — are just as relevant today as they were this past weekend.’

The violence I’m seeing in all the reports — from corporate and independent media alike — is of police en masse with weapons and riot gear penning people in, attacking people, threatening and assaulting trans folk, queer folks and women, beating, trampling, charging, and injuring people (including people with disabilities, people holding babies, elders, journalists, random passersby, people in so-called ‘green zones’), rounding people up in mass arrests, sending people to the hospital with broken bones, throwing people physically to the ground by their necks, and generally using brute violence and intimidation against the population.

All of which was ‘legitimated’ by new laws the police initially said were passed quietly (the lawyers and the mayor weren’t even informed) — and which turned out *not* to be law at all — stating that within the ‘security perimeter’ the Toronto police could bodily search anyone they wish upon demand, and could demand that we produce ID without the usual privacy and civil liberties protections we expect in this country.

This is Stephen Harper’s Canada — and culturally, people’s acceptance of such a state of affairs smacks of Weimar Germany to anyone who has studied — or lived through — the rise of actual authoritarianism. It is also the side of Canada that those of us who are non-native don’t usually have to see. As Ray says in one of the interviews cited below, the brute force Canada has always used against native people under colonial rule, Canada is now using against the rest of us. Witness the four-hour pen at Queen and Spadina, or the charging at crowds peacefully assembled singing Oh Canada. What the state does to the most vulnerable of us, it will eventually do to all of us, so we must stand in solidarity with those who are most vulnerable.

I met a woman who had moved to Canada from the former Yugoslavia. She works at the flower shop where I picked up flowers to give to friends as they were released from jail last February. As she cut and wrapped daisies for me, she looked out the front window of her shop at the police lined up outside and the Canadian flags marching past, and said she left and came to Canada to get away from this kind of thing and never expected it here. Her words have stayed with me. “Didn’t we learn anything? The German people put up with a lot before things got really bad.”

Quote from Leslie James Pickering

The following was transcribed from a discussion on the July 12, 2020 episode of The Final Straw podcast. Leslie James Pickering was the spokesperson for the Earth Liberation Front and Animal Liberation Front during the peak years of when THOUSANDS of actions of sabotage were being carried out by those groups.

One thing that I noticed when doing this press work for the ELF, was that against even my own predictions, the movement really really grew fast with a totally new, totally different kind of person when these actions were happening. And I wanna point it out because a lot of these discussions are really class based and really based on these privileges that we never question in this society.

I did this interview when If A Tree Falls came out, and one of the points that I concluded on is that it won't matter at all how comfortable we are with violence or property destruction when the planet's dead. And we have these things of how comfortable we are in our movement or how comfortable we are in our actions and they seem really important to us, but when you stop and look at the big picture, our comfort levels are pretty irrelevant when we are talking about the annihilation of the planet, millions of millions of animals being slaughtered and all these other really horrific things. What we're comfortable with in terms of our actions to bring about social change is something we need to think about but it shouldn't be our ultimate deciding factor on what we do.

When I was doing the press work for the ELF, surprisingly it seemed like people were flocking to the PNW from every corner of the earth to join this movement and all they knew about it, was that things were burning and that people were calling themselves anarchists, dressing in black, and protests were turning into riots. They knew very little and they were coming out of the woodwork to join. You can look at how much growth happens at Portland, OR and I hate to say that the movement is a gentrifying force in some of these places that become movement hubs. People just flock there and it was not the kind of people I was used to seeing in these movements.

When it comes to bringing about social change, a certain kind of person seems to be attracted to it, no matter what war it is they're gonna be against, they're gonna protest it. They're oriented towards wanting to go out in the streets, or wanting to sign petitions, or wanting to organize, or wanting to do the kind of work that these movements tend to be known for doing. Organizer work. But what I saw with the radical environmental movement was that a different kind of person that never really came out of the woodwork when the idea was that we were gonna protest or we were gonna do petitions and hold signs and write letters. I saw people energized and excited by the fact that this movement was fighting in a more direct and a destructive way. And I wouldn't want to make it seem like I would discredit that. There's a big place for people who might not be inspired by conversations so much or by signing petitions, etc. but might be inspired by something like Vail ski resort burning down and they seem like they just came out of the woodwork.

And I think sometimes we base this assumption on "well this is what social change is and everybody is gonna be uncomfortable with it". No, there were a lot of people who were not only comfortable with sabotage and destruction but were inspired by it and wouldn't have joined the movement otherwise. These are the same people that watch monster trucks travelling over cars. Who knows what. But this is a massive section of American society.

Why is it that so many of our relatives don't want to join the movement? One quick story: I've got a side of the family that I'm not too close with. They tease you a lot and are kind of gruff and I never really took to them because they seemed so gruff and aggressive and unfriendly and they never understood my politics. I was always a sissy and they had all these terms, and I just kind of avoided them forever. And it wasn't until the film *If A Tree Falls* came out that I was featured in, that all of a sudden they got it. All this time, even knowing that I got arrested on the Washington Monument hanging a banner up, it wasn't doing it for them. But as soon as they saw me in movie when things were burning down and I was like "rah rah rah", they were like "oh yeah, now we know! We knew it was in you all along!". Like it's funny but that's like a lot of America. It really is.

There's all kinds of people out there and it's not that they disagree with us, it's that they think we're wasting our time. If they see us doing something that they think makes sense, well then they might join us. You know it's not that they hate the environment necessarily and that they don't want to join us. It's that they think we're ridiculous and we're wasting our time. And so I think there needs to be a place for those people in the movement. I'm not saying that all the liberals are wasting their time. But I think there needs to be a place in the movement for people who wanna engage in a different way besides comfortable, peaceful protest.

Two Essays from Fuck The Police Means We Don't Act Like Cops To Each Other

By Clementine Morrigan (2020)

Clementine Morrigan's work can be found at clementinemorrigan.com

Cancel Culture Is Abusive

Cancel culture reminds me so much of my experience of being in an abusive relationship. There is a set of (always changing, sometimes arbitrary) rules that I have to follow. If I am told I am doing something wrong or that I've broken a rule then I must apologise and do what I'm told to set things right. I feel like I have to walk around on eggshells, always wondering if another explosion will be triggered. I believe, when I am inevitably attacked, that it must be my fault, and that if only I could be good, this wouldn't happen.

I have been deep in woke social justice queer world for many years, I'm a public figure who makes my living off my creative work. I'm a survivor living with complex ptsd, who is committed to justice, who wants a better world for all of us. For a long time, I went along with things that didn't sit right with me. I watched people being attacked and exiled from community, and I tried to rationalise it to myself. It was always framed as just and righteous and I tried to tell myself that it was. I tried to tell myself that people were just getting what they deserved, that these were just the consequences of their actions. I secretly worried about what would happen when the mob turned on me.

I remember when I first got sober, after years of being a street involved alcoholic, I was terrified. How could I ever redeem myself? I had acted out of alignment with my principles for years, I was the bad guy, I was the toxic one, the abusive one. How could I ever build a life for myself knowing that it could all be taken away at any moment if anyone decided to dig up my past? I

seriously contemplated suicide. But eventually, I decided that I'm defined by the actions I take today, and through the twelve steps I connected with my integrity and learned how to live in alignment with my principles.

And today, I do live in alignment with my principles. My actions are rooted in my deeply held political, ethical, and spiritual beliefs. I don't go around acting in harmful ways, and when I do act out of alignment with my integrity, I know how to take responsibility and set things right. So, I shouldn't be scared anymore right? I shouldn't be worried about being brutally cancelled, because I know that I am acting from an ethical, principled place.

But cancel culture doesn't work that way. Under the logic of cancel culture, if someone 'calls you out you have one option: to 'be accountable', which means to accept the framing that the person calling you out is putting forward, and to accept whatever consequences this person thinks you deserve. If you don't do this, and even if you do, you will be met with mob harassment designed to enforce these consequences. There is no option to respond by saying: I've heard what you are saying, I've thought about it deeply, I've talked it over with my trusted advisors (therapist, sponsor, close friends, etc), and I don't agree with your framing, and I don't think I've done anything wrong. I feel secure in the fact that my actions are in alignment with my integrity.

Taking true responsibility when we have caused harm requires that we don't take responsibility for something we did not do. Agreeing with a call out in an attempt to avoid the abuse that will be hurled at us if we don't, not because we think we did something wrong but because we are afraid, is exactly the same mentality as a victim in an abusive relationship agreeing with the abuser to try to avoid 'being in trouble.' It's such an insanely abusive mentality that I see play out over and over in our communities and it terrifies me.

I have reached a place in my recovery, and in my spiritual and emotional growth, where I can no longer pretend that these dynamics are acceptable. I can no longer pretend that I don't live in fear of my community. I can no longer stand by and watch the mob take down someone else. To be perfectly honest, I don't care what they did. I don't believe vague rumours that imply a lot but say very little, I don't believe disagreement is a punishable offence, and even in cases where harm has been caused, I don't think trying to harass someone into 'being accountable' is ever acceptable or even effective.

I also don't care about the various identities of the people involved. We will list off the marginalized identities of the accuser and the positions of power of the accused as if this justifies the mob harassment. It doesn't. The mob itself creates a huge amount of power that we don't account for in our assessment of the power dynamics of the situation. And people's lives and their situations are more complex than a list of identities. I believe we can and should agree upon a universal standard of behaviour toward each other.

We can expect each other to act with basic human decency. We can intervene on abuse without being abusive ourselves. A person's identity doesn't make abusive behaviour okay, ever, and when we are employing the power of the mob to harass a person and break them down into compliance, when we destroy their social life, try to get them fired, won't let them escape the onslaught of harassment, when we message all their friends and demand that everyone 'hold them accountable', we are being abusive. It's literally that simple.

I reject the whole system. And I recognise that it my trauma, my c-ptsd and my experience of child abuse and domestic violence that ever made me silently put up with this behaviour in my communities. I was afraid.

I'm still afraid. But my courage is stronger than my fear.

We Are Allowed To Disagree With People Who Ground Their Claims To Truth And Authority In Their Identity

No identity group has a singular perspective or ideology. Leftists within any particular identity group also have many ideological and strategic disagreements.

No one can claim to speak on behalf of the large numbers of people who fall within any particular identity group. Claims to speak for and on behalf of an entire identity group erase the diversity of opinion within that group.

In social justice culture identity is mobilized in authoritarian ways, to silence disagreement, to end discussion, and to justify punishment.

Pretending to agree with someone because they have grounded their claim to truth in their identity is dishonest. It is also insulting to the many people within that identity group who also don't share the same views.

Leftist movements need room for ideological disagreement and discussion. Weaponizing identity to silence dissent is counterproductive to the goal of ending domination and exploitation.

Quote from We Will Not Cancel Us

by Adrienne Maree Brown (2020)

Additionally, and historically, the presence of infiltration in our movements is documented and prevalent. This also comes to those of us who facilitate movements often- the quiet whisper that someone in the meeting leaked the notes, is antagonizing without principle, appeared out of nowhere and started taking up a ton of space. The reach of COINTELPRO and subsequent surveillance and the infiltration campaigns is still being uncovered, and this strategy reaches back as long as humans have waged war against each other. Call outs are an incredible modern tool for those who are not committed to movements to use against those having impact.

Right now calling someone out online seems like first/only option for a lot of people in the face of any kind of dissonance. We need to have the skills to be able to discern what kind of dissonance we are dealing with or being asked to help with, what kind of support is actually needed, and the capacity we have to meet that need without calling on or informing the state.

Too often, we are using call outs to avoid direct conflict. Call outs are also being used to tilt public opinion about organizational or sectoral conflicts. Conflict, and growing community that can hold political difference, are actually healthy, generative, necessary moves for vibrant visions to be actualized.

I can't help but wonder who benefits from movements that engage in public infighting, blame, sham, and knee-jerk call outs? I can't help but see the state grinning, gathering all the data it needs, watching us weaken ourselves. Meanwhile, the conflicts are unresolved, and/or harm continues. [...]

I don't find it satisfying, and I don't think it is transformative to publicly call people out for instant consequences with no attempt at a conversation, mediation, boundary setting, or community accountability (which often happens in a supported process with a limited number of known participants).

It doesn't make sense to say "believe all survivors" if we don't also remember that most of us are survivors, which includes most people who cause harm. What we mean is we are tired of being silenced, dismissed, powerless in our pain, hurt over and over. Yes. But being loud is different from

being whole, or even being heard, being cared for, being comforted, being healed. Being loud is different from being just. Being able to destroy is different from being able to generate a future where harm isn't happening all around us.

No Badjacketing: The State Wants to Kill Us; Let's Not Cooperate

The Twin Cities General Defense Committee, Local 14 (2015)

*We prepared this short piece after several comrades were badjacketed in public and with pictures on social media at the 4th Precinct Shutdown. We believe those individual cases have been dealt with, and don't wish to cause unnecessary division by complaining, or publicly calling any group or individual out. Instead, **this is intended to provoke reflection**, and conversation, amongst all of us, as to how to deal with the suspicions we may have of people we don't know in our growing movements, without creating the sorts of divisions among ourselves that does the work of the State and the police for them. We intend to act in solidarity with those who know how to act in solidarity.*

*We ask that all organizations and groups working for a better world in which we have killed White Supremacy, Capitalism, and all other forms of oppression, consider that (1) none of us represent the mandate of all the people, (2) that we may have instead genuine and important strategic and tactical differences between ourselves about the best ways to accomplish that world, (3) **that we will not win by pretending these differences do not exist, or dictating against difference, but instead by engaging on these differences in the most democratic and least hierarchical ways possible.***

Therefore, we ask that groups and individuals read this document against the practice of badjacketing, discuss it, and consider publicly endorsing here that we will refrain from the practices of badjacketing. This is not a call to be lax about security; indeed, many of us have been very involved in the provision of security at the Fourth Precinct. Instead, it is a call to be democratic and accountable about our security practices.

Every time people organize for liberation, autonomy, and a better world, the state and the bosses try to crush our movements. They don't particularly care how they do it, but they don't want to work hard. It's easier for them, if we do it for them.

- They can do this by misportraying us in the media, and they do.
- They do this by sowing distrust and division within or between movements, and they do.
- They can do this by harassing our people and preventing them from getting jobs, or demoralizing them with constant police contact, and they do.
- They do this by sending infiltrators into our groups, and they do.
- They do this by encouraging fascist groups to attack us, and they do.
- They do this by directly and openly attacking us with police, and they do.

But perhaps the easiest and most effective thing they can do to neutralize and destroy our movements for liberation is to encourage us to act paranoid and to refuse each other's solidarity.

One of the most effective techniques for this is called jacketing (aka ‘snitchjacketing,’ ‘badjacketing,’ or ‘bad-rapping’), and it’s when one of our own (or a paid infiltrator) accuses others without cause or evidence of being an infiltrator, threat, or security risk.

BADJACKETING: creating suspicion, by spreading rumors or unsubstantiated accusations, that people are undercovers, infiltrators, snitches, or cooperators. Sometimes this is done out of fear and paranoia. But normally, those who ‘lay jackets’ on others want to consolidate their control over a movement and feel threatened in their authority. It’s a favorite tactic of the State in destroying movements of liberation.

These tactics of the state and the police go together, and jacketing often leads to direct violence and the destruction of movements. If you’re still reading, let’s take a look at two well known regional cases: the State assassination of Illinois Black Panther Party Chairman Fred Hampton and Mark Clark (1969), and the murder of American Indian Movement militant and Anna Mae Aquash (Mi’kmaq) (1975).

Case 1: Infiltrators, Jacketing, and Assassination: the Assassination of Black Panthers Fred Hampton and Mark Clark.

The Black Panther Party’s Illinois chapter was lead by stellar young militant Fred Hampton. Their major projects included the self-defense and community support programs for which the Panthers became justifiably famous. A major next step was to ally with the Blackstone Rangers, an alliance that terrified the Chicago police and politicians and the FBI alike. The FBI dealt with it easily, by turning a Panther into an infiltrator.

William O’Neal turned snitch in exchange at first for bail money, and then increasingly for a great deal of money. O’Neal rose to trusted positions within the BPP, becoming Hampton’s head of security. It was O’Neal who drugged Hampton’s food in preparation for the assassination.

O’Neal routinely consolidated his power within the BPP by accusing others of being snitches, informants, or state cooperators, creating an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust within the BPP. It was partly his use of jacketing accusations that led to his rise in leadership.

O’Neal also played a creating division between the BPP and other groups, most notably the Blackstone Rangers, on behalf of the FBI. In addition to talking shit about the Rangers with his BPP comrades, O’Neal composed forged letters between the Rangers and the BPP, insulting and threatening each other. O’Neal was successful in this regard; the two groups never achieved strategic or tactical cooperation.

The infiltration of movements and movement spaces is real, and dangerous, as the assassination of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark demonstrate. But jacketing is another tool used to destroy movements, and is used most frequently by infiltrators themselves.

1. At the least, it pushes away people who have, or are willing, to do work and make sacrifices for the movements.
2. Worse, it silences entire groups by sowing mistrust within them and making discussion of strategy and tactics difficult.
3. Very commonly, those accused of acting as informants become so alienated from their accusers that they actually become snitches.
4. Worst-case scenario, people die. That worst-case scenario is all too common and real, and there is a famous regional history to it as well, in the case of Anna Mae Aquash, a Native

American woman from Canada who had worked and sacrificed tirelessly for the American Indian Movement, or AIM.

Case 2: Infiltrators, Jacketing, and Murder: the Murder of Anna Mae Aquash from the American Indian Movement.

In February 1976, the body of Anna Mae Aquash was found exposed in South Dakota. She'd been shot in the head execution style, apparently because someone thought she was an infiltrator. In what should be seen as a pattern at this point, there was indeed an infiltrator within AIM, but it wasn't Anna Mae. Instead it was an infiltrator named Douglass Durham, a White man claiming Native Heritage, who had gained the trust of key AIM leaders. As with O'Neal, it was partly through lying about others – jacketing – that he had gained his position of leadership and trust within AIM.

Durham accused Anna Mae of working for the Feds. Anna Mae ended up murdered. There remains a lot of controversy and anger over who killed her. No serious person believes she was a Fed. Very few believe the Feds killed her. But they might as well have done so: given the violence and repression they were inflicting on AIM, as they had done with the BPP, it was natural that people within AIM would be suspicious and armed for self-defense. By creating more suspicion and paying Douglass Durham to accuse Anna Mae, the FBI is directly involved in the murder of Anna Mae Aquash. **But whoever pulled the trigger on her allowed themselves to become accomplices of the State, and enemies of Native People/First Nations.** AIM lost one of its most dedicated and skilled organizers and the blame for her murder remains a source of division within the movement. After being attacked by the police, dismissed and lied about by the media, shot at by white supremacists, and insulted by many in the 'public,' it is natural to be on edge and find it difficult to work together or to trust those we don't already know and trust. This is why racism and sexism and oppression of all sorts exist: to divide groups from each other, in order to more effectively take advantage of them.

We will win when our solidarity trespasses the boundaries they set for us. Against all oppression. For the solidarity of the people.

Interrogation Tactics

(source forgotten)

Whenever the cops ask you anything other than your name and address, it's best to stick with only the Magic Words, **"I am going to remain silent, I want to see a lawyer,"** thus avoiding such problems entirely. Talking to the police is dangerous. If you are ever approached by the police, remain silent! This is critical even if you believe you have nothing to hide. People often make the mistake of believing they have done nothing wrong and therefore have no reason to not to talk to the police. It is important to not answer any of their questions — even the most casual conversation or seemingly small piece of unimportant information can lead to more intense lines of questioning and/or get yourself or others in trouble. They mean it when they say, "Anything you say can and will be used against you." What they don't mention is that they'll also use it against anyone you speak for or speak about! Cops are highly trained to be sneaky, use psychological techniques and lie to get information out of you. Attempting to talk your way out of the situation may backfire, and lying to the police is a crime. Make sure if you're arrested with other people, the rest of the group knows the Magic Words and promises to use them.

Saying: “I’m going to remain silent, I want to see a lawyer,” invokes the rights which protect you from interrogation. When you say this, the cops (and all other law enforcement officials) are legally required to stop asking you questions. They probably won’t stop, so just repeat the Magic Words or remain silent until they catch on.

Knowing what kinds of tactics are used in the interrogation process is important so you can mentally prepare for how to deal with them. Some lies they will tell you:

»» “You’re not a suspect — just help us understand what happened here and then you can go.”

»» “If you don’t answer my questions, I’ll have no choice but to arrest you. Do you want to go to jail?”

»» “If you don’t answer my questions, I’m going to charge you with resisting arrest.”

»» “All of your friends have cooperated and we let them go home. You’re the only one left.” Cops have lots of ways they can try to trick you into talking. Here are some scams they’ll pull:

»» Good Cop/Bad Cop: Bad cop is aggressive and menacing, while good cop is nice, friendly, and familiar (usually good cop is the same race and gender as you). The idea is bad cop scares you so bad you are desperately looking for a friend. Good cop is that friend.

»» Your Friends Snitched. The cops will tell you that your friends ratted on you so that you will snitch on them. Meanwhile, they tell your friends the same thing. If anyone breaks and talks, you all go down.

»» Exaggerating the strength of their case. They tell you that they have recording, fingerprints, DNA, documents, jailhouse snitches, surveillance, eyewitnesses, etc. All of this may true or all may be false but you simply don’t know because you are isolated. They try and get to you as soon as possible to play on your fears and work that confused state of mind to their advantage.

»» Honest Character. The cops will tell you that they have all the evidence they need to convict you and that if you “take responsibility” and confess, the judge will be impressed by your honesty and go easy on you. What they really mean is: “we don’t have enough evidence yet, please confess.”

»» Comparison. They will convince you that they think you are the least to blame for what happened and that, therefore, you will not suffer as severe a sentence. It’s the other guys they are really after and if you cooperate, they will put a good word in for you.

»» Small talk. What is critical to getting the ultimate admission is to get you talking in the first place about anything — usually in a “friendly” manner. They will try and find something that you have in common and just have a regular conversation. Then, when you feel comfortable just talking, they will move into the area of the crime. Remember that any small talk with a cop is a slippery slope, and should be avoided by refusing to answer any questions, even the smallest ones.

»» Threats. These are usually subtle. They mention the maximum penalties for the crime and imply that unless you roll over, you will get every day of it. Also, they usually throw in that cooperation is looked at very favorably by a judge and your refusal will result in additional penalties.

»» Promises. They will cut a “deal” with you or “put a good word in” for you. Don’t be fooled. They have no power whatsoever to make deals — only prosecutors can do that and, even then, the judge is never bound by any bargain. Interrogation is designed to make you feel isolated and intimidated, especially if you have been separated from your comrades. It is really easy to believe what the cops tell you. However, assert that you are going to remain silent and insist

upon speaking with a lawyer before you answer any questions or sign anything. To sum this all up, please remember the Golden Rule: *never trust a cop.*

Signal Fails

(sections from an anonymous zine, 2019)

Bond, James Bond: Having Signal doesn't make you bulletproof. Give some people a little encryption, and they'll immediately subject their entire contact list to the absolute sketchiest shit. Your phone is still a tracking device, and trust is still built. Talk with your people about what kinds of things you feel comfortable talking about on the phone, and what you don't.

Silence is not consent: Ever go to a meeting, make a plans with others, establish a Signal group to coordinate logistics, and then have one or two people rapidly change your collective plans by a rapid series of texts that no one has time to respond to? Not cool.

Hell is an endless meeting: A Signal group isn't an ongoing meeting. I'm already way too glued to my phone, so I don't like it when a thread is blowing up my phone and it's just a long side conversation between two people or someone's stream of consciousness that is unrelated to the purpose of the group. I appreciate it when conversations have beginnings and ends.

It Wants to Feed: I especially hate this one. Probably because of social media, some of us are used to information being curated for us by a platform. But Signal is not social media, thank fuck. So watch out because when a big Signal group starts becoming THE FEED, you're in trouble. That means if you're not on it and paying attention, you will miss out on all kinds of important information, whether it's upcoming events, people changing their pronouns, or flamewars that lead to social conflict. People start to forget you exist, and eventually, you literally disappear. Kill THE FEED.

Fire in a Crowded Theatre: aka the panic button problem. You're chillin in a big Signal group with all your sketchy friends and all their actual phone numbers, someone gets pinched for shoplifting or something, and *surprise* their phone isn't encrypted! Everyone freaks and jumps ship, but it's too little too late, because if the cops are going through that phone right now, they can see everyone who left and the social mapping is done. Womp womp.

Mission Creep: Someone created a Signal group to co-ordinate a specific, time-limited event. It's over, but no one wants to let go. Somehow, this very specific ad-hoc formation is now THE PERMANENT ORGANIZATION that has tasked itself with deciding everything to do about all things – indefinitely.

A Few Proposals for Better Practices

1. *Keep it IRL* – As one contributor put it, “Communication is not just about sharin information.” Face to face communication builds whole relationships, including trust, and continues to be the most secure way to communicate.
2. *Secure your devices* – Most devices (phones and computers) now have the option for full disk encryption. Encryption is only as good as your password and protects your data ‘at rest’, i.e. when your device is OFF or the data is not being used by programs. Your lock screen provides some protection while your device is ON, but can be bypassed by a sophisticated attacker. Some operating systems force you to use the same password for encryption and your lock screen, which is unfortunate as it's not practical to enter a long password 25 times a day (sometimes in the presence of prying eyes or surveillance cameras).

3. *Establish boundaries* – We have different senses of what’s safe to talk about on our phones and what’s not. Discuss and develop collective boundaries, and where we disagree, respect other people’s boundaries even if you think it’s safe.
4. *Agree on a vouching system* – If you’re in a group discussing sensitive things, develop an explicit collective understanding of what constitutes a vouch for a new person to join. In an era where anarchists catch conspiracy charges, miscommunications about this can land people in jail.
5. *Ask first* – If you’re going to add someone to a thread, thereby revealing their phone number to the entire group, ask for their and the group’s consent first.
6. *Minimize decision-making* – Consider leaving decisions other than yes/no for in person meetings, if possible. In my experience, Signal impoverishes any decision-making process.
7. *Defined purpose* – Ideally, a Signal group will have a specific purpose. Each new person added to that group should have that purpose clearly explained to them. If that purpose has been served, leave the group and delete it.
8. *Disappearing messages* – Very useful for housekeeping. Ranging from 5 seconds to 1 week, Disappearing Messages can be set by selecting the stopwatch icon in the top bar of a conversation. Many people use a standard 1-week disappearing time on all messages, whether the conversation is sensitive or not. Select your expiration time based on your threat model. This also protects you somewhat if the person you are communicating with is using less-than-ideal phone security practices.
9. *Enable the Registration Lock* – Enable this in Signal’s Privacy Settings, so if someone is ever able to hack your phone number used to register your account, they still have to get your PIN to hijack your identity. This is especially important for anonymous Signal accounts registered with burner numbers, since someone else will almost certainly use this number again.
10. *Turn off message previews* – Keep messages from appearing on your lock screen. On my device, I had to set this on my device settings (not Signal settings) under Lock Screen Preferences > Hide Sensitive Content.
11. *Delete Old Messages* – Either by enabling thread trimming or manually deleting completed conversations, don’t keep messages around that you don’t need anymore.

Beyond the Ecology of Presence: Being Anarchists on Indigenous Lands

by charred

[This essay appeared in *The Oystercatcher* #18 (May 2021), an anarcho-surrealist journal based in BC.]

A few years ago I was at a talk by Leanne Simpson, an Anishinaabe writer and activist. After she had laid down the hard facts about Canadian colonialism and Indigenous resurgence, there

came the inevitable question from a well-meaning settler: “This all sounds so awful! What can I do to help?” Without missing a beat, Simpson replied: “Give the land back.” Confusion in the eyes of the questioner, nervous laughter from the rest of the audience. “No,” she continued. “I’m serious. Give the land back. All of it. Now.”

A few weeks ago, I was “oystercathered” a link to a recent piece circulating in the anarchist milieu with the title “Another Word for Settle: A Response to ‘Rattachements’ and ‘Inhabit,’” asking me to ruminate on the issues raised by these textual interventions.

That has served as a jumping off point for an Oystercatcher article that, I hope, might move the discussion of what has been called an “ecology of presence” more deeply in an anarchist direction.

“Another Word for Settle” got me thinking about what Leanne Simpson said that night, because this piece by thecollective argues that the best thing – perhaps the only thing – that radical settlers can do is support Indigenous peoples in their struggles for self-determination. By doing anything else, we are perpetuating colonialism.

Just to be clear, I believe that supporting Indigenous people in their struggles is absolutely essential for settlers who want to contribute to the development of more autonomy, less colonization, and finding pathways beyond the self-destruction of the currently dominant order. What I don’t agree with is that this is the only valid approach for decolonizing settlers to take.

Without getting too much into who said what about whom in this debate, thecollective do not like the fact that the authors of both the “Rattachement” and “Inhabit” pieces are heavily influenced by the Tiqqunist/Invisible Committee scene that dominates radical theory and practice in France. And they don’t like that scene coming to North America, where its imported focus on building networks of autonomous communes in the countryside registers very differently. Europeans returning to the land in Europe can say they are taking back what is theirs; people of European descent busting out of the cities they’ve imposed on Turtle Island can say no such thing.

This is the big problem that thecollective point out with the “Inhabit” (Territories newsletter) project. They want to fill the continent with communes, but they are apparently unaware of the fact that the land they have their eye on is already inhabited; that is, they have no analysis of their positioning and responsibilities as settlers. US radical politics has long been focused on economic and racial inequality between and amongst Black, White, and Latinx communities, rather than on the colonization of Indigenous peoples. So, while this oversight is hard to condone, it is not necessarily surprising. And this situation is, thankfully, changing, mostly due to the work of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) writers and organizers who are establishing their own analyses and their own solidarities. “Inhabit”/Territories will not be able to hold on to their position for long.

Thecollective’s critique of “Rattachement” is more subtle and interesting, because these writers (the Dispositions collective) do show an awareness of Indigenous struggles. The “Rattachement” argument is that ‘we’ (they are clearly writing for a settler audience) should return to the land, to build an “ecology of presence” that will enable us to better fight capitalism, colonialism, and the state form. They cite the Zapatistas and the Mohawk nations as examples they can learn from, but, crucially for thecollective, they do not explicitly call for the return of Indigenous land.

This is an omission that should be called out. But thecollective go further than this. At one point they say that “it must not be seen as a necessary precondition for decolonization that settlers develop relationships ... with land that we occupy.” This critique makes sense to me, as it

leaves open many possibilities: for example, an “ecology of presence” could be a precondition for settler decolonization, just not a necessary one for Indigenous decolonization. I do think settlers need to develop different relationships with the land, because the currently dominant order is so obviously unsustainable. Climate change. Species extinction. Doomcetera. And it is Indigenous peoples who are, and have long been, bearing the brunt of our destructive ways of life.

Right after this sentence, though, the collective write: “Settlers deciding to prioritize building these new relationships with the land does not bring us closer to decolonization.” This is a different kind of critique, because it says approaches like the “ecology of presence” are not only unnecessary, they are unhelpful, a waste of time and energy. And then there comes an even stronger rejection: any kind of new relationship that settlers can build with the land “would be colonial, not revolutionary.” It would be actively negative and harmful.

The stand that the collective take on the question of settlers and the land highlights something at the core of our responsibilities in a context of decolonization. The collective want there to be a single way for settlers to participate in this kind of work. As I’ve said, I agree that supporting Indigenous peoples in their struggles for the return of their land is essential. But I don’t agree that all settlers who claim some kind of decolonial awareness or practice must necessarily follow the same path, whatever that path might be. Like so many anarchists before me, I don’t like it when someone tries to tell us what we should do (someone like Vladimir Ilyich, for example).

I also can’t accept that settlers who leave urban centres are, necessarily, only perpetuating colonialism. For one thing, we need to remember that settlers living in cities are also on the land, they just went there so long ago, and are living such an alienated life, that they have forgotten where they are. If settlers are to learn anything from our Indigenous teachers, surely we must understand that there is simply nowhere that is not on the land. (Glen Coulthard’s concept of *urbs nullius* is important here.) Staying in the city, therefore, has no inherent benefit over leaving it, and in many ways it’s a worse choice, because of all of the damage that cities do.

Can we imagine that settlers who get out of the city, who skill themselves up for more autonomous and sustainable lives, might actually be working against colonialism, in some ways, at the same time as they are perpetuating it, in other ways? One of the most clear and powerful examples can be found in the folks who have relocated themselves to be near where the most intense decolonizing action is. This is happening in Northern British Columbia, where settlers are establishing relationships of mutual aid and mutual responsibility with Indigenous peoples defending their territories from encroachment. I find it hard to accept that these folks are just ‘going back to the land,’ like hippies in the 60s.

It’s not easy to live outside of the first world city, especially far outside, where you don’t have the infrastructure city dwellers are used to, like electricity coming out of wires, water coming out of pipes, food magically appearing in supermarkets, and so on. To live near the site of struggle and not be a burden you have to be able to take care of yourself and those around you, in a context where screwing up might mean having nothing to eat for the winter. This simultaneously subtracts you (partially and relatively, of course) from the circuits of the state and capital, and also renders those circuits redundant, weakening their hold. That’s something, rather than nothing, and I think it’s something helpful, rather than harmful, to settler and Indigenous struggles for decolonization.

While there are many Indigenous folks who insist, for good reasons, that settlers should have only limited and defined involvement in decolonization struggles, there are other voices to be heard. Speaking in Vancouver in 2013, Diné activist Klee Benally rejected what he called the

Ally Industrial Complex, along with its badges and ideologies, and said: “If you want to say you’re acting in solidarity with us you must have a meaningful connection to Indigenous people’s liberation struggles, and you must have a meaningful relationship with the people whose land you are on.” This might seem like vague guidance – what kinds of relationships are meaningful, and even whose land one is on can be hard to figure out. But in my experience, what matters is the effort put into these relationships, into trying, even though you might fail. That’s what makes you an active subject, that’s what makes you something other than a site of reproduction of the existing order. As Jeff Corntassel has written (in an article with Corey Snelgrove and Rita Dhamoon), for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people on someone else’s land, “the goal is to be known not as strangers but as welcome visitors with accountability to the Indigenous nations and peoples of the territory.”

This kind of ethical approach is in keeping with the Two Row Wampum (or Guswenta) agreement, struck between the Haudenosaunee and Dutch Settlers in 1613. The Guswenta establishes a mode of settler-Indigenous relations that acknowledges the autonomy of both settlers and Indigenous Peoples, while highlighting the fact that we are traveling the same river together, i.e. that we have common interests, and must address the conflicts and difficulties that will necessarily arise between us. It was an attempt to extend the mode of relating that Indigenous nations enjoyed to the newcomers – who of course promptly rejected it in favour of a state-capitalist model of domination. But anarchists will recognize, and have recognized, an opportunity for the kind of autonomy they have long struggled to establish in their own worlds.

There is, of course, no clear agreement on exactly how this should be done, but there is, as a result, a rich history of ideas and debates. The ecology of presence has a lot in common with “dual power”, a concept that emerged in the early 20th century, and is still alive and well in anarchist circles. We can reach further back, to Kropotkin’s work on mutual aid, and if we like, to Fourier’s phalansteries. I have always tended to agree with what Klee Benally says about ideology and badges – they are not the most important things. Instead, I think it’s crucial to keep in mind that, whatever settlers do on Turtle Island, we’re going to be doing it on Indigenous land. We can set up our bookstores, TAZs, and communes. We can have our debates about what is to be done. And while we’re doing all of this, we can try to have meaningful relationships with the people whose land we are on.

Near the end of their piece, the collective argue that settlers should understand that, because our positions are different, the paths that settlers and Indigenous peoples take must also differ. I see the wisdom in this, as it is an acknowledgment of the Two Row relationship of mutual autonomy. But I would like to extend it, to say that we, as settlers, might also want to recognize that the positions from which we struggle differ, and thus the paths we take must also differ. (I’ll take Emma over Vlad almost every time.)

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