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# **Dissenting Opinion: Solidarity as a Weapon**

**A Critique of the J20 Support Campaign**

CrimethInc.

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February 4, 2019

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to more seriously. While acknowledging its limits, we ask that we start taking *disruption* more seriously. The disruptions that most prominently define our time are the riot, the blockade, the occupation, and, on the horizon, the commune. The decision to retreat from combative tactics should only come after we have gained significant strength.

“The question of pacifism is serious only for those who have the ability to open fire. In this case, pacifism becomes a sign of power, since it’s only in an extreme position of strength that we are freed from the need to fire.”

-The Invisible Committee

In the past, there have been traditions of solidarity that meant continuing the struggles of those imprisoned or murdered by the state. Let us acknowledge the effects of repression from the J20 case as ongoing and strive to continue with the aims of revolutionary struggle as a practice of solidarity with the case’s defendants and supporters.

For freedom!

-Some comrades (ex-defendants and not)

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than Trump's ascendancy? As the failures of the prevailing order become ever more obvious, perhaps we should continue to force fractures of this kind.

Some may scoff at insurrectionists who cite the Greek anarchist movement, but the situation in Greece is an accelerated version of our own here in the US. Comrades there have described how various sectors of the population took up the confrontational and combative tactics that had been used by anarchists in moments of crisis, such as after the police killing of Alexis Grigoropoulos. The contagion was so intense that even those who had previously decried these tactics joined in. In France, after years of riots in response to austerity measures, police brutality, and attacks on the ZAD, we are seeing disruption spread countrywide. "In opening up spaces free from state control, these ruptures offer an opportunity for liberation: an insurrection."

From Ferguson, Baltimore, and Standing Rock to J20, it is not a stretch to say we live in an era of increasing conflict in the US, as well. Like it or not, the future will involve social discord and revolution; things will not continue as they are forever. We would argue for agents of change to fight harder and sooner rather than later. Conflict can open up space for new perspectives, discussions, and forms of engagement while playing an important role in defending any revolutionary forms of life we create.

The riot is the focal reemergence of rebellion in our era, when the relevance of the labor movement and the strike along with it has dwindled as global capitalism has expanded and adapted. The riot ascends at a time when our commonality, discontent, and strength aren't primarily formed by our labor power but by our *dispossession*. This is a time of destitution, when broad antagonisms will continue to take shape against the state and the police.

We ask that we be bolder in what we disseminate, plan, and do. That we begin to take ourselves and the freedom we aspire

We affirm the actions taken that day. Part of what makes these revolutionary days of action effective is how they are followed up. How do we put into perspective the anger and urgency shown that day? How can that moment permeate its way into subsequent moments—to create new ones? What does it mean to *understand* what occurred from each of our respective localities—and how would it look to externalize these shared perceptions within a larger social framework, creating a subjectivity that can extend beyond activist minorities and radical milieus, beyond protest towards the synthesis of a new world?

Using historically grounded black bloc tactics, the counter-inaugural protests of January 20, 2017 manifested a demandless metropolitan riot with an explicitly anti-fascist, anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian, and abolitionist orientation. The movement itself existed within a broader spectrum of resistance. Therein lies a strength with the capacity to grow relative to its ability to echo and resonate into the future.

Perhaps January 20 can serve as a reference point for revolt in the years to come: an annual day of anarchist activity situated in a collective memory, with an emphasis on building power and expanding our abilities as a movement. In our present context, it feels especially important to intervene from an anti-electoral perspective, combating the next election cycle and the fallacious notion that we only need to get rid of Trump, not the system itself.

Defining conflicts compel people to choose sides. There is strength in drawing lines in the sand and demonstrating that the institutions of misery we are forced to co-exist with are neither neutral nor impervious. Spreading signals of disorder can increase our tactical strength as we hone a practice of vandalism, property destruction, public occupation, and rowdiness. This interrupts the narrative of social peace and makes it indisputably clear that people are opposed to the present system and fighting against it. What better moment was there to do that

To wrap up our series on the day of action on January 20, 2017 and the protracted legal struggle that followed it, we present this outside submission from a group including J20 defendants. In May 2018, at the opening of the second J20 trial, a call to action appeared entitled “Freedom for J20 Defendants,” encouraging people to take a more confrontational approach in the solidarity campaign. The following text begins where that one left off, functioning as a reflection, critique, and addendum. While this is not the way that we would put things, we consider it important that various dissenting viewpoints enter the historical record to inform future organizing.

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All charges have been dismissed for the J20 defendants. Congratulations to all comrades who fought against this attempt to escalate repression in the US. The prosecutors’ collusion with Project Veritas and their over-reaching approach to the case ultimately backfired.

The dismissal of all remaining charges is a significant victory. This thwarts the state’s attempt to set new precedents in criminalizing association as organizational “conspiracy.” The prosecution wanted to crack down on both black bloc tactics and the politics of those who utilize them, transforming street protests and the forms of repression with which the state targets political ideas. Outside of a few plea deals, there were no convictions. The campaign has clearly demonstrated the value of working together and adhering to principles of collective solidarity. We developed new strategies, such as disrupting the prosecution’s evidential groupings and preferred trial order. We built solidarity initiatives that sustained hundreds of defendants’ trips to court. These efforts helped the defendants resist the pressure to cooperate with the state and the plea offers that the prosecution was banking on people accepting.

We must celebrate our victories. Yet for some of us, this win tastes a bit bitter. Despite all our hard work, it is more the consequence of the errors and limitations of the authorities than of our own strengths. We feel that we did not effectively take advantage of the moment we were in to affirm our stances. Had we actively fought against repression, we would be in a better position for the struggles ahead.

The fervor from Trump's election, the counter-inaugural protests, the airport blockades—all that initial momentum has tapered off. This is to be expected; in our governed society, it is common for the population to swing between outrage and acceptance. However, we believe that the strategy that we chose in the J20 case has contributed to this inertia. Essentially, we presented ourselves as “innocent liberals” and kept quiet throughout the case, basing our approach in tacit restrictions and disempowerment. We feel this defensive posture has contributed to a collective limitation. This becomes especially clear when we reflect on how we could have used the case as an opportunity to propel ourselves. Instead, our movements and the relationships adjacent to them have been left on the back foot. From this weaker position, we must face today's problems and try to expand on the revolutionary potential in each moment.

After the inauguration, we failed to *continue* to declare a *break* from this world. Instead, we reified it.

Many within this campaign believed that the conservative approach was the best way—or even that it was the *only* way. The primary aim of this critique will be to challenge that notion, identify its limitations, and propose alternatives.

## A Vision of What Could Have Been

The J20 case directly impacted roughly 200 comrades across the country and exponentially more by proxy. This was a very

is an inevitable consequence of conflict; therefore, it must be incorporated into any winning revolutionary strategy. Whether we're talking about attacks, disaster relief, or a free breakfast program, repression is sure to result if it threatens the interests of capital and state power. We do not benefit from being too tame.

Furthermore, additional repression isn't always inherently negative. We should evaluate it in relation to our overall strategy, not in a vacuum. Additional repression can offer new opportunities in the overall fight. For example, an indictment for an incendiary speech could be leveraged to (re)gain popular support.

We have a choice: we can run and hide or fight back. If we give the state an inch, it will certainly take a mile. All our clichés apply here: stand firm, throw down, take up the gauntlet, hold the line—to the barricades! Repression is being meted out precisely because the social situation is becoming more precarious and because the actions for which the defendants were accused threaten the state. This means that solidarity is not simply raising money for legal defense and pleading to the state for leniency. Instead, it is an attack on power, and choosing to attack is not only refusing to bow down, but also contributing to the wider atmosphere of social antagonism. In many countries, a single slogan abounds: solidarity is a weapon. Let's put it into practice in the US.

## Towards a Future

January 20, 2017 saw the ushering in of a new generation of the radical left, a defining moment in a neo-fascist era. In an epoch with few such entry points, we should not understate the significance of this moment. We will not reiterate the importance of fierce resistance at Trump's inauguration, but choosing not to act was not an option.

never about broken windows, but political dissent. The function of repression is to suppress. By bringing forth what the state seeks to remove or minimize, we could impose costs on the forces of repression. The state fears the potential that property destruction, both the practice and the meaning behind it, will spread as a social contagion.

Some may denounce the logic of “solidarity means attack.” We disagree, advocating another sense of revolutionary solidarity. It is important to remember that certain actions could adversely affect the outcome of any political trial—so choices must be made intelligently—and it is of utmost importance that political actors exercise caution in their activities. But there is a difference between caution and inaction, and the latter is unacceptable.

This type of solidarity acknowledges that for the exploited, repression is a continuous ongoing process, and that all of our struggles are intimately intertwined. It affirms that there is a connection between targeted repression like the J20 case and everyday racist policing, immigrant detention centers, and the counter-insurgency strategies developed abroad. It understands that capitalism and the state operate in similar ways in very different places.

What methods can we borrow across difference? What instills worry? What creates scandal? What makes the state’s pursuit undesirable? A multitude of things can be done to support the accused and combat repression: street demonstrations, fundraising, public meetings, escalating struggle, attempting to radicalize and connect with current social struggles. We should interweave them all in such a way as to *deepen* our struggles.

For fear of justifying the repression that was already in progress, we did not take a proper stance against this system. Even small gestures such as defendants rebelling against being misgendered in court or speaking out in the face of explicit racism were discouraged. This was a mistake. Repression

large environment to play within and we were situated in a society agitated by Trump’s election and fascinated by us.

Imagine a sensational solidarity campaign that made the case known everywhere: a campaign that broke with normalcy and moved forward with a revolutionary affect, building towards a *departure* from this presidency, presidency itself, global capitalism, white supremacy, rampant misogyny, and the logistics systems that keep them in place—consider the airport blockades against Trump’s Muslim ban. Looking at the international reach of the 2017 Women’s Marches and the longstanding tradition of international days of solidarity among anarchists, a sensational solidarity campaign could have resonated beyond national borders.

Imagine if this case and its two hundred defendants had become a reference point for *every disaffection*. A voice that echoed across lecture halls, social centers, high schools, television screens, workplaces, in the streets, and everywhere else. A root system that overrode concerns for property or civility, insisting on tenacious power from below—a tear from which the fabric of our society began to fray. Imagine an effort that turned the J20 case into a national crisis for the state. What would it have taken to accomplish this?

Imagine the momentum from a raucous situation demanding the freedom of two hundred comrades flowing into other social potentialities (e.g., anti-ICE occupations, the national prison strike, anti-fascist struggles). We failed to maximize on building new capacities and bonds and radicalizing and including new people.

If our goal is to make governance untenable, we have to strategize expansively. What would increase the longevity of struggle? Along what vectors do struggles coalesce and spread? How do we plan for the next social movement, the next election, the next decade, the next uprising? We exist within a continuum of struggle. Accordingly, we must acknowledge our conditions to make each moment a step

towards the next horizon. The question we face after this case's conclusion is synonymous with the one we face at all times: *What now?*

The question of possibility here is twofold. First, we have to speak about how to build the capacity to make such a vision possible. Perhaps it wasn't possible at the time. But still, we believe there were a variety of restrictive dynamics within and around the case that limited what possibilities could have emerged.

There was a fair amount of momentum at that moment. People shut down Milo Yiannopolis' event at UC Berkeley. The graffiti collective Indecline had put naked Trump statues in every major city. People dug up Trump's golf course in California, as others did at the Trump golf course in Washington, DC on April 1, 2017, at the opening of the first week of action in solidarity with J20 defendants. Were there ways we could have helped this sort of action to proliferate, or spread news of them?

## Reflection: What Was

We must contend with how the J20 campaign played into "good" vs. "bad" protester dynamics through *silence*. We maintain our previous position that the narratives established before the May 14 trial set up those alleged to have engaged in property damage to be thrown under the bus. What good is it to assert liberal narratives like First Amendment rights and innocence if there are not also perspectives *and* actions that advance militant protest and revolutionary politics? The former alone will not create a bolstered defense—nor do they articulate a vision that could take us beyond the prevailing order.

The jury was unable to reach a unanimous verdict. The discovery of the Brady violation was fortuitous, and ultimately

it is vital to collectively act in such a way as to conjoin our strengths and make such efforts more successful, tapping into tangential possibilities and sustaining a level of uncontrollability. We would love for comrades to critically elaborate and build on this proposal.

James Baldwin offers us an American vision for revolutionary solidarity. When Angela Davis was incarcerated, Baldwin wrote an open letter to her in the *New York Review of Books*:

“One might have hoped that, by this hour, the very sight of chains on black flesh, or the very sight of chains, would be so intolerable a sight for the American people, and so unbearable a memory, that they would themselves spontaneously rise up and strike off the manacles. But, no, they appear to glory in their chains; now, more than ever, they appear to measure their safety in chains and corpses.”

## Revolutionary Solidarity

Our opponents have interests to maintain; they factor these in when they decide how aggressively to pursue convictions in a particular case. There are boundless forces in any given situation and several ways to engage them. Taking an offensive approach means trying to make the pursuit of such cases or the sustained incarceration of the imprisoned no longer worth it. We could call this *the practice of price setting*: building on fighting capacities and refusing to allow the state to kidnap our comrades without repercussions.

Costs may include many things, such as a prosecutor's mental health, convenience, the USAO's functionality (which was disrupted by call-ins), the stability of an individual's job or even of governance as a whole. The cost of breaking a window isn't financial but *social*. As many emphasized, the J20 case was



coming out of left field. Again, an attempt by the prosecution would mean an extension of their overreach, engendering activity that could bring things to the public eye.

We were anticipating that the materials' release would create scandal. Some would say "the police obviously made that" and others would surely create distance. A minority may have felt emboldened and at least everyone was healthily challenged in their views. All in all, we were content with making noise and spreading our analysis.

It's hard to say exactly what kind of effect this strategy had. But we would argue that it did indeed have one. It's telling that we heard nothing about the article despite knowing it to have reached the opposition's hands. We'd argue that we have to assume all this activity to have been a factor in their decision-making around the time of the second trial and the acknowledgment of the Brady violation. Like a fly buzzing in the room during a focused staring contest, increasing its volume as the contest endures.

We reveal this strategy because we desire not to have to rely on a bluff. We want to facilitate the construction of a force capable of triggering widespread waves of disruption in response to crisis or repression. We want to improve and expand on the forms of solidarity we can produce and to bring the "To Libertarians" proposal into reality.

Perhaps our first goal should be to arrive at a point at which we can bluff more realistically—for example, by becoming capable of utilizing our collective networks and infrastructure to present a convincing threat of mobilization. From there, the next goal would be pose the same pressure as a reality, not a bluff. (Ideally, we would skip directly to the second goal.) We propose that we need to develop enough movement intelligence and strength to have a shared instinct about when to employ various forms of disruption. This would greatly aid us in fights like the ones against DAPL, against the J20 case, against ICE detention centers and the border—fights in which

led to the prosecution's defeat. However, there was no guarantee we would discover this violation, nor that the judge would acknowledge it. Effective strategies must seek to counteract our enemy's intentions while advancing our own. Luck must be factored in, but not made the backbone of a strategy; nor can we rely on the proper operations of the state. In a sense, it was a fluke that the Brady violation unraveled the case. In order for a Brady violation to win, one has first to acknowledge the authority of the court system and second to trust that the court will follow its rules and not create an exception (which is to create and follow a new rule). In this moment, when the state lacked legitimacy, it outmaneuvered us and chose not to protect the prosecutor Jennifer Kerkhoff. This move turned out to be an advantageous but limited outcome for us. The court found that she had violated the defendants' due process rights to receive all potentially exculpatory evidence through discovery. After the cases were dismissed, the District Attorney's Office promoted her. By finding a Brady violation occurred, the court minimized the consequences of the state's mistake, but the DA reasserted its authority, by rewarding the prosecutor, free of compromise.

What would it have looked like to use the court's determination of a Brady violation to delegitimize the state itself?

We should reflect critically on this. Why did we hand over so much power and legitimacy to the legal apparatus? Why did we indulge so much in the spectacle of the courtroom? Very little within defendant-led organizing was done to challenge our relationship with the law and its courts. Instead, much work narrowly examined the inanity of the case's conspiratorial allegations, re-legitimizing the concept of innocence. As anarchists, we are against authoritarian and punitive methods that reinforce power imbalances. We are against prisons and the entirety of the legal system—not simply the nuanced absurdities and contradictions therein. We need to have more faith in what we actually believe in and strive for. By choosing to

tread lightly, we compromised an attempt to spread our analyses, ceding significant ground to the authorities.

In the sphere of action, things generally remained small. At what point would we have intervened? If things were to turn out negatively in the legal process, it seemed the plan was to “reduce harm” and bid our comrades farewell to prison while hanging onto the coattails of respectability. After the first trial, the state’s strategy seemed to be to isolate the case’s radical elements and drag the broader support efforts into exhaustion. In other words, *divide and conquer*. This was not a situation in which we were powerless or devoid of options. Within DefendJ20Resistance organizing, refusing to think critically, limiting ourselves, and appealing to civil liberties were dominant habits that went largely unchecked and unchallenged.

While these critiques may seem harsh, we don’t wish to underplay the work that went into fighting the case. Our argument is that in the end, the work was politically unsound, qualitatively deficient, and strategically incomplete. “Going liberal” can be considered the “vanilla” of anti-repression; a fairly plain tried and true approach. But there are many other flavors to choose from.

We want to take a moment to honor the complete reimagining of “Jury Nullification” that took place in DC during the second trial. A juror read the words “Google Jury Nullification” written on a bathroom stall inside the courthouse. She looked it up and then proceeded to share the information with the rest of the jury. We are impressed. One person’s bathroom doodle accomplished so much—disseminating information about jury nullification to the jurors, creating scandal, revitalizing the case in the eyes of comrades, giving prosecutors yet another headache, and, of course, giving us all a good laugh. Bravo. Seemingly small actions such as these should not be underestimated.

What else could have been done? Where else could we have looked for lessons and inspiration?

the lead detective, various members of the DOJ and USAO, the former judge, and local news outlets. The text reached various local venues and was handed out to press at a press conference.

Alongside the text’s circulation, complementary actions took place to apply pressure. These actions took place immediately ahead of the May trial to maximize stress on our enemies, limit their time, and proactively take advantage of any unforeseen favorable developments. Actions that shifted the atmosphere in DC and vandalism created an air of hostility towards the case. A proposal for a series of anti-repression speaking events threatened to raise social consciousness. The events were to connect various social movements, identifying the state’s mechanisms of repression. The first event took an explicitly agitational tone. Another call-in campaign furthered our goal of making the USAO a living hell. Because these actions occurred as a consequence of the J20 case, they imposed a cost for prosecuting it further.

There was also a video. It was to be disseminated diffusely, and was for a short time; until some, upon seeing it, contemplated including it in something more concrete. The lack of a customary place to host this video points to a need for more insurrectionary infrastructure in the US. Comrades abroad utilize platforms like Actforfree and 325.nostate.net, which American comrades today don’t generally use.

If the prosecution had attempted to use these materials against the defendants, it would only have further extended their overreach. At what point do prosecutors begin to feel hopeless about trying to prove an alleged criminal conspiracy? Does a scandal such as this give them strength, or create further difficulty and confusion? We know the process can become the punishment. When do they declare “Enough”? We did not fear adding to their allegations of conspiracy, as the prosecutors already believed in these allegations and were struggling to prove them. The formal DefendJ20Resistance network was well positioned to fight against a text and video

ously positioned and unable to engage the anarchists. “To Libertarians” clarified for the state what the cost of continuing to imprison dozens of anarchists would be. Thanks to bellicose words, the threat of mass mobilization, and the thorough distribution of the text, “To Libertarians” pressured the Spanish state into releasing the prisoners. The state released them on the grounds of “insufficient evidence,” despite possessing incriminating evidence against many of them. This serves as a golden example of an anti-repression campaign. It retained political integrity, utilized creative ingenuity, and defended its subjects—even the innocent ones.

Our aim was to emulate this success. We saw the need to intervene after the defendants’ victory in the first trial and the subsequent dropping of 129 charges. When the prosecution was focusing on defendants accused of more explicit criminality, it was important to defend them outside and against the structures of law and order. We decided to deploy an autonomous strategy.

The “Freedom for J20 Defendants” text was circulated ahead of the May trial. The text detailed our dissatisfaction with the general orientation of defendJ20resistance, our analysis of the situation, and an intense opposition to the case, its employers, and the world they inhabit. In response, we advocated a militant call to action. The strategy did not solely rely on the internet; we acknowledge the limitations of today’s oversaturation of information. We figured it would suffice to release it on radical news outlets such as itsgoingdown.org, where our enemies were sure to look. In addition, we distributed physical copies in DC where the case was taking place. An alternate and more explicit version of the text was distributed inside the courthouse café, which was frequented by lawyers, legal workers, police, security guards, and various others. In addition, copies were scattered outside both of the courthouse’s entrances and the entrances of nearby metros. The text was both emailed and physically mailed to various people including the prosecutor,

Fighting repression should be understood as an opportunity to take the offensive. One does not always have to sacrifice substance for results. Looking back on this case, we’re particularly influenced by a few examples.

During the Asheville 11 case, supporters called for solidarity actions ahead of court hearings. The “Yo Tambien Soy Anarquista” campaign against Operation Pandora in Spain fought the imprisonment of several anarchists using graffiti, speaking events, marches, and uncompromising political narratives. And the “To Libertarians” strategy from 20<sup>th</sup> century Spain presented a calculated call to action, leading to the release of more than fifty anarchist prisoners.

Through this discussion, we ask that comrades and their respective networks reflect on this. How can we best mobilize support networks? How can we anticipate and combat burnout? How do we encourage each other to participate in the face of gloom? How do we win the support of those who choose to look the other way? How do we draw on historical lessons, generations of wisdom, and a diversity of perspectives? And then—how do we utilize them?

## The Science of Opposition

The case of the Asheville 11 shared some similarities with the J20 case. On the night of May Day 2010, 11 people arrested in the vicinity of a demonstration that involved property destruction were charged with vandalism, rioting, and conspiracy based on scant evidence. After a harrowing ordeal, the prosecution dropped most of the charges and a couple defendants took plea deals for “misdemeanor riot.” Years of stress and repression left the local community fractured and burned out.

The elements we’re most interested in are the confrontational ones: the support crew’s call for solidarity actions

ahead of hearings, the actions that accompanied them, and the visibility they produced. The call created a specific kind of power and a new angle of pressure because it asked us to extend our repertoire and kept us engaged.

Comrades from the Asheville support crew pushed a clear narrative: innocent of all charges, police malfeasance, and the aggressive prosecution to suppress radical politics. The call for actions helped keep the case in the public eye. The police corruption, the controversy over the Asheville Police Department's evidence room and the departure, indictment, and imprisonment of the chief forced the state's hand in favor of the defendants. The fact that the case stayed public despite years of delay applied pressure to the prosecutor to drop the charges.

The Asheville 11 case can be considered a worst-case scenario: very few people supported or understood the defendants and the state was well-positioned to depict them as mere criminals. Yet even then, solidarity actions did not further endanger the defendants.

To be clear, we believe that it made sense for people to employ a cautious approach at the beginning of the J20 case. But we believe that there should have been elements such as these inside the overall ecology of resistance to the J20 case at later points. The J20 solidarity actions were mostly comprised of banner drops, press releases, fundraisers, and the like but generally failed to extend to more confrontational forms. Remaining conformist in narrative and action deprived the movement of dynamism and growth, consequently failing to keep the campaign's participants and supporters engaged. A year into the case, energy for support efforts had tapered off—a problem in itself, given that criminal litigation often drags on for years.

Yet it wasn't just our side feeling the effects of its duration. At that same time, the state had failed in its attempts to convict defendants in the November trial, looking very bad in its pursuit, and had exhausted countless resources, leaving the lead prosecutor visibly worn. By entering into a new phase of sol-

their situation—for example, many people spread the narrative that defendants were being charged for a handful of windows that only a few were responsible for breaking. This narrative puts alleged breakers on the receiving end of perceived guilt; it didn't help to spread any justification or support for those who did break the windows, nor for any defendant who might be found guilty of doing so.

People acting on their own initiative accomplished some of the best work that came out of the J20 efforts. However, due to confining interpersonal and structural dynamics, much of the initiative that is vital to effective organizing was inhibited. Despite this, the efforts that did make their way through were often celebrated—but only after the fact. Remember, actions inform action.

The common response to repression from the onset of this case was hesitation, often constricting the effort of others. We should consider how to hone our reflexes to such situations and the dilemmas they engender—whether that means working more collaboratively or knowing when to branch off.

## **To Libertarians**

In Spain, in the volatile aftermath of the Franco regime, more than fifty anarchists remained imprisoned while the more reformist elements of the CNT recuperated the movement's revolutionary gains. These prisoners were not receiving support due to the illicit nature of their accused crimes, which included bank robberies and bombings. Anarchists in the region reached out to Guy Debord in France for help.

Debord drafted the text "To Libertarians," a militant call to action demanding the release of the prisoners. Fully 25,000 people signed their names to the appeal; the text was widely circulated throughout Spain. At that time, the Spanish government was chiefly concerned with fascist threats, leaving it precari-

and alleged breakers were up. Remembering that Democracy Now! participated in the initial media blackout of the case and the events that led up to it, we should have been prepared to shift directions when left-wing populists like them inevitably turned their backs on us.

This type of betrayal is to be expected from the democratic left. It is a reminder to think about the lines we are taking and the directions for us to go at certain junctures. And it is precisely at this type of juncture that we are reminded of a saying: “Words divide—acts unite.”

After the majority of defendants had their charges dropped, most people tuned out. Given the baseness of American public discourse, many of those who were reminded of the case were likely to be on the side of capitalists and their property. Again, this was the state’s strategy: *divide and conquer*. At this juncture, what good was appealing to notions of innocence or the right to protest? Accusing the government, the prosecution, and the police of injustice only reasserts the concept of innocence within this context.

The authors are split on the issue of innocence. Some of us feel that narratives of innocence are useful for garnering wide support and that they should be complemented by stauncher narratives to broaden the discourse of the issues at hand. The others prefer to bypass the question of guilt or innocence completely, refusing to participate in the logic of the state. The latter position presents an interesting challenge for us on the question of innocence. In what ways can we boldly support those who engage in militant protest? How can we dignify black/brown youth who are accused of stealing cigarettes, fleeing, or resisting in other ways that are used to justify police violence without relying on narratives of innocence? How can we combat using the language of our oppressors to create a more liberatory one?

There wasn’t a cohesive strategy to support alleged breakers at this point. The campaign had largely disassociated from

idity and changing its nature, the campaign could have revitalized itself, taking advantage of its enemies in a fight they were already losing.

At different stages of the case, there should have been shifts. Adaptation is key to survival. A movement that doesn’t develop and leaves its potential unrealized will die. The amount of burnout and fatigue among J20 defendants and supporters both after the first trial and now is indicative of this. The question of adaptation and survival permeates every aspect of our collective existence; we should continually strive to answer it.

Imagine if after the first round of dropped charges, there had been a series of eruptions—widespread disruptions and marches expressing indignation at the remaining charges. A moment encouraging social fissure, a crisis: rabble-rousing at universities and workplaces, marches in the streets, interventions and direct actions everywhere. An effort to get more people behind the remaining J20 defendants without their having to adhere to our exact ideas, a reminder that we are all angry and all long to be free, and, importantly, an effort that brought the participants feelings of joy and power.

But what was nurtured around the case wasn’t conducive to making any sort of effort like this possible, even autonomously. Everyone was paralyzed by the campaign’s physiology in narrative, atmosphere, and action.

## Two Accounts

At some point after the first trial, there was a meeting in DC with defendants and supporters. During that meeting, someone proposed the idea of having a march that “went against traffic.” Hearing this, someone who does legal support, with a lot of social capital and movement experience, nervously interrupted, “I think this conversation has

gone in a very bad direction.” and rushed out of the room. Everyone (including myself) was then forced to think that the idea was bad. Reflecting on this moment now, I don’t think the idea was. This kind of reaction was common around the case. It made discussion impossible, shut down possibilities, and suppressed the development of our resistance to the case. I saw a tremendous amount of initiative and capacity destroyed by attitudes and paranoia. We missed opportunities such as establishing a long-term collective house in DC for defendants and supporters and discouraged many comrades from wanting to be involved. The conditions around the case caused many people to become alienated or hurt. After a year, dozens of comrades wanted little to do with J20 stuff.

After the majority of charges were dropped, there was a West Coast J20 speaking tour organized. The tour was an opportunity for people working on the case to raise support and reach out to regions who were less likely to be up to date or entangled in the case. There was a lot of opposition to this tour happening. Defendants and supporters who opposed it didn’t offer many reasons beyond insisting it was potentially harmful to defendants who were still facing charges. In my opinion, this was the result of bad faith and problematic power dynamics. The practice of hosting anti-repression events is understood all around the world. Such events are essential to overcoming isolation. The tour was ultimately able to go through but we were forced to eject a defendant who was still facing charges because others weren’t okay with them speaking. I’m sure that the tour would’ve been a source of

If the state’s intention is to repress an action or political body, it can be powerful to bring the very topics it is targeting to light: to say what is happening and explain what you think it means.

Generally, within the J20 solidarity campaign, discussions such as these were few and often very limited in scope. They often focused on Trumpism, the intensity of the charges, and the right to protest. This reactivity came at the cost of gaining qualitative strength. It even seemed to us that many comrades were actually *unable* to articulate why anyone would break a bank window or torch a limousine. Comrades near the case chose to forego discussion of why people participate in uprisings, allowing the State to keep the discourse about the more confrontational elements in the sphere of “senseless violence” and criminal activity. Whether this was due to inability or unwillingness, it reduced the overall quality of J20 solidarity. Think about Mark Bray explaining anti-fascism on the news or speaking events that discussed the uprisings in DC after Martin Luther King’s assassination and the 1991 Mount Pleasant riots. The final statement made was fine enough, but it was too little too late.

Broad support and the ability to work with others were key in the *Yo Soy Tambien Anarquista* campaign. In the US, however, we do not have the luxury of a strong historical memory of struggle nor the same anarchist movement.

The efforts to connect with the DC Black Lives Matter chapter provide a good example of what it could look like to connect with others and their struggles in the US. At the time, this kind of work would have the most impact in Washington, DC, the main site of struggle for the case. This also offers an example of the kind of work anarchists can be doing right now to be prepared to combat isolation and repression in the future.

The liberal defensive posture taken in the J20 case did garner the case media attention and superficial support from the likes of Democracy Now! But that support was rescinded as soon as “innocent” protesters, medics, and journalists were off trial

archists saw the danger of their politics being diluted by receiving such wide support. They created narratives that built broadly while maintaining their political integrity. Articulate and clear positions dignified their movement and politics while antagonizing and discrediting the state:

“I too am an anarchist.”

“Neither innocent nor guilty.”

“The terrorist is the one who condemns us to a life of misery, not the one who rebels against it.”

“Terrorism is not being able to reach the end of the month.”

“The only terrorist is the capitalist state.”

As is common in Spain, constant anarchist graffiti maintained an atmosphere of visibility and hostility around the case. Large marches disrupted the flow of normalcy. There were direct actions including blockades and property damage, speaking events that offered discussion and community building, and small-scale clandestine attacks. All of these applied pressure from different angles.

“The Pandora solidarity campaigns included a large number of solidarity talks that gave information about the case and also talked about the importance of the practices of sabotage and insurrection that the state was trying to punish. And without a doubt, that made us stronger.”

-An anonymous participant in the solidarity campaign against Operation Pandora

empowerment and fulfillment for that defendant but it ended up causing them harm instead. I believe all of us who were on the tour regretted making this decision. But at the time, there was little room to breathe because of how unhealthy the atmosphere around the case was. There was a lot of paranoia in the air and the question of accountability was consistently difficult to address with such a wide pool of defendants.

As a movement, we weren't able to maximize the potential of the calls to action. There was an issue of capacity but there was also an issue of participants feeling dis-engaged, which adversely affected the capacity for actions. In our experiences in many conversations around action, people would severely limit themselves because they weren't sure what was acceptable. After a year of mostly banner drops and fundraisers, many felt that supporting the J20 case meant dressing nicely and going to court or, at most, helping logistically. When this happens, a few people will stick around but most will turn their attention and energy elsewhere.

Actions inform action. In order for actions to generalize, people have to think them up, carry them out, and publicize them so that they can spread.

Within the J20 solidarity efforts, there were some fiercer actions, but people seemed hesitant to imitate or advocate for them and people doing work around the case were likely to discourage such things. It makes sense that people doing legal support would be tightly wound, but it doesn't make sense for people to allow that trepidation to influence our politics and our work as revolutionaries. DefendJ20Resistance was mostly comprised of defendants. As political agents of change, we will not always follow in accordance with what would be considered “legally sound.” Isn't that why we participated in the action on J20? Isn't our conflict with the law and its courts the

reason why so many of us put in support work against the case? Our solidarity efforts need to reflect our values, or else we risk not achieving meaningful enough goals; we risk inertia.

Partisans of more conservative approaches managed to make themselves indispensable. For many defendants and supporters, this was their first bout against repression and they deferred to those with social capital, movement experience, and palatable defensive stances. What would be necessary for us to have other options next time? Folks of more militant inclinations who have just as much experience would have to do the same kind of work. We would have to nurture an environment of solidarity, hospitality, and autonomy.

Radical outlets, such as CrimethInc. and *It's Going Down*, co-published calls to action including strong narratives:

“Make it clear that there will be personal consequences for taking the side of oppression.”

“The best defense is a good offense! If there is a powerful movement against Trump and the forces he represents, defendants from the previous clashes will be more likely to receive the support they deserve. Keep organizing new efforts against Trump, police, nationalists, and the pipelines and profiteering from which they draw their power.”

CrimethInc. also published a compelling piece after the conclusion of the first trial critiquing the state as a whole. This type of messaging was generally depreciated by J20 defendants and supporters. During moments of hardship, people can start to believe that revolutionary aims are too idealistic and naïve, and this can become infectious. We ask that people think twice about where those feelings and thoughts come from. There is no ignorance in unapologetically fighting for a freer world. If anything is naïve, it is the idea that liberalism will solve all our problems.

We cannot rely solely on a few radical outlets to disseminate political narratives. We must come up with our own narratives and diffuse them in our efforts wherever we can, or else they are likely to remain limited to our own circles. We must challenge ourselves to advance our struggles. Our efforts should aim to multiply revolutionary possibilities, which means expanding on what's already in place, not simply replicating existing modes. We need to do a better job of identifying these strengths and weaknesses in order to adjust our approaches accordingly.

A multiplicity of narratives is expected. When have the people who comprise any political body been unanimous in their positions on direct action and resistance? These differences should be encouraged, not stifled. It's important to create a diverse set of perspectives, complicating the ways in which reactionary forces seek to marginalize revolutionary gestures and their proponents. The J20 case saw some of that but ultimately too little.

## **We Are All Anarchists**

*Yo Soy Tambien Anarquista*. “I am also an anarchist.” In 2014, eleven anarchists in Spain were arrested on terrorism charges in a police action known as Operation Pandora. Seven were imprisoned; the other four were released with charges. After an extensive solidarity campaign and a couple years of court appearances, all of their charges were dropped. The solidarity campaign showed how sensationalized confrontational tactics, a diverse array of actions (e.g., graffiti, speaking events, marches), and savvy uncompromising narratives challenging innocence, guilt, and political targeting can succeed.

Anarchists accurately saw the terrorism charges as a means to create fear and isolate the state's enemies. The campaign was able to fight this and effectively garner broad support. An-