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Traveling Autonomous Zone

Rob los Ricos

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In his book *Temporary Autonomous Zone*, Hakim Bey suggests that we not worry about changing the world, but instead take charge of our own lives whenever possible. He reminds us that, even though such insurrections as the ones in Paris 1871 and during the Spanish Civil War were ultimately crushed militarily, they at least achieved a period of autonomy for a portion of their lives, which is more than many of us can say.

One recurring argument that comes up with Anarchists I discussed TAZ with regards the word ‘temporary’. “I’m not so sure I agree with his flippant attitude towards permanence,” wrote South Dakota prisoner Phil Smith. “I am interested in changing the world to the extent possible, and it seems that Bey is willing to accept these temporary autonomous zones flickering in and out of existence while capitalism abides. Fuck that! I want more!”

Indeed, we all want more, but the point is that we are nowhere near the point that we can overthrow capitalism. Should that prevent us from creating oases of liberation whenever and wherever possible? Certainly not!

To put things in another perspective, think of time in a geological sense. Ten thousand years is merely a bat of an eye when

discussing epochs of geological history. Ten thousand years ago, much of the Americas was under immense sheets of ice or was the floor of shallow oceans. Of course, these were only temporary conditions which have changed radically since.

In a historical timeframe, human beings have only been recording their doings for five thousand years. Capitalism has only been around a minute fraction of that time, and it will eventually disappear, just as the era of Assyrian or Babylonian empires passed.

In the meanwhile, why not ditch the system now and again to make something different?

Though I initially shared Phil's sentiments about the term 'temporary', now I've come to understand that nothing is permanent anyway, certainly not on this planet. However, I also want more than an afternoon of liberation or a few months in a squat. I have a fascination about nomadism that led me to scheming about Travelling Autonomous Zones.

Perhaps the greatest example of a Traveling Autonomous Zone would be an ocean-going one. A sixty-foot long yacht could easily contain a commune of twelve people. The ship could spend most of its time in international waters, beyond the laws and borders of most nations. The opportunities for organizational mayhem are incredible in the open sea: pirate radio, clandestine landings, disrupting whaling and other mammalian massacres by commercial fishers, not to mention ferrying outlaw activists to places of relative safety. The only times the ship would have to come into contact with nations would be to stock up on supplies (fresh water, food, medicine, etc.), and the necessity of such contact could be reduced by a resourceful crew. In times of bad weather a harbor would be a desirable place to be.

On land, a bus or small caravan of vehicles could transport TAZ from one area of liberation to another as time and necessity dictate. The members could transport materials from region to region (things like 'zines and other literature, clothing, small trade items, etc.).

This would be an extremely valuable resource for the anarchist community, as it might lend itself to more secure distribution (though somewhat slower) than the U.S. mail. Also, it seems that nomadic bands are more naturally resistant to hierarchy than stationary communities. Several such rolling communities could expand for events such as national or regional gatherings, and would also create propaganda merely by passing through rural areas that have little experience beyond their own communities.

Of course, this visibility would also be a danger, as it might attract the attention of unwanted, watchful eyes. Still, it would be better to travel in numbers than to do it alone.

In areas where there is not a strong squatting movement, the squats could move from one place to another as their presence became more noticeable than is comfortable for the squatters. By moving from one campsite to the next, anarcho-campers would be difficult to keep up with, even in the anarchist community. These problems are easily overcome by using available technology, such as radios or cellular phones.

All in all, 'temporary' or 'traveling' autonomous zones can easily be created by people with the will to do them. In this way, a clear demonstration about how non-state communities could function would do more to educate people about mutual aid and cooperation than almost any other vehicle for the promotion of anarchist ideas. It's one thing to think/talk/ write about your beliefs, but it is much more meaningful to actually enact them!

Let's get busy, ya'll!