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Uri Gordon

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Right of Reply: Anarchy in the Holy Land!

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It's pretty rough being an Israeli anarchist these days. On a good day you are dismissed as irresponsible and naive, ignorant of history and blind to reality while your dedicated, life-risking activities are, at best, an easily-absorbed tantrum in the Nanny State. And that's on a good day. The normal treatment is a bit less savory. You are violently despised, branded a fifth column for Iran and al-Qaida, and all the beatings, tear-gassings and shootings you and your comrades endure are gleefully cheered on, alongside the usual calls to put the anarchists up against the wall.

In his May 24 "Power & Politics" column "Anarchy has its place", Elliot Jager is just the man to give you a bit of both. After a rhapsody of belittling rhetoric designed to brand anarchists as irrelevant, we are back with the usual vitriol and bad faith: well-rehearsed cheap shots, stock phrases and smug moralizing alongside harangues of abuse and dehumanization of the enemy. Hate, not reason, is behind the accusation that Israelis who take

direct action against the Segregation Barrier effectively aid those who would murder Israeli civilians. This is manipulative nonsense.

Get real — as if every publicly dismantled roadblock or hole in the segregation barrier isn't closely guarded and soon repaired by contractors. At most we're costing the state some money and man-hours. The main thing that happens is that everybody gets to see our weekly demonstrations violently repressed. Symbolic actions are only the most visible part of a much wider struggle that includes more sustainable actions, from interfaith dialogue to the accompaniment of olive harvesting to joint ecological projects, as well as demonstrations, publishing and educational work. The point of all this is not only to dismantle barriers but to get the army out of Palestine, dismantling the entire regime of occupation with its apparatus of death, imprisonment and confiscation. We are not interested in better managing of the conflict — we want to end it by reconciliation among enemies.

AND THAT'S just for starters. Jager invokes Leviathan, Hobbes's metaphor for the State. It is the sovereign to which everyone supposedly cedes his autonomy, so as to avoid a war of all against all and a precarious life that is "nasty, brutish and short." This is what we are told about human nature. Now tell me one thing: If you don't trust people to get along without rulers, how can you possibly trust them to rule other people? Leviathan is not as Jager imagines it. The cadaverous beast is an artificial social machine of domination, with living human beings as operating parts. We all fuel the matrix of hierarchical and coercive institutions, and we can destroy it by constructing a new society from the grassroots even as we confront injustice. Leviathan speaks from the mouths of those who apologize for having lost faith in their capacity to make their own history. Those who know they can do so reject its easy lies. People with this kind of analysis don't inhabit cafes and art galleries. And so when Israeli activists get out of their comfort zones and put their bodies on the line for the future, suddenly they're a threat.

THERE ARE remarkable parallels here to the civil resistance to the withdrawal from Gaza — a self-organized, grassroots campaign of disobedience and direct action if there ever was one, brutally repressed by the forces of the state in the name of majority rule. Many anarchists, by the way, opposed the disengagement — as they would any armed unilateralism toward citizens or non-citizens under military occupation. The truth is that Israeli anarchists are demonized because their actions are coherent and bold. The joint Palestinian-Israeli struggle transgresses the fundamental taboos put in place by Zionist militarism. Alongside the living example of nonviolence and cooperation between the two peoples, the struggle forces Israeli spectators to confront their dark collective traumas. Israelis who demonstrate hand-in-hand with Palestinians are threatening because they are afraid neither of Arabs nor of the Second Holocaust that they are supposedly destined to perpetrate. Notice how everything comes out when the anarchists are vilified: the fear of annihilation, the enemy as a calculated murderer, and victims' guilt expiated through the assertion of self-defense and just war as unexamined axioms. And this is threatening on a deeper level than any hole in the fence — but, then again, anarchists didn't get their reputation as trouble-makers for nothing. Refuse communion at the edge of the Abyss. "Disimagine" this nightmare disguised as reality, where victims of victims victimize each other until one day we are all blown away to Kingdom Come.

We can still break out of the vicious cycle of drawing the justification for present atrocities from the living memory of the horrors of the past — if only we realize that in doing so we are playing into the hands of all those who mean to rule us. AS FOR ourselves, in manifesting our solidarity with Palestinians we have no intention of romanticizing their struggle, or of hiding our opposition to anyone who would rule the peoples of this land. Rather it is a question of starting to practice desertion, refusal, sabotage, attack against every violent authority, all coercive power, and every state.