

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

Anti-Copyright



On No Platform and ITS

William Gillis

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Should publishing neonazi material be tolerated among anarchists?

To almost every anarchist the answer is and has always been no. This is not a matter of censoring or hiding from ideas, it's a matter of not giving shitty people with shitty values and goals the legitimacy of a platform and connection with us. Social association matters, it maps networks of trust and collaboration, it declares degrees of affinity, and provides points of entry. When you hang with nazis, when you allow them into your spaces, or when you promote their propaganda you're quite reasonably gonna get treated like a nazi collaborator.

The world is not a formless and consequenceless forum for the airing and interplay of ideas. It's particularly sad that — in the drama surrounding Little Black Cart publishing the defacto English-language mouthpiece of a terrorist group targeting anarchists — anyone should have to point out to self-proclaimed “post-anarchists” the limits of the “marketplace of ideas” notion and the dangerousness of privileging the pretense of civil dialog.

Ideas rise to prominence for lots of reasons, their evolutionary fitness in a given context is not solely or often even chiefly deter-

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mined by their epistemic value. When more rational or accurate ideas win out they often do so only very slowly, laboriously tearing down vast edifices of bullshit that can be raised quickly.

Nationalism is fucking stupid, but nationalist propaganda is particularly effective — its simplistic resonance persuades faster than critique can keep pace. It hooks into our shallow monkey brain instincts, feeding off our worst desires for status, power, belonging, and community, and providing an excuse to shrink the circle of our concern for others and avoid all the fatiguing intellectual responsibility such empathy brings. While we waste time critiquing its lies and misdirection nationalism happily continues building an army and preparing to crush us.

This doesn't mean that we should expunge nationalist appeals from the historical record or make them totally inaccessible — epistemic closure is dangerous and it's important to understand our enemies — but we shouldn't make their dissemination easy, and we shouldn't help in giving them slick packaging, prominence, and legitimacy. Since nationalism primarily recruits not through reason but through displays of social positioning and brute force — displays that promise power and demonstrate how much can be gotten away with — dialog is often a trap.

Almost everyone gets this.

An esoteric text dump online is different than something gilded in book form. The role of a publisher — even more so in the era of the internet — is to give social prominence to certain things. To leverage social and financial capital to disseminate something and lend legitimacy to it. Anarchists don't publish flat earth nuts or climate change deniers because those perspectives have simply nothing in common with anarchism; they are not relevant or coherent with or even arguably reconcilable with anarchy. And while there is immense space for complexity, novelty, exploration, and contention within anarchism it is not yet so undermined as a concept as to be infinitely expansive. There are boundaries and a core locus of concern with the liberation of all.

We certainly don't publish neonazis or tankies. It doesn't matter that Mao was once an anarchist or that Mussolini ran in anarchist circles — they were clearly at fundamental odds with the anarchist project. But even those genocidal ideologies pale before the mass murderous ideology of ITS, who have even more stridently sought to embrace the opposite of anarchism. Rejecting the defining anarchist goal of liberation for all, ITS derides this as “humanist” and “moralist” — valorizing instead the murder of strangers for sport. Instead of freedom and the abolition of domination, they've devolved into worshipping a silly macho “wildness” that's just decentralized domination with some residual environmentalist affectations and a laughable cloak of subalternity.

Once upon a time it was possible to quibble that their ideology shouldn't be taken seriously as a declaration of intent. That the entire philosophy was self-evidently empty posturing by edgelords. And that when some brats declare that they want to kill all humans or that they're “worse than Hitler” the extremity of such statements revealed their insincerity. But ITS' attacks on anarchists, children's hospitals, students, hikers, etc. long ago made such continued deflection impossible.

The Journal Atassa's website is filled with translations of ITS communiques and interviews — Atassa has effectively operated as ITS' press office in the anglosphere. That Little Black Cart would seek to publish Atassa as a journal and insert it in anarchist spaces follows the same trajectory of assisted entryism that has led to ITS communiques being repeatedly published on AnarchistNews.org, hosted on TheAnarchistLibrary.org, read aloud enthusiastically on Free Radical Radio, laughed about approvingly on The Brilliant, etc. All from the influence of roughly the same circle of self declared nihilists.

Let's be clear that Little Black Cart's defense of their publication of Atassa in terms of whether “calls to action” are present in the print version of Atassa is as absolutely and transparently ridiculous a defense as could be imagined.

Whether a white nationalist journal makes “calls to action” is completely irrelevant. A neonazi text that speaks in airy abstract terms and avoids making a direct call to exterminate is in no real sense different than a neonazi text that lets slip such calls. This distinction is purely a legal artifice and one that should be largely irrelevant to anarchists. We all know this game intimately because we’ve played it continually over the last few decades when struggling with the liberal legal regime. The ELF had cells and the press office, legally distinct entities, but functioning as a single whole. Such positioning may save someone from prison but no anarchist actually buys that they’re ultimately distinct, they are but different organs within the same movement or project.

What’s intolerable about white nationalism isn’t merely its specific acts of violence, it’s the fucking white nationalism itself. Similarly what is intolerable about ITS isn’t merely their violent acts but their fucking values and goals. The violent acts are merely proof that they are actually serious about their vile ideology — even if they have not as of yet figured out how to for example sabotage nuclear plants and kill at a larger scale.

LBC contextualizes their publication of Atassa with, “The ideas we wish to publish are visionary, world-wrecking, ideas about a passionate, critical, fiery anarchy unleashed upon the world.” And similar statements have repeatedly been made across Anarchist-News.org and associated media projects — framing ITS as anarchist. But there is no sliver of anarchy to be found in ITS unless we are now — after years of attempted twisting and corruption — to accept a notion of anarchy as merely ANY fiery world-wrecking.

ITS does not seek to end domination and expand freedom, the wildness they worship might as well be called fractured fascism. Broadly contiguous with and reflective of the sort of “national anarchists” that have cropped up among modern fascists with a decentralization fetish. The same almost sociopathic myopia and localism of nationalism, except to an even greater extent.

but we cannot afford to erode the beautiful idea itself, to lend space and legitimacy to its avowed enemies. And we certainly shouldn't be helping those actively trying to kill anarchists.

LBC's decision to publish Atassa, Anews' publication of ITS manifestos, their continued hosting on AnarchistLibrary.org and as audio recordings on Free Radical Radio are obviously beyond the pale in the same way that nazi or tankie texts would be. Not because anarchism cannot survive forbidden readings — although it is shameful we've done such a poor job enunciating and defending our values that somehow a small number found ITS' inane perspective to have resonance — but because such publication legitimizes a profound watering down of anarchist values and basic norms.

That some of the folks slinging ITS have now *also* published “critiques” of ITS feels about as paper thin as it is when some white nationalist under immense social pressure says “*hey now, I have a few disagreements with Hitler and the historical Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei.*”

It's true that now at long last a couple folks in this circle have voiced a critique of ITS. Yet in his essay in Black Seed inveighing against anyone loudly opposed to ITS, Bellamy's “critique” of ITS functioned mostly as an attempt to distance them from anticivic nihilism, “*Despite their many references to egoist and nihilist [sic] strands of anarchism, including quite recent ones concurrent with the above this is quite plainly a holy war, not a deconstruction of civilization through individual liberation. I see no room for a praxis of individual or small, intimate group liberation in conjunction with such an ascetic, semi-suicidal religious imperative.*”

Notice how askew this analysis is. Bellamy casts the problem with ITS as that they're not focusing myopically enough! In this picture what's wrong with ITS is the intensity and scope of their values. God fucking forbid someone feel strongly committed to action or some large goal. Surely *that's* what's actually intolerable about ITS. And never mind the values of “individual or small intimate group liberation” that Bellamy casts as somehow both nihilist and desirable instead. The problem with ITS is apparently that they care about shit beyond their friend circle. Such critiques of “moralism” are hard not to read in vein of the “the problem with all these fucks is they get triggered about shit” nihilism at the bedrock of the alt-right.

Myself, being a “feverish” moralizing fuck, I diagnosed ITS as being too myopically focused in the immediate. The simple macho and subrational rush of brutal domination involved in murder, mixed with the visceral instinct of *trees good concrete bad*, both instincts fetishized by a all too nihilist failure to intellectually probe deeper or wider. Just as Richard Spencer admits that race or ethnicity is an arbitrary and contradictory construct, so too do they

essentially admit that “the wild” is not ultimately an intellectually defensible category or concept, just as they’ve admitted they don’t get the science they castigate. They’re gonna go with the arbitrary value that psychologically resonates with them given their personal history, and fuck any sort of intellectual reflection that might undermine such or reorient them towards different values. Unlike certain fascists ITS is obviously not trying to convert large numbers of people to their cause, but they’re just as obviously leveraging the same sort of irrational psychological resonances that underpin fascism. A fetishization of violence and a return to mythologized lost tradition, a shrinking of one’s empathic circle to a closer relationships and othering of the rest, a ridicule for reason, truth, and intellectual diligence. It’s this latter trick that allows them to value their self-aware nonsensical construct of “the wild”.

Note how these few nihilists only now “critiquing” ITS can’t bring themselves to actually make an argument for some values and not others. They never address how murder for sport is wrong or why the lives of strangers should matter to us. They don’t want to get drawn into such an explicit metaethical conversation because it would bare just how arbitrary their values of “self” interest and privileging a few immediate relationships over others are. They want to duck such with trivializing moves like “of course we’re against bad things” when said bad things are overwhelming socially recognized (and *only* when those bad things are overwhelmingly socially recognized), but the entire project of anticiv nihilism has increasingly seemed to be about expanding the overton window of what’s socially allowable. If they’re trying to distinguish themselves from ITS it’s obviously incumbent upon them to explain the walls holding their myopic focus on immediacy from devolving into the even more extreme reductio of that demonstrated by ITS. After a decade of attempting to erode anarchism’s capacity to say anything, to uproot its ethical foundations, they’re now left grasping at the air trying to assert that there’s no slippery slope between them and ITS. Despite a number of individuals in the an-

a number in these circles actually would like us to be so de-fanged, but I wish they would explicitly step to with that argument so it can be roundly rejected.

I mean is the level of bullshit used to equivocate and condemn condemnations of ITS really to be our future? Halfassed concern trolling and “whaddaboutism” where any restatement of what should be ethically obvious but somehow isn’t is in turn silenced as “virtue signaling?”

When the same folks who condemned those speaking out against the bombing of an anarchist infoshop then whined about civility, free speech and the disrespect of LBC’s property in Seattle, the Bay Area Anarchist Bookfair organizers proclaimed that they wouldn’t exclude vendors based on their content. Immediately alt-right, anti-feminist, MRA, and pro-Israel material cropped up. Because. This. Is. What. Fucking. Happens.

There are so many more reactionaries than anarchists in this world that they could sneeze and flood us out of our spaces or drown out our voice. Some bare community norms or expectations are inherent and necessary. I’ve pushed for tolerance and ecumenicalism for years, but it’s hard to imagine what could even remain if we accept publishing the de facto press office of a group that opposes freedom and is out to kill all humans. The alt-right literature was promptly removed from the Bay Area Bookfair by spontaneously organizing attendees, but however horrible the alt-right is let’s remember they at least don’t champion the extermination of literally everyone.

Look, again, I *get* that there are dangers here. LA’s condemnation of “individualism” wholesale is obviously absolute trash. But just because something as central to anarchist practice as No Platform can be abused doesn’t mean anarchists can afford to suddenly discard it. Anarchism at core is an ethical stance against all domination, seeking the liberation of all — there should be room for vibrant intellectual diversity in discussing how this is applied, differences in strategy, prediction, and preferred implementation —

happened after a loss of social capital. (Honest props to those nihilists who called him out and cut ties with him over it.)

What's also flabbergasting is the audacity with which ITS apologists have instead tried to reframe the conflict around a motte and bailey of "indiscriminacy" in violence. As if the only thing objectionable is that some perfectly valid anarchist comrades are getting a little too sloppy when it comes to collateral damage in their actions. It's insulting and disturbing that they think this reframing will work. ITS declares they want to kill everyone and proceed to target randos and anarchists — and their apologists try to turn the discussion into a re-litigation of the late 90s nonviolence debate.

No anarchist project nor any manner by which anyone might move through our world, occurs without some form of violence — even the violence of nonviolence. But we can still recognize varying degrees of violence, and of domination, and subjugation. We can engage mindful of the context of our actions and the various feedback loops attendant to certain tactics or strategies. We can also — and this is the critical bit — seek to fucking minimize domination in the world, to expand things like agency and consent. The pretense that ITS's murderfest and wish for mass death poses any serious or interesting questions for anarchists would be laughable if so many in LBC's orbit haven't somehow claimed such.

Of course Atassa — as ITS' English language press office — doesn't even bother with such deflections. The only pretense of defense it conjures is feigned outrage at gringos talking shit about something in a (not so) distant country. What a laughable pastiche of anticolonialism and white liberal insecurities! Are anarchists not to condemn the North Korean government or the Assad Regime? Must we refrain from critique of the Muslim Brotherhood or Daesh when communists laud them? Where does this "can't critique distant things" nonsense end? Can't develop an opinion on someone widely called out for rape in a slightly distant city? Someone in our scene snitches and we get to say "well I'm not super close with all the relevant individuals"? I mean I know that

activ nihilist milieu long praising or expressing delight at ITS (see Free Radical Radio for some of the more public individuals).

When former anarchists reject not just the strawmen they set up with "moralism" but all ethics, declare that the abolition of oppression is impossible and undesirable, say "might makes right" and misanthropically fetishize mass die-off in a civilizational collapse, but then protest "sure, I don't support killing random people" how honestly should we read such a deflection?

And does it really matter if they do happen to arbitrarily draw such a line? Richard Spencer can say he wants "peaceful" ethnic cleansing, but we all know the inevitable conclusion of his values. And what else could he really get away with saying in public? To many of us ITS has laid bare the inevitable and boring conclusion of most of this most recent misbegotten "nihilist" project in North America. A notion of anarchy increasingly stripped of all ethical content and rendered into a shallow aesthetic of revolt and attack. By now we should all realize that such an aesthetic is entirely swallowable by and deeply reconcilable with reactionary forces.

Let me clarify where I am personally coming from here, because I am certainly not suggesting that we banish everything remotely problematic or deviant. I am quite loudly reviled in a few of circles for taking iconoclastic stances in anarchism, as well as encouraging and facilitating critical dialog with ideas or circles deemed verboten. I have consistently been about challenging orthodoxies and expanding overton windows. I have built up and published writers that I have sharp and public disagreements with. While I have been vitriolic in my critiques of them I've nevertheless tabled and spoken at libertarian conventions, debated reactionary non-anarchist transhumanists, and even helped a bit in negotiating the original St Paul Principles — an influential treaty with maoists and liberals. I was once staunchly primitivist and have continued to engage at length with various branches of those ideas, even undertaking lengthy dialogs with some of today's "eco-extremists" like John Jacobi (even despite Atassa's inclusion of his writing). For a

decade and a half since I worked up the backbone to stand up to the anarchist and leftist orthodoxy I've dealt with plenty of suspicious would-be scene police hoping to make a name for themselves by running me out of things for crimethink. Last year the LA Anarchist Bookfair side-eyed my application to table because they thought mutualism smelled like "propertarianism" — I would be certainly excluded by any ban on "individualists." I've even hilariously been accused on Anews of trying to build a "red brown alliance" because a think tank I'm involved with engages in dialog with libertarians and the notoriously thirdpositiony Counterpunch has republished a few of our public domain essays (never mind that we've been the most consistent and outspoken critics of the fascist creep in libertarian circles, have converted thousands of libertarians, and are frequently targeted by actual fascists for our work). Syndicalists, Platformists, and "anarchists" in spitting distance of Maoism have said far worse about me, happily making up shit or conflating ("ancap" etc). I am well aware of how opportunistically "fascist" can be thrown by some and how hungry certain bureaucratic dinosaurs in the red branches of anarchism are for inane ideological purges and unfair litmus tests.

Anarchy is complex and varied in its application and we must embrace the often weird and unruly ideological mess that people make of it. We must continue to make sure there's room for varying kinds of people with varying takes.

But there are nonetheless still *some* boundaries to the anarchist project.

There have to be or else anarchism would be absolutely indistinct from anything else and also immediately overrun.

We don't let fascists in our spaces. We don't let a very large array of fucked up shit in our spaces. We don't think that our goals justify literally any means, nor do we believe that a number of means can feasibly lead to the ends we desire — or else we would have no problem with state communists and claim that mass slaughter and imprisonment are capable of building a world we

could ever be interested in. Many of the exact same people now wailing about someone ripping up a copy of Atassa at the Seattle Bookfair I remember once laughing in approval at state communists getting water dumped on their books when they tried to table anarchist bookfairs. There are and have always been things rightfully considered utterly beyond the pale in anarchism. It is not remotely acceptable to distro fascist propaganda, and certainly not at an anarchist bookfair — even if the writers originally came from the anarchist movement (as again in the case of some "national anarchists").

I know that my repeat comparison to nazis will be dismissed out of hand by a few — and shrieked about from the residual anews peanut gallery — as rank hyperbole, but when pressed no defender of ITS and Atassa has so far coughed up any attempt at meaningful distinction in why we should treat them differently. What's so infuriating is that many of these people clearly perceive ITS as just some "misbehaving" comrades who are only a little bit lost. They know that they can't just openly say that ITS' values and analysis are close to their own because they know that anarchists at large would then revolt and kick them from the milieu like the "national anarchists" were once. Since Scott Campbell raised the profile of ITS' targeting of anarchists and anarchist spaces, some folks involved with LBC have felt pressured into backpeddling a little. But these same cheerleaders knew damn well that ITS had tried to kill an anarchist years back and didn't raise a peep then.

It behooves us to ask what other random idiotic monsters these "ITS isn't that bad" folks would thus invite into our spaces and discourse. Are they going to start publishing shit like Keith Preston's "national anarchist" propaganda? This isn't rhetoric — Aragorn has already done this. In the late oughts Aragorn facilitated "national anarchist" entryism on anarchistnews.org, on antipolitics.net, and in the Berkeley study group. Defending the inclusion of BANA members and publishing national anarchist writing. It's great that he stopped, but it's concerning as hell that such retractions only