THE POLITICS OF BOMBS

This discussion paper was submitted to us by a reader. Although we don't all agree with the writer's position on what revolutionary activity is, we do feel the paper will begin a discussion on the role of armed struggle in Canada. It also points out lessons to be learned from the activities and trials of Direct Action.

The nature of the response to the article, "Julie Rats Out," in *Resistance* 10, and the discussion surrounding the letter to *Open Road* 21, indicate the degree to which we, as a movement, have not addressed the most basic issues raised by the actions of Direct Action and the Wimmin's Fire Brigade, or the subsequent arrest and trials of the Vancouver Five.

It has been our tendency to treat this example of armed resistance within the boundaries of the Canadian state as if it were an isolated, unprecedented, and wholly ahistorical event. After all, with the exception of the FLQ in Québec between 1963 and '70, Canada has no modern experience of homegrown clandestine armed resistance—in fact, very little history of militant resistance of any stripe. It is our weakness that we fail to recognize that in this way Canada is not representative of every other major West European societies, but is in fact, unique. Most West European societies have developed and sustained an armed movement since the early 70s. If we are to understand the Direct Action/Wimmin's Fire Brigade/Vancouver Five experience, if we are to critically assimilate and build upon it, we must look at it in this broader context of resistance.

If we are to look at armed struggle as a serious option within the Canadian State, we must establish its potential purposes.These are: armed propoganda, sabotage—causing real material damage to the State apparatus and capitalism, posing the revolutionary option; laying the base for a future popular armed resistance.

Armed Propaganda

> *The coordination of urban guerrilla actions, including armed action, is the principal way of making armed propaganda. These actions, carried out with specific and determined objectives, inevitably become propaganda material for the mass communications system.*
> —*Carlos Marighella, Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla*

All guerrilla actions are inevitably armed propaganda. The success of such actions as propaganda tools, however, depends on a variety of factors. The greater the degree to which the target of the action is associated in popular consciousness with some aspect of oppression, the greater the ease with which it can find broad-based support. If the target has been a clear focus for ongoing work on the part of the legal movement, the reason for the actions will be immediately clear, at least to those people aware of the issue. This will be especially true if the activities of the legal movement have failed to alter the behaviour of the target, despite an ongoing and consistent campaign. The timing in this case is important. Armed propaganda will be most effective if the legal movement has hit an apparent impasse.

It is equally important to the overall propaganda success of an armed action that workers not be endangered. Any reticence regarding armed struggle within the movement will be reinforced by the injury or death of an innocent party, and any potential popular appeal will be completely precluded.

However, we must equally recognize that such injuries and deaths, as tragic as they certainly are, will always be a possibility in the context of armed resistance, particularly as the State often has a secret interest in allowing such incidents to occur (if not creating them) to fuel its propaganda war against the guerrilla. It must equally be recognized that all States, including the Canadian State, are daily engaged in genocide and violent attacks against Third World peoples, against other species, and against the earth itself. No error on the part of the guerrilla could begin to touch this daily violence, which has become acceptable as a structural part of our society to such a degree as to go on virtually ignored.

Beyond the actual action itself, the success in terms of propaganda depends, to a great degree, on the capacity of supporters in the legal movement to effectively do propaganda work. The action must become widely known and contextually understood to receive the maximum popular support. The guerrilla cannot be expected to do this, and by and large will not be in a position to do this. This job is the responsibility of sympathetic people in the legal movement.

Sabotage

Every urban guerrilla action directed at property is an act of sabotage. Whereas the legal movement can raise consciousness regarding a particular issue, as long as it is public and legal, it can do little to actually disrupt the ability of the State apparatus to carry through its intentions. Only a flexible, clandestine, armed movement is in a position to carry out relentless attack and sabotage, albeit in a limited form. Such sabotage, while it may not ultimately stop a project, slows it down and greatly increases the cost.

Posing the Revolutionary Option

> *The principle (is) that revolutionary action in itself, the very act of arming oneself, preparing, equipping, and pursuing activities that violate bourgeois legality, generates revolutionary consciousness, and conditions.*
> —*a Tupamaro*

> *The mass armed capability which will destroy the State has its beginnings in very small armed actions, and through these guerrilla actions the armed mass capability develops.*
> —*Red Army Fraction (RAF)*

By engaging in armed struggle, even in its most formative stage, the guerrilla raises the issues of militant armed resistance to the capitalist State from a dim theoretical concept to an immediate practical possibility. In doing so, the nature of left discussion is qualitatively changed. The possibility for revolutionaries to engage in effective armed resistance is affirmed. While this preliminary armed resistance will, de facto, receive only limited support, even on the left, this limited support is the potential nucleus for the eventual armed struggle that will be necessary for revolutionary change to occur in any nation-State.

As well as indicating the possibility for militant resistance, armed activity demonstrates the possibility of pinpointing the system's weak points, and attacking offensively and effectively, even from a perspective of relative weakness. By so doing the myth of the invincible State is deflated and new possibilities for resistance are opened up.

> *Urban guerrilla warfare aims to destroy the domination of the State by striking at single weak points, and to destroy the myth of the omnipotence of the State and its invulnerability.*
> —*RAF*

When carried out in a consistent way, guerrilla politics can be empowering to even the legal left. The guerrilla, because of its clandestine organization, is in a position to add a concrete dimension to the propaganda and agitation of the legal left.

In short, the guerrilla is an offensive position adopted by a limited number of comrades. The guerrilla is the revolutionary expression of our rage in the face of a seemingly monolithic and untouchable enemy.

Almost every example of urban guerrilla resistance has been subject to a litany of attacks from the "traditional" left. The most common and recurrent criticisms are that: the time is not right, and therefore, armed resistance is elitist; and, armed resistance brings down repression on legitimate left organizations and individuals.

Waiting for the Right Time

> *If there is not a reasonably prepared group, the revolutionary conjunctures are simply wasted or not taken advantage of.*
> —*a Tupamaro*

> *It would be wrong to engage in armed struggle only when the "the consent of the masses" is assured, for this would actually mean to renounce the struggle altogether, as this consent can be obtained only by struggle itself. True mass armed struggle can only take place when it is understood by the masses, however, the comprehension of the need for armed struggle can only be aroused through beginning armed struggle.*
> —*RAF*

The concept that when "the time is right" for armed struggle we will recognize it and by some amazing osmosis, absorb the information and ability we need to effectively wage guerrilla warfare is indeed a curious one. Clearly, if we don't begin now to prepare for the eventual armed conflict with the State, the State will take all necessary precautions to ensure its ultimate control before the point of crisis likely to motivate massive resistance in the First World actually occurs.

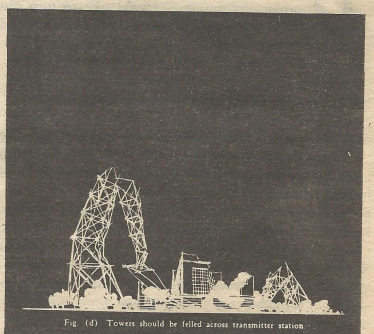


Fig (d) Towers should be felled across transmitter station

In fact, it is clear that the modern techno-police State is fairly advanced in this area. While we carry on our low-level, largely educational, political work, the State is busily developing the means of surveillance that will allow it to identify and, if necessary, monitor the movement and activity of each and every individual in this society. If we do not act now to organize effective clandestine opposition, the total surveillance State will be quietly placed in motion, perhaps curtailing once and for all the possibility of effective revolutionary upsurge.

Armed Resistance Brings Down Repression

> *Repression is indeed part of revolution, a natural anti-thesis, the always-to-be-expected defense/attack reflex of the beleagured, toothless tiger.*
>
> *—George Jackson*

The concept that armed activity brings down repression on uninvolved people of the left is one of the more revealing statements to come from those opposed to armed struggle.

Such a perception presumes that somehow the State is willing to stand by and allow left opposition to unfold unchallenged as long as it remains non-violent. Clearly, this is not the case. While non-violent, legal organizing may not illicit direct intervention from the State, the police apparatus engages in constant intervention, infiltration, surveillance, and destabilization. Andy Moxley's work as an infiltrator in the peace movement stands as witness to this.

This statement further presumes that there exists some form of valid left activity that will allow the left to play an objectively revolutionary role without threatening their security vis-a-vis the State.

The unrecognized reality is that armed activity does not create repression. Repression is a structural part of the "techno-fascist" State on every level. Armed resistance simply brings it out into the open where it can be seen and understood for what it is.

Finally, the legal left often fails to realize that the primary motivation for raids, arrests, and other repressive actions against the legal left in the wake of a guerrilla attack is not to capture those who are responsible (the police know they won't be found in legal left organizations), but to drive a wedge between the legal movement and the guerrilla. The tragedy is that the legal left, by and large, falls right into the trap, often going on to do the State's anti-guerrilla public relations work.

> *If we accept revolution, we must accept all that it implies: repression, counter-terrorism, days filled with work, nervous strain, prison, funerals.*
>
> *—George Jackson*

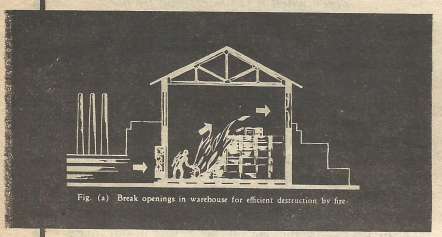


Fig. (a) Break openings in warehouse for efficient destruction by fire.

Having established a general framework for evaluating armed struggle in First World urban environments, we'd like to turn out attention to the particulars of the Direct Action and Wimmin's Fire Brigade experience.

Cheekye-Dunsmuir Power Substation

On May 31, 1982, Direct Action bombed the Cheekye-Dunsmuir power substation. From both an ideological and a strategic perspective, this action was armed activity of the highest order.

As an act of sabotage is was very successful. The power-substation, which was just about ready to go into action, was rendered useless. Direct Action's four bombs caused more that $5 million damage, necessitating the reconstruction of the substation nearly from scratch.

In terms of posing the revolutionary option, the action was well timed. The legal movement had spent years petitioning, letter-writing, picketing, blockading, etc., without successfully putting a halt to Hydro's plan to develop Cheekye-Dunsmuir regardless of environmental or human costs. Direct Action showed that when the State closes all legal channels there still remain options for people who are opposed to the policies of the State, and these options can be exercised by small committed groups with few resources.

In propaganda terms, the communiqué was clear and concise, explaining simply why the bombing had been necessary. If there was a weakness in propaganda terms, it didn't lie either in the action or the accompanying communiqué; it is to be found in our inability as a movement to recognize the parameters of what had occurred and to widely circulate the communiqué and develop a discussion around it.

Litton Industries Bombing

As an act of sabotage, the Direct Action bombing of Litton Industries on October 14, 1982, was a massive success, causing an estimated $7 million damage and eventually playing a role in creating the situation whereby Litton Systems of Canada was not invited to bid on the contract for the guidance device for the advanced version of the Cruise Missile. Litton President, Ronald Keating, made clear in April '84 that both public pressure and the Direct Action bombing played a role in knocking Litton out of the running. He said, "(Protesters) are an irritant, they get a lot of publicity, and the Americans read every damn bit of it. Pressure from these people is making the Americans look twice." He added, "No one else has been bombed." (He's got a valid complaint, someone ought to do something about that.)

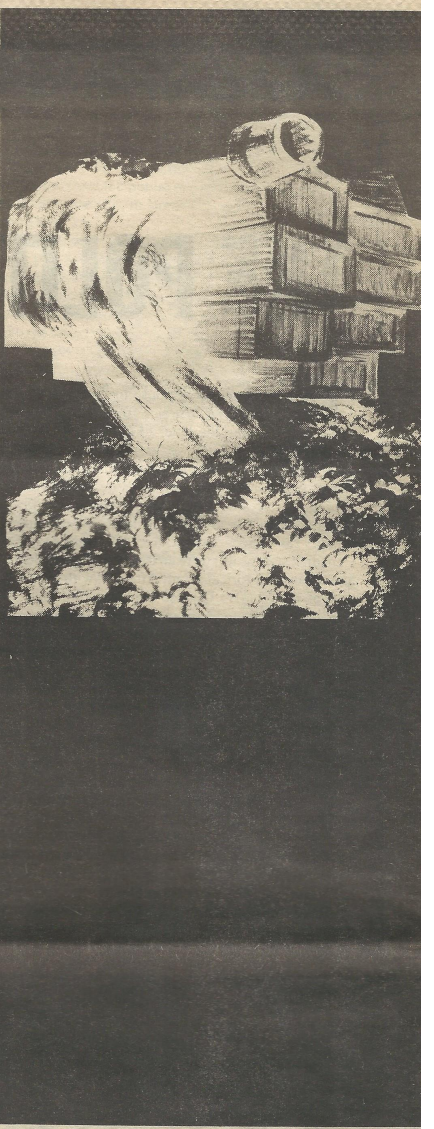
Again, the communiqué was clear and concise. In fact, from a sabotage and propaganda perspective, it seems likely that the action would have been a success had it not led to seven injuries, some of them quite serious. The injuries were a result of the bomb exploding twelve minutes early (there has been speculation that police radios accidentally triggered it), and of security personnel and police failing to grasp the seriousness of the situation and evacuate the building immediately. As it was, the workers were leaving the building at the exact moment the 50-pound bomb exploded, leaving them open to maximum injury.

Direct Action released a communiqué taking responsibility for errors on their own part, as well as indicating actions on the part of Litton security personnel and the cops which contributed to the tragedy. The communiqué then went on to delineate all of the errors which led to the injuries. It is too long to reprint or summarize here, but it is well worth reading. It clearly outlines the errors Direct Action made and the degree to which the police and security incompetence contributed to the situation.

The police moved quickly to exploit any uncertainties in the movement regarding the actions. They mounted a series of raids against legal peace groups including the Cruise Missile Conversion Project, the Alliance for Non-Violent Action, and World Emergency, as well as against prominent individuals in the peace movement. These actions, clearly intended to drive a wedge between Direct Action and the peace movement were, in large part, successful, with some leading figures in the peace movement going so far as to cooperate with the police investigation and to publicly state their hope that Direct Action would be successfully apprehended. There were also laudable examples of individuals in the peace movement who clearly expressed their solidarity with Direct Action (and later, the Vancouver Five) in the face of State attacks.

Red Hot Video Firebombings

The November 22, 1982 firebombings of three Red Hot Video locations in the lower mainland of BC was far and away the most popular armed attack of this period. This action was extremely successful, reducing one outlet to ashes and seriously damaging a second. In the third case, the incendiary device failed to ignite. It was also an action immediately embraced by all sections of the women's movement as one which expressed their rage. Groups as diverse as the BC Federation of Women and the Montréal-based Feminist Coalition Against Pornography publicly embraced it. It was soon clear that women recognized in this action the final option when faced with the total intransigience of the State.



In spite of the unfortunate injuries at Litton Industries, the Direct Action and Wimmin's Fire Brigade campaigns of 1982 were, by and large, effective on all levels. As propaganda the actions and communiqués were extremely pointed and effective, interlocking well with large-scale public campaigns. We wish to reiterate that any shortcomings on the propaganda level were in large part based on the lack of recognition by sympathetic people active in the legal movement of the necessity for distributing the communiqués and encouraging discussion about them and the strategy they represented. It was not until the injuries at Litton that the movement began discussing Direct Action and their strategy, and those of us who wished to defend the strategy were forced into an intensely defensive position, a very poor position from which to begin such a complex discussion. Retrospectively, it was a major error to let the positive example of the Cheekye-Dunsmuir bombing pass with so little attention. The fact that the Litton bombing was destined to be Direct Action's last action further complicated matters because we were still in the middle of the very complex discussion surrounding that action and the injuries at the time of the arrests.

The Arrests

The arrest of the Vancouver Five, on January 20, 1983, was, when looked at retrospectively, almost inevitable. The quantity of organizing those five individuals had to do in isolation made it virtually certain that they would manage for long. Nonetheless, it appears as if they made certain errors that indicate an inadequate understanding of police tactics. These errors must be recognized, examined, and understood, so as to be avoided in the future.

The fact that they continued to live in the Vancouver area and continued to maintain contact, even at a very low level, with some friends was a complete misjudgement of circumstances. Clearly, if and when the police pinpointed them as suspects, friends and acquaintances would be put under surveillance. At that point it was only a matter of time until the police came in direct contact with one or more of the Five. If one is to believe the police version of the surveillance that led to the Five (although certain parts of the police story are totally implausible) then this is exactly what happened.

There are lessons to be learned from the information available regarding the nature and style of the police investigation. It is clear that they are more aware of where individuals are at ideologically than we sometimes give them credit for. They were able to draw up a pool of suspects reasonably quickly, and although this pool contained many individuals who were totally uninvolved, it appears to have eventually provided the key connection that led to the Five, after which it simply became a matter of collecting the necessary information. It is clear that they are capable of sophisticated surveillance. They claim to have had as many as eight to ten cops surveilling a single suspect at times, and they claim to have been able to place Brent in Calgary at a certain time due to a "paper trail" which he left. It is also clear that they are willing to overlook criminal activities if they are holding out for a bigger bust. They clearly let several possible stolen vehicle arrests pass, and quite probably watched the Red Hot Video firebombings, while holding out for a more major arrest.

Some of the lessons to be drawn from this are clear. Comrades engaging in illegal activity on this scale must be prepared to go completely underground, which implies severing all contacts with their previous milieu and friends. Such contacts, while emotionally and psychologically significant, are suicidal from a security perspective. Police surveillance is sophisticated. If comrades involved in clandestine work are to avoid it, they must practice sophisticated counter-surveillance. Primary to this is a capacity to remove themselves from the areas where investigations are likely to start. And, of course, it is clear that any sense that the police are aware of one's activities, particularly any direct contact with the cops, however seemingly innocuous, requires that the guerrilla disappear and destroy everything that might allow the cops to trace them. All of this implies a highly developed network.

> *The urban guerrilla presupposes the organization of an illegal apparatus, in other words, apartments, weapons, ammunition, cars, and identification papers.*
>
> *—RAF*

It appears that by remaining in the Vancouver area, by maintaining contacts with friends, and by ignoring significant brushes with the law, the Five greatly facilitated their own ultimate arrest.

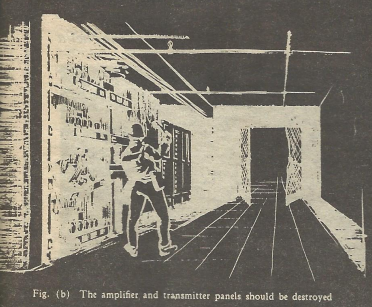


Fig. (b) The amplifier and transmitter panels should be destroyed

The Trial

> *If the military situation is difficult from the first moments, the political situation will be no less delicate; and if a single military error can wipe out the guerrillas, a political error can check their development for a long period.*
>
> *—Che Guevara*

While certain tactical errors may have contributed to the arrest of the Five, their ramifications for the strategy of armed resistance were minor. It was the errors committed by the arrested comrades and those of us who did defence/support work that served most to defuse the importance of the contributions of Direct Action and the Wimmin's Fire Brigade to resistance in Canada.

The approach of the Five to the legal system and the trials was a serious political misjudgement. By denying responsibility for the actions, rather than defending the actions and approaching the trials as a vehicle for a discussion of the issues and the role of armed struggle in a First World country, they completely abdicated any control over the trials.

By hedging their bets on minimizing their sentences, the Five put themselves in a situation where they could not actively use the trials for propaganda purposes without threatening their legal strategy. In so doing they promoted several erroneous perceptions. First of all, they de facto recognized the right of the courts, and by extension, the State, to judge their actions, rather than pinpointing the role of the legal system as a pillar of class injustice before which no equitable judgement can ever be expected, and least of all in a case of armed resistance. Secondly, the integrity which they lost by denying responsibility for their actions, lost them the support of certain sections of the public—including the jury. These errors were further compounded by the fact that they ultimately placed the case in the hands of lawyers and hung their hopes on legal challenges regarding the legitimacy of wiretaps, and similar details of legal protocol. Such a statement of faith in the legal system served only to contribute to further mystification surrounding the theoretical "neutrality" of the courts, and by extension, the State.

The response of supporters was to adopt the liberal demand of the "right to a fair trial." The more we worked with this demand, the more we boxed ourselves in politically. If the Five were maintaining their innocence and we were demanding a "fair trial," then we were de facto blocked from engaging in the primary discussion regarding the actions and role of armed struggle in Canada. If questioned regarding the actions, we were forced by our line to treat the issue of armed struggle as secondary or even inconsequential. Although the Five did resist this, they did so in a weak fashion.

> *We know that if there was such a thing as fair trials and justice—we would walk free. But there is no justice and we will not receive a fair trial. Yet because it is sometimes possible to exploit the contradictions inherent in the bourgeois democratic legal process (which result from the need for lawmakers to appear fair and legitimate), we will be participating in the courtroom facade to try and minimize the legal attack against us.*
>
> *—Julie, Ann, Gerry, Doug, Brent*
> *"Free the Five Newsletter"*
> *March 13, '83*

It was not until issue 7 of the "Free the Five Newsletter," issued November 16, '83, that four of the Five first publicly opposed the "fair trial" strategy, which by that time had been going on for nearly ten months.

> *Much of the political work done around our case has been centred on the process of "right to a fair trial," and abuses of process by the media, police, and prosecution. We would like to see the political work done on our case centre around what we consider to be the real issues: environmentalism, feminism, anti-imperialism, and radical activism.*
>
> *—Ann, Gerry, Doug, Brent*

However, in spite of these statements the defence/support milieu failed to change gears. We continued to orient our work around State excesses and illegalities, dispensing information, but refused to engage in the central debate: What is the role of armed resistance in Canada? How can militant resistance be constructed here?

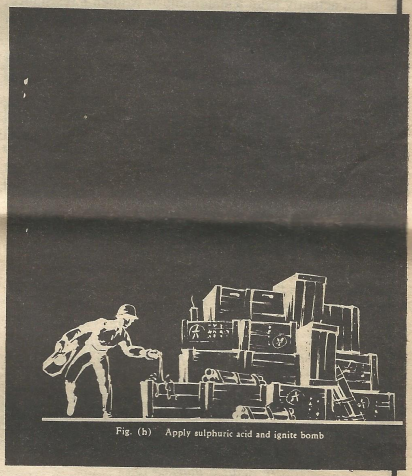


Fig. (h) Apply sulphuric acid and ignite bomb

If we are to attempt to pinpoint the reasons why we failed to respond positively to the situation the arrests and trials presented us with, several weaknesses become apparent. Both the prisoners and their defence/support committees failed to see the judicial experience, both the courts and prison, as an integral part of the armed struggle. The Five failed to take the lead in using the courtroom as a platform for propaganda and the prison as a central element in the confrontation between oppression and resistance. For our part we fell into the trap of believing we could somehow save our friends if we dwelled on the contradictions within the State's legal system and downplayed the armed actions of Direct Action and the Wimmin's Fire Brigade. The liberal deviations that occurred in this scenario were never rectified in any important way because no shared conception of politics in general or of the trials in particular ever evolved between the Five and their supporters. Because there was no solid political analysis of the situation coming from the prisoners and the supporters failed to evolve one, the possibility of using the trials to build support for the armed struggle was lost.

The situation worsened when the guilty pleas were filed. On March 17, 1984, Julie and Gerry pleaded guilty. Julie pleaded guilty to conspiracy to rob a Brinks armoured car, attempted arson of the Port Coquitlam Red Hot Video, car theft, possession of explosives, possession of weapons dangerous to the public peace, and bombing Litton Industries. Gerry filed the same guilty plea, less possession of explosives and the Litton bombing. On June 4, '84, Ann pleaded guilty to the Cheekye-Dunsmuir bombing, the

Litton bombing, possession of explosives, and possession of weapons. Ann had already been found guilty of conspiracy to rob a Brinks armoured car, possession of explosives, possession of weapons, possession of stolen property, vehicle theft, and breaking and entering. On June 8, Doug pleaded guilty to the Cheekye-Dunsmuir bombing and Brent pleaded guilty to possession of weapons and possession of explosives, having already been found guilty of the same charges as Ann in the first trial.

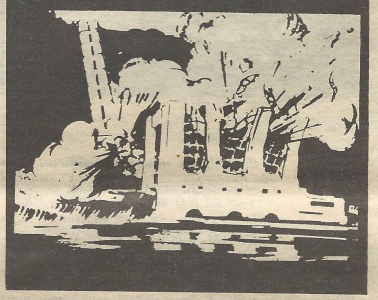
While the desire to put an end to dead time faced in endless trials is understandable, especially given the fact that the outcome of the first trial was hardly a victory from a legal perspective. The guilty pleas left little to be recouped politically following the almost exclusive focus of defence/support politics on the "right to a fair trial." Particularly damaging was Gerry's decision to accept a guilty plea on the Wimmin's Fire Brigade actions as part of a plea bargain. This was particularly disorienting as the Wimmin's Fire Brigade had been generally recognized as an all women's group and the action as an all women's action. Gerry's decision to plead guilty purely as a practicality, while understood by those supporters closer to the decision-making process, was not necessarily so clear for the broader political community watching the trials, some of whom were taken aback. (We had done such an effective job of our "right to a fair trial" campaign that some people in the political community actually believed the Five were persecuted innocents and in the face of the guilty pleas, felt their trust had been betrayed! This is rather a large statement of how effectively we buried the key issues in our defence/support work.) And it was left unclear whether the Wimmin's Fire Brigade had actually been a statement of women's resistance, or simply Direct Action using another name for reasons of political efficacy. Given the massive popularity of the Wimmin's Fire Brigade, particularly in the women's community, to introduce such unclarity was a political error.

It was not until the sentencing that the first real political statements came from the Five, and this was one and a half years after the arrest and nearly two years after the last action. On June 5, '84, Ann read her statement. This long, eloquent, and powerful statement said, among other things:

> *In the beginning when I was first arrested, I was intimidated and surrounded by the courts and prison. This fear provided the basis for the belief that if I played the legal game, I would get acquitted or get less time. This belief obscured my vision and fooled me into believing that I could get a break from the legal system. But this past eight months in court has sharpened my perceptions and strengthened my political convictions to see that the legal game is rigged and political prisoners are dealt a marked deck.*
>
> *Even though I knew that a few militant direct actions would not make the revolution or stop these projects, I believed it was necessary to begin the development of an underground resistance movements that was capable of sabotage and expropriations and could work free from police surveillance. The development of an effective resistance movement is not an overnight affair—it takes decades of evolution. It has to start somewhere in small numbers and whether or not it grows, becomes effective and successful, will depend on whether or not we make it happen.*

Finally, on June 25, '84, Brent was sentenced and made his sentencing statement. A brief portion follows:

> *Illegal activities were one part of my activism in the struggle, against the injustices and threats to life manifest in modern industrial civilization and the political and economic system of imperialism. The overall purpose of any illegal activity I was involved in was to further develop the struggle and thereby contribute to the possibility of a better world—one in which all people can finally live in freedom and international unity. Even if this does not come about in my lifetime, it is my hope that one day our future relatives will live in such a world.*



The sentencing statements were powerful political statements and were received as such. As good as the sentencing statements were, coming as they did, at the end of a long and intense process, they did not serve as a rallying point for a discussion. Had such statements come early in the legal process and had the defence/support committees chosen to stress the politics inherent in the actions and accompanying communiqués, the political potential of the trials might have been realized. As it was, the political issues, quite simply, came to the fore too late.

The Appeals

A further blow came with Julie's decision to break with her former comrades and recant.

In an emotionally charged performance Julie used her sentence appeal to focus the bulk of the responsibility for Direct Action and the Wimmin's Fire Brigade on Ann and Brent, particularly Brent, whom she identified variously as the leader and the planner. She claimed to have been harassed into the group, to have been young and impressionable, a state she described as an adolescent crisis, and to have been worn down and molded by constant pressure and abuse. She claims her seeming vigour for revolutionary activity, as it was recorded on the wiretaps and bugs, was not representative of her true feelings, but part of an effort to appear tough in order to ward off the constant criticism she was a victim of. She even went as far as to suggest she would have left the group, claiming she feared to do so after reading Marighella's *Mini-Manual of the Urban Guerrilla*, where she claimed Marighella said anyone leaving the guerrilla must be liquidated.

It is important to note in passing that Marighella didn't say this. What he, in fact, said regarding the guerrilla was:

> *When he (a guerrilla) cannot face the difficulties, or knows he lacks the patience to wait, it is better to relinquish his role before he betrays his pledge, for he clearly lacks the basic qualities necessary to be a guerrilla.*

While the purpose of Julie's patchwork story of lies, distortion, and paranoia was clearly to save her own skin, the quality of her story, the degree to which it fits into the standard State line on guerrilla politics, the degree to which it is tailored for counter-insurgency, indicate that she must have fallen victim to fairly intense police pressure, that she had been a pawn in the larger political strategy. The long sentence that Julie was given was doubtless part of a strategy to break her spirit so that she would be open to approaches from the State. In order to have this excessive sentence reduced, Julie was willing to engage in whatever grovelling was required and to portray her former comrades, particularly Ann and Brent, both of whom had sentence appeals forthcoming, as deranged and irresponsible, if not out-and-out remorselessly evil.

The outcome was predictable. Ann and Brent had their sentence appeals denied. Julie, for her part, received a five year reduction from twenty to fifteen for her propaganda role in the State's attack on Ann and Brent in particular, and the guerrilla in general.

Prison

With the end of the appeals came the end of the Vancouver Five as a public issue and the comrades withdrew from the public eye to serve their sentences. In Ann's case life, in Brent's 22 years, for Gerry ten, and Doug six.

As was the case with the trials, they have not used their prison time or the repression they face there as a springboard for a discussion of guerrilla resistance. Rather than asserting themselves as political prisoners in an ongoing way, they have assimilated themselves into the anonymity of the prison milieu. This has led to a situation where their courageous acts of resistance and their entire strategy as enunciated in the communiqués and the sentencing statements have been forgotten by all save a few tiny, isolated pockets of supporters.

To sum up, the Five and their supporters have thus far failed to play their potential role in advancing an understanding of armed struggle within the Canadian State. This lack is due to serious shortcomings in our political understanding of the elements at play. We failed to recognize and utilize the possibilities for advancing the strategy of armed struggle available in the trial process. In so doing, the opportunies opened up by the actions of Direct Action and the Wimmin's Fire Brigade were lost. The mystifying demand of the "right to a fair trial," led nowhere and served to liquidate the key issue of armed resistance in Canada. Although the history of Direct Action and the Wimmin's Fire Brigade has doubtless left its mark on the Canadian left, although the concept of armed resistance has been put on the agenda in a practical way so that it will never again be the non-issue it was prior to this experience, to date we have not really overcome the pacifying effects of the political errors we have made. It seems that both the Five and their supporters, having suffered this defeat, have turned away from the discussion of armed struggle to focus their energy elsewhere.

If we are to overcome the errors we have made, we must critically examine these errors, we must critically examine the events surrounding Direct Action, the Wimmin's Fire Brigade, and the Vancouver Five. As painful as it may be, we must pinpoint the errors and shortcomings of both the prisoners and their supporters and deal with them honestly. We can learn by studying the national liberation struggles of Third and Fourth World peoples in the Third World, Western Europe, and the USA, as well as by examining the history and current practice of the urban guerrilla movements in the USA and Western Europe. And, of course, we must face the responsibility of developing our own practice in Canada.

We have written the above not as an attack on the prisoners or their support community. We extend our love and solidarity to the imprisoned comrades who have contributed so much of themselves towards the realization of armed struggle in Canada. We also extend our love and solidarity to all who have worked to support the imprisoned comrades, and to all those who struggle for revolutionary change.

We cannot see any way to avoid certain criticisms given the current situation on the Canadian left. However, we have offered the above criticisms not as a personal attack on anyone, nor to create further divisions in the movement, but in the hope of creating a genuine discussion around the experiences of armed resistance and in the hope of aiding in pushing the struggle forward.

> *It is better to err acting than to do nothing for fear of erring. Without initiative there is no guerrilla warfare.*
>
> *—Carlos Marighella*