

Free Us All!

Free the Five Billion

Some know them as the Vancouver Five, the Squamish Five or, more often, just the Five. They were arrested by a combat-ready SWAT team on a remote stretch of highway near Squamish, British Columbia, Canada on Jan. 20, 1983, and charged with a series of political bombings across Canada during the preceding year. The bombings included a controversial power station in B.C., a factory in Toronto making parts for the Cruise missile and three rape film emporiums in the Vancouver area.

“1984 has been here for a long time already. The thought-police are out to get us, so that words like ‘militant,’ ‘resistance,’ ‘attack,’ ‘revolution,’ ‘feminist,’ ‘ecology,’ ‘struggle,’ etc. will no longer exist in the human vocabulary.”

— Ann Hansen

Since their arrests, the Five have played a central role in one of the most crucial political dramas of the time. They didn't ask for the part; it was foisted on them. The result is that they are in the fight of their lives.

Their fight will affect the entire anti-authoritarian/autonomous movement. The massive, high-technology surveillance, the police destabilization and harrassment campaign, the move by authorities to “criminalize” and depoliticize them, the unleashing of the media — all tactics aimed at a community that is decentralized, and therefore resistant to traditional infiltration and co-opting techniques.

If the authorities are successful in railroading the Five, then police, judicial officials and the news media will consider it open season to employ these tactics on a larger and more intrusive scale.

Already, the circle of surveillance and dirty tricks is widening — to the women's community, the anti-war and anti-nuke

movements and beyond. And the federal government has now introduced legislation to establish a Canadian Security Intelligence Service with powers of surveillance even less restricted than those of the FBI and the CIA. The case of the Five was cited in the House of Commons by a cabinet minister as a justification for Big Brother even though legislation was being prepared long before any of the bombings took place.

Julie Belmas, Gerry Hannah, Ann Hansen, Doug Stewart and Brent Taylor are well known to us, and respected by us. They have long been active in grass roots work on environmental, native sovereignty and anti-war and anti-nuke issues.

After pleading not guilty, they are sitting in prison, denied bail, awaiting the first of a series of four political show trials set for Sept. 12 and scheduled to take up to six months. The authorities have no

substantive witnesses against them, but will submit a mountain of roombug tapes and transcripts in an effort to prove the

“As far as we're concerned, this case isn't about anarchy, or civil rights, or methods of struggle. It's just part of the struggle, and the important thing is to maintain the primacy of the struggle to protect the earth and strive for liberation.”

— Brent Taylor

Five belonged to an “anarchist-terrorist cell” called variously Direct Action and the Wimmin's Fire Brigade.

The nature of the “evidence” requires thorough and painstaking preparation for defence, but this is impossible under the isolating conditions in lock-up. Massive legal costs compound the difficulties.

The case of the five has thrown into sharp relief the need for a coherent and unified movement to defend anti-authoritarian activists under attack, no matter what differences might exist over tactical considerations. This “extra” edition of *Open Road* (as well as last spring's Direct Action issue, and the upcoming “1984” issue) are dedicated to helping build that consensus.

We urge our readers, and all individuals and groups concerned with protecting the right to be politically active in 1984 and beyond, to assist in the defense of the Five, either by donations of money, or with energy and educational work. Not to the exclusion of your own concrete work, but in resonance with it.

“For centuries, the authorities have reacted violently to women who resisted; they used to brand us ‘witches’ and burned us. Now they label us ‘terrorist’ and try to bury us in their cement tombs.”

— Julie Belmas

Shortly after the arrests, the cry went up to Free the Five! As the connections between the case and the wider struggle started to manifest themselves, friends and support came to realize we are in reality defending ourselves and everyone else when we defend the Five. That's when a new slogan (at first, meant half in jest) started to take root:

FREE THE FIVE BILLION — FREE US ALL!

