

In 1983, after a series of actions, the Vancouver Five were arrested. Across Canada the debate on armed resistance intensified. In 1986 we received an unsolicited article titled "The Politics of Bombs," and a discussion group from within the community was formed using the article as its subject. The article caused much agitated debate, especially among members of the Vancouver Five support group. The Open Road collective decided to run the story (issue #22) in order to broaden the much needed debate, and provoke further thought and discussion of a "sensitive" topic. It is now five years since those arrests, and while the discussion groups here have long faded away, the debate continues. The following articles are in response to "The Politics of Bombs."

The issue is courage

The issue is courage. Whether to flee or fight or seek accommodation.

In conventional military forces it is an axiom that a soldier never lets her/his rifle fall to the ground. There are several reasons for this: to avoid accidental discharge, to prevent damage to the weapon, and to avoid contamination with dirt.

To drop one's weapon is also symbolic of defeat.

The unconventional soldier -- or guerrilla -- is armed with more than a rifle. S/he is also armed with ideology and a will to fight that is rooted in the class and national character of those whose liberation we risk our lives for. The guerrilla is a political-military soldier. Revolutionary in orientation; military in operations. When the captured guerrilla loses their rifle they are neither weaponless or defeated. Even imprisonment or death cannot rob us of the ideals and principles upon which we base a lifetime of struggle. National liberation and socialist revolution cannot be snuffed out so easily. The most serious defeat we can suffer at the hands of our enemy is to surrender our principles for then we have stripped the will to fight from our hearts. If there is any rehabilitation program in the minds of our captors it revolves around capitulation.

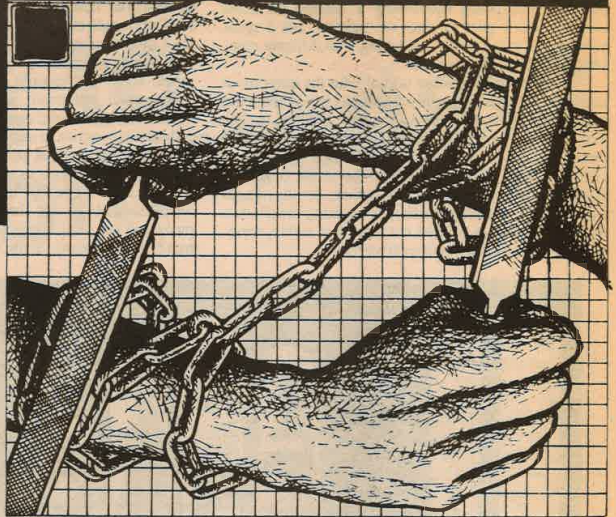
The enemy designs propaganda and isolation units to break us down and destroy our spirits. They will exploit any sign of weakness and maximize our losses. They kill some of us and bury others with decades of time. They play on white supremacy, sexism, and the brutality of prison. They isolate leaders and selected individuals while trying to rub our noses in the dirt. They attempt to disarm us, realizing that we are revolutionaries, not criminals.

The guerrilla is no armchair revolutionary. One does not rely on university degrees, class privileges or artificial bravado to carry out one's duty to make the revolution. This applies whether in the field or in the penitentiary. We must recognize that it is the intention of our captors to make us suffer for our political commitment. As in the "Myth of Sysphus" they have sentenced us to what they think is hell on earth -- a futile lifetime of trying to reach the top of a mountain whose peak is always beyond reach.

But these are fools with their hierarchical way of thinking.

Time and conditions change but some things do not and one is the essence of the guerrilla which flows from the hearts and minds of people willing to resist and wage war against imperialism. We are never without means to resist unless we're clinically dead or abandon our principles.

The FMLN (El Salvador) began with two .38 pistols; the Vietnamese with a half dozen rifles and the Sandinistas with not much more. The resistance in Azania has continued to grow in the face of the most vicious fascism on this earth and we are all aware of the heroic beginnings and victory of the Cuban revolution. Each of these struggles suffered extraordinary setbacks but never lost sight of their goals or a simple fact of life that they would rather die fighting than live on their



knees. To paraphrase Fidel -- you don't have to be a communist to be a revolutionary but you damn well better be ready to fight.

While we look for our weapons left behind to be picked up and utilized by others, this is not always the case. The struggle ebbs and flows based on many factors and we must adjust to this reality. The level of support for captured combatants and political prisoners is not what it could or should be. To some degree this is directly related to mass organization's unwillingness to integrate the political prisoner/POW issues with national liberation/class struggle.

While this can be discouraging and requires more analysis and planning, we must not let such a decline in mass struggle at a particular point in time dampen our efforts to advance ourselves as revolutionaries. We need to redouble our efforts to put the plight of political prisoners/POWs on the agenda of mass organizations.

The urban jungle does not field soldiers with camo's, field packs and M-16s. It produces guerrillas with the political and military skills to wage a protracted struggle that can lead to mass mobilization and people's war; cadre that must develop fundamental skills, organization, moral character, courage and commitment. All under conditions that are far from ideal.

This process does not end when we are captured. We do not waiver at the first sight of the interrogator or in the face of beatings, separation from our children and comrades or the years in isolation cells. If one thing the guerrilla experience teaches it is to overcome the odds -- by any means necessary.

In the camps we must summon up the same skills and commitment that have enabled us to elude and battle the enemy for extended periods of time in clandestinity. Resistance isn't a strategy we begin at the time of capture, it's a strategy we continue in spite of being captured. The more severe the isolation the greater

the challenge to persevere and it is a challenge we must spare no effort to take on.

Within the camps political prisoners/POWs naturally gravitate to each other. We are natural allies. The camp commanders are aware of this and if they don't break it up with transfers or control units they put it under surveillance by their lackeys. We need to be aware of this while recognizing that solidarity among political prisoners/POWs is one of our foremost weapons.

We do not collaborate with the enemy. The intense propaganda battles called trials are the first step after capture to fight criminalization and let our voices be heard. The demands of clandestinity are well suited to the camps. Security has always been paramount to avoid eyes and ears; without initiative we know we cannot succeed and we must be innovative and flexible; we recognize the importance of self-discipline, political education, strong bodies and maintaining our health; we emphasize moral character and respect the more spiritual needs of some of our comrades; we share old skills and learn new ones; we learn who to trust and who not to trust; we analyze and criticize and learn from our errors; we acquire patience and we adjust to being without and make the most of what we have when we have it; we learn to go it alone when necessary in hostile environments but know the day will come when "...down is no longer beyond our reach."

In conclusion, I am reminded of something told to me many years ago by a fellow worker. He said that it takes as much courage to carry a lunch pail to a sweatshop every day to feed your kids as it does to shoulder a weapon. There's an element of truth to this little parable and we would do well not to lose sight of it as we continue to fight for political recognition and survival.

-- Raymond Luc Levasseur
The Ohio Seven

Whether to flee or fight

Even an initial cursory read of the last Open Road feature piece, "The Politics of Bombs," had me seething with response. This is a quick emotional reply to a pejorative article.

The brief introduction from the OR collective says that the article "points out lessons to be learned from the activities and trials of Direct Action." Do we accept every anonymous opinion piece as valid in pointing out lessons or should it first be verified for accuracy in source of privy knowledge and historical information? There is an incredible responsibility to be dealt with that revolves around the way that most people take what they read as fact, even when it is just opinion from a distant viewpoint.

The credentials game is loathsome though sometimes it's sort of helpful in a self-explanatory way. I don't need to worry about anonymity, because I don't have any, so I can run down why I have something to say about the Vancouver 5. I worked from the start with the "Free the Five Defense Group," which published a regular newsletter. Also with the "Vancouver 5 Support Group" until there was a split of internal working dynamics. The defense group held meetings with defendants' lawyers and visited the prisoners often. Much effort was put into our communications with all media -- radical, progressive and establishment. I had weekly visits with Ann Hansen as her paralegal assistant on the Red Hot Video anti-porn charges and was part of the

TO STRUGGLE OR...

women's workgroup researching a defense on those charges. But it goes beyond the politics 'cos I spent years working and living and loving with different combinations of those individuals.

My intention is not to deal with the question of armed struggle but rather just the points raised about the actions and arrests of the Vancouver 5. It is unfortunate that "The Politics of Bombs" attempted to deal with these focal points at the same time...armed struggle and "Direct Action." That is probably the origin of all the false assumptions made by the writer, by the simple juxtaposition of topics...artificially equating them when they were never in parallel existence but rather sometimes merging and sometimes divergent.



There is no time or space here to talk in-depth about all the specifics that were spanned by the years of actions, trials and jailtime. Nor is it possible to be anywhere near 100% open with details about any aspect of a legal case, both prior to and after arrest and incarceration. All I can do at this moment is pass on my perspective as someone who was present during all the shit that went down, right at the heart of the tornado.

Under the section on "Arrests," that author prods the 5 for their errors. "They made errors that indicate an inadequate understanding of police tactics...These errors must be avoided in future." All errors, ideally, must be avoided but we all know it ain't always so perfectly easy. No one of us is omnipotent and we can fully understand police tactics yet still get caught. It takes only one stray hair or fibre to convict! And yeah, many people did conclude that just because they were arrested that "the 5 greatly facilitated their own ultimate arrest." Me, I blame the State for all arrests. They've got the police, army, courts, prisons and technology on their side. If Direct Action hadn't acted, they wouldn't be in jail so the responsibility started there and that is exactly the choice they made. They took a big risk in losing a chunk of future because of their beliefs in the now and they did it in a conscious, knowledgeable way accepting the outcome. The wiretaps have feet of audiotape recording serious raps about what time they were looking at and how to live through it. Three of the 5 had been long involved in prison abolition struggles. No naiveite there.

The next section is "Trials" which should actually include the "voir dire," jury selection, first (of 4 proposed) trial, and sentencing. There are some big arrogant assumptions voiced that "errors...defused the importance of the contributions of Direct Action and the Wimmis' Fire Brigade to resistance in Canada." Whose measuring stick? What criteria is being used to judge? That there were no follow-up or copy-cat actions has more to do with the non-readiness of the progressive movements, rather than any blame on errors of the prisoners. The importance of DA and WFB to resistance has been quite great when you look at a larger picture beyond whether or not others "picked up the gun, or the bomb" or some such flamboyant posturing. Both groups' actions were successful. They caused financial and structural damage to their targets, halted the process

of industrial desecration, began the closure of many RHV porn outlets in BC, and forced the non-renewal of the Litton Cruise Missile contract with the pentagon. The spread of awareness through all segments of the public about the specific crimes of their targets, and ecology and militarism and pornography in general, made many optimistic again. And what a boost to our disheartened spirits to see people act out their convictions in an autonomous grassroots way. The ripple effect may take years still for us to see clearly.

Now the author is hepped up about "the 5 denied responsibility for their actions." The entire third paragraph is a total factual inaccuracy. It is assumptive, naive, and dogmatic. Some of the 5 pled guilty to some

of the actions...some to more than others...some to less...one even to an action that he didn't participate in. The fact of it is that the 5 political prisoners pled "not guilty" in the first of 4 trials...the charges being all the so-called "criminal/non-political" ones. Two of the 5 even altered their strategy during first trial and did a change of plea to "guilty." The other 3 continued and were, by and large, found guilty on all charges so they pled guilty to the remaining political charges. Package jobs, we could say. Not all pled, or were convicted, on all the same charges or actions. Now, are we supposed to think that "taking responsibility for the actions" means pleading guilty in the courtroom?? How pathetic to give such status to the State. We can take, or not take, responsibility within ourselves or our community. A "not guilty" plea has never meant you didn't do whatever. It is just one of your only choices in this State theatre. Barabas or Jesus. Are the 5 being reprimanded for bad morals...imagine pleading "not guilty"?? Should they have sacrificed more? Whoever coined "honesty is the best policy" already lived from a position of power where cunning was not a sought-after or necessary value. And the end of the same sentence, criticizing the 5 for abrogating their responsibility (and I add also, it's time for me and you and all the easy critics to check out if we've shown any responsibility by taking actions for the future), is a classic attitude...approaching the trials as a vehicle for a discussion of the issues and the role of armed struggle... Well, no one ever intended on steering down that avenue. From the arrests on, the prisoners were clear that their interest was in talking about pornography, ecology, land-based struggles, etc. These were the heartcore of their resistance and discussions of strategy, while important, were separate from what education motivated and united the movement.

My memory of how decisions were made to proceed in State-controlled trials is that such moments were tense and crucial. The trials were not approached as situations "to use for propaganda purposes." People have little or no power in the court theatre, so why pretend you can or even want to? The whole concept of "propaganda" is mercenary because it necessitates manipulation of image and people. Direct Action existed and acted in contravention to propagandistic attitudes. Change by action was the conviction. It irks me to read that "they recognized the right of the courts, and by ex-

tenion, the State, to judge their actions..." Are you serious with that crap??? Under the most stressful situation with the furor of anti-terrorism blazing across Canada, did anyone expect they would be given freedom of expression? The trials were separated, as prosecution strategy, to prevent any chance of truth and revolutionary raps from emerging. Only those who could come to the "voir dire," trial, and sentencing saw the whole picture of conveyor belt just-us. The rest of the movement must judge DA and WFB from their actions and statements. If anyone wants to criticize and condemn them on the basis of media coverage of the trials, then they are unwitting dupes of the State's game. The 5 continually stated through the newsletter that the legal system is class oppressive. How did anyone ever miss that message even to the point of thinking that the 5 were ignorant of that obvious reality.

After the trials and sentencing were done, one regret was that they had not taken a position of total non-cooperation from the start. But that can only be felt in retrospect. It cannot be anticipated in advance that any participation is hopeless because revolutionaries still operate with optimism and hope.

Another outrage-inducing quote..."the integrity they lost by denying responsibility for their actions, led them the support of certain sections of the public, including the jury." I've already questioned this assumption that they denied responsibility, and now, in whose eyes have they lost integrity?...those of self-righteous critics?? And as far as losing support, there is not much you can do if the movement or the public wants to abandon you. They will do it anyway. The radicals will drop you 'cos you aren't perfect enough or you didn't do it the right (read "their") way, or you didn't win. Basically, 'cos you let them down. The public will drop you 'cos you went too far or 'cos you got caught. Basically, 'cos you made them scared. The jury never supported the prisoners! Pulled from the suburban voter's list, it was a whole crew of racially pure class-clones. Did anyone think they wouldn't do their best job of representing the opinions of this mediocre safe society? They were told to...be good robots thinking and deciding for the whole robot citizenship.

The movement spent a lot of time criticizing the 5 for being elitist, remote, and into martyrdom. The moment anyone moves out of politically correct inactivism, they get crucified for being *vanguardist*. Then if they get nabbed, they are called martyrs. And the condemnations still continue with articles like "The Politics of Bombs"...because you think they can control every situation they find themselves in and because you demand they make perfect decisions based on a God-like omnipotent foreknowledge of what the State will do. It makes me the most angry that radicals have allowed them no room for simply being human. Yeah, full of mistakes...and emotions and vulnerability. I thought one of the most teaching aspects of Direct Action was their humanism (the wholistic visionary variety, not liberal humanism). It would be good to see that respect returned to them 'cos they sure could have written off the rest of us for our long-standing armchair addiction.

Let's be more positive about the education that was achieved. Publicity from the support groups; expert witnesses during the "voir dire" testifying about the effects of media brainwashing on the public; witnesses from feminist and ecology groups and the American Indian Movement giving background character testimony; and sentencing statements from the prisoners are some examples.

The "right to a fair trial" demand was only one stance among many that the defense took. It was knowingly directed at the liberal public who perhaps had not seen that the State conspires to deny people a fair trial while, at the same time, claiming it as one of our constitutional and democratically guaranteed rights. Exposing the contradictions was the crux of that demand.

It is still a legitimate political tactic to try and minimize the legal attack against revolutionaries by pleading "not guilty," having lawyers, calling witnesses, etc. It is done everywhere, all the time. It does not automatically imply one is naive or cooperative with the State if they take that legal route. Yes, the 5 did criticize the "right to a fair trial" strategy after several months. This was because they saw that many people were one-dimensional in their support and had neglected the issues behind the actions that led to the arrests. It was even self-sacrificing of the prisoners, their constant pressure to turn our attention off them and back to the issues.

Once again, the article harangues that "...we refused to engage in the central debate: What is the role of armed resistance in Canada?" No one refused to engage in that discussion. It happened here and there, many

places, but mostly privately 'cos that is the best way, right? But it never was the central debate. Shit, this piece goes on endlessly trying to make a point of how the 5 failed to push a certain strategy that was only a key issue in the mind of the author.

Next is the criticism of the guilty pleas. The writer is never satisfied. First criticized for not taking responsibility, now they are castigated for pleading guilty. As far as Gerry Hannah pleading guilty to the anti-porn firebombings, it never was much of a problem for the support people here. Everyone thought it was peculiar and unfortunate that the prosecution forced him to accept the inclusion of that charge in the plea bargaining package, but it was easily explainable as being exactly that. The word was spread that the State forced him to take that as part of the rap and so it was known and accepted and was not "damaging" or "disorienting."

After the long discourse on trials and appeals that the author, other than briefly, was not attendant at, the article continues to pontificate on the 5's conduct in prison. "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." I consider this left-wing neo-fascism. Pushing guerrilla strategy discussion as the #1 focus again, now we must shit on the prisoners for not being confrontational enough even when locked down, repressed and majorly controlled!!! The penitentiaries don't lay a red carpet for political prisoners and potential death is on the daily agenda inside. Much of the political organizing done behind bars is invisible to the outside 'cos it is frontline work so often subtle and slow. Push them to be martyrs again, sacrificing all for the cause? Whose cause? Only when someone knows the context firsthand of being political inside prison do I feel like listening to their judgement. Until then I'm gonna respect the prisoners' position based on their individual situations and the changes that all people, especially prisoners, make through the years.

The language in "The Politics of Bombs" holds harsh condemnation. Maybe it's not intended that way but, for example, to say the 5 have "assimilated themselves into the anonymity of the prison milieu" betrays such negative attitudes toward them and the prison population in general. It discredits all the surviving they have done plus the full range of work they have both continued and just begun. The prisoners have continued to write and visit personal and political contacts; write for political journals; write, play and record music; hungerstrike for their demands; and contribute immensely to the sanity and growth of fellow prisoners. How can someone write this off so casually? I'm not going to fully detail all of their activities 'cos the authorities would just love to add anything to their files, but suffice it to say that I know that their political and compassionate contributions have blossomed over the five years they've been locked down (two of the men are out on parole now), and much happiness and awareness has been imparted to other prisoners, prison workers, outside activists, and family and friends who come in touch with them.

I give total agreement to efforts at discussing where we are going with revolutionary movements. I reject dogmatic and self-righteous static articles like what permeates "The Politics of Bombs" article. It is hard to trust it when someone writes that they extend their love to their comrades after they just sort-of ripped the stuffing out of them, and that we must deal with shortcomings honestly after they just adjusted history to fit their "armed struggle key issue" point. If we ever do begin to discuss this point in history in a genuine and deep way, then I hope it could be done with all ears and minds open to listening to different opinions and respecting that such differences can co-exist.

Ultimately, this is what was lacking in the article. The writer has not mind-expanded enough to envision a militant resistance not based on the Eurocentric armed underground model. Direct Action had a unique and individually-created politics of eco-feminist sabotage defense/offense that follows politically and spiritually more in the line of the American Indian Movement actions. You can't make them into something they weren't and criticize them for not being that. See their conduct and themselves for what they had diligently and consciously evolved themselves into. Nonvanguard. Grassroots. Autonomous. Acting for the best interests of the Earth, the people, and the future. Enough. The defense rests!

Hoka Hey!
Jill Bend

Or to accommodate

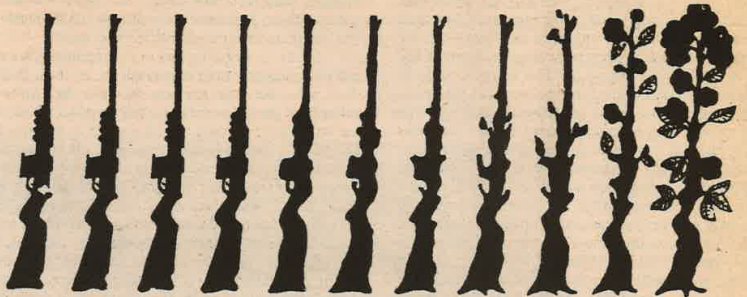
The article entitled "The Politics of Bombs" in Open Road #22 (Spring 1988), is a forceful argument for the use of guerrilla struggle to further the anarchist cause. Unfortunately, its strength lies in the use of half-truths and half-baked ideas. Because the article makes an emotional appeal that flies in the face of logic, history and anarchist philosophy, it must be critiqued in the harshest terms. To ignore the article or to pretend that its opinions should be given serious consideration would be irresponsible. Those who are serious about creating an anarchist movement cannot allow such faulty reasoning to go unchallenged.

What is the matter with advocating the so-called revolutionary violence outlined in "Bombs"? The author suggests two answers: that "the time is not right and therefore armed resistance is elitist," and that "armed resistance brings down repression on legitimate left organizations and individuals." It is significant that the writer does not attempt to argue against the first position. Instead s/he delivers a diverting chat on the increased surveillance and repressive capabilities of the state, suggesting that if we do not act now, it will soon be too late. But let us examine the criticism more fully, for it contains much that is the essence of the anarchist position. As anarchists, our goal is a society free from exploitation and hierarchy. Since those who benefit from the present system cannot be expected to give up their privilege without a struggle, we assume a revolution will be necessary. If we were Marxist-Leninists, we would argue that a vanguard will be necessary to lead and make the revolution, and we would argue for a coup d'etat. But to be an anarchist is to believe in a different kind of revolution, the social revolution. This is a revolution made by the great majority of society, not a handful of conspirators. But we are a tiny minority. Most

those who possess the key. So the guerrillas not only fail to understand those they claim to want to help, they fail utterly to communicate with them. This failure comes directly from the mistaken notion that violence can be used to awaken the slumbering populace, which will then magically endorse the programme of the vanguard.

Is more proof needed to support the argument that the guerrillas are elitist? If so, examine all the authorities quoted in "Bombs" (and let's not forget such appeals to authorities are distinctly unanarchistic). Save for a few quotes on a different topic from Direct Action, every other statement is from a self-professed Marxist-Leninist group or person. Marighella, the Tupamaros, George Jackson, the Red Army Fraction, Che Guevara -- not one was ever an anarchist. This shouldn't come as a surprise, for the call for guerrilla action in the midst of a distinctly unanarchistic society is a call for a vanguard. The time for violence comes when the people of a society have decided they no longer wish to live under the domination of rulers and bosses. When this happens, we don't need the vanguard to emerge from the underground and show us the way; we'll make our own way. In the meantime, can we honestly say that such a time has arrived? If you think it has, reflect on the daily papers, the political debates, and the strength of the right wing, and consider just what the average person thinks about the benefits of anarchism.

What is the real effect of the guerrilla in our society? First, the vanguard violence alienates more people than it attracts. This alone is sufficient to abandon it as a tactic. Second, as the author of "Bombs" suggests, it does bring increased repression down on the anarchist movement. This is much more important than the author would admit. S/he dismisses the importance of increased repression by arguing that since the state is busy repressing people anyway, a little more shouldn't



people do not even know what anarchism means. Because the society at large does not understand or support anarchism, those who want to start guerrilla warfare do not represent the people. They represent themselves; that is to say, they are an elitist vanguard. Because people have not been convinced, through education and their own experience, that anarchism is desirable, they cannot interpret terrorist activities in the way guerrillas would like. They judge events by the way they affect their own lives right now. The violence of the guerrilla is seen as a personal attack on things and ideas they hold important; therefore, the actions often push them to support increased repression. The self-proclaimed advanced wing of the revolution appears to be little more than yet another group of thugs out to make life more difficult for the "common" man and woman.

This perception may be more accurate than it seems. Examine the rhetoric of any guerrilla group. It is usually filled with patronizing contempt for those who have yet to achieve the "correct" consciousness, as defined by the vanguard. It is always written in leftist jargon -- that is, it's written in code, decipherable only by

matter. But this line of argument fails to recognize the important differences between forms of government. All are bad, but some are worse than others. The armed repression brought on by elitist violence makes it harder for us to reach people, harder to put out literature, harder even to function in our day-to-day lives. It drives out those who may be interested in anarchism but are not committed enough to stand up to being hounded by the police. Increased repression makes our lives and work harder. What does it do to forward the revolution? Is there something to be gained that outweighs the cost? Nope. We've seen time and time again that vanguard violence and increased repression do not mobilize the masses. More often, it does not strike a responsive chord in the hearts of people; it frightens them, and they turn to the state for protection. Why else does the state pay agents provocateur? Not to "drive a wedge between the legal movement and the guerrilla," as "Bombs" would have it, but to mobilize popular support for increased repression and to discredit anarchism by equating it with mindless, random violence. This allows the state to take the high moral ground and claim that the government

and the police stand for peace, for safety, for the end to arbitrary violence. It's not true, of course, but given state control of education and the media, most people at this time would rather trust the authorities than a handful of self-announced liberators. This makes a certain amount of sense, for at least in theory the authorities are accountable, but the vanguard is not. Guerrilla violence is great propaganda all right, great for the state. The point is not that the "legal" left should busy itself to justify and explain the violence of the guerrilla. The point is, until the people themselves choose revolution, all of our attempts to explain the bombings and the kidnap-



ings are doomed. When they do see the need for it, we won't need to explain, interpret, or justify it.

What does the history of the anarchist movement tell us about the use of vanguardist violence? This sort of thing has been advocated several times in the history of the movement, but it has never made the revolution and it has never advanced the cause of anarchism. Without fail, every anarchist who argued for the attentat or propaganda by the deed (that is, those who managed to avoid getting arrested or blowing themselves up), repudiated violence later, for one very good reason: it doesn't work. The Russian terrorist group known as Narodnya Volya, or the People's Will (often mistakenly referred to as the Nihilists), was a very successful action group. It even managed to obtain its primary objective, when in 1881 it blew up the czar. But to the group's surprise, the people did not rise up in arms, the regime did not crumble, and their goal of liberalism/acquisitiveness with a patina of anarchist slogans, did not make the revolution, despite blowing up a goodly number of banks and a judge. Emile Henry, essentially a nineteenth century Hinkley, blew up people and things to impress his would-be lady-love, and failed notably to mobilize the masses. The Haymarket bomb of 1886, whether thrown by an anarchist or a police agent, had the effect of justifying in the public mind a red-hunt that crushed the anarchist movement in the United States. Alexander Berkman's attempt to murder Henry Clay Frick in 1892 at Homestead got him fourteen years in jail. Because Berkman acted in isolation from the workers he sought to help, his assassination attempt was widely regarded as an outrage, even though the same workers had just used arms to defend themselves from company gun thugs. Berkman himself later concluded that propaganda by the deed was futile. In 1901, the anarchist Leon Czolgosz killed the American president. The result? Another red-hunt that finished off what was left of the anarchist movement and turned it into a sect. In Spain in the 1910s and 1920s, the anarchists turned to a policy of assassinating employers and capitalists. There were two significant results: capitalists started murdering labour leaders and anarchists, and the anarchist organizations became havens for professional criminals who were indistinguishable from American mobsters. Compare this with the success of the anarchist Peasant Insurgent Army in the Ukraine from 1918 to 1921, or the anarchist militias in the Spanish Civil War. Both were effective because they flowed directly from the needs and desires of the mass of people. This revolutionary violence, and the skills necessary to carry it out, were not the result of a vanguard but of years of propaganda, organization, and education. Jump forward to the activities of the various guerrilla groups of our time (none of which, incidentally, were anarchist). Just how have the bombings, the kidnappings, the murders committed by the Symbionese Liberation Front, Baader-Meinhof, the Weather Underground, the assorted Red Brigades, furthered the revolution? The Palestine Liberation Organization has been carrying out all sorts of guerrilla activities for twenty-five years, but the spontaneous organization of West Bank Palestinians has done more for their cause than all the hijackings and bombings of the PLO (which has yet, it should be noted, to even capture a single Israeli tank).

Every radical group that is in the minority has a real problem when it comes to generating support. We have two ways to deal with the so-called apathy of the masses. We can decry their "lack of consciousness," treat them with contempt, and determine to force the revolution with a guerrilla vanguard. Or we can understand the consciousness as it exists, build on its anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist, anti-stabulist elements (which exist in plenty), and try to show how and why we are anarchists and show how anarchism would benefit humanity. The first alternative is elitist and hierarchical; the second is anarchistic.



It may be argued that I have expected too much from guerrilla activity, that no one really expects it to make the revolution, that it has very different objectives. It is often argued, for example, that the murdering of high-ranking officials and the destruction of property is an act of revenge, or a way of inspiring fear in the oppressor, or a way to draw attention to injustice. The author of "Bombs," for example, eloquently makes the case for revenge: "the guerrilla is the revolutionary expression of our rage in the face of a seemingly monolithic and un-touchable enemy." But what does it mean when we allow our rage to provoke us into irrational, harmful activities? It means that we have quite literally lost our senses, that we've abandoned our reason and have allowed our emotions to determine our actions. Since we don't rely on reason, we can't assess the consequences. This means we are very likely to undertake tasks that might make us feel good but may directly hurt the cause we want to help. In this case, guerrilla action becomes an expression of neurotic behaviour, that is, the pursuit of objectives by means that actively prevent us from obtaining these objectives. To put it in the slogans of the guerrilla vanguard, while it may be true that "theory without action equals nothing," it is equally true that action without theory means you do something stupid. Revenge is not a political ideology, and those who want to use anarchism to release their rage would be better advised to pound a mattress with a tennis racket.

As for inspiring fear in the oppressors, we must ask two questions: does terror really scare them, and if it does, what are their reactions likely to be? Since the rulers have the army and the police to protect them, they are unlikely to become scared enough to change their policies. On the other hand, scaring people doesn't make them back down or change their minds. When they are under attack and have the power to do so, they fight back. When Czar Alexander II was blown up in 1881, his heir was so scared that he instituted a reign of terror, rescinded liberal reforms, and hanged the assassins. The SLA activists so frightened the American government that it burned them alive. Is this really the response we want to provoke? As for using terrorism to draw attention to injustice, without a broad base of support the vanguard actions will never be understood by those we wish to reach.

There is another argument against guerrilla action, one that is too often ignored. Simply put, underground activity tends to corrupt its practitioners. It does this in a number of ways. First, it establishes an elite faction that has a special status in the movement. Since the guerrillas must be secretive if they are to survive, they alone decide actions, policies, and ethics. Yet the rest of the movement, in the words of "Bombs," has the "job" to make the guerrillas' actions "widely known and contextually understood." In other words, the minority will decide policy and the majority will accept it and explain it. This is classic Marxist-Leninist ideology. The underground faction will also require massive support from the legal movement, in the form of money, equipment, papers, safe-houses, emotional support, and propaganda work. This means that a majority works in order to take care of an elite - capitalism, if you like, in its purest form, based on physical force and the gun, not legal mechanisms. And given their special status, their noble choice to go underground for the good of all, their

daily jeopardy, how could the guerrillas not come to believe that they deserve this support, deserve the right to decide policy? The anarchist beliefs are founded on the idea that power and privilege corrupt people, even the most egalitarian; that is why we must destroy the institutions and ideologies that give factions power. Yet the guerrillas would have us create new structures that, just coincidentally, give them control. I would not trust myself in such a position, and I certainly won't trust someone else in it either; neither should you.

Second, the lives the guerrillas are forced to lead tend to corrupt them. Their very survival depends on their ability to lie and deceive; they must trust no one; they must guard every word and every action. But it becomes very difficult to limit this behaviour, to discriminate between those one can trust and those one cannot. People in the underground need to become paranoid to function, but this paranoia renders them unfit for relationships with the legal movement. The guerrillas must make decisions and take action on the basis of this paranoia; to protect themselves, they can easily come to advocate absolutely amoral behaviour. Unable to discriminate between friend and foe, they come to perceive any criticism, even that of allies and comrades, as an active threat. Instead of being the "active" wing of the movement, they become mavericks, isolated, tormented, and treacherous. Since humans have an amazing capacity for self-deception, the guerrillas often come to believe that whatever helps them in their underground existence is good; and this can become a defence for the ripping off, even the murder, of their comrades. Does this seem far-fetched? Consider how patriotism and power can combine to produce an Oliver North; how exactly does the guerrilla movement differ? More to the point, read the accounts of people who have been in the underground. Unable to trust anyone, they lose their moral compass. Examine the life of Nechayev, who stole from his friends, blackmailed revolutionary exiles, planted papers on a comrade who disagreed with him and caused his arrest and death, and strangled a member of his circle who quite correctly denounced him as a liar. Look at the Polish group Zmowa Robotnicza, or Workers' Conspiracy, which turned revolutionary violence and appropriations into a means for making themselves wealthy in 1906. In Spain, many of the *pistoleros* degenerated in vicious, self-serving thugs. Read *Bommi Baumann's book, How It All Began*, to see how living underground turned good comrades into basket cases. To advocate an underground guerrilla movement is to advocate the creation of a cadre convinced of its right to dictate policy and determine actions without regard to the wishes of the majority. At the same time, this cadre lives in conditions that make it unstable and untrustworthy. This is a program for fascism, not anarchism.

Unlike the hypocritical author of "Bombs," I will not pretend to want to avoid personal attacks or avoid further splits in the movement. Nor do I want to create "a genuine discussion around the experiences of armed resistance." Armed struggle, as presented in "The Politics of Bombs," is a stupid idea, and it must be opposed. As anarchists, we don't want a movement or a society formed around a vanguard of trigger-happy gorillas. Let the elitist violence freaks find shelter in the Ku Klux Klan or the Marxist-Leninist sects, not the anarchist movement. We have a more important, much more difficult task at hand. We have to stay visible, to work with all kinds of people. We have to earn the respect and trust of people and we must think hard about our tactics and actions; we must try to live responsibly to provide an example. We will never be able to point to the rubble of a destroyed building to prove our revolutionary credentials; we will never have the comforts of self-righteousness and utter faith in our infallibility. We may be assured, however, that we are part of the solution, not part of the problem.



- Carter Hill

[Three pages of this letter to Open Road have not been reprinted here. We were unable to contact Carter to discuss the deletion of this section; no address was included with this submission. The deleted pages describe at length the types of personalities Carter believes are attracted to armed struggle; these pages are available as photocopies on request.]