

Global Warming, Youth, and the Democratic Party—A Conversation

July 2
All,

Young people are rising up against so many horrors of this country: racism, gun violence, the immoral immigration policies, and now they're coming out in protests against global warming!

While we're not young people, we understand a lot about this system, and we have an important vision of the kind of world we believe would create equality, justice and freedom for all, and we can easily share our many organizing strategies (ways to connecting unions, communities, neighborhoods, organizations, & alliances, etc). I believe we all need to become more active, if people can, because these young people will learn from us & we will learn from them! And together we will have a far more substantial impact.

Honestly, whenever I speak up at rallies, whether it's in the Bronx or at other locations, I always talk about the bigger picture, how both parties are financed by the rich, how it's the system we live under that we have to change to make this a better world, and people always come up to me and ask for my phone number, and info so we can be connected. That's why I think we should all be as active as we can be.

Mary

Here's the message I received in my other email:

From: "Ilana Cohen & 350.org" <350@350.org>

Date: July 2, 2018 at 1:02:58 PM EDT

To: "Mary Hemings" <maryatbcjn@gmail.com>

Subject: Zero Hour for the climate

Reply-To: 350@350.org

Mary,

This is Zero Hour for the climate.

Young people are growing up in a world already shaken by the impacts of climate change — from year-round wildfires to Category 6 hurricanes to deadly heat waves year after year. *These young people may also be the last generation who can do anything to stop the worst of this crisis.*

That's why, on July 21, a movement led by high schoolers of color will march in New York, DC, and around the country to demand our elected officials take bold action to protect young people and our futures — before it's too late.

[Sign up here to stand with young leaders and join the Zero Hour climate march in New York on July 21.](#)

As the Trump administration disregards the dignity and human rights of young people and their families, we have a responsibility to stand with youth who are fighting to protect our collective future and prevent the worst impacts of climate change.

Zero Hour is a youth-led movement founded to center the diverse voices of young people in conversations about climate and environmental justice — and to advocate for the young people most affected by climate change. And here at 350.org, we are proud to be supporting their critical work.

On July 19, a wave of young activists will descend on Capitol Hill to lobby elected leaders for a just transition to a 100% renewable energy-powered future. Then, on Saturday, July 21, youth will march alongside thousands of supporters like you and demand an end to business as usual on climate change once and for all.

[Join young leaders in calling for the just, bold climate action we need to protect our futures. March with Zero Hour in New York City on July 21.](#)

The fossil free world we need is already on its way: from the explosive growth of renewables to the wave of cities and states voting to block dirty fossil fuel projects, you see signs that our movement is winning everywhere you look. Now, we need to push more leaders to step up before we've lost our chance to stop the worst of this crisis.

By keeping up a loud, steady drumbeat of demands for climate solutions – in the streets, in our communities, along the route of fossil fuel pipelines, at the ballot box, and everywhere in between – we're sending a clear message that our movement is too big to be ignored.

[They're hearing us. Keep making noise. Join the youth-led Zero Hour climate march in New York on July 21.](#)

With resolve,
Ilana Cohen, Zero Hour NYC Co-Coordinator
& the [350.org](#) team

PS: Not in NYC? There are Zero Hour sister marches happening across the country on July 21. [Check out the map of Zero Hour marches and find an action near you here.](#)

July 20
Mary,

Apparently the message that you forwarded is from a group associated with [350.org](#), which was founded by Bill McKibben. Have you had much contact with them? What's your impression of [350.org](#) and its practice?

Thanks,
Jack

July 20
Jack,

A few years ago I joined Bronx Climate Justice North (BCJN), which is the Bronx affiliate of 350.org, because they were doing interesting work about a lot of important struggles. During my initial time with BCJN, we worked both locally in the Bronx and with 350 in NYC. Some of us went to a number of their protests in Manhattan and upstate NY, as well as to some of their meetings on the Upper West Side at NY Society for Ethical Culture where they hold meetings & events, so, I got to know a number of people who play significant leadership roles. And we participated in a number of protests with them at many different locations in the city and upstate. And they supported the struggle of the Standing Rock Sioux against the Dakota Pipeline, as did we.

In the last year or two, we've been more locally based in the work that we're doing... Things like:

- Protests against police brutality when a cop punched a young man in the head 18 times & a video showed what he did.
- Work to defend a homeless facility that opened on Broadway in the Bronx that right-wing people protested.
- Local protests against the racists in Charlottesville awhile ago, and many recent protests for immigrants' rights.
- Working with people in the Bronx, with Mychael Johnson from South Bronx Unite, Ray Figueroa from Brook Park & NYC Community Garden Coalition, friends in Marble Hill and Kingsbridge, and many clergy & religious leaders, where we've held events.

In the more recent period, BCJN has become part of a coalition of groups (North Bronx Racial Justice Coalition, NBRJ) that collectively wants to organize events together. Our recent event about youth & gun violence was pretty significant... held at a church in Marble Hill, had a number of young speakers who had different experiences & backgrounds, and were quite radical, including a young man who had been formerly incarcerated, as well as a woman from the youth committee of Black Lives Matter. And we had a great turnout, almost 100 people were there.

So to answer your question about 350.org, I feel it's a pretty liberal group, but they take actions and organize around many important

things, and by taking action and bringing people together to fight against many horrors, there's room for more radical people to play a role. Their activities are often a great place to leaflet about a different approach or about upcoming activities.

Mary

July 3
Mary,

Thanks for your reply.

I have no doubt that Bronx Climate Justice North has engaged in struggles at the local level, and I think that it's important to engage in such struggles. Why would serious folks take us seriously if we didn't? So thanks for engaging — that's absolutely necessary.

Thanks for clarifying that BCJN is part of the 350.org network. I'd go beyond your characterization of it as "a pretty liberal group", though I think that it is that. Here are a few thoughts and questions:

First, if I recall correctly, Bill McKibben was the principal founder of 350.org. The name itself comes from McKibben's claim — at the time — that it was absolutely critical to keep atmospheric carbon levels below 350 parts per million — or else face disaster. This is characteristic of what I see as a panic-mongering attempt to stampede folks by saying "This is it. If we lose this immediate fight, all will be lost." This was said about holding atmospheric carbon to 350 ppm; then to 400ppm; it was said about the Keystone Pipeline (James Hansen, prominent atmospheric scientist connected with McKibben, stated flatly that if the Keystone Pipeline wasn't blocked it would be "game over" for life as we know it). Statements like these will stampede folks — but after a while one has to wonder whether they aren't manipulative and disingenuous, and whether they aren't harmful to building a long term fight for what's necessary: a complete reorganization of society from the bottom up, rather than short term "this is our last chance so follow us" approaches that lead to channeling activism into pressuring Democratic politicians. McKibben certainly orients to the Democrats in just this way, and I think that 350.org does, at least nationally.

So second, I'm interested as to how BCJN, as a 350.org affiliate, is influenced by the above. Is there any pressure from the national 350.org? How do folks relate to the Democrats?

Third, and related: What's the reaction to the election of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez right in New York City? It seems to me that this is likely to be double-edged: it will likely encourage more activism, but much of this is likely to be channeled towards DSA, electoralism, and the Democrats (as we've seen so often). Ocasio-Cortez may well be a rising star for the "Bernies" — much younger (28), a Latina woman who's bright and charismatic, and working inside the electoral system with the DSA and the Democrats. Will there be sentiment for the kind of local demos, actions, and groupings that you reported on to orient towards working inside the system, like Ocasio-Cortez, and orienting local actions towards pressuring politicians. How can we relate to (or counter) that tendency?

Fourth, is there an audience in BCNJ for the Utopian — for the Bulletin, for (say) Ron's short book on Lenin, etc.? What could be done to help facilitate reaching folks (what kinds of articles, topics, etc.?)

I am not expecting definitive answers to my questions. I think, or at least hope, that we can share thoughts about questions like these and, through dialogue, help better understand how to combine activism with the need for libertarian socialism.

Jack

July 5
Hi Jack,

Your questions are great! Your comments about Bill McKibben are correct, but he lives in Vermont, and he's not very involved with folks here in NYC, even though he's the major leader of the 350 organization.

After marching in the huge NYC climate march in September of 2014 with a couple friends, I decided to get involved in the movement, so I found BCJN, which was located quite close to me

here in the Bronx. Although a few of us initially went to many events in Manhattan, where 350 NYC holds its meetings, our focus was on both local organizing and major events, such as protests against the AIM pipeline, the Keystone pipeline, the Indian Point nuclear power plant, the Dakota Access Pipeline, in defense of the Standing Rock Sioux, etc., as well work for the farmworkers in NYS.

Initially there were quite a few people involved with BCJN, but now the number of active people is quite small. While we still have a large mailing list, and sometimes lots of folks will turn out for something, the active core is quite small. The coordinator, Jen, is pretty radical, and she's a former friend of Joanne Landy. And Wayne has also been somewhat involved. As an organization, BCJN is not oriented to the DP, though one person on the steering cte leans that way. So the core of the organization is to the left of the DP. Over time we've developed important relationships with various organizations and religious centers in the northwest section the Bronx, as well as with important allies in the south Bronx, including Ray from Brook Park, South Bronx Unite, and many others.

Our recent event about youth and gun violence was an amazing success because of the relevant topic, an amazing panel, extensive leafleting, and the coalition we created to bring this together: North Bronx Racial Justice Coalition.

I think Ocasio-Cortez's victory is pretty interesting because it reflects the extent to which young people are rising up against the powers that be. Yes, she's a democrat, so we'll see what she does, but it may be interesting to see her response to the DP system, because it's so corrupt and I'm sure she hopes to make a difference. The fact that she's quite local makes me want to keep up with what she does.

I believe many people, especially young folks, want to do what they can to make this a better world, which is why so many are becoming active to try to do something. So i feel more of us should try to become involved in important actions & organizations that are doing relevant things. We all have a significant understanding of how this system works and the ability to connect to people who want to fight the horrors that are escalating. And I believe we could collectively have some impact on what is happening if we all

became more active. I've been quite impressed by the number of people who have come up to me after I've made a few radical comments about this system at an event, which has happened several times in the last month. When I went to a protest against the horrible separation of immigrant families in New Rochelle a few days ago, after I spoke about the system we live under, several people came up to me and wanted information to stay in touch. So people are looking for a strategy, and trying to figure out what to do about this system. We have an answer, not an easy one, but one many people understand when we explain what democracy would look like from the bottom up, not the top down.

Yes, I do believe there's an audience for the Utopian, but BCJN is quite small. I believe our outreach in the communities offers even more potential. And the NBRJ coalition includes someone who is joining BCJN & I feel has excellent potential. I also feel that it would be helpful for our work to create some pamphlets that address different issues, and to create a pamphlet about who we are. Yes, we need to combine activism with our understanding of what libertarian socialism could be!

Mary

July 5
Hi Mary,

Thanks for your reply.

I guess that 350.org must vary quite a bit from area to area. In the Bay Area, they seem to be pretty influenced by their national organization, and orient quite a bit to trying to pressure local and Congressional Democrats. In fact, most of the activism in the Bay Area is being influenced in one way or another by the Democrats. For example, in the city of Richmond (about 10 miles north of Oakland), the dominant political group is the Richmond Progressive Alliance, whose key organizer is Mike Parker (veteran IS leader, now in Solidarity) and includes other names that may be familiar (Ken Paff, Steve Early, Margaret Jordan — all in Solidarity). They are an open alliance of Greens, independents, and Democrats. In the 2016 presidential primary, Mike Parker (and others) changed their political affiliation from Green Party to Independent so that

they could cross over and vote for Bernie Sanders in the Democratic Party primary. And the most rapidly growing group in the area is DSA, which recently held an East Bay (Oakland / Berkeley / Richmond) meeting of several hundred, and is if anything bigger in San Francisco. And the dominant faction in DSA out here believes in working with, endorsing and voting for “progressive” Democrats.

That’s really just a brief and very sketchy take, but from what I can make out similar things are happening elsewhere. I hear that DSA in Brooklyn has between 500 and 1,000 turning out for some of their events. Many are activists, and most orient in one way or another to the Democrats (many have an “inside and outside” approach, meaning support “good” Democrats and don’t support “not so good” ones). Some left groups that have traditionally opposed the Democrats and Republicans have become at best fuzzy on the question — for example, many members of Solidarity no longer see opposition to the Democrats as a principle and will support some Democrats (many of them supported Bernie Sanders, for example).

So I’m a little bit surprised that only one person in the BCJN steering committee orients towards the Democrats. I expect that the election of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez will have some impact on this. She’s a really intelligent, young, engaging, articulate Latina woman and DSA member who advocates a pretty radical program: abolish ICE; national health care; universal public education through college; decent housing for all; etc. Already, left groups are lining up to support her (and, by extension, others who follow in her footsteps running as Democrats) or debating whether to do so: from what I can tell, most of Solidarity is in support; there’s a debate in ISO; Socialist Alternative (Kshama Sawant, the socialist Seattle City Council person, is in that group) supported Ocasio-Cortez from the ghetto; etc. I think that many, perhaps most, who have traditionally in principle opposed the Democrats may well cross over to supporting Ocasio-Cortez and other insurgents. Many traveled at least part way down this path with Bernie Sanders. Ocasio-Cortez may take this much further — I think that she’s more likely to appeal to activists, to people of color, to young people than Bernie.

So I think that it’s really important for us to be clear about where we stand vis a vis what I think is an emergent tendency to abandon

opposition to the Democrats. I think that we need to review why we've been in principle opposed to the Democrats, but as well I think that we have to ask where the emerging movement is going and whether we ought to revise our long-time position given the current context. In particular, I think that we should ask: do we think that Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (and others in the DSA) are likely to take over the Democratic Party, or to split it, or even to have a major influence on its policies. Or is it more likely that these activist / politicians will, consciously or not, help corral activists and movements within the confines of the Democratic Party, as has so often happened in the past. Or, are other courses likely. From how I've posed this, you can probably guess my position: principled opposition to the Democratic Party, while trying to find ways to engage with and fight alongside activists in united front fashion — fighting for what's needed, but also being clear that we can't really get what's really needed without socialist reorganization of society.

I think that this is an important discussion, and hopefully we will get to discuss this at some length next month in New York, where I think that a discussion of how to relate to the Democratic Party is on the agenda.

Best,
Jack

July 6
Mary,

I want to add a bit to what I wrote yesterday.

I've spent some time reading up on Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and also just watched an hour or more of interviews with her via YouTube. She has gotten much attention for calling for abolishing ICE, and also for calling for impeaching Trump. But something else is clear: she is for a Keynesian New Deal: higher taxes on the "haves" to fund jobs and services: guaranteed jobs, universal free higher education, health care for all, etc. And she's very clear that she thinks that the way to win this is by getting more Democrats elected, and by having a collaborative approach towards all Democrats (Pelosi included).

I think that we're likely to see a groundswell of support for Ocasio-Cortez's (and Bernie Sanders) approach: work collaboratively with the Democratic caucus in Congress (Ocasio-Cortez said this in each interview that I watched; Sanders has been part of the Democratic Caucus since 1990); call for a Keynesian welfare state / New Deal approach funded by higher and more progressive taxes (never mind that this won't come close to providing the funding needed for Ocasio-Cortez's program); and get this program adopted by electing more Democrats (in the process of doing so, almost surely the program will be watered down, in order to maintain "consensus" and "electability".)

I hope that we're all clear that this program can't be implemented without a truly radical restructuring of society. Attempted solutions in K-12 education, to take one example, have repeatedly run into this barrier: it's possible to improve conditions for some for a limited time, but those solutions don't scale. Just to provide the needed smaller class size would, by my estimate, run into the trillions of dollars — and this doesn't begin to deal with the massive problems in high poverty communities like the one in East Oakland (where I taught), where for some kids it's a struggle just to make it to school intact, where many haven't had a meal since school lunch the day before, where they're exposed to lead in the environment, live in group homes, etc. So new programs are tried, they work for some but not for most, and many parents out of desperation opt for the next variant that is sent down the pipe by the billionaires (like Eli Broad and Bill Gates). In other words: the deep-seated problems in education are rooted in class and race, and won't be solved under capitalism. We can fight to improve conditions, and we should (I did and still do), but we also need to be clear that lasting change for all (or even most) requires a radical reorganization of society (not a Keynesian welfare state, a la Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez).

Jack

July 8
Jack,

I completely agree with your comments about Ocasio-Cortez, what she's been trying to do, its impact on many others, as well as the limitations of her strategy. It's the increase in the numbers of

people, particularly young people, who are becoming active to try to make this a better world that I feel may lay the groundwork for a new kind of movement. Young people are fighting against many different issues: income inequality, poverty, the homeless situation, poor education, racism, police brutality, climate change, continuing wars, mass incarceration... and the list goes on. Most recently the significant protests around the country against the immoral immigration policies of this government, separating children from their parents, have mobilized many people who are holding protests all over. And the reality that there will be no easy way for many of these children to be reunited with their families makes me believe that this struggle will continue.

As I mentioned before, the activist young people who have become involved in these struggles are both liberals and radicals. And many of the deep problems in education are understood by these young people, many of whom are afraid that it won't be solved under capitalism, but they do not know what else to do! So that's why I believe that more of us should make connections to those who are continuing in these struggles, share our understanding about this system, what we believe is needed, how we envision a truly just and equitable society, what we need to do to get there, and our thoughts about how to build the movement we need to truly fight against this system. I know that many young people understand that a significant and lasting change for all will require a radical reorganization of society (not a Keynesian welfare state, a la Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez). Although many understand that the DP won't get us there, they know of no other way, and that's where we come in. We need to become more involved in various struggles, and areas where movements are building, so that we can help to make clear the need for a radical reorganization of society, not a Keynesian welfare state, including the need for a massive change to the education system so that all schools are as well organized as those of the elite with smaller class size, relevant instruction, interactive learning, etc..

To me the issue of the Democratic Party is its role in this society, as you clearly outlined in your email. They're an essential part of the tyranny of this system, using their pretense for a better world to help enable the system to continue. So I feel what's most important is to make clear the irrelevance of voting for them because they will not change anything of substance. But I also understand why a

number of people will want to vote for Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez because she's for many good things greatly needed by people. So I feel we need to have conversations with those people to help them understand how this system works. I don't care if people vote for democrats because they view the vote as a lesser evil, but I do care whether they understand the system and are willing to become part of the struggle against it. So while I agree with your stated principled opposition to the DP, I feel the most important aspect of that opposition is finding ways to have meaningful conversations with those who need to more fully understand the role the DP plays. We need to share strategies about how to engage in these struggles and fight along side other activists in the struggle.

Mary

July 9
Mary,

Thanks for your reply. I have read it through, and think that I need to respond: I do care about whether people swallow lesser evilism; I don't agree that voting for Democrats is irrelevant but think that it's a trap. And while I myself have been an activist for years, I expect that there are several on the Utopian list who can best contribute in other ways. For example, I expect that Ron's time is better spent in the thinking and writing that he does than it would be as an activist.

I think that we need to be clear on what's going on: what does the mainstream of the Democratic Party represent; what do Warren, Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez represent; why are they in the same party; why are they not irrelevant; why is Ocasio-Cortez a Democrat, and what happens if we scratch the surface (for example: Ocasio-Cortez wants ICE abolished, but would have the Immigration and Naturalization Service take on ICE's work); and why supporting Sanders / Ocasio-Cortez / ... will lead to channeling whatever movements there are into focusing on the November elections and then, ultimately, demoralization. This — corralling people, and potential movements, into narrow electoral activity and convincing them that somehow the Democrats will deliver some of what they need and convincing them that neoliberalism (Hillary Clinton, Nancy Pelosi, Chuck Schumer...) is a "lesser evil" — is why voting for the

Democrats is not irrelevant at all. It's why we do need to be concerned about "lesser evilism."

For example, take the red state teachers. I wrote a report on the meeting I attended in Oakland at which four leaders of strikes in West Virginia, Kentucky and Arizona spoke, and I found the event uplifting. But unfortunately, the strategy of the red state teacher leaders now is to run candidates in the November elections to try to take over local and state school boards, legislatures, etc. They will be running as Democrats. This is not irrelevant. It's turning the movement — the most significant strikes in years — back in on itself, back into the system.

I appreciate that you understand and articulate that major enduring positive change requires reorganizing society from the bottom up — socialism, not capitalism. So I wouldn't be emphasizing the points on why voting for the Democrats isn't irrelevant and why we should care if people are voting for the Democrats as a lesser evil if I didn't think that it's critical for us to be as clear on these points as it is to be clear on the need for system change.

Jack

Guns, Gun Violence, Youth Liberation— Perspectives

Over the past year, *The Utopian* has carried discussions of guns, gun control, student actions around gun violence, self-defense of militant movements and armed self-defense of oppressed peoples.

Two articles relevant to these issues appear on the following pages. We hope they stimulate further discussion. The first article, 'Anarchists and Guns' appeared in the Summer 2018 issue of the *Fifth Estate*. The second article, 'Gun Control? No, Youth Liberation! Mass Shootings--School Walkouts--Getting Free' appeared in *Crimethinc* (March 20, 2018).

Direct access to the original versions of these articles can be accessed via the following links:

https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ui=2&ik=60b4b74620&attid=0.1&permmsgid=msga:r4547013373021308390&th=164a58ce979d9c67&view=att&disp=inline&realattid=f_jjoxjpiv0

<https://crimethinc.com/2018/03/20/gun-control-no-youth-liberation-mass-shootings-school-walkouts-getting-free>

--Editor



Anarchists & Guns

“Workingmen: Arm yourselves and appear in full force!”

—1886 Haymarket leaflet

PAUL WALKER

The initial clamor about controlling gun violence following the horrible mass shooting at Parkland, Fla. high school this February mostly subsided following huge demonstrations of students across the country in March and April. Young students appeared everywhere in the media advocating reforms, but no legislation has passed that will staunch the blood flow, and probably none will be forthcoming.

(As this was written, another high school massacre occurred in Santa Fe, Tex., followed by several other smaller ones that quickly disappeared from public attention.)

Liberal policies will do little to stem gun violence, and right wing proposals to arm everybody, led by the increasingly shrill National Rifle Association (NRA), only assures more killing.

Neither approach will successfully combat gun violence in a country steeped in a history of violence, where a third of the population owns 300 million firearms, and political limits constrain lawmakers to, at best, make tepid reforms.

While that mainstream debate continues, those who see the need for defense against a rising right wing current and perhaps for a revolution in a future period are involved in a parallel discussion about arms possession. If you oppose the political state what should be the stance toward legislation that would limit gun ownership and type of weaponry? Formal laws take the place of autonomous action in all spheres of life, providing both a protective and a repressive function. Armed might is the core of the political state. Without it protecting the ruling class and its economic and social arrangements, hierarchal systems from the first slave states to the current capitalist ones wouldn't have lasted long in the face of popular resistance.

However, the modern state mediates some of the worst abuses and natural consequences of an exploitative system. One can assume most anarchists, while opposing the state as an institution, are supportive of laws within the current sys-

tem such as those governing the environment, product and workplace safety, discrimination, speed limits, and crimes against persons, all of which are enforced by the same tyrannical system of cops, judges, and courts which victimize the poor and people of color, and repress expressions of resistance.

It is certain that anarchists and other revolutionaries share a concern about the daily death toll the proliferation of firearms exacts, but the question to consider is, are arms a special and unique category different from air quality regulation or no left turn prohibitions?

Other than the United States, most Western countries have strict requirements regarding weaponry, including ownership, type, usage, etc., resulting in gun death rates up to 90 percent less than that of this country.

All of the liberal proposals for background checks, mandatory gun locks and safes, prohibiting ownership by abusers, and banning semi-automatic assault rifles, if enacted, would probably reduce gun violence somewhat. However, even under that politically fanciful scenario, that would still leave a heavily armed population with a capacity to act out shootings against themselves and others.

When we move to a discussion on our end of things as to what position should be taken regarding gun ownership, a whole different set of concerns come into the equation. It takes place in a context far from the understandable liberal dismay at the repeated mass shootings, one that considers the consequences of a disarmed population unable to protect workers and minorities against a tyrannical government, racist or right-wing mobs, or the ability to defend a revolution.

Historically, anarchists have admired armed revolutionaries, on the European barricades of 1848, at the 1871 Paris Commune, the revolutionary resistance to the Bolsheviks by the Makhnovist movement and Kronstadt garrison, and the most frequently cited example, our comrades of the anarchist militias in Spain who fought both fascists and Stalinists in the defense of the revolution they created in the 1930s.

THE QUESTION HERE IS WHAT WORKS FOR ORGANIZING DEFENSE OF ONE'S SELF AND COMMUNITY AND A REVOLUTION

The John Brown Gun Clubs have been active in meeting armed rightists on their own terms. redneckrevolt.org



In the U.S., African Americans frequently employed armed resistance to white racist terror following the Civil War and into the 1960s. Workers in the coal fields of West Virginia and Kentucky fought cops, National Guard, and company goons to defend their unions or the right to organize in the 1920s. In 1886, anarchist labor leaders called upon their members to "Arm yourselves and appear in full force," at a rally in Chicago's Haymarket Square. Many did, but following a bomb blast and ensuing gunfire that left scores dead and wounded, four anarchists were hanged by the state of Illinois.

HUEY NEWTON, CHAIRMAN OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY in the 1960s, famously urged oppressed black people to, "Pick up the gun!" The specter of armed African Americans confronting brutal urban police forces led to a murderous campaign of repression against the party resulting in the deaths of dozens of Panthers in spectacular shoot-outs across the country, and an eclipse of their non-violent community based programs.

The 1921 so-called Tulsa Race Riot was actually a white mob and police attack against a prosperous African American district. Black World War I veterans and members of the African Blood Brotherhood bravely built barricades to defend their neighborhoods against the marauders.

The resistance against the mobs was so intense that white city officials aerial bombed the defenders, burning the black section to the ground, killing hundreds.

The third aerial bombing of the U.S. (the second being Pearl Harbor) came in 1985 when a Philadelphia police helicopter dropped an incendiary device on the communal living space of the MOVE organization following a pitched gun battle with authorities trying to serve arrest warrants including ones for arms possession. The resulting fire killed eleven MOVE members including five children and destroyed 65 houses. Many of the black liberation group's members remain

in prison serving long sentences. (See article in this issue.)

All of these examples (hundreds more exist) were heroic struggles against oppression and exploitation, yet almost all of them were scenes of great bloodshed and usually defeat of the radical forces pitted against the ruling powers.

The Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was originally proposed by its Framers to guarantee states the right to raise militias to suppress slave uprisings and armed white revolts such as Bacon's and Shay's Rebellions. In recent years, its alleged ambiguity has morphed explicitly into a right of personal gun ownership, and increasingly advocated by the NRA to expand an armed population. However, the Framers also saw the necessity for having every white male armed in an era when they had a palpable fear of slave rebellions and Indian attacks. That siege mentality still exists among many whites, particularly ones who are armed.

THE QUESTION HERE IS WHAT WORKS for organizing defense of one's self and community and a revolution if that comes to pass. Just as in day-to-day organizing, we evaluate what works partly by examining the strategies and tactics of past campaigns so we don't repeat the same mistakes. What does this say about the efficacy of arming for revolution or for even community self-defense?

The first line of defense for capitalism and the political state once threatened is the police who are increasingly militarized. The cops of yore did damage enough when armed only a little better than their challengers, but now they possess military grade armaments including tanks and a variety of sophisticated weapons, surveillance, and command capacity.

Were the cops to fail in efforts to halt a mass based movement demanding revolutionary change, the final level of protection of the state is its regular armed forces who could easily overcome any popular-based revolution or resistance. A modern revolution could only occur if sections of the military

THE QUESTION HERE IS WHAT WORKS FOR ORGANIZING DEFENSE OF ONE'S SELF AND COMMUNITY AND A REVOLUTION

The John Brown Gun Clubs have been active in meeting armed rightists on their own terms. redneckrevolt.org



In the U.S., African Americans frequently employed armed resistance to white racist terror following the Civil War and into the 1960s. Workers in the coal fields of West Virginia and Kentucky fought cops, National Guard, and company goons to defend their unions or the right to organize in the 1920s. In 1886, anarchist labor leaders called upon their members to “Arm yourselves and appear in full force,” at a rally in Chicago’s Haymarket Square. Many did, but following a bomb blast and ensuing gunfire that left scores dead and wounded, four anarchists were hanged by the state of Illinois.

HUEY NEWTON, CHAIRMAN OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY in the 1960s, famously urged oppressed black people to, “Pick up the gun!” The specter of armed African Americans confronting brutal urban police forces led to a murderous campaign of repression against the party resulting in the deaths of dozens of Panthers in spectacular shoot-outs across the country, and an eclipse of their non-violent community based programs.

The 1921 so-called Tulsa Race Riot was actually a white mob and police attack against a prosperous African American district. Black World War I veterans and members of the African Blood Brotherhood bravely built barricades to defend their neighborhoods against the marauders.

The resistance against the mobs was so intense that white city officials aerial bombed the defenders, burning the black section to the ground, killing hundreds.

The third aerial bombing of the U.S. (the second being Pearl Harbor) came in 1985 when a Philadelphia police helicopter dropped an incendiary device on the communal living space of the MOVE organization following a pitched gun battle with authorities trying to serve arrest warrants including ones for arms possession. The resulting fire killed eleven MOVE members including five children and destroyed 65 houses. Many of the black liberation group’s members remain

in prison serving long sentences. (See article in this issue.)

All of these examples (hundreds more exist) were heroic struggles against oppression and exploitation, yet almost all of them were scenes of great bloodshed and usually defeat of the radical forces pitted against the ruling powers.

The Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was originally proposed by its Framers to guarantee states the right to raise militias to suppress slave uprisings and armed white revolts such as Bacon’s and Shay’s Rebellions. In recent years, its alleged ambiguity has morphed explicitly into a right of personal gun ownership, and increasingly advocated by the NRA to expand an armed population. However, the Framers also saw the necessity for having every white male armed in an era when they had a palpable fear of slave rebellions and Indian attacks. That siege mentality still exists among many whites, particularly ones who are armed.

THE QUESTION HERE IS WHAT WORKS for organizing defense of one’s self and community and a revolution if that comes to pass. Just as in day-to-day organizing, we evaluate what works partly by examining the strategies and tactics of past campaigns so we don’t repeat the same mistakes. What does this say about the efficacy of arming for revolution or for even community self-defense?

The first line of defense for capitalism and the political state once threatened is the police who are increasingly militarized. The cops of yore did damage enough when armed only a little better than their challengers, but now they possess military grade armaments including tanks and a variety of sophisticated weapons, surveillance, and command capacity.

Were the cops to fail in efforts to halt a mass based movement demanding revolutionary change, the final level of protection of the state is its regular armed forces who could easily overcome any popular-based revolution or resistance. A modern revolution could only occur if sections of the military

joined the revolution.

Regarding defense against fascist threats to our movements on a daily basis, let alone for revolution or even radical reform: We are currently way outgunned. There are ten million AR-15 assault rifles owned by Americans. How many can we estimate are in the hands of, in general, Trump supporters, or narrowing it to extreme rightists and open fascists compared to how many are possessed by anarchists or leftists? The math is not encouraging.

Employing increasingly strident, far right-wing rhetoric, the NRA with its five million armed members, could easily be transformed into fascist militias as happened after World War I when the German Freikorps, a right-wing para-military, was used by the government to suppress revolutionary upsurges.

Currently, on the left, there are small gun groups like Guerrilla Mainframe and the Huey P. Newton Gun Club, which oppose police brutality and advocate for the rights of black gun owners.

Also, there is Redneck Revolt, an anti-capitalist, anti-racist, and anti-fascist group which organizes white working-class people and has more than 33 local chapters, an off-shoot of the John Brown Gun Clubs. They've appeared armed at Trump rallies in the manner rightists have elsewhere. Left groups are all under heavy police surveillance. The co-founder of the two black organizations, Rakem Balogun, was recently locked up for five months without bail on suspicion of "domestic terrorism."

It's hard to say what this suggests doing. We are clearly outgunned both by the state and the right. Should historic defeats encourage us to submit without a struggle? Should we depend upon the state to protect us from rightist assault? The answers to these questions are obvious.

HARDER QUESTIONS ARE, SHOULD ANARCHISTS OPPOSE ANY RESTRICTIONS on gun ownership other than background checks, or even that? Should we see the Red Neck/John Brown Gun Clubs as a model of armed resistance against an increasingly crazed right wing which has no debate about the issue of guns?

In answering this, we should be aware that there will be 35,000 U.S. gun deaths in a given year with 100,000 people wounded. If anarchists were as armed as are current gun owners, would we be any safer from murdering one another, taking our own lives, and shooting others accidentally? Probably not. (Full disclosure: I own three weapons, and do not want to surrender them.)

However, revolution has always been an undertaking filled with risks and the future is uncertain as to what will occur as this country's politics get crazier. It's been said that we should have a big tool box, one which includes a multitude of resources of which guns at a particular time could be useful ones.

Most revolutions are thought of as extremely violent events, but the act of revolution by itself, the wheel turning over the old society and bringing the new one to the top, is usually fairly non-violent. In Russia and Spain, for instance, revolutionary ideals supplanted the conventional norms of capitalism and the state as workers and peasants simply began life without bosses and cops. It was the defense of those new forms in which so many lives were lost.

No one from the *Fifth Estate* offers advice as to whether gun possession is appropriate or not, and certainly not this writer. The most appropriate tools are those which have always led towards revolution—organizing around greater freedom, protecting those most at risk from racism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia, supporting struggles in the workplace and the community, and subverting loyalty to the empire, its military, and its wars.

Once we see where this has brought us, it will be an organic process of deciding the best means of defense.

Paul Walker is a long time friend of the *Fifth Estate* who lives in the Detroit area.

FIFTH ESTATE 6 SUMMER 2018

Support still needed for those arrested at Trump's 2017 Inauguration

J20 Trials Continue to Drag on

ANONYMOUS

B By the time this is published, the J20 trials, the prosecutions of protesters mass arrested at Trump's inauguration in January 2017, will likely be in full swing.

Despite having charges dismissed against 129 of the 230 people indicted and the first trial resulting in unanimous acquittals for six defendants in January, the US Attorney's office has doubled down on its year and a half long legal effort to prosecute the 59 remaining defendants.

The 59 are those who the government claims to have specific evidence against that they either destroyed property, organized the demonstration, or knowingly engaged in black bloc tactics. The cases against these individuals will be tried in groups of five and six through October of this year.

A major development in the case was a filing by the US Attorney that government wanted to call as a so-called expert witness, an FBI agent who spent two years in "an undercover capacity" infiltrating an "anarchist extremist group" in New York City from 2008 to 2010.

During that investigation, the agent participated in a black bloc action dur-

Gun Control? No, Youth Liberation!



The New Normal

Another mass shooting. We're horrified, but we can't say we're surprised. These shootings have been going on for as long as we can remember. The victims at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School weren't even born when Columbine happened—and mass shootings have only gotten worse since then. Four of the ten deadliest mass shootings in American history have taken place in the last two years.

Why the last two years? The answer tells us a lot about this society. 2016 and 2017 saw a wave of backlash against the struggles and visibility of queer and trans people, women, and people of color, especially the Black Lives Matter movement.

The reactions came in many forms: “men’s rights,” the alt-right, the Trump campaign. But all of them were based in the anxiety that straight, white men are losing their power over society—and it’s no secret that mass shooters tend to be angry white men with a history of hating women.

Dylann Roof, who killed nine people at a black church in South Carolina in 2015, left behind a manifesto claiming that black people are inferior and bemoaning the supposed “disappearance” of the white race.

Omar Mateen, who killed 49 people at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando in 2016, was training to become a police officer. He had physically abused his former wife on a regular basis.

Stephen Paddock, the white Trump-supporting millionaire who carried out the deadliest civilian mass shooting in American history in 2017 in Las Vegas, was notorious for berating his girlfriend in public.

Devin Kelley, who beat his wife and stepchild while in the Air Force, looked up to Dylann Roof and copied his attack, entering a church in Sutherland Springs, Texas in 2017 and shooting over forty people—25 of them fatally.

Nikolas Cruz, who killed 17 students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, posted comments online degrading Muslims and threatening to kill anti-fascists. His classmates knew that he wore a MAGA hat, had been abusive to his ex-girlfriend, and had assaulted her boyfriend and called him racial slurs. Later, it was discovered that Cruz carved swastikas into the ammunition magazines he used on the day of the shooting.

The Old Normal

The problem of mass shootings goes much deeper than just the last couple of years. It cuts to the heart of American culture. Our whole society is built on a competition to take power *over* others: rich over poor, politicians over citizens, men over women and gender non-conforming people, white people over people of color. Politicians on both sides of the gun control debate agree on the need for more resources to diagnose and treat mental illness; but the desire to have power over others is not a mental illness, it’s a social one. Mass shootings will continue as long as this competition for power is the basis of our society.

The US government is holding **2.3 million people** captive in prison—as many people as there were in the Soviet gulag system at its peak. Police routinely brutalize and murder people of color with impunity. In 2017, cops shot and killed almost a thousand people, over twice the number of people who died in mass shootings that year. Where are the Democrats clamoring for gun control when cops routinely shoot unarmed teens?

The United States itself was founded on genocide, slavery, and white supremacy. Last year’s shooting in Las Vegas may have been the deadliest *civilian* shooting in US history, but the two deadliest gun massacres on American soil were carried out by the military—against former slaves in the Fort Pillow Massacre and against the Lakota Nation in the Wounded Knee Massacre. Soldiers shot between 200 and 300 people in each. We won’t even mention the countless invasions, coups, and massacres that the US has perpetrated elsewhere around the world.

White people have carried out some of the most violent acts in the history of the world, but you don’t hear them described as terrorists when they shoot up a school or bomb another country. Why? Violence directed down the hierarchy gets normalized and becomes invisible, while violence from those lower on the hierarchy against those above them provokes shock and outrage.

This is why those in power cannot offer real solutions—they’re too invested in the same system of power that causes mass shootings.

Breaking the Norms

What’s different this time is that instead of waiting for solutions from leaders, one of the groups targeted by mass shootings—students—took power back into their own hands. **Not power over, but power with each other.**

In the days after the Parkland shooting, teens across the country walked out of their schools. On the one-month anniversary, the largest school walkouts since the civil rights movement took place. It’s only thanks to disruptive *direct action* outside the normal political channels that the topic of mass shootings has remained part of the national conversation.

Authorities have responded by threatening suspension in some school districts and imposing limits on the walkouts in others. (“OK, but just for 17 minutes.”) In Florida, politicians and even the NRA hurriedly responded to student demands in order to seem relevant. Whether they were for or against gun control, they all wanted to send the same message: “You have to go through *us* to change things.”

It’s time to stop depending on adults who are invested in America’s system of power to solve the problems it produces. It’s time for young people to get together and set out on a different path.

Gun Control Is a False Solution

Gun control is a false solution—and not for the reasons you hear from the NRA. In fact, the NRA has backed the most significant steps towards gun control **in order to impose limits on black people’s efforts to achieve liberation.**

The NRA was founded in 1871, immediately after the original version of the KKK was outlawed. One of their primary goals was to keep guns out of the hands of recently freed slaves. Later, in the South, the NRA crafted the legislation and licensing schemes that denied Martin Luther King, Jr. the weapon he applied for after his house was firebombed. You’d never know it from NRA propaganda, but modern gun control began when the NRA backed Ronald Reagan in outlawing open carry in California in order to disarm the Black Panthers’ armed citizen patrols.

The United States government is racist—its cops are racist, its courts are racist, and any new laws they pass will be used chiefly against the poor people and people of color who are always targeted by the state. More laws won’t protect us when it’s the same racist system enforcing them.

School Security Is a False Solution

Making schools even more like prisons won’t give us freedom *or* safety. School is already violent. Teachers focus on obedience more than education, administrators control where you can be and when, school cops routinely brutalize and

criminalize students. The cop at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School did *nothing* when he was needed most!

There is no safety without self-determination. The people who knew best about the threat that Nikolas Cruz posed were his own classmates—they knew about his bigotry, the threats he repeatedly made, and the way he was abusive to his ex-girlfriend. The solution is not to deputize students to report on each other to adults, but to take that power from teachers and administrators and school security and give it back to the students themselves. Students should have power over their lives and the conditions of their education.

Mental health efforts aren't enough. The alienation we feel from each other in a world mediated by technology and the ways the economy and the school system condition us to compete against each other can make *anyone* feel worthless, helpless, and desperate for power. We need to create a society in which our self-worth isn't based on competition, in which each person's well-being is understood to depend on everyone else's.

Linking mental health efforts to state control, surveillance, and incarceration will just give the state another tool to increase incarceration and social control. The government doesn't sincerely care about stopping mass shootings—they've been getting worse for decades now without any change coming from the halls of power.

What You(th) Can Do

Try youth liberation! If you can shut down your school, why not downtown? Why not the highway? The economy itself? The same people who are letting oil companies poison our water, helping racist police get away with murder, keeping us from getting the health care we need, and trying to force us back into the boxes of gender—they're the ones who want students to stay in their place, obeying orders and conforming and regurgitating what teachers tell you. Administrators need students for their schools, but *you* don't need *them*.

Start a secret club for the abolition of principals. Form a union to defend students from authoritarian administrators. Host viewing parties or reading groups about cool ideas and discuss

what you would want to do and learn if you were *in control of your own lives*. Students like you have organized assemblies in Quebec, forced back police lines in Chile, shut down airports in Mexico, and stood up to tanks in Tiananmen Square. You can network with young people around the world who are rebelling against the same things. Talk to each other, learn from each other's efforts, and take that inspiration to the place you live. Adults might be able to help you with these things—provided they're not too busy trying to *control everything*—but they can't do them for you.

Solidarity! The student-led fight to end mass shootings connects to lots of other struggles for liberation. People working against police oppression can tell you how cops perpetrate and exacerbate gun violence in black communities. Anti-fascists can tell you how they track white supremacists who aim to promote the toxic masculinity and white resentment that cause mass shootings. Agitators from worker-led unions can share ideas about how to organize and make decisions collectively. Women and gender non-conforming people who practice self-defense can share techniques that young people can use too.

Show up to other actions against oppression. See what you can learn—and what you can offer.

To the Students

Don't hold back. You don't have to wait until you're 18—or for the elections if you're over 18—to get organized and take action. This is your chance. RIGHT NOW. Don't let adults set limits on your imagination. Don't let political parties or school boards tell you what counts as appropriate protest. They can't run those schools without you. Together, we can make the changes they never will.

Crimethinc (March 20, 2018)

Who We Are

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To look for Utopia means providing a vision for the future – of a world worth living in, of a life beyond what people settle for as experience clouds their hopes. It means insisting that hope is real, counting on human potential and dreams.

Utopians do not accept “what is” as “what must be.” We see potential for freedom even in the hardest of apparent reality. Within our oppressive society are forces for hope, freedom, and human solidarity, possibilities pressing toward a self-managed, cooperative commonwealth. We don’t know if these forces will win out; we see them as hopes, as moral norms by which to judge society today, as challenges to all of us to act in such a way as to realize a fully human community.

We can describe some of these possibilities: worldwide opposition to the imperialist domination of the global economy; struggles against dictatorship in China, Syria, Egypt, and Venezuela; fights for national liberation in Ukraine, Kurdistan, and Palestine; cultural movements for the defense and recovery of indigenous languages and histories; changes in society’s acceptance of homosexuality, trans-gender freedom, and women’s equality, campaigns to defend the rights of immigrants and racial and religious minorities. The organized labor movement and the Black movement in the United States have – we hope – new utopian phases ahead.

But beyond these specifics, we are talking about something familiar to everyone, although difficult to get a handle on. In small ways, every day, people live by cooperation, not competition. Filling in for a co-worker, caring for an old woman upstairs, helping out at AA meetings, donating and working for disaster relief – people know how to live cooperatively on a small scale. What we don’t know, and no one has found a blueprint for, is how to live cooperatively on a national and international scale – even on the scale of a mass

political movement. Nobody has described how the society we want will look, or how to get it, though we know what it will be – a society where people are free to be good.

This is a good time to be publishing a journal dedicated to utopianism, revolutionary socialism, and anarchism. The left is no longer in retreat. The struggles of organized labor, the Black and Latino communities, women, lesbian/bisexual/gay/transgender people, indigenists, and environmentalists are gaining strength. Within the world of the organized left, the influence of anarchists and libertarian socialists has greatly increased.

But these are perilous times as well. The fabric of the post-World War II world system—a “democratic ideal” for Europe and the United States masking elite control and international domination—is fraying. In the U.S. and Europe we see ideals of openness and inclusion in collision with xenophobia and race resentment. The parties of reform – the Democrats in the U.S., the Social Democrats in Europe, the Christian Democrats in Latin America, the old nationalist parties in Africa and Asia (where they still exist) – have abandoned the idea of social reform and freedom from international capital; yet, at least in the U.S., the Democratic Party has lost none of its ability to absorb, blunt, and demoralize radical efforts at change from within. While the collapse of the Soviet bloc and China’s adoption of a capitalist economic system under a Communist political dictatorship have tarnished Marxism’s idealist image, they have also discredited, for many, the very idea of changing society fundamentally. As never since the early nineteenth century, many believe that market capitalism is the only path to human progress.

A highly problematic new phenomenon in recent years has been the rise of Islamicist or Jihadist religious fanaticism, which exploits radical hopes for escape from western domination as mass support for a tyrannical, socially regressive, and exceptionally brutal war against non-Muslims and the great majority of Muslims. This development is a response partly to the collapse of secular anti-imperialism in Africa, the Arab world, and Asia since fifty years ago, and partly to continuing European domination in these areas, now made worse by the anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim backlash in Europe itself. The road forward, clearly, lies in rebuilding a democratic, radical anti-imperialism, but how this may occur we don’t know.

Moreover, with a few exceptions, revolutionary anarchist and libertarian socialist groups remain small and their influence limited. Various kinds of reformism and Marxism still attract radical-minded people. Both these ideologies and their corresponding movements accept the state, capital-labor relations, conventional technology, and political authoritarianism.

But these are reasons why it is important to continue to work for freedom and speak of utopia. This racist, sexist, and authoritarian society has not developed any new charms. It remains exploitive and unstable, threatening economic collapse and environmental destruction. It wages war around the globe, while nuclear weapons still exist and even spread. Even at its best -- most stable and peaceful -- it provides a way of life that should be intolerable: a life of often meaningless work and overwork; hatred and oppression within the family, violence from the authorities; the continuing risk of sudden violent death for LGBT people, women, and Black people; the threat of deportation of undocumented immigrants. The very major reforms of the last period of social struggle, in the 1960s, while changing so much, left African Americans and other minority populations in the U.S. and around the world facing exclusion and daily police (state) violence, literally without effective rights to life. The videos we see every day (in which new technology makes visible what has always been going on) reveal, like sheet lightning, the reality of the system we live under. For this society, from its inception, to call itself "democracy" is a slap in the face of language.

This paradoxical situation -- a society in obvious decay but without a mass movement to challenge it fundamentally -- is, we hope, coming to an end. As new movements develop, liberal-reform and Marxist ideas will show new life, but so have utopian and libertarian ideas. We work with this in mind. We have to do what was not done during the last period of really radical social struggles in the 1960s and 1970s. Among other things, revolutionary anarchist and libertarian socialist theory very much needs further development, including its critique of Marxism, and its ideas about how to relate to mass struggles, democratic and socialist theory, and popular culture. And we need to reinvigorate the ideals of anarchism/libertarian socialism and the threads in today's world that may, if we can find them and follow them, lead to a future worth dying for and living in.

This future, we state clearly, is an ideal, not a certainty. The lure of Marxism, for many, has been its seeming promise that a new world is objectively determined and inevitable. This idea is not only wrong but elitist and brutal: if the new society is inevitable then those who are for it are free to shoot or imprison everyone who stands in the way. That is the key to Marxism's development from utopia to dictatorship, which everyone except Marxists is aware of. Nor do we believe in an inevitable collapse of the present system—capitalism can push its way from crisis to crisis at its usual cost in broken lives and destroyed hopes. We believe people have to make ethical choices about whether to accept life as it is or to struggle for a new society, and then about whether the society they are for will be democratic or authoritarian. The only key to the future is a moral determination to get there, a dream of a world in which those who were obscure to one another will one day walk together. We do not know where this key may be found, but we know the only way to find it is to search for it.

That is who we are.

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