



SOLIDARITY

A zine about state repression, the
legal system and solidarity.
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2024 - TO OUR FRIENDS

The state intensifies its repressive apparatus, capturing within its net increasing numbers of those who have been taking action in solidarity with Palestinian resistance and against the genocide in Gaza. Comrades face house raids, police harassment, surveillance, court cases and more.

In light of this current moment in struggle, you hold now a reformatted version of a zine produced in Sydney in 2013 grappling with elements of solidarity. While we are in another time now and the present situation casts its own shadow, this zine is an attempt to piece together, if not a continuity of struggle, at least a memory of resistance before. It is hoped that reading about how others coped with state repression might give an amount of strength here and now, that some of what was learned then and is communicated in these articles is still relevant today. That not every lesson needs to be re-learned or mistake re-made.

All the pieces contained here (except this intro) had multiple authors, an important note that shows how they were the result of collective discussion and consideration. The first piece was written towards the end of 2012 and is a reminder to never talk to the police. The second piece was written in late 2009 or early 2010 and considers some of the experiences and lessons learned from a long court case and attempts at solidarity during. The third piece was written in late 2006 and wasn't included in the original zine. It considers some of the responses from 'the Left' towards a riot that broke out against the G20 summit in Melbourne.

The last two articles from the original zine didn't make the cut as they were written on different continents about broader concepts of solidarity instead of specifically related to protest, state repression and facing the legal system.

In love, rage and solidarity.

ORIGINAL INTRO - 2013

Ideas about solidarity are at the heart of the activity of so many anarchists, both in actions and in our daily lives. But it also remains a contested term due to the vagueness and fluidity of what folk consider it to mean and how to enact it in practice.

While we are in no way seeking to provide definitive answers to these necessary ambiguities, we also think that it is important for revolutionaries to talk about how we might solidify some of the concepts of solidarity in our ongoing practice. To work out what this might really look like.

Part of the difficulty is that solidarity is a term that has relevance to a variety of different terrains of struggle. So this zine begins with a couple of articles that we have been involved in writing over the past few years that refer to solidarity in relation to facing immediate state repression. The first is an open letter about dealing with surveillance, while the second is an article written at the end of the long court process that resulted from the Melbourne G20 protests in 2006. So, state repression and arrestee support - areas where our broad ideas of solidarity must be made practical.

Beyond these direct practical concerns however, solidarity also refers to bigger, more ongoing strategic questions of who we choose to ally ourselves with and to fight alongside. The final two articles are just a couple of fairly recent things that we like from overseas. The first one, a reflection on Occupy, considers who we look to and the immediate alliances we make in a moment where there is an upsurge in struggle. The final article reflects on the 'solidarity network' method of organising struggle and considers the implications of everyday solidarity in terms of longterm struggle.

A few of us put this pamphlet together to supplement a workshop on solidarity that we're doing at the Brisbane Anarchist Summer School, Jan 2013. It is certainly not comprehensive, but just a few things that we thought could feed discussions on this topic.

An open letter to anarchists (and others) in Melbourne (and other places) who feel under attention from the state; or “please don’t talk to the cops”

Dear comrades,

First of all: you have our solidarity. We know that feeling surveilled and monitored can be a very real trauma, and we know that those feelings don't just disappear though the 'correct' political analysis or through macho bravado.

We have no interest in singling out anyone or any group for condemnation. However, these recent events, and the conversations around them, have emphasised to us the importance of creating a strong collective culture in which we refuse to speak with ASIO or the cops: not matter how innocent the circumstances might seem. Even when we're under pressure - and we're always under pressure - we need to be able to deal with debates and conflicts without creating unnecessary divisions between ourselves.

It's precisely because things don't seem to have gone too badly on this occasion when people chose to speak with ASIO that it's important to raise a critique of ever talking to them. We're worried that we could become complacent to the dangers. It seems necessary to re-iterate why 'don't talk' should be a general political principle.

We gain nothing; they gain something

There's no information we could gain from talking to the cops that is useful to us. In the first place, it is clear that we should not and cannot trust anything they say. Beyond this, what actual good does it do us to 'know' that they're monitoring this group or the other? Without being paranoid, we should always assume that they could be monitoring us, and this shouldn't change our behaviour. Whether or not we have particular signs of attention from the state, we should organise and communicate openly in the same ways, and we should be cautious in the same ways. From this perspective, getting confirmation or information from the state does not inform our practice in any useful way.

On the other hand, the cops could always gain something from any conversation with us. They are trained to question and to gather information. The information that's useful to them isn't just the details of (non-existent) secret plots: anything inadvertently disclosed about our relationships could be useful to them.

Collective refusal gives us more power and control

Ultimately we need to resist creating a situation in which it could be seen as normal, harmless or acceptable for individuals to talk to the police.

The state tries to sow seeds of doubt and division. A key way they do this is to try to separate us out and target us as individuals. In this way they try to get us to say contradictory things, fabricate stories, and so on. The only real way to respond to this is to always be creating a strong political foundation in which we collectively refuse to speak with police.

We would like to think that refusing to speak with police after an arrest is a principle that most comrades already understand – though it's one that needs constant reiteration. As well as being sound legal advice, it is a political principle, because it gives us the best chance of working out a collective response to the immediacy of state repression. We think that it is just as crucial that this principle exists outside of arrest situations.

In writing this we draw from our own experience of being watched closely by the State, particularly in the period between the Melbourne G20 protest in 2006 and APEC in Sydney in 2007. We know that being approached for information by police or ASIO can be intimidating, and an individual's circumstances can make it more intimidating.

During this period people were followed out of pubs and cornered in dark streets by police. One person was asked to give information in exchange for having serious charges dropped. In such situations a collective culture of supporting each other in outright refusing to talk keeps us all stronger and safer and prevents anyone being targeted as an individual.

While we'd hope to have a movement in which we can trust comrades never to say anything stupid or dangerous, we are stronger if we collectively don't say anything at all. That way no one is singled out.

One thing we've noticed is that it's often uni students who are approached by police for information. Choosing to refuse to be singled out helps create a culture of solidarity where people's privileges and vulnerabilities are diffused amongst many comrades. No one should consider themselves in a position where they're secure enough to talk with police.

If you are approached by police, ASIO, or anyone else after information, you should refuse to talk to them and tell other people what happened. You should tell your friends, close comrades and people you work with in collectives: but you should also make an effort to spread this information more widely – through our own channels, not through the press.

Some notes on the media

We think that we have to be very careful about dealing with the mainstream media. We don't think that the possibility of media attention is any justification for talking with police. Whilst it seems plausible, we're very sceptical of the idea that a newspaper article on the fact that your campaign group is under surveillance is any sort of strategy. We can imagine very few situations in which a story about anarchists – or any activists – being monitored by ASIO would be anything other than

1. a liberal story in which we were 'innocent' victims being pursued by the state, which should allow 'democratic dissent'; or
2. a beat up which presents us as 'terrorists' who deserve everything we get.

What do we gain from either of these presentations?

A further note on this particular situation: it's never ok to talk to the press about a comrade who is incommunicado, no matter how sympathetic the journo or how seemingly trivial the comment you give. It's never ok to do anything that will help the press build a story about a comrade who is choosing stay quiet and whose situation might well be made worse by publicity.

A conclusion

We live in a world with prisons, with police, with intelligence agencies. We need to get a grip on what this means when we oppose the state. We struggle against them; they aim to undermine and crush our attempts to make a new world.

We need to learn from history. There's a reason why 'don't talk to the cops' is a fundamental principle for radical movements. We've made mistakes too – we'd like to be able to learn from each others' mistakes, not make them again.

- some comrades in Sydney

taken from:
goldenbarleyschool.wordpress.com



On court and solidarity.

by the mutiny collective.

The legal process from all the G20 arrests isn't over yet: it looks like the last charge of unlawful assembly charges that the jury couldn't agree on won't be tried until next year. Nevertheless, we've been able to draw a sigh of relief. With not guilty verdicts on the most significant charges, we don't have to worry about more friends and comrades going to jail this time. It's important, however, not to let these good verdicts make us complacent or lead us to ignore how significant – and how traumatic – these G20 cases have been. As revolutionaries we don't have any faith in the legal system to bring 'justice'; the fact that our friends were found not guilty on many charges this time doesn't mean that we'll be safe next time. While the verdicts were a huge relief, they also obscure the degree to which the entire legal process – from arrests, through drawn out hearings and years of waiting, to the weeks of trials – consists of various forms of punishment.

I went from Sydney to Melbourne for the first week of Sina's trial. It was strange and disconcerting for me to run into acquaintances from the general activist left milieu who didn't know that the trial was even happening. It made me feel like I was kind of crazy – maybe this thing that had taken over so much of my life (partly without my choice but also because I'd chosen G20 solidarity work as politically important) wasn't that important to anyone else. Part of the problem was that the process had simply been dragged on for so long. From dramatic and difficult beginnings, we'd had years of court appearances, bail hearings, mentions, sentencings and appeals. The time scale makes it easy for those not closely involved in events to lose track.

But the fact remains that solidarity is a long-term process.

The Melbourne G20 actions occurred in November 2006. It took a long time to pass for the resolution of a couple of actions to come to a close. Certainly this is not the longest political case by any measure, nor should it come as a surprise that the state has an interest at times in keeping people locked into the routines and banal rhythms of the legal system. So, the question of what we as people and friends and comrades of people who have, and undoubtedly will again face this situation, can learn from this experience has to take a form that is relevant to our practice and lives. One of the clear problems that came out of this most recent experience, from our perspective, can be thought of as perhaps the timeline of an action: where does commitment to an action begin and end?

Before taking part in the days of G20 actions, probably there was little consideration of what the aftermath might be like. Certainly, many people were taken by surprise on the Saturday, with no one really thinking anything like what happened was possible. In this sense, we were confronted as much by surprise as the state was. What the impact of this surprise ended up looking like became a problem of solidarity with the arrestees. For many, commitment to that action could end the day after or at least not long after the events actually finished. For others this took longer. Others had no choice. But, clearly, with the material need for forms of solidarity to have continued until it's all finished in the courts – not to mention the question of supporting people in and after jail – the question of the where, when, form and longevity of solidarity is a very real one.

Dealing with the aftermath is as much a part of the action, and as much a part of the movement as the more exciting elements of what we do. Solidarity work can be boring work, and may not always have the explicitly political front that some would prefer, but neglecting the question of solidarity is a real problem within the movements. Some have criticised the notion or emphasis upon fundraising over politics as it played out in the G20 solidarity. This question raises a number of discussions about what the relationship between a political and legal campaign looks like and what the role of arrestees in a political campaign should or could be. The arrestee becomes an object in the schema of political movements and maneuvering as soon as one takes the position that solidarity, and political solidarity, can only be expressed through an explicitly political campaign. Bundled up in all of the arguments about political campaigns are numerous assumptions about 'real politics' that need to be unpacked at some other time. Suffice to say for now: the state's targeting of individuals, and of us collectively through individuals, becomes a lived experience, material and subjective for the arrestees. Our response to this reality is in the most profound and direct sense, a reflection of how we think the practice of radical politics and change happens. This necessarily implies the reality that solidarity takes numerous forms, which fulfill different needs.

Solidarity in itself is an important campaign – regardless of the form it takes. It should never be thought of as something other to the movement. We can't think that there is something more important to be doing elsewhere at the expense of engaging with the reality of an existing trial. This doesn't mean that we can or should drop everything else that we are doing as soon as someone gets arrested, but it does mean that solidarity needs to be given more time and political importance in its own right, than it appears to have in Australia at present. We can't think of change, and self-reproducing movements if we think only of the next big action, event or campaign, whilst neglecting the reality that the state

tries to fuck us up, and that this at times takes the form of charges, trials, and prison. That is, we have to defend ourselves not just at the barricades, or the lock-on site, or the picket, but in between these moments and spaces.

Stress on arrestees during a long court process and questions of what it means to provide support and solidarity all reach their peak in the very limiting physical space of the court complex and courtroom itself. Turning up in court day after day for two and a half weeks for the aggravated burglary trial made acute the arcane hierarchies and oppressiveness of the legal system and how the highly formalised language and structure are designed to intimidate, isolate and pressure arrestees into caving in. And of course this trial was only the end of a case that dragged on for more than two years, during which life for the arrestees was punctuated by court appearances and meetings with lawyers.

The presence of people at court to offer support and solidarity at hearings and trials helps somewhat to counter the disempowerment felt by those going through trial. At the basest level it means people who are facing political charges don't feel alone and isolated. It was also noticeably important during the drawn out aggravated burglary trial, because it gave the arrestees people who aren't lawyers and whom they actually trust, someone to talk to and have a cigarette or coffee with during the frequent recesses and for the three days it took the jury to return a verdict. Having comrades to talk to at these times helped to reduce the stress and anxiety, whether it was to debrief about what was happening with the trial or to talk about something totally different. Also people bringing us lunch at court, and those who gave us out-of-towners places to stay and general hospitality were much appreciated and helped greatly with being able to cope with the overall situation.

The court area is also an intimidating place where making decisions can be difficult and where lawyers exert a lot of influence. Political solidarity here is crucial to give people the option of stepping away from their lawyers when making decisions and being able to confer with comrades. There were certainly times over the course of the G20 case that it seemed arrestees under the stress of the court process and pressure from their lawyers made rash decisions. Having comrades physically there (and of course not just in court, but in the periods between as well) hopefully can help people feel like their lawyers don't have to be their first point of reference when making decisions. While lawyers have their role and their expertise, they are part of the system that does not understand collectivity and collective responsibility. Their job is to represent their individual client and this can mean that the arguments they make in court can impact on other arrestees. It is important for arrestees to work together and with those offering solidarity in directing their lawyers.

The aggravated burglary trial was an example of this occurring fairly well and it was one of the strengths that contributed to the successful verdict. Acting collectively as best we can in this process means lawyers can't run divisive campaigns. It can help to ensure that the privileges of some in terms of race and class background – which play out so strongly in the legal system – can be extended across differences rather than being used to divide arrestees or benefit only a few. This is important because as much as we might sometimes want to, the courtroom is not a place that allows for the articulation of revolutionary politics. Certainly, in the aggravated burglary case even when elements of a political defence were used, they never extended beyond the niceties of liberal-left pacifism. This can be frustrating but the best we can do is stand together and push their rules as best we can to get a good outcome (although there may be some disagreement here, as some people feel it is still worth taking a strong political line to court).

While the next time people are arrested or face trial will probably be as different from the G20 cases as they were from anything prior, we still hope that we can learn from what we went through. This discussion was begun, in part, at a meeting held in Melbourne during the trial; we need to continue to think through the difficult questions of how to make solidarity meaningful. This article only touches on many of the issues and we hope a lot more is written and distributed in the coming months about this long and draining process.

G20: A first communiqué from two uncitizens of Arterial Bloc

We apologise for the delay. We were not able to head straight from the streets to the Internet. We have been dealing with the consequences of achieving more than perhaps we thought we would, and the aftermath of repression. We have been caring for each other, talking to each other, trying to find out what happened to those arrested and injured; remembering to breathe and sleep and eat.

The demonising ["Crazies! Foreign crazies!"] of Arterial Bloc by other sections of the Left (a demonising that only seems to have escalated in the last few days) has been cowardly, hysterical and, in the deepest sense, uncomradely. A willing eagerness to blame violence on "interstate" or "foreign" agitators is both false and xenophobic. Why must the militant protestor always be an other, both geographically and philosophically distanced from us? Why should struggle respect national or state borders? There has been a belief expressed not only by the corporate media but also by the Left that such actions as occurred at the G20 could not and should not be possible here in Australia. By extension, those involved are not "genuine" protestors but false provocateurs; or, if those involved were indeed "local", their protest was immature and apolitical.

We did not come out of nowhere and we are not strangers. We do not have "contempt" for "ordinary protesters"; we are ordinary protesters. What was Arterial Bloc? It was a call-out, a costume, and an attempt at internal democracy and communication. It was joined and accompanied on the day by many people who chose, for that time, to work together. Arterial Bloc is not an organization or a party; it is not a homogenous group or a faceless, rootless mob. We are female, male and in between; workers, unemployed, students, union members. We have been on union picket lines; we have created squatted social centres; we have blockaded in forests and cities; we have cooked and distributed free meals; we have leafleted, rallied, called meetings; we have lived together and apart, and tried to love each other. We are ordinary: as scared and as alienated as everybody else. We do not have magical solutions; we have desire that will not be governed.

The fear displayed towards members of the Bloc seems grounded largely in the Bloc's tactics of masking and disguise. Most criticism of the tactic centres on the idea that "disguise" is somehow sinister; that it leaves the movement open to infiltration by police and/or fascists, and that not knowing or not recognising fellow protestors is a bad thing.

Unpacking the semiotics of disguise is complicated. What follows is an attempt to do so.

Firstly, some history. Contrary to general belief, the G20 protests are not the first time that a "disguised" Bloc has appeared at an Australian protest. Orange Bloc pursued a similar tactic at the 2003 WTO protests in Homebush and the Sydney

CBD; orange boilersuits and bandanas were chosen for their visual resonance with the “war on terror” and the ensuing “state of emergency” across the globe, a state of emergency which, as Walter Benjamin once noted, is not an exception but the rule.

White overalls also have a particular historical resonance within the contemporary anti-capitalist movement, having been for many years the disguise of choice for the Tute Bianche, an autonomist group of largely Italian origin who began organising in 1994. Now is not the time or place for an extended discussion of the Tute Bianche, but a decent quote from one of their many documents (freely available on the internet) may help to illuminate the political arguments in favour of disguise:

“The white overalls are not a movement, they are a tool which was devised in the context of a broader movement (the social centers of the Charta of Milan) and made available to an even broader movement (the global one). Nowadays the white overalls exist in many countries. The white overalls are neither an institution nor a political current, nor are they to be strictly identified with Ya Basta! or the social centers of North-East Italy [...]”

One of our soundbites is: “We’re wearing the white overall so that other people wear it. We’re wearing the white overall so that we can take it off someday”.

The white overall is not a “uniform” [...] It hasn’t got militaristic origins. Back in Autumn 1994 the Mayor of Milan evicted the Leoncavallo squatted centre and stated: “Squatters are nothing other than ghosts now!” His description was accepted ironically, and thousands of people dressed in white stormed the streets of the city and rioted for hour. That was the real debut of the white overalls [...]

After that debut, the imagery of the white overall was enriched by ironic references to the “blue overalls”: nowadays labour has changed [...] “flexibility”, part-time and precarious jobs have made exploitation less visible, there’s a new “ghostly” working class.”

A white overall or similar disguise is a refusal to claim a space of “citizenship”, as the original Arterial Bloc call out (widely distributed) makes clear. Contemporary capitalism makes ghosts of us all, because it leeches us of our own precious and unique desires – and the embodiment of those desires – in favour of a homogenous “discipline” and “order”. We cease to be human beings; we are mere machinery and leftovers. For those of us who are ostensibly “free” there is the discipline of the workplace; of welfare, police and state surveillance (one must be the “grateful” and “well behaved” poor or be nothing); of educational institutions; and not least the discipline of the average protest. For those who face the brunt of state repression, there is the detention centre, the jail, the ghost prison of an unknown country. These forms of repression and enclosure are all connected: in solidarity with those who are refused citizenship and freedom of movement we also refuse citizenship; as a rebuttal to the fact that we are targeted and profiled on an everyday basis for

visible difference – ethnicity, poverty and class, gender and sexuality – we choose to disguise that visibility. We will not “stand up and be counted” as citizens within this false democracy. Capitalism haunts us, and it makes us haunted; we will haunt it.

Socialist Alternative (among others) has claimed that the tactic of disguise “can only be justified in situations of extreme state repression”, and that until such time, we must continue to be “ordinary”. The basic fact is that over the past five years, the “war on terror” has been used as the overarching excuse for extreme state repression, both in Australia and elsewhere. “Ordinary” people have been raided, beaten, locked up, charged with crimes that they never committed; it is time for us to stop claiming the space of “ordinary” and “innocent” as a space of safety. If those of us who attend rallies and public protests are only doing so “on behalf” of those who have been denied the presumption of innocence, what power and privileges are we thereby claiming for ourselves? If we as protestors are always “innocent”, who is “guilty”: rioters in Redfern, Iraqi insurgents, Guantanamo prisoners, Tongan youth?

Capitalism does not tolerate serious, revolutionary dissent; it never has and it never will. The state will do everything in its power to crush revolutionary movements, and it will not care to distinguish between the “innocent” and the “guilty”, between the “good” and the “bad” protestor. Are we revolutionaries, or not? If we are, then we are already enemies of the state. Let us not be afraid of being called so.

“The same people who are murdered slowly in the mechanized slaughterhouses of work are also arguing, singing, drinking, dancing, making love, holding the streets, picking up weapons and inventing a new poetry.” (Raoul Vaneigem)

We reclaim the radical ordinary. We do not feel the need to pitch a “central message” through the filter of the corporate media to the mythical “ordinary person” who, apparently, can only comprehend or sympathise with managed dissent.

A false dichotomy is set up between the role of the “disciplined”, politically mature protestor and the inarticulate other. The other is positioned as a person or a group too worn out by oppression to resist tactically. This other is protested for, or on behalf of, but we must never indulge in their tactics. Both property damage and any spontaneous, emotional embodiment of resistance are seen as apolitical, as reactions to be left (pun intended) behind as we attain proper political maturity. “Oppressed others” (in Redfern, Macquarie Fields, Palm Island, Lakemba) who are perhaps never expected by those who call for disciplined protest to reach the requisite levels of political maturity have been rhetorically defended for their “justified” anger. But those who set Macquarie Fields on fire are never presumed to be part of a mass resistance to capitalism; and those who are presumed to be a part of “the movement” are therefore seen as outside of the system that produces such anger.

Property damage can be tactical, and as a tactic it has a long history. As peasant saboteurs and early industrial workers made clear, property damage was a direct disruption of capitalism's machinery, and of its discipline of lives and bodies in the workplace:

"I am not going to attempt to justify sabotage on any moral ground. If the workers consider that sabotage is necessary, that in itself makes sabotage moral. Its necessity is its excuse for existence. And for us to discuss the morality of sabotage would be as absurd as to discuss the morality of the strike or the morality of the class struggle itself. In order to understand sabotage or to accept it at all it is necessary to accept the concept of class struggle. If you believe that between the workers on the one side and their employers on the other there is peace, there is harmony such as exists between brothers, and that consequently whatever strikes and lockouts occur are simply family squabbles; if you believe that a point can be reached whereby the employer can get enough and the worker can get enough, a point of amicable adjustment of industrial warfare and economic distribution, then there is no justification and no explanation of sabotage intelligible to you." — Elizabeth Gurley Flynn (Sabotage, Cleveland, Ohio, 1916)

Almost 100 years later, sabotage and property damage can still be used to disrupt the efficient functioning and discipline of capitalism, not only in the workplace, but in each area of our lives where this discipline has reach, which is to say, all of our lives, every day. The machinery of war and of welfare; the militarisation of public space and the containment of protest within sanctioned zones – all these things need to be dismantled. When barricades are destroyed, streets are opened.

Beyond tactics and planning is the exhilaration of embodying refusal – even if only for a moment, and these moments are not without politics. Why should politics and protest be disciplined spaces, spaces without emotion and desire? To be caught up in the moment, in a collective energy, is a rare rupture of the alienation, isolation and powerlessness of our everyday lives. These moments show us what we are capable of; but we are capable of much more. We must preserve a movement of resistance to capitalism that is made up of many different acts of refusal and creation. However, we genuinely fail to understand how anyone who calls herself a revolutionary can fail to find at least some beauty in the sight of a smashed police van.

We can and will discuss tactics and their consequences; a more detailed response to specific events during the G20 protests is being prepared.

With love and solidarity,

From two people who will be known as Gertrude and Fuchsia.

