RADAR

Spring 2026

Issue 04





Radar is a journal based out of the United States. The editors take part in movements and unrest across the country, the hemisphere, and the world. We act decisively from within these struggles, to effect them and to learn from them. *Radar* seeks to investigate and report on contemporary crises, riots, protest movements, and revolts, primarily in the United States and Western Hemisphere. We will discuss key concepts of modern struggles and the problems they face. We will compare notes on how people organize themselves to topple state power, and reflect on struggles for a life free from exploitation.

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RADAR JOURNAL

RESONANCES

In general, the men of lower intelligence won out. Afraid of their own shortcomings and of the intelligence of their opponents, so that they would not lose out in reasoned argument or be taken by surprise by their quick-witted opponents, they boldly moved into action.

— Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War

There is nobody that is willing to eat a dead thing as it is; so they boil it, and roast it, and alter it by fire and medicines, as it were, changing and quenching the slaughtered gore with thousands of sweet sauces, that the palate being thereby deceived may admit of such uncouth fare.

— Plutarch, Moralia

Ignorance, malevolence, and guess-work have truly seized power. For all of their pomp and bombast, the administration has proved incapable of fulfilling the cruel promises they made to their voters. This does not stop them, month by month, from dressing up their failures as successes.

In August of 2025, the US military began bombing alleged Venezuelan drug boats in the Carribean. President Trump declared these alleged drug traffickers "unlawful combatants," implying they had no right to due process and were thus eligible for killing. Throughout the fall and winter, Trump asserted, without proof, that Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro captained an international drug trafficking network called Cartel de los Soles. At time of writing, the United States has killed 168 people across fifty-three airstrikes in the Caribbean and Pacific. One group of Ecuadoran fishermen told *The Guardian* that a US drone bombed their twenty-person vessel just north of the Galapagos Islands. As the bloodied and battered crew swam to a US military boat nearby, soldiers detained them at gunpoint. The Department of Defense celebrates these actions as acts of "national defense," and uses them to build relationships with dictators like Ecuador's Daniel Noboa.



Damage to a residential building during the US military's airstrikes in Caracas

After several months bombing small boats, the United States—in complicity with Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica—raided Caracas, Venezuela. Delta Force operators rushed into the home of Nicolas and Cilia Flores Maduro. In short order, they captured the Venezuelan president and his wife, killing eighty people on the way. In an unsealed January 3 indictment, the DOJ concedes that Cartel de los Soles does not really exist. Instead, they describe Maduro as the chief of a system of patronage and corruption. Meanwhile, US Army Master Sgt. Gannon Ken Van Dyke—a Special Forces operator involved in the Caracas raid—used his insider knowledge to win $409,000 on the gambling platform Polymarket.

In the days following the arrest, the Trump administration openly boasted of their intentions to "seize" Venezuelan oil. Trump himself pressured US oil companies to invest in Venezuelan oil markets. Delcy Rodriguez and the remaining Chavistas are retreating from the social democratic politics of the Bolivarian revolution, even normalizing trade with Israel. We still do not know how far the party will go in order to retain power in Venezuela, or, more importantly, what the colectivos and powerful autonomous movements in the country will permit. US oil companies have balked at the prospect of investing in Venezuelan oil exploitation. For Trump and friends, the blitzkrieg action provided a model for the imagination, something they hoped to reproduce across the globe and even within the country itself. They hoped it proved their invulnerability. They were wrong.

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Following the anti-ICE revolt in LA last summer, federal authorities reallocated around 300 ICE agents and 150 Border Patrolmen to Chicago. They called this new deployment "Operation Midway Blitz." Activists, parents, and faith groups escorted school children home. Protesters assembled repeatedly at the Broadview Detention Center, clashing with police, throwing back tear gas, and generally creating episodes of disobedience for the duration of the Operation.

A week into the surge, ICE agents murdered Silverio Villegas González. He was caught in an ICE roadblock and murdered while attempting to flee.

On December 2, ICE deployed 100 agents to the Twin Cities as a part of a multi-city deployment including Charlotte, New Orleans, and Memphis. A month later, that number had grown to 1,000 agents. By February, nearly 3,000 federal agents laid siege to the metropolitan area. Regardless, resistance to "Operation Metro Surge" was comprehensive, relentless, and effective.

80,000 Minnesotans joined rapid response networks, roaming the Twin Cities day and night, disrupting ICE operations, confronting agents, sheltering immigrants. High schoolers walked out of class repeatedly in cities and suburbs across the country. On January 7, ICE agent Jonathan Ross killed rapid responder Renee Good. Within hours, thousands flooded the streets, some throwing objects and clashing with federal agents. Seven days later, residents confronted ICE agents in north side Minneapolis, smashing windows of their cars and looting firearms from the trunks. Receipts and other documents inside showed the full names of many agents and which hotels were hosting them.

Grassroots organizers and trade unions used the intervening weeks to agitate and organize for a general strike. On January 23, in sub-zero temperatures, tens of thousands of striking workers marched through the streets of Minneapolis. The resistance to ICE had brought together the first bonafide US general strike since the 1940s. Organizers and leftists across the country took notes, or else observed this development with inspired awe. Unfortunately, celebrations did not last long. The next day, on January 24, federal agents executed rapid responder Alex Pretti.

By morning's end, community members had erected barricades in Whittier, the area of the killing. Local police and federal agents fired tear gas canisters as protesters burned dumpsters, and threw stones and bottles at authorities. Across the country, high schoolers walked out of class. Migrant detainees in Dilley, Texas marched inside of the facility, demanding amnesty for themselves, justice for Good and Pretti, and immediate release for Liam Conejo Ramos (a five year old detainee). Supporters outside of the facility faced lines of riot police who shot tear gas and rubber bullets at them.



Resistance did not let up. On January 28, protesters converged on multiple hotels hosting ICE agents, breaking their windows and throwing fireworks at them. Rapid responders staked these hotels out, documenting agents on their way to their cars in the morning. At the Whipple Federal Building, confrontations with agents recurred frequently.

On February 12, Border Czar Tom Homan announced the end of Operation Metro Surge. Drawdown of federal authorities began immediately. Local Democrats paid lip-service to the resistance. The administration had misjudged the political atmosphere, and it had cost them considerable legitimacy and confidence. The same day, an online video showed a white woman pour flammable liquid on a proposed ICE facility in Kansas City, MO and setting it on fire. A week later, someone in Sunrise, AZ broke windows at an ICE-owned warehouse and threw a propane gas tank inside. In March, community members painted anti-ICE slogans on a Republican Party headquarters in Albuquerque, NM and set the entrance ablaze.

If the Trump administration thought they were going to dominate communities inside of the US as they had in Venezuela, they were wrong. In many cases, the resistance to Operation Metro Surge proved that grassroots resistance remained the strongest obstacle to the consolidation of power by Trump and his many allies in industry and official politics. For the government, their problems were soon to become much more serious.

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The US Army killed the Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on February 28, in a surprise attack coordinated with the Israelis. In his death, the Ayatollah Khamanei became a religious martyr for many of the worlds 200 million Shi'i Muslims. As they affirmed their new relationship to the Jihadist regime in Syria, the Trump administration called for a secular revolution in Iran. They justified their attacks on civilian centers by the premise that it would create the context for a popular rebellion. Hegseth told American viewers, who largely viewed the airstrikes with indifference or horror, that the "limited operation" in Iran would last no more than two weeks.

The Iranian response to the attacks destroyed that timeline overnight. In the first two weeks of March, the Iranian military used drones and rockets to bombard US military installations and satellites across the entire Gulf. Targeted attacks in Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, and the UAE devastated US imperialist build-up 30 years in the making. While the American and Israeli armies busied themselves blowing up elementary schools, apartment buildings, and hospitals, the IRGC effectively blinded the imperialists in the Gulf. While a new revolution against dependent capitalism in Iran did not arrive, a veritable insurrection against Saudi domination in Bahrain has shaken the island nation, as youth and Bahraini proletarians fight to finish the "Arab Spring" revolt in that country, once crushed by Saudi tanks. The GI Rights Hotline reports a 500% increase in "conscientious objector" petitions within the US army after the barbarous airstrike on a Minab elementary school killed 120 children and their teachers.

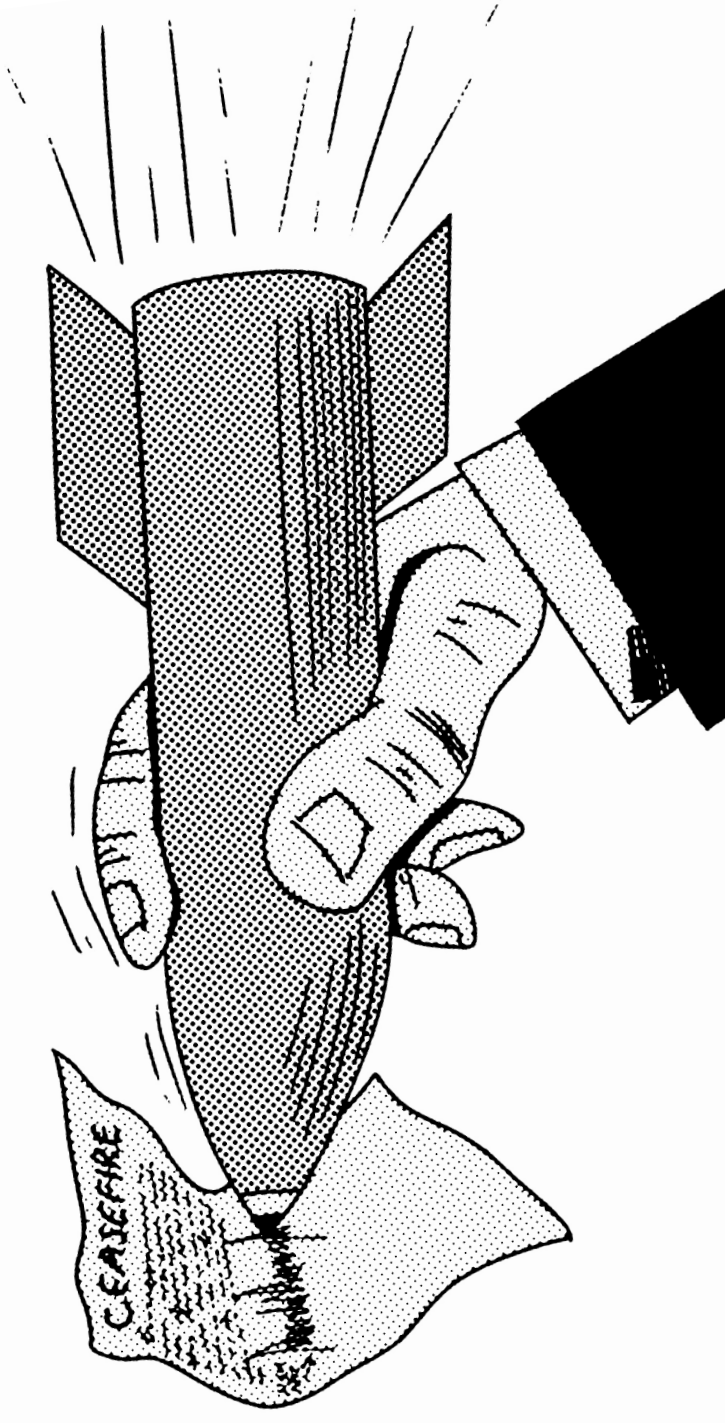
The aggression in Iran opened the door to renewed fighting between Israel and Hezbollah. Armed resistance erupted in Tyre, Sidon, Nabatieh, and in the Dahiyeh. Joint Hezbollah and IRGC rocket attacks on Israel have proved that the imperialists cannot project indestructible force all over the world without incurring damages themselves.

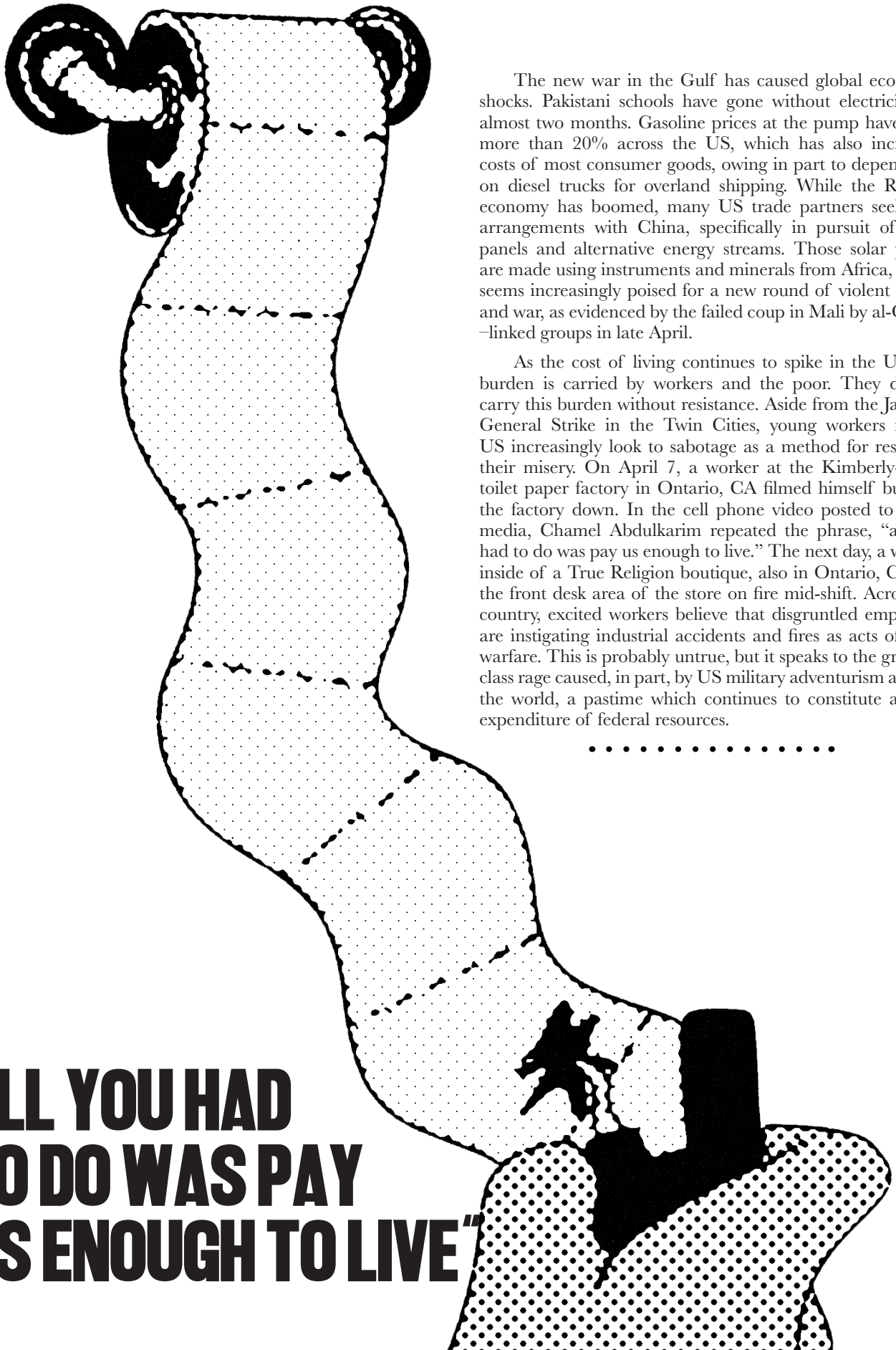
More significant than any of the drone attacks for the world system, the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz has become the main point of leverage for the Iranians. For more than two months (at time of writing), commercial ships passing through the Strait risk direct attack by the Iranians. Since oil, fertilizer, and other vital commodities pass through the Strait, it has forced the US and its allies to negotiate with the Islamic Republic, much as they would prefer otherwise.

In Gaza, the Israelis continuously violate last year's ceasefire. Hamas and other resistance groups do not appear willing or able to re-engage the occupation in armed battle. In Nabatieh, Tyre, the Beqaa Valley, Qana, Khiam, and elsewhere in southern Lebanon, Israeli soldiers have set about destroying ancient cities, displacing their residents, and desecrating their holy sites. Still, the war in the Gulf is becoming a serious quagmire for the US administration. It certainly is not a repeat of the Venezuela episode.

On April 7, Donald Trump published a statement on social media asserting that a "whole civilization will die tonight, never to be brought back again." For an entire day, people across the world speculated, with great anxiety and fear, that the President was preparing to use a nuclear bomb in Iran. Thankfully, he did not. In the end, he dug up a weeks-old proposal from the Iranians for a ceasefire, holding it up as "adequate grounds for negotiations." According to *The Economist*, a full 80 million people (23% of the US) supported these genocidal threats. These 80 million form the true backbone of the Trump regime, and of modern barbarism in general. Proponents of radical change will have to consider the existence of this bloc in their strategies and worldview.

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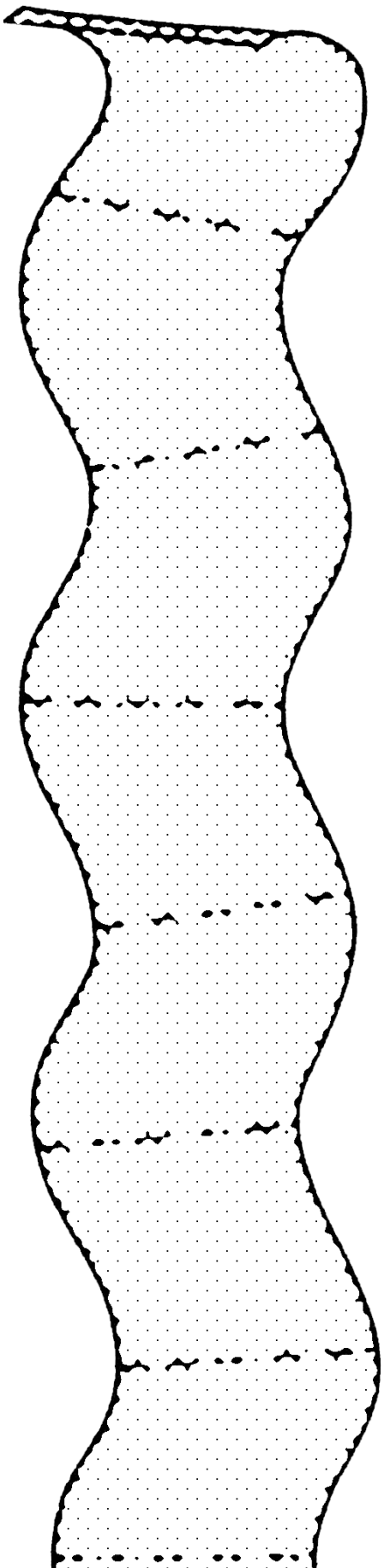




"ALL YOU HAD TO DO WAS PAY US ENOUGH TO LIVE"

The new war in the Gulf has caused global economic shocks. Pakistani schools have gone without electricity for almost two months. Gasoline prices at the pump have risen more than 20% across the US, which has also increased costs of most consumer goods, owing in part to dependence on diesel trucks for overland shipping. While the Russian economy has boomed, many US trade partners seek new arrangements with China, specifically in pursuit of solar panels and alternative energy streams. Those solar panels are made using instruments and minerals from Africa, which seems increasingly poised for a new round of violent unrest and war, as evidenced by the failed coup in Mali by al-Qaeda –linked groups in late April.

As the cost of living continues to spike in the US, the burden is carried by workers and the poor. They do not carry this burden without resistance. Aside from the January General Strike in the Twin Cities, young workers in the US increasingly look to sabotage as a method for resolving their misery. On April 7, a worker at the Kimberly-Clark toilet paper factory in Ontario, CA filmed himself burning the factory down. In the cell phone video posted to social media, Chamel Abdulkarim repeated the phrase, "all you had to do was pay us enough to live." The next day, a worker inside of a True Religion boutique, also in Ontario, CA, set the front desk area of the store on fire mid-shift. Across the country, excited workers believe that disgruntled employees are instigating industrial accidents and fires as acts of class warfare. This is probably untrue, but it speaks to the growing class rage caused, in part, by US military adventurism around the world, a pastime which continues to constitute a huge expenditure of federal resources.



This issue comes at a time of serious changes in our country. The balance of forces seems to be tilting away from the state and back toward autonomous resistance movements. We are excited to present essays and contributions about topics around the world, charting the course of this shift. Some of our associates traveled to El Salvador to connect with organizers there and to study the effects of Bukelismo and the state of exception first hand. They have generously collaborated with us to produce reflections on these efforts, which you can read in "When the Ash Settles."

After the publication of issue 03, some people from our editorial collective visited Chicago to attend a conference. At an after-party event, they met Abdul Shanna, a former BLA prisoner of war. Abdul organized closely with James "Yaki" Sayles, about whom we published an essay last year. We are overjoyed to be in touch with Abdul. The Revolutionary Intercommunalism Research Group conducted an interview with him, in which he reflects on his life in the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army.

Just before the current ceasefire in Gaza, a friend of Radar joined a solidarity flotilla to Palestine called A Thousand Madleens. On his trip, he sent friends and loved ones photographs and updates periodically. Inspired by his journey, we asked him for permission to turn a few of his updates into a piece for publication. Those reflections, with our introduction, can be read in "The Lee Shore."

Finally, a correspondent from Mexico sent us a historical look at the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion. This group formed alongside the Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre, covered at great length in *Radar* 03 in the essay "Autonomy Armed, Autonomy Disarmed." This new article, "The Fire and the Word," picks up directly where the previous essay left off, helping us to trace the mysterious development of the world famous indigenous movement known as the Zapatistas.

With the help of our readers, independent distributors, and friends, we have sold more than 5,000 copies of *Radar.* We will continue to fulfill orders as long as we have them, but we expect to sell out of issue 02 and 03 fairly soon. We are so happy to say that you can buy *Radar* at infoshops, social centers, book stores, galleries, shows, and zine tables across the country. We would love your help putting this journal into the hands of people who can test and improve these ideas in real struggle and practice. As always, we welcome feedback, criticism, corrections, and correspondence.

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POST-SCRIPT ON MASS CLANDESTINITY

Revisiting a concept introduced in Radar 02 in light of recent anti-ICE resistance in the Twin Cities:

> "How can something be 'mass' if it is hidden? How can a movement or organization be secret if everyone knows about it? If it operates in the shadows, how can it be participatory? According to conventional thinking, these ideas cannot coexist . . . But those of us who operate under the radar, maintaining political independence, should focus on building mass revolutionary federations and networks—groups dedicated not just to activism or propaganda, but to revolutionary strategy—in secrecy."
>
> — "Tip of the Spear: Looking Back on 'Looking Back': James 'Yaki' Sayles and Organizing Politics Underground" by R.I.R.G. (*Radar* 02)

Between December 2025 and February 2026, roughly 80,000 volunteers joined rapid response networks in the Twin Cities. As thousands of federal agents flooded Minneapolis-St. Paul and their suburbs, a broad cross-section of Minnesotans downloaded encrypted messaging apps, adopted pseudonyms, and joined neighborhood-based defense groups. Day and night, anonymous volunteers convened a grassroots urban defense movement.

Unlike other rapid response networks around the country, the Twin Cities infrastructure was not substantially built on long-term public organizing or demonstrable community ties. Many volunteers participated with full face coverings, totally unknown to pedestrians or collaborators.

When imagining a "mass clandestine" organization, we have provided a number of examples. Those examples, such as the Zapatistas, appear to operate under conditions different from our own. Some people have misunderstood the proposal for a specific "model"—a generic kind of form or tool to test in various places and times. We do not propose any kind of model. The concept of "mass clandestinity" could be thought of more as an orientation one might take to constructing any kind of revolutionary organization, regardless of what other principles or standards might shape it.

We wanted to briefly propose that the Twin Cities rapid response networks embody, in practice, the principle of "mass clandestinity," at least in part. These networks have seemingly developed quickly and dissolved quickly as well, which is perhaps a hallmark of the modern information age. Regardless, we know that some, on account of the examples R.I.R.G. provided, may have envisioned a political form requiring many years to develop. Perhaps we have erred with these examples.

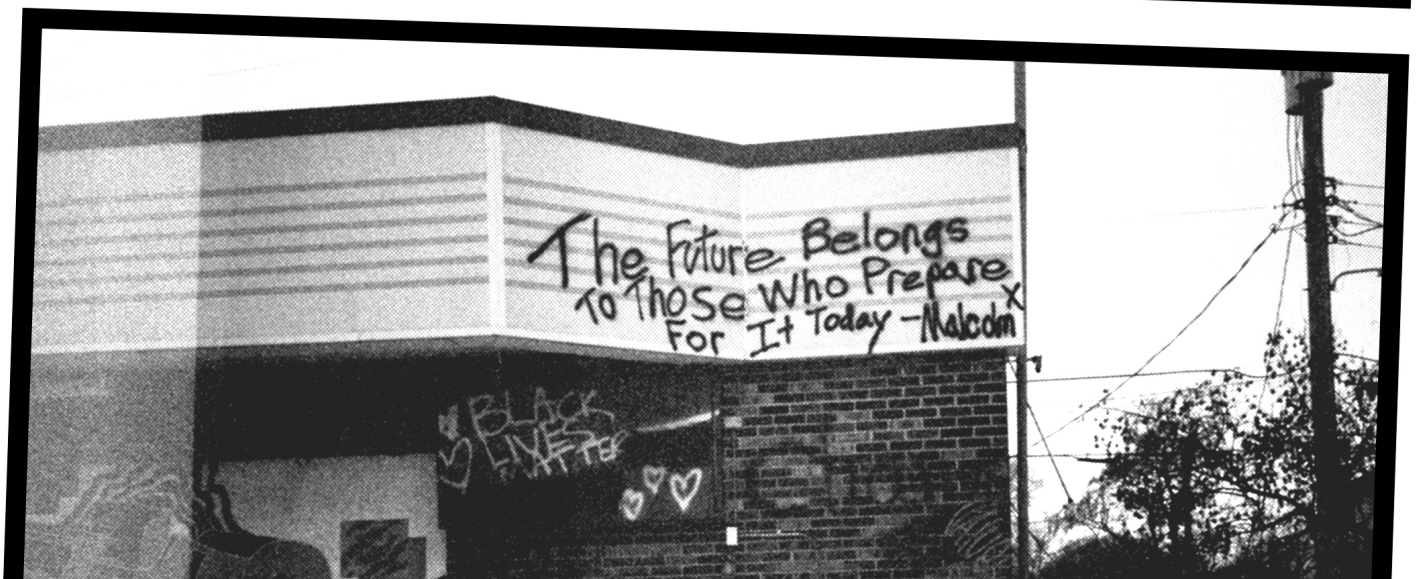
Comparing the example of the Twin Cities resistance with the Zapatista movement, or any other long-term organizing approach, could help illustrate the consequences of different uses for this idea.

We believe that, moving forward, this kind of political framework—involving very many, mostly anonymous, participants—will become the primary tool for liberatory movements. They will take from affinity groups the practice of secrecy, and from mass movements the quality of robust participation, and they will combine them into a new kind of political power. As repression, mass surveillance, and violence come to characterize all struggles, small isolated groups and large open organizations will continue to carry the brunt of the attacks by the government. This creates something of an "evolutionary pressure" within social movements, prompting them to embrace mass clandestinity, whatever their goals may be.

The most urgent question for aspiring revolutionaries today is how to organize within our communities, networks, and movements in the absence of a mass spontaneous uprising, in a context of escalating repression and surveillance. We need to find ways to connect our ideas, skills, and proposals to a wide audience, while fostering active participation in struggles shaping our future. Given that future revolutionary movements will likely involve many anonymous participants, our approach in the present would do well to align with this eventuality, since our general orientation should focus on conjoining spontaneous rebellions with organized revolutionaries.

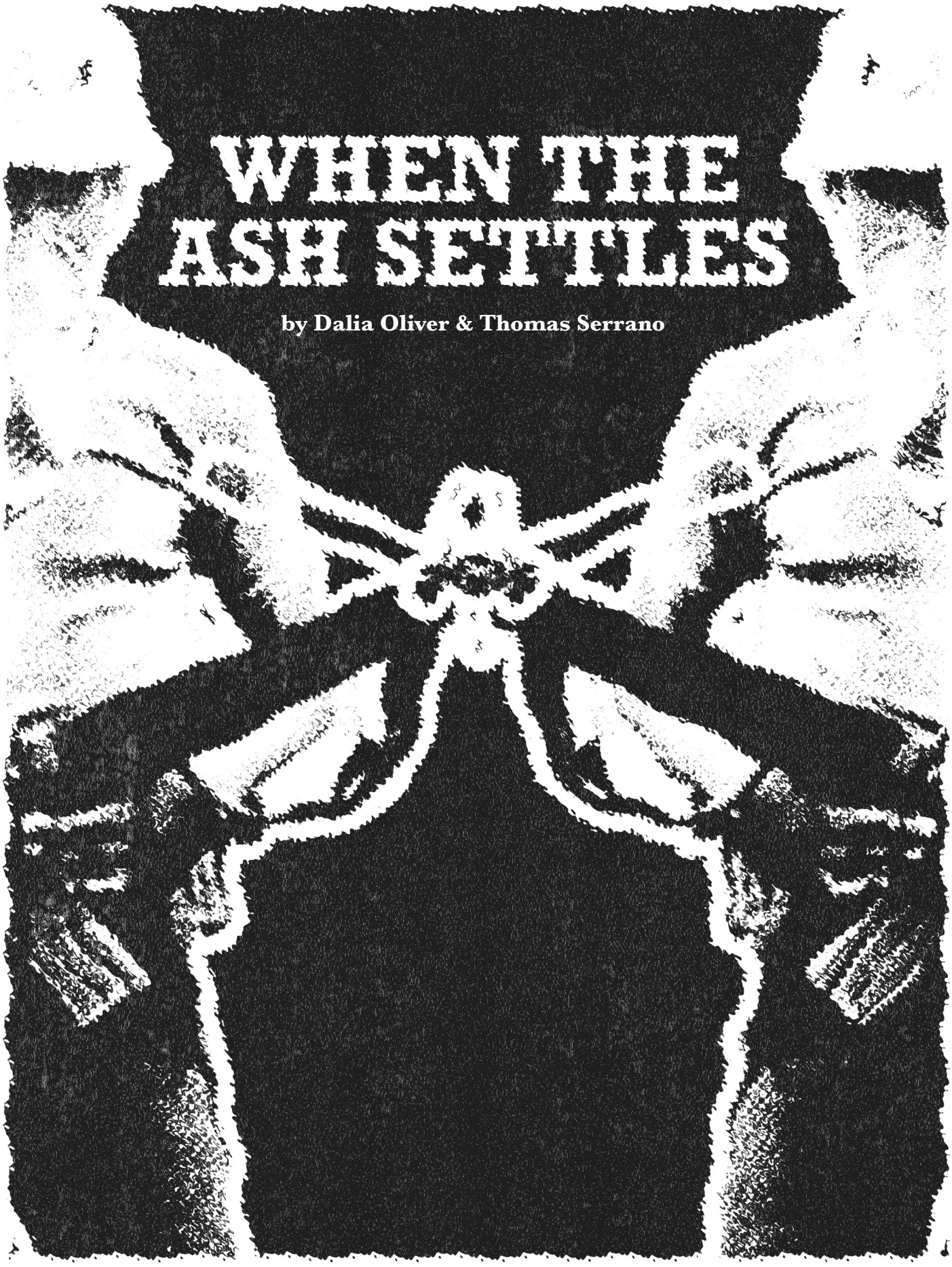

Restaurant


ICE OUT!


The Future Belongs
To Those Who Prepare
For It Today -Malcolm X
BLACK LIVES

WHEN THE ASH SETTLES

by Dalia Oliver & Thomas Serrano



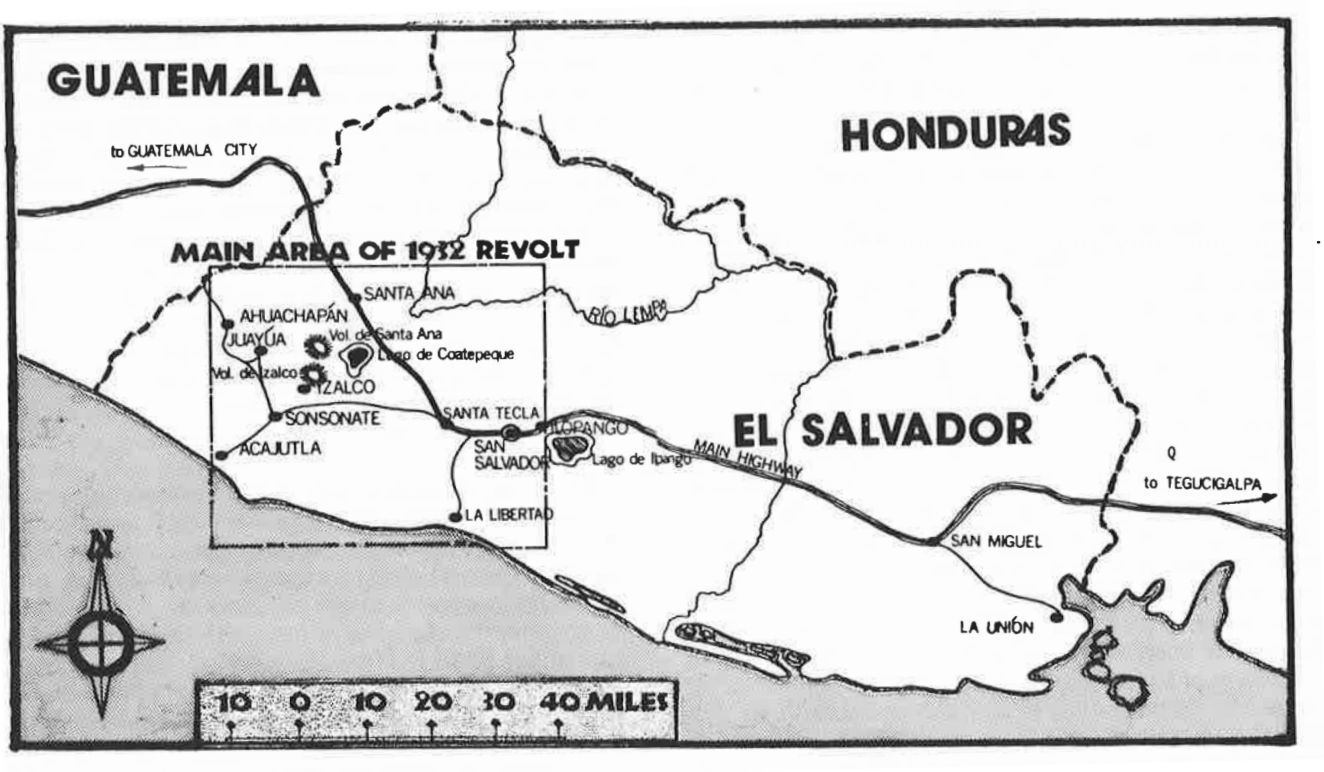
PART ONE: UPRISING, ARMED STRUGGLE, CIVIL WAR

THE FIRST AMERICAN SOVIET

But one day in your brokenness
Breaking the yoke, you arose
You wanted it to be everything
from everyone, like in Christ
To the first soviet of America:
They turned it all to shit by gunfire
— Pedro Geoffroy Rivas, "Un Romance de Enero" (1935)

The day of El Salvador's 1932 uprising, volcanic ash blanketed the sky. By mid-afternoon, the sun appeared not to have risen at all. Birds collided into each other in their confusion. For the thousands of people living in the western departments of El Salvador, nothing marked the transition into night. Then, rocket flares filled the sky over Santa Tecla, Sonsonate, Izalco and Ahuachapán. The sounds of conch shells and whistles accompanied the flames of flares, announcing the insurrection. As many as seven thousand insurgents—indigenous peasants alongside ladinos and others—descended on military barracks in Sonsonate, Tacuba, Santa Tecla, and around San Salvador. Insurgents drew members from across El Salvador's working poor, defying rigid categories of race and political ideology.

A seventy-eight-year-old Indian named Lino Argueta led four hundred men into the nearby town of Colón to retrieve nearly one hundred machetes that had been confiscated by the authorities there. They hoped to use the weapons to siege a barracks in Santa Tecla. Argueta died in the raid. He rallied his men until he collapsed.



KILLING THE JUST AS THOUGH THEY WERE SINNERS

The Salvadoran government, led by General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, brutally suppressed the uprising. The military defeated the rebellion with indiscriminate machine gun fire and pursued survivors into the mountains. In the following days, soldiers massacred Indians. They conducted targeted, discriminate killings of Communist voters, assembled on *Las Listas*—kill lists provided by the government. The saying, "Mataron justos por pecadores" (They killed the just as though they were the sinners), entered everyday parlance as rural communities made sense of the repression. Martínez's men killed more than twenty thousand people. The 1932 uprising is known primarily for the counter-revolutionary brutality that followed—*La Matanza*, the Massacre.

The government outlawed the Partido Comunista Salvadoreño (PCS) and executed its most prominent figure, Farabundo Martí, a veteran of Augustin Sandino's anti-imperialist war against the US Marines in Nicaragua. Martí escaped arrest and assassination a dozen times prior. The PCS went underground and operated clandestinely. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, regime changes, coups, intensification of coffee production, and soaring prices spurred industrialization. The country's wealthy, land-owning oligarchs partnered more and more with multinational corporations.

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Last winter, you told me you wanted to go to Central America to study Spanish and find comrades. I didn't know then what drove you. I didn't know you felt, perhaps more sharply than I did, the limits of our work in the US. I didn't know your family history. I didn't know your father, a young, naive enlistee, ended up God-knows-where in urban combat he still can't make sense of. I didn't know your grandfather, who died just as you found your voice to challenge him, had been a Green Beret instructor—first at the MACV Recondo School in Vietnam, then at the School of the Americas in Panama, where he trained the Bolivians who eventually captured Che.

My earliest memory of politics is the pockmarked telephone poles and abandoned adobe walls of my mother's hometown in Chalatenango, the northernmost region of El Salvador. I would soon learn that my very birth depended on a chain of events: the day a guerrilla blew up a bridge, the scorn of a demonic paramilitary uncle, narrowly avoided conscription, and countless other contingencies in the tangled stream of history.

Since then, I have walked knowing the earth beneath me might one day tremble with the shock of revolution—that every valley could rise, every mountain flatten, and the rushing current of history could sweep us across this broad, open plain.

We came of age in the long shadow of Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring. We felt the bone-chill of water cannons at Standing Rock, the otherworldly heat from a burning police cruiser. We learned the steady work of building collective infrastructure and doing anti-fascist research. We confronted what we didn't know about making revolution in the US as we tried to keep police out of the forest and comrades out of prison.

All the while, we studied our peers in Hong Kong, Chile, Myanmar, and beyond. We came to see how revolution at home depends on the fate of revolutions abroad, and vice versa. We understood, as clearly as day, the task of forging new connections across borders.

Someone has to do it, we said to ourselves. So, giving each other a nudge, we planned a trip.

I've traveled to El Salvador every year for most of my life, always to visit family. As Bukele's government won favor across the hemisphere, particularly up North, I felt more urgency behind my long-held desire to establish political ties between our comrades in the US and those in El Salvador.



We needed to connect with militants of the historic revolutionary forces of the Civil War and those struggling against Bukele's regime now, to understand their past and present struggles. We hoped to share a bit about our own organizing too.

A few months passed, and we took our task more seriously each passing day. We read books about the history of El Salvador, skimmed articles, studied maps. We booked our flights and bus tickets. You were on your way to Guatemala. I chased cold-calls and half-leads from the Rust Belt while you studied Spanish and established contacts there in Guate. I would meet you in Guatemala City with a sketch of a plan and a voice recorder.

We took the bus together to San Salvador. On our way, we watched volcanic peaks crawl across the horizon as the bus passed by the Cordillera de Apaneca mountain range. The bus hummed through the central plateau to its north and east. Today, the plateau is crisscrossed by a logistics corridor, and the mountains are wrapped in a circuit of domestic tourism attractions. Large warehouses dot the side of the highway against a backdrop of volcanoes. Breweries strung with patio lights nestle into the mountains, many of them gated off. In the flood plains below, housing developments offer the minimum legal definition of a house in exchange for the average value of a subsidized loan from the state. The once-fertile plains, still green with cane, are now a reservoir for the finance capital of the Salvadoran elite and cartel bosses alike.



We'd spend a few days in Apaneca, not far from Juayua, where insurgents seized the town in 1932. Today, the whole place bustled with municipal and retail workers preparing for nightfall. The town was preparing to celebrate the Nativity of Mary, and every town on La Ruta de las Flores would commemorate her birth with a lantern festival. Above the plaza by the church, municipal workers better-accustomed to desks and keyboards teetered on rolling scaffolds as they hung lanterns. They smiled playfully as you took their pictures. As we entered the church, the walls reverberated with the sound of a rambunctious marching band. They're half as numerous as they sound, and about half the height you expected: you're impressed to learn they are schoolchildren. Their sense of rhythm is strong, even if they fall out of order circling the courtyard.

We're on our way to the capitol. Once there, we linger in the plazas, meander through the Historic Center. "What is haunting this place?" you asked me. You don't know it was once the bustling center of El Salvador's informal economy. Then came the regime's forced displacement of street vendors. Now the Historic Center is the crown jewel of Bukele's program of social cleansing.

Squinting through the glare of sun-bleached concrete, we watched uniforms march through the plaza: CAM municipal police with their mall-cop gait, DOM workers tearing up shrubs to widen the pavement, guards posted at the National Palace. That morning, all was quiet. Forty-five years earlier, death squad bombs and bullets rained down on the largest single protest in Latin American history—Oscar Romero's funeral. Dozens died; hundreds were trampled in panic. Four months after we left, a soldier shot a woman dead in the same plaza, in broad daylight. The regime called it an accident. Her blood was quickly power-washed off the concrete, into the news cycle's river of amnesia.

We arrived in Bukele's San Salvador and looked on his works. We set out to find our friends, his enemies.

THE LONG NIGHT (1932-1970)

In the decades following La Matanza, the counterrevolution consolidated its rule over El Salvador. Dictators ruled in succession until 1979. The PCS and other revolutionary factions effectively disappeared. The country's peasants were further crushed by exploitation and repression. Through the '30s-'50s, the national oligarchy concentrated their land holdings and intensified coffee production for export as a cash crop. Land consolidation left many peasants landless, and dependency on coffee exports left the Salvadoran economy vulnerable to volatile commodity prices.

To address these issues by diversifying the economy and employing newly urbanized workers, the reformist and "modernizing" dictatorship of the '60s attempted to industrialize the country via import-substitution. This process coincided with the slow rebirth of the PCS, inspired by the Cuban Revolution in 1959. The party established fledgling experiments in armed struggle, but they never fired a shot in anger. After a decade of heavy repression of labor organizing and electoralism, a minority within the PCS—including their Secretary General, Salvador Cayetano-Carpio—concluded armed struggle was the only path to revolution in El Salvador.

The United States increased its presence in El Salvador. In 1964, the CIA helped establish ORDEN, a Green Beret-trained anti-communist paramilitary organization responsible for some of the worst repression in the country.

¿INDEPENDENCIA PARA QUIÉN?

It's the first Independence Day of Bukele's illegal second term. The sky is a solid sheet of gray. All morning, the echo of drums and fireworks marches through the window. We dress to the rhythmic drumming. Police have cordoned off

the center of town, and an hours-long procession of school children march in uniform down the main boulevard, performing their now-obligatory patriotic routine. This is only the second Independence Day since Bukele gerrymandered 262 Salvadoran municipalities into forty-four new ones, one fifth the previous total. The children's parade routes are now five times as long and twice as muddy, soiling the spectacularly white socks of their regime uniforms as they're paraded throughout the country.

We don't head any deeper into the city to watch the parade. We slip past the police cordon and wait for our ride at the edge of town. Our destination is well north of the Plaza Salvador del Mundo. A few days ago, we shared the plaza with a few young skaters. Today, the crowds are lined up all the way down to Parque Cuscatlán, and they're following the Independence Day parade route down the Alameda Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Our driver rolls his eyes at the spectacle and keeps us far clear of the Salvadoran special forces' parade floats and the helicopter airshow. The streets were cleared out by the holiday, devoid of vehicle and pedestrian traffic. We make it to our destination in record time.

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The Director opens the door promptly, greeting us with a warm smile. We brought sweet breads to share: *salpores, viejitas, semita, peperechas*, the works. The Director teases me for having the Salvadoran trait of being a *pandulcero* and puts on the coffee pot.

The President steps out from her office and greets us as well: "Can I offer either of you some water? Let me get that for you. . .Please, pull up a seat."

We sit down with our water and coffee, each pulling out a notebook and pen. We hit record on the voice recorder and begin.

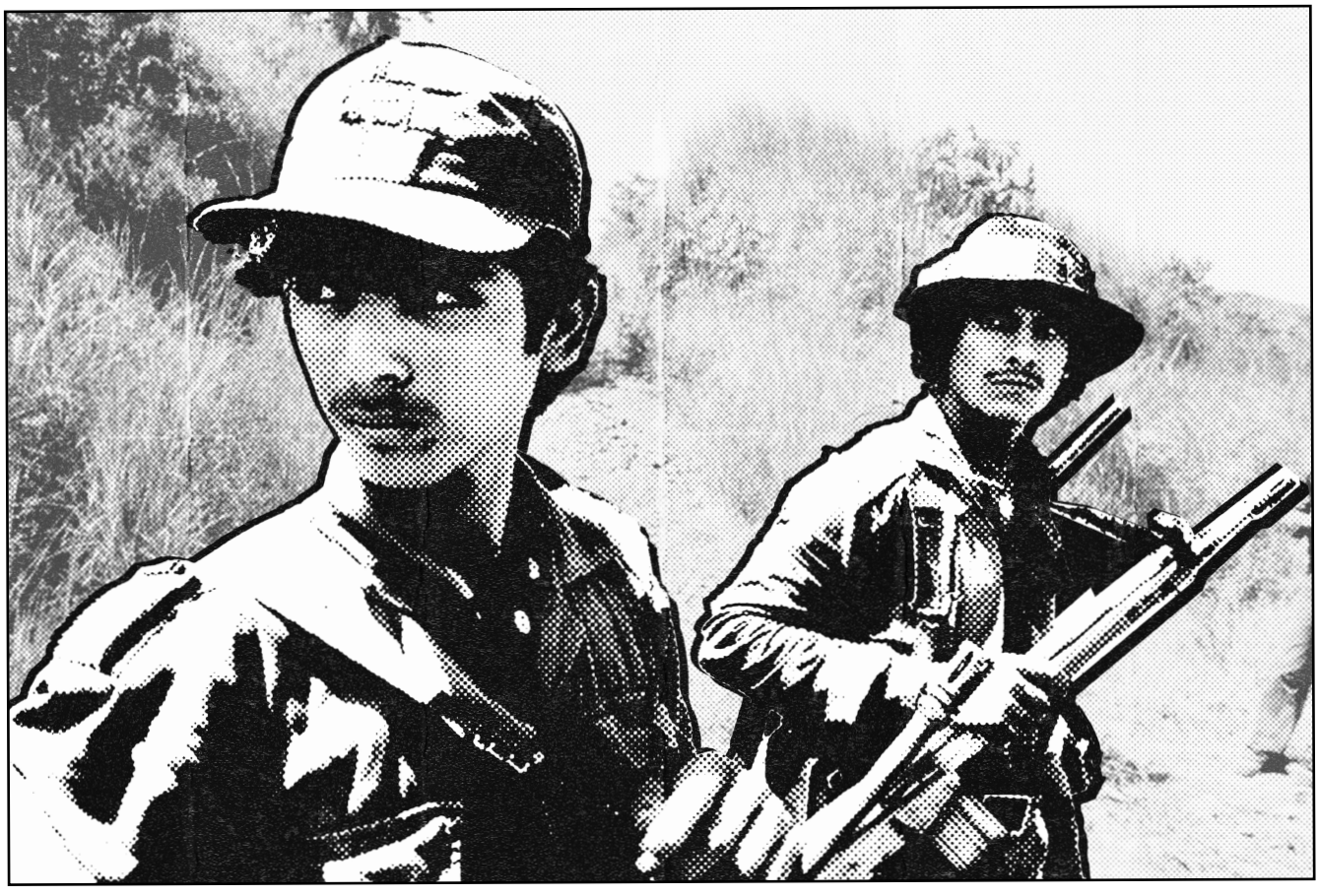
"How long has it been? It feels like you were just here!"

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Some months ago, we met The Foundation for the first time. We knew of them through their publications, including one impressive overview of guerrilla medic operations during the war. It is packed with dozens of interviews with former guerrillas, including internationalists. It took four people, in total, relaying messages from us, to put us directly in touch.

We rang the bell of a heavy metal door. A student volunteer peeked through the small glass lookout, opened the door for us, and led us to a nondescript waiting area in the front of the building. Some older men were wrapping up a meeting center room. The Director came out, showered us in warm greetings, and showed us around: "Here is the book display of our publications, here is our mock up of an underground broadcasting bunker for Radio Farabundo Martí, our main meeting room is also an exhibition space. . ."

In the main room, two ex-guerrillas of the Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí (FPL) are tagging photos from the Civil War for their archive. They project the photos on the wall.



Robert Nickelsberg, "Two guerrillas from the Farabundo Martí Popular Liberation Forces (FPL) watch a low-flying Salvadoran military observation plane near the Guazapa volcano on the road to Suchitoto, El Salvador, on Oct. 21, 1983"

"This girl and that boy got married during the war. See how the boy is not wearing any socks? Imagine roughing the mountains in no socks! This child begged to fight when his parents were killed. We couldn't hold him back. He threw himself headlong into the frontlines."

They see us looking on. We exchange introductions. They recognize my surname and show us photos from the plaza at the center of my mother's hometown in Chalatenango. They turn to you, and jest at your fair skin and clear eyes: "What part of Chalate are you from?"

We take our seats. The Director pulls out her notebook and puts on her glasses. At first, we have a difficult time explaining who we are and why we are there. We find ourselves clarifying we are neither journalists nor students. You joke that you hope history will not call us activists, either. We settle in, grow more candid with her.

"The people of El Salvador were not wrong to think they could win a revolution," you tell her. "It would have taken a proportionate crisis in the US." Her posture relaxes, and for a moment, the room is silent. She gives us a knowing smile.

THE FUERZAS POPULARES DE LIBERACIÓN FARABUNDO MARTÍ (FPL)

We're back at The Foundation for the fifth time, a few months later. Our last time, we presented on the long arc of US social movements and rebellions since the Occupy movement. This time we had a chance to see the archives. You pull out a box, and from that box, the internal organizational chart of the FPL, written in pen on now-delicate paper.

"You have a strong intuition for where you'll find the good documents," The President tells you.

Of the five politico-military organizations that would constitute the FMLN, the FPL was the first. The FPL was founded by the Secretary General of the PCS, Salvador Cayetano-Carpio, on April 1, 1970, marking a split from the PCS. Its founding strategy advocated for prolonged people's war against American imperialism, drawing from the Vietnamese example, adapting it to the Salvadoran and Central American context. The FPL contrasted their strategy to focoismo, the strategy advocated by Che Guevara.

The FPL operated under a method of *trabajo compartimentados* (compartmentalized work) in which members lived clandestinely under pseudonyms, organized in cells and small agencies working independently, and knew no more than necessary about the going-ons of other cells. The method of compartmentalized work allowed the FPL to develop operational and strategic continuity while evading political repression as the organization matured.

The FPL did not believe small, clandestine cells could win a revolution. Instead, this period was the first stage of organization en route to a popular war. The link between the mass movement and the armed wing was fundamental to their theory. The FPL formed clandestine *grupos de apoyo*, or support groups, that directly supported the armed component while intervening in mass struggles.

In August 1972, the FPL released their first proclamation and activated their commando units. The commandos bombed the Argentinian Embassy in San Salvador. Soon, commandos reorganized into militias. By 1976, the militias were once again reorganized, this time into local guerrilla units. The guerrilla units would go on to form a mobile regular army.

"This book is about my sister," The Director told us, as she stood behind the glass case of books and gestured at a stack of some of the older books on display.

She tells us her sister and two other comrades were some of the first martyrs of the FPL in its urban guerrilla phase. They were responsible for a safe house in Santa Tecla. One day, the house was besieged by the Salvadoran Army. They fought for eleven hours, enough time to burn identifying documents and other materials that would risk the lives and freedom of other FPL members. Knowing they would not make it out of the house alive, they took their own lives. Their deaths became part of the FPL's internal mythology.

Our conversation drifted with overflowing excitement. You asked if we could look through the archives; we were hoping to find documents with captivating graphics to scan and reproduce for a fundraiser. First we went for the box of *El Rebelde*, the internal ideological organ. "I used to have a huge stack of *El Rebelde*", The Director said. "My father burned all of them."

We fished out an organizational chart from a few years before the war. The President exclaimed that she had goosebumps. She recalled those years, when the FPL sent fifty militants to Cuba to receive military training and form the core of the popular army back home. Then Sandinistas launched their insurrection in 1979. The FPL debated how to respond.

"Were you one of the twenty-five who went to Cuba, then Nicaragua?" you asked her.

"Me!" she exclaimed. "Of course!"

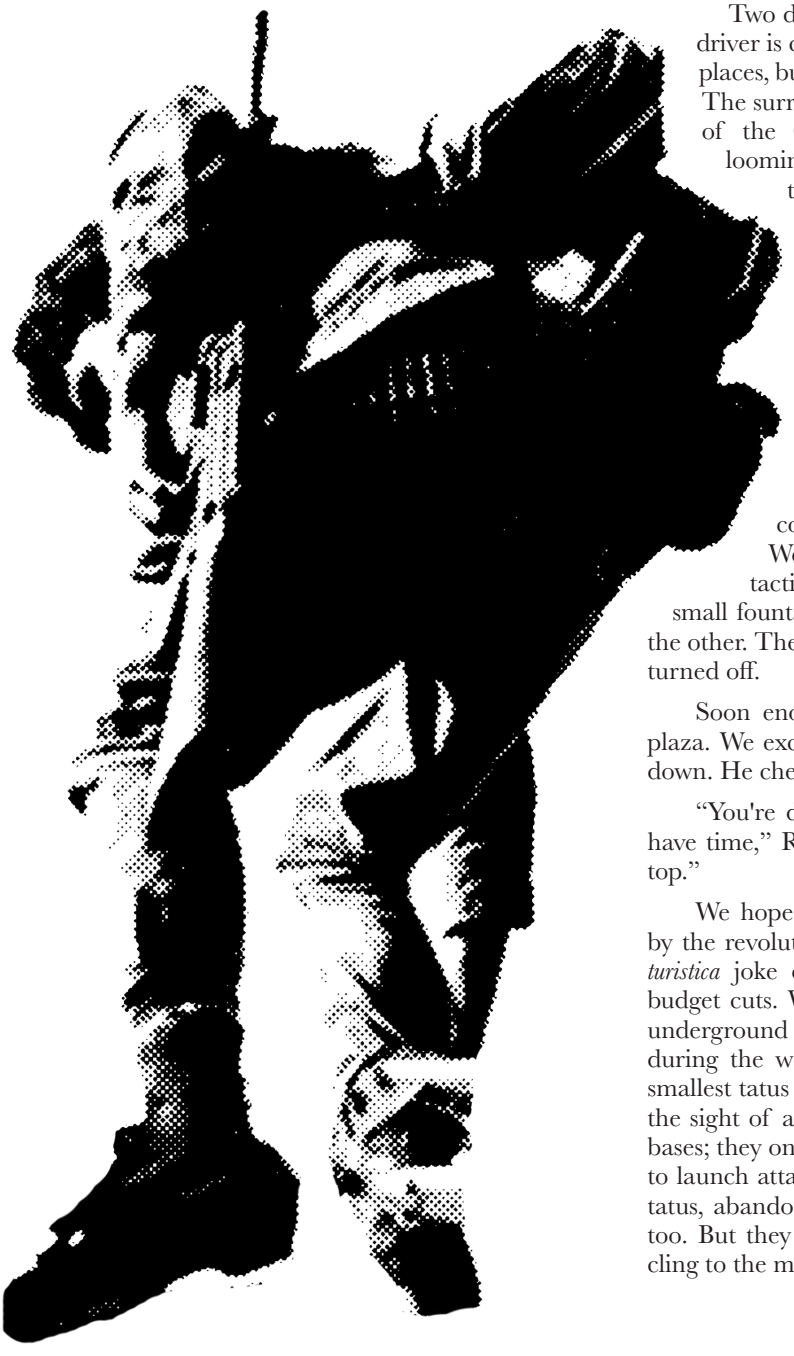
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The popular mass movement arm of the FPL, *Bloque Popular Revolucionario* (Revolutionary People's Block, BPR), was founded in 1975. Between 1979 and 1980, the BPR was the largest and most combative politico-military organization in the country, with an estimated 60,000 members.

Meanwhile, in the US, repression against Central American solidarity movements marked a novel reconfiguration of collaboration and information-sharing between the FBI and CIA. The CIA solicited forged intelligence materials from Salvadoran intelligence agencies and the National Guard of El Salvador, one of the most repressive law enforcement agencies in the world at that time. The CIA then passed those documents along to the FBI. The FBI, in turn, shared intelligence with a secret network of right-wing Salvadorans, located in Miami, who gathered information on left-wing Salvadorans fleeing to the US.

PART TWO: "NEGOTIATED REVOLUTION"

And the United States'
President's more
my country's President
than my country's President is...
—Roque Dalton, "OAS" (1970)



A few weeks before we left for El Salvador, we happened across *In the Name of the People*, a 1985 documentary in which four filmmakers sneak into El Salvador in the midst of the Civil War and document a group of guerrillas as they head for Guazapa to launch an offensive on the capital. We were a short drive from Guazapa with an open day on our itinerary. A few online search queries later, we found a phone number associated with the Museo de Guazapa. With no guarantees of a response, you message the number. The recipient responds: the museum project was abandoned before it could open due to the "adverse political situation" in El Salvador. They offer to show us around Guazapa anyway.

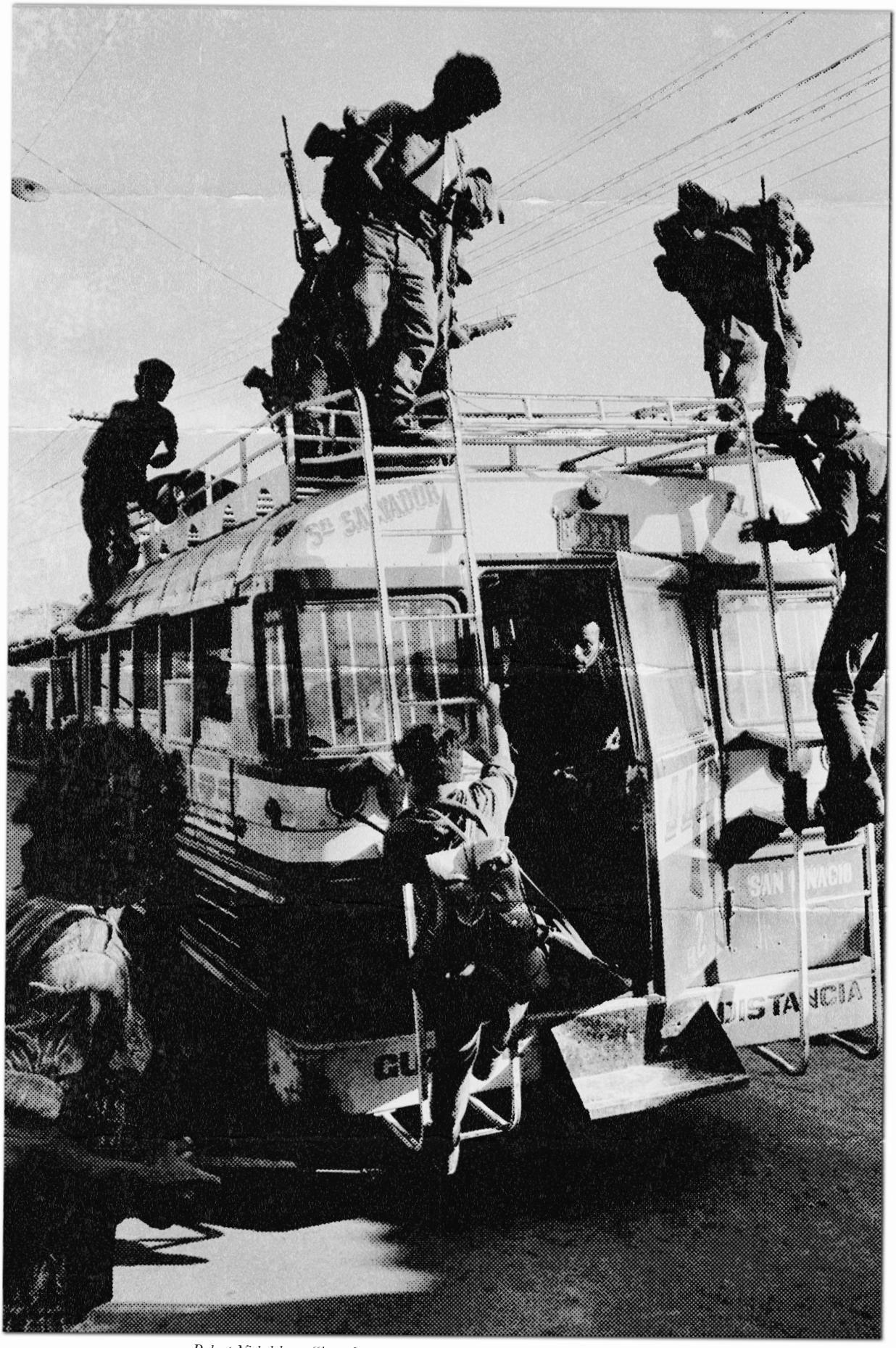
Two days later, we're in a car on our way there. Our driver is confused why we want to go to Guazapa, of all places, but he drops us off near the central plaza anyway. The surrounding roads all seem to converge at the base of the Cerro Guazapa, the long-dormant volcano looming over the town. The central plaza sits no larger than a gas station. There must be a hundred people bustling about: families leaving the nearby church collect themselves on the benches; children and teenagers sit on the waist-high stone retention walls eating lunch and talking with their friends. A street vendor on the corner mans a table of tactical gear and toy guns. You spot a hot pink balaclava fitted over the head of a mannequin and try to imagine the best occasion to wear one.

Tunnels of vine-covered arches mark each corner of the plaza. They converge in the center. We enter the archway closest to the table of tactical gear. Where the paths converge, there is a small fountain, three ceramic pots stacked one on top of the other. The fountain is dry. The water has long since been turned off.

Soon enough, our guide calls. He has arrived at the plaza. We exchange introductions. His eyes scan us up and down. He checks his watch.

"You're dressed for a hike up the cerro, but we won't have time," Roberto tells you. "It's a four hour hike to the top."

We hoped to traverse the real trails of the cerro used by the revolutionary combatants of the Civil War, not that *turistica* joke of a trail that's fallen into disrepair due to budget cuts. We wanted to climb into one of the *tatus*, the underground bunkers and tunnels used by revolutionaries during the war, inspired by those of the Viet Cong. The smallest tatus are narrow bomb shelters one can dive into at the sight of air assets. The largest tatus are proper military bases; they once hosted the guerrilla infrastructure necessary to launch attacks on the US-backed Salvadoran Army. The tatus, abandoned since the end of the war, are languishing too. But they persist. Much like their old inhabitants, they cling to the mountainside with stories to tell.



Robert Nickelsberg, "Armed guerrillas from the Fuerzas Populares de Liberacion, FPL, disembark from a passenger bus in La Palma, El Salvador, February 6, 1983"



"They say that during the war the Guazapa Cerro was *la flecha en el corazón del enemigo* (the arrow in the heart of the enemy)," Roberto tells us. "But in truth, we used to say it was *la flecha en el culo del enemigo* (the arrow in the asshole of the enemy)."

Roberto grew up on the Cerro Guazapa, and the Civil War began when he was only four years old. His family fled, like many others, from the mountain into the town. "I was too young to fight," he says. "But I would have if I was just a few years older."

As we round the corner, we tell Roberto a bit about ourselves and what brought us to Guazapa. His face lights up.

"Many ex-combatants are gathered in Guazapa today for a meeting," he says. "Let's see if they will speak with you."

BALANCE OF FORCES

On November 11, 1989, days after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the FMLN launched its final offensive, the *Offensiva Hasta el Tope*. After twenty years of armed struggle and ten years of open civil war, revolutionaries brought an armed offensive into the urban core of the capital for the first time. In an echo of 1932 and 1981, revolutionaries again sought to foment a general insurrection. Because of unanticipated massive aerial bombardment of proletarian neighborhoods and weaknesses in their urban organizing, the FMLN did not achieve this goal. Without a general insurrection, despite their brave fighting, the guerrilla army could not militarily collapse the Salvadoran Army.

For the Salvadoran armed forces, the offensive proved that despite practically limitless yankee cash and arms, they had not eroded the guerrilla capacity to organize a massive attack. Brutal repression of the population was a double-edged sword that encouraged more resistance than supplication, and the state's incomplete implementation of American-backed reforms did not effectively undercut the economic grievances that motivated the struggle. Thus, a military victory in either direction seemed impossible, and the consensus between the guerrilla leadership and the mass movement aspired to find a political solution and peace.

At this time, the socialist bloc, serving as the international rearguard of the FMLN, came apart at the seams. The FMLN could not entirely rely on domestic bases of operation and logistics, and the socialist countries supported the FMLN's military advances with arms, training, and intelligence. In 1979, fifty FPL combatants went to Cuba for training in order to then become the core of the FPL armed forces. In Nicaragua, when the 1978-1979 offensive to overthrow the Somoza regime reached a critical juncture, twenty-five FPL combatants formed the Farabundo Martí internationalist brigade, departed from Cuba, and went on to participate in the final blow against Somoza. With the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) well established in Nicaragua, the FMLN could count on Managua as a headquarters for their military operations and the Nicaraguan territory as a steady logistical corridor for arms shipments from far-flung allies. By 1989, this arrangement collapsed.

On October 18, 1989, Honduran soldiers interdicted a van loaded with Soviet-made small arms en route from Nicaragua to the FMLN. Such shipments had long been suspected by American intelligence, but this was the first one to be publicly known. The revelation inconvenienced Soviet diplomatic efforts to improve relations with the United States; the US State Department summoned Soviet ambassador Yuri Dubinin to answer for the van-load of rifles. Only a visit from the Soviet Foreign Office Chief on Latin America, Yuri Pavlov, could smooth things over. But, on November 25, 1989, weeks into the final offensive, a plane carrying surface-to-air missiles bound for the FMLN crashed in Salvadoran territory.



Up to this point, the Salvadoran Army retained air-superiority; they had uncontested capacity to operate aircraft over Salvadoran territory, which allowed them to helicopter quick reaction forces and bombs deep into guerrilla territory. While the FMLN did develop sophisticated and novel techniques for using small arms to shoot down rotary-wing aircraft, without these missiles, they could not turn the tide of the war; thus, the missiles were sufficient threat to Salvadoran-US interests to trigger diplomatic action from the US.

Soviet diplomats feared the missile incident would threaten the Malta Summit between President Bush and Gorbachev set for December 2. While the summit went as planned, US Secretary of State James Baker demanded the Soviets take action to prevent Cuban and Nicaraguan rearmament of the FMLN immediately.

Two days later, Moscow ordered a freighter laden with four helicopters bound for Nicaragua to immediately return to port in Leningrad. Additionally, the Sandinistas, preparing for an election in February of the following year, requested emergency funds from the Soviets in order to provide consumer goods to Nicaraguans. To pressure the Nicaraguans into compliance, the Soviets denied this aid.

On December 12, at the Central American summit in San Isidro, Costa Rica, President Ortega of the FSLN repudiated the FMLN, signing a declaration demanding that the FMLN immediately cease hostilities and endorsing the existing Salvadoran government. The Sandinistas publicly buckled under combined American-Soviet pressure, sending a clear message to the world: the Salvadorans were now on their own.

GUAZAPA: LA FLECHA EN EL CORAZÓN DEL ENEMIGO

We climb the stairs up to the FMLN party house. A few ex-combatants leave, but most linger, talking to each other, rallying children. Roberto ushers us into the pavilion. Four women greet us, inviting us to pull up chairs. Four more ex-combatants pull up chairs, then another five. A circle forms beneath a floor-to-ceiling mural of Oscar Romero. A disco ball hangs from the rafters above his head, glimmering in the sunlight. One of the men introduces himself by his nom de guerre: Fernando.

"I'm giving you my pseudonym for safety reasons. We're still in the game," he says, winking.

We thought we'd be a quarter of the way up the Guazapa Cerro by now, but the mountains here make their own plans. We're not prepared to interview a dozen or more ex-combatants, but we know where to start. You pull out a Zoom recorder. We introduce ourselves and hit record.

"Some of us joined the guerrilla not because we were brave, but to save our own lives," says Ana María. Ana María is the oldest ex-combatant at the meeting. She joined the FPL in 1975, one year before The Director's sister and her husband sacrificed their lives defending the safe house in Santa Tecla.

"All of the women here are our comrades who lived in San Vicente, where we were during the war. But when it ended, we didn't have the courage to go back to live where we had our land. We had to go to another place where no one knew us to start anew. It doesn't mean you forget your roots because you fought. But you know that where you lived there are people who would probably kill you if you returned. After the peace agreements, many comrades were killed."

Ana María's son, René, is an adult now and he brings his elderly mother to ex-combatants' meetings. Born near the close of the war, René's childhood took place against the backdrop of the Peace Accords process. As an adult, he witnessed first-hand the neutralizing effect the Accords had on political organizations and the disillusionment of surviving guerrillas within the FMLN.

"The government itself, the politicians in power, encourage crime," René tells us. "They start asking for help to fight crime, to fight drug trafficking, to fight everything. And what kind of help do they need? Many millions of dollars in loans. For that, they need to have a population full of criminals, or at least to create that image in front of everyone. After the war, they encouraged crime because they needed resources. Gangs were used politically this way because the politicians were friends with the criminals. In the end, that money was going to end up in all of their hands."

"The revolutionary struggle governed as a political party," Fernando adds. "In the end, I would call this a mistake."

He notes that President Nayib Bukele came of age in the same post-war youth movement as Ana María's son and another man at the meeting. Once in power, the FMLN did not abandon previous regimes' strategy of leveraging gangs, social violence, and policing as a method of social control. Instead, the party developed treaties with gangs and oversaw a major escalation in police militarization.

"In the end, the process of struggle created fear. Yes, that process [of continuing the revolutionary struggle as a political party] was carried out using gangs," says Fernando.

"The State of Exception has not benefited us. The regime was built to confront the gangs. Many people were wrong about that. The State of Exception is not against gangs, it is against us, against the people. Gangs are obviously against the law. So, [the soldiers and police] go, they capture them, they put them in prison. But the State of Exception is against the people. Now, if we were to organize ourselves, they would take us away for illegal association. They'd put us in jail for illegal association. And we would be locked up under the State of Exception. So, what does that mean? That they don't allow us to organize."

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Ana María must leave before the others. Her trek home is a long one, and she needs to be back before dark. She takes your hand and holds it between her palms. The decades have left marks like contours of mountains on the back of her hands.

"Look, *jovenes*, when you come back, I can welcome you to my community," she says. "I can organize the people there so that you can engage with them however you want. I'll be waiting for you whenever you want to visit. We'll gather people so that they know we have to take to the streets, and that we have to take to the streets of other places, too."

Fernando rests his arm on your shoulder. He looks you in the eye and asks, "Do you understand what we mean by *compa*?"

"Yes, I think so," you say, your eyes tearing up.

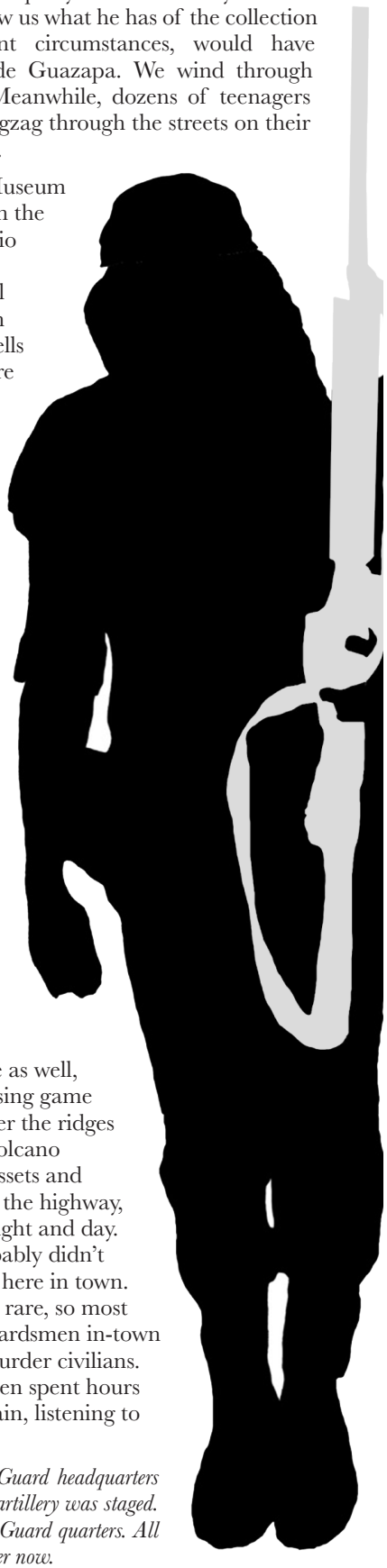
"Thank you, compas," he says, hugging us both. "Come back with your friends. We'll see what crazy shit we can stir up."

He casts you a mischievous smile. He gestures as though he's holding a rifle at his waist, then fires it twice into the air.

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We left the FMLN party house in a buoyant daze. Roberto offers to show us what he has of the collection that, under different circumstances, would have seeded the Museo de Guazapa. We wind through Guazapa together. Meanwhile, dozens of teenagers in school uniforms zigzag through the streets on their way home for dinner.

The Guazapa Museum is four moldy boxes in the corner of an art studio and workshop, piled between a heavy steel door and a well-worn drill press. Roberto tells us projects like this are languishing all over this humid, paper-moldering country. The Bukele administration has pulled funding for historical memory projects, especially those preserving the memory of the Civil War.



Leaning on the pile of boxes is a chintzy katana, the promotion gift of some National Guard officer. Less than thirty kilometers from San Salvador, Guazapa was unusually close to the capital for a guerrilla base. It had the dishonor of hosting an army base as well, making for an unceasing game of cat-and-mouse over the ridges and crevices of the volcano during the war. Air assets and artillery criss-crossed the highway, bombing the cerro night and day. The guardsmen probably didn't fight many guerrillas here in town. Attacks in town were rare, so most of the business of guardsmen in-town was to repress and murder civilians. Perhaps the guardsmen spent hours staring at the mountain, listening to the thunder above.

Here is where the Guard headquarters was. There is where the artillery was staged. Down this way was the Guard quarters. All of that has been built over now.



In the top right of the pile sits a box full of photographs depicting guerrillas. One photo shows a squad moving through a field crouched and camouflaged in the same grasses that grew all around them on the cerro. These were the Fuerzas Armadas de la Resistencia Nacional (FARN) special forces in training. Displayed together, they could make a fine introduction to guerrilla special forces as a unique innovation of the FMLN. Another glance, and you feel the hot wind blowing across the plains around the mountain, rustling the tufts of grass on their backs. They are wordless and tense, frozen mid-step towards the capital.

There are some familiar faces in the box: Comandante Schafik Hándal, center in a row of other stiff-backed leaders; left-wing TV-journalist Mauricio Funes, leaning to camera, thrusting his microphone forward into a table of *dirigentes*. If you told any of the men in the photographs which of these two men would lead the FMLN as the elected president of the republic, you'd be laughed straight out of the tatu.

After digging through the prints, our eyes wander over the remaining boxes. You paw halfheartedly at the jutting eagle-head pommel of a rusty combat machete, but it has nothing to say.

Across the street, we're treated to some coffee and sweetbreads in a humble café. As I dip my salpor into a cup of coffee, the baker chuckles, "You're eating that salpor like a Chalateco." A curious boy can't help but stare from behind a doorway; he warmly returns a smile and greeting. A gentle rain comes in, pattering down the leaves of a tree from which Roberto refuses to trim a single branch.

Leaving Guazapa, we're caught in traffic. Ahead of us the whole way, there is a gang of soldiers hitchhiking in the bed of a bright red pickup. They are all smiles, bantering and scrolling on their phones. You're sure one of them must be playing Candy Crush. Their patches make it clear; these are 4th Infantry Brigade, stationed at *El Paraiso*, once the lamentation of many a Green Beret.

The driver drops off the soldiers at a mechanic shop at the edge of town. Locals have likely seen this scene before. It has been a while since guerrillas have overrun El Paraiso, a long time since a guerrilla made their nest in the tall trees overlooking town.

PEACE ACCORDS

FMLN leadership signed the Peace Accords on January 16, 1992. International headlines announced an exemplary "negotiated revolution." A ceasefire followed two weeks later. The FMLN disarmed. Thousands of ex-combatants surrendered their weapons. Ex-comandantes and government officials traveled the world, preemptively declaring the success of the negotiations: liberal democracy had finally arrived in El Salvador, sixty years after La Matanza. The FMLN transitioned from an insurgent political-military organization into an electoral party.

Many insurgents remained hesitant to turn in their weapons. Death squads continued to conduct political assassinations against FMLN members, killing an estimated twenty-four people before the Peace Accords reached their second anniversary. Assassins targeted another one hundred people in that same period. Party officials defended the Peace Accords while skepticism spread among rank-and-filers and mid-level cadre. *Did the costs of the war justify the compromises taking place?*

Two guerrilla commanders, Francisco Velis ("Miguel Hernández") and Heleno Hernán Castro ("Carmelo"), were murdered in October 1993. President Cristiani denounced the murders, but he did little by way of investigation. The killers were never identified.

At Carmelo's funeral, ERP leader Joaquín Villalobos warned the press that these assassinations could heighten the indignation of the Salvadoran people and disrupt the already tenuous trust in the peace process. "I can't tell our people to trust the peace process with three deaths a week," he said. "Some sectors of the FMLN itself could react against the party's line to stay calm and act on their own."

A few days later, forty people dawning FMLN bandanas burned tires and graffitied the building of *El Diario de Hoy*. They accused the paper's director of being the spokesperson of the death squads.

The Salvadoran Revolutionary Front (FRS), who identified themselves as mid-level FMLN commanders acting independently of party leadership, sent a communique to national television channels following the small rebellion. The FRS charged the members of the oligarchy with promoting the death squads. They warned that the business magnates and their fancy homes in the wealthy neighborhoods of San Salvador would become military targets if the assassinations continued.



Robert Nickelsberg, "A guerrilla from the Ejerecito Revolucionario del Pueblo, ERP, stands on the street as black smoke rises during combat with government security forces in San Miguel, El Salvador, September 1, 1983"

THE FATE OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Elena leans into the table, "Where is class consciousness in the postwar period? It doesn't exist. What exists is the blurring of a whole host of needs, supposedly unique to each person, that cannot be resolved by a comprehensive solution. In peace, we see this fragmentation of interests. Fragmentation: that's the postwar period in this country. Not only in this country but all over the world. It's an international agenda."

"What has turned everything upside down and fragmented class interests?" you ask.

"Imperialism—under which we are still dominated," she answers.

"I will take it upon myself to sound like a dinosaur because I use the word imperialism. The thing is, they banned us from NGOs, they banned us from speaking in revolutionary terms. They came here and they established a different language. They turned feminism, which was a movement of respect for human beings, into an individual interest, turned feminism into a trend: liberal feminism, feminism for civil rights. And thus, feminism cannot be revolutionary, and a man cannot be a feminist."

Before and during the war, politico-military organizations and the mass movements often worked in concert. For example, the first offensive of 1981 coincided with large strike actions. To foment a general insurrection, support groups bridged the gaps between mass groups and the guerrillas. During the war, the constant threat of bombardment and attack by the Salvadoran Army contributed to widespread deferral to, and dependence on, the military units of the FMLN by poor Salvadorans. The FMLN often warned people of imminent attacks and provided instructions for evacuation. This effectively established a chain of command that persisted after the war's end.

"After the war, the dependency intensified," Miguel, an ex-combatant, told us. "The government began to co-opt all of the social movements."

Many Salvadorans wanted stability and peace after years of fighting. The FMLN did not have a program for social and economic change following the war. The social movements, which once generated their own platforms and demands, became thoroughly dependent on the FMLN throughout the latter half of the war. The grassroots struggles, which should have produced the vision of a free El Salvador, no longer possessed the means to do so creatively.

"In other words, [in the post-war era], the FMLN had a commission for relations with social movements. This commission was not a relationship of respect between organizations but rather dependency," Miguel said. "A dependency that did not allow the movement to generate its own social demands."

Many ex-combatants who survived the war grew critical of FMLN leadership. Countless veterans of the historic FMLN were purged from its ranks.

"Many veterans were critical and kept saying things the electoral FMLN did not consider correct within the party—to such an extent that they drove us out of the party en masse. People saw that the FMLN became abusive of their power. People started saying, 'Damn, they've abandoned their own comrades. They kicked you out of the party without any explanation.' When you ask them why they kicked you out, they didn't give you an explanation, even though you were one of the founders."



Robert Nickelsberg, "Two members of the Fuerzas Populares de Liberacion, FPL, pose for a picture near Santa Anita, Chalatenango department, El Salvador, February 23 1981. Salvadoran women were present in all levels of leadership in guerrilla organizations, constituting their significant incorporation into the political struggle. An estimated 30% of the full force of the FMLN was comprised of women."

PART THREE: BUKELE'S BRIGADES



It's a summer night, and the heat lightning is exploding over Apopa, painting the sky purple. We order three pupusas each and make small talk with the waiter. He glances over my shoulder. There are four soldiers patrolling the street. A small boy, no older than two, the son of one of the women who cooks here, points at them and cries out. The waiter swings the boy to his hip and rushes to the street. As the soldiers pass, he shouts, "Get out of here! Fuck off!" while bouncing the boy on his hip. As the waiter taunts the soldiers, the young boy shrieks with laughter.

The next day, we're lingering on the street corner near the *pupuseria*, waiting on a car, when another gang of soldiers approaches. The soldiers stare long enough at the woman flipping pupusas for her to know they will not be paying for their meal. She turns her head toward you, rolling her eyes: *Do you see?* You lift your sunglasses, return her knowing glance, and roll your eyes at the soldiers. The eyes know no language barriers.

El Salvador is overrun with brigades. The streets teem with gangs of soldiers walking about in groups of two, six, ten. They have their patrol routes, routines, and tasks. Some patrol with long guns. Groups of prisoners, on release to do public works, also line the streets and plazas of the country. Two arms of the regime, extended across the territory, molding and shaping public space, ordering it.

The soldiers are the more obvious and jarring presence. Young, soft-looking enlistees, children really. In combat uniforms, wielding hand-me-down M16A1s and A2s. The newly purchased Israeli Galils make up a decent chunk of Salvadoran arms imports, but they must be reserved for elite units and those guys wearing capes who stand at attention during Bukele's speeches. They amble to-and-fro around town, popping into stores, squeezing a free meal out of some pupuserias; after years of constant presence, they don't raise the temperature much.

In the early years of *Bukelismo*, they were certainly overzealous. They still confronted gangs in possession of actual territory. Moreover, the communities were as yet unaccustomed to the omnipresence of soldiers. The soldiers likewise did not yet understand the task assigned to them, and they exploited every opportunity they found to assert themselves. They encircled and occupied rough towns like Apopa with checkpoints in and out. They brought in police and soldiers from other towns. They transformed the municipal skate park into a barracks. In the middle of town, police officers stripped middle-class business owners down to their tattoos in plain view of their shop windows. The destitute and disposable were beaten in the street. This, however, was mostly a show of force.

The real regime was on the outskirts of town, in the *colonias*, previously under total gang control. The extraordinary claim that the State of Exception reestablished freedom of movement throughout the territory was not entirely true. Yes, gang boundaries that once cut neighborhoods in half were no more, and middle-class journalists could now go where they pleased. But come curfew hour in the peripheral areas, working-class residents faced ID checks and interrogations by soldiers. Mothers, who had to traverse town at odd hours for work, planned and requested their rides carefully. Their young sons' psyches wilted and broke under the daily gaze and questioning of the patrols.

Things have settled down a bit with the years; they've all gotten a bit more accustomed to each other, accustomed to this slow, quiet rout.

MARAS & POLICING

Mano Dura (2003) and Super Mano Dura (2004-2009) were the official ARENA (Nationalist Republican Alliance) responses to the gang problems created in the decade after the war. Ostensibly, these were tough-on-crime policies meant to weaken the gangs. In practice, the Mano Dura policies resulted in increases in short, arbitrary detentions of suspected gang members, who then gained further control of the prison system and developed more sophisticated organization. In 2012, under the first FMLN administration, the state arranged the first gang truce in El Salvador. In return for further benefits and autonomy behind bars, gangs reduced the homicide rate (by disguising their murders as disappearances).

Additionally, police were given orders not to patrol in neighborhoods under gang control. The truce showed that gangs were an independent political force in El Salvador, capable of manifesting their own interests and influence. The gang truce broke down in 2014 with the second FMLN administration, the first administration led by an ex-guerilla, Salvador Sánchez Cerén. The Sánchez administration further militarized the police by initiating joint police-military deployments and forming joint police-military anti-gang units. As a result, 2015 was the most violent year in El Salvador since the war.

Throughout these years, police death squads operated in collaboration with authorities. One such paramilitary group, Halcón 32, committed ninety-seven contract murders in and around the roughly twenty thousand person town of San Luis Talpa, some at the behest of a mayor, others for a local drug trafficker. The death squads helped local authorities eliminate competition in illicit business.

THE RISE OF BUKELE

"GOOD DAY. PLEASE OPEN YOUR DOORS AND WINDOWS, COVER YOUR FOOD AND DRINKING WATER, AND VACATE YOUR HOME FOR THE NEXT THIRTY MINUTES. WE ARE FUMIGATING THE NEIGHBORHOOD."

We awoke to the crackling voice of a man speaking through hell's own megaphone. The fumigation brigade let themselves in through the iron gate separating the alley from the main street. They quickly get to work fogging the entire alley. We are able to get a glimpse of them through the window. They're uniformed in the typical bright Dirección de Obras Municipales (DOM) T-shirts, with the same slick branding you always see: a clean modern logo, the updated "Gobierno de El Salvador" crest. They go up and down the alley with motorized foggers. The other brigades, while less immediately obvious, are not always so subtle either.



The regime has revamped and stood up new ministries in the last few years. Notably, DOM and MOPT (Ministry of Public Works and Transportation). Both participate in well-branded public works, clearly indicated with signage both during and after the work itself. The workers, deployed in brigades to job sites, are uniformed in new, brightly colored printed shirts. Projects include new highways to nowhere, tourist beach clean-ups, and anti-mosquito fumigation campaigns. The workforce for these ambitious and well-publicized works is, however, not military brigades. These are brigades of *reos en fase de confianza*—prisoners on work release.

The State of Exception and the skyrocketed prison population have secured the state a substantial labor pool in a country with low productivity that constantly bleeds its "skilled labor" to the North. Just this year, MOPT secured funding for another three thousand tracking bracelets for its work release program. Rumors abound. The national identification card (DUI) has a field for profession. Several people tell us that proletarian Salvadorans who are at the mercy of the regime are far more likely to be picked up if their DUI says they are a welder, carpenter, or other skilled laborer.

Dissidents in El Salvador have long learned to be wary of the state and even their own neighbors; first under the military dictatorship, then the many diffuse regimes of street gangs. Now, they also fear the intrusion of prisoner brigades into workplaces and residences. The regime gives a fumigator or municipal laborer on work release every incentive to snitch on politically sensitive matters, whether it's to improve their own lot or avoid brutal consequences.

NURTURING GANGS

In 2012, shortly before Sánchez's anti-gang war, political marketer and advertiser, Nayib Bukele, joined his client party, the FMLN, and was elected mayor of Nuevo Cuscatlán. At the height of the Sánchez crackdown, in 2015, he was elected Mayor of San Salvador. While the highest levels of government were not actively negotiating with gangs under Sánchez, lesser and local actors did. Bukele used a network of handlers to negotiate control of the capital. He gave warnings before policing actions and offered preferential access and control of community assistance programs to gangs in return for cooperation with public order, gentrification, election campaigning and other such favors. During the 2014-2019 anti-gang war, San Salvador was a redoubt for the gangs, and Bukele independently cultivated their loyalty. When the FMLN expelled Bukele in 2017, he and the gangs had a shared interest in unseating the FMLN and installing Bukele as president. Bukele was a proven benefactor and partner of the infamous San Salvador gangs.

Street gangs went on to interfere in FMLN and ARENA attempts to campaign in working-class neighborhoods. In the lead-up to the 2019 election, they pressured family members and neighbors to vote for Bukele. They threatened and confiscated the DUIs of anyone who intended to vote otherwise.

CONSOLIDATION OF STATE POWER

On February 9, 2020—not one year into his presidency—Bukele sent forty soldiers, armed in plate carriers and helmets, to occupy the floor of the Legislative Assembly, pressuring the legislature to approve a $100 million loan from the US for security spending. Bukele's administration issued a state of emergency the following month. This enabled them to enact the strictest COVID-19 lockdown in the hemisphere. Police filled the prison-like quarantine centers with curfew-breakers. For months, authorities only allowed residents two weekly trips for food. In much of the country, restrictions on movement were enforced by military omnipresence. In San Salvador's poorest neighborhoods, which have the highest rates of informal employment, the government delegated lockdown enforcement and distribution of emergency aid to the gangs, long accustomed to monitoring and restricting the movements of their neighbors.

In anticipation of the February 2021 legislative elections, Bukele's arrangement of mutual support with the gangs continued. Nuevas Ideas—his political party—swept the legislature. In May 2021, the legislature voted to purge the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court was the last legal check on Bukele's power; the previous year, it struck down unconstitutional use of the military and arbitrary COVID detentions. Bukele had consolidated power across the entire government.

For Independence Day, September 15, 2021, many social movements convened the largest protest against Bukele to this day. They held a series of large marches over the next month. In October 2021, the Nuevas Ideas legislature passed a ban on public gatherings, citing increases in COVID cases.

One group that helped organize the Independence Day protest was the *Alianza Nacional El Salvador en Paz* (National Alliance for a Peaceful El Salvador), a coalition of former guerrillas and former military, continuing the long trend of ex-combatants finding themselves in struggles long after the war.

On September 3, 2025 the Supreme Court ruled that Bukele could run for an unconstitutional second term.

THE STATE OF EXCEPTION: WINNOWING THE GANGS AND TOTAL SOVEREIGNTY

In late March 2022, under the guise of routine negotiations, Bukele officials betrayed several of their long-standing gang allies, arresting key leaders. In retaliation, foot soldiers throughout the country unleashed a killing spree, murdering eighty-seven people over a single weekend. On March 27, 2022, the Legislative Assembly granted President Bukele a state of exception, which has been renewed continually ever since.

Within ten months of mass arrests and the military occupation of poor neighborhoods, the government broke the territorial control of the street gangs. Decades of rent extraction, extortion and limited mobility ended almost overnight. However, freedom of movement remains highly constrained by state security forces. In the first years of the State of Exception, poor urban neighborhoods and municipalities were regularly subject to outright cordoning.



In May and June 2024, three years after mass protests against the regime, police announced the arrests of eleven senior citizens. The government claimed they planned to bomb Bukele's illegal second inauguration. The story unraveled fast. In May, officials announced arrests that had not yet taken place. One of the supposed suspects had been dead for months.

One fact stood firm: all the men eventually arrested were veterans of the armed conflict. They belonged to Alianza Nacional El Salvador en Paz.

In 2023, authorities arrested five former combatants—community leaders and environmental activists in the anti-mining movement that won the 2017 ban on metallic mining. Prosecutors charged them with dubious "war crimes."

Many saw the arrests as a warning. Bukele planned to repeal the mining ban. He did so just before Christmas 2024. It marked his first widely unpopular move since he imposed the State of Exception.

PLAN CERO OCIO & CECOT

Between March 2022 and March 2025, after three years of the State of Exception, Salvadoran security forces report detaining 85,000 people (1.4% of the population). Some estimate the total prison population to be 105,000 to 107,000 (up to 1.8% of the population) with three out of every one hundred men currently incarcerated.

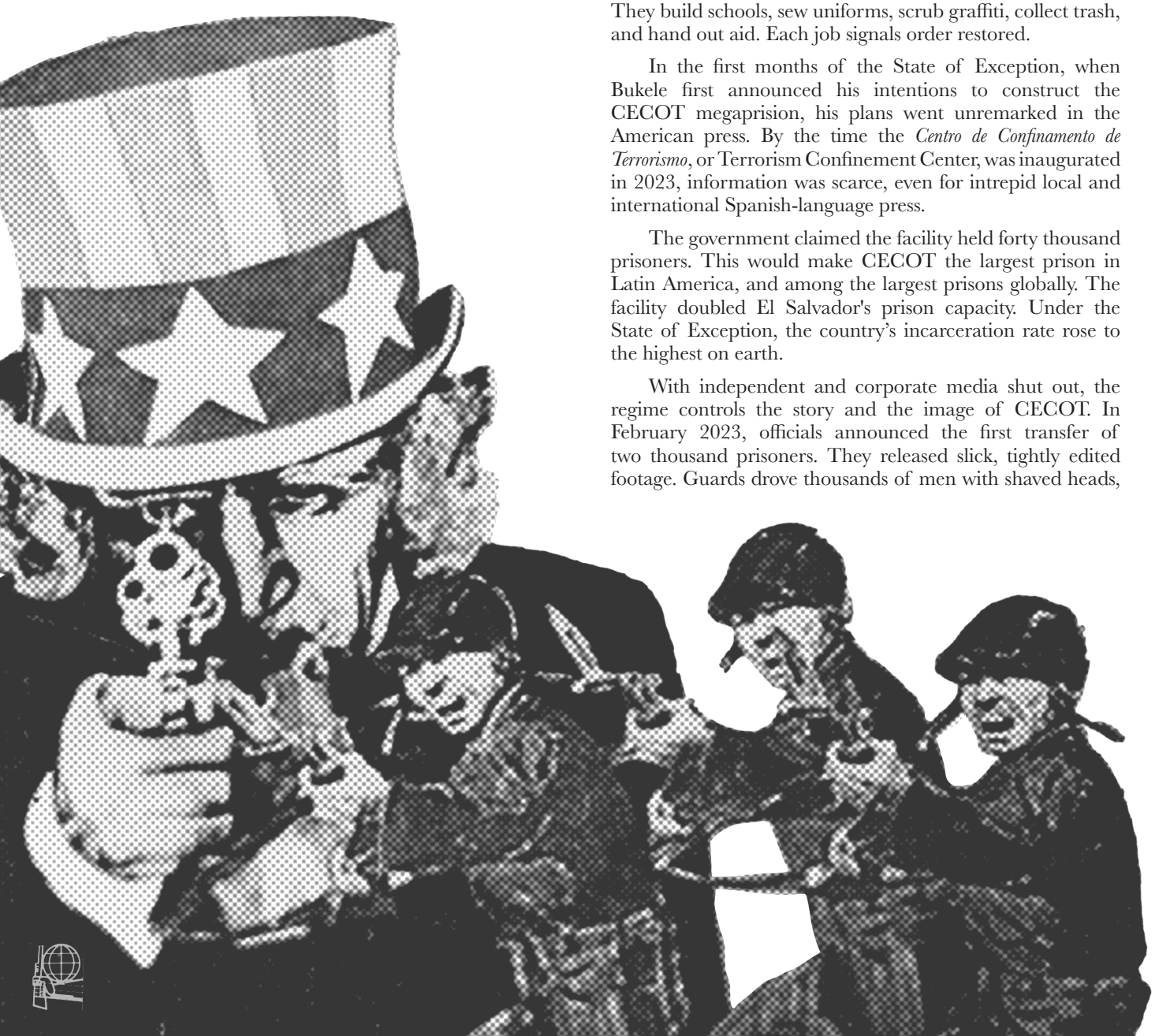
The exploitation of prison labor and its spectacular representation is a cornerstone of the State of Exception with the *Plan Cero Ocio* (Plan Zero Leisure). As of March 2025, it claims to "employ" 37,000 incarcerated workers. The government aspires to enslave 48,000 people (0.8% of the population) this way.

Reports show prison laborers working on the private property of the prison minister's wealthy friends. But the model project under Plan Cero Ocio is school construction and renovation. The work folds into Bukele's *Plan Dos Escuelas Por Día*, which promises two new schools each day. Officials assign prisoners to projects the public can see and applaud. They build schools, sew uniforms, scrub graffiti, collect trash, and hand out aid. Each job signals order restored.

In the first months of the State of Exception, when Bukele first announced his intentions to construct the CECOT megaprision, his plans went unremarked in the American press. By the time the *Centro de Confinamento de Terrorismo*, or Terrorism Confinement Center, was inaugurated in 2023, information was scarce, even for intrepid local and international Spanish-language press.

The government claimed the facility held forty thousand prisoners. This would make CECOT the largest prison in Latin America, and among the largest prisons globally. The facility doubled El Salvador's prison capacity. Under the State of Exception, the country's incarceration rate rose to the highest on earth.

With independent and corporate media shut out, the regime controls the story and the image of CECOT. In February 2023, officials announced the first transfer of two thousand prisoners. They released slick, tightly edited footage. Guards drove thousands of men with shaved heads,



stripped to basketball shorts, into the prison at a run. The men hunched forward as cameras followed.

Guards packed them into rows. Each man pressed his forehead to the shoulder blades of the man in front of him and wedged himself against the legs of the man behind him. Drones filmed from above. The rows blurred into a single mass of flesh. Later, some observers noted similarities between the conditions and exposure imposed on detainees in CECOT and those used by the IDF on Palestinians in Gaza.

The regime would later bring in select personalities to film CECOT, with a preference for sycophantic YouTubers and, later, MAGA politicians. In all cases, these portrayals would highlight the facility's exceptional scale; however, the prison is not an exception from the norm of torture, abuse, and neglect in El Salvador's less modern prisons.

PRISON OF THE AMERICAS?

In March 2025, the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) chartered three flights carrying over two hundred Venezuelan migrants—alleged gang members—from the US to El Salvador. Also on those flights were a handful of high-ranking Salvadoran gang members who were previously set to testify in US Federal Court. These leaders' testimony could possibly reveal details of illegal gang negotiations with Bukele. In the previous month, Trump's State Department struck a deal with the Bukele regime; in exchange for $6 million, and possibly other favors, El Salvador would hold Venezuelan deportees in CECOT. Neither regime has explained why the gang leaders were deported prior to testifying.

One Salvadoran man deported to CECOT on a March 2025 flight became a household name in both the United States and El Salvador. Kilmar Abrego Garcia was deported due to an "administrative error." A judge permitted Kilmar's presence in the US in 2019. The "error," as admitted by the government in court, inflamed the outrage of Americans and Salvadorans alike.

The use of CECOT to confine American migrants under the label of "terrorist" fuses two tracks: safe third country agreements and extraordinary rendition. Safe third country agreements allow the United States to send asylum seekers to other nations while their claims stall or die. These countries rarely offer real safety or a future migrants would choose. "Extraordinary rendition"—state-organized kidnapping—came into popular parlance during the US-led Global War on Terror. The United States sent terrorism suspects to third countries known for harsh interrogation, often with CIA support. The US used allies such as Egypt, Syria, and Jordan to torture and kill detainees. Many of these prisons, widely known as "black sites," operated in secret.

CECOT is not a black site. The governments of El Salvador and the United States flaunt it. Its power comes from its spectacle, not from secrecy. Yet the migrants held there exist in the same extrajudicial limbo born of the War on Terror. They face confinement without clear legal recourse, and reports point to torture all the same.

The United States and its lesser partner regimes, like El Salvador, continue to contort and stretch the ever-plastic category of "terrorist." Recently, the word has been expanded to include members of street gangs, then migrants, and now, US citizens who defend their neighbors from federal occupation. The category of the "terrorist" will continue to morph so long as it lends governments limitless power to pursue financial, industrial, and geopolitical aims. Domestic law enforcement will further resemble Special Operators from the US Army. The scope and breadth of detention and disappearance by the state will expand. It is not difficult to imagine a future where American citizens are detained in CECOT, a notion Trump himself has publicly suggested. If this is to be the case, the movement against the State of Exception in El Salvador may find new allies in the US.

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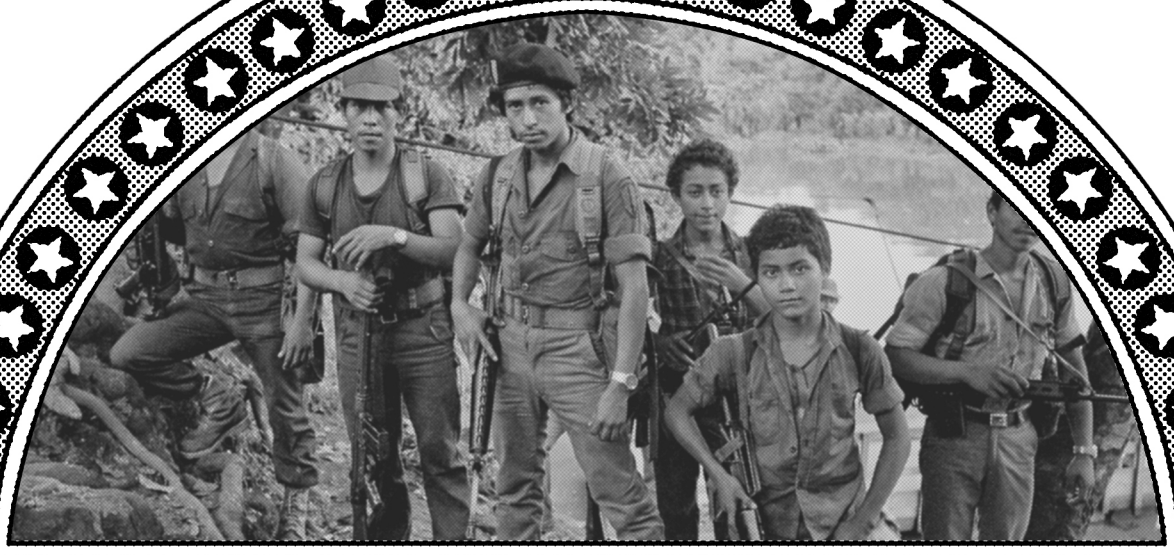
Visit the regime's preeminent tourist beach, El Zonte, on a sleepy Tuesday afternoon. You may be surprised; you may find something of a ghost town, haunted by some of the few white European and North American tourists in the country. The streets have been penned in, perhaps to corral these poltergeists, to prevent them from wandering off into the rest of the country. The playpen is tidy, the walls are white, the streets are clear, and the beach is clean—thanks, in no small part, to the brigades of enslaved prisoners. One wonders if the Northern tourists can even see what's before them. Do they ask themselves why these men are lined up on the beach under watch of an officer, rifle in hand?

Do they see the loop close on this figure 8? At one end—back home—the immigrant and the settler meet; the one cleaning the dishes, making the food, tending to the lawn of the other. Then through the crux of CECOT, we arrive at the other side: tourists removed from the stress back home, basking on the beaches of a penal colony.

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Nearly three million years ago, the long revolution of subduction and fire lifted the Central American isthmus from the ocean floor. It split one vast sea into the Atlantic and the Pacific and stitched the Americas together. Stand anywhere along the Pacific coast, from Chile to Alaska, and look out at the horizon. Beneath that wide calm, the old force keeps moving. The earth turns in on itself. It slips into subduction zones below our feet, then rises again, molten and bright. This motion came long before us. It will remain after we are gone.

Those of us who dream of the world erupting into revolution know our fates are bound with those on continents far away, in times long past. We have brothers working shipping drayage to the port of Long Beach. Sisters in the cane fields between San Salvador and the coast. For Earth to erupt in one great sequence of revolutions, overturning capitalism's scars on the geologic record, we must shake the earth together where we stand and raise a new horizon for humanity from its depths. Only then, the ground will tremble and empires will crumble. Somewhere over a cresting wave, beyond the black volcanic sand, we've seen a glimmer of this. We hope you will, too.



APPENDIX

Amor al Mundo—Principles for Political Travel

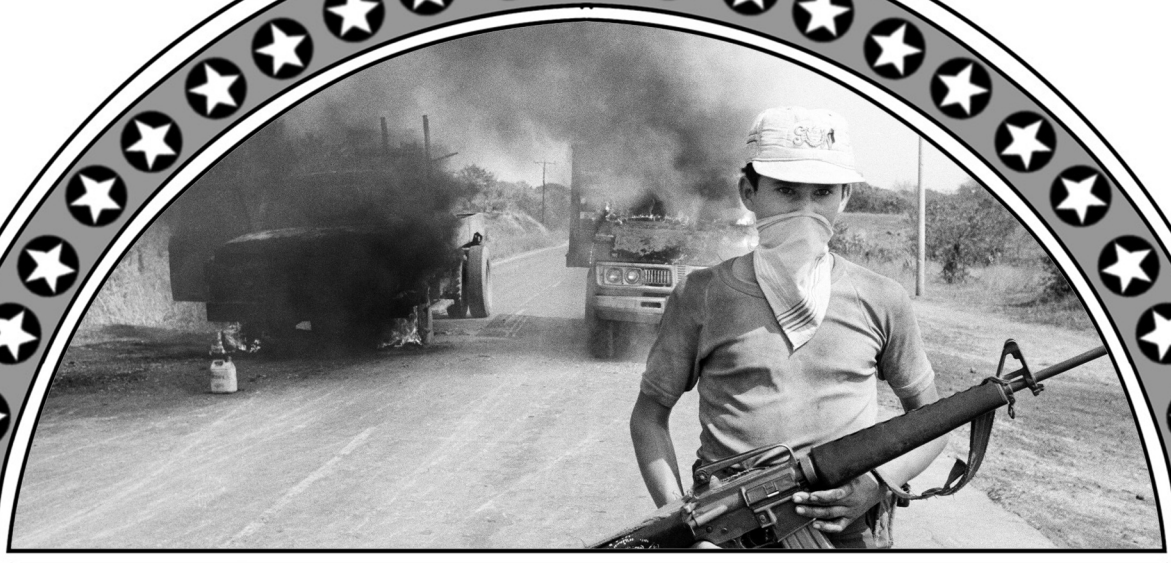
1. **Speak the language.** Listen to podcasts. Watch movies and TV. Don't worry about sounding awkward—you're learning. Memorize the fifty most common verbs and a few adjectives; then you can describe any noun you don't know. Methods that use positive language transfer, active recall, and immediate speaking practice work better than apps or textbooks. Look for a weekly conversation table in your city, or ask a friend to host one with you.

2. **Study the history and political terrain.** Use documentaries, books, social media, and podcasts to learn your destination's history and current events. Focus on revolutionary struggles, social movements, political repression, and political prisoners. Independent news sources offer critical insight.

   Study the city on a map beforehand to plan and adjust on the fly. You don't need a PhD—knowing the people's history and geography is enough to spark conversation and show respect.

3. **Cultivate interest about your trip among friends and comrades.** Our travels are never just ours. Share your plans with trusted friends. A Signal thread can keep them updated. Take note of what you'll report back. You'll be surprised how many will support your trip and your work on the ground when you have a clear plan for study, documentation, and follow-up.

4. **Listen and observe with calibrated discernment.** We move through our own political worlds using familiar heuristics to judge strategies, events, and tactics. Those shortcuts often fail in new contexts. A prison riot led by right-wing forces and gangs in Guatemala is not the same as a self-organized rebellion in a US prison. Broad similarities matter less than the differences. As you travel, listen to people and events on their own terms. Your task is to understand those terms.



5 **Lead with warmth, humility, and curiosity.** In many places, you may find yourself, often unknowingly, sitting with a participant of a revolutionary civil war. They defy assumptions about age, race, gender, or education. The most compelling stories come from unexpected people. Here, warmth, humility, and curiosity matter more than your own political experience—they invite stories and analysis. This is the core principle of political travel.

6 **Document your observations and interactions.** Keep a travel journal. Write every day, even if just a bullet list of places, observations, and quotes. Add longer reflections when you can. Make a list of questions for people you meet and gather questions from comrades. Use a voice recorder for interviews. Store all documentation on an encrypted flash drive or cloud. Relationships are your most valuable asset—never carry unsecured records on devices or across borders.

7 **Plan for reciprocity.** Plan a short presentation on your own political context and share it with friends and comrades you meet. Remember many countries are small—your audience may need context on US geography, racism, policing, and militant struggles.

As you build relationships, think about the skills and resources you can offer in the medium and long term. If you stay in someone's home, consider what you bring to it. When you return, give a report-back: the recent history of the place, who you met, their lives, and the outcomes of recent struggles. Connect their strategies and objectives to your own context.

8 **Stay in touch.**



The Killing Of

by I.S.

I struggle to begin this propaganda poem
I begin in the ugliness of a police murder
Renee Good turns her car away and is shot
in the arm, breast, and head

A crowd forms, screams and breaks one window
The people present new demands
A fast death shows a body is just a place
and there is no easy way out

It's tough to write this propaganda
Cause I know I've been wrong a lot
Not made it in time, or thought
something else would happen or, it's over

Scout Schultz walks outside the dormitory
and is shot one time, that's all it took
Fifty people marched and one cop car burned
I regret to say I wasn't among them

Life and history are two separate planes
that need one another to make sense
Seek balance with respect to ideas and action
Account for each new occurrence

Tamir Rice is in a park with his family
Who watch him dying after two shots
We also watched Michael, Eric, Akai, and John
The unrest was good, heavy work, but

Something different may have gone down
If a few people had stepped into the street
where George Floyd is pinned down
Before, instead of after, the murder

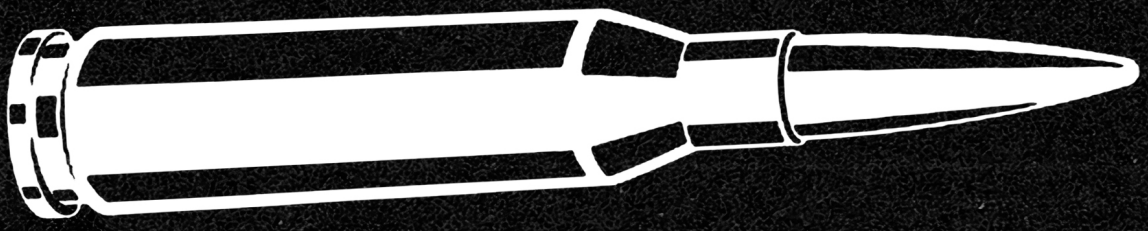
There is use in things going on out there
May they jolt us back into formation
Nothing drags on more tiresome
than idealization or forced movement

Proprioception is how we sense position,
movement and force without visual confirmation
Gross and fine motor skills, self-regulation
can help a child sleep through the night

The mother holds her baby over a bowl of dry beans
As her feet tap the beans shift and tap back
I watch the baby learn her own end
Which is often further than we think

When you really get it right
The consequence of your action
Plays roughly before you— liberated
in its own deed, sung out by the Creator

BACK AND FORTH: A SOLDIER'S STORY



Interview with Abdul Shanna

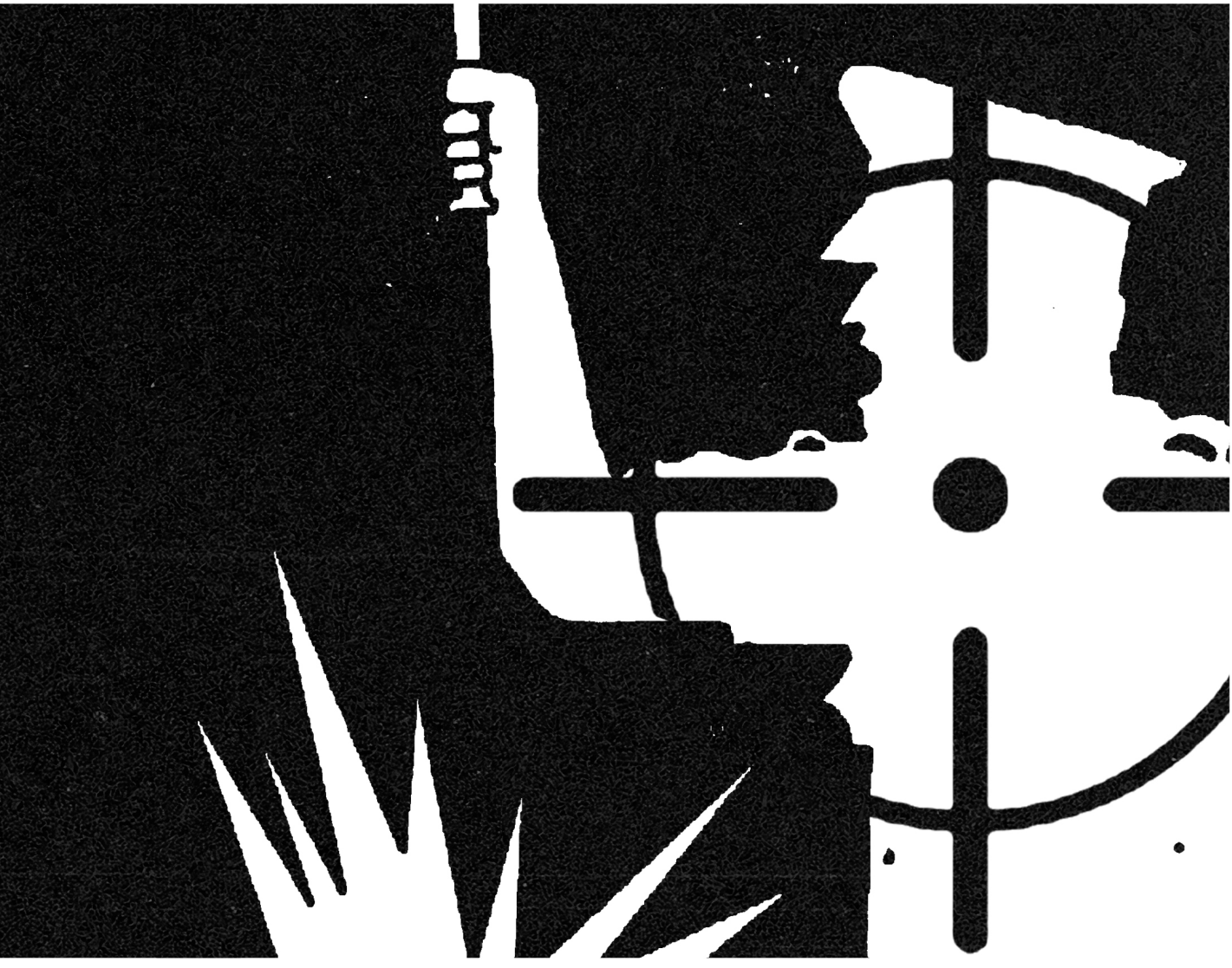
by Revolutionary Intercommunalism Research Group

In *Radar* 02, we published an essay by Revolutionary Intercommunalism Research Group (R.I.R.G.) titled "Tip of the Spear: Looking Back on 'Looking Back'—James "Yaki" Sayles and Organizing Politics Underground." That essay analyzed the history of the armed social movements of the 1960s and '70s in the US and Latin America. R.I.R.G. sought to clarify the role of aspiring revolutionaries and to answer important questions related to the tasks of organizing: How should aspiring revolutionaries relate to the broader community? How can they normalize their ideas and grow their networks while protecting themselves from state repression? How to develop and pursue concrete plans while responding to episodes of spontaneous protest and rebellion?

The authors propose that revolutionaries can and must orient to spontaneous mass resistance. They also must develop technical capacities fit for a physical struggle with the state. And, finally, they must promote their theories and politics at the largest scale possible, taking responsibility for the cultivation and normalization of radical politics within the broader society. The specific approach fit for these tasks, according to the R.I.R.G, is "mass clandestinity." The authors trace their argument back to reflections made by Yaki Sayles in his prison journal *Vita Wa Watu*.

The publication of "Tip of the Spear …" brought R.I.R.G. into contact with Abdul Shanna. Abdul organized with Yaki as members of the Stateville Prisoner Organization, later known as the New Afrikan Prisoners Organization.

In this conversation with Abdul, he generously shares stories and reflections from his life, including stories from his time in the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army. In the following interview, Abdul discusses the heights of conflict between the Panthers, the BLA, and the United States government. Bank robberies, plane hijackings, shoot outs, prison breaks—Black revolutionaries made recourse to all of the common methods of urban guerrilla warfare. These methods, as Abdul makes clear, could not—and were not supposed to—replace community organizing, conventional protesting, or everyday activism. The context of overwhelming repression in the early 1970s convinced many Black activists that a strong "military front" could help them advance their broader aims.



The extent to which the Black Liberation Army harassed the US government may well be lost to history. Many of their actions never received the kind of notoriety one would expect, given their extreme and shocking methods. In 1975, some members of the BLA issued a statement calling to "consolidate" the loose network, to develop a new strategic orientation in the period of advanced repression and retreat by the mainstream movement. Yaki and his journal *Vita Wa Watu* were sympathetic to this position. So was Abdul.

The need to experiment with strategies to counter repression while conducting popular organizing has not disappeared. Over the past several months, federal agents occupied streets in Minnesota, Louisiana, Maine, and Vermont. On two occasions, they killed rapid responders in broad daylight.

Thousands of people organized networks via encrypted messaging platforms. Block-by-block organization has been coordinated via text message. An extensive and popular movement materialized through everyday people who know each other only by pseudonyms. Workers and organizers have brought together enormous crowds. They even organized two massive strikes. Governor Walz and the progressive wings of the Democratic Party called for "calm" while laundering themselves with the popularity of the grassroots movement.

If a broad and mostly anonymous movement hopes to uproot the system that gave rise to ICE, it will have to develop a political ambition wholly separate from the Democratic Party. How can it do so while defending its participants? As federal authorities freely use AI-driven apps provided by Palantir to identify and target immigrants and activists alike, the need to address this question is more urgent each day. Perhaps lessons from the past can be instructive.

Revolutionary Intercommunalism Research Group sat down with Abdul for this interview in late 2025. We edited the conversation for clarity but tried to preserve the conversational tone. Any confusion, oversights, or inconsistencies can be attributed to our editorial process.

RIRG: Who are you, brother Abdul? I know you're from Chicago. What part of the city are you from? How do you see yourself in the history of Chicago? How did you end up living the life you've lived?

Abdul: I'm from the Southside of Chicago: the Ida B. Wells projects, which is one of the first projects built in the United States. My mother always referred to them as "concrete concentration camps." Ida B. Wells and Altgeld Gardens, which is real far south, opened in the early 1940s. That was the same time that Japanese and Italians were put into concentration camps in the United States, so it was a dual purpose.

My mother was very militant.[1] She told me she would beat me if she ever heard me saying the pledge of allegiance or singing the national anthem. So I got in a lot of trouble in school because I wouldn't stand for that. I wouldn't put my hand over my heart. I never said the pledge of allegiance. I've never said the pledge of allegiance in my life. I don't know what it is. If you asked me to repeat it, I couldn't, I don't know it.

My mother started doing political work when I was twelve. I remember she used to get letters from the House Un-American Activities Committee. It was weird. I was politicized by not just what was happening in the community, but by the work my mother was doing. She brought home tons of pamphlets and leaflets and pictures.

I did a report when I was in the 8th grade on urban renewal. It was based on materials my mom had sitting around the house. When I finished the report, my classmates started clapping. All I was doing was repeating what was on the cards and the literature my mother had that said Chicago was more segregated than Johannesburg. Basically that it wasn't "urban renewal" they were doing but "people removal."

I remember Lake Park from 47th to 51st was one of the blackest sections of Kenwood. They tore down the whole section. That was in 1960 and 1961. As of 2025, there's still not one property on that side of the street. They were trying to make it more affluent, more white, and they succeeded.

I became politically active in college. My mother took me to a demonstration that King and Jesse Jackson were at in at Marquette Park.

R: That was in 1968?

A: This was in the summer of 1966. There was only five counter-demonstrators in the park. They were from the Nazi Party and they were like a football field away. So, you know, I felt empowered. There was 300 demonstrators. I felt really good. We walked from 66th to 63rd, along Albany. When we turned the corner on 63rd, there was a mob of 5,000 or more rabid, racist, white people trying to kill everybody. They showered us with bricks and bottles. The police didn't arrest any of them. They would take somebody, put 'em in the paddy wagon, drive them a block, and let them out. By the time we got back to the park on 66th street, we were surrounded by that crowd of white people. I thought I was going to die.

Strange enough, I read something that Bernadine Dohrn said, that she was politicized during that same campaign, when King came to Chicago in the summer of '66.

After that, I become more and more political. I remember in like 1967, the Black Panther newspaper started printing. It really influenced me. The Party was a big influence. I read everything I could; Guevara, Stokely, H. Rap Brown. I started a Black student union on campus.

R: What school did you go to? What year did the Black Panther Party start in Chicago and what year did you join? And what were some of the initial requirements when joining the Party in Chicago?

A: I went to a couple of different schools. I went to Marshall High School and I went to Parker High School. I played basketball for both of those schools. I joined the Party after my senior year in college. After four years of college. I didn't graduate.

R: You went to college in Tucson, correct?

A: That was in Tucson, yes. I went to college on a basketball scholarship. I came back and joined the Party in June of 1969. But I met Fred Hampton in December 1968.[2]

I was home from college and my friends and I planned to go out, do some partying, go to some clubs.

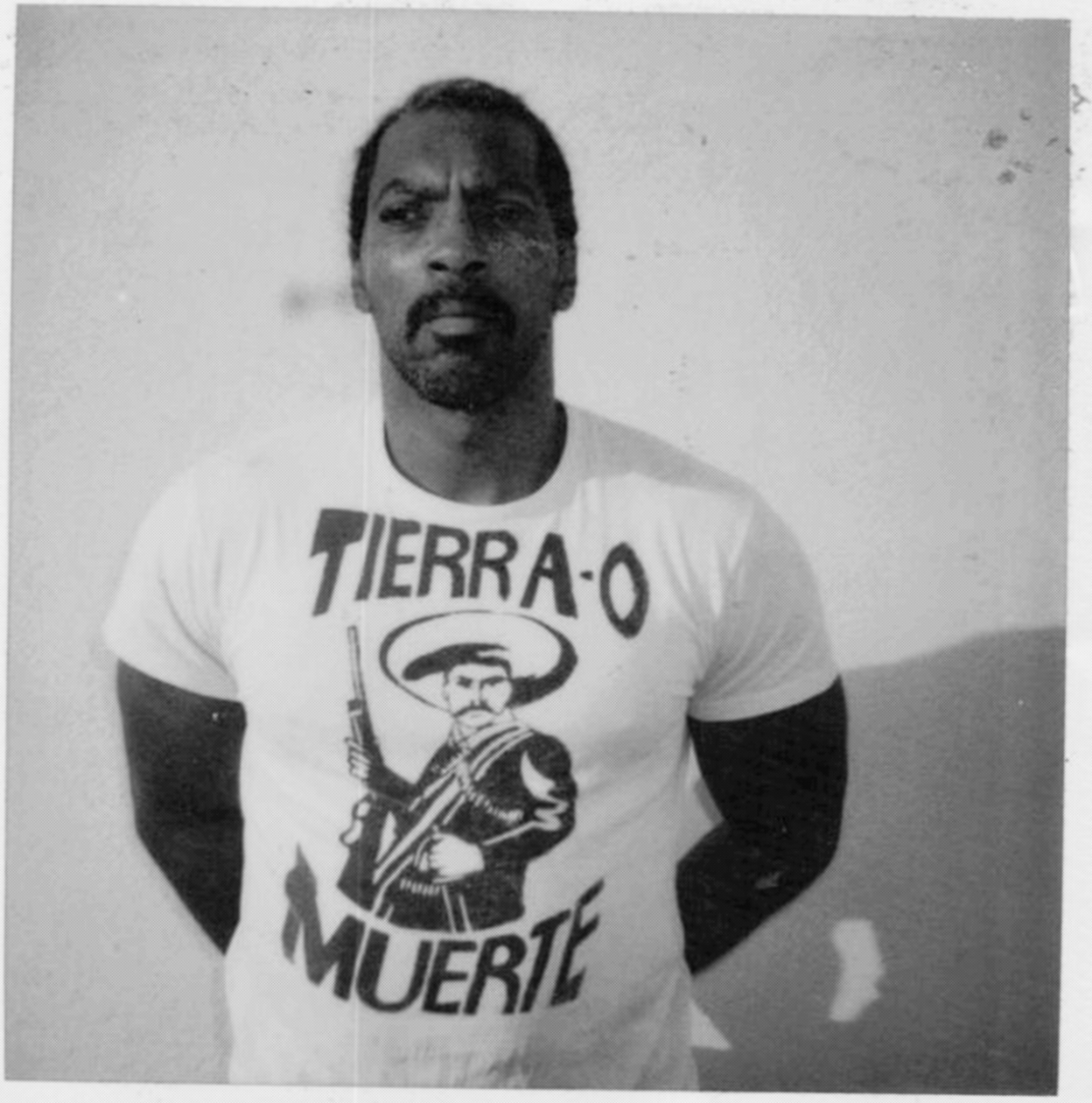
We stopped by the Panther office. I had on a three piece suit and a London Fog overcoat, a trench coat, and they thought we were pigs. They were questioning us. They had us over by the bathroom. The friend of mine, he was dressed in a suit too. So they thought we were the FBI, or somebody, trying to spy on the Party. Everybody in the Party was dressed like hippies. You know, jeans and fatigues, not dreads but hair that hadn't been combed in weeks. We looked like strangers.

So eventually they went and got Bobby Rush who was the Minister of Defense. We went to high school together at Marshall and he said, "ah, that's just Brad." So we spent maybe an hour, two hours, with Fred. It was a highlight of my life, those moments talking to Fred about the Party.

I came back from college the following Spring and joined the Party. You had to do six weeks of political education and you had to be available 24/7 for community work. Going door to door. Selling papers. Doing whatever you were instructed to do.

When I joined the Party in 1969, it was at the height of the Party in Illinois. There were 1,500 members. The first time I tried to go to a political education class, I couldn't even get up the stairs. The room seated seventy-five, but there were people wall to wall. The same in the office. The third floor, where they kept the food for the Breakfast for Children program, looked like a warehouse. I've never seen so many eggs before, so much cereal, so much milk. It was piled to the ceiling. And I'm like, "wow, they're feeding a lot of kids." Nothing ever spoiled.

Soon after I joined, the FBI raided us. It was the first raid on the office. The office was raided three times that year. In June, July, and October. I don't remember the exact dates. I was only in the Party for one year but it was the most intense period of my life.


TIERRA-O
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R: Chairman Fred was murdered by Chicago Police Department December 4, 1969. How does that fit in that timeline?

A: I slept in the apartment where they killed him every Wednesday night because of my girlfriend. She lived further out west, and often suggested that I spend the night there on Monroe rather than going all the way to the South Side, where I lived.

That particular night I didn't stay there. I had a temporary job. But Minister Doc Sachel, who was the Minister of Health, drove me home. He explained to me that the Party was going to go through changes. First thing, Fred was going to be elevated to the Central Committee. Second thing, that the central office was looking to relocate to either New York or Chicago. Because you couldn't have a central office in Oakland, CA. It's not centrally located, it's not strategic.

R: Can you give context for where Fred Hampton's apartment was in the city?

A: Fred Hampton's apartment was about a block from the main office. The main office was 2350 West Madison, which is on Western and Madison. Fred's apartment was on Monroe, between Western and Oakley. We walked through two vacant lots to get to the apartment. We parked our cars in those vacant lots.

Chairman Fred's car had to be repaired every time he'd go somewhere. He had an old '57 Chrysler. I remember, there was an article in the Tribune that tried to say that Chairman Fred was a hustler and that he was using people and money from the Party. They said he wore $300 suits and drove a Cadillac. His car was a humpty. He wore a t-shirt and jeans. The only time he was presentable was when he had to give a speech. Otherwise, you couldn't get him in fancy clothes.



R: Can you talk about what led to your eventual arrest in 1971?

A: The FBI raided our office for the second time on July 31, 1969. They said that they caught three people inside the office. I can only remember two names, Larry White and Alvin Jeffries. They broke an arm or a leg on everybody; everybody had their heads bandaged. I was first arrested in the office when they raided it for the third time, on October 4, 1969. That was a big development. They beat the dog shit out of us.

I was inside the office when someone fired a warning shot to keep the cops from coming in. They stood at the steps on the 3rd floor, ready to open the door, and one of us fired [*editors: Abdul was charged with "attempted murder" for this incident*]. In response, police shot into the office for what seemed like an hour. We were in a safe area between the walls. A bullet came through the walls. It must have come through one brick and two plaster walls. I thought, "it's time to get out of here."

So we came down the stairs. They attacked us and beat us. They did not even search us. They beat us over every inch of our body either with a club, with a rifle, or with a pistol. That's how they "searched" us. Then they put us in a paddy wagon, took us to the police station, and beat us two more times. One member of the Party was beaten so bad he never came back to the office, ever. Years later, in 1979 when I got out of jail, I saw him and called out to his name. He was like half a block away. I said, "hey Terry!" and he took off running. I still don't know if he was traumatized or he just didn't like me.

Anyway, when we were arrested that October, they took us before two lines of police and they told them, "these are the Panthers. The fuckers aren't even Black. They're a bunch of yellow pussycats. If you see them on the streets, shoot them. But don't shoot them in the stomach—shoot them twice in the head."

I thought they were trying to scare us. Then something happened. I got caught in the L station. The police were going to do me but there was a couple there that saved my life. Then they followed me. They followed the bus I got on. I had to make a decision. If I got off on 13th or 14th street, they could have took me in the alley and shot me. So I got off on Roosevelt Road and walked down the middle of the road like a hooker. They got out and they laughed and said, "ok Brad, you get away this time but we're still going to kill your Black ass."

Before they could kill me, we decided to take out one of them. A Chicago policeman. That was June 19, 1970. So I went to Stateville Prison in May of 1971 for that.

Bit by bit, we were able to organize and bring people together there. When I was in the county jail on an attempted murder charge from that October raid I met this gangbanger. This gang leader named Sam Dillon. They called him "Sandman." We had some real ideological struggles. The jail was so crowded we were sleeping in the dayroom. We struggled all night. I thought, you know, I didn't reach him. I was really angry at myself, because I didn't reach him. But when I got to Stateville in '71, he was running the prison for the Stones, and he said to me, "Brad, you need to come over to E House and help me organize." So I had made some in-roads into him. He actually participated in some study groups that we had.

So we were organizing, trying to do political education, and trying to change the mentality from people fighting each other to people coming together to fight the administration.

R: Were you doing this under the guise of any name? Or any organization?

A: It was me, Yaki, my co-defendants, and a couple of other people who were a part of the collective. We didn't have a name for the collective at that time.

R: This guy you're working with, you said, "Stones." You mean the Black P. Stone Rangers?

A: Black P. Stone Nation. Black P. Stone Rangers was an earlier name they used.

R: Can we back up a little bit to you meeting Yaki?

A: Yeah. I met Yaki in the fall of 1973. He became an important part of our collective.

I remember, I had a connection to a friend that used to send me books. She sent me *Blood in My Eye*. Yaki walks up to me and says, "you should give me the book." And I said, "why should I give you the book?" and he said, "I can type it and make a copy for everybody in the collective." Yaki only typed with two fingers. I gave him the book around 6 p.m. Before lights out at 10 p.m., he gave me half the book. In the morning before we went to breakfast, he gave me the rest. He typed the book in less than twelve hours and he only typed with two fingers.

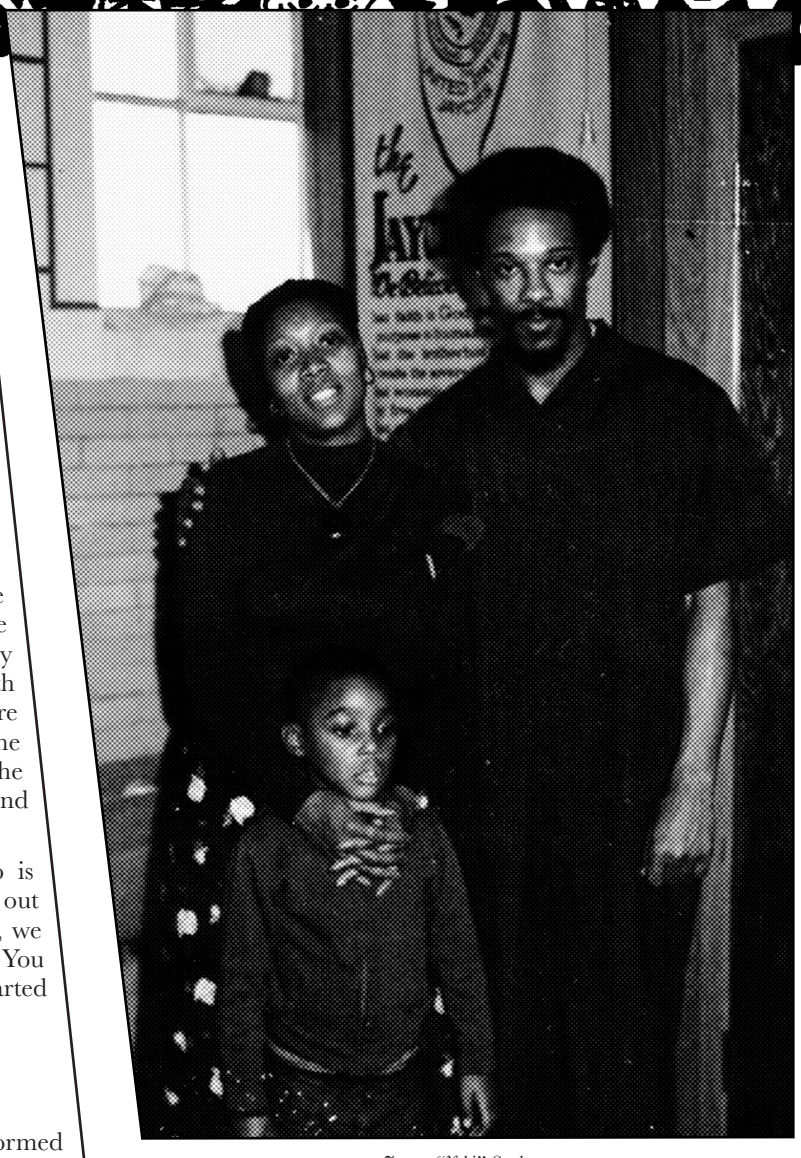
After he did that, we started asking, "Who is this guy?" He was really quiet. He didn't stand out that much. He was just a solid person. After that, we became closer. We started a different collective. You know, people fell off, we found new people. We started a newsletter.

R: This is what year?

A: I would say, the first part of 1975.

People were going home and we formed an organization called, the "Stateville Prisoner's Organization." And they did the same thing at Pontiac and the same thing in Menard. The people in Menard, they were associated with us. Our initial formation was sort of like, the message that the BLA put out in "Message to the Movement."[3] You know, we'll work with anybody. Doesn't matter religion or politics. We'll come together in some type of united front or national liberation front. Eventually our politics became a little more specific.

When that process started I was a Marxist-Leninist. When the process ended, I was a Revolutionary Nationalist. So Yaki, without me knowing it, pulled me out of strict Marxist-Leninism. I remember, one of my partners saying that I treated him like I was Joe Stalin. He was afraid of me. And it really hurt my feelings. I think I was his section leader [in the Party], and I was asking him, "brother, did you sell your quota of newspapers yet?" And he said,"oh not yet, I ..." And I said,"brother, there is no excuse. Go sell your papers and come back." He said, "well, I don't have any money to get back." I told him, "sell five papers, get nickel money, and then you can get on the bus." I was cold. I was too cold. The criticism was correct.



James "Yaki" Sayles

R: Tell us about when you met with the Sojourner Truth Organization (STO). That was around that time, right?

A: We met with former cadre from STO in 1977. Prisoners had attacked the guards because the guards had beaten someone very badly.

R: This is at Stateville?

A: Yeah. Three people were charged with attempted murder and one person was charged with murder. We got assistance from lawyers on the outside. With Kingsley Clarke, from Jeffrey Haas, and from the People's Law Office. We beat all the charges.

An officer was eating a piece of cake when his throat was cut. The defendant beat the charge because the autopsy couldn't prove whether or not he died from choking on the cake or from the bleeding. They couldn't say which one it was, so they threw the charges out.



To Sahib
"The Season of Struggle
is our Season"

yahi

R: I'm curious, let's say around 1978 or 1979, how did y'all respond to destruction of the movement on the outside while you were in the prison? How did you reflect on the late 1960s? In 1979, you said your politics became sharper, more clear. What were the politics at that time? What were the divisions, the goals, the objectives of the organization you were a part of? Was "abolition" a buzzword at the time?

A: No, but it wasn't something that people were opposed to. The initial collective that we formed was more or less a united front. We became more specific and we became revolutionary nationalists. From the,"Stateville Prisoner's Organization," we adopted, "New Afrikan Prisoner's Organization."

In the late 1970s, in the Chicago area, there wasn't a lot of movement activity. So we did the best we could to educate people. Yaki was good at writing. So we worked on journals and a lot of articles. I remember one time, we were cellies together, and Sundiata Acoli asked him to do something that was like thirty pages and Yaki did it within about two or three days. Sundiata was like, "who are you? This would take a normal person months to do this." Before Yaki was incarcerated he was a part of the Black Writers Guild in Chicago along with Don L. Lee and Sam Greenlee. Way later, I guess it was 2006, Sam Greenlee, I read something where he said, "whatever happened to Yaki? I heard he got life in prison." That surprised me because I thought maybe that Yaki knew those people but that he wasn't really, wasn't really close to them. I was wrong.

R: So you're released on parole in 1978, right? Then what?

A: In July of 1978, they had a prison uprising at Pontiac where three guards were killed. They charged seventeen people with a capital crime of killing these police officers. So we helped them out. We did defense for the Pontiac brothers. You know, a lot of the leg work, meetings, educating, trying to get the lawyers in line, you know, not to sell each other out. There was only 1 person convicted and that was the person who pled guilty.

We had a collective with former members of RAM *[Editors note: Revolutionary Action Movement—for more, see "The Student Intifada and the Revolution to Come," Radar 01]*. They had become members of the African People's Party. So we had the people from NAPO and the people from the African People's Party and we formed what we called a federated cell to work on the all the Pontiac stuff.

I got out in 1978. In 1979, I caught new charges. I had a bank robbery charge and two attempted murder charges against the police. One of them was the chief of the police of the town where the bank was. In December of 1979, when I got out on bail, I went underground. I was still on parole and I was facing quite a bit of time.

R: This was in Chicago?

A: In the suburbs of Chicago, Park Forest.

R: So you get bail and you decide to go underground?

A: I had to go underground. I was on parole for killing a cop and then I caught two more attempted murder charges against the police. They would have buried me.

R: Can you talk about that period of time? And the decision to go to New York?

A: There wasn't a decision. New York was where I had to go. That's where the collective was.

While we were in Stateville, when we first transitioned from the Stateville Prisoner's Organization to the New Afrikan Prisoner's Organization, we had a contact that had asked if we wanted to become a part of the Black Liberation Army. So we made a decision collectively to join. That was after "Message to the Movement" came out. They were trying to consolidate all the different cells that were functioning but weren't connected. So the effort to consolidate was to make it sort have some kind of democratic-centralism, a command structure. Some people adhered to it, other people didn't, and they kept doing their own thing.

So in December of 1979, I went underground. I went to New York. I worked with some really good people there. One of them was Kamau Sadiki. Most of the people in that collective have passed. Bashir Hameed died in prison in 2008. Abdul Majid died in prison in 2016. Other people died, you know, from different things.

R: Do you want to talk about the experience of being underground with Kamau Sadiki? You told me about his character a little bit.

A: Well, that's all I can, you know, that's all I can safely talk about. I've never met anyone with stronger character. I've never met anyone as humble and as dependable. If there was something to be done, he would volunteer to do it, and he would be there on time.

One of the things we had to do was, we had a safe house, but the safe house was occupied by about 400,000 roaches. If it was dark and you cut on the light, the walls were brown. There were more roaches than I've ever seen in my life. So, Kamau and I went over there about four times, setting off bombs and trying to deal with the roaches. We didn't make much of an inroad, but we tried. Kamau was the only one who kept at it.

He was an incredibly selfless person, you know? A revolutionary's revolutionary. I had met him before he became part of the collective. I was part of the collective with another person and he said Kamau was his hero. Kamau was the person that he admired the most from the underground.

R: You want to tell us a little bit about what your life was like in these years underground? How, like just, for the reader's sake, what's day to day like? How you're organizing at all within that context.

A: I wasn't organizing. That was the hardest part about being underground. Being separate from political stuff, not being able to function. Sell papers or, do door to door work or, you know, mass work. I couldn't do it.

I went to a couple of rallies and it was so big that I could just go on the outskirts. But I couldn't do any work. Every once in a while they would have a movie viewing. And I could slip into the movie or something. But most of the time that I was underground, I led a normal life. I worked.

I remember reading about this other guy who went underground from California and our paths crossed. But all he did was hide. He never came out of the house. He never went anywhere. And I remember the person that was my contact person when I first got to New York was his contact person, and he was trying to get him to get out of the house. Because I came there, I got my own apartment. I found my own temporary job. This guy was just like looking out the window all the time. So he tried to hook us up together. So, he came to my house, and I said, "Well, I'm working with a group of people and, you know, if you're interested in working with us, we'd love to have you." He said, "No way." He got up and walked out the door. He didn't want to *function* underground. He wanted to hide. My thing was, I didn't go underground to hide. I was going underground to fight. My position was that it was the police that need to hide.

R: How was your family's response to your politics and your development, you know, your experience in the prison? Did your family support you in any of this or where they a support network for you at any point?

A: Well, my family wasn't a support network and your family shouldn't be a support network when you're underground. That's how you get caught. You have to be able to sever all your ties with your family because they'll go to them. They'll tell them, "if you don't tell us where he is, we'll kill you." If they know where you are, they're going to tell on you. So I had severed all the ties with my family. I had a new family in New York.

My partner was very, very, supportive. She knew what was going on. She met all the people in the collective. When we moved, they came and helped us move.

When I came home finally from prison my oldest sister said to me, "Baby, I'm so proud of you, I don't even know what to say." And that was one of the most important things anybody's ever said to me. Because I always wondered how people in my family understood what I was doing, you know?

R: There were other cells, other collectives operating in New York at the time.

A: Yeah. When I came to New York for Black Liberation Day, I met this member of the collective. His name was Bishmi, Kenneth Hunter. And he said that there were seven separate cells operating in New York and New Jersey at the time. And they had met and had made an agreement that whoever made a breakthrough first would do financial support for the others. But that didn't happen. Some people made financial breakthroughs, but they didn't support the other people.

As a matter of fact, two people from the group that made the breakthroughs joined us. So when they would do things, they knew exactly where, who it was, because they had planned or talked about doing some of those same things.

R: With other people.

A: Yeah.

R: You were telling me that, I don't know if it was a conflict, but different collectives and cells had different strategies around how they would build support.

A: Well, that was the collective that I was a part of where we had a split. That was internal to my collective.

R: I see.

A: Anybody can go out and do anything, anytime they want. But the thing is, if the people are not ready for what you're doing, is what you're doing helping the struggle or is it setting back the struggle? If you don't have a network set up prior to engaging in armed struggle, and the police are chasing you all over the country, with all these cameras, how are you going to build a network after the fact?

You know, cause everybody will be afraid. Pictures of your face are up everywhere . . . people are going to say, "don't come here, go somewhere else."

R: Many people, I think still today and probably for many centuries have the idea that actions, successful actions, successful expropriations, successful interventions of some kind will create the basis for mass support. As opposed to building mass support in order to do those actions. What do you have to say about that? Is that kind of the nature of the split? People obviously wanted there to be a kind of, you know, popular insurrection and maybe they thought differently about how to build that?

A: Well, all I can say, if you don't have a network built, you don't have a hole to crawl in, you're in big trouble. Especially in today's world where they have so much more technology to track you. It can't be the other way around.

I've heard this before and I was like, "Okay, I'll listen to what you're saying," but then these cases actually came down, where these two brothers had to go underground, go further underground. One of them was already underground when the case happened.



R: He had to go double underground.

A: He had to go deeper. You run out of money real fast. He ended up going to hide in a place where he had been before. Everyone in that small town in South Carolina knew him. So he couldn't go out. They had a nationwide manhunt and nobody had experienced that before. They put on the mad dog killers, you know, they went berserk in the New York area. I've never seen any repression like this ever in my life.

They thought that these guys were bodyguards for Assata. They thought Assata was in the truck that they were in. And that's why they thought they had shot the police, because they thought they were protecting her.

So all throughout Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, women would be walking down the street. Police officers would get out of the car and run and tackle them and pull up their skirt because she's supposed to have a scar on her thigh. So they were pulling up, tackling women, pulling up their skirt, saying, "excuse me, I thought you were Assata Shakur, I'm sorry." It was unbelievable. They were kicking people's doors down. You know, like, mass hysteria erupts and they're saying, "I saw those two people go into this apartment!" They would just kick doors down for two weeks.

R: After the prison break?

A: No, this was when two people were stopped in Queens and the police didn't get their guns unholstered. They got off thirty shots and the police didn't get off any. One police officer was shot thirteen times and he lived. It was incredible. Thirteen times with a 9mm and he lived, but he wasn't able to identify anybody.

So they had like three or four trials because they were actually convicted of second degree murder. First degree would be killing a police officer on duty. And they were charged with killing the police officer on duty, but the jury wouldn't bring back the first degree verdict. They only brought back second degree.

R: I'll have to get more details about this from you afterwards, but about the year and..

A: It was 1981, April of 1981.

R: Oh, okay. So that's the pretext for it being Assata's bodyguards.

A: Right. They didn't know what was going on.

R: So, it's 1981. You brought us up to May 1981. There's this crazy manhunt situation. There's people double underground. I mean, 1981 was a bit of an eventful year. There's obviously the events with the Brinks truck. I don't know how that affected things. There's still hijackings. There's still crazy stuff going on.

A: I didn't change anything that I did. I had a safe house of my own. I was living with my partner and I was working. As a matter of fact, I was working not too far from where Sekou was trapped and beaten damn near half to death.

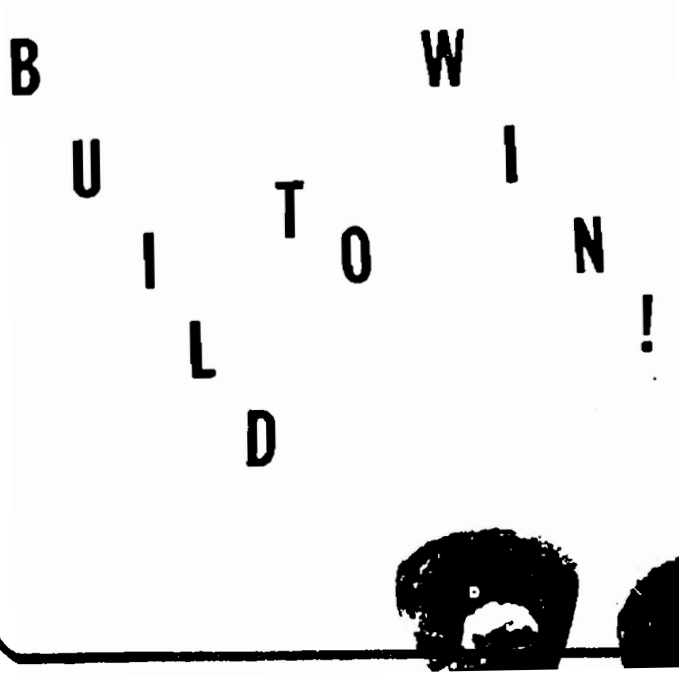
I didn't have to alter what I was doing. At that time, I still had, like I said, my own safe house, the place that I rented when I first came here.

R: If you can add to that, I wonder, because also in the 1980s was the crack epidemic, the beginning of what some would call the chemical genocide of the working class black community in the inner cities at the time. What effect did the introduction of crack cocaine in the beginning of the so-called Drug War have on the comrades and the movement? Was there a shift that happened from the decade before or the previous two years to the next preceding two years?

A: A lot of people got caught up in that epidemic. A lot of people got trapped. A lot of political people. At the time, it was believed that cocaine wasn't habit forming, it wasn't addictive. That was before the crack. And a lot of comrades got caught in in that wave.

It was more devastating than you could even think. When it first hit New York, people were throwing babies out of windows. People were shooting their grandmother, you know, because their grandmother wouldn't give them money. It was like *Brave New World*. There were lines a block long where people were going to buy drugs. There were doctors, lawyers, police officers, prosecutors, everybody was in those lines. So it wasn't just the movement people, but everybody was affected by that plague.

The United States government unleashed that on the community. They brought the drugs from Colombia and Panama. They brought drugs to the United States and took guns to the Contras and El Salvador.



R: In 1987, you went back to prison. Do you want to talk about, politically, the difference between being in the first and the second time?

A: It was the difference between night and day. The first time there was more and more organization. When I went to prison I went with a young man that called himself "Iceberg," and all he did all day was walk around and talk about pimping. "I'm gonna be a pimp, Imma pimp and die on the courthouse steps. I'm a pimp, I'm a pimp." Then one day he said to me, "Bradley, have you read *Return to the Source* by Amilcar Cabral?" And I turned around and looked at him and I said, "What are you saying?" He said, "Well, I really recommend that you read *Return to the Source* because it'll give you . . ." and I almost started crying. This guy, he had completely changed his mentality. And I was like, wow, it's unbelievable. That was within about four years. So he had went to prison and became politicized. There was a lot of people that were reading, a lot of people were interested in learning.

I remember that I was almost hounded by the guys that were in school, they would be calling, "Mr. Green! Mr. Green! I got a question for you! They were asking me questions about stuff they were studying in school and I would say, "I don't know," and they would say, "No Mr. Green, you're a teacher, you have to know. Would you go and research and find out for us?" They'd be asking me questions about the Civil War and about political struggles. It was amazing. People were trying to learn.

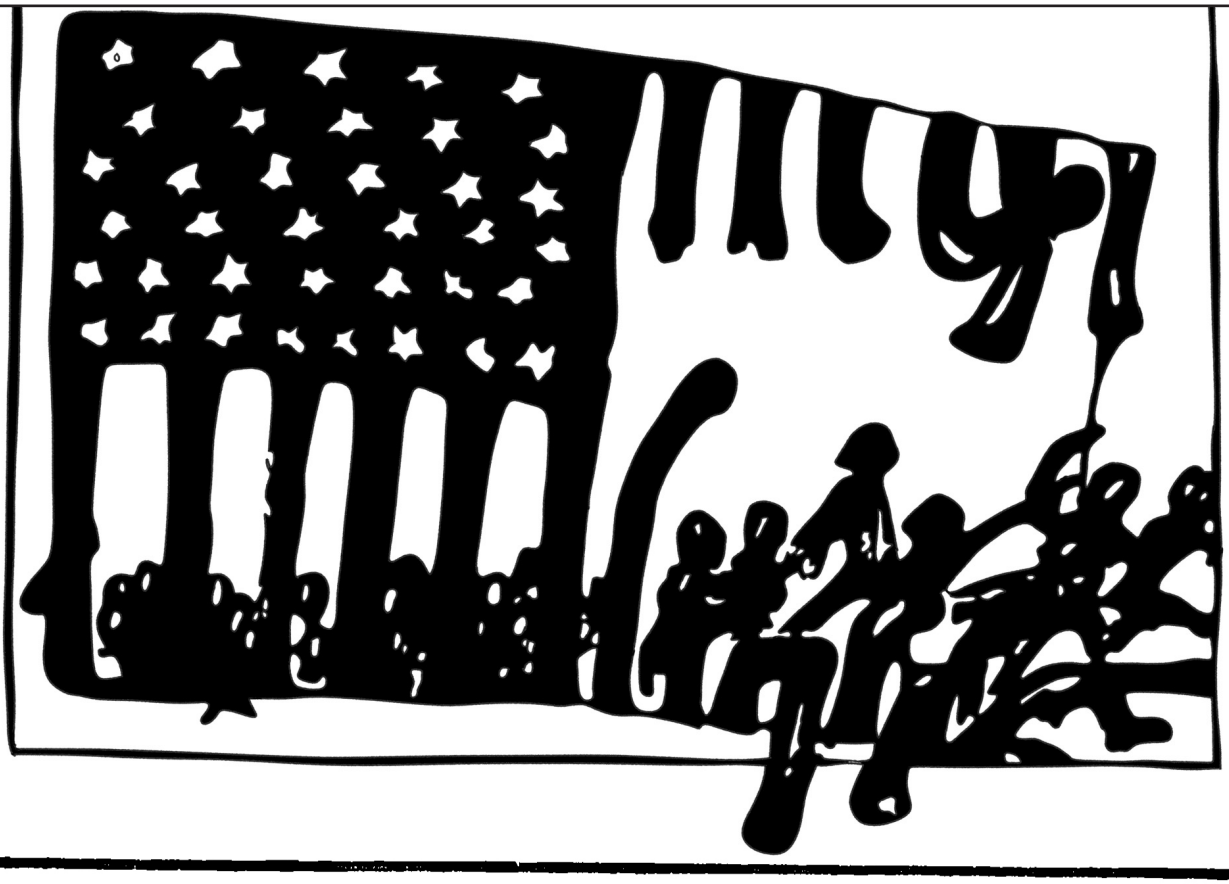
When I went back to prison in the '80s it was the complete opposite. It seemed like everybody was backwards. We had a study group and we had like four people. We only could get like four people to a class. Then I did some work with some Puerto Ricans and we had like two people. There was never that level of interest, it just wasn't there.

In the 1970s my cell partner was a Disciple, but he was the foremost authority on George Jackson in the whole prison. When he was in Pontiac he used to have them training, crawling around the ground, like there was machine gun fire. None of that in the '80s, it was all different.

All the different groups were at everybody's throat. There was a basketball game and the whole gym was fighting. I mean everybody was fighting in the gym but me and the guy who was working for the prison. We're standing on top of the bench and they're just fighting. Everybody's fighting. It's a whole different time and place. Because there was nothing happening in the streets. There was no movement, and prison is only a reflection of what people are doing on the streets.

I got out in 1997. I moved to the east coast. I did a little work with Ashanti and some other people. I did a lot of work in Asbury Park. The lady I worked for and her husband, they were Garveyites. So we did a little work in Asbury.

Basically that was it, because when I went to Tucson there was absolutely nothing going on. When I went to Tucson in 2004 there was absolutely zero activity. I worked with the immigrant movement a little bit and they were progressive. They were very, very, progressive. Around 2006, when the immigration movement blew up all over the country and kids walked out of school, I'm thinking, the revolution is starting all over again. They had huge rallies. At one time, I think it was maybe 2009, they said to me, "we want you to consult with some people. We want to do some armed struggle." It was amazing.



R: I would like to speed up a little bit towards the current day in a way. What are your thoughts on the events of 2020 and does that have any comparison to the late 1960s? And also a question I have for you—especially with your relationship with brother Yaki—why isn't the New Afrikan Independence Movement a mass movement today? Did you ever read Huey P. Newton's *Revolutionary Intercommunalism*? I know that a big part of the split in 1971 was around revolutionary nationalism. Do you feel like he was over-correcting? How do you see that today? Where do you see this current generation going?

A: Ok, you're asking three or four questions in the same question.

Why isn't the New Afrikan Independence Movement a mass movement? That is a phenomenal question. As a member of that movement, being self-critical, it also reminds me of people being in a party; your language has to speak to the people and not to your comrades. So you have to have something that appeals to people, not just with stereotypical party writing. And I think that in the New Afrikan Independence Movement they need to take a step back and analyze what works and what doesn't work. If it doesn't work, you have to discard it. You can't keep doing the same thing, making mistakes, and not working and thinking that it's going to work twenty years later.

It's not the people that are wrong. It's how you attempt to go and organize. Organizing is the whole key. If you follow Cabral, you don't go out and tell people, "I want you to come and do this." You find out what people want to do to help advance the struggle and then you help provide them the opportunity to do that. Instead of telling them, I need you to come and do this, you say, "what would you like to change? What would you like to improve? Here's some other people that are working with that. If you really want to do this, what you said, here's your opportunity to go work with these people." Rather than passing out fliers and asking people to come to things and to support people they don't know anything about.

I think in political education, that's the first thing you've got to learn how to do, to organize. It's not something everybody can do. Everybody can be part of an organization that can help, but in order to move people to where they need to be moved, especially now with fascism being in people's faces, we should have a mass movement.

I think one thing is that people get mobilization mixed up with organizing. If you call a rally, we'll have 10,000 people there, but those 10,000 people will leave. They're not doing coherent, cohesive things that are building to the next level. They just come to rallies and then they go home. That's not an organization. People think, well, we had 10,000 people out there protesting against the genocide in Palestine. But what are they going to do next?

R: That leads me to think . . . this is really central to Fanon as well, The Wretched of the Earth and Yaki, investigating the issue of "spontaneity." Like, what do we do with this? Every five, ten years, it's either a new generation or a new scene, but it's not like a continuous struggle from one generation to the next. Like the Palestinian struggle, like the struggle with Cabral and their movement for independence. Why don't we see it here in the so-called United States, I'll refer to as Babylon. Why does it seem to be this inconsistent, selective amnesia around history, events, and where we want to go? How do we get to this point where we're at now? If that makes any sense.

A: It makes a lot of sense. If you don't have organization, then things don't transfer. Everything is starting anew every time you do something. Every event is a new thing.

I mean, when you think about it, Mao started organizing, what, in 1915? And they didn't win until 1949. I mean, that's a long, long, period of time. And if you don't have an organization, people come and go. You're working on something and then everybody that was doing that, they're gone. Like you said, five years. Who's going to be where in five years? And how do you make that bond so that people are really working on this? It's a life project. They can leave and go somewhere, but they're going to leave and go do the same work wherever they are. You know? It's a good thing when they leave because now you spread to another city and you're going to have more and more people.

The reason why I talk about Cabral is because what he did in Guinea-Bissau was a miracle. No one's ever done that. No one's ever been able to organize the people into a fighting force that were enemies for 1,500 years. And probably, of course, there were internal struggles, but getting them to become part of the same organization, that alone was an accomplishment. The first thing he did was not go out and organize. The first thing he did was go out and take a survey and find out—what is it that people wanted to do? What is it people wanted to change? And if you could keep a tab on that, what do you want to work on? What are you interested in changing? And what are you *willing* to do? Because a lot of people have a lot of rhetoric. And they'll tell you this, that, and the other, and this is what's wrong with what you're doing. But they're not willing to do any work. And I guess that's the criteria that you, how you judge people, is on their work. Not on their rhetoric. Can you depend on them? Are they steadfast? Are they going to keep working year in, year out, you know?

R: I'm wondering if you have thoughts on how organized groups, whether that's a clandestine collective or a mass group somehow, how people should be relating to events of spontaneous activity, whether that's a strike or a prison uprising or a rebellion. You know, in our world, probably also back in the day, organized groups, most organized groups, they don't really interact with these phenomena, or they write them off as not very important. I'm wondering if you have thoughts about this.

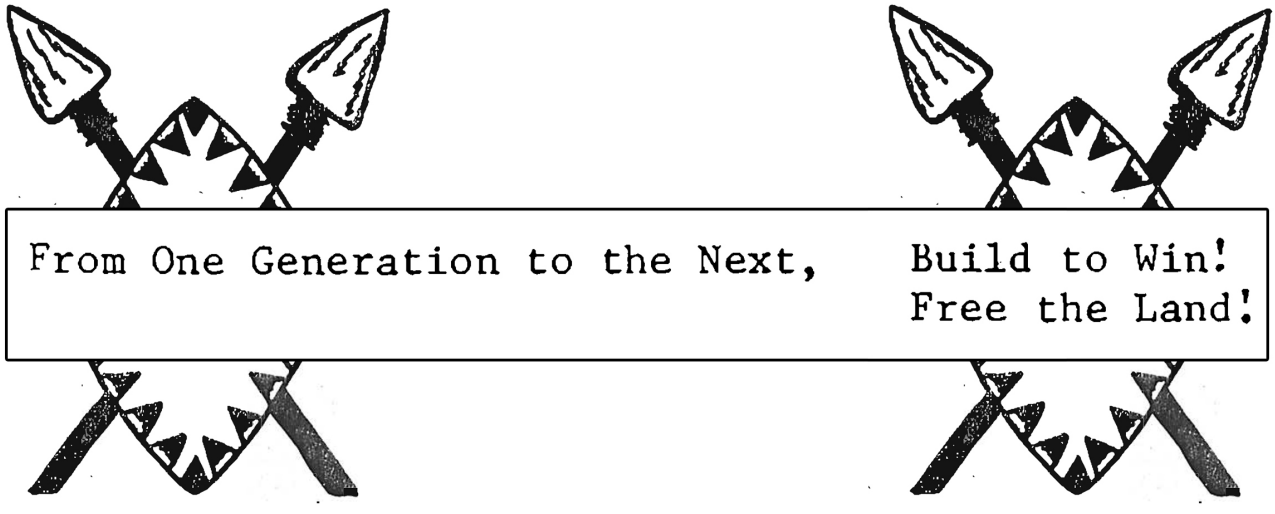
A: If they're not reacting to what's going on in the community, then they're not really connected to the community. So how effective can they be if they're not connected to 2020? It was even more intense than the 60s, than the late '60s. It lasted for a longer period of time. The problem was, what developed from it? We had all these people in the street. Did the movement advance? Everything that you do, you're doing it not just to be doing it, but to advance the struggle further and faster. So, like as a mobilization, it was tops. But did we come out of that period with other stronger organizations and forms that helped the struggle? Because what happens when things don't work, people get disappointed and they get, "oh, my God." They despair. You know, you can have somebody so active, and then next week they're gone. And, like, I don't believe it. That person was a heart and soul.

R: The morale has been crushed.

A: Yeah. And that's what happens when you're struggling inside an empire, and it seems like they're infallible. People get tired or they have to go wherever they're going. How do you sustain an organization or at least a framework to go forward?

R: Well, where do you feel like we must go from this point forward? You know, 2025, Trump part two, multiple political assassinations over the last six months. What do you feel like this is leading to? What are the preparations that we must take, where another moment of spontaneity happens, so we can respond to it adequately? And, like, in an advanced position, that's being on the defense. It seems like we're always on the defense and never on the offense. You can't win a game purely on defense.

A: I talk about the '60s, the '70s, and the '80s. This is up to y'all to figure out, what the next level is. Because this is concrete analysis of concrete conditions. Y'all have forums and organizations, and this is y'all time. You know, nothing can be imported, no matter what we did in the '60s, no matter how well it was done. It can't be redone, because this is a different time and different circumstances. I believe in concrete analysis of concrete conditions. And, you know, what happened with George Jackson and the San Quentin Six, that was 1971. These are different times. So you can't say, "you need to do this." If I say, "well, let's follow Lenin," you can't export anything from any things that are done on the north side. You might not be able to redo them on the south side. There's different circumstances and different people and different forces. So you just have to look at what you have and see what you can do. But the main thing is to find out what the masses want. And that will take you back, because they may not be where you are, or they may be more advanced than you are. You've got to take the temperature and see it through. Nobody can say you need to have *these forms of organizations*. They failed in the '60s. Why would they work now? I mean, we had organizations, people put forth maximum effort, people died, people went to prison forever. We made some successes, we made a lot of more mistakes.



R: The movement comes and kind of like, ebbs and flows, and you spoke earlier about the tendency towards despair or isolation, especially if it's just spontaneity without any organization. How did you come to deal with those, or cope with, the failure of the movement? At the height of the movement, how did it feel? Did you really think the revolution was gonna happen tomorrow? Was that the spirit you lived with everyday?

A: In 1966 the movement was still just beginning. The summer of '66, that was when Meredith marched in Mississippi and got shot. Stokely was there with King and he was screaming "Black Power!" So that was the beginning of the movement. Most people at that time were not political, it was a different period of time. It was almost like a century passed between 1966 and 1969 because there was so much more consciousness and so much more organization by 1969.

At that time, people didn't really understand what a revolution was and how much work it was. They thought that it was going to be around the corner. A lot of people were not prepared for the repression that came behind it. And it came hard.

People focused on the murder of Fred Hampton and Carl Hampton and all the raids that happened but the campaign was bigger than that. Every time they stopped somebody who had any kind of ties to an organization, they arrested them. So it was a constant struggle against the pigs.

It was an exciting period of time to live through because of the level of organization and the spirit that people had. I don't think the despair set in until the '70s. During the '60s, until Fred was killed, the spirit was building and building.

R: In a lot of other countries, you know, in Vietnam, there was more repression than in the US. In China there was more repression than in the US, and in Guinea Bissau there's plenty of repression. Algeria, there is more repression than there was in the US. Do you have an idea or did you have an idea at some point why the repression was actually not leading to more resistance after a certain point? Because at first it does, and then eventually, it doesn't.

A: Repression can only lead to more resistance if the resistance is organized.

If it's not organized it's going to lead to despair and people running for the hills. It's terror. The only way to resist that is to have a a foundation, something that people can fall back on. Because if everybody's arrested, what do you do? They come and get every single person and isolate every single person, what do you do from that point forward? What are you supposed to do when the fascists really come?

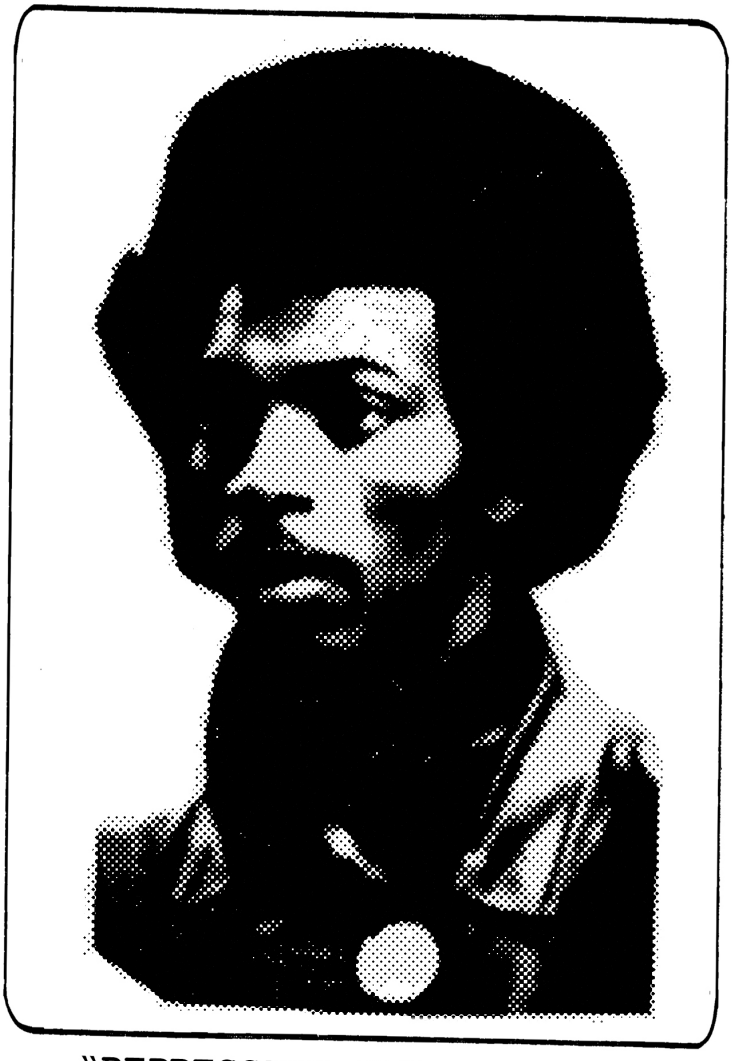


NOTES

1. Abdul's mother was a part of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). CORE was one of the major Civil Rights Movement organizations fighting segregation in the US. They organized pickets, sit-ins, and actions like "Freedom Rides," where Black and white people would ride on public buses together in areas where segregation was still uphold by local laws or norms. In many cases, they were met with violence.

2. While in Tucson Abdul was attempting to organize a Black Panther Party chapter. The FBI raided his house but he wasn't home. He and his friends decided to stake out the house, armed, but the FBI didn't return. They had regular meetings and arms trainings facilitated by an old CPUSA member who did time in federal prison in the early 1950s. This provoked a local scandal in Tucson where the BPP was accused of training in the mountains outside of the city. According to Abdul, this wasn't true, because they had dropped the idea of becoming a chapter by that time.

3. Available to read online: www.thetalkingdrum.com/mes.html



"REPRESSION CAN ONLY LEAD TO MORE RESISTANCE IF THE RESISTANCE IS ORGANIZED."

-Abdul Shanna


Prison
is
the
crime!

HOUSE ARREST

by May June

Ancient lives whirl past
speed walking the ghosts
are totally invisible
no one knows magic
but the crazy and the sane

we count our blessings by
each slice of bread

a loaf was the slice of
last year and the
dream of the bakery,
the communist bread
factory, all of that
a forgotten generation

today we hope for tomorrow
since court has invaded our
dinning room and the judge says

no coffee !!
no concerts !!
no camping !!

you're welcome

SWEET STENCH OF THE CREEK

by May June

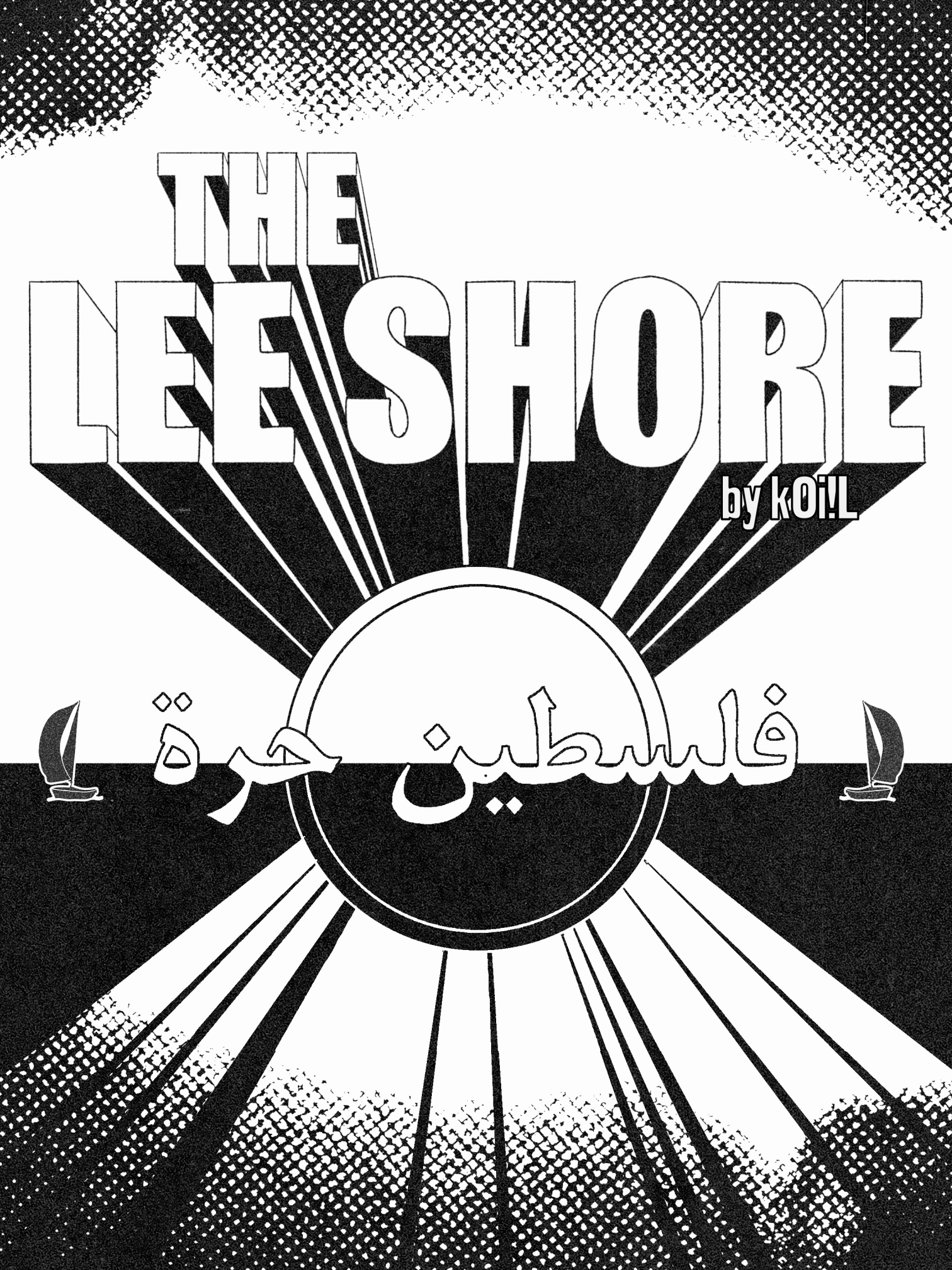
We've done it like this
We did it like this
We'll do it like this
We had to like this
We lost you like this
We loved you like this
We fought it like this
We found it like this
We planned it like this

Never could have
Planned it like this

They did it like this
They built it like this
They killed them like this
They jailed us like this
They scared us like this
They feared us like this
They feared us like this
They feared us

We did it
We did it
I did it
We did it
We'll do it again
Again and again
Again and again

Like this


THE
LEE SHORE
by kOi!L
فلسطين حرة

INTRODUCTION

In August 2025, 500 activists from forty-four countries boarded forty vessels in Genoa, Barcelona, Catania, and Tunis. Those aboard set out to break the inhumane blockade of the Gaza Strip by the US-backed Israeli military. They called themselves the Sumud Global Flotilla. They aspired to recreate moments of international solidarity and action within the longer context of the Palestine solidarity movement, such as the 2010 Gaza Freedom Flotilla, in which nine activists were cruelly assassinated by the Israelis in their attempts to break a similar military blockade.

In Fall 2025, the US-Israeli war in Palestine had reached apocalyptic proportions. Paramilitaries associated with the US-based Gaza Humanitarian Foundation killed nearly 1,000 starving people in food lines. 1.4 million people struggled to survive in the city of Rafah, nearly 70% of Gaza's inhabitants. The Israelis used American weapons to bombard and destroy the Late Bronze Age city, founded over 3,300 years ago. Images of stomach-turning violence spread across the globe.

As armed groups in Palestine fought day and night to repel Israeli soldiers, international activists entered a state of deep melancholia and despair. Over the preceding year, US presidents from both major parties had unleashed surprising violence on solidarity protesters. Universities suspended and expelled students and staff. Under the new Trump administration, ICE arrested organizers, as the Secretary of State Marco Rubio aggressively revoked the visa's of anti-war activists, journalists, and others. In the United Kingdom and Germany, battalions of helmeted police tackled and clubbed demonstrators. British authorities arrested nearly 2,500 people for declaring their support for Palestine Action.

The proposal and campaign to launch a flotilla came at the right time. Across Europe, thousands attended campaign events and fundraisers. The prospect of directly intervening in the genocide mobilized organizers and volunteers desperate to do something effective. Labor unions in Italy held rallies with thousands of workers, promising to shut the country down if soldiers attacked or endangered the flotilla, as they had done to a ship called the *Conscience* in May 2025.

The Global Sumud Flotilla did not break the blockade, and it did not deliver direct aid or assistance to embattled Palestinians on the shores of Gaza. Though a subsequent flotilla of nine ships, organized by Freedom Flotilla Coalition and Thousand Madleens to Gaza, involving another 150 participants, was not far behind.

This brought the total number of sailors in September 2025 to 650, across nearly fifty boats. The *Conscience* joined Thousand Madleens, despite the attack on their vessel just four months prior.

When Israel intercepted Sumud's boats on October 1, protests exploded across the world. Blockades of trains and ports throughout Italy threatened to bring the country to a stand still. Large crowds confronted police in Turin, Milan, and elsewhere. Crowds assembled in Istanbul, Barcelona, Brussels, and throughout Europe. In Libya, Tunisia, Mauritania, and throughout northern Africa, protesters took to the streets. Activists, Muslims, and protesters mobilized in cities and town in Argentina, Greece, Bangladesh, and elsewhere to denounce the repression of the Flotilla, and the domination of Palestine by the US-backed regime.

A new ceasefire agreement between the Palestinian resistance and the occupation began on October 10, 2025. The Israelis have violated it continuously, but the violence and forced starvation have subsided considerably for the time being.

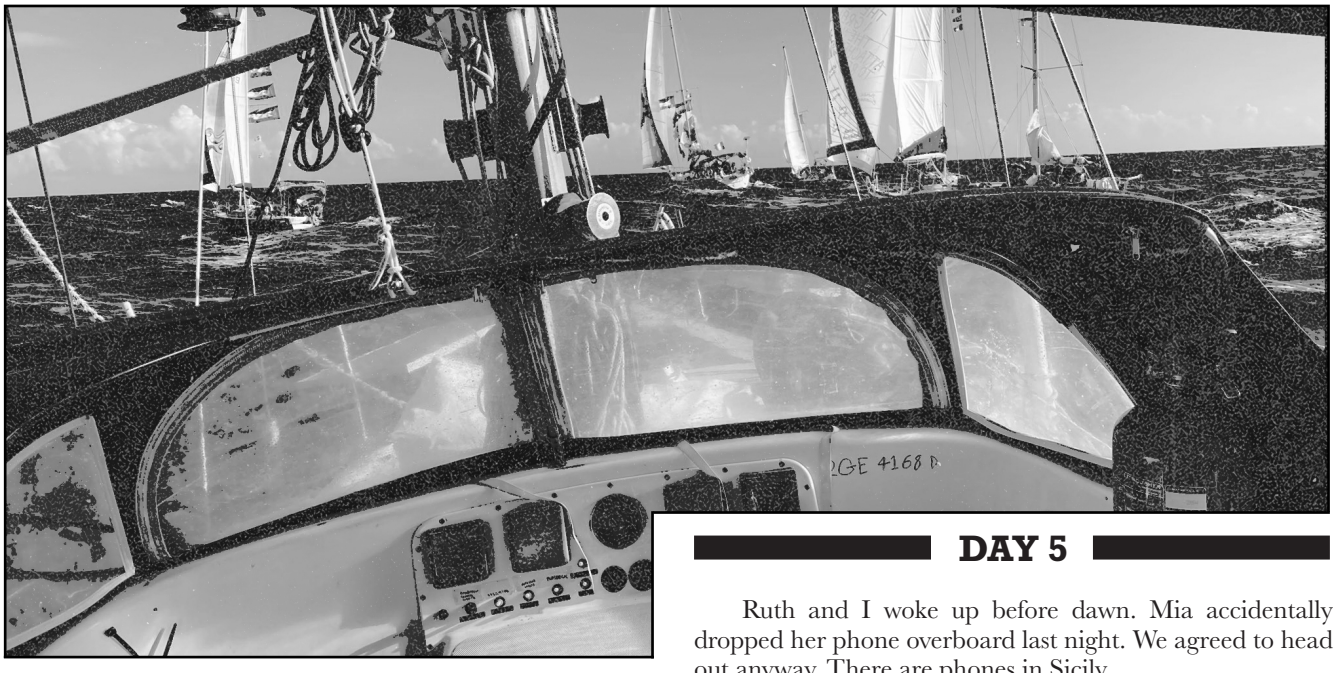
New solidarity flotillas to Gaza are set to depart throughout 2026.

In February, organizers announced the Nuestra América Convoy. This new campaign seeks to break the US blockade of Cuba, which is causing shortages and outages throughout the island. Some of the Nuestra América organizers participated in the Sumud flotilla.

These efforts have received coverage from media outlets across the world, owing in part to the participation of celebrities and influencers on some of the ships. To our knowledge, there is no public account of the day-to-day experience preparing for and participating in these events, especially not from a US-based anarchist operating with no sponsor or family wealth.

If maritime convoys are to become a new form of action for international solidarity movements, it seems valuable to provide some direct reflections by a participant. We hope that the following account, written by a participant of the Thousand Madleens to Gaza, clarifies the process and allows others to visualize themselves taking similar risks to free the world from imperialism, extraction, and control.

GETTING TO NAPLES



DAY 1

My flight landed too late to make my connection from Paris to Naples. Several shouting matches erupted in Passport Control, mostly in the long line of Americans. The next flight to Naples was in nine hours. I trash-picked some cardboard to rest on, and let my eye mask and earbuds cancel out the din. I managed to make up a few hours of lost sleep.

When I came to, I received mildly good news. Andre, our Sardinian, is meeting the boat and its seller soon. Someone is figuring out the insurance. Best of all, a portion of the Sumud Flotilla which left Barcelona yesterday supposedly had to stop or turn back for now due to weather.

We are trying quite hard to sail with Sumud. Thing is, being in position and ready on time is a breakneck scramble. Also, the organizer who was our in to cut through the formalities of joining has ghosted us. He was always a slow texter. We don't know what's up.

There's another flotilla supposedly happening later this month: Thousand Madleens. That was our fallback plan, but I must admit seeing Sumud in the news has me determined to move quickly so we can join them. Maybe even without a formal invite. Obviously I don't wish for their delay. I want them crashing into the blockade today, as soon as possible. But the delay may give us a chance to join.

I sprinted through central Naples to find a ferry that would take me to Procida, the small island where the boat is docked. In an hour, I'll meet my crewmates for the first time. I will certainly collapse from exhaustion right after.

DAY 5

Ruth and I woke up before dawn. Mia accidentally dropped her phone overboard last night. We agreed to head out anyway. There are phones in Sicily.

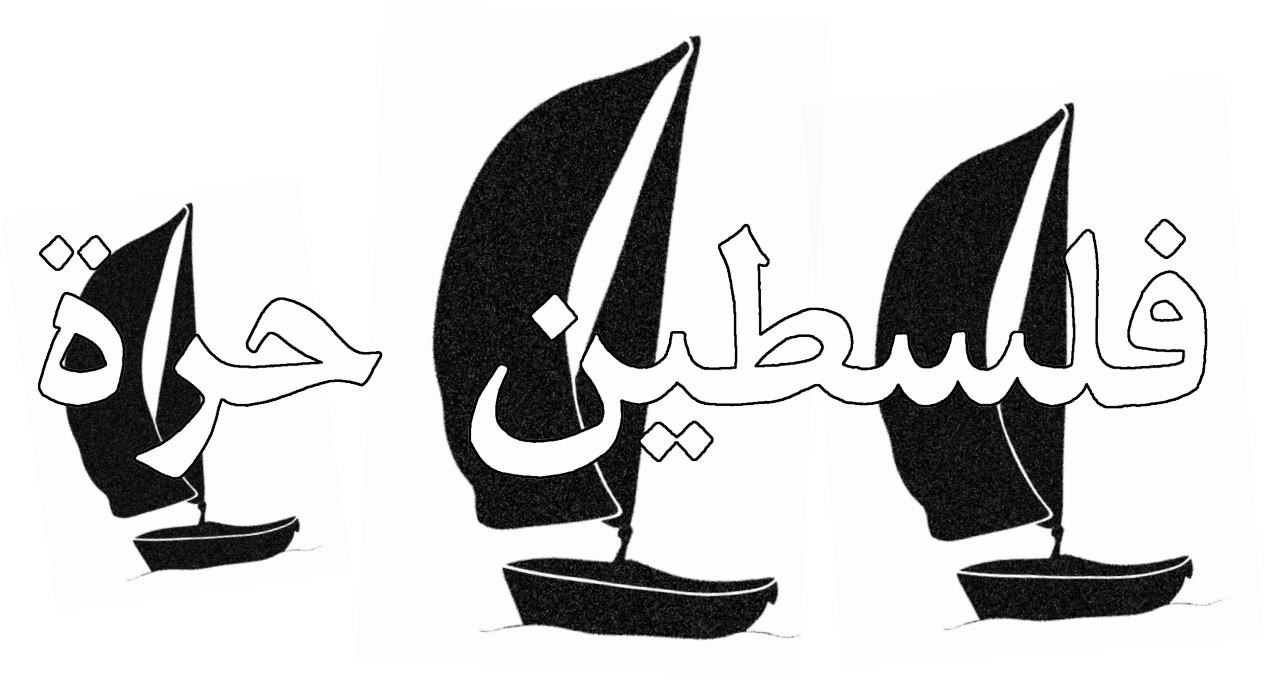
The wind was light this morning, so we motored out through the glassy sea. The Naples archipelago is an amazingly beautiful place. Our course gave us an up-close view of Capri. The mountainous limestone spires were unbelievable.

We listened to music. My fellow Americans played Andre all their favorite anti-police rap hits. Behind the wheel, I wondered what songs brought me here, which ones made me angry. I thought of Fifteen's "Headlines," Dystopia's "Jarhead Fertilizer." I thought of Zegota's cover of "Ohio." I thought of seeing someone you know shot dead, and thought of it happening a hundred thousand times over.

There's another small worry on our horizon. An organizational one. We've been in close contact with Thousand Madleens. We thought they'd welcome us into their flotilla with open arms. But now that we're talking more, they're surprisingly uptight. They insist we have a politician on board. It's commonplace in Europe for politicians to make grand statements on the genocide. But will they make sacrifices with us? Don't they have a job to do?

We hope they will allow us to bring a journalist instead. We haven't broached the subject really.

Also, I've been talking to the skipper of Thousand Madleens. She demands a level of hyper compliance with Italian law. I've tried to befriend her, and to work with her. She has made it difficult. Conforming to maritime regulations will not alter the risks inherent to our mission. I think things will get smoothed over when we meet them soon in Catania.



DAY 8

An Israeli drone struck Sumud. I am absolutely sure of it. The Tunisian media is reporting that a stray cigarette ash cast onto a life jacket started a fire, then a CO2 canister burst, causing an explosion. This is a lie.

Before going to bed, Andre and I were riding high. Macron's government has collapsed. Andre is convinced we are winning and changing the world. I wake up to him yelling, "they are attacking us! They are attacking us!" His voice quivering with tears. He gave no further context.

"Here, Andre?!" I crouch low in the cockpit looking around in a panic. "Who?! Where?"

Andre is glued to his phone. It happened in Tunis, maybe a minute prior.

"I have to tell Sumud!"

"They know, Andre! Please stay here with us!" There's no stopping him and he sprints off in tears.

This strike is just like the one on the *Conscience*.

The next morning, the mood is dour. I can see Sumud huddled out on the dock in a big mourning circle. I feel like a jerk for talking trash about Sumud organizers. I want to give them my support. They are my comrades. It doesn't seem like anything has changed beyond maybe a slight delay for them. Resolve remains high. You can't let the terrorists win.

I have something else I need to take care of this morning. The bank canceled our huge Amazon-Italy order for humanitarian aid. They flagged it as "fraud." I've been trying to get us a hook up. I find someone with lots of extra baby formula. I have to meet him at Marina Xiphonio tomorrow morning.

I see someone shuffling across the marina and I recognize him.

"Cesare!?"

Cesare was my 73 year old skipper two years ago on *Nadir*, a German search and rescue boat. Our hearts are aglow and we embrace. How he ended up with Sumud, I have no idea. I'm just so glad to see a familiar face.

If there's one kind of person who truly doesn't care about an activist security perimeter, it's this retired ambulance driver. He always wears flip flops and cargo shorts. He waves his hand and guides me right through. Two pallets of baby formula, various ages. Enough to fill our boat. Problem solved.

Next is the road trip. We leave early to catch the train to Catania airport. We stop by a bodega. I'm very eager to use the Italian Andre's been teaching me. My québécois friend once told me that the best way to learn a new language is to look your target directly in the eye and use every single word you know.

"CHOW SCUZI PORTRAY AVENE UN PANNE CON ACIETE DI OLIVE PER FAVORE."

The Spanish word for oil that I've used is quite different from the Italian. Instead of bread with a little olive oil on it, I receive a straight-up loaded-down olive sandwich. "*GRATZI!*" Andre laughs behind me.

We arrive at the airport and go through absolute hell to rent a car. There are fields of them. Matrix style gigantic reserves of them, all seemingly identical. Why is it so fucking hard to rent a single one?

Somehow we find Frank Autoleggio, where we made our reservation. Many people told us this was not a real company. Looking around from the tiny office, I'm pretty sure they only had one car, and it was not the SUV we reserved. Even the attendant seemed convinced we had made a mistake, that we did not want to rent from them.



DAY 12

Sumud left today.

For the last time, we wondered if we might join them in this first wave of confrontations. Now the question is settled. That ship has sailed. The thought sits a bit heavy in me. We will watch them and hope for their well-being.

We day-sailed around the harbor as they filed out. The boats from Tunis are underway also, according to Sumud's online tracker. Bon voyage, Sumud. Bella Ciao.

They left behind a mountain of supplies. I wanted a running pole and I found several. We scored 200 gallons of diesel.

It's just us, Sumud land support, and a few sailors from the boats that couldn't leave. One last boat remains, held up by electrical issues but trying to catch up. It's Cesare and his boat. A few of us stand ready with hand flares to send him off.

DAY 15

The Marina is ours.

I wake up in the main. The stack pack along the boom makes a perfect cradle. Best sleep I've had here. When it got colder, I zipped the sail bag shut like a sleeping bag.

I eat fruit and coffee with the French for breakfast. I still can't remember their names. I like Max, skipper of *Naruda.* Andre's friend Manu is here to paint the sails. He's a street artist in Sardinia. He tries to show me something on Instagram, but can't find it. We talk some about the name. *White Kites* was the plan, but Mia nixed it after the French heard "white guys." Now she wants *Soul of my Soul*, from a Palestinian man holding his granddaughter.

Manu wears a 3D-printed Batman mask. We stretch the sails out for him, and he paints. The mask never comes off, even after dark, when he works with a headlamp.

I join my first skippers' call. Mostly just dates for trainings. Some Sumud boats, still at anchor, might join us. Could be a mess, but I'm fine with it as long as it does not delay our departure. Either way, Sumud is late. We might sail together after all, with or without coordination.

DAY 23

Protests, strikes, and riots spread across Italy. Both Italian and Spanish governments have deployed warships to protect Sumud from attack. It feels like a huge escalation.

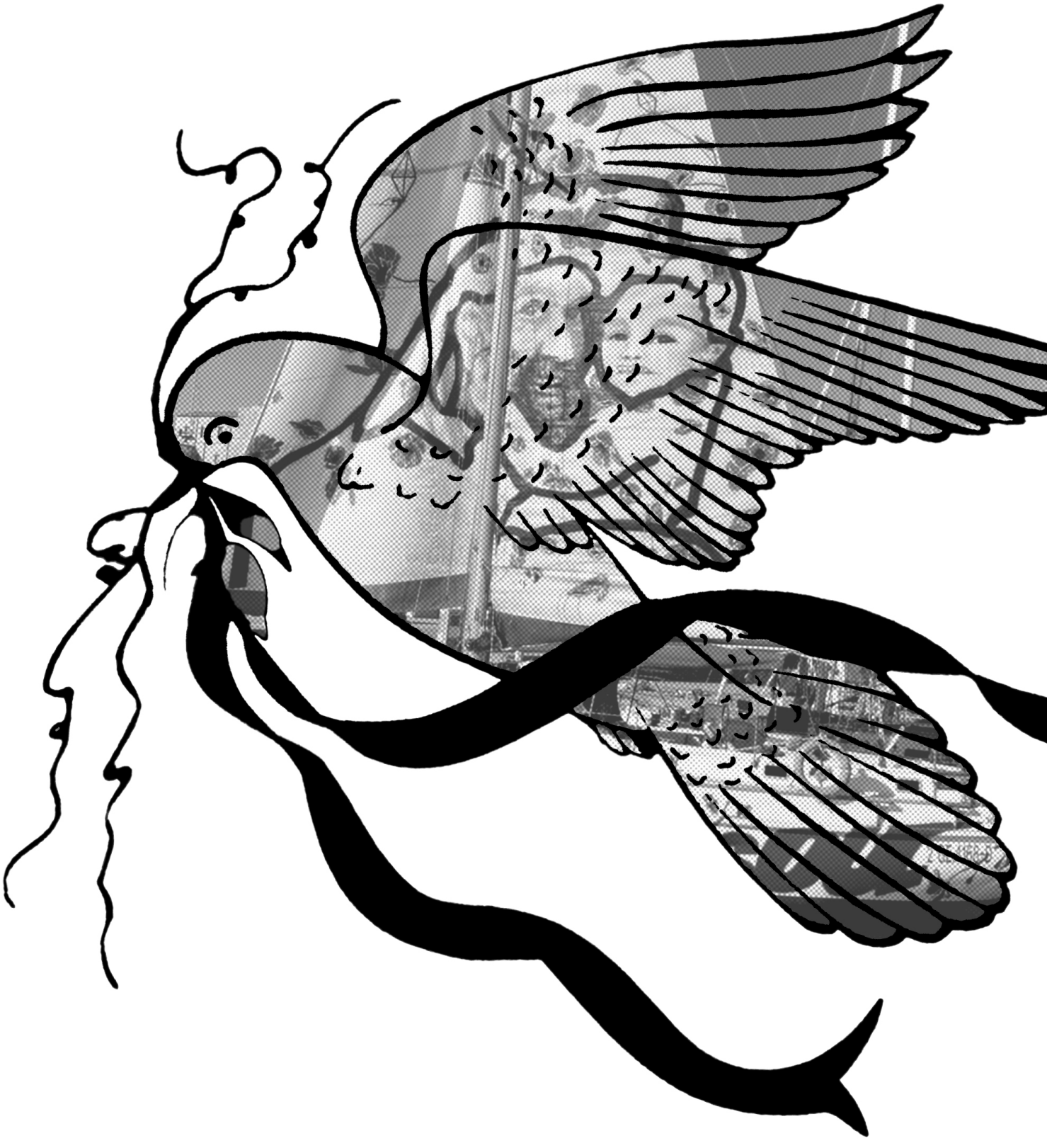
As an anarchist, I consider the implications carefully. I think the flotillas are forcing European governments to react to our initiative, not the other way around. Andre became convinced that the movement might free Gaza and create a new Europe, born in flames.

Today was our last day of trainings. This was supposed to be our departure date.

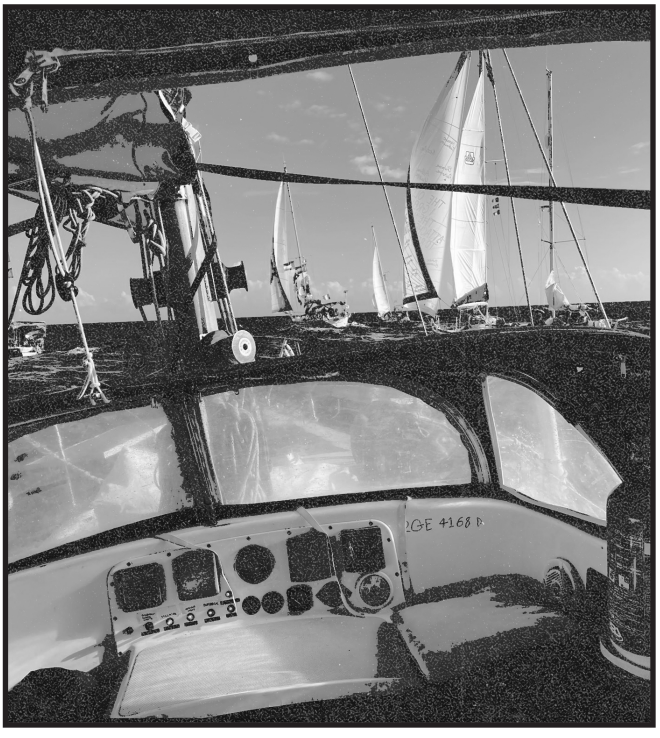
Supporters rallied at the marina. Representatives from different working groups gave speeches. A para-cyclist from a group called Gaza Sunbirds joined the crowd. Before Israeli soldiers blew apart his leg during the Great March of Return, he was Palestine's pre-eminent cyclist. The occupation deliberately targets Palestinian athletes. He's back on the saddle now, undeterred.

A veteran of the French Resistance gave a speech. The ninety-four-year-old leftist talked about what aspirations they had during the war. "This is not what we fought for."

Organizers asked me to give a speech on behalf of the skippers. I can't believe that my interest in boats has brought me to this moment. I'm no different from anyone else here. I just showed up to support Palestine, to support freedom. I'm so glad to be here.



SAILING TO GAZA



DAY 24

We're at sea. We pushed off at 9:00 a.m. This might be the last time we hold each other for a while.

"I'll be watching out for you!"

"See you in prison!"

Hugs all around. The security team is particularly enthusiastic. We motor out of Augusta Bay for Catania. Nine knots of wind dead on the stern. This is a good chance to see how we stack up against other boats. We don't fare too poorly. I was worried they'd be faster than us.

One Guardia Finanzia and one Coast Guard boat keep a close watch.

Andre calls for a video chat. We drop the hook outside of a small fisherman's harbor in Catania. A skiff shuttles the celebrities to shore. I make out friends in the crowd: Gu, the Italian wastewater engineer; Laura the Danish filmmaker . . .

Every so often a cheer goes up from the assembled supporters. We wave back and forth for hours. I'm scrambling to make last minute preparations. It's raining on-and-off. Lightning fills the sky above the coastal city.

We rally together and set out with the last rays of light behind us. I'm eager to go.

After all this time, we're finally sailing east.

DAY 25

120 miles off Sicily. It's a wild ride.

The sun is almost up and the anemometer reads 20. The seas are on the beam which gives us face fulls of spray and a heavy roll. What a way to start a long and difficult passage!

I scan the horizon, counting off our whole rag-tag squad. Each boat looks like a small white triangle in the water. They've all had an adventure getting to this point. It's stirring to see them out here, alive in the sun's first rays.

Three people in our crew are seasick. We're struggling to keep up with the electrical demands of our boat. Our solar is pretty half-assed, and our batteries are cooked. We let the diesel groan it's deep hum to try to keep things charged.

There's a big squall around noon. We loose sight of the others as rain blasts the cockpit. All said, the boat holds up remarkably.

I talk to Jimena for the first time about her office. She's an MP (Member of Parliament) for the region of Madrid. Her mother, she tells me, is convinced that the government deployed the warship on account of her participation in the flotilla.

I spend the evening trying to cook. I've made many meals in adverse weather before, but cooking today, on this boat, might be the hardest it's been in my life. There's no clamps to hold the pots in place. Objects slide around like a skating rink. I hold each pot for the entire duration of its cook time, one by one.

I hope desperately tomorrow will be calmer.

DAY 26

30 miles from Crete. 600 from Gaza.

The Israelis have intercepted Sumud. They are fifty-five miles from Gaza. My friend says the soldiers are struggling to board the sailboats. It sounds unbelievable, but he thinks he will see daybreak over the shores of Gaza.

In the meantime, we're still bogged down by unbelievably elaborate plans to convince a replacement politician to join our flotilla. IDF soldiers are terrorizing our comrades and we've paused in Crete because of this missing piece of our "strategy." The sea is calm tonight but my heart is in turmoil.

It's midnight. I haven't slept but my watch starts in two hours. There's also a big depression headed our way.




JRC

DAY 27

515 miles from Gaza.

In the morning calm, we start another round of chats and Signal calls. We push toward a plan. We talk through the risks, plain and direct. By the end, everyone agrees: if we have to go, we go.

We all stayed up last night to follow the news of Sumud's confrontation and interception. Israel showed up in force, but they failed to lock everything down. They forcibly stopped the boats, only for them to scurry ahead at the first chance. The IOF shouted through loudspeakers, boarded vessels, blasted unarmed sailors with water cannons in the dark. Many boats made it amazingly far—two, supposedly, into Gaza's territorial waters.

Europe has erupted in demonstrations. The boats serve as a rallying point for widespread anger. A symbol and nothing more. But that's enough for now. We know what we have to do: keep this in the news, on people's minds. We don't have the numbers to push through like Sumud did. If we do make it, it will be because the whole world is watching us.

We're only eight boats now. More are on the way. As others take the streets, we will take the seas.

We plan an emergency call about the Belgian politician. One of the coordinators chimes in with a bombshell: the Belgian politician can't make it until next weekend. No way we will wait for them.

The sky sweeps over us in a low gray blanket of clouds, fringed at its edges. The weather I once feared will be our stage. Its power will carry us east. The ocean itself will be our chariot. We will find the lee shore.

There's another long slog of meetings. I've never been one for video calls. The most frustrating news comes from the *Conscience*. It's sailing south. We had planned for it to meet us at sea. They have 100 doctors, journalists, activists, and mariners on board, but now they say they can't meet us. Their plans to refuel have been stymied somehow. They say going too slow would waste fuel and they only have enough to straight-shot it to Gaza. It doesn't make sense to me. Sailing together would really give us some weight as a flotilla. Anyway, we are heading to the same place.

Our old batteries are a constant problem. After a power failure, I discover we've accidentally depleted both banks. With no reserve battery charge, we can't start the engine to charge the batteries.

I call for help. Right away someone responds that they have a generator. It's *King Julien* of course, our heroes. As darkness falls and the seas grow angry, we manage a boat-to-boat transfer of the generator. Anne, skipper of *King Julien*, is cool and collected at the helm while the boat is tossed like a toy inches from ours. Zane, the other skipper, manages to plop it on our deck with one hand.

I was afraid we would lose power, falling out of communication. That might still happen soon, but not today.

DAY 28

320 miles from Gaza.

It's been another day of meetings. The first news raised a cheer: the *Conscience* can stay at sea long enough to join us. In reality, it seems like there have always been two factions onboard. The one fighting to hold together our partnership convinced the other cautiously pragmatic side to oblige.

Today's sailing has been pleasant. The relatively calm sea fair wind just begs us to fly the chute. A fixed wing surveillance drone made a few low passes over us today. I've grown used to tuning them out.

If we maintain our current course and speed, we will theoretically reach the shores of Gaza on October 7. Some people think this is a media nightmare that will doom all of our efforts. Some people just don't care at all. Israel is going to call us Hamas terrorists no matter what we do. Some think that the zeal of IOF soldiers will be dangerously high, and that our crews run a greater risk of physical violence. Some people want to delay, waiting around at sea until the 8th. The downside is we would definitely lose our chance to sail in with the much faster *Conscience*, which everyone wants. They are steaming in sooner than that, maybe the 6th. If Israel wants to intercept us, we can't really control where or what day. They don't act within any kind of guidelines.

All this makes me reflect on the nature of this whole thing. What is arrival? What's the end? Is this a symbolic act? A media gesture? Or is there some infinitesimally small but real chance that we'll make it if the political waters part in front of us? Can we be the first trickle of a people's sea corridor?

I don't really make time to digest the news. I'm busy all day and night. I spend all of my downtime typing up these messages. Despite my usual obliviousness, the announcement of the deal with Hamas and the US was hard to miss. I don't know what to make of it. I've never been a sharp political observer, but it swells more of the same feeling inside me that has been building to a crescendo: now is the time, we have to demand some form of freedom for Gaza, a genuine freedom, and do it now.

DAY 29

We motor east through the early hours. My chest stews with a hint of adrenaline. We're still a couple hundred miles away, but it feels like we're making our move.

I spoke with friends back home during my night watch. I was very happy to hear their voices. Home is a warm thought.

I finally crawl down below for some much needed sleep. I nestle up in the lee cloth on the starboard berth.

[The Israeli Military boards, arrests us, and hijacks our boat at 0500 on October 8, still 125 miles from Gaza]



EPILOGUE



I don't know how many days it's been. Time has blurred and I've lost track of many details. Here is the end of my story.

A strange boat appears on the horizon. It crosses our path and slips into the darkness, heading southwest. That's the direction of the *Conscience*, far behind us, so we alert them.

The action died down. Expecting a long night, I try to take a nap. I wake up soon to M's voice, full of alarm: "Not a drill, not a drill, boat behind us."

I throw on my pants and shoes, passport in hand, ready to ditch my phone. When I emerge, I see the dark silhouette of an Israeli patrol boat. I try not to feel doomed. Maybe we'll still make it to daybreak. We were hoping they wouldn't come for us so soon. We're still 120 miles out. We thought we would have another day to get closer. We were wrong.

I try sending a final text: "we're ready," but they likely jammed our Starlink. The patrol boats are too big to do boardings. I see a group of lights. Probably RHIBs (editor: Rigid-Hulled Inflatable Boats). My heart sinks. It's over. It's chaos. One boat collides into another, maybe *Naruda*. We stick close to *Tadzio*, still under sail but now also running the diesel.

Behind a spotlight, the patrol boat barks orders: "Stop your engine! Lower your sails!"

Coming from street protests, we followed the mantra, "slow down, tighten up." It didn't help us. You can't lock arms with a boat, and you can't de-arrest one either. Once the boardings started, it didn't matter who was nearby. I wish we'd spread out, maybe ten miles between each boat.

The RHIB drives up into our port beam. A group of commandos board, pointing their rifles at us. One of them wears a hat with a strobe light on it. They stomp over everything with their boots. The frame for the bimini became a hazardous pile of half-suspended steel tubing.

"Where are the cameras? Where is the Starlink? Trust me, you want to tell me now!" We play the silent game, obviously. Eventually, they notice the cameras. This guy ties into a harness with all his combat gear on underneath. When he gets halfway up, he turns around the winch override. Just like anyone could have predicted, the knot catches and leaves him dangling fifteen feet above the deck. It takes several people to get him down. I'd laugh if I weren't so annoyed. They need me to turn off the autopilot.

They load us onto the RHIB and run us out to the frigate waiting nearby. I watch the sun rise over the horizon, angry at everything they've taken from us. Once aboard, the deck feels strangely steady under my feet. They search us, record our passports, lead us down to cabins, and lock us inside.

There's a trope in filmmaking, usually horror, when the action ends and the screen goes black. Everything goes quiet for a moment. The silence makes you look inside yourself, heightening the psychological impact of the preceding scene.

Six of us sat in this cabin, worn down. It was so easy for them. We always knew they had the power, but we didn't expect it to come so quick. For me, this was the lowest point. I take a cold shower in the bathroom crouched under the exposed pipe where they removed the shower head, just to do something.

People wonder how long it will take to sail to Ashdod. Through the small window I can see water moving past, about the speed of a Washington State Ferry. "Eight to ten hours?" I spitball. I was pretty close.

On the ship, they began pointing cameras at us. They perform for the Western media. Once we reached the harbor in Ashdod, they performed for a different audience.

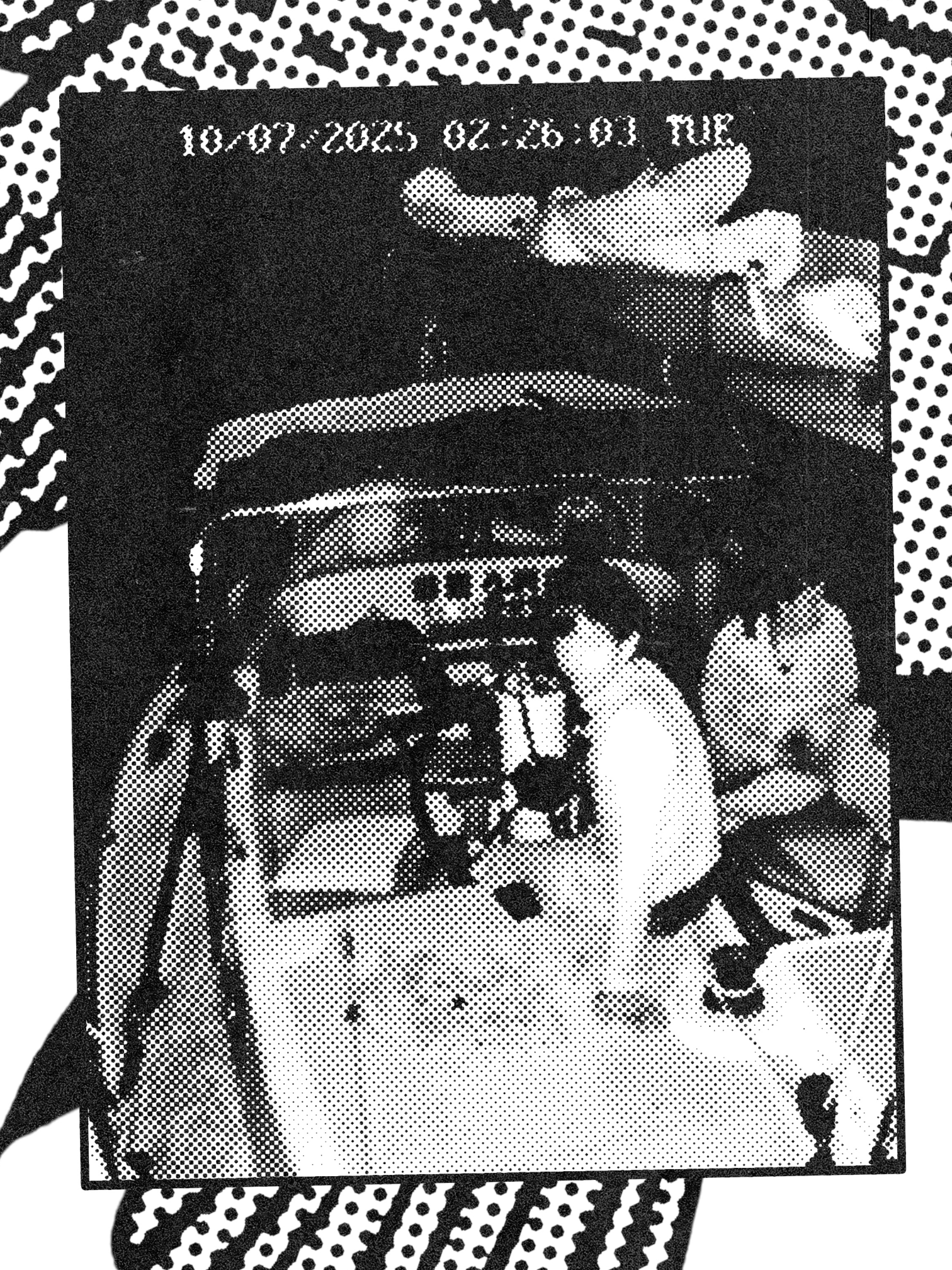
One moment a soldier calmly led me by my elbow. The next, two men twist my arms behind my back, driving me forward at a punishing pace. They force us to kneel in their piss. They throw some of us around, shoving people's heads into the concrete. One of them plays a pop song about their wonderful country. They play it on repeat for the next hour or two.

Customs is cleared out for us. We're led one by one through a gauntlet of desks and computers.

I'm given the emergency deportation form. Obviously, nobody is signing anything about trying to enter "Israel." This is the form that says that as a person soon to be deported, I waive my right to stay in jail for an extra 3 days. I was a little frustrated yesterday that we really had no unified position on this. I sign it. Many others do too, roughly two thirds of us.

They search me again. They throw my shirt into the trash. A friend behind me in line saw it on the heap of confiscated clothing and mourned.

• • • • • • • • •


10/07/2025 02:26:03 TUE

We're outside the doors. It's night and the soldiers rough us up again. They zip-tie my wrists tightly, but I space my palms apart to create some slack for myself. Someone cinches my blindfold as tight as he can. It's so tight it feels like my eyes are pressed inside my skull.

They lead me onto a bus and push me onto a metal bench. After a few moments, the door slams. Someone with a French accent says, "You can lift, there are no guards." Mine is so tight that I can only peek out the bottom but my friend loosens it with his bound hands. I think we look pretty cool with all our matching blindfold-turned-headbands. White with vertical red stripes.

The rest of the bus experience is miserable. We wait for over an hour in the stifling heat. My wrists ache. We eventually move and the sweltering heat is replaced with frigid air conditioning, ice cold on our sweaty bodies. My sole act of defiance is to tie my shoes. They slashed all of our laces beforehand, but I find two slightly longer scraps on the floor and use them to delicately tie one pair of eyelets shut on each shoe. It's the only way to make myself warmer. The ride is agony and lasts for at least an hour, maybe two.

We arrive at the jail. They place us in a big cage. Eventually they cut the zip-ties off and shuffle us randomly into cells. Along the way, a guard hands me a sandwich. They corral me into a cell with some French sailors, an Italian, the Turkish captain of the *Conscience*, and a Spanish polyglot. Seeing others eat wakes up my stomach. The red filling inside the sandwich tastes like children's toothpaste.

The cell is lined with cots. We're not overcrowded. It's the opposite, strangely. It seems like this whole block has been emptied out for us. Maybe they thought there would be more of us. Maybe they didn't want us to have any contact with Palestinians. My caffeine withdrawal helps me sleep the next night and day away. Sometimes the lights flip on and the guards loudly barge in to say something. We make a halfhearted attempt to keep a running time, but it's all a guess.

I honestly can't keep the days straight. If I recall correctly, a representative from the US consulate visited us on the first day. He asks if we want to release our information to our family, employers, and media. I check, "All" and am somewhat embarrassed for it. He promises to get one message out each and assures us that they will work to resolve this. Braedon eyes him skeptically with arms folded.

The US representative has heard the same rumors that we have. Turkey might be negotiating on our behalf.

Hours pass. The French are meeting with their consular representatives when someone comes by the cell door to offer us food. I'm surprised. I take a plate of rice, beans, and some disgusting fake tuna. We take plates for our absent French companions. Three of us eat. Unbeknownst to me, everyone else is on hunger strike. When the French return, they kindly refuse the food we took for them. I am sitting on the floor eating. It's not their intention but suddenly I have four plates worth of food thrust in front of me and I feel like I am somehow being punished for not starting off refusing everything.

We talk to some Sumud sailors. They've been in for eight days and seem to be the rowdiest of the bunch. They were put in a cell with a busted toilet, shit overflowing before they even arrived. In protest, they sing to the tune of Bella Ciao,

"We need a toilet

A working toilet

We need it now, need it now, need it now, now, now."

It goes on for an hour. There's a Welsh guy with a remarkable voice who sings some other tunes too, just for morale. I assume Palestinians aren't given such permissiveness from the guards.

They load us onto the prison bus and drive for hours through the desert. We see the desert valley out of cracks in the bus. There's not much else to see. We might be going to Jordan. We can see one guard with long acrylics who keeps dropping her rifle while trying to text. We steal a glance at another guard's phone and the map has us halfway to somewhere.

Eventually, we arrive at Ramon Airport in Israeli-controlled territory. The windswept landscape takes my breath away. The sky is enormous and so are the mountains. They shuffle us briskly through the airport where we board a Turkish Airlines plane.

The flight is joyous and the staff is very kind to us. When we land in Istanbul, the airline provides us with button-up shirts and shoes. Several Turkish ministers announce themselves on the loudspeaker. On the tarmac, journalists assemble in a frenzy, hoping to capture our photographs. I hesitantly shook the hand of Turkish officials. When people smile, it's hard for me to be mean to them. Let them have their media field day, I don't know if it matters. I suppose that even monsters should support Palestine.

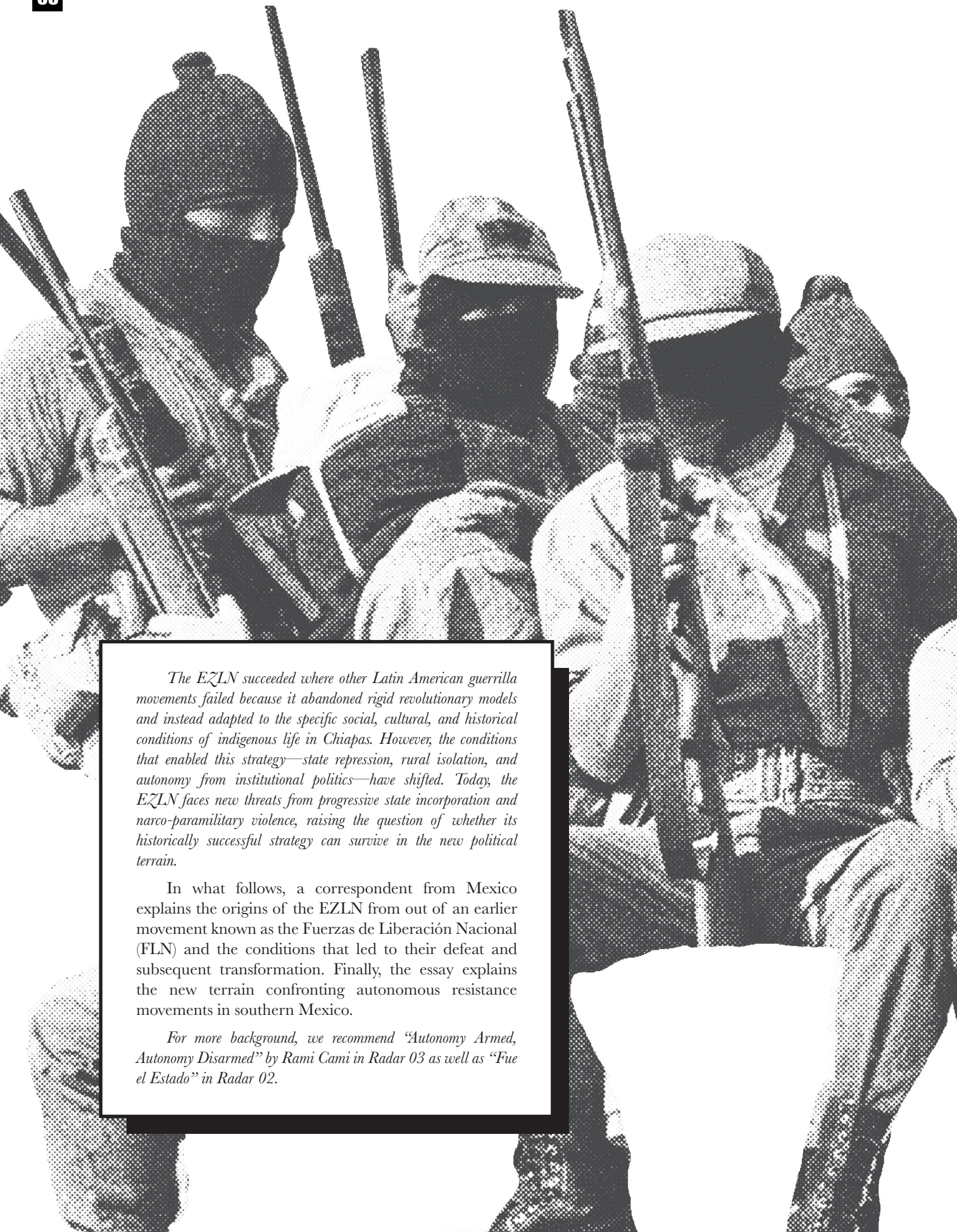
The American representative does not show up to the airport. In the frenzy, I meet an accomplished humans rights lawyer who was on the *Conscience*. He's a fellow punk and also a fellow rock climber. Most of us book tickets for home. Turkish Airlines is taking requests.

It's here that I truly make my greatest mistake. They are arranging tickets with no questions asked. Where to? I should've said Kuala Lumpur. Tokyo. Sydney. There's a few who refused the Turkish government's offer out of principle but it would have been way funnier if I made them fly me across the globe. Instead, I chose Barcelona.

There's a lot of talk of second waves and keeping up momentum. For me, that means getting my costal ICC, a very low-tier European pleasure craft license that I can't get back home. If I want to do something like this again, search and rescue, or some other crazy thing, it will be good to have. Barcelona is one of the places where I can do this.

Someone from the flotilla invited me to stay with her in Vallcarca, a squatted neighborhood on the north edge of the city. Every wall bears proud anarchist murals and the community spaces are too many to list. This old little building rumbles under the stir of pigeons, but it feels good to land in a place that has an air of resiliency.





The EZLN succeeded where other Latin American guerrilla movements failed because it abandoned rigid revolutionary models and instead adapted to the specific social, cultural, and historical conditions of indigenous life in Chiapas. However, the conditions that enabled this strategy—state repression, rural isolation, and autonomy from institutional politics—have shifted. Today, the EZLN faces new threats from progressive state incorporation and narco-paramilitary violence, raising the question of whether its historically successful strategy can survive in the new political terrain.

In what follows, a correspondent from Mexico explains the origins of the EZLN from out of an earlier movement known as the Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional (FLN) and the conditions that led to their defeat and subsequent transformation. Finally, the essay explains the new terrain confronting autonomous resistance movements in southern Mexico.

For more background, we recommend "Autonomy Armed, Autonomy Disarmed" by Rami Cami in Radar 03 as well as "Fue el Estado" in Radar 02.

Behind our black mask, behind our armed voice, behind our unnameable name, behind what you see of us—behind this, we are one of you. Behind this we are the same simple and ordinary men and women that are repeated in all races, painted in all colors, speak in all languages, and live in all places. Brothers and sisters of the entire world, welcome to the mountains of the Mexican Southeast. Welcome to this corner of the world where we are all the same because we are different. Welcome to the search for life and the struggle against death.

—Major Ana María

THE FIRE AND THE WORD

by Ajolote Travesti

For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to cast away stones, and a time to
gather stones together;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace
—Ecclesiastes

The Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional (FLN) began in Monterrey, two hours south of Texas, in the summer of 1969. Student protests had engulfed major cities across Mexico in flames the year prior, and the movement was fragmenting under bloody repression. Like many others at the time, the founding group of the FLN drew inspiration from the Vietnamese National Liberation Front as well as from the words and speeches of Che Guevara. FLN groups formed in Veracruz, Mexico City, Tabasco, Puebla and Chiapas.

At the same time, urban activists and aspiring revolutionaries formed another umbrella organization known as the Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre[1] (LC23S). The Liga sought to empower social movements in this period of heightened repression via bank robberies, kidnappings, and armed attacks on law enforcement. Their hundreds of members conducted extensive propaganda and participated in social movement organizing within the urban centers of Mexico.

For their part, the FLN criticized the Liga's belief that urban guerrilla struggle was a better strategy to attack capitalism than rural armed struggle. The FLN subscribed to the "foco theory," the idea that the best point to attack from was the countryside, starting with a small group of dedicated revolutionaries, building a revolutionary movement via demonstrations of skill, effectiveness, and courage—a theory similar but distinct from the "propaganda of the deed" hypothesis within the anarchist movement half a century prior. Focoismo sought to apply a form of Marxism-Leninism to Latin American conditions. It was widely denounced by so-called "orthodox" parties and organizations as "anarchistic."

After Che's death in 1967, revolutionaries in Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Palestine, and elsewhere began to abandon focoismo, unable to bring the strategy to successful ends. For their attempts, the focoistas often failed to integrate into local indigenous practices, languages, and cultures in the places they hoped to fight. They could not build bases of support for their strategies once the US had already developed a counter-strategy across the continent: Operation Condor (editor: see "Fue el Estado," *Radar* 02).

Urban guerrillas likewise faced serious and tragic obstacles. In Venezuela, Guatemala, Uruguay, the United States, Italy, Ireland, Germany, and elsewhere, young people battled police in armed standoffs. Many languished in prisons. In some cases (such as Guatemala), US-backed dictatorships turned entire countries into zones of brutality and ethnic cleansing. In Mexico, the FLN remained committed to building a revolutionary movement outside of the urban centers. They rooted themselves in rural Chiapas. In the 1970s, they pursued the strategy of "people's war," alongside their contemporaries in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

The Mexican government, backed by millions in American counterinsurgency funds, stomped out communists in Mexican cities. Under the pretext of fighting the cultivation of opium and marijuana in Sinaloa, the US-Mexican policing operations provided ample cover for what was later named the "Guerra Sucia": a 20-year period of brutal repression, extrajudicial executions, and disappearances of left-wing student groups and guerillas.

In 1974, police raided several FLN safehouses close to Mexico City, Monterrey, and Chiapas. Soldiers killed several FLN members; they kidnapped and tortured others. Authorities seized many critical documents about the FLN and LC23S during the raids, hoping to decisively crush the many autonomous movements across the country. Survivors of these attacks remained steadfast.

1. Editor's note: See "Autonomy Armed, Autonomy Disarmed" in *Radar* 03 for a detailed overview of this group.

Throughout the ‘70s, the FLN was silently holding out in the jungle of Chiapas completely clandestine, studying, and training in military tactics. On a secluded farm, they established a group called the Núcleo Guerrillero Emiliano Zapata (NGEZ). With this small “nucleus,” they hoped to re-establish a basis for a broad assault on capitalism in Mexico. They conducted neither bombings, kidnappings, nor public acts. They described this as a period of “silent accumulation of forces.” While the LC23S conducted attacks in central and northern Mexico, the FLN sought to insert itself into the groundswell of resistance taking shape in rural, religious, indigenous Chiapas.

IN CHIAPAS

The struggle over land has been a constituent part of indigenous life in southern Mexico since the arrival of Spanish colonizers. Each generation brought with it a new phase of struggle over natural resources.

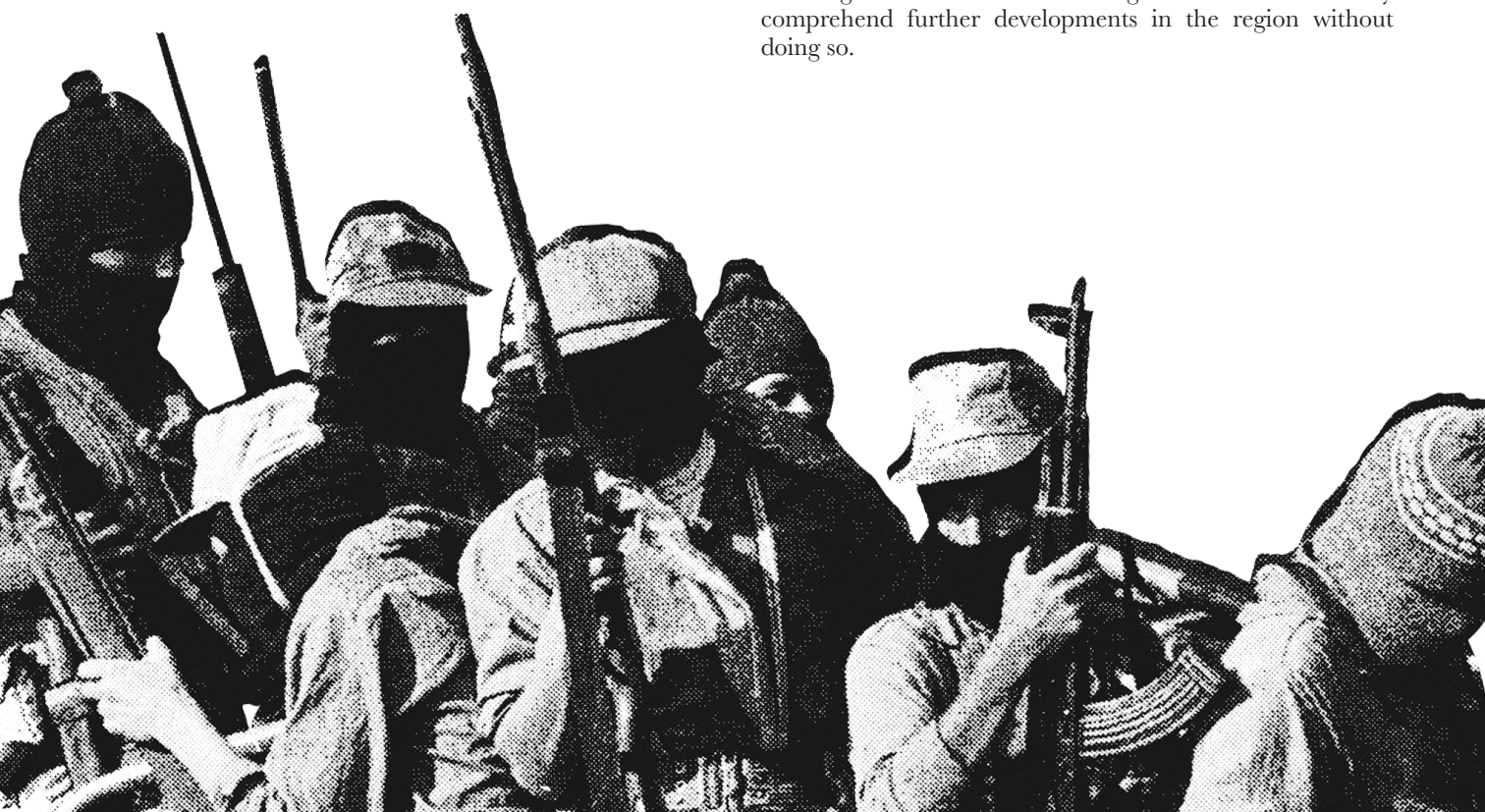
Reforms in the 1930s made it possible for landless farmers to claim rural land under certain conditions. Indigenous peasants worked together to form collective farms where they were or migrated into the Lacandon Jungle to form ejidos there. In the mid-1970s, a new period of struggles began in Chiapas, initiated by the Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Tojolabal, and Cho'ol communities.

In 1975, organized militants in the central highlands founded the Farmworkers and Peasants Independent Central (CIOAC), an affiliate of the Mexican Communist Party. The CIOAC found popularity among the Chiapas farmers as they joined fights demanding better leases from the landlords. They organized tenants the government hoped to dispossess in order to build a hydroelectric dam development. In 1977, peasants formed a CIOAC-affiliate organization across multiple towns in Chiapas.

The landlords of Chiapas, their private armies, and the PRI government fought back. When landless peasants attempted to organize unions, the government refused to recognize them. When they looked for government mediation in their disputes with the bosses or landlords, they were ignored. In 1977 and 1978, the army occupied towns throughout the region of Simojovel, Huitiupan, Sanilla, and Ocosingo, Chiapas. The government sent none other than General Jose Hernandez, famous for his role in the violent repression of demonstrations in Mexico City in 1968, to occupy the rebellious Mayan communities. The army, mercenaries, and landlords burned down peasant villages, stole farmers' tools, and destroyed their infrastructure. They beat and shot organizers, raped women, and, in at least one case, threw farmers from a helicopter. In Venustiano Carranza, Chiapas, after decades of protest, land seizures, and sit-ins, armed resistance erupted. Insurgents formed an organization called the Chiapas Provisional Coordinating Office, eventually changing its name to the Emiliano Zapata Campesina Organization, working to organize their struggle on a national scale.

Something had to give. Local farmers, in a state of open rebellion, sought out additional methods and ideas. They found them in the radical diocese of Bishop Samuel Ruiz and the FLN.

Let's take a closer look at this radical bishop and the religious movement he belonged to. We cannot fully comprehend further developments in the region without doing so.



ECCLESIAL BASE COMMUNITIES

The Catholic Church forbade translation of the Bible for centuries to maintain control over the poor and indigenous. All over the world, services were held in Latin until 1965. The Second Vatican Council opened the interpretation of the Bible and allowed services in local languages. From the Irish Republican Army to the Civil Rights Movement, the poor began understanding class antagonism and anti-imperialism through the Bible.

Samuel Ruiz, better known as Tatik, served as bishop of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas from 1959-1999. The 1968 general council of Latin American bishops in Medellin marked a *toma de conciencia* in the Latin American Church. The council denounced poverty and welcomed the passion for liberation from servitude. Bishop Ruiz learned the Mayan languages, and the Jesuits in Bachajon translated the Bible into Tzeltal. By 1971, the catechists and missionaries in Ocosingo developed an indigenous theology where the Mayan peasants spoke for themselves. Church fathers encouraged the indigenous communities to see the Word of God within their own culture and history. They began to gather the Word from the communities and spread it there. The discovery of God in them and for them.

The catechists of Ocosingo reached highland Chiapas after a recent process of new settlement. It was easy to identify their own injustice through Exodus. The weak (David, the Mayan) against the strong (Goliath, the capitalists). The catechists hosted discussions about political and everyday economic affairs. When the FLN arrived in Chiapas, these groups were the perfect seed for the EZLN. Through the 60s, 70s, and 80s, the Cristóbal de las Casas Diocese in highland Chiapas organized on a historic scale.

The 1974 Indian Congress in Cristóbal brought together 1,250 Indian delegates from 327 communities. There they articulated the injustices against them and detailed their position against merchants and monopolists. Ruiz went on to consolidate the congress into the Catholic civil corps to organize self-defense in the Lacandon conflict and satisfy material needs.

In the 1980s, the ecclesial communities evolved into the Asociación Rural de Interés Colectivo– Unión de Uniones (ARIC-UU). Comprised of 10,000 families cultivating common-use land, this union of ejidos became the major peasant power of the entire central highlands.





EZLN

We confronted the common belief that an armed revolution was possible in any country other than Mexico. That is to say, Mexico was considered the country of solidarity, but never the country of revolution. When we proposed a revolution, we were considered heretics among the left. The left said that revolution wasn't Mexico's role, that we were too close to the United States, that the regime in Mexico resembled the European model, and that because of this, revolutionary change was only possible by electoral methods, by peaceful methods, or, in the most radical scenario, by insurrectional methods. This means that the unarmed masses, with broad mobilizations, would disrupt the economy and create a crisis in the state apparatus, which would then fall and a new government would take power. When we proposed a guerilla war, an armed struggle, we broke with this tradition, a tradition that was very strong during that time. With what was happening in Nicaragua and what was beginning to happen in El Salvador... The struggle in Guatemala was rejuvenating itself a second time, a third, a fourth. I don't know. Eventually someone said, And why not here in Mexico? Immediately, there was a sense of caution, of prudence, as if to say, Not here; here our role is to help those peoples that are liberating themselves and only later, eventually, Mexico might aspire to revolution. The fact that we broke with this idea implies that we also broke with other theoretical schema.

—Subcomandante Marcos, 1994

On November 17, 1983, five men and one woman came together to form the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN). Half were mestizos, half indigenous.

The Indians, conscious and organized to fight for their interests, drew the gaze of the entire Mexican left. The FLN, with others like them, hoped to transform the scattered and localized resistance movements into a single revolutionary uprising. They entered Mayan Catholic associations quietly, working with patience and discipline. Villagers took notice, as did reformers close to Bishop Ruiz. FLN cadre were elected into leadership positions of the rural unions. By 1990, half of the unions stood with the EZLN.

Once elected, the EZLN radicalized these local union groups. Marcos rose to "subcomandante." They brought in arms to gather and train recruits in the jungle.

The FLN still had bases of support amongst urban militants across Mexico. Chiapas was different. There, the FLN shed their old habits and language, embracing a new life and language (literally and rhetorically). In ten years, they had become a revolutionary indigenous organization.

In a November 2003 EZLN communiqué, EZLN members recall:

> We devoted ourselves to survival tasks, that is, hunting, fishing, and gathering wild fruits and plants. During this time, we focused on learning about the terrain, i.e., orientation, hiking, and topography. We also studied military strategies and tactics of the US Army and Mexican Army manuals, as well as the use and care of various firearms and martial arts. We also studied Mexican history and we had, by the way, a very intense cultural life.

By ingratiating themselves to local cultures and conditions, the EZLN developed a viable and realistic strategy. Their growth came not from successive military feats or by importing models and plans laid out elsewhere, but from adapting to and organizing around the people of Chiapas. As their leadership drew increasingly from indigenous communities, the EZLN built a powerful social base among the marginalized and exploited, in particular among women.

Returning to the November 2003 communiqué:

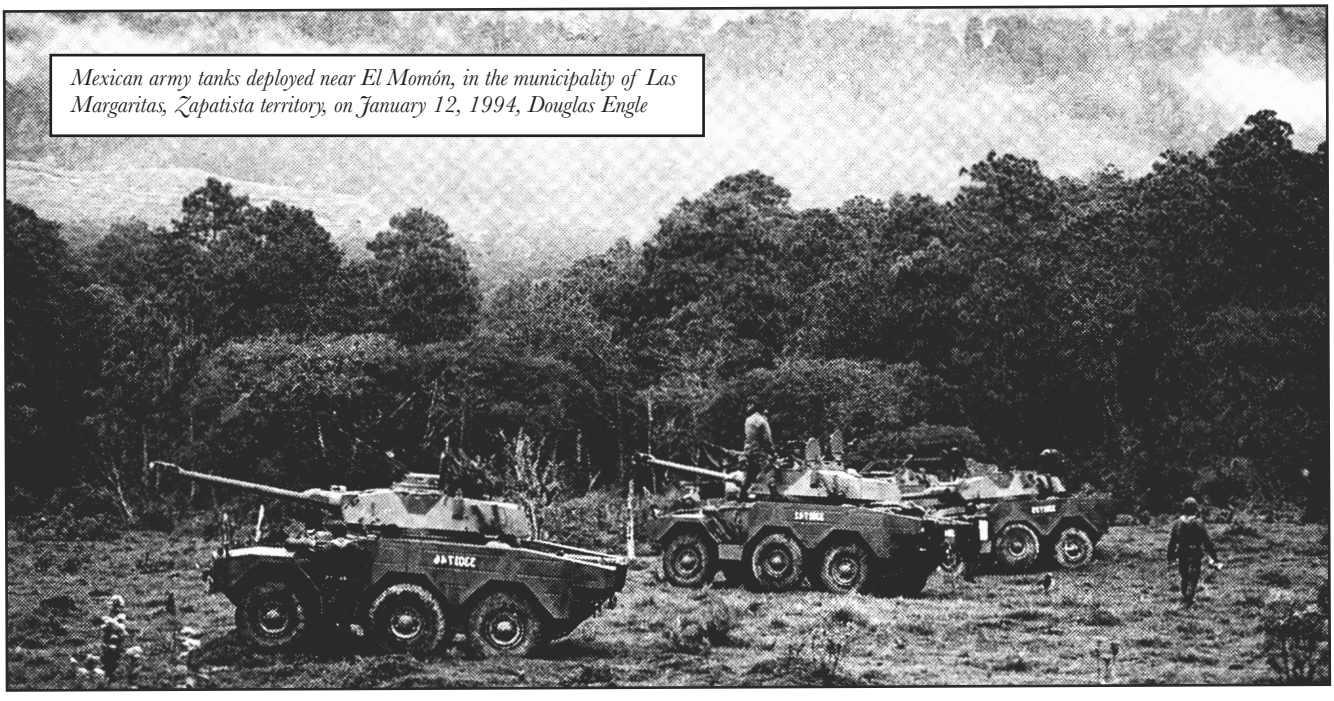
> First, we spoke with one person, and that person spoke with their family. From the family, it spread to the village. From the village to the region. Little by little, our presence became an open secret and a massive conspiracy. In this stage, the EZLN was no longer what we had thought it would be when we arrived. By then, we had already been defeated by the indigenous communities, and as a result of that defeat, the EZLN began to grow exponentially and become "very different," meaning that the wheel continued to dent until, finally, it was round and could do what a wheel should do, that is, to roll.

NAFTA

In 1992, as the "massive conspiracy" of Zapatismo spread throughout Chiapas, authorities in the USA, Mexico City, and Canada signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This marked the functional end of Mexican sovereignty.

In 1994, when the agreement went into effect, tariffs and restrictions on international exchange with the wealthier nations to the north devastated the lives of millions of Mexicans. Heavily subsidized US grains flooded the Mexican market, cratering costs and leaving millions of campesinos penniless. Along the borders, industrial maquiladoras filled with desperate workers arriving from rural agricultural communities that could no longer support them. They assembled cars and other export goods, as US companies exploited the low wages in Mexico. NAFTA sharply increased Mexican dependency on US capital and US dependence on super-exploited Mexican labor. Increased US demand for narcotics, paired with increased repression of the drug trade by the DEA, brought widespread violence and killing to much of Tamaulipas and other northern Mexican states. Near the maquiladoras, violence specifically targeting young women constitutes its own kind of historical tragedy and outrage.

Today, Mexico depends on the American economy even for the root of their indigenous cultures: corn. Cultivated by Mexican migrant laborers inside of the US, exploited by American bosses, and exported back to Mexico with higher and higher tariffs, Mexicans have lost the mother seed of their ancestral and surviving civilizations.



Mexican army tanks deployed near El Momón, in the municipality of Las Margaritas, Zapatista territory, on January 12, 1994, Douglas Engle

For the last 30 years, nearly every social movement and rebellion in Mexico derives its raison d'être from conditions and terms imposed on the country by NAFTA.

The Zapatistas are no different. They were among the first to comprehend the shifting terrain clearly. They staked a position around which millions of people would come to rally in the following years.

THE UPRISING

In May 1993, scarcely 7 months before NAFTA would take effect, the Mexican Army found a Zapatista encampment in Corralchen, close to Ocosingo, Chiapas. The army found propaganda, bullets, and information revealing plans to attack the Ocosingo administration building. When soldiers arrived, the Zapatistas fled. Confusion and paranoia among the ill-prepared army led them to shoot one another on multiple occasions. Friendly fire killed a dozen soldiers; six more were seriously wounded. The Mexican government attributed the casualties to the Zapatistas.

Few understood what was happening or what was coming next.

On January 1, 1994, on the anniversary of the Haitian and Cuban Revolutions, at 12:30 a.m., 6,500 Mayans with balaclavas and old rifles took San Cristobal de las Casas and six other towns in the high mountains of Chiapas.

1000 Tzotzil Maya from the 24th Battalion took over San Cristóbal. They raided the Procuraduria de Justicia. Insurgents shot a cop in the legs and seized the building. They ransacked the facility, piling documents, furniture, and fixtures into an inferno that engulfed the entire structure.

Others rushed to the Palacio Municipal, tearing down the doors and lighting them as barricades in the center of San Cristobal. They took all the useful machinery and equipment they found. They declared war on the government and the PRI (the ruling party).

With their "First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle," the Zapatistas invited everyone to join the armed struggle, to take Mexico City, and to overthrow the government. They argued that by signing NAFTA, the PRI betrayed the principles of the Mexican Revolution, selling Mexican independence to US corporations.

The Declaration of War (the First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle) starts:

> We are a product of 500 years of struggle: first against slavery, then during the War of Independence against Spain led by insurgents, then to avoid being absorbed by North American expansionism, then to promulgate our Constitution and expel the French empire from our soil, and later the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz denied us the just application of the Reform laws and the people rebelled and leaders like Villa and Zapata emerged, poor men just like us. We have been denied the most elemental preparation so they can use us as cannon fodder and pillage the wealth of our country. They don't care that we have nothing, absolutely nothing, not even a roof over our heads, no land, no work, no health care, no food nor education. Nor are we able to freely and democratically elect our political representatives, nor is there independence from foreigners, nor is there peace nor justice for ourselves and our children.

The Third Regiment, composed of 1,500 Maya Tzeltal combatants, took over Ocosingo. A helicopter buzzed overhead while fighters seized the big ranchos and fincas. Rebels arrested armed security and confiscated their weapons and ammunition, using some of the most effective tactics popularized by the Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre during the Guerra Sucia twenty years prior. Ocosingo became a nightmare for the Zapatistas. The Mexican Army sent 1,800 soldiers. They were joined by 2,400 more in the following days. The army massacred healthcare workers on a Zapatista-run bus. They opened fire on two Red Cross ambulances, killing two paramedics.

The 8th Battalion, made up of 1,000 Mayan Tzeltal people, seized the administration buildings in towns surrounding San Cristóbal de las Casas: Altamirano, Chanal, Oxchic, and Huixtan. Some stayed in central squares, while others joined the guerrilla uprising. About 2,000 fighters defended the encampments and reserves. The Second Strategic Reserve, composed of Mayan Chol people, defended the jungle, while the First Strategic Reserve protected the Tzeltal, Tojolabal, Tzotzil, and Chol areas of the region. After twenty years of preparation, the EZLN changed the course of Mexican, Latin American, and global history overnight.

As the Mayan-Mam geographer Linda Quiqivix writes in her book "Palestine 1492,":

> The Zapatistas were credited with launching the globalization from below "movement of movements" with their uprising on January 1, 1994, weaving solidarity across the globe, making clear they were not anti-globalization but were for a different type of globalization, an alter-globalization, "a world where many worlds fit," as the Zapatistas were saying then, "a world where all the worlds fit," as the Zapatistas are more precise in saying today.

At 3 a.m. on January 2, 1994, the guerrillas fled San Cristóbal, leaving a message on the local administration building: "Attention Mexicans: we went to Rancho Nuevo, then Tuxtla. There will be no rest. Thanks to everyone. Thanks, people of San Cristóbal de las Casas. We don't want NAFTA, we want freedom. Viva el EZLN." They raided stores and pharmacies across downtown, with locals following suit, looting everything from food to refrigerators, loading them onto trucks. A few hours later, two Mexican Army units retook the city. Fifty-seven died in the fighting, soldiers, civilians, and Zapatistas alike.

On January 3, 1994, the Zapatistas captured the notorious former Chiapas mayor Absalón Castellanos Domínguez. By the 4th, the Mexican Army had retaken Ocosingo and surrounding liberated towns. Zapatistas didn't hold these positions. They retreated to undetectable areas on the rural periphery. The 8th Battalion, nimble as ever, launched attacks on two San Cristóbal Army facilities. They



abandoned their plan to march on Mexico City. Most of the insurgents retreated to the Lacandon Jungle.

Zapatista saboteurs destroyed electrical infrastructure and PEMEX gas pipelines across Chiapas. In Puebla and Michoacán, they burned two electric towers. On January 9, a car bomb exploded in Mexico City. Zapatistas bombed the Acapulco administration building, and more car bombs hit military bases in Mexico City, its peripheries, and Hidalgo. The rebels threatened further actions nationwide if the government continued to send soldiers to Chiapas.

On January 12, after two weeks of fighting, the president ordered a ceasefire, marking his first step toward dialogue with the Zapatistas. He sent a commission to offer amnesty. By then, the death toll had risen to 108. On January 18, the governor of Chiapas resigned. The Zapatistas presented an agenda with four points and a schedule to begin talks. They exchanged the former mayor, Absalón, for Zapatista prisoners.

70,000 people marched in Mexico City calling for peace. The four points, which demanded justice for the poor and indigenous people, later became the Acuerdos de San Andrés (San Andres Accords), signed two years later. The government have yet to fulfill all of their commitments laid out in the Accords. In 1996, the EZLN founded the Congreso Nacional Indígena (CNI), an unarmed civil organization. The CNI pressures the government, with support from indigenous groups across Mexico, to uphold the Accords. 2026 marks exactly 30 years of this unfulfilled promise.

Las Abejas, an ecclesial base community, refused to join the 1994 Zapatista uprising, opposing armed struggle. On December 22, 1997, ninety paramilitaries massacred forty-five Abejas during a church service in Acteal. The victims, mostly children, pregnant women, and the elderly, were all Tsotzil. Prior to 1994, at least ten paramilitary groups, backed by the ruling class, fought Zapatistas, much like today's drug cartels. These forces have long served as a counterinsurgency tool and excuse for invasion, as shown by recent events like the kidnapping of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro. The 1994 massacre marks a chapter in the Zapatista movement. It reminds many of the need to use arms in the 1994 rebellion.

LA OTRA CAMPAÑA, MORENA, AND ZAPATISMO TODAY

In June 2005, the EZLN published a document called the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle (Sexta Declaración de la Selva Lacandona). In the declaration, the Zapatistas explained their worldview to a global audience, promoting their politics, and declaring their support for grassroots and international resistance to capitalism "from below." The Sexta also explains the need for a new kind of political movement inside of Mexico to uphold the San Andrés Accords and to oppose neoliberalism. The next year, as presidential elections drew near, the Zapatistas launched a nationwide mobilization to promote the Declaration, known as *La Otra Campaña* (The Other Campaign).

During the Other Campaign, Subcommandante Marcos and other Zapatistas traveled across all of Mexico's thirty-one states, hosting meetings with grassroots movements, organizations, and activists. Through their long and immensely popular campaign, they managed to bring together a coalition of 900 collectives and organizations and nearly 2,000 individuals under a single strategic banner and framework, often also called "the Sexta."

The Other Campaign was not without hardships. In early May, police violently attacked the event in San Salvador, Atenco, arresting 275 people, killing two, and sexually abusing twenty-three women. Upon reaching Mexico City, the Campaign halted. Police searched everywhere for Subcommandante Marcos. The EZLN issued a "Red Alert" warning for all Zapatista communities, fearing that Atenco-style assaults would recur at events across the country and even in Chiapas. Demonstrations erupted nationwide. In Oaxaca, The Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) launched an insurrection. Teachers, students, and workers barricaded the streets, clashing with police and compelling government forces to evacuate. The workers took over radio stations and university buildings. The Oaxaca Commune retained control over the liberated city for six months. The Other Campaign resumed in northern Mexico.

As the popular movements sought to establish a new common sense for activists across the country and the world, the results of the Mexican presidential elections arrived: Felipe Calderón defeated the leftist candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO). The latter wasted no time associating himself with the new generation of activists opposing neoliberalism.

Following the attacks on the Other Campaign, the violent suppression of the Oaxaca uprising, and the defeat of AMLO, left-wing movements in Mexico found themselves with incredible global notoriety but few tangible victories at the scale they had hoped to attain them. Calderón sharply expanded the US-led drug war against Mexico. Violence and killings affected every region of the country, including the Zapatista communities in Chiapas. Over time, and especially following the re-election of the PRI in 2012, many left-wing movements drew closer together. This included increased collaboration between activists from the Sexta and Morena, AMLO's populist left-wing party.

In 2018, Morena won the election. They promised to bring an end to neoliberalism in Mexico. They received 53% of the vote on this promise. They retained power after sharply expanding social services among many of Mexico's poorest communities. In 2024, Morena won in a landslide 60% victory, earning a supermajority in the Chamber of Deputies. Under many of the ambitions popularized by the Other Campaign, the ruling party of Mexico appears to have established a new political reality in the country.

Paramilitary attacks on Zapatista communities have recurred for nearly thirty years. But they have increased in frequency. In February 2021, members of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (a narcotics and weapons supply chain partially funded by wealthy white Mormons in Utah) raided several Zapatista communities. Since 2023, the Organización Regional de Cafeticultores de Ocosingo (ORCAO), a paramilitary group linked to the government, has attacked Zapatista communities Moses and Gandhi, displacing

dozens from the Caracoles (small, independent villages). The Zapatistas claim that ongoing immiseration in Central America is driving violence and competition north into Chiapas, disrupting the narcotics monopoly of Ismael "el Mayo" Mario Zambada García (who was arrested in 2024 and subsequently testified in US court that he paid millions in bribes every month to Mexican officials in order to operate). This competition and power vacuum are fueling the violence in the area; the Morena government denies and downplays the threats to the indigenous communities of Chiapas.

A newly minted megaproject known as the Tren May now runs forty-two trains across Yucatán, Quintana Roo, Chiapas, Campeche, and Tabasco, covering the entire Maya region with tourists and international investors. Belize and Guatemala have shown interest in extending the train and the Corredor Interoceánico into Central America, a plan Subcommandante Marcos predicted during his El Sur Grita speech after the attacks on Zapatista caracoles began in 2001.

Today, Morena is hailed as the most progressive government in Latin America, with a successful pension campaign for workers over sixty-five and significant improvements in social security. On the other hand, it wages an open war against organized, left-wing, indigenous nations like the ninety members of the CNI. Just as the PRI persecuted and killed guerrillas during the Guerra Sucia while supporting the Sandinistas in Nicaragua.

Due to increasing attacks by ORCAO and others, the Zapatista Caracoles have closed to the public for the first time since their founding in 2003. Today, they serve Mayan locals as community centers. The annual Zapatista gatherings have continued nonetheless. They hold one during Holy Week, another in the first weeks of August, and the most important, which celebrates the 1994 uprising, every New Year's Eve.

Many former Zapatistas now work in Morena. The San Andrés Accords remain unfulfilled, and the first generation of Zapatistas are entering old age. Young radicals in Mexico increasingly support Morena, signaling the slow retreat of the Zapatista movement.

If sovereign power, as Giorgio Agamben coined it a year after the Zapatista uprising, determines who lives and who dies, partisan power decides what is visible and invisible in the fight against domination. To cultivate a strong partisan power, we must translate our struggles into the many repressed and marginalized languages of the poor and angry people of the world.

If indigenous communities, poor people, students, and workers in Mexico are going to continue the fight carried forward by the Zapatistas, they will have to cultivate new strategies and methods for the new terrain. The left-wing government provides increased services and resources to many leftists but undermines their ability to organize themselves at the scale required to meaningfully oppose US domination over Mexican resources and people. Moreover, indigenous people and farmers remain uniquely disenfranchised within the existing social democratic reforms. In all likelihood, these communities will continue to pose a serious challenge to the social order in the coming years, opposing the proliferation of paramilitaries, privatized security, innovative forms of economic coercion, and even military attacks from across the US border.

On March 5 and 6, 2026, the White House hosted the 2026 Americas Counter Cartel Conference. They invited allies from Bolivia, Honduras, the Dominican Republic, Paraguay, and dictators from El Salvador, Ecuador, and Argentina, including the newly elected president of Chile, a child of former Nazi stormtroopers. During this gathering, US Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller declared that Mexico-based drug cartels were military entities that could only be defeated through military means. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth urged the assembled leaders to take "offensive action" against drug dealers and supply chains throughout the hemisphere.

These statements can only be interpreted as direct threats against Mexico, a country that now intimidates the US due to its growing trade relations with China.

If this dynamic continues to escalate, with the US using regional state allies against Mexico, the consequences could be catastrophic, especially in rural areas. After many decades of deadly operations and meddling, it is not impossible to imagine the US conducting international assaults on Mexico via paramilitary proxies from around the world, as they do in Haiti and the Congo.

In the face of threats from Trump, President Claudia Sheinbaum has sought to bolster her international reputation, ostensibly hoping to mitigate the dangers by doing so. At the same time, the Morena government is attempting to develop the economic might of Mexico, address the needs of the lower classes, and maintain law and order inside of the country. In other words, they hope to use a combination of clientelism, economic development, public relations, and welfare to mitigate class conflict inside of the country indefinitely.

This cannot last forever. In April, two CIA agents died in a mysterious car crash in Chihuahua, in what was described as a counter-narcotics operation alongside Mexican law enforcement. President Claudia Sheinbaum says she had no knowledge of CIA operations inside of Mexico. As international pressures continuously challenge the sovereignty of the country and the independence of its indigenous communities, social movements like the Zapatistas will become more crucial than ever. These movements mobilize a massive base of poor people around concrete practices and real needs. They retain a degree of anonymity, armed capacity, and creativity, making them indispensable in the face of growing pressures. When the institutional path fails, the poor and marginalized will have only one another to rely on.

From the shadows of la Gran Tenochtitlán and with the revolutionary ghosts of Iximulew, doing all we can with the power of nature and the force of our ancestors, from Milpa Alta and Xochimilco to destroy the Mexico City FIFA World Cup, to recover our land and water,

Commander in Chief,

Ajolote Travesti


The red star that calls out to humanity and the world





