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After the Crest, pt. III

Barcelona Anarchists at Low Tide

This is the third part in our “After the Crest” series, studying how we can make the most of the waning phase of upheavals. This installment analyzes the rhythms of struggle in Barcelona over the past several years, discussing the complex relationship between anarchists and larger social movements as popular struggles escalated and then subsided. It concludes with practical input on how anarchists can take advantage of a period of ebbing momentum.

For best results, read this in combination with our earlier features on Barcelona: “Fire Extinguishers and Fire Starters,” describing the plaza occupation movement of spring 2011, and “The Rose of Fire Has Returned,” focusing on the general strike of March 2012. Together, the three pieces trace the trajectory of an upheaval from its inspiring but ideologically murky inception through the high point of confrontation and into the aftermath.

ANARCHISTS IN BARCELONA played an important and visible role in the social upheavals of September 2010 to May 2012, which in their turn were an influential contribution to the global upheavals taking place in those same years. By the summer of 2012, in the Spanish state and elsewhere, these upheavals largely appeared to have subsided. Anarchists in Barcelona have faced a number of important questions and difficulties as a growing social disintegration contrasts with the earlier times of social coalescence. Will the gains won in those moments of rebellion be lost now that the prevailing social mood is one of resignation?

Whether it takes months or years, such gains are never lost, only surrendered. Social rebels can hold on to the strength they have won if they allow it to transform rather than expecting it to accumulate. It would be self-defeating to predict, from this vantage point in 2013, whether the anarchist struggle in Barcelona will lose ground or go back on the offensive, because that future rests largely on our own decisions.

Timeline of Events

2007: A conflict arises within the squatters' movement when one sector seeks legalization within a reformist discourse of housing rights. As a result, anarchists redouble their efforts to elaborate a critique of capitalist housing. They also question the practice of squatting for the sake of squatting.

End of 2007: CGT-led bus drivers' strike, with critical use of sabotage and anarchist solidarity, wins many of its demands.

Spring 2008: A campaign begins for the freedom of longtime anarchist prisoner Amadeu Casellas. A year later, a similar campaign begins for Joaquin Garces.

September-October 2008: US stock market crashes.

October 2008: In an action two years in preparation, populist but nonetheless practical anticapitalists in Catalunya use half a million euros robbed from banks through fraudulent loans to print and distribute hundreds of thousands of copies of a newspaper (published in three different volumes over the next two years) that criticizes capitalism and suggests alternatives. About three years later the group begins a complex of consumer and producer eco-cooperatives.

December 2008: Greece is gripped by an insurrection, with solidarity actions and important consequences in anarchist practice in Barcelona.

Spring 2009: A huge student movement against Plan Bologna austerity measures is killed off by pacifist leadership. Once occupied universities are evicted, the radical part of the student movement turns to squatting empty buildings and self-organizing a “free university.”

2009: Barcelona witnesses a growth of coordinated solidarity actions and attacks in solidarity with anarchist prisoners and anarchists in Chile and Greece, as well as daylight attacks against targets that can be easily associated with housing and job precarity. The support campaign wins the freedom of Joaquin Garces.

Spring 2010: The government in Madrid announces the first of many rounds of austerity measures. In preparation, major and minor labor unions, along with anarchist and other groups, begin preparing resistance across the Spanish state. In Barcelona, the first neighborhood assemblies are also formed to organize the upcoming general strike.

September 29, 2010: General strike, with major participation and heavy rioting in Barcelona.

January 27, 2011: Minority unions, primarily the anarcho-syndicalist CNT and CGT, launch their own general strike, without the major unions. Participation is significant though far from total, and complemented by several significant sabotage actions.

May 1, 2011: In a collaborative effort between anarcho-syndicalist organizations, socialist Catalan independence organizations, and insurrectionary or informal anarchists, a combative May Day protest successfully wreaks havoc in a rich neighborhood for over an hour.

May 16, 2011: A day after major protests across the Spanish state, a group of 100 activists begin an occupation of Plaça Catalunya in the center of Barcelona. Within a few days, the occupation grows to 100,000 and beyond. The 15M movement is born. Subsequently, new neighborhood assemblies appear across the city, and a series of massive protests and blockades are organized.

Fall 2011: The movement against the privatization of healthcare in

6. By “Western medicine,” we should not understand every European tradition of healing, but the proactively patriarchal and capitalist practice of medicine that was institutionalized in the Enlightenment and subsequently globalized.

7. Given the worldwide recession that forms the backdrop of today’s social struggles, this formulation only deals with the possibility of economic crisis. But struggling in times of social peace can also provoke a crisis in governance that is not directly caused by economic recession, as in the rebellions of 1968.

Catalunya peaks with numerous blockades and occupations of hospitals and clinics.

January 2012: Public transportation workers, largely organized by the CGT, betray their promises and sell out a week-long strike before it begins, making a deal that meets none of their initial demands and wasting weeks of organizing, much of it carried out by allies and transportation-users. Fortunately, that same week, a student strike takes over the streets. Students disobey their leaders, riot, and attack the media.

March 29, 2012: A general strike paralyzes the country. In Barcelona and other cities, protesters engage in the biggest riots yet.

May 1, 2012: The police militarize the streets, expecting possible rioting in the anti-capitalist May Day protest. Most anarchists, however, prioritize countering media and government discourses around the earlier general strike. Thousands of flyers are distributed.

October 31, 2012: The minority unions hold another general strike. This time, the CGT organizes peace police to prevent riots. Most anarchists do not solidarize with the strike, and it passes practically without notice.

November 14, 2012: The major unions together with the smaller unions carry out the next general strike. The neighborhood assemblies, largely weakened, and the informal anarchists, doubtful or uninspired, do not play a major role in preparing. In Barcelona, the protests during the strike are massive, but the police control the streets and brutalize people from one end of the city to the other. The general mood after the strike is of disappointment or powerlessness.

Rhythms of Struggle

THE SOCIAL UPEHAVALS in Barcelona were not caused by material conditions. The structures and traditions that became most important in the space of the revolt were already in place before the economic crash. And the greatest spikes in popular participation in the revolt were direct responses either to movement initiatives that resonated with people’s perception of their problems, or to a perceived attack on their living conditions. Specifically, spikes occurred when the government announced an austerity measure—not when austerity measures took effect or the economic crisis as a whole began to be felt—or else when an initiative such as a strike or an occupation attracted many people and went off successfully. In other words, people’s perception of their living conditions and the possibilities for resistance has proved more real than any objective measurement of those conditions on a material level, whether evaluated in wages, unemployment, or otherwise.

The key to gaining strength in times of social disintegration can be found in this approach. We are not mere subjects of social forces. On the contrary, we actively and confrontationally position ourselves to contradict the narrative that justifies or hides those forces. When the narrative depicted social peace and prosperity, we occupied a network of cracks in and margins of that prosperity, demonstrating that we were not content with the wages society was willing to pay us and that we knew we were not the only ones in refusal. When the narrative depicted change and reform, we positioned ourselves at the juncture of the mass of bodies beginning to appear in the streets and an imaginary horizon that contradicted the democratic ideology that mobilized and homogenized those bodies. When the narrative depicts disappointment and powerlessness, we approach the collapse of social movements with joy, because it unmasks the false promises of populists and reveals what is truly lacking for us to regain our lives. Just as our actions had meaning in times of social peace—just as revolutions were not inevitable in times of austerity—our actions, our projects, and the positions we choose in relation to events can sometimes tip the scales to determine whether a social disintegration erases everything that was won in a period of revolt, or whether the lull that always follows the storm will soon be interrupted by another wave of revolt.

A simple comparison of events in the United States and events in Catalunya suggests that a highly disintegrated society is likely to sustain a single brief flare of resistance before normality resumes, whereas a more coalesced society can sustain multiple intense waves of revolt in relatively close succession before exhausting its hope and rage. Some of us hold that the activity of social struggles—understood broadly—is the best way to reverse the social disintegration caused by capitalism. The farmers and artisans who blindly resist modernization; the insurrectionaries who connect with popular rage; the activists who overcome themselves by spreading an ethic of mutual aid rather than the specialization of charity; the old people who insist on telling the stories of their defeat; and the artists who evade their own recuperation—all of them help society[1] to coalesce in the face of the disintegrating force of capitalism.

Just as the more densely knit society can sustain the reverberations of revolt for longer, the places within that society where comrades seek and generate conflict as part of an ongoing effort will not fall back into silence as quickly. In Catalunya as in the United States, a successful projectuality has allowed certain towns and cities to maintain more intense struggles where all around them the social peace has already returned. Revolt moves through the social body, but its specific functions may be performed by any of that body's cells. We are not external to the body, as a surgeon, a

active, sometimes in conflict, sometimes in harmony. When the FAI succeeded in its important mission of blocking the syndicalist takeover of the CNT, around 1934, they also initiated the unfortunate unification of the anarchist space within and under the CNT. It is possible that this unification already bore rotten fruit in 1934, when the anarchists failed to show effective solidarity with the insurrection in Asturias, although it would take more reading to confirm whether the CNT's organizational hegemony hindered solidarity.

3. Of course, its roots can be traced back further, as when insurrectionary anarchists were expelled from or broke with spaces controlled by anarcho-syndicalists (1996), were subsequently defeated by repression in the space they had created for themselves (2003), and took refuge in the space created by squatters or returned to resume a direct engagement with the anarcho-syndicalists in the space of the CNT. This interpenetration helped lay the groundwork for the subsequent shattering of the previously segmented anarchist space.

4. Those who, in my mind, have carried on the methods of the antiglobalization movement without learning most of its critical lessons.

5. One might argue that a change in the physical content of labor has made unions less relevant. But in the case of Barcelona, while factory labor has clearly declined and the service industry blossomed, this does not seem to provide a satisfying explanation. In the '20s and '30s, two of the largest (and most radical) sectors in the CNT, as well as two of the largest trades on an absolute scale, were the wood workers' and bricklayers' unions. The workers in those unions were (un)employed overwhelmingly by the construction industry, which was far more precarious and short-term than factory work. Construction work tended to be given out on a per job basis. It did not generate either the sense of neighborhood or the relatively stable collective relationships that the factories did. And for the dispossessed peasants who made up the ranks of those unions, the new forms of mass construction hardly constituted skilled labor. In other words, work in the construction industry a hundred years ago was not so different from work in the service industry today, an industry that employs the vast majority of Barcelona's underemployed anarchists. Yet those anarchists do not have a union. I would argue, in very unmaterialist terms, that the key shift has been cultural. The proletarian identity has been eroded and replaced by a democratic identity, aided by the strategic extension of commodities into the lives of the poor, and by the even more strategic universalization of bourgeois culture through television. In fact, it was probably the survival of strong feudal characteristics in Spanish society, and not the reality of factory labor, that enabled the exploited to identify so clearly as proletarian when they came to the city a hundred years ago. Although the unseen purpose of their wage labor was to unify them with their bosses, they transposed the peasant/lord division from the countryside to the apparently similar but essentially different inequality they found in the city.

* Learn a material skill that would be useful to you if the State and capitalism were destroyed, like carpentry or dentistry. Encourage your friends to learn such skills. Discourage them from embarking on a life path that is premised on the persistence of capitalism.

* Join existing projects that potentially constitute a material intensification of relations of collective self-organization, like clinics, gardens, and workshops. If none exist that suit your talents, talk with friends about starting one. Begin the discussion with questions like these: How we do this in such a way that it sustains us rather than exhausting us? How can this serve as an invitation to our neighbors to begin to abandon capitalist ways of life? How can this support those on the front lines of the social war?

* Challenge the legitimacy of all campaigns of repression. Cultivate awareness and outrage among your neighbors, coworkers, and other people you interact with. Organize visible events such as potlucks in a public place at which people can symbolically support those facing repression. Go door to door if you have to.

* Tell stories of resistance. Organize neighborhood anarchist history tours that weave together the heroic battles of the previous century with those of last year. We've been fighting this war for hundreds of years; we will be for hundreds of years to come. Every scarred revolutionary who resists burnout and holds true into old age, and every young anarchist who does not have to start from scratch, constitute a victory against oblivion.

Endnotes

1. While it does encourage us to think of the ways that power is diffuse, not simply a top-down imposition that we suffer passively, the identification of "society" as the enemy reveals a disturbing ignorance as to what exactly the State forcibly disintegrated and reconstitutes with the bonds of nationalism and the Spectacle. It is this same unknown that palpably coalesces in the space of the riot and of struggle more generally. Margaret Thatcher's assertion that society does not exist, only the Market, was less an observation than the mission statement of capitalism.

2. A classic example of this would be the disastrous strategy of collaboration with the republican government chosen by the CNT in July 1936, and their ability to suppress other strategic tendencies, such as the illegalist tendency of some Italian and Catalan anarchist expropriators in Barcelona, and the insurrectionary tendency of the Friends of Durruti group—not to mention the critical voice of Durruti himself, before he was killed by the Stalinists. The anarchist space throughout the Spanish state was far more heterogeneous and fragmented before the Civil War than is generally recognized. Dozens of different currents and tendencies were

sociologist, or a vanguard, but neither are we its prisoners.

We imagine that it will be the concussiveness of repeated outbursts of revolt, and not the geometrical growth of a social movement, that will destroy the current structures of governance, the way the intense vibrations of an earthquake or avalanche liquefy the hardest materials.

If this is correct, one of the vital tasks of rebels is to unlearn the mechanical motions of the Left and the fatalistic expectations that a mechanical worldview inculcates, and to relearn rhythmic cycles of struggle.

The Anarchist Space

A COUPLE YEARS before the new social movements broke out, many anarchists had already begun to change how they interacted and how they positioned themselves in relation to the rest of society. This enabled them to be much more effective in the social coalescence that occurred from the general strike of September 2010 through the 15M movement to May Day 2012; to play a role in extending and radicalizing that coalescence; and to hold on to a good deal of potential as it began to fade away.

In the previous century, the anarchist space in Barcelona—the terrain of struggle which anarchists inhabit and help to create—has changed in shape and density numerous times. I would identify three different forms this space can take: a unified space, which is held together by an organizational center of gravity, with communication occurring primarily within a singular organizational set of boundaries that can presume to represent an anarchist movement; a segmented space, which is divided between multiple centers that generally do not overlap or communicate; and a fragmented space, which is comprised of numerous distinct groups or currents that, despite differing and often conflicting, intersect and overlap to an untraceable degree, so communication and connection are networked intensively. In their long history in Barcelona, anarchists have always been most effective when their space was fragmented.

An increase in their strength, or the potential loss of that strength, has generally led them to unify their space of struggle. Unified spaces have generally precipitated major defeats, as the weaknesses of a single line of struggle can affect the entire movement.[2] The contrasting interpretations of those defeats have repeatedly led to the appearance of a segmented anarchist space. In the last thirty years, the anarchist space in Barcelona has gone from unified, to segmented, to fragmented.

The last change occurred primarily between 2008 and 2012.[3] It was visible in the exodus of anarchists from the squatting bubble, in the bus

drivers' strike of 2008, in increasing attempts at citywide or regional coordination through 2009 and 2010, and afterwards in participation in neighborhood assemblies, plaza occupations, citywide coordinating groups, campaigns against foreclosures, campaigns against immigrant detention centers and raids, and labor assemblies for the organization of strikes. Clearly, the increase of popular resistance and the erosion of social peace helped to strengthen the anarchist space and created many more opportunities for methods of non-unified coordination to be put into practice, but the fragmentation of the anarchist space—which also made it impossible for any one part to dominate the others, and compelled anarchists to seek shared spaces—was already a fact.

Throughout these moments of growth, a major strategic tension has played out between those who sought to unify the anarchist movement and those who fought to preserve its fragmentation.

Neither Recuperation Nor Repression

IN PART BECAUSE of the change in how most anarchists are positioning themselves, neither recuperation nor repression has been able to suppress the upheaval.

Initially, most anarchists positioned themselves in such a way as to not have any hope of nourishing or influencing the revolt. They either accepted it uncritically, happy that other people were finally taking to the streets no matter what their motives or expectations were, or else they dismissed it as reformist.

This dismissal reveals an important miscalculation. By correctly characterizing the new neighborhood assemblies or the occupation of Plaça Catalunya as “social democratic,” radical anarchists obscured what proved to be the more important characteristic: that these spaces were spontaneous and not institutional (at least, not yet). Characterizing people or spaces as reformist is erroneous, even if factually accurate, because reformism is an institutional force that captures people and spaces, rather than an essence that emanates from them. Anarchists who were justifiably concerned with avoiding reformist strategies walled themselves off from new relationships, not realizing that spaces of encounter always have revolutionary potential. The people who fill those spaces initially enact reformist strategies because that is what they know. The structures that institutionalize those spaces are imposed afterwards by internal or external recuperators.

The mistrust of reformism was overcome the same way in Plaça Catalunya and in the neighborhood assemblies. First, a couple of the more adventurous, eccentric, or leftist anarchists began to participate. Some of

To spark new upheavals, or at least be present at their beginnings, we need to hone our social intuition. When we understand how other people perceive their problems, we will be able to make or at least recognize a call to arms that speaks to them. For these upheavals to push past stagnation, they must avail themselves of structures for the revolutionary self-organization of life. We may create some of these structures, but many more will arise independently. Anarchists should connect with those who create them, even and especially if they are not revolutionary. Recuperation is not inevitable in spontaneous structures; it is the successful institutionalization of the structures that do not succeed in connecting with a struggle for the destruction of the existing order. The tendency towards creation is an essentially liberating tendency that capitalism consistently harnesses. But it is the harness, and not the creation, that constitutes recuperation.

What We Can Do after the Crest

- * Strengthen the new relationships that formed in moments of rebellion. Learn to care for one another in practical ways.
- * Identify which obligations neither sustain us nor succeed in inspiring new bouts of struggle, and give up on them. In Barcelona, this has meant activist projects like the mutual aid networks that made sense in a certain moment: projects that in theory should put us in contact with others who want to struggle, but in practice rarely do.
- * Create spaces of encounter, debate, and fun for anarchists and other radicals. The purpose of these spaces is not to generate action, but to encourage reflection on our ongoing practices. Such spaces also strengthen new relationships of camaraderie. If people have the energy to go back on the offensive, these spaces will provide the necessary density to avoid dispersion and inspire action.
- * Carry out withering yet humble propaganda against populists and leftists.
- * Continue to send signals of revolt to those who are listening. Consider the benefits of highly visible, daytime sabotage actions, or actions that serve as invitations to illegality while also making people's lives easier, like forcibly opening up the metro for free riders or raiding supermarkets to distribute groceries. Do not feel obliged to keep up a high rhythm of attacks.
- * Organize visible low-key actions that don't demand much energy, that keep people seeing each other and remind neighbors that the struggle is ongoing. These might include noise demos in support of those facing repression, or setting up a literature table in a public place.

would stave off the feelings of isolation or the appearance that the movement was disintegrating.

Such organizations tend to generate campaigns that exhaust our energies, rather than facilitating a collective process in which we find the struggles that rejuvenate us. They generate visibility for their own organizational existence rather than illuminating the fault lines that run between society and the governing apparatuses that interpenetrate it. These new assemblies did not attempt to create a social struggle for those who did not know how to find one, but to allow those already participating in struggle to sharpen their strategies. Although anarchist structures should support the participants, they should never encourage weakness, and the inability to find lines of conflict or to initiate a revolutionary project is a weakness anarchists cannot afford. Struggles are not started by activists, anarchist or otherwise. Those who seek an organization to compensate for their alienation or lack of initiative can only be a burden to assemblies oriented towards confrontation.

By adopting this approach before the economic crisis broke, anarchists were poised to radicalize struggles when larger numbers of people began taking to the streets. Carrying on isolated battles in the depths of social peace and capitalist prosperity makes perfect sense: it limits the options for capitalist accumulation, hastening the crisis, and puts rebels in a stronger position when the crisis breaks.[7] Anarchists betray that strength when they focus on the narrow economics of austerity as soon as the opportunity comes around. Those who tend towards populism will immediately tie their discourses to precarity and poverty, forgetting that capitalism is equally odious in its moments of peace and prosperity. They will lose all the strength they have built if capitalism passes into a new era of prosperity, or if fascism or some other political movement offers an apparent solution to the problem of precarity.

We are anarchists specifically because we do not water down our critique of social ills. We seek to strike the system at its roots. Positioning ourselves in conflict with both the dominant system and its potential recuperation also means not focusing on the conflicts that are the most visible, and sometimes illusory, like the conflict between workers and austerity measures. In fact, work and austerity exist in harmony. The true conflict is harder to elucidate, but it is our job to reveal it.

One way Capital has mediated this conflict is by imposing its rhythms on our lives, including our struggles. Social upheavals will always be followed by lulls of disappointment and apparent inactivity. Accepting these troughs and knowing how to take advantage of them is the key to preventing upheaval from being merely a flash in the pan.

these felt comfortable in the new spaces, others were wary, but all of them were able to share space with reformists, either out of tolerance or thick skin. Then they spread the word within their circles, and soon it became popular for most anarchists to attend these heterogeneous spaces, though how they participated varied greatly.

This pattern defied a number of my expectations, though it makes sense in retrospect. Those with the sharpest social intuition, who arrived early in the spaces that later proved to be of great importance, were hippies, leftists, and, only very rarely, combative anarchists. Later, the insurrectionary anarchists and the intensely activist anarchists[4] flooded in. The activists tended to build up the structures of the assemblies and occupations without trying to distill their revolutionary potential or criticize their social democratic anxieties; on the whole, they avoided practices that would generate conflict with their newfound allies. Of the insurrectionaries, some denounced the hypocrisy of a spontaneous movement that in one moment called for revolution and in another discussed getting rid of bad politicians or rescuing the welfare state. Not realizing that incoherence is a constant feature of life under capitalism, for anarchists as well as vaguely upset citizens, they turned their back on the new movements. The others stayed, seeking a balance between conflict and connection. Their conflictive approach drove them to seek fault lines and drive them open, while also trying to be part of a constantly expanding web of relationships.

Simultaneously, the new practice of engagement dovetailed with anarchist support for the general strikes. The strike was already an accepted tradition of struggle, and anarchists in particular have a long history of organizing them, so it was less a leap of faith for anarchists to work with unionists, influencing the outcome and character of the strikes. Their distrust of unions (which many CNT members share) helped rather than hindered their ability to radicalize the strikes, as long as they were willing to engage in some way.

As anarchist engagement in non-anarchist spaces brought clear results, many anarchists adopted a practice of participating in spaces of encounter and fostering relationships with people in institutionalized dissident organizations, while never joining those organizations. This positioning enabled anarchists to keep leftist institutions in check, holding them up to the radical values they purport to espouse and criticizing their betrayals more directly. It is possible that this is one reason why the social struggles in Barcelona have not been recuperated.

Another reason is that there has been no unified strategy of recuperation. The labor unions once occupied the critical position, enabling them to recuperate the most threatening of struggles.[5] But new activist

formations like Real Democracy Now have shown the most potential to capture popular outrage and redirect it towards superficial democratic complaints that focus on politicians and civic forms of participation. It has been in the organizational interests of unions to pull the focus of complaint back to the terrain of economics and labor—though this seems to have infected that terrain with the practice of assemblies and self-organization that was being co-opted by democracy activists. Thanks to the jockeying between competing would-be recuperators, the hollow discourse of the democrats has been contaminated with questions of economy, while the vertical terrain of the unions has been undermined by a renewed tradition of self-organization.

Recuperation is still a danger, and some would say the anarcho-reformist CGT (the third largest labor union in the country, a split from the anarchist CNT) is the most capable of synthesizing these two strategies of recuperation. In the meantime, both the terrain of labor and the terrain of democracy are constantly destabilized by radicals who bring an anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist vision. However, as labor and democracy are recuperative lenses placed on top of the fundamentally radical fields of sustenance and organization, it is probable that even if nobody employs a successful strategy of recuperation, as long as radicals do not succeed in shattering the recuperative lenses already in place, ongoing social conflicts will not be able to develop a truly revolutionary character. Nonetheless, a conflict that cannot be recuperated will continue to destabilize the State.

One of three things could happen that would make anarchists incapable of preventing ongoing attempts at recuperation. If the media, aided by anarchist arrogance, succeed in isolating anarchists from broader movements, then the unions, activist organizations, and left-wing political parties will be able to bind social struggle within a discourse of democracy, rights, and reform. If anarchists give up their conflictive attitudes out of fear of some greater evil (such as fascism, which will be discussed presently), they will not be able to expose and criticize recuperators in the movement. Finally, if they unify and become a movement with which the unions or activist formations could negotiate, they will end up legitimizing the power of would-be leaders, and they will lose the ability to interact in a fragmentive way with other sectors of the movement. A fragmentive interaction is crucial in that it allows anarchists to criticize and create relationships simultaneously, thus generating a multiplicity of forms of both criticism and relation, undermining homogeneity and discipline in non-anarchist sectors of the social movements and potentially extending fragmentation well beyond the anarchist space.

Repression has not failed for lack of effort by the police. Police

can only defeat the rise of fascism by pooling our strength with leftists, it makes sense to do so. But just because we share a common problem—fascism spells the annihilation of both anarchists and leftists—does not mean we have a common destination. We should never stop prioritizing the communication of specifically anarchist reasons to oppose fascism, which include our arguments against capitalism, against the State in all its forms, and against borders. Once some of them got scared into a common front, anarchists in Barcelona as elsewhere put their forces behind discourses that were essentially social democratic—attacking fascism as a violation of human rights, thereby distinguishing it from democracy rather than revealing the many common projects that the two systems of governance share.

Not only is this dishonest, it is also stupid. Fascist parties and movements begin to flourish precisely because people are losing faith in democracy. That loss of faith is a good thing. In treating fascism as an exception, antifascist common fronts serve to reassert faith in democratic values. The people who are suffering the most from the crisis in capitalism have already lost faith in those values, which have already failed them. It is no coincidence that antifascist fronts typically exclude the most marginalized in order to present the face of the normal citizen. They want to hide the very real crisis of immigration, in order to pretend that democracy can still work. Anarchists should not be arguing that we could all just get along if we protect human rights, but rather that the crisis of immigration is a problem of capitalism rather than ethnicity.

Even if fascism is defeated or averted, if anarchists have to abandon their struggle against capitalism to stop it, then it will have succeeded insofar as fascism is a tool deployed by the State to defend capitalism in circumstances when democracy does not suffice.

When the Tide Rolls Out

WHEN THE LABOR UNIONS tried to abandon the growing social upheaval after the first general strike got out of their control, people organized a strike through the small, radical unions, and then created entirely new spaces of confrontation through the plaza occupations. When the plaza occupations disappeared, anarchists intentionally organized new assemblies conducive to debate via which we could refine our different strategies and take measure of our collective force, countering the dispersion that previously characterized the Barcelona anarchist space. Though there were some attempts to unify, on the whole we resisted the effort to create a new organization, a movement-coordinating body that

of national independence, a can of worms that appears on the menu of many member states aside from Spain. But the conflict revolves around a fictitious community of resistance that is easy for people to join and easy for politicians to control. Just as the fascists present the immigrant as a scapegoat to misdirect people's rage, the independence movement presents the bad government in Madrid, to be replaced by a good government in Barcelona.

A second conflict occurs within the independence movement itself, which has traditionally been socialist and has now been hijacked by conservatives. Who will seize the opportunity to take power? Who will remain true to the lurid dream of socialism, continuing the fight for a sort of Catalan Cuba? As the movement inevitably betrays itself, the principled part might radicalize, but as long as anarchists fail to address the forms of oppression faced by occupied linguistic-cultural groups (dare I say it; *nations*), the *indepes* are likely to adhere to a nationalist vision of revolution.

Some of them are sincere allies in the fight against repression, against austerity, and against fascism, but this is not without its own set of complications. As anarchists work alongside socialist *indepes* to fight the rising tide of fascism, they come face to face again with the question that was first highlighted by the 2010 general strike: how to position themselves in relation to events.

A functional component of fascism is its exceptionalism, not only in the juridical sense meant by Carl Schmitt, but also in how it is integrated into capitalist systems of governance. Even though fascism and democracy are fully integrated as complementing strategies of control—the unleashing of fascism by Capital is not exceptional, but systematic and functional—the structure of democracy predisposes us to experience the threat of fascism as exceptional.

Although Barcelona should be the first place on earth where anarchists would mistrust antifascist common fronts, this time as other times the threat of fascism has convinced anarchists to work together with political opportunists in uncritical alliances.

In a curious pattern, anarchists who knew very well in the plaza occupations how to deal critically with socialists suddenly started issuing common propaganda with them, working in the same organizational framework. They forgot that before the crisis broke, they were already engaging in the most effective form of organization against fascism—the work they were carrying out against xenophobia. It goes without saying that anarchists always have and always must stand against fascism. Sometimes, this requires us to occupy common spaces of struggle with leftists. If we

harassed neighborhood assemblies occupying plazas or marching in the streets, they brutally evicted the Plaça Catalunya encampment, they arrested twenty-two people for attempting to blockade Parliament, they arrested large numbers of people after every riot including over a hundred after the March 29 general strike, they have imprisoned people, they have inflicted permanent injuries upon several people, and they have introduced new laws and surveillance measures that constitute a serious crackdown on popular struggle.

But at every step, spreading resistance has discouraged the authorities from continuing these campaigns of repression. When they arrested a list of mostly anarchists for spitting on or assaulting politicians during the June 2011 blockade of Parliament, spontaneous solidarity protests numbering in the thousands took to the streets, covered the walls with graffiti, and rained abuse upon the police. Neighborhood assemblies took up collections for their legal costs. Even though the pacifist leadership of the 15M movement, together with the media, succeeded in demonizing the violence of blocking streets and spitting on politicians, when specific people were arrested for that violence—people whom their neighbors and other protesters had gotten to know in the neighborhood assemblies or elsewhere—the entire movement claimed them as their own. When the repression failed to isolate the bad protesters and only brought more people out into the streets, the government quickly scaled down the attention they were giving to the case and quietly left it on the back burner.

A similar thing happened with their new public snitching website, inaugurated to encourage good citizens to identify rioters from photos taken during the March 29 general strike. On the whole, anarchists responded with a clandestine mentality, assuming the reality of repression and staying low or preparing to go into hiding. Fortunately, socialist independentists, parents, and neighborhood assemblies protested the snitching website publicly, flooding the streets in indignation or refusing to accept the criminalization of rioters. After a few weeks, the government took the website down.

Metamorphosis: Shifts and Seasons

IF THE SOCIAL UPHEAVAL in Barcelona was neither recuperated nor repressed, why has it faded away? Although some important errors and weaknesses did contribute to its decline, the decline was inevitable and even healthy.

Both leftism and the rationalist worldview it stems from train us to view the world in an unrealistic way. This generates false expectations and

false criteria with which to evaluate our struggles. The crux of the matter is that we are not the abstract value both Capital and the Left see in us: we are living beings with our own autonomous rhythms that constantly fly in the face of managerial strategies and social mechanics.

People took to the streets with a social democratic idea of revolution. Encouraged by pacifist assurances about “people power,” by media misrepresentations of the Arab Spring or the Color Revolutions, by Hollywood fantasies like the revised ending of *V for Vendetta* which subsequently found its way into specifically cyber-activist portrayals of revolution like the one projected in *Zeitgeist 3*, they thought they could bring power to its knees simply by taking to the streets.

When this proved false, they experienced the great emotional force of disappointment. This disappointment was delayed by the initial rush of overcoming alienation in the blossoming neighborhood assemblies, or by the recurrences of the dream of people power fostered in the massive protests organized every few months out of the 15M phenomenon. But when the assemblies shrank and the protests did not bring the results they were looking for, there was nothing left to hold back the disappointment.

When people disappear, it turns out that their eyes go first, and their ears linger a while longer. We can react to their disappearance as a completed fact, concluding that the others were never really in the struggle to begin with and giving up on the conversation that had begun with them. Or we can recognize that the disappeared are really only *half-disappeared*, that they are still there, blind and invisible, listening. When we continue the conversation, banging on bank windows, taping open the gates of the metro, setting off fireworks at noise demos, the half-disappeared can hear this, and they understand it to be an invitation back into the streets. That invitation is first of all a demand that they rethink their vision of the struggle. Those who do come back, come back stronger.

And even those who never go away do not stay in the streets consistently. They are for ever coming and going, deciding whether to let their projects die or try once more to resuscitate them. We have to recognize that even those who dedicate their entire lives to the struggle must also have their seasons.

Earlier, I described the struggle in a time of social coalescence as a constantly expanding web of relationships. That expansion gave people a new pulse. It contradicted the unflagging march of alienation. But when it seemed to subside, people lost the collective heartbeat they had only just found.

They did not lose the pulse because it had disappeared, but because the expansion that gives it meaning is not quantitative. It is no mistake

The Problem of Nationalism

PREDICTABLY, THE STATE has deployed a new set of mechanisms to make up for the collapse of social peace. Nationalism has been foremost among these. In Catalunya, this has manifested in two very distinct ways: fascist political movements, and the movement for Catalan independence.

As early as 2009, there were some in Greece who identified xenophobia as perhaps the most important state strategy to enclose and counterattack the insurrection. But they were few. Anarchist responses to xenophobia and fascism were too little and too late to prevent the concerted flood of media propaganda from redirecting popular angst away from the owning class to the most marginalized.

In Catalunya, the situation is different. Solidarity with immigrants was already a priority among anarchists and leftist activists before the crisis. At the same time, the state contains powerful forces committed to a progressive strategy of social control. The media, therefore, have not been unanimous in encouraging xenophobia and building a base for fascist political parties.

There is another factor that may have put fascists at a disadvantage. Events in Catalunya forced the fascists to reveal their hand several years earlier than might have behooved them. This deprived them of a period of invisibility in which to build a base before going on the offensive. The factor that forced their hand was the expansion of the Catalan independence movement.

It could be argued that the movement for Catalan independence as such arose during the transition from dictatorship to democracy, in order to recuperate the struggle against the State and sap support for radical anti-capitalists. That argument is beyond the scope of this article. In any case, the independence movement predates the economic crisis and does not exist as a merely recuperative force, but rather as a struggle in its own right. However, in September 2012, the conservative political party in power in Catalunya jumped on the bandwagon and put their support behind a referendum for independence, which political parties in Madrid subsequently declared illegal. Spanish military officials and then fascist parties and street organizations have gone public declaring war on the movement for Catalan independence.

This creates a number of conflicts, none of which is easy to understand. Much of the Catalan elite has entered into conflict with the Spanish elite, which further erodes the illusion of social peace and political stability—even forcing the European Union to deal with the impossible question

anti-capitalist and entertains revolutionary pretensions. It is by no means immune to becoming a structure for recuperation, but that is all the more likely to happen if it is shunned by revolutionaries who have a critique of recuperation.

While anarchists are quick to criticize or physically attack capitalist forms of housing, food production, and healthcare, they have generally not joined the CIC or any other project that puts anarchist social relations into practice on a material level. By staying away, they avoid conflict with those who would turn the cooperatives into reformist or anodyne structures, just as they avoided conflict with those who kept the healthcare movement in the dead end of pleading for mercy for the welfare state.

Capitalism is failing an increasing number of people in their simple desire to sustain themselves. This creates a ready opportunity to put other forms of sustenance into practice, but it also poses a problem. Other countries that suffer worse economic conditions than Spain have already shown that precarity can precipitate mass emigration that weakens social struggles. The same force that is beginning to oblige anarchists and their neighbors to take extended or even permanent trips to Scandinavia to work in kitchens or fish factories will also disintegrate the bonds that hold together a newly coalescing society.

Voline identified the anarchist failure to create structures in which new social relations could be put into practice on a material level as a key factor that allowed the Bolsheviks to hijack the Russian Revolution. The same weakness has prevented Barcelona anarchists from enabling the major social upheavals to become revolutionary.

Eventually, people get tired of just protesting. For a long time, anarchists have used the inevitable failure of protest movements as proof of the weakness of pacifism or any other practice of dissent and demands. But people also get tired of going on strike, attending assemblies, and burning dumpsters. If the principles of self-organization and mutual aid are constrained to mere slogans on posters or formulations in debates, they lose their force.

Yet these constraints derive from very real weaknesses. Something as complicated as the self-organization of healthcare could only become reality on the basis of a profound reskilling and widespread participation. It has to grow from simple words to detailed dreams, and from small-scale to larger projects. Nor will this growth be unilinear: like everything, it will have ebbs and flows, setbacks and disappointments. But if we are not open to this growth, if we do not start these projects or spread these dreams, nor take part when others do—then who will?

that the science of Capital teaches us to recognize only one form of expansion. Because we are blinded to the horizons towards which the social body expands, we lose hold of it and fall back to the flat reality of alienation. Sadly, the same magic that makes the social body stronger than the chains of the State also shakes off those who have been trained to think geometrically, as much as they would like to remain in the presence of that new and growing collectivity.

*When one catches a dragon by the tail,
one must never expect a smooth ride.*

The intensification of relationships that goes hand in hand with the coalescence of society is never a quantitative growth. It occurs in multiple dimensions at once. The tendrils of the web surge forward, capturing new space, linking new bodies, and then contract, deepening the intensity of those links. Just as the visible growth of a tree needs the attendant growth of the roots, a social struggle needs moments of subterranean expansion.

In Mediterranean Barcelona, the heat of high summer makes it easy to recognize that the dog days are not moments for going on the attack or sitting through meetings, but for relaxing, exalting the body, and reflecting on recent struggles and the upcoming autumn. But the leftist obligation to produce motion often deprives us of winter. All people in struggle need a time to confront their despair, lick their wounds, and to fall back on the comforting bonds of friendship. Not realizing this animal necessity, many anarchists exhaust themselves by trying to maintain a constant rhythm, or they mistake a slowdown for a loss of strength, and they allow their gains to be washed away. But winter can be an important time to hunker down, to carry forward the projects that sustain us (and realize which those are), to test the strength of new relationships, and to sound the depth of one's community of struggle.

These rhythms are not uniform, just as one winter is never the same as the next. Some winters, people light fires in the open and stand by them until spring, as the Greek comrades did in 2008, which we tried to imitate, in a way, in 2010. Other winters, everyone retreats to their private hearths, as at the end of 2012. But was that a defeat?

After the general strike of September 2010, anarchists discovered that there was tinder everywhere. They stayed busy in their burrows and prepared another great fire before the winter was out, and the general strike of January 2011 lit the way to May Day and the plaza occupation movement.

With all the activity, that summer was short, and people were beginning to tire by autumn. The fall of 2011 was not the “*otoño caliente*” (hot autumn) everyone was expecting, informed by the logic of geometric growth. In their shrinking neighborhood assemblies, some new spaces of encounter, and the persisting spaces of coordination with the unions, people just managed to hold on through winter, riding the last of the wave that had begun in May. They kept their dreams and memories intense through lively debate, so that when the two major unions were finally forced to call a new general strike by an even greater round of austerity measures, people threw themselves into organizing it, and what was created exceeded everyone’s expectations. Through force of will, people stayed on their feet despite heavy blows of repression. Striding forward, they made it through May Day, 2012, long enough to take the streets without being intimidated by the immense police presence, and to counteract the media narrative about the March 29 riots with an onslaught of flyers, posters, and graffiti.

After that, the social body fell asleep. The summer was long and pacific. In the fall people rallied to prepare a new round of strikes or to stop the growth of fascism, but could not see clearly how to carry those struggles forward. The next general strikes sputtered forward ineffectively, and in winter people holed up in small group projects they had created with friends, whether or not those projects had proven effective in the last months. These included specifically anarchist assemblies that organized debate and propaganda, neighborhood social centers, distros, free stores, or mutual aid networks intended to encourage anarchist responses to problems of job precarity or home foreclosures.

Narrated as the movements of a great social body, this rhythm of rise and fall makes perfect sense. After such gigantic efforts, the collectivity needs to sleep, and that sleep is not a form of weakness but a necessary activity in which gains can be solidified. Yet many people experienced the exhaustion of the social body as defeat, as loss. In accepting this as reality, they will learn all the wrong lessons, rather than identifying the activities most crucial to the moment.

To a slight extent, because conversations about a rhythmic rather than geometric resistance had already begun to take place, comrades in Barcelona were able to shift their focus, despite widespread feelings of defeat. Anarchists gave priority to groups of a newly expanded affinity, in which they worked together with comrades whom they had gotten to know in the recent upheavals. They debated, they recovered their energy, and they strengthened friendships new and old. If the recognition that a slowdown was inevitable and healthy had been generalized, they might have carried out these activities with a sense of triumph and innovation.

the anarchist space was characterized by an ignorance of their projects.

This ignorance proved not to be a coincidence. Even after the intervention made these projects better known, anarchists almost unanimously failed to make use of them. This was not a political decision, as not a single critique of these projects (at least, not the more anti-capitalist ones) ever appeared. Rather, it seemed to be entirely a question of habit and rhythm. Anarchist militants were simply too busy getting beaten up by cops—and skipping meals for meetings, and subjecting themselves to who knows how much stress to support prisoners or attend assemblies with syndicalists and socialists—to help support an anarchist healthcare project that at some points was even offering free massages and other forms of therapy to any participant in social struggles who would show up. Saint Durruti, martyr of our cause, may you smile in your grave.

These were not additions to a long list of projects that needed more labor power to keep from collapsing. They were projects that needed the encouragement of people walking through the door, projects that could give greater strength and wellbeing to anyone willing to stop being a robot for the revolution and take a sick day every now and then.

To be clear, we are not talking about anarchists who do not know how to stop. The impossibility of holding a debate on a Sunday morning, because of the evident sacredness of the previous night’s party, attests to the dependence of Barcelona anarchists on leisure. It is not a question of being unable to replenish themselves, but of replenishing themselves in the manner of workers or machines. Once again, we are faced with a contest between the imposed rhythms of capitalism and the rhythms our bodies and struggles demand.

But it is not only a question of rhythm. Across the board, anarchists have been hesitant to approach any question of material self-organization. A group of people centered around the *Crisi* newspaper and Enric Duran’s white-collar bank robbery have formed *La Cooperativa Integral Catalana* (CIC), a Catalan cooperative complex that includes consumers, producers, healthcare workers, and eco-communes. Unlike the United States, where cooperatives have either been a rational business decision for farmers or an innovative form of self-managed exploitation for radicals, cooperatives in Catalunya have a radical history. From the 1860s to the 1936 revolution, cooperatives were explicitly anticapitalist, sometimes utopian and often revolutionary, and fully integrated into the anarchist movement—supporting prisoners, helping create a libertarian culture, and equipping proletarian families to take care of themselves in a way that set them at odds with the demands of capitalism. They also spread practical visions—dreams, if you will—of how society might feed itself after a revolution. The CIC is also

takes too long to create another street confrontation, the collective lessons learned in the rioting of 29M will fade away. The answer may lie in convincing the radical unions to return to their previous combative stance, to agitate for confrontation from within the masses summoned by the major unions, or to return to large-scale occupations.

Whatever the outcome, anarchists were wise to save their energy rather than try to reproduce a previous victory in changed circumstances.

Unsubstantiated Dreams

ONE FACTOR THAT has repeatedly made it possible to force struggles into dead ends is the refusal of anarchists to substantiate their dreams. While Barcelona's nihilists have frequently graced the ongoing discourse on strategy with caustically cautionary warnings against optimism or planning the future, they have insisted on including dreaming in the list of luxuries that true revolutionaries are not permitted.

Unsatisfied with the implications of a strategy of total destruction for the growing group of people who urgently need to figure out questions of access to food, shelter, and healthcare—a group that includes many comrades—most anarchists have differed with the nihilists to address the question of self-organization as a positive practice that might satisfy all life's needs.

Well into the rise of the movement for healthcare, some anarchists began to participate critically. Even though the dismantling of public healthcare affects them directly, they generally did not perceive the movement as relevant to them, as it was mobilizing primarily to preserve the welfare state and reinforce Western medicine.[6] Later on, some anarchists discarded this apathy and began to hold debates on the problem. A small minority took the lessons of those debates and intervened in the movement for healthcare. Unfortunately, that intervention took place after the movement had already broken apart on the rocks of its own impotence.

What some comrades discovered in the course of the intervention, nonetheless, is of great importance. Many of those active in the movement harbored strong criticisms of Western medicine and were amenable to critiques of the welfare state. Most of the movement seemed to agree that healthcare was not organized in our interests even before privatization. In group conversations, nearly everybody had stories to share about disrespectful or harmful treatment at the hands of doctors and hospitals. A few participants in these conversations had even created projects for self-organizing healthcare outside and against capitalism. What's more, many of them were friends of anarchists, or anarchists themselves—yet most of

Instead, most comrades had the attitude that they had to be content with an inferior kind of activity, because it was the only activity that seemed possible in the moment. Thus, they correctly took advantage of the lull to debate the hot moments of struggle of the previous months, but they failed to recognize the particular value of that moment of social slumber.

The moment also demanded that anarchists strengthen their relationships of difference, seeking out the sincere neighbors, coworkers, and other people they had gotten to know in heterogeneous spaces such as the neighborhood assemblies. These were the people with whom they were losing contact due to social disintegration. It is of the utmost importance to resist that social disintegration, to seek out recent acquaintances and continue solidifying relationships. Obviously, it is much easier to struggle together with comrades of affinity in moments of social peace or defeatism, especially because so many other people ceasing struggling in these moments. But we must not confine our method of struggle to the "hot" moments of upheaval and coalescence. We must also learn a long, abiding struggle, and this requires reaching out to those we met and learning what practical things we can share when they no longer continue to participate in assemblies, debates, and protests.

As noted earlier, it is also important to keep making noise, whether via protests or attacks, to invite the disappeared to return to the streets. In Barcelona, this has happened with continued student strikes and actions enabling people to ride the metro for free. However, if these actions are not undertaken as a conscious invitation, but as an attempt to maintain lost momentum, they will only contribute to the exhaustion and disillusionment of those in the struggle.

Finally, moments of defeatism and disintegration need to be seized as opportunities for propaganda. After a strong wave of struggle, people often fall away because they are exhausted and because they are disappointed at how little they have accomplished, how much farther they have to go. This is the time when anarchists have to unmask the false promises of the recuperators and reformists. This is the time to show that all the politicians, all the government, have to be thrown out, that the police and the media are our enemy, that revolution is not an easy affair. This is the time to celebrate our collective bravery in the streets, to remember what we were fighting for, and to point to promising directions that were revealed in the recent struggle, whether those include a practice of assemblies and self-organization, a defense of houses from eviction, the expropriation of food and clothes from capitalists, the occupation of land, or the burning of banks. It is rare that the death of a struggle does not leave behind some bones that can be fashioned into new tools. We should not leave them lying

in the dust.

On the whole, anarchists in Barcelona did not seize on the temporary collapse of the struggle to point out the false promises of the recuperators. In fact, the opposite happened. When one of the neighborhood assemblies that functioned on largely anarchic lines started to flag and disappear—as had all the neighborhood assemblies at that point—some Trotskyists who had been saving their energy for that moment, and who had not committed their time and energy to keeping the assembly alive in the prior months, swooped in like vultures to blame the weakness of the assembly on the informal structure that anarchists had won in debates more than a year earlier.

Healing ourselves, strengthening friendships, building consistent and practical relationships with people we met in the upheaval, inviting the disappeared back into the streets, showing that the disappointment only reflects the false promises of reformists and recuperators: these are the essential tasks in the moments of exhaustion, defeatism, and disintegration that nearly always follow social upheavals. These are the tasks that can set off a new wave of struggle after the inevitable low—that prepare the way for subsequent peaks and plateaus to reach ever higher. At the very least, they equip us to stay strong and be prepared for whatever comes next.

We also need a culture of lively debate to hone our social intuition so that we can keep up with changes in context. Struggle has its cycles, but these cycles are not repetitions, and not every metamorphosis in the social struggle is cyclical.

The context in Barcelona has shifted several times over the last couple years. At some points, anarchists cleaved to this shift like naturals, whereas they missed other shifts and had to spend months catching up—or simply lost in a terrain that suddenly behaved differently.

The struggle shifted after the first general strike. It shifted again with the plaza occupation movement. It shifted yet again when the plaza occupation dissolved and the neighborhood assemblies blossomed. That shift was recognized and to a certain extent even precipitated by anarchists, whereas the activists and would-be politicians entirely missed the boat: they stayed on in Plaça Catalunya, trying to salvage their precious structures. After wasting a lot of effort, they partially succeeded saving those structures, but happily their absence meant they were not there to recuperate all of the neighborhood assemblies.

Some time in summer or fall 2011, there was another shift. Most anarchists missed it. I certainly did, as I can't even identify when it happened. The growing strength of the struggle was not matched by a growth of opportunities for waging it. The labor unions would not call another

general strike, despite our attempts to pressure the minority unions to make it happen. The struggles against austerity in education and health-care would not take a radical direction, even though they had moments of intense support and had moved towards building a practice of road blockades and occupations.

The strategic clarity of the previous months evaporated. It became necessary to identify what we needed to struggle. We were also forced to interrogate our relationships with others in struggle when a transportation strike was betrayed (by its leadership? by its own base? the argument continues) and a student strike unexpectedly cast off those who were managing it. Clarity returned when a general strike was finally announced for March 29, 2012. We knew how to organize for that. But the questions of the winter had not necessarily been answered.

If the growth of a struggle can only be traced geometrically, then we can only interpret it as defeat that the March 29 general strike was so strong, and the general strike of November 14 the same year was so weak. March 29 offered important lessons about organizing a strike and fighting in the streets. Given that the unions successfully pacified the November 14 general strike and the police dominated the streets, does that mean that our enemies learned their lessons, and we did not learn ours?

Looking back on the March general strike, a friend succinctly identified the proper question, though his attitude only depressed and confounded me at the time. Three weeks of incredibly exhausting preparation went into making the March 29 strike and riots possible, and afterwards all that energy dissipated, rather than coming back to us. Was it worth it?

Our exhaustion, along with the fear that the riots had produced in the unions, precipitated another shift. The general strike called for October 31 by the small radical unions and the general strike called for November 14 by all the unions were not unfolding in the same context as the glorious 29M general strike. Most anarchists could not find the motivation to throw themselves into preparing for them. Fortunately, this pessimism arose from a lucid social intuition. For our part, we had still not answered the question of how to make the energy of the riot return to us rather than dissipating as a cathartic outburst. And the unions, for their part, were less concerned with getting a lot of people into the street and more concerned with proving to the police that they could keep things under control. The failure of the October and November strikes—the fact that they were boring, under-attended, and ultimately demoralizing—is a victory for the struggle as long as we follow up by exploring how to effectively create a visible, large-scale confrontation that cannot be pacified by the unions or the police.

Unfortunately, there is a time limit for finding the answer. If it