

# **The Irrepressible Anarchists**

**Federal Infiltration and Repression — What It Means, What to Do, What Not  
to Fear**

CrimethInc.

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The beast has been awakened—snarling—and wants to bite someone soon. We fear, not without reason, that it may be us. At this moment the Underground Armies of Barbarian Anarchists are getting scant attention. Still, we are on a very short list. We have recently been considered a genuine threat to national security. We have yet to be linked in any manner to the hijackers and their supporters, despite the obvious advantages that the reactionaries stand to gain by doing so. This will not last forever. We are being given a grace period, to rally around the flag and return to the fold, or else. They will connect the dots or create the dots to connect, and just because many of us are Americans does not mean we are safe.

Thus speculated the CrimethInc. Warbringer cell in *After the Fall*, an analysis published in the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001. Granted, the FBI has not seriously attempted to link the domestic anarchist movement to actual Islamic terror organizations—that would be too much of a stretch, even for the geniuses who testified at Daniel McGowan’s detention hearing that CrimethInc. had published a book about Emma Goldman—but they have taken advantage of the climate of fear to equate sabotage with terrorism, initiating a new campaign against environmental and animal-rights activists. The grace period is over—in May, 2005, the FBI announced that it considers the Earth Liberation Front domestic terror threat number one—and the government hopes to use this opportunity to settle scores with the anarchist movement in general.

This has been coming all along, of course. Every generation that has succeeded in pushing its resistance past rhetoric into effective action has borne the brunt of state repression. There was no way the FBI was going to let the statute of limitations elapse on the old ELF arsons without charging *someone* with them<sup>1</sup>. Anyone who thought there could be eco-defense without eco-defendants hadn’t thought social struggle all the way through yet.

The first thing we must do in coming to grips with this assault on our community is recognize that it is not an aberration, but something totally predictable and normal—at least, normal in the context of the current absurd social order. Any effective struggle against the system of domination is going to involve arrests, investigations, and prison terms, not to mention violent attacks from both state forces and vigilantes. These are an intrinsic part of our job description as revolutionary anarchists, whatever tactics we employ on an individual basis. Just as it didn’t serve us to throw up our hands in dismay when the global context changed on September 11, alarmism can only hurt us now. Let’s calmly familiarize ourselves with the possibility that some of us are going to spend time in court and prison, while doing everything we can to prevent this and maintaining a realistic sense of the extent of the current threat.

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, the great majority of environmentalist direct action cases still remain unsolved. The FBI alleges that there have been over 1200 criminal acts carried out by underground activists since 1990, and 150 “eco-terror” investigations are still open.

## The Story Thus Far

It is impossible to provide thorough or timely coverage of every aspect of this subject here, so we urge readers to consult these websites: [ecoprisoners.org](http://ecoprisoners.org), [greenscare.org](http://greenscare.org), [fbi-witchhunt.org](http://fbi-witchhunt.org), and especially [portland.indymedia.org](http://portland.indymedia.org). For basic context, we'll present a short summary as of this writing, but please don't stop here.

Most activists date the latest wave of repression, popularly termed the "green scare," from December 7, 2005, when the FBI carried out a series of raids around the US. Further arrests and indictments followed until a total of fourteen people were charged with various counts of arson, destruction of property, and conspiracy in the oddly-named "Operation Backfire<sup>2</sup>." Of these, Joseph Dibee, Josephine Overaker, and Rebecca Rubin are thought to be in hiding outside the US, while William Rodgers allegedly committed suicide in his jail cell on the winter solstice. Stanislas Meyerhoff, Kevin Tubbs, Chelsea Dawn Gerlach, Suzanne Savoie, and Kendall Tankersley are believed to be cooperating with the government—i.e., offering to testify against others in hopes of receiving lighter sentences. The entire case of the FBI seems to have initially been based on the testimony of one heroin addict, Jacob Ferguson, so the decision of others to cooperate with the state is particularly troubling. Daniel McGowan, Jonathan Paul, and Briana Waters are currently free on outrageously high bail<sup>3</sup>, while Joyanna Zacher and Nathan Block have been denied bail as a result of the testimony of informants. The trial is cartoonishly scheduled for Halloween, October 31, 2006.

The following month, Zachary Jenson, Lauren Weiner and Eric McDavid were arrested in Auburn, California for allegedly conspiring to commit actions on behalf of the ELF. They were set up by an FBI agent provocateur, "Anna," who was sleeping with one of them; apparently she bought bomb-making materials and rented a bugged house for them. Apparently "Anna" had been traveling in anarchist circles since summer of 2004, attending two Crime-thInc. convergences and a host of other events<sup>4</sup> (in the muddled words of FBI flunky Nasson Walker, "The s/he has provided information that has been utilized in at least twelve separate anarchist cases."). Lauren was released into house arrest on \$1.2 million bail, and subsequently pleaded guilty and agreed to testify against the others—an infuriating development

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<sup>2</sup> According to the Oxford American Dictionary, a backfire is "a fire set intentionally to arrest the progress of an approaching fire by creating a burned area in its path, thus depriving the fire of fuel." This seems to confirm that the FBI strategy to suppress dissent is based on the use of agents provocateurs and false allegations, as were COINTELPRO and other programs that ended up backfiring on them.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel McGowan, for example, was released into house arrest on \$1.6 million bail. Before his arrest, Daniel worked for a non-profit organization that helps women in domestic abuse situations navigate the legal system. In the rare circumstances in which abusers are arrested and charged (see the article on domestic violence elsewhere in this issue), how high do you think their bail is set? This is a classic example of the way the capitalist system works: violence against individuals is practically accepted, while alleged destruction of property is met with the stiffest possible penalties before even being brought to trial.

<sup>4</sup> University of Miami sociology professor Linda Belgrave reports that "Anna" was in Florida posing as a medic at a protest on June 6, 2005; when an elderly woman who was apparently suffering from heat exhaustion approached her for aid, "Anna" offered her a sip of Gatorade, then declined to assist her further. The woman collapsed and an ambulance was called. If any doubt lingered as to whether the FBI is concerned about human life, their insertion of incompetent frauds into medic teams serving law-abiding protestors should settle the matter.

when her codefendants were starving in isolation cells. Two months later, the very night this article was finished, Zachary was reported to have just done the same thing.

In March, six activists associated with the animal rights group Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty, which has driven an animal testing corporation to the brink of bankruptcy, were found guilty on charges of using their website to incite attacks on Huntingdon Life Sciences and their business partners. Some of them face up to eleven years in prison for making use of their supposed right to free speech.

All the while, grand juries—secretive government interrogation organs established to gather information about alleged crimes—have been convened around the country, indicting anyone with connections to activist communities, jailing those who won't speak, and nosing around for further leads in the war on dissent. FBI agents have announced that anarchist groups such as Food Not Bombs and Indymedia are near the top of their terror watch list. Whether or not anarchists are ready for it, we are now being targeted as public enemy number one.

Together, these various cases spell out a cohesive message: *Don't act, you will be caught. Don't associate with dissidents, you will be framed. Don't trust your comrades, you will be infiltrated. Don't speak about others' actions, you will be imprisoned.*

This message is the most important part of the FBI campaign. Even with all the anti-terror funding in the world, they can't infiltrate every anarchist circle and pin charges on every prominent activist. They hope that, by staging this massive display of force, they can intimidate the rest of us into silence and passivity, just as the excessive and unsustainable police presence at the FTAA protests in Miami November 2003 was calculated to put an end to the era of anarchist mass mobilizations by giving an inflated impression of the power of the state.

## The Radical Response

The responses of the anarchist media can be divided into two basic camps. The first camp, exemplified by the more theoretical journals such as *Fifth Estate*, reacted by printing news about the arrests and charges followed by vague afterthoughts to the effect that one must not lose hope. It could be argued that publicizing repression without offering concrete proposals for how to respond assists the FBI in their work. To their eternal discredit, *Anarchy: A so-called Journal of Desire Armed* set the low-water mark for this sort of thing in implying that the current situation is simply the result of a "fetishization of security culture" in anarchist circles. Thankfully, more action-oriented publications and websites such as *No Compromise* and *The New York Rat* have provided practical information on how to support targeted activists through letter-writing, fund-raising, and solidarity actions. Sad to say, the current issue of *Rolling Thunder* falls into the former category, but we hope to remedy that next issue by sharing all the skills for prisoner and defendant support that are being honed in our community right now.

Participation in anarchist legal aid and prisoner support projects has increased over the past months, though not yet enough to exert a great influence over the course of events. This

increase is ironic, given that a year ago some of those now targeted by the state were trying to figure out how to reinvigorate prisoner support in North America. The pivotal question now is whether or not anarchist organizers, so used to working in the limited context of their own communities, will be able to muster widespread public outrage over this witch hunt. Without that, this round may end badly for the accused, and that will encourage the authorities to initiate another roundup.

## **What Does It All Mean?**

It is of the utmost importance that those currently being targeted receive the funding and community support necessary for the best possible legal defense. As on every other front, every inch should cost our persecutors as much as possible, whether or not we win individual battles. Good legal support has proven indispensable in keeping mass actions viable; for example, the legal defense and countersuits following the protests against the IMF meeting in Washington, D.C. in 2002 not only cleared hundreds of protesters of charges, but also tied the hands of the D.C. police for several protests to come. The struggle in the courtroom is not the postscript to the struggle in the street, but that struggle conducted by different means; it is not the end of the story unless we give up and make it so. The same goes for the struggle in prison, for those serving sentences: a community cannot foster long-term commitment to militant struggle unless it supports its prisoners of war; conversely, those prisoners have power to the extent to which their comrades outside maintain enough momentum to exert social and political leverage.

While we're at it, let's postulate a few other lessons from the initial phase of this wave of repression. First, every activist group should be prepared to be targeted, with resources (a lawyer, money, a network of potential supporters) and a game plan ready. Second, in times of increased surveillance and repression, we must be cautious without letting fear immobilize us. We're powerful because we act, and because we're connected to others; being frightened into passivity and isolation can only weaken and endanger us. Third, now more than ever solidarity means constructive criticism, not speculations ("That arson? I bet that was Alphonse—he's into macho tactics") or accusations ("She never does anything—she's just a lot of talk"). You never know what situation a person is in: she might be a wanted fugitive who can't respond to your thoughtless words without endangering herself. Likewise, "innocent" activists may be accused of others' actions, and even go to prison for them; but this is the fault of the government, not on the ones who act, so long as they don't stupidly put others at risk. Finally, much of the evidence in recent cases is based on informants wearing microphones into conversations. Activists should consider the possibility that even trusted companions could be wired; don't ever reminisce needlessly over past illegal actions, don't assume old cases are closed even after a decade of silence, don't work with people you're not sure you'll trust ten years from now. Meet a person's family and friends before joining in illegal activity.

And above all, DON'T TALK TO POLICE OR THE FBI. No matter what, it can never help you. They wouldn't ask you in the first place if they didn't need your help to ruin your life. Remember: *"I am going to remain silent. I would like to speak with an attorney."*

## The Enemy Within

"They can't get inside you," she had said. But they could get inside you. There were things, your own acts, from which you could not recover. Something was killed in your breast; burnt out, cauterized out...

"Sometimes," she said, "they threaten you with something—something you can't stand up to, can't even think about. And then you say, 'Don't do it to me, to it to somebody else, do it to so-and-so.' And perhaps you might pretend, afterwards, that it was only a trick and that you just said it to make them stop and didn't really mean it. But that isn't true. At the time when it happens you do mean it. You think there's no other way of saving yourself and you're quite ready to save yourself that way. You want it to happen to the other person. You don't give a damn what they suffer. All you care about is yourself."

"All you care about is yourself," he echoed.

He was not running or cheering any longer. He was back in the Ministry of Love, with everything forgiven, his soul white as snow. He was in the public dock, confessing everything, implicating everybody. He was walking down the white-tiled corridor, with the feeling of walking in the sunlight, and an armed guard at his back. The long-hoped-for bullet was entering his brain.

But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother.

— George Orwell at the bitter end of *1984*

Brutal assaults from the state should come as no surprise. The most troubling aspect of this story is that some of those arrested—and even some who were not arrested, who are not even facing the threat of life in prison—have agreed to speak to the authorities, putting others at grievous risk.

Imagine the situation of an activist who has agreed to testify against her former comrades. All the experiences that made her an anarchist, from childhood on, come back to haunt her as she betrays her own values and commitments, siding with the bullies, the rapists, the snide executives and sadistic police. Whatever tremendous feats she has accomplished, whatever personal qualities she took pride in, now she will be remembered as an informant and must live with the knowledge that she is one.

In return for the potential of one day rejoining the defeated herd she fought so hard to escape, she must tell herself the same lies that once outraged her: that people are essentially selfish and untrustworthy, that complicity in injustice is inevitable and acceptable, that one can simply look out for number one in a disastrously unsustainable world. She does not

even know how much leniency she can expect; the government can hardly let her off the hook when they've worked so hard to find her. On the other hand, as a snitch, she can be sure that if she goes to prison her fellow inmates will terrorize her. This gives the state even more power over her. Perhaps she considers breaking off collaboration, but to do so would only leave her isolated from all directions; the die is already cast. One can hardly imagine a worse position to be in.

Let us phase out the masked figure lobbing a molotov cocktail as the idealized image of revolt; there is a time for that, and the sooner it comes back around the better, but it is not the ultimate stage of struggle. Henceforth, when we think of resistance at its most courageous and romantic, let us picture someone like ourselves in an interrogation chamber, not masked but handcuffed, being threatened with life and death in captivity and still refusing to render herself and her fellows into her enemies' hands.

Facing the threat of incarceration, we must redefine freedom and safety as factors under our control, not external circumstances. Freedom is not a matter of how many fences happen to be around you, but of following the dictates of your conscience no matter what. Safety is not the condition of being temporarily outside the grasp of your enemies, but of trusting yourself enough to know that your friends will never come to harm because of you and you will never become something you despise.

## **We Can Win: Success Stories from the Struggle against Repression**

Not only is it critical to fight in the courtrooms as well as the streets—it's also possible to win those fights. A brief look at our own recent history shows countless cases in which activists have beaten charges and even come out ahead in counter-suits. Such victories not only discourage our enemies from taking us to court, they can also provide needed resources for further organizing. Throwing up one's hands in panic as soon as someone gets arrested is not only counterproductive, it's also needlessly pessimistic. To offset the doomsaying of the inexperienced and easily demoralized, let's reflect on a couple recent victories won by activists forced to fight within the legal system.

At the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia summer of 2000, Camilo Viveiros and two others were beaten and arrested by a group of police that included John Timoney, then Police Commissioner of Philadelphia. Charged with numerous felonies (as a rule, you always get charged by the police for whatever they do to you) and demonized as violent extremists, the activists came to be known as the Timoney Three; Camilo himself faced more than thirty-seven years in prison and \$55,000 in fines. They awaited trial for four years, while Timoney jet-setted around the world giving presentations on how to repress protesters and serving as Chief of Police in Miami during the FTAA ministerial in 2003. It seemed certain that anyone charged with assaulting someone in such a position of power was doomed to go to prison. Yet when the trial finally came, Timoney and the other officers made fools of themselves, offering wildly conflicting testimonies; after the defense presented a videotape

that revealed the testimony of the police to be mere fabrication, the three were declared innocent of all charges. In an excellent article the March-April 2006 issue of the *Earth First!* journal, Camilo outlined the lessons of that trial for those currently facing government repression.

One of the most important trials of the preceding generation of environmental activism ended in an unconditional victory over the mendacious, murderous authorities. In 1990, Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney were nearly killed by a car bomb while on a speaking tour to promote resistance to corporate logging. Rather than investigating the bombing, the FBI charged the two with making and transporting bombs. They also took advantage of the opportunity to carry out a nationwide smear campaign against Earth First!, and sent agents to create dossiers on over five hundred activists associated with the organization. To this day, it remains unclear whether the bombing was the work of freelance vigilantes or of the FBI themselves—in the weeks before it, FBI agents instructed the local police on how to make bombs exactly like the one that nearly killed Judi and Darryl. The charges failed to hold up in court, and the two initiated a counter-suit against the FBI and Oakland Police Department. Although the FBI managed to delay the trial for almost eleven years, during which Judi, who was crippled by the bombing, died of cancer, Darryl and others continued pressing the suit. Finally, in 2002, a jury found the FBI and Oakland Police guilty and ordered them to pay \$4.4 million in damages.

When the struggle in the courtroom fails, there are always other means of resistance. On November 2, 1979, after giving birth in prison only to have her daughter taken away in less than a week, Black freedom fighter Assata Shakur managed one of the most impressive jailbreaks of the era. After almost a year in a West Virginia federal prison for women, surrounded by white supremacists from the Aryan Sisterhood prison gang, Shakur was transferred to the maximum security wing of the Clinton Correctional Center in New Jersey. There she was one of only eight maximum security prisoners held in a small, well-fenced cellblock of their own. The rest of Clinton, including its visiting area, was medium security and not fenced in.

According to news reports, Shakur's escape proceeded as follows: Three men—two black, one white—using bogus driver's licenses and Social Security cards requested visits with Assata four weeks in advance, as was prison policy. Apparently, prison officials never did the requisite background checks. On the day of the escape, the three met in the waiting room at the prison entrance, where they were processed through registration and shuttled in a van to the visiting room in South Hall. One member of the team went ahead of the others. Although there was a sign stating that all visitors would be searched with a hand-held metal detector, he made it through registration without even a pat-down. Meanwhile, the other two men were processed without a search. As these two were being let through the chain-link fences and locked metal doors at the visiting center one of them drew a gun and took the guard hostage. Simultaneously, the man visiting Shakur rushed the control booth, put two pistols to the glass wall, and ordered the officer to open the room's metal door. She obliged.

From there, Shakur and her companions took a third guard hostage and made it to the parked van. Because only the maximum security section of the prison was fully fenced in, the escape team was able to speed across a grassy meadow to the parking lot of the

Hunterdon State School, where they meet two more female accomplices, and split up into a “two-tone blue sedan” and a Ford Maverick. All the guards were released unharmed and the FBI immediately launched a massive hunt. But Shakur disappeared without a trace. For the next five years authorities hunted in vain. Shakur had vanished. Numerous other alleged BLA cadre were busted during those years, including Tupac’s step-father, Mutula Shakur.

In 1984, word came from ninety miles off the coast of Florida: the FBI’s most wanted female fugitive was living in Cuba, working on a masters degree in political science, writing her autobiography, and raising her daughter. She still lives there today.

## **Our Strategy from Here**

This is a somewhat quiet phase of resistance in this country, as everyone waits out the end of the Bush presidency; we can afford to focus a lot of energy on benefit events, prisoner support groups, and public outreach. When things heat up again, we’ll benefit from having done this work, and in the meantime it offers us a rallying point.

In addition to supporting our targeted comrades, we have to protect the infrastructure of our community. In Italy, where the brutal state repression of the past decade has succeeded in paralyzing many of those who bottomlined anarchist projects, police and fascists have been able to shut down some of the social centers, publications, and protest campaigns that formed the life’s blood of a vibrant anarchist movement. We must not allow that to happen here. The government will target those who are most active and visible; when one of us is immobilized by legal problems, it’s up to the rest of us to take up the slack. Our infrastructure is not just made up of formally organized groups; it also consists of and depends on our social networks and culture of resistance. If people cease to come together at politicized entertainment events and community potlucks, or cease to work through conflicts and share emotional support, that will be just as devastating as the loss of an infoshop or Food Not Bombs.

As for our proactive tactics, how should we adjust them in the light of this offensive? It’s worth pointing out that, with the exception of Rob Thaxton<sup>5</sup>, no anarchist in recent memory has served more than a couple years in prison for participation in mass actions—this is impressive, given the high level of confrontation these have sometimes reached. It seems to be harder to make charges stick in mass action scenarios, perhaps because they involve so many suspects and so much chaos, and also because investigating them at great length would overextend the resources of the state. The police are forced to grab whomever they can—usually not people who had any major role in the actions—and charge them with crimes for which there is little evidence.

Ironically, in the wake of September 11<sup>th</sup>, anarchists backed off militant mass actions in fear that they would meet stiffer repression. Consequently, we have less leverage and morale—and we are still being targeted as domestic enemy number one! The FBI and the whole apparatus of repression are after us whether or not we skulk around in the shadows,

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<sup>5</sup> Rob just finished serving a seven year sentence for throwing a rock at a police officer during a Reclaim the Streets in Eugene, Oregon, June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1999.

so we may as well organize openly. If we're all headed for court anyway, we have little to lose, and we stand to gain much-needed visibility and momentum. If enough of us stick our necks out, they can't target us all, and the more people of all walks of life are familiar with our struggle the more allies we can hope to find. Now is the time to form accessible anarchist structures, to speak publicly about our opposition to capitalism and domination, to organize large-scale anarchist actions. Far from endangering us, this may actually make us *safer*.

As for those who prefer more covert tactics such as arson and sabotage, the clearest lesson of the current phase of repression is that the government is interested above all in mapping networks of resistance<sup>6</sup>. If you are not connected to the current pool of suspects, doing as your conscience dictates is no more dangerous now than it was a decade ago, provided you practice flawless security culture and pick prudent comrades who will never buckle under pressure. Indeed, as the trials of the current defendants play out over the coming months, we will be given valuable insight into how the FBI investigates crimes of this nature. This should, if anything, make it easier for activists to engage safely in militant direct action.

Our enemies are wrong to hypothesize that we can be frightened into passivity. If the prospect of living in a world of domination and despair was bad enough to catalyze us into action, think how much less appealing it is to be silent knowing our comrades can be taken from us at any time. As they escalate this conflict, we can only respond in kind.

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<sup>6</sup> In January 2006, a fifty-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of damaging over a dozen cars and two buildings at an automobile dealership in Newport, Oregon. The buildings were spray painted with the letters "ELF," and two local news stations had received calls claiming the action in the name of the ELF. However, as reported by the *Newport News Times*, "Police could not establish any connection between MacMurdo and the ELF organization. It is believed his actions were retaliatory in nature and not any kind of political statement." He was charged with criminal mischief and his bail was set at \$32,500, a miniscule amount by eco-terror standards. What does a guy have to do these days to get charged as an eco-terrorist? Obviously, he has to have the right friends.

find each other.



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