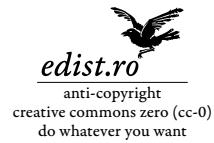


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Willem Van Spronsen and Histories of Resistance

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A year ago today, 69-year-old anarchist Willem Van Spronsen attacked an ICE facility in Washington state. He attempted to sabotage the buses the facility would use to transport people to concentration camps. For this, he was shot and killed by the police. We should remember him, tell stories of him, and draw inspiration from his sacrifice. We need to believe in the possibility of collectively organizing and acting to stop the atrocities that the US capitalist state commits.

Last summer, a presenter at a critical theory workshop I attended outlined his conception of “counterhistory.” He argued that counterhistory has two main components: 1) Identifying and dismantling the dominant historical imaginary and 2) Reconfiguring our methodological tools for understanding how history operates. He primarily writes counterhistories focused on the operations of power and what he calls the military-academic-industrial complex. I agree with this, but I think he missed a crucial third step.

I am convinced that we must complement these two components of counterhistory with a third: telling histories of resistance, struggle, and the possibility of building alternative worlds. These histories inspire action today, instill the belief that resistance and alternatives are possible in the face of a history of oppression and loss, and give us practical lessons for how to fight most effectively. Willem Van Spronsen was guided by this conception of history.

Van Spronsen had a historical understanding of the dangers of our present times and the need to fight back against the rise of fascism. In his final note before attempting to sabotage the ICE buses, he says that: “when I was a boy, in post war Holland, later France, my head was filled with stories of the rise of fascism in the 30s. I promised myself that I would not be one of those who stands by as neighbors are torn from their homes and imprisoned for somehow being perceived as lesser. You don’t have to burn the motherfucker down, but are you just going to stand by?”

History provides both a caution of the dangers of fascism as well as inspiration for struggle. Willem identified himself in a line of

struggle going back to John Brown’s attempt to start an insurrection to end slavery. This historical understanding of the possibility and duty of individuals to act against violent oppression seems instrumental to his ability to make the ultimate sacrifice in the fight for freedom and justice today. As he said, “I follow three teachers: Don Pritts, my spiritual guide, ‘love without action is just a word.’ John Brown, my moral guide, ‘what is needed is action!’ Emma Goldman, my political guide, ‘if I can’t dance, I don’t want to be in your revolution.’”

Spronsen follows with: “I’m a head in the clouds dreamer, I believe in love and redemption. I believe we’re going to win. I’m joyfully revolutionary.” And he ends with “keep the faith! All power to the people! Bella ciao.”

Willem Van Spronsen, presente!