



Des Moines Mutual Aid Monthly

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Bring It

BY COMRADE PATRICK

Mounting tensions in this county were briefly eased by the government's response to Alex Pretti's murder last month. Against our expectations, the Trump administration cut a rare retreat in response to the fallout, retiring the acting head of ICE enforcement and announcing a drawdown of federal forces in Minneapolis. It appears that the open murder of white citizens is, for now, an escalation the government does not wish to hazard.

This retreat is more symbolic than material. Federal pigs are still terrorizing Minneapolis and hundreds of other cities and towns, and the Department of Homeland Security is even now buying up warehouses which they plan on turning into concentration camps for detained

migrants. The people of Minneapolis can and should still celebrate a victory. ICE and CPB agents are being removed from Minnesota because its residents organized a successful insurgency against federal occupation.

The lessons learned by Minneapolis residents are being absorbed all over the country, and the models of resistance established there are being replicated in Des Moines. Loose neighborhood organizations have been formed to identify and resist federal immigration agents. We applaud the pre-emptive creation of resistance networks and caution them only to ignore the whitewashed history of Minneapolis' resistance already being told by counterinsurgent nonprofits: that all participants were nonviolent, that local Democrats and police helped in any way, that all you must do is document atrocities and bear

witness. People up north told ICE agents to kill themselves, chased them out of neighborhoods, stole their guns and burned their cars. Their resistance was made effective by materially impeding ICE's atrocities, not by merely documenting them.

Even this advice might be unnecessary. Trench rumors about raids which did not take place (at CFresh and other locations) in the past few weeks demonstrate not just our community's anxiety but also anticipation, a readiness to fight back and to identify a combatant to engage with. The people hate ICE and want to fight them in the streets. We hope ICE does not come here. If they do, they will find a city ready to turn them back, with determination in our heads and Minneapolis in our hearts. ■



Hands Off Cuba

BY COMRADE BETSY

The humanitarian crisis in Cuba is indescribably dire as the US exerts economic pressure on this small island nation. Cuba is running out of fuel, and fast. US military and diplomatic actions have effectively blocked any and all major fuel shipments, deepening shortages that now threaten basic services and public safety. This intensified blockade follows more than 60 years of U.S. embargo policies, described often with flimsy euphemisms to avoid formal declarations of war.

Cuba's main supplier of oil for years was Venezuela, but those shipments have largely ceased after the U.S. kidnapped Maduro and took control early this year. In the void left by Venezuela, Mexico was positioned to step up as Cuba's main fuel supplier, but Trump's tariffs and economic threats on any country cooperating with Cuba stopped Mexico from shipping fuel, due largely to its own colonial relationship with the United States.

For over half a century, Cuba has been portrayed as a boogeyman by US policymakers. A socialist government, less than 100 miles from the shore of our own, is of course a target for chauvinistic practices and economic interference. Cuba has long been accused of hosting Russian intelligence, supporting "terrorist" organizations, and even using supreme communist technology to give a host of maladies to international diplomats (i.e. Havana Syndrome).

Due to decades of sanctions, blockades, and other imperialistic sabotage, ordinary Cuban people are facing abhorrent conditions like water shortages, power outages, and a lack of basic supplies and medicine. Disruption of fuel means that basic services like trash pickup and ambulances cannot operate. Some estimates conclude that Cuba could be out of fuel by mid-March.

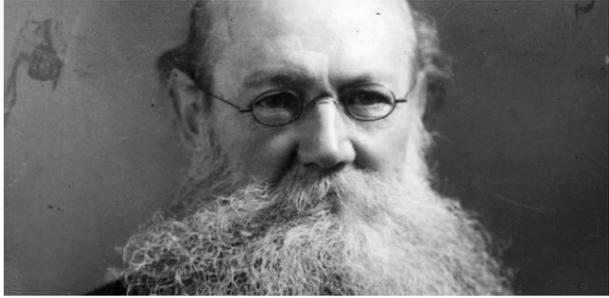
Despite all these challenges, Cuba has made significant strides and gains since its revolution. They've established a universal healthcare system with one of the world's highest doctor-to-patient ratios, and developed impressive vaccines against diseases like lung cancer and Meningitis B. In addition, the nation has achieved a universal literacy rate, advanced women's rights, and significantly reduced the economic inequality that plagued it previously.

The current stranglehold on Cuba's economy and its people is a thinly veiled attempt to manufacture a humanitarian crisis and promote regime change. This is just one instance in a broader pattern where the US targets any socialist country as much as possible to prove that communism is ineffective and dangerous, using sanctions as one of the main tools to do so. It's crucial that we resist the imperialist and simplistic media framing of this issue, offer our support to the Cuban people, and work for an end to this illegal and inhumane economic war. ■

Make Mutual Aid Mutual Again! (MMAMA)

BY COMRADE JENOTS

Kropotkin's book *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution* remains the most crucial and instructive text on the subject of mutual aid.



Life is short, and those of us who feel a duty to improve the world have no right to waste their time. We need to read the good books and avoid the mediocre ones. While I will not name the bad ones, I will point to a common theme in them: they present mutual aid as a kind of lifestyle, attitude, and disposition, and little more. For example, it is commonly said that mutual aid has to do with treating those one helps with dignity and respect, emphasizing their autonomy, etc. While this is true, it's not something entirely outside the wheelhouse of the same charity organizations we often criticize—and it's really not hard to imagine that liberal institutions and charities might one day be able to help people from all walks of life, and in all states of despair, without prejudice, in their limited way. In terms of attitude,

we are at most a stone's throw from one another. So where is the distinction, really?

Many authors choose to focus on these elements because (to be overly charitable) they don't know how to pin down the 'mutual' element of mutual aid—and this is no surprise, because doing that is *difficult*—that is, *complicated but achievable*. Like any other important thing, it requires thinking with your brain, spending more time thinking than talking/writing/publishing, and having strongly justified reasons for the activities one's group engages in as opposed to "we've been doing it a long time". Above all, it means making a conscious connection between the group's activity and demonstrating a different way of life for human beings. Needless to say, it is no surprise that some of our 'comrades' who have long given up on the idea of a better world, but refuse to admit it, do not share the ambition to align mutual aid with its own damn name, and are content to perform charity with a leftist paint job.

Kropotkin's major contribution, the sense in which his book *still to this day* outstrips all other writing on the subject, is threefold: First, it is descriptive, choosing to observe the world rather than to prescribe norms of behavior, least of all petty attitudes and postures. Second, being descriptive, it shows us that other animals, and past humans, have actually managed to engage in this kind of activity for a very long time as a condition of their way of life—out of need, not habit or mere principle. Third, that there is indeed a difference between one-sided giving and mutually beneficial activity, and that the latter is very much real and achievable.

Kropotkin gives an excellent example, in a later chapter, about peasant farmers pooling their resources to purchase farm equipment they could not afford alone, giving everyone access to improved means of subsistence and production. Here he is pointing to something that some of the lesser books on the subject never even attempt to broach: that mutual aid should *benefit everyone, including the people who do it*. It seems kind of obvious, and most of us will even admit to having failed to meet this standard, but the lack of ambition around realizing this element of our work is disappointing (to put it gently).

Failure and lack of ambition are mutually reinforcing (at least *they* can pull it off...): we gain nothing from our organizations besides back-patting, when we could expand our activities to benefit ourselves and each other, to maintain our own enthusiasm and sense of hope, and to continue to push our ambitions forward towards a general, all-encompassing method of social organization, especially in the wake of the state's simultaneous withdrawal from, and attack on, human life in every shape. Not to mention, it would enable us to more deeply support and expand our charitable efforts. Mutual aid must build a way of life that would be recognizable and attractive to any person, in purely material terms. A person who does not already have some ideological commitment should be attracted to mutual aid because they have something to gain from their involvement. That is a foundation on which to rest sound moral principles: charitable aid, autonomy, and dignity. Before we can do that, we must make mutual aid mutual, again! ■

A Letter to Society

BY COMRADE J-WIZ

The purpose of jail is said to be to distribute punishment as a means of righting a wrong, and to make society safer. But does it make society safe, or does it further break down a community? Without addressing the real problem, jail is only an illusion shown to society to pacify a fear or wound. Crimes have not stopped since the inception of jail. Instead, they have ballooned in eras of "hard on crime" policies like the "The War On Drugs" in the Reagan era. Jails have failed to have a major impact on society's problems.

Who benefits from these institutions of jail, and who suffers? Tax payers are funding the uptick in these institutions, while investors in the prison market benefit. Dismantling the prison system is heavily opposed by politicians. As a result, dismantling families is more feasible and attractive. Jails are over-packed with unfair and overpriced bonds, even for the most minute of charges. They sit an individual in jail to waste away until they are sent to another institution, with nothing addressed and no aid offered. Who suffers in this system? Directly, the family, but indirectly, society at large—the community that this institution of jail is supposed to protect. Those fatherless and motherless kids garner deeply embedded anger and pain, with no understanding of how to deal with them properly. Now that the structure of the family has been broken, where is that anger released? Back on to the society that jail is supposed to benefit.

Oversentencing results in those who do try to rehabilitate themselves not being given the opportunity to utilize what they've learned, because they are not given a chance for early release. There are no bills being written for the sake of correcting this broken system, because the system isn't broken at all - it's excelling in its design. **We must not close the door on those who've previously strayed off course in society, because they are uniquely capable of connecting with those straying in society today.**

In Anamosa, there is a lack of treatment for inmates to address thinking behaviors, and any treatment or classes are only offered to those ready to be paroled or released. MRT (Moral Reconciliation Therapy) is the standard treatment, with participation for the purpose of release, not for the purpose of mental change. Inmates are tasked with the responsibility of creating self-help groups, which are greeted with strong opposition by the administration. Rehabilitation isn't a temporary project, it's a lifestyle—one that has to be practiced, not leased.

After two unfortunate murders in 2021, barbed wire fences were put up all around the yard and cell houses. The purpose of this is still unknown, because there are no benefits that these fences provide. If the purpose was

to psychologically make the population feel caged in, then that project was a success. Cameras are everywhere, including the shower area, to clearly enforce that every part of your life is under scrutiny.

Crime is not acceptable, but neither should be the inhumane treatment of those who perpetrate crime. In each of the five housing units here (LUA, LUB, LUC, LUD, and LUE) the drinking water in the cells come with a "drink at your own risk" understanding due to the high lead levels. LUA, previously a special needs unit, is now a short term unit (that also houses long termers) and has extreme ventilation issues, a broken AC unit, and no windows.

LUB is a very troubled unit, caged from the inside and outside, with an overall eerie and sinister feel. Chicken wire covers all the windows and wild birds fly around. In this kind of environment, you can't help but feel like a caged animal.

LUC houses long term inmates, primarily more of the older population, and was once alleged to be the "honor" unit. However, this building is old and moldy and has no hot water in the cells. LUC deals with sicknesses that circulate and linger, resulting in illness and death.

MHU is the medical unit, or so-called infirmary. Typical procedure is to send a message to the infirmary, and depending on how important they feel the issues are, they schedule the visit time. The infirmary offers no preventative healthcare. Every complaint is met with the solution of Tylenol, and any sickness, Medicine-D. All these visits come with a \$3 copay, making it easy for someone to feel like they don't want to waste time and \$3 they don't have for minimal help. Trying to get to Iowa City's medical facility for review is met with numerous steps of deterrence, and even then, MRIs and other forms of treatment may not be scheduled for six months or over a year.

Some inmates in school have struggled for years to get their HISET, without the aid of tutors. Although other inmates have volunteered time to champion a tutoring program for those who need it, this administration has failed to meet this need and facilitate the help. This is another instance of punishment over rehabilitation.

Synthetic drugs, especially K2, are another problem we face here. The only course of action is to banish the intimate to segregation (the hole), perpetuating the same cycle of addiction and punishment while neglecting their mental wellness. The Iowa Dept. of Corrections often attempts to create the narrative that inmates are largely responsible for the flow of drugs into the prison. Consequences of this have been the over-frisking of visitors, and forcing family and friends to send mail through a Las Vegas outsource, "Pigeonly", that takes weeks to be

delivered. As you can imagine, the amount of family members sending mail has decreased astronomically. This narrative is an excuse to deprive the inmate population and their families of a natural connection during visits.

Families, taking time out of their busy daily lives and often travelling from out of state, are so important to support people who have been through something traumatic and need consolation. All we can do is look at them from across the table and tell them to be strong. If your child or visitor breaks down and cries in these moments, we get written up and our visit terminated. We are expected to be robots unable to share moments of compassion. Food vending machines have been removed from the visiting room, taking away the basic human ability to share food with family and friends. Though there are pop machines, bathroom breaks are heavily monitored and could result in cancellation of a visit, so drink at your own risk.

Visitors who do not strictly qualify as immediate family members are restricted, and the number of visitors allowed at the same time is also limited, causing inconvenience. Many visitors have stopped coming because of the stress of the highly monitored visits and dealing with prison guards. In many cases communication is limited to phone calls or video visits, navigating a few slots per week on a difficult-to-use website. Many go weeks without even a video visit.

Without any outside support, doing time is not only hard mentally and emotionally, but financially as well. Once we are committed to the care of the Department of Corrections, we have to pay 20% restitution, taken away from the money we made working one of the state jobs. Some jobs' hourly pay is as low as 33 cents/hour, and the pay is monthly. They also take restitution from the monies your family or friends send you. Everything here is expensive, and on everything purchased, there is a 6% charge for stay and 7% sale tax.

This system is failing to be a vehicle for rehabilitation, failing to promote mental wellness, failing to champion education, and failing to promote or value healthy family connections. Incarcerated individuals waste away until they get close enough to release for recommended treatment. We have to understand that people coming into this system without the proper means for change return to society hardened by isolation. How does that help society, or anyone perpetrating crime? The need for reform is an innate calling to disconnect from the destructive ways of yesterday. This is not a house for irredeemable beings, rather beings paying for a moment. The moment is NOT us. Wherefore, the question becomes, are the unjust treatments just, because of the errors of imperfect people? ■