

**We Gather Here Today In Disservice of The State**



**Winter 2022**



Des Moines Mutual Aid is an Abolitionist Mutual Aid Collective made up of varying radical and revolutionary tendencies in what is currently known as central iowa.

None of these articles represent the collective as a whole. Take what you can from these pieces and burn the prisons.

In Love and Rage,  
Des Moines Mutual Aid

[iowamutualaid.org](http://iowamutualaid.org)  
[desmoinesmutualaid@protonmail.com](mailto:desmoinesmutualaid@protonmail.com)

## **Des Moines Mutual Aid Points Of Unity**

### **0. We believe in working shoulder to shoulder and standing in solidarity with all oppressed communities.**

We ourselves are oppressed, and our mutual aid work is a fight for our collective liberation. We do not believe in a top-down model of charity. Instead, we contrast our efforts at horizontal mutual aid, the fostering of mutually beneficial relationships and communities, to dehumanizing and colonizing charity.

### **1. We believe in community autonomy.**

We believe that the communities we live and organize in have been largely excluded from state social services, but intensely surveilled and policed by the state repressive apparatus. Capitalism is fundamentally unable to meet people's needs. We want to build self-sustaining communities that are independent of the capitalist state, both materially and ideologically, and can resist its repression.

### **2. We are police and prison abolitionists.**

Abolition and the mutual aid that we practice are inextricably linked. We don't rely on capitalist institutions or the police to do our work. We believe in building strong and resilient communities which make police obsolete, including community systems of accountability and crisis intervention.

### **3. We work to raise the political consciousness of our communities.**

Part of political education is connecting people's lived experiences to a broader political perspective. Another component is working to ensure that people can meet their basic needs. It is difficult to organize for future liberation when someone is entrenched in day-to-day struggle.

### **4. We have open disagreements with each other about ideas and practices.**

We believe there is no formula for resolving our ideological differences other than working towards our common aims, engaging with each other in a comradely manner, and respecting one another, whether or not we can hash out disagreements in the process.

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## Mutual Aid: A Burnout Counterculture



It's an all-too familiar feeling for your average person trying to dismantle the capitalist state: Brought on by the combination of endless problems to solve, repetitive tasks to keep up with, monotonous wage labor, and disillusionment of having not made any progress over the past two years (among a myriad of other stress-inducing conditions), the exhaustion never seems to go away. Burnout is experienced when pushing one's individual capacity with any type of work. However, organizing spaces on the Left tend to create a "burnout culture," which sets any committed organizer on the inevitable path to "resentment, exhaustion, shame, and frustration"\* after consistent participation. Often, organizers who take on what feels like the brunt of the workload will burn out around the same time and may choose to stop organizing altogether. This leaves their organizing spaces with few options but to scale back their capacity or fold in. Burnout can be extremely detrimental to the movement at large, and it is imperative that organizers work to transform burnout culture into a culture of community care for each other in the practice of mutual aid.

Burnout has become such an intrinsic part of movement organizing because the task at hand is so large. Dismantling oppressive systems that have been in the works for centuries and building stable, thriving communities cannot be accomplished overnight. There is and always will be work to be done, and the inevitable internal conflicts within organizing spaces only feed the fire that burns us out. It's easy to guilt oneself into the mindset of needing to contribute to "the work" whenever possible or else be subsumed by shame that problems continue to exist and people continue to suffer because of a lack of individual effort.

When burnout really hits the fan, organizers start throwing this guilt and resentment at each other, demanding that other organizers need to step up so that those who have contributed a lot of work can take a break. At this stage, the brink of internal conflict has manifested again. At its peak, the stress and anxiety created by burnout culture leaves organizers disheartened and ready to give up on the movement.

In a sense, burnout culture demands relentless selflessness, a feeling of always being “on call” to resolve the next issue, which can be a real energy drain. When organizers’ capacity is drained, the projects they organize are in jeopardy of falling apart, and the people affected by burnout experience a loss of direction and community. This leads to a condition pointed out by Estelle Ellison, organizer and creator of the *Abolish Time* page and zine, that “Whenever ‘the work’ drains the capacity of its organizers, we are left to seek out our own care outside of the organizations we help to create and sustain.”\*\* In this regard, one common remedy to relentless selflessness is the liberal, individualized fad of self-justified selfishness, or “self-care.” In this practice, people take a break from their organizing spaces to become an indulgent consumer. Granted, a spa day is nice if you can afford it, but “self-care days” are just a quick patch that contributes to burnout culture’s cycle of overwork, burnout, take a break, repeat (if there’s still a willingness to return to “the work”). At best, this indulgence will provide enough of an energy boost to get back to work, but with burnout culture still intact, it’s only a matter of time before another crash and burn.

What is needed instead is an integral culture of community care in the practice of mutual aid within organizing spaces. A main feature of mutual aid is building communities that can support and sustain themselves, as opposed to relying on and being disappointed by the capitalist state, NGOs, or other nonprofits to meet basic survival needs. A bit of irony is found as people often become burnt out as a result of working on various “mutual aid” projects, which in theory, should be supporting and empowering the people who are organizing them. If organizers don’t gain anything from their efforts besides a feel-good, savior-sense of having helped someone else to survive, it’s not mutual aid. It’s merely setting oneself up to work until there’s no energy left to give.\*\*\* As pointed out by a CrimethInc organizer on a recent *It’s Going Down* podcast,\*\*\*\* “successful organizing leads to having more capacity.” Increased capacity is evidenced by a stronger community that has gained some sense of that self-sustaining means of survival which leaves everyone involved better off materially, physically, and/or mentally. In this fashion, organizers must focus on actively avoiding burnout by caring for each other in tandem with the work they take on. There is a great need to understand that taking care of each other as human beings *is* “the work” and must be incorporated *in* “the work.”

**“Successful organizing leads to having more capacity.”**

Of course, that is easy to say, but figuring out what community care looks like in practice is a harder task. How can organizers best support each other to avoid burnout and organizational collapse? Perhaps it’s simply checking in on a personal level before diving into the workload for the day. Or maybe it’s setting intentional spaces to get to know each other as people and fellow community members rather than as organizers, building the trust that makes it easier to offer and ask for support when the work gets stressful. Trust building also makes processes of conflict-resolution more manageable and less likely to steer participants toward burnout or disengagement from the organization. Even discussing current factors contributing to burnout culture as an organization may help unearth ways to shift the group dynamic and refocus on what work can be accomplished successfully. Finally, at an individual level, it is crucial to know and communicate one’s own limits and capacity. This, in addition to the previously mentioned group efforts, will aid in normalizing the practice of consensual delegation of workloads to trusted comrades so that a handful of organizers aren’t trapped in the cycle of burnout.

While there is definitely more to dissect in regards to creating a meaningful culture of community care, one thing to be sure of is that the burnout culture prevalent in organizing spaces needs to be dismantled if autonomous projects and movements are to be sustained. Some days it requires a huge amount of effort just

to black flag react to a comrade's Signal message, let alone make sure the neighborhood is fed and sheltered. **However, if dedicated folks can successfully take care of and look out for each other alongside tackling the seemingly "bigger work," dreams of communities principled on mutual aid are sure to transpire.**

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\* Dean Spade, author of the widely circulated Verso publication, [Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis \(and The Next\)](#), defines burnout as "the combination of resentment, exhaustion, shame, and frustration that make us lose connection to pleasure and passion in the work and instead encounter difficult feelings like avoidance, compulsion, control, and anxiety."

\*\* [Estelle Ellison](#), *Abolish Time* zine #1

\*\*\* Another irony is identified here in which compulsory work until exhaustion is a symptom of the labor systems under capitalism which organizers are working to abolish.

\*\*\*\* [It's Going Down, November 24, 2021 "Organization, Repression, Burnout, Action: A Discussion with Crimethinc."](#)



# Art and Surrealism in Material Struggle: A Brief Discussion

Consider for a moment the impact of art in your life. Stories, music, drawing, painting, poetry; art saturates every part of what it means to be human. You can trace the emotions of our collective history through art, you can discover the people of any time with awe through what they create with their hands and minds and inspiration can be drawn therein. You can better understand Indigenous tribes in so-called Amerika and their unwavering resistance to colonial domination through drumming, singing, and dancing which, among other things, is done in celebration, preparation for war, and prayer. Their refusal to be dominated by colonist pigs is marked by their continued use of these powerful, artistic lifeways. This spirit of the people and that of resistance continues to be found through artists like the Halluci Nation, who's song 'The Virus' with Saul Williams and the Chippewa Travelers provides a profound perspective of the colonized people that have abjectly refused surrender.

**The people**

**The virus took on many shapes**

**The bear, the elk, the antelope, the elephant, the deer**

**The mineral, the iron, the copper, the coltan, and the rubber**

**The coffee, the cotton, the sugar**

**The people**

**The germ traveled faster than the bullet**

**They harvest the mountains inside, protect the crops, herd the cattle**

**The people**

**The women and children were separated from the men**

**They're divided as a foot into the regional filters of their minds**

**The violence of arrogance, crawls into the air, nestles into the geospatial cortex**

**We are not a conquered people**

**Drum beats by region**

**I was awakened by my older brother**

**The compound was on fire**

**Awakened by my older brother**

**The compound was on fire**

**The compound was on fire**

**The compound was on fire”**

Art is a part of a proper historical dialectic understanding. A way of understanding the process of history through contradicting, opposing forces, and how those contradictions resolve to move forward. Paired with a proper understanding of the material conditions of the people as their relation to the environment they exist in and their ability to utilize the resources within this environment, and their role as a driving force of history. A revolutionary might gain a proper understanding of, or for who, we are, and why we are, through the process of historical dialectical materialism. This understanding is critical in determining the trajectory of the material struggle and the revolutionary's role within it. Art and surrealism (which seeks to inspire the effort to resolve the contradictory conditions between that of dream and reality), in a movement are often misused and mutilated, promoting a metaphorical idea of struggle and a dominating individualism. Some examples of this art can be found in the form of infographics, liberal media co-opting revolutionary language, social media activist personalities, and corporate content. Some created intently for the purpose of propaganda and manipulation, some created and maintained by the masses who believe their art is revolutionary while being reformist in nature, they disarm the people. These dreams of reformism and concessions as the way forward are where we can see examples of a distorted surrealism. All seek to legitimize the existing systems and remove consciousness from the tangible struggle to change the material conditions of the people and alter the masses relation to the means of production, power, and each other, and total return of indigenous sovereignty over their land and lives. They replace this development of radical consciousness with a leashed and prepared, safe, idea that reforms will provide the answers to the pain of the masses, or the belief that posting the right thing on your instagram story will serve as a catalyst for liberation.



These ideas are founded in individualism and excuse their consumer from the duty to take responsibility into their own hands.

You cannot legitimize the illegitimate.

Now that we've discussed what revolutionary art is not, let's discuss what it can be. Frantz Fanon, in 'Wretched of the Earth', speaks on how art that discusses the past and is created for the people engaging in the national liberation struggle must be created with "*the intention of opening up the future, of spurring them (the masses - my emphasis) into action and fostering hope.*" This, I believe, is the beautiful role of revolutionary art and surrealism, not to pull the masses away from the material struggle but to better engage them with it, to provide joy and hope, to help inspire action and craft the dream to be strived for, what the future may hold. A prime example of revolutionary art would be the protest song Bella Ciao. Originally sung by the Mondino workers of rice paddy fields in Northern Italy in protest of their working conditions, it was adopted and modified into the anthem of the Italian anti-fascist partisans during World War Two, resisting Nazi and Italian fascist forces.

***This, I believe, is the beautiful role of revolutionary art and surrealism, not to pull the masses away from the material struggle but to better engage***

The lyrics are as follows:

**One morning I awakened,  
oh bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao! (Goodbye beautiful)  
One morning I awakened  
And I found the invader.  
Oh partisan carry me away,  
oh bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao  
oh partisan carry me away  
Because I feel death approaching.  
And if I die as a partisan,  
oh bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao and if I die as a partisan  
then you must bury me.  
Bury me up in the mountain,  
oh bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao bury me up in the mountain  
under the shade of a beautiful flower.  
And all those who shall pass,  
oh bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao and all those who shall pass  
will tell me "what a beautiful flower."  
This is the flower of the partisan,  
oh bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao this is the flower of the partisan  
who died for freedom**

To this day this song holds a place in the hearts of partisans, liberation forces, and revolutionaries around the world. From anti-fascists in Portland, Oregon battling oppressive pigs and neo-nazis, to the Syrian Defense Forces the YPG, and YPJ in Rojava, NE Syria and Kurdistan defending themselves from the Islamic State of Iraq, from Syria, and from Turkish fascism. Continually it fosters in many a sense of hope, dreams of the future of peace and safety, and a call to action.

I would like to continue Fanon's take on revolutionary art and the artist in material, decolonial struggle. "*But in order to secure hope, in order to give it substance, he must take part in the action and commit himself body and soul to the national struggle. You can talk about anything you like, but when it comes to talking about that one thing in a man's life that involves opening up new horizons, enlightening your country, and standing tall alongside your own people, then muscle power is required.*" (Fanon - Wretched of the Earth)

**Without engaging in the popular struggle the artist is in no state to define the masses.**

Fanon goes on to discuss that revolutionary national culture, and therefore revolutionary art, grows and is shaped in the tangible matrix of the liberation struggle. That, the common plight of the masses, straining for their lives and future, must mold both the artist and art. That, in order for revolutionary art to properly capture the spirit of the people and become the direct expression of the masses, the artist must be an active participant in the struggle.

***the common plight of the masses,  
straining for their lives and future,  
must mold both the artist and art***

The artist's role is to clearly define the people from which they derive inspiration, until they are no longer separated from the masses there can be no forward momentum. Haitian poet René Depestre describes in his poem "Face á la nuit" (Facing the Night) what is required to develop and understand national culture.

**"The lady was not alone/ She had a husband/ A husband who knew everything/ But to tell the truth knew nothing/ Because culture does not come without making concessions/ Without conceding your flesh and blood/ Without conceding yourself to others/ A concession worth just as much as/ Classicism or Romanticism/ And all that nurtures the soul."**

The artist has not engaged in the struggle alongside the people and is therefore incapable of defining them. The role of art in revolutionary struggle, if used properly, is to become like a tidal wave. Propelling the people forward, inspiring in them the beauty of, and their duty to the struggle for liberation, sweeping away all that would inhibit and defang it. It is capable of forging a dream of the people free from their oppressors, a dream of what they can be, and inspiring action to achieve those dreams. It gives us songs to sing with our revolutionary family as we march to battle, as we cook, build, heal, and toil towards victory. It maintains within us a revolutionary fire that inspires us to act now, to organize our neighbors, our city, inspires us to throw a brick at a pig and to feed our community so that it might take it upon itself to tear away its oppressors. It also fills us with somber yet hopeful memories, reminders of those we love who have conceded their flesh and blood so that the liberation struggle could triumph. Let their sacrifices never be in vain.

All love and solidarity.

Consider reading Frantz Fanon's "[\*Wretched of The Earth\*](#)".

# Mutual Aid and Revolution

Andžejs Jenots

We have all had the misfortune of being exposed to many ridiculous caricatures of what mutual aid entails, which attempt to prop up even worse caricatures of what revolution entails. I think very few people involved in mutual aid, if any, hold to the fairytale that a good society should reproduce itself primarily through mutual aid, or that buzzwords like "horizontal" and "decentralized" can magically do away with the need for regulation, oversight, administration, etc. in a vast society with millions of people, each with thousands of intractably complex dependencies on goods and services. I'm not going to discuss these things because they've been discussed at length, but also because they have in common a fatal obsession with speculating about the future society, rather than appraising the role of mutual aid in the present. Instead, I want to discuss the potential for mutual aid as a revolutionary activity – that is, one having to do with the abolition of the system of wage labor.

Mutual aid in the USA is rarely linked up to revolutionary activity of any kind at all, except in very shallow, superficial, symbolic, and ineffectual ways. Throw a rock in any direction and you will hit Black Panther nostalgia (often with no account of why the BPP failed), vague anti-capitalist rhetoric (usually with no concept of what capital is and does), appeals to the so-called 'community' (in which some constantly-shifting, faceless 'community' cookie-cut out of the broader population for convenience, stands invisibly behind some activist-reformist or wannabe class-collaborator), and so on. My argument, as someone who is decidedly *in favor* of mutual aid as an activity and a perspective, is that mutual aid, on average, in its current state in the US doesn't know its own role in revolution, but it could have one if we wanted it to.

## CRITICISMS

It can be clarified in basic economic terms what mutual aid is, without being too reductive. This isn't to defend "economics" as a generally legitimate form of knowledge, it's to understand the material basis of our activity – what enables or disables it to take place. I think the most typical case is simple: to the extent that mutual aid is an activity resulting in products and services, financed by groups of workers who exist because they (or a large enough share of them) sell their labor power to the enemy class for a wage, mutual aid is the redistribution of a share of those wages. Unions and class-independent political organizations are also financed by (in their case, members') wages. The difference is that mutual aid, in its most common incarnation, isn't usually an attempt to build a political weapon to extort or expropriate the wealth of the capitalist class, which many brave bandits and bold revolutionaries have made central to their political aims in the last 150 years. Whatever way you cut it, mutual aid attempts to optimize how a group of people allocates *wages* (usually after paying their bills first) for some kind of agreed-upon plan of distribution.

It is clear what the main weakness in this is: all (class-independent) mutual aid activity is constrained by the wages of its participants and donors, all of which are of course subject to economic forces (which leftists often pride themselves on their nonexistent understanding of) over which they have no control, and whose control mutual aid is unable (and does not generally even attempt) to dispute. And while the same is true of unions and parties, the *aims* of mutual aid are different: mutual aid redistributes this income directly, it doesn't itself consume it as calories and protein with the aim of becoming something more. The point is merely this: there are serious problems from the revolutionary point of view - which sees this society as being in decline (with all the consequences that has for wages) - if mutual aid is taken to be about what we and our friends can do with \$20/wk, adjusted yearly for inflation. We'll discuss an alternative vision of mutual aid in the next section.

Second, it is often claimed by proponents of mutual aid that we want to build infrastructure to exist outside of capitalism. There is no such thing as 'existing outside of capitalism'. The vast majority of humankind sells its

labor power for wages, and we would not be able to do mutual aid if we (including donors) didn't. If we *somehow* were able to do mutual aid on a nontrivial scale in a way that mortally compromised capitalist production (e.g., affected the labor pool) -- then we would either be swiftly disciplined by the state or be in a situation of dual power. At best, the escape ladder idea sometimes associated with mutual aid can offer an escape for only a handful so small that the enemy doesn't even notice. The aims of communists are not humble, they are audacious. The point is to eliminate class society in its entirety, not flee it and hope it won't follow (even if fleeing just means staying in place geographically but out of the crosshairs).

In any case, what are such *somehows* about, anyway? What sort of state of affairs does this situation describe besides one in which production for exchange and wage labor are already on their way out? What are we getting at by thinking about a situation in which capitalist production is mortally wounded, if not one in which capitalist social relations are negated (regionally, totally, etc.)? And do we need to rehash debates regarding the vanguard, the party form, exchange, and so on, just so we can paint a picture of the form of production known as communism in the needlessly specific terms of the form of distribution known to us as mutual aid (a method we inherit from a world of scarcity)?

## REVOLUTIONARY MUTUAL AID

I think the key is partly this: mutual aid is for and about *the world we're in* (the one that is in never-ending decline, but which will never simply collapse), not the one we *wish* we were in. We know better than to project our personal fantasies onto a world we can't make out even in outline except negatively: the absence of economic coercion, the absence of money, the absence of a state. This has always been a very difficult aspect of being a communist -- contending with the fact that the *actual* way the world we loathe will be negated by a world that emerges from it isn't something we can insist on by seeing it vaguely in our mind's eye and turning that into a political program. Rather, it is a regular, distant fact like the weather this minute a year from now. We can, however, talk about mutual aid as a tool in a world it might not escape -- in *this* world.

The idea of mutual aid as an infrastructure project for revolution has merit, but not (as it is sometimes viewed) as filling some imaginary social void of skills and techniques for survival - a void that does not exist in our society because of its deep technical division of labor by specialization. The role of organizations in mutual aid is to be a place for those who want to share their skills. The skills that tend to make up a small handful of small organizations are always eclipsed in number and effectiveness by the skills that make up the existing division of labor in capitalist production. But the ways in which these various forms of expertise, embedded inside society, will one day need to interact and meet each other in a revolutionary moment is precisely the kind of thing that can be thought about in advance by those who do mutual aid. And, as with anything else that begins as an organization or institution, the goal of a mutual aid organization is eventually to dissolve into (whatever will be) the normal functioning of a new society which *organically, just by being what it is*, connects individuals and their needs and abilities.

Mutual aid is not infrastructure for running away or carving out a small plot of land - literal or figurative, it is infrastructure for driving a spear into the heart of capital and sustaining an effort to do so. Mutual aid is a basis for preparedness for future revolutionary events, including for the allocation of all of the skills and capabilities whose aims will be redirected from profit-making to something else as a result of the widespread clarity gained in a revolutionary situation. Even though we can say little in detail about a coming revolution, we know that it will be a conflict between classes, and that will mean strain on dependencies between those classes. To the extent we now depend on the enemy class for the organization of the production of goods and services (and in many ways, we do), someday we won't be able to anymore. However, the fight will no longer belong only to 'we unhappy few,' these early-to-consciousness revolutionaries, with our meager skillsets. It will become everyone's domain.

Some things we are used to, some things we desperately need, some things we'd like to have -- we might be cut off from. Mutual aid, done right, can make it possible for us to live and act in those times because it is *about* the intentional allocation of resources for living and fighting. Although nobody can get everything in the hands of everyone who needs it, revolutionary mutual aid can think about and prepare to insert itself into the places where class harmony used to enable the meeting of needs (at gunpoint, on the condition of the organization of society by capital) and where the absence of class harmony will have disabled it. *Its task is to re-link production with distribution when and where capitalist social relations no longer do.* This is not something that takes place automatically, nor should it simply mimic the existing forms of distribution under capitalism. What needs are created when a cowardly union refuses to authorize a popular strike? What needs are created when a city jails dozens of people for violating a curfew during a riot? But also – what *means of meeting needs are created* (or freed up) when a hospital's worth of medical professionals is suddenly in open revolt against its ownership, perhaps even with a political perspective of some kind? This last question deals with the role mutual aid neglects most, because mutual aid tends to want to live in the present at the expense of what it will one day need to be, if we believe we haven't already seen the peak of social upheaval. To this end, one of the central tasks of mutual aid is less about doing something for the sake of doing something, and more about thinking and noticing – understanding the trajectory capitalism is taking in order to understand the needs it will create and the means, methods, technique, skills, expertise, etc. which finally become available to us as they are expelled from capitalism.

The Bolsheviks, and everyone else, were surprised by the appearance of workers' councils in 1905 – it was a new form of struggle that caught everyone off guard. Whatever your opinion of them, they then *theorized* this new form and took it seriously as the basis for a new society – even advocating for these councils to seize power before the party had anything resembling a political majority within them and before they gutted these same councils in order to maintain power and order. This recognition of the right form in the right historical moment is something to aspire to, and it doesn't take a party to do that. There may one day appear a meaningful political current that does not aspire to hold the reins of social production of goods and services, and believes workers themselves should decide their arrangements of production and distribution. Whether that will be based on mutual aid alone is unlikely. But the relationship that a self-proclaimed party has with workers' self-organization, whether that takes the form of mutual aid associations or factory committees, is a legitimate test of that party's usefulness and robustness as a political vehicle for the interests of workers. A good organization, I like to think, is going to be spending its time identifying these novel forms of workers' self-organization, not prescribing them based on existing formulae.

**(the task of revolutionary mutual aid) is to re-link production with distribution when and where capitalist social relations no longer do.**

## CONCLUSION

We have, more than anything, an overly-romanticized past that we inherit because we (somewhat reasonably) want to carry on the legacies of the people and organizations that our cherished myths tell us to admire and respect – the people who would supposedly lead the oppressed to victory *if only* they were here with us. But they aren't, and however noble they were and however hard they fought – they failed. Only we are here with us while time passes, things change, rebellions and insurrections take place, etc. There *can be* a revolutionary mutual aid in *our world* because there is a role in the world for revolutionaries: to make out the contours of what exactly is disintegrating before our eyes, how it's disintegrating, what that might imply about the future world emerging out of this one, and to facilitate its birth. There is more to this than pondering forever, there is actually trying one's hand at the practice problems: weaving together revolutionary threads that exist among individuals today. Learning to meaningfully combine the people, skills,

and desires around you in a way that is *clarifying* to those around you. This requires constantly reevaluating what it means for these sorts of activities we engage in to be a catalyst in the coming revolution, where they will tackle much bigger versions of these problems, and their tackling will be precisely the *practical activity of communists* in revolution.

You should read:

[Chuang](#)

[Endnotes](#)

[Hard Crackers](#)

[Insurgent Notes](#)

# A Wish for Community Education

The modern k-12 school structure is a failed system that cannot address mental health and needs to be dismantled consciously. Many teachers and counselors are doing their best within the system, desperately trying while at the brink/stepping over their own mental health limits. They are caring for the communities' young ones who are also in a constant state of trauma. If high school wasn't hard enough, try it during covid times. I write as a mother of two teens navigating and side-stepping this system. Beyond the daily fear of being one of those that may die of covid and spreading the plague to loved ones, there has been a tenfold increase in the amount of threats of mass shootings in schools. The tough-luck, go-harder-no-matter-what is a forced patriarchal, privileged, leftover colonial mindset, made to homogenize or fail the children and teens in our communities.

## **It needs to end.**

We can do better for the children in our lives and our community. Our society has been taught to follow whatever is already in place, a little reform will make it better. That is definitely easier, for sure, but when something is truly and blatantly broken as fuck, why would you think following this least resistant path full of barriers to change will work out for anyone? It is also obviously privileged as fuck to send your kid to private school, or play school with private tutors in your private pods, rather than work toward a better system for all. However, those avenues have their charms and enticing elements. So, let's break it down and reimagine a better life and learning for our children that is inclusive to all.

What is it about school that we feel is necessary for our young ones to gain and grow into people that will in turn "make our world a better place". Many people have already resigned to leaving the overwhelming amount of problems for our next generation to fix. Didn't we all hate it when our elders said it was up to us to fix the world's problems, skirting their own responsibility to their children and community? We have to first do our part and make teaching and learning ok again. Socialization, actual skills needed to survive and thrive, Arts and humanities, the basic skills needed to fully learn a subject, the ability to hear and activity listen to something said, to speak their minds with educated conviction verbally or nonverbally, a truthful not whitewashed understanding of the current and past state of the global world. That is a wish list for community education I think a lot of us could agree to.

What is it about pods (privileged parents during the beginning of the pandemic teamed up with other privileged parents, to bring their kids together to be taught by private tutor), private school, boarding school, public school, online school, unschooling (a lesson- and curriculum-free implementation of homeschooling, unschooling encourages exploration of activities and ideas initiated by the children themselves, adopted by many anarchist parents), and charter school, that we like? Pods offer a sense of security during a pandemic. Private and boarding schools tout quality of education and structure. Public school brings many options for socialization and extracurricular activities and frees up the working class parents to keep working. Online school, homeschooling, and unschooling can give parents and students more freedom in how they structure their day, and the pace of their learning if they have the option to stay home with their children. Unschooling can give students and parents autonomy and authority over their own learning. Charter schools can give teachers and parents more freedom to structure the school to how they see fit.

However, all of these modes/structures lack an amount of inclusivity in the community in which the individuals belong. All of these systems also rely on a heavy dose of privilege to participate. Not all children can attend public school and thrive or survive. The majority of parents cannot afford to stay at home or send their children to a charter or private school. Can we combine all of the most needed and useful features to make learning more accessible and fulfilling for all, and at the same time support autonomy and community?

I'm going to throw some ideas out there I'm sure many teachers and parents have thought about frequently since the beginning of the pandemic; Learning pods of 6-12 individuals, each having a buddy they check in with daily for the 8 week period they are partnered up to work on a subject or skill. A councilor could meet with the pods to help guide during weekly meetings or conflict-specific mental health discussions. After that 8 week class has concluded, pods could then go on to dive deeper into that subject or quarantine and then be restructured into a new pod and class. Athletic, theatric, vocal, mathematical teams kept in pods during their seasons of play and creation. All forms of Covid-19 testing available and used regularly on site, following scientific guidelines. Masks would only need to be required while moving through any shared spaces, bathrooms, hallways, doorways, etc, holding individual peers accountable for the safety of the pod. Mental Health buddies could stay in pods, moving together to new class subjects, easing transitional anxiety and encouraging strong bonds of friendship. Rooms of shared resources could be assigned to pods during particular hours of the week, and/or require masks during public hours. Negative Covid-19 tests required to attend athletic and social events all scheduled on Fridays to allow a two to three day quarantine period and point of contact Covid-19 test taken on Monday. Quarantine periods planned after larger scheduled social events. Negative test results required after spontaneous events before returning to in-person pod sessions.

Let's all imagine this new world of community-responsible learning. I see current school buildings becoming the new learning centers where pods can meet in person to work on skills, learn subjects, morning movement sessions to start the day and cleaning and sanitizing to end the day, socializing 2-3x a week. Online materials and discussions are presented and shared other days of the week. A daily discussion of current and/or historical events led by the students after it is presented by a rotating, virtual community expert. Community guidelines created to facilitate and support inclusivity and diversity, bringing about a better understanding while discussing and disagreeing about materials. This type of weekly schedule would free up each classroom for 8 weeks at a time, for two separate pods. Each pod could create a weekly meal plan and cook together in each classroom for meal times in person. These Centers could invite and support individuals wishing to teach skills they have mastered while meeting with one pod for a few days a week for eight weeks, or while teaching an online class which is then archived for future learning. Students could request subjects for learning from the community. Students could offer classes they create to younger students to learn from older students. Youth could create classes for elders to learn and understand the struggles youth are currently navigating.

I am not saying I have all the answers here, but I am sure collectively we could find them, and this is all very tangible if we collectively reject hierarchy, reject patriarchy, claim the funds already allocated by the community for education, clearly communicate our needs, and ignore the current structure, thereby dismantling it for our future generations health. Do it for the kids!



# **Capitalism: An Economic Dictatorship**



## 1. What is Capitalism?

Capitalism is characterized as the private ownership of the means of production within a market economy. In simpler terms, capitalism is when private individuals own the factories, stores, and industries within a market system. The CEO owns the company, and the *employee has no say* in the companies actions, the employee has no say over however much they get underpaid for their work, and the employee is a slave to the boss with minor restrictions. The employee sells their time and body to their employer in exchange for (usually) small amounts of money. Capitalism, as an economic system, is by definition *undemocratic* and in practice *exploitive*.

*Capitalism is an economic dictatorship funded by the exploitation of the worker.*

The rest of this text will substantiate this claim and provide resources for learning more about this concept and solutions to this problem.

## 2. Capitalism and Democracy

Capitalism has a strange Relationship with the idea of democracy; it can co-exist with the parliamentary and representative democracy we have grown accustomed to, but cannot co-exist with the extension of the idea of democracy to the economy. The workers have no say in how their workplace is run, they have no say in how they are treated beyond the very extreme outliers that are illegal, but those as well are normally not enforced, the worker has no say over what happens to the product of their labor. A worker can be fired at a moments notice by the boss, while the worker has no say in the functions of the workplace, where the boss reigns supreme.

There is no democracy at work. There is no freedom in our economic system and there can be no freedom in our economy until the workers, collectively, own and have a say over the functions of their workplace and the products of their labor.

## 3. Exploitation Is a Capitalist Necessity

In this section I will explain the three main types of exploitation in a capitalist economy: Wage Theft, Underpayment, and the Labor Theory of Value.

### 1. Wage Theft

Wage Theft occurs when an employee is not paid for their work, for example, a worker works 40 hours a week, with a wage of 10 dollars an hour, but gets paid 200 dollars that week instead of 400, or gets paid 400 dollars while doing unpaid overtime. Both of which are illegal, but barely ever enforced by the state.

### 2. Underpayment

Underpayment occurs when a worker is not paid enough money to survive off of, being around 15 dollars an hour in the United States. A Capitalist deems a worker not worthy or not working hard enough, or even doing labor that is not valuable enough, to the point that no matter how hard they work at it or how perfectly they perform the tasks assigned to them to justify a living wage. Underpayment is a symptom of the capitalist class valuing profits over people. Someone working a full time job should be able to afford to live, to eat, to sleep in a bed, and to have shelter from the outdoors, and beyond that afford simple commodities and hobbies. (I would further this claim to assert that all have the right to all basic necessities required to live: water, food, shelter are essential to life, and thus a right to all those that are alive regardless of their employment status. I would further this claim by asserting that all have a right to well being, and thus a right to do things they enjoy

and have things whilst not basically necessary, are necessary for the well being of an individual. Any attempt to institute a policy, economic system or anything else that degrades or seeks to abolish these rights is one with core principles not focused on the well being of all.)

### **3. The Labor Theory of Value**

The Labor Theory of Value asserts that all value is derived from labor, whether that labor be physical or mental. For example, you have no real use for a cow. It'll kinda just sit there, moo from time to time, eat some grass and shit on your lawn. However, you do have use for a cooked steak, the primary use being that you can eat it to gain energy and continue living, generally considered a good thing. The steak is valuable because of the labor put into the creation of it, from the labor the farmer put in to raise the cow, to the butcher who labored to cut the meat and transport it, to the cook who labored to cook it, for if steak required no labor to create it no one would pay anything for it, its value would be essentially non-existent. You are paying for the labor all of these people put in to create the steak, and the value, or price, of the steak is derived from the labor put into its production. This analysis is true for all things exchanged on a market. The value of an object is equal to the value of all labor put into it.

*All value is derived from labor.*

This in itself is not exploitation, but on a closer analysis you will discover a disturbing fact. If value is produced through labor, then an employee should be paid for all the labor they

put in. For example, let's say you work for a carving business. Every day you're given a block of wood worth 5 dollars, and in the span of one day you turn it into a carving of a bird. The bird carving sells for \$55. But you sold your day's labor to the owner of the carving business for \$20 a day, which means the business spent only \$25 on a carving that sold for \$55, and obtained a \$30 profit. However, your labor is precisely what turned an item worth \$5 into an item worth \$55! In this sense, the business steals those \$30 from you, and if the capitalist paid you fairly, paid you the extra \$30, they would never make a profit at all and their business would fail and be replaced with a capitalist willing to take part in this exploitation.

*You will never be compensated for the full value of your labor under capitalism.*

This is theft, and the most necessary and evident form of exploitation within capitalism. Without it, companies couldn't make a profit, so they steal the money from you. They exploit you and pay you less money than you labored for, and is necessary for capitalism to function. Theft is at the core of capitalism's inner-workings, and thus capitalism cannot be reformed.

### **4. What Exploitation Says About Capitalism**

The fact that a economic system can not only provide rampant exploitation as a result of its inner workings but has exploitation at the very heart and core of its philosophy is a economic system that has degraded the value of human life to the point where people are seen as only commodities, tools to create wealth to be bought for as little as possible. Workers are no longer people but tools ripe for exploitation in the eyes of the capitalist. An economic system that does not value human life but goes as far as to degrade the value of human life to the point they become simple commitedies shows us two things: One, that capitalism is an economic system that does not value life and thus must be abolished, and Two: It must be replaced. The fact that exploitation is inherent to capitalism, and that capitalism lives and subsists off of this exploitation tells us that it must be abolished and that we must not allow an economic system to degrade us like this, and it tells us that the value of human life must be core and central to the solution to the economy we replace it with.

#### 4. The Choice of Oppressor

Proponents of Capitalism argue that due to your ability to choose your boss, it's no dictatorship. You may quit your job anytime, you may choose a benevolent boss and quit jobs until you find one! This view is privileged in nature and is completely false.

The poor cannot afford to quit their shitty 7-7 12 dollar an hour jobs, doing so would leave them starving and evicted out of their overpriced apartment with peeling paint and water that looks yellow that runs out of rusty pipes their landlord refuses to fix. The poor cannot afford

the burden of being jobless while begging for another economic dictator to exploit their bodies for profit. The poor cannot sacrifice more than they have to follow the dead corpse of the "American Dream" and its puppetmaster. On top of this is the fact that those capitalists who are "benevolent", who believe they are doing something good, *still* exploit their workers, *still* steal from you in the way described in the Labor Theory of Value section, they *still* are a dictator, having all say in the functions of the workplace and what happens to the products of the workers labor. Even in the best case scenario, a benevolent dictator is *still* a dictator, and exploitation is *still* exploitation no matter how nice the exploiter is about it.

#### 5. Forwards to a Economic Democracy

All of the facts as stated above point us to the fact that *capitalism is undemocratic, and functions on exploitation*. Then what, would the replacement be? The answer to that question is simple: Economic Democracy must be the replacement, but what is economic democracy and how would it function?

Economic democracy, at its most basic level, is when workers own their workplace, when they all, collectively, have a say in how their workplace functions and acts, and have control over the products of their labor. This idea is known as Socialism. The idea of *workers' ownership* as opposed to *private ownership* is the basis of Socialism, and there are many theories and ideas on how to implement workers' ownership of the means of production. There are two main groups of thought, the Libertarian Socialist school of thought, and the State Socialist school of thought. (Please note there are many disagreements throughout the ideologies within both of these schools of thought and every ideology within these schools of thought has its own ideas. For practical purposes I will be simplifying and generalizing, and this is not meant to be an in depth analysis of the ideologies within these groups).

Libertarian Socialists generally advocate for worker ownership through direct workplace democracy, and normally with the abolishment of a market economy, where you directly vote for workplace decisions along with the abolishment or severe reduction of the state.

State Socialists generally advocate for worker ownership through, direct workplace democracy, democratic ownership of industries, or state ownership of industries while preserving the state and its power, and the general consensus among state socialists is the preservation of the state is to protect and spread the revolution, and believe the state will wither away after global revolution is achieved.

Before taking a look at the books below, remember this: you can only benefit by taking an earnest and honest look at other ideas. You may find them to be correct, and you may find them to be wrong. But what will benefit you most is the knowledge of why people believe in this

idea, why people agree with it, and with it a deeper understanding of the world. *You can only benefit from learning* about different ideas and perspectives and about different people. Remember this, and consider reading some of the free books listed here.

## Socialist Reading

[\*Reform or Revolution\* by Rosa Luxemborg](#)

[\*Wage Labor and Capital\* by Karl Marx](#)

[\*Anti-Capitalism 101\* by Steve Klabnik](#)

## Libertarian Socialist Reading

[\*Anarchy Works\* by Peter Gelderloos](#)

[\*Anarcho-Syndicalism Theory and Practice\* by Rudolf Rocker](#)

[\*Anarchy\* by Errico Malatesta](#)

## State Socialist Reading

[\*State and Revolution\* by Vladamir Lenin](#)

[\*The Principles of Communism\* by Friedrich Engels](#)



# **Court Solidarity: How and Why, or, We Don't Leave Our Fighters Behind**

## **The Why**

Court Solidarity, also known as Court Support and various other names, is a tactic used by non-lawyers to support defendants going through the legal system. It is generally used to support folks that are tangled up in protest or political persecution charges, but can be adapted for use for any defendant.

The basic reasoning of why this tactic has developed is that the state uses isolation as a tool for intimidation and compliance. The state relies on you feeling powerless once they have you in their grips. Most people from marginalized communities have an intimate knowledge of how the legal system can seriously harm and disrupt you and your family's life, long before you even get to trial. If we show up for our neighbors and loved ones during this process it can allow the defendant to feel less alone which can result in more courage to face the state. When we know our communities have our back, we are less likely to be coerced into decisions detrimental to ourselves and our communities and more willing to fight back.

## **A Brief History of Des Moines Mutual Aid Court Solidarity**

When the uprising after the police murder of George Floyd began, Des Moines Mutual Aid understood we needed to organize a bail fund to keep our fighters out of jail and get them back to the streets. This was also during the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and jails are an extremely dangerous hotspot for virus transmission.

As expected, the state responded viciously to the protests and began making mass arrests. We put a call out to the community and they responded rapidly with donations. We set up a hotline that is monitored 24/7 to alert us to arrests and typically have bonds posted within hours. We managed to bail out every protester in Des Moines since the Summer of 2020 and continue to do so at the time of this writing at the beginning of 2022.

After bail was paid and people were released we would interview them as they left the jail to assess immediate needs and get contact info. We then worked on securing pro bono lawyers as well as mental health professionals. By keeping records of who was bailed out, we were able to follow up and link people with lawyers and therapists as needed.

As the street protests cooled down and the trials began, we put out a call to build a Court Solidarity crew. We used information from the defendants and public court records to keep up to date on court scheduling and made sure we showed up to court dates. This also served as a movement building tactic. Many different orgs are represented on these days and we use this time to eat together, organize further, and strategize about upcoming cases. The Covid-19 pandemic limited some of what we could accomplish, but we were able to take precautions and still show up for our people.

The vast majority of Des Moines protest cases that didn't take a plea deal ended in acquittal or charges dismissed.

## **The How**

In any given case, we can support a defendant in various ways. We will briefly touch on the major areas that the majority of defendants will have in common. Some of these processes and details may vary based on jurisdiction.

## **Arrest**

Once someone is arrested, there are two crucial tasks to take care of as soon as possible.

The first is to find out what their immediate needs are, both for them or those that depend on them. Needs such as injuries, time-dependent medications, pets, children, dependent adults, immigration status, etc. Many orgs and affinity groups get ahead of this by having a "file" for each member in a safe

place that can be accessed by a trusted person not at the event. At the very least, if you are knowingly going into a potentially arrestable situation, have a trusted person staying behind keep these details. There may be a need to advocate at the jail to make sure they get the medications or medical care they need.

The second crucial part is to determine their bail and get it paid quickly. The longer someone is in the hands of the state the possibility of something very bad happening increases. If there is a bail fund in your area, memorize their contact information and make sure everyone in your circles does the same. Write it on your body with a permanent marker. Make sure those in jail with you are aware of it.

Do not talk to anyone during your arrest, at the jail, or while in prisoner transport; the pigs, the jail staff, others in jail, anyone at all. You are being listened to and all of it will be used against you and others.

## **Pre-Trial**

Once the ransom is paid, or the defendant is denied bail and must wait in a cage for trial, the next step is to find legal representation. It is generally advised to file for a public defender immediately so that they will not go unrepresented before securing a private lawyer. Do not discount a public defender if that is your only option.

In many states there is a short time limit after an arrest to request a jury trial. Now is the time to do that. You can decide later if you would rather have a bench trial or take a plea. During times of mass protest arrests, some lawyers will offer up their services. Some of these will be great lawyers and some will be vultures looking to make a name for themselves off the struggle. Unfortunately this is hard to discern immediately, but will likely come to light quickly. You will need to start calling around and pulling any strings you may have. Good places to start are any local National Lawyers' Guilds, law school legal clinics, or simply asking on social media.

This is also the time to organize defense committees for the defendant or a group of defendants, with their consent. The defense committee's roles include raising funds for legal costs and dependent care as well as popular support, as deemed appropriate. They often work hand in hand with the lawyers to make sure neither is creating roadblocks for the defendant's goals. The defense committees should have one or more individuals that keep track of the defendant's mental health and arrange for therapy or other means of relief. All of these processes are traumatic to the defendant.

As the pre-trial hearings begin to be scheduled, it is good to have someone in touch with the lawyer or the defendant to keep track of dates. In Iowa it is very simple to access public court records, but the language of the filings is not standardized and can be confusing. If all else fails, call the courthouse to confirm times and dates. Des Moines Mutual Aid made a habit of showing up to the courthouse early to confirm courtroom numbers and times, which was then communicated to the Court Solidarity crew.

There are many types of hearings before a trial, and it may not always be appropriate to the defendant's goals to have a crowd of supporters. That can only be determined by them, with advice from their lawyer. It is also not unusual for the state to offer a plea deal at these hearings, nor is it uncommon for the defendant to accept it. 90-95% of charges never reach the trial stage. It is not a weakness of the defendant to take a plea to get on with their lives, nor is a trial a platform for a political stance unless the defendant specifically chooses to use it for that. It is very important for supporters to honor that.

It is also important to understand that a defendant's goals may change at any time. We must also honor that in so much as they are not cooperating with the state at the expense of others or taking a plea that may force an adverse effect on another defendant. Too often folks get intimidated during this period and agree to plea conditions that harm others. Many defense attorneys may even encourage this because they are trained to zealously defend their client, but in doing so they isolate the particular charge in front of them away from the wider goals of The Movement. Movement centered lawyers are not common in most places, but this has been changing for the better in recent years. This is where cooperation and open communication between the defendant, their legal defense team, and their defense committee is crucial.

It should be noted that some aspects of legal strategy may not make sense to the defense committees, and some defense committees actions may not make sense to the lawyer. If there is a good relationship of



honest communication, these conflicts can be overcome and become creative and effective tactics that can further The Movement.

## **Trial**

If the case gets to trial, everything starts to speed up. In the weeks leading up to the first trial date there will likely be more frequent hearings, offered deals, deposed witnesses, and, just as suddenly, charges may be dropped or a deal taken. The defense committees's role during this is to keep tabs on all these events, build up the numbers of people committed to sit in on the trial, and maintain the level of public exposure that the defendant requests.

Once the trial starts, fill those seats! There are few feelings of isolation like sitting in a courtroom inside a building completely filled with people that have your worst interests in mind, many of them armed. When you have a few dozen people sitting with you it can give the little extra courage needed to complete this on your terms. There is evidence to suggest that court support and character letters, which we will come back to, have a positive effect for the defendant during sentencing.

If the defendant is feeling it, have the whole crew eat together during lunch breaks, and rest somewhere together while waiting on the jury to return its verdict. This can have the effect of keeping the defendant's morale up, as well as that of the defense committees, many of whom may be defendants themselves. The stress of state repression during times of increased resistance can, and all too frequently has, fractured relationships and solidarity. These are important moments to nurture those relationships and maintain the strength we built together in the street.

## **Post-Trial**

Once the verdict has been determined or the plea has been taken, further support is needed.

In the situation of a guilty verdict or accepted plea, the next step in this terrible process is sentencing. Character letters are a tactic that we have personally witnessed as having a positive effect on sentencing. A character letter is a letter to the judge from an individual, telling a story of who the defendant is and how important they are to their communities. It is not good practice here to argue about the verdict, or even mention the charges. The point here is to humanize the defendant, ask for leniency, and to push back on the judge's default perspective of seeing them as just another statistic. Numerous times over the past year we have heard the judge mention that they have read the letters and "see that you are important to many people". The lawyer will advise on the process and format for these letters, but typically you will need to approach the lawyer for this info. It is not a terribly common practice to most lawyers that are not experienced in movement or political persecution cases. There are numerous online resources detailing how to write one, or you can get in touch with Des Moines Mutual Aid.

There will also be a need to help cover fines, probation fees, restitution, and/or court costs. This is generally raised through crowdfunding. In the best case scenario the whole cost can be covered quickly and paid in full. This will have a positive effect on probation, sometimes even shortening the length of the supervision period. Other times it will have to be paid on a payment plan. Remember that many protest arrests are of people knowingly risking their freedom to further ours. They have families and other responsibilities identical to yours, and at the very least we can try to share the burden of these always obscenely large amounts of money the state demands with the threat of further violence.

In the worst case scenario of a prison sentence, money again will be needed for the commissary. Prison food and basic toiletries are notoriously inadequate, as well as access to medicine. Sending funds can make a major change on the day to day life inside.

Letters to those forced into the cage are very important. Make sure to research the jail or prison's rules on letters. They can be very arbitrary, frustrating, and change frequently, but should never be too much of an obstacle to keep in touch. The letters they receive will keep them connected to the world outside and help battle the isolation and stress of incarceration. The letters you receive back will give you a real time idea of the condition they are in and conditions they are suffering through. This may create the position for

organizing better conditions for all those trapped inside, a persistent issue that all communities have. The letters can be mailed directly to the prison, and many prisons have an electronic option that makes it easier to keep in more frequent contact.

Consider creating a letter writing club and asking your loved one inside if they know anyone else that would also like correspondence. Also consider sending books and literature to them, but again research the particular institution's policies.

Always keep in the front of your mind that all correspondence will be read by the state. Be smart about what you write. The Security Culture that kept us safe in the streets will keep us safe here too.

There are likely folks on the outside that depend on the defendant. This will be a hard time for them. Listen to what they say they need and arrange that support also.

This is a very broad overview of Court Solidarity. Many of the important details will differ based on the laws of your state. Looking up state code and talking to lawyers, law students, or paralegals will help you get a handle on that.

Our next installment will cover prison escapes, how to live underground, and states that refuse u.s. extradition.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact us at [desmoinesmutualaid@protonmail.com](mailto:desmoinesmutualaid@protonmail.com).

*May capitalism's armed militias never capture you. If they do, may your people have your back like you had theirs.*

# Disaster/Revolution

Almost without exception, historical revolutions have been preceded by military, economic, or natural disaster. The insurrection which established the Paris Commune in 1871 followed months of siege and starvation in the city. Russia in October 1917 had lost 9 million dead on the killing fields of World War 1, suffered mass starvation in the cities, and was on the verge of military defeat. The China which the Chinese Communist Party led to revolutionary victory in 1949 had been in the decades prior a veritable hellscape of mass famine and rule by sociopathic warlords, imperialists, and foreign occupiers. Disaster, constituent deprivation, that feeling of being hungry or cold, shatters the legitimacy of the state for ordinary people in ways that mere propaganda or agitation can not.

Both the shock of sudden natural disaster and the slow creep of hunger also tend to foster people's best instincts, at least in the short term. The media depiction of widespread violence and 'looting', and the media's portrayal of civilians as helpless victims after natural disasters are deceitful propaganda. In fact, you are far more likely to be rescued from peril in a disaster by your neighbors than by professional rescuers, more likely to be fed and given shelter by informal community networks in the following days than by FEMA. Collective suffering forges in trauma a previously absent sense of collective identity, a "disaster community" (term coined by Rebecca Solnit), a short-lived, highly functional, stateless society. Informal networks of mutual aid sprout naturally from the cracks in institutions wrought by disaster, and often flourish until the state finally lumbers in with massive resources and massive violence to reassert itself.

Climate change is going to increase the frequency and scale of disasters in the very near future. In Des Moines, this will mostly take the form of more regular violent storms in the summer and polar vortexes in the winter along with semi-perennial cycles of drought and flooding. COVID has gone from acute crisis to mere background noise, and major weather events and climate refugees will soon be commonplace and share the same fate. This elevated need for disaster response will strain the resources of the local, state, and national government, already weakened by 50 years of slashed budgets. Based on its behavior in past disasters, we can predict that the state will allocate what resources for recovery it has to more wealthy areas as climate change disaster and its resultant social disruptions multiply. Police and repressive institutions will be more empowered, because unlike regular people, the economic and political elites *do* tend to panic in disaster and demand the use of state violence to 'restore order'.

The result will be more suffering in the neighborhoods we live in, but also a serious de-legitimization of the state as a guarantor of stability, and the springing up, by necessity, of networks of mutual aid following disaster. If the radical left is able to effectively organize coordination between those networks and provide critical resources to communities passed over by state support, to help feed people the government let go hungry, the loyalty of affected populations may well shift far to the left. It is important to remember that in every popular communist revolution in history, the masses did not have a sudden collective conversion to Marxism, resulting in the overthrow of the state, but instead supported the revolutionaries because they were able to provide basic services that the existing regime would not or could not. In the context of climate disaster, we may thus find ourselves with greater opportunity to, if not overthrow the state entirely, carve out areas more or less free of the capitalist state and expand networks of mutual aid into stable social relations.

It is not enough for us, though, to simply wait for the inevitable climate disasters to strike, and join in the community response as it occurs. Emergent post-disaster mutual aid networks *do* tend to fizzle out or be supplanted, co-opted, or violently crushed by the state. If the radical left is sufficiently prepared, though, we may be able to intervene effectively to strengthen these mutual aid networks, mobilize masses of new volunteers, radicalize at least some of them, and inoculate them against future cooptation by the state.

It is important to remember that the state and the left are not the only organized agents active in post-disaster power vacuums: right wing charities (the Salvation Army) and vigilante groups also attempt to fill the void. Right wing elements like the Oathkeepers, more organized sections of III%-ers, and less centralized affinity groups of right-wing survivalists have long stockpiled food, water, ammunition, and other supplies, and often have expertise with radio communications. These organizations and individuals have the capacity to commit gross acts of violence and intervene in well-coordinated, well-resourced ways in the context of crisis. A well-publicized example is the vigilante roadblocks established in the Pacific Northwest during fire evacuation orders in late summer 2020. As authorities in the rural areas outside of Portland announced evacuation orders, local right-wing elements set up blockades on major roadways to prevent (nonexistent) antifa arsonists/looters from entering their neighborhoods, causing delays in evacuation efforts. Climate change may create situations where the evacuation orders are never lifted and sheriff's deputies never shut down the roadblocks, where middling government bureaucrats have to negotiate with whoever is staffing the blockades about where aid supplies will go.

The crucial positive example for us to study is the Common Grounds Collective in post-Katrina New Orleans. A group of anarchists, along with the local community, managed to build incredible social infrastructure there, including a medical clinic, food distribution and garden, and community ride service, along with other essential recovery programs. This collective was able to make the state and state-aligned charities irrelevant in the neighborhood they worked in, and forced out murderous right-wing vigilantes (including the local police) by means of armed opposition. These programs didn't vanish after the 'recovery' from the hurricane, but instead grew and became part of the movement infrastructure there. We shouldn't take this example as the end point of liberation, but their ability to out-coordinate well-resourced charities, the state, and right-wing militias may be a beginning point for how we can transform the fleeting impulse towards mutual aid into a society based upon it in the context of climate catastrophe.

An important aspect of Common Ground's success was its ability to call upon street medics and organizers, many of whom knew each other through anti-globalization and anti-war protest movements. We have here in Des Moines a similar local network formed largely by 2020's protests and ongoing mutual aid efforts. This network, and its collective experience in mutual aid work, puts us in a good position to help organic post-disaster mutual aid efforts flourish. In order to successfully challenge the state for legitimacy and defend ourselves from right-wing violence, though, we should take additional steps to prepare ourselves.

Our decision-making and mobilization processes are currently based on cell and internet networks, which rely on the power grid. This grid is weak at the best of times and will certainly fail in the event of sufficiently nasty inclement weather, so we should build our own voice and data ham radio network, and consider options for small-scale off-grid power. Our ability to distribute resources relies on local retail stores, but supply chains can break down quickly in times of crisis. In addition to stockpiling at least some food, fuel, and ammunition, we should take some time to identify stores outside of the metro area, and forge connections with leftists in other cities who may be relied on as an alternative supply chain if needed. Local storage locations, especially refrigerated food storage facilities, may be convinced to give out soon-to-spoil products, and should be identified, so that the left can distribute this food rather than right-wing or state-affiliated charities. It may be worthwhile to identify and map out on paper hubs of state activity (police stations, etc.), likely staging areas for state responses, and critical intersections where police or vigilante blockades may be established (and routes around them). Last, there *are* some preparations individuals can make to be less likely to need assistance in case of disaster and more able to be a part of a coordinated response, detailed in the coda.

History informs us that in moments of crisis, those organizations which are most prepared in terms of communications and ability to mobilize people and resources are most able to bend reality towards its vision long after the crisis. Climate change will make crises more frequent: climate disaster is the context in which

we now organize. The state is slow to respond to disaster, the right can only shoot people or offer dehumanizing charity, but our model of mutual aid makes us nimble and encourages autonomy. In time, we may well be able to follow the example of the Communards, Bolsheviks, and CCP, and wrest power from the capitalist state in the context of climate change fueled instability. In fact, this may be our last, best chance to do so.

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There are great resources easily found on the internet for all sorts of individual emergency preparation, and if you are interested in learning more, you should seek them out (a good starting point is the podcast *Live Like the World is Dying*). Community prep, what's discussed above, is what I think needs the most attention, but there are a few things you can do for free (or for under \$100) to make it more likely that you can give assistance to others than find yourself desperately in need of it in a time of crisis:

- Buy or find at food banks a month's worth of preserved food.
- Have at least a week's worth of water stored (1 gallon/person/day).
- Buy or steal a transportable water filter, like a sawyer mini, and a windup or solar powered radio/flashlight/charger combo.
- If you rely on medication, you should try to keep at least a month's extra supply on hand.
- If you drive, never let your gas tank be less than 1/2 full, and keep a full jerry can around if you can afford it.
- Keep vital documents, a few day's worth of medication, a change of clothes, and whatever cash you can afford in a backpack, a 'go bag'.

Do all this, and you're more prepared for most emergencies than 99% of people out there!





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