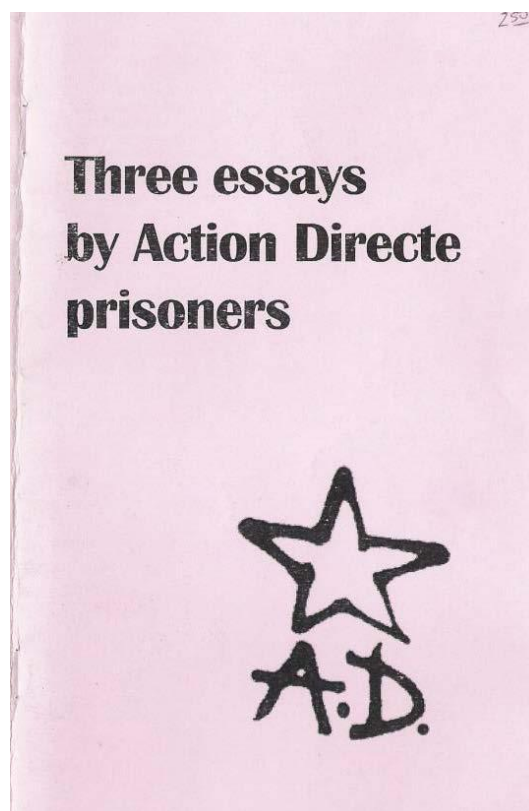


Three essays by Action Directe prisoners

Joëlle Aubron, Nathalie Ménigon & Jean-Marc Rouillan



Mayday 2001

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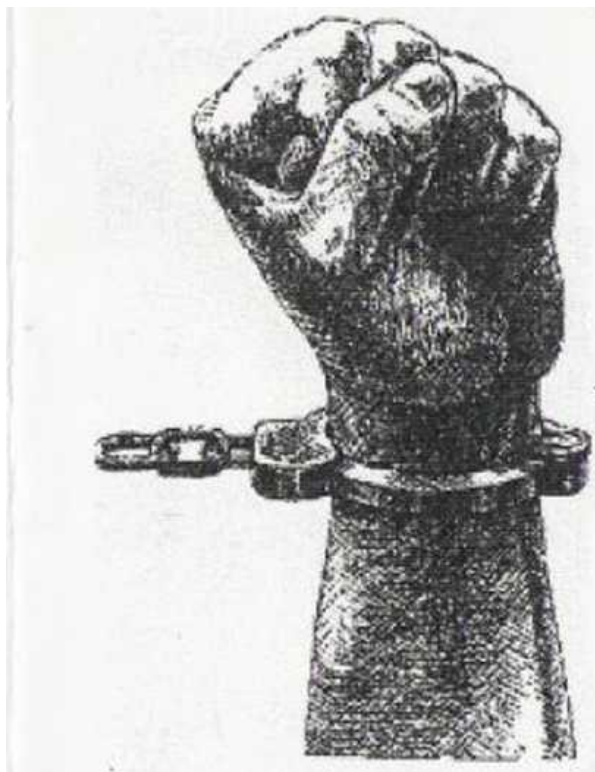
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Short Collective Biography of Action Directe Prisoners

Joelle Aubron, July 1996

We, members of Action Directe, have been incarcerated since February 1987. When the four of us were arrested it became a symbol for the government of its fight against the guerilla on this territory. It brought its propaganda and counterrevolutionary methods to bear on us, isolating us by reorganizing, for example, a section of the Fleury-Merogis Maison d'arret des femmes. The first trials were meant to show off the omnipotence of bourgeois justice. Certain cases, for which other comrades had already been incarcerated for years, were at last closed in the delirium that surrounded our "participation" in this show.

On December 18th 1987 we began our first hunger-strike to be reunited together and for an end to solitary confinement. Before it ended on April 15th 1988, two of us had appeared in five trials after more than two months on strike. Ill at ease, semiconscious, receiving transfusions behind the scenes, it didn't matter, the Special Sections' show had to go on¹.

Everyday, the powers that be deploy their forces against many hostile realities. Although there were activists from the organization or from other realities behind bars, it was our arrests, trials, and detention that the State made into the perfect expressions of its monopoly of violence, of its will to triumph and to triumph quickly at that.

A perfect example if there ever was one of this show of force was the trial of January 1989. Dealing with the "Pierre Overney " Commando's action against Georges Besse, the final act in this drama just had to be in step with the hateful barrage of propaganda that had followed our action. Named President Director General of Renault by the social-democratic government, Besse specialized in brutal restructuring, laying off tens of thousands of workers at a time (34 000 at PUKPechiney, 25 000 at Renault). Despite the slander the bourgeoisie's media lackeys and trade union collaborators, the action

¹ The distinct characteristics of these Special Sections come into play in two ways:

a) First, regardless of where the actions were committed the cases are heard by judges working in a special section of the Public Prosecutor's department in Paris, the 14th section.

b) Secondly, the Assize court jury is made up of "professional jurors". This means that it is not a "people's jury" but rather magistrates chosen by those in power, who are supposed to judge according to their "innermost convictions". Set up in 1986, this special jurisdiction is meant to tie the sentences directly to the level of confrontation while simultaneously depoliticizing them as much as is possible.

met with sympathy amongst the workers². So the trial had two objectives : to maintain the line put forward from the beginning that the attack was not a political act, and to take yet another opportunity to hammer in the wonders of neoliberalism. We were treated to the spectacle of both a minister and an ex-minister paying homage to the perfect technocrat G. Besse; Edith Cresson, who had assigned Besse to Renault while Minister of Industrial Restructuring and Foreign Trade and then became Minister of European Affairs in the new socialist government in 1988, and Andr  Giraud who was Minister of Defense in the previous right-wing government. Whatever contradiction there was in two such high-ranking political figures testifying at the trial of “four criminal fanatics” was simply buried under the violent consensus of the media and political establishment. They enthusiastically hailed our first sentence of life plus 18 years³ as if it were their own personal victory, the crowning glory of their strategy to annihilate the revolutionary left-wing struggle.

We called off our first strike without having most of our demands met. Any slight remedy to our isolation would prove to be only temporary. Two months after this trial the four of us were once again subjected to the torture of solitary confinement. In April 1989 we again went into battle with the same demands, namely an end to solitary confinement and the reunification of political prisoners. In July 1989 our detention in solitary confinement was officially ended and we were partially reunited; we were furthermore promised that accommodations would be made so we could speak with one another (a promise that was never kept).

In fact, that Fall we found ourselves in partial solitary in a section specially built for us. The right we had won to be grouped by sex, two women and two men, was not withdrawn, and yet neither was the State’s strategy of destroying revolutionary hostility on this territory, as expressed through its actions against us.

In January 1991 we began a new battle. Once again our demands were to be reunited together and for an end to solitary confinement. At the same time we were trying to build a Resistance Front to class justice and prison. So for two years, up until April 1993, we took turns going on hungerstrike for a week at a time each.

In May 1995 we received our second life sentences. Before the trial had even started it was clear that all over the world a cycle of struggle had petered out. Whatever its errors, on this territory Action Directe was without a doubt the most advanced expression of this cycle. This explains the extreme symbolization that surrounds us.

² Discussions between workers at the factory gates, which included threats and hopes of an action against Besse, were reported in the court records. In a similar vein, there were the union delegates who threatened their bosses that they would end up like Besse, or the poster that appeared that winter with a photo of the new President Director General with a bullseye on his forehead and the words “After Besse whose turn is it?”, also handed out as a tract by the workers at RenaultVivorde.

³ This means we are supposed to spend eighteen years in prison. It is only after these eighteen years that our sentence will become a “normal” life sentence with the hope for a possible release. So it is that we could be released after twenty five years of prison.

Time will judge our contribution to the proletariat's long march towards political autonomy, the proletariat being the only class that is fundamentally revolutionary to the end. Like many others throughout history and in our own generation, we have made choices that demanded a total commitment of our lives. We have no regrets. Our individual paths are intertwined with an important era for the proletarian movement on this continent at a time of growing inter-relatedness between the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggles.

JEAN-MARC ROUILLAN was sixteen years old in 1968. From a left-wing family, he was nevertheless not very political. He has suggested that this might be what enabled him to engage in the revolt against totalitarianism with no hesitation. He was active with the CAL (Comité d'action Lycéen — Student Action Committee) in events in the neighborhoods north of Toulouse. He then joined the anarcho-communist movement, notably the Autonomous Libertarian Groups (translator's note: Groupes Autonomes Libertaires — it is important to note that in Europe the word "libertarian" is not associated solely with anarchocapitalism as in the United States, but also with left-wing anarchism and anti-authoritarianism). These months were a time of intense learning where direct action was a common occurrence in the many struggles within the revitalized revolutionary movement. Occupation committees in the factories, rent strikes in the cities, struggle against the police state...

Given that the city was rightly considered the capital of antifrancoist Spain, he then became involved in support work for the revolutionary struggle against Franco's dictatorship. In 1970 he was a member of the first nucleus of the Movimiento Iberico de Liberacion (MIL), the armed organization of the Barcelona (Catalunya) underground workers movement.

The MIL acquired funds for the solidarity chests and lent its political and technical support to the self-organized groups and the different fighting assemblies that were growing on the ground. It functioned as a network of anti-fascist resistance (the GACs, Groupes Autonomes de Combat — Autonomous Fighting Groups) but it also developed an anti-capitalist praxis tailored to this period: political autonomy for the working class, radical critique and anti-revisionism, against all collaboration with the "democratic" forces that only wanted to shepherd Francoism into a new authoritarian bourgeois regime. The MIL-GAC was destroyed by fierce repression. One of its members, Salvador Puig Antich, was the last political prisoner to be sentenced to death by garroting (March 2[nd] 1974). Back in France, Jean-Marc worked to bring together many libertarian and autonomist groups willing to carry out international armed struggle against the dictatorship. Out of this came the GARI (Groupes d'Action Revolutionnaire Internationalistes — Internationalist Revolutionary Armed Groups) which were active at this time in many European countries. Jean-Marc was arrested in 1974, but when Franco died he was amnestied and released in Spring 1977.

He then started working to bring together the post-May '68 autonomist movement with the new expressions of autonomous working class struggle that came out of '68 and the battles of the late seventies, and which found most of their inspiration in the

various Italian theses. He worked to set up underground groups like the Coordinations Autonomes (trans: Autonomous Coordinations) and to generalize actions and resistance. The fruit of this labor was Action Directe (trans: Action Directe), born in early 1978.

NATHALIE MENIGON was born in 1957 in a working class family. In 1975 she began working at a bank, joined the CFDT trade union after a strike. She was then kicked out of the union and joined the autonomous communist group “Camarades” (trans: Comrades). Like the Italian group Autonomia Operaia (trans: Workers Autonomy), “Camarades” called for anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist social revolt and lent its support to the Italian guerilla movement. Nathalie took part in discussions and demonstrations in the Paris autonomist scene, and at the same time contemplated the necessity of armed combat.

In 1978 she and several comrades, including Jean-Marc, founded the revolutionary communist organization Action Directe. It was about concretely fighting the system and promoting the organization of the working class and its strategy: armed struggle. Both she and Jean-Marc participated in the first action claimed by the group: the machine gunning of the French chamber of commerce on May 1st 1979.

AD launched its first campaign of armed propaganda in Fall 1979. It would last until 1980. From the very beginning AD attacked those places where the State’s most important policies were thought out, decided upon and put into practice. AD chose its targets based on those questions that it described as being decisive at this stage (restructuring of the factories and neighbourhoods; military intervention in Tunisia, Chad and Zaire). More globally, AD was throwing down the red line that it intended to defend to the end: unity of the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggles. As an example of this unity AD also attacked those involved in the exploitation of immigrant workers, responsible for the conditions they lived in and against which they were struggling.

Nathalie and Jean-Marc were arrested in September 1980 following a firefight with the police. After the election of Mitterand (1981) and the first social democratic government, a political battle erupted in the prisons. Solidarity movements were formed calling for an amnesty of political prisoners and for an end to the special courts. The massive mobilisation and the contradictions among the new powers led to the release of all communist and anarchist prisoners and the abolition of State Security Court. Jean-Marc was freed in August 1981, Nathalie in September.

Action Directe took action again in November and December of that year. It participated in the occupation of sweatshops in Sentier and buildings in Barbes. Over a hundred mainly Turkish foreign families were thus rehoused. At the same time this campaign was accompanied by several actions and demonstrations against sweatshops and for housing. It was also a matter of supporting Turkish comrades who had fled to France after the US-supported *coup d’etat* in their country in 1980. The reconstruction of underground structures continued on at the same time.

In June 1982 AD led an important mobilization against the G-7 Summit in Versailles. It was a decisive step towards the integration of the imperialist countries along the lines elaborated by the Reagan administration.

On the last day of the Summit, June 6th, Israel attacked Lebanon. One of the lines of imperialist redeployment was thus illustrated in the most concrete way possible. There followed the invasion of Lebanon by Israeli troops, with all that followed for the Lebanese and Palestinian people. This led to AD reorienting itself towards new targets, claiming responsibility for the machinegunning of the car of the Israeli embassy's chief of security and a number of actions against Israeli companies. After a massacre-attack against a Jewish restaurant (Goldenberg) on Rosiers street in Paris, the powers that be orchestrated directed a counterrevolutionary propaganda campaign throughout the media. In an interview with the newspaper Liberation, Jean-Marc defended the machinegunning of the chief of security and condemned the massacre attacks. At the same time as the Council of Ministers tried to isolate the organization's militants by ordering the dissolution of Action Directe, a series of raids were carried out against squats and known revolutionaries. Nathalie was still recovering from a serious car accident that had taken place when she was bringing posters against the G-7 Summit back from Brussels. Nevertheless, both she and Jean-Marc went underground.

GEORGES CIPRIANI was born in a working class family in 1950. In the late sixties he worked at the Renault "artillery", a machine-tool factory. He was working as a revolutionary activist in the base committees at "Devil's Island" (a part of the Renault site at Boulogne-Billancourt) when Pierre Overney, a communist activist, was assassinated by a security guard while passing out pamphlets in front of the factory (February 25th 1972). After the large mobilizations that followed this assassination, Georges left for Germany where he lived for ten years, participating in the anti-imperialist movement there. He took part in the organization's activities between 1982 and 1987.

Today, Georges is no longer a member of the Action Directe prisoners' collective. In the summer of 1993, after years of total and partial solitary confinement, Georges had to be committed to the Villejuif psychiatric hospital. After our two hungerstrikes of several months each, our hungerstrikes of one-in-four weeks from '91 to '93 certainly must have contributed to his weakened psyche.

JOELLE AUBRON: I was born in 1959. My family came from the traditional French bourgeoisie, but lived in a working class neighbourhood in Paris. I learned quickly that social equality was just a word engraved over my public school doorways.

The other even more important factor was the renewal of the revolutionary movement that took place in the sixties. Its anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism and anti-revisionism infused the atmosphere of that period.

By the late seventies very radical levels of confrontation had already been tried out and were still taking place, the Black Panther Party in the United States, the guerilla movement in Latin America, the Palestinian struggle... Closer to home, in Italy and Germany other guerillas were hitting the system at the heart of its cities. While there were many different struggles with specific demands, they all existed within a common

dynamic against the system. So I lived in squats, in working class neighbourhoods in Paris that were facing real estate development. There was the anti-nuclear demonstration in Malville in the summer of 1977, where a demonstrator was killed by a cop's grenade. In October, at the same time in France was getting ready to extradite the lawyer Klaus Croissant to Germany, the RAF prisoners were executed at Stammheim. I was not a member in any group, but at these times I was going to demonstrations armed with molotov cocktails and took part in minor actions (against Equator's embassy after the bloody repression of sugar workers in Guyagil; the truck that was rigged to look like it was booby-trapped and left in front of the Minister of Justice following the sentencing of revolutionary activists...) Revolutionary violence was integrated into the everyday praxis of activists, guerilla attacks showed us that we too would have to engage in armed struggle in our class warfare, it was a period full of discussion about the armed experiment, specifically the Italian situation.

To give a very short summary, one of the things we discussed was whether or not it was necessary to have a political-military organization. In 1980, even though the autonomist group that I was a part of participated in AD actions and lent our logistical support, its members were not members of Action Directe.

I was arrested with a comrade from AD in 1982 while leaving a place where there were arms. I did not declare myself to be a member of AD. I continued to think about things while in prison. It was a period marked by the cowardice of the French extreme left in general and the inanity of the French autonomist movement in particular. Imperialism advanced in all its splendor: the Israeli intervention in Lebanon, Thatcher in the Malvinas, the FYP bombing of Beeka in Lebanon, Reagan's attack on Grenada, the mining of Nicaragua's harbours... The supposedly left-wing French government's policies revealed the social-democrats' submission to the neoliberal line that was dominant around the world. At the same time the former revolutionary movement was going to pieces. On the one hand were those who would jump at any chance of acquiring power, on the other those who did nothing but recite the old formulas that left the proletariat just as defenseless against the attacks of the bourgeoisie. I now saw not only the usefulness of armed struggle, but also the necessity of the strategy of having a guerilla organization. Despite this, when I was released from prison in 1984, at first I only engaged in legal activities : support for the organization's prisoners, book distribution, newspaper. Even though I had decided to get back with AD I did not want to go underground as soon as I got out of prison. It was almost a year later, when the repression was intensifying, that I went underground.

We identify as revolutionary communists. Between 1982 and 1987, the organization developed its actions following two related strategies, the Unity of Revolutionaries in Western Europe and the Anti-imperialist Front.

"For us, connecting the strategy of the Anti-imperialist FYP to the question of capitalist rule in Western Europe and the changes in its power relations meant establishing and actualizing the unity between revolutionary class's struggle and internationalism,

as a living politic.”⁴ This corresponded with the reinvigorated proletarian Internationalism that had come out of the revolutionary wave of the sixties. It was also based on changes in the system of capital accumulation, which had accelerated since the Versaille Summit. This new take on the anticapitalist struggle was necessary as European integration became an essential terrain of struggle, as important as the local or international terrains.

The West European bloc was both a source of logistical support for the imperialist rollback and a competing pole within the imperialist triad and its adoption of the new liberal-toyotist model of accumulation. On the other hand, the worldwide threat of war resulting from the militaristic policies of Reagan and his friends underlined the urgent need to build a proletarian front in all the parts of the movement from the guerilla to the neighbourhood groups to the factory cells, with the goals of revolutionary sabotage and construction. At the heart of these factors that carry within them the spark of communism — that movement whose praxis abolishes the existing order of things — the Front embodied the united attack on imperialism’s core policies, not just of the communist forces but of all the revolutionary and anti-imperialist realities. In January 1985 Action Directe and the RAF issued a joint text, signed by both organizations.

The dozen actions claimed by the organization during its first offensive as a unified West European guerilla included attacks on NATO structures, arms factories, the nerve centers of conomic and military power, and the assassination of Rene Audran, the Ministry of Defense’s director of International Affairs, who was thus responsible for French arms sales abroad. In November 1986, at the end of the second offensive, the “Pierre Overney” Commando put an end to Georges Besse’s career.

Today, after ten years of imprisonment, our incarceration is not so much marked by the project of destroying us as by the wish to bury us. Several factors should be noted when analysing this strategic reorientation on the part of the State. First of all, our struggles in prison. The partial success in breaking Georges should also be taken into account along with the continuing weakness of the French revolutionary movement as well as the need to resolve the contradiction between exceptional detention and an official claim that there are no political prisoners.

One way in which the system tries to constantly maintain its legitimacy is by denying the existence of revolutionary prisoners. If things were as they should be no one would know how to resist its judicial or economic laws. “Necessary adaptation to globalization” or building a fortress Europe to protect against “the whole world’s problems”, as barbaric and unjust as they may be in the eyes of the growing number of people who are marginalized, impoverished, deported on charter flights, reduced to begging,... these laws must be respected by those very people who they exploit, oppress and alienate. Erasing the revolutionary prisoners from the picture of contradictions wracking our societies is a central element in the process of preserving this submission to Capital’s prestige.

⁴ Trial statement -1991.

Our arrests followed many other attacks by the forces of repression. They put an end to Action Directe's politicomilitary activity. In the late eighties an undeniable historic break was made. This observation is not at all apocalyptic when understood within our continent's revolutionary history. What is obviously much more serious are the widespread and unreasonable criticisms of the accumulated experience of twenty years of struggle, especially of the guerilla struggle. Instead of a critique of our actual errors, there is only a litany of confusion. Instead of building bridges towards new perspectives it only leads to the liquidation of the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist Left in Europe.

We believe that this revolutionary experiment can only be surpassed by a new revolutionary experiment taking into account and distilling the general interests of the entire class. We know on which heritage we ourselves based our search for new pathways. Nothing we see leads us to doubt the maxim "communism or barbarism", because never before have the "projects" of "capitalism with a human face" seemed more vain. Thus we have no reason to recant. Despite the conditions in which we find ourselves we continue our political work, discussing things with other revolutionary prisoners in writing, participating in a publication (FYont), translating discussion texts or actions, especially those regarding the European revolutionary movement...

Political Prisoners and the Question of Violence

June 19th 1998

Joelle Aubron. Nathalie Menigon. Jean-Marc Rouillan

“There is no revolution without violence. Those who don’t accept violence can cross out the word revolution from their dictionary.”

-Malcolm X

Working to free political prisoners is not a neutral act. It never has been. It must primarily be a means of reappropriating the concept of revolutionary violence. To do so today is to challenge the sense of taboo and mandatory silence that befell the movement after the defeats and reversals suffered by the guerilla and other hostile forces on this continent. The bourgeoisie has repressed the very idea of violence.

From Paris to Naples, from the workplace to the ghetto streets, a recomposition of the revolutionary forces has begun. It cannot be denied. Within this overall revival, the movement should now find the strength to stop repeating simplistic antiterrorist denunciations and churning out watered down revolutionary cliches. Because both of these betrayals maintain the proletariat in the same state of impotent submission.

The years of reformist pacifism and sectarian catechisms, all about what the counter-violence of the exploited and oppressed should and especially should not consist of, have clouded any emancipatory vision. Sure, some still talk of picking up the gun but always without acting concretely to prepare the organisation of the revolutionary war. As far as they are concerned, the time is never right for revolutionary action.

The big anti-terrorist campaigns of the eighties took advantage of these twin betrayals of the fake revolutionaries. And now campaigns for the freedom of political prisoners are being organised based on the same collaboration: first off they claim that no good came of the armed struggle of the sixties to the eighties. That this struggle represented nothing more than a “death-wish” after the barricades of ’68 were defeated. That it all originated in the badly healed history of the forties. Turning a new page is what is most important for all of these “supporters”. The obvious conclusion, then nothing else will happen and their past and present betrayals will all be justified.

For others, the failures of the eighties all boil down to the simple defeat of the guerilla, and are mystified by the mantras of the official protester. All of their favourite empty formulas are called out: the absence of a Party, of a class union, of an organised autonomous movement...

Within these rearguard campaigns the liberation of political prisoners becomes the ultimate way of rewriting the revolutionary history of our continent since the sixties. It amounts to the partial sectarian critique carried out by the new talking shops.

We, who have for years been held hostage behind these prison bars, refuse to have any part in this or to be turned into the objects of these underhanded operations.

One does not work to free political prisoners out of a sense of charity or humanism. Denouncing the conditions in which political prisoners are held should mainly be a matter of agitation and propaganda. It should automatically overstep the boundaries imposed upon it and confront the fundamental questions of revolutionary process in our era. It is thus a political act and a class position. A way to fight to reappropriate our memory and knowledge, to empower us and destroy bourgeois power. By fighting for liberation we reappropriate our hidden history and experience of struggle. But more than anything else, we reappropriate the very concept of legitimate “ counter-violence “.

For years this concept has been attacked, distorted and dragged through the mud.

The class struggle, however, is constantly creating and reproducing this counter-violence. It is inherent in the violence of the capitalist system itself. The first violence is that of exploitation, routine, the discipline of the factory barracks, misery and forced labour. The violence of profits. Within this mode of production the exploited naturally engage in this counter-violence: it is the unavoidable result of the violence of capital’s relations of production. It is its condemnation.

During the movement against the closing of the Renault factory in Vilvorde a worker reminded us of this, remarking that “the violent ones are those who shut the factory and throw the workers into the street.”

The violence is the whole system. The least of its social relations is violent. Violence is the logic of imperialist subordination and impoverishment that condemns humanity in the periphery to misery. Violence is the fascistization of the monopolies’ power. It is the apartheid of institutional racism, the rise of reactionary policies. It is sexist violence...

Daily life leaves the mark of violence on the body of every man and woman who is exploited, oppressed, pushed around, forced to struggle just to survive.

To resist and rebel against this violence is a “life instinct”.

The exploiters monopolise violence, which is concentrated in the mechanisms and relations of the State. The confrontation between State and Class is thus at the heart of all conflicts, but in a different way than in the past. What with globalisation the State is no longer simply the government apparatus of the nation-state or the State system. The relations and mechanisms of State express themselves differently within the global conjuncture of their contradictions and political crisis. The State is the reflection of multinational monopoly interests and also reflects their contradictions in a competitive war without mercy.

The cops and anti-terrorist laws are the armour that protects these local, national and continental multi-State powers. They militarise them. The more violent power

becomes, the more violence becomes power. The more they are taken over by the real economic power of a handful of monopolies and managerial elites, the more they insist on the spectacular manipulation of “democracy”, with its obsessive, ever-present and onedimensional self-legitimising propaganda. This show has become the dictatorial means by which the violence of everyday life is managed.

Those in power have always accepted “protest” as a perfectly tolerable ghetto — more than that, today it is a subculture parasitically tied to the survival of the bourgeois regime. It has guaranteed itself this status by going along with the manipulation and denunciation of revolutionaries, out of fear perhaps that even silence could be construed as tacit support for “terrorism”.

The protester’s pacifism is bound by whatever the powerful will make of it.

The social movements only threaten the established order when their actions contain the possibility of stepping outside of the regular framework of struggle. They are only a threat inasmuch as they appear to be able to turn to revolutionary action raising the question of revolutionary violence. But it is clear today that the card-carrying activists have internalised the mantras of official anti-terrorism to the point of caricature. They stitch the slogans of order and morality in the prairies of submission.

At the top of their lungs they repeat that it is the aggressor who is weak one and the victim who is strong, that those who rebel are fanatics and those who exploit are legitimate spokespeople, partners in “democratic” reconciliation and republican antifascist fronts!

The official commemoration of May [’68] was a true victory for these pseudo-revolutionaries. Their road to Damocles had been blessed. By condemning violence, the sanctimonious ones justified the fact that they had returned to the fold of the bourgeois elite.

Sixty-eight was recuperated because it could be. Everything about it that was characteristic of protest in the metropole and that it never managed to completely escape allowed its history to be taken over. The insurrectionary autonomous movement that followed in ’77 had to be dealt with differently. From the insurrectionary demonstrations in Milan and Rome to the acts of anti-NATO resistance, to the “asambleista” movement in Spain, and from the grassroots rebellions of the working class to the guerilla attacks, ’77 was autonomous and armed and ripped a hole in the consensus of the imperialist centers. Faced with this situation the repression could not afford any halfmeasures. These events had to be wiped from the collective memory and those who participated were to either repent or rot in special prisons.

The movement of ’77 had pushed the autonomous alternative too far, and so all of the system’s various forces united in attacking it, making it pay with every ounce of its being.

Yet revolutionary violence remains on the agenda, all the more so because the monopolies have taken over and fenced off all political space. Revolutionary violence definitely cannot and will never take the archaic form many imagine for it. For them it is nothing more than a memory, a fantasy or a diversion...

They should explain to us how we are to subvert and destroy the monopolies and their militarism, how we should sabotage the fascistization of globalisation.

In all seriousness, who still believes that we can win by reading from our prayerbooks of pious wishes, by fighting for little reforms, by signing petitions and going for long walks?

For having merely asked such obvious questions we can already hear the regular insults: adventurists, substitutionists, immediatists, anarchists...

Back in 1971 Lotta Continue already knew exactly what to make of such attacks: "Those who get scandalized and yell about terrorism and romanticism are usually just trying to hide their own cowardice before their revolutionary duties."

And this is exactly what is going on today.

The violence that political prisoners symbolise is not just ancient history. It is more than just the human legacy of the past two decades of struggle with its successes and failures. Anyone who still cares about the emancipation of the proletariat and who takes the time to understand it within its historic context knows that it is much more than that.

It shows that armed violence is necessary if one wants to subvert the management of our neoliberal societies today. That it is and will continue to be necessary to use it in order to break out of the straightjacket of the fake protester. This straightjacket is necessary to maintain submission, with some differences but still essentially the same; submission to dictatorship's future. Only armed violence can tear away the banner of citizenship's "good wishes", of new "New Deals", of a return to the welfare state, of anti-fascist unity with the "progressive" bourgeoisie...

A minor sidenote. Lots of people demonstrate every week against Le Pen, against Fini... alongside the very people who maintain the wall of silence that surrounds political imprisonment in our European countries. As far as the prisoners from the guerilla are concerned, the social-democratic management of the prison system has nothing to learn from authoritarian regimes. They use the same methods, such as criminalization, white torture [solitary confinement!, arbitrary treatment and beatings, and hide them all behind a facade of foolproof arrogance.

In France our comrades Groix, Ramazan Alpaslan and Pello Marinelarenari have died in their cells. Many other comrades suffer from incurable diseases that were caused by the conditions of their imprisonment.

Two hundred political prisoners are rotting in the French prisons, and yet those in charge of this "slow death" still want to lead the anti-fascist struggle!

Those who do not want to talk about imperialism and State repression should also remain quiet when it comes to fascism.

To raise the question of political prisoners and revolutionary violence is to relentlessly work to revolutionise the "revolutionaries" in the metropole.

First of all because this question reveals the degree to which an alliance has been built with the "left-wing" managers during two decades of campaigns for charity or establishment anti-fascism. When these do-gooders were in the government they en-

thusiastically defended the triumph of neoliberalism and were responsible for a leap forward to unprecedented inequality. They wrote the laws of this new apartheid and proportional representation for the Front National.

Furthermore, used properly the question of violence and political prisoners should also be a tool to fight against the gradualist tradition that was inherited from the opportunistic old “Communist” Parties. All those concepts of peaceful coexistence that are repeated out of a sense of habit: “the mass line” and the rejection of the minority aspect of violence, everything that has been used to indefinitely postpone any revolutionary action.

Decades of “responsible” actions, appeasement, electoralism, routine, reducing revolutionary activity and ideas to a set of cliché-ridden platitudes... this has made the movement lose sight of one of the key points of Marxist theory: that the transition from capitalism to socialism will be full of revolutionary violence. It cannot happen any other way.

To raise the issue of revolutionary violence is thus to regain a sense of the revolutionary goal. It means reconnecting our present-day struggles and resistance to the possible destruction of the system itself, tying a sense of daily combat to our historic class interests.

It means acting in the spirit of past struggles and rediscovering the red thread that runs from June 1848 to the Paris Commune, from the Revolution of 1905 to the European Revolution of 1917–1923, to the Spanish Revolution in 1936, to Barcelona’s Mayo ’37, to China’s Long March and Cultural Revolution, to all the anti-colonial struggles, to Che Guevara and the Cuban, Congolese and Bolivian guerilla; and from Europe’s *May piu senza fucile* of 1968 to the autonomous offensives and movements of 1977–78.

It means putting theory back on its feet. The lessons and experiences of past struggles and the entire revolutionary process are part and parcel of the practical problems, the resolution of tasks, the direct action of revolutionaries today. Gravediggers and talking shops will never own the theory of struggle. Whenever struggle breaks out anew it is imperative to break through all the litanies and spectacular traffic and reappropriate the practical theory.

Today as in the past, communism is the language of preparation and application of revolutionary violence. It is the will to incarnate times of [working] class power. With no theory, memory or violent practice, proletarian activists will never be able to afford a consistent strategy to build class power.

This is all the more true now that the key subject is a highly marginalised proletariat. In fact, the revolutionary subject capable of transforming society is no longer a professional worker, or even the mass-worker of the post-war era, but rather the impoverished worker who is suffering the intense violence of worldwide exploitation. The same subject from Jakarta to La Courveuve, from Los Angeles to Lagos, but at the same time a subject that reflects strong social diversity. The homogenisation and polarisation of his/her condition has rearranged the context of the class struggle. It

is obvious that the proletariat can no longer recompose itself with the same means of struggle and organisation as in the past. These historic methods have actually become obstacles that aggravate his/her economic and social marginalisation, with all the associated political and cultural consequences. The super-exploited proletariat will not recompose itself as a revolutionary class through strikes or trade union politics, nor even by joining this or that political party whose talk is more radical than its neighbours. These are no longer options. Instead, he/she will learn through direct action and in the flames of revolt. The misery in which s/he lives and the repression s/he faces from those who represent capitalism in crisis constantly force him/her into violent confrontations.

To prepare for armed confrontation is to work for the recomposition of the class, for the unity and politicisation of this global super-exploited proletariat. It is to show that it represents the only worldwide class capable of carrying the revolutionary process to its final conclusion. A class which is made to fill this role, its historic and collective nature being to destroy its present individualised position as an economic and political slave of capital.

This is a long-term process of consciousness raising and organisation, a class war in which sporadic battles will spread into an insurrectionary confrontation.

To face up to the question of violence implies organising it along revolutionary lines. It is an initial collective and practical attempt to rearm the proletariat with the desire to arm itself and wage revolutionary war against capital. It is the concrete application of the questions at the heart of the struggle for political autonomy.

In time the (working] class will once again take up both its flag and its gun, in one burst, as they are inseparable. It will carry forth its own interests and the war to make them triumph. Through their interaction class interests will guide the gun and the gun will clear the way to reveal its uncompromising global interests.

In Conclusion

What does it mean to raise the question of armed violence on this International Day of the Revolutionary Prisoner?

From the back of our prison cells we can already hear the sighs of the ill-intentioned. No comrades, the question of armed violence is not the only revolutionary issue we care about, nor is it the only pressing issue that needs to be addressed. Some people have always distorted the guerilla's position by claiming that this is all we think about. This is a ready-made argument that all too often serves as an excuse for not carrying out any real discussion about the necessity of violence and its organised practice. It has always been the trump card used by those who wish to silence the debate.

We prisoners from the guerilla are simply trying to examine some basic elements of this question. Its actual nature and the contradictions with which it confronts activists in the imperialist countries.

Amongst the latter there are many who support a guerilla somewhere in the world. Few, however, take the next step and go from support in this particular situation onto the global nature of the issue, and so on to the concrete implications concerning where we live. Because supporting the idea of a revolutionary guerilla automatically raises practical political questions. To do all you can so that the guerilla wins in Mexico, Turkey or Asia demands serious thought about what action revolutionaries should take in the “belly of the beast”, in the fortress where the monopolies keep their loot. Where the owners and technocrats who carve up the whole planet live in prosperity. Where the exploiters and oppressors of over 90% of the global proletariat live.

In 1972 Andreas Baader, Ulrike Meinhof and the other comrades from the RAF offered an initial answer to this question by destroying the American military computers that were being used to plan the bombing of Vietnam. This action overstepped the boundaries of mere support, becoming instead a concrete act that united the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggles here with the struggle for freedom on the periphery.

For three decades the globalisation of production and exchange has undergone an unprecedented qualitative advance. Not a day passes that even the least of things does not remind us of this fact. But this globalisation is first and foremost the globalisation of class struggle, the globalisation of problems and the globalisation of solutions.

At this point, who can seriously claim to understand why people take up arms in the Sierra and simultaneously condemn those who do the same in the fortresses of the imperialist order? Who can claim that the specific factors dominate the general conflict to this point? That this is a fair and revolutionary position?

The search for unity is the revolutionary projection of the global proletariat.

Wherever they find themselves revolutionaries should reinforce and direct this “long march”. They should work towards the politicization and recomposition of the class in the framework of this era’s dominant space, in all its dimensions from the local to the global. Everywhere they should destroy obstacles and limits that always reduce struggles to the rules and boundaries of the system’s national and institutional organization. The two are now directly connected. And in the imperialist metropole, the national and the institutional are all the more reactionary, as they become mechanisms in the process of fascistiation of the monopolies.

The vast armies of poor workers, the big monopolies’ new slaves and the disinherited slum dwellers, constitute the majority of humanity. This super-exploited proletariat is the axis around which the questions of wealth redistribution and the appropriation of the means of production must be resolved. It’s the only way. No other class or subclass can be substituted for it in the revolutionary process. Least of all the representatives of local and national metropolitan classes who always end up defending “progress”, the reforms of imperialist citizenship and the sacred charities.

How can anyone believe that there is even a grain of hope to be found in the netherworld of the “left of the left” and the other forms of metropolitan protest? In the end all they will ever do is work to protect and manage the minor local advantages. They can not escape this bureaucratic destiny.

Furthermore, they know very well that these little reforms are only granted on condition that they divide the [working] class and mobilise it around issues tied to its own backyard which is protected by borderguards and vigipirate plans (translators note: Vigipirate is an anti-terrorist plan that especially targets immigrants). Behind their facade they are collaborating with apartheid.

For more than fifty years, the triumph of “social democratic” thought in the European metropolises has revealed itself to be a sham at both the level of institutions and protest groups. The half-measures of populist programmes have not saved the proletariat from monopoly capitalism’s legal claws. On the contrary, they have made the claws more dynamic. The chasm between stolen wealth and poverty has never been so violent. Not only increased productivity and the infernal rhythm of production, but also precarity and the insecurity of millions of proletarians have all aggravated the already intense level of exploitation.

As far as the proletariat is concerned institutional politics offers a choice between the lesser of two evils, or simply quitting the game.

Around the world the proletarian class is alone faced with the alternative of socialism or barbarism that is comes from the development and decomposition of capitalism.

From the streets of Gaza to the barricades of Bogota, from Chiapas to the ghettos and slums of our own European megacities, wherever it rebels it must take up arms... everywhere the masses are overstepping the rotten boundaries of the old structures. The political parties and institutionalised trade unions are today reduced to impotence and inadequacy when faced with the new spaces and their globalisation. Everywhere the proletariat is socialising new resistance, in selfeducation and self-organisation, in the quest for its political autonomy. Of course this doesn’t come about without many mistakes. False beliefs and real fundamentalism are spreading like a new plague. Yet the winds of freedom are blowing, and they are stronger.

Wherever proletarians rebel they recover the sense of revolutionary violence. Where there are no guns they use stones. And yet some people insist that the guerrilla’s time has past, that armed struggle is ancient history!

We are told that all of this changes nothing for revolutionaries here. That we must faithfully continue to go through the ridiculous motions of revisionist gradualism. That we must perfect our bottled jargon on imaginary insurrections to come and remain patient while getting ready for them. The only way to really get ready for the revolution is by engaging in revolutionary action. Legalism, pacifism and daily compromises have never come close to bringing about revolution. Only firm revolutionary action, the resolution of tasks as they actually arise and the subversion of banacks rules will awaken the revolutionary spirit.

The preconditions of the coming revolutionary surge show the centrality of the perfect ties binding together the struggles for class autonomy, armed liberation and proletarian internationalism. It's only a beginning...

It is right to rebel! Dare to struggle, dare to win!

Resistance is a Duty!

I Jean Marc Rouillan, January 27[tn] 2000 /

The death penalty still exists inside French prisons. It is true that the condemned no longer have their heads chopped off. That bloody spectacle was too obscene for the tragicomedy of our aseptic societies. And yet today the long prison sentences are murdering people. It is simply a slow assassination consisting of a thousand daily deaths. An execution which takes twenty years to carry out, sometimes more, but nevertheless just as effective as a knife. Death was delegated to the guards' work, to the "necessary" violences, to the days without life, to hopelessness. Before the war, when public executions ceased to serve any function in the imagery of State violence, they were hidden away in the "courts of honour" of the Penitentiary Administration. We no longer slice the neck today, not in public or otherwise; in this brave new world the prisoner's death is described as "natural": suicides, diseases and insanity. The ultimate negation as the deceased are no longer even counted as prisoners. For if medical release has all but disappeared from prison, the administration nevertheless makes sure to send the dying prisoner out to a hospital before he passes away. Sometimes they wait right up until the last coma, until the last breath before they remove them from their registers. They are afraid of a miraculous recovery, and especially of the possibility that a dying prisoner might enjoy a few extra days of "stolen freedom".

For the time being the administration is still hiding this management of death behind various stratagems and lies. Not many people dare to make the connection between the ravages of **SLOW DEATH** and the back-to-back sentences, the psychiatrization of penal centers, the generally foul nature of the prisons maintained by the Penitentiary Administration and courts which are entirely beholden to conservative and repressive ideas. The death penalty can be felt even if it has no name and no clear form. It is administrative. It is as faceless as the judges in charge of sentencing or the bureaucrats at Vendome Place who apply it with "innocence" and care. The hangman used to wear a mask, these people hide behind rules, penal mathematics, and the reactionary conformist environment.

From our submissions to our false revolts, we are all responsible for the establishment of the new penal order. With hardly a murmur of complaint, without rebelling, either in the prisons or on the outside, we have abandoned the field to the institution of **SLOW DEATH**. And it's a new dungeon!

The guillotine was reserved for the worst, for the most unlucky, for the most miserable. The administrative system of **SLOW DEATH** effects thousands upon thousands of men and women:

* Those sentenced to life in prison, of course, whose number has not stopped growing in twenty years. With the new sentencing policies their sentences will never be commuted. In the past a life sentence was horrible on a human scale. The condemned pretty much almost knew that he would serve 17 to 18 years. Today, with the sentences of thirty years and the “real” life sentence (as if there was such a thing as a fake life sentence!), it is no longer exceptional to meet prisoners who have passed more than twenty years behind bars.

0 Prisoners receive several sentences to be served consecutively, so that they would have to live two lives in order to serve their entire time. It is not all that uncommon for prisoners to be scheduled for release in 2056 or 2062!

0 Prisoners having sentences of over fifteen years without possibility of parole.

0 But **SLOW DEATH** also touches thousands of prisoners who do not have the inner strength to resist the annihilation of penal elimination and the system of isolation sections (IS) and secure establishments. And last of all, the shitty pardon granted for the year 2000 and the verdict of the Troyes Criminal Court against the prisoners who escaped from Clairvaux (how can anyone pretend that a fifteen year sentence is some kind of clemency!) show that nothing will change without a fight. Our backs are against the wall, and this is especially true for those of us who are in isolation sections, who are subjected to **WHITE TORTURE**, who are held in the Secure Establishments, who are sick and waiting in vain for medical release.

How many shattered illusions? How many times must we wait in vain for false promises?

Will the revolt against **SLOW DEATH** take the form of a new inferno as violent as the movements of the summer of '74, with all of its nameless dead? Or will it take the form of the guerilla struggle, as was the case in the battle against the High Security Wings? You can see it coming in the contours of the new imprisonment and the deaf resistance that it provokes.

One thing is for sure, prison today is already quite different from what it was in the 1970s and 1980s. The penal system marches in step with the rest of society as a whole, of which it is the highest form of repression. There was an obvious connection between the masses of workers at the Big Factory wearing their work uniforms and the lines of carefully numbered prisoners all wearing their prison uniforms, a connection between the chains of production and the collective shackles, between the big sweatshops and mandatory prison labour. Prison evolves alongside society and finally its new characteristics are tied to social relations on the outside. Today, **SLOW DEATH** is one of the dominant forms of prison in a neoliberal society. The “complete prison” and long sentences carry the imprint of the error-free and completely manageable flexible labour force. Finally, **SLOW DEATH** exemplifies the fragile prison. And as such this dehumanized condition is the reflection of masses of people without rights.

And yet just as on the outside, if the system produces inexorable destruction, at the same time it guarantees the minimum necessary to survive, just enough to camouflage its crime and stave off radical revolts.

The current debates around Doctor Vasseur's [Dr Veronique Vasseur, doctor in charge of prisons for the Minister of Health, who initiated two inquiries into the prison system — translator] book do nothing to challenge the reality of the new dungeons, as they all end up being sucked into and recuperated by the institutionalization of **SLOW DEATH**. They merely aim to make survival more bearable. In just a few days, the subject of long sentences was replaced with discussions favouring the orientation of the Minister's model prison projects (in its heyday Fleury was a model prison, as was the Moulin complex!) While tomorrow the cells may no longer be filthy or rundown, prisoners will be dying of loneliness, neglect, and the physical and mental sicknesses of the "clean" prison. Because the most significant fact about today's prisons are the rapidly expanding sentences being handed down. The Criminal Courts are now condemning people to 24, 25 and 28 years, who just ten years ago would have received sentences of 12 or maybe 15 years. The prosecutors are backing up their inflationary requests with fairy tales about eventual parole after having served half a sentence. And yet they know full well that parole is now only granted in exceptional cases.

The sentencing statistics in France are rigged. The turn-over of shorter sentences makes any calculation of the effective length of detention impossible. What's more, the fact that people are being locked up for minor infractions that just yesterday would not have merited incarceration, further masks the reality of what is going on. All the more so as they, like the VIP prisoners [white collar criminals, corrupt politicians and others who end up behind bars — translators note], enjoy parole and other measures of early release.

We are also disgusted by the media's treatment of the exVIP prisoners' petition. No, Mr Mareste, this kind of statement doesn't bring us forward by even one year. On the contrary it reinforces the old myths about prison. According to them, the prison system is brutal sanctuary of the law of the jungle and prisoner rape. What a great sales pitch coming from a guy like Bob Denard! This French secret agent who has worked on behalf of the South African Apartheid regime led mercenary gangs who lived by violence and rape inflicted on the people of Africa. As for Le Flock Prigent, fairy godmother to the multinational corporations, it is obviously better to condemn the little daily violences in the holding cells rather than the power relations that the monopolies impose on society. Especially considering that he was the head of the EDF [France's State-run electricity monopoly — translator's note], that is to say the most important network of corruption, rackets and neocolonial violence during the 1980s.

Neoliberal society's power relations are much stronger outside than inside the prison walls. And inside, the violence and power of the administration is on a completely different scale than that which exists between prisoners. What's more, despite the imposed castration, there is certainly no more homosexuality than on the outside. And there are certainly more rapes committed in the offices of personnel managers, in religious institutes, or simply in the family, than in our group cells!

To recap : this false debate has only one goal as far as we can see, that of pushing prison reform in the direction desired by Guigou [Elisabeth Guigou, Minister of Justice

— traslator’s note] and company rather than prioritizing the issues of long sentences, isolation, sentencing and genuine programmes to reintegrate people into outside society. Reforming survival boils down to managing **SLOW DEATH**.

We are already hundreds, going on thousands, who grasp the fact that we have been sentenced to death. And we are faced with this raw truth : our humanity depends on rising up against the unnameable end that they have in store for us. Faced with this administrative crime, we not only have the right to refuse and the right to revolt, but we now have a duty to do so if we are able, wherever we are, with our own means, with our fists if need be, individually and collectively. The fight against the institution of torturers and hangmen will be merciless. Repression will be fierce. We have already had a taste of of the administration’s vendettas, so we have some idea of what they have in store for us. Crimes disguised as suicides, beatings, years and years in isolation wings, insults and harrassment, in fact everything that they can get away with behind the veil of laws and rules. Nevertheless, our refusal is not afraid of their violence. Nothing more can happen to us, for unless there is some radical change **WE ARE ALREADY DEAD** and buried alive.

In the prisons of the French State, it is urgent that:

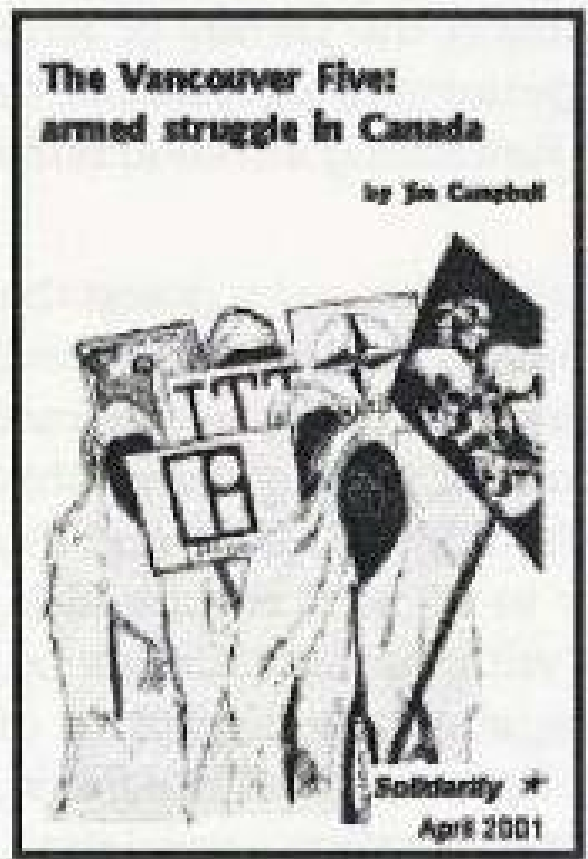
- 1) The white torture wings, the isolation wings that followed the High Security Wings, must be unconditionally closed
- 2) Re-establishment of the various procedures to lessen sentences : parole, pardons, reductions, *etc.*
- 3) Liberation of prisoners having served twenty years
- 4) Immediate liberation of all prisoners who are sick or close to death

Recommended Reading

The Vancouver 5: armed struggle in Canada;

The Vancouver 5: armed struggle in Canada; by Jim Campbell. In 1981 and 1982 several bombings (against a hydro substation, an arms manufacturer and three pornographic video stores) were carried out in Western Canada under the banner of Direct Action and the Wimmin's Fire Brigade. When five members of the Vancouver anarchist scene were arrested for these attacks they became known as the Vancouver Five — this is an account of the politics and practice, successes and errors of the Five and their supporters. 20 pages

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Enemies of the State

Enemies of the State, interviews with euroamerican political prisoners Marilyn Buck and David Gilbert and former political prisoner Laura Whitehorn. A frank discussion of past political movements, victories and errors, and the current political climate for revolutionary struggle within the United States. 77 pages.

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The Ted K Archive

Joëlle Aubron, Nathalie Ménigon & Jean-Marc Rouillan
Three essays by Action Directe prisoners
Mayday 2001

<www.archive.org/details/threeessaysbyactiondirecteprisoners>
Solidarity Montreal

www.thetedkarchive.com