SPRING 2016

epic.noblogs.org
613anarchy.net

REAP WHAT YOU SOW

RADICALS REFLECT ON KINGSTON'S "SAVE OUR PRISON FARMS" CAMPAIGN

To transform society from a competitive, materialistic, greedy, sadistic one, means changing those values and institutions to a non-materialistic, co-operative, life-affirming one, which can only be done using a diversity of tactics and long-term strategy that all kinds of people can plug into.

- *anonymous*

'SAVE OUR PRISON FARMS' CAMPAIGN TIMELINE

February 2009: Federal government and Correctional Services Canada (CSC) announce the closure of all six prison farms across Canada.

December 2009: 200 people attend public meeting to kick off campaign.

June 2010: Margaret Atwood speaks to 1000 people and leads a march to CSC headquarters. Hundreds pledge to commit civil disobedience to defend the farms, and a phone tree is built. Campaign organizers attempt (unsuccessfully) to obtain court injunction.

June 2010: Trailer is set up on private property across from Frontenac prison farm for 24 hour surveillance of the farm. Organizers publicly announce their intention to block cattle trucks.

July 2010: Training is held showing how to interact with police, stop traffic, lock down and deal with being arrested.

July 24, 2010: 250 protesters block CSC parking lots all morning.

August 6, 2010: Organizers are threatened by police and nearly cancel the blockade, reiterate their commitment to 'non-violent protest.'

August 8, 2010: Cattle trucks are spotted and phone tree is activated. Hundreds take over roadway into prison, successfully repelling trucks. After 7 hours campaign leaders agree to dismantle blockade overnight in exchange for police promise to wait until the morning to bring trucks in.

August 9, 2010: Protesters return to find concrete barricades and a massive police presence. Anyone trying to occupy the roadway is violently arrested. Cattle is removed and sent for auction. Six cows are purchased by the campaign to maintain the herd until the farms are restored.

2010-2015: Campaign organizers refocus efforts on supporting arrestees, political lobbying and organizing to defeat the Conservative Party.

Fall 2015: Justin Trudeau is elected with a Liberal majority government.

INTRODUCTION *... by reeko*

2010 will be remembered as a year of protest across so-called Canada. With majority control of Parliament, the Harper government was moving forward full speed with its right-wing agenda, including a major restructuring of the federal prison system. Three major international events were to be held across the country: the Winter Olympics in Vancouver, the Security and Prosperity Partnership (which was cancelled) and the infamous G20 Summit in Toronto. Under the slogan of "Riot 2010," anarchist networks were activated to coordinate actions for the major demonstrations in Vancouver and Toronto, and security agencies were given more than a billion dollars to organize the largest and most militarized police operations in Canada since the FLQ Crisis.

Radicals in Kingston were less targeted than those in some other Ontario cities – no trumped-up conspiracy charges were laid, no one spent significant time in jail, and no infiltrators were revealed to be living among us. Still, there was a noticeable chilling effect. Repression had come down harder elsewhere, and many of us were involved in supporting our captured friends and comrades. These conditions created an impetus for many of us to familiarize ourselves with the workings of the prison-industrial complex and start imagining what prison resistance might look like.

While all this was going on, a coalition of local farmers, progressive church groups, and prison reform advocates emerged as the "Save Our Prison Farms" campaign. The federal government had decided to close the six prison farms across the country, claiming that farm skills were no longer useful in the contemporary economy. Obviously this pissed off the farmers, as well as many believers in rehabilitation (their philosophy exemplified by the oft-repeated phrase, "It's *Corrections* Canada, not *Punishment* Canada!"). The campaign quickly grew to a few hundred members, and eventually a few thousand, which for a relatively grassroots campaign is huge for Kingston. Nearly every group with a bone to pick with the Conservative Government got involved. Anarchists and radicals, some already looking for ways to challenge the prison system, and most impressed by the size of the campaign and its somewhat militant tactics, started discussing whether and how to engage with the campaign.

There has been a steady drop in Canada's crime rate since 1991. The synchronicity between the slow downward slide of crime rates, and the legalization and popular access to methadone maintenance programs during the nineties, is not a coincidence. Thousands of addicts no longer had to do B&E's, robberies, turn tricks or some other risky business to support their habit.

Using the harm reduction model as a metaphor, I began to see that the struggle to abolish prisons did not have to be an either/or proposition with respect to prison reform. Prison reforms can contribute towards revolutionary change as long as the activists keep their "eyes on the prize," and as long as the "prize" remains creating revolutionary change, not just nicer prisons. There are few if any drug addicts or prisoners languishing in solitary confinement, who would choose to wait for a revolution before anyone helped them with either their addiction or confinement.

History has demonstrated that revolutionary change is the result of thousands of blows to the metaphorical capitalist beast until it has grown so weak that one final fatal blow brings it to it's knees. Historians usually attribute this final fatal blow as the most important one to remember, but the fall of any dominant political/economic system is proceeded by a murky blend of reformist, revolutionary, violent and non-violent currents that eventually erode the foundations of the existing power structure until it topples over.

When the system does topple over, there is inevitably a power vacuum, and if the vast majority of people have not changed their values and begun the process of developing an alternative society, then there is a great danger of another regime with the same values and structure as the original, perhaps even worse, filling that vacuum. In other words, the struggle to abolish prisons and capitalism is a long-term struggle.

Capitalism is rooted in values that are perpetuated through its educational, cultural, political and economic institutions. These values and institutions are interactive and inseparable like the nervous and vascular system are inseparable from the rest of the human body.

Unfortunately, even though writing and speaking are very important, they are a lot easier to do with political correctness than it is to work with others. As an old farmer told me recently, I can explain to you how to milk a cow until the rest of the cows come home, but eventually you're going to have to get your hands dirty, sit down on that stool and milk it.

Decisions regarding tactics and strategy do not come with a politically correct blueprint. There are times when part of a revolutionary strategy may be to struggle for reforms because they are usually concrete struggles that will make life better for real people now. Prisoners suffering in isolation for years at a time, can't wait for the revolution to free them. Many will go crazy or die in the meantime. But the campaign to end isolation can be framed in a clear prison abolitionist context, expose more people to revolutionary goals, and be a step towards the actual abolition of prisons and capitalism.

I can see the parallels between using the strategy of harm reduction in the struggle to overcome addiction, and the strategy of using prison reforms to abolish prisons. Old school addiction activists argue that there are only two options: to be or not to be an addict. They argue that harm reduction programs such as needle exchanges and methadone programs only facilitate addiction. They argue that addiction should be treated as a lifestyle choice that should be criminalized and punished.

One thing harm reduction activists share with their old school counterparts is the goal of eradicating addiction from society. But instead of treating addiction as a lifestyle choice that should be criminalized, harm reduction activists argue that addiction should be treated as a chronic health issue, with a long road to recovery.

The role of harm reduction activists is to make that road less debilitating so recovering addicts can lead meaningful and socially useful lives, even while in recovery. Embracing harm reduction policies has contributed to the reduction in crime rates and the cost of the criminal justice system, as well as the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS, HIV, and Hepatitis C.

We chose various approaches, from getting involved directly in the organizing committee, to intervening in the campaign narrative with a prison abolitionist perspective, to organizing tactical training, to autonomously participating in direct actions, to refusing to participate and instead focusing on other projects. This diversity of perspectives is somewhat reflected in the pages that follow.

For my part, I helped write and distribute a pamphlet called *Superprisons: What They Are, How To Stop Them* that introduced readers to prison abolition, made connections between various social movements organizing opposition to the Harper government, and proposed a coalitional strategy for moving forward, similar to the anti-Harris movement in Ontario in the 1990s. It was distributed widely and generally well-received.

I was peripherally involved in the campaign committee, and involved with an ad-hoc group of radicals that formed to make plans about ways to participate in campaign actions. I had heated arguments at the blockade with some organizers who brokered deals with the police and that ultimately led to dispersing the blockade.

For two years following the blockade, I was involved in a local prison abolitionist collective that spent a lot of time chasing the momentum of the prison farms campaign and trying to mobilize its members to work with us in challenging prison construction and expansion in the Kingston area. And while some relationships were formed during that campaign that have been fruitful in terms of turnout for public events and mutual support on overlapping issues, there has also been a lot of failure to mobilize these people, most of whom have decided they are not interested in fighting prisons.

This political trajectory for some of us is detailed in *Some Thoughts About Prisoners Justice Day 2012 in Kingston*, a series of reflections by some group members on the disaster that was the attempted construction blockade at Collins Bay Institution in August 2012. That was really the last time we actively tried to recruit or mobilize the participants in the Save Our Prison Farms campaign.

The campaign leadership, while supporting weekly vigils and occasional public events, have almost entirely focused their energies on an electoral strategy to defeat Harper, which has succeeded, and may indeed pay off for them as the new Liberal government under Justin Trudeau has promised to re-open the farm in Kingston, likely with much fanfare, ribbon-cutting, baby-kissing and the like.

Given this looming decision and the end of the campaign, a call for submissions was put out for prison abolitionists with the following questions:

Is this a victory? What have we gained? What opportunities have we missed?

How did or didn't this movement strengthen our goals as prison abolitionists? How should we relate to single-issue or reformist movements?

While I don't think there are simple answers to these questions, as evidenced by the diversity of submissions, my personal opinion is essentially this: I think it was a good decision for radicals to intervene in the prison farms campaign, to the extent that we were honest about our intentions and politics and sought to spread them. Some relationships between radicals were strengthened and our tactics fine-tuned in ways that have proven valuable since. Some relationships with unaffiliated participants and even campaign leadership were built that continue to pay off, while other bridges were burned – and, well, sometimes a bridge *should* be burned.

I do think we as radicals often make the mistake of equating militant tactics with revolutionary objectives – but in light of recent events such as the 2012 student strike in Montreal (that would paralyze the economy to stop a tuition hike) or the peak of Black Lives Matter across the United States (that would burn the city down to demand a cop is charged with murder or for more 'police accountability measures') many radicals across North America are questioning this logical fallacy.

For example, a core belief or principle for anarchists is the view that power structures are inherently oppressive. However, as an anarchist, I could work in a limited capacity with others who believe in hierarchies, in a single issue campaign to end solitary confinement, as long as my role would be limited to the areas where I do not have to reinforce those power structures, say by policing our demonstrations. If I do not have to sacrifice my principles or identity, then it can be useful to work with others in areas where we share similar goals and can find consensus.

What kind of world are we fighting for if not one where we can live happily in communities with others who may believe in God or not, smoke weed or not, wear mini-skirts or burqas, or have sex with someone of the same gender or not? As long as we do not oppress other living creatures, then everyone should have the freedom and right to live and believe in what they want. Of course this is an over-simplification, but I think you'll get my point.

There are many examples of the paralysis, and eventual irrelevancy that develops when people will only work with those who share exactly the same ideology. In the sixties and seventies, the left was dominated by Maoists, Leninists, Trotskyists, Marxist-Leninists, and socialists who spent all their time critiquing and fighting over the minutiae of their own particular brand of Marxism, leaving very little time and energy to organize against the capitalist elite. Sometimes it seems as though the same type of sectarianism, dogmatism, and intolerance amongst the various anarchist primitivists, situationists, greens, syndicalists and insurrectionists threatens to consume us, and lead to the same legacy of paralysis and irrelevancy.

In reality, political activism is composed of actions that are motivated and framed by ideas. If tactics are examined outside of a political context, they can look the same for both fascists and anarchists. Demonstrations, pickets, pamphlets, sabotage, and marches can be organized by either fascists or anarchists. What distinguishes one action from another is their political purpose. Their important distinguishing features are the principles, values and ideology that guide the action, so these are the features we do not want to sacrifice.

REFORMIST VS REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLES

... anonymous

The question we are faced with is this: should anarchists or revolutionaries be working with others in projects whose goals are ultimately reformist? More specifically, should revolutionary prison abolitionists work on single-issue reformist projects?

The concrete campaign in question is the Save Our Prison Farm campaign with its goal of preventing the Harper Conservatives from closing the 6 prison farms; in particular, the Collins Bay prison farm in Kingston. The goal of the campaign was reformist in that it did not reference either the abolition of prisons or capitalism, yet many of the people involved were revolutionaries, anarchists and prison abolitionists.

I am going to argue that there is no simple answer to this question because it is based on a false dichotomy or in a more colloquial expression, black and white thinking. Another similar false dichotomy involves the question of whether revolutionaries should engage in strategies or tactics that are 'violent' or should they restrict themselves exclusively to 'non-violence.'

Our human mind is very limited in its ability to conceptualize the complex reality in which we live, and so we create these false dichotomies because they reduce this reality, that is composed of paradoxes and shades of grey, into something simple, one dimensional and static.

So should revolutionaries work with reformists on single issue projects?

At the risk of appearing to parody proverbs by famous philosophers, my short answer is, “we can walk and chew gum at the same time.”

My long answer is that revolutionaries are perfectly capable of working on reformist projects such as the Save Our Prison Farm campaign with people who may not share all our views or goals, while still working on other prison abolition projects with like-minded revolutionaries. The important thing, the deal breaker, is that we should never sacrifice our core beliefs or principles in order to work with others.

I'm not arguing that we shouldn't engage with social movements during these exciting moments. In fact, I agree with one contributor that in these situations people are often more open to experimentation and radical possibilities than usual. I think, however, that we should do so with a clear strategy and with honesty about our political intentions. And perhaps we will have to prepare ourselves for the unpleasant task of undermining self-appointed leaders if and when they decide to cut a deal or pull the plug under pressure.

Finally, I think it's important to plan strategies that have clear objectives and are appropriate to the political context. It's a mistake to assume that liberals and progressives are always the natural allies and coalition partners of anarchists and radicals. I think this will become increasingly clear under the Trudeau regime, as we see more 'politically correct' forms of capitalist development and state recuperation move forward. We may well discover that those who stood on our side of the barricades under Harper now stare back at us from the other side under Justin Trudeau. It's a new political reality for liberals of all stripes, and its a reality that may well change whether, how and with whom we as radicals decide to intervene in popular struggles moving forward.

Thanks to everyone who submitted to this zine. Kingston is a small city and it takes courage to be controversial, even when it's necessary.

reeko
Spring 2016

References:

Til The Cows Come Home
... documentary available at prisonfarmfilm.org
Superprisons: What They Are, How To Stop Them
... EPIC zine available at epic.noblogs.org
Some Thoughts On Prisoners Justice Day 2012 in Kingston
... EPIC zine available at epic.noblogs.org

REFLECTIONS FOR RADICALS *... Aric McBay*

It's difficult to make a concise appraisal of the prison farm movement. It was a multi-faceted, sprawling, and largely informal coalition of thousands of people from many different political backgrounds and walks of life. While many of the participants were small-L liberals, there were also anarchists, socialists, libertarians and conservatives, and people without any particular political loyalties. The movement was made up of farmers, teachers, social justice workers, nuns, prison reform advocates, lawyers, unemployed people, students, service workers, former prisoners, abolitionists, and even a few corrections workers, among many others.

All those people were driven by a great variety of overlapping concerns. The treatment of inmates. The very existence of prisons. Democracy and government transparency. Opposition to the Harper's increasingly authoritarian approach. The preservation of farmland. Community safety. The ability of our community to feed itself in the long term. The importance of a community standing up for itself. The viability of confrontational social movements.

This enormous diversity was mostly a strength, because it brought people with many resources and perspectives and repertoires of action together. This diversity was also a challenge, of course. It was certainly an obstacle to national media attention—few national media outlets understood what was going on, and few bothered to cover the issue. The diversity and complexity of the movement was also a challenge for people who wanted to intervene in that movement—especially radicals—whether to maximize its immediate effectiveness or to encourage a lasting culture of resistance.

Was it a victory? The question reminds me of a historian's joke:

Q. What was the effect of the French Revolution?
A: It's too soon to say.

The immediate material goal of the prison farm movement was to keep the prison farms open, to keep the dairy cows on the Collins Bay farm. In that, we failed in the short term.

The “Save Our Prison Farms” campaign was never a liberation struggle. It is a struggle to maintain a progressive illusion about the social benefits of both prisons and farms. As anarchists and abolitionists, we need to be critical of our desire to engage with campaigns that are parroting the carceral logic of state institutions in the hope that we can 'reach the masses.' As an attempt to shape prison policy by aspiring prison consultants and politicians, how do you engage and support its aims without becoming a part of its machinery? If this was a fight to maintain one version of social order, how does training people in militant tactics further the goal of liberation? And when this campaign ends in something called victory, what are the lessons that we have taught ourselves and the folks we've engaged with? Where does the outrage and support that attracted you to them in the first place go? If the Liberal government re-opens the prison farms in the name of 'democracy,' it will not be a victory for abolitionists.

My goal isn't to save our prison farm. It's to burn the prisons to the ground.

For a world without stalls and cages. Without concrete walls and fences.

Toward a world without confinement, coercion, and control, where human and non-human animals alike can touch the earth and see the sky.

- *Auroch*

As preserving the heritage cattle herd became one of the main focal points of the campaign, the official messaging of the campaign moved even further from being focused on the conditions of human prisoners. This makes perfect sense. Through years of controlled breeding this herd was prized for it's docility and productivity. In many ways, cattle are easy to uphold as model prisoners.

The logic of animal husbandry dovetails with the logic of incarceration in many ways. Wild things both act in ways that elude and undermine the capitalist system of value and the social order from which it springs when left to their own devices, and are seen as a resource waiting to be tapped. Through confinement, coercion, and other more readily recognized forms of violence they are molded over time with the goal of creating a a docile, controllable mass who have their lives stripped from them in order to create value.

Many prisoners do want the farms back. They talk about how meaningful it is to care for another living creature. To learn how to work with a cow without forcing it. To set their own hours, be relatively self-directed, get outside and touch the ground and smell the air and the shit and have contact with another life and feel important to it and get something back from it. These things are fucking basic experiences that prison and the society that produces prison denies so many. Without the compulsions of capitalism and the coercion of life in a cage, how else might people be freely seeking these moments of communion and joy?

But we may succeed in the long term—it's still very plausible that the farm at Collins Bay will be reopened. And it's still very plausible that the cows—diligently cared for by the Pen Farm Herd Co-op—will be restored to those pastures. And, especially if that happens, we may see that a short term failure can actually be better—even more revolutionary—than a short term success.

What if, back in early 2010, the Harper government had been motivated more by political savvy than by their punitive and authoritarian urges? What if they had promised to delay the closure of the farm at Collins Bay, to "study the problem," to draw things out? (1)

If they had done that, they could have defused the prison farm movement before it became fully realized. They could have nipped the big marches in the bud. They could have quashed the blockades without having to bring in OPP from across half the province. Ultimately they could have closed the prison farms anyway, but without provoking the angry community mobilization that they created through stone-walling and aggressive disrespect.

That would have been a true defeat. A true failure is when a community fails to mobilize. When it is disempowered by apathy. When a movement dies in its crib because people fall for the illusion that business as usual will lead us to a worthwhile future.

The imperfect movement we had was much better. When people go outside business as usual, when they begin to act as a group to defend their community, when they use tactics that they decide on rather than what they are told to do, then you see glimmers of radical and even revolutionary potential. Which is hard to see in the moment. In the early days of the prison farm movement few people anticipated its potential. Indeed, early on it was pretty typical for both liberals and radicals to say it couldn't be done, that no one would care about prisoners, or that no one would engage in civil disobedience or break they law. Of course, people did defy the law by the hundred, in numbers that were enormous for Kingston.

(1) I'll note that this is the stage where we currently are with the new Liberal federal government, which has promised to reopen the farms, but is taking its time.

In general, any mobilization is a chance to learn, and practice, and to build a culture of resistance. Of course, the prison farm movement was not perfect. There were many missed opportunities. On that subject I'm going to address the radicals, for a few reasons. First, radicals are the audience of this project. And second, I'm going to hold us to a higher standard.

Many of the liberals involved—people who had rarely questioned the prevailing assumptions about how "democracy" works in Canada—were in genuinely new territory. Some of them had little experience in social movements. Few of them had experience in civil disobedience or the mass defiance of police. Many of them went to the absolute limit of their comfort zone and their experience, and performed their roles with considerable courage and dedication, so I'm willing to write off minor mistakes.

Radicals, on the other hand, often have a bit more experience in social movements and more comfort with the idea of breaking the law when it is the right thing to do. In the best of worlds, we are better equipped to deal with participation in something like the prison farm movement, and more willing to think critically about our own errors.

Let me briefly outline a few of our missed opportunities, from my own perspective.

I wish we had seen higher-profile public participation of radicals, including prison abolitionists, in the campaign. Many people in the movement who felt inexperienced were looking for cues and people to emulate. And when abolitionists and radicals more broadly spoke to the movement they were generally well received. Abolitionist speakers and the Superprisons zine produced by End the Prison Industrial Complex, were accepted enthusiastically by most members of the movement and had real influence.

Some radicals kept a deliberately low profile in the movement. The G20 events in Toronto made radicals wary of getting sold out or denounced by a larger liberal faction. There was also an organizing meeting during which radicals were aggressively questioned by a nun at the Sisters of Providence—this "inquisition" also weakened trust for radicals.

I think one of the clearest demonstrations of this was when prisoners inside federal institutions across the country went on strike to protest 30% cuts to their already meagre wages. Weekly vigils are held at Collins Bay Institution in support of re-opening the farms, and a group of anarchists and prison abolitionists, many of whom have been working with people from the prison farms movement for years, showed up to the vigil with leaflets about the strike To pass out to motorists. We were asked by one of the vigil participants to stop because we were supposedly undermining their goals and apparently upsetting motorists, evidenced by the fact that they were getting "fewer honks than ever."

And that's bloody sad**.**

Romantic ideas about the positive social impact of working on a farm, such as the healing power of a hard day's work, were at the heart of the official messaging of the campaign from the beginning. Pointing to reduced recidivism rates and relying on the correctional concept of the 'pro-social individual' again, reinforces the carceral logic of Corrections Canada and in the end helps justify the institutions that we seek to abolish. As one guard from Frontenac told me off-hand when asked his opinion on the farm: *"I guess it would be okay... I mean, it's good to keep them busy and if they're tired they won't get in as much shit."*

FIRE TO THE PRISONS MEANS FIRE TO THE PRISON FARMS *... by Auroch*

I don't know about you, but my problem with prisons isn't that they're unsustainable. Hell. I wouldn't want them to be.

My problem with prisons isn't that they aren't effective enough at teaching prisoners the value of a hard day's work. Rather, I think an end to the State, Capitalism and the systems of control they rely on to exploit life and labour from humans, non-human animals, and the planet sounds like quite a fine fucking idea.

I don't want to reform the reformatory. I want to see it destroyed.

So when the “Save Our Prison Farms” movement was gaining steam in Kingston, channelling outrage at a particular scumbag of a politician, supporting the rosy idea of “sustainable local heritage farms” amidst a peppering of claims about concern for the wellbeing of prisoners, I wasn't excited about it despite the massive public support the campaign was picking up. And when folks I was working with on anarchist projects in town expressed that they were excited and inspired by the massive support for the campaign it I was actually pretty fucking depressed.

The claims of the campaign about concern for prisoners were misplaced at best and at worst exploitative and replicated the logic of the carceral system ("Paying Their Way Through Agriculture" being a main slogan of the campaign). Yes, there were calls from various prisoners for the re-instatement of the farms. And recently, a group of prisoners in Quebec released a list of demands, and re-opening the farms was one of them. But it seems clear that the campaign to “Save Our Prison Farms” did not emerge as an answer to those calls, but rather because farmers felt their livelihoods were being insulted by the government's decision to close the farms.

The goal of the campaign wasn't to undermine the correctional apparatus, but to defend the value of farming and put pressure the government in defense of the correctional ideal of 'rehabilitation.' When that campaign ends or loses energy, even if it ends in a kind of victory, we lose the ability to further access outrage that motivated people to act.

Unfortunately, this state of affairs is exactly what those in power want. They want radicals and liberals to distrust each other. They want to divide movements into manageable fragments. A small but militant Black Bloc can be handled by riot police. A larger but less aggressive liberal faction can be appeased by policy crumbs, or frightened off by the threat of arrest.

When a movement becomes large, unified, diverse, and defiant, it becomes a real threat to those in power. That is what those in power fear most, and ultimately what we must encourage whenever possible.

But producing such a movement is not easy, and the opportunity does not arrive often. Building an effective movement of that sort requires trust and time and deliberate efforts to build a community of resistance. And it asks a lot, frankly, of radicals. Because in those situations being militant is not enough.

Willingness to be arrested, willingness to confront the police, these things are the final step for a liberal person in a civil disobedience campaign. But for a radical, they may only be the first step. The bigger challenge is to engage with potential radicals in the movement, to have challenging conversations in those rare moments when people understand that the status quo is not working and when they are open to new ideas and new tactics.

During the build-up to our blockades, we had a surveillance station located across the street from Collins Bay prison. It was called the Community On Watch Station (COWS). It was a trailer staffed 24 hours a day by volunteers, who watched the prison for weeks for any sign that the dairy herd would be removed, so that a phone tree could be activated to immediately bring in hundreds of people to blockade the prison.

As coordinator of this part of the campaign, I was impressed by how enthusiastically people volunteered their time for this community surveillance at all hours, day and night, and by how meticulously they logged activity at the prison. The COWS trailer become a focal point of community support, and a depot for a steady stream of donations.

I had hoped that radicals, in particular, would use the COWS station as an opportunity to visit so they could have conversations with some of the prison farm movement's most dedicated members. To talk about tactics, and decision-making, and prison abolition, and many other things. But for the most part those conversations didn't seem to happen.

Those conversations are hard. Not because they are dangerous. Dangerous things are sometimes easier for militants because they are exciting and dramatic and make us feel powerful and such things motivate us. No, those conversations are hard because they can be awkward and uncomfortable and tedious, and generally without any kind of dramatic outcome whatsoever. Rejection, which is familiar to organizers of all kinds, can make us feel small and powerless.

But those conversations are also extremely important. Not everyone is receptive to radical ideas, of course. But some people are, and in some moments more than usual. Broad-based movements like the prison farm campaign offer a genuine opportunity for prison abolitionists and other radicals to spread their ideas and to find long-term allies.

It's funny, in a way, that many militants are happier to brave a confrontation with riot police than to have an awkward conversation with a stranger. But there are moments when the conversation will actually accomplish more. And that conversation may mean that the next time we do face a line of riot police that we are greater in number. That our movements are stronger. And that we have a better chance to win.

I don't want to sound as if radicals made no progress in the prison farm movement. Far from it. The movement would never had gotten to the stage of civil disobedience if not for radical involvement, and without that defiant action the movement would never had gotten as big as it did.
But I hope that when a similar movement begins to grow one day in the future, when a similar movement arrives, we will be better equipped to engage with more people in that moment. And to produce stronger movements. Movements that can win.

Aric McBay is an author, activist and small-scale organic farmer.
His website is http://www.aricmcbay.org


YOU WILL
BE
ARRESTED
SOLARTECH


LUCKHART
POLICE
POLIC

I was alone and I had to attend a debrief meeting with my affinity group. All of the work that I had done to build trust over the months leading up to this was GONE. I was certain that the group would shun me and probably think that I was an informant. At the meeting I was visibly distraught and shaking. I struggled explain what had happened. My eyes welled up with tears; my chest felt a crushing sensation and my limbs grew weak. But instead of being ostracized, I saw in my friends' faces concern, empathy and love. They asked me if I was ok, if I wanted someone to stay with me.

I decided not to attend the blockade the next day. Instead I did what I could from home even though it felt like I was under pseudo house arrest. I set up shop and hit social media, twitter, Facebook and contacted every media outlet that I could. For me this was such an inadequate way to participate and be engaged – but I didn't want to put others in harm's way.

Since the prison farm demo I continue to make noise. While I dealt with nightmares, anxiety, depression and PTSD in summer 2010 and beyond, it didn't break me. My relationships with my affinity group transformed into deep solidarity and long lasting friendships. I am more vigilant at protests, more aware of my surroundings and even more protective of those I hit the streets with – my senses have been sharpened. While this experience could have left me living with fear and discouraged from activism it actually strengthened my politics and my relationships with activists and made me even more committed to the movement.

My relationship with my cousin and her husband however, has suffered. We no longer spend time together, I am no longer invited to dinners and we lost touch over the years – only seeing each other at funerals. While I grieve my childhood friendship with her, I know that this was a life-changing moment for me, and with change there are always losses. I wonder if she knows that her call actually radicalized me and brought me closer to anarchist and anti-oppressive actions and projects.

- *Dorkis*

PROFILING THE TAMBOURINE *... by Dorkis*

I stood defiant in the pouring rain, my rain jacket soaked through and my jeans shrunken soppy wet to my legs. Although cold and exhausted I had my secret weapon in one hand – the tambourine. I wouldn't have guessed that this innocent yet feisty musical instrument would be the reason I would be targeted as a troublemaker at the prison farm blockade on August 8, 2010, the day before 9 protestors were arrested for blocking cattle trucks.

The prison farms protest was one of the most intriguing and formative demos in my life. It has been a challenge to write this story, even with kind and persistent support from fellow activists who say that it is important and that there is a lot to unpack and learn from it. I hope my experience helps future movements and activists, particularly those who may find themselves, like I did, caught in a fucked up situation with family, affinity groups and, of course, the police state.

Had you approached me early in the spring of 2010 when my affinity group started to meet to discuss tactics, strategies and thoughts on the upcoming demos I would not have stood out as a leader. Not only was I more or less new to this form of activism, security culture and aligning my politics more strongly with anarchism, I was also torn between several worlds that overlapped and made me question my politics, my graduate research and as a community organizer. In the spring and summer of 2010 I confronted myself on many fronts – indeed, I experienced a radical transformation.

So, I was hesitant when I was asked to join a small affinity group working on prison farm activism. I had not worked closely with most of the folks in the group and didn't know if I could trust them. Because I was living, working and breathing between many worlds, folks never got the chance to get to know the whole me – I hid that deep inside, afraid that if I was too raw, real and open that I would get hurt.

I'm giving you this context because it is important, I was afraid to take my activism to this level because of the very real need to trust my comrades. Could I trust them? Could they trust me?

I started going to affinity group meetings and there was a clear overlap with the upcoming G20 protests. While we spoke of local actions for the prison farms, we were also planning and thinking through what role we would play at the G20, how we would support other activists and groups at the forefront and what risks we were willing to take. I have always struggled with confrontation with authority figures, especially the police. I happen to have police officers in my family – talk about awkward family dinners! I had never been able to be honest with that side of my family, not wanting to be taken as confrontational or radical and dismissed as an angry feminist. My partner and I would leave the rare dinner with them feeling totally fucked up, like parts of us had been broken off and composted with the dinner scraps.

Despite my negative relationship to authority, I also felt uncomfortable when activist friends of mine would rant about cops. Intellectually and politically I recognized their problems with the police, yet I found myself on occasion defending those who decided to become police officers: “what about the working class folks who move into these jobs to escape poverty?”, “what about those who join to actually help people”?, “they are just doing their job, they are not just pawns of the police state”. These were my poor attempts to justify my cousin's decision to join the force. But these contradictions came to a head in the summer of 2010.

While this is a story about the prison farms protests, it is inseparable from the experience of the G20 protests in Toronto that same summer. At the G20 I found myself in direct physical confrontations with the police. At the Critical Mass, we rode our bicycles until our legs were shaky and our voices harsh.. I was disturbed and terrified as cops jumped on cyclists, pulled them down and beat them. We ended at the temporary detention centre to support our comrades inside and shit got real – folks all around us were getting snatched, protesters were screaming, crying – the boot came down hard and we booked it.

As my friend and I biked away we were swarmed by bike cops and surrounded. We were detained and searched, my friend was arrested and I was threatened with the same. I wanted to re-set myself after what I'd seen, but there was no going back.

A couple of months later I again stared straight at a line of riot police at the Kingston prison farm protests. It was raining, we had been out all day, and things were starting to look grim. I chatted with a few folks in my affinity group, and we decided to try to boost morale. That is when I got out the tambourine. I may be small, but as my friends know, I can be loud. I made my way through the crowd, dancing, singing, starting protest chants and trying to liven up our group. I got some smiles and laughs and sure enough the crowd started joining me in this festive musical dance dance revolution.

As I scanned the stone-faced riot police, I suddenly realized I was face to face with my cousin's husband, who was pretending not to know me. Holy fuck. I tried to keep the chants going, but his eyes were so cold and full of hate, I was scared of him in that moment.

I decided to stay. I kept dancing, started singing even louder, but I had a really bad feeling. Soon afterwards we dispersed to regroup the next day. As I biked home I thought about what had happened but decided it would be OK. I got home to a slew of voicemail messages. I checked message after message, my cousin, my mother, my mother. So much anger in their voices – I was shocked. I am a grown ass woman, why were they calling me so frantically?

I sat down exhausted and my phone rang. It was my cousin. She says she has been trying to call me all day. I said I've been out, she replies "I know!" She tells me that I have been "profiled" as a lead instigator who will likely be arrested should I show up the next day to blockade. She tells me that my academic career would suffer if I was arrested. I wasn't sure what to think, was this a scare tactic, or was it a concerned family member trying to protect me?

I hung up the phone, and it rang again, this time my mother, who had been contacted by my cousin to warn her of my potential arrest. My mother was freaking out and I kept saying "no, this is my right, I stand behind this, and no this will not stop me from going, and no I don't think it was cool for my cousin to call and rat me out to you." My mother and I exploded over the phone. It was a complete and utter clash and I had to let her go because I was shaking with a toxic mix of rage, fear and anxiety.