

Intersections

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The Most Dangerous Gang

By Josh Neuhouser

There was no reason why Oscar Grant had to die. His last moments, captured on video and broadcast on the news at the beginning of this year, showed him lying face down on the Oakland BART while the police officer standing over him calmly took out a pistol and fired into his back. A week later, hundreds of enraged citizens marched through downtown Oakland demanding justice. The rally escalated into a riot.

The government, anxious for order, opened an investigation for murder into the officer who killed Grant, who was originally placed on paid leave. This was the first time in decades that a killer cop was held to the same standards as any other violent crime suspect. Given that the police are accustomed to acting with impunity, this is undoubtedly a sign of hope.

The death of an unarmed man was not an isolated incident, though the rage afterwards unfortunately was. Police harassment and violence are an everyday occurrence not just in the Bay Area, but the Northwest as well. A woman, eight months pregnant, disputes a speeding ticket and receives three electric shocks from a taser outside the African American Academy on Beacon Hill in Seattle. The same police officer that kills a schizophrenic immigrant in his car on I-5 four years ago goes on to beat a 15

year old girl in her jail cell because she acts "real lippy" and kicks a shoe in his direction. A 42 year old man is beaten to death by three officers in Portland for urinating outside. An Everett homeowner is killed in his own backyard by police who claim they thought a robbery was in progress; he had simply been making a lot of noise while moving his own barbecue. A Mexican man in Olympia is shot in the back by three police officers, who receive paid vacation as their "punishment."

Just weeks before Oscar Grant was murdered, a popular uprising threatened to topple the Greek government. It was sparked by an incident, perceived by many Greeks as a sign of a creeping return to the military dictatorship that once ruled their country, but something that we in America have become numb to through familiarity: the killing of an unarmed civilian by a police officer. The historian Kristian Williams has argued that the modern police force in America evolved directly out of the runaway slave patrols of the Antebellum days, as well as the infamous Pinkerton detective agency that employers used to violently break strikes. And to this day, the goal of policing has not been public safety but social control. Even the FBI admits that you are more likely to be killed by a police officer for "undetermined reasons" than by an active shooter, the danger that the police supposedly exist to protect us from.

When people riot, it is a clear signal that no existing political formation is



capable of meeting the needs and desires of a community. This includes the well meaning but misguided world of nonprofit organizations and the parasitic socialist organizations that descend on spontaneous rebellions like flies on a piece of meat as well as the politicians that are currently in power. Those living outside communities where riots take place have no right to judge, because they do not know the conditions that drove people to riot. However, some have turned the riots into a fetish, treating a broken storefront window as an end in itself. Young "insurrectionist" anarchists, mostly white, swarmed into Oakland from San Francisco during the rebellion – and it is worth noting that of the people arrested, those with white

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Who You Gonna Call? One another. *by Andrew Hedden*

Direct Action Tactics in Trying Times

Your boss won't pay you for hours you worked. The landlord won't fix your backed-up toilet. Your friend was detained by Immigration Customs Enforcement, and now she's facing deportation. "Who you gonna call?" You might call a lawyer, or a social worker, or you might file an appeal that may or may not receive a reply. But in an economy where these problems are becoming all too common, these solutions just aren't cutting it any more – they can be too slow, too expensive, and too isolating. Instead, many groups are turning towards a different solution: direct action.

"Direct action involves bringing people together to confront the person responsible for a problem, in order to demand a swift solution," explains Emily, a member of Seattle Solidarity Network (SeaSol for short), an all-volunteer organization that supports workers and tenants. Through fliers on telephone poles and bus stops, a web site on the Internet, and good old fashioned word-of-mouth, SeaSol encourages people who have a problem with a boss or landlord to contact the group for support. Together, they write a demand letter and mobilize a crowd of people to deliver it to the boss or landlord's house or workplace. If the boss or landlord fails to fix the problem by a stated deadline, SeaSol takes further collective action. Using these tactics, SeaSol has enjoyed a string of victories: winning relocation assistance for tenants and back pay for workers; forcing employers to drop frivolous lawsuits; and more.

While SeaSol focuses on workplace and housing concerns, many organizations around the world have applied a similar approach to a range of issues. Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP), a Canadian group widely

recognized as one of the first to develop the direct action model, targets government assistance offices that illegally withhold support from people. Another Canadian group, No One is Illegal (NOII), uses similar tactics on immigration and detention issues. In British Columbia, the group has occupied the offices of Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) and has prevented CBSA officers from carrying out deportation orders by blocking access.

In one instance, more than 1,500 people were mobilized to directly prevent the deportation of a Punjabi refugee at an airport. "Direct action is not always involved in our support work, and many migrants have been able to win residency without recourse to it," explains NOII member Usman Majeed. "However, when petitions, letters to politicians, press conferences, rallies, and legal avenues are all rejected by the state, we have little choice but to use our own bodies to protect and defend members of our community."

As times get tougher, many people are beginning to question the ability of social services and the legal system to



December 10, 2008 over 1500 supporters - primarily elderly, women, and working class South Asians - converged at Vancouver International Airport, surrounded a vehicle holding Mr. Laibar Singh, and prevented his deportation.

effectively put an end to injustices committed by bosses, landlords and the government. An important book called *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, edited by the group INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, calls this problem "the Non-Profit Industrial Complex." The book discusses how non-profit organizations' dependence on paid staff and funding from the government or private foundations like the Rockefeller Foundation severely limits what they can accomplish. By mobilizing groups of people rather than relying solely on experts, direct action groups build something that goes beyond solving individual grievances. Direct action groups demonstrate that peoples' issues aren't isolated, but represent a much larger system of disempowerment.

Over time, direct action organizations can help empower a community to stand up to this system. As No One is Illegal states, "it is imperative to concretely offer support to those at the front lines of repressive immigration policies and to build our communities' own capacity for resistance and self-organization." Each fight is a learning experience for everyone involved, and as lessons are applied, communities win demands more and more often. At a time when we stand to lose so much, we all benefit from the empowering effect of real victory.

Intersections is a publication of **Common Action**

<http://www.nwcommonaction.org>

Common Action is a regional anarchist organization in the Northwest United States with members representing the cities of Bellingham, Seattle, Tacoma, Olympia, and Bremerton.

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Happy Birthday Common Action!

This June, the regional anarchist organization Common Action turns one year old. We held our founding conference on June 7th, 2008, with the goal of building a non-hierarchical organization with long-term strategy and strong connections to the general community. We have spent the first year building our community, designing our political structures, educating ourselves, deciding on political activities, and producing the Intersections newsletter. Here are some of the things we've done in the past few months.

General Assembly

In April, members of the anarchist organization Common Action met in Seattle, WA for our fourth general assembly. Members came from Seattle, Bremerton, Tacoma, and Olympia, as well as a guest from Portland. We came together to continue developing our politics, start work on new Common Action projects – and sing lots of karaoke.

Speaking Tour

In May, Common Action hosted a speaking tour in Seattle, Tacoma, Olympia, and Portland. Andrej Grubacic, a radical historian who teaches at Zmedia Institute and the University of San Francisco, gave the talk "Anarchism for the 21st Century: Building Movements for Lasting Change."

Forum on Free Health Care

In May 21st, Olympia Common Action hosted a forum on free health care, with the goal of one day establishing a free

health clinic in Olympia. We hope that this will build connections between people who are passionate about working toward this goal.

Featured panelists included:

Dr. Muhammad Ayub, M.D., M.B.H. is a family physician and community organizer committed to helping establish a free clinic.

Peter Bohmer, long-time activist and organizer, teaches political economy at The Evergreen State College.

CC Coates was a member of the carpenter's union for many years. Now, dealing with work-related health issues, CC has a unique view on the health care crisis.

Aaron Dixon helped establish the first free clinics in Seattle while he was the Captain of the Black Panther Party.

Rob Richards is the organizer for the Poor People's Union and the poor people's tent city Camp Quixote.

Amy Winslow is an RN/BSN who helped establish a free clinic in Tacoma.

For more information about the free health clinic project, contact us at olyfreehealthcare@riseup.net or 360-701-8810.

Olympia Common Action also plans to hold an open meeting in the near future, called "Common Action Presents: Building an Anarchist Movement."

New Kitsap County Branch

We founded our newest branch in Kitsap County, based mostly in Bremerton, and we have begun seeking out like-minded organizations in what is an otherwise very conservative Navy town.

Exciting Work Ahead

Common Action has a lot of exciting work ahead of us this summer both locally and across the region. Our newsletter Intersections will continue to appear quarterly with the next issue slated for September. We also plan to take part in an the anarchist bookfair that will be held in Seattle from October 17th-18th. We are also beginning to plan for another speaking tour.

Get in touch !

Contact us at: nwcommonaction@gmail.com, or visit our MySpace page at myspace.com/commonaction, or join our listserv at <http://groups.google.com/group/nwcommonactionannouncements>.



The Most Dangerous Gang *Continued from page 1*

skin have generally not been charged. We should also remember that though the beating of Rodney King, subsequent trial of the guilty officers, and riots following their acquittal were able to briefly focus America's attention on police brutality, the issue dropped out of public view again after the smoke cleared in Los Angeles.

But riots can also give birth to grassroots organizing that focuses the rage that was first only incoherently and violently expressed. Following 1967's 12th Street Riot, the anger of Detroit found form in the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, which fought against racism on the job and within the union until the

League dissolved in 1971. And the most promising solutions for ending police violence were proposed by the Black Panther Party, which was founded to defend the black community from the police but also provided free food and health care and persuaded gangs to fight the power instead of each other. By doing so, they challenged the capitalist system that creates such want and inequality that some are forced to resort to crime to survive and others need police to feel safe.

It is too early to know if these lessons have been learned. An organization called the Coalition Against Police Executions has recently formed, but it

has also been criticized for having too narrow a scope. What seems more likely than 1960's-style community organizing is the Depression-era tendency to romanticize outlaws. Just as bank robbers John Dillinger and Pretty Boy Floyd became folk heroes, many people have also celebrated Lovelle Mixon, an Oakland man who killed four police officers in March. The fact that he was being investigated for child rape while on parole makes no difference: like Dillinger and Floyd, he is seen as the only one fighting against the hated government. The reasons why won't matter as long as people don't see anything better.

No Child Left Outside *by Rachel Skeen*

My five-year-old son Henry looks at the childproof handle on our front door.

"Why am I locked in?" he asks.

"I don't know, kid," I say.

It's too much to explain that our society is crazy, that the entire country is terrified that any child allowed outside will be abducted by a stranger and sexually assaulted. Which means that if he goes out, passers-by will knock on my door to berate me, or, worst case, call Child Protective Services.

And the safety we gain is only an illusion. At home, kids will watch G-rated movies such as *Ratatouille*, where people throw knives at a rat. Kids will be killed in car accidents on their way to soccer practice, and they'll be sexually assaulted in their own homes and churches.

In exchange, so much is lost. The freedom to wander and explore the outdoors isn't optional, but a basic human need. It's also a necessity for a free society. We need a commons, a place where people can gather and get to know their neighbors, rather than sitting at home and watching corporate-sponsored news on television. If our children can't get it, how will our adults? The way our children live is both a reflection of society and a blueprint for the next generation of adults.

Whenever I talk to other parents about our childhood roaming, we are all so sad that our children won't have it. "But," we all conclude, "What can we do about it? The world has changed."

The answer is that the world has to change again. We need to protect children from the sexual assaults that happen in their own homes. According to Prevent Child Abuse America, the

majority of sexual abuse is perpetrated by someone the child knows, such as a family member or someone trusted by the family.

We need to push the boundaries of what our neighbors consider safe, even if only by a little. In my neighborhood, my



neighbors think that kids are safe to go to 7-11 at the age of thirteen. So if I let them go at the age of eight, people are going to call the police. But how about eleven?

And we need a concerted communal effort to help our children be free in the outdoors. How about Saturdays in the park with a large group of children and adults? Summer evenings where we block off the streets with garbage cans and have barbecues? Even more radical: a return to the eight-hour day, so adults can be around in the evenings to monitor our neighborhoods.

Last year, when my children were two and four, I hopped on the bus to the University District, a neighborhood of teenagers and college students, where

the only children you see are stuck in strollers. We went stroller-free, although my younger daughter has a medical condition that slows her down and tires her easily, and despite having to hold their hands to keep them out of the street, and even though I got sick and tired of telling them to stop playing with the public telephones.

Just as I was feeling my most exasperated, and wondering why I was wasting my time on a pointless expedition, a man approached me and said, "Free children!"

I laughed, knowing exactly what he meant. Not children you can get without paying for, but children who are exploring on their own two feet. He went on to explain that he worked with homeless youth in the University District, and if they'd been given more independence as children, they'd be better prepared to manage their own lives.

So independence is what I will give them, as much as I can. The lock stays on the door for now, but I've shown my five-year-old how to operate it, and my children are starting to have free rein in the yard. Today the yard, tomorrow the world.

Resources:

- www.generationfive.org provides a vision to transform society in order to address the intergenerational impact of child sexual abuse
- www.preventchildabuse.org has resources and information about child abuse

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