The following two essays, *On Antifa: Some Critical Notes* and *What Do Anti-Fascists Actually Believe?*, are republished here from itsgoingdown.org to spread debate and critical self-reflection in our own movements and struggles, specifically anti-fascism as it has become a hot-topic in the wake of Trump’s election and the subsequent rise of racist attacks and harassment throughout the so-called United States.

Let these words embolden and sharpen our struggles against fascism and the democracy that enables it.

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We continue to encourage everyone to engage in the anti-fascist work of exposing and countering organized white nationalist and fascist groups, now and in the future.

* NOTE: “On Antifa” is also influenced by the theoretical approach of Gilles Dauve, who has talked many a comrade out of engaging in the practical, day-to-day work of anti-fascism—instead encouraging them to wait for that “final day” of revolution, or to simply ignore fascist groups as they murder our comrades and oppressed people, try to take over communities, and recruit from the same circles we are in. Dauve’s nonsense deserves a good debunking. Until then, however, comrades should consider whether quietism in the face of the Far Right—the path chosen by Dauve and his mentor Bordiga—is really the response they want to take at this crucial time.
a replacement for, a larger radical vision. Anti-fascism is comparable to political prisoner work. No one claims that supporting our imprisoned comrades will bring down capitalism, the state, and hierarchy, but it is a necessary piece of background work that we feel must be done. Mobilizing large radical movements against neoliberal (or populist) capitalism is not the focus of anti-fascism; this is the work of the anarchist and anti-capitalist movements as a whole.

5) We don’t mind critiques of our movement—criticisms help reveal our shortcomings and challenge us to do better—but we do ask critics to learn a little more about what it is they are criticizing. There are several good blogs to read and many groups that can be contacted in order to become more informed.

We don’t doubt the author of “On Antifa” has met some people who call themselves anti-fascists and who have the beliefs that are described in the essay; we do, however, very strongly object to this critique passing itself off as representative of the U.S. anti-fascist movement as a whole.

up to Queens for a pro-immigrant noise demo.

3: A united front against fascism has never really worked out well for those of us who want to destroy more than just fascism. Our desires to do more than destroy, and/or prevent fascism, find themselves indefinitely tabled. Antifa is not a political project and has no real political content beyond “let’s beat up racists.” I do see now an attempt to extend the project of antifa beyond this historical limit point but instead of attempting to extend the project I would rather further other actual radical projects.

4: Anti-fascism tends to point to a return to a less-racist status quo but usually does not look at structural things deeply enough to understand that to be against white-supremacy would include being against the USA as a colonial nation-state. Antifa sees trees where there is indeed a forest; in that they view the enemy as an individual (i.e. Trump) or groupings of Nazis or other racist white-nationalists instead of analyzing the structural nature of our
5: Antifa often bases itself in a type of good vs. evil moralism which assume being against white-supremacy or racism is a purely personal choice made by good people, thus once again obscuring structural and impersonal white-supremacy. Antifa often makes appeals to “duty” as its motive, instead of self-defense or something else (though now the language has shifted toward self-defense). This likely speaks to the historical mostly white makeup of antifa.

6: To describe every material action against racists and/or white nationalists as antifa, as some in antifa do, is to erase the resistance and revolt of those who are not antifa but something all their own.

If Antifa were to oust Donald Trump and to somehow de-mobilize every single racist in this society we would be left with a situation akin to a racist society. This is an analysis that is but a few steps removed from the Liberal position that we should just all get along.

They also frequently work with politicians and law enforcement and minimize or thwart direct action. Anti-fascism is instead an engagement in this work from a radical perspective, which utilizes direct action and refuses to rely on the cops or courts to counter the Far Right.

Anti-fascist work is a bulwark against the most ideologically reactionary forms of the Far Right. This work is particularly important when fascists come into radical circles to cross-recruit and gain dominance; for example, we see this activity in the radical environmental and animal rights groups, music subcultures, and soccer supporters clubs. At other times, some Far Right groups position themselves as an independent revolutionary force against the neoliberal state, and try to recruit disenchanted people into their ranks (known as the “Three Way Fight” perspective).

To criticize antifa for not mobilizing against Obama is to misunderstand the movement: anti-fascism is not a comprehensive critique of hierarchical society in and of itself. Anti-fascist work is done as a piece of, and...
The head of the State and its lackeys may be ousted but there persists the structure of the State and its manifold institutions. A reportback from Tunisia states as much. The revolt against fascism (or a bonafide dictator) must seek to go beyond a sort of purification of the territory. Racism is not just the action of organized white racists, but the perpetuation of a whole system. Obviously, what is not mentioned above is another glaring omission of antifa: a substantive critique of capitalism.

Lastly, antifa bears no real critique of democracy, whether representative or direct. This is mostly due to its lack of politics. This returns to the reality that antifa lies dormant when the status quo, that does not trouble it, rumbles on. As noted in Dixie Be Damned, “white supremacy’s greatest ally in this country has been democracy, not fascism.” Since antifa relies on demonization as part of its mobilization, it could not (and did not) mobilize in any way against the Obama administration. Antifa may have seen Obama as contemptible, but fears of being seen as racist
blocked resistance to Obama and his policies (this was even more broadly seen on the Left). Anarchists and anti-state communists bear no such compunctions. We know the enemy is not just fascism or organized white racists but the whole of this society.

All this to say, of course I am against fascism but I am also against many other things. Critiques of these notes will come on like a flood. I may be attacked as not giving the answer to what is to be done now in our current moment. I would contend that the goal is the same (full communism) but because of the upswing of the Right that we will need defensive measures. It would behoove us to make of our defensive measures ones that are also offensive. The Liberals and the Left already are making calls for unity and safety above all, but what has been necessary is to foster antagonisms and the antagonisms have never been as high as they are now. Should we put away our partisan rage now? And on safety: this society has not only failed to keep us safe before Trump, it has the recent past there has been the occasional person with sympathies for capitalism who has participated; generally they don’t hang around for long.

2) In point #7 of “On Antifa,” the author places “anti-fascists” in opposition to “anarchists and anti-state Marxists.” In practice, the U.S. anti-fascist movement is largely a subset of the anarchist movement, with strong participation by current or former punks and skinheads (which only makes sense since there is constant fascist recruitment in those circles, which makes people particularly sensitive to the issue). There are also a few anti-state Marxists, as well as a handful of Maoists. For the author of the essay to believe otherwise shows that they lack perspective on the national composition of the U.S. antifascist milieu.

3) In point #2, the author writes, “Antifa is not a political project and has no real political content beyond ‘let’s beat up racists.’”

Even a cursory reading of any of the main antifa blogs (such as It’s Going Down, Anti-Fascist News, or Three Way Fight) or the websites of local groups,
perspective purely of self-defense, having to fight off crews of boneheads invading the punk scene. This is rarely the case anymore, despite Little Black Cart peddling the misrepresentation that:

“Almost 30 years ago the fight against fascism looked almost identical to how it does today... The people who were resisting, who were fighting, used a vocabulary to describe what was happening that was incredibly constrained. That vocabulary, emotional and theoretical, hasn’t improved much since.”

None of us has met anyone active in antifa groups for the last decade or more who believes such simplistic nonsense.

Today, an understanding of structural racism and how white supremacy is woven into the fabric of the U.S. is essentially a requirement to do this work. If a person with these simplistic views wanted to get involved in antifa circles, we would help them develop a deeper critique before we could closely work with them. Similarly, we can’t think of anyone currently in our circles who does not oppose capitalism. In

been actively attacking us as an internal insurgency with racist, sexist, anti-immigrant, transphobic, xenophobic and capitalist violence. Safety should be a given but we know that real safety comes with a fundamentally different form of life.

Let’s open the possibilities of our revolt against this society instead of foreclosing them. Let’s roll.
What Do Anti-Fascists Actually Believe?

For many years, until early 2016, the U.S. antifascist movement was small and relatively stable in numbers, with only occasional national mobilizations. This year, however, new groups started springing up, largely in reaction to Trump’s candidacy. With Trump’s election, the trickle turned into a flood of interest.

Along with renewed interest has also come a flood of commentary by people who seem to consider themselves “experts” on the antifa movement. They are lining up to give us instructions or to criticize us. What’s common to them all—whether from good or bad intentions—is that they know very little about the existing movement, and therefore grossly misrepresent it.

Because the essay “On Antifa: Some Critical Notes” comes from the same political circles as our own, and has been reposted by comrades, we feel obligated to correct how the author paints today’s actual U.S. antifa movement.*

People assure us that “On Antifa” is an honest critique. Of course, we can’t say that it doesn’t accurately represent the people with whom the author is in contact. What we can say with certainty is that, as three long-term participants in the antifascist milieu, who belong to active antifascist groups (Philly Antifa and NYC Antifa)—and who know hundreds of active anti-fascists, including many currently part of the TORCH Antifa Network, the successor to Anti-Racist Action (ARA) Network, which one of us was in—the picture painted in this essay bears little or no relationship to the national antifascist movement as a whole.

1) In the 1980s and early 1990s, some people—especially some members of Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice (SHARP), and to a lesser extent, ARA—did believe that “racism” was a specific thing embodied in KKK, bonehead groups, and other white supremacist groups, and that smashing it would somehow bring down “the system.” Politically, they were wrong about this, although many of them were coming from a