



# **To Praise Our Glorious MASKED MILITANTS**

*Anonymous  
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It is easy to make fun of the invite being passed around for the new anarchist assembly. Does their Covid Struggle Session come off as just the entitled whining of authoritarian activists role-playing as anarchists? Ok, I can see that. Did the 40 page zine they link to have 2 pages worth of actual arguments, after all the Cultural Studies slop and progressive shibboleths are filtered out? Probably. Are their politics really reducible to just being the moral vanguard of Democrat activism? Well, who are we to say. But take heart, for they may yet still play a vital role for anarchists in Pittsburgh.

It is oft-remarked at how what passes for anarchist projects in the 2020's has largely consisted of DIY charity projects, indistinguishable from the Good Works of Christian volunteer efforts only in aesthetics and speech codes. But we should reflect for a moment and recall some of the things that gave rise to earlier, less tedious, moments of US anarchism of decades prior.

During the anti-globalization and anti-war years, anarchists didn't just spring out of nowhere. Sure, some of them had been turned onto anarchist projects by first reading zines. But many of them were driven to anarchism by the frustrations they experienced at trying to work with Maoists or the ISO. There have been few recruiting tools better for anarchists than letting a sane individual try to keep up with the tyrant-in-a-teapot machinations of socialist groupsicles. So perhaps a little grasping authoritarianism is exactly what we need today.

Hell, at this point things couldn't get any worse in the scene, so what's the harm in trying? The worst they can do is just add more mirth to the already amusing spectacle of Rad Dem posturing. But we shouldn't rule out the possibility that they will leave behind a few newly minted anarchists in their wake, as past experience demonstrates such groups have the tendency to do.

When and if we do encounter those whose self-esteem has made them an ill-fit for the Rad Dem lectures on Covid Wrongthink, we can recall some other lessons from the recent past to inform them about. Like about how **one of the primary things that distinguishes anarchist organizing from authoritarian models, is the presumption of disagreement and even conflict.**

Spokescouncils allowed anarchists from diverse affinity groups to meet, discuss, and plan, without needing everyone else in the room to agree with them. Small affinity groups, among other purposes, allowed people to cohere around shared ends and split apart when those ends were no longer shared - without needing to seek ideological cohesion on a deeper level.

The concept of "diversity of tactics" arose *not* as a moral principle, but as a practical solution to the problems that occurred when large groups of activists with drastically different plans for street protests all tried to work together - and all the drama, conflicts, and snitching that resulted. By segregating street events by tactics, it allowed the widest variety of groups to participate in street demonstrations in the way they felt comfortable with, and still do necessary coordination with other groups. This minimized the kinds of divisions that law enforcement takes advantage of.

**We can also appreciate the masked militants and their collage of progressive talking points, for the object lesson they provide in the perils of moralism.** It is easy, between consuming zines about the spiritual rot of Civilization, and doomscrolling the trump-era social media posts of urban progressives, to fall into the same moralist trap of our masked militant dem friends. *That trap: to mistake propaganda for political analysis.*

Moralism, the habitual reduction of all politics to simple moral parables, is an easy discourse to fall into. Moral parables, as didactic fictions, make for good propaganda because their simplicity, and stark moral contrast, are both provocative and easily disseminated. But if we mean what we say and aren't just posturing, or "virtue signalling" if you're a Substack subscriber, we need more than propaganda thinking. We need to address situations in their full complexity and moral ambiguity. Such efforts will prove out of reach for career blue state social media hottakers like Cindy Milstein - anarchism's answer to the phenomenon of Disney Adults. *But I'm not addressing those poor souls. Milstein, et al, are best left to ramble about the creeping Christofascism lurking behind every conceivable social activity (at least those activities not attended entirely by a mix of humanities grad students and oogles). If we attempt to challenge them, they'll only fall further down the spiral of Bluestate Q-Anonism. The ones we can speak to are those who hold silent their discomfort during Rad Dem struggle sessions, not the true believers who experience no such cognitive dissonance.*

If our glorious masked militants crave the buzz of huffing their own herbal-tincture-breath all day, more power to them. But we should note that they chose to meet in person. If there is a causal linkage between unmasked social interactions and dead Palestinians, then there certainly is also a causal linkage between even having masked

meetings and dead Palestinians, when all interactions could be had via zoom. Surely, the damage to the social fabric of our scenes is obvious after years of social distancing, so who could blame them for favoring their own comfort over Palestinian lives. Nonetheless that is the choice they have made, just as most of us decide to continue to travel in cars despite the fact that 1 out of 93 of us will die in a motor vehicle collision. We all take the risks of our choices on balance every day, and we can compare unmasking to other personal risks. But what makes driving a better analog than junk food is that when we get in the car we aren't just putting our own lives at risk, but the lives of other drivers and pedestrians on the road. Those collisions are a greater risk for some of the same demographics who face worse outcomes from covid: the under-insured, the elderly, the immunocompromised (who are more likely to catch fatal infections during a hospital stay), etc. There is also a similar problem of Long Vehicle Collision, a syndrome where the effects of a vehicle collision, both physical and cognitive, both visible and invisible, can last for a lifetime and make us more susceptible to further ailments. Most of us make the choice to put other people's lives at risk every day, in more ways than we recognize, just as the militant maskers are risking the lives of the most vulnerable by not being militant zoomers (well, hopefully most of them are zoomers, but I mean "zoom users". At least I hope for *their* sake that they're zoomers, and not still acting like that in their 30's...).

Let us remember that "militant" and "revolutionary," outside of the political hobbyist usage, have origins in very real violence. The premise of radical politics is that a meaningful lasting change to the political systems we live under, due to the entrenched interests of elites, *cannot change without a drastic resistance that has historically*

*always involved a great degree of violence. No simple moral parable survives exposure to real prolonged violence.*

The anarcho-Disney stories of battles between the forces of light and the dark forces of Capitalism, Covid, and perhaps Mordor, will lose all their power in the minds of any thinking person living through actual applied "militancy" in its literal form. As they should. Because the alternative is worse.

Those who cling to such simple parables in spite of the contravening evidence of their eyes, do so only by sharpening such parables to a razor edge. **It is in the minds of fanatics that such parables are distorted so that the category of "friend" continually shrinks and the category of "traitor to the people" continually expands.** Those who choose to prefer such parables to the much more ambiguous world in front of them, end up becoming the very people for whom the violence of events becomes its own end.

**There is no reason to trust a moralist until they are willing to make the climb down from their imaginary towers to meet with the rest of us in the dirt and filth of the actual world we live in.** And then, maybe, by making their case for forever masking, they might win over the minds of some antiauthoritarians who won't be seen at their struggle sessions.

Some of us are antiauthoritarians precisely *because we've already been in enough struggle sessions to know that the apparent cohesion that results from such environments is only the flimsy conformity resulting from fear of social rejection.*

It falls apart when people can take their masks off and breathe a little.

