

Low-Key: On the Security of Counter-Power Movements



Revolutionary Anti-Imperialist Movement

The Agent

Security in the revolutionary movement is an absolute necessity. With agents of the state working around the clock to take in and pacify subversives, we run the risk of becoming the unwitting targets of state repression. That is not to say that the revolutionary movement against imperialism is the principle target of repressive state forces at the moment, but that through necessity, our work brings us to the same communities that are home to the oppressed peoples most threateningly eyed by the imperialists in this country. In amerikkka this includes those who have been labeled “liabilities” in the euphemized conquests of the Third World, and those who are most frequently and brutally victimized by the imperialist state within its own borders. It is for this reason that we share proximity with agents who work perpetually to assist in the mass torture, murder and incarceration of the oppressed peoples. In this way, it does not matter how low-key our activities are kept, we will register somewhere if we are simply in the *right place*.

The intention of this document is not to provide any technical or logistic support on getting away with illegal activity, but to be a list of suggestions for building a strong organization capable of operating without being subverted by those very same agents whose job it is to gain a conviction. That is the work of the Agent; they may not be FBI or necessarily the “Authorities” (though in other cases they may). That is what makes them so dangerously diverse and incredibly versatile in undermining and liquidating potential threats to amerikkkan hegemony. To understand why it is necessary that we guard against them and remove them whenever they are discovered, we must understand what they do. One may think that they can operate as an organization while infiltrated simply because they have not committed or planned any criminal action; however, that would be a misunderstanding of the role of the Agent. Their job is not to deliver just sentences to those who have committed crimes. The Agent’s responsibility is to—for one reason or another—obtain an indictment, and hopefully a conviction.

The Agent may have been recruited for a variety of different reasons: they could be a former revolutionary, worn down by the state, perhaps even facing incarceration if they do not cooperate; they could be charismatic and guaranteed state payroll only if they successfully lead to the indictment and conviction of a “subversive.” What does this mean for you as a member of

a collective/organization working among these communities? Essentially, that they will do whatever it takes to make you a guilty party, or even gather or fabricate evidence to suggest that. What makes this all the more simple is that the Patriot Act has effectively obliterated most protections against entrapment, which had previously prevented agents from legally bringing forward charges on a conspiracy or act which they had planned for you, or that you would not have done without their intervention. This means that an agent can potentially gather materials, create a plan, and get you to simply say—on record—that you agree to carry out the act and have made anything which can be construed as progress toward its completion, and use that as legal evidence to indict you.

We must understand that with the presence of agents in an organization effectively immune to their infiltration, having committed to no illegal actions whatsoever (good luck with that), they are still vulnerable to attempted subversion and shady tactics employed with the self-serving justification of cash, honor or immunity for the indictment of “subversives.” So in the field of organization, it should never be assumed that you are simply “too irrelevant” to be caught by a government agent. Your collective may already be a target as we speak, however unlikely seems. The truth of the matter is that with the proximity of our activities to those of peoples more closely monitored by the state, we are bound to end up rubbing shoulders with unsavory people. Although we may not be their targets yet, they control areas of shared interest, and we run the risk of our activities ending up on their radar if we are not careful.

These agents are not always obvious. They may be former Black Panthers, Young Lords, AIM members, Communist Party members or simply other “activists” interested in what we do. They will likely have an abundance of advice and appear charismatic, knowledgeable, or brave, and thus desirable for inclusion in our activism. Their demeanor may seem polarizing and oddly inspiring to us; however, despite this, there are always ways to identify a potential agent. We do not need to suspect everyone, we simply need to create habits which will help us resist common measures used to indict us. As well, we must guard against bad political tendencies displayed in our collectives both by agents and liabilities. These tendencies, whether or not they are shown by an agent, will naturally cause conflict and poor security in the collective, as well as create an unsafe environment for oppressed peoples in general. If we can effectively learn to deal with these tendencies, we can create a long-term solution to the problem of infiltration and of

liquidation. Liabilities and agents, in this case, are both equal partners in the liquidation of revolutionary struggle.

The Liability

The Liability is a broad category that includes not only those susceptible to being recruited as agents, but also the general noise of the liquidationist tendencies within a revolutionary movement. The Liability can be summarized as someone whose bad politics and unsafe or careless practices undermine the security and intentions of the whole movement. This will not necessarily deliver us to government forces in every instance, but if the Liability goes unaddressed, it will always do so in the end. This does not in any immediate way make them an agent, though it does indeed make them suspect. If they do not lead us straight into the hands of the state, the Liability could be the threat themselves; often they are particularly abusive individuals who, if not dealt with cautiously, can directly threaten the physical safety and wellbeing of our comrades. As such, their actions negatively affect the morale and stability of the group, and excuses should never be made for anyone who physically (or otherwise) threatens other members; excusing such behavior can only lead to the unraveling and eventual dissolution of the collective. We are always stronger without liabilities and potential agents in our midsts. Where no corrective measures can be taken, there must be action.

Being able to understand and identify behavioral patterns that communicate dangerous tendencies in a person's political framework is vitally important to spotting a potential liability, or even an agent. This does not mean that someone must have perfect politics or flawless practice in order to contribute to the revolutionary movement, by any means. However there are tendencies which must be struggled with; ones that can prove dangerous if allowed to germinate. For instance, when examining their particular interest within the line of revolutionary work, you can identify if they are more interested in the concept of revolution from a *Military* rather than a *Political* standpoint: generally those who take extra care and philosophical rigor in examining methodology, and in fetishizing the means of revolution rather than understanding the ends. This strictly militaristic view leaves them aloof to the basic principles of proletarian class politics, becoming more absorbed in the concept of armed defense/offense without

understanding or addressing the basic institutions of political power needed to back them. This makes them a liability on two fronts:

1) they can find themselves persistently engaging in activities beyond the readiness of the revolutionary movement, justified only by their fetishistic view of militant action. Thus, they risk putting themselves in the headlights of the authorities, and can jeopardize the long-term struggles of the collective in building institutions essential for organized resistance, and as a result put the whole collective at risk;

2) they can easily be offered the excitement and allure of a militant struggle in many other ways, either with the reactionary forces or the fascists, who provide an environment well suited to their tastes. If the importance of our revolutionary movement and the end goal of communism is not reinforced in them, they have no more attachment to it than any other militant struggle. Similarly, it could cause the pressure of outside forces to turn their attitude from *distant* to *disinterested*.

Either result is extremely dangerous and must be taken seriously, as both are followed by the possibility of liquidation. Therefore it does not matter whether or not you can always prove that someone is an *agent*, because effectively identifying their status as a *liability* can bring about the same end-result. That is why a policy of intense rigor in the struggle with all liabilities must be taken up, and they must be ejected or molded into more workable comrades in the revolutionary struggle.

Overall, the presence of individuals with dangerous or counter-revolutionary politics should never be allowed to stagnate within an organization; there must be a constant and rigorous struggle against their ideas. In order to create an environment which is both as safe as possible for the oppressed people operating in it, and actively seeks to undermine and expose any potential leaks in the collective, we need to enforce an atmosphere that is hostile towards those who are not serious about their political work. This is not only a matter of ejecting potential agents, but also of protecting our membership from the chauvinistic rapists and abusers who would pose a threat to them beyond that of state repression. If we cultivate such an environment, we stand the best chance of ridding ourselves of potential threats through the molding or ejection of liabilities, and the exposure and subsequent elimination of agents.

However, not all liabilities ascribe to dangerous political trends. Those who do not take security seriously often risk compromising our organizational safety with their reckless behavior, thinking the threats posed to us are insignificant or absent. This kind of thinking potentially justifies activities which can put the organization needlessly at risk, for the sake of time or effort they feel is wasted. They figure, if the threats are not imminent, then what is the use in being so thorough with our security practices? They do not believe that agents could be actively pursuing us, or assume that taking additional security measures would be too obstructive to our goal of integrating the movement into one more readily accessible to the supportive masses.

These are terrible assumptions. As explained previously, we may not necessarily need to be under suspicion for our activities to register on state radar. Secondly, our movement can be both secure and accessible with little to no difficulty while practicing these security measures, which are as simple as prioritizing a rigorous atmosphere of political struggle. This is something which can and should be made stimulating to the development of the organization, and of course security practice should never interfere with the ability of the organization to grow in a healthy way. However, there is no sense in prioritizing growth over safety, and thus growing an organization at the expense of inviting more cops and rapists into its ranks than true comrades.

In the other camp, you find people who actively make themselves vulnerable to the tactics of the state. A prime example of which being those who regularly abuse drugs and/or alcohol. This is not, of course, a condemnation of those who use such substances, but a realistic look at how this behavior can interfere with the security of an organization. Many have fallen victim to loose talk induced by a long night at the bar with suspiciously inquisitive strangers. These strangers do not necessarily need to be agents or authorities of any kind. However if one thing leads to another, and someone finds themselves discussing (or boasting about) their radical political work, who knows where this information may end up.

With the use of illegal substances you run the extra risk of being targeted by police and potentially being indicted. In the past, a very common police and FBI tactic for breaking up the radical movements was to target suspected radicals for other charges, such as drug charges which carry a potentially damaging sentence, in order to secure from them confessions in return for immunity. Many “comrades” in these scenarios have been made to testify against their fellow

radicals in order to avoid a decade or more in prison for exaggerated drug charges. Of course, with drugs and alcohol out of the picture, the police can still find ways to indict you, but that is no reason to engage in reckless behavior.

It is not so much that drugs and alcohol have no place in the movement, as it is that the abuse of either is something we simply cannot afford to constantly engage in. The use of drugs/alcohol does not in itself spell an eventual end to the organization, however there are limits which must be observed, and discipline that has to be enforced when dealing with this kind of thing. If the behaviors of comrades regarding drugs/alcohol begin to seriously affect their work, or endanger our organization, it has become a liability for the movement and should be addressed. We have to recognize the importance of the ability to do political work without hindrance. For this reason drug/alcohol use should be discouraged, and its abuse needs to be addressed and dealt with.

In all forms, the liability is someone who threatens the security of the organization with internal or external collapse. The liability should always be pushed into a safe and disciplined political atmosphere, whether their politics or their habits are what present problems. This atmosphere is our first and most important line of defense, which all others support. Our comrades depend on their organizations and collectives for basic realizable safety and organizational security; to tolerate liabilities is to welcome threats to all our comrades. We must take full responsibility for the implementation of a secure political culture, and enforcing a discipline around it which makes our work possible and as safe as it can be.

Securing Identities

Our first and most important step for individualized security practice is to divide personal identities across mediums and between groups. What this means essentially, is that we need to put the control of our personal information in our own hands, through the successful separation of our various presences. We want to ensure that anyone looking for us, or for information about us, has to face as many roadblocks as possible in doing so. This is not foolproof, and can be circumvented with enough skill, time and effort. However our principle desire here is to make it as difficult as possible for them to do that. Chances are, the people who will be looking for us most often have limited time and resources to pour into finding us. So making ourselves

accessible to the right people, while limiting how much any given person can know about us is key.

One of the very basic ways of ensuring this is through the use of pseudonyms and alternate identities/stories. These do not have to be (and I implore that they will not) made highly complex, because they neither need to be, nor will it be easy to keep everything straight in your head while you juggle these complexly diverse identities you have made. What this essentially means, is that you want to choose fake names, ones that you will use exclusively on the ground with a particular group, and ones you will use exclusively online, etc. You only want to use these names respectively, and want to limit how many people know of you as both individuals. Online, you want to limit how much personal information someone can find about you, or at least how much consistent information they can find. If you must, you can choose a different place/date of birth, and come up with a different home city/state. However you want to keep it simple, do not make it difficult for you to remember, and always avoid posting pictures of yourself online in places linked to your political work.

On the ground, this is made a tad more challenging and different protocol is required. You certainly do not want to use the same pseudonym as in your writing online; this would make things far too easy for those who wish to find more about you after a single meeting in an activist setting. People who meet you for the first time at even the most inane political action would immediately be able to place you with a definite theoretical organization, a distinct history of action and demands. Having just any activist able to access basic information about you in itself is not necessarily a problem; however, it can be compromising when trying to shield your identity from others who could potentially take interest in you as a target for investigative work. Therefore, dividing your online/offline presence is a key measure to ensuring that you have some level of control over what others know about you.

Adopting a pseudonym is only the beginning of the process; dividing and securing your identity in the context of political organizing requires flexibility. As the political situation changes with regards to the safety of your personal identity (for instance: if you plan on relocating or have drawn unwanted attention to yourself) there may be a point when it becomes wise to drop a name and assume a new one. As members of the Revolutionary Movement we are not “show people,” nor are we entertainers or celebrities. There is no sense in cultivating a “brand” to

impress our fellow leftists, and we must be quite pragmatic in the propagation of our organizational activities in order to prevent jeopardizing the security of our members and ourselves. This means that regardless of how frustrating having to abandon a name and draw attention off of yourself can be, at many points it may be necessary; especially when dealing with the fact that police working in and around activist scenes may be looking to place you in other circles upon your arrival at a new locale. In such an instance, changing your identity could prevent them from accessing the kind of resources they need to preempt any ideas you have for future organizing, and help them break up the collectives.

Another important practice is being readily prepared to cover your face whenever it may become necessary. Avoid being photographed (or photographing others/yourself) in any potentially incriminating situation, and do not use pictures of yourself on any online account used for political purposes. The police will often come into activist circles and photograph people to keep their identities on file if they are routinely involved in organizing, so wearing something that can be used to conveniently cover your face (like a scarf) during demonstrations will help you in the long run. Anything used to conceal your hair, something as simple as an ordinary hat, can also be quite helpful in these situations. This is especially pertinent with the added threat of reprisal from unaffiliated fascists and groups such as the KKK; anything to avoid being recognized by them could very well save your life at some point.

The threat posed by the unveiling of activist circles and their members is not something specifically relegated to police, it is something that we have engaged in ourselves on quite a few levels, through our unnecessary propagation of ourselves and our activities. This not only happens individually, but organizationally as well. This is linked to the organizational liability created by a refusal to acknowledge the importance of security practice. On an organizational level, this can amount to the advertisement of specific members by their name, gender, nationality, etc. This tends to happen a lot in attempt to vindicate or decry collectives or organizations on the basis of their membership rather than their political positions. This kind of behavior is dangerous as well as tokenizing, as it is another way of delivering information on membership to the authorities who would very much benefit from it.

Similarly, this happens individually through the kind of “guerrilla journalism” which all too often captures people in a context which could very easily land them behind bars, or perhaps offer

their identities to reactionaries who would seek to harm them. To offer the kind of coverage denied by bourgeois media, it could potentially be beneficial to photograph or film the protests and actions as they happen. That said, there must be strict protocol, and careless photographing of activists and especially of situations which may be misconstrued or lead to arrests is absolutely unacceptable. This kind of recklessness can very well lead to the identification of our comrades by the police or by Fascists, and they very well may end up in jail for crimes they may not have even committed, lose their jobs, or even be viciously attacked by reactionaries. This is a responsibility we have to take very seriously, as it can have very real consequences if we do not.

Securing Information

Just as with our identities, information on our activities and the extent of our involvement with radical politics should be on a strict “need to know” basis. Information on ourselves and the activities of our organizations and collectives must be controlled, and an atmosphere must be created that accepts this reality as a principle for organization. Loose talk can put us in very bad situations, and this not only goes for what we are truly involved in, but also what future plans we may have. There is a time and place for these discussions, and a short list of what we should discuss with most people. The role of an agent in situations like these is always to coax the most compromising responses out of us. So to have a regimented idea of what is and what is not acceptable and safe to say is vital to keeping yourself out of tough situations.

The problem with organizing, especially mass organizing or simply conversing between comrades, is that outside our immediate circles of highly trusted comrades (and sometimes, even within them) we are not always sure exactly who we are talking to. This is somewhat expected given the political context. That being said, we *do* want to retain a healthy degree of secrecy even between our comrades, as some information that is simply irrelevant for our purposes could be potentially damaging if it given to the wrong people. Overall there should be a degree of acceptance of this reality within the organization, much more than already exists. We simply cannot—and in some cases should not—know everything about the person we are talking to, as some information is irrelevant even in ascertaining someone’s status as a liability or an agent. This doesn’t need to be pushed to the forefronts of our minds, but it should definitely be internalized as mechanic we can use to improve organizational security.

Though, keeping this in mind, since we cannot always be absolutely sure of who it is we are talking to, and what their background of activity and work is, we should never freely exchange information which could be later injurious to our organization. When someone asks a potentially dangerous question, it is not necessary to immediately suspect them as an agent (unless other unique tendencies make this suspicion well-founded,) however to be safe, the question should be avoided. These may range from questions of an organization's involvement in a particular recent event, their stance on the use of violence, or even simply personal questions about political affiliations by a less-than-familiar person. These questions could potentially prove compromising, especially if the reaction of the person is not what is desired. Sometimes it is better to avoid the possibility of these situations turning sour than to attempt to engage with them on these levels.

With regards to non-secure online/over the phone communication, one must always be careful not to discuss anything which could be used to incriminate them later. Do not discuss potentially dangerous topics with people on unsecure mediums, and overall just be careful with subject matter in general. This data is collected and stored, so conversations had in these mediums are most-often being put on record somewhere, even if they are not accessed by the authorities. This is also a concern for people if their online accounts are hacked or accessed by others whom can view their messages and information, so tight control of subject matter over unsecure electronic mediums is an essential method. There are many guides on how to keep online interactions relatively secure, however for a general (and less technical) method, it is best to keep sensitive conversations to secure mediums.

Avoid talking about your politics or political work with everyone that you meet. It is often said in the sphere of mass organizing that a communist should never be afraid to state they are a communist. This is somewhat true, but in the context of building a secure and small organization or collective which is not yet ready for, or whose strategy is not aimed at, mass organizing in a very traditional sense, great consideration must be taken in how we engage in political discussion in potentially unsympathetic spaces. What this means, is that even among the most developed stages of our struggle, it is not always opportune to allow everyone to know your political stance, and that it could actually be harmful to do so. For instance, in conversations with coworkers or acquaintances you may find yourself in a discussion about politics in which their opinions are very antagonistic to yours. There is absolutely no need to paint yourself against this backdrop, or

to attempt to create a scene which will only alienate all the others in the situation. Furthermore, you could be risking your job, your studies, and your contacts through unnecessary political banter. There are situations which are understandably impossible to remain silent in, however in the realm of political banter and nonsense-talk, there is little to gain and potentially a lot to lose.

This becomes even more pertinent with the seriousness of your political work. There is no need to implicate yourself, especially in actions you were not part of, through your expressed support for them. This should be made doubly clear for all situations involving the deaths of police and soldiers, and all acts of “terrorism.” It is dangerous to publicly declare your support for a particular “terrorist” act that has recently occurred, or to talk freely among your coworkers about your lack of concern for—or joy in—a recent police shooting. It does not matter what we think of these events, because ultimately pledging our public support for them in our workplaces and schools does nothing for the advancement of the movement. We must be constantly aware of the context of our conversations, and make the practical considerations of what consequences we may face from being too open about our views in these circumstances.

Our interactions should be dictated by circumstance, our discourse must adopt logical restrictions and tones given the context. When trying to polarize people generally, and bring a certain attitude forward with regards to events and general systems, we should want to use the organization as our loudspeaker. However, in our personal lives we should seek to keep a low profile, and not to draw undue attention to ourselves because of the potential consequences it may have for ourselves and our comrades. We must regulate how we engage on these things with people who could potentially jeopardize the movement as a whole. To create enemies in our personal lives aware of our political alignments has very obvious dangers. To this end, we must understand that the security of information—of what we know—must be carefully considered throughout our work.

Undue Suspicion

However, taking these precautionary measures too far can also cause issues, as undue suspicion poses a threat to the morale of an organization/collective otherwise engaging in secure practices and developing a healthy security culture. There is no need to suspect everyone who asks a question out of line, makes a mistake, or has liberal (or simply bad) political ideas of being an

agent or liability. To create a culture of suspicion is no better than to create one which is unsafe and insecure politically. Without a clear logic to back it up, the jacketing of members as agents, snitches, or general liabilities who need to be disposed of sets up the creation of an echo-chamber. There is no need to do this: people make mistakes, they ask bad questions, and hold bad positions. However, enforcing rigorous struggle and more effective and logical security practices can help to sort those who are workable from those who present clear danger.

As for liabilities, ejection should generally be reserved only for those who present a real and immediate danger for other members; either through continual reckless behavior and lack of regard, or through abusive and violent behavior. However there is no reason to assume every mistake is indicative of a tendency towards dangerous and malicious activity; actions will speak for themselves in this regard. Productive working relationships should always be valued in this way, if there is a closeness, and if their behavior presents no clear threat, there is no reason that alternative methods of struggle cannot be pursued. However there should be absolutely no hesitation among those, even those who consider themselves close to the individual, to eject them if their activities present an immediate and continual threat to the organization.

As for agents things are more serious, because this category is very specific and it has implications which are much more sinister. It is true that anyone could be an agent, however most will not be; if a secure practice is taken seriously, many of them will be ejected as liabilities anyway, before their discovery as agents. To label someone as an agent you must be absolutely sure of their guilt, as it is a very serious accusation. If someone is found to be an agent, they must not only be immediately excised, but word must be sent out naming this person and exposing their activities. To discover an actual agent and have proof is vital to being able to save not only one collective, but a whole host of revolutionary organizations/collectives which could be targeted after their work has finished with you.

Overall, we must be realistic that there is a large degree of trust which must be handled in these organizations, we cannot afford to always be so sure of everything, and sometimes we have to trust that the people we have surrounded ourselves with are genuine and want to be here. These secure practices will help solidify the relationships and trust with those who can make the cut to progress into serious political work, however this should never unnecessarily hinder our work. Security should not consume us and prevent us from working, but make our work safer and more

sustainable. As such, a culture of suspicion replaces security: it consumes it and destroys the trust, morale, and accessibility of our organization. So we must remain scientific and to a degree, professional, in our analysis of ourselves and our comrades. These things should never be taken for granted, and should create a more comfortable atmosphere.