

Federation of Anarchists and Syndicalists



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WHY WE WEAR BLACK



ANTIFASCISM AND BLACK BLOC
FOR MODERATES

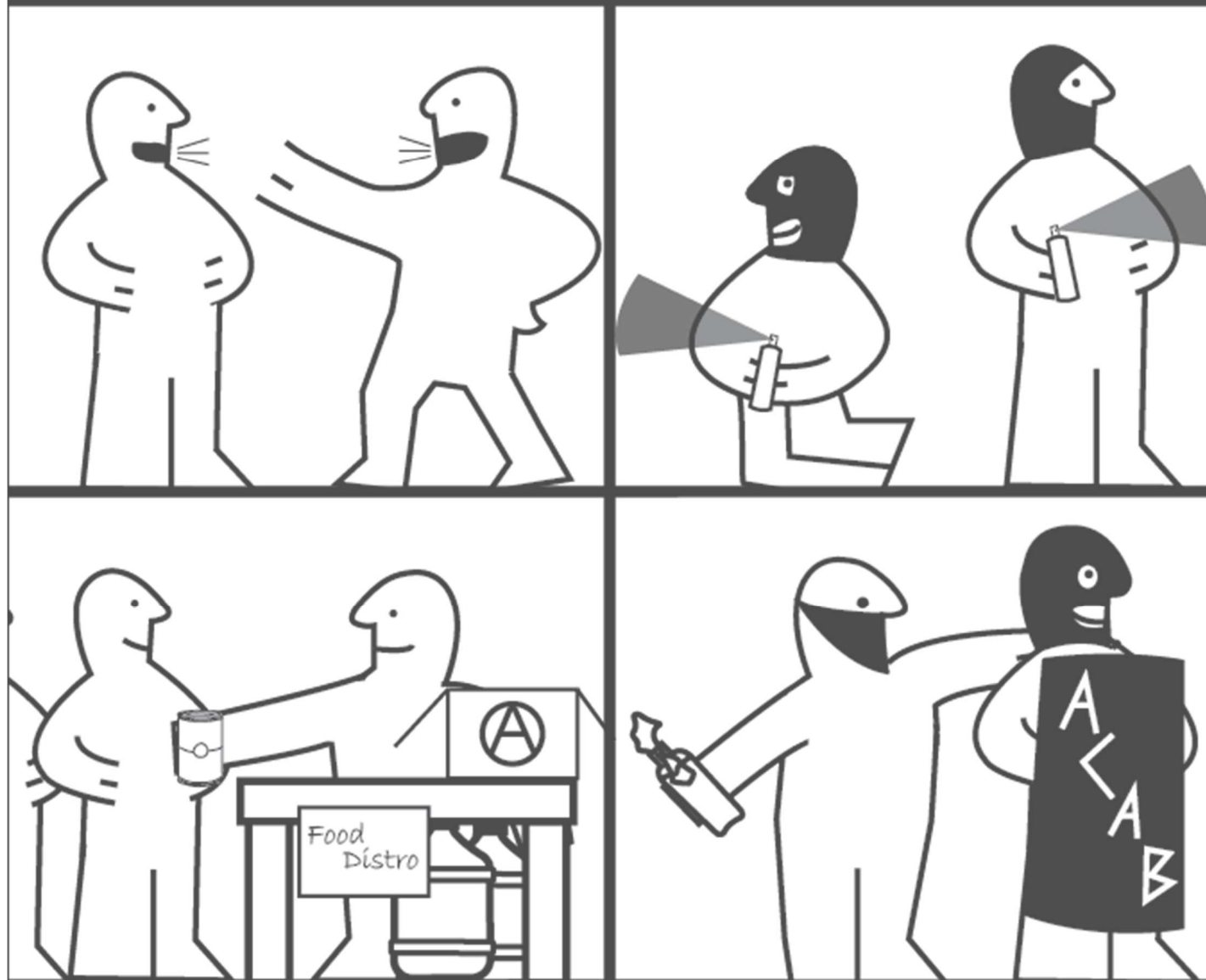
*... I wear the black
For the poor and the beaten
down
Livin' in the hopeless
Hungry side of town
I wear it for the prisoner
Who has long paid for his
crime
But is there because
He's a victim of the time.
- Johnny Cash, The Man in Black*

Further reading

How Nonviolence Protects the State by Peter Gelderloos
Vote? What for? By Errico Malatesta
Defending Das Institut by Locusts and Wild Honey
How Portland Stopped the Proud Boys by Robert Evans
Antifa Isn't the Problem by Mark Bray

<https://theanarchistlibrary.org>

ONE STRUGGLE



MANY TACTICS

Since the 2016 campaign and through the rollercoaster that was the Trump administration, the word “antifa” has been on people’s minds a lot. Antifa conjures up images of aggressive crowds at protests wearing all black, covering up their faces, and maybe doing some things that moderate liberals would find distasteful.

But what is antifa really? Are we all just violent extremists with the wrong strategies? Deranged anarchists that just want to be wild? Let’s see if we can’t dispel some of those preconceptions! You might not come around to agree with the methods when you finish reading, but you’ll be hopefully better informed and prepared for more fruitful discussions!

“WHAT IS ANTIFA?”

Antifa is short for antifascism as a political stance and for antifascist when referring to someone who holds that stance. Antifascism as a movement is as old as fascism, having many incarnations in many localities in the last 100 years. Most notably are the Arditi del Popolo who fought against Mussolini’s blackshirts, and Antifaschistische Aktion who opposed Hitler’s brownshirts. In recent times, the rise of white supremacy and fascism in the first world (particularly the US with the Alt-Right) has spurred the growth of a renewed antifa movement.

Antifascism isn’t exclusive to any political ideology, and you yourself are likely (hopefully) antifascist even if you prefer to march with signs in your casual clothes!

“WHY DO YOU COVER YOUR FACE?”

When you see people showing up to events dressed in all black, they’re using a tactic called “black bloc.” The idea behind wearing bloc is kinda like the idea behind a comic book character wearing a mask. the police like to crackdown on progressive and leftwing demonstrations. Even peaceful marches! And when they come down on us, we don’t want them to know our faces so they can’t criminalize our marches as effectively. Further still, we don’t want white supremacist groups to have our identities either!

The police may be able to use more *legitimized* methods for crushing progressivism, but the fascists and neo-nazis out there aren’t afraid of going

around the red tape. Showing them who we are puts ourselves at risk of being attacked as well as our loved ones! We don't want the local bigots to show up at our homes or workplaces to assault us or worse. These people keep websites and databases with identities and personal information on people they deem to be "degenerate" (or "woke" if they wanna be more palatable) with intent to be used against those individuals!

We don't use black bloc to avoid accountability or to cause chaos with impunity. It's a self-defense measure against retaliation from the state seeking to repress organized dissent and from the modern brownshirts we oppose.

"YOU CAN'T JUST CLAIM THAT EVERYONE WHO DISAGREES WITH YOU IS A FASCIST!"

That's true! Good thing we don't do that! Fascism is a *very* specific thing, even in the context of conservative politics. Fascism's hallmarks are distinctly nationalistic and hinged on bigotry, othering, imposing a cultural identity on the nation, and intent on restoring a mythical past glory to the nation through the power of the state and economy. Anti-fascists by definition do not subscribe to such ideals and we come from across the remaining political spectrum. Anarchists, Liberals, Democratic Socialists, all are distinct movements and factions, yet we put these differences aside to combat the more pressing enemy.

And yes, maybe some individuals use shaky rhetoric or definitions to identify fascism among other similar ideologies that must also be opposed, or even are too hasty to pick the wrong battles. This is worrisome for sure as it dilutes the heft of the labels and the gravity of the genuine malefactors. To this end it is important to be well informed and educated on different ideologies, what they are, their destructive and regressive natures, and how they may intersect. We must know our enemy if we are to combat them.

"YOU LOOK TO ME LIKE A BUNCH OF OUTSIDE AGITATORS TRYING TO RUIN OUR PROTESTS!"

The idea of the "outside agitator" is that someone who opposes the ideals of a demonstration, or benefits from support of those who oppose them, clandestinely inserts themselves into the crowd as a supporter and acts in a way that



CONCLUSION

For years now, fascism has been on the rise with particular momentum in the last decade and the standard response from the reigning centrist blocs have been to engage voices of fascism, autocracy, and hatred with well-mannered debate and to treat them as if they are valid perspectives in the marketplace of ideas. That all we need to do to protect ourselves and society from evil designs is to calmly refute them in public and showcase how ludicrous they really are, then vote in the fall for the party that goes out of its way to compromise with these same malefactors and fails to act on dire issues. That was a mistake.

The results of this approach have been proportionately the same as they were almost a century ago when Chamberlain applied his appeasement strategy towards Hitler. Conservatives have only drifted further to the right and into the backyard of outright fascism to remarkable successes in discourse, culture, and elections. It's time we stop treating them as if such despotism and barbarism is an acceptable political stance. We must draw a line and say "Here! No further!"

If we continue to use kid gloves, we will no longer have our liberal republic and instead mourn our LGBTQ friends and family wishing we had acted when there was a chance to save them. This zine is not asking you to embrace anarchism or to don the black bloc with us, necessarily. Only that you try to understand what we're doing and why in our fight against authoritarianism, queerphobia, xenophobia, racism, white supremacy, and Christian-nationalism.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that everyone is created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights. That among these rights are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, people must come together (if necessary, in spite of government). That whenever any form of government or movement of dangerous fools becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to defend themselves and each other. When a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government and cultural force, and to provide community defense for their future security.

delegitimizes the movement or gives police a justification for breaking up the assembly, usually violently. Things that usually get eyed as potential actions of O.A.s are violent or otherwise illegal acts like property destruction, graffiti, fighting, etc.

We'll get to the topic of legitimacy and violence in a bit but the idea that the police need an excuse to brutalize a protest crowd like they did across the US in 2020, or the fascists to attack innocents like they did in Charlottesville is giving them all too much credit.

Yeah, the aforementioned deeds can give them a quick snapshot with which to legitimize all sorts of retributive violence and repression. But as we saw in 2020, if the police and reactionaries like Rittenhouse want to attack peaceful demonstrations then they will. The upheaval and violence that was plastered that summer on all of our TVs stemmed from peaceful marches being cornered and repressed by a class of bullies that were upset by basic criticism. The media will then use one-sided misinformation and selective footage edits to demonize the movement afterwards (or at least muddy the waters and cause doubt that neuters progress), even though it was pacifistic through and through!

It would be lazy and dismissive to just say that police have never tried it, or that they've never done similar spy work. But the big thing is that they don't need to, and it's not at the front of the playbook!

"IF YOU'RE TRULY A PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT, WHY ARE YOU SO VIOLENT? THE ONLY LEGITIMATE WAY TO PROTEST IS PEACEFULLY!"

The idea that pacifism is "the only legitimate form of protest" stems from a misinterpretation of history and doesn't actually hold water. Pacifism as lauded in the tales of Dr King and of Gandhi fail to give the whole picture and in doing so oversimplify actual events giving too much credit to these particular camps in achieving the supposed success.

The narrative that Gandhi's hunger striking, and Dr King's marching omits the efforts of other, less peaceful, movements happening in the same spaces, towards the same goals, and achieving their own successes. Groups like the Black Panther

Party with their armed cop watching (which was fully and totally legal until the NRA and then-Governor Reagan got upset), or the many episodes in southern Asia's colonial history of violent uprisings and mutinies against British rule. Dr King himself is quoted as saying "when the negro uses force in self-defense, he does not forfeit support – he may even win it by the courage and self-respect it reflects."

Negotiation and acquiescence to these pacifist factions were calculated political moves by the ruling powers. The ruling class was fearful of the more revolutionary counterparts and of losing total control in other sectors of the situation as a result. So, they opted to concede smaller, retrospectively small, points to these pacifist factions. India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh were freed from colonial rule, but they were forced to handle difficult issues as part of the decolonization process that still plague them today. Ethnonationalism, border friction with each other, religious conflict, and continued economic and geopolitical exploitation that's reminiscent of the colonial period.

Minorities in the US likewise still face discrimination, systemic violence and disenfranchisement, and disproportionate poverty/criminalization. The passage of the Civil Rights act and Voting Rights act didn't magically erase interpersonal and systemic racism.

"Nobody in the world, nobody in history, has ever gotten their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of the people who were oppressing them."

— ASSATA SHAKUR

"BY RESORTING TO VIOLENCE AGAINST FASCISTS, YOU'RE NO BETTER THAN THEM! YOU CAN'T CHANGE MINDS WITH FISTS!"

When we engage them with violence, it is to defend ourselves and to defend others. When white supremacists, religious zealots, and fascist thugs enter a space it is no longer safe. We don't always escalate to violence right away, instead attempting to talk individual provocateurs out of the area, deescalate tensions,

and generally provide buffers between fascists and those they target. When fists begin to fly it means we have exhausted our options or that they have exceeded our ability to peacefully defuse the situation.

At which point we must rebuke them in a language they seek to inflict upon the broader society. These people want to harm your neighbors, your communities, potentially even you. Their goals involve the hateful destruction of peoples they deem to be "degenerate," "unamerican," etc. They are largely beyond reason and to ignore them is to invite their growth. We've learned these lessons in the 1930s: the most effective way to stop fascism is to directly combat it. Appeasement and debate allow them to organize and spread their bile to new places and fresh ears on the political right.

You can approach them with as many facts, evidence, logic, and debate as you please, but they do not care for logic. These good faith tactics are great between good faith actors, but fascists and bigots are not acting in good faith. They will often dig their heels in and shout louder like toddlers. Hitler himself in all his evil said after taking power that "Only one thing could have stopped us – if our adversaries had, from the first day, smashed with the utmost brutality the nucleus of our movement."¹

However, it is nonetheless important when employing violence against nefarious characters that we do not lose sight of why we fight them. We fight for the poor, the crestfallen, the queer, and the marginalized. We become violent now so that we may live peacefully later.

If we really wish to strive for the emancipation of the people, do not let us reject in principle the means without which the struggle can never be ended; and, remember, the most energetic measures are also the most efficient and the least wasteful. Only do not let us lose sight of the fact that ours is a struggle inspired by love and not by hatred, and that it is our duty to do all in our power to see that the necessary violence does not degenerate into mere ferocity, and that it be used only as a weapon in the struggle of right against wrong.

- ERRICO MALATESTA, *VIOLENCE AS A SOCIAL FACTOR*

¹ <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/adolf-hitler-smashing-the-nucleus/>