

The Charleston SC Massacre & Beyond anti-fascist notes from an anarchist perspective

First of May Anarchist Alliance Summer 2015

**Plus: A Report on the Sept. 5th 2015
"Unity Against White Supremacy & the
Confederate flag" Rally in St. Paul MN**



The following is a discussion document first drafted in June 2015 and discussed, amended, edited over the course of a couple months, and approved by the First of May Anarchist Alliance in September 2015. This statement may be quoted from or reproduced without permission or cost, provided that First of May Anarchist Alliance is cited as the author.

We welcome discussion and debate of this document in order to help build a stronger and more sophisticated revolutionary anti-fascist movement.

This statement is dedicated to the martyrs of the “Mother Emanuel” massacre and all victims of racist and fascist violence. We dedicate our lives to ending these attacks, and the system that perpetuates them.



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The Charleston SC Massacre & Beyond

anti-fascist notes from an anarchist perspective

**First of May Anarchist Alliance
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I. On June 17, 2015 a young white fascist carried out a vicious and hateful mass murder against 9 parishioners and clergy of the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

“Mother” Emanuel is the oldest Black congregation in the American South. It was the center of planning for a great slave rebellion in 1822 that was suppressed with the execution of Denmark Vesey and 34 others and the burning of the church building. The re-built “Mother” Emanuel has been at the center of Black Charleston ever since.

Dylann Storm Roof, the white supremacist that carried out the massacre must have known the symbolic power of his act of terror. It seems to have been designed to respond to the mass movements of the last year, that “No, Black lives do not matter.”

Roof is said to have drifted into fascist politics as part of the sizable right-wing and racist support for George Zimmerman, the vigilante killer of Trayvon Martin in Florida. Roof said that Zimmerman was right, and so did the courts and many others. Roof went on to make contact with neo-nazis, the KKK, and the racist Council of Conservative Citizens. He publicly identified with the old apartheid regimes in Southern Africa. It would be a mistake to see his radicalization and activation as an isolated incident – more likely Roof represents the tip of an iceberg.



Vigil for the victims of the shooting at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, S.C.

II. South Carolina was the heart of the Confederacy, the state most dependent on slave labor and where the first shots of the US Civil War were fired. Since the defeat of post-Civil War Reconstruction, the racist white power structure has ruled the state, openly flying the Confederate flag as their symbol.

But it would be a mistake to view this massacre or American racism as only a southern phenomenon. The United States is built on stolen Indigenous land and African slavery was integral to the economy of the entire United States. The government and economy are structurally racist with communities of color permanently disempowered and thus heavily policed and imprisoned.

While Southern politicians and historical markers can be brazenly white supremacist, it is in Minnesota, the North Star State, where the greatest racial economic inequity occurs.

“As long as you south of the Canadian border, you South.” – Malcolm X

III. The attack in Charleston SC is seen and felt by many as a continuation of the series of high profile murders of Black people, mainly by the police including that of Walter Scott, killed by the cops in North Charleston in April.

What has come to be called the Black Lives Matter movement arose around protests of the 2012 racist vigilante murder of Trayvon Martin, an African-American teenager in Florida and erupted in rebellion in Ferguson, MO and Baltimore MD in response to police murders there. A wave of militant protests followed in many cities across the country. Students walked out of school, highways were blocked, and the Mall of America was shut down. These actions directly impaired “business as usual” and inflicted a cost on the system for these racist murders that the courts would not deliver.

Black Lives Matter has galvanized a new generation of activists into the streets and organizations, and in many places has asserted an inspiring example of radical direct action, rejection of the old reformist leaders, and independence from the establishment. Overall though, on a national scale, the official “movement” has been mainly co-opted and put under the control of traditional civil rights groups and new professional non-profits – all with close ties to the Democratic Party. Demands pushed by the reformists like more cops of color or data-collecting body-cameras on the police are wrong not because they are inadequate, but because they are actually harmful in that they make the repressive apparatus stronger and more resilient.

The need to cohere an anti-authoritarian revolutionary current remains. Anarchists do not seek to take over or control mass movements. Instead we honestly and openly share our revolutionary perspective on how to move forward and we look to collaborate with others on common projects. We defend the autonomy of movements from political parties, politicians, paid professional organizers and other authoritarian “leaders”. Our aim is to promote and defend the liberating self-activity of the Black community and the broad working-classes against all oppression and exploitation.



Thousands of enslaved blacks worked on the railroads right up to and during the Civil War



Ferguson MO and Baltimore MD erupted in rebellion in response to police murders of unarmed African-Americans.

IV. We should welcome, encourage, and participate in the new efforts to confront and remove official symbols of white supremacy like the Confederate flag. These symbols are designed to promote domination and control of the Black community and other people of color, to exalt the white ruling class’s supposed greatness and superiority, and to bind working-class whites to the system.

But we must not allow these actions to be used as an “anti-racist” cover for those that continue to rule over a structurally white supremacist society, but now are finding the open celebration of racism and racists distasteful and inconvenient.

It would also be a serious error to repeat their narrative that the “dumb, uneducated redneck” is the *source* of white supremacy in this country.



V. Comrades now in First of May have been active in combating the KKK and neo-nazis like Roof and his kind for over 4 decades and have been instrumental in the anti-fascist movement in the U.S. The Charleston massacre and other recent developments force us to update our assessment of the threat of a fascist movement in the US and its relationship and conflict with the ruling class and official culture.



The most useful way to understand fascism is that of an independent reactionary movement that seeks to impose its authoritarian solutions on all of society - including the ruling class – by any means necessary. Historically fascist movements have been based on extreme nationalist, racist and anti-Semitic, and patriarchal (sexist and homophobic) ideologies. They have typically sought to rally the excluded against the “betrayal” or “incompetence” of the present rulers - which means a certain competition for hearts and minds of the revolutionary minded with anarchists and others – while remaining open to partnering with the bosses to attack working-class movements and oppressed communities. That familiar framework will continue as the major thrust of fascist politics and activity, but we shouldn’t be caught off guard by fascist-like movements that emerge in unfamiliar garb (including led by those from traditionally oppressed communities, or mouthing rhetoric usually associated with the Left).



“Golden Dawn” Greek fascists present themselves as “anti-austerity”

It has been striking that in an era of a limping recovery, stagnant wages and continued imperial military adventures - all ruled over by a liberal Black President – that the fascists have failed to grow and their organizing capacity has actually declined. The lone-wolf terrorist attacks like in Charleston, Milwaukee (at the Sikh temple), and Kansas City (at a Jewish community center) actually reveal the flailing around of fascists without a serious movement to plug into. There is still certainly a base for hard-core racist, patriarchal, authoritarian ideas as any internet comments section is likely to show. So why have the fascists been so poorly organized?

Reasons include changes in society and culture (can future fascist movements really expect to recruit poor and alienated white youth if hip-hop is prohibited?), internal divisions amongst the fascists, some state repression, and a tenacious and militant anti-fascist opposition.

The best explanation may be the incorporation of the Tea Party and various similar groups and individuals into the GOP. The Republican Party has often seemed off its rocker in recent years in a way that seemed counter-intuitive to winning elections. But just as the Democrats have the responsibility of incorporating autonomous and radical movements of the Left, so too does the GOP for forces on the Right. This co-option has meant the energies and resources of the grassroots Right have been largely absorbed into legal electoral politics.



Mitt Romney addresses NH Tea Party meeting in 2012

It appears that the post-massacre backlash against Confederate symbols has presented an opportunity to those in the Republican Party who, with a national election on the horizon, feel it is time to shed some of the most explicit white-supremacist, fascistic elements within their base that exclude the Party's growth and support among other communities.

At the same time the growing alienation of working-class and middle-class whites from the establishment is continuing. While this presents opportunities for revolutionary anti-racists and anti-fascists, it likely also means a return to right-wing movements outside of the control of mainstream politics, ones with strong fascist tendencies and momentum towards extra-legal clashes with both the state and popular movements of the oppressed communities and the Left.

Fascism is not currently in any way close to seizing power, nor is there any substantial base for fascism presently within the ruling class. While the fascist movements are currently small and scattered, as we've said, it is likely that this will begin to change. Things could develop quickly and polarize communities, cities, and society as a whole. The recent confrontations in Olympia WA where pro-police nazis fought Black Lives Matter and anarchist activists shows the volatile direction things could take.



Black Lives Matter and anti-fascists hold the streets of Olympia WA against neo-nazi threats and attacks

VI. Racists are organizing more openly and actively in response to the movement against police brutality and police attacks on the Black community. Donald Trump is attempting to ride this racist wave, focusing on immigrants, undocumented workers, Latinos and people of color. His rhetoric is openly racist and reactionary, calling for mass round ups and mass deportations of millions of undocumented workers.



Trump ousts Latino reporter from press conference, shouting "Go back to Univision!"



Boston brothers assault Latino homeless man, assert "Trump was right -- all these illegals need to be deported."

Two white racists in Boston recently attacked a homeless Latino man saying they were following the call of Trump. At a recent New Hampshire townhall meeting, Trump listed "Ferguson and Baltimore" as examples of areas where criminal gangs must be fought.

Trump regularly uses the most retrograde chauvinistic slurs against female adversaries. Trump is not a fascist; he is an opportunist. But he has tapped into a mass base of people in this country who are openly racist, sexist, anti-immigrant, anti-Black, and anti-feminist. This is a dangerous development and makes clear that there is a base for right-wing violence and a potential base for fascism in this country. As anti-racists and anti-fascists we have our work cut out for us.

The racists who are supporting Trump do not appear to be from the most excluded. They are mainly middle class and working class whites that likely are feeling threatened and alienated from mainstream politics. It may be that they have been laid off or had their wages or benefits cut. They may not be able to find good jobs or their children may not be able to find decent jobs or afford college. The ruling class and the capitalist system are responsible for these attacks, but these white folks are refusing to join with the rest of the working class and people of color to fight the system. Instead they are looking for scapegoats to blame. The reactionaries point to undocumented workers and families, the Black community, GLBT community and feminists, as the source of the problem in order to deflect people's anger from the billionaires and the corporations and their government and police who are the true source of the attacks. Workers must decide which side are they on.

VII. Developing somewhat independently, but swimming in the same sea, is the anti-feminist so-called “Men’s Rights” movement. Sexism and male violence against women is widespread in this society and still fundamental to the system’s rule, despite the advances women have fought for and won. Men’s Rights Activists (MRA’s) are trying to politically represent and organize the backlash to any anti-sexist progress – and just like the white supremacists they have trends that are willing to carry out vicious acts of violence against women and symbols of anti-sexism – including recent mass shootings in Louisiana (June 2015) and California (May 2014).



Detroit protest against so-called “Men’s Rights” conference

The immediate threat of the fascists is threefold:

- 1. The violence and damage they inflict on people, like the Charleston massacre.**
- 2. The promotion of policies and strategies into the mainstream, such as a militarized border fence or criminalizing abortion.**
- 3. The space they occupy as an apparent radical alternative to the status quo, recruiting alienated white workers and youth and defining the Left as aligned with the system.**

VIII. PROGRAM FOR ACTION

1. Advocate and build for independent community self-defense against racist and fascist violence whether from police, vigilante, religious fundamentalist or KKK/neo-nazi attacks. These could grow out of Cop-Watch, Defense Committees, tenant unions, union shop stewards, music scenes, women and queer self-defense, anti-fascist sports teams & supporters groups and other formations.
2. Support, promote and participate in efforts to confront, take down and dismantle official and public symbols of white supremacy. But underscore the systemic and structural racism in this country and the need to challenge not only symbols of the past but the current racist, sexist capitalist order we live under today. Both the philosophy AND the structure of white supremacy must be overthrown.
3. Work to cohere a revolutionary anti-authoritarian wing of the Black Lives Matter movement and future movements against police brutality and for Black Liberation. Oppose the attempts to turn these insurgent movements into vehicles for politicians and other reformists.
4. Within antifa and the broader radical movement, encourage the development of anti-fascist theory and approaches to counter the misogynist “Men’s Rights Movement” and patriarchal relationships and structures generally.
5. Support demands (backed up by direct action) including an end to police brutality, immigration raids, and deportations; defend Native sovereignty; full access and equality in housing, education, healthcare – including full reproductive rights; living wage union jobs; community controlled reparations to rebuild communities devastated by capitalist exploitation and neglect. Raise the necessity of anarchist revolution to achieve real freedom and equality.
6. Encourage activists and organizers – and the broader community we interact with to be aware of, pay attention to, and prepare to deal with the potential of a re-emergent fascist movement. Offer to do presentations and one-on-ones with various community, union, and movement groups on the threat of the fascists and some history and lessons from the resistance.
7. Make an effort to speak and organize around these issues not just with activist circles but also within our workplaces, unions, neighborhoods and schools. We cannot write off everyone amongst the fascists’ constituency. We should compete to win white workers and youth, including those from rightwing, conservative, and Libertarian backgrounds to anti-racist and ultimately revolutionary anarchist stances. “White heritage”, “southern blood”, “white pride” and the rest is just a cover for white supremacy. In order to bring together the unity that is needed, white workers must decide if they stand with the whole working class against racist violence, white supremacy and capitalism or if they stand with the white supremacists in defense of the capitalist system (or fascist barbarism) and against their own class.
8. Elaborate more fully the anarchist vision of an egalitarian, anti-racist, anti-patriarchal, communal society and the revolutionary means needed to achieve it.

IWW General Defense Committee, Black Lives Matter, Native Lives Matter Confront the Confederate Flag & White Supremacy in St. Paul MN



IWW GDC organized anti-racist march around the Minnesota State Capitol and rallied at (and against) the Columbus statue. The march was in response to a planned rally by supporters of the Confederate flag.

On September 5th 2015 the Twin Cities local of the IWW union's General Defense Committee (IWW GDC) held a successful counter-protest to a planned pro-Confederate flag rally at the State Capitol in St. Paul MN. Black Lives Matter - St. Paul, Native Lives Matter and several other groups and individuals joined with in defiant opposition to white supremacy.

An unknown group declaring themselves "Minnesota 10,000 for Southern Heritage" had called for a rally to promote and defend the Confederate Flag. Although one of their public members is apparently African-American, both he and other supporters of the group had explicitly racist postings on social media along with jabs at the Black Lives Matter movement. Local media gave the small group much publicity.

The Twin Cities IWW GDC has taken the position that whenever fascist or white supremacist groups, no matter how presently small or marginal, seek to take the public square or create space for organization and activities in the Twin Cities – they must be militantly opposed by as large, broad and diverse a working-class force as possible.

Despite the early hour and drizzling clouds, 100 determined anti-racists made a strong show of force. The pro-Confederate cowards were a no-show, moving their tiny rally to an outer ring suburb. The boisterous anti-racists decided to hold the ground anyway and marched across the Capitol, rallying at (and against) the Columbus statue. Speakers affirmed their willingness to confront racists and fascists, the historical roots of white supremacy – especially the enslavement of African labor and the occupation of Native lands, and the need to organize community self-defense against police brutality. A Confederate flag was torn apart and burned.

A quickly organized, but efficient multi-racial security/marshal team directed cars away from or around the march and escorted some suspicious characters away from the rally. The police kept their distance and there were no arrests.