

# ANATHEMA

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## WAR ON CHRISTMAS

One of the mechanisms through which the violence and misery of the U.S. nation-state is obscured is through the recurring seasonal catharsis of Christmas. Traditionally, the state has used this time period to produce a brief illusory respite from meanness and misery, reassuring its citizens that our society is okay despite all evidence to the contrary. The state reminds us of its originary role as the sole guarantor of peace, joy and goodwill, and solidifies its monopoly on these concepts.

During the holiday season, we're heavily encouraged/coerced to temporarily show our capacity for generosity, but only in ways that are convenient for the state and capitalism. Ironically, this mostly just enhances the daily indignities and stress of people who can't afford to buy the kinds of gifts that will confirm, in the very specific ways that society requires, their ability to care for those they love.

Meanwhile, it is the only time of year that the upper/middle classes are encouraged to temporarily experience pity and compassion for the houseless and suffering, whose bodies they usually just step over on the way to work every day. This brief window of generosity is highly controlled, mostly in the form of consumer purchases for other people in similar class scenes. Charity is usually channeled through non-profits and churches that ensure the donors do not develop real relationships with the people they're helping out. Christmas allows people to discharge their needs for communion and compassion, which they will ultimately let go of as soon as the ruthless resilience of the new year kicks in and we go back to normal.

There are definitely ways from within Christian/European traditions to recover principles of expropriation and mutual aid that challenge the state's recuperation of these practices. According to some, the original St. Nicholas of 4th-century AD Myra (now Turkey), now known as Santa Claus, gave up his fortune and redirected his wealthy family's resources to the poor, becoming an infamous defender of the oppressed. This legend has inspired subsequent Christmas myths that distort St. Nicholas's actual practices and help obscure social reality. *(continued on back page)*

## AFTER ALEPPO

There are no unbroken windows in besieged Aleppo. An aerial view reveals the collapsed lung of Syria's most populated metropolitan area, its barricades still smoking, its streets empty. Putin has vowed to kill anyone who remains after Assad's regime forces enter and secure the territory. There is nothing anyone can do about this. Donating to organizations like the White Helmets might be useful in other urban areas, but no relief efforts currently operate in East Aleppo. If there is any work left to be done, it is to bear witness to history. Many will forget the years of bombing raids – Syrians will not.

Over the years, I have found that in organizing spaces, people often do not know what to say on the subject of the Syrian Civil War. This makes sense in a conflict where the good guy/bad guy dichotomy doesn't quite fit the narrative. We understand Assad to be a murderous dictator. We understand that Putin provides the Syrian Army's air power in order to prop up his only ally in the region. But the narrative grows complicated when we consider *\*who\** Assad is fighting in the back alleys of Aleppo.

There is no denying that the FSA (Free Syrian Army) existed in 2011 when the war began, and continues to exist in some rebel-held regions (including besieged Aleppo) today. But the challenge is distinguishing these fighters from the Islamists of Nusra, Fatah, and other factions affiliated with Al-Qaeda, who have been receiving weapons from the West in Aleppo, and who, about 300 miles north in Mosul, Iraq have been the subjects of repeated bombardment by the western funded Iraqi military. There is a fundamental contradiction in the West's repeated coverage of the atrocities in Eastern Aleppo, and its neglect of the civilian population getting massacred in Mosul.

But Aleppo is also meaningful because it signifies the loss of the last opposition-held stronghold in a major city. Without Aleppo, the opposition has no hope of toppling the regime. Thanks to the Russian air force, Assad has adopted a few square miles of rubble, which in my childhood held the most beautiful souk and mosque in all of Syria. But as footage of desperate people fleeing East Aleppo floods the internet, *(continued on page 3)*

# WHAT WENT DOWN

November 25 - Masked individuals vandalized OCF office at Washington Ave and 20th St.

November 27 - Anti-pipeline graffiti spotted in North Philly.

November 28 - Anti-nazi graffiti spotted in West Philly.

December 5 - Fascist and anti-antifa stickers torn down in the Northeast.

December 9 - OCF office vandalized again.

December 17 - Antifa out local nazi Joey Phyl with posters, cover fascist graffiti with antifa stickers and posters, and disposed of gentrifier ads. ★

## 10 REASONS TROUBLEMAKERS SHOULD WELCOME CHRISTMAS

1. Free tree ornaments everywhere provide the would-be paint bomber with ample supplies
2. Shopping chaos creates environments highly conducive to product liberation
3. Home Alone, done right.
4. Free Amazon.com packages litter the porches of absentee white-collar 9-5ers
5. Joyfully escaping the scene of crime into a crowd of similarly-dressed santas (probably for light skinned people only)
6. No, you don't need a new outfit or computer from your parents. No gift cards. Cash money to re-direct into bail funds, community firearms trainings, spray-paint and cash-paid boltcutters.
7. Xmas tree bonfires after the fact, or during the fact.
8. Turning unfortunate gifts into cash because no cashier doubts people are making returns around now
9. A silent night guaranteed to have way less people on the street for your privacy
10. A clear opportunity to flex those mutual aid and free association muscles by choosing who you wanna be around and choosing (or not) to give gifts. ★

## INVITATION TO SUBMIT TO ANATHEMA

Anathema welcomes submissions and aims to include a range of contributions from an anti-authoritarian perspective. The editors do not necessarily agree with the viewpoints published in this newspaper. We intend instead to provide space for internal dialogue, sharing information and analysis and feelings that are rarely legitimated by other forums. The paper's content tends to be published anonymously, in order to provide a more secure space under the current conditions of state surveillance and repression.

We accept local news stories, poems, political analysis, letters to the editor, reportbacks, critiques of us, and any other style of writing you feel moved to contribute. You can email submissions to [anathemaphl@riseup.net](mailto:anathemaphl@riseup.net). ★ [2]

# COMMUNITY UPDATES

Open hours at LAVA (4134 Lancaster Ave.) have started up again for informal organizing and zine distribution on Wednesdays from 5-8.

Keep an eye out for an Anti-Authoritarian Assembly on January 14th.

## Announcing the PHL Autonomous Anti-Repression Fund

In today's increasingly dark political climate, it is more important than ever to directly support people taking risks and going on the offensive against the misery of everyday life, whether as part of a broader political strategy or for reasons of everyday survival and self-defense. The PHL Autonomous Anti-Repression Fund aims to offer a safety net for people in Philadelphia who are limited in their ability to act because they lack resources for bail and other fees if something goes wrong.

This anti-repression fund is part of a broader project of building informal networks of care and resistance outside of non-profits and other organizations, which all too often have their own constraints about what they can and can't support. We aim to support people and activities that are criminalized by the state while also unsupported by formal activist organizations and the mainstream public. The actions we support will not necessarily be planned, "political," or contain a palatable message.

All donations to the anti-repression fund will go directly towards paying bail, bond, legal and/or medical fees following arrest. Your contributions will encourage and embolden people to do what they need to do to try to get free, knowing that other people have their back.

Please donate if you can, and spread the word!!

Donate directly via paypal: [phlbailfund@riseup.net](mailto:phlbailfund@riseup.net)

Donate at our rally.org site: [www.rally.org/phlaarf](http://www.rally.org/phlaarf) ★

*"No, lack of numbers is no cause for alarm. They are there, the exploited, all around us—are also 'us'—and could take us by surprise again at any moment (as could we ourselves). In the realm of the quantitative our task is to experiment and spread an insurrectional method for the self-organization of the necessary destruction of power and subjugation. Small groups with intermediate destructive aims based on affinity that can multiply, spread horizontally and coordinate, without limit. The apparent rift between anarchist theory and practice thus disappears along with the false conflict between individual and mass, and not least the conviction that the tenets of anarchism must be espoused by the exploited before they can fight for their own freedom along with that of others. An informal practice of attack leads to freedom revealing itself qualitatively, in leaps and bounds, far from the straight line of quantity, education, progress and waiting." - Jean Weir*



## [AFTER ALEPPO CONTINUED]

I'm not thinking about the architectural wonders of a world that now seems like a dream. I'm wondering how we can mourn what was ultimately a military defeat of one side over another in a brutal civil war, how we can change the language of this narrative to encompass the enormity of the pain felt by people who have just fled homes they will likely never return to. I, like many other Syrians, struggle to feel the loss of an opposition whose constituency might realistically consist of insurgents from abroad, of Islamists who hold sacred the practice of slavery. But the loss of the people of Aleppo? I struggle to assign it words.

It is very possible that this language does not exist. War, like all traumatic events, tears and distorts language, leaves its victims silent and empty. The people of Syria do not deserve what they have been dealt – a proxy war played out by countless foreign powers, a murderous regime that cares little for its dissenters, an opposition whose legitimate cohort has become difficult to distinguish. Maybe this is the best way to remember Aleppo, and more broadly, Homs, Raqqa, Idlib, and all the other Syrian cities bloodied by the events of the last five years – to consider how legitimate revolutions can be co-opted and interpolated by power, whether it be in the form of foreign dollars or repressive ideologies – to denounce the cowardice of a regime that only knows how to speak through the barrel of a gun, to acknowledge that no language can resolve the loss of the Syrian people, which is expansive and knows no borders or bounds. ★

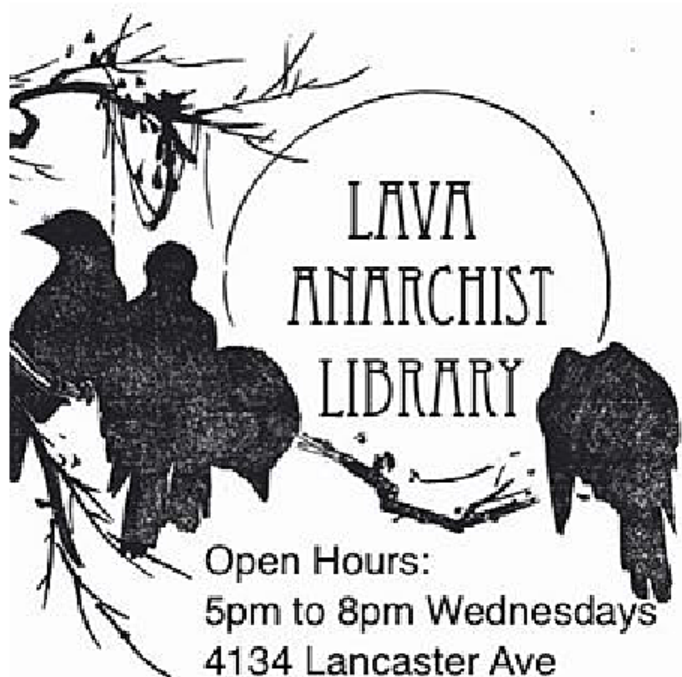
## PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH WAS

A lot of people talked about their fear of a Trump presidency, and how if and when he becomes president the country will become fascist or a dictatorship or some sort of authoritarian regime. The situation that we've seen in so many movies and international news broadcasts is here, and it's not the result of a dramatic coup, like so many other authoritarian regimes before it; this one was elected democratically. If you count yourself among those who feared this shift to the right, now is a time to ask yourself seriously: how much is too much? Does the sanctity of democratic government outweigh the need to get rid of oppressive government? Where do you draw the line? What are you willing to tolerate and what will you actively fight against?

Too many who have expressed that if they lived under an unjust, fascist, authoritarian state they would rise up and fight, only to turn around and begrudgingly accept the regime change. This is a challenge to everyone who said "Bernie or bust," or "anyone but Trump," to everyone who said they wouldn't be complacent in an oppressive situation when they learned about fascism in history class, to everyone who thought the characters in Star Wars or The

Hunger Games or Harry Potter were doing the right thing: revolt against the government.

Think hard about what you can do to stop Trump from taking power, and, failing that, how you can unseat him from power. What do you know that can be put to use? What will you have to learn? Who can you trust and rely on to fight alongside you? Begin answering these questions for yourself and go do it. ★



## *directional*

on top the morning crawled over the dusty mountains,  
the dry air became weighted and wet.

the soil crept.

overhead the clouds reigned high above burnt and ashen chaparral.  
the gray land, pockmarked with erosion scars  
had thirst.

above the freeway, above the tamped soil, concrete laid bare  
inside whispers escaping clenched, chipped teeth.

I walked passed the crumbling, boarded up bay windows,  
passed the fecal sidewalk,  
past overdoses.

the water, blown about like dingy sheets on a clothesline,  
cracked and broke, high-pitched, on the streets like Baltimore riots.  
my shoes became heavy until I could not walk.  
the moon, weighted still,  
above the Earth like a wrecking ball.  
and the police were out too,  
crowding the sidewalks and streets like kudzu or roaches.  
guns pointed at zipped tent doors lining the crowded avenue,  
no one stirred or ever slept. ★

## [WAR ON CHRISTMAS CONTINUED]

Russian anarchist Petr Kropotkin, who was a distant descendent of St. Nicholas and apparently closely resembled him, was fascinated by St. Nicholas's legacy and frustrated by the ways it had been manipulated. Kropotkin admired Santa Claus's use of what he felt was a for-love-not-profit, craft-based factory system to make gifts, and saw in it a potential model for anarchist socioeconomic production. I personally have no desire for any future world in which factory labor or labor itself exists, but I can appreciate the gestures towards generalizing a gift-based economy that the myth of Santa might represent. Kropotkin had some better ideas about Christmas-related actions, allegedly proposing that people disguise themselves en masse as Santa Clauses, "infiltrate stores, [and] give away the toys".

Other Christmas imagery has been appropriated from indigenous traditions and used to enforce Victorian morality and police social roles. Some argue that the imagery of Santa flying through the night sky on a reindeer-drawn sleigh, for example, originates with shamanistic traditions in ancient Northern Europe in which amanita mushrooms were a sacrament and ingested via reindeer. This produced sensations of size distortion and flying, as well as a flushed ruddy glow like that of Santa. Sacred traditions used this to gain insight and transcendental experience that challenged social reality.

Today, Santa's night riding is instead used to affirm the quality of moral "goodness." It is that quality that makes children deserving of Christmas goodwill and allows people entry into Santa Claus's gift economy. It is 100% tied to obediently playing one's assigned role in society, performing the role of "good boy" or "good girl." The gift economy that it produces, moreover, restricts St. Nicholas's original gift economy to children only, in a move for reproductive futurism (i.e. the prioritization of children in the interest of reproducing capitalist class society).

Current Christmas practices, happening on stolen land here in Turtle Island, also mostly tend to consist of stolen and erased indigenous traditions, especially from what is now Europe. Even the practice itself of celebrating December 25, including the story of a miraculous birth in a manger on that day, is a combination of the birth myths of ancient cult figures Mithras and Perseus. When Christians were first attempting to aggressively impose and universalize their traditions in the Roman Empire, they found it easier to do so by setting their rituals around ones that already

existed. These also included Saturnalia, the weeklong Roman pagan period of lawlessness from December 17-25.

The winter solstice, or Yule, has been celebrated for thousands of years. Initially denounced, certain elements of Yule were then reappropriated in order to popularize Christmas — for example, evergreen trees, which represented continual life for those attempting to survive the dead of winter. Mistletoe has long been held to have potent magical properties, including in Celtic rituals around sexuality and abundance, and the Norse Vikings' use of mistletoe to create peace between enemies.

### Make Some Fuckin' Noise

New Year's Eve Anti-Prison Demo  
7pm at Arch St & 7th St  
Bring Noisemakers



Ancient Scandinavian rituals around the winter solstice involved warmth, enclosure and lights to endure the winter and keep the darkness at bay. All this has been converted into a \$655 billion industry of tinsel, plastic and florescent light shows. Thus Center City gets festively adorned with millions of dollars of ornaments as we celebrate the wondrous plastic bounty of

capitalism.

Other popular Christmas myths eerily recode some of the disturbing realities of socioeconomic production. The Christmas myth of Santa's workshop of elves, for example, misrepresents the hundreds of factories on the other side of the world that make Christmas ornaments, sometimes by using forced child labor. While there is occasionally some public outcry about these issues, this type of thing is completely inseparable from the mechanisms of global colonial capitalism and the particularly false stories of peace and joy that smooth over its ugly violence at this time of year. That is, there is no reforming the exploitative capitalist undercurrents that have made Christmas possible — only war.

While renowned liberal trashcan The New York Times alleges that "there is no evidence of an organized attack on Christmas in the United States," small attacks on symbols of Christmas and capitalism have consistently occurred in Philadelphia over the last couple years. Last year, a new yuppie bar in West Philly was tagged "Merry Christmas, Fuck You;" two years ago, the prominent Christmas market at Love Park was vandalized with graffiti of Mike Brown's name. In small ways, these actions move towards publicly exposing the ugliness under the florescent beauty of the Christmas season, and the long histories of exploitation and domination that enable its current rituals. What will happen this year still remains to be seen. ★