

Down the Maxi-prison

The hour of rebellion – Towards Insurrection – The struggle against the maxi-prison. Contributions to the struggle against the construction of a maxi-prison in Brussels. Transcriptions of some of the debates.

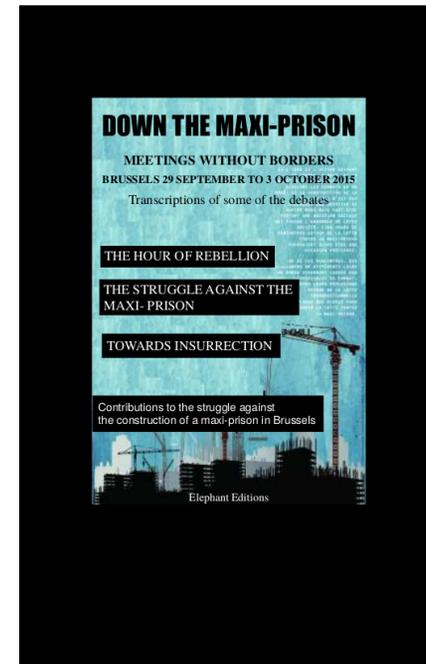
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Meetings without borders 29 September to 3 October 2015

Contributions to the struggle against the construction of a maxi-prison in Brussels. *c/o Le Passage, espace d'info et de coordination dans la lutte contre la maxi-prison.* Translation of the transcription of the meetings, which were held in French. Translated by Elephant Editions.

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2015

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The hour of rebellion

There are a thousand reasons to rebel, and not one good reason to resign oneself. Jean Weir, a comrade from Brixton (London), with years' experience in the struggle for freedom, will come to share her reflections. If power is building walls everywhere around us and the chains that restrain us are being renewed at the double, the desire for freedom and the refusal to be defeated can still ignite and put this world down. To us then to blow hard on the flames that are smouldering in this society that is becoming more and more an open prison with each day that passes.

29 September 2015 in Le Passage, *struggle venue against the maxi-prison*, in Anderlecht (Brussels).

Jean

There are a thousand reasons to rebel, and not one good reason to desist. And I believe that here, now, this is also a moment of rebellion, because I don't think that anyone has come here with good intentions. We are here because we are against. We haven't gone to the cinema, we haven't gone shopping, we are here because we want to expand our field of vision, because we want to rebel consciously.

So, I must say right away—perhaps you already thought so—that I'm an impostor. It is here that there is rebellion and I come from darkness, the heart of darkness let's say, London. Sure, there are spontaneous revolts there, but thought-out revolts carried forward with constancy and all the qualities that we see here, there are not. And so if I am here it is to encounter this revolt, to be contaminated by it, to know more comrades here than I already know, that I love and esteem.

...You shouldn't hesitate to speak... if someone throws down the gauntlet...

We must also be authors of difficult things. I didn't come here to bring something that I know I can give to this situation. I mean here, the struggle against the maxi-prison, comrades all over the world are watching this struggle and are inspired by it. There are prisons all around the world and the world itself is an open prison, but in this open prison there are free spirits like ourselves, and not only, and we are always seeking to discover how we can avoid just waiting for the next revolt to break out. And it is this search that I perceive exists

here: a continuous revolt, but projectual. Within the projectuality, there is also a project, but it can't be summed up in one single project. If I have understood correctly, this project starts above all from the desire of each individual to not accept something aberrant, a thing one doesn't want to live with and doesn't want to submit to.

And so, also having this enormous treasure of having comrades, comrades with whom one has affinity, it is possible to set about doing something and act. And believe me, it's not like that everywhere in the world, not even in countries where it is said that there are many comrades: it looks as though there is a movement, but that doesn't mean that there are the prerequisites for affinity. Affinity, not as an activist considers it... I've been a few (fortunately) times to meetings of activists where hundreds of them arrive and at some point they decide to act that day with symbolic actions and then say, 'So, now we will form affinity groups'. They choose from among each other, go into a corner of the room and decide what they will do. For them, this is an affinity group. For us—when I say 'us' I'm starting from the assumption that here we are in the presence of an insurrectionalist tension—the concept of affinity is deeper, and harder also, it's problematic. If I need to deepen my ideas and desires, and how I can seek to realise my dreams in some way and find my accomplices, those I think would want to act with me, I also have to reflect and experiment and find a method, a methodology that I can communicate to a few comrades or people with whom I think I might be able to find affinity. But if I'm not prepared to look into myself to find what I really want, I cannot share it with someone else. And I see that there is sometimes a little fear in going to the bottom of oneself. For where will it take us? How will I make it to go to work tomorrow if I really go to the depths of my desires? Because we know that we want to destroy this world. We don't want this world, but we are all accomplices. And so I think affinity should be related to projectuality, that is to say, affinity is to be found in the deepening of what I want, how I see the world, how I think it is possible to attack this world and what means I think to use and that I can find. And this also comes across through living things, living them together and attacking together. Through acting, we also see how others are, and how we are ourselves. If I understand correctly, we are here before a reality in which there is the substance of affinity in action.

We are speaking of structures that oppress us and what it is that prevents us from finding ways to attack these structures. Sometimes, as I said, it is lack of affinity, sometimes it is also the incapacity to elaborate a methodology that can be accessible to comrades who are a little involved all over the place. Not all comrades are single-minded, they say 'I like the ideas at the basis of what I'm doing with my comrades, so for me it's not complicated, why all the complications?'

[Unfortunately José had a problem that prevented him from coming. Two comrades present talked about the history of the anti-prison struggle Spain from the time of the COPEL to the struggle against the FIES. This was followed by a discussion about revolt in prison, links between inside and outside, intermediate struggles within the walls, restructuring and the ongoing transformation of the function and form of prison... This debate was not recorded at the request of the comrades present.]

Looking back over these days and struggle perspectives

October 3, 2015, in the Marolles, Brussels — Going over these five days of exchange and discussion to outline trails for prospects of struggle today, here and elsewhere.

In some parts of the world there are other influences coming into movement and then, what sometimes prevents revolt is not the police, not jail, but this.. how can I say, this rapid spreading inside the movement of things that are trying to attract, because in fact, there are many phenomena of temporary revolt. It might for example be a deadline, that is to say the calendar: such and such a day there is the Summit, so I know that that day I'll throw some stones, I'll find some people, I'll feel good. But is that a place where one can find affinity? It's true that there are some comrades who have the experience of many such deadlines, who somehow have an affinity in action, but not necessarily projectual affinity. There are comrades who get together, for example in the daily revolt or rather the struggle against squat evictions, facing bailiffs, police and all that, but in these places there is no constancy or desire to deepen, to analyse. With our means of communication, or non-communication depending on how we see these things, we can present a little spectacle for the movement from time to time but to successfully go into things, it's necessary to create something else. In a large city such as London, if one has no fixed points, we can find ourselves very alone. For nothing goes. Okay, block the street and save the squat, or at least do something in order to leave with heads held high, knowing that we fought to defend the squat. But then what do we have left if we don't have any fixed points in such very fluid situations? I see for example that here or in Italy, or Greece, there are such points in the movement. On the contrary, in England it's like this: open a squat, immediately open it to everyone, organise benefits. But when it comes to talking square, in depth, everybody runs away. They don't want that. How to reach this 'conscious revolt' without having fixed points? I don't know, I'm asking questions, we are here from different places and I don't think that the intention of these meetings is to listen, one evening to one, the next to another and then another, to do something consumable. No, I think we should problematize. These meetings must be problematic, not informative. And since tonight is the first of these meetings, I think that's what I'd like to try to do together with everyone here: to seek to achieve a problematic going into things. I know, I'm stating the obvious...

I'd like us to be able to discuss among ourselves, rather than submit to the discourse of someone who basically doesn't know what to say at this moment. Because I've also come to learn, to get to know. I haven't come with a little packet of something ready made. I'm not saying we couldn't also do that, we could, but I, at this moment, can't provide it. I'm not saying that I have nothing to say, perhaps I have indeed something to say, but I can't say it over the heads of everyone.

Billy

An additional thing to what you are saying, because you said it is not obvious to be in a place where there are comrades with whom you can move, move slowly towards something, to elaborate a project of struggle. There is another problem that comes after, which is even harder to discuss, and which for me also in this struggle remains problematic, it is that once we have that, we have this project, what to do next? It's now two years that we are agitating in the Brussels neighbourhoods against the maxi prison, full of things have happened, there is a whole identification of the enemy that has been elaborated, anyone in the neighbourhoods that wants to know who is going to build the new jail can find their names and addresses, and act accordingly. After, another question arises. Does one stay with the things one knows will work, that is to say, affinity groups, this place here [Le Passage] that works as a reference point, the publications we produce, the proposal to attack now, or is it that it has become possible to try something beyond that? Something that will really get other people involved, maybe even some strength, by force of circumstance, (that's to say, not anarchists or revolutionaries), the people who said they were prepared to fight against the maxi-prison, who even told us they are willing to do many things against this new jail. Such a moment, and let's drop all the typical fantasies about it, I think we could call an insurrectional moment. Because it bridges the gap between those who have a clear idea in mind and others who are just angry and also want to do something.

Jean

Our struggle affects all aspects of reality, but this time it is reality that has chosen for us. Any time they decide to build a maxi prison next to my house, I won't have too many problems in choosing the focus of my struggle if I have anarchist comrades to begin to undertake such a struggle, as has happened here. Is it possible to involve others? In fact, others are already involved in the discourse against the maxi-prison, because it's also for them that power is building it. But often in reality, and I've seen it in Brixton, there may be moments when there are many comrades in the streets, even attacking, breaking a few windows, but the people of the area, those who in the riots burn everything—they don't just break one window, they burn the whole shop—don't join in a political demonstration, one that they see as political. They see a similarity among the people doing something, a similarity that makes them feel excluded from or foreign to it. Obviously, an intermediate struggle (I don't know if you use this word), with an insurrectionalist approach—because basically, all struggles are intermediate struggles—is not the same. There are many ongoing struggles against prisons, but they are not conceived in this way by comrades. They see it

The other debates held at this encounter

The struggle against the type C prisons in Greece

September 30, 2015 in Saint-Gilles — The conflict on Greek soil is smouldering and has certainly experienced significant explosions in recent years, so it is hardly surprising that the Greek State has unleashed all of its repressive arsenal to try to crush the revolt. In 2014 it launched a plan to establish “Type C” isolation prisons in which to bury alive anarchists, revolutionaries and rebels. A struggle to counter this project of annihilation was launched from inside the prisons, and supported in the streets. Some comrades go back over this step in the struggle against the State.

Contribution of comrades imprisoned in Korydallos prison (Athens)

October 2, 2015 in Brussels — Two anarchist comrades, Alexandros Mitroussias and Dimitris Bourzoukos, currently held in Korydallos prison, participate by phone to assess the struggle against type C and its connection with other struggles going on elsewhere.

The revolt in the Spanish prisons

2 October 2015 Anderlecht — At the end of the 70s the Spanish prisons are shaken by waves of protest, mutinies, escapes and hostage-taking of guards. A coordination of prisoners in struggle, the COPEL, is formed and fights for a general amnesty for all prisoners. In the early 90s the struggle grows in magnitude again in response to the FIES, a new regime of solitary confinement set up by the State to break the prisoners' resistance. Around the 2000s, prisoners fight headlong against this regime of extermination.

Comrade José Delgado, who has spent more than 25 years behind bars, will talk about his personal experiences of struggle in the prison world, but not only.

old boys, I can find them anywhere. But that's not the question. I must know whether there are some boys aged 15 that are capable of doing something and have said, 'I want to do something'.

Jean

They mustn't come and tell you that they've done something...

Lucas

Of course, otherwise it would be a problem, but...

Jean

I'm very interested in this discussion because of the question of the maxi prison here but also because there are realities elsewhere where we really need to succeed in making an organisational proposition, destructive, informal, insurrectional. That's also why I'm interested in discussing these things. If there is the model, let's say, that we have more or less elaborated, of informal organization composed of affinity groups of comrades who begin to develop a project and of these base organisms. But in this hypothesis a concrete goal has always been implicit: the great day of destruction. One day these organizational forms will culminate in a destructive moment. For Comiso, it was the occupation of the base. 'One day we'll go there and we'll destroy the base.' But there are other realities where such a model is not applicable in my opinion. For example, if you have an area which could be Brixton in London where there are large, huge social housing ghettos, and where they are carrying out 'ethnic cleansing', 'social cleansing' call it what you like, a reality where more and more people are being forced out of their home to quit the children's school, their neighbours, and are being sent to towns, not the suburbs, but in the north of England... Nevertheless in my opinion this methodology is very interesting, acceptable and could be experimented, even though it is still a question of a minority within a minority within a minority...

rather as a partial struggle, a single issue, and so they are ready to make agreements with all and sundry in order to grow quantitatively. If, on the other hand this is an insurrectionalist intermediate struggle, in the end I know that even if we manage to get on the site and prevent the construction of the prison, they will build more. What interests us is the methodology and experience of the attack that we have along the way. We develop a methodology so that others can appropriate it themselves, not for them to come and join us. They can remain what they are, who they are, with their own people, they should not be assimilated with something that is totally foreign and alien to them. We are aliens for people. We must recognise that. But there could be a moment of a meeting of tensions. However, the exploited suffer a certain defeatism around the issue of prison, it's part of their lives, they go in and come out. And they already live in a prison, in the neighbourhoods where they were born, these are already prison corridors with their proportion of cameras, security guards, cops. It may be difficult even for those who are going to end up in this new prison to fight against its construction. There may be a time when that occurs, but it is not a given that they consider the struggle against the maxi prison a priority. It isn't because we offer methods that they can appropriate at this moment, here at the time of the revolt, that they are disposed to put them into practice. It isn't because for us the things to be done are clear that this is the case for another. However, something different could set something off. The cops kill a boy in the neighbourhood and the whole area rises up. At such a time, also the comrades who struggle against the maximum prison could be there. And it is in this moment that there is the possibility that proposals for the self-organization of the attack could be taken up in the riots, extending horizontally, but also qualitatively towards the maxi-prison. That is to say, rather than extend to department stores and so on, head against the maxi-prison.

Life isn't a straight line. We must therefore have other elements within the framework let's say, for it to explode. We should also say that we live in a world that is forever more atomized, individuals always speaking with their I-Phones, they are isolated and lost in a reality that we don't know, or are involved in stories that we can't even understand. To shatter it, there might be a need for another element. The question is whether we can create this element. That I don't know, I don't know if we are able to reach such a level. I know some comrades in similar moments considered it necessary to take a leap, I'm not saying forward, but elsewhere. To continue as before, but with certain other elements. And if these elements don't arrive from reality? Or maybe there is something missing in our analysis that really affects people in their bones, inside them? Because if something touches people inside, they move. It may be that what is said is considered right, but it's not enough to make them move, make them act. There needs to be something that touches them inside. Perhaps it's not prison, but the reasons for the existence of the prison? Yes, there is confinement, but

why? Why do people need to be locked up? What for? Because they mustn't steal, burgle, no, they must go to work! Or if they don't go to work, they must still remain in a life under control. And these young people spend their lives being tortured by the threat of work, not the threat of prison. I think that this is a much greater threat: it is daily, it is huge and invisible at the same time, it is an ideological coercion that offers a paradigm. We were born into a paradigm in which work exists—even if it doesn't. It's always about what must, should exist. And so we have to fight for work, even if there is no work, that's what is proposed. If we were to talk of the destruction of work at the same time as talking about the destruction of the maxi-prison? Perhaps this could give a dynamic in the discourse that could succeed in touching them. For the law is related to work. It's not only the cops that control. The law, obedience to law, the acceptance of living within the law... to also put that on the table. And go with it to the schools. I am convinced that today that revolt is carried out more and more by the very young. I have also seen with my own eyes, in my neighbourhood, that it was the very young to have taken the initiative. The initiative to block streets, burn tyres, damage vans of the riot police. They were very young. And very young people do not immediately think about prison, but they are confronted with work all the time: you must study because you get a job afterwards. Think about the things that these anarchists in the Netherlands of De Moker said nearly a century ago about the question of work. "Work is a crime". That's the real crime.

As you raised the question of how you can go ahead in this struggle, I'm outside, it's hard for me to talk about that. In the intermediate struggle, there is a goal, but in this objective, there is the totality of life. Because if I'm going to fight against something, it is because my life is there, my life is in the moment of attack against this objective. I think that the discourse on work (for its destruction, not its improvement) can be inserted into the discourse against the prison. For it is not only a question of repression. What is it that is repressed? It's life. The moment we speak of work, destroying work, we are speaking of life. Of taking life. If we fail to touch life, why rebel? One cannot only rebel against, we must also have a sense of something vital in this revolt. This thing is present in spontaneous revolts, life emerges in these moments. And in the moment of the riot, work is destroyed, even if it doesn't last. We must realize that we are all polluted by the ideology of work, we only have experience of some alternative work, but it's still a question of work.

Chiara

Work is related to the need for money. And when you speak of destroying work, that's the difficult part. How will we live, people say. In the time of the revolt, work is destroyed, we are together, we live, but after it remains difficult

If we mix the two things, I don't think it will work. Perhaps there is a contradiction, I believe, you can't apply a model, one can use a model for reasoning, and apply modalities that one can put together as desired to invent a methodology adequate to the reality in which we live. If we are talking to boys of 15, it is absurd to believe they will organize with all the boys of 15 who live in their block of flats, in their neighbourhood. But they might talk to a few to go and do what they want to do, all these things we don't need to name. So for me, the question is this: we cannot detach the organizational proposal from the destructive proposal. The constructive proposal in Comiso was to 'build up' enough people to be able to go in and destroy the base. But here I don't think that one is saying 'Ah, one day we will invade the construction site.' But that exists in other places, there are comrades, for example in Wales, who go to occupy the fields and construction sites, after, there is not an insurrectionary orientation we must say.

I get the impression that we must put the cards on the table, but may have to take them in a different selection. Perhaps. Because one must be clear of what one is proposing to people. What basically does one want to reach? That they organize, and what it means if there is no proposal of attack one day, where do we want attacks to be, outside the movement? That's the problem in my opinion.

Lucas

I think there's something more in the organisational dimension that is potentially very important, and exists in almost all metropolitan areas today, it means having the confidence to find a common language, to know where all the different elements are. Because I said earlier, 'I don't know if there are any struggle circles', but this is not quite true actually, because I know that there are some. I don't know if they will keep their word, I can't know that, no one can guarantee it. That also goes for anarchists anyway: sometimes they say yes, and they do no. So it's nothing strange. But I know who said, 'I'm always here, you know where to find me when the time comes to do something.' And another who said: 'I've got plenty of mates, we're up for that.' And the question, the problem, with organization is that it's very difficult to avoid delegation here. Because obviously people are delegating 'the final decision' in inverted commas, the decision to launch the big attack or I don't know what, to us. But that shouldn't surprise us. We chose that. We've carried out a specific struggle, we opened a place for that, we said, 'Come, we have some proposals, some suggestions to make' and at a certain point, someone said: 'I'm up for that', another said, 'I know about it, I'm ready'. And so it's up to us, people with quite a few ideas, including the thing as a whole, the entirety of the struggle, to put it all together and make a proposal that can work. If I want to go looking for 15 year

Agis

‘There is no return,’ I don’t understand what you mean by that. When we talk about organization, how we can handle the discourse, that is to say, it is based on documents, proposals that have been made, how to advance these suggestions.

Lucas

To clarify a bit: with this leaflet we tried to make things clear, to have a basic document to give and give again, always. This leaflet doesn’t just say ‘organize yourselves’. It’s just not true. It details: it speaks of ‘struggle circles’, it explains how they can constitute themselves, what their purpose is, how they can coordinate. The only thing is that, since we’re in the presence of an informal organization in this struggle, we cannot verify constantly how many of these circles of struggle exist. Just as I cannot know how many anarchist affinity groups are active today, I can’t know. I can have an idea, I can have impressions but communication is still limited, limited in the sense of where it remains with suggestions. And sometimes there is a return, sometimes there is not. If in addition, it suggests things that can be worth years of prison, no one is going to come and tell me ‘Oh yeah, I followed your suggestion, I went for it.’ That’s not possible. It’s one or the other.

Jean

It’s right what you say, because if we want to talk about coordinating, self-coordinating this is an organizational reality. We want to say ‘we have to coordinate in a certain way’, but when there is already sabotage in course, we are more in the presence of affinity groups acting rather than base organizations, I believe. Because if we are already talking about attack and destruction realised autonomously, which is already underway, today, tomorrow, after tomorrow, it could be a good method. I think, one must choose how to struggle. Because already there are things happening, that are visible, and are, say, I’ll say the word, ‘claimed’ in a sense, not personally, but *mise au jour* in the sense that these things are not hidden — even on the posters it can be read that there have already been attacks. So if we want to propose, perhaps it is more interesting to propose that people who are against the prison form affinity groups to attack, they must realize a plurality of attack. If we want to make base organisms to coordinate to attack all together — because the project of Comiso was that, we didn’t talk about going at night to sabotage, no, it was each one organizing to find their comrades, friends, family, colleagues, for one day to go into the base and destroy it. And here it is more that each organizes to attack, tomorrow or after tomorrow, and it’s very beautiful, but it is another project in my opinion.

to propose to others to give up all these things they cannot get other than with money. Yes, okay, we experiment, we chose to live our lives putting work aside. So we squat, find ways to get food, the land I don’t know... But it is difficult to propose it to everyone.

Jean

But I didn’t mean that, I didn’t say it’s necessary to expand an intermediate struggle to confront the issue of work. I said that we must insert a utopian reference, inserted in the discourse of why prison exists. That it is continuing death.

You ask the question ‘why do people not engage in this struggle, even if they have every respect for the comrades and they appreciate many things that are happening?’ Many years ago we had a similar experience with a struggle against a missile base in Sicily. Why did the people not move? ...Because the whole territory would be contaminated by soldiers and so on... But at the same time, one can’t say that it failed, because it was a question of experiencing something, putting a methodology into practice. And every comrade who participated, and grasped this methodology, has a heritage in itself... We don’t know where we will get to even in the very short term, there are changes in course in reality that are not even foreseeable. There are things that could happen from one moment to the next. The concept of time since the anarchist movement began to exist has changed. Now we are struggling and we have two things: there is the objective and there is the result. But we also have the experience, knowledge of ourselves, of other comrades, of the enemy. And an awareness of having this knowledge, that each one carries in oneself. Tomorrow we could end up alone amidst a crowd and want to take the initiative, if we continue the experience of informal struggle... We speak against technology, we speak of optic fibres, we know that this world is all repression. Prison or consumption are carried out through digital communications, fibre optics and all that. If we cut that, we are also cutting things that are ours. And it could also be the enemy that does it, as it has done at times, to prevent people communicating. If I can’t communicate with my comrades, that does not that I can’t act, provided I have a legacy inside me. If on the contrary I belong to a movement, identity-based let’s say, and when my comrades who share the same identity as me are not there, perhaps I would be totally lost. But if I’m tough enough, if I’m pretty sure of myself, I can take the initiative, even if I am alone with strangers. That’s why I insist on this methodology that seems to have failed.

I don’t know how far in this struggle against the maxi-prison a methodology has been developed for others who want to fight and destroy the maxi-prison. That is to say, to develop a methodology of concrete struggle, to form

nuclei, entities, call them what we like, self-organized and self-managed by those who create them, but capable of coordinating because they recognize each other. They can find each other, they aren't clandestine cells, they are visible entities in the sense that they have a name, which can coordinate. They might even consist of one or two individuals. Maybe students, or unemployed, or I don't know what. And also comrades, who are part of these entities. But I don't know if this is included in the discourse against the maxi-prison. Are you perhaps asking the question because elements are missing in this struggle that you would like to discuss with the comrades that are here? Or is it that it is a statement, saying that this lack comes from outside? How do you see it?

Billy

I believe that in one way or another, in a way that isn't political, this idea of nuclei exists. The sympathy that the people have towards this struggle exists, in the things that they perhaps do or don't do. In common, there is only that which we share in this struggle.

But you asked if these things exist and if they are capable of coordinating. And there lies the problem, it is the problem that we are confronted with here. The comrades will probably think that I'm too optimistic, but I'm convinced that these base groups exist and act. And without us necessarily knowing about it. They exist in many encounters, in full of little things that go on around us that are not the work of anarchists. After, when talking about coordination capability, we get to our big problem. Because you can open a place, we can distribute the newspaper to make the connection between all these things, but there is always a distance, a distance that is not easy to bridge. To bridge over time because small encounters generate little things, that can be done and it is done.

What is somewhat new today, perhaps we need to think about it—and I don't know if it can be generalized to other contexts—is how to ensure that this support, that exists, which is socially diffuse, that is to say, not just anywhere, not among activists, not in the left... so this support then, can it turn into revolt or not. And if it turns into rebellion, I think that will happen suddenly. Well, of course, something we need to think about, is what to do in this immediacy. But it is in the moment itself that the transformation becomes possible. People do not start off from a plan 'Ah, in three months I will do something.' They want to move tomorrow or the next day.

Alfredo

I have read this document. I was also talking about that because in it it talks about about self-organization, but what is self-organization? I agree with self-organization, but I am trying to understand what it means because there are many interpretations.

Agis

So I would like to know what you don't agree with that is proposed in this document.

Alfredo

For example the organization of people. They cannot be 'self-organized by themselves.'

Agis

That means you don't think that people of the neighbourhoods...

Alfredo

But that it works for the anarchists, it can't work for people.

Agis

So you find that there is not sufficient information for this type of organization that you are you thinking of?

Alfredo

Yes that's it.

Amélie

So this document speaks of 'struggle circles', circles where people know each other, live in the same neighbourhood, pupils at the same school etc., who agree on the fact that they want to prevent the construction of the maxi-prison. They discuss among themselves, they think, etc., but there is... no return, anyway... I do not know.

cians or unions, that it's autonomous, there is not an aim of representation, and that it exists only to do something, to act.

Jean

But it's that: how to act? Because if we don't say that...

Agis

Wait, because I have another suggestion to make for this discussion. That is to say, we are proposing something in the past, in the future, in the present? No, it has been proposed, this organization. I have documents available for that, I can understand them through a precise reference written in a document. I know it very well, because otherwise I would be an alien. I'd come here and I wouldn't understand anything. If we spoke of organization, if we said 'Yes, we must get organized in some way, an informal organization...'. You talked about Comiso yesterday, for example. I know the organizational documents about it. I agree that they can't be proposed today in the situation of Brussels. But I also know, since we have spoken of organization, that a document was produced proposing a certain way.

Jean

But what then?

Agis

There is an organizational document that addresses some points on how to organize and stuff. You have to read this document, otherwise we cannot understand. And if I hadn't read it, and I have also translated it into Greek, I wouldn't understand what we are talking about here.

Ilona

Ah, that's where the leaflet...

Agis

Again, you must read this document. If you don't agree with this document, it must be discussed. But we must refer to this document. [The leaflet in question is found and passed round. It's about the text 'How to fight against the construction of the maxi-prison', published as a leaflet and reprinted in the news sheet Ricochets]

Alfredo

I'll stop you for a moment, because I want to understand, what does that mean, the hour of revolt? The riot in the neighbourhood? We mustn't go round in circles.

It's a problem that, that is to say, we are facing a specific, well determined struggle: 'not in my backyard'. That is what you're saying to people. 'No prison in my garden, put it somewhere else.' I know you're anarchist and that's not what you think, but that's what people understand.

That's what people understand from what you're saying, that prison is right, but it must be built elsewhere, not in their garden.

Billy

I don't think so..

Alfredo

Ah yes, I think so. For are you really convinced that people have understood that prison is a disgrace for everyone? No I don't agree. People normally consider prison to be something that is right, and necessary. For from the moment that society exists, it is necessary for prison to exist, and for work to exist.

We can't destroy work and leave the prison, or destroy the prison and leave society. We can't destroy prisons. Because if they don't build it here, they will build it somewhere else. That's what people understand from what you are saying.

So 'the hour of revolt', does that make any sense in this situation here? For the struggle here, the objective is to destroy this new prison, not prison in general, right? This is a quiproquo. We need to try to understand that. Because from the whole discussion tonight, I haven't been able to understand if this quiproquo is clear? Do we really think that people are against prison, in general? No. They are against, rightly, the prison they are building in their garden.

For 'the revolt', what can that mean in my opinion? It is when there is something negative for me, an attack, something that damages me, and I counter-attack, I respond, even in a violent way, a just way, well-founded, but also irrational. But listen, if we're talking about a specific struggle, that's quite the opposite of rebellion. A specific struggle, it's organization, it's specification, it's having clear ideas, knowing what I am doing, knowing the means, the aims, knowing everything. And that is very different from revolt.

When a young person is killed in the street by cops and people destroy an entire neighbourhood, that is revolt. But that has nothing to do with an intermediate aim or a specific struggle.

A specific struggle is studying at the table. One sits around a table and sees what possibilities we have. What are people asking for? Ah, they are demanding 'no prison in my garden'. That's it, of course it isn't condivable by anarchists, but it's still what we have to say. 'Oh, stick this prison somewhere else, not in my back garden'. You will say that anarchists can't say that, of course we can't say that, but we must say it. Because that's what people want to hear in our world. If I go to the main square of the neighbourhood where they want to build the prison, I have to say exactly that. Not a whole bazaar that I am an anarchist and I find it necessary to abolish prisons... 'Oh', people will say, 'That's impossible that, thieves must be put in prison!'

Here we need to discuss a specific struggle: organization, ability to foresee the consequences of our action, try to find ways to do what must be done. The revolt in that is it that people must take a small step forward to get off the pavement and into the middle of the street? If this is revolt in a specific struggle, then I agree. But if it's the big day, la grande soirée, I don't agree.

There, we've invented hot water once again.

Anita

I don't agree. I think that Brussels is very very different from any village in Flanders or Wallonia. There are many people in this city who are against prison. Not for anarchist reasons, but they say jail is shit. They don't want the maxi-prison to be built somewhere else, they don't want it to be built at all. But they can't agree on what needs to be done, so perhaps they won't agree to fight, to engage in anything, they will stay resigned and whatever you like. But this theme of 'no prison down here in my place' and that we go to Haren to say 'no prison here, but, somewhere else, that's ok', such a story doesn't work in Brussels.

I think in Brussels there is the possibility of doing something with this, beyond just the aspect of the land at Haren.

Alfredo

I didn't know that Brussels was an anarchist village.

Anita

But it's not that, I didn't say that people here are all anarchists. But there is an anti-prison feeling which well and truly exists, without for that being anarchist.

to me, it's very difficult. It's like you said, it's in relation to an action, or in the action itself. I don't know if I'm being clear, but if the enemy is identified, and if the people who want to do it know how to, how to do it and do it and at some point, organization moves to something else, to something more, that is to say, organizing oneself for something bigger, then what form does this informal organization take. I think that what we have already seen, or have heard spoken about, the base nuclei, today, in the present configuration of Brussels for example, I find it hard to imagine that concretely possible. I'm not from here, but in Paris for example, I don't see how concretely, you say, to blow breathe into an organization.

Lucas

It is also there that I don't agree with a certain part of the discussion that has taken place, because the question of organization, as you said, is in the action itself, it locates itself in the struggle itself. It doesn't exist outside that. And it is realized every time something happens. Well, I think one is a little mistaken about the reality we are in if we don't see that there are already people who are organizing themselves. They organize themselves and they can also organize themselves against the maxi-prison, but in a way that is for us 'contactable', penetrable in the sense that we can have a relation, but it is not an organization of ours. And that's it, that's exactly what we want.

If we were to propose organizations by sector, I think that ignores the class composition, if we want to talk like that, how it has been destroyed. In the Brussels neighbourhoods nobody can identify with their work, that's a bygone world, people identify more with corners in a square, the snack bar they go to, the bars where they hang out and things like that.

These are the organizational possibilities, and could grow at a moment when there is a concrete proposal, at the time when the struggle wants to do something. The question then becomes 'how can we coordinate, how can we communicate between all these different corners, coins, say, that are minimal points, but which could, as happens in life itself, in social life anchored in relationships and not something external that comes from the anarchists, meet up if necessary. We can't go into the districts of Brussels to propose: 'We must attack the companies that are building the maxi-prison, let's make a group with a name and an address to do it.' People will say, 'But you are completely crazy, the only place that leads is to prison.' The people who organize to attack something, to destroy something, do it without letting me know, and so much the better. You see, there is a limit. If we really think that organization is the organization of the struggle, and moreover informal, one can only make suggestions, which are general guidelines: that it is without this and without that, without politi-

I think we are here to give a contribution that like all things that come from outside can be out of context, right?

Jean

I can't say that I'm aware of all the things, all the proposals that you've made during this struggle, but I think that, in general, in an informal logic, organization should not exist outside action. That is to say, one shouldn't speak of organization without having a specific objective of action. Otherwise it is organizing for the sake of organizing and doesn't make sense to me, and I think for many people. So what is the proposal, why organize oneself? Organize oneself, because there must be a dénouement. It's not organizing oneself to have an organization parallel to the existence of the maxi-prison. So, it is related to the objective of destroying this prison. But how, because there are already indications and affirmations in the attacks made against the collaborators, builders and all that. But what is it that is being proposed, outside the movement, let's say? There is a proposal for a mass organization, not a political organization. And a mass organization, that can be one person, it can be ten people, it is not 'mass' in the Marxist-Leninist sense. That makes you laugh, but it's a manner of speaking. It is 'mass' with a small 'm'. That means it is absolutely without politicians, absolutely without hierarchy, without leaders; it is self-organized. But this organizational proposal cannot exist without the destructive goal. If not it makes no sense to speak of organization. Otherwise it falls into a vacuum, makes no sense, it's scary. You see, I'm against the Organization. I want to do something and so I have to put together all the elements in order to do that, to destroy that thing. That's organization. The destructive message isn't just an organizational message it's a message of what form this destruction must have. The project of the maxi prison is a long term thing, how can we propose the destruction of that? To go and occupy the construction site? People are not stupid, I want to put my energy into this thing, yes I take risks... And people take risks, there are some who take risks as soon as they leave their house ... I don't think people are afraid to take risks, but they want to take risks for their own things, not for things of others. So the proposal must be something that people can grasp and take 'this, it's mine because I want to do it'. Well, I don't know, maybe there is some ambiguity in the reason for organizing. I don't know, it's a question.

Andreas

I want to talk about what was said in relation to the informal organization. If the proposal is not to end up once a week discussing what we'll do next week, suddenly, the form that this organization would take, well, it's not very clear

Sophie

It's not that people will be against all prisons as anarchists are. But they are against prison as they know it. And which, beyond such and such a prison, the prison in Belgium, they find unbearable. It's not a feeling against all prisons but it still goes beyond 'not in my backyard'.

In addition, Belgium is a small country. When they add a prison in Haren, people understand that it will concern the whole territory of Brussels and beyond.

Alfredo

Perhaps.

Billy

Okay, we might also just not understand each other over the next five days. The question is not whether people are more like this or more like that. It's that we started this struggle against the construction of the maxi-prison not because as anarchists, we are against prison. It began because for years there has been a tension in the neighbourhoods, and in the prisons, which confronts the prison world. Not because they want all rapists to be out or something like that, not at all. It's not that they don't want prisons to exist, it's not that. But they suffer prison, as Sophie said, as it is, and they are enraged by this, they are ready, they have been ready to go quite far to do something against that. What we said to ourselves is: rather than continuing to act against things that exist, let's try to bring the conflict to something that power is trying to put into act. And there, the argument isn't 'don't build this prison my garden', the argument is 'they have three billion euros to build a prison to put our children in rather than give us a school that functions properly'. That's what people are saying. The 'not in my garden' is something else, and that's not at all present here, yes, perhaps in the village next to the construction site, but not in neighbourhoods. I've never heard anyone here come out with such an argument.

Alfredo

So if I understand, an 'anarchistly correct' discourse against prison can be the basis of the discourse against the maximum prison they are building here in Brussels. Is that what you mean?

Billy

No. I don't think that the arguments that we are currently using in this struggle are specifically anarchist arguments. Obviously, we are anarchists, we don't hide it, and so that is also present. I don't think that people would do something just because they like me as an anarchist...

Alfredo

... excuse me, my question isn't theoretical, it's concrete. That's to say, the aim of the proposal that we're making to people is to get them to move. So, what makes people move? That we, in as organized and clear a way as possible, through action, tell people what they are already thinking, right? But are you sure that people are against prison in general? [But no, no...] No? So it is perhaps that they are against this new prison...

Adele

Wait, that doesn't mean this thing 'not in my garden' it's not one or the other. As Anita said, there are plenty of people who have reasons for being against the prison as they know it. It's not like 'not in my backyard', that's got nothing to do with it. It's rather 'we've been through that' or 'our brothers have been through it' or 'our mother has been through it', it's like that. That's not the same thing as 'we have a beautiful park here, we don't want them to build a prison in it'.

Sophie

The arguments that we developed during this struggle aren't 'Ah, you have to be against all prisons before you fight against the maxi-prison project'. When I said 'People are against the prison they know', it is because they have concrete examples of such and such a screw that beat someone they know, such and such a judicial process that took too long, disgusting Justice, a disgusting screw, disgusting prison conditions, all that, they have experienced it themselves or their loved ones, not just in one prison, the worst of the worst, but in several prisons. So, when you tell them they are going to build another new prison, one of the arguments that we often use for example is that they're doing it to lock even more people up, even longer. That's not really saying 'we are against prison in general'. This means 'what you know already is one step; but with this new project, they can move to another level'. This isn't a particularly anarchist argument, saying 'locking more people up for longer'. But this argument rests on a base of experience of people themselves, what they have already lived and experienced.

Amélie

Someone could develop further on this issue of informal, temporary organization, with people, with revolutionary suggestions, because I have trouble now seeing...

Alfredo

It seems to me that someone talked about this kind of organization yesterday and then all fell silent. Let's go into it. People who work have knowledge within their working relations. Bakers know other bakers. Warning, this is not a corporatist question, it is a matter of knowing. Because we have the idea that revolutionary activity is that of anarchists with a revolutionary consciousness, but that is alongside it. Let's imagine for a moment how people might think. Somebody doesn't agree with the maxi-prison and wants to do something. And nevertheless he can't become an anarchist in order to be able to do something. He can connect with his friends, his colleagues. Sometimes, it would go like this: base nuclei born from work relations, in the different sectors. Not to defend their work, but to make it possible to attack in an organized manner. Think of the possibilities that exist for example in the sector of lorry drivers. This is a sector that presents possibilities. A truck can at some point be used differently one way or another. Not just for transporting, but also to be able to pass by force. There are different work sectors, we don't know them, given that everyone here is against work, myself included. So let's think about the fact that the world is based on work, people work, they usually know each other through work. This temporary organizational possibility doesn't seek to defend the interests of a certain work category, but to attack. It is just a possibility of a strong link between people. Such a dimension is a very strong element in the struggle. And I for example, in a base nucleus of a sector, I have to realise my presence with careful attention. Without making our inspiration, our enthusiasm, our possibility to smash the world weigh too heavily. You have to go with the people, go gently, talk quietly, pay attention to words. There is a difference between attack and insurrection, between rebellion and insurrection, between insurrection and smashing up an office. Because people are careful, they want to know things, they want simple goals that are achievable, they don't just want to hear dreams. I'm talking about something that I've known, that I've done. Whether it works or doesn't work, is another question. And some comrades here might see something out of date, or how do you say, above ground, in that. That's also another question. Each one should know and learn from the revolutionary instruments and experiences that have already been realised. Otherwise we can understand nothing of the experience in course, the struggle that is in the process of being developed. And that too, it is another question.

you, etc.’ Such a thing is right but at the same time it is not very tangible. And I think it passes over the needs of many people... already ‘find your comrades in affinity’, there are many who have ideas but who don’t have mates around them, who fail to convince their circles — the need I said, to join something, to be part of something. And we must criticize all that, but I think it’s necessary. And that has been set aside in the struggle. We did not say for example to create a committee against the maxi-prison where people can come, who meet once a week and where they can feel they are part of something.

Alfredo

But what, we must talk about affinity to people? It’s not possible something like that, it doesn’t exist. People would come together based on affinity? But you must have a very acute revolutionary consciousness to do that. How can people have such a revolutionary consciousness? What are we talking about? I don’t understand the argument. Are we talking about affinity between anarchist comrades who have, I hope, a very acute revolutionary consciousness? In that case, one can select affinity groups.

But people who are in the squares, in the street, who have their needs, who work, who are exploited, who are unemployed, what affinities can they seek? The affinity of misery! The words we use must have a meaning. Otherwise I can’t understand anything. The organization that needs to be born among people should not be made by us, in their place. It must be made by them, with us. With our presence, our suggestions, not according to our model of affinity. Affinity is a problem of anarchists. Anarchists have just one, how to say, propulsive function. They have to stop there. Otherwise one takes on the same role as any shit politician as there are everywhere. I don’t think that is the role of anarchists. Insurrectional organization has nothing to do with committees and all that. We can’t say ‘get organized, do what you like, depending on your taste.’ It’s not possible. I refuse to do something like that. So, it is a question of being present in the organization that people need to give themselves. Because the project to attack the building of a maxi-jail or what other crap they are trying to build, this is something that needs to be addressed through an organization.

An informal organization, temporary, not directed by someone, but with the revolutionary suggestions of someone. And who is that ‘someone’? The anarchists. Ho, Bakunin did that work a hundred and fifty years ago, he spoke of that, he sought to make organizations like that. On the contrary, something like ‘do as you like’, it terrifies me.

Alfredo

Listen, I have experience of thirty prisons, direct experience. I’ve known hundreds and hundreds of prisoners. The worst supporters of prison, are the prisoners themselves.

Adele

All right, but we mustn’t forget that here in Belgium we are coming from a period when there have been six years of revolts in the prisons. There has been a break in the daily habit of the prison where the guards were beating as much as they liked, where a load of filthy stuff was going on and where there were many many revolts for years and years. Not all prisoners stayed in their corner, resigned. There was that experience, we can’t deny it. And this experience is also linked to areas of Brussels, Charleroi, Liege. It’s a reality. Right now, we are living a more glacial period, but there are still traces of all these experiences. When you go into the streets to talk, for sure you can find someone who’ll say ‘that’s prison’, but next you’ll find someone who says ‘I agree with you’.

Jean

But I’d like to know: do the comrades here talk to specific ‘people’ of certain categories? I mean to students for example, well, I mean, clearly determined groups of people to confront them with an *aut aut* let’s say, ‘let’s organize against the maxi-prison’ and propose to them directly that they form these minimal base organizations together with other realities. One goes out and says, ‘Now we must organize because we won’t prevent the maxi-prison if we don’t organize’. Because there are other organizations that say they are against the maxi-prison, but we know well that they are political organizations who have no real intention of preventing the construction. They only say this to assimilate and control people, to defuse tension, to scatter and, as always, to prevent a revolt.

So, in my opinion, correct me if you’ve done that, but before creating, say, this space of struggle around the maxi-prison, a space where you are attacking at all levels, with words, with papers, with actions... There in the attack there is also an organizational aspect. For we must talk to people directly: everyone is perhaps against the maxi-prison, but the parties are also against it but they will do nothing, you can’t delegate the struggle to them. No, we have to do it ourselves. And this needs to be said clearly. ‘If we don’t want the maxi-prison, we must act. And to do that, we must organize. But not to join up with political parties, trade unions or structures that already exist. We must organize exclusively to attack the maxi-prison project.’ And then we must look people in the eye and propose forming organizational entities. One can invent a name one

likes. Leagues, I don't know, leagues against the maxi-prison... But it must be clear that these are organizations dedicated to the struggle against the maxi-prison. I don't know what word to call these organizations would make sense here.

When one goes into the streets to talk, there may be one or two people who come to talk to us afterwards. They say, 'you're right'. And so we must organize. Because there are individuals who are more enterprising and have more authoritativeness. How can you say it in French? It's not 'authority', it's that they have other people's respect, an individual who has something, a person that can be trusted... There are people in neighbourhoods, in schools, everywhere, that stand out a little from the average, it is these people we need to meet effectively.

If a person approaches us and says he [or she] agrees and at this point, we don't have a methodological organizational and self-organized proposal... Not that they should come in here to talk with us, but that they talk among themselves in the neighbourhood, with their mates, 'listen, we can also try to organize' and they try this with their own creativity. Afterwards, when there are two or three of these small groups of individuals, but who are able to speak with their people — it is not us who have to go and talk to them, they will talk with them, it is they who will organize with them. And if we are present, they must understand that we don't want to control something, that we are not a political party. We need people to understand this. We need to include criticism of the reformist forces that are against the maxi-prison, in words, in our discourse. This must be part of our discourse.

It may be that we meet rebels who have experiences that we don't know about, but we can also meet people who are of the opinion that they must organize and don't know how to. And then we can make an organizational proposal. It's not that we meet people and then say 'Ciao, bye bye!' see you on the barricades. No, we have to say 'we'll meet again in a week to talk about that'.

It's therefore necessary in my opinion to dedicate a little time and attention to this problematic. And we must ask ourselves if we want to, if we can take such a step, make such an attempt. Because it is also a part of this project of struggle, it is really a fundamental part in my opinion.

Leila

When I go to meet people in the street... they aren't stupid, they understand, they are against the parties, they understand what the prison is, they know well what a maxi prison would mean today in the context of Brussels. I don't need to make long speeches, they live the system on their own skin. But I feel that the system, society, has broken them from childhood and told them: 'You are

here.' On the other hand there have also been other suggestions made to us, by people disposed to fight, to really do something. And it's with these suggestions that we need to build, or, how to say, elaborate more deeply the very naughty thing we have in our minds, very naughty in the sense that we really could try to make an insurrection against the maxi-prison. What happens after is up to the people to decide, that is out of our hands.

Alfredo

I'm wondering one thing. What does that mean, 'make an insurrection'? If you propose that to someone in the neighbourhood, he will answer, but how? 'The means that I have, who are my comrades to do that with? The anarchists? And then, me, if I'm from the neighbourhood, do I have to become anarchist to attack the maxi-prison? No I'm not prepared to become an anarchist. So I have to look for my comrades in the neighbourhood, not with these anarchists who are very dangerous, in any case the police told me that the anarchists are very dangerous.' We must therefore try to clarify the words that we say to people. Insurrection, attack, self-organization, these are words that have the limits of all words. They seem to explain a concept, but in reality, sometimes they are very difficult to understand. For me, I want to ask a general question, what does that mean, insurrection? What do you mean by 'we must make the insurrection together?' 'Organize yourselves, according to your taste, depending on your sensitivities'? I don't believe in something like that.

No, I don't think 'you can organise yourselves in some way.' I think it's possible that you see opportunities to identify the instruments of the struggle and set them aside. You don't need to be an anarchist for that. I also think you can identify the responsibilities of individuals, businesses, construction machinery and all that. So I give you an indication to organize yourselves. You with us. Among people who are thinking of doing something to fight against the maxi-prison. Some will say that I have fixation on the question of organization. But it is almost impossible to do anything without organization, without the instruments to achieve what you want to do. It would be very nice to be able to do things only with enthusiasm or faith. An old newspaper of Malatesta was called "Faith". But that isn't enough.

Amélie

So you're saying it takes organization, insurrection. I would then have to have more ideas of how that gets in place really, when you don't belong to some of the existing affinity groups, when you come from elsewhere and you say: 'Yes, the maxi prison, I want to fight against it.' Often, we say to them 'Then, find your own comrades, your affinities, and fight as it seems good to

Raymond

I think it's also necessary to emphasize what one has managed to do here in the neighbourhoods. For example, I think everyone has seen the posters, leaflets, newspapers, they have all heard at least once, if not discussed among themselves, the triple proposal of self-organization, autonomy and permanent conflictuality. We are taken seriously, I think. They know we aren't swimming in confusion, that we have very clear ideas and that they have been the same from the start. The analysis of the economic fabric, I think everyone in the neighbourhoods finds it interesting.

So we need to try to build something on that, even if we haven't reached all the objectives we set at the beginning. There are ideas that have already emerged, we have already discussed them, so it makes no sense to go into too much detail here, but generally, we must perhaps try to create moments of rupture, sabotage the relations of authority, propose the combat, etc. I think that means building on the foundation we now have in the neighbourhoods.

Lucas

If we now start talking now about "we will radicalise Haren"... You can get lost in things that are far away from our initial project. Our initial plan was to say "If you don't want this maxi-prison to be built, it won't just be having to attack the companies that can be found everywhere around you, it won't just be having to be uncontrollable or I don't know what, no, it is going to require an insurrection, because that's the only way to stop a project of power." I'm not speaking of insurrection in the way it is imagined, with Syria or I don't know what, but in the sense that it breaks the relations of resignation that are at the basis of any project, any repressive step forward. And we must continue to keep that in mind, with all the elements that we have already accumulated during this struggle, during these two and a half years. It is to try to keep going forward, let's say, in the same way, according to the same 'plan': where is there a potential for revolt?

We know it is there. It's not in Haren, it's not in the European area with its Eurocrats, no, it's here right next to us. It's here that people have told us, 'I'm ready to attack.' That's what we have been hearing for two years and now people are saying, 'Well, when is it that you want us to attack together? How are you thinking of doing it?' And we, we already know what won't work. We can't propose doing a demo together to the people, then go and attack. Nobody believes in that kind of stuff.

There are also other things that we've tried that we know about, that reality has told us, 'You anarchists, you need to think, that won't work. That's from another era, other times. That might have worked in another context, but not

shit'. And that's what I feel. They have the rage, but they don't make a certain step because all the time they have been told they are incapable.

Apart from this resignation, I also feel a permanent tension, because every day people are facing shit. Well, that's two and a half years, but I feel that that could also... come on, the fact of continuing to go into the street, spread the struggle proposal, it can turn out that, there...

Jean

I think that's part of our task. To manage to penetrate certain individuals, to try to bring out of these people the desire to try to do something to overcome this despair and depression.

And we need to be careful with that. Because it is a vital force that we communicate. Yes, it is a methodological proposal, but it is vital forces we need to try to encounter. And for all of us, our vital force has been damaged, repressed.

And if someone discovers 'yes, there are people like me' not in the ideological sense, but in the sense that they want to do something by themselves, without parties, without being controlled... I am free to make this proposition: 'Look, you're free to carry out your own struggle, you mustn't line up behind someone. Decide by yourselves and know that you're not alone.' That's what we need to succeed in saying. 'You're free to imagine how to attack the maxi-prison, but know that you are not alone. One can create, horizontally, ways to contact each other, to support each other. And to see where we can go, because it's not possible to say everything all at once. Go talk with your friends, because I think people like you could do many things, you could always, in any case.'

I know it's hard to say I know it's hard to say these things, but at worst they'll just say 'Fuck off.' One can try. But to try we must be convinced. We have to have in mind, not a specific model, but something, a methodological vision, and be convinced of that. If we are not convinced, we can't convince anyone else. That's sure.

Alfredo

I don't really agree to say to people 'you're free, it's up to you to decide how to attack'. My experience tells me the opposite: it's people that ask 'What can we do?'

If you tell people, 'You're free', they know very well that they're not free. The first thing people think, 'That's great, who are these people? They themselves don't even know what to do, they're asking me.'

I think it's dangerous to think like that. It's necessary to have a clear idea, not only theoretically, but practical, of what needs to be done. And probably

it's even better to tell people, without being concerned about seeming authoritarian, those with a complicated project that they want apply to the letter, regardless of the consequences. No, not that, but to have clear ideas of what to do, and tell people, 'We must attack and destroy this monstrosity they are building'...

Jean

... No, sorry, but I meant to say 'create in your own way, find the instruments to destroy'...

Alfredo

No, I don't really agree.

Jean

I can give an example from the past: the struggle against the missile base in Comiso (Sicily). Obviously, the reality of Sicily is different from here. There are many villages there, and in the villages it is quite common for political parties to do meetings: a politician or any other shit comes to the square and talks, blahblahblah. We noted that and organized meetings in the villages, with very modest means because we didn't have a cent. It was often Alfredo who talked. And he spoke against the base, but it was a discourse on the social effects of the base on the region, on the people. It wasn't just 'Yankees go home' or 'Down with nuclear weapons', but arguments like 'the price of houses will go up, twenty thousand American soldiers, prostitution'. We used to talk like that. And so there were all those people who listened. Perhaps in the morning they had heard a crap Communist Party politico or one from the MSI [fascist party], but now they were listening to an anarchist comrade. And we weren't there to talk about anarchy, but to speak clearly against the base and that we must attack it, we must destroy the base. And at these meetings, we had leaflets that contained a precise discourse for that moment for these people. And in all that, there was the self-organizational proposal. After the meetings, most people went home, but there were some who stayed and started talking. 'You're right! We must destroy this base!' And there were some who formed these entities, which were the starting points. We also did the same outside some schools. And a couple of days later all the students came out of school, they did a strike. They didn't come looking for us, they didn't come to say 'we are going to strike'. They went on strike and came out into the street. They had formed a league against the base by themselves. Look, the day after, someone came knocking on our door, a member of the Communist Youth Party: 'Why we don't we work together?'. Because they were scared. The Communist Party saw that all these

Harenais will move to direct action overnight, but perhaps one, maybe two, three, who knows.

Amélie

I think it's one thing to change the discourse a little while there is hope of reaching a legal solution, this discourse will necessarily be different when they start to pour the cement and people understand that "there, all that had no effect". The question I ask myself is more how is it that I want to be there knowing that many people there have relations with politicians, the Media and the cops. And some of them are clearly playing the enemy's game. How do you relate to that, what do you do with that? For going to tell them yet again that all that's no use, that's certainly something you can do, but it doesn't help us to be present in the agitation.

Ilona

I don't want to get stuck on the question of Haren, because it's not something that set our hearts on fire, neither at the start of the struggle and certainly not now after everything that's happened. Instead I'd like to come back to this question of identifying the enemy.

The construction of a prison, a maxi-prison, might look like something vast and untouchable, but we managed above all to break the silence around this project that the State didn't want to talk about (now even the Minister of Justice has had to take a position concerning the project, who has even said that also he doesn't like maxi prison but that there is still a need for it). Then, it became clear that even the construction of a maxi-jail is not something invulnerable. We saw this with the story of the architect, which was much publicized, and also with all other actions that have happened, direct actions. Yes, it became clear: there is a way to touch them in their project. You don't just have to wait and complain day after day, "Oh, dear, another prison, again this, again that...". No, there are ways to disrupt them, to attack them. And that's an important point. And for the future too it is important. Because if in five years, when there is something else, we will still remember what happened with this architect or that company there; remember, there, "Some people did this, maybe it's a good idea to do it too now." It gives us some idea about the means we have to fight against something. There aren't just demos, there aren't only petitions, no, we have weapons at our disposal. That's also why this is important: it can live in everyone's imaginary.

Christian

One thing that we could rightly say to the people in Haren, is that despite their clear desire not to see the prison built, the first stones are about to be laid. And in the face of that, we see the limitations of their action in Haren. So, put forward things that are closer to us as means of action; say “Here we act the good guys, we don’t want a maxi-prison, and yet there it is.” That, I believe, pushing things a little to use a word that’s very much in fashion, is radicalization, it’s a bit like what. “You’ve been good, and now the bricks are there. The State is taking the piss out of you. You had your democratic voice, and yet the bricks are there, the machines are there, the builders are there. So what now?”

Ajwain

A big problem is also the fact that, yes, we are agitating in the neighbourhoods and proposing a struggle against something that isn’t built yet. And that means that perhaps this is taking place a bit further on in their lives than the more immediate things, things they are struck with here and now. That can be a bit frustrating for us, because we can have all these analyses, these elements and moving in several places, have access to various stories of struggle and time to discuss things. Perhaps, or rather definitely, others don’t have access to all that or don’t care about these things. I think we can’t forget that in any case, also if this prison eventually gets built, its story will be a story of struggle, of combat and not resignation. I think that will lead to something in the future, when that prison becomes people’s immediate problem and the fact that it is associated with a struggle.

What you are saying about the Haren people, frankly, doesn’t affect here. It doesn’t affect people who might end up in this prison one day and could burn it. In my opinion, the two paths are quite separate.

Christian

It’s true that the people of Haren in their greenery and their little vegetable gardens, are obviously not in the same situation as the people in the neighbourhoods here. It’s really two worlds, but I think there was an Englishman who defined it as the syndrome of “Not in my backyard.” Anyway, it’s like that so far. They don’t want the prison, and when they see the walls starting to rise, it won’t be the same thing. And that’s what I’m getting at, it’s to say that when the walls start to appear, we will have to..., hey, one could think of levering in that direction and saying: there you’ve had your citizens’ consultation to know whether you wanted this prison or not, you expressed yourselves, and now they’re building it. Well, without any great hopes, I don’t think all the

young people had moved. And that’s not the only thing, we also went to Gela, where there is the ANIC, this horrible oil refinery, a very poor region. There the DIGOS, the political police, arrested us, and the next shift of workers refused to go into the factory until they freed us. So, there were some there who formed a league against the base. Well, at that point, it’s not that we could begin to say, ‘Now we are twenty or fifty’, no, there was a point of reference, one here, one there. With time we had accumulated so many points of reference that we had to find a place, small, about the same as here, to be able to coordinate. A place with a phone. [no cell phones in these days...] So they would come, we talked and began the preparations for the moment that had to come: to go inside the base and destroy it. Obviously people were also afraid, they weren’t people who went on demos to smash everything. But that’s the story anyway of Sicily: there had been revolts which remained in the people’s memory. The denomination of ‘leagues’ is also a reference to these past revolts.

People saw perfectly well that there was the police, the army, the soldiers... ‘...and what could we, who have no weapons to be distributed, do then?’. ‘At a such a moment, when the whole world is looking at us: we will go into the base and they can’t afford to carry out a massacre. That’s our strength: enter the base with trucks, tractors,...’

Alfredo

.. And we also had other things...

Jean

So, say it...

Alfredo

...they were small things, but good things. We had two trucks to get inside, we had the goods set aside, we had things eh!

Jean

But of course! People are not stupid...

Alfredo

... And also we are not stupid...

Jean

...but that's it, because we also wanted conspiracies of egos to come about...

I'm speaking about these things to tell what was done. There hadn't been any previous moments. We went ahead, of course someone had clearer ideas, as often happens. In any case, there were comrades who had grasped this logic and others who opposed it, because they followed a union logic. In Sicily, there is unemployment, high rents... if one is able to organize such thing, why not try to give houses to people, to give... No! Right now, it is the base that must be destroyed. That's the intermediate struggle.

It was very difficult. We had to stick to that, and that was also a problem to face: to succeed in maintaining energy, concentration on the objective we had chosen. And then there are so many stories we could tell, because it was a very particular situation. You have to imagine... there was the Communist Party that was opposed to the base, there were the pacifists who were opposed to the base, there were the Communist Youth who were against the base, then us—and besides, there were also anarchists who didn't think like us—we stood out from all the alliance against the base and we started out to accentuate the differences, the different way of conceiving the struggle. We always said in talks 'Yes, the Communist Party are against the base, but they don't go far enough. They tell us to sign petitions, they get coaches to bring a hundred thousand people to a demonstration... But a hundred thousand people today, and tomorrow there is nobody. That doesn't destroy the base, we must destroy the base.' We kept hitting the same nail, always, always.

One evening, there were two comrades and a little bit of paint and a brush. And instead of writing 'Yankees go home' and that kind of stuff, first they drew lots of beautiful encircled As and all that, but then, for example... There was a Communist who was always doing symbolic hunger strikes in front of the base, I think his name was Catalano. So they painted 'Catalano has never stopped eating' signed 'Partito Comunista'. Or, 'The mayor is cocu'[his wife deceives him], signed 'Partito Socialista' of which he was a leading figure. The next day there was a meeting of the municipal council and they decided to put up posters everywhere against 'the uncivilised that sully the walls'.

There was also the proposal to inform the whole Italian anarchist movement of this struggle that was taking place. A few days were therefore organized, days for I don't know how many comrades of Italy to come down to. Then a comrade—present here besides— went to see the mayor and told him, 'Listen, I don't know how many thousands of punks, people like that are going to arrive... if you don't want them to piss in your gardens and outside the town hall, you have to give us something'. And they gave us the football grounds. But there was grass growing up to the waist, so there were comrades who cut it all. And that's where we did the meetings. This is to say that it was a way of im-

Ilona

I think there are two more difficulties to add to the list that Athalie made. The first point is the long duration of this struggle, how to continue something in the really long term, without getting tired and wanting to do something else. Because there are other things to do as well as a specific struggle. The second point is that I have the impression that there is always so much to do with this struggle, really, every day I can imagine ten things to do for the struggle. But you have to think a little, what is most relevant at some point. Because otherwise we can also fill our days with ten thousand activities and forget to do what is really important. I find it difficult sometimes. We need to know where we want to go and inscribe what we are doing in all that, to have a mid-term, short-term to long-term perspective.

Amélie

I have something to say about the decision that was made to really go into the areas, and not to the village at Haren. At first, that was also tried there, one was present with leaflets, posters, discussions, individual relations with some people. And then, well, when you said that the campaign of power hasn't touched the people you're speaking about the neighbourhoods because there in Haren it struck them a lot I think.

And already before, they didn't need the media campaign, just the actual reading of the leaflets and understanding the consequences was enough: it soon became clear that they wanted something legal and through the media, not a struggle based on direct action. Suddenly the question arises: when the works begin, what is it going to be like to go back there, come on, I don't know, it's a choice. When you speak of long duration, there is a whole preparatory phase and talking about the thing. I think here in Anderlecht and Saint Gilles they know the story, they know how to identify Haren, they know where it is, that it will be the biggest and all that. Anyway, at some point the works will begin, so I guess that the agitation will change. Come on, in any case, the people there will want to move more openly.

So I'm questioning a little this analytical choice and the idea to move in the neighbourhoods and not go to Haren so as not to bother with all kinds of imaginable reflections and strategic choices that we don't agree with. But then, how do you go back or is it that you don't want to go back at all? Because some positions have even gone quite far, in front of the media, to really make a distinction between those occupying the land and those struggling in the neighbourhoods; it was pretty trashy and it became quite hostile terrain.

become screws, to make them see that it isn't without risk, doing this kind of job.

I believe that a place as a point of reference — I don't think we can expect people to start coming to it regularly, and that's quite understandable. But having a point of reference can be useful from one moment to the next: when something happens, when there is a leap in the struggle, then having this point of reference, it seems to me very good. Because one can say to people, here's where you can find us. And then, it's also good for us, for discussing how to go forward in the struggle. So it has a dual function, no? This is a precious place here, so as to be able to talk as we are doing now, because as we are speaking now, if three people from a neighbourhood were to come in, we'd need to change the subject, but at the same time it serves for when we need to give an address, a date at some point, "see you there."

Athalia

I didn't mean to destroy the thing at all, because for two and a half years we've been present in the street and I feel... Just for example, when I am walking around here in the area, people know who I am, they know I'm not a cop (yes, yes, that's important), we've still managed to do quite a lot. Well, I don't want to brag, but it happens that people say, "Damn, you're determined", "Frankly, well done". There are full of things to do, it's important to be here, we show that, too.

Lucas

The operation that the State has launched with the media campaign, or in any case that the contractors have mounted to try to break the struggle and present anarchists as people who come from goodness knows where and that they want to kill the architects' wives and such like; and then the raids, talk of terrorism, the cops who also raided this place in front of everyone. This operation was clearly intended "Good, if you are with these people here, if you talk to them, you will be contaminated, you're going to get a visit from the federal police." And I still think that even now, three months after these events, it didn't work. Because people wouldn't have kept taking leaflets in the street, they wouldn't put posters up in their window, they'd tell us, "But are you crazy or what, leave me alone". And they haven't done that. And this is something in favour of the struggle. Let's say this first thing they tried to do, it just hasn't worked.

posing on the political reality that had to concede spaces at a certain moment. Only afterwards, there was little understanding on the part of comrades, more than anything. For when we were talking about 'leagues against the base', they imagined crowds in the streets. They imagined thousands of people, all armed with conventional things of a peasant revolt. But they come to Comiso and what do they find? There were no streets full of people. So they were a little disappointed, or they even felt perhaps deceived. They didn't understand the basic logic employed: that one day there could be two or three people forming this league, but tomorrow when the struggle comes to its dénouement, these leagues would inflate. Each league with its people, its lorry, its stuff to take into the base. We must also say that we were sabotaged by the political forces...

Alfredo

... And anarchists...

Jean

Because we know... one day there is a poster announcing the block of one of the entrances to the base, the next day another talks about occupying the base... the people couldn't understand the difference. The Communist Party did like this: two days prior to our initiative, they programmed theirs. And so, the people went to the first appointment... So we also had the experience of political life, how it functions. Even the slogans on the walls, these touched many politicians, much more than other things did.

Things went ahead for two years and then we said, we need to give a date for the occupation of the base. And not everyone agreed, it must be said, some anarchists walked away at that point. But we couldn't spend all our lives in Comiso, right? Once there the date was set, comrades came to prepare the destructive occupation. And one night in the little house that we had been lent out there—and it was dark because there was no electricity, just a few candles—two guys entered. One had a woman's stocking over his head and a 'nerve di boue' [a whip made out of an ox sinew] in his hand, the other was wearing a balaclava that was much too big and had a small handgun. And they threatened us: 'You break our balls, fuck off out of here!'. Then a shot was fired in the direction of Alfredo. It was the village mayor who had sent a couple of thugs to threaten us.

All these things can be useful today.

It should be said that much depended on the Communist Party. For if the party didn't give the go ahead to people to go into the base, they wouldn't do it.

Alfredo

And well, the people didn't come.

Well, the village of Comiso, wasn't considered a very combative village. But near it there was a larger village, Vittoria, which has a great tradition of struggle. So all the people who were injured by the cops during the clashes on the day of the occupation, were taken in two ambulances to Vittoria, not to Comiso. Because we thought that when the people of Vittoria saw all these injured kids, with broken bones, covered in blood on the ground... We didn't take them to hospital [right away], we brought them to the square of Vittoria. But nobody moved.

Jean

That's the story of Comiso. What has remained is the strong organizational element...

Alfredo

...but also the bullshit of the anarchists remains. And from the organizational side, what is important is what was done badly and what wasn't done.

For example, a major bullshit that touches the heart of anarchists, is the question of control. If you find yourself in an insurrectional situation in which two, three or four thousand or one hundred and fifty thousand people will participate, you can't know who is going to come. If a thousand people come, there are twenty cops among them. So you must find a way to control. Or you are there with four thousand people and eighty cops, it's standard. But anarchists, no, they don't want to control who comes, no... ! We did a meeting with the comrades who had been in Comiso for two and a half years and said, 'We need to see a bit with the people who are coming. If there is a comrade from Milan, he must check if he knows all the people coming from Milan. And if there is someone he doesn't know, we must see who they are, where they come from, their name...'. And no, it wasn't possible. 'We are anarchists and we can't control.' Yet it is a method for trying to avoid—even if it still remains possible—the presence of cops among you.

And this control was not carried out. Not just not in Comiso, but also at other times. For example, when we did a struggle, come on, it was an experience, in Trento against the Pope. The same method had been proposed and was rejected again with the same argument: 'No, anarchists don't control.'

body got the message. Or somebody who comes here, goes past the Passage and says 'Oh yes, I know, it's these architects there, I've got their address.' Yes, this confirms something for me.

After this I'm left with a sensation, I can't derive from it that all the neighbourhoods have understood. It's an important part of our project, and it exists. That's not bad at all. That people consider what we have pointed to as our enemy, "Yes, that's right, that's our enemy." Well, that's not bad is it.

Iлона

Yes, once we were putting up stickers with the names of the companies that build prisons. And a guy stops us and says 'Ah, this is the first time I see who actually does this live! I know for example that Interbuild also build prisons.' And it's true what he said. It wasn't a sticker with a name that was being put up, it is another of our stickers that said that. That's important, what you said, the question of identification of the enemy. It's a big job, but it still gives results I believe.

Jean

But for example, companies that will build the prison, I see many things here. There is also a discourse that identifies the prison as work, and that too is a field of action, I mean, to have people understand that we shouldn't go to work there. That's to say, that this isn't clean work. And also that being a screw is not very...

Iлона

Yes, but the authorities haven't come out with this here. I think rather it will be workers from elsewhere who'll come to build the site.

Amélie

The question of prison guards is more valid or in the village of Haren, for the business side. Shopkeepers who are pleased because it will bring more people to their businesses. And also that the State will recruit more screws to go and work there.

Jean

I think this is also a place where one can talk clearly with leaflets and so on to the shopkeepers, and people saying that it's not okay. Prison screws as customers, that's not very nice. And also talk like this to those who want to

Amélie

I also find that there really is a desire to vary things in the offer of, you know, regular meals, musical evenings, screenings, discussions. I think this is more mixed than what was done before and it is an indication of what's needed. Because all the time discussions... On the contrary, again the last time, when there was the musical evening, seeing people come in and be super happy with the music and at the same time see the posters.

Lucas

I think there's also something a bit problematic when talking about people, people, people. After three times, it gets a bit too much for me. Because we shouldn't think that everything we have in our heads should also be in the head of all the people we're talking to.

They can't imagine that we have very, very wicked plans at the back of our heads. And that's not necessary. Maybe they can't put together all the elements that we see around us, the elements you said at first, analyses of how the city is being restructured, what the maxi-prison is inserted in and the decision to push against that. Then, methods, they get bits of it, they can't get the whole thing. The problem, for us is how do we continue to keep this vision of the whole, that in some way is our project of struggle. And we can't hope to explain this whole project of struggle to someone who says, "Yes, let's burn the maxi prison", no that's impossible. It would take years, experiences... This is not to say that people are idiots, they just have other things to do than just that.

So for me it's impossible to make an evaluation of Le Passage, because we can't separate it from all the other aspects of the struggle. Because otherwise it would lose its meaning. That's to say, The Passage isn't a place to bring as many people as possible to, it was never seen like that. It's seen as a point of reference in a struggle where all kinds of methods are employed, which are proposed publicly and not so publicly.

So I think if we want to talk about a critical assessment of this struggle, we need to try to bear in mind all the different elements and not separate them from each other by saying "this worked," "that didn't work." Everything we try to undertake has implications that we can't, don't have, the means to analyse. We can only have some impressions, which can confirm some things, but beyond that, it starts to get difficult.

When we take up the point that was made at the beginning again, when Raymond explained that prison, it's not just four walls, there are the companies that are building it and all that, how can we know whether this has been understood by people? The only thing is that I can look at newspapers, I'll see if something was broken, bombed or burned, I don't know, so, apparently some-

Billy

To get back to Brussels: if you were to do a thing like 'come this day, to go and destroy the base', everybody would take the piss out of us. Because people are not martyrs, they know that the police will be there and that they will possibly shoot them. Anyway today, and with the social situation that has changed dramatically, such a proposal doesn't seem applicable any more to me. Not here, and I think not anywhere else.

That doesn't preclude the need to think about how to organize such a moment of rupture.

Alfredo

Yes, it was invented because it really broke our balls. Otherwise the situation there could have lasted twenty years, thirty years, something eternal.

Billy

I don't think we should underestimate people's ability. They react to things that maybe we don't react to. For us, in general, there is a long journey of meetings and going into things before passing to something else with a comrade. But for most people today that's not the case. They may be prepared to do something when the thing is already there. If they see that the street is on fire, they might also be ready to throw a molotov. If the street is not on fire, you can say ten thousand times 'We must set the street on fire' and nothing will happen. Because these are words, indeed not without parallel with the system that says 'consume, consume, consume' and then us 'rebel, rebel, rebel'.

Bassem

I think sometimes you have to make an analysis of the situation to see how we can work for the best, how we can react. Because the argument you said about work, that we must speak against work, I totally agree in theory. But reality is something else. But reality is quite different. The waves of refugees who have just arrived on European soil are the cheapest labour for capitalism. And it will use them to this end. We can already see how many of these people are directly integrated into the workplace. But sometimes your conscience, it acts, because you're going to contact who? It's not that you're going to contact anarchists, no, you're dealing with simple people, people who follow the system through the TV. So normally, you need arguments and to create links so that they can follow you in your project. If you come down into the street to talk to people and you think that the next day they will react... no. When you have an objective, such as the comrades here who struggle against the maxi-prison,

this is the link to go and talk to people, to say that we need to talk about it, and why not, organize the struggle in the neighbourhoods. And there the basis for achieving awareness is found, to arrive at people reacting. This is the opposite of saying that we leave people free and they will react just like that.

For reality shows us clearly that people do not react, sometimes they react to media coverage like yesterday, for example, when there were three thousand people at the demonstration here because the theme of refugees was in the media. The people went out and followed.

If we want to take the initiative to touch, as you say, people with our anarchist ideas, we need, how to say, to facilitate the discussion a little. Because we can see that people who are excluded from everything, who know only work, home, TV... a connection with them can be created through issues, needs. For example, there are many movements today that rebel, if we use this word, we can agree or disagree with these movements, but you must be inside, you have to be there. We must be there with our position, with our ideas. As long as we are always away from these movements, far away from the neighbourhoods, we stay among ourselves, we talk, we say we will reach our goal, rebellion, revolution, but we'll never get there like that.

What we need today are other forms of communication, space, creation. Creating spaces, links with people, or directly in the street. And this can be through actions, activities, graffiti as said Jean said. And inside that we can arrive at coordination.

But that poses a problem. There are organizations everywhere today, but each one is fighting for an objective, as for example Le Passage that is a place of struggle against the maxi-prison, but there is not just this place that struggles against the maxi-prison. There are other groups, other initiatives. How are we going to reach a coordination between all of this? It is not easy.

Jean

I believe that the attempt to do something like that, if we are seeking to develop an organizational proposal, obviously isn't likely to succeed. But the things that we do, are also to sharpen our instruments, not only for use right away, that's to say, to invent instruments. And then there's a possibility: the comrades have the experience of being against the maxi-prison themselves and taking pleasure in struggling against it with net clear ideas. At the same time, without thinking of necessarily reaching the goal, one can take a step further, or rather horizontally, to initiate a more detailed organizational discourse. For the experience it can give to comrades who struggle. After that it can become a model of intervention that one can propose or experiment in another reality.

I'll take a small step back. I think there are many phenomena that happen in life, against the enemy, that seem spontaneous. There is something going

Amélie

Is it also possible to talk a bit, well, to take stock of the first two years of this struggle? To see just what went well, what went not so well, what are the prospects?

Ilona

But the idea of this discussion was to discuss the points that were raised at the start.

Farid

Yes, true, but also others. In fact, I think the idea of this discussion was not so much to explain what has happened in two years. There are stories, traces of that, translated into several languages. If people have come here they've already read a little bit about what's happening here. After that, it's more to try to think about our potential, the limits that exist, and there are a few things that have been singled out, but it would be good if other things were put on the table.

Amélie

But it's true that in the literature there are rarely any conclusions. There are stories of what is happening, but there's no real overview. For example this place here. At a certain moment it was a choice to open a place to have a point of reference. It was seen like that. For example, I'm interested to know if you feel that it really works as a point of reference, what it brings. In any case, I have the impression that it's still well known in the neighbourhood, it's well identified. I think on that point, it's already successful. It gives a face, something tangible, that we didn't have before.

Athalie

When there was the idea, the desire to open this place, it was precisely for that purpose. Because we go into the street, but without a place like this, people don't really know where to find us. I don't really want to take stock of this place, but it has also allowed people, perhaps not necessarily in the neighbourhood, to come along. There are people here now that I'd never seen before. But the locals don't necessarily come, because they are doing other stuff, then, as you say, it does have an impact as well. People know what Le Passage is.

1991, Molenbeek in 1995, Anderlecht in 1997, and more recently, the Marolles in 2006, Molenbeek and Anderlecht in 2009, Saint-Gilles in 2010 and Matongé in 2011. So, all of these elements suggest to us that the poor neighbourhoods in Brussels are a potential terrain to trigger and spread hostilities against the maxi-prison.

Athalie

Well, I don't feel like talking for hours at level of method, I think that the method, the bases of this method of what we're trying to do are fairly clear, they are self-organization and direct action. Now I'd rather try to go a bit further in the discussion and talk about the challenges or questions we are confronted with in this struggle. For example, a question that I face is the communitarian barrier. I think it's something that we certainly shouldn't deny. I feel support in the streets, but I think that this barrier still exists. Then, I don't want to destroy things and say that there is no way to go forward and act in spite of that, but I'd like to discuss this and ways to confront it.

Also, something else I ask myself is, here, in Brussels there is constant tension, but some resignation clearly also exists. So I'd like to discuss how to break it, this resignation. And then another thing I wanted to discuss is that here, some people have chosen to express their ideas openly and publicly without hiding their faces, the idea of opening a place like Le Passage where ideas have spread is a clear example. But not everyone makes that choice. I want to put this question on the table, because we shouldn't deny it, and I'd just like to go further into the discussion.

Ilona

True, I think that there are many barriers in the lives of a lot of people, including anarchists, of why one doesn't act. There are also barriers between us and in some populations as you say, the community barrier exists. And we must also remember that the cops put pressure on people. Already there is the bar that always puts our posters and newspapers up and the cops went there saying "You're going to have problems if you keep putting that stuff up". We know that happens. When we organize a gathering they militarise half the area to impress on everyone "don't go near these people because you're going to have problems." So we are a little in this climate here. Later, things could change at some point. We can just keep on trying, without being full of illusions, but try to break the barriers that exist.

on, and there is an eruption for a while in the streets, a battle, there are the cops, there are comrades, there are neighbours. In a wider dimension, when in Greece Alexis [Grigoropolis], the comrade of 15 years, was killed by a cop in an anarchist area, there was an immediate revolt of the anarchists. That's normal, it's as if your young brother has been murdered inside your house. And the following Monday, all the schools were on strike. The young people attacked police stations and so on. But in the years before there had been anarchist comrades who always carried out attacks. I mean that in the actions carried out at some point, yes, they're spontaneous, but a contribution might also have been made earlier. And that doesn't just exist in Greece, where it is quite extensive. What I would like to manage to say... We have always said that small actions, small attacks, even made by one or two comrades, are very valuable. And this goes beyond being part of a specific struggle: we can attack all the time, because we are under attack all the time. And these actions are realised by affinity groups, and they might have a certain opening, but they are also a proposal, a theoretical proposition, that we can attack and we don't need to be a hundred thousand.

And so, in my opinion, there is also a need to create a self-organizational proposal in the attacks that we realise. Even if it is not directly put into practice by others. Because what is happening at times of struggle with a strong component of political forces? Almost always the same scenario is repeated: the search for quantity, alliances, the popular front. But if we have practised, even just at the level of a proposal, even if it doesn't go right to the end, this other way of proposing organization, self-organization, which is a qualitative question, not quantitative... that is what is very important to understand, the difference between quantitative and qualitative. Quality is without measure, one doesn't count oneself, it's the possibility that it can become something other. If we always let ourselves be hindered by the quantitative, and of that there are many examples from the past and struggles in course. In such struggles based on the quantitative, the anarchists also go there and lose themselves as anarchists. We must have the courage to be alone.

In presenting the debate tonight on revolt, somewhere we are often very alone. But we must never give in and go towards the quantitative. Even if we are alone, we have that flame that we must always keep alive in the attack. And the attack, is not only fire, it can also be leaflets, it depends on the project behind it. Attack is acting without mediation.

I think the discourse we need to make, because in many situations the quantitative dominates spirits, is that we start off from quality. We should then expect to be alone, to find ourselves isolated, we launch messages in bottles. This is our wealth, we have nothing else. It is the experience of what is lived, and I believe that at this time you are living something wonderful against the maxi-prison, no? Without going into the details, but I think there are moments that

some will carry with them throughout their life. So one mustn't let oneself get demoralized.

And we are going towards the unknown in Europe. Up until now, we have always been on the happy island, everyone wants to come to Europe, but tomorrow, because things are developing by leaps and bounds now, there may be a jump and we will find ourselves clueless in situations without the usual points of reference. If at that moment we don't have a minimum of methodological baggage, how then will we be able to move? Even alone or in small groups, with thousands of people around us that we don't know? If we go back to the question of Greece, I'd like to tell you an anecdote. A comrade told me very lucidly how he thought of going to a demonstration following the assassination of Alexis. And there, you can find yourself in a demonstration with four thousand anarchists. So that day, the comrade thought he was going to a demo of anarchists. He almost didn't go because Monday there wouldn't be anyone there, and so on. He came out of the metro and found himself in a crowd. He knew no one. He himself felt afraid. He said, 'We anarchists have set off this revolt, but how will we survive what might happen in such rebellion?' It was the first time he had ever lived such a moment. It was the revolt of the people, not the revolt of the anarchists. Of the anarchists, he met only two or three in that crowd there.

I think that after a few weeks, this revolt began to be repressed or to dissolve. But why do we want to apply this methodology? Because we want revolts to spread, intensify. So if you already have a methodology to propose... to people who are already in struggle—it isn't the same as making a proposal to the people who are going to work, to school and go home afterwards. If we managed to build this methodology, we would have an important weapon for intervening in reality. And in that optic there, the specific struggle is basically an experiment. Obviously, if we manage to touch the thing, the objective, and after everyone decides to continue to fight on other things, all the better, even better.

It is also a dream all that. But how many anarchists throughout history have been deluded by building popular fronts and that kind of stuff? Whether against an American base in Italy or against a high speed train, or against fascists? We must find a way other than 'dangerous liaisons'.

Because we lack self-awareness, that's also the problem. That's also the problem. Like everyone else, we also have a way of waiting at times. But we need to take the initiative, and each one of us must make ourselves capable of taking the initiative. We don't always have comrades with us to do it in place of us. And this ability comes from experience. A word at the right moment can change everything. Obviously, not just the word, but the tension that is behind the word, can change something, it can turn a moment around. I am speaking from an experience. Imagine that you are in the middle of a hammering by the forces of repression, someone says 'Let's go and come back another time when

Raymond

This struggle against the maxi-prison is based on some analyses. B. has spoken of the analysis of the power offensive in Brussels, me I'm going to talk about three points of analysis that I consider to be very important. The first point is that when we look at the functioning of the prison we see that a jail under construction is a lot more than just a building site. An existing jail is far more than four walls and barbed wire. The modern prison takes root within a web of companies, building constructors, architectural firms, providers of services, financing agencies. All of these companies have offices, building sites, vehicles, machinery. These things are all around us in Brussels, in the neighbourhoods, and are often close at hand. So attacks on these things and against those responsible can take very different forms: alone or in a large group, by day or night, but each time it will be an attack on what is bringing about the prison.

The second point of analysis is of what allows power to impose its maxi prison project on the population. I think that generally all projects of power are based on our consent, either because we are in favour of them, or because we are resigned. Here it is the neighbourhoods who will suffer the consequences of this new prison most, as they are the ones who will fill it up. And as not many people actually support the construction of the new prison, this project will be built on the resignation of the neighbourhoods, the decision to not oppose it. And the State will manufacture this resignation, maintain it with a stifling repression by cops, cameras, peacekeepers; with a strengthening of control in public transport, in social poverty benefits; with the crushing routine of work; with the compensation offered for houses, youth education projects and all that shit; with administered oblivion concerning all the revolts, all the disputes that have upturned Brussels in recent years. And so came the idea of making the neighbourhoods uncontrollable for power, that's to say, to act on all the points where order is seeking to impose itself and create an atmosphere conducive to revolt. One last important point of analysis concerns the availability of the poor neighbourhoods in Brussels to fight against the project of the maxi-prison. And here we see that the question of the prison is very much present in neighbourhoods.

B struck a point too, there are many people who go in and out of prison from a young age. All the people in the neighbourhoods know someone who's been inside, it is a constant topic of discussion. We also note that in the neighbourhoods there is a permanent struggle against the daily attacks of the State and this struggle mostly takes the form of individual refusal, small insubordinations, anonymous vengeance. It is rare for the detonation to reach our ears, but actually, I think we can consider that the conflictuality is permanent. Finally, some areas experienced very big riots not so long ago, I'm thinking of Forest in

also affected by prison in their daily lives who have friends in jail, family members in jail and have also expressed rage against the jails.

Well, so I think this is a first point, because this struggle wasn't dreamt up just like that because a prison is going to be built, but also because there was a response in neighbourhoods. Also, this prison isn't separate from other State projects. It's not just that they're going to build a prison and the rest of the city will remain the same. Brussels is a somewhat special capital where there is quite strong antagonism between the bourgeois neighbourhoods, the European district, zones which are already more or less pacified or completely pacified, on the one hand and other neighbourhoods where not long ago there were a lot of riots, where there is clear hatred of the cop, a hatred of order or in any case an aversion towards all that is done by the State and where people also depend on illegal practices for survival and so on. So, I think that in Brussels, one of the issues is the pacification or management of this antagonism. To carry this out there is obviously the maxi-prison, but there are also other things being set up by power.

First there are kinds of urban and real estate projects to change the areas where the riots broke out (I think Bethlehem square is a good example). There are the shopping malls that they want to build, and façade renovation, so they give subsidies to make the living areas look nicer, nicer for them of course, well-ordered and clean. All this is also moving in the direction of gentrification, to bring wealthier people into the poor districts and throw out that part of the population they don't like. This is going hand in hand with an intensified cop presence, more and more cops, many real cops complete with gun, cap, bullet-proof vest, and cops of all colours, red, purple, cops of the STIB, neighbourhood agents involved in crime prevention. And this is also going hand in hand with an increase in the number of cameras in the streets. So it is clear that control is being established that is turning the city of Brussels into something aseptic that one could call a prison-city in the same way as the maxi prison. Then there is the need to manage all the people who have become economically useless, all the people thrown into unemployment, passing into illegality to survive. And well, the management of these people, to avoid riots, chaos breaking out again comes about, as I said before, either by throwing them out of the city, sending them to Charleroi or to other less connected places, or integrating them into citizen initiatives taken up by the city hall, associations, and obviously there is jail for those who don't want to listen to anything and that's where the maxi prison comes in.

So we can see that the maxi-prison is like the icing on the cake of the transformation of Brussels into a kind of huge open-air prison. In that sense, the struggle against the maxi-prison is also a struggle against everything that is happening in and around Brussels.

they're not expecting us'. And if someone replies, 'Yes, yes, I agree. See you at eight o'clock tonight.' And that actually happened during a demonstration against a very significant military base, a base that controls all the Middle East. And at a certain point, there was the British army in front of the base and comrades, and also some people of the area, started to throw a few stones. But what are you doing, there were also army tanks, and them, these are not cops, they are murderers that only know how to kill: soldiers. And so, someone said 'Wait a moment, for these are robots in front of us. But we are not robots. We have a brain, a heart and ideas, no? Why don't we split and come back another time?' – 'I agree! See you tonight at eight o'clock!' And in the evening a whole convoy of 4 x 4s arrived. They had made an appointment next to a gas station. They filled [boxes of empty beer] bottles and stuck them in the car of who had proposed to meet again in the evening! There was not even any discussion possible. And then there was a night of rebellion.

Of course, it was a fluke. But if we hadn't spoken out in advance, we wouldn't have been able to act.

When you have a little experience of struggle, when you have projectuality... Is it at times when things are not perfect that we are not available? No, I think we must be present in the things that are in the process of happening, I mean, in things that are not completely lost in an anarchist sense, there's almost nothing there—even if there are anarchist comrades involved. And if we have experiences like this one here, we have something to take into these moments.

So to the question that was raised, 'what we must do here in this struggle?', for me, if you have the strength and inventiveness, it is to make this discourse about coordinated self-organised entities against the maxi-prison. It could be very interesting. Also for those making the discourse. For we must work it out and it's not easy.

Sophie

The proposal you make to coordinate things, you must already have an understanding of what is happening, where it is coming from. And that's not always the case. Things are happening and you don't know where it's coming from. There is antagonism, but it doesn't take all the forms as when students take to the streets. This is another kind of antagonism. So, of course we are proposing a space where this coordination could come about, but it's not yet happened that there has been the need to create a coordination, because I have the impression that things are done more anonymously, diffuse, rather than by an organization with these entities that are visible in themselves.

Adèle

I find the proposal of self-organization is always present in this struggle all the same. Perhaps there is something in what you say that I don't quite understand, but I feel that this is what we are proposing all the time.

Jean

But with a specific proposal of how to organize oneself, in what way, and by being in this self-organization?

If we talk about this proposal for self-organization and coordination, it is a specific proposal, with a limit in time too.

Adèle

The proposal is to complicate the construction of the maxi prison, self-organizing with the people around you.

Alfredo

If I have understood correctly, you have proposed a self-organization of people, among themselves, whatever form they develop, alone. Is that the proposal that you have been making for two years?

Adèle

That everyone who is against the project puts a spoke in the wheels of this project, looking for some friends to move with.

Leila

And clarifying that self-organization is to organize without parties, without politicians and all that.

Alexandre

And using the means of direct action. We accentuate that. Direct action, so bypassing the institutions, without appealing to them...

Alfredo

That's understandable, but shouldn't a way to self-organize be suggested?

The struggle against the maxi-prison

To prevent the construction of the biggest prison in Belgian history in Brussels, is to fight against power wanting to turn the whole city into a huge open-air prison. Yes, inside or out, no one can be free in the shadow of a prison, it is by self-organized struggle and direct action that we need to confront this monster State project.

Comrades active in this struggle will trace a picture of it, raise issues to be faced and invite reflection on the challenges that the struggle presents.

30 September 2015 at Le Passage, place of struggle against the maxi-prison at Anderlecht (Bruxelles)

Raymond

All three of us will introduce the discussion. We'll try to keep it short, because many of the people here are directly involved in this struggle. We thought of pointing out the challenges that are facing us in this struggle, focusing on the discussion that will follow. We will talk a little about the roots of the struggle against the maxi-prison, the analyses that led us to carry it out and the methodology, without any chronology.

Farid

So, if the decision was made to fight against the construction of this particular prison, it is not just because it is clearly a huge repressive structure and an instrument of State control, but also because there is much that is quite favourable to a struggle against the prison here in Brussels. Already between 2006 and 2011, many mutinies, escapes and riots in the prisons took place. Parallel to and in conjunction with these movements, there were also movements of solidarity and struggle outside. An account of this period exists, Brick by Brick. Not only anarchists were involved in this solidarity movement, but also people directly affected by prison. And then there have also been many encounters while leafleting and in discussions with people in the neighbourhoods, people

Not a local, but generalised insurrection. Why not dream of a development like that? Why in this small town of Sicily could another struggle not have developed, then in another town, then in Italy, Europe and the whole world? A generalised insurrection, why not? Well, anarchists are the only people in the world who can dream an enormity like that, fit for the madhouse.

Towards insurrection, if that has any meaning for me it is this: start off from a specific struggle, after which we don't know what can happen. Usually we go to jail, usually. But you can't say 'no, a development like that is impossible', why not?

Billy

On the one hand, I think proposing something like committees and all that would be seen as a politician's trick and rightly rejected. On the other, I think the organizational proposal materializes in the disseminating in the territory of the proposal of how to fight. This proposition has been clear from the outset: first, attack the companies and all the institutions involved in the construction of the maxi-prison, because it's not just four walls; and secondly, it is from the neighbourhoods that it is necessary to organise oneself, this is where part of the battle begins. These two aspects, when appropriated and accepted by people, they will defend in their own words, they don't have any more need of the anarchists. They will say what they have understood of our discourse among themselves, that is to say, their people, their friends, their colleagues. And I can't have immediate access to this dimension, I don't even want it. It's enough a contact here, a contact there, another over there. And if these people, these contacts get together and find the space to talk among themselves, we can foresee the creation of a coordination like you were talking about. And I think it could happen here. But you have to imagine how, so that it makes sense. For it is not that we should propose to people to go putting up posters. Why should they put up posters? They talk with their neighbours, relatives, mates, it's only people like us that put up posters.

Alfredo

When we talk about self-organization, it means autonomy from the political forces that are perhaps also against the maxi-prison in some way. That's one side of self organization, but there is another side. And this is the aspect of maintaining constant relations, to know each other, to have constant reference points, recognized, visible points.

Obviously I agree with the rejection of the idea of generalized committees, this is normal. But this is only a first step, this refusal, the second is that self-organization cannot be on one side that of the people, and on the other that of the anarchists. Because people do not want to become anarchists to fight against the maxi-prison, people are not in the least interested in anarchy, but they may be very interested in fighting against the maxi-prison.

So if we are faced with two organizations, that of the people and that of the anarchists, this is dispersive in my opinion. The problem that one had to face in the past is already the question of the organisation of the anarchists, the problem of specific organizations of struggle related to a specific project, to an intermediate struggle, not an eternal organization but a specific organization that gives itself the aim of destroying the struggle objective. And that is for the anarchists, then there are the people, and they are not anarchists, they are not

even interested, we can't talk about anarchism to people in order to destroy the maxi-prison.

Billy

I think even the bakers who put our posters 'Destroy the maxi prison' in their shop window in some places also become points of reference. For they are the bakers of the neighbourhood, everybody goes there to get their bread, and when people ask them 'Why did you put a poster like that up?' he'll answer them. He won't answer 'Ah, I put it up because a nice girl brought it to me.' No, he will explain why he is against the maxi-prison. When I spoke before of a social support that exists, that's real, it also makes reference to, among others, to that kind of thing, far more real than any programmatic discourse on paper. And in any case, it's today, here, with this kind of stuff we have to do the struggle.

Jean

But let's say this liking, this sympathy that people might have for us, isn't propulsive. It can, on the contrary, even be negative. They say, 'Ah, good boys, we admire them, we encourage them.' and that's all. But our proposal needs to be propulsive: to seek to create, not an ultimatum, but an invitation to accept or refuse. That is to say, 'You're a baker, organize with other bakers, and form a base nucleus', come on, let's drop this word, let's call it what we like, 'bakers against the maxi-prison'. And to the schoolkids, 'Organize yourselves, and we'll see you in a week'. Because we need to give deadlines. That's the proposal we are making, it's tangible that it seeks to activate people, that they become aware of themselves. And becoming aware isn't B following A. It must be an appropriation by individuals who address their pride. Because one also touches people's pride. We shouldn't always talk as if we are the good guys and others are the bad guys. We must also say: 'What are we, cowards? We are cowards if we allow them to do that.' We always make rational discourses, descriptions of what the maxi prison is and all that, without penetrating people. 'But what are you? You're not going to move? So don't come crying if they stick you in jail.' We mustn't always talk so as to have good relations with people, we can also risk having bad relations with people at a given moment. I don't mean we have to be arrogant, but we have to try to say 'come on guys, we have to move, we're the ones who have to do it, if it's not us who move, they will build their prison. So, don't come crying to us because we will be already elsewhere, or perhaps even in jail!'

No, that's not enough. I'm not interested in the comrade who does things like that and after is happy about it, arrives in prison, turns over in bed and falls sleep because he has done his job. No. In any case, in such a situation the job has yet to begin. I am interested in who thinks, seeks to use their ability to understand, uses their head. So they must have experience, which is acquired over time, obviously, but also in the streets, experience and a revolutionary culture. I have terrible experience of a lot of comrades saying to me, 'I don't give a shit about books, I'm not interested in books, all that reading is not for me, I'm only interested in action.'

I don't agree. You can't act if you haven't understood beforehand and to understand you have to make an effort. You must read books, you have to study, but, careful, the book you are studying can become an excuse for sleeping, for always staying with books in one's hands. But at a certain point you have to close the books and say 'Enough books!'. 'Enough books' doesn't mean 'no books'. Then the project. The revolutionary project is born through culture, knowledge, experience, ability, also the heart, also saying at some point, 'right, enough'. All of that is a whole, not easy to understand, not easy to cut into pieces and tell oneself, 'Well I did this little thing, my little bit, I'm pleased, I don't want to do anything else', no. The anarchist is a complete man, is a complete woman, cannot be defined in little pieces. For example I've had the experience of many comrades who can read and write and know anarchist history and all that, but don't know how to drive a car. But what does the question of knowing how to drive a car or a motorbike have to do with what I'm talking about. Listen, I think it does have something to do with it. And if anyone in this room doesn't know how to drive a car, it would be well for them to learn. It's the same thing as the military map we were talking about before.

Well, I think I haven't spoken about insurrection, as always, that always happens to me, but I'll try to end this long chatter. Let's say the effort we have to make, in my opinion, especially here in the struggle that you are in the act of developing, bringing about, is to give a direct contribution, but not heavy, not with the anarchist flag, to the construction of groups that you yourselves have called if I remember well, struggle circles, which, if left to themselves, cannot move to an attack against your objective — it is a proposal in the discussion.

For example, we stayed two and a half years in a town in Sicily to fight against the US military base, in Comiso, and we developed a struggle during these years. I hadn't understood in this struggle, what could develop during this struggle. I stayed there two and a half years, trying to build affinity groups, base nuclei, we attacked the base, we took our share of blows, we went to hospital, each did their part, but I didn't understand something that she [indicating a comrade present in the room] understood: that our project contained the possibility of an insurrection.

obviously based on attack, on self-organization? Also that is not easy. Because our discourse, we talk to people, our discourse convinces people, people understand the disruption of such a project of power arriving in a neighbourhood, that can destroy neighbourhoods, that can transform the lives of one hundred thousand people, and so they dream of doing something. Each one of these two hundred thousand people has a mind. A mind, that's an entire organization.

Each has their own idea. Each one wants to do something different from the other. That's normal, man is made like that, we must marvel at this thing, even we who are in this room, what are we talking about? About something that is different in the head of each one, we see it in a different way, and it's good that this be so. How can it be achieved then that people can organize themselves in an anarchist way without becoming anarchists, without entering anarchist groups, without people even realizing they are accepting the anarchist concept? Because if I approach someone and say 'listen, we have to attack, that's an anarchist concept', the guy answers 'I'm not interested, I agree with you about the attack, but I'm not interested in knowing whether attack is an anarchist concept or not.' If I speak to someone about an attack based on conflictuality, on permanent conflictuality, I have to tell him everything about permanent conflictuality, I have to tell him that there are no deadlines, there are no moments when we can be pleased with what has been done and the struggle is over. There is a struggle that continues in time, without stopping.

'Permanent conflictuality, that's an anarchist concept' and the guy says to me, 'What does that mean, that means nothing to me that it's an anarchist concept, I like the idea, I want to do it.' What we are talking about here is not idle chatter, it's something important because we are arriving at a concept of an organization of people in an anarchist way without people realizing that they are in the process of organizing in an anarchist way. Because if we were building a political party, that is to say, if we are going to talk to people, to be understood we would need to use a symbolic language, use very striking leaflets, symbols; or else you have to use ideas. In the first case, we are building a party, it doesn't matter if it is big or small, or is called anarchist or something else, it's still a party. In the second case, we are building a spontaneous organization.

Spontaneous, even with our interpretation, our presence, it is spontaneous, because we are trying to have anarchist ideas accepted by people without putting the stamp on it that this is something anarchist. This isn't something new that we are facing here. Bakunin used it 150 years ago. We must understand that we are not politicians, we don't talk a political language but at the same time, we are not just people walking heart in hand, no, we are people who also think. Enthusiasm is not enough, it is not enough to have all our availability and put ourselves in the forefront to confront all the risks, confront the cops, have fights.

We have to have the... it's not even courage, we must have respect for people to dare to look them in the eyes and say certain things. It is also proof of confidence.

Alfredo

For me it's not a matter of saying but doing.

It is a different model that one envisages, an organizational model in a specific struggle. It is self-organization, whatever form one gives it, regardless of the words used to designate it, but with precise characteristics: outside parties, outside the unions. But we should anyway have an organizational idea of self-organization, we cannot just leave it to spontaneity.

I am frightened by spontaneity. I always say be careful in the face of spontaneity. Anything can come out of spontaneity, today white, tomorrow black.

Jean

That's why we must try to predict spontaneity to be ready to get inside it.

Alfredo

On the contrary, but I'm not for predicting spontaneity, it is the project that we have to foresee, given that we are before a struggle with a purpose, within a certain territory, a well-defined part of the population that has the problem on their backs. Me, who lives in Italy, the prison they will build in Brussels only interests me relatively, I can have a theoretical interest, because I am an anarchist and therefore against prison, but basically in my garden, the thing doesn't interest me.

We must look at the real thing: the real struggle that is in front of us. The comrades involved won't talk about it till the end of the world, no? They will try to do something: organize for it to become possible, at some point, to attack. To attack according to some possibilities, of course, because it is not that all directions are always open.

To meet up in a corner and talk as anarchists of how to destroy the prison, all anarchists are able to do that. Give oneself an organization, based on affinity, on affinity groups rather, that coordinate between themselves to achieve the goal that they have set. So not an eternal organization, not a fixed formalized organization, but an informal organization that we have been talking about for forty, fifty years. It's terrible, we're always talk about the same thing. But this is the organizational question that we must face.

Towards insurrection

To launch a struggle against a precise aspect of power that is oppressing us, against a repressive structure under construction like the maxi-prison, is to pose the question of destruction. Because that's the only way to put a final end to the structure in question. To believe that an enormous project such as the maxi-prison can be prevented by the gentle voice of petitions and legalist opposition is not only to deceive oneself but also everyone else, all the oppressed and excluded. No, such a struggle must pose the question of insurrection: stopping the progression of power by force and self-organisation. But how pose this question? With the aid of attempts if not similar, at least moved by a similar will in the past, comrade Alfredo M. Bonanno will throw some light on this crucial question.

October 1, 2015 at Acrata, *anarchist library*, in Brussels

Alfredo

Every time I start to talk I ask myself, 'And if I didn't want to say anything for example?'

The title of this debate is 'Towards insurrection'. I said to myself, what does this 'towards insurrection' mean? That is, towards insurrection can mean writing, or talking anyway, or indicating a direction, something moving towards insurrection. I don't know what it is that moves towards insurrection.

I know that's what I've lived, and what I've seen, events that might seem like an insurrection in act. I later realised that it wasn't an insurrection, it was a simple riot. Now we are talking about something that can push us towards a riot, something that happens just like that, all of a sudden, for a reason that one can't foresee, in the street, in the squares, with a hundred thousand people coming out into the streets, is that what we're talking about tonight?

I don't think so. For me, that's not an insurrection. A hundred thousand people coming out into the streets, destroying the town, smashing the shops, dancing their war dance on commodities, — because we are against commodities we anarchists — is that insurrection? No.

Insurrection, apart from the fact that I don't know what it is, but still, I can envisage something that can look like an insurrectional project, is a movement.

'Well, do something, no?', 'Go and lead our situation, we mustn't put management into the hands of forty thousand communists, we are one million two hundred thousand.' So then we go into the government, we go to war. Traditional war with an army. It was anarchists who did these things, they weren't sent from planet Mars, it was anarchists. But it's not them, poor guys, it's quantity. Quantity is a positive thing, but at the same time it is something very negative. Because it blocks the decision to act. At certain moments you think the time has come, the time for you to get off the pavement and go into the street, enough.

If you wait to be three, thirty or thirty million, it's over. Let me tell you a little story that I experienced personally. I am Sicilian. In a small town in Sicily, Castelverano, near Palermo, in the fifties there were anarchist comrades doing anarcho-syndicalist activity. And at some point they became representatives in that small town, it was the municipal elections. And people were saying to them, 'Go, now you are going to the town hall, so you'll be able to do what you've been saying for thirty years.' 'Oh no', the comrades reply, 'we are anarchists, we don't vote.' The people said the anarchists are crazy. For thirty years they have been saying that we must change things and when they could make a difference at the town hall, they don't want to go. That's the contradiction, you see. If you make a certain discourse, a quantitative discourse, a time could come when people agree with you, but then you have to go right to the end, because if you're not going to, then you're a jerk. Speaking biologically: what are you talking about if you've been talking about shit from the start?

So, back to our discussion. The project is something that must develop from affinity, but where there is a *repressive project of the State against a certain reality* — why do I say *a certain reality*, because power obviously has a total repressive project that concerns all reality, but at some point we begin to see nuances that affect some sides, or some part, for example the population of a certain area, that always happens. For example here there is the question of the maxi-prison, it only affects part of Belgium, it doesn't touch all of Belgium. So we are before a specific repressive act. The State wants to achieve its global repressive project, with a specific act that affects a certain part of the territory, a certain number of people and all that. Anarchists, one can obviously organize to do something to stop this project.

They must organize by themselves or with the people. This is a big problem, it is not easy to decide. Because, look, there are comrades who don't agree about doing things with people. I know many. They agree of course to do things in a situation of specific struggle, but in parallel. Because they think 'well, it's impossible to get two hundred and fifty thousand people to become anarchist.' And I agree, that's not possible.

But is that the only solution? To remain outside? Or start talking to people? And then we reach one of the essential points of our reasoning: just talk? Or try to pass organizational ideas that are characteristic of anarchism, which are

gle affinity group eventually ends up chasing its own tail, it goes round and round and this is meaningless. For example, they have means they could use but remain unused. They have knowledge, studies of reality, research. And by reality, I also mean topography. Topography. For example in all my life I have never known an anarchist who can read a military map. Oh, a military map, eh! It is made by the army. And now he finds himself in the countryside and can't read the military map, he confuses a tree with a hole and falls down the hole. Then, but that's not enough because what does it mean that I can read a military map and I do nothing? Then there is the situation where it is power that gives us a taste and offers us an unacceptable repressive model – let's put aside for now the concept of the people – it is unacceptable for us, for anarchists, unacceptable. But it can also be that it is the anarchists themselves who are seeking an objective to attack, why not? For example here there is the repressive project of the maxi-prison that they want to build, it is a proposal that the State has made against reality to transform it for its benefit, of course, according to its plans, and that's one thing.

But the initiative can also be taken by the anarchist group, the affinity groups coordinated between them and all that, that can also happen, no? That is to say, the study of reality, one cannot always be 'waiting for repression', we can take the initiative. Obviously, the thing changes, it changes a lot, because sometimes someone has said to me 'Well, there are always repressive forms, the mere existence of the State is a repressive act, so it's easy for us to attack anything.'

I don't agree with that too much. What can it mean to attack the cop passing in the street, it is an expression of the State, it is the State that is walking past me. It's an extremely complicated consideration of the development of repression that is walking inside a single individual, with his uniform and everything. No, I don't like that, it seems a small thing, it seems to me an act of cowardice; more than cowardice it seems a lack of analysis. It seems to me as if one wasn't able to do something more important and so we did the smallest thing, easier, nearer, closer to hand.

Well no, because what we are talking about is analysis, that is to say, the project, and the project must somehow have a certain, how do you say, capacity to develop. And in the very development of the project, you see how many things you can do to attack before or alongside the moment in which we are attacked. We are anarchists, our DNA (pardon me the word), is attack, not waiting. I look at the traditional anarchist organizations we have sometimes defined as organizations of synthesis. These are organizations that wait, they wait to develop, to become big and numerous.

For example the Spanish situation in 1936 developed in a terrible way in my opinion because of quantity. Because if you think that in the CNT there were one million two hundred thousand members pushing on the organization,

A movement is essentially made up of projects, projects are made of specifications, something that looks at reality to try to foresee it, that is to say, to try to understand how this shit reality we have before us can develop. What we can expect, what can our revolutionary task be to make this reality move towards insurrection.

This is where the word 'insurrection' starts to have meaning for me. But that doesn't mean that I'm in the condition to make the insurrection move, I am in the condition to move, to write, to realise a project.

A project is realised by women and men who are committed, who put their lives into it. This is not only made of chatter, words, as we are doing tonight. It is made of ideas.

When we talk about destruction, which is a horrible word, I'm afraid of destruction because I am for life, for happiness, for love, but at the same time I ask myself, how can we live in a reality like this, how can you be in love with someone in a reality that only produces shit and forces us to live in shit? It's not possible. So, that's why I'm for destruction.

I'm not for destruction tout court, I am for the destruction of this reality, to build a different society. Anyone can tell me, but you, how can you be sure that the society you're talking about would be better than the one you just defined as a shit society. I am not sure, my comrades. I am sure that I don't like this society, and that all the projects which for forty years I have been developing in my head and also with my hands, with other comrades, to transform – careful, transform, not modify – are projects of destruction. And there will also be projects of destruction in a different, new society, different, even if that society is called anarchy, because anarchy is a project, it's a process of development, it is not something established because otherwise it would be a new form of repression, even if it is called anarchy. Because the anarchists who went to power were the worst repressors in history. It's useless to talk of anarchist revolution if we don't take into account that the anarchist revolution is a process, not an état établi. something established. This is what I want to talk about tonight, 'towards insurrection', I want to talk about a project.

So the project is made of means, knowledge, ideas, exchange of ideas between comrades, the capacity to understand the other and try not to choke them with their needs.

Because each of us needs to live, and we approach the comrade and start saying right away what we want, what we want to do and what we want them to do for us – we must give the other comrade space to grow and to make us grow, at the same time. This is what is called 'affinity'. This is what is called 'the search for affinity'. Because all the topics we will be talking about tonight, that we will be able to talk about, I hope, are based on the concept of affinity. I don't want to build a party, I don't even want to build a movement established according to certain rules, certain projects, certain programs even if it is the

program of Malatesta, it's shit this program. Why is it shit? Because Malatesta was a great revolutionary. Because it's out of date, times have changed, the things we're saying tonight won't be valid in thirty years' time.

Because time is a terrible thing, we need to try to see the reality in which the words we are saying now exist. No program, no project established once and for all, affinity is something that needs to be sought. We are anarchist comrades, we know what an anarchist group is. It is made up of comrades who meet, more or less in a place, in a place that is more or less known, more or less big or small, more or less dirty or clean (I don't know, usually it's dirty). They meet, talk, look at each other, love each other, there is also hatred sometimes, misunderstanding. But to meet together in an anarchist group, can you call this a search for affinity? No. No, my comrades.

This is a well known quid pro quo, very widespread. Affinity is something else. It is a search that starts from the single individual who has to move to seek their comrades. Obviously, the anarchist group is – in theory – a privileged place. In the anarchist group I look for my comrades with whom to do things, and I can't embrace the first comrade that arrives tonight and that I've never seen in my life, and propose doing a holdup together. I would be crazy if I did that. So I have to try to build reciprocal knowledge with him. But this knowledge is not friendship, it's not love, it's not knowledge based on culture, on the ability to understand the story of our life, my problems, my needs, my desires... no, it's not that. It is built on the specific knowledge of... I was thinking of the word *physisité*. I have before me a man, a woman, it is a living body that I have before me, someone who is talking to me, but the words don't say anything to me, someone with little gestures, little reactions, I must look at that these reactions, I have to investigate them, to see what kind of guy he is, what capabilities he has, and only after I start to know him, have some frequentation, I have a few little experiences with him, banal, everyday if you like, stupid.

How can we put it, we eat together for example, I see how he eats, what he eats, this comrade, if he starts breaking my balls on his selection of eating and all that, if for him this is the most important thing in his life, well, it's not a good *affinitaire*, I have no affinity with him, it's not for me. For example, to give things a name, if I have before me a comrade who is a vegetarian and talks all the time about his problems of food, this is something that doesn't interest me. But if he starts talking to me about things we can do together, how to find the tools to do things together – we understand each other when I use the general word 'things'?

Things that seek to transform the reality we have before us of course. Someone once said to me, 'But these are small things, how do you want to transform reality with a little thing, with the search for small instruments or is it just for training, a kind of revolutionary sport?' I didn't agree. These assertions were stupid in my opinion. Because it is these little things that make one see avail-

ability, capacity. It has happened, for example, that I have found myself with a comrade that I thought I knew well, studying an action together, whatever it was, let's not go into details of course, studying it in every detail – eh, remember, we're talking about affinity. So we studied all that, the table covered in papers, things, measurements, accounts of movements to go and check and all that. And then, when we got to the door – because it was necessary to go through it – the comrade freezes, stops outside the door. It's not his fault, it's my fault. That is to say it's my fault, because you have to go through it, I can't go alone, I have to go with him. If he doesn't want to go through that door and freezes, it's my fault. It's my fault because I didn't individuate affinity with him. I was wrong, that's all. So we try to solve the problem, one way or the other, and turn back. So to get back to our problem: affinity is the basis for looking for the comrades with whom I can develop my revolutionary project. It is not a question of number. It isn't that it takes fifty comrades.

Even two people, two comrades, also three, four, are an affinity group. The affinity group must participate in the life of the anarchist group within which the group finds itself, it must do all the things the anarchist group does. Revolutionary propaganda, discussions, debates, demonstrations, everything you like, but it must also have the awareness of being a different little thing and provide itself with the means for the action it wants to achieve in the present or in the future, alone as an affinity group.

And try to understand that this can be connections with other affinity groups that form in the same anarchist group or elsewhere in another group, in another city, another country; and establishing collaborative relationships. Because some objectives cannot be achieved with just the group of two, three comrades. For some objectives perhaps you need to be forty people, and then there are maybe four, five, ten affinity groups. This arithmetical mechanism which can be a little disgusting seen from the outside, is an essential thing to see how the mechanism of a project works. It is something that must have an organizational base. We cannot leave it to the spontaneity of each person, each comrade.

I've always been of the opinion that we have not thought enough about the difficulty of understanding the concept of affinity. Because there are always quid pro quos returning, because comrades ask themselves, 'but why can't that be done with the whole anarchist group?' 'Why can we not talk about things to be done all together in a group. Things to do all together within a group, or else – even worse – in the square with people and all that stuff?'. No, I think we must learn to establish different levels in which one is acting. In a different way.

Going towards insurrection means, or I think it could mean, moving towards a different situation from that in which we find ourselves. But move alone? Move only through affinity groups? No, because at some point the sin-