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“If hard work were such a good thing, surely
the rich would have kept it all to themselves”
—Lane Kirkland

THE BIG IDEA

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Simón Radowitzky

On a tranquil Sunday afternoon in the middle of Buenos Aires, 14 November 1909, a young anarchist by the name of Simón Radowitzky hurled a homemade bomb inside a coach and ended a police chief’s reign of terror. Riding in that coach was the infamous Colonel Ramón Lorenzo Falcón, head of the capital city police.

Radowitzky was only eighteen years old but had experienced the ugliness of life in a short span. He had been born in central Ukraine, poor. He carried a scar since 14-years-old that extended from chest to neck, a wound from the saber of a Russian Cossack during a labor dispute in Kiev. Imprisoned in Russia for some time, he had immigrated to Argentina in 1908, tramping around the provinces as a day laborer before settling in the capital as a blacksmith. A consummate reader at his local anarchist library, he there learned to read and write Spanish in short order, even if his speech was halting. He was a quiet, unassuming young man who, between work and anarchist involvement, had little time for much else.



Simón Radowitzky’s mugshot on arriving at Ushuaia Prison in Tierra del Fuego Province, 1915.

The colonel, on the other hand, had been born in Argentina and enjoyed a long military career. Falcón (which incidentally means “Hawk” in Spanish) first saw action in the so-called Battle of the Desert—a bloody six-year long campaign of massacre and pillage against the Mapuche, Ranqueles, and Tehuelches tribes in which the country extended its control over the Pampa and Patagonia. He had also fought republican opponents of the Argentine oligarchy (key beneficiaries of indigenous displacement), which had dominated the country from its inception. After decades of imposing the oligarchy’s will in the countryside, it seemed logical to task him with keeping law and order in Buenos Aires’ streets. (That and he had taken a special trip to Europe for the sole purpose of understanding European police tactics refined to deal with anarchism.) When he assumed the position in 1906, heads of state were gravely worried about the influx of European immigrants. They had been good sources of cheap labor but had recently organized into powerful labor unions, some under the sway of anarchism. One of Falcón’s first acts was



Portrait of Colonel Ramón Lorenzo Falcón, Caras y Caretas magazine a week after his death in 1909.

to brutally quash a renters’ strike that in 1907 involved nearly all of the city’s 2,500 tenement buildings (which housed approximately 140,000 people), and was led by anarchist organizers (the city’s socialists balked at helping). After breaking the strike, the government used the Residence Law of 1902 to deport many organizers “whose conduct compromises national security or disturbs public order” (written broadly so as to give officials ample latitude). This in turn led to anarchist Francisco Solano Regis’ two assassination attempts on President Alcorta, using bombs of his own confection—one delivered at the bottom of a fruit basket, the

second thrown at Alcorta’s carriage; both sparked but failed to detonate.

But the action that sealed together the fates of Radowitzky and Falcón was the May Day festivities of 1909. With the country’s Centennial looming (including massive preparations and public works projects), the police chief was on high alert for disruptive elements and chose to escalate an already provocative action. The restive bakers’ union organized the event at the Plaza Lorea, just down the street from Congress. A stage had already been set up and as anarchists began to arrive in the late morning, Falcón unleashed his men. After a scuffle, police opened fire, killing 5 and wounding 44. It was a bloodbath as never before witnessed in the country’s labor struggles. Radowitzky was at the plaza but escaped unharmed. That anarchists referred to Falcón as the leader of Argentina’s cossacks must have seemed too familiar for the young Ukrainian.

Shortly thereafter Radowitzky began to distance himself from his comrades, which propagandists by the deed always did prior to an action so as to minimize repercussions on the movement. His Russian roommates taught him the fundamentals of bomb-making but were kept in the dark about his intentions. He built his bomb, armed himself thoroughly, and took to following Falcón’s movements. Sunday arrived, and as the colonel headed out from home, Radowitzky stood on the corner, anxious. The moment was not right. But on his target’s return home, he saw his chance. He stepped behind the coach and slung the bomb into the carriage, which detonated powerfully. Both Falcón and his personal secretary (a young toady named Juan Lartigau) were gravely injured. The colonel was lifted from the rubble onto the sidewalk, bleeding profusely and with both legs broken. His last words were to mutter “assassins!” twice. His secretary also perished on the way to the hospital.



Photograph of Falcón’s destroyed coach.

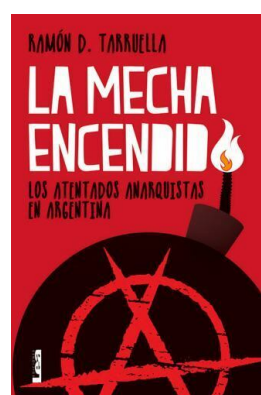
Meanwhile, two police officers nearby and a group of citizens gave chase. Radowitzky unfortunately had packed a veritable arsenal: an imitation Smith & Wesson, a Mauser pistol, 43 bullets, and in a suit was weighed down. Between running and firing at his pursuers, he tired, stumbled, and accidentally shot himself in the chest. He struggled, seriously wounded but alive, and when he was finally subdued shouted, “And there’s a bomb for every last one of you!”



Radowitzky, finally released from prison in 1930.

After his conviction, he was sent to the dreaded prison of Argentine’s Siberia: Ushuaia. He became something of a legend there, “the anarchist saint,” some called him. He led his fellow prisoners in a hunger strike in protest of the terrible living conditions, the frequent tortures and beatings, the heavy work

loads.¹ In 1918 Miguel Arcángel Roscigna—an up-and-coming legend himself as an anarchist expropriator—infiltrated the prison as a guard and broke his comrade out. Radowitzky fled the island prison and attempted to cross the wretched cold at the edge of the world, six hundred miles from Antarctica. After weeks in flight, he was picked up by a Chilean warship and repatriated. In 1930, President Hipólito Yrigoyen, in a bid to appease workers which had long agitated for his release, pardoned Simón Radowitzky. The Ukrainian anarchist took up residence in Uruguay. But as soon as the Spanish Civil War broke out, he joined the international brigades and fought until his health began to fail him. In the wake of

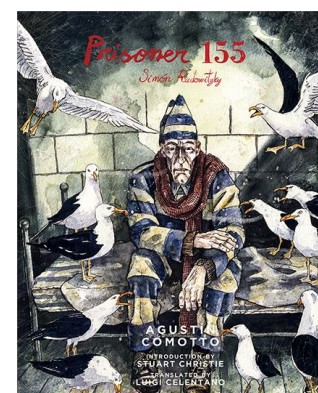


La mecha encendida (2016) gives an excellent history of the many anarchist assassinations and attempts in early 20th century Argentina. The book has sadly not yet been translated into English.

the war, he fled to France until the Nazi advance was close. His final flight was to Mexico where he worked as a toymaker. He died of a heart attack on March 4, 1956 at the age of 64—an extraordinary life if ever there was one.

Radowitzky’s act against the police chief was highly consequential. The state was caught off guard and paralyzed in response to the assassination. The police immediately dialed back their

heavy-handedness for a full decade (until the horrific violence witnessed during the Tragic Week of January 1919), becoming far more subtle and less indiscriminate in their anti-radical activities. The Ukrainian’s action was roundly praised by anarchists at the time for its audacity and precision. No innocent party was injured or died. Falcón’s culpability and propensity to do worse were clear and evident. There, progressives, is your harm-reduction! Radowitzky’s propaganda by the deed was taken as a model by working class vindicators in Argentina such as Kurt Wilckens and anarchist expropriators such as Buenaventura Durruti, Miguel Arcángel Roscigna, and Severino Di Giovanni.



Prisoner 155: Simón Radowitzky (2018), a beautiful graphic biography of the anarchist vindicator’s life by Agustín Comotto.

In late 2018, two anarchists detonated an explosive at the tomb of Colonel Falcón—an interesting gesture which cost one of them three fingers, but which nonetheless reignited an appraisal for the bloody colonel and the legacy he left for subsequent imitators of state terrorism in the decades to come. Would that Simón Radowitzky still had his imitators too.²

¹ “Radowitzky en el Fin del Mundo,” *Revista Orsai*, April-June 2011.

² “Quién es la mujer que puso la bomba en la tumba de Ramón Falcón,” *Clarín*, 14 November 2018

The Folly of Localism

Let us interrogate, and possibly smelt down, another golden calf—this one with a particularly high melting point since it is worshiped by virtually the entire political spectrum: the Local Small Business. (Not that of the single proprietor or the cooperative—with them we have no quarrel since they extract value directly from no one.)

Small business has long been touted as the basic building block of the US’ capitalist economy; if the fifty states are to be America’s “laboratories of democracy,”¹ small businesses are asserted to be the testing grounds for entrepreneurial success. They conjure images of an egalitarian society run by small-time merchants, with deep roots in their locality, their avarice tempered by neighborliness. Somehow, these values scale up as the best of the small businesses grow into regional, national, and multinational success stories. Hence, conservatives and liberals worship at this idol’s feet because it gives them ideological cover. The small enterprise vindicates business at all levels as having been meritocratically founded, carrying high-minded principles intact at all stages of growth. Even the largest conglomerate is merely a neighbor that just got a little bigger. Which is why only half the population laughed incredulously when Mitt Romney said in 2011 that, “Corporations are people, my friend.”

The current ideological justification for the small business originated with Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential run. Weeks

before the election, a 35-year-old would-be plumbing empresario named Samuel Joseph Wurzelbacher—thereafter known as Joe the Plumber—accosted the candidate by going after the Democratic achilles’ heel. *I want to buy a plumbing business. Will you be taxing small businesses more?* (In fact, Joe was not a licensed plumber and was in no position to buy such a business.) Obama said no, if anything he’d be getting a tax break. But that didn’t matter. The conservative backlash overnight turned him into the humble face of anti-socialism in the US, which carried on institutionally through the Tea Party Movement.

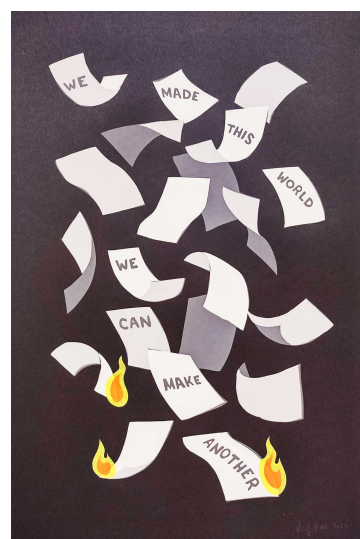


Image by Roger Peet, justseeds.org, or follow @toospheny

During his reelection campaign, responding to the alligator tears of

entrepreneurs and posers like Joe Wurzelbacher, Obama ignited a truly stupid debate. He made the very basic point that businesspeople were not responsible for the very infrastructure their enterprises used as a matter of course: bridges, roads, the internet, mass education, etc. “You didn’t build that,” the government did. Which provoked a notion that has since remained in the zeitgeist: *I*, John Gault, the entrepreneur, the visionary, the risk-taking proprietor—I *built that*. Behind this simple creed is the eternal justification for why capitalists claim to own all business profits. But between Obama’s praise of government initiative and the Tea Party’s ode to the free market, everyone missed that neither is possible without workers. Both sides were wrong. Not only have ordinary laborers generated *all* public and private wealth,³ they have quite literally built everything.

Since the Obama era state-market kerfuffle, the small local business has become one of a few least common denominators that unite the right and left. In 2016, liberal NPR even launched what has become one of the most downloaded podcasts in the US: “How I Built It.” Headed by the lapsed journalist, now entrepreneurial kiss-up, Guy Raz, the show continues the ideological work of old vintage on the small business and the role of the entrepreneur. As (actual) reporter Nathan Robinson describes the podcast, critical thought and probing questions are completely absent from Raz space. “The program is a 40-minute infomercial for some of America’s largest companies subsidized by NPR listeners... Founders and CEOs get to spin out whatever self-serving Horatio Alger story they have honed over the years, with Raz offering the occasional ‘Wow’ or ‘How did that feel?’”⁴

Take the recent episode featuring Roxanne Quimby, co-founder of the famous hippie-esque brand Burt’s Bees. Quimby credits an early move to San Francisco with “unlocking” her consciousness, moving her to the “extreme left.” Rejecting materialism, she desired “meaning” and “transcendence.” And she got it by imitating her hero, Henry David Thoreau, relocating to rural Maine, living off the grid, as part of the -back-to-the-land movement. In due course she met the local large-scale beekeeper, an older curmudgeon by the name of Burt Shavitz. “Inspired” by his lifestyle, she apprenticed with him and suggested a business partnership, which at some point also became romantic. He had long been selling honey at farmers markets in recycled jars. She suggested better branding and a slowly growing portfolio of other products such as candles. Soon the business was thriving, with their products finally leaving farmers markets and hitting boutiques and gift shops. They

hired their first few employees (a rare admission on Raz’s program); the only worker at all personified was an unnamed 14-year-old high school student who became the bookkeeper.

At this time Quimby and Shavitz found their business too big to rely on raw materials of their own extraction and began buying wax. They also found themselves at another crossroad. Burt’s Bees was already sufficiently big to pay themselves all the money they needed for their preferred anti-materialist lifestyle. But Quimby admits something had changed in her. She was “ambitious” where Shavitz was not; he “went along” merely to satisfy her thirst for growth. In 1991 sales hit \$1.5 million. Then came their famous lip balm. They dropped candles and took up skin care products because these were “scalable,” had a great return, and required but a “simple industrial process.” Quimby then moved the company to North Carolina, with 45 workers now, to satisfy distribution and supply chain concerns. Incredibly, she claims the company somehow kept its rustic Maine “authenticity” (a word roundly abused by localism) in the southern state. Which probably had everything to do with Quimby’s change of the Burt’s Bees logo. Taking a woodcut made of Shavitz’s grizzled visage, she decided to plaster it on their products. She feared reprising the cosmetic industry’s exploitation of women by using female faces in a way that did not “respect their full depth.” (Apparently using Shavitz’s face, lifted from his chosen setting, to meet corporate demands for authenticity, was not in itself an ethical quandary.) Quimby’s and Shavitz’s romantic relationship came to an end and in 1999, about the time the company hit \$60 million in sales, she bought Burt out of the company. And in 2003, Quimby sold most of her company shares to Clorox for \$1 billion, making her fabulously wealthy. All due to her unique “vision.” At this point in the interview Raz asked his one critical question for the entire show: Quimby has been criticized for making barrels of money at Shavitz’s expense. She responded that, well, she “was the more responsible party for managing wealth... I could do the right thing with it. And I don’t know that he would have used it very productively.” She says she’s given back to the “community” in a way he never did.

“How I Built It” is hardly exceptional. There are a variety of programs—from TED Talks to The Startup Story to Entrepreneurs on Fire—that tout the singular profile of an entrepreneur (almost as though they were a separate species), their mind over matter struggle when in fact their success involves the very simple process of capital movement, disruption, and growth; it is a blandly *material* story. As Roxanne Quimby puts it, somewhere in the early 1990s, “Suddenly money became so important. Not for what it would buy but just because it was critical to the operation of the business”—growth for its sake. “It was a simple version of capitalism which I had rejected” and then fully embraced. Everyone has vision, ideas that could propel money-making forward. But few have the agency to command the levers of capital. Quimby acknowledges (past Raz’s sycophantic praise) that part of her story involves “luck,” or more mysteriously, “divine intervention.” As with all instances of capitalist success, the real story is not this or that innovation but rather how one individual managed to get ahead above everyone who put in equal or greater amounts of labor.

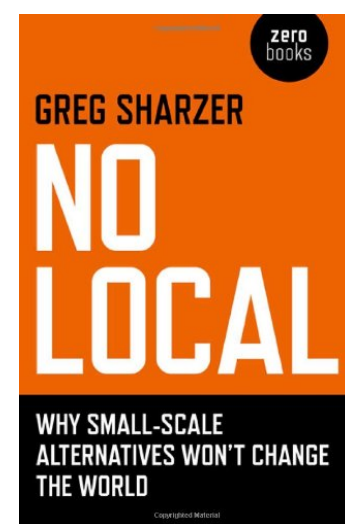
Liberalism is particularly attuned to the small local business because it meets their aesthetics preferences and fuzzy political demands. As described, it conjures cute shops and friendly on-site proprietors, community (another abused word) made in the process of exchange. But this desire for small business is merely winding back the clock on a system where growth is imperative. It is attempting to halt economic destiny; big business and small are structurally indistinguishable—they are merely at different stages. The best of the smalls will outgrow their roots and with it lose every vestige—if it ever had any—of wholesomeness. But as with Burt’s Bees, once local companies will often endeavor to keep a small-time

aesthetic. Take the bucolic sounding State Farm Insurance Company that greets us, “Like A Good Neighbor...” Wal-Mart grew from a dime store (Walton’s 5&10) into the twelfth largest employer on the planet. But from barely concealed Charismatic Christian values to encouraging RV owners to stay in their parking lots when on the road, the company portrays itself as part of some extended family. In fact, Wal-Mart turned Sam Walton’s first store into a museum as though to say, we (the corporate *we*) have not forgotten where we came from (while consigning most of its employees to poverty wages).

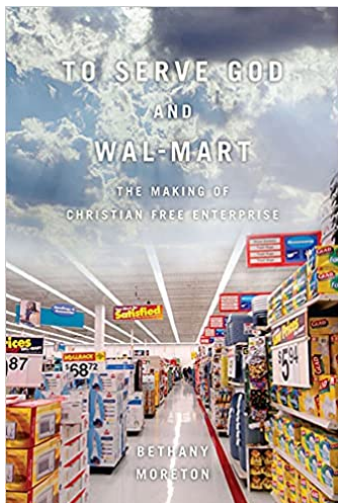
Liberals and progressives also fête small business as uniquely capable of solving our environmental crises. There are a number of objections, most of them fleshed out in Greg Sharzer’s *No Local: Why Small-Scale Alternatives Won’t Change the World*. Firstly, localism is itself a dubious idea. If a bank, lending globalized capital, loans to a local shop—if said store dispenses goods imported outside its environs, how is that local? If profits are deposited in a bank (most of which have international reach), how are these funds benefiting the local economy? Secondly, progressive environmentalists like Bill McKibbin pine for something he calls “good old fashioned greed” and for companies, somehow, to occupy a “sweet spot” of not too big, not too small—a true *ingénue* since without growth capitalism would necessarily collapse. Thirdly, small local businesses usually have no economies of scale and suffer from other inefficiencies (such as high shipping costs) that can make them far more wasteful and polluting than large companies. Fourthly, small businesses are the least regulated size of business, often paying lower wages, providing fewer benefits, are less likely to be unionized, and are legally exempt from a host of regulations compared to larger companies. In giant corporations, workers are at times able to hide in its nooks and crannies—occasionally scamming, often shirking. That is far more difficult in small businesses where employees are saddled with at times troubling personal relationships with the owner(s). The list of objections go on.

Sadly, radicals often fall into the trap of lauding the small proprietorship. Which recalls an incident in recent local anarchist history, which occurred in Pittsburgh, April 2015. After the death of a comrade, Mike Vesch, a group of several dozen social “vandals” (the media’s term, not mine), donning the mask and carrying the red & black, apparently wishing to honor his passing with a little riot, went on a window-smashing spree down a section of Walnut Street—an area long of pronounced bourgeois sensibility. (How ghastly! We hope no insurance company folded over payouts totalling about \$20,000.) To judge from subsequent reporting, it appears none of the rascals were caught by the city’s finest. (For shame!)

In any case, a controversy ensued immediately among radicals between sympathizers of the action and its detractors. The latter pointed out that among the seven businesses attacked were two they (and witnesses to the media) described as local “small businesses,” one owned by a Vietnamese immigrant family as I recall. How could they attack these independents and minorities like that? they asked. To which I and others responded, “Did they not have employees? Why would we care about exploiters just because they are minorities?” I had recently been in one of the establishments maimed by ax handles—a coffee shop. The store was empty but for a late teenage worker, me sipping coffee, and a man in a corner severely plunking away at a laptop. At one point the young employee dropped something and the man, who turned out to be the owner, flew into a rage screaming at her until tears welled up. Then he stormed out. While I cannot speak to the work conditions endured at the restaurant, surely it was not magically exempt from class conflict either.² As it turned out, I was then employed by (but not working that night at) another coffee shop on Walnut Street, this one having escaped damage. Which upset me. I



Greg Sharzer's *No Local* offers a welcomed deep (Marxist) economic reflection on why the small business simply cannot be the vanguard of the green revolution.



A fascinating biography of a megacorporation, Bethany Moreton's *To Serve God and Wal-Mart* covers a variety of other right-wing phenomenon including charismatic Christianity's connection to communications technology, the little-noticed mass dissemination of free enterprise ideology, and the company's deep support of Christian capitalist educational initiatives.

chafed daily when sentimental yuppies referred to the “cuteness” of my workplace, and inflated their egos purring to each other in line that they were part of the *solution* by buying local. “Oh my, local coffee [imported from Sumatra, Tanzania, or Columbia] is so much more delicious than Starbucks!” Never did they inquire into its owners, ask us how we were treated (granted, we probably would have lied), or noticed some obvious ways in which we were underpaid. In fact, the owners generally fomented a hostile work environment. They once ordered our manager to go to court and contest an already pitious unemployment claim, just for spite. (This manager informed us too that the owners were OG Trump supporters—that is, before his 2015 presidential bid. Right neighborly they were.)

Localism attempts to mask the basic extractive process found at all other levels of bigness. But they are no less sites of social war. Daily we are engaged in a process of capturing as many dollars (“money-points” some punks like to call them) as possible. As wage

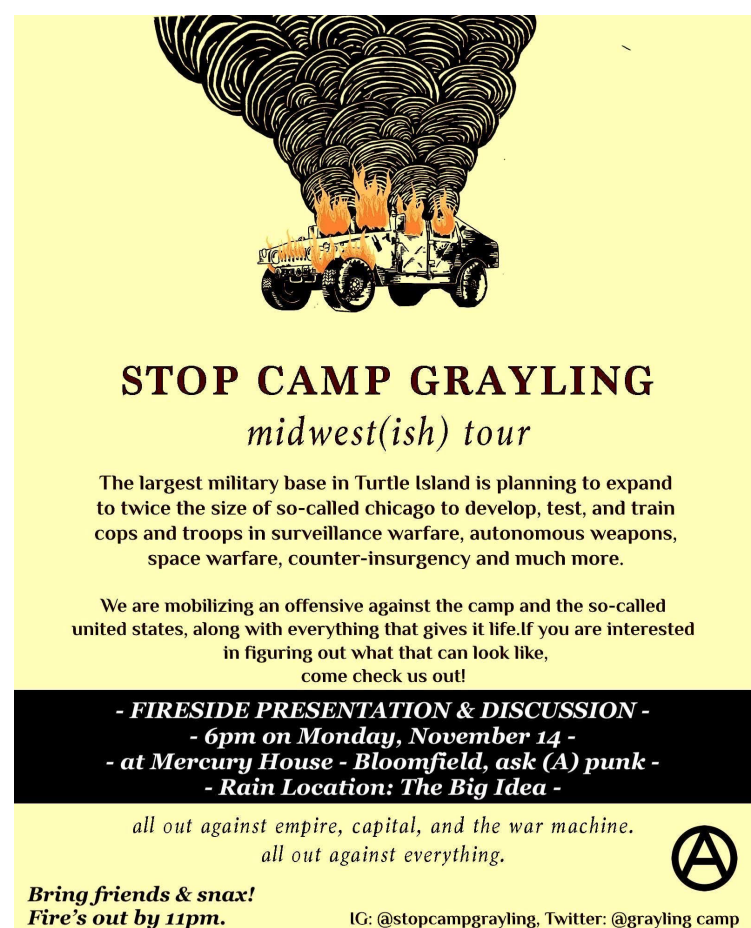
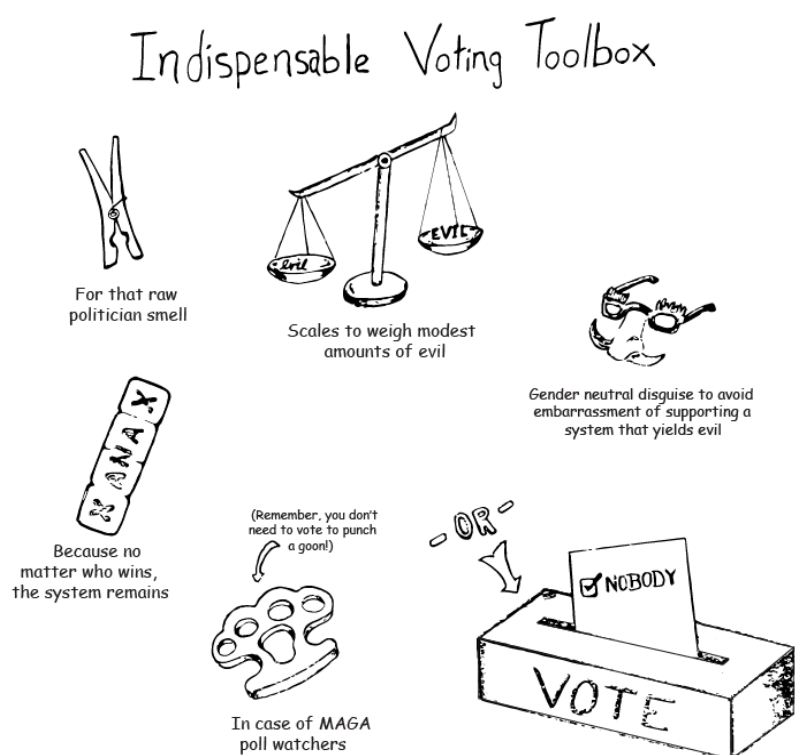
or salary-owners, our ability to earn is structurally limited and we often live paycheck to paycheck. Owners of capital meanwhile can only amass wealth by wresting it from their employees. This is a basic and obvious social fact that localism attempts to disguise through homely aesthetics. Any truly liberatory movement can hardly give a pass to sites of small capital accumulation than they can big ones.

¹ A suggestion made by Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis in 1932.

² For coverage of the attack see: “[Vandals Smash Windows on Several Storefronts In Shadyside](#),” *CBS Pittsburgh*, 10 April 2015; “[Weekend Spree of Vandalism Against Stores Shocks Shadyside](#),” *The Pittsburgh Tribune*, 12 April 2015.

³ All workers create all public and private wealth thusly: first, they create all profits at their one or several jobs. Second, they directly or indirectly pay all taxes; indirectly they generate all profits that businesspeople then use to pay business and capital accumulation taxes. There’s no getting around it: drones are less superfluous to a hive than employers are to the economy.

⁴ [Nathan J. Robinson, “You Didn’t Build That: A Tale of Two Podcasts,” *Current Affairs*, 6 December 2018.](#) As an antidote to “How I Built It,” Robinson recommends its diametrical opposite: the [Working People Podcast](#), where ordinary laborers are asked about their work experiences and life struggles.



Jim Rogers: A One-Year Memorial

On 13 October 2021, Jim Rogers was murdered at the hands of the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police. Jim was tased to death at the intersection of West Penn Place and Harriet Street in Pittsburgh’s “Little Italy”—a “City of Neighborhoods.” To mark one year, a group of mourners answered a request by Rogers’ closest family to aid in the establishment of a memorial.

Jim was 54 years old and black. Responding to a false report of a stolen bicycle, officers of the Pittsburgh Police found Mr. Rogers—“Jim-Jim” to his family—riding a bike lent to him by a neighbor, and tased him 10 times. This caused him to suffer cardiac arrest. He passed away the next day.

One year later, a crowd gathers. Brick single-family homes line the streets in this section of Bloomfield between Liberty and Penn. What brought the crowd there is an instagram post: @justice4jimjim. A slight autumn chill is in the air as the pink hue of sunset reflects off the few clouds that dot the sky. A child chases a basketball. Crickets chirp as the street lamps turn on. Soul music is heard playing from a member of the crowd’s bluetooth speaker. A family is drawn to their front porch by the spectacle.

Across the street, the local news organizations form a picket. Television cameras point at the growing crowd while photojournalists circulate amongst it, taking interviews and pictures of anyone that will talk to them. The family of Jim has arrived. His sister-in-law Tiffany, niece Diamond, and aunt and uncle. Led by a prayer from Pastor Erin, the memorial ceremony begins. Words are spoken of a loving god, for whose child we weep. Memorial candles give off a warm glow as they are lit and passed around. Other victims of police violence are remembered too.

Antwon Rose, Jr., shot in the back by Officer Rosfeld of the East Pittsburgh police in 2018. Jayland Walker, shot 46 times by Akron police in 2022. And George Floyd, whose 2020 murder moved the country. The pastor calls attention to the “disease of institutional racism.” Recognizing the righteous indignation at the lack of a case against these murderers, anger is tempered with a call for prayer to move the hearts of the grand jury.

Rather than charge the officers, District Attorney Stephen Zappala convened this jury to seek a recommendation. 2022 is an election year and recent news has it that the grand jury will not meet again. Their probe has ended. Court monitors believe this suggests they have come to a conclusion as to whether charges should be filed, but that the DA’s office is postponing any announcement of such. Currently, the family of Jim has filed a federal lawsuit against the Pittsburgh police officers involved in the killing. For their defense, the city is putting up \$30,000 for each defendant to pay for private legal representation. (Through taxes, the community is forced to fund a costly defense of its aggressors.)

The prayer ends with a call for patience, courage, and strength.

Next to speak is a young activist who echoes some of the sentiments of Pastor Erin, with an added demand that charges be brought. They affirm the beauty of the people standing together against police violence, supporting the family of Jim, and defending the community. Defending it against anti-black state violence, showing that Jim was loved, that his life mattered. To remember that Jim Rogers was killed by Officer Keith Edmonds, wielding a taser. As well as to recognize the medical neglect from

the EMTs who upon arrival at the scene callously acted only to clean Jim’s blood off the officers’ hands.

Jim’s niece, Diamond, gives a brief but emotional statement. Recollecting memories of her uncle and the truth that everyone has struggles of their own. She ends her words by asking the group to come in for a hug.

Next to speak on his nephew’s memory and admonish Zappala for his failure to act is Jim’s uncle. He calls for unity in the fight for justice. “That was a good person who died here!” he laments. It’s a gut-wrenching display of grief on behalf of the family.

The plan now is to begin walking from here, the scene of the police attack on Jim Roger’s life, to Friendship Park nearby. As candles begin to be lit, the news cameras close in. “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough” by The Temptations begins to play. The short walk to the park that sits directly behind West Penn Hospital proceeds without incident, Motown hits playing all the while. The police presence is out of sight, a gang of motorcycle cops wait a few blocks over on Liberty, ready to pounce. If the police choose to attack the memorial march, the excuse will almost certainly be that they were impeding emergency vehicle access to the hospital. One can’t help but wonder, with a hospital so close, why it was at UPMC Mercy, a day later, that Jim Rogers was pronounced dead?

Upon arriving at the park, the mourners form a circle around a yellow banner with red print reading “People’s Justice for Jim Rogers.” One by one, candles are laid around a photograph of Jim as a young man. The organizers ask the group to work together to protect this memorial, to never forget the name Jim Rogers.

The Temptations’ song “My Girl” plays from the mobile sound system. The news organizations slowly slink away. The air becomes

lighter as the crowd thins. A familial atmosphere sets in. This has been a year-long struggle for justice. Love has been a recurring theme of the night. Love that pushes Jim’s family to keep up the fight—love that brings a community together in the face of constant state violence and intimidation.

Jim’s niece, Diamond, and sister-in-law, Tiffany, after the memorial talked about how the past year has affected them. They are anxious to hear the grand jury’s decision, still holding out hope that the system will yet yield a bit of justice. Zappala, who has been playing politics with the Rogers case, is the person they most want to question. He had said, upon seeing video of the police attack a year ago, that it looked like police officers had committed a crime. Cynically, however, the DA summoned the grand jury to keep his hands clean and delay any action until after the November elections. Reelection above all else.

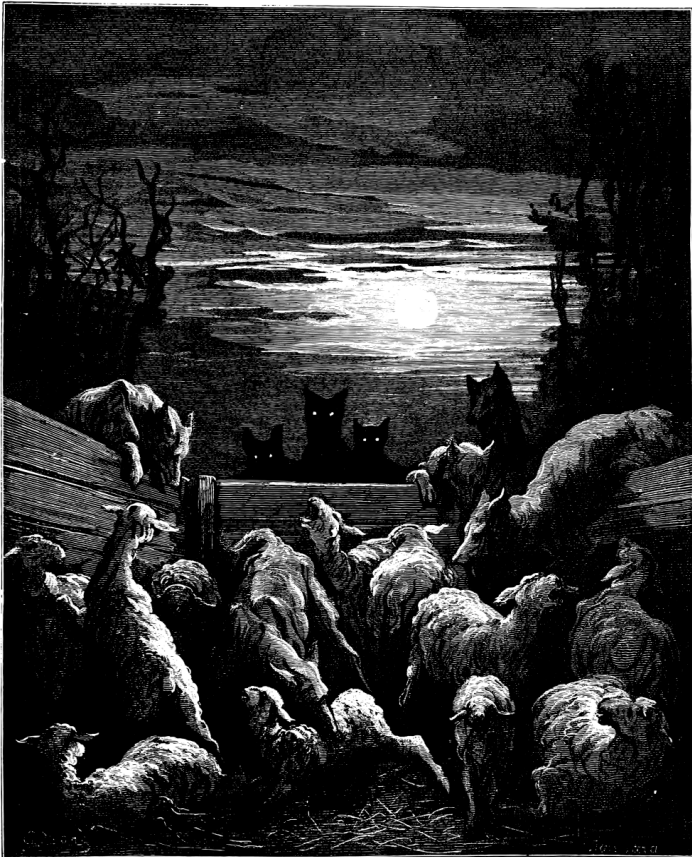


More than anything, Diamond and Tiffany want people to remember, to keep Jim’s memory alive. For people to keep showing up. To not let the police get away with this, or the next murder they will inevitably committ. Diamond hopes that more can be done to serve the black community’s mental health. This attack is just another in a long line of anti-black aggression that predates the founding of this country. They reiterate that they are not done fighting for Jim, and they hope to organize another event outside the halls of power while the weather is still agreeable. Jim will not be forgotten.

Voltairine de Cleyre

In mid-November 1866, a fiery anarchist was born in southern Michigan. Underappreciated and largely forgotten today, Voltairine de Cleyre was known in Gilded Age America for her captivating persona, her political zeal, and her powerful pen. Her neglect is probably owed to her untimely death at only 45 in 1912 around anarchism’s peak, while such distinguished contemporaries as Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman lived on. Voltairine was born, lived, and died in poverty. “She was compelled to work long hours to earn a meager living,” and dedicated all her spare time to writing, speaking, and activism. “She flayed her body to utter one more lucid and convincing argument in praise of direct action,” said a colleague. She was recognized by contemporaries as being the most extraordinary writer anarchism had produced and could have made a lot of money had she thought commercially. Beginning at a tender age, Voltairine began to suffer interminable personal tragedies and chronic illness, which quickly congealed into a dark view of the world—her life “a long drawn-out martyrdom” as a friend called it. Indeed, powerful emotions appear as the main catalyst to all her writing and actions. Once she said that “at bottom convictions are mostly temperamental.” (I couldn’t agree more.) Emma said that Voltairine “saw life mostly in greys and blacks, and painted it accordingly.” She “tried to take her own life more than once.” Uncommonly kind to animals, her home became “a hospital for misused cats and dogs.” She was boundlessly compassionate, unequivocally at odds with society as constituted, “ascetic” in an almost religious way (a “nun,” a “saint” as some associates described her), private and withdrawn, especially with age. She was compared, with good reason, to Louise Michel, both called

“priestess[es] of pity and vengeance” and compared to Mary Wollstonecraft, “intelligent and high-strung, both lived as individualists in the face of stifling convention.”



We have cried—and the gods are silent;
We have trusted—and been betrayed;
We have loved—and the fruit was ashes;
We have given—the gift was weighed.

We know that the heavens are empty;
—Voltairine de Cleyre

Like many anarchists the world over, her radicalization began with a deep confrontation with what we may call the cosmic state—the elaborate, stiflingly bureaucratic, and hierarchical government of God found in the Catholic Church. Raised in a household with a devout mother and a deist father (his better side winning out when he named his daughter after the the free-thinker Voltaire), she received an education—first rate if perpetually conflictive—at the Convent of Our Lady of Lake Huron in Sarnia, Ontario. Painfully, her internal struggle with the divine and external conflicts with nuns and clergy sharpened her intellect and nurtured a predilection for freedom. Given the wide overlap between free thought and radical politics, Voltarine was quickly introduced to and took to anarchism as the inevitable conclusion of her struggles. Immediately after her secondary education, Voltaire launched herself into what became a near life-long routine: dizzyingly productive publishing, prolific speaking (from Boston to Topeka, and in Scotland and England too), the thankless mundanity of activist labor, and the grinding drudgery of work. Having few skills upon graduating, she supported herself largely through teaching immigrants English, which created deep links to Yiddish-speaking Eastern Europeans in Philadelphia, her home city for much of her adult life.

It was Voltairine that popularized a middle road advocated by a handful of anarchists between the two dominant factions:

anarcho-communism and anarcho-individualism. Calling it anarchism without adjectives, her notion was that if social “compulsion” could be destroyed, a variety of alternatives—suited to the particular wishes of intentional communities—would flourish. As one fellow exponent, Fernando Tarrida del Mármol put it, “Anarchy is an axiom; the economic question is secondary.” In fact, Voltairine lived on such bare amenities—an aesthete by circumstance when poor but by conviction on the rare times she had money—that she was deeply critical of, for instance, Emma Goldman (an avowed anarcho-communist) who preferred paid speaking gigs among pretentiously progressive bourgeois audiences and spent her fees on sumptuous dining and posh accommodations.

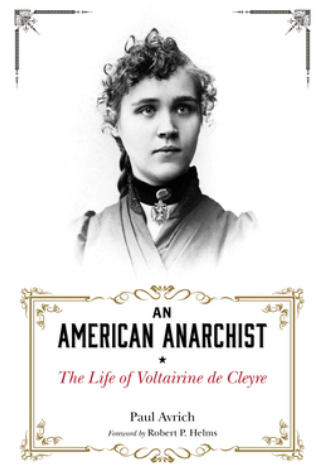


Like Albert Parsons a generation before, Voltairine was unique for being a notable American-born anarchist. And in the footsteps of the Chicago martyr, she often called up the country’s rebellious moments and figures—Thomas Payne and the American revolution, the abolitionists and (surprisingly) even Jeffersonian democracy—into a synthesis with anarchism.

So committed to autonomy was Voltairine that she was also an enemy of marriage, exclusivity, and even believed partners would be better off not living together. “I will not *live* with you,” she once

told a lover, “for if I do I suffer the tortures of owning and being owned.” She thought monogamy, even if practiced among the most liberated, too often (maybe inevitably) reproduced traditional roles and perpetuated all the ills of patriarchy—doubly tragic when it plagued the relationships of comrades. “It is insufficient to dispense with the priest or the registrar. The spirit of marriage makes for slavery.” Marriage as an institution and all other such constraints “destroys the pure spontaneity of love.” And the number of avowedly anarchist men who became her lovers and turned possessive was not a few.

In 1902 she suffered an assassination attempt from a fellow anarchist named Herman Helcher who became obsessed with Voltairine, shooting her point-blank as she was about to board a trolley. Hit in the chest above the heart and twice in the back, accounts differ on whether two or none of the bullets were removed. In either case, she carried at least one in her the rest of her life. Not only did she refuse cooperation with the police, she raised money for Helcher’s defense, and plead his case in court. But to no avail; he was imprisoned for six years. In 1912, a combination of illnesses, including the return of one she had suffered since childhood, cut her life short at its prime.



Paul Avrich's *An American Anarchist* is not only a compelling biography of Voltairine de Cleyre, it matches engaging prose with exhaustive research.

A Halloween Story

It is possible that all ghastly legends, which haunt us most when the world is dark and we are alone, are created to account for a deeper horrific fact of life—one difficult, painful even, to explain except through the tropes of magic and mystery. Vampires are always portrayed as refined, genteel, bourgeois, that prey on the innocent, sucking the life force from others because they have none of their own. They are solitary, miserly, with no social bonds. The legend of the zombie—the living dead, forced to mindlessly serve some powerful warlock—which originated in Haiti has long been known to be a commentary on the unspeakable horror of slavery.

David Graeber in *Debt*, tells this Halloweenesque legend found among the Tiv people in Nigeria, who coalesced into a distinct ethnic group precisely when mass enslavement of Africans by Europeans began. With that context, the social anxiety behind the myth is obvious. The Tiv feared that the greed of a savvy few within their communities would, through debt relations, disrupt their relative egalitarianism:

“There was believed to be a certain actual biological substance called *tsav* that grew on the human heart. This was what gave certain people their charm, energy, and their powers of persuasion. *Tsav* therefore was both a physical and that invisible power that allows certain people to bend others to their will. The problem was—and most Tiv of that time appear to have believed that this was *the* problem with their society—that it was also possible to augment one’s *tsav* through artificial means, and this could only be accomplished by consuming human flesh. Now, I should emphasize right away that there is no reason to believe that any Tiv actually did practice cannibalism. The idea of eating human flesh appears to have disgusted and horrified the average Tiv as much as it would the average American. Yet for centuries, most appear to have been veritably obsessed by the suspicion that some of their neighbors—and particularly prominent men who became de facto political leaders—were, in fact, secret cannibals. Men who build up

their *tsav* by such means, the stories went, attained extraordinary powers: the ability to fly, to become impervious to weapons, to be able to send out their souls at night to kill their victims in such a way that their victims did not even know they were dead, but would wander about, confused and feckless, to be harvested for their cannibal feasts. They became, in short, terrifying witches. The *mbatsav*, or society of witches, was always looking for new members, and the way to accomplish this was to trick people into eating human flesh. A witch would take a piece of a body of one of his own close relatives, who he had murdered, and place it in the victim’s food. If the man was foolish enough to eat it, he would contract a ‘flesh-debt,’ and the society of witches ensured that flesh-debts are always paid...

“If you eat from the wrong dish, but you do not have a ‘strong heart’—the potential to become a witch—you will become sick and flee from the house in terror. But if you have that hidden potential, the flesh will begin to work in you. That evening, you will find your house surrounded by screeching cats and owls. Strange noises will fill the air. Your new creditor will appear before you, backed by his confederates in evil. He will tell of how he killed his own brother so you two could dine together, and pretend to be tortured by the thought of having lost his own kin as you sit there, surrounded by your plump and healthy relatives. The other witches will concur, acting as if all this is your own fault...

“There’s only one way out, and that’s to pledge a member of your own family as substitute. This is possible, because you will find you have terrible new powers, but they must be used as the other witches demand. One by one, you must kill off your brothers, sisters, children; their bodies will be stolen from their graves by the college of witches, brought back to life just long enough to be properly fattened, tortured, killed again, then carved and roasted for yet another feast.”