

# PIKEVILLE NAZI RALLY: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US?

On April 29th two far-right, Neo-Nazi groups convened in Pikeville, KY to hold a rally. The Traditional Workers' Party (TWP) lead by Matthew Heimbach organized the rally, describing it on their page as a "weekend [that] will include fellowship, a public charity event, and a conference series of workshops on political ideology, activist tactics, and much more". Together with the National Socialist Movement (NSM), lead by Jeff Schoep, the two groups planned to organize Pikeville, a small town in Appalachia, and attract the local working class to their racist ideology. On this point, they did not succeed. When asked about their feelings beforehand, the majority of Pikeville residents were upset that hate groups would come to their town to spew violence. They were also confused as to why the TWP and NSM thought that Pikeville would welcome such ignorance.

In the days leading up to the demonstration, local moderate liberal groups were intimidated out of their own counter-protest by threats of violence from the Neo-Nazis. Also, a temporary city ordinance was passed that banned masks and hoods - often worn by the anti-racist, anti-fascist groups opposing the Nazis in order to protect their identities. Still, on Saturday the 29th both sides, the fascists and the anti-fascists, came to the center of town. They were fenced off with metal police pens. Only the cops and the media were allowed in the middle of the fences. The Nazis shouted racial slurs and chanted the names of their leaders across the fences, but there was no physical altercation. At 5:00 p.m., when the fascist groups' permit for their demonstration ended, they all posed for their cam-

eras in one last unified Nazi salute as riot cops attempted to surround the counter-protest. According to the city manager of Pikeville, Donovan Blackburn, there were three arrests of counter-protesters, though not much more is known. While the white nationalists were counting the day as a success, they were interrupted on their way out by the court summons of Matthew Heimbach who was charged for a previous offense in which he attacked a Black woman at a Trump rally (now he is suing Trump, saying that he was only responding to the President's order to "get them out of there"). As both sides walked back to their cars, fascists waved guns aimed at counter-demonstrators, and threw a concussion grenade into a crowd of antifascists.



What does this mean for Lansing? The National Socialist Movement is based in Detroit and has a visible presence in our city, most notably seen in the 2006 rally that they held on the steps of the Capitol. At least one of the Nazis present at the rally has been seen in our Lansing. Groups such as these are working to normalize their message of hate and mass violence, and they are actively recruiting in what they perceive to be vulnerable areas. Part of their strategy is rebranding: we see it in the mission statement on the TWP website of "Faith Family and Folk",

and we see it in the changing of the NSM logo from the swastika to a symbol known as the "ordal" upon the election of Trump. In order to counter the organizing efforts of these fascists, we must continue to build our community in solidarity with one another and resist those who come to divide us.

# no more illusions

## a journal of solidarity & defense

### WHAT IS A "SANCTUARY?": IMMIGRANTS, POLICE, AND COMMUNITY SELF-DEFENSE

Ever since Donald Trump took office there has been a widespread popular movement to declare cities "sanctuaries" for immigrants. These policies demand *active non-cooperation* between municipal law enforcement and federal immigration police. On April 3rd of this year, after months of community pressure, the Lansing city council officially declared Lansing a "sanctuary city." The executive order passed by the mayor's office earlier that day greatly influenced the city council's resolution. In that order, Mayor Virg Bernero argued that becoming a sanctuary city is important because it helps build trust with the local police. He said that "Police work involves strong relationships with the community" and that policing is "about building bridges, not walls. The Trump approach is divisive and dangerous."

Perhaps predictably, on April 12th the Lansing City Council, under pressure from the Chamber of Commerce, rescinded their Sanctuary City resolution. Despite this cowardly act, the Mayor's executive order remains. The Sanctuary City executive order is definitely a win and something that the immigrant freedom movement should be excited about. **But this "win" has serious problems: it is built upon two ultimately flawed premises.**

1. The executive order is inherently *temporary* and will expire when Mayor Bernero leaves office
2. It relies on an unabashed faith in the Lansing Police Department

Mayor Bernero has announced that he is not running for re-election. This means that this November the tenuous nature of our sanctuary status

will be in full display. The next mayor of the city can revoke the executive order instantly. And the city council passing another sanctuary resolution is unpredictable at best. So we face the reality of city politics: the sanctuary status is at the mercy of the political whims of career politicians. What happens when they change their minds and challenge the freedom of Lansing's immigrant community? We are forced to ask: **what could the security of sanctuary look like without the machinations of politicians?** If we organize collectively and build organizations with the capacity to de-



fend ourselves from the immigration police then we would have the power. In our current situation we are relying on the unreliable. If we organized outside of the Mayor's office, then **the politicians and police in Lansing and DC would have to truly reckon with us.**

The second problem with the current sanctuary city status is even more straightforward: the executive order is totally misguided in its reliance on the benevolence of the police force. For many in the city of Lansing, the police are seen not as an

organization to build "strong relationships" with. Instead, the police are seen as more of a nuisance than any sort of solution to community problems. Bernero is basing **his sanctuary order on a false promise of positive relations with the police** without reckoning with the fundamental antagonism between poor people, especially poor people of color, and the arbitrary violence of the cops.

This uncomfortable dynamic is being felt in cities across the country. In one recent story that NPR did on the "sanctuary" city of Newark, New Jersey, the reporter interviewed a group of immigrants from Ecuador: "Almost all say they're afraid to call the police." When the city government pretends to use "sanctuary" to build trust with the police, they are ignoring the truth that many people will never trust the police. This means that if the sanctuary city status is billed as *primarily a pro-police* piece of propaganda, then the price of sanctuary city comes at a high cost for the poor and most marginalized among us, **those who are most often victimized by the police.**

So when Mayor Bernero says that "We do not want our local police to become de facto immigration agents" it bears the question: **what do we want our local police to "become"?** An alternate solution raises itself: would we feel safer from violence if there were less police? Sanctuary city status cannot merely rely on political legislation or police benevolence. These "solutions" are temporary at best and deeply misguided at worst. We need to instead build connections in our communities, across racial barriers, across different neighborhoods and diverse backgrounds. A different form of sanctuary is possible: one that is powered by people getting organized and collectively defending our neighbors, friends, and loved ones. Once we reckon with the flaws in "sanctuary" as law, we can begin to develop a practice of sanctuary rooted in *community self-defense*, a practice of sanctuary that is more sustainable and truly revolutionary.

## REBELLIONS BEHIND PRISON WALLS: UPDATE ON THE 2016 PRISONER STRIKE AND REPRESSION

In early 2016 the incarcerated freedom fighters of the Free Alabama Movement (FAM) put out a proposal for a coordinated national prisoner strike, the first of its kind. The date set for the national strike was September 9th, 2016, the 45th anniversary of the Attica Prison Uprising. The strike was set to call attention to the uninhabitable living conditions of prisons across the country as well as the low wages paid to prisoners and other problems related to the dehumanization of incarcerated people. Some prisoners also wanted to draw attention to the larger structural problems in our society. One Michigan prisoner pointed out that “prisons are convenient for society because it’s where society hides all of its problems.”

Prisoners across Michigan organized to support the national strike and on the morning of September 9th prisoners did not show up to work at four different facilities. One of the largest actions in the country occurred at Kinross Correctional Facility in the Upper Peninsula. On the morning of September 10th prisoners organized a huge peaceful demonstration in the prison yard. When a team of riot police attacked the prisoners, the situation escalated into a battle in which the prisoners attempted to defend themselves from the violence of the police.

Brutal retaliation against the prisoners followed this action. At least 200 prisoners were rounded up, found guilty of “incite to riot,” transferred to facilities across the state, and put in adminis-

trative segregation, commonly known as solitary confinement. Most of their property, including legal documents, clothing, televisions, and other personal belongings acquired with great difficulty over many years, was destroyed or stolen.

Now, more than 7 months later, about 100 of those prisoners have finally been let out from solitary confinement and back into the general population. This is a huge win, but it also means that more than 80 of the Kinross prison rebels are still in solitary. Some may remain there for another 17 months. These prisoners are being punished harshly and unfairly merely for their alleged participation in a peaceful demonstration against unlivable conditions.

As the struggle against the violence of prison continues, we can support those locked up with letters of support. These letters go a long way toward showing incarcerated people that there are others outside who care about their struggle and are paying attention. In the words of one Kinross rebel who was let out of solitary in early May, “I’m writing to you today to say thank you and all the others who have supported us... I’m going to end here because mushiness is not a good look in here, but for all you’ve done for us I guess I can sacrifice a little of my male bravado in the interest of honesty, realness, and gratitude! So again and many times over ‘thank you.’”

For more updates, resources, and analysis, as well as a list of Michigan prisoners seeking letters of support, go to [MichiganAbolition.org](http://MichiganAbolition.org)



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## PERSPECTIVES ON REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE:

*This is the first article in a series of pieces that argue perspectives on revolutionary theory. The following article is the perspective of one author, Jules. Subsequent pieces that both engage with and critique these ideas will be published in the next issue.*

### UNDERSTANDING THE RISE OF THE RIOT AND THE HIGHWAY BLOCKADE

by Jules

We are currently facing a historical moment in which some revolutionary tactics are rising in prominence and some are falling into the dustbin of history. Although the capitalist system is global in nature, these dynamics develop differently in different places. For this piece we are going to zoom in on the United States. For a moment, think back to the beginning of the 20th century: poor and oppressed people were fighting back. But how? What sort of tactics were people using? What tactics during that time had *the most revolutionary potential*? In Michigan, as across the country, workers were organizing militant unions and shutting down major pieces of U.S. industry. In addition to their struggle for dignity and better working conditions, they were also leveraging their position as workers to challenge the whole of society by *shutting down the places that they worked*.

Now fast forward to today: what tactics are poor and oppressed people already using to fight back today? Ever since the late 1960s, the United States has seen wave after wave of riots, and their younger cousin: blockades of infrastructure like highways and shipping ports.

For more than a century the Left understood the revolutionary potential contained in the strike of workers. Yet many on the Left today are in the habit of dismissing riots and similar actions as “disorganized” or not tied to any larger coherent project of liberation. This view is incorrect. By understanding the tactics of strike and riot as tied to larger changes in the economy we can understand the changing terrain of revolutionary struggle. In sum, until the early 1970s the economy in

the U.S. was booming. This meant that capitalists, or big business owners, were making most of their money by producing things and by exploiting the workers that made those things. The auto industry and heavy manufacturing in Detroit is prototypical of this era. We call the places that workers make commodities the “**sphere of production**.”

After the severe economic downturn, or *crisis*, that began in the 1970s, it was much harder for the capitalists to make money by “pure” manufacturing. Economic downturn, deindustrialization, automation (the replacement of workers with machines): these processes all ramped up in the 1970s. This meant that workers in huge numbers were cast out from manufacturing plants. They lost their steady employment. These changes meant that it became harder for the capitalists to make money by *producing things*. It became easier to make a profit in the world of finance and in the world of delivering products. So what does this mean for the poor and working class seeking to make fundamentally restructure society so that it actually meets their needs? It means that they had to reimagine their relationship to the capitalist system. These changes meant that they were no longer primarily related to the system as *workers*. Instead, their labor was less important to the making of profit. This means they became “**surplus populations**.”

This change in the relationship of poor people to the economy means that the terrain of revolutionary struggle also changed. The sites of struggle changed from the *sphere of production* to the sphere of circulation. “Circulation” means the part of the economy where goods get moved around to different places in a timely fashion to create wealth. Think Amazon. Or even more generally, think of the entire shipping industry.

So we have now arrived at the past few decades: we have now arrived at 2017. Militant actions at the workplace, at the point of production, no longer carry the weight they once did.

Instead, the poor, the Black, radicals and revolutionaries are fighting back by *shutting down the circulation of commodities*. They are rioting and shutting down cities. They are looting and taking back goods from shops that exploit them. They are shutting down the Port of Oakland. They are shutting down major freeways.

Why are these the tactics of choice? Because we fight where we stand. We are, by and large, no longer participants in the widespread *production* of commodities. Instead, we find the chokeholds of the economy where *stuff is moved around*. We fight back from the neighborhoods, not the workplace (although many of us fight back at the workplace too).

Armed with this analysis, we can better understand the explosions popping off across the country: youth attack police cars in Portland because *jobs promised them no longer exist*. The Black poor burn down a CVS because the system has deemed them *more fit for a prison cell than a steady job*. The spread of the riot represents a spread of disenchantment, a spread of generalized dispossession.

The highway blockade, the riot, the struggle against capital at places *other* than the factory, these tactics have arrived. By looking at the broader trends of automation and deindustrialization we can better understand the rise of the riot as reflective of a fundamentally changed relationship between the working class and the economy. With this rudimentary analysis we can better understand and sympathize with the tactics that freedom fighters are already using.

And with this understanding comes a choice: People are already fighting for freedom. Do we condemn them? Or do we join them?

*Much of the theoretical framework for this piece owes a debt to the work of Joshua Clover in his 2016 book *Riot, Strike, Riot: The New Era of Uprisings*.*