

SELF HELP FOR REVOLUTIONARIES

This guide is for those who participated in the uprising last summer and who are now navigating the changing terrain; for revolutionaries who are dealing with a slowing pace of struggle.

This 'self help' guide is for those who participated in the uprising last summer and who are now navigating the changing terrain. While it is not clear what this summer will bring, we may be entering a lull. Things may cool off for a period. This text was written for revolutionaries who are dealing with a slowing pace of struggle.

Of course, we hope to be wrong. We would eagerly welcome a return of the revolutionary élan we saw in the streets in the summer of 2020. But we have to face reality. Some might take this as a sign of retreat. Regardless, we must catch our breath today to prepare for tomorrow's battles, which means consolidating our forces, finding our friends, and staying out of jail.

Many of us participated in the uprising in ways that sought to push it to its limits: to make it bigger, more intense, more widespread, more dynamic. We were inspired when the Third Precinct went up in flames. Like a guiding light, we followed it. We dipped our torches in the flames, carrying them to every city in this dark country where, for a few beautiful months, hope shined bright. Then we saw them doused, one by one. Today, we find ourselves alone, or maybe with a few friends, huddling over those last embers.

Navigating these ups and downs is difficult. As each wave of struggle breaks, it may seem that our numbers and capacity should only grow. But this is often not the case. Participants instead turn on each other, blaming one another for why the movement failed. The excitement of the uprising gives way to enthusiastic inquisitions and character assassinations of old friends. Combined with repression, this can lead to a situation where many people pull back, leave town, or simply leave altogether.

In the big picture, we did all we could have done to change the outcome of last summer's uprising. We are a minor current in a much larger sea, and our influence is minimal at best when compared to the flows of history. What we do certainly matters, but we should not inflate our importance.

We are thus faced with an old question. How do we maintain a fidelity to the potential we glimpsed in the uprising, once the uprising itself has been eclipsed? How are we to “resist, as long as the ‘intermission’ of the revolution lasts, the homicidal assault of the ghosts of guilt, the solitude that leads to confusion, the hallucinations and deviations that lead to madness, and the return to the habitual roles of economic and family life that were thought to have been left behind?”

Below are some suggestions on what we can do in this moment of lull. We hope that by finding each other, building, and preparing, that we will have more capacity, resolve, and strength in the next round.

1 *A wave of repression often follows a wave of mass struggle.*

The state never rests. As struggle recede, the state will continue to intimidate participants, hoping that someone will panic and reveal information about their activities and networks. If the FBI or local police make a visit, the key is to stay calm, never talk, and always reach out to comrades to build support. In the aftermath of the 2011 Occupy movement, a number of “known anarchists” in the Pacific Northwest were subpoenaed to testify in front of a grand jury, and then sentenced to jail time when they refused to cooperate. It’s possible this strategy of ‘casting-a-wide-net’ to build a social map of partisans will be used again.

2 *Avoid participating in internecine fights within your city’s political scene in this period.*

Even when we think we are right, these debates are often losing battles that tend to become divorced from any practical consequences or real stakes. People who we find ourselves debating frequently have no skin in the game to begin with. Beware of conflicts that are merely masks for ego trips and performances of power that have little to do with actually destroying the old order. The unfortunate reality is that no social circle is free of its petty feuds, vanity, self-aggrandisement, competitiveness, and delusions of grandeur. We are all mutilated by this world. Treasure the friendships you’ve found, and hold onto them.

3 *This is not an argument for self-isolation. We should aim to build an ecology of revolutionary perspectives with room for both debate and collaboration.*

The main political dividing line is between those who have a basic orientation towards revolution and those who don’t. At the same time, the main personal dividing line is between those who are capable and willing to treat others with respect and those who aren’t.

Revolutionary ideas are undeveloped today, including our own, because these ideas can only be tested in struggle. We simply have to

be generous—which means not getting obsessive over minor factional differences—if we want to develop revolutionary practice in any meaningful direction.

4 *By now you probably have a mild adrenaline addiction as well as extreme nervous system burnout. This can make for a long crash and persistent depression.*

It can really help to do intensive weight training or combat sports. Your body is probably more primed for this than you think. You can do this on your own or with comrades. The point is not just to become physically strong, but rather to build strength in a broader sense. This means learning to care for your mental health, learning to operate in high-adrenaline situations, and developing the discipline to structure your own time. Develop the skills that will allow you to ramp up, but also slow down when necessary. These things can be an enormous personal help when there is a lull in general political activity and will also increase your capacity to fight when the time comes.

5 *Revolutionaries tend to quit not because of repression or incarceration, but because of demoralization.*

Watching something beautiful and powerful be crushed is a real and traumatic loss. Often mental health issues are tied to the lows that follow huge upsurges in struggle. If you are able to, you might want to start seeing a therapist. If you cannot afford a therapist, get together with friends to talk about how you are feeling. Be honest, do not judge, and listen. It is completely normal to feel sad, upset, hopeless, and somewhat lost. Sharing misery with one another is an important way to bond, overcome the misery, and develop resilience.

6 *Take the time to reflect on your experience of the uprising with friends.*

Ask yourself: what surprised you in the moment? Who tended to show up and where did things tend to happen in the city? What were the turning points and missed opportunities? What were you able to

contribute, and what did you wish you could have contributed? Are there skills, resources, infrastructure, contacts, or organizational capacities that you wished you had had? Compare your experience to reports from other cities. Try to develop these reflections into something that can be shared. It is safe to assume that many others are thinking through the same questions, and would benefit from your insights. Narrating these stories is how we prevent amnesia from washing away the lessons learned in struggle.

7 *Develop practical skills based on your experiences in the uprising.*

Try to use this lull to develop the concrete skills that might be needed for the next round of struggles. This can be done alone but is best done with friends. Be patient and forgiving: learning new skills takes time. There are certain skills that every comrade should have a basic competency in. For other skills, it might make sense for certain comrades to really focus on developing proficiencies. In preparing for the coming struggles, a group of friends should strive for the right balance between a shared baseline competency and a sensible division of labor.

8 *Reading is a crucial part of developing your fighting capacities. Make the most of this downtime by studying.*

What questions did the movement raise for you? What don't you understand about capitalist society, race and gender, and the history of struggle? A limited understanding of the world can lead to unrealistic expectations about how struggles might progress and how they are defeated. Grounding our perspectives in theory and history can help stave off despair and cynicism. Reading together allows us to learn how to think together and prepares us to do so on the fly during struggles. As with other skills, it's important that comrades sustain a baseline of shared theoretical knowledge and reflective competencies. Not everyone needs to become an expert on everything. But everyone should be confident enough to hold their own in conversations. This prevents the emergence of a scene of informal leaders and followers.

9 *After an uprising, it is tempting to turn to some sort of “organizing” as a way to still feel like you’re contributing something. But it is also risky.*

The reality is that none of us really knows what to do in moments of lull. Lots of experiments have been tried in the last couple decades, with little to show for their efforts. But all we can do is experiment.

It makes a lot of sense to continue with some kind of organizing project after the uprising. Such organizing projects can be links between one wave of struggle to another. At the same time, many projects launched after previous uprisings failed make much difference during 2020’s events, a fact which should provoke a reassessment.

One way to think of organizing projects is to question whether they can ultimately contribute to these uprisings when they occur, or at least to similar but more limited moments of struggle. The reality is that most organizing projects, even the most “radical” and well-intentioned, either have little to offer in the moment or end up actually playing a conservative role when things are really accelerating. All we can do is be honest about our projects, leave behind those that serve as brakes on the struggle, and try to develop skills and forms of coordination that can clearly contribute to something more militant. But this is easier said than done. It is very difficult in this period to know what is helpful and what is simply doing busy work.

10 *Take on a collective project that will build infrastructure or capacity for future struggles.*

The lull between struggles can sometimes last years. There are a number of pressures to pull us apart. But we are most effective when struggles occur if we are already organized in some way. This means finding some way to hold on to one another during the downtime.

It makes sense to develop projects with your friends that will keep you collaborating. By learning how to work and think together in the downtime, we are able to do it much more effectively in the heat of the moment. Avoid becoming a foot soldier to existing networks of activists; try instead to initiate something new. Develop new forms of infrastructure or hone practical skills so that you and

your friends have something practical to contribute to future struggles. Avoid insularity where possible. Look for ways that your project can put you in touch with other revolutionaries in a practical way. The aim is to strike a balance between something ambitious enough that you are excited to do it, but humble enough that you can sustain it. These things should be based around people's actual aptitude, interests, and what they like to do.

11 *The race is long. You don't want to burn out. Be honest about your capacities.*

There is nothing wrong with taking a step back from the intensity of the movement to get your life on track. Intense periods of struggle often require us to temporarily sacrifice or sideline other aspects of our lives, which can atrophy or crumble if we do not attend to them. In this down time rebuild whatever you need to: whether that is making more money, reconnecting with old friends, or planting a garden. More personal stability usually means we are in a better position to contribute when it matters.

Do things you enjoy besides politics: play the guitar, learn how to surf, write a novel, travel, and make art. Find time to enjoy your life. Boredom is counter-revolutionary.

12 Find each other.

Many people all over the country had similar experiences as us last summer and are thinking through similar questions. We have to be humble about what people like us can contribute or build during these lulls. But we shouldn't shy away from the fact that what we, and people like us, were able to contribute to the uprising did matter. The more of us there are next time--and the more we are coordinated in some way, with a shared infrastructure, and a shared baseline of skills and theoretical knowledge, and a shared maturity in handling debates and disagreements--will matter. If the next uprising is to produce a breakthrough into something fundamentally new, we will need as

many of us as possible to keep that rupture open.

For that reason, we need to find each other.

13 *While there is no avoiding the internet, be careful.*

During the pandemic, internet activism skyrocketed. The types of thinking and language popular on social media offer us the worst examples of how we should relate to one another as comrades. How we behave on these platforms undeniably influences how we behave with each other in real life. All we can do is be aware of that tension and try not to replicate the worst.

14 *Keep going.*

Hopefully we will meet each other in the streets once again, renewed, strengthened, and with a greater capacity to fight our enemies. Many of us will never meet each other, but we should all know that there are more and more of us all over the country, dedicated and working to overthrow capitalist society and bring our catastrophic way of life to an end. Every barricade built, every police station burned, every store looted is a way of communicating with each other, of seeing each other, of knowing that we are not alone.

In the meantime, let's be gentle with each other, so we can be dangerous with the enemy.

When it's time, we'll see you at the barricades.

How do we maintain a fidelity to the potential we glimpsed in the uprising, once the uprising itself has been eclipsed?

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In *Self Help For Revolutionaries*, the anonymous author offers 14 suggestions for what we can do when the crest of an uprising has passed.