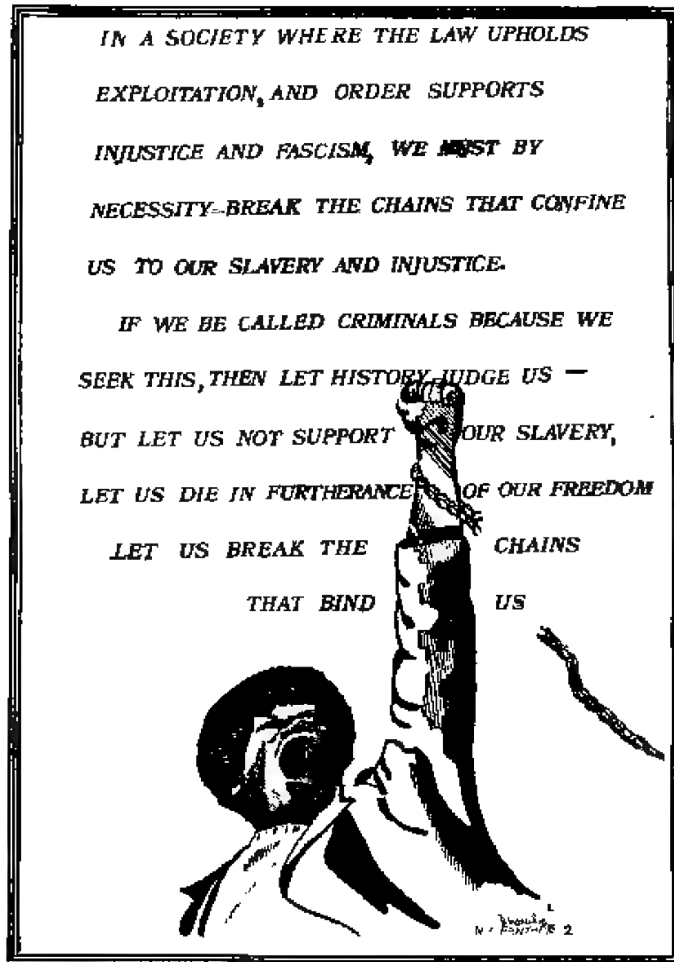


Armed Struggle:



Natural Response to Fascism

Martin Sostre



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with whatever weapons at hand



"Most movement organizations are so busy following their dogmatic party lines, repeating revolutionary clichés and downing other movement groups that they're unable to see the self-evident. Were their natural powers of perception and consciousness not stultified by party-lineism they would know that a revolutionary liberation movement must deal with the enemy concurrently on all levels, including armed violence. Otherwise when the inevitable showdown with the ruling class comes, the revolution will be left defenseless and the lives of our beloved comrades needlessly sacrificed."—Martin Sostre

One might not guess it from its title, but Martin Sostre's essay, "Armed Struggle: Natural Response to Fascism," is a nuanced, careful, and eloquent consideration of political strategy in the context of repressive, totalitarian rule. Published in 1975 in the magazine *Black Flag: Organ of the Anarchist Black Cross*, Sostre's essay is partly a response to leftist critiques of the strategies of the controversial Symbionese Liberation Army, or SLA, whose acts of assassination, kidnapping, and armed-robbery were often deemed vanguardist, tactically-ill thought, and politically disastrous. Yet Sostre reads the theoretical manifesto of the SLA against the real-world political conditions in the United States, where in the 1970s, just as now, a set of "repressive fascist measures" were being implemented—from restoration of the death penalty to a system of total surveillance to "infiltration, frame-ups, assassinations, brutalisations, de-humanisations, behaviour modification, and genocide."

In this light, Sostre asks, what should the popular response to fascism look like? If the political rhetoric of fascism is white supremacy and its primal political program is violence, can it only be challenged via appeals to humanity, calls for reform, or prayers for peace, democracy, and non-violence? Sostre is also clear, however, that the fight against fascism demands not a single strategy, but a range of strategies: the anti-fascist response must be "multi-dimensional," "complex," and able to meet people where they are.

Born in East Harlem on March 20, 1923, Martin Ramirez Sostre, was an Afro-Puerto Rican revolutionary anarchist. After a short stint in the army and a longer period of hustling, Sostre opened the legendary Afro Asian Book Shop at 1412 Jefferson Avenue in Buffalo, NY. The bookstore became a political and pedagogical refuge for many during the urban strife and whitesupremacist warfare that rocked the city in the late 1960s. In 1967, Sostre and co-worker Geraldine Robinson were arrested on COINTELPRO fabricated drug charges. He was sentenced by an all-white jury to thirty to forty years in prison. Sostre spent the next decade in prison, often in solitary confinement, regularly humiliated and tortured by guards.

While incarcerated, Sostre became a successful "jailhouse lawyer" using legal appeals for his own rights. He also advocated for the religious and political rights of all prisoners and for the end of draconian policies of censorship, solitary confinement, and invasive bodily exams. As the editors of the North Carolina Central Law Review note in their introduction to Sostre's 1973 essay "The New Prisoner" Sostre was also "the moving force behind the formation of a prisoners' union in New York State and

an advocate of minimum wages for inmate workers.” Sostre also introduced figures like Black anarchist Lorenzo Kom’Boa Ervin to anarchist theory and practice. Sostre was released from prison in 1976 through a combination of his own efforts and of the Free Martin Sostre campaign. He died on August 12, 2015 at the age of 92.

A visionary with a highly attuned sense of both justice and praxis, Martin Sostre had the mind of a political strategist. These qualities are demonstrated in his essay “Armed Struggle: Natural Response to Fascism.” We reprint it below.

I have carefully studied the Declaration of the Revolutionary War and the Symbionese Liberation Army and find it generally sound. It incorporates much of our historical revolutionary experience. I believe that the Symbionese Liberation Army has one of the most advanced revolutionary programmes for liberation in operation within the United States of America.

The SLA represents the greatest challenge to fascist power because it objectifies the nucleus of the people’s army which as history shows is necessary to deliver the death-blow to the military arm of the fascist parasitic class.

Your comrade in struggle,

Martin Sostre

Martin Sostre, “Armed Struggle: Natural Response to Fascism,” *Black Flag: Organ of the Anarchist Black Cross*, vol. 4 no. 3 (August 1975)

criminal ruling class rubbed their hands in glee and publicised how divided the left was over the SLA. Each left organisation seemed to be competing with the others for legitimacy by denouncing the SLA. It was utterly disgusting, reactionary and opportunistic.

Nor were the denunciations made in a spirit of constructive criticism by fellow comrades. No attempt was made by the movement press to publicise the SLA's programme, analyse it and point out where it was erroneous. The criticism was deliberately hostile and designed to isolate the SLA by poisoning people's minds against them.

Conspicuously absent from the denunciations of the SLA in the movement press is any discussion of the role of armed struggle. The impression given is that armed struggle is not an essential part of the revolutionary struggle, that revolutionary violence is something repulsive which should be shunned. The left movement press would have one believe that to overthrow the criminal ruling class we have merely to organise mass movements, demonstrations, protest and repeat revolutionary slogans. Even after Chile (the lates of a series of tragedies where thousands of defenceless comrades were slaughtered because of the criminal refusal of leftist leaders to arm the people against the armed might of the ruling class) the movement in the United States still follows the same ill-fated line of Allende – as evidenced by the bitter denunciations of the armed action of the SLA.

Most movement organisations are so busy following their dogmatic party lines, repeating revolutionary cliches and downing other movement groups that they're unable to see the self-evident. Were their natural powers of perception and consciousness not stultified by party-lineism they would know that a revolutionary liberation movement must deal with the enemy concurrently on all levels, including armed violence. Otherwise when the inevitable showdown with the ruling class comes, the revolution will be left defenceless and the lives of our beloved comrades needlessly sacrificed.

The SLA is the armed resistance of the people to the exploitative, racist and sexist fascism which is now upon us. All resisters of oppression, on whatever level of conscience they may be, should rejoice at the SLA's existence, at their successful deeds and the fear they put in the hearts of the criminal ruling class. It's therefore the duty of us all to support by all means necessary, our SLA comrades. We must close ranks with them and give them the support they need. Let's not fall for the malicious lies spread by agents of the FBI about the SLA which are designed to isolate the SLA from the people to make it easier to capture and murder them.

Armed Struggle: Natural Response to Fascism

Martin Sostre

Sisters and Brothers:

The escalating repression by this predatory, racist and sexist capitalist system makes glaringly clear to all but the most politically backward that the dire predictions that U.S. capitalism would evolve into fascism have come to pass. Restoration of the death penalty, life sentences for drugs, recent supreme Court rulings upholding the denial of the right to live in communes, the right to privacy and human dignity (by granting police the right to arbitrarily invade peoples' persons and homes and use as evidence in court anything seized during the illegal search), police electronic eavesdropping, infiltration, frame-ups, assassinations, brutalisations, de-humanisations, behaviour modification, and genocide are some of the repressive fascist measures now being implemented.

The question now is: What are we going to do about this murderous fascism? Shall we continue spouting revolutionary rhetoric without commensurate deeds and passively stand by like sheep while our comrades are framed by the gestapo police kidnapped off the streets and murdered one by one? Must we passively wait our turn to be led to the oppressors' cages, brutalised or murdered? Or shall we oppose the choking fascist oppression which if allowed to continue encroaching on what is left of our personal freedoms will eventually convert us into de-humanised mindless robots? The answer is obvious. Indeed, to defend ourselves by all means necessary against the destruction of our human rights and personhood not only is the natural right to self-defence but a human duty.

By what means then shall we resist the fascist oppressors? The answer to this is determined by the means employed to press us. Our oppression is multi-dimensional. We are oppressed economically, legally, psychologically, culturally, physically and by all other means deemed necessary by the criminal ruling class to maintain themselves in power. Since oppression is multi-dimensional, does not common sense dictate that resistance to it be multi-dimensional with each level of oppression challenged by a commensurate level of revolutionary resistance?

For example, the fascist lies propagated by the controlled media press must be challenged with revolutionary truth disseminated by the movement press, tapes, films, books, pamphlets, leaflets, posters, etc. Not too many revolutionaries and militants will disagree with this. Only when the same common-sense is applied to opposing fascist violence with revolutionary armed resistance do many of them become

horrified. Witness the reaction of most of the movement people to SLA's [Symbionese Liberation Army] revolutionary response to fascist repression.

The current revolutionary action of the SLA is the correct and inevitable response to the countless kidnappings, frame-ups, brutalisations and murders perpetrated by the ruling class members upon resisters of oppression. At long last the individual members of this exploitative-racist-sexist system are being subjected to revolutionary justice. As Malcolm X said, "It's a case of the chickens coming home to roost." I extend my revolutionary love and solidarity to my SLA comrades and wish them every success.

Why then are so-called militants and revolutionaries so horrified when armed fascist repression is resisted by the armed might of the people? Do they expect the people to revert to the turn-the-other-cheek state of the 1950s and respond to fascist murder, sadistic brutalisation, frame-ups and tortures with passive acquiescence, love for our fascist enemies and cooperation in our own oppression?

Or is it that these horrified so-called militants and revolutionaries see the liberation struggle as one dimensional, to be fought solely on the level of consciousness they happen to be on? Surely they cannot be so politically retarded [sic] as to believe that in a liberation struggle the enemy should be fought on only one level – that approved by the enemy.

It is just as absurd to propose that everyone resist fascist oppression through peaceful means as to propose armed resistance for everyone. Just because I'm a revolutionary anarcho-communist who believes in armed struggle does not dogmatize me to propose that everyone arm and go underground. Nor would I denounce those who refuse to do so.

Paradoxically, though these leftists bitterly denounce all violence by US revolutionaries against the US ruling class, they highly praise as "heroic" the armed violence of the revolutionaries in Africa, Asia, Ireland, the Middle-East and Latin America. The rule seems to be that armed violence is an acceptable form of revolutionary struggle except when employed by US revolutionaries against the fascist ruling class of the US. In effect, it's as if the role of these left groups is to protect the ruling class from violence and confine the liberation struggle to the boundaries of legal activities approved by the ruling class.

However, the irrefutable truth is that a liberation struggle is revolutionary war. Revolutionary war is a complicated process of mass struggle, armed and unarmed,

peace and violent, legal and clandestine, economic and political, where all forms of struggle are developed harmoniously around the axle of armed struggle. Anyone who by now has not grasped these basic facts does not know what liberation struggle is – or is trying to palm off reformism for liberation struggle.

A distinction must be made between reformists and revolutionaries. Reformists seek merely to reform through legal means, and not overthrow the existing fascist system. That's why they panic when the people exercise their right to armed self-defence against the genocidal violence of the fascist ruling class. Revolutionaries seek the *complete overthrow* of the fascist system by all means necessary including armed struggle. Revolutionaries seek, moreover, to subject to peoples' justice individual members of the ruling class for their many crimes against humanity.

The spreading of the East and West coasts of the philosophy of subjecting members and agents of the ruling class to people's justice attests to how widespread this revolutionary concept has become. It can never be erased from the consciousness of the people, the revolutionary clock.

At long last the peoples' armed force has emerged within the United States to oppose the gestapo of the ruling class. The balance of power has radically shifted. Gone forever are the days when fascists could prepare every conceivable crime with impunity. The price of oppression has been raised and shall soon become prohibitive.

The stolen billions of dollars possessed by members of the criminal ruling class shall soon become a liability. They'll be forced to convert their mansions into fortresses protected by round the clock armed guards and electronic protective devices. Every venture outside the besieged fortress will require escorts of armed guards. Even this will not guarantee safety. For revolutionary justice shall stalk the fascist criminals at every turn. Already the people's army has sent shivers of fear through the spine of the criminal ruling class who clearly recognise the signs as meaning: the beginning of the end.

Conversely, the people's armed self-defence force has created new hope in the hearts of the oppressed – particularly revolutionary comrades held hostage in fascist prisons serving long sentences. Soon the fascist ruling class will be forced to free these prisoners of war in exchange for captured members of their own class.

The denunciation of the SLA by the movement press is indistinguishable from that of the ruling class. Indeed, some movement papers quoted statements from the controlled press to support their claim that the people rejected the kidnapping. The