The Responsibility of Criminals

Roadkill Revolt

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Obviously, you don't run around telling everyone you're under investigation, anyone who has been investigated, or in close relation with someone who has, knows this well. So how do we ensure we keep those around us safe while under this type of pursuit?

To start this: Is this an inflammatory title? Kind of. Kind of not. This is not a blanket statement, not by a long shot.

So in what context is this meant?

Firstly, Political criminals, specifically if they've been caught, specifically if they are anarchists. Secondly, there will be no answers here. There will be questions posed and pondered, things suggested and condemned - but none of these are answers. This is to encourage thought on the issue and hopefully illuminate a needed conversation. I have opinions and surely my opinions will reflect here, figure out yours. Finally, everything is hypothetical. Always.

So lets propose a hypothetical: A person, a political criminal, let's call them elderberry, is under surveillance of a federal agency and actively under repression of the courts in trial. Aware of this, elderberry continuously involves themselves in political situations that require discretion. Some of their close affiliates are aware of this, but they regard themselves as an "organizer" as well as find themselves going to discrete anarchist gatherings. They engage in political activities, with varying risk levels, and often coexist in sensitive, political spaces, both with individuals that are aware of their surveillance status and with those who are not.

Is this okay?

Those who are aware of elderberry's status are able to address that within their risk assessment when deciding to involve themselves. What about everyone else?

Let's say elderberry goes to a gathering, 4 days in the forest. At an anarchist gathering you can expect the surveillance of local law enforcement, but, suddenly, because of elderberry's attendance, federal surveillance is now targeted at the gathering. Feds have authority, access, and equipment that is not available to local kops. Most others at the gathering will not have viewed being under the federal gaze as a likely possibility. Even with the increase of left-wing political repression in recent years, for most anarchist gatherings, federal agencies are barely, if at all, aware and do not care. Yet elderberry changed those odds.

Depending on the gathering, depending on the frontline, there's a damn good chance of high-risk individuals being there: other political criminals who have evaded being investigated, migrants, "illegal" workers, people on the run, etc... . None who anticipated the feds watching them. Although they were not the subject of the investigation, due to the increased abilities of the agency surveilling elderberry, flags may be raised, or, they may plainly investigate everyone. Given the current RICO case against Weelaunee forest defenders, which is attempting to set precedent of left-leaning communities and, specifically, anarchist (or those who they choose to label as such), working together being labeled as "organized crime"

and “racketeering”; this is plenty of incentive for said federal agency to take note on everyone at that gathering.

Elderberry arrived with 1 or 2 close comrades, there are 30ish people at the gathering depending on the day. Elderberry, attempted to be diligent (or maybe they didn’t) to make sure their stuff wasn’t bugged or tracked, but maybe they missed something. Turns out their phone is bugged, and although they don’t have it on them while having sensitive conversations, it’s on them enough during casual moments and a few things slip through. They also mostly turn off their phone when they are partaking in sensitive activities, some of which are group activities - a pattern that may or may not be noticed. Nobody but elderberry and the comrades they came with know that they are under federal surveillance.

Can anybody else there give informed consent to participating? Fooling local kops is a lot easier than fooling the feds. Evading local kops is a lot easier than evading the feds. You’re playing a very different game when you are dealing with 3 letter agencies.

Obviously, elderberry can’t go around telling everyone at the gathering that they are under surveillance or being investigated - that would leave them vulnerable. Obviously, people often tend to try keeping a low profile while under surveillance, but that is an individual risk one must make for themselves. When making that personal assessment should you actively be considering those around you? Is it ethical not to? Even outside of spaces with explicitly active political criminals, would it be ethical for elderberry to volunteer at a soup kitchen that has a lot of “illegal” migrants that go there? This is a question of are others informed enough to make proper risk assessments to gauge their willingness, and therefore consent, and do we owe each other that? Is it fair to put others at that risk? Is it worth it? Could it be harmful?

Personally, i believe it is the feds’ job to try to find political criminals, and leading the feds to hotspots for their investigations is doing their job for them. We owe each other a lot, even if we are not in direct community. Not even necessarily for each other but for Liberation. When we are fighting alongside each other, even if on different fronts, it is in our best interest to protect each other.

Again, these are not answers, only opinions. And, although hypothetical, a very real concern, especially lately.

We need more political criminals, not more political prisoners. We keep us safe. Or at least we probably should.