

## Justice for Gaza: why we cry out

Andrew Loucks  
LINCHPIN

The Israeli government strangles and plans an attack on Gaza for months, times its provocation for the biggest of US election days, then launches an audaciously brutal bombardment upon a people trapped in the most densely populated land in the world. It bombs infrastructure, schools, mosques, homes and aid depots, leaving hundreds of thousands without power, clean water, adequate food and access to medical care.

It calls its own cease fire on its own terms, content with battering a defenceless people until they submit, cognizant of the need to stop just before Obama's inauguration. There is outrage all over the world, but in Canada the mainstream media largely laps up and regurgitates the propaganda of the powerful, and the federal government applauds enthusiastically.

It is easy to feel powerless in the antiwar movement, especially in these "war on terror", "support 'our' troops", "democratic states must have the right to defend themselves" days. We live in a country where we have next to no power between elections; and during these charades of democracy our collective pulse is taken several times a day to determine the best course of manipulation. Our cries in the streets against the bombing and strangling of Palestinians into submission seem irrelevant in this context. In some ways they are. But only if we are unrealistic about what they can accomplish, unwise about what these tactics can do.

Our demonstrations are not ways to pressure or convince Canadian politicians into changing their minds. Why would the

administrators of a middle power state (Canada) that is fully integrated with a falling empire (the US) interested in supporting their bully (Israel) on the block (the Middle East) lose sleep over 1400 dead Palestinians and a few thousand muslims, peaceniks and radicals yelling in the streets? Let's face it: our political

we simply must let out – especially those of us who are connected to the bombings and ongoing seige through family and other experiences. They are refusals to follow the logic of isolation and self-interest inherent in media questions like "why are you steelworkers protesting?" They are tangible, active manifestations of opposition that mean far more than a poll. They are opportunities to connect our resistance with our communities directly. Most importantly, they are ways to build a more powerful movement.

It is becoming more powerful. It is more difficult now for far right ideologues like Benjamin Netanyahu to come to Canadian communities and spread hate. Major unions like the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and the Ontario branch of the Canadian Union of Public Employees have signed on to the Palestinian call for boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS) and are holding fast against

the usual stinging accusations of anti-semitism. We must support these and other efforts to resist, and we must work hard to counter propaganda for Israeli apartheid, especially when the spotlight is on.

*Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions:*  
<http://www.bdsmovement.net>



January 6/09: Toronto march against Israeli assault on Gaza  
Photo: Edward Wong

system is pathetically unresponsive to demands for justice.

So why should we put parts of our lives on hold to ramp up political activities if they're not going to save any lives on the ground? What are all the protests and marches and forums and other efforts for?

They are reactive displays of outrage

### about us >>

Common Cause is an Ontario anarchist organization. We publish the Linchpin paper bimonthly, as well as additional content online. Branches are active in Hamilton, Ottawa and Toronto, and there is interest elsewhere, including northern Ontario. We welcome new members and alliances with activist groups. Contact us at:

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# Ashanti Alston: Anarchist Panther

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Ashanti Alston (b. 1954) came of age as the political action of the '60s was hitting its peak. He recalls struggling through Malcolm X's biography as a teen and feeling awestruck at the 1967 rebellions that saw numerous American neighbourhoods temporarily taken over by the people who lived there, including his home town of Plainfield, New Jersey. "That was my entry," recalls Alston. "I wanted to be one of them black revolutionaries." (<http://illvox.org/2008/06/22/an-interview-with-ashanti-alston/>)

Alston joined the Black Panther Party while still in high school, starting a chapter in Plainfield, and later going underground with the Black Liberation Army. For a while, Alston straddled the above ground Panther work of selling newspapers and running breakfast programs with more aggressive underground tactics, such as attempts to free political prisoners. The BLA would also target police for their brutality, as well as drug dealers and banks, to both disrupt exploitation and help fund political work. In

1974 Alston was involved in a Connecticut "bank expropriation," captured and imprisoned for 11 years.

Alston wouldn't call himself a class struggle anarchist. He accepts few if any labels, but has been influenced by the Panthers, post structuralism, anti-oppression, Marxism, the Zapatistas, indigenous American thought and struggles, environmental justice groups (Earth First and others), anarcho-communists, primitivists, individualists and others. For Alston, strict adherence to one or another school of thought and praxis implies you have the answers for people: "I don't want to be categorized as a particular school because I know if I do, the world I would hope to be created won't have room for all kinds of tendencies of anarchism, or all kinds of tendencies of people living their lives according to their own terms."

Nevertheless, Alston is firmly an anarchist, and he knows why: "Even with the white anarchist community, I really feel like of all the groups, the anarchist mindset is still open to understanding all the different oppressions, that they're not stuck on that it's just the system out there and you have

to change the system. Anarchists, I think, understand the power thing more than others, so for me there's potential there. Already, anarchists will deal with movements that silence queers, folks of color, even on an age level — ageism, ableism. And when we start talking about how we have centered everything around us as human beings [at the expense of other species and ecosystems], I think that's great shit. For that, I'm going to stay with the anarchist movement. I just want that movement to figure out more ways to be relevant to the broader communities."

Today, Alston is active in the prison abolition movement (Critical Resistance and the National Jericho Movement), in Anarchist People of Color organizing, and in efforts to connect organizers of colour in the north with the Zapatistas (Estacion Libre).

*For a much more thorough account of Ashanti Alston's life and politics, check out:*

<http://illvox.org/2008/06/22/an-interview-with-ashanti-alston/>  
[http://auto\\_sol.tao.ca/node/3021](http://auto_sol.tao.ca/node/3021)

## Black Anarchism and Lorenzo Komboa Ervin

Jeremy O'Toole  
LINCHPIN

In order to remain relevant, anarchists should strive for our theory to be a culmination of teachings from individuals and communities in struggle and revolt against capitalism and domination. Black anarchism is a term used to describe the contributions made by black revolutionaries to anarchist thought and towards a movement that is tailored to their own experience.

One such revolutionary is Lorenzo Komboa Ervin. Born in Tennessee, his political activity began at age 12 as a member of the NAACP, participating in sit ins and rallies. As the political and social atmosphere became more volatile in the US and around the world, Ervin was radicalized as a part of the movements of the 60's and 70's, becoming a member of the Black Panther Party after being drafted to fight in Vietnam. Out of these movements grew a number of Black anarchists, many gravitating toward anarchism while incarcerated for their political activities. In 1969 Ervin was accused of plotting to

assassinate a KKK leader and was finally apprehended following an international manhunt, during which he sought refuge in Cuba and East Germany.

On the run, Ervin became disillusioned with state socialism after witnessing how these ideas were implemented in the countries he fled to. This led him to write



Lorenzo Komboa Ervin  
[infohop.org/rants/lorenzo.html](http://infohop.org/rants/lorenzo.html)

*Anarchism and the Black Revolution* while in prison, writing, "Even though there are governments that claim to be 'workers states,' 'Socialist countries' or so-called

'revolutionary governments,' in essence they all have the same function: dictatorship and oppression of the many over the few."

Aside from being a basic introduction to class struggle anarchism, his writings also outline some of the foundation for Black anarchist ideas in North America. Some of these ideas were met with controversy, particularly his proposals regarding Black nationalism and intercommunalism. Ervin emphasized organizing as a Black nation and put forth intercommunalism, which he describes as the need for "world relations between African people and their revolutionary social movements, instead of their governments and heads of state." This view is rejected by some anarchists, who see it as too nationalistic.

Ervin has been involved with organizations like the IWW and Love & Rage since being released from prison in 1983. Today, he remains active in a number of projects around prisoners and anti-racist community organizing, and continues to write and do speaking engagements.

*More info on Lorenzo and Black anarchism:*  
[illvox.org](http://illvox.org) or [lemming.mahost.org/abr/](http://lemming.mahost.org/abr/)

# Canada Rescuing Afghanistan?

A review of *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar*

Andrew Loucks  
LINCHPIN

If you are a political junkie of some sort, you will likely be fascinated by Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang's multi-faceted answer to the question of how the Canadian government came to help invade and occupy Afghanistan. The role of Ballistic Missile Defense and the Iraq war; the transitions from the Chretien to the Martin and Harper governments; the bravado, patriotism and military marketing skill of Canadian Chief of Defence Staff Rick Hillier; the imbalance between civilian departments and the military; and the ever-present consideration of remaining favoured members of the US imperial sphere are all factors impressively explained and documented in *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar* (Toronto: Penguin Group, 2007).

Stein and Lang wouldn't use the words "invade" and "occupy". If the Canadian Oxford dictionary had pictures, the authors would feature near the definition of intelligentsia. Stein directs the Munk Centre for International Studies at the University of Toronto. Lang too has been a fellow at the Munk Centre, and also Chief of Staff to two former Liberal Ministers of National Defence. Interviews with these ministers and other government officials provide evidence for the backbone of Stein and Lang's analysis.

To explain how the Canadian government became so heavily involved in fighting an insurgency in Afghanistan, Stein and Lang borrow three words from the editor of the Beirut Star: ignorance, arrogance and ordinance. It's their catchy way of concluding what might have been long obvious to some: Ottawa hadn't a clue about Afghanistan and its people; it bought into the egos of Bush's America and Canadian Chief of Defence Staff Rick Hillier; and it was oblivious to the developing insurgency.

Some of Stein and Lang's answers, in basic form, are not profound. We may not learn much from their description of Paul Martin's so-called "non-hierarchical" style. But the details of the "how", the multi-layered

analysis of Canadian state machinations in *The Unexpected War* should be interesting even to anti-authoritarian lefties. Most importantly, Stein and Lang show, unequivocally, Chretien's, Martin's, Harper's – and especially the Canadian military's – imperative: "Canada's missions were largely, if not exclusively, determined on the basis of Ottawa's relationship with the United States.... Much was ignored: Afganistan's history, its traditions and accomplishments, its social structure...." (261, 262).

It should have always been clear that the US marines (and their Canadian counterparts) are not, as Indian author and activist Arundhati Roy jokingly put it in 2002, on a feminist mission to liberate Afghan women from their burkhas. But it is valuable to have further, detailed confirmation from the mouths of government officials themselves. Over and over again, Canadian foreign policy decisions were made on the basis of favourable relations with the rulers in Washington and the brass at the Pentagon.

In other words – if it isn't sufficiently obvious already – Afghanistan didn't really matter too much to Canada's Prime Ministers and their cabinets when they sent thousands of troops and billions of dollars (90 per cent to the military) to Afghanistan. Talk about helping a wartorn people is mainly about "shap[ing] the public environment" (198). Stein and Lang recognize this, writing in their concluding chapter of the importance of actually "seeing" Afghanistan, of the importance of "meeting of eyes and...sharing of stories." But this isn't likely to happen in the North or South tower of National Defence Headquarters, or the Cabinet anteroom.

*The Unexpected War* is a book interested in a nobler, wiser statecraft. Stein and Lang pay little attention to the sophistication of empire. They insist "there is no intention to conquer in Canada's mission in Kandahar" (302). Canadian soldiers may be very professional and noble (no doubt, many are not), conducting some reconstruction and genuinely wanting to help improve Afghan lives. But their role as instruments of Canadian

statecraft is to "close with and destroy the enemy" – enemies never being chosen without anticipating what Washington wants.

## On the Web

More available at [linchpin.ca](http://linchpin.ca)

### Hamilton and Toronto march in solidarity with Gaza

Reports and pictures from Toronto and Hamilton marches

### Ontario anarchist discussion forum

"The popular international anarchist discussion forum [anarchistblackcat.org](http://anarchistblackcat.org) has now added a forum specific for for anarchists and those interested in anarchism in Ontario..."

### Greece: we didn't need another martyr

"With the grassroots mobilisation in schools and universities growing for some time against proposed reforms, Alexandros Grigoropoulos, only 16 years old, was the unlucky choice to become victim and scapegoat of the police apparatus..."

## Members' Blogs

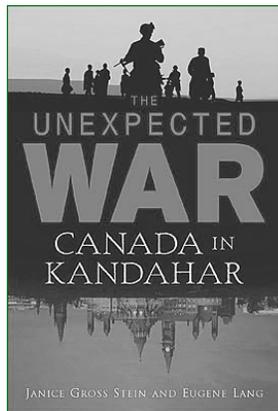
### Police assault students and workers at CUPE 3903 rally

"Police officers then arrested four other protesters, two of which I saw being held on the ground, their faces being crushed into concrete and piles of sharp ice and gravel. One protester's forehead was bleeding from being forced down into the ice."

### Israeli apartheid: an Asian dimension

A new source of cheap and disposable labour was needed after the old one (Palestinians) dried up given security fears...

### Last of "secret trial five" out on bail with strict conditions; still faces deportation to torture



# Learning from the Greek Uprising

Patrick Murtagh  
LINCHPIN

On December 6, 2008 it was not a dark and stormy night when the shot rang out, but it soon became so as a police bullet killed 15 year old Alexis Grigoropoulos. Not that such incidents are unusual. According to a spokesman for the anarchosyndicalist Greek ESE “dozens of Greeks have been killed by the police” since the end of the military dictatorship in 1973.

What was unique was the response, perhaps indicative of the harder times that we have entered. Within minutes the news spread across the country via cell phone, and informal groups of friends had gathered to protest the murder.

Protest turned to riot, and for some weeks the conservative government of Greece teetered on the brink of defeat. Dozens of universities and high schools were occupied. Working class demonstrations and a one day general strike coincided with the student revolt. The government was saved, not by its own efforts but rather by a loss of nerve on the part of the socialist PASOK and the communist KKE who ended up criticising the insurgent students and the left-socialist Syriza more than they did the government.

The events didn't occur in a vacuum. Decades of student militancy have garnered widespread public sympathy since 1973. Tactics such as university occupations are almost routine. Then there is the general state of the Greek economy and society.

Youth unemployment and underemployment are endemic and growing. The government has come to be widely seen as both corrupt and incompetent. While recklessly accumulating public debt (foreign debt was estimated to total 93.9% of GDP in 2008) the state has been demonstrably generous to its corporate friends. In various social conflicts over the past decade the state has sometimes emerged victorious, but often has been forced to back down in the face of popular movements.

Few of the factors that underlay the revolt

but distinctly poorly attended.

Then, incredibly anticlimactically, the Revolution was called off for Christmas. When the New Year arrived the usual militant Greek demonstrations resumed, but without the mass participation and occupations of December. An opportunity had been lost.

What happened shows that mass rebellion is possible in a modern state and, given economic conditions, it is almost inevitable. It also showed that modern technology can amplify small scale initiatives into mass movements. It also showed that such movements can be, at best, inspired, never directed. The Leninist dream is over.

It was also demonstrated that such rebellions have to go beyond mere street fighting if they are to lead to anything permanent. The Greeks began this process with their occupations of educational institutions and brief takeovers of media outlets. They were unable to go further, however, because of a lack of response from Greek workers who generally remained passive outside of young workers in the streets. Without such participation, “revolts” will remain limited and inevitably fizzle out with little gained.

Finally, while rebellions are inevitably spontaneous, in the absence of organization and vision they cannot go further to actually change society. This may have been the main reason for the passivity of the Greek working class. Without such a vision and clear ideas on how to achieve it, one cannot depend on any vanguard, whether it is a party or whether it is those most willing to fight in the streets.

*Patrick edits Molly's Blog:*  
<http://mollymew.blogspot.com>



Athens, December 2008 (<http://athens.indymedia.org>)

in Greece are unique to that country, aside from the existence of a relatively large and militant anarchist movement. It is no wonder that European governments openly worried about the spread of such revolts to other countries. The Greek insurgents attempted to spread the insurrection internationally, using media events and the same cell phone tactics that had proven successful locally. The response was widespread – perhaps hundreds of sympathy actions worldwide –

## Events

**Anarchists Against the Wall**  
Against the theft of Palestinian land

**Ottawa:** Feb 22, 7pm. Jack Purcell Comm. Centre. Info: [abla\\_a76@hotmail.com](mailto:abla_a76@hotmail.com)

**Kingston:** Feb 23. Time TBA. AKA Autonomous Social Centre (75 Queen Street). Info: [grandfunk.cfr@gmail.com](mailto:grandfunk.cfr@gmail.com)

**Toronto:** Feb 24, 7pm. OISE Auditorium (252 Bloor W)

**London:** Feb 25, 6pm. Fanshawe College D Bldg, D1041.

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