

Ep. 150: “A Game of 20 Questions”

150 Celebration

Episode Theme:

Welcome to this week’s edition of *Coffee with Comrades*, a podcast discussing culture, current events, theory, and action through a radical lens...

Intro:

Okay, so I just need y’all to know I considered opening this episode with a fucking air-horn but ultimately decided against it. I think that really demonstrates maturity on my part, but it may also illustrate a real lack of comedic timing. But, I digress...

Welcome, guys, gals, and non-binary pals, to Episode 150 of *Coffee with Comrades*!

Holy shit, it’s actually wild to write that figure down. Maybe if I spell it out it’ll look more real? One-hundred-and-fifty. Nope. Still unbelievable. I’m realizing I am now writing this script stream-of-consciousness style and that is probably because I am *enormously* tired as a result of getting approximately 5 hours of sleep last night, but needless to say this is all staying in the fucking podcast.

Anyway, wow. I gotta say, I feel super jazzed right now. I think after Ep. 200 I’ll just start using every hundred episodes as a retrospective instead of every 50, but it is genuinely satisfying to hit another milestone. I thought I’d take some time to pause, reflect, and mark the occasion with another Q&A edition of *Coffee with Comrades*. I tried to organize these questions in a way that made thematic sense, but the end-result, one way or another, is that I’m gonna be talking at you a lot this episode. So, hopefully you’re into that? I dunno. I’ve never done an episode quite like this, so it’ll be cool to see how it’s received, for better or worse.

That said, before we jump into questions, I do have a couple quick announcements to get through first.

How about that new artwork, huh?? The new *Coffee with Comrades* art, which I like to call our “isometric utopian coffee co-op” was made by the inimitable Nathanael Whale. Folks who listen to *Macabre Media* podcast may recognize Nathanael’s handiwork. I’m so fucking pleased with how the final design came out. I wanted to really lean into the whole “coffee” aesthetic that’s been a part of our show since its inception. The goal was to make a coffee shop *inside* of an espresso machine and Nathanael really just knocked it outta the park. I mean, c’mon, y’all: take a look at all the little *details* in that art, it’s just *delightful*!

Not only that, but Nathanael also helped me design a brand new logo for *Coffee with Comrades*! In the past, we used Draconian font for our episodes. But I’ve had folks reach out on several occasions to say that “Coffee with Comrades” looked like “Toffee with Tomrades” on account of the “C’s” in Draconian Font looking a lot like “T’s.” So, with any luck, our new logo will at least be legible to everyone! Again, massive “thank you” to Nathanael who really gave his all on this art.

In addition, you may have noticed that www.coffeewithcomrades.com has had something of a makeover recently. That is thanks, in no small part, to the help of my friend and comrade, Ursula. Humongous ups to Ursula for all the patience, care, and concern she showed me in helping me revamp the website. Truly, it's all thanks to her know-how that we were able to put the damn thing together. I hope it's more pleasant on the eyes than the hideous LibSyn interface. We put in a lotta time and effort, so I hope folks actually visit the dang thing.

I also want to plug some of our pals in the *Channel Zero Network*...

...If this is your first time checking out *Coffee with Comrades*, thank you so much for being here! This will probably be a *super* confusing episode for you. But, hey, more power to ya! Longtime listeners of the show know that *Coffee with Comrades* is a proud part of the *Channel Zero Network*, an anarchist confederation of podcasts and radio shows.

We're also a program made by a worker for workers. This independent, DIY media project is kept afloat by the generosity and solidarity of listeners just like you. If you dig this show, if you enjoy the conversations we have on this program every week, I'd encourage you to consider supporting our podcast by going to www.patreon.com/coffeewithcomrades and signing up to become a monthly sustainer starting at just a \$1/month. Literally just a dollar. One single dollar.

In return for your gesture of kindness and support, you can join our Discord server, enjoy exclusive first access to new *Coffee with Comrades* episodes, get behind-the-scenes sneak peaks at the making of our episodes, *and* be a part of our fiction book club! Plus, during the month of October, we're gonna be watching horror movies together with our Discord community. And, when the holidays roll around in November and December, we have a few more special surprises up our sleeve.

If you subscribe at the \$5/month level, we'll send you our digital zine catalogue which is filled with issues of *Cold Brew Chronicles*, our bi-monthly zine that's chock-full of essays, stories, poetry, art, and so much more.

I love doing this show, but anyone who's ever created a podcast will tell you that it is a whole *lot* of work. Putting out episodes every single week is no small task. But, because of the camaraderie and support of the comrades in our Patreon, we're able to continue this project and keep up our dedication to never accept ads from third-parties. That said, none of this stuff is meant to exist behind a paywall. "From each according to their volition, to each according to their needs," as the adage goes. If you want to read our zines or hang out in our wholesome Discord server, hit me up and we can work something out!

If you're not in a position to support the show financially but still wanna help us out, that's fucking awesome. A lot of folks are in the same position. It's cool. If you dig *Coffee with Comrades*, the number one way you can support the show is by telling your friends about this podcast. Word-of-mouth is really the only way a show like ours grows.

At any rate, you're probably sick to death of me talking about Patreon at this point, but I do have some exciting news to announce, as well. We recently crossed the threshold for our \$500/month goal on Patreon. Which means, (drum roll please...)

[INSERT DRUM ROLL]

We are gonna be making shirts!

Okay, so, I wanted to have shirts already *made* by the time of this announcement, but then I realized...holy *shit*, making shirts is expensive as hell. I've looked into a couple different options: trying to solicit pre-orders, getting stuff printed on-demand, screen-printing, you-name-it. So, I'm still not entirely sure *how* I am going to get shirts made, but it is very much a thing that's happening. Which brings me to the next exciting piece of this announcement.

I've a number of different shirt ideas I've drawn up. There's a poll linked in the show-notes of the episode that you can check out the different options. I'm curious to see what folks like the most. That's probably where we'll start. So, if you're listening to this and you're like, "Fuck yea, I wanna *Coffee with Comrades* t-shirt!" then go and vote in the poll.

This also means that I have to announce our next Patreon goal. Once we reach \$750/month on Patreon, I will record a mini-TRPG actual play campaign set in a solarpunk world built collaboratively with other podcast hosts and friends of mine and we'll tell a story set in that world together. I know a bunch of y'all are enormous nerds, so I figured that would be a fun goal to set.

Additionally, while we're on the subject of Patreon, I have updated our site to now accept annual contributions. So, if you'd prefer to put everything together in a lump sum rather than as a monthly drip, you can now do so!

The last thing I'll say about Patreon is that I am updating some of the tiers and clarifying some of the rewards. Some of the rewards just never really got solicited or folks were disinterested in them. So, I'm going to be tinkering with everything this month. It'll all be locked into place starting in November. I'll keep folks updated with regular updates on Patreon as we proceed.

Alrighty, well, I think that's all I got for announcements.

Questions:

- 1. If you could go back in time to visit yourself when you made the first episode of Coffee with Comrades, what do you think would surprise Episode 1 Pearson the most?***

Honestly, I never thought we'd make it this far so it's sorta surreal to look back on 150 episodes--really, *over* a 150 episodes--and think about all the different things that have surprised me over the years. I guess, if I had to lay it out, I think the thing that most surprises me is that this show has continued to find an audience. And a fucking awesome audience, at that! The way that this show has continued to grow and find new listeners is all 100% thanks to people like you sharing the program with their friends and comrades. It fucking floors me.

I think that's probably what would surprise Episode 1 Pearson the most. Like, if it wasn't for this show, I wouldn't have wound up meeting my partner, I wouldn't have met a bunch of the amazing comrades on the Channel Zero Network, I wouldn't have met all the kind-hearted and wholesome folks in our Discord server. I get so much joy out of chatting with folks in our Discord. I know it sounds cheesy or whatever, but the community that has come up in support of this show is fucking unreal.

Radical politics, at its best, really does cultivate a genuine sense of community and solidarity. I knew that going into making this podcast, but I've been continually reminded of it throughout the years. So, shout-out to all our pals in the Discord and much love to everyone who listens to this show, whether this is your 150th episode or your very first. I'm probably gonna say it a lot today, but thank you, thank you, thank you.

2. ***What advice would you give to folks who are new to organizing?***

Oh, god, where to begin?

I love this question and think it's a really urgent one. We're living in absolutely hellish times where more and more of us need to be actively engaged in the process of organizing our neighborhoods, our communities, our cities. Less shitposting and memes, more community gardens, land projects, and direct action! I guess the first thing I'd say is to shut the fuck up and listen to the folks in your community who're already actively engaged in work. Sometimes, it can be difficult to find, but those folks who've gotten experience in your neck-of-the-woods are a fucking invaluable resource. That certainly doesn't mean they're infallible, but movement veterans and elders possess positively vital insights.

The second big bit of advice I would give is to identify your own skills. Right? Like, a movement is comprised of discrete individuals. There's this dialectical synthesis of the free and autonomous individual interacting and networking and connecting with their community. But in order to really *aid* your neighbors, you sorta gotta know what you're good at. That doesn't mean "pick a lane and do not stray from it." All of our struggles are deeply, fundamentally intersectional. The more we recognize that, the better! What it means is: identify what unique talents and skills you possess. Are you a greenthumb? Get engaged in community-gardening projects! Do you know a lot about firearms? Train your friends and comrades in their uses and limitations. Skill-shares, workshops, and other sorta educational activities are really vital here for disseminating information and equipping folks with new, useful skills.

I've learned the most from getting involved, putting boots on the ground. But a lotta folks will tell you to start with theory. I think that's sound advice, as long as you're actually doing something *with* that theory. There is a necessary and vital interplay between educating ourselves and our comrades and actually getting engaged, sticking our fingers into the good earth, and bringing forth the seeds of our collective liberation.

When I was first getting involved in organizing, I would be really critical of folks who came in and out of movement spaces. Things would flare up, get active, and folks would flock to radical spaces. But then the cycle would ebb. Membership and participation would fall off, wither. You can often be forgivably frustrated by these developments. But they're natural, healthy, and inevitable so long as the necessities of work and life (and capitalism, in general) get in the way. Roll with the punches. When life's swinging hard, swing harder.

The last advice I would give is simple: embrace failure. Failure is good! Fucking up is great! We need to kill the idea that failure is "bad" or "unhelpful." Just the opposite is true! We learn the *most* from our mistakes and our failures. Every revolutionary rupture was precipitated by a thousand-thousand failures. What we can and should do is take every opportunity to learn from our mistakes so that we can become better as individuals, as comrades, and as communities. The struggle for universal emancipation is an endless one. Onward, ever onward, toward the next horizon.

3. ***How do you see people's spiritual journeys (agnostic, Satanist, Buddhist, ex-fundie, etc.) play out in their unique radical politics?***

I mean, in some ways, I think that's kinda for them to decide?

But, okay, that's kind of a cop-out answer. Maybe I should talk a little bit about my own experiences? So, I was raised (like many middle-class white folks in the so-called U.S.) in a Christian household. And not like your normal Christians who only go to church when it's convenient or who only go on holidays. My folks took us to church every single Sunday when I was growing up. We had to dress up (much to my chagrin) and had Sunday school and all that stuff. So, like, I grew up in a vocally evangelical, conservative, at times very fundamentalist branch of Presbyterianism that believed in some vapid shit like predestination and salvation for "the elect" alone. To this day, women in the PCA *still* aren't allowed to be pastors.

That said, I also took some good stuff. I think the Biblical character of Jesus has some pretty revolutionary ideas, regardless of who the historical Jesus of Nazareth may or may not have been. The beatitudes fuck! I got into Christian anarchism first because I saw it was really compatible with the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. I read Tolstoy and Thoreau and Ellul and Claiborne, I got interested in the Catholic Worker Movement, that sorta thing.

Even though I've shed my faith like an ill-fitting garment, I think the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth still directly inform and impact and direct my life in material, measurable ways. I've been told before by friends and comrades that I am the most "spiritual atheist" they've ever met. And while that doesn't exactly sit right with me because I identify as neither "spiritual" nor especially "atheistic," I think I get what they're saying, nonetheless. And I guess this sorta digression is illuminative of a broader point.

Whatever you believe about god or spirituality or the cosmos, in my mind, is secondary to how those beliefs (or lack of beliefs) inform your material engagement with our shared, concrete reality. There is an overwhelming abundance of unanswerable questions about mystical, cosmic subjects and, frankly, I don't *really* care all that much about those sorta questions, personally, because they appear to me to be secondary to the very real suffering, misery, and dispossession all throughout the world today.

If your spiritual beliefs or lack of spiritual beliefs directly inspire you to take action, then you're a comrade, in my book. If you believe in the Christian god, but are a proponent of universal salvation and liberation theology, that's badass. If you're an occultist who fucks with hoodoo, but you curse fascists, that's sick as hell. If you're agnostic, but show up to anti-racist protests and attend your local SRA meetings, fuck yea, that rocks. At the end of the day, I care far more about what folks actually *do* than what they profess to believe in.

4. *It's common for leftists, especially online, to rag on academia. What's good about it?*

Nothing...

(Cue laugh track)

No, but for real, I do think there is some good that can come out of academia (albeit, in a limited capacity.) I have been fortunate to meet some really fantastic comrades and colleagues while studying at a university. My thesis advisor when I got my Master's was an anarchist and we got along fantastically. He was arguably one of the most influential people I've ever met. Shout-out to Beck. I've also been joined in the streets on numerous occasions by colleagues in my cohort at anti-racist demonstrations and on the picket-line at union rallies.

But, at the same time, academia *is* really easy to rag on because it serves the same purpose as electoral politics. That is, it exists to launder radical ideas and transform them into research grants, scholarship opportunities, and academic papers to be published in lofty academic journals secured tightly behind a pricy paywall, to be read by a small handful of people whose only real interest in your work is to find holes in your arguments so they can turn around and publish a paper of their own. And then the cycle repeats.

I have been at the university for too long. I am burnt the fuck out. Writing my dissertation has not been a joy. Academia has soured the things I love most in this world--reading and writing--because they now exist almost exclusively within a narrow vacuum where I must ply my skills and knowledge and insight for a paycheck. This is the great paradox of capitalism: even if you work a job that, by all rights, you should love, our society's fetishization of profit will invariably poison your heart's desires and turn your joy to ashes in your mouth.

Sound bleak?

That's because it is.

Don't get me wrong: I do sincerely appreciate getting to learn from, with, and alongside other folks in a classroom setting. Teaching, at its best, can still be a rapturous, rhapsodic experience. At its best, research really *can* be a deeply edifying, rewarding, and beautiful process. But it has been soured by the reality of capitalist exploitation. It is no wonder that universities no longer resemble institutions of scholarship, free inquiry, and collaborative knowledge-making and have instead almost entirely devolved into bastions of business.

A few of my advisors have tried to say that the "line between radical academia and organizing in the streets" is artificial and that it doesn't exist. But I've never seen any of them at a protest or at the community-garden or at a range day, so I'm not really sure if I buy all that.

The long and short of it? School fucking sucks. Let's abolish capitalism, smash the school, and make learning free and open and available to everyone, all the time, at no cost.

5. ***Which revolutionaries have inspired you the most?***

My comrades, to be honest.

I guess the best way to answer this question is to kinda split it up into two parts. The first section would be the revolutionary folks historically, living and dead, who've inspired me. The second would be the people who're still alive and at work today who inspire me.

So, for the first category, a short, non-exhaustive list:

- Albert Camus
- Murray Bookchin
- Emma Goldman
- Lucy Parsons
- The Haymarket Martyrs
- Buenventura Durruti
- George Orwell
- Leo Tolstoy
- Ursula K. Le Guin
- Angela Davis
- bell hooks
- David Graeber
- Howard Zinn

Then, for the second category, the folks I know and love:

- Cindy Milstein and Carla Bergman inspire me endlessly. Both of them are such powerful, thoughtful, kind-hearted, and compassionate human beings. And what *radical* minds and prolific creators they are! I hope to lead as humble, gentle, and revolutionary lives as the two of them.

- My comrade and former housemate, Adrien, inspires me so much. They really got the ball rolling on the community gardens in Tallahassee to help fight against food scarcity and ensure folks have access to free, delicious, and nutritious food.
- My union comrades in the Graduate Assistants United. A special shout-out to my good friend and comrade, Leah.
- All of the folks on the Channel Zero Network. Special shout-outs, though, to Amy and Liz of *Rebel Steps*, Chris from *Time Talks*, Tim from *the Solecast*, Bursts from *The Final Straw*, and Margaret from *Live Like the World is Dying*. The passion, insight, advice, and solidarity of the Channel Zero Network has made such a difference in the quality and maturation of this podcast and I am inexpressibly grateful for their patience, friendship, and revolutionary example.
- Last, but certainly not least, my partner, Megan. More on that, though, in just a second.

6. *Which people in your life inspire you?*

Yeah, I know, it's cheesy and romantic or whatever, but buckle-in because you asked.

Never, in my entire life, have I ever met someone as powerful, majestic, and almighty as my partner, Megan. By far and away, she is the single most empathetic, compassionate, and self-possessed human being I've ever had the good fortune of encountering. Her example as a mother, a partner, a friend, and a comrade inspires me every single fucking day. She is literally a paragon of patience, humility, and understanding. I fucking adore her.

Izzy and Soph, Megan's kids, are also a source of endless inspiration. Anyone who follows me on Twitter will have seen me tweet about their silly quips, earnest questions, and hilarious pranks. They're two of the most precocious, intelligent, and sophisticated children I've ever had the pleasure of meeting. I think the world of both of them and their desire to change the world and make it a more just, equal, and radical place has moved me to tears more times than I can count.

7. *What is the most challenging part of raising kids as an anarchist?*

God, I wager, it's probably the same answer regardless of whatever ideology underpins your worldview. Patience, empathy, understanding. Forgiveness is huge. Compassion. I mean, I guess the biggest single issue of "raising kids as an anarchist" is having to actively try to counter all the brainwashing that comes from our society. I mean, in all of human history, I don't think there's been any society as successfully and emphatically propagandized as the U.S. empire. So, I think deprogramming those hegemonic ideological inculcators is super challenging.

That said, I also think you have to be sorta Socratic in your approach. I'm not tryna be some kinda authority figure saying, "This is wrong, this right, do this, don't do that." A lot of times, the kids will recognize when something's unjust. They'll ask, "Why do we even *have* presidents?" or "Why do you *have* to go to work?" or "Why do we *have* cops, anyway?" I think the goal ought to be to try and foster that inquisitive, critical nature, to challenge kids to really examine those questions for themselves and come to their own conclusions.

I'm attracted to anarchism in the same way a lot of people might be attracted to any particular worldview: it helps me describe, name, and identify the way the world works. I happen to think the tenets of anarchism, broadly speaking--mutual aid, horizontality, egalitarianism, and so forth--are incredibly liberatory, potent, and meaningful. I think they provide potentialities and emergent pathways for transformation and emancipation. But I also don't want to force that on the kids. I want to love and challenge and champion them as they struggle to divine their own perspectives.

8. *What is your favorite type of mutual aid project?*

Disaster relief. Shout-out to Mutual Aid Disaster Relief and SRAid.

9. *What's your favorite TTRPG (right now or of all time)?*

Right now, *Wanderhome*, for sure. Hanging out with Jay at GenCon this year really cemented the intentionality of the game's design. The way that Jay approaches games is so fucking tight. The whole crew at Possum Creek is really endearing and wholesome. Plus, *Wanderhome* is an absolute joy to play! I still want to try playing it GMless since, as of yet, I've only played a more structured game with my partner, our pal Travis, and the kids. But it's definitely top-tier for me, right now.

That said, I recently got the .pdfs for *The One Ring 2nd Edition* which is a TRPG set in Tolkien's Middle-Earth and it looks fucking fantastic. I can't wait to get my hands on the physical edition. They've got this whole massive starter set filled with maps and dice and hand-outs and playing cards. Plus, I splurged and got the faux-leather cover special edition and it looks positively gorgeous.

My favorite TRPG of all time, though, is probably *Dungeons & Dragons*. It's a classic. I've sunk more hours into that game than any other TRPG. I've played 3 different campaigns from Level 1 to Level 20 and more one-shots and mini-campaigns than I can count. *D&D* fucking rocks.

10. *Natural, washed, or honey? And why is natural process best?*

Yes! A coffee question.

Natural, though, I do enjoy washed coffees, as well. The natural sundried process for cultivating coffee--for those unaware--sorta works like this: after the coffee is plucked from the stem, it's then left out to dry out on wooden beds in the full light of the blazing

sun. The coffee cherry, which surrounds the actual coffee bean which will eventually be roasted, ground up, and extracted for that delicious bean juice, is thus exposed to the natural elements (hence the name: the natural, sundried process.)

As summarized in a write-up by Counterculture Coffee, “To prevent the cherries from spoiling, they are raked and turned throughout the day and then covered at night or during rain storms. This process, which can take 3-6 weeks normally, is the more-traditional method of processing coffee. This process of drying the cherries out in the sun originated in places without reliable access to water and usually works best in areas with low humidity and infrequent rain.” After that, the dried out coffee is sent off to have the cherry and pulp peeled off, leaving behind the individual coffee beans.

The washed process, as I understand it, is much more mechanical. The coffee cherries are first stripped away by industrial tools that pulverize the fruit and squirt out the skin-covered seed. Then, the skins get flaked away, leaving only the seed behind. Then, they get thrown into a washer and are either washed with water or fermented to the farmer’s specifications. After the remaining fruit is stripped away from the seeds, they’re left to dry--sometimes in the sun, but usually in a machine or under a heat-lamp.

Naturally processed coffees, in my book, really are the best. Obviously, this is subjective, but there’s a reason why I like them. I tend to really gravitate towards fruity, floral coffees. I particularly adore coffees from Ethiopia, Kenya, and Yemen. That region of the world, unlike any other, really does shine when it comes to coffee. The natural process allows the bean to be encased in its fruity exterior for an extended period of time and this results in coffees that often wind up tasting more fruity and floral than their washed-process counterparts.

What’s more, there’s something about the slow, ritualistic, and intentional process of naturally cultivated coffees that speaks to me on an aesthetic level, especially since I’m someone who really enjoys the ritual of coffee preparation itself. So, knowing that a naturally processed coffee had the same care, regard, and attention from seed to cup, from Ethiopia to Indiana, is really satisfying.

Again, this isn’t to say that washed coffees are *bad*, just that I prefer natural sundried coffees best.

11. What is your favorite coffee grinder and why is it the MY Hario?

I love this question because I just get the image in my head of a little kid aimlessly spinning a plastic toy handgrinder and grinning with the sorta euphoric delight that only small children can really manage. Anyway, I have had experience with a number of different grinders over the years and am pleased to say we actually have *two* of my different favorites at the house.

The Fellow Ode is my go-to for when I’m at the house. The base unit doesn’t grind espresso-fine, but that’s chill because I don’t actually make espresso at home because espresso machines are mind-bogglingly expensive. It’s perfect for filter coffee,

regardless of whether I'm making an aeropress or a V60 or a Chemex. Plus it looks fuckin' sleek as hell and I feel handy and proficient when I do routine maintenance to clean it or clear out any jams.

If I'm on-the-go, though—traveling back to visit family, going camping, visiting another state—I'll bring my Knock Aergrind, which is this tiny little handgrinder that fits seamlessly into the hollowed-out plunger of the aeropress. Even if it can really only load up a small number of beans at a time, the aergrind's versatility and portability are fucking righteous.

There are obviously grinders that are *way* more expensive than I'd love to use and which are doubtlessly better than what I have at-hand. Maybe one day I'll be part of a coffee co-op and get to use an industrial grinder or get my hands on a Niche or something like that. But getting a good grinder is ultimately a game of diminishing returns once you reach a certain threshold.

12. *I recently heard Margaret Killjoy talking about how she doesn't lead on organising because her position as an author/podcaster etc could put her at risk of being in a kind of cult of personality 'Life of Brian' type of situation. Is that a concern for you? Do you find yourself doing anything to guard against it?*

I love Margaret! Shout-out to Margaret Killjoy. What a real one.

Okay, so I actually know exactly the conversation you're talking about, which happened on Robert Evans' and Cool Zone Media's podcast *It Could Happen Here*. The conversation was great and if you're listening to this you should definitely check out the episode if you haven't already.

Frankly, no, this isn't really a concern of mine. And maybe that sounds hubristic and maybe I underestimate the reach of *Coffee with Comrades*, but I personally don't feel like I should stop doing organizing because I also happen to be a podcaster, a writer, a teacher, or what-have-you. In fact, I think that sorta analysis might miss the point of what Margaret and Robert were really talking about. But, more on that in just a second.

First, I wanna talk about leadership.

Maybe this is just common sense to me because I come out of an anarchist tradition and have that kinda approach to community-organizing, but I eschew "leadership" roles as often as possible. I've often had well-intentioned comrades try to offer me or support me in taking some sorta leadership position and I have always, always, always shown recalcitrance in those situations. The reason being because, as an anarchist, I have what I like to think is a fairly robust understanding of power dynamics. And it seems very clear to me that power, especially personal power or representative power, is *incredibly* corrosive.

What we need in movement spaces is one of two things.

Option A: No Gods, No Masters, No Leaders. This is, in many ways, what I tend to default to in those spaces, both as I actively reject any attempt to have "leadership"

foisted upon me *and* because I seek to challenge whatever forms of nascent authority exist in a given organization, group, or cadre.

Option B, however, is I think the more nuanced approach. You could call it something like “a group of leaderless leaders” or “servant-oriented leadership,” but neither of those phrases really capture what I’m trying to say. I think that addressing power dynamics and creating a space where no one figure has authority over any other is super critical to creating healthy, potent, and resilient community-organizing.

But, ultimately, I think what Margaret and Robert were *really* getting at is the concept of social capital. Maybe this is just because I was recently rereading *The Dispossessed* for our *Coffee with Comrades* monthly book club, but I think the nascent impulse to “find a nice, easy hierarchy and settle in” exists all across the left, even in ostensibly anarchist spaces. I think some of my more Marxist comrades are less critical of leadership, but I think that’s a grave mistake.

Look, if you’re listening to this 150th Episode, chances are you’ve probably listened to at *least* one other *Coffee with Comrades* episode in the past. And we live in deeply troubling times where a raging pandemic and capitalist immiseration have left us more isolated, lonely, and alienated than perhaps ever before in human history. At times like these, we understandably gravitate towards community, especially towards charismatic people who clearly give a shit. And most leftist podcasters aren’t in it for the money and aren’t here to grift you. We do this because we genuinely want to change this miserable fucking world and make it better.

But when we’re in your earbuds, there’s this intimacy that can begin to develop. Sometimes, that can be a really lovely and healthy thing. I think the *Coffee with Comrades* Discord Server--which has been called on more than one occasion the “most wholesome leftist corner of the internet”--is a testament to this sorta robust, personable, and emergent community that can come out of left-wing independent media.

On the other hand, parasocial relationships *can* form. Cults of personality *can* emerge. And any podcast host or media personality who *isn’t* afraid of that and actively warning you against it is fucking suspect and should be treated as such.

I think this is really at the heart of what Margaret and Robert were talking about. I know Robert talks about it on *Behind the Bastards* all the time, probably because part of that program is looking at the horrific kinda shit that happens when cults form up. The insularity and exclusivity of so many leftist spaces needs to be aggressively torn down.

Our proper role in the social organism is to unbuild walls.

13. How do you see people balancing a deep involvement with a personal cause (ie race, gender, climate, disability, etc) with broader issues or issues that don't affect them? What can be done to break people out of blind spots and silos while still cultivating deep expertise on specific issues?

I think the urgent reality we'd all do well to acknowledge is the ways in which all our disparate struggles are fundamentally united. The fight against capitalism is inseparable from the battle against white supremacy, which is necessarily bound-up in the war against settler colonialism and for decolonization, which is of course intricately tied to our movements against climate change. I reckon it is incumbent upon all people of conscience to actively point out these connections at every opportunity--on social media, in our neighborhood assemblies, our families, our community-organizing spaces. But I also think it's important to demonstrate our solidarity with one another by linking up distinct organizations whenever and wherever we can, both as a strategic goal and as a tactical necessity.

Of particular urgency, I think, is platforming folks from places that continue to be marginalized: disability justice organizers and queer liberation activists, for example. At times, I think the sheer *number* of injustices that immiserate our lives is like...mind-boggling. I dunno about you, but I often can get paralyzed just *thinking* about the ways in which any *one* of these injustices is enmeshed in the social fabric of our lives. When you look at all of them, together, it becomes a many-headed hydra. I think it's tempting to suggest, "Okay, well, the hydra has many heads, but it only has one body, and the body is _____" fill-in-the-blank: capitalism, hierarchy, whatever. The trouble with that, of course, is that it's reductive and misses the forest for the trees.

Now, as far as expertise is concerned, I don't think intersectionality and expertise are mutually exclusive. Quite the contrary, I think that *without* an understanding of intersectionality, any expertise is going to be fatally flawed from the start. Take the abolitionist, for example. A good abolitionist, in my mind, has to account for anti-Black racism, white supremacy, legal injustices, must possess a robust understanding of cops, of settler colonialism, of militarization, of the ways in which mass incarceration play out in this country, the list goes on. That sorta expertise is *already* inextricable from a number of other justice-focused struggles. So, I think it's a both/and sorta thing rather than either/or. We need both intersectionality *and* expertise in order to address the social ills in our lives and if we have one without the other we'll never even begin to make headway.

14. *What episode has been the most objectively successful (in terms of plays/reactions etc) and if you had to choose one episode to have that same impact what one would it be?*

Episode 54 with *Srsly Wrong* has remained our most popular episode (by far and away.) Which makes sense, right? I've said it before and I'll say it again: *Srsly Wrong* is the best left podcast out there. The other ones that enjoy enduring popularity are our two-part mini-series with the Indigenous Anarchist Federation (Episodes 51 & 52) and our collaborations with my buddy, George, who plays drums in Stick to Your Guns (Episodes 55 and 120.) Those are, like, our Top 5.

The second part of this question is a bit more difficult to determine, if I'm being honest. I mean, the obvious answer is that I want *all* our episodes to be that popular and

to receive that enthusiastic of a response. But, obviously, that's an overbroad reply so I should probably be a bit more particular. If you twisted my arm, I'd probably say Ep. 119: "Google Murray Bookchin" which we did with Anark or Ep. 106: "Notes from the End of the World" which we did with Margaret Killjoy. I'm also a big fan of our goofy *Animal Crossing* episode which we did with Liz of *Rebel Steps* (which is Ep. 84: "What New Horizons Await?") and our collaboration with Mexie, Ep. 60: "A Future for All Earth's Critters."

15. If you had to redo an episode for any reason, which would it be and why?

So, there's a truthful answer to this and a less truthful answer. If you are the person who asked me this, shoot me a DM and maybe I'll consider answering. Maybe. Perhaps.

The less truthful answer is Ep. 47 & 48, our two-part mini-series on *The Dispossessed*. Not because I think those episodes are *bad*, by any means, but because there's just so much I would've liked to cover and we got bogged down in Ep. 48 debating what was, to my mind, a myopic and unnecessary tangent. I would've preferred to use that time talking about, I dunno, literally *anything* else.

Fortunately, though, we had a very lovely first session of our *Coffee with Comrades* book club where we spent a good chunk of time chatting about Le Guin's magnum opus with our Discord community. That was a swell change-of-pace.

16. What fears do you have about the future?

I reckon the same fears as you do, more or less. I mean, whomst amongst us doesn't have crippling climate change anxiety from time-to-time? I am definitely worried about the different pressure points that are primed to break. If you really want to ruin your day, Google search, "Nine climate tipping points now active." Shit's fucking terrifying. While I think it's probably foolish to suggest that there will be "one big collapse," I do think that any one of these issues will inevitably and invariably have cascading side-effects that ripple outward in ways that, to some extent, are unpredictable.

Bouncing off that, I'm really worried about the rising tide of reactionary politics internationally. In some ways, I think liberals in the imperial core are breathing a sigh-of-relief right now. Their good ol' boy is back in the Oval Office, after all. But I think this is the sorta grave miscalculation that inevitably stems from electoralism where your only plan is what will happen in the next 4 years and how to manage to cling onto whatever slivers of power you can wrest for yourself. If January 6th's attempted putsch is any indication, the fascistic impulse that undergirds so much of the far-right in the U.S. is very much alive and well and isn't going anywhere any time soon. As neoliberalism continues to fail people, politics will grow more and more polarized. Fascism is not going to be put down by liberal reformists. Fascism must be fought.

Surveillance capitalism, monopolization, and the centralization of the internet also terrify me. I haven't had a Facebook for over a decade, but if the Facebook shutdown this past week doesn't serve as the wake-up call that it ought to be, then we may just be daft as well as doomed. I cut my teeth organizing in the wake of Occupy and the so-called Arab Spring, so one of the very first issues to animate my politics and instigate action were issues around capitalism and surveillance. The ubiquitous surveillance of the internet and the way its used to turn us into strings of monetized digits is antihuman and reprehensible and we should all do everything in our power to democratize the internet and wrest its control from the oligarchs who're stuffing ads down our throats and making a killing hand-over-fist.

17. What gives you hope about the future?

See, now, *this* is my sorta question!

I've said it before and I'll say it again: I think there's a deep connection between our hopes and our fears and I'm glad these questions were asked back-to-back because they help illustrate what I think is a broader point about revolutionary struggles for social transformation and universal emancipation. Namely, if we can't identify both the things that leave us terrified, paralyzed, and feeling powerless than how can begin to develop strategies and pathways for liberation (and vice versa.)

Anyway, I think there's *so* much to be hopeful about. I dunno if you've been living under a rock, but I think it's fair to say we're living in times that are just bursting with revolutionary potential. "Abolition" seems less like a pipe-dream and more like a livable reality every day. I know at the end of 2020 folks joked a lot online about how the burning of the third police precinct in Minneapolis inspired a lotta folks, but I genuinely think that was a huge turning point for the struggle against white supremacy and *for* police abolition in the so-called US.

I'm also endlessly inspired by my comrades' projects for mutual aid and food sovereignty. I've said it before and I'll say it again, the folks in Mutual Aid Disaster Relief and SRAid are doing enormously valuable and spectacular work. I'm always floored to hear about folks' land trusts and community-gardens. The fact that leftists are increasingly training to become competent not just with firearms but also developing skills of medical aid, homesteading, food forestry, and survival are all really encouraging to me, especially when we consider just how damning the future of climate change can be.

Also, strikes are going on all across the world. Both gig economy workers at Uber and Lyft as well as actors in the IATSE have announced strike actions just this week, to say nothing of the miners, teachers, and healthcare workers who've demonstrated in solidarity to show their power. All of that shit is enormously fucking inspiring.

But I think what gives me hope the most about the future is my partner's kids. I know, I know, I'm being sappy again, but I'm serious. If future generations will inherit

the Earth, then goddammit, we may just make it out of these apocalyptic times not just *alive*, but *thriving*. The creativity, ingenuity, and critical thinking of kids these days is fucking incredible to behold. I have the rare luxury of getting to learn with, from, and alongside kids as a professor and my students teach me so much every day and give me so much fucking hope for a brighter and better tomorrow.

18. *What does a just and equitable world look like to you?*

God, this is such a good, fun, hard question. I know this is kind of a cop-out, but I am gonna share a bit of creative writing with you to maybe paint a better picture. So, here's a short story, a solarpunk work of speculative fiction I wrote called, *We'll Burn the Black Flags Last...*

We wake with the sun. The reclaimed apartment complex overlooks a shallow creek littered with lily pads. We rise slowly, disentangling from love-knotted sheets. We sit on the balcony and drink coffee with flavor notes of blueberry and caramel. Languid smoke drifts up from the hand-rolled cigarette balanced between your fingers as you take another pull and say, "Weird, don't you think? Not that long ago, houseless folks thronged around this pond. Now they all have a place to call *home*." Behind the sliding-glass-doors our housemates are cooking breakfast. It'll be our turn tomorrow morning. Today, our only responsibility was to make the coffee.

After we break bread with our comrades, you and I part ways. I walk across the street to the old university. Today, my fellow learners are putting on a rendition of *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* in the open-aired theater. We've spent the past week exploring the play's themes and motifs. Now, finally, we can do a dramatic reading. The kids really get into it: some reprise the major roles, others do backdrops and set-design.

Once I finish teaching a couple hours later, I swing by your shared studio space. In the old days, you'd never be able to afford rent for a place like this. Now, you share a whole warehouse with a dozen other community artists. Your jeans are splotted with flecks of dried paint. We go for a walk. The two of us traipse past reclaimed storefronts: grocery stores where all the food is free, worker co-ops baking confectionary goodies. We pick up your grandma's medication from the people's pharmacy. Street art covers virtually every building, defiant reminders that we are still here, despite the odds. The elements have reclaimed vast swaths of territory. Where weeds were once cut back, wildflowers now sprout through concrete cracks. Queer couples walk hand-in-hand, kiss on the street corners while they wait for bicyclists to surge across the crosswalk.

We stop for more coffee at the Bread and Roses Kitchen. There are no baristas present: the community-space is open to all. A little wooden sign reads, "If the jugs of cold brew run out, there's more in the fridge!" A gangly gang of teenagers play a tabletop role-playing-game in the back lounge, rolling dice that skip across the table as they wave their arms animatedly and pretend to fight imaginary monsters with slathering jowls and sword-sharp teeth.

You and I sit on the back porch. A cluster of songbirds gather in a nearby live oak tree, chirruping a sweet, resounding chorus. They flit from branch to branch, giggling as they swoop overhead. I work on the manuscript for the new novel I've been writing, frantically spilling ink

along the parchment. You splash watercolor paint across your sketchbook, content to see the colors wash outside the lines. There is no horizon to our freedom and autonomy. And, to think, we used to be cramped up for hours, working jobs we loathed just to make rent, to put food on the table. Not that long, folks had to work forty-hour-weeks. These days, we hardly work *half* that much, housing is free and guaranteed, and post-scarcity ensures a healthy, plant-based diet. With all this extra time, we're free to chase the things that ignite our passions, to pursue the pleasures that bring us joy, joy, joy...

Even though it was almost five years ago now, people still talk about the Cataclysmic Summer. After three successive hurricanes and widespread flooding, the state pulled out of the surrounding region—or “sacrifice zone,” as they called it. We never left. Where would we go? With drought in the Midwest, famine in the northeast, and wildfires on the west coast, we had no other options. Those of us who could boarded up windows, hunkered down, and hoped for the best. Many of us crowded into the local university’s student union to weather the storms together, laying out sleeping bags on the linoleum floor.

When we emerged to a battered and bruised city, no one came to save us.

We had to save ourselves.

We renamed the streets first, christening them after those who came before us.

Kropotkin’s Corner.

Parsons’ Place.

Assata Shakur Street.

In retrospect, I suppose it seems kinda silly. But there was something about walking underneath those names every day: Washington, Jackson, Lee, these harbingers of so much death and unnecessary suffering, hanging over our heads like the blade of a guillotine. We needed new reminders—constant, unwavering—that we were part of a larger, historical struggle, one that had carried on for generations and would continue long into the future.

The front lawns of St. Augustine grass rapidly followed. We tilled the soil, planted seeds. Turnips and squash, cucumbers and melons, lemongrass and tealeaf. Permaculture gardens sprung up all across the city. We understood the word for “world” is forest. We fashioned a fertile landscape, reminding ourselves that we are not separate from nature, that our fate is inextricably linked to every other living being that inhabits this planet. It was thrilling to push our fingers into the earth, to feel damp dirt beneath our nails, to remember we came from dust and one way or another, to dust we would invariably return.

Overtime, the occupation that began at the university transformed into a regional enclave, an autonomous territory comprised of several dozen decentralized cantons arranged together in a decolonized, democratic confederation. Nowadays, you can hardly notice the devastation that left so many homeless, hungry, and afraid. The reconstruction programs promoted by the people’s assemblies have made a concerted effort to rehabilitate the city. Now, there is plenty: work to each according to their volition, abundance for all regardless of ability.

We had to renovate a lot of old buildings, but housing wasn’t an issue. After all the gentrification that plagued the city, there were dozens of apartment buildings just sitting empty. Which turned out to be pretty handy, since climate refugees began rapidly flocking to our autonomous region, inspired by the promise of anarchy...

When night falls, you and I go dancing at the folk punk show. After all, is a revolution without dancing one worth even having? We shout the lyrics to each other over the frantic strumming of guitar, the piledriving percussion, the thick thrum of bass. After the show, breathless, we stagger punch-drunk to the top of the old capitol building, past jury-rigged solar panels, still humming quietly with latent energy. Together, we survey the autonomous enclave, stretching out to the horizon beneath a canopy of stars winking in and out of the inky blackness overhead.

Ours is not the only project that has sprung up in the wake of the state's collapse. Vast swaths of the Midwest are now part of a Marxist federation. In the Pacific Northwest, social ecologists have instituted democratic confederalism. Vast swaths of the global south have risen up, kicked out the exploiters and capitalists, declared their own autonomy.

Tomorrow, you have to go out on patrol with the people's militia. Ecofascists have been spotted just beyond the edge of our northeastern most canton. Who's to say what their purpose is? You tell me not to worry, but I can't help fretting every time you have to leave, even if I know you'd lay down your life willingly to preserve this revolutionary society. Your courage is infectious. I am proud to be your partner, your friend, your comrade.

You take my hand and, as our fingers entwine, you tell me, "We still have a long way to go. After all, freedom is a constant struggle. We'll burn the black flags last..."

19. *What moments of joy have you been a part of recently?*

I recently went and saw Slipknot and Code Orange with some pals. My friend Jeremy just absolutely lost his shit. It was very wholesome.

I sprayed the hose in the backyard the other day and Albus chased the stream of water, gallivanting about, bounding about like a loony-tune and snapping his slathering jowls with wanton abandon.

I sat on the front porch swing, late one night, listening to the sounds of evening swelling as my partner dozed off on my shoulder.

Those are just a handful of moments worth sticking around for.

20. *If you had to interview 1 (one) right-winger, who would it be and why?*

I am pretty sure it goes without saying that I am not especially interested in platforming reactionaries on *Coffee with Comrades*. I mean, the literal name of the show is "Coffee with *Comrades*." Plus, as an antifascist, I'm sympathetic to the strategy and goal of deplatforming hateful asshats generally and doing everything in my power to ensure their outreach is mitigated. That's not to say that all right-wingers are *far-right* or outright fascists. Despite the noteworthy rightward drift of popular politics in the so-called US since the Reagan era, I'm convinced we have more in common with more conservative folks than fascists do.

Which is a shame, yknow, because a lotta leftists act like self-righteous asses and sorta go, “If you don’t agree with my politics, then I won’t even be your friend!” I think this is childish, solipsistic, and utterly myopic. Revolutionary movements are gonna need a broad base of support. Onboarding people and engaging folks in good-faith is fucking vital if we want to transform society.

I don’t want to live in a world where everyone believes the exact same thing. That sounds dull as fuck, for one, but it also sounds counterproductive. If you ask me, at the heart of anarchism is a real respect for dissent and dissidence. I think figuring out ways to mediate that are important as hell.

Now, don’t get me wrong. As I said at the outset of this answer, I have no friends who are fascists and I will never be friends with a fascist. Fascism is not to be debated, it is to be destroyed. Leftists often like to debate about “where the line is” for winning conservative folks over to our side and I think it can be very clearly seen when someone denies another human being their own self-worth, autonomy, and dignity.

All that said, I just think it’s really critical to engage the apolitical, liberals, and even conservative folks in our lives and try to invite as many people into the fold of radical politics by inciting our neighbors, friends, and families against the pervasive evils of social hierarchy. To be clear: I’m not saying you should go out and proselytize to folks. That would be weird as hell. But I think living your politics out in community with others and not shying away from difficult, good-faith dialogue is essential if we are ever gonna build the left into a force capable of confronting the hegemonic forces plaguing society today.

Okay, so all those caveats aside, I’m not gonna give you a spicy answer. Honestly, if I’m gonna be sitting down with a right-wing person, I’d wanna be joined by one of my best friends, who I won’t name because he listens to the show periodically and I don’t wanna embarrass him. He identifies as a libertarian, last I checked, and is (generally) critical of power and amenable to ideas of individual liberty. From there, it’s just a short little hop, skip, and a jump to autonomy. Plus, he dislikes cops, so that’s a win in my book.

I do think a conversation with a right-wing libertarian could prove to be interesting. My friend and I have had some really intriguing debates over the years. But this podcast isn’t a forum for debates, for performatively dunking on someone. The goal is to foster critical, meaningful, substantive dialogue. So, if I ever did it, that’s the route I’d choose. I’ll leave you with this fun little bit from Murray Bookchin about how we should call “libertarians” *propertarians*.

[INSERT AUDIO HERE]

Okay, so I know the title is “20 questions” but here’s a bonus one a listener asked anyway:

21. What do you see in the future for *Coffee with Comrades*? What kinds of topics or guests would you like to feature?

Honestly, this is kind of another bad answer, but I wager we'll be doing more of the same! I've joked before that *Coffee with Comrades* is little more than an elaborate excuse for me to justify having cool conversations with folks and that's more or less the truth. At the very least, it's precisely what I intend to do moving forward.

That said, I do have a lotta fun ideas sitting around in a Google Doc that I'd love to get to some day. Honestly, only having one host has made some of that difficult because it'd be much easier to just have a co-host to occasionally sitdown and shoot the shit with. But I've come to realize that's maybe not the best fit for this particular show because I am manic as hell and working with me on creative projects is probably enormously grueling and exhausting because I am an insufferable shit at times.

I will say this: I'm currently working on a series I've tentatively called "A People's History of Coffee." I've wanted to do episodes on coffee for a long time on this program since, after all, it's sorta in the name. In fact, I had been planning to try and put together three episodes and make them Ep. 151, 152, and 153. But, as I began to do more and more research, I realized that, in order to do the subject justice, I would need to spend much more than three episodes on the subject.

So, as of right now, that project is still in-development. I promise once it gets put together, it'll be fucking epic. I've already read four different books, consumed a fuck-ton of popular sources on the internet, and I have a whole stack of academic articles to get through. Plus, I'm gonna invite some folks on for different episode topics because I fucking love coffee but I have never worked in the industry as a barista. Coffee's only ever been a hobby and ritual for me, never a source of employment. So I wanna get some perspective from folks who've actually been in the workplace, too.

At any rate, suffice to say I'm very excited to do that series and it'll probably end up being at least 5 full-length episodes, maybe more. So keep your eyes peeled for that.

Holy shit, I think that's all I got for y'all today. Boy, was that a lotta me speaking. Anyway, thank you all so fucking much for listening to Ep. 150 of *Coffee with Comrades*. This program means a whole helluva lot to me and I'm really grateful to everyone who supports us on Patreon, everyone who's ever shared the show with a friend, tweeted about us, shared us in your Instagram story. You're all *fucking* legends and I genuinely cannot express in words how grateful I am for the community that has come up around this show.

Here's to a 150 more!

Outro:

Alright, well, I think that about does it for this episode of *Coffee with Comrades*! Thanks so much for tuning in. *Coffee with Comrades* is an independent, DIY media project, part of the Channel Zero Network. If you dig what you hear, you can follow us online by going to @coffeewcomrades on Twitter or @coffeewithcomrades on Instagram. You can also visit our website, coffeewithcomrades.com, and support our work financially by going to patreon.com/coffeewithcomrades. You can find *Coffee with Comrades* wherever you get your favorite anti-capitalist propaganda. Be sure to smash that subscribe button so you never miss an episode! While you're at it, help us increase our reach by rating and reviewing the show. Got feedback, criticism, or just wanna get in-touch with us? Shoot us an email at coffeewithcomrades@gmail.com. And, as always, stay wild out there, comrades!

Final Music:

“The Preservation of Hate” by Like Moths to Flames

Bloopers:

Featuring your favorite, wholesome, lefty podcast host being an *extraordinary* fuck-up.