

SDS'S INDEPENDENT ZINE FOR LEFTIST ART AND LITERATURE

THE ROCKY! UNDER GROUND



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"WHAT IS THE ROCKY UNDERGROUND?"

THE ROCKY UNDERGROUND IS THE FIRST INDEPENDENT LEFTIST ZINE MADE BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER'S SDS CHAPTER. STUDENTS FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY MEMBERS HAVE CREATED THIS ZINE TO UPLIFT LEFTIST VOICES ON CAMPUS BY FEATURING THEIR ART WHILE WRITING AND PROMOTING OPEN DISCOURSE.

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THANKS FOR READING SOLIDARITY FOREVER

A Guide to Overcoming the White Leftist Stereotype

by Zoë Krampitz

What is the goal of leftist ideologies and organizations? You're bound to get a different answer from every ideology you ask. Infighting never really seems to die out. Yet, a consistent theme across many organizations is apparent: improving the world we live in. For many of us, this means dismantling the systems that uphold oppression, promoting inclusivity, and giving a platform to the marginalized. As much as we would like, taking down the prison-industrial complex, mass incarceration, healthcare inequality, and every other tyrannical system existing in our society requires slow and consistent work. However, there are swifter steps we can take that allow us to build the foundation for these overarching goals.

College leftists, especially white ones, have garnered a reputation for being overintellectual elitist posers, who use radical ideologies as an accessory, ultimately reducing significant movements into a facet of their carefully crafted identity.

While a bit extreme, this stereotype isn't unwarranted.

There are more than enough cases of seemingly dedicated students graduating college and eventually abandoning the causes they believed in. In building sustainable, lasting leftist spaces, an emphasis must be placed on community-based praxis.

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It's not enough to sit around and debate over which philosopher's theoretical utopia is the most ideal. While an understanding of the theory behind different ideologies is important, actually participating and aiding one's community is more in line with our overarching goals.

In turn, adjusting the language we use in leftist spaces aids our success in effective praxis. Overly academic leftist language is often inaccessible and not inclusive for the communities we aim to reach. Making a habit of using layman's terms to discuss leftist topics and social issues breeds an environment where individuals from different backgrounds and experiences are comfortable participating. Being able to communicate the theory behind our motivations to the community fosters open, constructive dialogue and mutual respect. Gaining the perspective of those directly impacted by the issues we are fighting for is invaluable.

This isn't to say that academic language doesn't have its place. Academic language can provide a level of precision and detail that is necessary for nuanced discussions and debates around complex social and political issues. It also provides a framework that promotes consistency and standardization in discussions and debates, reducing potential misunderstandings. Such language is accurate and concise; it's much easier to discuss vast theoretical topics when baseline information has been communicated quickly and precisely. The use of academic language also often lends credibility and legitimacy to leftist arguments. Disregarding academic elitism, it's much harder to discredit radical ideas that are supported by intellectual backing than those that read like unhinged conspiracy theories.

Rather than completely eradicating academic language from leftist spaces, we should simply limit it to prevent an education-centric hierarchy and elitism.

Take a step back. What do you aim to achieve by participating in a leftist space? Is the way you're interacting with the space, and ultimately the community, helping you achieve this goal? Maybe it's time to reevaluate the way you interact with the community as a whole.

BODILY AUTONOMY UNDER CAPITALISM

BY ELEYNA MAVES

January 22nd, 2023 marked the 50th anniversary of the landmark Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision. It was also the 39th anniversary of Ronald Reagan's declaration of January 22nd as "National Sanctity of Life Day." Abortion has had a complicated past in the United States, certain procedures dipping in and out of legality depending on local legislation and national court decisions. Most recently, the overturn of Roe v. Wade in June 2022 has put into effect "trigger bans" in fourteen different states, and eleven to twelve more are expected to ban or significantly restrict abortion in the coming years.

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Why have we suddenly slid over fifty years backwards in social progress? The second- and third-wave feminist movements have made incredible progress in the past five decades, but why can't we seem to get past abortion?

The answer is obvious: some people value the idea of a child over the health and well-being of the person carrying it. I believe that this panic over abortion can be linked not only to contemporary Christianity, but to one of the most common threads seen in moral panics: bodily autonomy.

Bodily autonomy, roughly defined, is the idea that one has self-government and free will (autonomy) to choose what happens with their body. It is also the belief that people should not be judged based on their choices of what to do with the body they are given. In this manner, it may also be seen as bodily sovereignty. This has been an incredibly important principle to the abortion rights movement, as most supporters campaign for people's "right to choose." But since as early as the 1980's, bodily autonomy has been becoming the guiding principle of another movement making change for the collective good: the practice of liberatory harm reduction.

In her book, *Saving Our Own Lives: The Liberatory Practice of Harm Reduction*, Shira Hassan says that liberatory harm reduction saved her life. Hassan has been working as an activist with various non-profits since the 1990's.

She writes, "Liberatory Harm Reductionists support each other and our communities without judgement, stigma, or coercion, and

we do not force others to change... Liberatory Harm Reduction is true self-determination and total body autonomy.” (29). These practices, called simply “harm reduction” when they were first developed, were created to better the lives of people who are often denigrated by society and therefore refused help by it. Harm reduction came as a new way of living for drug addicts, sex workers, and people with disabilities or mental illness. It became a way to meet people where they’re at and create networks of mutually supportive care that kept people safe when the established systems in our society refused to do so.

Liberatory harm reduction does this by creating networks of mutual support. In Shira Hassan’s case, it included some of the first ever syringe exchanges, programs designed to provide people who inject drugs with clean needles and a safe place to inject, reducing their risk of injury and overdose.

In my own hometown of Albuquerque, an organization called Street Safe offers warming stations for local sex workers, and distributes a “bad guy list” of dangerous men for them to avoid. Liberatory harm reduction recognizes that many people will do what they have to in order to survive terrible conditions, and that they should not be judged for how they manage to get by. It recognizes that “safety” is relative, and that no one is unworthy of help.

But why do people have to survive these terrible conditions in the first place? Why do people keep having to choose between drugs and chronic pain, or between sex work and starving?



These choices, though made by individuals, are heavily influenced by the systems that we live within. True bodily autonomy, and autonomy in general, will not be achieved until we can free people from the oppressive forces of capitalism that seek to control them.

At every step of the way, the government wants to influence what you do. As short-lived indie rock duo Hymie's Basement put it, "You put your life in the hands of the highway designers, your stride an unforeseen side effect of the urban planners realized blueprint dream."

Everything from the food we eat to the air we breathe, the cars we drive and the streets we drive them on, the jobs we work, and the medical care we get is shaped by the whims of our government officials and the corporate executives that influence them behind the scenes. And in every step of their decision process, they prioritize their profits over the health and safety of the people who will live in the world they've created.

Under the current capitalist system, we all lack true bodily autonomy, as we are subject to the pollution of the scraps that the upper class deems to throw down to us. When given the choice, almost everyone would choose to eat healthy, to spend time in nature, to get the necessary medical services they need, and to take care of their mental health. But for many, these choices simply aren't available. Which is why we, as a student left, must continue to fight for the right of the working class and the oppressed to self-determine and to be supported by their communities no matter what. The right to abortion is a good first step, and we intend to continue our work until every individual has the bodily autonomy they deserve.





ARTIST SPOTLIGHT: KOMRADS

INTERVIEW BY SEVERIN NOTHING

Severin: How long have you been making music for?

Komrads: I've been doing this project since 2014 but I've been playing music since I was like a young teen, since like 2002, 2001.

S: Is this your first industrial project or were you doing that before?

K: Yes, it is.



S: What originally drew you towards industrial?

K: Growing up I did listen to a little bit of Nine Inch Nails and stuff like that too. A little bit of Skinny Puppy and Ministry. After playing in a bunch of metal and punk bands I got tired of unreliable band members and wanted to work with machines *laughs* but that's what got me into this.

S: That's great! [Industrial] has its weird little history along with it, do you see yourself as continuing a sort of legacy with early industrial acts or diverging from them?

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What you do is certainly more melodic than the early industrial stuff but it still definitely has a strong physicality behind it that's somewhat reminiscent of that.



K: Yeah, I think I definitely have a little more structure than say, like, Throbbing Gristle or Suicide. But, I don't know, I like to take a little bit of the early influences. I really like Ministry's Twitch album, like those early synth stabs and like big drum kits. I take some of those early influences and then diverge that into something new. Because, I'm tired of all the old bands being around. It's cool some of them are still here but I like hearing new sounds.

S: Yeah, absolutely. I had the pleasure of seeing you live back in [September] and I noticed that you liked to use a lot of sampling to transition between your songs. I think I caught something from American Psycho there.

K: Oh yeah. I change it up every couple months. I'll have just kind of a theme with movie samples. I think it's because I had a singer in an old band who would not stop talking in between songs and that drove me nuts. So, I don't speak hardly at all and I'll just have a few samples to kind of set the mood. This fall I did a lot of American Psycho and then I always throw in something from either Mean Girls or Road Warrior.

S: I remember when I heard those come on I just started laughing. I'm like "Oh this is great!"







K: That's what I'm going for. I'm hoping that a bit of my dark sense of humor comes through and it's not just all doom and gloom.



S: With regards to doom and gloom, I noticed you also used some sampling on two of your tracks off of The Wolf: "Cross-fire" and "The Dream". Both pretty explicitly political uses of sampling. How do you approach politics in your work and how do you think sampling plays into it?

K: Well, I have to be careful with sampling because I'll have to pay for whatever if it's from something copyrighted. So, I'll definitely stick with news and things like that. I'm just painting the grim picture of the world that we live in. You pointed out The Dream specifically. I sampled Ronald Reagan in that. Where I feel like he's perceived as this Republican patron saint but his last speech before he left the white house was about accepting immigrants and that's something that I feel really strong about. Yet the Republican Party reveres that man but does not listen to those last words that he put out even though everything else he did was shit. You know, the War on Drugs. Total Failure and waste of resources. But, I like that one thing that people seem to breeze over.

S: I think Skinny Puppy also sampled Ronald Reagan more than a few times in some of their songs.



K: I think so too, and there's some great punk songs about him. I mean, he influenced some great bands *laughs* you know, listen to any Dead Kennedy's record.



S: One other thing I noticed as well was that out of the three bands of that night, it was you, Kite, and Front 242, you were actually the only one to forego the stage entirely. Is that kind of audience-performer proximity important to you as someone with a kind of punk inclination?



K: That was more just adapting to the situation. I do love playing on the floor and when I'm touring I do a lot of DIY venues. I like being on the level with the audience and I think that's also why Photo City has me perform there because I'm not going to throw a fit if I can't get my stuff on stage. It's not really a huge venue so when there's touring acts I like to just respect their space and just give them everything they need and I'll set up in front of everybody. That actually happened in 2019 as well I opened for Pigface there and they're like "Alright we got two cables left and one monitor, here you go!"



S: So, is all that equipment that you bring in all yours?

K: Yep! So, I bring all my own lighting and I program the whole light show myself just to accentuate the music and really make it into an experience.

S: You already went into it a little bit but who do you think you've been most influenced by in this current project?

K: I'd like to say some obscure indie act but really it's Nine Inch Nails and Trent Reznor. Those are my hugest influences on doing this.







I mean, and then they just opened the floodgates for countless other artists to get into. It stemmed from that, at least for where I'm at especially right now. When I started this project, I was trying to go for more of an electro-clash kind of sound like Ladytron or like mid-2000's Peaches and I just didn't like the energy. I just kept going back and listening to industrial and I thought "why not give it a shot?"

S: Yeah, I think you've done pretty well with it so far. I mean, I absolutely love your albums. I listened to your discography a few times before this interview just to kind of prep myself again going into it and there's some great stuff there.

K: Heck yeah, thank you very much.

S: I also noticed your music deals a lot with themes of disillusionment and control. I think that these topics resonate a lot given a lot of the recent protests and stuff like that in Rochester and I was just wondering where you're coming from when you're talking about that. I specifically think of The Midnight Sun where you say something to the effect of "the sun doesn't heal us anymore."

K: Oh yeah, that's actually the first song I ever wrote for this project. I hadn't performed music for years before starting this project and from my last band. So, the disillusionment that came from that was – My old band was utterly imploding and I had no interest in doing anything until a buddy of mine gave me a sampler and I picked up a synthesizer and that inspired me to write that.









S: Do you have any big plans going into this year? Any new music to look out for or tours or stuff like that?

K: Oh yeah, I've been working on a remix album. So, I've been collecting remixes from a ton of artists for my album *The Wolf*. So I've got a remix comp coming out probably like this spring, maybe the summer it'll be out. There's some really cool stuff on there. I've released a couple of the remixes already. I've got that and then this May I'll be going on tour. I'm touring the West Coast and the Southwest US. Starting in Seattle, I'm playing *Out From The Shadows* festival in Portland Oregon and making my way all the way down to San Diego and then over to Texas and we're ending the tour in Memphis. Then I'm bringing some other acts to Rochester this year too. So I'm working on bringing *Empathy Test* from the UK. They're going to be here in October. And *Golden Apes* from Berlin. And a few others I'm still working on I can't talk about them. There's going to be some really cool Rochester shows this summer and this fall.

S: That sounds awesome. I absolutely love the album art on *The Wolf*. Was that done by you or did you commission someone for that?

K: I commissioned somebody. I was just scouring Instagram trying to find inspiration and I found that guy. His name is Keith West. I think his handle is @hangxfang. I was just loving the artwork. The color schemes he used, really minimalist but striking.





I hit him up and he actually knew a bunch of my friends from Ohio. You know, we hit it off and I had him put that together for me. I commissioned that and got it back in like 3 weeks I was blown away.

S: Yeah, it definitely made a huge impact on me when I first saw it. Are there any other local acts that have made a good impression on you that you'd like to shout out?

K: Right here in Rochester, Sapphira Vee. She's opened for a few of the shows I've played. She's an awesome artist and she's on a Pittsburgh based industrial record label. She's almost got like a trip hop kind of sound like Sneaker Pimps or like IAMX. Really cool stuff. One of my favorite New York artists is STCLVR from Jamestown. I bring them up here at least a couple times a year and they are just a riot. We went on tour last year, we did the whole east coast. They're a real joy to watch every single night. It is just chaos up there.

S: Alright, I think unless you had anything extra you'd like to add, you can shout out your stuff here, where to find you, that sort of thing.

K: Find me on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok. On TikTok I do some live videos and some tutorials on programming lights and things like that. My next live show in Rochester is March 10th. I'll be playing at the Montage with Boy Jr.. So that's going to be a really fun show.

S: Sounds awesome! Thank you so much for finding time for this!



K: Yeah absolutely, my pleasure!

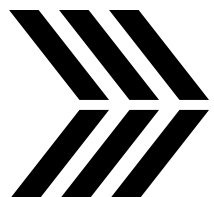
WHEN DOES "MELIORA" HAVE MEANING?

BY AL WRANGEL



Distributing alcohol to underage students, groping women, and hazing are activities that have little to no relationship to the seven values of Meliora. What's worse is that these and other acts far more grotesque occur regularly. And they will continue to happen. It is clear that fraternities and sororities, a few in particular, repeatedly condone and encourage actions that demean, threaten, or otherwise harm the University of Rochester student body, not to mention the other private residents who are unlucky enough to live close to an off-campus fraternity or sorority house. The question is not whether or not many fraternities funded and tolerated by the University of Rochester condone things like sexual assault, underage drinking, and hazing, but why the University continues to tolerate their existence. Is it that the University is not even particularly interested in pursuing its seven core values of Meliora?

This is possible, but there are other questions as well. Fraternity and Sorority Alumni are more likely to donate to their University. The allure of untold thousands from University of Rochester fraternity alumni must be tempting to the seemingly financially-pressed administration. Is this it? Or perhaps Director of Fraternity and Sorority Affairs John DiSarro has been effective in hiding or justifying the many wrongs of the University of Rochester Greek Life to the rest of the University's administration?





Regardless of what the reason is, the University should begin to seriously question its continuing support of such an archaic institution in such a forward-looking school. How many more times must University and Rochester law enforcement and EMS be summoned to out-of-control fraternity parties? How many more University students should be traumatized by forms of covert hazing, harassment, or sexual assault? The time is ripe for the University of Rochester to begin to take a serious look at the culture it seeks to cultivate on campus.

There is no shortage today of universities and colleges across the country who fail in one way or another to promote a healthy and interconnected campus life and the costs of this can be catastrophic. That is why the University of Rochester must take heavily into account not just the finance- or status-related components of maintaining Greek Life, but also the cultural components. What kind of culture does Greek Life in general promote? What kind of culture does Greek Life at the University of Rochester promote? The firm answer is- not a good one. Anyone reading this can likely think of a few instances of friends or acquaintances who joined fraternities or sororities, and, within a year, they are noticeably different people. They begin to take themselves and their fraternity or sorority more seriously, and associate with a smaller and more particular group. It seems that many fraternities can't help but take in young men who they've recruited, and tie them in with a culture of sexual harassment, regular illicit substance use, and whatever other habits the fraternity leadership has and promotes at that time. This is not Meliora, and if the university is at all serious about the values it claims to uphold, it must stop.



Greek Life at best represents a shallow understanding of the liberal values espoused by the University of Rochester, and in truth, more often than not, undermines them, making a joke out of the University's alleged commitment to "Integrity", "Equity", and "Openness". Fraternities and sororities are making the University of Rochester campus culture worse, and not better. Fraternities and sororities are making University of Rochester students worse, and not better.



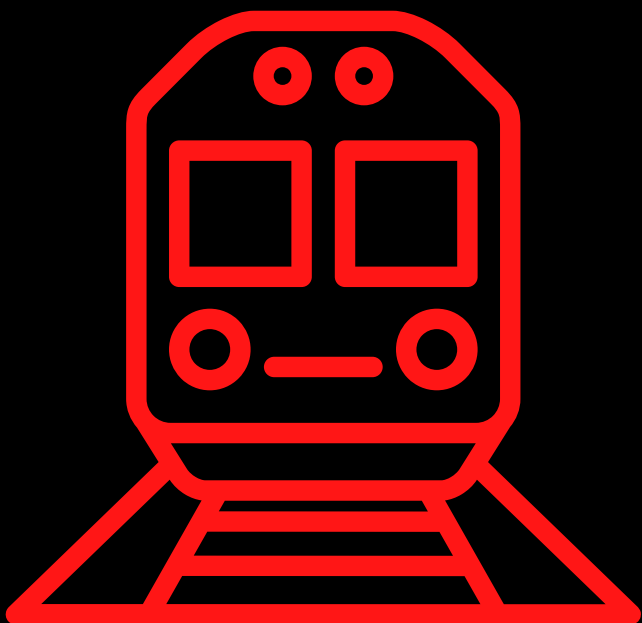
Listed by the administration as 'social' organizations, this means that the primary recognized purpose of Greek Life is to promote social involvement, and not to conduct charities. This should be obvious, yet it is worth clearly stating: no amount of charity mini-golf events nor donut-eating competitions thrown by various fraternities and sororities have any meaningful or significant impact. Nor are these events intended to. They exist solely to advertise feigned virtues to the University of Rochester community, in the hopes that the less discerning of the student body will fail to see past this thin veil. Further, these charities lighten the heavy conscience of some fraternity and sorority members who know all too well that getting high in the fraternity president's room and planning rush events doesn't make one a worthwhile contributor to society. Perhaps a charity tie-dying event will.

Sometimes I believe that the University's reluctance to banish Greek Life stems from them not imagining what a world without University of Rochester Greek Life would look like. But I would encourage the reader to do so right now, and imagine that world. Yes, the frat-sponsored parties and other events would be gone... but so too would the pervasive and ongoing history of sexual misconduct and other harassment indelibly associated with Greek Life. Does your conscience tell you that this is a trade worth making? Mine does.



The Five- Year Amtrak Plan


**By Some
Schwinghammer**



**Our culture? Shit.
Our society? Shit.
Our economics? Shit.
Our environment?
Shit.
And getting shit-er.**

**How do we change it?
Amtrak.**


**I promise, this is
going somewhere.**




Amtrak, the US Government run train agency. A rare federalized public service in the United States, so of course it's been kneecapped by both corporate and state interests alike. Its funding has been siphoned away, its legal right of way on tracks ignored, and with a special effort from the automobile/gas industries, Amtrak is a laughing stock. We, as leftists, must push for Amtrak to be funded, and to be successful. I shall cover the reasons for this fact in the following sections. By getting people riding trains again, we can accomplish four primary things.

First, it puts people in the same cars, literally, as everyone else. Yes there will be the more expensive seats, the cars at the front as Bong Joon Ho has commented on immensely in his 2019 adaptation of 'Snowpiercer'. However, on average, you will be exposing the working class to itself. Building the class consciousness required for revolutionary equity to be reached. If enough people of different backgrounds have to sit next to each other on the train, I would extrapolate that a decrease in the amount of racism, sexism, homophobia, all of it, would follow. This is for the same reason the right fights so hard against inclusivity in the media and in our communities, because science has shown how representing diversity does in fact decrease the level of racism, sexism, homophobia, and hate.


Think about why people become generally more progressive in college, or after traveling or studying abroad. They've been exposed to different people from different backgrounds. This changing of one's own views solely due to connection with those who experienced our shared world differently is a super power of humankind, one we must make use of as a modern leftist movement.




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Second, even nowadays people who ride the rails across the US always comment on the beauty of the views. Think about the art movements of the past, how they were inspired by these views. Human beings enjoy seeing and being in natural environments. We need it to be healthy, to be happy. Over the past century of American suburban sprawl (which we'll get to) the nature of our shared land has been made an enemy, killing the natural to plant lawns. Amtrak rail can return to the general population an appreciation of the natural beauty of the continent. Of the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains. It can expose once more, not through a congested highway, or from miles above the ground, the natural beauty of an entire fucking continent to a people who have been practically starved of it for a near century. As children, my sister and I would ask our aunt and uncle to take us on the rails for our birthdays, specifically the scenic routes. Why can't we do that more, not just for celebrations, but for everyday transport?


Third, Amtrak gets people to notably trust and enjoy a government service that isn't just under their noses. The employees, the conductor, the rails, everything making that train work is off the citizens dollar. Think about the USPS and how loved they are, and how difficult it is to "kill" those programs which people are already used to using. How unpopular would it be to overturn Medicaid or Social Security? Once you give the people a service they trust, they don't want it taken away. Hell, look at the overturning of Dobbs and the political waves it's made in red states. And I don't know about anyone else, but that feeling of awe when I saw the massive COVID vaccination facilities in my hometown, put together by the government for the people on the people's dollar, was immense, because we never see things like it anymore.


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No longer is there a new deal push for large public works projects. We as a population have been starved from the idea of a public good. The awe that I, and I'm sure others, feel must have the ability to change how people see the government and public utilities nationwide. And if we have the USPS, and we get Amtrak, what's next? Healthcare? Housing? Trust in public works projects is incredibly important when it comes to pushing the US as far left as we can *to better as many people's lives as possible*, at least before a proper revolution takes hold.

Fourth, Amtrak shows an alternative to the god forsaken suburban system that currently is our primary method of development. Amtrak trains? What about Amtrak light rail, Amtrak subways, everything. This isn't even considering the increase in funding local systems like BART, Trimet, and other city-specific public transit orgs would gain. This has the same effect of the first point with added environmental gains. Increasing public spaces increases class consciousness. Increasing trust in public systems increases the funding and number of said public systems. Suburbia is the antithesis to leftism, with suburban development you are going everywhere individually, in your individual metal box that you only leave to either enter a shared consumer location for a limited amount of time, your work space, or your own private home. You are no longer ever required to meet other people of other backgrounds, and that is entirely by design. The suburbs were devised as a method of separating the rich white people from the increasing urban non-white populations. From the poors, from the "inner-cities". And they continue today as a method of separation, but also of economic vacuuming. As 'Strong Towns' and others have written on extensively, suburban developments are heavily subsidized by the poorer and more diverse urban regions. However, this is all worthy of further writing so I'll stop here.

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If we push for Amtrak funding and legal right of way we can finally set free it's ability to change our society. If we let it, Amtrak will open one of the many (both already opened and still closed) valves at the base of the suburban lake, and even if it takes a century, suburbia will fall. And with suburbia, so too goes many individualist ideals of the American "dream" that we all live in today.

Amtrak can act as a catalyst. An imperfect step to becoming more environmentally, and socially, conscious. To opening the average American's mind to more public services. And, most importantly, to get people out of their own cars, and into everyone's cars.

If we can just fund it, Amtrak will succeed, making all of this is possible. I can't say if it's probable. But it is possible



THANK YOU TO OUR ISSUE 1 CONTRIBUTORS

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SOLIDARITY FOREVER

