

Remembering Jim Campbell

David Watson

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Our longtime friend and comrade Jim Campbell died suddenly last September 17 of heart failure. He was 57 years old. Jim was a mainstay of the Toronto (and larger Canadian and international) anarchist community. Though we had not been in close touch lately, we had a long political and personal relationship going back to the late 1970s, including political collaboration, correspondence, and visits in Detroit and Toronto.

In the 1970s, Jim was involved in a variety of radical and counter-cultural activities, including political discussion groups, food coops, communal living, and radical printing and publishing. While living in Vancouver in the mid-1970s, he was a founder of the magazine *Open Road*, one of the most significant anarchist publications of that entire period, which focused on anarchist cultural issues as well as native struggles, ecology, prisoner support, and feminism.

We met Jim and other Canadian friends through their typesetting and printing cooperative, Dumont Press Graphix in Kitchener, where Fredy and Lorraine Perlman would go to typeset Black & Red books. For many years, the FE and B&R also distributed the booklet he and other comrades at Dumont produced in 1979, *Ideas for Setting Your Mind in a Condition of Dis*Ease*, which in format and content was very much like the material B&R, the FE, and other anti-authoritarian projects were creating at that time.

Jim was fiercely honorable. He had a profound sense of responsibility to others. We had an abiding respect for his devotion, his years of service in the interest of the rights, freedom, and dignity of prisoners, both political and non-political, one of the most pariah groups in this society. We always admired Jim's steadfastness. He was an active member of the prisoner support movement, eventually becoming the mainstay and publisher/editor of the newsletter, *Bulldozer*: the only vehicle for prisoner reform, and the Prison News Service, publications that came out doggedly for many years. (For an article on the project and interview with Jim, see <http://www.rrj.ca/issue/1996/spring/212/>.) [Page not found, October, 2014.]

Another one of Jim's commitments was his consistent, principled defense of and support for the Vancouver 5, anarchists arrested for the bombing of the Litton Systems plant, in Toronto, in 1982. (Jim's account and analysis of these events can be found at <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/44/052.html>.) He was also an organizer of the 1988 Anarchist Survival Gathering in Toronto.

Jim had a sense of idealism and perspective and also a sense of practical reality and necessity. He was no pie-in-the-sky guy. While others might wax on about the glorious anarchist future, or argue over some theoretical nuance, he was likely rustling up food or gathering money to bail a comrade out of jail. In a movement where the most eloquent defenders of the Ideal could sometimes be just as likely to leave their tools out in the rain, Jim managed to speak clearly and humbly and also eloquently-while remembering always to attend to the practical needs of the community.

Jim had grown up in a farm community in southern Ontario. In a history of *Bulldozer* written in the January-February 1995 issue, Jim recounted that when he and others founded a rural anarchist communal farm in Ontario in the 1970s, "the farm floundered right from the beginning due to a lazy-faire attitude and middle class arrogance. With self-expression and 'do-your-own-thing' as the highest values, most communal members were unable to re-

spond to the realities of a situation determined by an unrelenting hostile climate, and the cycle of the seasons. Having grown up poor and living-in-the-country, it didn't seem to be such a big deal to be back, poor, and living-in-the-country. I left totally disillusioned at the end of 1981, moved to Toronto permanently, cut my hair, and got a full-time job shortly after." (See "*Bulldozer*: 15 years and more," in the issue, accessible at <http://www.prisonactivist.org/pubs/pns/about-bulldozer.html>.)

This was around the time we met him. What one has to like about the statement, rereading it today, is that it is the kind of thing, according to the typical scenario, that for some people would signal the end of radical commitment. For Jim, of course, it was a deepening of his radical, existential engagement. He didn't fit the stereotypes.

But cutting his hair and going to work hardly turned him into a sober, soulless militant. He worked hard on projects, but he had fun, and many a good laugh. The same Ontario Scots background that must have endowed him with his practical bent also was probably a source of his dry sense of humor. With a pragmatic and wry comment, Jim would often nail the practical absurdity of some claim or of an entire disagreement. In this way he was good at deflecting or deflating differences of opinion and reminding you of the larger view of life.

Perhaps parallel to his characteristic single, well-placed quip, was Jim's penchant for the much favored weapon among contemporary anarchists, the cream pie. He pied Canadian cabinet minister Marc Lalonde and, according to a mutual friend in Toronto, "some weird brain researcher from Spain named Calderon." He also pied Eldridge Cleaver, after the former Black Panther had turned into a right-wing Christian prosperity cultist. When Jim pied Cleaver, our friend reports, "the Christians with Cleaver almost beat him up. He said he was relieved when the cops showed up." One can hear him saying that with a laugh and an unabashed sense of the irony.

Jim was tough, he was upright, and he was full of life. He embodied the basic values we cherish—truth telling, solidarity, compassion, justice, practicality, humility, loyalty, friendship, a willingness to help. You knew that you could trust him completely, even with your life. You could trust him not only to think clearly and respond in the right way, but to be grounded and competent and reliable enough to get you through the hard times.

In comments sent to the Toronto memorial, Lorraine Perlman recalled: "He was receptive to native Americans and their projects. He helped the incarcerated find their voices. He listened to women. Jim's mind, heart, and body could do it all. It was a privilege to have known him."

All of us loved being with Jim Campbell. We thought we would have more opportunities to be with him. We already miss him, and will continue to miss him. The world will miss his good work, his insight, and his laugh.

—David Watson, December 2007



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<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/377-march-2008/remembering-jim-campbell>
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