

# PM Press

## Ten Years of Literary Molotovs

Craig O'Hara

2018

Bay Area-based PM Press celebrated its tenth anniversary of publishing in May with a bang-up party in Oakland, Calif., where staff, authors, and well-wishers howled at political sketch comedy, smashed a captured Amazon delivery drone, and danced the night away to punk rock.

PM was founded at the end of 2007 by a small group of people with decades of publishing, media, and organizing experience. At the outset we strived to create and distribute radical audio, video, and text releases through every available channel in all possible formats. True to one expanded variation of our name, "Print Matters," however, we're biased in favor of hardcopy books as the best format in which to communicate ideas for social change.

PM Press has never had a *New York Times* bestseller, and you will not find our books reviewed in its pages. It's not part of the financial equation for small presses to reach the mainstream by moving millions of copies of single titles, although we have sold millions of copies of books in total, often one at a time, face to face.

Events like anarchist book fairs and the existence of radical book shops are critical to exposing PM's work around the world. We organized, promoted, or attended 370 author events and 200 tabling exhibits in 2017 alone. PM is currently staffed by 10 people; several scattered around the West Coast, others working from the Rockies, Appalachia, New England, Montreal, and in the UK. After years of volunteer work, we are able to pay living wages by producing 30 books per year for gross sales surpassing a million dollars. And, like the *Fifth Estate*, PM just celebrated its 400<sup>th</sup> release.

There is a shrinking audience in 2018 for historical anarchist texts, which have long been the staple of movement publishers. While anarchism is a topic of intellectual study and debate in the universities, a defanged discourse too often takes place apart from the poor and working-class communities that nurtured the movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

One of our tasks as anarchist publishers, then, is to inject the historical politics of anarchism—active self-organizing, promotion of equality, opposition to hierarchy, the state, and organized religion—into the movements, milieus, and media of the times. Anarchism is always on the side of the oppressed. It never seeks mainstream respectability.

We have a broad enough umbrella to be a part of the discussion within many different cultures and experiences, from political prisoners to punk rockers, social scientists to cartoonists. Among our bestsellers, books such as *Sisters of the Revolution: A Feminist Speculative Fiction Anthology*, the full-color *Understanding Jim Crow: Using Racist Memorabilia to Teach Tolerance and Promote Social Justice*, and the West Virginia history book *Gun Thugs, Rednecks, and Radicals*, bridge perceived gaps between traditional supporters of anarchist publications, those involved with grassroots social justice activism, and professional writers and educators doing some of the best work in their fields.

At the level on which independent publishers operate, selling 3,000 copies of a book in one year makes it a bestseller. A handful of anarchist-specific backlist titles, including books on the CNT in the Spanish Revolution, German philosopher Gustav Landauer's collected works, and titles by UK activists Stuart Christie or Colin Ward, may not sell 100 copies annually, combined.

Many of the problems facing independent publishers today are the same as decades ago. Rising physical costs of producing a book—paper, freight, storage, advertising, distribution—are still everyday concerns. And, only a few want to do the unglamorous and physically demanding work of warehousing, or spend years learning the highly-detailed, solitary skills of proofing, indexing, and book design for projects that will rarely be financially profitable.

Yet countless writers, artists, and activists are submitting more manuscripts and proposals than PM could ever publish. If a dozen independent publishers formed tomorrow to disseminate these texts, in every format and genre, they'd have plenty of work to do.

Anti-authoritarian books garner plenty of attention within the modern anarchist movement, but building lasting alternatives to capitalism is what we have to do, not just churn out books. The ideas and examples contained in these books must inspire the doers who create community lending libraries, food-growing and sharing co-ops, non-capitalist child and elder care, prisoner support networks—and yes, eventually, revolution.

See PM titles & t-shirts at [pmpress.org](http://pmpress.org)

Craig O'Hara, cofounder of PM Press, has spent 25 years publishing and selling radical books to stores, at book fairs, conferences, rock concerts, flea markets, and activist gatherings.

# fifth Estate

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<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/401-summer-2018/pm-press>  
Fifth Estate #401, Summer 2018

**[fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net)**