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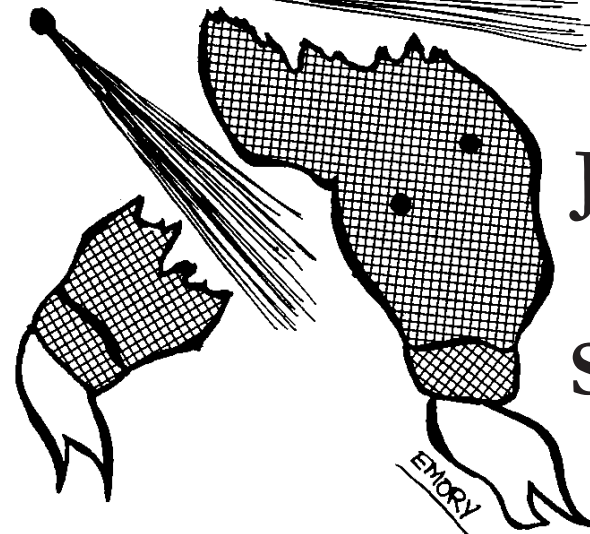
James Yaki Sayles (a.k.a. Atiba Shanna, Owusu Yaki Yakubu), was a New Afrikan communist revolutionary, guerrilla intellectual, and Black Liberation Army member, held captive for close to four decades as a political prisoner. He joined the ancestors in 2008 at the age of almost 60, four years after his release.

REFLECTIONS

on

**VICTOR
SERGE'S**

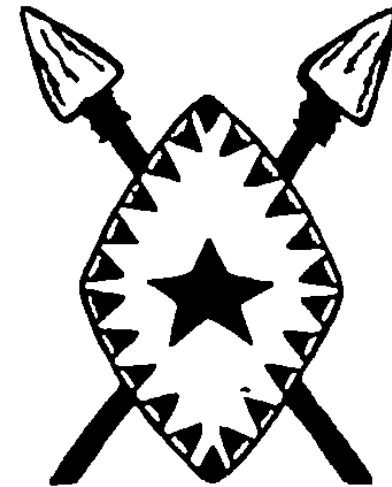
**“WHAT EVERYONE
SHOULD KNOW
ABOUT (STATE)
REPRESSION”**



by
**James
Yaki
Sayles**

against posing, adopting airs of mystery, dramatizing simple events, or 'conspiratorial' attitudes. The greatest virtue in a revolutionary is simplicity, and scorn for all poses...including 'revolutionary' and especially conspiratorial poses..."

Re-Build!



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Cover by Emory Douglas

intimidated or provoked. Don't reply to any question without having a lawyer present and without previously consulting with your lawyer. If possible, the lawyer should be a comrad, or at least someone who has a significant level of political consciousness. If it's not possible to have a lawyer, don't say anything without really thinking about it. As a matter of principle: **SAY NOTHING**. Trying to "explain" yourself is dangerous: you are in the hands of professionals who are able to get something out of your every word. Any "explanation" gives them valuable documentation. Lying is extremely dangerous: it is difficult to construct a story without its defects being too obvious, it is almost impossible to improvise. Don't try to be more clever than them: the relationship of forces is too unequal for that. **NEVER CONFESS**. When you deny something, deny it firmly. The enemy is capable of anything. Don't let yourself be surprised or disconcerted by the classic: "We know everything!" This is never the case. It is a barefaced trick...Don't be intimidated by the eternal threat: "You'll pay for this!" What you'll pay for is a confession, or a clumsy explanation, or falling for tricks and moments of panic; but whatever the situation of the accused, a hermetically sealed defense, built up out of much silence and few definite affirmations or denials, can only help. Don't believe a word of another classic ploy: "We know everything because your comrad So-and-So has talked!" Don't believe a word of it, even if they try to prove it. With a few carefully selected clues, the enemy is capable of feigning a profound knowledge of things. Even if So-and-So did "tell all," this is a further reason to be doubly circumspect. Again: **SAY NOTHING. SIGN NOTHING.**

8. "Before the police and courts: Don't try to establish the 'truth'—there is no truth in common between the oppressed and the oppressor. Their truth is not ours. Before the judges of the oppressor, the Comrad does not have to account for any act. The Comrad can turn the courtroom into a school, or, the Comrad can keep silent."

9. "A supreme warning: Be on your guard against conspiracy mania,

Editors' Note: In the 1960s, as repression tightened, revolutionary groups needed an understanding of how to shield themselves from the f.b.i. and police. But there had been no tradition of such security knowledge either in the Civil Rights movement or the youth gangs. At that time, the New Left started passing around a translation of Victor Serge's little pamphlet, "What Everyone Should Know About State Repression." Serge had been a Russian revolutionary journalist and organizer, who had worked underground against the Czar's secret police and had a lot of first-hand experience. Yaki encouraged comrades to check Serge's booklet out; but since the Russian had lived back a century ago, in a time when you could do things like jumping on a streetcar to evade surveillance, Yaki wanted to update and reinforce the basic lessons. To an active revolutionary, this understanding is like having a first-aid kit or emergency equipment. If you are reading this kind of literature you need to be prepared to fight the political police.

PART ONE: REFLECTIONS

1. Victor Serge quickly corrects a common misconception about repression. Most of us hold an image of imperialist repression formed by its spectacular, brutal, and murderous results, i.e., the predawn raid by the police, the invasion by military forces, or the bombings and lynchings by the state's paramilitary KKK-type garrison troops.

In other words, we view a **PART** of the repression process as if it were the whole, because this part is the most visible and impacting aspect, and the aspect most portrayed by the imperialist media as well as the media of the colonized nation.

But, Serge points out that, at the center of what everyone should know about the repression of the bourgeois-imperialist state—what allows us to put the whole process into perspective—is, **THE IMMEDIATE AIM** of all repressive forces. That immediate aim is “more to **know**, than to repress. **To know**, in order to repress at the appointed hour, to the extent desired—if not altogether.” They can't repress what they don't know...about.

Therefore, the most immediate aim of revolutionary cadres and the revolutionary masses is, in this context, to allow the opposition to know as little as possible, about anything, and anyone.

We should understand that each time we perform the common act of opening our mouths and speaking, we're telling someone **SOMETHING** about ourselves which has the potential of becoming a weapon used against us by the state, should that information fall or be placed in their hands: the way we think; what we think about; our habits, likes and dislikes; what we've done, what we may do, and how we may do it, etc.

And, the body has a language of its own, too. That is, our movements can tell the opposition things about us that they want **TO KNOW**, in

must take place, there must be face-to-face contact between such corresponding comrades so that the details of their exchanges can be arranged between them.

It's also much better that each comrad have different systems for corresponding with each comrad, than to have a single system for corresponding with each comrad. In the event of the state discovering the system used with one comrad, they won't be able to use that knowledge immediately against other comrades.

5. “Beware of telephones—**ALL** telephones. Never say **ANYTHING** over the phone that you wouldn't say to a police officer. Don't make appointments over the phone, except in pre-arranged, coded terms. And, when using such codes, make them sound as normal as possible, that is, don't have them sound as if they are obviously codes, or jagged parts of conversations, etc.”

6. “Make it a principle that, in illegal activity (which is to say, in all activity), a revolutionary should know only what it is useful or necessary to know; and that it is often dangerous to know or to tell more. The less that is known, the greater the security. Be on guard against the inclination to give away confidences. Know how to keep quiet; keeping quiet is a duty to the party and to the struggle. Know how to forget of your own accord what you should not know. It is a mistake, which may have serious consequences, to tell your closest friend, mate, or most trusty comrad a party secret which is not indispensable for them to know. Sometimes you may be doing them wrong; because you are responsible for what you know, and it may be a heavy responsibility. Don't take offense or get annoyed at another comrad's silence. This isn't a sign of a lack of confidence, but rather of fraternal esteem and of what should be a mutual consciousness of revolutionary duty.”

7. In the event of arrest: At all costs keep cool. Don't let yourself be

a more developed consciousness. By the time such an announcement is made (assuming that it will be), the lists of those to be arrested have already been compiled!!!!

So, one aspect of what we mean by **CONSCIOUSNESS**, from the revolutionary perspective, is that, folks have lived in amerikkka all their lives, and studied and been part of the development of struggle against the state, but they still have the consciousness of bourgeois reformists, slaves, adventurists, and dilettantes. They still have the consciousness of the petty-bourgeoisie, even while claiming to wage revolutionary warfare.

4. Write down as little as possible. It's better not to write. Don't take notes on sensitive subjects: it's better sometimes to forget certain things than to take them down in writing. With that in mind, practice remembering addresses, names, etc. Where **NECESSARY**, take notes which are intelligible only to yourself. Everyone can invent ways of abbreviating, inverting, transposing..With correspondence, take into account that your mail **WILL** be opened. Say as little as possible and try to make yourself understood only by the addressee (and, the **BEST** way to do this is by pre-arrangement, i.e., during face-to-face discussions with comrades, discuss and decide upon the methods to be used). Mention no third persons unless absolutely necessary (and, if this is to be done, it should be done according to pre-arranged methods, so that the third persons should be mentioned only by code names known only to the addressee)...Avoid all details about places, work, dates, and people...Learn to resort, even without prior arrangement, to what should always be very simple strategems for trivializing information. Don't say, for example, that Comrad Yusef has been arrested, but that Yusef has suddenly fallen ill. And, of course, "Yusef" will not be the comrad's real or work name, but a code name used only between yourself and the addressee. Each comrad should have as many names as necessary, and these names should be known only to those with a need to know.

In view of the fact that some correspondence between most comrades

order to be able to repress us. Thus, if they can't watch our movements, they'll be denied information that could be used to repress us and/or our people.

The enemy's attention to such things is part of their science of repression. Paying due attention to such things should be part of the science of revolutionary cadres, and of the science of the revolutionary masses. We must share revolutionary science even as we discipline ourselves to stand vigilant over **ALL** our words and actions.

2. While building the cadre and mass bases that must share revolutionary science and realize it in practical struggle, we must see that if the foundations that we build are shaky, then everything that comes to rest upon them will be shaky, too.

If we allow cracks to develop in the very foundation of the new movement, in the consciousness and practice of cadres and masses, then corrosion will be a characteristic element in and of the structures, and our consciousness will be flawed.

A major cause of cracks in foundations is undeveloped consciousness, incorrect political line, and unacknowledged or unrecognized liberalism and opportunism. These relate to the more apparent secondary causes, i.e., the "mistakes," complacency, and general failures to discipline our words and actions.

The discipline begins with experience, experiment, and the summation of these, which together form the core of development of revolutionary science. In the words of one comrad: "To 'Heighten Discipline' means, first and foremost, that We heighten our grasp and practice of the ideology, line, and strategy of the organization, and of the Movement. To be 'under the discipline of,' or 'subject to the discipline of' any organization, but the Army in particular, means that our comrades must heighten their efforts to understand our ideology, our political-military line, and our strategy; it means that We must accept these as our own;

that We are therefore able to put them into practice, be responsible for them, and be able to fight for them and defend them.” (Shalimar B., “Against The Wind,” NOTES FROM A NEW AFRIKAN P.O.W. JOURNAL, Book Six, 1980, p. 7)

3. The tasks ahead, and the conditions under which they must be performed demand that we not take anything for granted—least of all, our survival.

They know we’re coming. In fact, they know far too much about those of us already here. And, unless we grasp this fact, in all its implications, we’ll contaminate everything we touch, and expose everything we try to build.

We have to search for, and then apply, the consciousness, the skills and methods that will eliminate—or at least minimize—the disadvantages incurred especially over the last ten years, which have resulted in the further disruption of the revolutionary forces.

4. Serge also helps to place the image of the “professional” revolutionary into focus. It could be said that his entire book is about the most essential of those “special qualities” that enable the professional revolutionary (i.e., cadres), to carry on “the struggle against the political police”—the imperialist state’s first line of **ARMED** defense.

This insight into the substantive composition of the (professional) revolutionary cadre, helps us keep in mind that:

A) The “political police” and other armed/intelligence forces of the state are specialized defensive/offensive branches of the oppressive state, and to struggle against them is merely to engage the primary instruments of physical coercion and repression that the state has at its command. In other words, we must keep in mind that the **PRIMARY** struggle is against the state as a whole. In this way, we

and then finding out their plans. ‘Tailing’ sections are developed by all police forces...In the most serious cases, two agents spied on the same person unbeknown to each other; their reports were cross-checked and used to complement each other...These daily reports were sent to the police to be analyzed by specialists. These officers...were dangerously perceptive. They would draw up tables showing a person’s deeds and actions, the number of visits, their length, regularity, etc. Sometimes, these tables brought out the importance of one member’s relationships and his probable influence...Every revolutionary must regard himself as being permanently followed: on principle, the revolutionary should never neglect to take the necessary precautions to prevent being followed. The simplest rules are: 1) don’t go directly to where you are going; 2) turn down a deserted street to check whether you are being followed; 3) when in doubt, turn back; 4) if you notice that you are being followed, jump on some kind of transport and then change.”

Again, we must stress the importance of **CONSCIOUSNESS**. Security is not simply a matter of magical methods, especially when cadres only learn even the simplest methods in a mechanical manner, and by rote. Knowing the methods without having the theoretical perspective that allows them to be used in the most appropriate manner, is sometimes worse than not knowing the methods at all.

Another thing to keep in mind: It’s not a matter of being paranoid when it comes to employing such methods, nor is it a question of whether or not the opposition is actually following you. It’s a matter of making a habit of being serious, apply science, being disciplined and vigilant. The enemy won’t come up to you and say, “Watch yourself today, we’re playing for real, and watching every move you make.”

More on what we mean by stressing the importance of **CONSCIOUSNESS**: It happens that we got so-called vanguard forces who still—believe it or not—think that the time to get serious about “security” is after the state announces that “civil liberties” are being suspended, or that martial law is being imposed. But, by that time, it’s too late to start employing security methods, or to begin developing

PART TWO: GOOD PRACTICE IS THE RESULT OF GOOD PRACTICE

1. There was once a collective of aspiring New Afrikan revolutionaries, engaged in study, and one day the subject was “learning how to follow people and detect when you’re being followed.” One of the would-be revolutionaries saw no need for this type of study, got angry, and said that he was a revolutionary, and not an espionage agent.

Strangely, this study session took place in the late 1960s several days after the bloods had read an article which mentioned that the state was following such people as Stokely Carmichael, and placing beepers on their cars.

Other members of the collective tried to make the point that learning how to follow people, and to be able to detect and elude similar surveillance upon oneself, is an essential element in the training of all revolutionaries, whether they do “public” or “clandestine” work. Such training is part of the more practical side of the revolutionary **SCIENCE** practiced by the “professional” revolutionary.

2. Serge has a chapter on “Simple Advice To Revolutionaries,” and he points out that his suggestions aren’t “a complete code of the rules of clandestinity, nor even (a complete code) of the precautions to be taken by revolutionaries. They contain no sensational recipe. They are simply basic rules. Strictly speaking, common sense should be enough to suggest them. But unfortunately, long experience teaches us that it is not out of place to spell them out. Carelessness on the part of revolutionaries has always been the best aid the police have.”

3. Serge’s advice, sprinkled with a few bits of our comments: “At the start, all surveillance is from the outside. This always involves following the individual, getting to know their activities, movements, contacts,

can avoid being diverted by the struggles against its parts. The enemy is the u.s. imperialist state, not merely the f.b.i. or the street cop that commits the most recent act of colonial terror.

Therefore, when we seek to raise consciousness about repression, we want to focus on the repression of the imperialist state, not merely the repression of the f.b.i. or the local police department.

B) The imperialist state also has other instruments of coercion and repression, which assume political, economic, and socio-cultural forms, rather than physical/armed forms. Relative to the oppressed nation, **ALL** institutions directly or indirectly controlled by the imperialist state are repressive, perform counter-revolutionary functions, and are no less forces to be engaged in combat by revolutionary cadres and masses, than are the “political police.”

C) The State’s repressive apparatus is also “professional,” and is organized on a scientific basis, with, as Serge says, “special attention to their character, education, training, recruitment, intelligence, service record; their knowledge of the programs, statuses, origins, and methods of the revolutionary parties, and the histories of leading members...”

5. Hunters must be able to track, and to know the habits and feeding grounds of their prey. Intelligent prey, on the other hand, must know as much as possible about the hunter, which includes knowing what the hunter knows about the prey. If the hunter is tracking the prey, then the prey must learn to avoid leaving traces and trails. If the hunter pursues the prey based on knowledge of the prey’s habits and feeding patterns, then the prey must abandon those habits, avoid normal feeding areas, and maybe even change diets.

The opposition wants to know whatever possible—whatever we allow them to know. They wanna know who you know; where you go; when; how often; how long you stay; what you say and do while there...

Nothing is really insignificant. They are on their job even when we don't see or hear them (contrary to what most of us seem to believe), and to avoid being caught off guard, or coming up short, or having to improvise a quick lie or a quick getaway, we must be on our jobs even when we think we don't have to be.

6. Making the “need to know” principle part of our very being, should be understood to involve more than being vigilant with regard to clearly identifiable and visible repressive forces, and those kinds of situations and activity where the need is most obvious. The application of the “need to know” principle (basically, that no one needs to know any information other than that necessary to carry out their own activities), literally means that **NO ONE** inside organized structures knows more than necessary, and it means absolutely no one outside organized structures knows anything at all.

It often happens that, we begin working with people who are later uncovered as planted agents of the state, or who turn traitor. In such situations, we find ourselves faced not only with the exposure of names, addresses, details of actions, and other information that such persons acquired in the course of doing work that they were responsible for. We also usually find ourselves faced with the exposure of information that such people acquired from others who failed to practice “need to know.”

7. Making “need to know” part of our being means getting into the habit of never volunteering information. **EXAMPLE:** A sister doing maintenance work at an office building is mopping the floor at one of the offices. An employee of the firm approaches the office, stops at the door upon seeing the wet floor, and asks, “Is that wax?” The sister says, “You can walk on it.”

Now, if you ask the sister why she didn't say “Yes,” it was wax, or “No,” it wasn't: “Well, in the first place,” she'll say, with the air of

There must also be the training of supporters and sympathizers, primarily through the conduct of political education. We shouldn't take for granted that people will know the enemy and the methods used to infiltrate, disrupt, and divert mass organizations.

We must have a secure movement and struggle, not merely secure vanguard organizations, collectives, and units. We need an impenetrable wall of mass consciousness, an entire revolutionary class that knows about the purpose and methods of state repression, and how to defend against it, and how to turn defense into offense.

12. Some of the things we do, and some of the structures we build, must be “hidden” clandestinely, in the commonly understood meaning of the term. Other things we do, and other structures built, contacts made, relationships established, etc., while taking place in “public” view, must be done in more-or-less clandestine manner, so that the ultimate purposes aren't undesirably noticeable, connections aren't exposed, and contacts are subtle and unobserved.

This is exactly what's meant by "the party must organize so as to avoid enemy vigilance **AS FAR AS POSSIBLE.**" Revolutionary cadres and the revolutionary masses organize all forms of activity—political, economic, socio-cultural—among all classes, groups, and strata. Enemy vigilance must be avoided **AS FAR AS POSSIBLE** in ALL mass, "public," and so-called "legal" work.

10. When it's said that "the party must organize so as to hide its most important resources **ABSOLUTELY,**" this isn't limited to financial or material resources, nor to the stashing of such resources behind locked, secret doors.

What are our most important resources? Our cadres; supporters and sympathizers; networks; contacts and relationships. **THE PEOPLE ARE OUR MOST IMPORTANT RESOURCES.** The vast majority of our resources are "public"—they work nine-to-five; live in housing projects; attend school; receive some form of welfare payments; some (not enough as yet) hold sensitive positions in the enemy state apparatus, its academic, media, business and service institutions, and serve in its police and armed forces.

11. To say that "the party must organize so as to train our comrades in the behavior which is demanded by these imperatives," means the training in the consciousness and methods of "combating the political police" is part of the organizing process, beginning at the stage of cadre "spotting" and recruitment.

All organized structures must fashion an apparatus which specializes in such training, using detailed and systematic methods. This apparatus must be responsible for ongoing study, drawing lessons from our own experience and from the experiences of others. It should also coordinate the periodic assessment of cadres, structures, from the standpoint of security, conducting and testing the training and raising its level, in the daily activities and struggles.

a worker-teacher, instructing a cadre-pupil, "i told him just what he needed to know. He **seemed** to need to know if he could walk on the floor. But then, too, he might have wanted to know if i **was** waxing it—which they say i'm to do three times a week, but i don't. So he left, without finding out from me, whether it was wax or not. And, if tomorrow or next year, i **have** to say what it was, i can say whatever i like, or whatever i need to say. Yep, i make a habit outta tellin' 'em just what they need to know, and no more."

8. Serge: "...the immediate aim of the police is more to know, than to repress. To know, in order to repress at the appointed hour, to the extent desired—if not altogether."

The state and its repressive forces won't flash news bulletins each time they acquire a piece of information about revolutionary-mass forces. They won't publicize the names of those on today's surveillance sheet.

You may make a mistake, and in some cases, you'll be, or become aware of it, before it results in tragic consequences. But many times, we make mistakes, but remain unaware of them—until the door is kicked in (and sometimes even then we won't know exactly what led them to us). The enemy won't let us know when we've made mistakes and/or when they discover them. They assume that if we become aware of the mistake, we'll repair any cracks, or cover any traces, and learn from the experience so that the error won't be repeated.

The opposition assumes that if we learn that an agent has been exposed, or that a cadre has turned traitor, or that a comrad under torture has yielded information—the enemy assumes that in such situations we'll change whatever needs to be changed and abandon what needs to be abandoned. If comrades are arrested and released, the enemy assumes that we will impose a "no contact" policy, whereby contact with that comrad by others above and below, are brought to a minimum or stopped altogether. The enemy assumes that we know something about what we're doing, and that we take them, and ourselves, seriously.

They will get a piece of information and try to develop it to its deepest and widest limits, before deciding upon “the appointed hour.” And that’s not always a pre-dawn raid. It’s sometimes a stop by a traffic cop who “just happens” to notice a busted tail-light. Or, he may actually make the stop in ignorance, yet the grip of other branches seize the opportunity, when your info is run through the computer.

Sometimes the hour is seized when comrades carry out actions that run into obstacles. Under the cover of such mishaps, the enemy will move on names, faces, addresses, etc., that they already had, but they’ll pretend to have only discovered them as a result of the failed action. In this way, the enemy tries to keep us in the dark about the extent of information they already have, and they try to protect the sources of their information. They will always try to keep us ignorant as to how well they’ve been doing their job of infiltrating, turning, tapping, following, picture snapping, questioning, checking and cross-checking, indexing and cross-indexing...

Sometimes, the appointed hour arrives, but they deliberately “miss” someone. They throw the net only so far when making arrests...or they release someone—but they’re still interested in **KNOWING**. They hope that those “missed” by the net, and/or those released after an arrest, will become unconscious “breeders” and blind informers, by immediately becoming active again. In this way, we’d lead the state to more information on cadres they likely already knew about, and to names, faces, addresses, and methods, that they didn’t know about, or didn’t have the full scoop on.

They will also hope that **NEW** contacts will be made by unconscious breeders and blind informers; they will hope that **NEW** resources will be tapped, **NEW** networks established—all, exposed from the very beginning. They hope that we won’t perform what Lenin calls “the duty of a revolutionist to conceal from the eyes of the world the relationships and contacts which [he or she] maintains, which [he or she] is establishing or trying to establish.”

9. Serge: “Faced by this wily adversary, powerful and cunning, a communist party lacking clandestine organization, a party which keeps nothing hidden, is like an unarmed [person] with no cover, in the sights of a well-positioned [hunter]. Revolutionary work is too serious to be kept in a glasshouse. The party...must organize so as to avoid enemy vigilance **AS FAR AS POSSIBLE**; so as to hide its most important resources **ABSOLUTELY**...so as to train our comrades in the behavior which is demanded by these imperatives.”

“Clandestine organization” should be understood in at least two ways: 1) the organization of the type of political and military structures usually considered “underground”; 2) the type of political, economic, and socio-cultural activity, which, while considered “public,” or “legal,” is nevertheless **REVOLUTIONARY** activity, and should be conducted with an attitude and methods characterized by the present reality of the war.

We must understand: It becomes a criminal act when cadres and activists continue to think and act as though they are protected by the u.s. constitution, state and local statutes, and the myths and lies fed the settlers and colonies of the empire about “amerikkkan democracy,” and other nonsense. So-called bourgeois legality and morality died when the Portuguese landed on the Afrikan continent, and when Columbus landed in the “Indies.” The most “innocent”/“public” or “reformist” activity, is actual, or potential, revolutionary activity, and real revolution is illegal in amerikkka, and too serious to be kept in a glasshouse.

There is no such thing as “legal, anti-imperialist struggle,” or “legal, national liberation revolution.” The opposition moves on the belief that there are, or that there will soon be, connections between “public” and clandestine anti-imperialist, revolutionary activity. It is their job to discover any such connections—and they take their job seriously. So, they tap anti-imperialist phones, tape anti-imperialist speeches and snap the pictures of those who deliver such speeches. They also follow “public” activists, and otherwise keep close tabs on **ALL** their activity, no matter how “legal.”