

<https://dissonanttimes.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Book-Fair.mp3>

Earlier this month, anarchists from southern California to northern Washington gathered at the Sacramento bookfair to share books and zines, build relationships, and figure out what's possible in the ultimate fight to topple fascism. Some of the most powerful messages came from Black Panther Party elders Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin and JoNina Abron-Ervin who teamed up for the closing keynote. Their resounding message was clear – anarchists need to re-invest in their belief in the collective. We need to analyze the needs of the people on our own block, meet them where they're at, and attend to their material needs. The Black Panther Party offers us the strongest examples in our own history here in the PNW and beyond – providing childcare, food, healthcare, political education, and so much more. Lorenzo called attention to one of the lesser-known but more effective programs he was a part of: the pest removal program. It the kind of comfort and relief that people remembered much later.

JoNina shared her first impressions of anarchists back in the 60s, before she had met any anarchists of color, when she perceived them as privileged, out-of-touch incendiaries. JoNina's presence at the Anarchist bookfair revealed that her faith in anarchism has grown since then. She urged her audience not to fall into this stereotype, reminding us that when anarchists prove they can be in ongoing, mutual relationships, people listen to and support anarchist thought and tactics. She encouraged us to attend events hosted by the communities we are trying to connect with, to organize on the most immediate neighborhood levels, and to resist the tendency to isolate and insulate from others who don't perfectly align.

Lorenzo and JoNina's advice has been forged through many decades of struggle, defeat, and triumph. They contextualized the current fascist stronghold as a direct result of the organizing and successes they contributed to during the 60s and 70s. For example, student encampments and organizing for Palestine is being targeted now because the government is scared of the power gained by the student movement during the Vietnam War. Project 2025 developed in direct opposition to the DEI that emerged from Black students hosting sit-ins on campuses, demanding cultural centers and Black studies programs, and refusing to be extinguished.

Before this current moment, Nixon's administration was the closest to a fascist dictator takeover this country had seen in recent generations. In response, the revolutionaries of the 60s and 70s dissolved Nixon's power "by staying in the streets and mass political education". Lorenzo and JoNina recall the BPP's focus on training youth on community organizing and their driving principle: "ordinary people can do extraordinary things when they're activated." In July of 1969, 5,000 people showed up for a Black Panther Party Antifa Conference, and brought a "united front" to the fight against fascism. Lorenzo called for leftists to bring back the assembly – to travel to one another, talk in person, engage in discourse, and develop ideas together. We need an accessible, broad-based movement that can meet the current consciousness of the people.

Lorenzo and JoNina embodied a hopefulness and long-term perspective that is often missing in younger anarchist spaces. They reminded us fascism is the weakest form of a dying government – "tanks in cities do not indicate strength, it indicates desperation." At the end of the talk, Lorenzo released us back into the world with a confidence that echoed the victories of his day: "you must believe you can win."

*Hungry for more wisdom from movement elders? Check out Lorenzo's book, Anarchism and the Black Revolution, and JoNina's book, Driven by the Movement, Reports from the Black*

*Power Era. To hear these two in continued conversation, listen to the Black Autonomy Podcast and support them on Patreon!*

*The cover art for this issue was inspired by Lorenzo's invocation of a Victor Hugo sentiment: "No army can stop an idea who's time has come."*