

In a time of climate catastrophe, living in New Orleans means being constantly aware of our tenuous relationship with the environment.

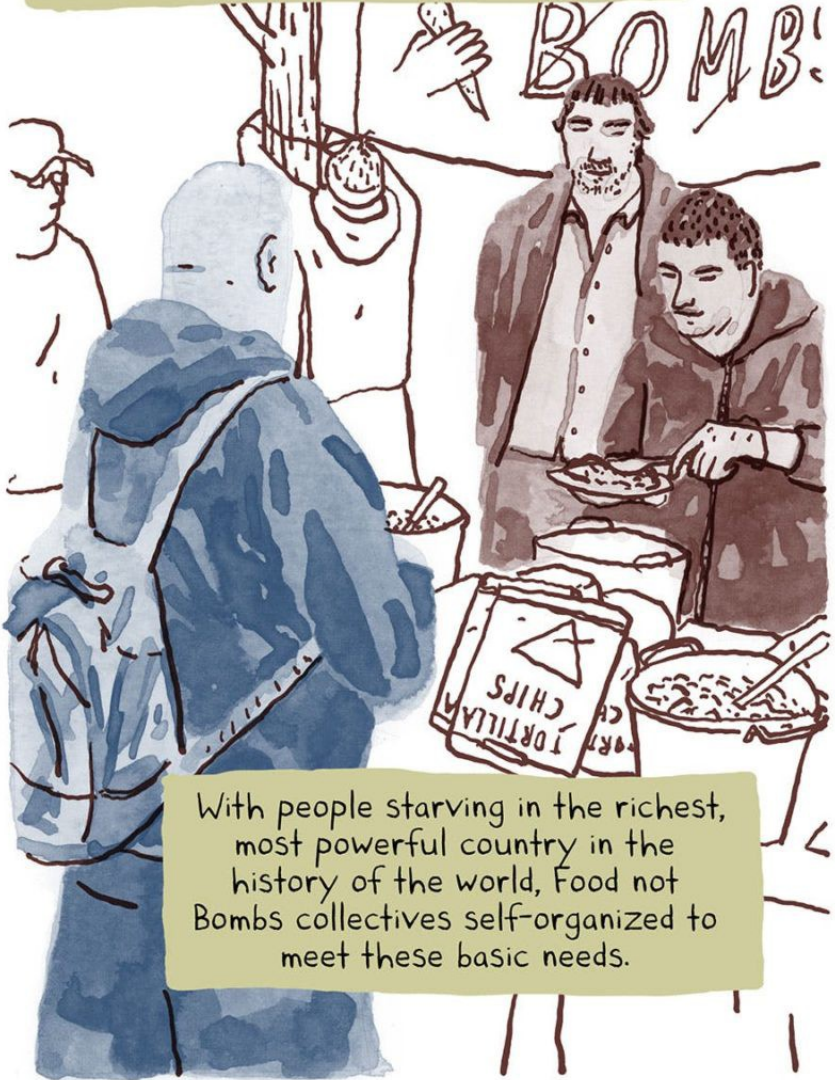


When I was growing up, I watched as the Common Ground collective organized relief in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.



Common Ground drew heavily on the anarchist principles of mutual aid and autonomy, highlighted by their motto "Solidarity not charity."

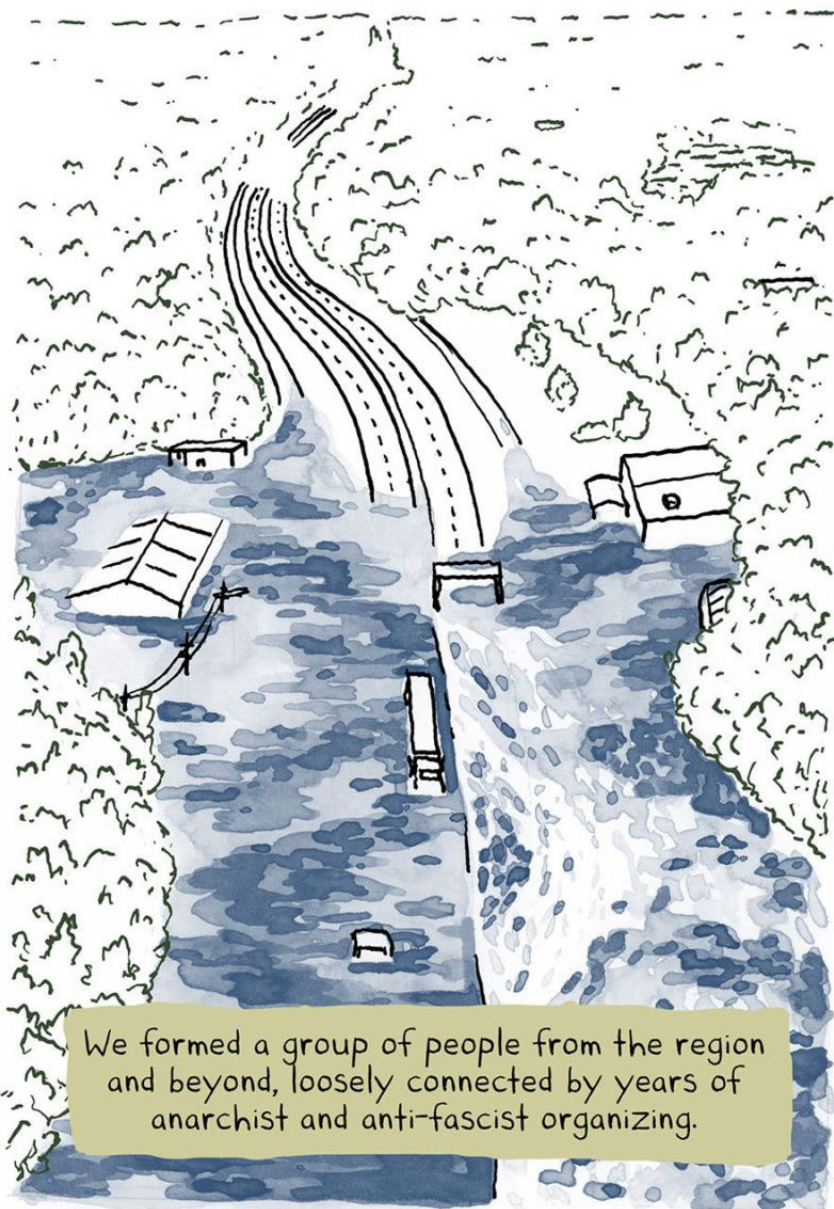
As I got older, I was drawn to similar projects like Food not Bombs, a mutual aid project that has been addressing food insecurity for four decades.



With people starving in the richest, most powerful country in the history of the world, Food not Bombs collectives self-organized to meet these basic needs.



In late August of 2017, Hurricane Harvey hit Texas. I decided to gather supplies and head to Houston.



We formed a group of people from the region and beyond, loosely connected by years of anarchist and anti-fascist organizing.

An infoshop called Solidarity acted as a staging ground for various groups to disperse from to points all over the city.



We'll be testing water in the Manchester neighborhood.

We're from New Orleans, we're down to help however.

LIDAPIT

I'm with NPR, I'll be following y'all.



Y'all may want to meet J in the 5th ward, they could use a hand picking up supplies.

LIMIT CASE UP
R per PERSON

Just fill carts with as much shit as you can,

we need diapers, feminine hygiene products,

cleaning supplies,

water, snacks,

food, gloves....



There was a Red Cross shelter said to be open in the 5th ward, but when we arrived there, we found nothing.



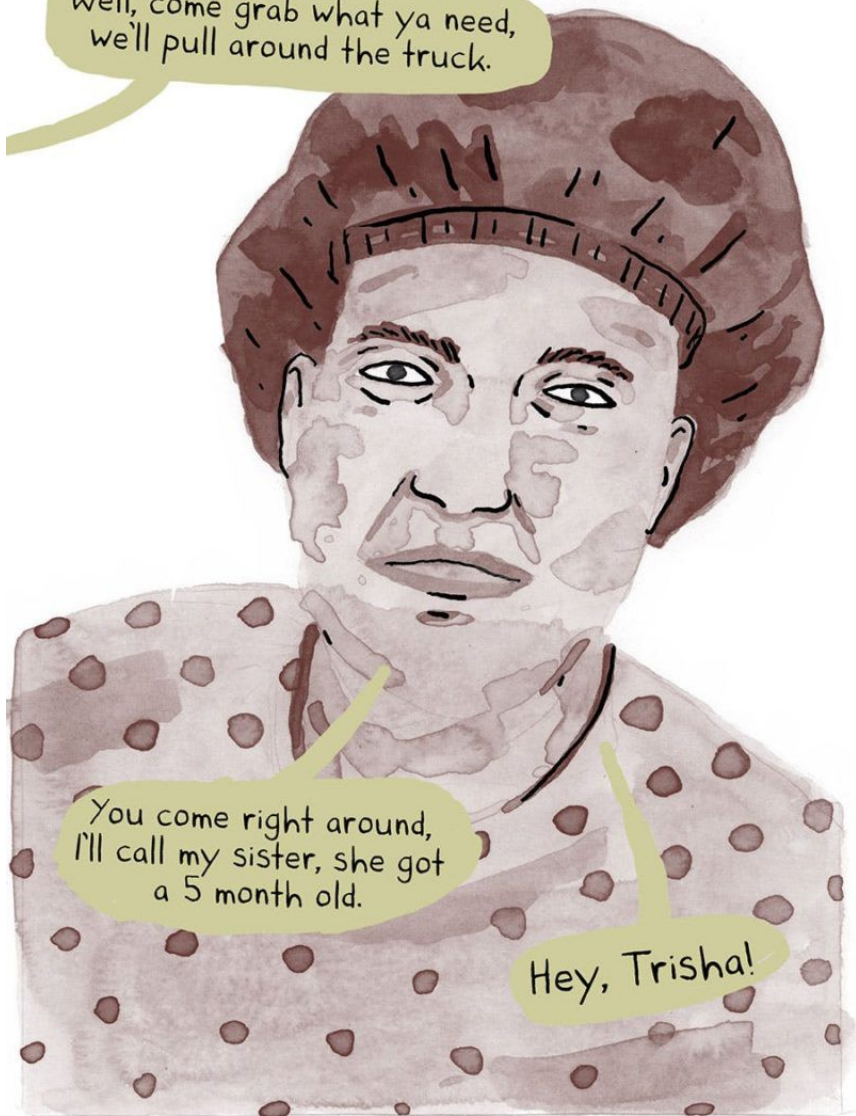
Hey do y'all know where the Red Cross shelter is, it says on their website it's right here.

Red Cross? Honey, no, there ain't no Red Cross down here.

I been without power three days, I'd know.

This pattern repeated. The official shelters around the city (of which supposedly there were many) had never been actually opened.

Well, come grab what ya need, we'll pull around the truck.



You come right around, I'll call my sister, she got a 5 month old.

Hey, Trisha!

But in many places we went, people were already self-organized and helping each other along neighborhood and familial lines.

Let's take this stuff down by the bayou, they really need it down there, this area didn't get too much water.

Lead the way!





Over the next three weeks, we would work with groups like Black Lives Matter, Redneck Revolt, Black Women's Defense League, World on My Shoulders and West St Recovery, a group that started a dispatch line for search and rescue and evolved with the needs of their community.



While we were often disorganized and short on financial means, autonomous and self-organized support was far more key than official aid.



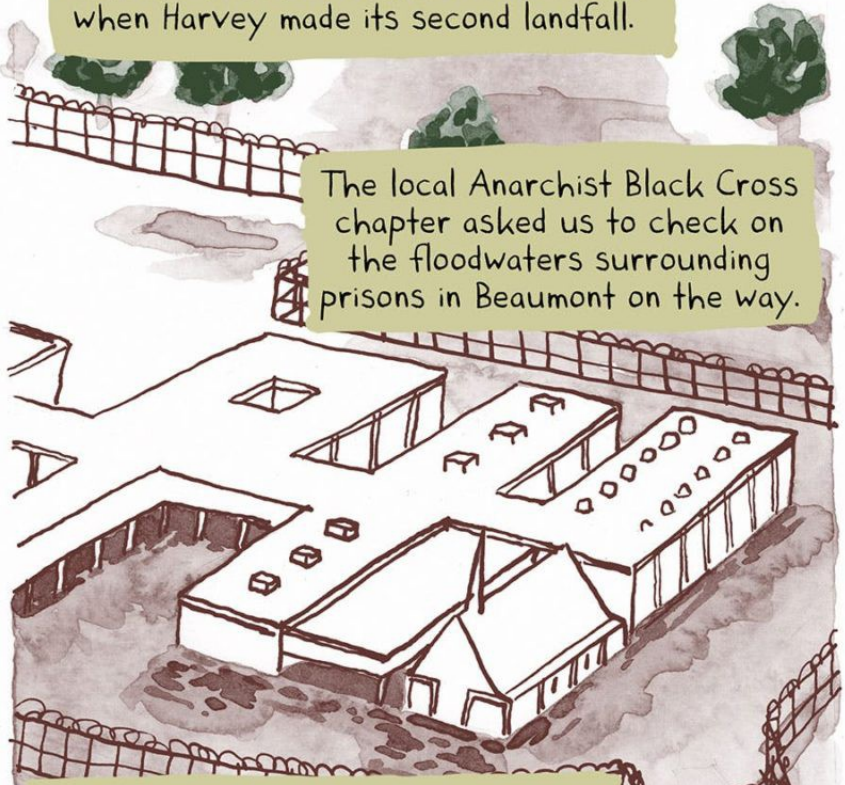
The only official shelter we found was the Convention Center in downtown Houston. This is a city with a metropolitan area the size of Massachusetts. And the shelter was swarming with federal marshals, ICE, and cops of all varieties.



I actually can't stick around for this distro, I'm not really supposed to leave Louisiana.



Not surprisingly, almost no one we spoke to was interested in going there.



We made a trip at one point to Port Arthur, which had suffered a direct hit when Harvey made its second landfall.

The local Anarchist Black Cross chapter asked us to check on the floodwaters surrounding prisons in Beaumont on the way.

They had been in contact with inmates in flooded cells who had been forced to drink water from toilets and survive off of bags of peanuts.

When we arrived the floodwaters had mostly subsided.

In Port Arthur, an extremely poor town surrounded by refineries, we were able to rapidly distribute dozens of gallons of gas, something that hadn't been as critical in Houston, as gas supplies returned relatively quickly.



At over \$215 billion in damages, the 2017 hurricane season was the costliest on record. After leaving Houston, we headed to Tampa, where a convergence center had been established to move supplies and labor to different parts of Florida, which had just been hit by Hurricane Irma.



The convergence space had been set up before Irma even came ashore, in part by veterans of Katrina's aftermath in New Orleans.



After the storm passed, trips from Tampa were made to Immokalee, Naples, the Keys, and other affected areas.




In Tampa huge amounts of supplies were distributed locally, and doctors were available for free.

When the deadliest hurricane in US history hit Puerto Rico a month later, punks, students, anarchists, neighbors and people of all stripes repurposed social and cultural centers as “Centros de Apoyo Mutuo” (Mutual Aid Centers), or CAMs, to distribute from and organize out of.



Many of the folks I worked with in Tampa and other like-minded individuals would leave the US mainland to provide support and help bolster efforts already undertaken by Puerto Ricans.





The CAMs distributed clean drinking water,

CAM

cooked meals for large groups of people,

started gardens and established solar energy infrastructure,

they helped people pull each other out of disaster while setting themselves up for a more resilient, autonomous future.

In the past few years, a movement for mutual aid disaster relief has spread, from autonomous responses to the wildfires in California to anarchists flying planes into areas of the Carolinas affected by Hurricane Florence.





Back home in New Orleans, we stay prepared and keep in touch with our neighbors as the next hurricane season heads our way.

Alright Miss Alice, how you doing today?

Fine, thank you, we'll be cooking later, if ya wanna stop by!

"Solidarity for Survival" On the web at: <https://thenib.com/>
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