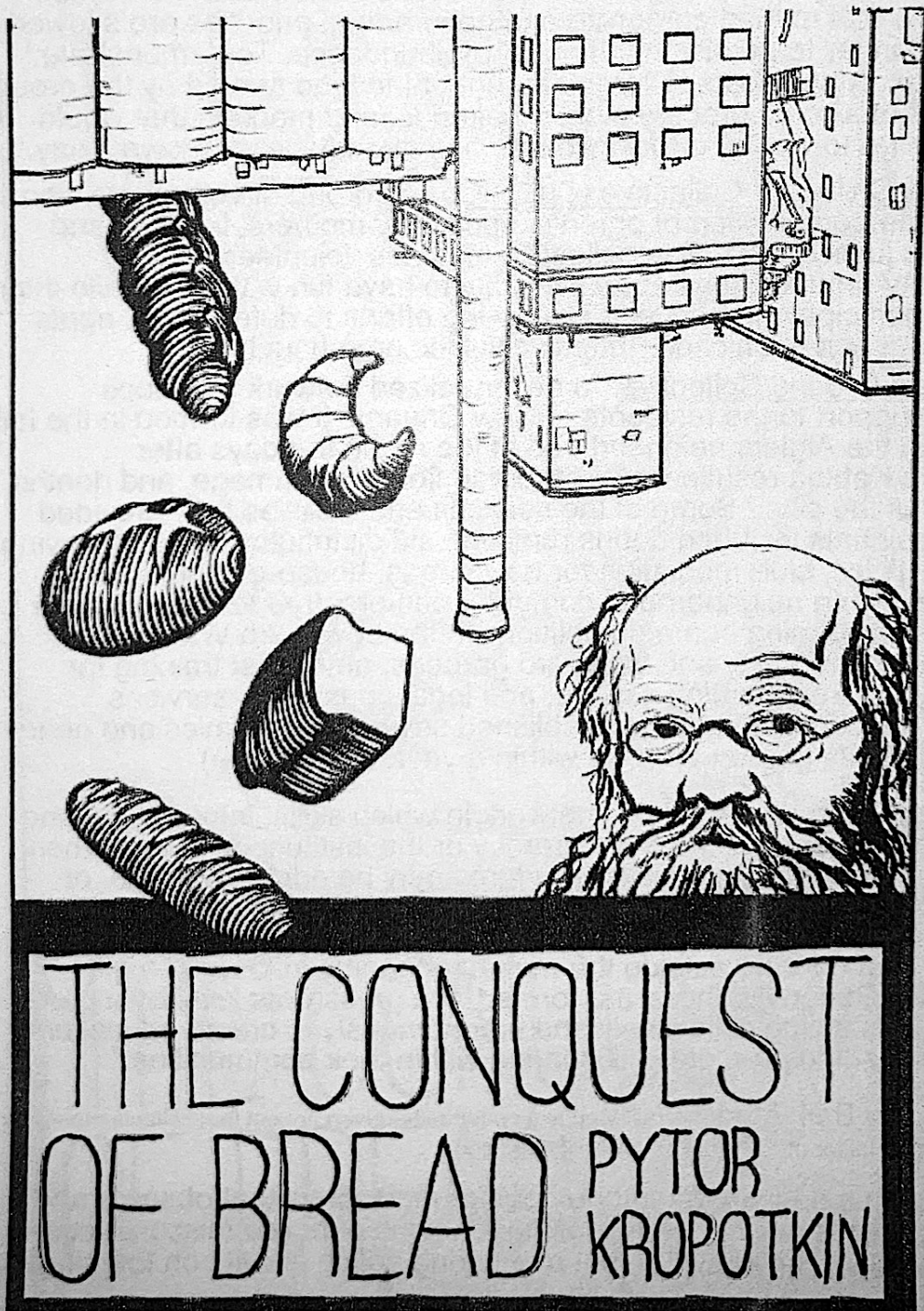


WHAT IS MUTUAL AID?

(from Boise Mutual Aid's zine "Mutual Aid: Solidarity in Action")

"Mutual aid" is when a community is empowered to meet their own material needs (housing, food, and healthcare) by caring for one another, while also organizing against the system that created the need in the first place.

The term "mutual aid" was created by the famous Russian evolutionary biologist Peter Kropotkin in his book "Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution", which argued that cooperation, not competition, is the driving force behind evolution. Kropotkin demonstrated that species who were able to work together, were able to better adapt to their environment, and were granted a competitive edge over those species who didn't or couldn't. The earliest human societies practiced mutual aid as a matter of survival. There are countless examples of its logic within the plant and animal kingdoms.



Examples of Mutual Aid in Practice

- **Black Panther Party for Self-Defense:** Fifty years ago, the Black Panthers were faced with the reality of widespread poverty and lack of service provision in their communities. Rather than appealing to the government, or the conscience of White America, the Panthers set to work organizing their own health clinics and breakfast programs for hungry school children. These programs were part of a broader strategy of building community power and were identified by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover as a primary threat to national security, by which he meant a threat to the legitimacy of the state and the white supremacist power structure that upholds it. (Submedia Video "What is Mutual Aid?")
- **Books To Prisoners:** "These projects accept donations of books from bookstores and individuals. Each project solicits letters from prisoners requesting books, usually by genre or by naming a preferred author. Project volunteers read the letters and reply with a few books taken from the shelves." (Submedia Video "What is Mutual Aid?")
- **Food Not Bombs:** "a loose-knit group of independent collectives, sharing free vegan and vegetarian food with others. Food Not Bombs' ideology is that myriad corporate and government priorities are skewed to allow hunger to persist in the midst of abundance. To demonstrate this and to reduce costs, a large amount of the food served by the group is surplus food from grocery stores, bakeries, and markets that would otherwise go to waste, or occasionally has already been thrown away."
- **Chicago Childcare Collective (ChiChiCo):** "a group of volunteers who support the participation of parents, especially mothers, in racial and economic justice work. The collective matches volunteers with community organizations across the city to have fun with kids while their parents participate in and lead organizing efforts to defend their rights and build a better Chicago." <https://chichico.org/about.html>
- **Common Ground Collective:** "a decentralized network of groups offering support to the residents of New Orleans. It was formed in the fall of 2005 in the Algiers neighborhood of the city in the days after Hurricane Katrina resulted in widespread flooding, damage, and deaths throughout the city... Some of the services and facilities they provided free to residents included debris removal, aid distribution centers, roving medical clinics, bioremediation for toxic areas, house-gutting, roof-tarping, building neighborhood computer centers, free tech support for non-profits, stopping home demolitions in the Lower 9th Ward, supporting community and backyard gardens, anti-racist training for volunteers, a tree planting service, and legal counseling services. Common Ground volunteers established seven health clinics and nearly 100 community garden projects within a year." (Wikipedia)
- **Free Skools:** "a decentralized network in which skills, information, and knowledge are shared without hierarchy or the institutional environment of formal schooling. Free school students may be adults, children, or both... The open structure of free schools is intended to encourage self-reliance, critical consciousness, and personal development. Free schools often operate outside the market economy in favor of a gift economy... Generally, these are formed at a grassroots level by a group of individuals acting collectively and autonomously to create educational opportunities and promote skill-sharing within their communities."
- **Community Bail Funds:** A bail fund is a community-driven project that collects money to post monetary bail for those in jail on pre-trial detention.
- **Cop-watch:** a network of autonomous organizations that observe and document police activity while looking for signs of police misconduct and police brutality. They believe that monitoring police activity on the streets is a way to prevent police brutality.