



resources for troublemakers young and old

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**PERMANENT
SUSPENSION**
view from a walkout



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Confronted by so much horror - school shootings, opioid addiction, violence from cops and others - it's easy to become discouraged and apathetic. But already in the first few months of 2018, hundreds of thousands of young people have responded to school shootings with mass walkouts and collective solidarity, breaking a cycle of disempowerment, isolation, violence and resignation. When politicians and administrators tell students to go back to class and wait until they're "adults" to engage they are working to reinstate this deadly cycle of apathy, as even once we become adults this society still treats us as children, especially those of us who desire something different.

We are sharing this chapter from Nanni Balestrini's novel The Unseen as encouragement for this young movement. Based on interviews with friends of the author, The Unseen poetically charts the development of a youth movement in 1960's Italy that eventually went beyond just students to include workers, housewives, prisoners, queers and more who collectively refused the passive roles that were forced upon them. Though coming from a time and place that may seem as distant as the Middle Ages to many of us now, Balestrini's

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Gelso is cleaning his glasses contentedly Malva and I hug in delight and you can still hear Cocco's great hoarse voice yelling so that's the end of your big-talk now eh and then he adds Mastino you're suspended permanently go to the headmaster's room when we send for you Valeriana's voice can be heard saying we ought to go down to the yard now to hold the meeting because it's the only place where there's room for us all together and everyone shouts in agreement everyone shouts mass meeting mass meeting yard yard and they start coming down the stairs and instead of coming down at an orderly rate as Mastino wanted they all run down and what's more thudding along with leaps and bounds to spite him and all shoving Mastino is still there motionless with his arms raised and his head down shouting no no quietly quietly and then everyone knows how it ended

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words than because people have now let rip enough Gelso looks at me from behind his little round glasses he asks me what the fuck's the shit shouting and Cocco says he's bluffing he's got nothing else left beneath us Mastino lifts his outstretched arms imploring boys and girls boys and girls stop the stair can't hold all that weight calm down and walk down the stairs at an orderly pace no running no noise

but these are orders don't you hear him he's still giving orders shouts Cocco now you can take back all your threats take it all back in front of everybody no more suspensions and mass meetings whenever we want them there's a great rumbling roar mass meeting mass meeting everyone's shouting below Mastino holds out his arms and then lets them drop and when he manages to speak he pants out yes yes all you want but come down here at once I entreat you I'm saying it for your own good come down here come down quietly don't run I beg you there won't be suspensions you can have your own meetings but come down I beg you everyone's shouting victory victory but no one's going down nobody believes all that about the stairs collapsing nobody takes the least bit of notice

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description of a school walkout beautifully captures fundamental tensions that students in the US are confronting today: the stupidity and apathy expected of us, the joy of breaking out of isolation, and the discovery that together we really can build a shared power that can shake the roots of a heartless society.

These are also the basic lessons that many of us have learned in the struggles of the past ten years, from the students movements against education cuts of 2008-2010, through Occupy Wall Street, to the movement for black lives sparked by the Ferguson rebellion. There are many sources for inspiration and wisdom as students figure out next steps in the movement against school shootings; the single most important source, though, will be their own experiences and the discussions of those fighting together.

To the young people today: please keep fighting for a world without mass shootings. It will necessarily be a less lonely place, and your walkouts help bring it into being.

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The agreed day arrives and early in the morning before they open the gates we'd put up a big poster to announce the mass meeting and inviting everybody to come along we are taking the meeting not asking for it it says in big letters and underneath Gelso had added as well as everything else we need the headmaster Mastino gets in first as usual and he starts reading the poster then his face turns ugly and he scowls at us stares at each of us as if to say I'm marking you down and I'll see to you later then the teachers get there and they read it without saying a word just look at us as though we're crazy a few minutes later out come a bunch of janitors that Mastino has told to pull down the posters

the bravest janitor who was also the stupidest one reaches up to remove the poster but Cocco gets in front of him in a rage with his arms raised with his long black overcoat with the scarlet lining and he lets out a scream at him the janitor stops in his tracks taken aback and then the rest of us get in front of the janitors they don't know what to do they look up at Mastino who looks down at them from the window of the headmaster's room but in the end they decide to go back inside because they realize if they push it it'll come to blows the first students to arrive have seen what happened they

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the procession has come to a halt up on the stairs they're all crowding up the whole length of the stairs you can hear Mastino below screaming something but it's unclear it's hard to make out what he's saying there's an incredible din then we lean out and see Mastino down on the ground floor in the centre of the stairwell tearing his hair desperation on his face all you can hear is him screaming the stairs the stairs paper pellets are raining from above and landing on Mastino's head then from the first and second floors come a hail of biros erasers pencils then exercise books and textbooks too they're all throwing things down at Mastino who is down there alone in the centre of the stairwell he's not even trying to shield himself his hands are thrust in his hair but not as a shield and he keeps on screaming the stairs the stairs

the teachers are nowhere in sight the janitors have vanished some teachers have run into the empty classrooms and locked themselves in in one classroom after another the glass door panels cave in and the teachers can be seen standing scared stiff with their backs to the wall down below Mastino delivers one last desperate shout that succeeds in being audible the stair's giving way the shouts quiet down less because of Mastino's

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of the corridor and runs up against the procession he starts screaming but now nobody's scared any more Cocco stops right in front of him and shouts in his face mass meeting mass meeting Mastino goes on shouting purple with rage and threatens them all with suspension and screams to go back into class but the procession bursts into another classroom the method is to enter en masse without warning

by the time Valeriana's halfway through the speech they're all up and ready to walk out there's no need any more even to talk they've got the idea already the noise is bringing everyone out from the rest of the classrooms the procession swells and the whole ground floor is swept in we take the stairs in procession up to the first floor and go into the first classroom we come to by now there are so many people that they can't all get in and there too all the students come out right away the ones pushing in collide with those pushing out we don't even go into the other rooms the students come out by themselves all over the place on the second floor too we see some leaning over the banisters screams of everyone out and we climb up the stairs to the second floor and when we reach the corridor they're already all out of the classrooms and they join the procession

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start talking it over with us and they don't go in and gradually the group gets bigger then Mastino decides to make a move himself and he comes out under the arcade so we can see he's there and he starts pacing up and down

I feel as if I'm watching the boss pacing in front of the factory in those stories I've read about the first workers' struggles the first strikes the same kind of intimidation and in fact the students get scared somebody starts saying he wants to go inside they come up with no end of excuses even though we keep explaining that if we all stay outside Mastino can do nothing he can't suspend us all but there's too much wavering and too much fear and a first little group heads shamefacedly inside it's like a general signal and the others all rush in too within a few minutes nearly everyone's gone in only twenty or so are left outside along with the six of us and Mastino goes back in too with a smug grin on his face

we're left in the lurch Malva's upset but Cocco's determined we'll go in and do it just the same those of us there are he says we have to do it just the same anyway we've got nothing to lose now he shouts and that way we'll persuade the others to hold the meeting just the

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same we all go in together and we install ourselves in an empty classroom on the ground floor and we've only been there a minute and we haven't even started speaking when Mastino arrives yelling what are you doing here you you and you you're all suspended come to my room one at a time and he walks out leaving the door open Scilla kicks the door and then he barricades it we shove two benches in front of it we're silent for a moment we must do something we eye one another but we don't know what to do we feel trapped

then in a flash I can see as if it was in front of me the page of a pamphlet I've read this summer about forms of struggle in the factories and all that stuff I can see that page in front of me with the heading in bold print indoor demo and I say indoor demo we must have an indoor demo what say the others yes an indoor demo we'll go into all the classrooms and we'll get all the others to come out at least we can try we'll start with the top class and we'll go through them all everyone agrees we go out and form a small procession in the corridor and we reach the first classroom the lesson has already started we burst in we all go into the classroom together in silence the teacher notorious as Mastino's toady

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takes fright and doesn't say a word all the students are facing the door

Valeriana is firm when she talks she is nervous of course but clear her voice carries well and her words are distinct the headmaster says he has suspended us all because we wanted to hold a mass meeting without his consent everyone knew it you all knew it too that this meeting was planned we've been talking about it for a fortnight now today you came inside out of fear but if you're scared today you'll be scared tomorrow as well and always and we'll never be able to settle our problems ourselves so you've got to make a start now right away we must all hold the meeting right away to show that in this school we aren't slaves we have to do it so we can do what they're doing in all the other schools to show that we're the ones to decide because the school is ours it's not Mastino's

Cocco and Scilla give the teacher threatening looks as if to say don't you dare open your mouth and he doesn't he keeps quiet all right some people at the desks stand up and the first comments start coming that's right let's get out there let's all get out there yes we'll go round all the classrooms Mastino arrives from the other end

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