Sandy and Nora Talk Politics

Episode 38 – Live show Q&A

[Intro Music: (In robot voice:“You are listening to Sandy and Nora’s podcast.”)]

[Crowd applause and cheering. Nora laughs.]

Nora: We as left wing people believe, I believe, that the expertise that surrounds us in our movements has the solutions to all of our problems. Actually. That working people know what they need for liberation, that Black people know what they need for liberation, that Indigenous people know what they need for liberation. It’s the strategy that needs to be debated and discussed. In this room, we have all of the solutions. And so tonight – part two of the podcast – (laughing) isn’t it amazing how, it’s like magic, this is going to be a whole week has past and everyone’s like “my life’s totally changed.” And we’re all like “we’re just sitting here, it’s magic.” Um, and we’ll be talking, and so please come to the microphone. And the first person who’s going to come to the microphone I’m going to have to get you to turn it on.

Audience member: So, yeah, thank-you for this discussion. This is really important, an important time, not just because of the, uh, event that’s happening tonight but…

Sandy: Speak from your stomach.

Audience member: (Louder.) Also, as you’ve…

Sandy: There you go.

Audience member: As you’ve identified what’s happening here, the United States, Brazil (Bolsonaro), Hungary, Sweden, probably many other places, white supremacy is on the rise and it is scary, especially for us racialized people in this room. We are going to be, uh, we’re the canary in the coalmine, right? So, um, the last bit of the discussion was kind of what do we do? And this is just like my tentative thoughts on this, uh, I’m not even convinced by my own argument, even though I make this argument all of the time. Um (clears throat), I often think about how in the heyday of white Americans lynching Black people, the media, like the newspapers and all that, they were as invested, as enthusiastically invested, and implicated in white supremacy as the people lynching those Black people, and they would write these incredibly lurid and detailed accounts of people being lynched. They did not do this because they wanted to inform people about the rise of white supremacy, right? They weren’t in solidarity with Black people, they were trying to create a situation, they were trying to create a narrative out there that would instill fear in Black people that would keep them in their place, and it kept people in their place. It kept people from organizing, for standing up for themselves and their communities, for lack of a better term. And it kept them in check, and it also had the effect, the intended effect I think, of normalizing what was happening. It was just kind of a normal thing. Like today we see the lynchings of Black people and it’s just kind of a normal thing, we’re not as stunned as we should be, every time we see a Black person being killed by cops or by a George Zimmerman. So what I’m wondering is, what I sometimes worry is that the media has not changed, corporate media is not on our side, right? It’s interested in page clicks, and making money and they are not writing stories about Bannon because they want to inform people about the rise of white supremacy. They just care about page clicks, and sometimes I worry that by opposing white supremacists publically in an uncareful way, in an unconscious way - I don’t know if those are words - but um, we are inadvertently giving them PR or supporting corporate media that only cares about page clicks. I understand obviously natural inclination is that’s it’s not our fault, we’re working within the system we’re, this is the terrain that we’re on, and this is what we can do. But sometimes I think, uh, maybe we need to engage in a lot more quieter forms of resistance, going into communities, talking to people, asking people “what do you need?” I have a feeling a lot of people if we actually spoke with people, who would be the victims of white supremacists, they wouldn’t say they need rallies, or op eds, or this or that right? Uh, we have no idea, I don’t think we’re doing that kind of work as much as we should be. What are your thoughts on that?

Nora: Wicked.

(Audience claps.)

Sandy: Ummmmmm. I powerfully disagree (laughs). For a hell of a lot of reasons, but like to just focus on one thing that you said, which is that we give them unintended PR. Like, what, what do we think would happen if we didn’t protest it? Would they have less PR? Like, I think we have to recognize the world that we are in, they are going to get that PR. Part of what we were discussing earlier is the type of discussion that is happening in the public sphere is the important part, for me. It’s not like, I, you know, there’s a risk in not publicly opposing the total devolution of our society. (Laughs.) And that risk is that, uh, they do it anyway because they are powerful, they do have the money and they have the wherewithal to completely railroad our movements and our society as it exists. And if it is the case that we believe that then there is a massive risk that we’re taking if we say “we’re just going to do really quiet organizing, because we don’t want to unintentionally bolster them.” But if we do clever organizing, that does shift the narrative landscape then that is a better outcome for what can happen later on, because what it does is even though my mother, for example, may not be like “I want a rally to happen tomorrow because of all of the cops that are killing Black people”. She probably doesn’t, no she hates all of the work that I do (both laugh). Like she’s just like nervous about my livelihood, in a good way, right? (Laughs.)

Nora: In a motherly way.

Sandy: In motherly way. She doesn’t hate it because she doesn’t think it’s good, she just doesn’t want me to be there, she wants someone else to do it. (Sandy and audience laugh.) Um, but she would never, like that wouldn’t be her response. But she knows about some of these events because we made it public. She knows that it’s happening, she wouldn’t have known about Andrew Loku, or Jermaine Carby, had folks who are organizing in Black Lives Matter not made it a public situation. And there are people who probably wouldn’t have known, maybe, about the Bannon/Frum talk that’s happening tonight if organizations, some of whom are represented in this room tonight, didn’t, ah, go ahead and do the protest that they did. And perhaps part of our disagreement is whether or not it matters that they knew or not. I think it does matter that they knew. Because people need to know where we are, in the alt right white supremacist super, super kind of fascist right wing organizing where we’re at. Because they’re really good at organizing underground, over-ground, all over the damn place. So it doesn’t, and we kind of suck (big laugh) doing the same thing. Nah, we’re not that bad, I’ll give us a, we do well with what we have, right? But I think it’s, I think it’s really dangerous for us to be so nervous of their power that we quiet up ourselves, that I do not think is the solution.

(Audience claps.)

Nora: I think though that we are not good at talking about how the mainstream media is so fucked. There is a reason, that Sandy and I aren’t on CBC radio. Right?

Sandy: Like truly.

Nora: Like there is, they will not, they will not interview me at CBC Québec City, even though the Anglophone community is like fucking 10 people, and fucking five of them work at the CBC, and I’m the sixth person. (Sandy and audience laugh.) And they’re all great, and they’re all lovely, and they’re all my friends. Like there is a reason and it’s because the mainstream media actively shuts out anything to the left of the centre. And that is, that means, and I think we’re, what you’re saying is totally… I actually, you know, when I heard… I’m like I agree with what you’re saying. But we have to then be very intelligent with how we engage with the press. First of all most journalists, they’re workers, they’re union members, they’re average people, they’re literally trying to get the news, and they hate their editor more than you hate their editor. That I think is really important to say. And then the mainstream press also has all of the problems woven into it, all of the white supremacy woven into it, not just woven into it but the maintenance of white supremacy. Like 10 years ago at Ryerson, where we are, 10 years ago, probably fucking more. No, 10 years ago, the Ryerson Review of…. no, the Ryersonian, to, to, to talk about whether or not we have a racism problem at Ryerson, because the school’s so diverse “it’s not possible to have a racism problem at Ryerson”. The Ryersonian thought it would be a good idea, oh it happened to be March 21, “oops we didn't know”, to feature the leader of Canada’s National Socialist Party on the front page. Yeah, you’re like “what, there’s a Nazi party in Canada?” We were like the same thing. It was like some fucking old fucking dude whose party was just him and the hook to Ryerson is that he went to Ryerson in 1961. (Sandy laughs.) I’m not even kidding, this is a thing that happened. The guy that did it is now in the mainstream press, and everybody that worked at that paper are all in the mainstream press. And you know and I, and they, they, I, I talk to many of them still and I think that minds have evolved and the media has evolved but not a lot. And so we actually have to be very good at saying the mainstream press is an expression of the status quo, it is not doing the work that we actually need it to do. Certainly the public broadcaster isn’t, the Post Media chain can’t. And then, and then so it’s like so what do we do? Do we write for Rank and File magazine or rankandfile.ca? Yes, many of us do. It’s really important. That’s a left wing workers’ publication. Do we make a podcast? Do we notice when the mainstream podcast establishment doesn’t even know we exist (Sandy laughs)? Yeah, we notice that. We fucking notice that. You know, do we notice that both of us are often shut out of platforms in Canadian media, that I literally cannot get anything published right now. Yeah, fucking I notice that shit. And so, but I don’t know if other people notice it. And so we need to talk to each other and we need to understand that these processes, that this is not random, this isn’t by accident, it isn’t like Sandy’s just not that talented and actually fucking Matt Galloway is. (Sandy sputters. Audience laughs. Audience members cheer.)

Sandy: (Laughing.) Ohhhhhkay.

Nora: Put her on the morning radio.

Sandy: Look at you out here making me enemies like (laughs)….

Nora: No, and I actually like… I just like, honestly when I think of Toronto radio I just think of Matt Galloway, that’s the only reason for that connection. (Sandy and audience laugh.) And so that’s not a dig at him. Um but it is a dig at Tom Power (crowd “ohhhhhhh”s and laughs). (Nora laughs.) because it’s so boring! It is the fucking boringest shit in the whole world. Like even my parents are like “well it’s not like, it’s kind of boring”. Right? I know.

Sandy: But it’s like actually, you’re raising an important point. Which is like, OK so the media has discussed what is happening like whatever is happening at Roy Thomson Hall tonight and the only discussion they’re having about it is free speech. Should we let him speak or should we not let him speak? As though there aren’t better things to say about it, like the discussion about mining that we were having earlier today.

Nora: The shooting in Québec City.

Sandy: The shooting in Québec City and Bannon having a relationship, or the, the, what’s his name?

Nora: Bissonette.

Sandy: Bissonnette having an obsession with, following Bannon’s rhetoric. Or you know the fact that, you know there’s so many ors, there’s so many of these things that could be looked at as a framework for discussion what’s happening tonight. Mining, Brazil, why would the Monk Foundation should be able to control our political discussions on and on and on. Those are the debates that should be happening in mainstream media. They’re not, and so we should create our own media but I think when we get those platforms, it’s so important, when I do media trainings, this is what I say. So free media training for everybody! When a journalist asks you a question like (in serious reporter voice) “Nora, don’t you think that Stephen Bannon deserves freedom of speech and the right to speak tonight?” That you say, “so did you know about the mining interests?” Like you don’t care about what, how they’re framing it. The story that they’ve already come up with. The story that they’ve already written, they’ve prewritten a story and so they’re asking you the questions that they’re expecting you to have certain answers to that are already in their notebook. You have to just, just you know take over the entire interview, if you’re one of these people that’s getting interviewed for these types of things. Take over the entire interview, create a whole new interview on your own and if the journalist can follow you, great. If they can’t, whatever you’ve got the camera. Make sure, hopefully it’s live and (laughing) you can just take that whole thing to wherever you need to go and just switch up the political discussion entirely. That’s more important…

Nora: Masterclass of Sandy on Power and Politics. (Sandy laughs. Audience laughs.) Which, google it. And I notice they never asked you back.

Sandy: (Laughs.) They probably never will.

Nora: I mean, it was a, it’s a masterclass interview, it was so good. (Sandy laughs.) And again, we do not live in a meritocracy, we live in a deeply un meritus society (laughs.)

Audience member: You guys were talking about the Alliance, the Canadian Alliance earlier, and Stockwell Day. I remember the Canadian Alliance. One of the things is, after everybody laughed at Stockwell Day coming to his first press conference on his skidew.

Nora: Which was hilarious. (Sandy and Nora laugh.)

Audience member: Which was fucking hilarious. He went on to become the Public Safety Minister of this country under Stephen Harper. So I always get nervous when we laugh too much, because when we laugh too much we’re ignoring sometimes the real danger that these ideas present. I wanted to give you a little report back on what happened earlier this evening because I was there.

Sandy: Oooo, great. Thank-you.

Audience member: Um. There were, I would estimate in the neighbourhood of let's just say many hundreds, six, 800 people perhaps around the Nathan Phillips, or the uh Roy Thomson Hall. Um, people were loud, people were boisterous, the police were in full force in response. Dozens and dozens police, mounted police…

Sandy: Oh, that was what I was about to ask.

Audience member: There were mounted police. Police were armed with pepper spray and they did deploy pepper spray in people’s faces who got close to the barricades, and…

Nora: They had barricades?

Sandy: For a crowd of about 800?

Audience member: Pardon?

Sandy: For a crowd of about 800?

Audience member: Oh yeah. They brought out everything.

Sandy: Oh my god.

Audience: People who got… The barricades were used to separate those who had paid to see the white supremacist from those of us who were protesting and if you got too close to the barricades and they thought you were getting in the territory, they pepper sprayed people. Some were also arrested. Um, I went up and down the crowd interrogating people who had paid to be there. First of all the crowd, 97% white I would say, paid tickets and standing in line.

Someone in the crowd: Shocker.

Audience member: Yes, complete shocker. The audience is shocked. (Sandy laughs.) And to answer what you were asking before, when you kind of asked people some of these questions why are you giving your money to a white supremacist, for example. It’s clear that they hadn’t even considered that their money was going to the white supremacist.

Sandy: Really?!

Audience member: Oh for real. Oh for real. Oh for real. When you ask them why they think this is entertainment. They say “oh well I’m just here to hear the debate.” I said “oh you haven’t made up your mind about white supremacy yet? (Nora, Sandy, and crowd laugh.) Um, the most troubling thing were the hundreds of people in the lineups, I thought any way, who were wearing a poppy. And you’re wearing a poppy on your chest while you’re lining up to go see a white supremacist speak.

(Audience claps. Sandy laughs.)

Sandy: (Still laughing.) The irony.

Nora: Oh, it’s so disgusting.

Sandy: (Laughing.) people have no self awareness. Unreal. Wow.

Audience member: But this isn't, so yeah... people are not...

Sandy: Wow!

Audience member: This is, this is entertainment and it's a game to a lot of people and they're not reflecting.

Sandy: Yup.

Audience member: What I wanted to ask the two of you though is, um, the federal NDP did not jump on board condemning this gathering until 11 people were murdered in a Synagogue in Pittsburg last Saturday. It was only after that that they decided that they were against this shit. So, if a lot of us feel despair in the lack of organizing I understand but, what I see hope in, in Ontario any way, are some of the, issue by issue movements. The fight for a fair minimum wage and labour standards, the fight for our sex ed curriculum as another example. I see people actually organizing and being excited and mobilized around these things and I actually wanted to ask the two of you outside of big political parties doing we want them to do. What do you think about some of these grassroots organizing around labour, around Trans and Queer rights that are coming up in spite of that lack of leadership from political parties.

Nora: Yeaaaaah, um. So one of the things that affected me in a major way was after, I like telling this story with Sandy on the stage and you'll see why. After Hurricane...Sandy (Nora laughs, crowd laughs, Sandy laughs), um, I had a weird opportunity to come to go down to New York and actually it was the first time in my life in New York City and they were like "welcome to New York City, here's your crowbar, here's your boots and you're actually going to do disaster relief." And, um, and it was the first time in my life that I saw the total break down of the state. That the United States was a fucking anarchist state, like there was, it was only self organizing to help people. And so I was there through Occupy and through Occupy they had a warehouse and they were like "Welcome! Here's your mask, here's your boots, here's your crowbar, here's your wheelbarrow, here's your team, this guy is from Saskatoon, this guy is from fucking Georgia." And I'm like "this is weird." And we go to someone's house and we're like "we're here to demo your house" and it was really tragic and we were just like pulling out the -----. And there was free food everywhere. Right? Yoga teachers for America, Jesus for America, fucking yoga Jesus teachers, right? (Crowd and Sandy laugh.) They're just giving everything that you want and I'm like “I'll have a hamburger and I'll have some lentil curry.” (Sandy laughs.) And FIMA wasn't there, right? There was no state support, it was chaos. Um, there was like people everywhere looking for scrap metal and everyone was working together and it was like I witnessed post state, the post state States, people actually doing things on their own. But it was in an extreme situation, a disaster situation and I realized then something that I knew which is that the, the human spirit is incredible, we all know that, we all have our own personal, uh, experience of struggle. We know stories of struggle and the human spirit is incredible. And we will always organize. We will always find a way to do the fight for $15, to laugh, to have joy in the most horrible circumstances. And the state as it goes on to be more and more, I think in Canada it's not fascism, it's more totalitarianism, it's a light totalitarianism that is enforced by our neighbours and that's enforced by the press and that's enforced by the police, um, that isn't necessarily police vehicles, like Americanized police vehicles, ‘cause that actual shit is unbelievable. But they don't need that because we're still too afraid to express ourselves. And so every attack on our collective organizing whether it's an attack on a collective agreement, an attack on a group of students, an attack on a student union, an attack on a movement, an attack on a group of people, is trying to crush all resistance to the state. And every political party's implicated in it. You know, everyone. Well, I'm going to have to be all like Québec exceptionalism, except for Québec Solidaire ‘cause fucking that's a whole other podcast episode. But, ah, but the mainstream federal ones are all implicated in it. So I'm not surprised that the most awesome actions in the past couple of years, like people in this room all had their hands on. People in this room all had their hands on Black Lives Matter, on the Fight for $15, on fighting injustice locally or broader than that, fighting for the sex ed curriculum, fighting against Rob Ford. Like, these are, these are our, these are survival. But it's, it's not enough. We know it's not enough, and it's not to denigrate that work because that work has to happen but where are the coalitions to bring everybody together? Where is labour hiring people to help Black Lives Matter do their work? Where are the universities being like we are going to protect our fucking right to dissent rather than being like (in very enthusiastic voice): "Hey Doug Ford! Come and fuck us as hard as you can." Literally that is what the universities are doing. And that, and so it's like (sighs), I don't want to, I understand probably everybody in this room is like literally at the edge of everything that they can do, they're literally giving it all and all this kind of stuff. But it's like, you know, I can do more actually. I can do more. And I can be more strategic. And if I voted for Suze Morrison or if I voted for Jessica Bell - who's a friend of mine - or Joel Harden, and I'm like not impressed with what they're doing, then you call them. And you say what is the, what the fuck is going on? Right? Or how can we force you to do these things. Because that's what we live in, it's an ecosystem. Right? There are tenancies on the left that I'm not a part of, that I fully respect. They've got tactics that I'm like not totally sure about, but they play a role, I play a role, we are pushing, they're pushing me to the left, I'm pushing them to the left, people are pushing us to be less racist, people are pushing us to be less ableist and we are to push them. And if we're not pushing them then what the fuck? Then you can't blame Jagmeet Singh for doing shit. I mean I can, because I'm in Québec and we're going to be an independent country. (Crowd laughs.) But um, but you can't, you can't really blame them if they're not being pushed, right? When we were in the Canadian Federation of Students, which is - you know - an organization that is not radical. We fucking relied on radical students to push us. Like literally, we would organize with people, and be like "can you please put these motions forward, can you please push us, can you please make us sure that we're doing these very radical things?” Because at the end of the day it is the debate that needs to be carried and if we're looking to leadership to do that then we're fucking not going to do it, that's not how it works. No one becomes a leader because they're fucking radical, literally nobody. Period.

Sandy: We had another talk earlier today where some of this kind of came up, where we have to start thinking about like you know if we're imagining the future - and as I said before it's not going to get any better (laughing) - we're not going to change the minds of the people who are really rooted in their Nazism right now. Like, we have to start being super creative about what we're, what a fight back looks like and so these movements that you've raised are really important and really exciting. And I hope that we get to a point where we can start to think about, um, you know we shouldn't have to but maybe we're going to have to think about providing services for one another. Right? Like, some, some people already started doing that here in Toronto, ah, with the, with the safe injection sites right? These, this, that's a really radical thing for a community to come together and say we're just going to do it because if you government will not do it we're going to engage in this civil disobedience and do it anyway for ourselves and I mean I learned that so palpably through the Tent City action that Black Lives Matter did. The amount of services that we had (laughing) in that space, like, it was, like, I see people who are in the audience who were there, who are laughing because it was actually kind of funny (laughs) it was like, like I would you know start, I was working full-time still while Tent City was happening so it was like this never sleeping moment time of my life. So I would like be there in the day and you know I would go to work and I'd come back and it would be like "oh, we got a microwave" and (laughs) "now we have a kitchen over here", and like "OK". (Sandy and crowd laugh.) And then you know, uh, do the shift of like staying up all night to like, uh, make sure that everything was safe and I'd go, go to my house to shower and then go to work, come back and oh "we have a full medical centre now, Sandy. It's all set up over here. We've got the medics over here." And it was just like, OK, like we actually have the ability in a community to create services for one another where the state has failed. And, quite frankly the state is failing in a lot of ways. (Someone in audience says "agreed.”) And it doesn't take a genius to realize that there is some sort of internal struggle happening within the NDP.

Nora: (Laughs.)

Sandy: I hope it's a struggle over, like that will result in listening more and more to people on the ground who are part of these movements because that is the pathway to victory. They are never going to be better Liberals than the Liberals, they're never going to like take the Conservative base, no one's going to bank on that shit. They should, they should be listening to, to movements like ours. Like that's what should be happening, but, like I don't know what's going on over there but that's not, like, where we win isn't our ability to organize for ourselves and that's how we change the culture that the NDP relies on to get elected.

Nora: And I think this whole discussion also requires a shout out and an acknowledgement to like Indigenous organizers who have protected everything for so long from the Canadian state and so specifically now, the Bear, Bear Clan Patrol in cities across Western Canada and Thunder Bay, right? Where people are actually out looking out helping, protecting people who are out on the streets, whether or not they live there or they're just out on the streets and, uh, protecting each other from child services, and child seizures, right? Like there is so much knowledge that is happening that if you know, as someone who is not a member of that community, who's not imposing and not going to get in there and be like teach me. I fucking do my research and I'm so like impressed by the resistance, the resilience, the language revitalization, right, the language camp that Christi Belcourt and Isaac, uh, are running. Right? It's like there's a language camp here, and, and they’re not the only ones actually running it, there's other, there's other kinds of programs like that where there's full Indigenous language camps to try to revitalize the languages. And you know, I, so a couple of weeks ago I had child services called on me. Someone called child services on, on me and we didn't know why and so we had 12 hours of like total hell, wondering what the fuck was going on. And I realized in that moment that I just had no idea who to call to know what the fuck to do, like I didn't know if it's this kind of complaint this would happen, if it's this kind of complaint this would happen and because this happened it's probably this kind of complaint. It was fully like, I spent 12 hours being like are my my children going to be seized tomorrow morning in this meeting with child services? And so sharing this knowledge and being like "this is an attack, these are anonymous complaints, these are systems that are, that exist to fuck you up." And uh, but they're also systems that have some safeguards in place that should work, that don't work, but in some, that can work too. Right? So how do we share that knowledge and how do we understand this with each other? And that requires talking about it. I have no problem talking about it, but like I have a partner who doesn't really want the fucking world to know that child services was called, was called on us, obviously. I have to be like (in a little voice) “sorry.” He has to be like. (Deep voice.) "Uhhhhkay." (Crowd and Sandy laugh.) Um, so we do have to share and talk and organize that way. Yup.

Audience member: Hey, so I think one of the things Sandy, you, and other folks with BLMTO was you controlled the narrative. Um, right now we're not doing that. We just had a huge, ah, rally with the Ontario Health Coalition. The day after the municipal elections 7, 000 people. Got no media attention because Ford went up to Scarborough and made an announcement about repealing the gains, many of the gains, under Bill 148. And there was a carbon tax announcement, there was a, uh, counter demo that was planned, uh, when there was supposed to be some anti-immigrant folks coming into town, um, and all of the work that we're doing right now to me sounds very reactive and we're not actually driving the narrative. So I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about what our organizing would look like and how it would be different if we were actually controlling the narrative that went out there rather than just responding to the shit the right is throwing at us.

Sandy: Well, actually, I, I, think that reactive organizing is really important. And I think that it is, ah, a good thing. Um, and so don't throw that out the window. We need to be able to do that, uh, and do it well. I think like there's a, a, so everybody who knows me, and has organized with me, has heard me make this rant before. But I'm going to do it again, just for y'all. So, there is like this word reactionary that is, uh, means being conservative essentially, um, that people have confused with reactive and often like they've heard the negative connotation behind the idea of being reactionary, and think that that means that you shouldn't be reactive and you should only organize proactively, I'm not saying that that's what you're saying, but I'm, I'm saying that that's something that I've heard out there, and I want to disabuse everybody (laughs). Those are not opposites. They're not the same thing, they don't mean the same thing. It is very important to react when the right does something terrible, we should react. They should not be able to, uh, go forward without some sort of friction, they should have friction, if not an entire hard-stop wall. So we should do that, that is very important. Um, in addition though, um we, we do need to have proactive organizing which is kind of what we were talking about before with social movements. In Ontario our social movements are really weak. Across this country our social movements are really, really weak. Um, that's not just, like that's not because like people suck. (Laughs.) That's not what the reason is. It's because we've been under attack for a really long time, a lot of the activists who've been doing this work got burned out, were arrested during the G20 and have, uh, perhaps restrictions on themselves still to this day where they can't organize in the same way. Some of our most talented activists that people may not realize that that's a reality that has really affected our ability to organize. Um, we have to rebuild those social movements. Like we, Nora and I are often talking about how there's, there's not really a feminist movement here. Like there's, there's no feminist movement (laughs). Like who do we, who do we call (laughs) if we're, if we want to have a feminist, ah, ah fight back on something? Like who's the organization? I don't know (laughs). Um, we have to define those, those groups. We have to create them. And that's a lot of really, really hard work and, um, I think that powerful organizations like you know I, I hope that eventually the universities like get their, like realize that "oh, we're going to lose it all" (laughs).

Nora: Yup, everything.

Sandy: And start using some of that money to literally underwrite activists. I was in the States recently at this conference where I met a bunch of organizations whose purpose is to like underwrite activists so they have these massive foundations that are for the purpose of like random shit, like saving gorillas or something, but what they really do is they pay for activists to do their work. So they're paying for an activist whose in BLM in Chicago, like three of them, a salary so that they can just go and like, and have benefits and they can, they underwrite the work of, uh, people who do guerilla gardening and so on like. Unions could do that! In a big way! Here! Like we could fund the anti-fascist movement. We have the money to fund it on the left, but I'm not really sure why, like is it, that people are like nervous? Have people not come up with the idea. I've said it in sooooo many workshops now that I know you all have heard it! (Laughs.) Like I just, I, I, don't, I don't know why there is resistance to, to really funding and supporting sustainable social movements. Because it's fucking hard, it is hard to sustain it, um, for so long. And you get really, like, take it from me. You get really tired (laughing) and it's really hard, you know while you're working a job, or you know getting fired, or trying to work a job, or living a regular life and organizing. Like, we can't just let our movements die. And we can't exist without movements if we want to really make, make an impact.

Nora: Yeah, and we're reactive because we don't have any ability to be proactive. Right? Like I think, reactive, being reactive is important because literally that is all we have right now.

Sandy: We don't, we don't control the power of the state.

Nora: No, um, and you know it depends on what you mean. So you have a rally and what is success? That you get mainstream media coverage? Well of course you're not going to get it if the Premier does something that's fucked. Do you know what I mean? So it's like, if your metric for success has literally nothing to do with how successful your organizing is, then you need a new metric of success. And this is why.

Sandy: 7, 000 people is great! Like you made a massive impact.

Nora: It's very good. Yeah, yeah, and those are people that will hopefully will come back out. Or who are involved in these local coalitions or whatever. And it's like the CBC didn't pay attention, and it's like the CBC, fucking fuck them. Right? Right, the fucking Toronto Star, like fuck them too. I don't know. We, you know, I, I was supposed to. Like CBC flew me in to talk about what is was like to be under attack for Humboldt for a fucking one-on-one for 20 minutes and I show up and they're like "yeah, so we have to cut your segment." Like they flew me in! And they're like, so you're going to have a three minute segment, so you're going to have a three minute conversation and then we're going to fly you home. And I was like "Oh, OK, why?" And they’re like because the Finance Minister agreed to be on the air. And I'm like "What in the fuck free press changes it's editorial decision because a fucking wax talking head is like “Yeah I'm going to come on your show and say shit. I'm going to say shit.” And you're gonna bump everything that you were planning to do that is journalistic to listen to fucking Bill Morneau. Guess what you're not going to do? You're not going to do shit." (Audience laughs.) You're not changing, you're not going to have a gotcha moment, you're not going to have a fucking scoop. You are going to get shit.

Sandy: Free PR for the federal Liberal party. That's what it is.

Nora: It was free PR for the federal Liberal party. And it's like, so we cannot rely on media coverage as a metric of our success. Media coverage is great when it happens, and when it doesn't happen you're like...

Sandy: Make your own.

Nora: Whatever. You know like, fuck. Thank god we had a photographer there. (Laughs.) Thank god we had good photos. Um, and so we have to also be OK with the fact that with if we're reacting all the time we literally cannot build anything. That is the definition of being reactive because we're too busy being reactive. And so yes, we build social movements to be proactive while at the same time we're reacting to stuff.

Audience member: I have two questions if that's OK. First about controlling the narrative and sharing knowledge. I am from Scarborough and I recently came across, I don't know much about them so it's not an endorsement. Um, but The Discourse and they are they like take a poll of what people in the community want to be covered and then they try to write stories about it and they're doing a segment in Scarborough about like stereotypes and all that stuff. Anyways. Um, so that's like an alternative media, um, and do you think that it's, it's better or like a good strategy is to support that kind of thing and boost alternative media that is telling these stories or do you think that that knowledge sharing happens best in like organizing grassroots communities? So that's that. And then the second one is unrelated but I would love you to cover. I have two small kids and, um, I'm trying to figure out how to do give more of myself to things that are important and include my kids, or not, or just if you have caregiving responsibilities of any kind, how do you mesh that with that?

Nora: Totally. Um, yeah I think the question of what do you do is really personal. What skills do you have? If you're a writer fucking get involved in alternative media. You know why not? You'll practice, you'll learn, you'll make mistakes, you'll meet new people. (Laughing) If you're not a good writer don't fucking try to be a writer, writing sucks. (Audience member laughs.)

Sandy: I like writing.

Nora: I mean writing is easy for me. If it was hard for me I would be like fuck this, right? It's like why I'm not a pianist. Right? I was like "This is hard. I'm not going to be a pianist. (Crowd laughs.)

Sandy: So she became an organist.

Nora: I mean not fucking professionally. (Sandy laughs.) If there was an organ here I'd be playing it.

Sandy: She's an organist. Seriously. (Laughs.)

Nora: Yeah, but I'm not recording or anything. Right?

(Crowd laughs.)

Nora: So it's about skill set. Examine your own skill set. Figure out, you've got limited time. What brings you the most joy? And think that, there's not like a hierarchy of what's, what's more virtuous, it's just literally this is where I can place my time. The question on caregiving is not easy, right. I have two kids as well, uh, they are twins. Which is the fucking worst (crowd and Sandy laugh), right? If you are a twin literally text your parents right now and be like "I'm fucking sorry." (Sandy laughs.) Uh, if you can. And, uh, and so, yeah, like for the only way that makes it work for my family is that my, my partner is like a bit more shy than I am and so he's happy for me to do the work and he's happy to take the kids. So it's like get out of the house, do the, do the organizing work, go to the meetings. Be my representative because I prefer to stay at home, do my other work, because he's got another job. And I'll watch the kids. Um, but I think that what, the, the, the perspective that guides me, with, with children and child rearing and stuff is like, you know, it, it sucks. Like anyone in this room that's a parent I'm sure you're like the world, like I don't know if my kids are going to see a world, period. Like the world is fucked. And so for me it's really important to just like model my politics all the time to them, it's just model. I don't, I don't have to talk to about them, it's like I try to live the best political life that I can live. And that my, that they hear political debate between my partner and I. And they do. Literally the other night (laughing) one of my kids, I was ranting about... something. (Sandy laughs.) And I was literally yelling with my finger in the air at my partner, like not yelling at him, but yelling about something and one of my kids looks at me and goes (raises finger and shakes it) “rah rah rah rah rah.” (Everyone laughs). With his finger in the air. And I was like, I'm pissed at that, but like it's OK because he gets that like I'm, I'm passionate about this (Sandy and audience laugh). And um, I think that that's the best gift that I can give my, my kids. (Sandy and audience laugh.) Is a crazy angry mum. (Sandy laughs.) That is not going to save their ass because they can figure it out them fucking selves, um, but, um, but also finding a community of people and finding that space, like it's, the thing about being in Québec so like people have kids both really young and really old and so spaces tend to be more kid friendly, I find there. The debates that I remember in Toronto just don't exist there and bringing a kid to a meeting is not a big deal but it's such a pain in the ass that you just find someone else to take care of your kids and then there's just apartments are set up differently so like I know someone who just left his door open because his neighbours would listen for his kids because they were all in the same space. Right? And it's just not something that I think really can happen in Toronto for a bunch of like logistical reasons. Because we just have more like more apartment blocks that are apartment, like, I don't know whatever. So I don't know it's really hard, it's a struggle, and I would just find like fellow parents in the movement and, and then not get too down when you have to miss stuff, unfortunately. It's like, you know, if anyone thinks that someone leading the revolution is someone with two young kids like they're fucked because you just, it's either you pick your kids or you pick the revolution. And you can pick the revolution but you know your kids probably need you too, so fuck fine. I say that, I'm like not with my kids right now, right? (Sandy and Nora laugh.)

Sandy: And also though organizers should be attentive to trying to make sure that there is programming for, uh, are we building a world where we're trying to include everybody? Let's build that world in our organizing. I think that was one of the major successes of the very public work that we were doing through BLM was that almost every major action that we had, whether it was the Allen Road takeover, or Tent City or, I don't know, you name it like that weird meeting that we had with the government like all of that had programming or space specifically for children and parents. And it makes a difference of who comes out and who feels accepted in to the movement and who finds a place there. Make space for everybody. Like if we're, if we're trying to build a world for everyone, then build a world for everyone with what you're doing. Your other question was...

Nora: Media.

Sandy: All of the above. It's not an either or. All of the, like you know the alternative media is good, getting information across in organizing is good, it's all, it's all good.

Nora: Everything's good.

Sandy: The, the beautiful and most frustrating thing about this moment is that we have nothing figured out, so try it all. (Laughs.) Hopefully some of it works. And if it doesn't, well we fucking tried. Right?

(Crowd cheers. Nora laughs.)

(Outro music.)