

LOOK

ORGANIZING — RESISTANCE
AGAINST — SURVEILLANCE
TECHNOLOGY IN SAN DIEGO



LILLY IRANI

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OUT!



INTRODUCTION

THIS ZINE IS ABOUT fighting something that is hard to see but sees us all the time. Surveillance technology puts our information in the hands of law enforcement and those who would profit from our personal lives. Champions of surveillance tell us it will bring safety and progress — smarter cities and a better life. We're told surveillance will make us safe from those who are different than us. This is a diversion that focuses on simplistic tech solutions and fear instead of creating resources that keep all of us safe.

In these pages, you'll find the story of a diverse San Diego coalition and the tactics they used to resist and refuse a local push to create a hyper-surveillance city. The coalition brought together technology workers, environmentalists, criminalized communities, and immigrant communities.

Resistance can seem overwhelming for a lot of reasons.

First, we have to confront the idea that all technology is good and is the logical result of “progress.” After installing thousands of surveillance cameras with little to no public input, Mayor Kevin Faulconer bragged that San Diego would be the largest smart city in the world; a city where street lights could smell fires before buildings burnt. Data, the city boasted, was the new bacon. Companies and the City were selling dystopia masked as utopia. The gain for the companies was clear. The gains for the community were not. Would the data from the streetlights be shared with ICE? Would police use it to harass young people for minor stuff?



Resistance can also seem hard because of the magnitude and complexity of the issue. Community members directly affected are often intimidated by technology or unaware of when and how it is being used. Tech workers who see the inside of these technologies can be disconnected from the communities most harshly impacted by surveillance; they also tend to embrace technological solutions as a matter of habit.

But it can be done, and there are many histories of people mounting resistance. This is only one.

San Diego is a border town and a military town, so people seem surprised that a coalition like ours can come together.



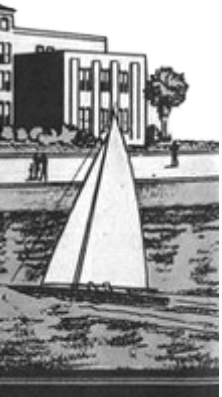
Some were spooked by the invasion of their privacy. Others were already surveilled and threatened by gang suppression units and deportation regimes. Tech workers who did not want their extracted labor to contribute to such systems found a vehicle to reclaim their agency. In organizing together, we learned what people different than us were dealing with. Organizing against surveillance and for tech accountability became intertwined with organizing for racial justice.

At its heart, this is a story about relationships. No matter how righteous a cause or how determined a people, a coalition has little chance of succeeding without the mutual trust and understanding of its partners.

Resistance is always a work in progress and different in every circumstance. But we want you to join us, wherever you live. Every city has different political conditions, but we can learn from each other. Racial capitalism's roadmap for innovation makes money out of cities. Property owners want to sell as high as possible. They use the police to clear out anyone they don't want, dehumanizing them by calling them "bad guys"

in need of surveillance and policing. This is all done through advertising, policing, and land development. New surveillance technologies pop up everyday. These pages share the strategies our coalition used to confront and slow down these processes so people could get involved in controlling the technology.

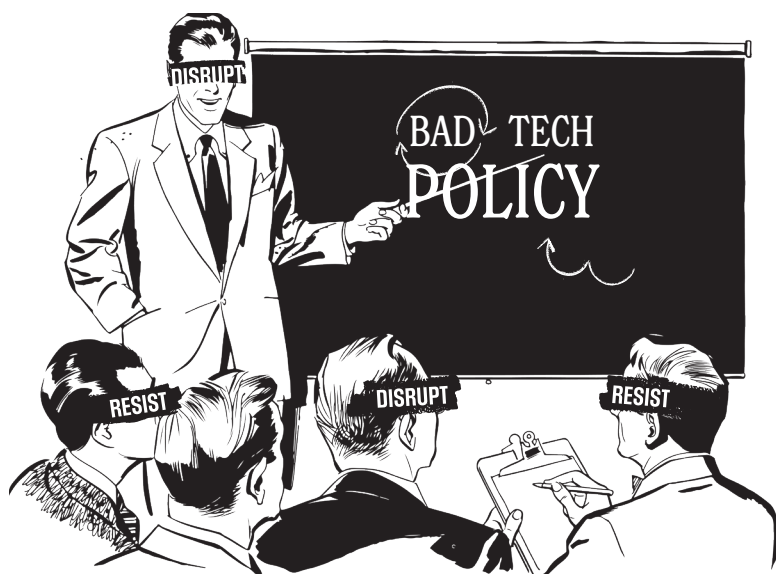
Reform on the road to abolition.

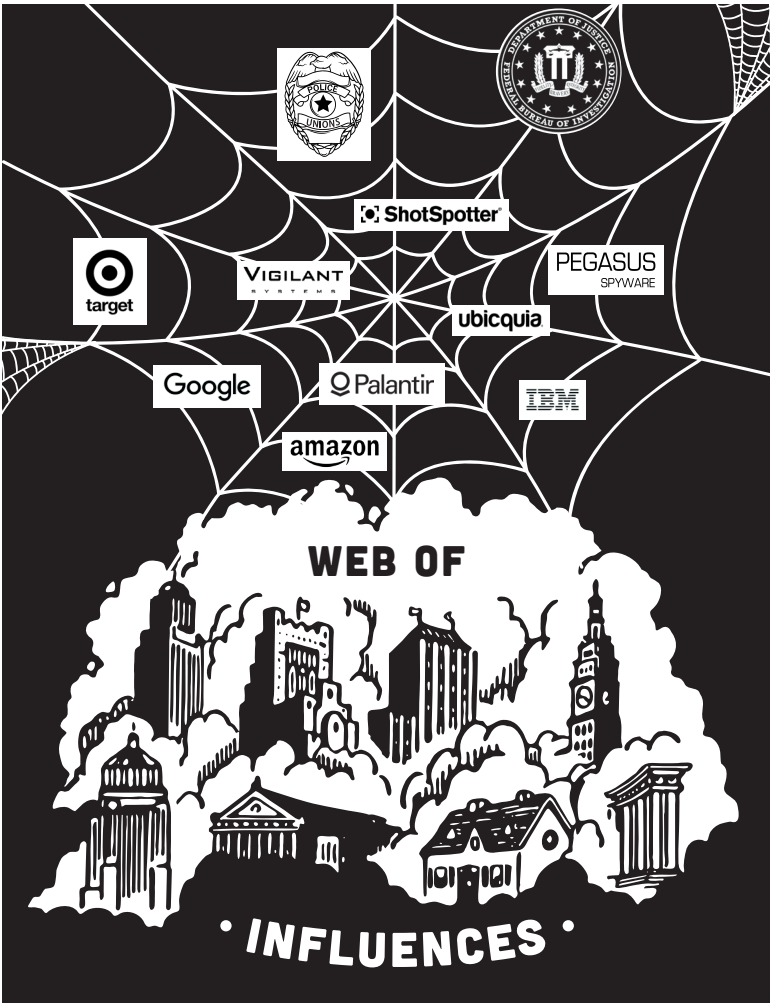


THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SURVEILLANCE

This problem is urgent because many millions of dollars are poured into surveillance infrastructures by governments and corporations each year.

The individuals who often benefit from these projects are experts, so it can be difficult for movements to create the collective expertise they can trust and push past experts' desires to pretend that these technologies are only good. Tech worker organizers tend to focus on workplace issues while tech experts implicitly or explicitly work for the state-industrial surveillance complex. Often these surveillance infrastructures are championed under the guise of "smart and connected communities," "smart cities," and fighting crime and terrorism. This piece offers concrete tactics for building





collective expertise, strategic relationships, and coalitions of the scope necessary to tackle emerging surveillance infrastructures at many levels through local action.

At its heart, this zine is a reminder that surveillance gives complete strangers power to see our everyday lives. Would we be okay if our parents or partners were able to follow and document our every move? If not, why allow the government or corporations to do so?

TACTICS THAT WORKED FOR US

Every community and its politics are different so your mileage may vary. With experience, organizers learn to navigate, work around, and overcome challenges as they come. Here's some of what worked for us in San Diego, a city few think of as poised for change.



REQUIRE LOCAL GOVERNMENT to get community input whenever surveillance technology is purchased.

ENROLL TECH WORKERS, even if they are not surveillance experts, to help the coalition interpret software, hardware, contracts, and generate informed doubt or help identify latent harms. Look for ones that will be allies. They can sometimes be found hanging out in groups like Tech Workers Coalition, Science for the People, Showing Up for Racial Justice, or in graduate student unions at universities.

BUILD LONG LASTING AND SUSTAINABLE RELATIONSHIPS with people and organizations that will take up this effort with you; we are most powerful sharing the work and standing together. If you don't already have relationships with others who will stand with you, find organizers and leaders who do have relationships and build the movement with them. Look around and ask "who knows and is trusted by a lot of people?" Those are good people for joining forces.

TRANSLATE the technological possibilities into harms that are meaningful to communities based on their specific experiences. Use this as an organizing and political education strategy.

PREPARE THE GROUND FOR JOINT ACTION by developing a practice and cadre of organizers to repeatedly hold community education programs, and take advantage of these to cross-train communities in the issues faced by other groups in the coalition.

KEEP THE DEBATE ON AN ISSUE WHERE COMMUNITIES CAN BE EXPERTS. We focused on democratic oversight rather than debating with the police about whether a specific technology was any good. We wanted to frame the debate and set the goal posts where we could be the authorities on what a good solution is.

BE STRATEGIC. What is your goal? Will calling out officials publicly help your goal? Or will it harm it? Will a private conversation be more effective? Not every situation calls for the same response.

IDENTIFY THE KEY DECISION MAKERS you need to sway. Figure out who they listen to and what makes them sweat. Meet with them at their offices, confront them in public, send written letters and comments, and get everyone you know to do so as well. Educate them and persuade them through all means necessary.



BUILD A COALITION if curtailing surveillance tech will require lots of people to put pressure on those with power. Bring together groups, figure out your points of unity, and stay focused and creative in relentless pursuit of them.



GET ATTENTION! Hold press conferences and organize your communities to speak about the issue and why the public should care. Invite journalists who will come ready to write and broadcast.

PLANT THE SEEDS FOR GOOD REPORTING. Get to know your local journalists, find the ones you trust, and help them tell your story. Journalists help the public understand and join your fight. They also investigate and can find facts that might help your fight, like improper use of surveillance tech or surveillance tech you didn't know was there. Keep them up to date on what is happening in your fight and teach them what you think they need to know to help the public understand what's important. But don't tell them what to write. They hate that!

AVOID FLAG PLANTING! Make sure everyone gets credit for the fight and its wins. Especially with tech, it can be sexy for non-profits to claim credit for what a much bigger community is doing. This creates tensions and erodes solidarity.

WHAT THE F*** HAPPENED?

A Timeline

GE installs LightGrid on 3,000 San Diego streetlights.

2014

City of San Diego orders 3,000+ Smart Streetlights with data storage.

2016

City of San Diego purchases 1,000 additional Smart Streetlights.

2018

2015

GE Smart Streetlight pilot program debuts in Little Italy and Gaslamp.

2017

Smart Cities San Diego Hackathon.

City of San Diego and GE start "building the world's largest municipal Internet of Things."

Environmental Services Dept produces Digital Infrastructure.

Report about the Smart Streetlight program.

2019

One of us heard about the Smart Streetlights program and complained to their councilmember. They were directed to a City run forum on the program.

City begins first of 12 community forums to inform public about Smart Streetlight program.

After going to the first Smart Streetlights forum and finding it empty, we called up everyone we knew and got them into the next forum to ask hard questions.

Journalists discover SDPD was accessing video footage collected by Streetlights and using to prosecute.

A local organizer writes a blog post about the Smart Streetlights and the danger they pose to communities of color.¹

Our coalition publishes the first opinion piece against the Smart Streetlights program in one newspaper. Three days later, another newspaper publishes a range of opinions on the program. The issue is getting attention!^{2,3}

Our coalition hosts a public screening of "The Feeling of Being Watched" about journalist Assia Boundaoui's struggle to find out why the FBI surveilled her neighborhood growing up. This helps us talk about how surveillance affects people but is hard to see or talk about.⁴



2020

JANUARY

Alignment with SD City Councilmember Monica Montgomery-Steppe (MMS)

18 **Public Safety and Liveable Neighborhoods Committee (PSLN) Meeting**⁵

City presents own Smart Streetlight policy and exaggerates public consultation

FEBRUARY

Strategy and lobbying meetings with City Council

Q&A with Councilmembers, focused on general tech (not specific devices) to hold Council accountable



Pro-Tip

Develop trusted relationships with journalists to establish public, credible facts as you progress

15 **Leaked Memo Reveals Huge Cost Overruns For San Diego's 'Smart Streetlights'**⁶

16 **UCSD Student Government makes unexpected appearance at PSLN meeting to comment on the Streetlights**⁷

28 **Journalists reveal San Diego Considered Giving Police Real-Time Access to Streetlight Cameras**⁸

City had lied about functionality they had been considering for Streetlights

MARCH



Pro-Tip

Take input from other coalitions and groups to ensure their concerns and needs are represented

18 We asked a major civil liberties organization to show up against the Smart Streetlights and for the Ordinance at City Council. They were not in the Coalition, but every voice with us makes us stronger.

MAY

21 **A TRUST coalition organization hosts a zoom panel with a local journalist, researcher, and criminal justice reform activist talking about what surveillance technology means for communities.**⁹






Pro-Tip

Organize within networks to understand how your city funds its technology. How could that money better serve the community?

The TRUST coalition puts on another panel, this time about the history of surveillance programs targeting Muslims in San Diego.¹⁰

JUNE



ACTION ALERT:
comment to councilmembers
at the City Council's Budget Hearing
Item 11 - Sustainability Department
dial 619.541.6310 - access code 105579#

"Stop funding the Smart Streetlights, and divert that money to other areas that are better used, and where San Diegans can be benefit from. Such as Library, Park, Homeless Service, Small Businesses Support, etc."

9

Understand funding sources

We mobilized as many people as we could to email councilmembers and speak at a City Council budget hearing. We urged the city to defund the streetlights and use the money for COVID relief and libraries. We rallied climate justice and economic justice organizations to our side since the Streetlights took money away from community resources and climate plans.

21



JULY

8

TRUSTSD Coalition presents their ordinance at PSLN meeting

TRUSTSD hands ordinance over to MMS and staff; works with them over multiple meetings to answer questions while they worked with city staff behind the scenes.

In July, members of our coalition crashed the City Attorney's pro-surveillance press conference uninvited. They turned her event into an impromptu debate over the city's Smart Streetlights program.

Photo by Jesse Marx

AUGUST

While waiting on City Attorney Mara Elliott's analysis, City staff and MMS's staff works together on ordinance language.

City stops paying Ubicquia bill for storing data, but company allows SDPD free access to footage for a time.

8

Cyber Hell Song¹¹

Inspired by local reporting about our fight, a random San Diegan we don't know wrote a song about our fight and posted it online!

SEPTEMBER

The city pulls the plug on the streetlights!

The city planned to get a modified Streetlights contract approved at the PSLN Committee meeting. Under pressure from the previous day's press conference, they pulled the request. They said they would not bring back the Streetlights until a surveillance oversight ordinance was in place.

8

TRUSTSD holds press conference in front of 101 Ash St. building¹²

We compared the Streetlights to an expensive and uninhabitable building, 101 Ash, that the city bought under the Mayor's watch. The pressure on the Mayor worked. He suspended the Streetlights program until further notice.

9

OCTOBER

Elliott releases 17-page memo

The City Attorney releases a pro-surveillance and pro-police analysis of the TRUST SD ordinance.

Coalition issues response

The coalition researched and wrote a response that they sent to all councilmembers.

DECEMBER

23

San Diego Smart Streetlights Are Off. But They're Still Helping Police¹³

City of San Diego physically removes the streetlight in El Cajon to get footage for a case since Ubicquia was withholding data hostage due to non-payment by city

2021

TRUSTSD spends this year educating the newly elected City Council, earning their support for the TRUST Ordinances



SDPD tries to renew contract for Shotspotter gunshot detection devices. Technology only installed in a 4-square mile area (primarily Black and brown) and costs \$230K a year.

JULY

26

TRUSTSD Coalition stops City from renewing Shotspotter contract, arguing for no new surveillance technologies until ordinance is in place; Council declines to vote on the controversial contract and the contract expires.

We're Watching How the Council Weighs the Devices Watching Us¹⁴

2022

APRIL

- 6 City Council votes unanimously to create the Privacy Advisory Board and Mayor signs into law

JUNE

Police begins publicly mobilizing supporters for big loopholes, including one to hide police work with federal agencies like the FBI and ICE

We learn that FBI has visited elected officials (except Montgomery-Steppe) to pressure them to change the ordinance; City Council adds a loophole to the ordinance, keeping federal task force activities secret.

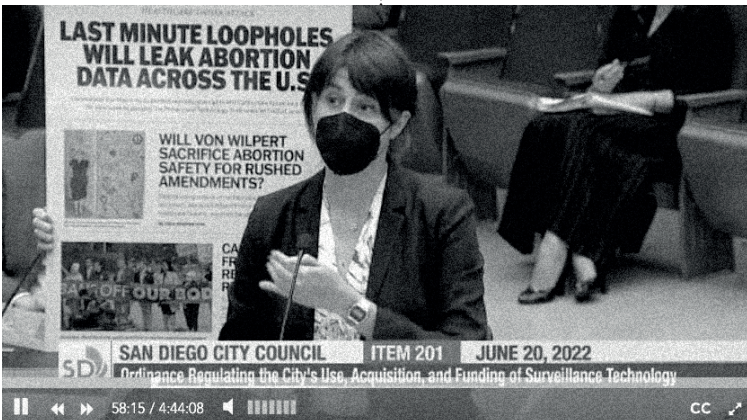
JULY

TRUSTSD organizes against federal task force exemption, showing how it harms reproductive rights, gender affirming care, and immigrant and Muslim communities

- 18 City Council votes unanimously to make surveillance oversight ordinance into law¹⁶

*Opinion: Amendments to San Diego's surveillance ordinance will harm residents. Here's how.*¹⁵

While TRUSTSD fought off some of the amendments the police asked for, the federal task force exemption made it into the final law. They lost the fight over the loophole, but the oversight ordinance still makes it easier for affected communities to come back and fight another day.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This zine is dedicated to all of the hard work of the organizations in the coalition and beyond who participated in this fight.

We were especially in the trenches with steering committee members Gen from Moral and Just Governance, Hodayra and Jeanine from Partnership for Advancement of New Americans, Jean Huy from We the People, Kandi and Piggy from Asian Solidarity Collective, Seth from Tech Lead, and, from the early days, Dustin with Council for American-Islamic Relations, as well as organizers from Tech Workers Coalition and Pillars of the Community.



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The following organizations struggled together as the TRUST Coalition:

Activist San Diego	MAS San Diego
Al Otro Lado	Migrante
Alliance San Diego	Muslim Leadership Council
Anakbayan San Diego	Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans (PANA)
Asian Solidarity Collective (ASC)	Paving Great Futures
Black Lives Matter San Diego	People Over Profit
Change Begins With Me Indivisible	Pillars of the Community
Community Advocates for Just and Moral Governance	Racial Justice Coalition
Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) San Diego	San Diego Original Black Panther Party For Community Empowerment
Democratic Socialists of America San Diego	San Diego Tenants United
Employee Rights Center	Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ)
Generation Justice	TechLEAD
Homie UP	Tech Workers Coalition (TWC)
Indivisible La Jolla & Pacific Beach	The AjA Project
Indivisible Resistance San Diego	Think Dignity
Majdal Community Center	Universidad Popular
March for Black Women San Diego	United Women of East Africa Support Team
	We the People SD

Finally, thank you Jeanette for growing this zine with us with so much love and excitement. We are also so grateful to Stacey and Dinah at AjA for helping us get this zine across the finish line and publishing it so that all can access it.

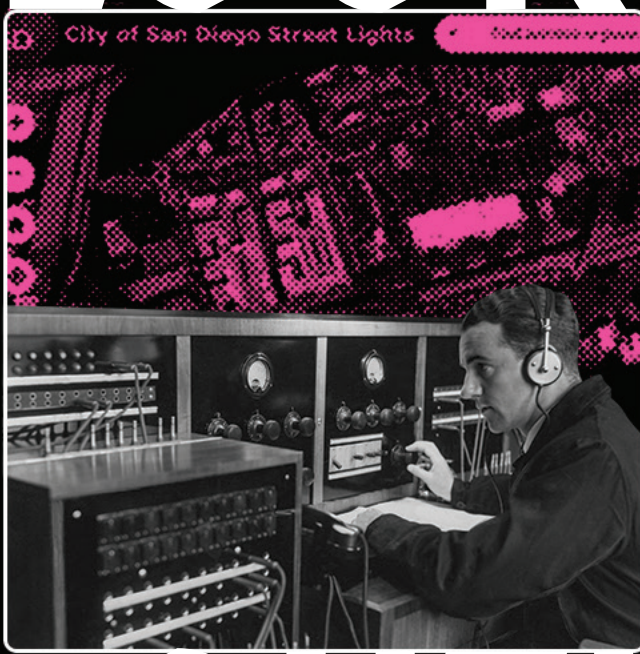
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