

# ANATHEMA

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## THOUGHTS ON THE DNC

*"[T]he places of institutional power exert a magnetic attraction on revolutionaries. But when the insurgents manage to penetrate parliaments, presidential palaces, and other headquarters of institutions, as in Ukraine, in Libya or in Wisconsin, it's only to discover empty places, that is, empty of power, and furnished without any taste. It's not to prevent the "people" from "taking power" that they are so fiercely kept from invading such places, but to prevent them from realizing that power no longer resides in the institutions."*

- To Our Friends by The Invisible Committee

What does protesting at the DNC do? Or stated another way, what can we hope to accomplish at the DNC? Recent calls from different sectors, including the Philly Coalition for REAL Justice and the Workers World Party (and endorsed by a dozen other groups), to "Shut Down the DNC" provide an optimistic vision that we should consider critically. While making predictions is always a surefire way of making mistakes, one thing we can do is look to the past to examine how others approached similar situations. This article will examine several similar mobilizations in order to evaluate the potentials and pitfalls for those attempting to shut down the DNC.

The organizing around the DNC could lead to some confusion about the intentions of the protests. There is the usual buildup of a large coalition of various issue-based groups with a much-needed focus on Black liberation and anti-police struggle. Although the message of the DNC protests appears to be increasingly anti-police, it remains to be seen how far the protesters will step outside of the law. Protest organizers have responded to the government's designated protest zones, to be held in FDR Park as they were for the 2000 RNC, with requests for permits to protest in front of the convention site and pledging to march on the DNC down Broad Street with or without a permit. While their refusal to accept the conditions of the city government should be applauded, a permitted or unpermitted march on the convention is still a far cry from shutting down the convention. On the other hand, recent events such as the July 6th action for Alton Sterling (killed by police in Baton Rouge), which blocked on-ramps to Interstate 676, imply [cont. on page 3]

## ATTACK ON A CONSTRUCTION SITE AS PART OF THE MONTH FOR THE EARTH AND AGAINST CAPITAL

via Contra Info

Everywhere the wild is pushing back against civilization. Even in the cities, wildness flourishes in forgotten places, slowly widening the cracks in this civilized order.

On a warm spring night, we went to a construction site where there was once a wild and abandoned place. We did what we could to hinder the progress that has befallen that area: removing survey stakes and dividers, stealing and destroying pieces of what was being built, and smashing the machines that homogenize and commodify the land.

We don't know what they intend to build on the site and we don't care. Any domestication of wild places infuriates us.

We took this action as a contribution to the month for the earth and against capital.

Philadelphia

Spring 2016



**DNC ARREST HOTLINE: 484-758-0388**

# RECENT ACTIONS

*Spring* - A construction site is sabotaged as part of the month for the earth and against capital.

*July 6* - Protesters block highway I-676 in response to police killings of Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, LA and Philando Castile in Minneapolis, MN. Protests against police continue for the next 5 days.

*July 8* - Anti-police and anti-white supremacy graffiti appears in multiple neighborhoods across town for Alton Sterling and Philando Castile.

*July 15* - A banner in solidarity with the teachers and residents of Oaxaca, Mexico facing state repression is hung in Doylestown, PA.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

RE: Union Bosses Article (via Anarchadelphia)

I was a bit astounded to see this piece in your current issue, which is evidently based not upon any effort to ascertain the actual facts, but simply upon gossip. Nearly everything it says about the IWW is wrong, ranging from the history (the IWW waged several struggles after World War I, including a Philadelphia strike in 1936 by seamen who refused to work a ship carrying munitions to Franco's forces), to the offhand reference to the South Street Workers Union campaign, to the false and defamatory claim that unnamed "esteemed local anarchists" (I am certain you mean to refer to me, though I have never heard anyone else refer to me this way) were booted from the IWW for financial discrepancies. (I am not sure why you are dismissive of our efforts in behalf of the Santander workers, which were greatly appreciated by the comrades in Spain - we did indeed publish some articles on the dispute, but also picketed four Santander branches and distributed a couple thousand leaflets about the struggle.)

The South Street campaign (which was in the early 2000s - in the 90s the Philly IWW, which I was not then a member of, organized a Borders Bookstore, attempted to organize teaching assistants, did much Mumia solidarity work, organized several small units at various nonprofit organizations, etc.) was never aimed at a strike, but rather was an attempt to pioneer a form of sectoral unionism which could support a highly transient group of workers in their struggles to improve their conditions. While it only lasted for about four years, it was involved in several campaigns during that period. In one case, workers surrounded their manager during worktime and after more than a half-hour or argument successfully compelled him to reinstate an effectively dismissed worker (he was not being scheduled) and to give workers control over their scheduling; in another, front of house workers were mobilized to support the undocumented workers who were not being paid. Certainly capitalism was not overthrown, and so the campaign can not be described as a complete success, but many workers gained a sense of their power, were assisted in resolving a large number of grievances, and brought together dozens of workers over a sustained period of time to discuss their issues and work to address them. (We also learned the difficulties of sustaining such a struggle; the campaign could not continue after some workers were deported, other key members faced personal emergencies; a[2]

wave of firings at Whole Foods drained energy; and the campaign became too reliant on support from IWW members who did not work the corridor.)

But I write because of the outrageous and wholly false claim that we were engaged in financial irregularities. Quite the contrary, national IWW officials booted us (in defiance of the IWW constitution) because we demanded financial accountability from them, and the right to criticize the officials. Indeed, the formal charges on which I and others were expelled and suspended made no mention of financial irregularities - rather they objected to our demand that national officials honor their financial obligations, that one member had used an epithet in a confrontation with the General Executive Board chair, and that a working committee of the branch issued regular reports of its activities rather than minutes of its very rare formal meetings. Because they were having difficulty persuading even the packed body to take these charges seriously, they invented other accusations during the debate (that I had stolen \$40,000 from the branch, which is self-evidently absurd, and had written checks to myself from a union account to which I was not even a signator - the Madison branch later sent a professional book-keeper to review these accusations and issued a report condemning them as complete fabrications) that were never part of the formal charges procedure.

This was part of a series of purges that continues to the present day, with members being expelled for organizing solidarity campaigns with workers around the world, criticizing branch officers, and pressing the organization to return to its roots as a self-managed workers organization. Many IWW members are resisting these purges, and I am hoping they will succeed in restoring accountability and democratic rights within the organization.

But there is not the slightest truth to the claim that anyone in Philadelphia IWW was involved in or expelled for "financial discrepancies"; to spread such smears in your publication is a disservice to the movement, and shows a shocking disregard for people who have put decades into the anarchist and syndicalist movements.

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Jon Bekken

*Dear Jon,*

*Thanks for the letter. There certainly were some exaggerations in there from a ranting blog post that gained some national traction, but I don't think it was necessarily wrong. The anti-Franco action of '36 may have been less than a century ago, but so was the 1920 suspension of some local wobblies for loading a ship bound for the White Army in Russia, and the IWW's own chronology doesn't even mention Philly after that until 1993. I have been told by a participant that the South Street union intended to strike when things fell apart for them, but the actual organizing efforts you mention don't seem in any way connected to the halting of production that many have waged made the workers powerful. Neither does solidarity with bank workers — with that much faith in the masses why not work with the Fraternal Order of Police in the hopes of getting them to strike so they're not out in the streets killing people? And while the context may have misled, "financial*

discrepancies" does not seem a false summation of your complaints regarding an executive board's spending and their claims that you appropriated \$40,000. In fact, your complaints about the formal organization, and proposed solutions regarding "democratic rights" only reinforce the idea that unions such as the IWW are outdated, bureaucratic, and have little bearing on anarchist trajectories today. Never mind that they don't address work as wage slavery, much the way democracy was founded on slavery in Greece.

*But this piece was clearly written for reasons that you altogether didn't address: the virtues of action in solidarity with the struggling working class and other orientations of anarchists, most especially through informally organized acts of sabotage (along with celebrating the upcoming prison strike). Instead, local red anarchists continue to attend a greater number of demonstrations that have have no direct bearing on their labor-oriented (or even anarchist) identification — and not even to fan "the flames of a burgeoning popular insurrection" as Sakolsky said the IWW founders had intended, which would have a great deal of bearing on the frustrations of today. Lost is the "spontaneity, poetry and humor" that Franklin Rosemont wagered made the IWW unique, while simultaneously failing to know "too much about work to be 'workerist.'"*

*So these local heroes march in place, stagnantly staring backward into the past, guided by class pride or guilt, becoming undifferentiated from any other protestor outside of personal aesthetic. But it is that very blending that I do not find surprising, unfortunately, when they associate with a man who is esteemed in some red circles and has suggested utilizing a police force "ATR" in our unlikely transition into utopia that I find painfully similar to a dictatorship of the proletariat.★*

[**DNC THOUGHTS CONT.**] the possibility of these marches exceeding the boundaries of their stated intent.

## THE SUMMIT AND THE CONVENTION

The calls to shut down the DNC on July 26th are reminiscent of the objectives of summit hopping within the framework of the antiglobalization movement. For this cycle of struggles in the early 2000s, many turned to Seattle as a model for mobilizing against large-scale conventions with heavy police presence protecting powerful figures. Summit hopping was facilitated by broad-based coalition groups, convergence spaces and multiple protests with specific political themes, all features we see heading toward the DNC. In addition to these preparations, the summits saw widespread vandalism, direct actions, street blockades, and the outbreak of rioting, which were facilitated by calls for "autonomous actions."

As a result of militant actions, the Seattle WTO (World Trade Organization) convention was—at least temporarily—shut down,

making it the touchstone for many future actions. Despite modeling potential success, the autonomous actions are often treated as spontaneous uprisings, which mystifies their potentially reproducible characteristics. Of course, there is the need for security culture around autonomous actions, making them difficult to study, but there are certain features of these actions that should be made clear:

- 1) They were innovative. The Seattle protests were the first large-scale use of the black bloc tactic in North America. Although masks were already a requirement for holding down a street when the police used chemical irritants, participants in black blocs used more of their wardrobe (i.e. wore black) to combat surveillance and enable them to successfully confront corporations and the police.
- 2) They used strategic formations. The Direct Action Network's plan in Seattle focused on preventing travel from the hotel to the convention, blocking main intersections with multiple converging marches meeting up from different directions. This strategic formation interrupted circulation rather than relying on a frontal attack.
- 3) They built on their experiences and trained. Even in summits like the one in Quebec City in 2001, where protesters did lay siege to the security fence, they did not rely on a head-on march plowing directly into the fence. Instead, autonomous groups trained ahead of time and came prepared to pull down the fence and confront police.

We can see glimmers of these kinds of actions within the call to shut down Broad St. with a march on the convention (July 26th 2pm) and the convergence at City Hall (July 26th 4pm). Additionally, the airport strike scheduled for that week threatens to disrupt travel to the DNC, even if these non-union workers are not directly in position to stop flights. But shutting down a convention of this scale is extremely difficult and, even with significant preparation, protesters cannot simply march on the convention. The classic summits of the antiglobalization movement remind us to direct our attention to autonomous groups disrupting weak points of circulation.

## BLOCK EVERYTHING!

Antiglobalization direct actions were never solely directed at the convention centers. The symbolic demonstrations gravitated toward the gatherings of politicians to maximize the amount of indifferent people in power who would see their signs. But those interested in direct struggle increasingly set their sights on surrounding areas. Hence, when the blockades around the WTO convention were dispersed, the black blocs and others headed toward the shopping districts. Kris Hermes tells us that the protesters at the RNC in Philadelphia [*concluded next page*]

# RESPECTABILITY MAINTAINS POLICE

The moment is stunning at first, and then without skipping a beat, respectability rears its ugly head. Activists everywhere are coming forward to denounce and put distance between themselves and Micah Xavier Johnson, the Dallas shooter who shot fourteen cops and killed five. They've made it very clear that they don't consider Micah to be a part of their movement, despite those activists' many mouthfuls of fiery rhetoric. The very same activists who rail against respectability politics. It's as if they don't remember the results of the last high-profile Black Lives Matter-related shooting.

Wikipedia defines respectability politics as "attempts by marginalized groups to police their own members and show their social values as being continuous, and compatible, with mainstream values rather than challenging the mainstream for its failure to accept difference." In a struggle against police and their brutality, internal policing seems to be the last thing one would want, and yet...

The activist who talks a tough game but condemns militant direct action against the white supremacist police has its parallels in Philly. Organizers here have proclaimed their hatred and disgust with "the pigs", screaming in cops' faces, only to become upset when people move toward the immediate disruption and abolition of police here and now (by, for example, trying to arrest someone or steal police gear). Cries of "white anarchists", "outside agitators", "disturbed individuals" and "ignorance" all swirl into one big whirlwind of respectability politics and self-policing. Can one really expect to further a movement against police if that movement constantly denounces anything more "violent" than yelling toward police? How can some consider themselves abolitionist when they hinder those who act to abolish?

Questions of morality aside, recent militant action against police has shown itself to be effective. Although police tell us they are here to maintain law and order (aka racism and control), their primary goal is actually self-preservation, both as individuals and as an institution. When two police officers were killed in Brooklyn by Ismaaiyl Brinsley in 2014, the NYPD put white supremacy on the back burner — the harassment, brutalization, and imprisonment of the NYC population fell dramatically in the wake of the attack. The police strike that resulted from the killing led to a 94% drop in summons being issued and a 66% decrease in arrests. Who could deny that an enormous reduction in everyday police activity is a step toward disempowering, and ultimately ending the police? ★

[DNC THOUGHTS CONCLUDED] in 2000 did not focus on shutting down the convention as much as they tried to "obstruct the flow of delegates traveling to the convention from their hotels." Others chose to disrupt stores instead of heading down to the convention where the masses of police congregated.

This trend developed in years to come. At the G20 summit in Pittsburgh in 2009 and again in Toronto in 2010, protesters swerved away from lines of police protecting the summit and headed toward unprotected areas of the city.

## EVERYONE HATES THE POLICE

Of course, even without directly confronting police lines, events like the DNC come with heavy-handed repression, complete with infiltration and police raids. As a result, it is difficult to learn from previous actions and the preparations of those involved in this kind of direct struggle. The dominant narrative of the DNC protests, as with past events, will be produced by the high-profile and public activists, emphasizing antiquated and symbolic strategies.

The preparations of autonomous groups in advance of the DNC will be happening secretly (if at all) and, due to this limitation, this article can only attempt to offer two things: 1) a lesson from the past about where others successfully focused their energies, and 2) a final caution about infiltration and security culture. In regards to the former, it will be important to consider the particulars of the city and how the convention is being organized: where are the flows of traffic, and the lines of circulation? Where best to begin a feeder march or build a barricade? Where is the \$64 million allocated for the convention being spent? For example, is the convention catered by kitchens outside the convention?

As for the latter, it is essential to remember that autonomous groups follow practices of security culture for their own protection. In place of calls for autonomous actions, there are currently factions within Philadelphia that seek to redefine security culture as a means to "isolate and exclude" autonomous groups based on their engagement in "violence or illegal activity." This is not only ironic—considering that the practices of secrecy and counter-surveillance developed for security culture are intended to protect people engaged in actions labeled violent and illegal—but it is also a blatant attempt to manage autonomous groups and preempt their activities. If, as historical events suggest, the disruption of the DNC is dependent on autonomous actions, we need to resist this distortion of security culture by self-appointed protest managers. Security culture should function as part of a strategy of autonomous direct struggle (one that exceeds the framework of the organized march), not an obstacle to it. ★