

Organizing in the Face of Increased Repression

By Starhawk

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Since the very first morning of the Seattle blockade a year ago, the police forces of the world have greeted the antiglobalization movement with a high level of violence and repression. As the international movement has continued on, the repression has fallen into a pattern discernible from DC to Prague and beyond. This pattern involves:

1. A concerted media campaign by the police and government forces that begins long before the demonstration, painting the activists as violent terrorists. All previous demos are equally characterized as violent, regardless of the actual facts.
2. Surveillance of meetings, email lists, phones, listserves, etc.
3. Attempts at pre-emptive control, which range from mass illegal arrests in DC the night before the action, shut downs of convergence centers and IndyMedia centers, and border closures, to declaring a 5-kilometer no-protest zone five months before the planned action in Quebec.
4. Less obvious violence on the street. Seattle taught them that tear gassing whole sections of the city was a bad idea. However, tear gas, pepper spray, beatings, projectile weapons, water cannon and concussion grenades, etc. are routinely used now from Prague to Cincinnati.
5. Random arrests and targeting of peaceful protestors, while those throwing rocks are often let go. Maybe nonviolent protestors are easier to catch? Or maybe this is a concerted effort to discourage wider participation in these actions?
6. Use of provocateurs. I am not saying that all who throw rocks are provocateurs. However, there is a growing body of eyewitnesses and stories of 'protestors' seen one moment throwing a rock at a window and the next, being sheltered behind a police line to indicate that provocateurs are being used. Along with them, we can suspect the whole range of fun cointelpro tactics.

7. Intimidation and brutality in jail, which reached levels of outright torture in Prague.
8. Some sporadic attempts to identify and neutralize 'leaders'-i.e. holding John Sellers of Ruckus on a million dollars bail for charges that were all later dropped.

What fun! It's enough to make you think we're being effective, especially when, as in Prague, the protestors still managed to disrupt the meeting and send the banksters home a day early.

What can we do about it? Are we doomed to have these actions become more and more dangerous, and smaller and smaller? Or can we succeed in building a mass movement in spite of repression?

1. The greatest restraint to police violence during an action is the organizing and alliance building we've done before the action ever happens. We need to counter their disinformation campaigns with our own community outreach, to leaflet, to talk to people, to go door to door, to explain to the community what we're doing and why long before we do it.
2. We need to build alliances with labor, (like the meeting of the local, or the folks down at the union hall), churches, NGOs, all the groups who are fighting the same vested interests. We don't have to do the same work they do, we don't have to change our hairstyles or analysis to accommodate them, but we do need to build bridges so that we can call on them to defend our-and their-civil rights, at the border, on the streets or in jail.
3. We need to train and prepare as many people as possible. The more people have had a chance to play out a dangerous situation, to think out possible responses and try out different tactics, the calmer and more resilient they'll be on the streets. Even a few centered people in a crowd can be enough to prevent panic and spark an effective moment of resistance. Trainings need to stress flexibility and developing a range of possible responses to widely varied situations, so activists are prepared in the moment to make choices about what to do.
4. We also need ever more flexible and creative tactics. The more we can plan for orchestrated spontaneity, the harder we'll be to stop. For example, in Prague part of the plan was for smaller marches led by flags of different colors to break away from the main march and go in different directions. While this tactic had been discussed at open

meetings for at least a month before the action, it still seemed to confuse the authorities.

5. We may need to focus more on preparation for surviving jail, for resisting intimidation and being prepared for interrogation, than on the classic jail solidarity tactics we've used in the U.S. Those tactics focus on attempting to stay in jail where our strength of numbers allows us to pressure the system to drop or lower charges, and helps to protect individuals at risk. These tactics were developed, however, in a very different time, when the authorities often were interested in releasing most and when jail experiences were often hard and uncomfortable but relatively decent. At times those conditions still prevail and that kind of jail solidarity has been effective in Seattle and DC. However, if people are being chained to the wall and beaten, the focus needs to shift to getting them out of jail. Solidarity then becomes what people outside jail do to put political pressure on the system, from calling on allies, phoning, faxing and emailing the authorities, to blockading the jail itself.
6. Organizing an action needs to include planning post-action and post-jail support, debriefing, trauma counseling, etc.
7. We need to continue building a broader, larger movement, to find ways to encourage participation at varied levels of risk, to support a wide variety of forms of protest that can mobilize different groups of people, to confront the racism, sexism, classism etc. in our own groups and reach out to more diversity. Most of all, we need to clarify our vision of the world we want to create, so we can mobilize peoples' hopes and desires as well as their outrage. And we need to be creative, visionary, wild, sexy, colorful, humorous, and fun in the face of the violence directed against us.

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