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The Black Bloc and Movement Solidarity

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The Black Bloc and Movement Solidarity

by BB 10:14am Thu Oct 5 '00

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Despite differences in tactics, and sometimes overarching strategy, I believe deeply that those committed to peaceful protest and those committed to assertive direct action can work in unison. If we defuse unnecessary animosities and attempt to open communication, we can both work toward each other's mutual benefit.

Disclaimer: I speak only for myself and use the pronoun "we" for functional reasons only.

Essentially, we are all disgusted with the current economic system which places power in the hands of an elite few at the extreme detriment to humanity and the natural world. We are also equally disgusted by the current American political system which strips every individual the right to assert her/his political power and forces us to choose between a few party-backed, corporately-sponsored puppets to make decisions for us. These systems continue to exist because of well orchestrated illusions called representative democracy and the free market. We are demanding, I presume, that the fundamentally misleading and tyrannical nature of these systems be exposed. Simultaneously, we are committed to exploring and implementing political and economic alternatives such as direct democracy, community control of resources, cooperative labor, and establishing autonomy. Some, including many Naderites, believe that these goals can be forwarded by strengthening leftist power within the political structure, and forcing it to provide concessions to disenfranchised and oppressed people. Others, including many within the bloc, reject this strategy as being counterproductive, directing revolutionary political energy into bureaucratic and ultimately meaningless reforms which fail to change the actual power structure of the state.

Despite these differences, however, we can work together to forward our collective goals. Few within the bloc would have been upset had Nader entered the debates. I personally think that he would have undermined the validity of both mainstream candidates and brought forth important issues which could have persuaded the American public to question the corporate power structure. On the other hand, I do not support his bid for the presidency because I do not support the concept of the presidency. In fact, I would rather have more openly oppressive conservative politicians come to power than more subtly oppressive liberals. No matter who wins, the poor lose, and will continue to until we all rise up and demand fundamental control over our political and economic decisions. And flagrant oppression breeds dissent while subtle oppression breeds apathy and complacency. Nevertheless, we were all in Boston a few days ago to expose the debates as a corporate, elitist mockery of democracy. I believe we can all agree with that.

Given that goal, softcore and hardcore tactics were both appropriate and didn't need to conflict with one another. Because it is the disruptive, as well as creative and noisy, nature of protest that attracts media attention, civil disobedience was a good choice. Virtually all disobedience was also perfectly constitutional, given that UMass is public property and that it has been specified by the U.S. Supreme Court that protests "must be allowed to occur within the reasonable sight and hearing range of those against whom or for whom the participants are demonstrating". When the police created a "free speech zone" barring demonstrators from the general vicinity of the Debate center, our civil rights were violated. Therefore, we were absolutely justified in attempting to breach those barriers. Additionally, even if such a move were not protected by the U.S. Constitution, we have an ethical right to participate in our political system, and to impede the functioning of, and indeed remove, that system if it no longer serves the people.

So, some within the black bloc chose to push back, tear down, and rush some of the barricades. This was not an attempt to incite the police to attack us, however. We are not masochistic, nor do we want merely to "fight with the police". As I understand it, we wanted to move our demonstration to the debate center itself, and block the participants from leaving for as long as possible. Because the police violently prevented us from doing so, we were

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forced to engage them. Had we made it to the center it would have provided massive media coverage and effectively communicated the outrage we feel toward our misrepresentative political system. Some Greens contend that in blocking participants from entering/leaving the debates, we are acting undemocratically and violating their freedom. I contend that our political machinery, which is propped up by illusions of democracy such as the meaningless corporate debates violates our fundamental freedoms daily. In order to free ourselves, and consequently our brothers and sisters, we must attack such a system and attack it intelligently. If in the process we violate the "freedoms" of corporate elites to rule us, so be it. Many Greens, and also many anarchists, were disapproving toward those in the crowd who launched plastic bottles and occasional sticks at the riot police, some calling this "violence". The projectiles, however, had no capability of harming the well-protected officers, but served as an effective distraction and annoyance. When police are pelted with small, harmless objects, they can't pay as much attention to beating back those on the frontlines who are trying to breach the barriers. There were also complaints that the bloc would rush the police, then run away, leaving peaceful protesters vulnerable to attack. Such is a complete misperception. Yes, after one of the orderly breaches of the blockades, the police rushed us and some retreated. Yet, those who retreated did so to gather medics for the injured and to regroup to decide how to proceed. The plan was that while the police were busy handling the initial broken blockade, we would rush forward at another point. This plan failed due to lack of general coordination. But let me assure anyone who felt betrayed that we are here to protect you as much as we're here to defy the police. Also, ALL of those beaten and sprayed as a result of the rush were blocers, many of them my close friends. As a testament of support, we risked our own safety to dislodge and drag many police barriers between seated protesters and police in order to block oncoming horse and riot police. The message: we respect and will assist all those struggling against capitalism and the state. Sometimes our tactics differ, and yes, sometimes we make mistakes, but we're here for each other.

To an equal or even greater extent, the bloc needs softcore peaceful protesters as well. The community created in the streets through singing, peaceful blockading, puppet shows, etc. is inspiring and important. Not only does it add to the festive mood of protest events, it also makes for good pr, which is essential at this point. Softcore folks also provide inspiring numbers and support, and their contributions are just as important as those practicing direct action.

These differing tactics can coexist simultaneously, and add to the strength of our movement when they do. The black bloc will continue to break police lines, occupy buildings, takeover areas, unarrest people, etc. with the goal of moving from protest to actual resistance. This does not preclude anyone else from less confrontational tactics. I, for one, also commit myself fully to avoiding placing people who do not want to confront the police in dangerous positions. This means that I will avoid inciting the police and running off leaving others in harm's way. We need to use all sorts of tactics to achieve our common goals. This is one of our greatest strengths, and confuses the hell out of the police who are trying to shut us down. Let's try to communicate without placing blame on one another. If we do, I am extremely confident that we can coordinate actions which allow room for multiple tactical angles, and fuel the unity and momentum of our growing movement.

SOLIDARITY NOW AND FOREVER! DON'T LET ANYONE DIVIDE US!

one participant in the O3 Black Bloc