

On the Black Bloc

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OF ALL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, ANARCHISM offers the widest analysis of oppression and ultimately the only ongoing path towards social revolution. We understand that as our movement grows, constant re-evaluation of our strategies and tactics is a necessary part of anarchist theory and action. With the growing discontent among more and more people we, as anarchists, have the opportunity to destabilize the state. To do this we must constantly critically analyze our movement's tactics and strategies. This is especially true after the black bloc fiasco at the April 5th demo in D.C.

The black bloc is an effective organizational structure to increase the presence of street militancy at demonstrations. The black bloc at the anti-Desert Storm march in January of 1991 was moderately successful in this regard. Though there were minor setbacks even then (this being the first North American anarchist bloc assembled) the tactic was effective. The January demo took place in a different context than previous ones — there was more anger and tension and the scene was much more charged. The bloc was tactically more organized with affinity groups that were prepared to be militant. This was not the case on April 5th. The April bloc was neither well organized nor effective. It can be shown that the organizational defects at this bloc are indicative of larger problems within the anarchist movement.

Prior to the demonstration, the call went out through the Love and Rage Network, as well as the larger and more informal anarchist network, that a black bloc was going to be formed. As a movement we suffer from a lack of structure in our networks and the only information relayed was that there would be a bloc. More communication throughout both of the networks, as to what we wished to achieve as an anarchist contingent, was sorely needed. And more analysis of the NOW movement in general and how the anarchist struggle is going to communicate with a wimyn's movement dominated by reformist tendencies is needed if we are to raise the voice of our struggle beyond its present scope.

If we are to advance, we must empower ourselves and each other to take back our lives. Many groups pay lip service to empowerment, from Greenpeace environmentalists to politicians in an election year. As anarchists, however, we understand that empowerment is not having politicians keep promises of better laws — these same laws prevent us from controlling our own lives and our own communities. Among the 850,000 people demonstrating the day of April 5th there was no empowerment — only confusion and disorientation. In our contingent, the wimyns-only bloc was invaded by a man who refused to accept the wimyns' decision about the empowerment they feel

from having a wimyn-only space. The black bloc, supposedly a tool to counter disempowering demos, supposedly a tool to organize ourselves, left us participants at the hands of the tyranny of structurelessness. How are we to counter this problem in the future?

Throughout the march, no one seemed to know where we were heading or what we going to do when we got there. At one point, a wimyn was informing the bloc what the persons up front had decided. This was not involvement or empowerment. A black bloc composed of well-organized affinity groups would not fall prey to such tyranny.

Prior to the demo, communication between affinity groups planning to participate should be extensive. Upon arriving at the pre-arranged meeting place, the affinity groups could size up the situation from their perspective: what do we as an affinity group hope to accomplish and see as the best strategy? Does this day offer us an opportunity to be militant? How many police are in the immediate area?

Before the demo, a meeting of either the general body or of delegates of the affinity groups should have met. The purpose of this is not to decide who was right or wrong or who was politically correct. The sharing of information and ideas about what the day may bring is necessary. These delegates would not be rulers; they do not hold you by contract. The purpose would be to communicate the different viewpoints of the affinity groups and to discuss tactics for the day. Giving to these delegates decision-making power about actions and structure is risky business. However, I was for the most part unaware of other affinity groups' purposes and plans. Tightly knit affinity groups that link up like a chain for common purposes create a force that is not easily stopped by the police. Organized action is effective action.

Aside from the wimyn's caucus, there was little organization of our contingent. And when a man refused to respect the wimyn's decisions for their own space, there was no way of dealing with the issue. "The first declaration of freedom for a slave is in denying the master access to her hut." The "would be masters" among us prey easily upon structurelessness. During the bloc, ideological argument is divisive and is counterproductive to action. Why is it that we stand for such disempowering action among us? Wimyn who declare male-free spaces must be respected as it is seen by these wimyn as vital to their liberation. I for one would have been comfortable seeing the wimyn physically remove him from their area. This was a wimyn's march and men present could at least show solidarity

Throughout the march, designated couriers of information could have helped the anarchist affinity groups to communicate as the day progressed. When the bloc left the general march, we did so at the expense of security and isolated ourselves. At this point, some of us attacked the anti-wimyn's cemetery. This action needlessly jeopardized our security since we were separated from the protective cloak of the larger demo. Tactically this was very dangerous and we should have realized this. When the police moved in the weakness of our bloc became painfully obvious.

With well-organized affinity groups, the bloc could have disbanded, avoiding the danger of mass arrest and reorganized at a pre-arranged location. Instead, the police played games with the bloc, chasing it one way and the next as they laughed at our ineffectiveness. A participant remarked, "At the best we look silly, and at worst, useless and disruptive." Do we organize as a black bloc to cater to adventurist notions of street militancy? No, it is a means to empower ourselves during demos — a temporary way to take back our streets and to demonstrate to ourselves and to others that there is a future beyond the confines of this state. If we do not better organize ourselves then we are doomed to failure.

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