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# **Burning the Bridges They Are Building: Anarchist Strategies Against the Police in the Puget Sound, Winter 2011**

Anonymous

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Burning the Bridges They Are Building: Anarchist Strategies  
Against the Police in the Puget Sound, Winter 2011  
2011

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2011



communique explains, “One company was attacked for its role in the installation of CCTV cameras and the other because it trains security agents. Take aim and target those complicit in the maintenance of this society of domination. Solidarity to the Northwest U.S. in their struggle against the pigs & to Montreal area anarchists facing state repression.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> pugetsoundanarchists.org

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– March 14, Tacoma, WA: A police cruiser is vandalized with paint and glass etching cream. This action is claimed in solidarity with the anarchist hunger strikers of the Caso Bombas.<sup>12</sup>

– March 15, Olympia, WA: A police substation is firebombed. The action is unclaimed.

– March 15, Santa Cruz, WA: A police cruiser is attacked with glass etching cream and its tires slashed. The communique reads, “Seattle. Montreal. Bahrain. Fuck the pigs.”<sup>13</sup>

– March 15, Vancouver, BC: A probation office is vandalized with anti-cop and anti-prison slogans. Pro-tourism signs are also obscured with paint. A communique declares the sabotage as “a small act of solidarity with comrades in prison on hunger strike in Chile and with comrades in the Puget Sound fighting the police!”<sup>14</sup>

– March 17, Montreal, Quebec: Several vehicles belonging to the Public Security Ministry of Quebec are doused in paint stripper and have their tires slashed. A communique states solidarity with people struggling against the police in Seattle and the Pacific Northwest.<sup>15</sup>

– March 18, Philadelphia, PA: A bank’s windows are smashed, and a communique claims solidarity with struggles in the Puget Sound and elsewhere.<sup>16</sup>

– March 20, Portland, OR: The windows and ATMs of a bank are destroyed and anti-police slogans are painted across the building. This is done in the presence of a cop, who chooses not to engage the hostile mob. The action was claimed in solidarity with anarchists in Seattle and Olympia.<sup>17</sup>

– March 21, Montreal, Quebec: Windows are smashed and paint is thrown on the walls of two security companies. The

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<sup>12</sup> pugetsoundanarchists.org

<sup>13</sup> pugetsoundanarchists.org

<sup>14</sup> pugetsoundanarchists.org

<sup>15</sup> pugetsoundanarchists.org

<sup>16</sup> pugetsoundanarchists.org

<sup>17</sup> pugetsoundanarchists.org

— February 18, Seattle, WA: Following the large street demonstration, arson is used in an attack against a police substation in Seattle. This substation was a frequent target of anti-police vandals and was subsequently closed.

— February 27, Portland, OR: The windows are smashed out of a police substation, “in solidarity with our comrades in Seattle and the recent uprisings against the police on the west coast.”<sup>7</sup>

— February 28, Portland, OR: Two banners are dropped in high-traffic areas, reading, “History tells us that the police are the real criminals — stop them” and “The police are legalized terrorists — stop them.” This coincides with the “West Coast Days of Action Against the Police and the Prison World They Maintain,”<sup>8</sup> called for by Seattle anarchists in response to police repression

— February 28, Tacoma, WA: A police department building is attacked. All its windows are smashed out and its facade stained with paint. A communique explains, “this was done as part of the West Coast call out for two days of action against the police.”<sup>9</sup>

— Early March, Seattle, WA: Several *Stranger* newspaper boxes are burned.

— March 4, Seattle, WA: The ATMs are glued and windows splashed with black paint at a Chase bank. A communiqué explains, “This act of revenge was done not simply against the bank but against the police who protect the tortuous coils of capital.”<sup>10</sup>

— March 4, Olympia, WA: Two police cruisers and a police station are smashed up in solidarity with Seattle and against the police everywhere.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> pugetsoundanarchists.org

<sup>8</sup> pugetsoundanarchists.org

<sup>9</sup> pugetsoundanarchists.org

<sup>10</sup> pugetsoundanarchists.org

<sup>11</sup> pugetsoundanarchists.org

## Introduction

When I moved to Seattle many years after the infamous upheaval of 1999, I found almost no remnants of whatever had existed here. Certainly, I could find other anarchists, but for a long time I found myself in variations of the same conversation: *How do we reach each other? What are we doing? Why does nothing happen?*

And then, finally, I was with other anarchists in the street — friends and acquaintances, but others, too. *Who are all these people?* We were all in black masks. This was the first black bloc in Seattle in about a decade. Hundreds of posters all over town had announced a demonstration against police violence in the middle of Capitol Hill as part of the West Coast Days of Action Against State Violence April 8–9, 2010. The size of the demonstration was modest — probably around 80 people — but nearly half the crowd came en bloc.

Anarchists in the Puget Sound<sup>1</sup> had been inspired by recent events elsewhere: the Greek insurrection of December 2008, the riots following the murder of Oscar Grant in 2009 in Oakland, and, most recently, the wild and disruptive demonstrations in Portland.<sup>2</sup> These were significant to us for many reasons. Anarchists played an active and critical part in all of them;

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<sup>1</sup> The Puget Sound is a geographical region that contains Seattle and other cities, including Tacoma and Olympia. The larger demonstrations and actions of winter 2011 were centered in Seattle. However, stronger regional connections developed among anarchists in the Puget Sound during this period, and there was much collaboration between anarchists from different cities. The actions during this time in Seattle were not just the work of Seattle anarchists, but of anarchists from throughout the region.

<sup>2</sup> More information here: [www.indybay.org](http://www.indybay.org)

they showed that people can actively resist the violence of police; they revealed that when people act on their rage, they open a space in defiance of the violence of everyday life. In this space, new social relations come to be as the authority of the state and capital are challenged. These distant fires had stirred the flames in us, and we took the streets that day ready for a fight.

But if the mild clashes of April 9 set off any sparks, they didn't seem to catch in the moment. At one point, cops used their bikes as mobile barriers to push the crowd out of the street and onto the sidewalk. As a cop on a horse cornered the group, one demonstrator tossed a paint bomb right at the cop's head. Incredibly, the paint-filled light bulb bounced unbroken off the helmet of the dazed cop, whose only reaction was a look of dim confusion. The paint bomb broke harmlessly on the street in a red splatter. Worse, the blow didn't embolden the crowd. Instead, there was a collective gasp of shock: *I can't believe someone did that!*

In the end, the police cleared the streets, beating and arresting three demonstrators and capturing two others blocks away after they left. Despite the fact that the police had committed the only real violence, the five arrested faced charges including assaulting an officer and rioting. In addition, the local anti-authoritarian scene was soon parroting familiar stereotypes: *those people ruined the protest for the rest of us; violence never solves anything*. I went home having experienced a harsh reminder of where I was. This wasn't Greece, or even Oakland, or even Portland. I lived in Seattle. The spell of social peace isn't broken here. *Nothing happens*.

Less than a year later, anarchists were in the streets in black masks again. But I wasn't lost in what I wished could happen. Something *was* happening. The occupied streets, the broken glass of police cruiser windows, the undercover forced out of the demonstration with a blow to the head, the smoke bombs hurled to keep horse cops at bay, the youth chanting "Eye for

Another communiqué added, "It is our hope that our struggles, and further, the struggles of all anti-authoritarians, will be mutually inspiring. The police have always used violence to uphold the institution of capitalism, and for that they should expect nothing less to be attacked."<sup>5</sup> The geographic distribution of solidarity actions shows that comrades around the country felt inspired by what they saw here. When Seattle anarchists faced repression, destruction flared up elsewhere — spreading the revolt further and helping to stave off fatigue in Seattle.

It's interesting to note that the timeline of attacks lags behind the timeline of demonstrations. It isn't until after the largest demonstrations against the police that the attacks began. As the ability to pull off inspiring acts openly in the streets began to recede, the number and intensity of clandestine attacks increased. One should be careful not to confuse correlation with causation, however. It is not the case that anarchists in the Puget Sound, faced with repression, have withdrawn from public activity to focus on desperate underground acts. On the contrary, the number of public actions and events has also increased since the peak of the anti-police struggle. The distinction between open acts and secretive attacks has also begun to blur; for example, on April 22, a group of anarchists attacked a bank in daylight on a busy commercial street, smashing almost all its windows, leaving leaflets, and disappearing before police could respond.<sup>6</sup>

— February 18, Seattle, WA: Police report over their radios that a precinct must be evacuated because a gas line has been opened. The timing of the discovery coincides exactly with the starting time of that night's anti-police demonstration. Because no action claim ever surfaced and the mainstream media did not report on the event, it's unknown whether this was sabotage or mere coincidence.

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<sup>5</sup> pugetsoundanarchists.org

<sup>6</sup> pugetsoundanarchists.org

following a demonstration elsewhere in town exploited the fact that their attention was diverted.

By challenging the centrality of public demonstrations, anarchists reveal that the violence of capital and the state surrounds us at all times, and that the façade of social peace depends upon our willingness to participate. Every intact window and undamaged patrol car hides the reality of social war; each act of violence against order reveals it. Attacks on banks and other symbols of capitalism can broaden the scope of the struggle by revealing the relationships between apparently unconnected targets.

In the Puget Sound, the significance of attacks was explained in communiqués left at the scene or posted anonymously to the local anarchist news site, [pugetsoundanarchists.org](http://pugetsoundanarchists.org). As anarchist action gained notoriety, the site began to receive tremendous amounts of traffic. Eventually, the mainstream media would cover any attack posted, quoting communiqués and citing the webpage, which encouraged spectators to read anarchists in their own unapologetic words.

For such attacks to spread, it is important that they be easy to imitate. Anarchists have carried out clandestine attacks in this region for years<sup>3</sup>, but the frequency of these increased through February and March 2011. It's impossible to tell, but this seems to indicate that new people were taking up this approach. Covert attacks also serve to strengthen existing connections between anarchists, preparing them for future acts. As one communiqué put it, "These acts of sabotage not only allow us to lash out at the symbols of domination in our lives, but also serve as a means to forge bonds of trust and experience acting with one another."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, this chronology documenting many attacks in the Puget Sound before the time frame discussed in this article: [pugetsoundanarchists.org](http://pugetsoundanarchists.org)

<sup>4</sup> [pugetsoundanarchists.org](http://pugetsoundanarchists.org)

an eye, a pig's gotta die!" — Seattle was seeing revolt explode beyond the control of both managed protests and state repression. This wasn't an insurrection like Greece, or even a series of riots like Oakland. But for a brief period between January and March 2011, people broke years of inertia to interrupt the social peace. And, as in the struggles that had inspired us the preceding April, anarchists played a critical role in fueling the flames.

# Violence, Counterattacks, and Counter-Information: A Brief Background to Anti-Police Tension in the Puget Sound

It would be an exaggeration to claim that anarchists are responsible for the most remarkable resistance to the police in the recent history of the Puget Sound. On the contrary, anarchists had no perceivable role in a string of unconnected attacks against police in 2009. For months, any casual reader of the mainstream media could learn that shots were being returned to cops and finding their targets.

Individual armed resistance to the police deserves analysis from anarchists, but falls outside of the scope of this article. I only have space here to mention the two most widely reported attacks.

— On the night of October 22, four Seattle police vehicles were firebombed in the East Precinct parking lot. A little over a week later, on Halloween night, two officers parked in a residential area were ambushed with gunfire from a car. One of the two, Timothy Brenton, was killed; his partner returned fire but the assailant escaped. The next week, police shot and arrested Christopher Monfort after a neighbor reported that his car matched the description of the one used in the attack. Police also claimed to have found in his apartment an assault rifle

ful getaway, dispose of evidence safely, and work only with trusted comrades, nighttime destruction entails fewer risks.<sup>2</sup>

No one believes that overthrowing capitalism is simply a matter of breaking enough windows. Windows are easily replaced, graffiti washed away. Like other tactics, covert action has to be evaluated as part of a larger strategy.

Anarchist intervention successfully altered the discourse of struggle in the Puget Sound, intensifying conflict and creating situations that were difficult for the forces of order to defuse. Clandestine attacks contributed directly to this: smashing the windows of a community police station is inherently difficult to co-opt, showing that anarchist struggle is fundamentally different from — and opposed to — reformist activism.

Such attacks also serve to broaden the terrain of the conflict. Public protests are the accepted territory of social movements; the police have crowd-control strategies to keep these under control. Striking where the authorities expect it least minimizes risk and maximizes the potential for destruction; if clandestine attacks are frequent, the police have to spread themselves thin, attempting to protect any place an attack *might* happen. Clever attacks can also be timed to coincide with other events — for example, the apparent sabotage of a gas line at the precinct coinciding with the beginning of the February 18 demonstration split the attention of the police. Likewise, the arson attack on a police station directly

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, attacks *are* risks. Still, it's noteworthy that only a handful of people have been caught during attacks in the Puget Sound in recent years. Some of these had attempted particularly risky acts, such as smashing the windows of a police station in front of several witnesses. All of them faced felony charges and could hardly portray themselves as a non-violent protestors caught in the crossfire. But in each case, the prosecutor was eventually forced to reduce the charges to misdemeanors carrying sentences of community service. In comparison, arrests occurred at almost every demonstration and at one simple jail solidarity gathering, although most of these charges were dropped or never filed.



## Postscript: A Chronology of Attacks and Solidarity Actions

“Anarchists, now is not the time to fear the baton of a pig and slink into hiding. Now is the time to muster up courage, scheme evil plots, and seek revenge. This was not simply an attack against the police, this was a call to make every one of those motherfuckers pay dearly! Not just for beating a fellow rebel, but for the everyday management and misery these spineless bastards heave upon our backs. In the coming nights it is our deepest desire that others will take it upon themselves to launch a greater surge of aggression against the swine that fill our streets.” -from a communiqué claiming an attack on two police cars and a police substation in Olympia, WA, in solidarity with anarchists in Seattle<sup>1</sup>

In addition to coordinating open revolt, anarchists in the Puget Sound also carried out clandestine attacks. While it takes a confident black bloc to break even a few windows at a demonstration and arrests will likely ensue, in the dead of night a handful of friends can wreak havoc on a target with relative ease. Public acts have advantages that covert acts lack; for example, a tactic is more likely to spread if it is demonstrated in the midst of a crowd. But as long as care is taken to plan a care-

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<sup>1</sup> pugetsoundanarchists.org

matching the bullets used in the killing and bomb-making materials, as well as other materials linking him to the shooting and bombings.

— On the morning of November 29, a man named Maurice Clemmons walked into a cafe in Lakewood, Washington, where four police officers were working on laptops before their shift. Clemmons opened fire on the officers, killing them, but did not aim at any other customers or the two baristas. Police went on to militarize the neighborhood where Brenton was killed a month earlier, using armored vehicles to block roads and a robot to destroy a house where Clemmons was suspected of hiding. The police eventually found Clemmons early on the morning of December 1 and shot him dead.

These shootings took place in the midst of a string of high-profile instances of police violence:

— In May 2009, Christopher Sean Harris was chased down a street in Belltown by two cops. The cops had not identified themselves to Harris. Deputy Matthew Paul shoved Harris’ head into a wall and crushed it, resulting in a catastrophic brain injury that finally won Harris a \$10 million settlement after it came out that police had lied to paramedics about how Harris was injured. It is unlikely Harris will recover.

— In November 2009, 15-year-old Malika Calhoun was slammed into a wall and punched twice while being detained in a holding cell by King County Sherriff’s Deputy Paul Schene. Schene had already shot two people, killing one of them; the legal system ruled these shootings “justified.” Schene was later acquitted of all charges relating to his assault of Calhoun.<sup>1</sup>

— On April 17, 2010, a group of Hispanic men were pulled over near Lake Union. Officer Shandy Cobane asserted: “I’m going to beat the fucking Mexican piss out of you homey. You

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<sup>1</sup> www.youtube.com

feel me?” and stomped on one of the men as he lay complying on the ground. No charges were filed against Cobane.<sup>2</sup>

— On June 14, 2010 Seattle cop Ian Walsh began harassing multiple young people attempting to cross Martin Luther King Jr. Way. When two young black women refused to passively accept his verbal and then physical aggression, he responded by punching one in the face and then arresting both.<sup>3</sup>

The victims of these assaults were all attacked for petty defiance of authority — such as jaywalking — or without any reason at all. These incidents don’t indicate an increase in the violence perpetrated by the police; the police have always been brutal. Rather, while the corporate media ignore or downplay police violence whenever possible, all these events were caught on video. When police are caught red-handed, even the complicit media can be forced to show their true face, lest their legitimacy be challenged by video websites.<sup>4</sup>

Rather than expose the growing tension between the population and the police, corporate media were careful to hide it behind a narrative of individual instances of “bad apple” police violence on one hand and the supposed insanity of Monfort and Clemmons on the other. In the *Seattle Times*, a spokesperson for the police called Brenton’s death an “act of terrorism.”<sup>5</sup> A local Fox News affiliate alleged that a confidential source had reported that child porn was found on Monfort’s computer<sup>6</sup>; no other news sources ran this information and the city never filed such charges. The *Seattle Times* also reported that Clemmons had previously been convicted of a felony child rape charge

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<sup>2</sup> Local anarchist coverage of the attack (including video): [pugetsoundanarchists.org](http://pugetsoundanarchists.org)

<sup>3</sup> Local anarchist coverage of the assault (including video): [arcticcirclecollective.net](http://arcticcirclecollective.net)

<sup>4</sup> Here it is worth noting that in some places, the police are moving to make videotaping a cop illegal: [gizmodo.com](http://gizmodo.com)

<sup>5</sup> [community.seattletimes.nwsources.com](http://community.seattletimes.nwsources.com)

<sup>6</sup> [www.q13fox.com](http://www.q13fox.com)

## Further Reading

*Pugetsoundanarchists.org* — News for anarchists from the Puget Sound

*Against the Police and the Prison World They Maintain: Communiqués from the Pacific Northwest January-March 2011* [pugetsoundanarchists.org](http://pugetsoundanarchists.org)

As anarchists we know we cannot find justice under the State and Capitalism. Instead, we seek vengeance. Vengeance for those whose lives can never be given back and vengeance for our own lives constrained by the tentacles of social control. We do not want a better system because, in fact, better only means more efficient for those who wish to kill and imprison us. We do not strive to reform those who love to see us on our knees. Instead we seek the total destruction of this system of domination, with our feet planted firmly on the ground. — from *Reportback & Statements Regarding the February 12<sup>th</sup> Anti-Police Demo in Seattle*<sup>30</sup>

Here in Seattle now, our feet remain firmly on the ground. We do not offer this analysis out of an inflated sense of the importance of last winter's events in relation to struggles elsewhere, but in contrast to the dreary quiet of so many preceding gray Northwestern winters. Things are not the same here now. There is more cohesion, more drive, more energy. The frequency of attacks, information nights, and solidarity actions has increased. We have learned new skills, tactics, and strategies. And although there is a stillness in the summer air, we know that the social war continues. The next time it flares up, we will be better prepared to feed the flames.

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<sup>30</sup> pugetsoundanarchists.org

among other crimes.<sup>7</sup> According to the *Times*, this was evidence of his deteriorating mental health — the only plausible reason one would take up arms against the police.

Clemmons never got a chance to speak for himself, but there's no need to speculate about Monfort's feelings. Monfort used his appearances in court and in the media to present a coherent critique. Despite surviving being shot in the head only to face the death penalty in prison, Monfort was calm, collected, and assertive — not at all the madman the media had presented. In particular, he decried officer Schene's beating of Calhoun. In court, he read aloud a list of people killed by cops in Washington state.<sup>8</sup> His courtroom statements became infamous; in another, he said, "We've had enough. The people will not take it any longer. We will not take it any longer. We'll fight and we're everywhere. You can't see us coming."<sup>9</sup> He openly invoked the language of war.<sup>10</sup>

The King County prosecutor recognized this, declaring that, in trying him with the arson and shooting, he was accusing Monfort of waging "his own personal war" against Seattle police.<sup>11</sup> He wasn't the only one capable of recognizing the significance of Monfort's transgression. Many people cheer attacks against the police, as a result of day-to-day experiences of being abused by them. Although he was caught, Monfort had accomplished a deed many dream of carrying out. It's difficult to gauge how widespread this sentiment is; it is often shouted down by the moral outrage of the good citizens who side with the police. On the blog for *The Stranger*, Seattle's supposedly "alternative" weekly newspaper, moderators frantically erased any comments that implied an understanding of why people would attack police.

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<sup>7</sup> seattletimes.nwsourc.com...

<sup>8</sup> www.youtube.com

<sup>9</sup> seattletimes.nwsourc.com

<sup>10</sup> denverabc.wordpress.com...

<sup>11</sup> www.komonews.com

## Liberal Reform and Social War

While the forces of order sought to isolate Monfort, anarchists set out to connect his acts — and individual instances of police violence<sup>12</sup> — to the invisible war hidden by the façade of social peace. At the previously mentioned demonstration against the police on April 9, 2009, anarchists distributed a leaflet titled “Some People Shoot Back,” which explained:

Almost none of the media coverage about Monfort mentioned the brutal beating of the 15-year-old girl, or the many other instances of police violence that motivated Monfort. This is because the media and the police work for the same power structure: a power structure that demands we all remain obedient while they rob us, exploit us, bully us, and lie to us, and then punish us with the utmost cruelty when we break one of their rules, or fight back. This is a system built on our misery. It is no coincidence that sometimes people snap, and do whatever they can to fight back against the agents of this system. To win just a moment of justice, a moment of vengeance. They are the bravest of us, the most honest.<sup>13</sup>

Anarchists defended Monfort’s act and called for prison solidarity for him,<sup>14</sup> insisting that all attacks on the police deserve support while also articulating that the struggle for freedom does not need more martyrs. The anarchist position of *social war* differs from Monfort’s war, even if there is a connection. As another leaflet put it,

What we want most is to fight strategically by cultivating our will to be free and then connecting with others committed to the same struggle: to create a world where cops are not welcome and where individual or systematic assaults on our friends and communities are met with full, sustainable expressions of our rage [...] We will not calm down as a war is waged

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<sup>12</sup> For example, [arcticcirclecollective.info](http://arcticcirclecollective.info) and [tan.anarchyplanet.org](http://tan.anarchyplanet.org)

<sup>13</sup> [arcticcirclecollective.net](http://arcticcirclecollective.net)

<sup>14</sup> [anarchistnews.org](http://anarchistnews.org)

tioned the website by name. Many people, hearing something shocking about rioting in Seattle, visited the site and read anarchist arguments for themselves. The production and dissemination of leaflets was entirely decentralized; several new leaflets appeared at every demonstration. After the black bloc grabbed many demonstrators’ imaginations on February 16, for example, a leaflet appeared that explained, on one side, “Why We Wear Masks” — and on the other, “Tips for Rioting.” At *The Stranger’s* accountability forum, a leaflet announced “The End of Dialogue.” When discourse centered on justice, anarchist leaflets exclaimed “Justice Is Impossible, and So Are We!”

This point is also critical: anarchists shunned the language of justice and accountability. By setting our sights on nothing less than total freedom, anarchists in the Puget Sound made our position inherently resistant to co-optation. Calls for accountability had already been reabsorbed into the system of domination — see, for example, community accountability forums.

*A call for justice is always an appeal to authority.* One form of justice would rely on the authority of the state to prosecute the perpetrator — but as anarchists, we must also oppose the justice system and its prisons. The vaguer model of justice — “social justice” — still relies on the moral authority of society, and remains easy for the state to assimilate. Consider, for example, the official response to the calls for justice following John T. Williams’ murder. The SPD has unveiled the friendly new face of repression: “justice-based policing,” explicitly aimed at policing more efficiently by rebuilding trust between the police and society.<sup>29</sup>

To act on one’s desire for freedom or vengeance is another matter entirely. Such action is direct and predicated on no authority but one’s own. As one reportback put it:

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<sup>29</sup> [spdblotter.seattle.gov...](http://spdblotter.seattle.gov...)

reprehensible, they conspired with the police to exclude the anarchist catalyst from the ongoing reaction.

Anarchists were right to openly oppose those recuperative forces. Had we been content to be a quiet, dissident voice — the civil conscience of the social organism respectfully shaking the bloody hand of an apologetic power — we would have been lost in the hollow discourse of accountability and reform. Instead, we broke that discourse like a cruiser window, and came out the other side with new friends who, like us, wanted to fight the cops — not talk with them.

Nonetheless, the blade cuts two ways, and our isolation contributed to the ending of this phase of struggle. By the time we what was happening, it was too late to form the connections we would have needed to keep the streets flooded. In retrospect, it would have been wise to hold at least one truly *general* assembly, open to the public at large.

Our experiments with the assembly form were essential to our success, and it was for the best that these assemblies mostly focused on creating space for self-identified anarchists. But in addition to the explicitly anarchist assemblies, a more open assembly that invited non-anarchists would have provided an opportunity for anarchists to present their positions directly to others. This would have been more challenging than speaking with people who shared the same politics, but it would have been worth it. Even if differing positions were not reconciled, when the inevitable media backlash began many people would already have an understanding of who anarchists are and why we do what we do — derived from experience, rather than corporate media distortions.

As for our own media, anarchists were remarkably on point. A local website, PugetSoundAnarchists.org, exploded with analyses, calls for action, reportbacks, communiqués, and leaflets and posters for printing. This provided a center for online communication throughout the region. When the mainstream media reported on anarchists, they usually men-

against us. We do not seek to make peace with the police. We bring fuel to the fires.<sup>15</sup>

But the dominant visible sentiment in Seattle did not embrace this. The fervor that followed Brenton's death sent many running back to the side of the police. The *Seattle Times* ran a photo of pedestrians stopping to put their right hands over their hearts — Starbucks cups still firmly grasped in the left — as Brenton's funeral procession drove by. The political climate of Seattle is largely liberal-progressive and produces much ideological incoherence — in this particular instance, moral outrage over out-of-control cops alongside an inability or unwillingness to understand the inherent brutality of the police, their place in the violence of capitalism and government, and their historical role and development. The liberal critique of police brutality demands reforms and reaffirms the role of authority in the same breath.

This cognitive dissonance was especially apparent in a clash between the union newspaper of Seattle police and the more liberal media of the city. *The Stranger* ran an article titled "What Some Seattle Cops Think the Problem Is."<sup>16</sup> The title itself is telling, as it reveals the reluctance of liberals to grapple with systems of violence, focusing instead on the opinions of the individual bad cops removed from their larger context. The article was about editorials written by officers in *The Guardian*, the SPD's union's newspaper. These are surprisingly honest: cops refer to the citizens they police as "the enemy," mocking community accountability efforts as "sideshows" that "exist only for chiefs and sheriffs to provide an illusion of citizen accountability." Anarchists affirm all of these statements. Liberals and progressives, on the other hand, value these sideshows because they understand the police as a social service. In their view, if public servants run afoul of civil society, they should be better

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<sup>15</sup> arcticcirclecollective.net

<sup>16</sup> www.thestranger.com...

managed. Comment after comment on *The Stranger's* online article protested, "But you work for us!"

## The Murder of John T. Williams

"All people seeking to be free find themselves in direct opposition to a system that is inherently violent and oppressive. The police deliberately use violence to control or kill off anyone who seeks to dismantle this power structure — or anyone already marginalized within it. We don't want a friendlier police force. [...] We want to get out of control. We want a world without cops." -from the anarchist leaflet *John T. Williams Was Murdered by Seattle Cop Ian Birk*<sup>17</sup>

However liberals sought to avoid coming to terms with the unfolding war, one particular event forced their illusion to its limits. On Monday, August 30, Seattle cop Ian D. Birk shot and killed John Williams, a 50-year-old Native American man.

Seattle Police and mainstream media initially described the lethal attack as an example of a cop defending himself in a dangerous situation. Williams, they said, was "armed" with a knife and "advanced" on the officer who repeatedly demanded he drop the weapon before resorting to gunfire. This story quickly fell apart. In reality, Williams did not approach Birk at all. He was merely crossing the street on his way home from a park he frequented. He probably did not respond to Birk's orders because he was partially deaf. The knife he was carrying was within the legal limit in Seattle; he had been using it to carve small totem poles — something he and his brothers had done for years. Only four seconds passed from the moment Birk exited his car to confront Williams to the fifth bullet he fired. Eventually it was revealed that the knife retrieved from the scene of the crime was found closed. There was no plausible explanation for the police to hide behind.

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<sup>17</sup> arcticcirclecollective.net...

about what would come next and the meaning of solidarity. Perhaps the poster said it best:

True solidarity is the recognition of your own struggle in the struggle of those suffering repression and then carried out through the continuity of that struggle; the maintenance of active revolt. The momentum that was born in the streets lives on even in the face of repression.<sup>28</sup>

## No Justice and No Resolution

The heightening of tensions in Seattle in winter 2011 didn't constitute an insurrection or even widespread rioting. Nonetheless, it marked a qualitative break with normality. Those who favored the intensification of struggle faced off against the powerful forces of order. Anarchists in the Puget Sound were able to identify those forces as enemies and confront them as such, opening a space in which social upheaval could begin. Without the strategic involvement of anarchists, the situation would not have developed as it did.

Yet anarchists and the new allies they found were unable to keep those moments of rupture open. It's important that we analyze soberly why this happened and what we could have done differently, rather than chalking it up to the inevitable death of temporary momentum. The police, whose hands had been tied by their leaders' fears of further antagonizing the public, regained their ability to use legitimized violence by conspiring with the forces that recuperate social struggles. When Rick Williams took the side of the city government against the enraged demonstrators — when the media set the stage on which the police could portray themselves as martyrs — when reformist and authoritarian groups announced that the fight was over or that anarchists were irresponsibly reckless or morally

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<sup>28</sup> Text available here: [pugetsundanarchists.org](http://pugetsundanarchists.org)

known John Williams was especially angry, holding a black flag throughout the march, yelling at the cops and banging it on the street in front of them. A few people from Seattle graffiti crews came; despite the heavy police presence, at least one took the opportunity to paint anti-cop slogans on the opulent walls of downtown.

Still, much of the 15<sup>th</sup> was a repeat of the unfortunate events of the 4<sup>th</sup>. Turnout was small, and police simply smothered the demonstration. Black bloc participants had decided ahead of time to play a defensive role, using reinforced banners and sticks to help hold the street when the police tried to push the crowd off it. But when the cops used their bikes as mobile barriers, anarchists were forced to join the rest of the crowd on the sidewalk. In frustration, most of the black bloc parted with the demonstration before it had even left downtown. The crowd then marched up the hill toward the East Precinct. By now the route had become routine. When it reached the precinct, a line of riot cops was waiting. The march moved up and down some of Capitol Hill's busier streets, losing more participants along the way, until finally a small group gathered at a nearby park, still chanting slogans.

People felt dispirited. It seemed the old Seattle had returned — the Seattle of April 9, 2010, the Seattle where nothing happens. No one bothered to write a reportback about the 15<sup>th</sup>, and the frequency of callouts and assemblies dropped drastically.

Nonetheless, something concrete remained from the period of unrest. Days after the March 15 demonstration dispersed, leaving anti-cop leaflets scattered on the ground, posters adorned the walls of Seattle advertising a benefit dinner for all those arrested during anti-police demonstrations. The dinner was held at the new anti-authoritarian social space in Seattle, *Autonomia*. The dinner was crowded and new friends spoke excitedly about everything they had seen, about the photographs projected on the wall from all the demonstrations,

Anarchists acted with urgency to counteract the corporate media's uncritical validation of Birk's account of the killing. One informal group produced a condemnation of the killing hours after it occurred, before police had publicly released Williams' identity.<sup>18</sup> Anarchists organized a rally on September 3 on a high-traffic corner near a college campus and a busy part of town. Participants displayed anti-cop banners and passed out hundreds of leaflets explaining the situation to passersby, many of whom hadn't known what happened or had believed the lies propagated in the media. The rally was followed by a short march to the precinct.

Eventually, the particularly egregious details of Williams' death forced the mainstream media to tell the story of what truly happened. They still looked for ways to justify the murder — for example, emphasizing Williams' record of minor criminal convictions.<sup>19</sup> But no attention was ever paid to the most shocking fact: Williams was only one of five people murdered by police in the Puget Sound that week.

— August 31, police shot to death David Charles Young, age 23, in Federal Way. Police opened fire on him on the basis of the supposed theft of a Ford F20 pickup truck. His father said: "He didn't deserve to die. They murdered an unarmed man."<sup>20</sup>

— In Spanaway, on August 31, King Ramses Hoover, age 27, was tasered to death at a house where he was staying as a guest. While tasing Hoover, police put him in handcuffs and bound his feet. The cops later blamed his death on drugs — not electrocution.

— On September 3, Richard Sims was shot to death by Tacoma police. Police say he was wielding a knife, although witnesses disagree.

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<sup>18</sup> arcticcirclecollective.net

<sup>19</sup> seattletimes.nwsourc.com...

<sup>20</sup> seattletimes.nwsourc.com

— On September 4, in Gold Bar, Adam Colliers, age 25, was tasered to death for “causing a disturbance.”

senting us, how could we deal with their role in isolating us? If we had not already made the connections necessary to keep ourselves from being isolated, wasn't it too late to make them now? If the dramatic acts of February 16, 18, and 26 had not inspired a continued street presence in March, what would be the effect of the dispiriting experience on the 4? It was not just the shrewd maneuvers of our enemies that ended the period of heightened struggle, but also our inability to counter them.

### **March 15: The Moment of Upheaval Ends; The Active Struggle Continues**

Nevertheless, the effort of March 15 should not be regarded as a total failure. The plan introduced an international tradition of demonstrations against police brutality on this day to the Northwest. In Seattle, anarchists shifted the focus of the demonstration, announcing on posters around town:

Traditionally, the day is titled “International Day Against Police Brutality” but this definition is limiting. We are calling for a demonstration “Against the Police.” The brutality of the police is an inherent part of their role as the guard dogs of the bosses and the rich; it is not simply an abuse of power, but a symptom of power itself.<sup>26</sup>

The callout emphasized that the struggle was bigger than any individual cop. Ian Birk and John Williams were not even mentioned. This strategically foregrounded the agency of the participants and their own rage against the police. As the poster explained, “taking to the streets on our own terms is a step toward building resistance to the police on a practical level.”<sup>27</sup>

Despite the repression of March 4, many new people still showed up for the demonstration. One woman who had

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<sup>26</sup> pugetsoundanarchists.org

<sup>27</sup> pugetsoundanarchists.org



## The Third Assembly

The terrain was changing rapidly. The previous courses of action no longer seemed adequate, and many people felt disheartened. Anarchists needed to look carefully at what was happening and reformulate.

The Third Assembly to Address the Problem of the Police took place a few days later on March 8. Unfortunately, participants failed to use the space to analyze how to counter our enemies' most recent moves. This could have been for several reasons. First, the simple matter of fatigue: after a month of several actions a week, each involving material preparation, arrests, and days of jail support, many admitted that they were tired and looking forward to taking a break. Many new faces did show up for the third assembly, promising fresh energy, but the conversation was more confused and meandering than in the past. There seemed to be general agreement that, as the last demonstration had been utterly suppressed, a new tactic must be tried, but the emphasis on concrete proposals for action had been lost. After an introductory summary of the preceding events and a short analysis of recent developments, the dialogue quickly filled with vague recommendations of what people *should* do. *What if we blockaded a highway? What if we occupied a politician's office?* Because these ideas had not been developed before the assembly, and because no one was taking responsibility to actualize them, the assembly ended after everyone was tired of talking without having set any new course. The only proposal was for a demonstration that had already been planned for March 15. It would prove to be the last demonstration of this period.

In the final analysis, the third assembly might have failed to develop a coherent strategy simply because the anarchists in attendance either did not see the situation changing around them or could not theorize a way to proceed. If we were committed to shunning the media, and they were committed to misrepre-

## The First Assembly

Despite anarchists' understanding of the role police play in capitalism, many felt totally unprepared for five murders in one week. Posters, banners, and leaflets seemed insignificant in the face of this escalating war. The killing spree was unfolding so fast that by the time the story of one victim was on a leaflet, anarchists were back in front of the computer reading about another killing. In groups around kitchen tables, in bars, at cafés, and on buses, friends discussed what to do.

An informal anarchist collective made a public call for an anarchist assembly<sup>1</sup> to address police violence on September 21. Many anarchists in the Puget Sound had never been to such an assembly. It was clear that local anarchists would need to experiment with the form — that the success of the assembly model elsewhere could not simply be duplicated in this context. The stated intention of the assembly was “to increase the level of joint activity, coordination, and face-to-face communication among already established anarchist networks.” The assembly was to be explicitly “not a space for the planning of events but rather [...] an opportunity for projects to be announced, for proposals to be stated, for connections to be made, deepened and expanded.” The call was addressed to anarchists, anti-authoritarians, and autonomists but was open to others as well, with some exceptions: “Arguments for police reform are not welcome at this assembly. If you choose to express good faith in this violent and oppressive system you will be asked to leave. The only requirement for attendance at this assem-

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<sup>1</sup> [arcticcirclecollective.net...](http://arcticcirclecollective.net...)

bly is the desire for the total abolition of the dominant social order that commits violence against us — including the police force. To this end, political parties are unwelcome — including so-called ‘revolutionary’ ones.”

The assembly took place in three stages. First, participants presented ongoing projects contributing to the anti-police struggle. Then they analyzed and discussed the situation, focusing on concrete proposals for action, time for which was reserved in the third phase of the assembly. Emphasizing concrete proposals discouraged vague statements about what “should be done” as well as attempts to develop concrete plans *during* the assembly. Participants were expected to propose plans for action that they had prepared in advance and that they were committing to carrying out with whoever else was interested. The assembly closed with informal discussion among individuals and groups attracted to each other’s analysis and proposals — an opportunity to exchange information for future dates to flesh out plans.

The first assembly was a success, socially speaking. Around forty people participated and made new connections. However, very few of the plans proposed were carried out.

to people’s banners so no one else could read them. Horse and bike cops lined the streets so that when the march finally moved it couldn’t take the street. Unmarked cars circled the block.

Many people felt discouraged and began to leave. As they did, the police cornered one demonstrator with their horses, announcing that he was under arrest. As the rest of the crowd came running with cameras, the cops panicked and attacked. As the horses charged into the front of the crowd, more cops rode their bikes into the back of the crowd, trapping them. One demonstrator was punched repeatedly in the head by a cop on a horse, then thrown to the ground and piled on by several more cops. He was arrested and taken to jail on charges of assaulting an officer. Soon after, the rest of the crowd dispersed.

The only violence at the demonstration was carried out by police. Nonetheless, the media used the protest as another opportunity to justify the repression of demonstrators: “The protest was yet another display of violence in Seattle following the announcement that former Seattle Police Officer Ian Birk would not be charged for the shooting death of John T. Williams. The acts of violence are in contrast to desires of the Williams family, who have repeatedly spoken out against anarchists and violent protesters.”<sup>25</sup>

The next day, sixteen people were surrounded by nearly two dozen police in cars and on bicycles as they left the jail after bailing their friend out. The cops insisted that they identify themselves; when they refused, six were arrested on suspicion of trespassing at the jail. This was a blatant attempt to identify demonstrators. The six spent the day in jail and were released that night. The charges were eventually dropped.

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<sup>25</sup> [www.seattlepi.com...](http://www.seattlepi.com...)

“violent” protestors: “I’m honored that a lot of people are touched, but sad that they are going overboard [...] If you want to protest, do it peacefully and honorably. Yelling at the police just disrespects yourself and it disrespects my brother.”<sup>21</sup> Rich O’Neil, the president of the police union who had defended Ian Birk as “a good young officer” after Birk murdered John Williams, commended Rick Williams for being “reasonable.”<sup>22</sup> The John T. Williams Organizing Committee, speaking for dozens of other organizations and purporting to speak for many activists, also issued a statement denouncing violence — not of the police, but of demonstrators.<sup>23</sup> Their last organized rally was on February 19; their primary maneuvers at this rally were to distance themselves from the “violence” of the demonstrations of the last few days, and to encourage people to channel their anger into voting the city prosecutor out of office.<sup>24</sup> After the city entered into settlement talks with the Williams family, the Organizing Committee did not call for any peaceful protests, either.

Those who continued to try to organize demonstrations faced more than the SPD anti-protest squad. Now that the groundwork had been laid to justify repression, the SPD would spare no expense. It didn’t help that the divisive efforts of corporate media and activist groups had whittled down the numbers wanting to take to the streets; many, it seemed, had been convinced that the fight was over. As night fell on March 4, the scene unfolding at Westlake looked dire: there seemed to be at least two cops for every demonstrator. The cops invented reasons to harass anyone they could. Some busied themselves writing tickets for people smoking too close to the public park, or for tossing leaflets, or for not having their bike lights turned on. Others positioned their bikes as close as they could

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<sup>21</sup> [seattletimes.nwsources.com...](http://seattletimes.nwsources.com...)

<sup>22</sup> [www.seattlepi.com...](http://www.seattlepi.com...)

<sup>23</sup> [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

<sup>24</sup> [www.komonews.com](http://www.komonews.com)

## The Forces of Order and the Maintenance of Social Stability

Meanwhile, the forces that maintain order wasted no time springing into action. Before John T. Williams was even buried, several different entities were enacting schemes to make sure nothing got out of hand. Like anarchists, they recognized that during wild expressions of social rage, a space can open in which anything can happen — including the dismantling of their own tenuous grasp on power.

The city government strategy was designed to defuse conflict while granting killer cops impunity. Even the corporate media described the court proceedings initiated by officials as empty gestures. The Firearm Review Board found the shooting unjustified; the official legal inquest into the shooting found that the shooting was unjustified; the Seattle Police Department Office of Professional Accountability made motions to fire Birk from the force. Police chief John Diaz called Williams’ murder a “huge mistake” and admitted Birk should be “held accountable.”<sup>1</sup> Later, the deputy chief called the shooting “egregious.”<sup>2</sup> The effect was for those in power — city officials, the chief of police, and the rest of the Seattle Police Department — to publicly distance themselves from Birk, the “bad apple,” knowing that nothing worse than unemployment would befall him.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.capitolhillseattle.com...](http://www.capitolhillseattle.com...)

<sup>2</sup> [www.seattlepi.com...](http://www.seattlepi.com...)

The long process provided a cooling period for the rage over Williams' murder. While in Oakland the dates for killer cop Mesherle's verdict and sentencing were long anticipated and contributed to the mounting tension, the decision to not charge Birk at all came suddenly and unexpectedly in the middle of an otherwise ordinary week of political theatrics. City prosecutor Dan Satterberg, who made the decision to not charge Birk, brought a prop to his press conference — a blown-up excerpt from city law on a giant note card — to explain that, whatever one thought of the slaying, the law simply wasn't written in such a way that the city could prosecute. "A jury would be compelled to find Officer Birk not guilty. There is no evidence to show malice. There's no evidence to refute Officer Birk's claim that he acted in good faith."<sup>3</sup>

City Mayor Mike McGinn held a press conference the next day to sternly but sadly nod his head in agreement: "I know the public finds the lack of action frustrating. So do I."<sup>4</sup> Eventually, the city paid \$1.5 million to the Williams family, with McGinn admitting that the point was to buy back "the trust of the community."<sup>5</sup> The only other state-sanctioned option was to undertake the hopeless task of trying to replace the politicians and laws. This is, after all, a democracy.

The Seattle Police Department had more plans for rebuilding their bridges to society. First, SPD established a direct line of communication to Williams' family, giving them the personal cell number of a sergeant they were instructed to call with any concerns in the aftermath of their relative's murder. According to a police spokesperson, this move was unprecedented in Seattle.<sup>6</sup> In another novel tactic, the SPD leaders participated in

capitalism and the Western way of life all over the globe,"<sup>15</sup> the media portrayal provided the police an opportunity to frame themselves as helpless victims of anarchist violence.<sup>16</sup> A few months later, in an attempt to curb militant demonstrations, the police in Denver used the excuse of a small firecracker being thrown at police to beat and arrest demonstrator Amelia Nicol, charging her with two counts of attempted murder of a police officer, criminal arson, possession and use of explosives, and inciting a riot.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, in Seattle, a firework tossed at a police car was described in the media as if it were a bomb: "the explosion could have injured [the police] or other persons nearby."<sup>18</sup> The police had already portrayed themselves in the media as being "under siege."<sup>19</sup>

On March 3, a day before the demonstration, SPD spokesperson Sean Whitcomb addressed the press about anarchists. Anarchists, it turned out, had been the ones repressing people — not the police, who were strong proponents of civil rights: "It concerns us that certain people are trying to exercise their first amendment rights and are being marginalized by a well-organized group of a few people that are looking at this as an opportunity to commit wildness and mayhem." While some amount of protesting is to be expected, things had simply gone too far: "We understand that there is a lot of anger and some amount of distrust [but] the Williams case is done. We're not gonna let some anarchists destroy the city that we're sworn to protect."<sup>20</sup>

Days earlier, mainstream media had widely reported that John Williams' brother, Rick Williams, was denouncing the

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<sup>3</sup> [www.seattlepi.com...](http://www.seattlepi.com...)

<sup>4</sup> [mayormcginns.seattle.gov](http://mayormcginns.seattle.gov)

<sup>5</sup> [www.komonews.com](http://www.komonews.com)

<sup>6</sup> [www.seattlepi.com...](http://www.seattlepi.com...)

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<sup>15</sup> As reported on the Glenn Beck show: [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

<sup>16</sup> Seattle police had already described themselves as "under siege" of anti-cop sentiment: [pugetsoundanarchists.org](http://pugetsoundanarchists.org)

<sup>17</sup> More information: [denverabc.wordpress.com](http://denverabc.wordpress.com)

<sup>18</sup> [www.komonews.com](http://www.komonews.com)

<sup>19</sup> [pugetsoundanarchists.org](http://pugetsoundanarchists.org)

<sup>20</sup> [pugetsoundanarchists.org](http://pugetsoundanarchists.org)

sticks and paint bombs. As the cops closed in again on a busy commercial street, another fire extinguisher was let off to create a smokescreen, and the mob dispersed. The cops chased and managed to arrest three people, but never filed charges, likely due to a lack of evidence.

## March 4: The Changing Terrain

Now the shape of demonstrations had been entirely transformed. As new groups adopted anarchist tactics, the momentum had no sign of slowing down.

The next call for a demonstration did not come from anarchists but from a group of teenagers who had started a new Seattle Cop Watch. The callout, posted to the local anarchist news site, used language similar to statements written by anarchists. It avoided calls for “justice” or “accountability”; it stated that the demonstration was against *police*, not police *brutality*. It was also the only callout to call explicitly for a black bloc. The group organizing the demonstration adopted the assembly model anarchists had developed to discuss plans and specifically invited anarchists they had met in the ongoing struggle.

Meanwhile, the SPD were paying careful attention to the role anarchists played in sharpening anti-police activity. Their previous, heavy-handed response — breaking into a local anarchist house and assaulting its occupants — had only kicked the hornet’s nest. If they couldn’t move to block the further proliferation of anarchist ideas and tactics, the situation would continue to spiral beyond their control. Thus began a combined effort from the police and other forces of social order to separate anarchists from the rest of demonstrators and crack down on them.

The February 26 action was nationally reported as a violent riot. Although anarchists delighted in hearing an hour of targeted attacks played up as part of “a coordinated effort to end

a “restorative healing circle”<sup>7</sup> influenced by Native traditions with Williams’ family members in an attempt to curb “fear and mistrust” between the Native community and Seattle police. The police spokesperson explained this as an opportunity for the police department to apologize without affecting any legal outcome. The William’s family’s attorney described this meeting as a success, noting that the circle created a feeling of “connection.”<sup>8</sup>

But what about the rest of the outraged populace? Might the police finally lose good citizens’ loyalty? Through organizations like the East Precinct Crime Prevention Coalition — whose mission statement explains that it exists to foster “partnerships among residents, schools, businesses/merchants, the Seattle Police Department, social service and government agencies”<sup>9</sup> — SPD organized community forums for police spokespeople including Chief Diaz himself to speak with self-appointed representatives of society.

The media also stepped up efforts to maintain order. The same newspaper that had heightened tensions by publishing the secretive police union papers then sought to resolve that tension by implementing a pressure release valve. In January, *The Stranger* began promoting its own “police accountability forum” under the name “Where Do We Go From Here?” The event was little more than a press conference for SPD and their friends — the chief of police, the head of the police union, the mayor, a city council member, and the head of the police-controlled Office of Police Accountability. A lawyer in favor of filing charges against Birk and a representative from the ACLU were the wild cards on the panel. The lawyer was later reported to be the “harshes critic” of police on the panel; she called the police “unprofessional” and suggested

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<sup>7</sup> The Police Department’s record of the minutes of this meeting are available here: [seattletimes.nwsources.com](http://seattletimes.nwsources.com)

<sup>8</sup> [www.seattlepi.com...](http://www.seattlepi.com...)

<sup>9</sup> [www.sngi.org](http://www.sngi.org)

that the SPD should list police infractions on its website. The police chief acknowledged that the website “needed work.”<sup>10</sup> According to *The Stranger*, discourse following murders like Williams’ is often “brash, with little dialogue between the police, community members, and the officials empowered to make policy changes.”<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, protests organized ostensibly to confront the violence of the SPD also functioned to prevent the situation from getting out of control. Most of these protests were organized by the John T. Williams Organizing Committee and the October 22<sup>nd</sup> Coalition.

The John T. Williams Organizing Committee was a coalition of various groups focused on winning small reforms in police department operations: cultural sensitivity trainings, policy changes, appointed liaisons with the Native community. They also asked that “consequences for Officer Birk may include loss of his job and badge but must at least take him off the streets until he has demonstrated he understands the newly instituted protocols developed in this process.”<sup>12</sup> Their strategy was to work with city officials, as demonstrated by the committee’s decision to deliver their demands to a city council member along with a gift — an offering of peace.<sup>13</sup> The Committee’s analysis of police violence indicated that they accepted the brutality of the larger system. They shied from the word murder, instead referring to Williams’ death as “a tragedy that could have and should have been avoided,” if police could “serve to increase public safety and peace in our community by employing a variety of de-escalation tactics with the greatest potential to avert violence against the public and the police.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> [slog.thestranger.com...](http://slog.thestranger.com...)

<sup>11</sup> [slog.thestranger.com...](http://slog.thestranger.com...)

<sup>12</sup> [www.facebook.com...](http://www.facebook.com...)

<sup>13</sup> [slog.thestranger.com...](http://slog.thestranger.com...)

<sup>14</sup> [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

## February 26: Action Against the Police and the Prison World

Little more than a week passed before anarchists took to the streets again. This time the occasion was the February 26 and 27 West Coast Days of Action Against the Police and the Prison World They Maintain,<sup>14</sup> called in solidarity with the struggle unfolding in Seattle.

In the weeks leading up to this, anarchists in the Puget Sound had increased coordination between different crews and cities, gained new comrades in the streets, increased their material preparedness for conflict, and held the streets in several successful mobilizations. People wanted to organize something bolder than a clandestine attack in the dead of night.

At 8 p.m., about two dozen people converged at the intersection where John Williams was murdered. Dressed in black with their faces masked, some cut down nearby construction fencing and threw it into the intersection, while others ran caution tape across the streets, blocking traffic. Still others held black flags and a banner — *Cops Murder Everywhere! Bite Back!* — or painted anti-cop slogans on nearby walls and the street itself. Just as the event started, a police car happened to pull up to the intersection, escorting a prisoner to the nearby West Precinct. The cop stayed in his car but demanded that the intersection be unblocked. An individual responded by approaching the car and unloading the entirety of a fire extinguisher at it. The cop left the scene immediately.

Within minutes, more police cars arrived and the anarchists headed toward the Capitol Hill neighborhood, cruisers in tow. Incredibly, they managed to lose their police tails as they painted slogans on the walls, handed out and threw leaflets, and attacked the windows of retail shops and banks with

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<sup>14</sup> [pugetsoundanarchists.org](http://pugetsoundanarchists.org)

black bloc. The horses reared back and retreated; they wouldn't cross the smoke. Demonstrators took advantage of the confusion to scatter and evade the police. Despite scattering, they were far from through.<sup>13</sup>

The youth marching in a bloc separate from the black bloc took it upon themselves to lead a charge back through downtown toward the jail, snaking around blocks to avoid the police. They had been inspired by the stories they had heard about anarchist noise demonstrations and wanted to create their own. Riot police formed a line to block the way, but this time the demonstrators forced their way through, despite more pepper spray. When they arrived at the jail and the noise demonstration commenced, the silhouettes of prisoners inside could be seen banging on the windows.

In the end, the demonstration followed the path of the one two days previous, up to the East Precinct only to be blocked by many riot police, and then up and down busy streets and eventually back down toward Westlake. A (perhaps former?) organizer for the John T. Williams Organizing was seen fearlessly taunting and yelling in the faces of riot cops and blocking busy lanes of traffic by himself. On the way, different groups that had splintered from the original demonstration rejoined it. At one point, members of the RCP began to try to lead the crowd in chants. Youths carrying black flags responded with their own chant: *Boring leader! Boring leader!*

Despite arrests and diminishing numbers in the street, the night's events had people feeling alive and afire. Demonstrators had proven that the unrest of February 16 wasn't a flash in the pan. What would happen if we just kept doing this?

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<sup>13</sup> One person was arrested and charged with the breaking of the cruiser window; but without any evidence that he was involved, it seems unlikely the charges will stick.

Despite apparent political differences, anarchists did attend Organizing Committee protests, bringing their own banners and leaflets and seeking to make connections with other angry groups and individuals. The primary significance of these protests was the involvement of John Williams' family and other members of the Native community. His brother, Rick Williams, spoke at most Organizing Committee events; the Committee had moved to make sure the Williams' family was on their side almost as fast as the politicians of the SPD had. Most of the other speakers at these rallies were mainstays from Seattle's liberal-left NGO scene. These activists — some salaried — lectured the crowd on responsibility, civility, and non-violence. In a context where no violent tactics had yet been used except by police, this betrayed the activists' fear of losing control of the situation. Their aim was to channel others' anger into their strategy to achieve meager reforms — a strategy doomed to fail. As shown in Oakland and in Greece, the state only turns the legal system against murdering police to the extent that it fears an actual upheaval. But the managers of social revolt fear this as much as city officials do.

The other organizing group did not shy away from the language of social upheaval. They proudly announced *A revolution is what we need!* But their revolution stank of authoritarian politics. The October 22<sup>nd</sup> Coalition is a national organization that promotes annual protests against police brutality. From their website, it is difficult to discern who exactly is behind the group; but in Seattle, it is evident that O22 functions as a front group for the Revolutionary Communist Party — a Maoist cult of personality based around leader Bob Avakian, known for remorselessly capitalizing on unrest to swell their party ranks or at least sell a few newspapers. The revolution that they claim will solve the problem of police violence does not include the abolition of the police; it is merely a changing of heads of state authority.

Because the RCP's agenda is to grow their so-called revolutionary party, they actively discourage revolt in the streets, which is always to be put off for some future, official Revolution under party management. Shortly after the murder of John T. Williams, O22 called for a protest to start at the intersection where he was killed. About seventy people gathered for speeches from Williams' tearful and enraged relatives. The crowd then began to march on the sidewalk towards the nearby SPD West precinct. RCP members pushed their newspapers and used bullhorns to try to lead the crowd in chants for "justice." A small but vocal group of anarchists began to shout those on bullhorns, and chants of *Cops, Pigs, Murderers!* and *No Justice! No Peace! Fuck the Police!* quickly became more popular with the crowd. The pace of the march picked up as it neared the precinct, and some participants took to the street. The energy had shifted from quiet mourning to palpable anger.

The precinct building appeared unguarded. For a moment, it seemed the crowd would charge it. However, the energy was headed off by a series of amplified speeches that turned the demonstration into an audience rather than an active group. Protest leaders implored the crowd not to be "violent" or "ignorant." One speaker even suggested that the solution was for police to use tasers<sup>15</sup> more often, or at least shoot people "in the knees" first. The anti-climax was a recorded speech from Bob Avakian played over the loudspeakers. The crowd quickly dwindled, and those who remained wore expressions of confusion and embarrassment.

Anarchists had been eager to push the limits of RCP-organized demonstrations in order to create new potential for revolt; but after this dismal experience, most were discouraged from even crashing O22 events. If nothing else, it was

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<sup>15</sup> Remember that several of the people murdered by police in the Puget Sound in the prior week were killed by tasers, not gunshots.

demonstrators were adopting black bloc tactics. While anarchists had previously been the only ones seeking to escalate things, on the 18<sup>th</sup> many others arrived with plans and masked faces. Many people brought their own black flags, so they were spread throughout the crowd rather than concentrated in the black bloc. One group of youth came wearing bandanas over their faces representing different gang affiliations but marched in a bloc, symbolizing their dedication to overcoming divisions in order to fight the police together.<sup>10</sup>

At first, the demonstration passed through parts of downtown that previous protests had not visited. The crowd walked against traffic through streets clogged with cars, making it difficult for police to follow. Journalists tried to approach the black bloc with cameras but were chased off. The night was alight in the eerie red glow of the street flares carried and thrown by some demonstrators.

The mob didn't wait for a line of riot cops like the one from two nights earlier to strike. Some masked demonstrators, not in black bloc attire, lobbed bottles at the police. Police reported that they had an undercover in the crowd near one of the bottle throwers, but he was afraid to act due to the militancy of the demonstration.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the undercover was discovered by members of the black bloc, struck in the head with a stick, and chased out.<sup>12</sup>

A rock shattered through the back window of a police cruiser. The officer inside it jumped out in a panic, leaving the car to drive into the police van in front of it. The crowd cheered, some jumping up and down in celebration.

The police tried to cover their shame with a torrent of pepper spray, but the crowd wouldn't relent. As cops on horseback began to charge the demonstrators, smoke bombs flew from the

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<sup>10</sup> Reported on here in the section titled "February 18<sup>th</sup>: More Militants Get Organized": [blackorchidcollective.wordpress.com...](http://blackorchidcollective.wordpress.com...)

<sup>11</sup> [www.seattlepi.com...](http://www.seattlepi.com...)

<sup>12</sup> [pugetsoundanarchists.org](http://pugetsoundanarchists.org)



Instead, the stalemate withered the energy of the mob, and differing thoughts as to how to proceed led to smaller groups splintering off and looking for busier streets to march down or other ways to approach the precinct. Ultimately, a dwindled march returned downtown and reoccupied the same intersection that had been blocked by a few people in January. People remained in the street as midnight approached; no one was arrested.

## February 18: Birk's Resignation Means Nothing

Whatever the limits of February 16, it was unlike any protests in the recent history of the Puget Sound. This brief flash of activity could not be the conclusion of the struggle. We felt compelled to maintain momentum and increase our material preparedness. Now that we knew there were sparks of discontent, we moved to lay tinder around them by setting a time and place, inviting as many people as we could, and staving off the extinguishing forces of social order. We had to create the same situation again — but this time bring gasoline to the flames.

An opportunity came immediately: the same day demonstrators had swarmed across the city, Ian Birk announced his resignation from SPD. Anarchists responded quickly with another anonymous and open call for a demonstration: “Another Rally at Westlake — Birk's Resignation Means Nothing!”<sup>9</sup>

Although only about half as many people turned out for the demonstration on February 18, the crowd was fiercer and more prepared to fight. The cops, too, seemed readier to clear people out of the streets, but the demonstration proved capable of defending itself. This was partly due to the increased preparedness of the black bloc, but also because non-anarchist

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<sup>9</sup> pugetsoundanarchists.org

encouraging how dissatisfied everyone was with this kind of protest.

In January, O22 called another demonstration on the final day of the court's inquest into the shooting, this time in the heart of downtown Seattle after dark. Fewer people gathered, including a very small group of anarchists with a banner and leaflets that criticized calls for justice and accountability:

The outcry for the prosecution of Ian Birk for murder — for the power of the law to bring down its heavy hands upon the murderer — reinforces state power. “Police accountability” is a contradiction of terms. The police are the overt, violent front of a war that is waged against us in innumerable ways. They maintain the social order as it exists: all of us below and one percent at the top. They are slave drivers of our everyday lives who uphold the interests of the elite. The police exist precisely to act without accountability. -*There is No Justice — Just Vengeance*<sup>16</sup>

In contrast, members of the RCP were handing out glossy, yellow cards that read *COMMUNISM: Why We Need It*. One party member was rebuffed by a young man as she tried to hand a card to him. She responded in a tone betraying the memorization of talking points: “But what do you know about communism? Is the Soviet Union real communism? Is China?” He quickly fled the demonstration in exasperation.

The attempted management of the protest continued to tire the crowd throughout the evening. The strategy for the march, the event managers announced, was to proceed through busy areas in an attempt to draw more numbers. But no passersby paid attention to the small procession. After the crowd subverted the chants of those holding bullhorns — changing the answer following *What do we want?* from *Justice!* to *Dead cops!* — the sidewalk march throughout downtown was halted for a reminder: *This is a non-violent protest aimed at building a mass movement!* The anarchists very nearly left at this point — the

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<sup>16</sup> Text available here: pugetsoundanarchists.org

course seemed set for as disheartening an outcome as the previous rally.

But something unexpected happened. As the march wandered through the crosswalk of a busy intersection, a woman — unknown to the anarchists, unaffiliated with the RCP, and holding only an umbrella — refused to leave the crosswalk. She blocked a city bus, which in turn blocked several lanes of traffic, which quickly backed up for blocks. While she stood there defiantly, she began to mock the other demonstrators for their passivity and cowardice. The few anarchists quickly joined her in the intersection. Next, a handful of street youth, known to congregate on that corner, walked into the middle of the street and sat down. As one stepped off the sidewalk, another cautiously commented, eying the nearby cops, “Hey, I don’t want to be around here if something is gonna go down.”

His friend replied, “I don’t want to be around here *unless* something is gonna down!” Talking to the anarchists, some of the youth explained that John Williams had been a friend of theirs, and that tonight they were ready to fight and go to jail in his honor.

Dismayed at their failure to corral the demonstrators and their anger, RCP members used their bullhorns to announce that this blockade was not the organizers’ intention and that anyone in the street could be arrested. But it was no use. Now passersby were interested in what was happening. Anarchists insisted that the bullhorns be passed around to allow anyone to speak out against the police. One woman came running from down the block and upon reaching the bullhorn announced, “I just want to say — fuck the police!”

Contrary to organizers’ misgivings, no one was arrested when the police arrived. In fact, the cops seemed at a loss. After repeatedly people to leave the street, they resorted to dragging people out of the clogged lanes of traffic. Incredibly, folks simply stood up and returned to the places they had been sitting. It seemed that, out of fear of further agitating the

they explained, wanted to divide the march and keep it under their own control. As the crowd began to turn up the hill with the bloc, the RCP organizers could only meekly follow. Their monopoly on anti-police protests in Seattle was over.

On the way to the precinct, more anarchist leaflets were spread all over the Capitol Hill neighborhood. Some demonstrators tried to pull down the fences around construction sites to drag into the streets; others implored drivers and people on buses to join them. As the crowd passed busy bars and cafés, demonstrators chanted, *Out of the bars! Into the streets!* But those crowded around tables and drinks were mostly content to watch through the windows, some flashing, of all things, peace signs. The demonstration moved on. *They can keep their bars. The streets are ours!*

As the demonstration came within a block of the precinct, a line of riot police came into view, blocking the way. The police were clearly scared of what might happen if hundreds of enraged demonstrators reached the station. The crowd didn’t try to change course, instead swelling into the intersection in front of the row of shields, clubs, and helmets. Tension rose. The crowd roared louder and louder, individuals fighting to the front of the mob to scream in the faces of cops who tried to maintain calm but visibly winced as some demonstrators yelled, “Chris Monfort was right!”

The crowd wanted to break through the line and swarm the precinct, but no one seemed prepared to. This was one error anarchists made that night: there were many flags, but not enough projectiles. If the paint bomb hurled on April 9, 2010 had been thrown on this night — followed by several more — there could have been an explosion. To be sure, this lack of material preparation was not the only limitation that kept the situation simmering rather than boiling over; few in the crowd had any experience fighting cops in the street. But many people were waiting for the first brick to be thrown.

Now, their numbers headed to Westlake to join the swelling mob. All the previous protests had drawn less than 100 participants. The crowd on February 16 was huge by comparison, although probably under 1000. It was hard to estimate the number because more people were still arriving as the march left the square, taking the street despite innumerable police on bikes and horses and in unmarked cars.

Marchers took over every lane of traffic. The black bloc was a massive, shifting shadow in the sea of bodies. Some people weaved in and out of the crowd, writing anti-cop slogans on street signs and walls with markers, unmasked but unconcerned about the cops pedaling nearby, powerless to intervene. The first stop for the demonstration was the intersection where Williams was murdered. After a moment of silence, anti-cop chants grew and grew, and again anarchist leaflets whirled through the air, saturating every inch of the crowd. One woman picked up a leaflet from the ground and remarked to a friend, "What are these anarchists about, anyway?"

Immediately, another demonstrator responded, "Here, read this," handing her a leaflet entitled "Anarchists: What the Fuck Are They Doing?"

The demonstration snaked uphill toward the East Precinct that had been visited by protesters only days earlier. Suddenly, there was a division. The RCP organizers headed in the opposite direction of the masked anarchists and announced through their bullhorns that they would be leading the march back down to Westlake. The anarchists, they explained, were trying to bring the march to the precinct, where things would escalate. That was dangerous, and people shouldn't follow. For a moment, the demonstration froze between the two poles. Others, including high-school-aged radicals not in the black bloc, stood in the middle and began explaining the situation to the rest of the demonstrators. Like the anarchists, they had not come to walk in circles, but to act on their rage. The RCP,

population, the authorities had ordered that force should not be used. The best the cops could do was to use their bodies to form a line, allowing one lane of traffic to remain open as the modest intersection occupation carried on for hours.

This showed that people were angry but had been bored by the innocuous and manipulative protests of reformists and authoritarians. Sadly, anarchists had allowed those groups to dominate the discourse surrounding police violence. And the hands of the police seemed bound — they were temporarily incapable of the repression they typically could exert. It was time to act swiftly.

## The Second Assembly and the Emergent Strategy

While the so-called revolutionary wing of the managers of social revolt wanted to exploit a potentially explosive situation to expand their ranks, anarchists had no interest in exploiting anyone's death to push a political program. This distinction is fundamental. Anarchists in the Puget Sound sought to act in solidarity with those resisting the violence of the police — not out of moral obligation, but because we recognize that our struggle is the same. We act on our own rage, for ourselves, against the forces of domination in our own lives. We don't demand "justice" or "accountability" — we want total freedom. If we act according to our values, our actions will resonate with new comrades, whom we trust to act on their own values and analysis. We don't offer a prescription; we don't seek to control the explosion. We want to lay the detonator.

Like the forces of order, anarchists recognized the opening of a gulf between police and the rest of society. In contrast to them, we sought to deepen the divide. But we were unsure how to proceed; our enemies had gotten the jump on us. When the call went out for the Second Assembly to Address the Problem of the Police, there was some skepticism. Few of the plans discussed at the previous assembly had materialized. An assembly is only a temporary, open space for comrades to shape ideas and strategies. The empty space of an assembly alone cannot generate energy and determination.

Nonetheless, the assembly was planned, in hopes that with more practice anarchists would learn to use this new tool. It

heard by many who hadn't attended the demonstration. Anarchists had loudly announced the end of passive protest. But would anarchist action become only another spectacle, with most of those who cheered remaining on the sidelines? What could mobilize the rage of a dormant population?

In only a few days, anarchists got an opportunity to find out. On February 15, reports circulated that the next day the city prosecutor would announce that no charges were to be filed against Birk. If there was a moment for large-scale anti-police revolt, this was it. Anarchists needed to act quickly to announce a time and place for a large gathering that could go in any direction as the night unfolded. Any hesitation and the moment of conflict would be framed and constrained by the forces invested in maintaining social peace. At the time, there was much talk of the use of Facebook to spread the popular uprising in Egypt weeks earlier. Anarchists in the Puget Sound are understandably skeptical about social media tools; nonetheless, they decided that Facebook might be the best way to reach large numbers of strangers quickly.

The callout was posted to Facebook anonymously as an event page. It was carefully worded so as to be as open to as many people as possible without compromising the anarchist analysis of the police. There was no call for self-restraint, no particular demands. The statement simply asked people to converge at 6 p.m. at Westlake Center, the closest thing to a public square in downtown Seattle and the starting point of many protests, in order to act on their rage. Overnight, the event page grew from 400 invites to over 8000. A commenter on the page asked, "Who is organizing this?"

Another responded, "At this point, we all are."

Confirmed attendees online and actual bodies in the street are two different things. But as evening fell, it was clear that the night would be different than the small protests of the past. The John T. Williams Organizing Committee and October 22<sup>nd</sup> Coalition had both called for their own protests a bit earlier.

ular rains, so the anarchist message lingered in the street days after the bodies in the demonstration had moved on.

The demonstrators moved from the market through downtown and up Capitol Hill toward the SPD's East Precinct. As they advanced, people ran to join from the sidewalks, grabbing anarchist leaflets and black flags to carry. Some announced that they had been friends of John Williams, aiming their rage against the rows of bike cops following along.

As the demonstrators approached the precinct, police cars fell in behind them. People dragged newspaper boxes and other debris into the street to hinder them. As at previous demonstrations, the momentum increased as the crowd neared the police station — but this time, it wouldn't be stifled.

As the bloc moved in on the precinct, officers stood by to guard it. Suddenly, an individual stepped forward and began banging a hammer on the windows of a parked police cruiser. It bounced harmlessly off the rear window; the next blow shattered the driver's-side window. The attacker then moved back into the bloc. For a second, the police stood still, in shock. Then, they came running in to snatch the window smasher. But as they closed in, several received quick jabs to the head from the sticks bearing black flags and fell back, stunned. More cops moved in, and the bloc dispersed.

## February 16: No Charges for Birk

The individual who attacked the cruiser escaped,<sup>8</sup> though the image was dramatically captured by a local photographer and quickly proliferated throughout blogs, print, and news media. Although anarchists in the Puget Sound were critical of attempts to work with corporate media, the prominence of the image ensured that the shattering of the police window was

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<sup>8</sup> Officers did manage to grab two demonstrators at random. Both were charged with misdemeanor obstruction; the charges were later dismissed.

followed the same form as the first assembly, and roughly the same number of people attended. Opening analysis focused on two points mentioned above: the managers of social order had not wasted any time getting the situation in order, but the police seemed to have their hands tied by their negative public image. Three strategies were presented: first, to subvert the orderly demonstrations organized by the October 22<sup>nd</sup> Coalition and steer them into a more conflictual direction; second, to confront the police wherever they attempted to keep ties to the society that was losing faith in them; and finally, for anarchists to organize their own demonstrations.

The assembly did not represent any constituted group or function as a formal decision-making body. There was no vote or attempt to reach consensus. Rather, a loose trajectory arose in an open discussion among comrades who tied their analysis to concrete proposals. Individuals were free to flesh out nuances and debate disagreements without pressure to resolve them. One advantage of this approach is that it produces mutual understandings of different and even conflicting positions. Individuals' natural tendency to gravitate toward the analyses and proposals that resonate with them reinforces respect for a diversity of tactics. In hindsight, it's easier to see how these different tactics proved mutually beneficial; what seemed like a series of different plans later revealed itself as a cohesive strategy.

# The Strategy in Practice: Anarchist Action as a Destabilizing Force

## Burning the Bridges They Are Building

It happens every time an uncontrollable fire breaks out. The cowardly people who will talk with the police and work with the police come out into the light. Some snitch to the cops, some call them for protection, some lead us toward meetings where we can “talk it out.” Full of vain dreams that cops can be good, they bow their heads, take the side of the police. They, like all cops, live in fear and are ruled by fear. They, like all cops, are the absolute enemy. -*The Police Are the Absolute Enemy*<sup>1</sup>

The risk of calling for an anarchist presence at *The Stranger*'s police accountability forum was that anarchists might accidentally participate in the proposed dialogue. The forum was organized precisely to invite the enraged to shape their rage into a civil, contained commentary; to present it to the panel of cops and politicians who would, in turn, regurgitate it as a new, improved justification for policing. Citizens would return home gutted of rage, knowing they tried, hoping they'd been heard.

There were two ways to avoid this trap: to present our call for the abolition of all police as something completely alien and hostile to the conversation unfolding within City Hall, and — with any luck — to destroy that conversation. We decided to try both.

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<sup>1</sup> [pugetsoundanarchists.org](http://pugetsoundanarchists.org)

actually attack the despised police; to push the tension in the city toward a point of rupture. This succeeded on all counts.

Inspired by the second assembly and by the previous week's noise demonstration, many anarchists attended. The black bloc gathering at the starting point of the demonstration grew until it numbered between thirty and forty. Many participants carried black flags draped from thick hardwood dowels. The same anarchist banners reappeared, emphasizing that the events about to unfold were aimed at police and the justice system in its entirety.

This time, O22 organizers didn't have time to argue for demonstrators to stay on the sidewalk. As soon as the march began to move, the black bloc took the streets and others followed. Police had been quick to push around a similarly-sized bloc at the April 9 demonstration in 2010, but this time they kept their distance. While the April 9 bloc had seemed unsure of itself, on this day the black mass was animated by a palpable rage, screaming *Hate! Hate! Hate! The Hate inside of me! All cops are Bastards! A-C-A-B!* The rage was visibly reinforced; many in the bloc were carrying clubs of their own.<sup>5</sup>

The march moved quickly through downtown Seattle, heading first to the Pike Place Market, Seattle's busy open-air market. Anarchists had brought leaflets emblazoned with the headings “Police Are the Absolute Enemy”<sup>6</sup> and “Justice Is Impossible — and So Are We”<sup>7</sup>. These were distributed by the thousands, both by passing them to people and by tossing them into the air. As it was a windy day, they spun like confetti around the demonstration, caught by the currents and carried far off. Some of them remained glued to the sidewalk by Seattle's reg-

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<sup>5</sup> At one of the later demonstrations in March, to general amusement, a cop was overheard warning others: “Be careful. Those flagpoles aren't just... they're not just flagpoles. They're also... uh, sticks. Not unlike ours.”

<sup>6</sup> Text available here: [pugetsoundanarchists.org](http://pugetsoundanarchists.org)

<sup>7</sup> Text available here: [pugetsoundanarchists.org](http://pugetsoundanarchists.org)

him. He returned to his car to call in backup and await instructions. As the noise continued, people began to smash nearby surveillance cameras.

Another police car arrived and tried to box the crowd in, but the demonstrators effortlessly walked around it, the cops inside afraid to face the group. The demonstration circled the jail a few times while more police cars arrived. Another officer attempted to approach the demonstration; a metal trash can was hurled at him, and he hastened back to his car. After half an hour, the demonstration suddenly dispersed, leaving the cops in their cars waiting obediently for orders. No one was arrested.

The three who had been beaten, threatened, and arrested were released the next day. The charges against them were dropped at their first court appearances.

The significance of the house invasion was clear: the police were threatened by those who wouldn't play the game of "accountability." Because of the swift response from anarchists, the cops' plan had backfired. That night many different crews from the Puget Sound, some of whom had never worked together before, discovered that they could face down the police — even on the enemy's home turf.

## For the Attack: Subverting Submissive Protests

The crashing of the accountability forum heralded the end of dialogue with police and their apologists. The noise demonstration had forged new connections in the street. The next step was to set a new trajectory for the coming demonstrations.

Following the second assembly, the first opportunity was another protest called for by the October 22<sup>nd</sup> Coalition on February 12. Anarchists intended to take the streets and hold them; to find new comrades in struggle; to shun symbolic protest and

The night of the forum, an explicitly anarchist manifestation gathered outside City Hall with banners, black flags, and leaflets. The banners read *Cops = Murderers*, *Judges = Executioners*, and *Police Violence Is Not an Accident — All Cops Are Bastards*. The leaflets were uncompromising, articulating the media's role in defending the function of police in the violence of capitalism. This group openly shunned dialogue with the police but communicated with other forum attendees.

Meanwhile, a handful of anarchists donned their best courtroom clothes and attended the forum with the intention of disrupting it. As the chief of police began to speak, one sharply dressed person after another stood up to interrupt him, bombarding him with epithets. The moderator meekly tried to quiet them, but couldn't. After this, many more from the audience who were not anarchists also refused to politely wait their turn to speak. Again and again, objections from the crowd derailed the panelists. Many people walked out and encouraged others to do so. Banners and signs were displayed across the stage calling for the resignation of the chief and the jailing of Birk. The rows of uniformed police in attendance watched, powerless, as the fragile bridges to society their leaders were trying to build went up in flames. While anarchists were not behind all of this, their unhesitating defiance set the tone for the whole event.

The anarchists gathered outside decided to move their banners, chants, and leaflets inside. Bandanas went over faces, but there was a pause — no one wanted to be the first to step into City Hall. It was a regular participant from a Seattle workers' and tenants' organization, Seattle Solidarity Network<sup>2</sup>, who first stepped into the forum, unmasked. The skills learned in demand letter deliveries to the offices of crooked bosses and corrupt landlords had found a new use. The others followed, and chants of *Cops! Pigs! Murderers!* echoed off the high ceiling

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<sup>2</sup> Seattle Solidarity Network is not explicitly anarchist but was founded by anarchists and operates on anarchist principles. libcom.org

of the government building. The forum ground to a halt again. Police and security came running to block the mob, journalists to snap photographs. The situation was finally defused by John T. Williams' brother, Rick Williams, who announced, "I came here to listen to these people! Quiet!" Many of the disrupters were unsure of how to proceed. The media was poised to announce that anarchists were disrespecting the wishes of the Williams family. Some argued briefly with Rick Williams, but most simply filed out, tossing the remaining leaflets into the air behind them.

The anarchist critique had not appeared as merely one of many political viewpoints rationally competing for speaking time and new adherents, but rather as a weapon. When their enemies began to rationalize, the anarchists aimed this weapon, took a deep breath, and lodged it deep in the throat of dialogue itself. The conversation sputtered, gurgled, and collapsed. In the next week's print edition, the editors of *The Stranger* didn't so much as mention the failed attempt at conciliatory communication they had tried to orchestrate. Their competitors announced that the forum had been a "failure."<sup>3</sup> The head of the police officers' union later complained in *The Guardian* that "people refused to be quiet!"<sup>4</sup> Now, anarchists had to move to take advantage of their winded opponents — to deny them any opportunity to regain an air of dignity.

## A Home Invasion and a Noise Demonstration

We have nothing to lose and everything to gain; them, quite the opposite. If they want us to be silent, we scream! If we are pushed, we push back. If they talk of reform, we talk of destruction. If they want to "Ian Birk" us, we want to "Chris Monfort"

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<sup>3</sup> seattletimes.nwsourc.com...

<sup>4</sup> seattletimes.nwsourc.com...

them. -*The Police Must Go*, distributed the night of the noise demonstration

Just two nights after the crashing of the accountability forum, the cops struck back. Some anarchists who had been involved were having a party at their house when a cop car pulled up. An officer approached and stated he was looking for one of them in particular — an anti-police activist with a visible presence in several communities. The cop said he fit the description of a suspect wanted in a supposed burglary investigation. The comrade in question had slipped into the house before the cop approached, and the friends on the porch refused to allow the cop to enter.

The cop left, but returned a few minutes later with reinforcements. The party was continuing inside when suddenly the police forced their way in through the windows; they attacked the occupants of the house, punching one in the face, and arrested three on flimsy assault charges. As the man they came looking for was carried out, one cop yelled at him "I will Ian Birk you, motherfucker!"

Friends quickly arranged bail and jail support, and many people spent the day waiting at the jail for the arrestees to be released. When they still had not been released that night, anarchists called for a noise demonstration outside the jail.

To everyone's surprise, about fifty people gathered — a larger crowd than the anarchist presence at any of the preceding demonstrations. Because the speaker system malfunctioned, the only noise was the sound of flag poles banging against walls and street signs and the screams and chants of the crowd. Nonetheless, the roar that assailed the concrete walls was tremendous. It was around 10 p.m. — lights out in the jail — but on several floors, the silhouettes of hands could be seen in the windows, waving back enthusiastically.

One cop car appeared. As the occupant exited the car to approach the mob, individuals ripped apart the grating of the jail guards' parking garage, flinging the bolts and hunks of metal at