

Reportback from the Port Blockade in Tacoma

The Boat That Wasn't Blocked

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Reportback from the Port Blockade in Tacoma

The contradictions deepen, contract, morph, stretch, swell, strain, until, in this world of death, they erupt, and the dead make their daring prison-break into the future — the possibility of life, land, freedom, and return. On October 7th, whether they knew it or not — certainly their enemy didn't — the Palestinian resistance engaged in what would become the beginning of the Final Intifada. No longer shall the meek inherit the earth, but by any means necessary revolution until victory. Like Vietnam, Cuba, and Algeria before them — the Fedayeen were there for them all — the armed struggle of guerrillas fighting against all of the weapons of hell on earth in the most desperate and decisive of temporalities — if not now, never — when they win, the world will change, and struggle will cascade across a fractured capitalist-imperialist order, as the oppressed of the world take up the possibilities for struggle given to them by the revelation that their oppressors are nothing but paper tigers, are weaker than a spider's web.

In a sense, they have already won, since they have delivered a decisive blow to the material and existential foundations of the world's most brutal genocidal settler-colonial occupying entity — and against all of the bloodthirsty imperial powers lining up to ensure the finality of their project of extermination. The only question for us is, when we scream From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will Be Free, do we mean it? Will we meet the Palestinian resistance in the possibility for revolt they have introduced into this prison world the moment they tore down the walls? Will we go beyond calls for ceasefire, humanitarian aid, and an end to genocide, and bring the war home to fight to defeat US imperialism, the precise cause for the extermination of the Palestinians and their imprisonment within expulsion, siege, and the world's largest concentration camp?

In Oakland, comrades locked down to the Cape Orlando, a genocide boat that has been deployed before by the US to transfer weapons to the Middle East and is now supplying the armaments the Israeli Occupying Force is utilizing to massacre and exterminate Palestinians in their quest to finish the Nakba. Our Bay Area comrades on short notice delayed the boat for 8 hours, and calls were quickly spread to Block the Boat when it docked in the next port in its route towards genocide and ethnic cleansing. The exact time was unclear, but we all remained flexible, converging upon the Port of Tacoma from everywhere along the west coast with the certainty that this time, we wouldn't merely delay the boat, we would stop it in its tracks, for we had forethought, planning, supplies, maps, affinity group coordination, and a militant spirit to confront the genocidaires in their abyssal logistics of death.

Comrades had learned from the Olympia and Tacoma port militarization resistance, and the battles of 2006 – 2007 wouldn't be repeated but surpassed. After the ceasefire marches, sit-ins, and symbolic displays of solidarity in the hundreds of thousands, after the Palestine actionists' spectacles of sabotage of Elbit and other manufacturers of death, after the incendiary expansion of the struggle to Stop Cop City into internationalist terms of solidarity as attack, and after quiet nights of anonymous spray-paint, banner drops, wheat-paste, shattered windows, and scorching accelerant, we were all here together with an exact material aim, the urgency to accomplish it, the numbers, energy, and desire to succeed in it, and, despite unfavorable terrain, an acceptance of the collective risks involved. So why the fuck did we stop?

The basic action as imagined and executed by the main organizers — Samidoun and AROC-Bay Area, with auxiliary support from Tacoma DSA and Tacoma Mutual Aid — was a picket line at every of the three entrances into Pier 7, the deepest into the port. Every entrance was already blocked, however, by Tacoma Police, Port security, presumably DHS and border patrol, the Coast

Guard, and the military. The action, then, would be directed towards the ILWU Local, who would be able to cite “Health and Safety” concerns in order to honor the picket line and refuse to load the genocide boat.

Without direct access to the boat, all the Block the Boat action would be able to accomplish was to force the issue of worker solidarity and direct the masses of participants (over 1,000!) to walk in circles repeating the chants “protest marshals,” conspicuously dressed in yellow vests, relayed through megaphones, breaking up the monotony of the picket with updates from their anonymous sources about the status of the blockade, instructions to stretch or break, some speeches, and many self-congratulatory declamations of success. Throughout the day, focus was emphasized for shift-changes when workers would be potentially entering the pier to load the weapons, and on a single worker who apparently was wanting out of the operation, refusing to participate in the logistics of genocide. Snacks, waters, canopies, rain ponchos, all streamed in, while hundreds continued to walk and to walk and to walk in circles.

The more militantly-minded, meanwhile, were off gathering rocks, rail ties, tires, pallets, and concrete slabs to build impromptu barricades at the entrances, where behind the fence the police and port security were waiting in intimidation, flashing their lights in the fog. Graffiti emerged on every surface, window, shipping container, and concrete barricade – which the organizers were not pleased about, and intervened often to, but still it proliferated. Rocks and other ballistics were gathered in dumpsters and placed in strategic areas for potential confrontation. The main rail line in and out was barricaded. So sure was everyone of the inevitability for confrontation – since a blockade is by nature a disruption of crucial logistics that must at all costs continue to flow, the weapons of the state would surely be used to ensure the weapons of the state reach their destination – that the hundred or so militants present just waited, preparing themselves, gathering the energy and preparing the surroundings for battle.

But, what the organizers didn’t tell us – didn’t tell anyone until it was far too late – was that the blockade as it was imagined and executed, as a picket line to prevent the ILWU workers from loading the weapons, was useless in the first place, since the military was already there to do the work of loading the weapons and were loading the weapons both from boat and from pier while the militants were constructing barricades and the protesters were marching in circles. There were rumors that since the dock workers were unable to operate the cranes, the military was only able to load small arms, instead of the Strykers, Iron Dome batteries, or Markava tanks that were actually destined to be loaded from JBLM caches. There were many rumors, but the boat was loaded, and left.

What the organizers did tell us is that our action was a resounding success, that we made a material impact to stop genocide, that we should be incredibly proud of ourselves, that we fucking did it, we accomplished a blockade – but they also told us since the boat was loaded, we should all leave. Everyone was confused, startled, stunned, deflated, disappointed, and left. Either the boat had been loaded, and we didn’t even complete a port blockade, or the boat hadn’t been fully loaded, and if we left there would be nothing stopping the boat from being loaded. Yet, the boat left regardless. The boat wasn’t blocked. Worse, the opportunity was wasted in order for fraudulent displays of “success.”

If the military had been loading the boat the entire time, why didn’t we change tactics, why didn’t we reorient, why didn’t we find opportunities to engage, why didn’t we escalate the possibilities of resistance? According to one worker, in the morning of the action ILWU local leadership informed longshore workers that the military personnel already present within the terminal

would load the boat, which, if true, would mean that the point of the action — to prevent the ILWU workers from loading the boat — was decided the morning the action began. According to another worker, it was indeed the military that loaded the boat, which, further, potentially violates the ILWU contract. Why didn't we act?

Even the militants bought into the misinformation from the organizers that we were doing something materially impactful, and since we were doing something materially impactful, the situation would inevitably escalate until we could be decisive and seize the moment for attack. Except we weren't impacting anything. So the moment would never come. While we were waiting, we could have been acting. If we knew that from the moment the action began, the ILWU wasn't going to load the boat and the military would take over, we could have shifted. If all of the weapons were already behind the fence, we could have focused less on barricades to block the entrance of trucks or trains and more on possibilities of bypassing the fence. Even the indigenous-led kayak action to block the boat was manipulated into thinking their action was a success and left the water. When the organizers called for dispersal at what felt like the height of the action's power, we could have taken that moment further. We didn't.

When questioned about why we were disbanding a powerful action before its power had even been realized, when the opportunities for engagement were all around us, when innumerable more supporters were pouring in from the north and the south, an "organizer" in a yellow-vest told us, "What, you think we can take on the US military?" Later when asked why we were leaving at the height of the action, they said "As a Palestinian, I'm feeling very escalated in this situation, and I'm going to walk away from this conversation." Can we remind these solidarity organizations that it is nothing other than the Palestinian resistance that is taking on the US military and its support for the Zionist occupying entity? Can we remind these solidarity organizations that it is nothing other than the Palestinian resistance that is escalating the global situation towards victory, freedom, liberation, and return? If you won't do what's possible to stop a genocide, please do not fucking hinder those who will try.

If the goal was to Block the Boat, to prevent the boat from being loaded with weapons, to prevent the boat from leaving, we massively failed. If the goal was to delay the boat with a large spectacle and display of solidarity for a ceasefire, an end to the genocide, and a free Palestine, we accomplished that spectacle. This is a form of solidarity that has its own importance — as a symbolic display. Not as a material intervention into the logistics of genocide. The anger, rage, and desire with which we entered the action still remains — we still wish to meet the Palestinian resistance in a global Intifada against genocide and its imperialist support. with which we entered the action still remains. This rage is real. While the Tacoma action wasn't our moment, the feeling of being around others who shared that rage in the midst of the concrete logistics of genocide convinces me that we will find countless other moments. If we can delay a boat transporting the weapons of extermination and leave with unimaginable potential, what else can we do, alone and together? The targets are everywhere. The secret is to begin. In every city, we should call for militant demonstrations for the freedom of Palestine and the victory of the resistance. Multiply sabotage. Multiply blockades. This time, let's mean it.

From the River to the Sea.
Intifada Until Victory.
Victory to the Palestinian Resistance.
Palestine Will Be Free.

The Boat That Wasn't Blocked

Another reportback from the Tacoma Block the Boat action

On November 3rd, we got word of the inspiring action down in Oakland where people were blocking a Merchant Mariner ship delivering weapons to Israel, we were filled with joy and excitement! Not long after, we got word the ship was going to be coming to the Port of Tacoma on Sunday and a call went out for people to come block the boat. Our crews got together and began to plan what we were going to do, but many of these plans got thrown off by constantly changing times from the organizers and worries about peace policing based off an event in Olympia on Saturday, as well as people talking down “side organizing” and telling everyone to “just listen to the organizers.” Eventually the final call went out for Monday at 4:30 in the morning and we sighed a heavy sigh at getting up so early and got ready to do just that.

We got up around 3, got ready and headed out. Our crew trekked through Tacoma for an hour to arrive to the picket, it felt like walking into Mordor and along the way we breathed in what felt like a lifetime of cancerous materials. While we were expecting to basically walk into a trap as we rolled into the zone and saw all the people and just how chill it all seemed to be we were relieved. We went to go look around for other crews and by the time we all got together there was about a 30 person consolidated black bloc with probably another 30-40 of scattered individuals and smaller crews who came in bloc.

Much of the day was spent standing around in the cold and rain while running off 3 or 4 hours of sleep. At some point we all found a nice tree hide out to chill in and other people got a barrel fire starting, and hours later more long term infrastructure like hot food and drinks and tarps and tents began to appear.

Throughout the day the numbers didn't dip below a couple hundred and at their height seemed close to a thousand, and even in the cold and rain the energy was really high and a lot of people seemed ready to throw down if something were to happen (and we'll return to this point later). People literally walked in circles and chanted nonstop for hours, like not even new people the same people. Just seeing it exhausted me more but you know what good for them.

There was some graffiti that went up and from what we saw very minimal peace policing — though we have heard from others who did experience it more intensely — and when people began barricading the rails and gates and stashing rocks for a potential confrontation many people were excited and jumped in to help us and other people within the broader picket started advocating for more barricades.

Ultimately the day and all the present energy and excitement petered out. There was a lot of conflicting information coming from the organizers, first that we totally blocked the boat from getting loaded! Then the military was loading it! Then only 7 of the 20 containers could get loaded! Then it was all loaded okay time to go home. There was also lots of conflicting information about what we were actually there to do. We came to block a boat, and so did many others, but some organizers said that wasn't realistic (the eternal excuse of cowardice) and then others say we were simply there to show solidarity with the workers? Either way, they called off the action and by the time we realized what was going on we tried to talk both with them and with others in the crowd to get people to stay — as far as we were concerned as long as the boat was there we should be there and the water blockade was on the way — but it was too late, numbers were thinning and the police who were stationed in their riot gear behind the fences were eyeing all of us and we had to retreat.

We affirm the objective that many came with in mind — to block the boat — and that we all failed to do so not only makes the action a failure but explicitly makes us murderers for not doing all we can to stop the shipment. We will not pat ourselves on the back and invent victories, especially not when we look at the genocide before us. If we are going to stop a genocide, we are going to jail, to prison, we are getting felonies, we are getting terrorism charges, we are going to ruin our lives and we must face these facts down, make peace with them, and do what needs to be done. All the “victories” are meaningless in the face of bombs, the excuses of “safety,” of “realism” of “you’re making us look bad” don’t mean shit when we let weapons get delivered to murder people.

But we cannot wallow in guilt and defeat. We accept our failure and we must think about moving the struggle further, in a combative direction that can secure material victories by stopping and physically destroying the infrastructure and materials that prop up the genocide. To this end we offer the following critiques of the organizers, but also of us who are just as much — if not more — to blame for those weapons that we directly watched leave that port.

On the Organizers

The critiques of Organizers and Organizations have been repeated infinitely over the years, but this is for a reason and we will again repeat it here.

These groups put out calls with militant language, chant things like “resistance is justified” and “intifada revolution” and give people the impression that they are going to engage in militant direct action, yet all people find time and time again are highly controlled and marshaled events that pose no real risk to the war machine. This shouldn’t surprise anyone, these large organizations with very public organizers are under intense public and legal scrutiny and are structurally incapable of escalation — if they are interested in it at all.

Many of the organizations that were involved were the usual scene of movement grifters — PSL, WWP, ANSWER, RevCom — who aren’t interested in anything but building their particular groupsicle and we still remembered how all over the country these groups explicitly played counter-insurgent during the 2020 uprising.

The other groups we are less familiar with and as such are going to operate under the assumption there there is some sincere desire to escalate and make a direct impact. Which is why we cannot understand why there was a call for everybody to go home. When we have a grasp on power, like shutting down a major port and doing economic damage, making the call for you as the organization to go home shouldn’t translate into a call for everybody to go home. Not only do liberation movements need to cultivate a sense of initiative for more and more people to get involved and take more decisive action, but so many people were still coming and excited about digging in. Even if the ship left, continued economic damage to the Port of Tacoma could stop them from shipping out military equipment again like what happened with the Port of Olympia during Port Militarization Resistance in 2006 and 2007, or how the rail blockades in Olympia in 2016 and 2017 failed to stop those specific loads of fracking proppants but sent the port into an economic death spiral from which it has yet to recover and led to the cancellation of future fracking proppant contracts.

We propose that liberation movements need to develop an explicit culture of when their organization or crew decides to call it, to leave it up to the autonomy of others on if they decide to stay or not rather than declaring an action over. People need to learn to accept the risks and

make decisions for themselves rather than play the game of follow the leader which makes for passive, docile movements that cannot think on their feet.

On Us

It's easy to critique others, but we also bare an intense blame for this failure and must do some intense reflection on ourselves to better fight in the future.

The first failure on our part was when organizers called off the initial start time, we should have put out a counter call for an occupation to block the port. While we don't know for sure, its possible that the delay of the boat arrival allowed military scabs to preemptively come into the port and a full occupation from the start could have blocked their arrival in the port and if nothing else would have explicitly set a more confrontational tone.

Second, there was a failure in logistics and many supplies and tools that crews had prepared were unable to make it up. While we had defensive and offensive equipment for us we should have come prepared with more for others — more respirators, more goggles, more helmets, more black clothes. Passing out or leaving out extra equipment for others to grab could have also done wonders to build an energy of confrontation.

Third, we relied way too heavily on the organizers' intel which proved to be wrong or questionable due to "trusted sources" that could not be verified. A comrade with a solid head on their shoulders repeatedly stated whenever we got info or heard rumors that we needed to visually confirm for ourselves before making any moves. On this point many of us lamented multiple times that we lacked scouts or binoculars. If we could have gotten visual confirmation of the boat being loaded — or not loaded! — that we could have shared with other people so they could see for themselves perhaps we could have actually gotten people to storm the port with us.

Fourth we were too okay with half measures. When people told us what was happening was blocking the port we were fine with not escalating. If it works, no point in escalating, fighting and risking arrest. However we should have been skeptical from the start that the police were not attacking. In all of our collective history of struggle when we are actually doing damage and blocking something critical the police *will* attack. Yet they didn't, and then suddenly we heard that only 7 of the 20 containers were able to be loaded. At this point we should have begun agitating the crowd to attack, 7 of 20 is still 7 containers of weapons that will be used to murder people yet we accepted this half victory until suddenly they said everything got loaded and it was time to leave.

Fifth and most critical of all we were too docile. Who gives a fuck about the security team or the plan when there is a clear objective and an obvious way to achieve it that we all came prepared for. We should have yelled more, contested the security team and organizers, agitated more directly, spent more time talking to people that showed up to block a boat rather than trying to convince the organizers of what we came to do. This is probably what cost us the most.

Final Thoughts and Reflection

We cannot wallow in our failures but take lessons from them and move forward. Autonomous rebels and people who left feeling dissatisfied must find each other, talk, strategize and act. We must be bold and ready to act to the gravity of the situation, we must build up autonomous

networks of individuals, crews and organizations that have the capacity to coordinate and the drive to act. This is what the struggle demands of us.

Come out to others demos' and actions, yes, but also don't wait for others — even us — to do what you can do yourself. Call for meetings, call for actions, carry out small night time actions. Expand the struggle. Lives depend on it and as someone once said, the future belongs to the daring.

Black Powder Press Reportback

The Tacoma port blockade yesterday was a beautiful show of solidarity, but a complete failure. Who even needs cops when the peace police will do their job for them for free?

At 5am in the cold and in the dark, hundreds of people wanting to blockade a shipment of weapons to Israel descended on the port of Tacoma. The way the port works is if the union declares the area is unsafe, they call off operations for the whole shift. A big enough crowd blocking the entrances is usually enough, and yesterday it worked basically immediately. Success, right?

The crowd grew and split into several pickets, marching in circles in different parts of the port, with organizers in yellow-green vests keeping people from stepping out of line. A group of riot cops was stationed inside the warehouse on the pier where the boat sat, waiting to try to stop protesters who might breach the fence and enter where boats are loaded. On the outside, the protest managers in yellow vests were constantly making sure nobody was planning to enter the pier.

The atmosphere was generally festive, powerful, and people's anger at the ongoing genocide was apparent. People came to block the port, and keep the boat from reaching its destination. Side goals were also making it cost more and to create an easily reproducible action.

It felt to most like it was working great, but in the middle of the afternoon, the self-declared leaders of the action made a confusing announcement: They told everyone the action was a success and everyone should go home. People were confused and deflated. Was the boat not still sitting there? Were they not trying to block the boat from being loaded?

It turns out that the military had sent in their own workers to load the boat, and the protest organizers had known about it for hours. Had people blocking the march known this, and that marching in circles was for the publicity of the organizers and for nothing more than photo op and a symbolic "show of resistance," things could have transpired quite differently.

Organizers spread misinformation throughout the protest and most people were convinced that marching in a circle and chanting was actively stopping the ship from being loaded or having shipments delivered. When in reality the military already had the shipment in the dock and successfully loaded all 28 containers. Out of fear of police dispersal, people were greatly discouraged and directed to not breach the chain link fence that separated them from the ship. At the end of the day, organizers called the action "over" and sent everyone home despite the ship still being in the dock.

People came to the action to block the boat. People were there to prevent the flow of arms to Israel. People were there to stand up for Gaza and put their own bodies on the line to take action to attack the war machine.

But the peace police took away people's agency. They did whatever they could to take away autonomy from anyone other than the big O organizers. They sabotaged the action to present a false narrative of success when in fact, they had actively prevented it.

How the fuck was that a "victory"? The people of Gaza need the bombs to stop dropping. For the arms destined for Israel to be stopped. In trying to seem respectable we are shooting ourselves in the foot and nothing more. ACAB indisputably includes the peace police.

Do what you can to stop the genocide now. If you're not willing to take action yourself, step out of the fucking way.

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