

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Fighting Terrorism Begins at Home

How and why we used direct action to thwart a fascist rally, and what we learned

CrimethInc.

March 18, 2004

Our story begins at the polar opposite of liberation and self-determination: an utterly apolitical, consumerist macho hardcore show. A former bandmate of mine was on tour with a popular band in the genre, and I went to see them at the rock club where they were opening for another band that had a music video on MTV. There were four fights during their set alone.

With the exception of the few minutes I got to watch my friend making music, I would have felt pretty silly being there—except that, as usual, I had a secret plan. Earlier that day, I had learned that the National Socialist Movement and the Ku Klux Klan were to hold a “white unity” rally at the state capital in a couple weeks—and I was interested in whether anyone else felt like this was a bad thing. I made an announcement about it before their band played, and afterwards collected a list of contacts from everyone who was interested in knowing more. Among these were, shockingly enough, a group of marines and a local part-time police officer; I’d finally

CrimethInc.
Fighting Terrorism Begins at Home
How and why we used direct action to thwart a fascist rally, and
what we learned
March 18, 2004

Retrieved on 7th November 2020 from crimethinc.com

theanarchistlibrary.org

happened upon an issue that could bring people together from as disparate walks of life as these right wing jar-heads and a grizzled, willfully unemployed revolutionary anarchist like myself.

I also met some old friends there, people I hadn't seen in a long time. Though they had little experience with political activism, they were angry that fascists were going to be welcomed into their city, and wanted to do something about it. Perfect. We made plans to meet, and passed the word along to everyone we trusted.

Out of this chance interaction, a planning group formed, which held a series of covert meetings in the days leading up to the fascist rally. For those who care, our group included people of a variety of ethnic groups, genders, sexual orientations, and body types; also, just as importantly, it consisted of a range of participants from long-time militant activists to people who didn't consider themselves political at all. One of my greatest frustrations with political activism as it is sometimes practiced is that in the process of purporting to protect against alienating people, activists alienate everyone who isn't similarly obsessed with radical protocol and procedure. This was not the case in our group: our discussions were informal, we had no membership list, no one needed any prior knowledge of activist culture to feel welcome.

We decided we were going to do our best to prevent the rally from happening at all, or, failing that, to make it as trying as possible for the fascists and the city that was hosting them. But why, you ask—don't the fascists have the right to free speech, just like everybody else? And doesn't confronting them just make their position look more attractive? Before we proceed with the account, let's go over these questions.

First of all, for an anarchist like me, the question of "the right to free speech" is a moot point. Talk of "rights" only makes sense if you accept the existence of an all-powerful state which grants them and can take them away. If you don't believe in recognizing the authority of a governing power that holds all our "rights" hostage, but instead believe that social life has to be cooperatively determined

viduals participating in direct actions not go any farther than they feel confident and comfortable doing; if you get hurt or arrested or otherwise in trouble while participating in a level of engagement for which you are not emotionally prepared, the effects can be debilitating. Far better that you get started slowly and conservatively, building a sustainable involvement with direct action projects that can continue over a lifetime, than rush into an action with wild abandon, have a bad experience, and swear off further participation in such actions. All but one of us had a really empowering, fulfilling time preparing for and engaging in this protest, and the one who came away from it with a sour taste did so in part because he had not prepared himself for the possible consequences of the lengths to which he took his resistance that day. Let's fight, let's run risks and push limits, but let's do so consciously and carefully, as part of a long-term process, so the experiences we gain in so doing will not go to waste!

by those in the thick of it, the question is not whether someone has the "right" to do something, but whether or not what they're doing is a good, socially responsible thing. The government might grant a corporation the "right" to destroy a forest or evict people from their homes, but that wouldn't make it right for us to stand idly by while they did so. The idea that any government can dole out rights impartially is a fallacy, anyway; as those in power inevitably use that power to represent their own interests, we might as well use whatever power we have to represent ours. Besides, the moment the Nazis and the Klan have the chance, they'll be thrilled to prevent people like you and me from exercising any so-called rights at all. Protecting their right to organize towards depriving others of rights, on the grounds that it's necessary to maintain the system of rights, is naive at best, if not outright duplicitous.

As for the "just ignore them and they'll go away" school of thought, that didn't work in Italy, Germany, or Spain a few generations back, and it hasn't worked lately in Europe either, where a powerful new fascist movement has been gaining a foothold. These fascist groups, once allowed to recruit members and get active, quickly begin targeting immigrants, radicals, and others with violence; the only solution that has worked is for activists to block their attempts to organize from the very beginning. In fact, scarcely two and a half decades earlier, a similar rally held by the same organizations in a city only an hour away from this one had ended in the murders of anti-fascist protesters, for which the police never found anyone guilty even though it was obvious who had committed them. Our reluctance to let this rally go unchallenged did not proceed from idle concerns.

Aside from the fascists themselves, we also had a bone to pick with the city. If they had not offered police protection, the fascists surely would not have dared show up to preach their hate and violence, for fear of a taste of their own medicine. As it turned out, the city must have spent tens of thousands of dollars—at the least—to make this rally possible. I know from plenty of experience at

demonstrations that cities usually only spend that kind of money to prevent free speech. Having had some of my own attempts to exercise my “right to free speech” end in tear gas and rubber bullet attacks (which are not cheap!), I found it particularly insulting that the government saw fit to allocate so much tax-payer money to enable the fascists to recruit right on their front lawn. Couldn’t that money have been better spent on education programs or social security, if it had to be spent at all?

What could be in it for them? Could it be that the conservatives in power were glad to offer the public the spectacle of these extreme groups, in comparison with whom they would appear moderate? Regardless, we decided it would be our job to make sure they had to work to earn every dollar they spent on security, and to cost them more than they’d bargained for if possible. This would discourage them from providing protection for future fascist rallies: if they knew the price tag would be even steeper than it had been this time, they might just tell the Klan and Nazis they’d have to go it alone, which would be fair enough. It would also highlight the willingness of the city to go to such great lengths to protect the fascists, which itself deserved public scrutiny. And in the course of our own efforts, we hoped to open a space for others to protest the rally as well, in whatever ways they saw fit.

When you engage in confrontational action, there’s always the possibility you will step on a few toes in the process. There’s a certain kind of activist organizer who gets really offended if everyone doesn’t follow the guidelines his group has unilaterally set; in addition to that, though I’m not one to believe in the myth that the masses are so “moderate” that any kind of militant action alienates them, it can in fact happen that people are intimidated by a masked group whose goals and tactics aren’t clear to them. We discussed the fact that we would be running this risk, and decided that in this case it was worth it: our first priority was not to convert people to our perspective, but to stop the fascists from getting a foothold for theirs. If we did make a bad impression on any other protesters, that

presumably assuming that non-confrontational tactics are always the most popular, and that people of color are the ones chiefly at risk from fascist organizing (when, in fact, people of anarchist and queer orientations, not to mention Jewish heritage, all of whom were present in our number along with people of color, are also significantly at risk from fascist activity). I would argue to the contrary that there were at least one hundred people at the protest that day, if not more, who went explicitly to confront the fascists and their protectors, and who wouldn’t have been there otherwise—that is to say, the best way to involve the greatest number of people is for the broadest possible array of approaches to be applied without interfering with one another. For the most part, we took great care to keep well away from the area reserved for the permitted rally, and did a decent job of not hindering their chosen approach. With the exception of this individual, and a clown (yes, literally, a clown) the mainstream media found to say that it was unfair that our noise was drowning out the fascists’ articulation of their ideas, few others expressed disapproval of the way our actions interacted with those of other protesters.

After the smoke cleared, we met again to discuss what had worked and what could have worked better. Spirits were generally high. We had demonstrated the power of a few individuals to come up with an idea, deploy it in the face of incredible odds, and influence the course of events. Acting on our own initiative, exploring our potential in practice, we had taken on the assembled powers of the Ku Klux Klan, the National Socialist Movement, and the state government, and scored some significant victories. Our initial plan for converging and setting the tone for the day’s had worked, and had we had a little more experience, numbers, or morale, we might well have shut the event down entirely. Beyond this, we had all gotten to know one another much better, and learned a lot about the amazing things we could do together.

Most of the necessary constructive criticism has been covered above, but one point remains to be made. It’s important that indi-

police—we decided against attempting to assail the fascists as they were returned to the parking lot. It was time to quit while we were as ahead as we were going to get, before any more arrests could be made. Those of us in masks and sweatshirts melted into the larger crowd, swiftly changing our clothing outside the view of the police, and then made our way in ones and twos out of the area as protesters from the permitted protest did the same. We suffered no more arrests in this process; we had successfully delayed the state-subsidized fascist rally, decorated the walls of the state political district with politics of our own, fought over a hundred fifty thoroughly equipped riot police, and lived to tell the tale.

Most mainstream media coverage of the event was deceitful, to say the least. They drastically underestimated the number of protesters, misrepresented the atmosphere by describing people as practically being amenable to the fascist presence, and made little to no mention of the way we delayed the rally or the violence with which the police responded. The fact that the mainstream cameras and reporters were the only ones allowed inside the police lines with the fascists was as telling as the spectacle many of us witnessed of the police chief and the fascist top dog smiling and laughing and chatting together behind the police lines.

Underground and independent media coverage was much more thorough and honest. Predictably, there was a post on a website from the white guy from the university mentioned above, arguing that although he understood the value of diversity of tactics, this demonstration had not been the appropriate time for direct action. Such a statement is disingenuous; accepting diversity of tactics means recognizing and respecting that others are going to make their own decisions about tactics and act accordingly, not granting that diverse approaches are acceptable “when I say so”! He argued, essentially, that the most proper role of any counter-rally demonstration was to involve the greatest possible number of people, especially those most seriously affected by fascist organizing—

wasn't going to turn them into fascists; and if everyone associated fascists with chaos and trouble, so much the better. I can imagine the Nazi “Commander” in city hall trying to get a permit next time, and the functionary explaining: “No, last time y'all came here you brought your friends the anarchists, and it was a big mess.”

Finally, apart from discouraging the fascists and unmasking the city's allegiances, this was a great opportunity for us proponents of direct action to put our experience at the service of other rightfully angry people, and get to know each other better in the bargain. As it turned out, by the time the event was over we'd made a lot more new friends than the Klan or the N.S.M. had.

Publicly, we took advantage of a few more social events to announce that counter-rally actions of some kind would take place, and used the lists thus gathered to send out reminders; we also wheatpasted fliers and posted notices on the internet to the same effect. Privately, we worked on strategy and structure. Those of us whose friends had been involved in some of the better-known anti-fascist actions of the preceding years contacted them and asked for pointers. Some of us explored the area and made annotated maps, which were distributed at meetings. We gathered what materials we could, and brainstormed about what approaches to take. We did our best to spread word of our plans to everyone who might want to participate, adding specifics according to the degree to which we felt we could trust them, so as to prevent information from falling into the wrong hands.

Shortly thereafter, we learned that a permitted protest had also been scheduled. Some of us had mixed feelings about this. It meant, on the one hand, that there would be a safe zone for protesters who didn't want to risk police repression; on the other hand, in our experience in this city, whenever a permitted protest occurred it was some distance from the event being protested, surrounded by a thick line of police and metal fencing, and proved to be a disempowering experience for all who participated in it. As all areas except the permitted zone would be locked down by police, it was

likely that the permitted protest would absorb all who showed up and the tone of the day would thus be set by the few who had organized it—which would mean all the energy we had put into our organizing was absorbed by their project, an outcome that would disappoint those who had accepted our invitation to the event in hopes of effectively contesting the fascist rally. To top it all off, organizers of permitted protests sometimes take offense to any other form of protest organized to take place alongside, so we had to be careful not to create dissension just by virtue of acting on our own initiative.

We concluded that we had to find a point at which to confront the fascists that was far from the permitted protest, both for civility's sake and to make sure no one was at risk who did not choose to be. Fortunately, our research had revealed that they would be using a parking lot on the opposite side of the rally site from the permitted zone. Those of us who were prepared for potentially dangerous physical confrontation planned to form a group that would advance on the parking lot. There were residential neighborhoods nearby, which we hoped would be far enough outside the zone of police surveillance that we could gather there and approach with the element of surprise. Once in *mêlée* with the police and perhaps the fascists, this group would stick tightly together, and do everything possible to thwart arrests. As the police had no knowledge of our plans, we didn't expect they would be prepared to make mass arrests, so we figured our primary problem was to stop them from picking off individuals. If we were beset by serious police attacks, we would retreat into the residential neighborhood, maintaining our coherence on the way, and then disperse there where the greatest number of us would be able to escape. If all else failed, we decided we would break up into our affinity groups and act individually to cause disruptions. If we could create an unstable enough situation by any of these means, we expected the rally would be delayed or canceled.

Well, back to the action. At this point, certain that we were not going to succeed in actually shutting down the rally, many of us made our way back up the perimeter towards the parking lot, to enact plan B: go after their cars. At the corner we had occupied before, we were met once again with a line of police, and there was another skirmish, this time involving mounted police as well. There were some blows and angry words exchanged between police officers and protesters—the latter now including a broad diversity of individuals, not just the organized demographic that had initiated direct action at the beginning of the event. Yet again, those the police grabbed were pulled free, but our progress was blocked. All the same, some individuals, moving stealthily outside the mass, subsequently managed to circumvent the police line and infiltrate the parking lot. The tires of a vehicle belonging to a fascist skinhead were slashed, and some scuffling and chasing ensued. The individuals involved managed to get away, but the rest of us on the corner could have done better to support them by making another charge at the police line around this time to create a distraction.

It was shortly afterwards that the day's five arrests took place; all five of them were the result of individuals walking around apart from the masked bloc while still wearing their masks. This made them obvious targets for police. Clearly, we should have gone over that lesson more thoroughly beforehand: wear your mask with the others in masks who can protect you, change your appearance radically when you leave their company. One individual's collarbone was broken in the process of the arrest, thanks to a policeman's overzealous tackling. All those arrested were bailed out of jail by that night; an experienced civil rights lawyer volunteered to take their cases gratis, and is currently in the process of getting them through the legal system with a minimum of hassles and repercussions.

Realizing that our morale was waning, our numbers dwindling, and the most dangerous period of the day approaching—when the permitted protesters would disperse, leaving only us and the

ourselves to form a buffer between the ones with the smoke bomb and everyone else. The inexperienced individual who attempted to hurl the smoke bomb once it was lit failed to get it past the banners, and it was something of a debacle, though no one was hurt (or scared, with the possible exception of said individual). Moral of the story: as my friend's high school band teacher always told him, practice at home!

Others among us took advantage of the sympathetic crowd cover to paint the buildings behind us with small slogans and artwork critical of fascism. Conversations took place, as well: people asked why we were wearing masks, and were generally understanding when we explained it was to avoid being profiled by the police—and, for that matter, the fascists, who were running surveillance of demonstrators for their own purposes.

Perhaps the only decidedly negative receptions any of us experienced came from two of the organizers of the permitted rally. One of them, a white man associated with the flagship state university, had come up to us when we were engaged in our standoff between the parking lot and the rally site, suggesting that we cease our militant activity and join the silent, passive protest in the permitted zone; he persisted in insisting, providing no tactical rationale for why we should give up the gains we had made at that point, until one hotheaded young person finally asked if he was a police officer. The other, somewhat less absurdly, asked the demonstrator with the big drum to stop playing it in the proximity of the permitted zone, on the grounds that it was drowning out their silent protest; for a time, the drummer was silent, out of respect for her request. Some tempers did flare in the midst of the fray, it's true, and it is possible that others exchanged harsh words at some point during the day. It's very important that those of us who practice direct action demonstrate the utmost in civility and sensitivity in the process of doing so, so there will never be any question about what part of our hearts such actions proceed from, or whether direct action activists are generally welcoming and responsible people.

A strategy alone is never enough. As things never go as expected, it is critical to have a structure that can remain useful when circumstances change. We divided into affinity groups, and buddied up inside of those; also, several individuals who were hoping to be noncombatants formed a communications team. Each of them was equipped with a cell phone or two-way radio, and chose an area to patrol or a task to fulfill—taking down license plate numbers from the fascists' cars, for example, or keeping abreast of areas free of police surveillance to which people could retreat if need be. They arranged an internal network so that information could be circulated as swiftly as possible and passed on to one of two contacts in the action-oriented group. During the event, they not only monitored the movements of fascists and police, but also distributed information to all of us when we were spread out.

The night before the rally, some brave souls went out with spray-paint, dressed as civilians. This was a role that could be played by those of us who felt more comfortable acting alone than in the chaos of a big demonstration, and an important one. By morning, the political district of the city, especially the aforementioned parking lot and the actual site of the rally, was covered thickly in anti-fascist graffiti. No matter that the city, clearly hell-bent on their chosen project of being welcoming hosts to the fascists, went to the surprising trouble of sandblasting all the graffiti off by the time the rally was to begin; they were our primary target readership, and now they have one more serious expense to factor into their budget next time they consider welcoming fascists.

Just before dawn, others went to a hiding place that had been scouted earlier and stashed our secret weapons: several 4' by 8' plywood banners painted with anti-fascist slogans. These had handholds cut into them (though after one of us had his hand smashed by a police baton while holding one up, we decided back handles would have been better), and could be tied together at the ends to form a massive, jointed, mobile barricade. Carrying these around our group would make it difficult for police to snatch or beat us, or

for that matter easily identify us or gauge our numbers. They were also festive, and made our goals clear. In the future, we'll probably use plexiglass instead of plywood, since one of them finally snapped in half after too much pressure from police on one side and protesters on the other—but we'll get to that story shortly.

We held a final meeting the morning of the big day, to fill in those who hadn't been present at earlier ones and make some last minute decisions. We picked a convergence point out in the residential neighborhood, and a time we hoped would be just long enough before the fascists would cross from the parking lot to the rally site that we could stop them, but not so far in advance that the police could force us to disperse first, or that too few potential participants in our action would have arrived (since, unfortunately, those promoting the permitted event had announced the protest as starting at the same time as the rally, which would be too late to interfere with it). Until that moment, we would be scattered into couples and tiny groups, in hopes of avoiding premature police attention. Our scouts would inform those of us with communications equipment if anything unexpected developed—say, the fascists were heading to the rally site earlier than expected, or there was already a police presence at the site of our planned convergence—and these spokespeople would pass word around to others, so we could react quickly.

We arrived a couple hours before the rally was to begin to find the entire area swarming with police in and out of uniform, massive metal fencing surrounding the rally site, surveillance cameras set up, snipers on the rooftops, mobile command centers down the block, several officers on horseback and more in riot gear, and even a helicopter overhead. It was intimidating, and there was little sign of other protesters. Our scouts reported that fascists had already arrived, and were fraternizing with police officers in a couple areas; however, there didn't seem to be much chance of catching them alone, so we stuck with plan A.

pitched than the earlier one had been; the police rained blows upon us, and we struck back, lifting the visors of their helmets to even the odds where necessary. One particularly aggressive officer lost his head in the fray and found himself surrounded by us—his colleagues had to snatch him over the fence to safety. It was real pandemonium at times, when police and protesters were mixed up and the lines between them became unclear; I believe at one point I even saw a demonstrator make use of a stage diving technique to get into the action! Once again, those the police attempted to nab for arrests were freed, but we failed to make much headway against their lines. In the end, we lifted the section of metal fencing over our heads and passed it to the back of the crowd, where it was dropped into a pit at the foot of the building behind us so it would not block further advances on our part. This simple disposal of a large segment of the police barricade was gratifying, at least, but it was clear we weren't prepared to break through their lines frontally.

The fascist rally was in full swing, now, with the two dozen of them who had made it out of the parking lot holding their swastika flags and making their speeches, most of which were drowned out by audience noise. The police had prohibited even the few fascist sympathizers who had showed up from passing through their lines, perhaps as a result of our activities; it was only fascist would-be leaders, their children, and the cameras of the mainstream media on the site. Lacking other ideas as to how to interrupt the event, some who had brought smoke bombs attempted to deploy one. The plywood banners that were still in our possession proved useful here; by holding them at waist height, up in the air, some were able to obscure the vision of the police ahead of us (though perhaps not of the rooftop snipers with binoculars) while others attempted to light and throw the smoke bomb. Under the circumstances this was imprudent at best, though, since at that point there were many around us who were not prepared for this level of risk. Some of us, not sure how we felt about what was going on, took it upon

In acting as a small, self-starting group, we had opened up the option of militant resistance to many others, who joined in enthusiastically; but the downside to this was that our group lost coherence within the larger mass. Our banners and banner holders had been separated from one another in the chaos, and we never again that day formed a tight nucleus. A city bus protected by police finally showed up to collect the cowering fascists, and drove off in the opposite direction with them inside. We received reports from our scouts that it was headed to the opposite side of the rally site, on the far side of the permitted zone from where we were; we tried to move down towards it, but moving in any even minimally organized manner through the assembled masses around the narrow perimeter of the rally site proved impossible. We didn't want to move through the permitted zone itself, anyway, so as not to draw heat to those seeking safety there or interfere with their chosen form of protest. This was the point at which individual actions by scattered groups could have taken place to heighten the atmosphere of uncertainty; whether any did is unknown, but certainly not enough did. Best case scenario, we would have had others ready to intercept the bus, but we had not prepared enough for that.

Surrounded by police, with us still hundreds of feet away, the fascists were able to leave the bus without being assaulted by anything more than the jeers of bystanders. Realizing that we had at last failed to prevent them from reaching the site, we changed our strategy: at this point our only hope of stopping the rally was to create chaos that seemed uncontrollable, so we attempted a full frontal offensive. The police barring our path had been replaced by now with officers in full body armor, and officers with tear gas rifles and on horseback stood behind them. The great metal fence was between us and them; it was composed of massively heavy sections, almost inextricably linked together. Amazingly, we were able to get one of the sections free, and pushed forward with it and a couple of our own barricades against the lines of police that immediately rushed to meet us. This confrontation was much more

We were all dressed as nondescript civilians, but carried bandannas and sweatshirts with which to render ourselves anonymous. Walking around the vicinity, we met people we recognized from other demonstrations and shows, and passed on to those we trusted the time and location of our convergence point—and maps, for those who had come from out of town. When the time came, we all made our way to the designated area, doing our best to appear to be nothing more than small groups moving randomly, and hoping not to hear the familiar thunder of helicopters overhead.

The moment was upon us—we pulled up our masks, grabbed the banners, and tied them together as we formed our bloc and made swiftly for the parking lot. There were perhaps forty of us, and we were going to take on at least one hundred fifty police, not to mention the thirty-odd fascists that had occasioned all this trouble. One of us had a great bass drum, with which to maintain morale—morale is critical in such situations, it makes all the difference in what a group feels capable of doing. Others had emergency whistles, which make a loud noise while leaving the hands free (though you should be careful not to damage your hearing with them, if playing for a long time). Later in the day, the drums turned out to be extremely useful for centering our group when it was spread out, and directing motion en masse. More drums and drummers might have been even more effective at these purposes, and at least would have saved our drummer the welts sustained from having to play constantly.

In a couple minutes we were across the street from the parking lot, jogging with our banners around us. At this instant, remarkably, we had the element of surprise on our side: neither the police nor the fascists were expecting us, we were throwing them into an unexpected situation and thus off-balance; the initiative was ours. For the rest of the day, we were not able to recapture this advantage; much of what we accomplished proceeded from the moment when we had it. Arguably, the mistake we made at this juncture was not to cross the street to the parking lot before

the police reached us. In discussions after the action, it came out that those who had thought to shout out that it was time to move across the street held back for fear that there might be undercover police among us who would identify them as leaders. In retrospect, we probably had enough coherence as a group that we could have prevented police from snatching supposed leaders; but the real solution to such a problem is to have the feeling of entitlement to make recommendations more evenly distributed among participants. This happened as the day wore on and all of us developed more confidence; unfortunately, police preparations increased at the same pace our morale did. Strike all at once and go for it while you have the chance, that's the moral of the story.

Be that as it may, in the next instant a line of police charged forward and met us in the middle of the street as we headed for the parking lot. A struggle followed, with them pushing on the banners from one side, and us from the other. A couple of us were struck or dragged by the hair at this point; it's worth pointing out, though this is no surprise, that the police were in fact the ones who initiated violence that day. All those they tried to grab for arrests were pulled back by friends. Partly owing to the general lack of experience in our numbers, at this point we had not yet developed a strong sense of what we could accomplish, so many were not as ready to push the limits as they would be later after they'd gotten accustomed to the situation. Consequently, we were pushed back across the street; but we held our ground there, seizing the corner of the intersection between the parking lot and the rally site and holding it in the face of further police pressure.

A standoff ensued. We stood on the corner, banners up on the outside, with a line of police in front of us and more police massing behind them. The fascists in the parking lot were hiding behind a dumpster, totally out of view and out of range of projectiles. Over the next few minutes, our numbers swiftly swelled, as protesters from a variety of perspectives and walks of life came to join us. In fact, in taking this corner, we had opened up a vast space around

the rally site for those protesters who didn't want to remain in the permitted zone, and scores rapidly filled it. This was definitely one of our accomplishments for the day, that we made it possible for protesters to move around the area at will, exercising their freedom of speech beyond the restrictions of the police cordon.

We had failed to actually meet the fascists in conflict, but now, having demonstrated our readiness for confrontation, we were between them and their rally site, and it was clear to everyone that there would be trouble if they came within range. They remained hidden behind their dumpster, with the police around them for protection, and other police conferred on how to handle the situation, while still others reinforced the line facing us. This went on for perhaps fifteen minutes, until it was time for their rally to begin. It continued for another fifteen minutes, and then another, and then another, until we had succeeded in delaying their rally by a full forty five minutes—no small achievement, under the circumstances! By this time, our group was dispersed within the much larger group of protesters that had gathered at the corner, most clearly understanding that they were delaying the rally by amassing there. Many were shouting furiously at the police for being willing to defend such opponents of liberty. The atmosphere was heated, to say the least.

It's worth interrupting here to emphasize what a different feeling it is to act for yourself with your companions in a situation like this than it is simply to follow the dictates of the police or some other authority. As frightening as it was to struggle physically with armed police officers, it was even more exhilarating to feel that we were acting according to our consciences rather than out of fear or conformity. That sensation, the feeling that your life really is your own and anything is possible, that you experience when you come to see the world around you as something negotiable and engage with it deliberately, is one I wish everyone could taste.