

Ten Reasons to Go Hard on January 20

CrimethInc.

January 12, 2017

Contents

1. What is at stake here is not a single day of protest, but the paradigm of what it will mean to resist Trump.	3
2. The inauguration is an opportunity for a wide range of people to work together, building new networks that could act together for years to come.	3
3. Demonstrators in DC can choose between a wide variety of tactics and points of intervention.	4
4. What happens in the United States on January 20 will have massive repercussions all over the world.	4
5. The price of failure is dire.	4
6. On the other hand, if the demonstrations succeed, we shouldn't let them be a missed opportunity.	4
7. This is our only chance to fight Trump under the laws and police protocol of the Obama era.	5
8. The DC police will have their hands full.	5
9. Anything that happens in DC will be worth 100 actions anywhere else.	5
10. If you can't make it to DC, there are plenty of models for organizing where you are...	6

The inauguration of Donald Trump is right around the corner. Disrupt J20 is publicizing a wide range of demonstrations all around the US on January 20, including a call for an anti-capitalist and anti-fascist contingent in Washington, DC.

But why focus on this particular day, of all days? And why would it be worth driving across the country to a city crowded with reactionaries and police? Here are ten reasons why we think everyone needs to pull out the stops on January 20.

1. What is at stake here is not a single day of protest, but the paradigm of what it will mean to resist Trump.

Right now, people around the US are outraged and terrified at the prospect of being governed by a megalomaniacal buffoon. This is an opportunity to expand the networks of people who are prepared to stand up to the government, but it won't last long. If the demonstrations are basically a rerun of the anyone-but-Bush years in which protesters simply carried signs powerlessly expressing their disapproval, everything that currently feels intolerable about a Trump presidency will be normalized soon enough. On the other hand, if the demonstrations interfere with the inauguration and the maintenance of order, that will help to normalize the kind of resistance that will be necessary to prevent Trump from implementing his agenda.

Whatever happens on January 20 will shape the popular imagination about the era we are entering. It will help to determine what people feel entitled to do, what they expect of themselves and each other, and how they conceive of the long-term horizon of social change.

Trump has benefitted from being able to portray himself as a rebel against the political establishment, a sort of billionaire underdog. This narrative is laughable already, but after January 20, when he and the Republican Party control the federal government in its entirety, there must be no confusion in anyone's mind that they are the establishment, and the real rebels are those who defy them.

2. The inauguration is an opportunity for a wide range of people to work together, building new networks that could act together for years to come.

People from many different organizations and contexts are calling for demonstrations on January 20. For example, alongside Disrupt J20, Ungovernable 2017 is bringing together partisans of Black autonomy and many other groups around the US under the same principles of self-determination and combativeness that motivate anarchist opposition to Trump. If the actions on January 20 go well, new fighting formations might arise that could continue to act together as the Trump era gets underway. When we approach days of action like January 20, it is important to aim beyond the target, understanding such days as steppingstones in the long process of building powerful movements.

3. Demonstrators in DC can choose between a wide variety of tactics and points of intervention.

Some are calling for blockades at the checkpoints around the parade route, in hopes that Trump will ride into office in front of silent, empty bleachers. Others are preparing to rove the city, supporting and defending other protesters and responding to situations as they arise. Still others are looking at blocking the transportation infrastructure. Washington, DC offers countless possibilities for self-organized groups to set their own goals and choose their own targets on their own time.

4. What happens in the United States on January 20 will have massive repercussions all over the world.

Right now, nationalist politicians like Marine le Pen are hoping to ride Trump's coattails to victory all around the world, while people in Mexico, Syria, and elsewhere fear for the policies Trump has promised to implement. If people outside the US see resistance directed against Trump from the first day of his term, that will renew their morale, set an example of what it means to fight back, and give them a reason not to fear or hate ordinary US citizens—which could save lives by discouraging terrorist attacks. It will also show the global ruling class that propelling the most explicitly reactionary and repressive candidate into office only creates havoc and disorder, discouraging them from supporting additional far-right nationalist parties.

5. The price of failure is dire.

Imagine the worst case scenario, in which millions of fans cheer for Trump while fascist gangs beat up protesters around Washington, DC. That would embolden right-wing thugs all over the country, provoking a new wave of racist attacks and recruiting: it would make 2017 the equivalent of 1932 in Germany. At the very least, we owe it to those who are determined to demonstrate in DC to make sure that they are not alone.

6. On the other hand, if the demonstrations succeed, we shouldn't let them be a missed opportunity.

In the best-case scenario, Trump's inauguration will be massively disrupted. Even in that case, however, it is still possible that the message that comes out of the protests will be the kind of reformism that failed so catastrophically under Obama, the same authoritarian liberal politics that set the stage for Trump to come to power in the first place. Everyone who has a thoroughgoing vision of liberation should be in Washington, DC to present it to the world.

7. This is our only chance to fight Trump under the laws and police protocol of the Obama era.

Later, when the Trump administration introduces new laws and surveillance programs and government agencies and FBI operations, it will be too late to build up momentum to resist them. We have to do that right now, while millions of people are angry, before it becomes significantly more difficult to organize. Neither hiding out in secretive closed circles nor behaving passively and obediently will keep anyone safe. If no one puts up any resistance, the crackdown will hit everyone sooner or later. The only surefire guarantee of safety is a powerful movement that can support arrestees and impose material consequences for repression.

8. The DC police will have their hands full.

At the turn of the century, DC police carried out a series of mass arrests in an attempt to suppress “anti-globalization” protests in the city; consequently, they were forced to pay out many millions of dollars in lawsuit settlements. (In one famous instance, two “black bloc anarchists” escaped from a mass arrest of over 500 people by crawling through the sewers, only to miss out on \$18,000 each.) Since then, DC police have been much more cautious in their treatment of protesters. They may change their protocol for January 20—anything is possible—but in a crowded situation with many different protagonists in the streets, it will be difficult for them to isolate demonstrators or to use violence against them without creating a volatile situation. If they are forced to employ tear gas, LRADs, or other indiscriminate weapons with the streets full of rich Republicans, that will be a humiliating defeat for them. It will show the world that—contrary to his promises—Trump’s inauguration does not herald the return of order but a period of intensifying chaos, and that real peace can only come about on mutually agreeable terms, not through the suppression of dissent.

9. Anything that happens in DC will be worth 100 actions anywhere else.

With all the police pressure concentrated on the nation’s capitol, it will be difficult indeed to pull off actions around the parade route—but with the eyes of the whole world fixed on Washington, DC, any effective action that takes place within the city limits will have a tremendous impact. Actions in other parts of the country may enable people to build ties locally, but they will likely be overshadowed in the nationwide narrative by whatever happens in DC. Indeed, if the demonstrations in DC go well, people in other parts of the country will likely be much more enthusiastic about getting involved with local organizing. Likewise, any new tactics that are demonstrated in Washington, DC will spread rapidly around the country.

10. If you can't make it to DC, there are plenty of models for organizing where you are...

...including student walkouts, wildcat strikes, demonstrations, and more. You could decorate your city in advance, or pick a target and carry out an offensive strike to shut down business for the day. Everywhere in the US and around the world, January 20 will be an opportunity to connect with people on the basis of opposition to the regime. Go into the day ready to promote plans for the *next* action, so you can build from one event to the next. Any actions that take place before January 20 will help to build up enthusiasm for it, just as actions immediately after the 20th will help continue momentum. Aim beyond the target!

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