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Blocking the Nazi March in Gothenburg

Using Every Tool in the Toolbox against Fascism

Inte rasist men...

October 12, 2017

On September 30, several hundred fascists participated in a march in Gothenburg called for by the Nordic Resistance Movement (NMR), a neo-Nazi organization that openly professes the doctrines of Adolf Hitler. Over the past year, members of the NMR have bombed several refugee homes and a left-wing bookstore in Gothenburg, while members of the Finnish branch of NMR murdered a passer-by at a demonstration in Helsinki. In Gothenburg, over 10,000 counter-demonstrators utilized a diversity of tactics to block the NMR march from reaching its starting point; although the police were the ones who physically stopped them, previous precedents show that the police will support and protect the neo-Nazis unless forced to do otherwise by grassroots anti-fascist momentum. It should give us pause that neo-Nazis in a country as small as Sweden could produce a rally on the scale of the one that fascists organized in Charlottesville last August. Here, we present an account from one of the many groups that participated in the counter-demonstration.

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*The following report was authored by Andreas of the group
“Inte rasist men...”*

On September 30, the openly fascist Nordic Resistance Movement (NMR) intended to march in Gothenburg. This date was not chosen by chance. They chose it as a result of the year-long debate about far-right publication *Nya Tidens* (New Times) right to attend the annual book fair taking place in Gothenburg at the same time—and also because it was Yom Kippur. NMR has well-documented ties to *Nya Tider*; like others on the far right, they claim that modern literature and media are to blame for the supposed downfall of Western Civilization. Add to this the media exposure from Nazis marching outside the book fair and the opportunity to disrupt one of the most sacred Jewish holidays and you can see why this date was attractive to the NMR.

On the day of the march, more than 10,000 antifascist counter-demonstrators filled the streets of Gothenburg to await the arrival of the Nazis. Among them, a small group of around 50 people, dressed up like members of the Rebel Alliance from Star Wars, clearly stood out. This group was coordinated by the non-profit anti-racist activist and research collective “Inte rasist, men...” (“Not racist, but...”), or IRM, of which I am a member. The plan for the day was to ridicule the Nazis by marching parallel to them and blasting the Imperial March on a huge portable loudspeaker while dressed up like Jedi, X-wing pilots, C3PO, Yoda, and Princess Leia. We sent a box of Darth Vader masks to one of the Nazi leaders before the event, sarcastically inviting them to join our “Star Wars LARP.” Fortunately, we could not execute this plan, as the Nazis were blocked, beaten by police, and had their leader arrested. They didn’t even make it to their planned starting point.

We hope that this text can be an inspiration for others to start their own anti-racist or anti-fascist organizations, or to broaden the scopes and approaches of existing ones. The rise of racism and fascism is global, and we need to share ideas and work together to overcome it. No pasarán!

IRM is a group of eight people and consists of researchers, writers, podcasters, techies, and even a cartoonist. Over our five-year existence, we have amassed a fairly big following, some of who volunteer with us, and we have become something of a household name in Sweden. Our work consists chiefly of researching and exposing the racism, sexism, and homophobia of politicians belonging to the racist Sweden Democrats (SD) party. We estimate that our work has helped remove at least 200 SD politicians from their positions. Of course, in a party like the SD, there's always another racist waiting to step up.

Over the last couple of years, we've also ventured into street activism, which has led to us taking on a larger part of the Swedish extreme-right movement. For example, when NMR marched in the Swedish city of Falun on May 1, we borrowed the German "Right against Right" concept by donating money to an anti-fascist charity based on the distance the Nazis walked. On the day of the march, our activists lined up by side of the planned route, holding signs with messages like "Nazis against Nazis," "A small step for a Nazi, a big step for humanity," and "You march, we donate." The Nazis were not amused. On another occasion, we succeeded in planting a sign with our logo right behind the party leader of the Sweden Democrats while he was being interviewed during the annual Swedish politicians week, so that every single picture of him in the media also contained our logo.

From the start, our strategy has been aimed at humor and exposure. Our internal motto is "Make racism awkward again." We have also made an effort to be inclusive, as we feel that a broad anti-racist movement which transcends the traditional right/left boundaries of Swedish party politics is needed to counter the momentum of racist and fascist groups in Sweden. The Sweden Democrats have been growing steadily for ten years. According to some polls, they are now the second biggest party in Sweden, a worrying development. This has

resulted in a creeping and hard-to-notice normalization of racist and fascist rhetoric and ideas, which has pushed the bar for what is acceptable and enabled organizations like NMR and *Nya Tider* to grow. We want to push back, and we feel that the best way to accomplish that is to address the root cause by exposing the SD for what they really are.

Leading up to September 30, NMR had been negotiating with the police. Their initial request for the march route was denied: they wanted to march through the city center, past the book fair and a synagogue. They were given a shorter and less central route. The Gothenburg city office stepped in and shortened the route even more, so that they were only permitted to walk a few blocks some distance from the city center and the synagogue and book fair.

Two weeks before September 30, 50 people from the NMR appeared unannounced in the Gothenburg city center, marched down the parade street, and gave a few speeches in a city square. The police, who had been tipped off about the action a few days earlier but claimed to have “misplaced” the information, gave the Nazis a police escort. When the news spread, anti-fascists rushed downtown and you could soon hear chants of “Alerta, alerta antifascista!” in the streets. The Nazis were gone by then. To many, this march was a worrying display of their power.

Afterwards, police officials defended the right of Nazis to march without a permit, made it clear that they would not attempt to identify the organizers of the march despite having filed a criminal report, and denied that the Nazis were engaging in hate crimes such as “agitation against an ethnic group.” This is indicative of where the police stand in regard to fascist organizing in Sweden.

On September 30, IRM met up with our participants, went over our strategy for the day, and then found a good spot to start our little parade. At the same time, the NMR assembled in the parking lot of a supermarket a few kilometers outside

of town. They began to walk towards their designated starting point, accompanied by journalists and police.

Then the news came in that the Nazis had attempted to depart from their permitted route to aim for the city center. In response, the police pushed them into a corner near another supermarket and formed a ring around them. When people on the streets of Gothenburg heard about this, they headed for the spot where the Nazis were being delayed and managed to completely block the streets leading into the city from there. This gave the police no option but to hold the Nazis there for the time period that their demonstration permit allowed, then let them make the humiliating walk back to their assembly point. As one Swedish journalist put it, “What was going to be the biggest Nazi march since World War II ended up being a humiliating walk between two supermarkets.”

While we were a little disappointed that our Nazi-trolling plan could not be fulfilled, we took our group and walked around the city center, much to the amusement of our fellow counter-demonstrators, who spontaneously burst into applause when we arrived. All in all, it was a glorious day. Gothenburg showed that there is no room for Nazis on our streets.

We considered it especially important that a large number of the activists who joined us to protest the Nazis were first-timers. They were a diverse range of people from teenagers to a grey-haired old lady, none of whom had experience taking to the streets. It was encouraging that they chose to join us in this demonstration, against the most violent Nazi organization Sweden has ever seen. We also received countless messages on social media cheering us on and asking when our next activity will be so that others can join in. We feel that this is how anti-fascism should work: it should be a broad movement of all ages, sexes, and religions, coming together to fight, regardless of political affiliations or preferred methods.