

WHO IS INVOLVED IN PLANNING THE ACTION?

This critique is not a sectarian one. We disagree with the proposal regardless of who is advocating it. However, we would be amiss if we did not include this warning from a defector from the appelist circles that have been heavily promoting this strategy: “The reason we don’t warn young femmes which dudes to avoid is related to the reason we’re trying to convince new people that NVDA is a viable strategy. We know better, but we don’t care who gets hurt” (*Jumping Ship, or Why I’m Defecting from the Terrible Community*, ANARCHISTNEWS.ORG).

The 2004 anonymous French text Appel (Call), which these social milieus have historically drawn inspiration from, openly critiques the logic of activism: “at the margins of this paralysis, there is the ‘we really have to do something, anything’ of the activists. . . . Without a doubt, the activist gets shit done. But she never devotes herself to thinking about how to do it.” The American appelists promoting nonviolent activism in 2023 are either amnesiac, cynical (as the defector warns), or both.

We honestly hope that no one would be so unethical as to deliberately trick people into carrying out a strategy that they don’t actually think is viable, but our decades of experience lead us to encourage readers to keep an eye out for cynical opportunism. Observe whether the people talking the loudest about this proposal end up putting their own lives and freedom on the line after they’ve encouraged other people to do so, and draw your own conclusions from what you see. Don’t let yourself get used as a disposable pawn in someone else’s political strategy.

WHAT IS AN AFFINITY GROUP? HOW WILL THEY BE ORGANIZED?

We agree with Block Cop City that affinity groups should be formed, build trust with one another, and coordinate with other affinity groups. But a mass nonviolent action is far from the only place where that can happen, and in fact is extremely limiting to exploring the depths of affinity and trust that we consider important. We encourage continual experimentation with ways of going on the offensive, wherever you are, whether it be by yourself, with your affinity group, or with two or more other affinity groups. We suggest experimentation with more precise and more imaginative targets, as well.

The Block Cop City proposal seeks to recruit large quantities of new people through the assumption that nonviolence is “safer.” But the idea of affinity groups (rooted in the Spanish expropriators and pistoleros of the early 20th century, Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers, and other predecessors who were definitely not nonviolent) is based upon the quality of your relationships. How can we be dangerous together?

We propose decentralized direct action now and also on November 13 in order to show that other strategies are possible. These actions don’t necessarily have to be “violent” or even illegal. But they should increase conflictuality with the police and reformists, they should be generalizable, and they should contribute to the spirit of wildness and dignity rather than channeling energy into the cages and compromises of nonviolence.

This critique was originally published on SCENES.NOBLOGS.ORG

Every compromise in defense of Mother Earth: an anarchist critique of Block Cop City’s nonviolence proposal

*“If you think it’s stupid, if you think it’s liberal, you don’t have to come.”
—A presenter, “Weelaunee Worldwide: Mass Action Speaking Tour”*

There is a proposed plan for a single day of nonviolent action on November 13 at the Cop City construction site in so-called Atlanta. We think that this proposal is counter-revolutionary, poorly planned, and unnecessarily dangerous to participants. Also, it’s stupid and liberal.

The following section headings and quotes are all taken from the Block Cop City FAQ (BLOCKCOPCITY.ORG/FAQ). If any of our questions below resonate with you, we hope that you make them frequently asked as well.

WHY NONVIOLENCE?

“This action will employ non-violent tactics not because we accept the state’s false dichotomy of legitimate and illegitimate protest, but rather, because we believe that a commitment to non-violent tactics will best allow us to stick together and overcome the police’s attempt to isolate and divide us.”

This is doublespeak. How exactly do nonviolent tactics overcome the police’s attempts to isolate and divide us, except by accepting and reinforcing their dichotomy between what types of action are legitimate and what are not? By appealing to the type of people who believe in precisely that dichotomy? The pigs murdered Tortuguita. Adopting a strategy of turning the other cheek is a truly shameful response to its death. How can any radical who witnessed the George Floyd insurrection advocate nonviolence with a straight face and still have any self-respect when they look in the mirror?

We understand that this proposal is not ideologically pacifist but “strategically” so. We disagree with this approach. Anarchy is masked, but through the black mask, our true fire shines. We need operational secrecy, anonymity, cunning, and trickery. But we are honest about what we believe in. If we don’t believe in nonviolence, then we don’t advocate it. To do otherwise is to act like a politician.

“Diversity of tactics” is an activist principle, not an anarchist one. Direct action is an anarchist principle, but tactics that are designed to appeal to the media or government are indirect by definition. A foundational principle of anarchy is that the way that we do things is important. As anarchists, we want to promote self-organization that increases conflict with the State and the advocates of reform and recuperation. This can include a myriad of different activities that are technically “not-violent,” but it does not include a deliberate strategy of nonviolence. It does not include petitions or speaking truth to power. It does not include agreements to not critique or denounce reformist and recuperative behavior. Historically, some anarchists have shattered the activist model of a carefully segregated diversity of tactics, as at the 2001 G8 summit in Genoa or the 2008 Republican National Convention in Minneapolis (see *“Wrecking You Again for the Very First Time”*, CONFLICTMN.BLACKBLOGS.ORG).

We don't think that this one-day nonviolent action will be effective in stopping Cop City or challenging State repression. But even if it were to be somewhat effective in causing some minor reform or concession, this Pyrrhic victory would inevitably lead to recuperators demanding that this strategy be repeated again and again in every situation, just as Earth First! did after their inexplicable victory at Warner Creek (which they were never able to replicate again). Some strategies are recuperative by nature, no matter who is carrying them out.

WHY IS THIS ACTION HAPPENING NOW?

"We know that mass civil disobedience is an unquestionable force of the Peoples' Power, and it is only the power of the people that can #StopCopCity."

The Power of the Forest has always and unquestionably been in the conflictuality of its defenders. Thus far, the defense of the forest has included both "violent" actions and actions that are "not-violent," but people carrying out "not-violent" actions (who may or may not be the same ones carrying out violent actions) have not labeled their activity as specifically "nonviolent." The struggle has grown because people are inspired by its conflictuality. So why make a shift to explicit nonviolence now? The struggle is certainly at a crossroads, but the path being proposed is a disavowal of all that has happened before and a severance of the sinews of our greatest power. The legacy of conflictuality must continue to be centered, honored, and uplifted.

WHAT IS THE PLAN FOR THE ACTION ITSELF?

"We will adhere to the group agreements that were decided upon beforehand and be well-prepared to stick together and protect one another from potential police violence."

How exactly will these agreements be enforced? Will there be protest marshals? One presenter was asked this question and replied that the agreements wouldn't actually be enforced and that people could defend themselves. If that is the case, why the insistence on a group agreement to nonviolence? That seems intended only to deter the participation of anyone who is critical of the ideology of nonviolence, which reduces the number of people who are actually prepared to protect one another. And if they don't want us there, then why are they doing some of their presentations at anarchist spaces?

The FAQ says that "a spokes-council of affinity groups will meet in the lead up to the action." What meaningful coordination could such a spokescouncil accomplish when the decision of advertising the action as nonviolent has already been made? Autonomous conflictual action is always possible (and if comrades want to pursue that course of action, we support them), but this situation has deliberately been set up to be as non-conducive to that as possible. We think it would be more tactical to strike elsewhere.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

"Though we cannot predict the actions of the police with certainty, a well-crafted action plan will mitigate the effects of repression and create a situation in which further unpro-

voked police violence will grow, rather than silence, the movement."

What is "unprovoked" police violence? That word implies that police violence can be legitimately provoked by the actions of illegitimate, violent protesters. This is just respectability politics.

The idea that nonviolence would cause further police violence and mass arrests to grow the movement rather than silence it is far from a certainty. What is a certainty is that if people are mass arrested due to a choice to pursue a strategy of nonviolence, this would result in even more legal cases when the struggle is already dealing with dozens of domestic terrorism and RICO charges. We really don't see how more arrests would help the people already facing charges. It's true that the 5 clergy members who locked themselves to a bulldozer only got trespassing charges, but there is no guarantee whatsoever that a larger crowd, including people from out of town, would be treated the same way.

There is a distinct possibility that everyone who goes to this action will be mass arrested and hit with domestic terrorism and RICO charges. It's theoretically possible that an overly broad application of those charges could end up weakening the cases in court, though there's no reason to assume that when people accused of offenses that are not violent have already had those charges filed against them. But more people would still have to deal with those charges in the meantime. Furthermore, the struggle to destroy Cop City and all forms of policing will not be automatically won just because those charges eventually fail.

One presenter described the strategy as a "wager." But betting on nonviolence and appealing to liberals is a fool's game. If one is going to risk police violence and heavy charges, we suggest that the far better wager is to make it worth it.

"It is far more difficult for the police to arrest, apply politically motivated charges, or inflict violence on a crowd that stands together."

The suggestion that a large crowd might make it more difficult for the police to be violent, in the context of a nonviolent action, is an extremely dangerous claim to make. If someone is going to adopt the strategy of nonviolence (which, as we've already said, we oppose on principle), they can't half-ass it. They have to be prepared for Christian or pacifist martyrdom, not wishfully hope that their nonviolent numbers might deter the pigs from attacking brutally. People should know what they're getting into, and the organizers' vague insinuations that this action is somehow less risky than previous Weeks of Action are recklessly irresponsible.

"And, of course, we recognize that the risk of inaction is far greater."

There are many possibilities for action, not just this proposal for nonviolence. To suggest otherwise is disingenuous. Anyone can take a look at the Scenes from the Atlanta Forest website and see that people have continued to act autonomously even after the encampment ended and put forth some proposals of their own. Block Cop City's rhetoric seeks to erase this fact in order to emotionally manipulate people into their single proposed course of action. It's the oldest trick in the activist playbook, and we're not falling for it.