

More Minneapolis Anarchy

Responses to our coverage of the Anarchist Gathering, June 18–22, 1987

Fifth Estate Collective

1988

Our coverage of the 1987 Anarchist Gathering held in Minneapolis, June 18–22 [FE #326, Summer, 1987] engendered rather scant response given its criticism of “dyed-in-the-wool” anarchism, paganism as a “problematic current,” and the low level of “education(al) and historical discussion” present there. We were hoping for an exchange on these subjects both for their relevance to the anti-authoritarian movement in general and as a critique of the conference which could provide lessons for the 1988 Gathering in Toronto.

Of the three letters printed below, the first continues the discussion regarding the tactics of the War Chest Tour held on the final day of the Minneapolis Gathering in which about seven people were arrested. The content of these demonstrations is unique in that they challenge entirely the concept of the state and capitalism rather than simply asking for the reform of a specific abuse of the state. As such, the considerations raised by Dennis Stempler are of great importance since it seems as though actions of this type will be a regular feature of our Gatherings and particularly since the next one will be held in a foreign country (for many of us).

Next, John Bekken and Joe Wojak question our contention regarding the inadequacies of classical anarchism and its texts. Dogbane Champion responds for the *Fifth Estate*. We do not consider any of these topics closed and welcome further discussion in these pages.

See replies in this issue: “Anarchy & the Sacred” and “Objections to Councilism”. and “Even more Minneapolis Anarchy”.

War Chest Tour

To The Fifth Estate:

In writing about the June 22 War Chest Tour in Minneapolis, it’s important that we do not merely act as reporters relaying eye witness accounts. Discussion is necessary if these demonstrations are to evolve to the point where they function not simply as outlets for our frustration but as tools of our intent to help create a social revolution. I’d like to discuss my perceptions which are, of course, not free from bias. As such, I am open to criticism.

One of the main questions people had during the first three days of the recent conference in Minneapolis was whether to go to the Monday demo. I found myself changing my mind on this question at least twice a day, and I did not finally decide to go until Sunday afternoon. There were many reasons for this but the main one was that most conversation about the impending demo focused on the event as a confrontation. I had no objection to this, in fact, I feel that we avoid confrontation far too much in our activities. However, I did feel that the demo was not

planned with this in mind. If confrontation is our aim, there is a necessary planning, organizing, and discussion of tactics that must precede it, and this had not occurred.

This began to happen to some degree at the Sunday afternoon workshop on the demo and a number of people brought out similar concerns. Some felt constrained as to what they could comfortably say since the discussion was being held outdoors in the park and “unfamiliar” people were constantly walking up to the meeting.

The debate at the workshop focused on the need for taking responsibility for our actions in the sense that we have to be aware of how we affect those around us. Also raised was the issue of solidarity, both during and after an event. Some felt that those who are arrested were on their own. Others felt that regardless of our disagreements, those in trouble needed our support, and that this is what true solidarity meant. It was also brought out that you don’t need to be a marcher to give support and solidarity—there are other functions that also need filling on demo day.

Other discussion centered around the need for organization and tactics. Most people felt that using small affinity groups of 4 to 8 persons was preferable. Such groups could be further subdivided into twos and threes who would stay together at all times. The idea was that nobody could be isolated by the cops and picked off during the demo. People then broke up into large “tactical” affinity groups. Later that night I decided that I would go to the demo, for a number of reasons: I wanted to go, to lend solidarity to the others, and I felt that I had developed an affinity with others who wanted to be there.

The next day, people gathered around noon at the Municipal Center, and energies built until about 12:30, when the march set off. The intentions of the police became obvious when two people were shoved by cops, who then tried to take them away. The march at that point was still fairly focused and the cops couldn’t pull it off.

A number of blocks later we reached the “porno” district. I’d rather not get into the validity, or lack of it, of anarchists demonstrating to censure someone else. Instead look at this action as condemning a group that is maliciously exploiting others. A number of sisters and brothers at this point took off their shirts. Some had previously painted the words “Not for Sale” across their chests. The sisters, in particular, stayed close together and were ringed by many others, thus making police intervention impractical.

Shortly after this, however, people began to drift more towards the edges at a time when the energy of the march became less focused. They thus became easier targets for quick police actions.

I was told that all arrested were released the same day. Of those, two were minors, which can complicate release. Different ways have been used to handle this. One is that you can bring a letter with you that is type-written by your “parents” that empowers an adult who is with you to act as your guardian. Another way is to arrange to give the cops a telephone number of your “parents” back in your hometown. This person can play the role and authorize your release to an adult in that city. Remember to plan ahead!

What can be learned? A demo has to be well-planned, yet not orchestrated or led. A tight, conscious solidarity is also necessary to prevent the opposition from taking control of the situation. We must be aware of both what tactics the cops are using and what our sisters and brothers are doing, so that they aren’t cut off from our support. The affinity group model is helpful for this, but it is not sufficient. We need to be able to come together quickly as a group to aid individuals,

When small actions are planned or undertaken, let those around you know what’s going on, so you’re not left out on a limb. In every demo, there comes a time when we have to decide who is directing it—the cops or us. Usually we yield to the cops, and the demo quickly ends, leaving a few arrested. If instead we are willing to take control back, things often end differently. An example occurred during the Haymarket May 1st march in Chicago. There, the cops grabbed two people. They were surrounded, and people refused to disperse until the two were released, which finally happened. It must also be realized that this tactic can backfire, but it needs to be considered more often.

Something else I learned was that most of us know little about tactics and self-defense. This needs to be corrected and skills sessions should be developed at future conferences. Another unnecessary deficiency is first-aid. I’m planning on putting together information on this and hope to have a skills session ready for the next conference.

All in all, I’m glad I was there, and I look forward to feedback and to the next gathering.

Dennis Stempler

Chicago, Illinois

Chapter & Verse

Dear FE:

In the Summer 1987 Fifth Estate, I greatly enjoyed the article “Anarchy in Minneapolis” due to the fact that I was unable to attend. It provided some insight into what went on.

However, what angered me about the article is when D.G. wrote the following:

On the one hand, it’s clear that died-in-the-wool anarchism, with chapter and verse quotations from the 19th century luminaries is only a moribund ideology, a variant of leftism which has little to offer in the way of a critique of the contemporary forms of domination...”

These “luminaries” laid down the basic foundations of anarchism. Bakunin, Kropotkin, Goldman, Berkman, and Malatesta, whose works are classics today, themselves fought, struggled and were imprisoned for their writings and activities. The sacrifices and ideas of these pioneers cannot be neglected.

True, many of the old “chapter and verse” quotations are obsolete, but many more are basic truths that reach through the decades to the present and have established themselves as fact. Bakunin wrote “...The State is authority, force...its nature is not to persuade but to impose itself by force...” This axiom is still true today and accepted by anarchists in general who probably don’t realize where these ideas originated and where they are conclusively proved.

So, give people a break who are just starting out and are weak on anarchist thought. That’s why they come to these gatherings, to learn, not to be scorned by the more experienced.

Yours in Solidarity & Anarchism,

Joe Wojak

North Carolina USA

Genuine Anarchism

Dear Friends:

As one of the “19th century anarchist throwbacks who briefly picketed the pagan workshop” at the Minneapolis Anarchist Gathering, I was somewhat taken aback by the evident contempt for anarchist ideas and practice expressed in “Dogbane’s” article (see FE Summer 1987)

“Dogbane” apparently took offense at our “rationalist” ideas (since when is there some sort of contradiction between anarchist ideas and rationality?), and at our decision not to attend the pagan workshop in order to discuss the merits of superstition and romantic nostalgia for the days when we lived in caves. We had better things to do (the workshop on Anarchist Communism, one of very few that got down to discussing the basic question of what it means to be an anarchist), and besides our picket sign said it all: “Say No to All Religion!”

“Dogbane,” after suggesting that we need to go “beyond anarchism,” contends that “the classical anarchist movement was eclipsed once and for all in the 1930s” —when the Spanish Revolution proved conclusively that an anarchist society is practical—“and it’s not about to be revived.” Anarchism, he contends, is a “moribund ideology,” a “wasm.”

If he feels this way, what was he doing at an anarchist gathering anyway? (The answer, of course, is clear—recruiting, just like the Trots he disparages.) For “Dogbane,” anything more thoughtful than an inchoate spirit of rebellion becomes “ideology” (that is, a coherent set of ideas and values), and therefore to be despised—like the working class (still the overwhelming majority of the population) which has no place in this neo-primitivist vision.

Anarchism—that is, genuine anarchism—is more relevant than ever. Unfortunately, the anarchist movement is burdened with large numbers of people who, like “Dogbane,” evidence not the slightest understanding of anarchist ideas or the anarchist tradition. At the Minneapolis Anarchist Gathering I circulated a leaflet discussing these

problems, and suggesting that we get together to rebuild our movement. (Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a copy.)

I'd like to end with a question. Just what do you have to offer that goes "beyond anarchism," that's more contemporary than our idea of building a self-managed, stateless society?

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fifth Estate

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