

Worldwide Anarchy

Demonstrations Across the World Oppose Globalized Capitalism

Walker Lane (Peter Werbe)

2000

FE note: A quarterly publication cannot hope to keep up with fast breaking events such as the actions that have taken place against capitalist rule over the last year. However, we think it is urgent to report these stories to encourage more such activity, and also, if even belatedly, to counteract the lies posing in the corporate media as news.



Detroit Anti-OAS demonstration, June 6, 2000 — photo Rebecca Cook
The June 4–6 demonstrations against the meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS) in Detroit and Windsor, Ontario, its Canadian sister city across the river were Seattle, Washington DC, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles in miniature.

America. As with other globalization strategies, it would mean the further exploitation of labor, and degradation of the environment by the elimination of so-called barriers to trade, i.e., local laws and regulations which currently give at least scant protection to people and nature in those countries.

Most of us had never heard of the proposed FTAA until a group of Toronto activists alerted us to the planned meeting in Windsor, and began organizing against it. The stealth in which the FTAA was cloaked is typical of the manner of launching and operating supranational organizations, such as the WTO and World Bank, which act in the service of international capital.

Although only 400 to 500 participated in Detroit and 4,000 in Windsor, the same elements were present that marked the other, larger actions. Of primary importance was the success by a small hand of activists in bringing public attention to another previously all but unknown association of governments and multinational corporations setting up plans to exploit more people and destroy more of the environment.

Before Seattle, many people might have thought the WTO was a wrestling federation; similarly the June protest actions brought an awareness, not only of the OAS, but also of its intent to establish the Free Trade Association of the Americas (FTAA) a NAFTA on steroids for the entire Western hemisphere.

The OAS is a coalition of the 35 countries of the Western Hemisphere, but the U.S., for all practical purposes, has controlled its policies for its own imperial needs since its inception.

The FTAA was originally proposed in 1994 and would constitute an expansion of NAFTA to the entire hemisphere. With it would come the penetration of U.S., Canadian, and Brazilian capital into impoverished, debt-ridden countries in Central and South

The intention of the protests was to bring these issues to public attention, and to reveal how plans for our Southern neighbors would also have an impact on the Detroit/Windsor area through job loss, increased privatization, and pollution. However, just as the corporate media focuses most of its attention on the form of street demonstrations rather than their message, so it was in the twin cities on the straits between the United States and Canada.

Initially, it looked as if our message against elite, undemocratic control of the economic future of this region would be lost in the hysteria created by the media, cops, and politicians about the impending actions. Since it was announced early on that Canadian Customs would bar foreign activists, the Detroit protests were conceived as support actions for larger demonstrations expected in Windsor where the OAS meetings were convening.

Hence, we were unprepared for the insanely erroneous information spread by the media about the city “bracing” for an improbable number of demonstrators ready to perpetrate violence and destruction. Most of the reports were traced back to the FBI and private consulting firms which now specialize in tracking demonstrators and whipping up hysteria.

“A hundred thousand terrorists are coming to Detroit,” shrieked Detroit City Councilwoman, Kay Everett. “They burned Seattle and it’s still burning,” she continued during a Council debate on whether to pass emergency ordinances which would ban not only wearing masks or hoods, but also possessing such heinous substances as vegetable oil, water bottles and gas masks. The mask ordinance passed as did one against carrying flammable liquids anywhere in the city.

Filled With Crazy Reports

The papers and TV news were filled with crazy reports that distorted the previous demos in Seattle and Washington as examples of violence on the part of protesters rather than the cops. One news station aired a report stating it had learned the Detroit City-County Building was “target number one for terrorists.” All police leaves were canceled. The cops were ordered to wear long sleeves despite the summer heat to prevent demonstrators from “pouring chemicals on their arms.”

The Wayne County administration, centered in Detroit, announced it was closing down its entire court system for two days after our scheduled demonstration. Temporary arrest processing centers were established, city jail wards were emptied to accommodate mass arrestees, and downtown employees were told to wear “casual clothes” when working, again, on the days following our march lest they be singled out by “violent demonstrators.”

Office workers were also told to be prepared for building lock-downs and bring extra food and a radio to work in case we were able to close down entire skyscrapers. Detroit police chief Benny Napoleon personally warned demonstrators, “You got the wrong town and the wrong police chief to mess with.”

In what appeared as a preview of things to come, two days before the march, 21 persons were arrested during a small Critical Mass bike ride by the notoriously brutal Detroit Police Gang Squad. They were ready for the riders, and as soon as their wheels touched the street, the plainclothes bullies threw them to the ground and piled their bikes into a waiting police pickup truck.

The Gang Squad is a hyped-up unit filled with psychopaths, thugs and sadists typical of those in other big cities which leave a swath of humiliated, injured or dead citizens who have the misfortune to cross their paths. In Detroit, they wear their own gang jackets bearing skull and crossbones emblems, and are generally out looking for heads to crack. Several of the arrested cyclists were charged with wearing a mask. Their trials are pending.

All of this was a bit dismaying to the forty of us at the organizing meetings planning a march of a few hundred people featuring several large puppets. It would have been comical if the intent wasn’t so sinister.

Whoever was running the show—the cops, the politicians, the FBI, corporate security consultants, or most probably a combination—almost succeeded in obliterating the message of the protest beneath the fears of a city expecting wild, violent demonstrations. However, for whatever reason, the frothing of the officials subsided a bit, and several of the area newspapers and TV outlets began quoting coalition spokespeople in Detroit and even giving out our web address.

Similar hysteria was occurring in Windsor as well but in a considerably ton down manner perhaps since mainstream organizations such as the Canadian Auto Workers union were directly involved in organizing on that side of the river. The local paper ran several decent stories on groups involved in the protests alongside full page photos of Windsor police rodocopped out and ready for “troublemakers.”

The sinister intent mentioned above may be described as the Detroit Model for cities about to experience large demonstrations. The same type of official lies, dutifully reported by the media, occurred prior to the Philadelphia and Los Angeles Republicrat conventions, and in similar, smaller demonstrations this summer such as the anti-oil action in Edmonton, Alberta, and the anti-biotech conference in Minneapolis.

The Detroit Model

The Detroit Model contains these elements:

Demonize the demonstrators. This diverts attention from the message of the protest (one of the major goals). Promote any false or wild disinformation necessary to frighten the passive populace, which depends on the corporate media for its news, about the upcoming event.

Characterize the protesters as being such a menace that extravagant expenditures on cop equipment are approved by a frightened city government. Detroit spent at least \$3 million on a variety of anti-riot gear while nine schools are closing due to a lack of funding and children often have to bring their own toilet paper to school.

Once demonstrators have been successfully branded as terrorists, cop violence, no matter how vicious, is legitimated. The police are, then, inoculated from criticism even though they perpetrate wholesale assaults on unarmed, nonresisting demonstrators with clubs, chemical agents, fists, boots, and rubber bullets.

The corporate media perpetrates such cognitive dissonance that even though television footage will show cops rampaging against defenseless protesters, the narrative will praise the police for their “restraint,” and label the demonstrators as “violent.”

Once the cops, media and politicians have set the stage for the city being transformed into a war zone (their doing), they accomplish another goal: scaring off participants.

Listening to the belligerent and threatening statements from Detroit’s police chief and realizing we were going to be considered an invading horde even though ninety-five percent of us live here, several people I spoke to decided to skip the protest knowing we probably were going to be outnumbered four to one by rodocops drooling over the opportunity to kick our asses. Some people who did attend and wanted to bring their children thought it wiser to leave them at home.

Murderous Corrupt Nature

Other threats direct and subtle are invoked to reduce participation. In Philadelphia, for instance, the Department of Human Services warned that people committing civil disobedience might have their children taken away. In Los Angeles, the county coroner’s office asked its employees to defer vacations until after the August Democratic convention. Given the murderous, corrupt nature of the LA cops, this fact alone could understandably turn some people away. Also, a 3,000 member National Guard Weapons of Mass Destruction unit was mobilized for action.

As it turned out, all was peaceful in Detroit during our rally and march. Several hundred bored cops lurked lazily on the sidelines while we had a spirited but contained parade featuring a couple of giant puppets moving up Woodward Ave. from Hart Plaza and then back again after hearing a few speeches.

The cops controlled the scene completely making our chants of “Whose Streets? Our Streets!” seem pretty hollow; it was like whistling in the dark as helicopters buzzed overhead, and a large force of riot cops in full gear and empty buses aching to be filled with demonstrators waited ominously a block away, but never were called into action.

Jason, from Detroit's Active Transformation group, following a stump speech by a local Green Party candidate told the crowd, "We aren't voting for any politicians; we want a change in how things are done. We are not selling bread; we are giving away yeast! We are agitating for a new world."

Ron Scott, from the Detroit Coalition Against Police Brutality, said "Somebody said that the City-County Building was the potential target of terrorism, but let me tell you what it really is, it is the home of terrorism."

The day's only arrests were made when twenty members of the police gang squad jumped three people heading to the rally carrying baseball batting helmets. When it turned out one of the trio had an outstanding traffic warrant, he was shoved in a cop car, blindfolded (isn't there a Geneva Convention prohibition against this?), and threatened with a beating if he lifted his head from his chest.

He was taken to a huge warehouse outfitted for processing mass arrests and dutifully led from booking station to station, but alas for the cops, he was the only one to fall into their clutches that day.

In general, we came out of the actions feeling pretty good. As in other cities, we were misrepresented by a media whose mission is to keep people in the dark about what is really happening and what the important issues are. But we made the most of what we had, brought to public attention another corporate swindle, and took another step in building a movement in Detroit which has no illusions about capitalism or the state.

NEXT ACTION: April 20 through 22, 2001, Quebec City, Summit of the Americas. FTAA plans to be finalized.

35 Arrests at Windsor OAS Protests

It probably would have been more appropriate to have told our front page story from the perspective of our comrades across the river in Windsor, Ontario since it was there that the parallels to the Seattle street action were more pronounced. However, artificial boundaries enforced by men with guns prohibited most of us from participating or reporting from that side of the border.

Canadian activists and unionists turned out 4,000 demonstrators on June 4, and were met by Seattle-style robo-cops winging pepper spray at anything that moved. Windsor police arrested 41 persons on mostly trumped up charges and basically locked down the entire city centre to keep the OAS meeting up and running.

The bureaucrats' gathering was surrounded by chain link fences and cement barricades patrolled by 5,000 cops and Mounties. Thirty-five of the arrests came when a crowd tried to stop a bus loaded with international delegates with their bodies and spikes under the tires.

Canadian border guards refused entry to 560 people during the 5-day protests while on average a thousand are turned back a month. The customs agency claimed they confiscated 200 items including gas masks, tear gas, pepper spray, bleach and spray paint from those they refused admittance.

fifth Estate

Walker Lane (Peter Werbe)
Worldwide Anarchy
Demonstrations Across the World Oppose Globalized Capitalism
2000

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/355-fall-winter-2000/worldwide-anarchy>
Fifth Estate #355, Fall-Winter, 2000

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net