

# A Day without Protest

Sober reflections on the G8 protests and the global resistance

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2004

The 30<sup>th</sup> annual G8 summit meeting of the major industrial nations was held this June on Sea Island, Georgia within a day's drive of the *Fifth Estate's* southern headquarters, so some FE collective members traveled to participate in the planned protests and counter-summit.

Approximately 300 resisters assembled in Brunswick, Georgia—the closest the demonstrators were allowed to the royal elite—to greet some of the 30,000 military and police personnel stationed throughout the region.

## Not Another Miami

This was not a mass gathering. The planned marches, organized under the auspices of United for Peace and Justice, attracted no more people than local antiwar events in a medium-sized city. This was not another Miami. The anarchist scene was represented in the streets by a small black bloc and by a temporary collective called Fix Shit Up.

The tentative analyses of the anarchist presence at the convergence that I've read pursue a common thesis, detailing some problems with the black bloc and celebrating the accomplishments of the neighborhood improvement action known as Fix Shit Up. From posted reports at places like Infoshop.org and A-Infos, a consensus begins to emerge, praising Fix Shit Up and belittling the black bloc.

Taking its name from the phrase “fuck shit up,” Fix Shit Up was an ambitious endeavor schemed up by SEANET (the South East Anarchist Network) to practice solidarity and create bonds with the local Brunswick community during the summit and to counter negative anti-anarchist propaganda in the media.

## Fix Shit Up: Charity or Solidarity?

A model for the devastating impact of environmental racism, Brunswick, Georgia is not a pretty place. The community includes the Gullah-Geechee people; since the 1950s, they have been evicted from their island homes by greedy developers and forced to abandon their ceremonial, hunting, and fishing sites. On the mainland today, their lives are riddled by disease, poverty, and pollution. That anarchists were more interested in “adopting a real anti-oppression analysis” by creating a context of solidarity with this community than fighting the police is obviously an important thing.

Here's an excerpt from one report: “[T]he G8 Fix Shit Up crew [...] are building solutions with their own hands [...] as they make a commitment to complete repairs on old houses for the impoverished in Brunswick.”

Another report described the Fix Shit Up project as “a model of communal functioning, of individuals throwing in for the greater good of all, within and outside of the group. In stark contrast to the divisive actions of my friends

in the Brunswick black block, and in spite of the youth of the organizers, the Fix Shit Up action was a model of anarchist political maturity.”

In practice, Fix Shit Up accomplished much: run-down houses were cleaned and repaired, anarchists worked extensively with the local African-American community, and a long-standing stereotype of the violent anarchist was subverted. In the words of one participant, it was “anarchy in action.” It may be premature, however, to use this action to announce a paradigm shift for the anarchist movement, away from direct action toward community improvement.

By no means disparaging the general spirit of solidarity that motivated Fix Shit Up, beyond vague notions of mutual aid and despite the best intentions of the participants, Fix Shit Up fundamentally appears as an isolated gesture. But perhaps, Fix Shit Up points to a future for anarchists of balancing heroics in the streets with helping others in the neighborhoods.

What would long-term solidarity look like? To move past symbolism and partial social amelioration requires a full-time commitment to anti-racism, community justice, and radical solidarity work. Like Food Not Bombs, Fix Shit Up borders on merely promoting anarchist ideology by “doing good works” in the same manner the Salvation Army promotes religion.

But as anarchists, we do need to repair our reputation. And I’m not talking about the media reputation. Why should African-Americans in places like Brunswick trust us? There are many reasons not to. Fix Shit Up was clearly about developing some of that trust. To move from liberal charity to revolutionary solidarity, from symbolic one-time gestures to long-lasting mutual aid, this requires more self-critical depth and more time than was shared by goodhearted anarchists for a few days in June. One of my traveling companions on the journey asked:

“What has happened in Brunswick since the anarchists and other G-8 protesters left? I haven’t a clue. Why not? Because it is on to the next event, the next party, or the next protest.”

Fix Shit Up rightly extended the focus away from the media freak show to capitalism’s permanent cruelty. The governor of Georgia may have declared “a state of emergency” for a month surrounding the summit, but for the poor and oppressed in south Georgia and the global south, daily life is a permanent state of emergency.

## **Nameless Prisoners**

Meanwhile, members of the black bloc undertook the riskiest action of the week. At the Thursday, June 10 protest, billed as a Palestinian Solidarity event, the black bloc embarked on a nine mile breakaway march in the blazing Georgia heat. With the stated intention of reaching the island where the global goons were meeting, the anarchists and their media escorts marched onward until they were finally stopped by the police and 15 were arrested. Some of the activists spent close to two weeks in jail, practiced jail solidarity, refused to give names, and were on a hunger strike for most of that time. Their statements from jail were eloquent and succinct. It’s appealing to imagine what this action might have been had 3,000 or 30,000 instead of 300 shown up.

## **Strategic Thinking or Strategic Retreat?**

Really, on the whole, the response of American radicals, revolutionaries, and global justice activists to the G8 summit in Georgia looked to me like retreat and defeat. But we probably could have seen it coming. If the victories of Seattle and Cancun were defined by the resisters’ abilities to reach out to the general public while effectively disrupting the business of the WTO, most convergences against global capital should honestly be described as losses.

Earlier this year, I endorsed the call put out by “G8 Resistance.” The message then was clear: “This is not a call to follow the bosses to their next summit,” it admonished. The writers obviously thought of Miami as they reminded, “We have been corralled, beaten, arrested and shot at in the locations of their choosing.” Instead of being predictably trapped at a counter-summit, we would be everywhere. We would be refusing every aspect of alienation in a transcontinental festival of transformation!

It sounded so good. But when June arrived, other than some small, token gestures, amazing and spirited solidarity demos failed to materialize.

Decentralization sounds like a strategic plan, but as another activist who went to Georgia put it, “I have yet to hear of any autonomous actions actually taking place, and I am not surprised. What tried to sound like strategic thinking, begins to appear as a strategic retreat.”

But this is only one piece in a much larger puzzle of the context that created the failure to mount any serious resistance to the G8. In the anarchist milieu (noting nevertheless that anarchists were very visible and present among the small numbers in Georgia), there appears to be a growing and palpable suspicion of old-school, oppositional activism in general and what’s now known as “summit-hopping” in particular.

Doesn’t summit-hopping encourage the stereotype that anarchists are nothing more than middle-class tourists? Don’t these mass gatherings simply give the authorities every opportunity to experiment with crowd control and the latest non-lethal, high-tech, anti-riot devices?

As each summit accelerates the spectacle of disempowered non-participation, the rulers ratify real domination and accentuate the futility of resistance. The real revolution must be elsewhere. But elsewhere may be too elusive, to the point of being nowhere.

Why did so many activists stay home? For at least one revolutionary I know, it was a conscious decision not to show up; since so many cops were coming to a veritable “pigapalooza,” why not give them nobody to intimidate and incarcerate.

Why wasn’t Brunswick like “the Miami model?” One person who went to both Miami and Brunswick offered a discerning but sober discussion of the police presence and tactics at both places: “Based on my experience and perception (and I wasn’t everywhere) the actual oppression by the police in Brunswick was small. The police activity that I saw had more the appearance of intimidation than of brutal attack. In short, this wasn’t the Miami model, which was an attack. Brunswick, I fear, was the beginning of the occupation, the dawn of the police state as business-as-usual.”

While some people regularly scoff at the idea of America becoming a police state, among Native and African-Americans, among the poor and imprisoned, this notion has never seemed strange. Now, in the days of the Patriot Act and Homeland Security, critics from the liberal middle class have at least entertained the frightening notion that the Bush cabal is carrying us towards fascism.

For now, whatever the ideological limits of “activism” and ‘protest-as-usual,” we still need to show up, to act. Every time elitist cliques and statist scoundrels gather, people need to oppose them. They are the thugs who have declared the endless war of the few against the many, and they are winning. We still need educational campaigns and mass mobilizations, even with all their symbolic and reformist shortcomings.

I’m not suggesting we unequivocally choose the “mass movement” model for organizing and action, but rather, that we not prematurely abandon the prospect of mass action as both precursor and adjunct to more radical approaches. In fact, an untimely day without protest—even and especially protest as counter-spectacle—could be the day when our hope for revolution will die.

# fifth Estate

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<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/366-fall-2004/a-day-without-protest>  
Fifth Estate #366, Fall, 2004

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