

Anarchists in Boston Protest DNC

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2004

Famously liberal Boston turned totalitarian at the end of July, complete with: newly installed surveillance cameras, random baggage searches and i.d. checks on public transportation, thousands of out-of-town police (including military police) in full riot gear, circling helicopters, F-14 overflights, and a 1,000-person capacity “free speech” protest pen a block from the convention center, constructed of razor wire, chain link fence, and overhead netting. These new toys and structures were created under the guise of “homeland security,” with the stated purpose of protecting Bostonians and convention delegates from likely terrorists and violent protesters, who would supposedly be out in force targeting the Democratic National Convention (DNC). This process ended up initiating a permanent surveillance program.

Inside the convention center, 4,000 delegates, 15,000 members of the media, and unknown numbers of corporate backers gathered (with the help of over \$45 million in taxpayer dollars) in a shell almost entirely insulated from anything other than the “official” Convention reality.

The DNC also took some interesting actions in light of its platform statement to support “independent media” in the “Arab and Muslim world.” While Fox News had multiple, large skybox banners, Al-Jazeera, the Middle East’s first independent satellite news organization (which provided significantly more coverage of the Convention than did most American networks), had their DNC-approved banner removed by the DNC without explanation.

Perhaps none of these actions should come as a surprise, however, from a party whose leaders are promoting the intent to increase funding and resources to fight the “War on Terror,” which it states “is not a clash of civilizations. It is a clash of civilization against chaos.” The official motto of the event was “Stronger at Home; Respected in the World”.

As part of this continuing war, the platform contains promises to: add 40,000 GIs; double the anti-terrorism special units; expand NATO forces in Afghanistan; affirm a commitment to supporting Israel, “our only true ally in the Middle East;” and “end the Castro regime as soon as possible,” while offering no similar calls for action against dictatorships in other countries.

Meanwhile, outside the convention center, thousands gathered for open forums, fairs, demonstrations, and small actions. Over 5,000 people attended the Boston Social Forum, the first in the US, part of the World Social Forum process which originated in 2001 in Brazil. Another one- to three thousand came out in the streets for an anti-war march the following Sunday.

The “free speech pen,” mostly boycotted by demonstrators, was a target of street theater. The Bl(a)ck Tea Society, an ad hoc coalition of different organizations (with the majority being some flavor of anarchist) set up a convergence center, the “Really, Really Democratic Bazaar,” and put out a call for decentralized actions.

The Bazaar drew an estimated 2,500 people of all ages (and numerous cops and agents) to the Boston Commons for free music, performances, teach-ins, kid activities, bio-diesel demonstrations, and free food. The decentralized actions were much smaller, ranging from a Critical Mass bike ride and a queer kiss-in, to smaller marches and a pirate party. At the latter event, three were arrested (half of the total number over the course of the whole week), one for holding a plastic toy pirate hook that the police claimed looked like a Molotov cocktail.

Significant discussion followed the week's events questioning why turnout of protesters at the DNC was so low in comparison to the tens and hundreds of people who have been a part of past mass actions. It appears that a number of factors were at play. Like the G8 protests in Georgia, organizers focused exclusively on decentralization at the expense of centralized actions. This appears to be an unneeded dichotomy, as decentralized actions can successfully take place alongside larger centralized ones and take advantage of the increased numbers of people present for the latter.

The fact that many trade union, women, queer, civil rights, and environmental organizations have either put their support behind Kerry or are actively not opposing him significantly lessened the amount of people coming out to protest the DNC. Finally, as with the G8, a number of participants decided to put off risk of arrest, and to put their limited amount of time and travel ability toward protesting the Republican convention in New York City.



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