

D.C. Inhoguration

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1969

WASHINGTON, D.C. (LNS)—A river of young Americans flowed up into downtown Washington from 14th St. and Pennsylvania Avenue, away from the Death Parade marking Richard Nixon's Inauguration January 20.

We were taking the streets for an affirmative celebration of our own. And when the cops came to break it up, the new fighting movement used fists, rocks and sticks to repel the attackers.

There were dozens of arrests before the day was over, but no sheep-like marches into the paddy wagons. On several occasions clusters of friends, or unknown street people comrades converged on police to free a brother or a sister. The tactic didn't always work—as police re-enforcements arrived quickly.

But folks began to understand through their own experiences and the exemplary actions of a few militants how the combination of mobility, guts and unity could work to defeat the enemy.

The street actions on Inauguration Day lasted less than an hour, but in that time a number of police officers had been pelted with rocks, police car windows were smashed, and a few storefront windows were broken. About 80 persons were arrested in the street actions and most were charged with disorderly conduct.

A spokesman for the Washington Metropolitan Police Department told LNS that several policemen suffered "minor injuries." He said that there were windshields broken on six cop cars and on 12 motorcycles and that there were a lot of dents.

The street actions were not a part of the official anti-war demonstration organized by the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (Mobe).

Many of the street people—about a thousand in all—identified with Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and Co-Aim, the New York based Coalition for an Anti-Imperialist Movement.

The young men and women who served as marshals for the massive Mobe march on Sunday, Jan. 19, most clearly illustrated the commitment of the Mobe to a brand of politics that is completely at variance with the direction of the movement taken in recent months.

The marshals cooperated fully with police in restricting the march to one-half of the Avenue, apparently not content to "let the pigs do the job of pigs," as one militant demonstrator observed.

Toward the end of that march, which had about 15,000 participants, militant demonstrators tried to occupy the entire street. Scuffles between demonstrators and marshals, and between demonstrators and cops broke out at the intersection of 3rd and Maryland. There were several arrests.

On at least one occasion, a marshal prevented a militant from trying to save one of his comrades.

As the march ended, rather uneventfully, Mobe leader Dave Dellinger announced that "the next event is the counter-inaugural ball at seven o'clock" but under pressure he quickly mentioned over the bull horn that "some people" were going to the Smithsonian Institute to greet Spiro Agnew.

The Agnew reception was a fine target for a demonstration for many reasons. Agnew himself personifies not only the stupid racist politician, but the rich imperialist. He is known for his ties to CIA backed foundations and for his role in supporting the fascist Greek junta.

"Fuck You, Agnew" and "Go Spiro, Beat Greece" were popular chants.

The reception for the vice-president was one of those typical ruling class events, where working class cops guard and servants serve while upper class folks put on tuxedos and gowns and ride in chauffeur-driven limousines.

A crowd of about a thousand young people massed on the mall behind the museum, inexplicably avoiding the more crowded front entrance on Constitution Avenue. U.S. Park Police, some of them proudly astride horses, appeared abruptly on the scene, and there was a quick standoff between these pigs (disguised as Smokey-the-bear) and the demonstrators, by then divided into two groups.

The question of group defense against the cops came into focus first on Saturday afternoon when demonstrators let the cops easily arrest Frank Mather, a staff member of the Radical Education Project (REP) in Ann Arbor, when he tore down some red-white-and-blue bunting at Young America's Inaugural Salute. Other protestors said that Frank could easily have been rescued if people were really "together."

By the time of the Smithsonian Institute action, just 24 hours later, there were some indications that folks were "together" on the subject of defense against the cops.

At one point, mounted Park Policemen charged at the Smithsonian crowd, dispersing it easily. Moments later, an individual cop ran into the crowd to make an arrest. He apprehended one of the brothers, but someone tackled the cop, knocking him to the ground. Someone else clobbered the cop on the head with a paper mailing tube and others kicked and punched him.

Still others rushed forward to pull away the brother who was being arrested. After everyone was safe, more cops arrived on the scene, but all they could do was rescue their colleague.

Similar incidents occurred Sunday and again Monday on the Inauguration route and in the streets of the city. It wasn't always possible to save people from getting arrested—and sometimes would-be helpers got nabbed themselves. But folks discovered that if they got together with a group of trusted friends, it was possible to make self-defense a reality, not just rhetoric.

Discontent with the Mobe flared when we discovered they were not bailing people out who were arrested Sunday.

Several clusters of militants met later that day to discuss plans for something more militant and exciting than the Mobe's "peace presence" along the parade route.

What resulted was a gathering in Franklin Park at noon and a noisy sidewalk march down 14th Street—with heavy policing to keep the crowd out of the street—toward the parade route on Pennsylvania Avenue.

We were surprised to discover that the cops let us concentrate right at the edge of the parade route.

The largest concentration was the confluence at the place where 14th Street, E. St. and Pennsylvania Avenue merge. In all, an estimated 5,000 anti-war protestors were among the parade onlookers.

Chants of "Sieg Heil" rang out when paratroopers in battle dress rushed onto Pennsylvania Avenue and lined up behind Washington Metropolitan Avenue to protect the inaugural parade from the people. But this soon gave way to "GIs, Si! Brass, NO!" and "GIs, Join Us!"

The crowd returned to "Sieg Heil" when members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff rode by in their limousines.

When Nixon, the one, went by in his new \$500,000 bullet-proof bomb-proof limousine, an assortment of missiles, including paper, pennies, a smoke bomb, and a wad of aluminum foil, came from the crowd.

Rennie Davis, a Mobe staff member, later told Liberation News Service that he felt one of the demonstration's major accomplishments was compelling Nixon to travel under such heavy armed guard.

"This means that Nixon, like Johnson, will be unable to move around this country, except at places like Fort Bragg," he said.

If anything, the generally vague political direction which the Mobe gave the demonstration is one more indication that those people at the vanguard of the movement, those with well-articulated revolutionary politics, must take the initiative in revitalizing and directing the anti-war movement.

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