

ACAB Includes the Peace Police

Three Report Backs from Palestinian Solidarity Actions

Anarchist Actions For Intifada, Black Powder Press, Backlash Blogs



2023

Contents

| | |
|---|---|
| BAY AREA: A CRITIQUE OF OBEDIENT PROTEST | |
| ANARCHIST ACTIONS FOR INTIFADA | 3 |
| PORT OF TACOMA: WHO EVEN NEEDS COPS WHEN ...? | |
| BLACK POWDER PRESS | 4 |
| AUSTRALIA: THE BOAT THAT WASN'T BLOCKED | |
| BACKLASH BLOGS | 5 |

Note: As with every mobilization, there are conflicting accounts of what happened from various personal and political vantage points. Yet the three excerpts below from recent report backs offer a much-needed critique of tendencies—“nonprofit-ally complex politics” and “peace police”—that repeatedly appear in moments of anarchic resistance so as to contain and limit transformative possibilities, and thus ultimately uphold the status quo.

BAY AREA: A CRITIQUE OF OBEDIENT PROTEST ANARCHIST ACTIONS FOR INTIFADA

At the November 5, 2023, protest against the “Friends of the IDF Gala” in San Carlos, California, hundreds of people mobilized to shut down this fundraiser for a fascist, zionist, genocidal army, but the key player preventing the actual disruption of this event was the nonprofit that “organized” the protest, Jewish Voices for Peace (JVP) Bay Area.

JVP Bay Area did the dirty work of the police and the “israeli” occupation forces (IOF) through its aggressive peace policing, relentless harassment of anyone who wanted to do something more than stand and shout, and protest marshaling that helped the donors of settler-colonialist genocide drive safely into the gala. It not only allowed but actually facilitated this fundraiser.

Not only did JVP Bay Area aggressively prevent the crowd from doing anything other than standing and shouting, its yellow-vested protest marshals moved the crowd down the road, allowing the gala attendees to reach the event, and prevented the crowd from knowing where a blockade could be most effective for actually stopping the fundraiser. Whether directly or indirectly, JVP Bay Area collaborated with the kkkops and zionists to help raise money for the IOF by ensuring the protest did not shut down the fundraiser.

The protest marshals were stationed behind police lines next to where gala attendees were driving in with giant “israeli” flags on their cars. Skyway Road is a dead-end; a blockade several hundred feet up the street in the direction of the Holly Street viaduct would have actually prevented gala attendees from being able to enter, shutting the entire event down. Alternatively or additionally, a blockade earlier in the day before the gala was being set up would have caused significant material disruption to the event. There were multiple strategies and tactics available for disrupting this gala.

When asked why the crowd wasn’t being invited or encouraged to block the entrance IOF donors were using, one of the white protest marshals stationed at the Fairfield Inn driveway literally said, “I’m just following orders.” Whose orders were they following? Why was following orders more important to them than spreading the word to stop the zionist cars that they could see driving right past them? It seems the “organizers” of this protest were instructing their security team to prevent protesters from stopping the gala.

JVP Bay Area corralled the crowd into the area directly in front of the Hiller Aviation Museum (the gala venue), stationed security at the alternate attendee entrance at the Fairfield Inn, and actively worked with the police to ensure that genocide funders were able to attend the gala safely. This nonprofit cannot say it was unaware of what was happening when its protest marshals watched gala attendees drive into the event.

It is clear that JVP Bay Area had no interest in actually stopping the gala from happening. Why not? JVP on the East Coast has done civil disobedience and direct action. This event was a

fundraiser for the IOF by an organization that raised almost \$90 million last year. If this was not a time and place where disruption was needed, when and where is?

The actions of the protest marshals, although disobeyed by some, were unfortunately generally effective in decreasing conflictuality within the crowd and setting a tone of obedient and compliant protest. The most liberal elements of the crowd took this as a signal to deputize themselves as peace police and harass those trying to actually shut down the fundraiser.

When participants of the demonstration attempted to take down barricades separating the crowd from the gala's venue, the peace police filmed and took photos, physically interjected, put the police barricades back together, and yelled at those attempting to push forward for "stirring shit up." Why show up to a fundraiser for an army committing genocide if not to stir things up? The organizers leading chants of "there is only one solution: intifada, revolution" showed themselves to be no more than counterrevolutionaries with zero desire to actually confront the kkkops and zionists right in front of them. The co-optation of this revolutionary language is disrespectful to every Palestinian martyr who has fought for their life, land, and freedom.

Where were the lessons of the antipolice rebellions of the past fourteen years in the Bay Area, from Oscar Grant to George Floyd? Why were the "organizers" so quick to encourage obedience to the police? Have they forgotten the role of the police within white supremacist capitalism, or are they just eager to capitalize on respectability politics by distancing themselves from the struggle for Black liberation and revolutionary abolition?

A JVP national board member named Lisa Rofel told the news, "The nicest thing we could say is that it's in bad taste." When fascist zionists are actively raising money to fund genocide, you want to say "the nicest thing"? You think it's "in bad taste" to give tens of millions of dollars to the IOF death machine?

To those of you who showed up and wanted to actually shut down this fundraiser for genocide, we have heard many of you express feelings of grief that protesting this gala "did nothing." We agree: nothing was done to stop the Palestinian genocide on Sunday. Our hearts are with you in this grief. We ask you to remember the rage you felt as you were forced to stand peacefully while funders of genocide drove by you in Teslas and the yellow vests blocked you from reaching them. Do not let this demoralize you. We ask you also to remember that no one and no organization has the right to tell you how to respond in the face of unspeakable evil. Just because they slapped their logo on an announcement does not mean they are entitled to control you or any other protester.

PORT OF TACOMA: WHO EVEN NEEDS COPS WHEN ...? BLACK POWDER PRESS

The Tacoma, Washington, port blockade on November 6, 2023, was a beautiful show of solidarity, but a complete failure. Who even needs cops when the peace police will do their job for them for free?

At 5 a.m. in the cold and dark, hundreds of people wanting to blockade a shipment of weapons to Israel descended on the port of Tacoma. The way the port works is if the union declares the area is unsafe, it calls off operations for the whole shift. A big enough crowd blocking the entrances is usually enough, and yesterday it worked basically immediately. Success, right?

The crowd grew and split into several pickets, marching in circles in different parts of the port, with organizers in yellow-green vests keeping people from stepping out of line. A group of riot cops was stationed inside the warehouse on the pier where the boat sat, waiting to try to stop protesters who might breach the fence and enter where boats are loaded. On the outside, the protest managers in yellow vests were constantly making sure nobody was planning to enter the pier.

The atmosphere was generally festive and powerful, and people's anger at the ongoing genocide was apparent. People came to block the port and keep the boat from reaching its destination. Side goals were also making it cost them more and to create an easily reproducible action.

It felt to most like it was working great, but in the middle of the afternoon, the self-declared leaders of the action made a confusing announcement. They told everyone the action was a success and everyone should go home. People were confused and deflated. Was the boat not still sitting there? Were they not trying to block the boat from being loaded?

It turns out that the military had sent in its own workers to load the boat, and the protest organizers had known about it for hours. Had people blocking the march known this, and that marching in circles was for the publicity of the organizers and nothing more than photo op and symbolic "show of resistance," things could have transpired quite differently.

Organizers spread misinformation throughout the protest, and most people were convinced that marching in a circle and chanting was actively stopping the ship from being loaded or having shipments delivered. In reality, the military already had the shipment in the dock and successfully loaded all twenty-eight containers. Out of fear of police dispersal, people were greatly discouraged and directed to not breach the chain-link fence that separated them from the ship. At the end of the day, organizers called the action "over" and sent everyone home despite the ship still being in the dock.

People came to the action to block the boat. People were there to prevent the flow of arms to Israel. People were there to stand up for Gaza and put their own bodies on the line to take action to attack the war machine.

But the peace police took away people's agency. They did whatever they could to take away autonomy from anyone other than the big O organizers. They sabotaged the action to present a false narrative of success when in fact, they had actively prevented it.

How the fuck was that a "victory"? The people of Gaza need the bombs to stop dropping. For the arms destined for Israel to be stopped. In trying to seem respectable, we are shooting ourselves in the foot and nothing more. ACAB indisputably includes the peace police.

Do what you can to stop the genocide now. If you're not willing to take action yourself, step out of the fucking way.

AUSTRALIA: THE BOAT THAT WASN'T BLOCKED BACKLASH BLOGS

There is a genocide in Palestine. We need to block the boats—to stop and disrupt ZIM ships, as a means to attack and undermine the Israeli killing machine. Right now, our efforts are being misdirected—by organizations that adopt the rhetoric of direct action, smear it over events that are not that, and undermine movements that truly have the will to act against Zionism.

A November 11, 2023, rally in Melbourne, Australia, titled Block the Boat, was organized in a way that did not reflect any intention of actually blocking boats but instead actively frustrated attempts to do so. Some disruption of a road took place in spite of the organizers through attendees defying and ignoring their instructions. Despite working to inhibit both the road blockade and direct action in general, organizers basked in credit on social media for the action that happened in Melbourne, also significantly exaggerating its size and impact.

People have a courage and capacity to act that overflows the bounds of symbolic demonstrations outside the empty halls of power. The words “Block the Boat” imply, well, blocking boats, and that was how many people interpreted it. Yet less prominent lettering on promotional materials indicated that the purpose was actually to say “Block the Boats” and “call for” a boycott—a message addressed to ZIM. It wasn’t clear why we had to go to the port to do this.

The call to gather at an event to “boycott ZIM” is bizarre. How can the general public boycott a company that doesn’t sell final goods? The only meaningful “boycott” in this case is not a boycott, it’s a strike—the withholding of labor.

I attended a meeting for Trade Unionists for Palestine where some people tried to call for exactly that. The cognitive dissonance was off the charts. There was much talk of wharves refusing to load ships for South African apartheid. What a glorious past. But when people suggested that the same resistance should happen now—that workers and unions should refuse to build or transport weapons destined for Israel—organizers responded aggressively and dismissively. The conversation was derailed into discussion of bringing more flags to rallies, issuing statements, and general BDS [boycott, divestment, sanctions]—things like Sodastream or McDonald’s.

While BDS is good, giving up McDonald’s is not the same as blocking the flow of weapons to Israel. And while statements are nice, it’s not words or lack thereof that kill people; it’s bombs.

In this context, the hypocrisy of the “Block the Boat” rallies [in both Melbourne, and soon after, Sydney] is jaw-dropping—to hold an event calling for someone else to boycott ZIM and the Israeli arms trade, while you and your organizations are continuing to load and unload ZIM ships, build and handle arms, and otherwise enable the supply chain of weapons for Israel.

The timing of the rallies also seemed suspiciously rigid and convenient. If the goal was to intercept a ZIM ship as it arrived in port, it seemed strange this could be scheduled several days in advance for the Melbourne event and a week for Sydney. That’s not how the sea works. It seemed odd as well that the mighty ocean would conspire via time and tide to bring a boat to port at ideal rally hours, 12 p.m. on a Saturday and 5:30 p.m. on a working day, respectively.

The locations weren’t conducive to disruption. The Sydney rally was planned for a recreational boat ramp some distance away from any container ship or cargo. The Melbourne event took place at a point which is seven to eight kilometers away from where ZIM ships are typically scheduled to dock.

It was hard to verify claims made by organizers that we were there to meet a ZIM ship because no one specified which ship we were supposed to be meeting. This would have been understandable if we were conducting a clandestine action relying on the element of surprise, but we were not—the time and place were splashed all over social media and flyers.

In Melbourne, few trucks came through bearing ZIM-branded containers, evoking what a comrade who was present describes as “jeers from the crowd and the collective middle finger.” At some point, these jeers escalated into action and people blocked the road to stop one such truck from coming through. Some lay down in front of it, others sat down. Eventually the truck was redirected to another entrance, facilitated by a police escort. People still wouldn’t leave, and

within hours there was a whole line of trucks backed up. Estimates I've heard range from fifty to sixty to "hundreds."

It was not the organizers who made this happen. People on Twitter posted in real time to say they "tried to get us to leave" and "the crowd are having none of it." One comrade who was present describes organizers yelling at people to move, actually attempting to grab one or two people, and being "quite physically intimidating"—though by their account, it was more words and shouting than physical force.

In the days that followed, there was a huge inflation on social media and then actual media of what had just happened. To be clear, we did not block the port. We blocked one road leading to the port, causing diversion of traffic. That is not nothing, but it is very different from blocking the boats.

This did not stop the same organizations that had tried to prevent the blockade from happening, and failed to support it when it did, from accepting the exaggerated credit. While some information can be found to clarify, none of this has come from the organizers themselves (Trade Unionists for Palestine). Judging by the online presence of affiliated individuals, you would think this group and its orbiters had always applauded direct action in general, the Melbourne action in particular, and even that they were the progenitors of the blockade that they tried to shut down.

I don't need to draw any conclusions about people's motivations and I won't. What is clear is that people are telling the public stuff that isn't true, harvesting their contact details, and getting them to turn out to events—on the basis that they can "block the boats" to stop weapons from going to Israel—when these organizers are actually making sure it is impossible to block any ZIM boat at these rallies.

There are ideological differences, differences in analysis, around the value of direct action. If you don't like or believe in it, don't do it. But get out of the way. Stop misleading people; stop—frankly—lying. I don't know what else to call it when people appropriate direct action rhetoric, bask in the credit for actions they didn't undertake and tried to stop, and tell untruths that demobilize or even render future actions impossible.

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