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Reactionary Protests in Atlanta: What is to Be Done

A Challenge to Consider Revolutionary Organizing

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With upcoming second protest on Saturday against the leaked Supreme Court decision regarding Roe v Wade, a growing level of discontent with the state of actions in various parts of the Atlanta movement should push us to spend a moment reflecting on the nature of a certain type of action frequently seen here in Atlanta: the speechifying and feckless march protests.

The problem with these protests is that they, like the organization and particular organizers leading them, are reactionary in nature. They seek to “return” or maintain some semblance of the status quo.

When the PSL arrives at BLM protests bearing “jail killer cops” signs, they indicate their belief that the carceral system is acceptable and only needs to be adjusted rather than abolished.

When the DSA spends its effort attempting to electorally work away the problems in imperialist America, they indicate their belief that the electoral system works, but needs to be adjusted to work for the people.

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When PSL organizers last year scoffed at anarchists showing up at their protests but refusing to bear those carceral signs, they display a lack of revolutionary mindset.

When Atlanta DSA eschews law breaking - beyond walking in the street on the way to stand in front of an empty Capitol building to yell at no one in particular while being observed by bemused state troopers, comfortably unmolested inside the safety net or the newly erected fortifications - they display a vast discomfort toward the revolutionary mindset.

When local organizers from both DSA and PSL at the last “defend Roe” march physically blocked other consenting protesters from joining anarchists attempting to create break-off faction of the march toward a direct action aimed at disruption through non-destructive civil disobedience, they exposed the reactionary heart at the core of what ails within swaths of the Atlanta movement.

When the “security” team of the recent counter rally at Stone Mountain loudly proclaimed activist attendees must follow their commands due to the nature of the security to regular protester relationship, they stifle the power of creative response against open displays of fascism.

These reactionary proclivities, whatever their source, by their very nature and expression through control over a protest, stifle the revolutionary potentiality and power that arises in historical moments such as we now experience.

Does PSL or Atlanta DSA hold some revolutionary views? Of course. Do the organizers at the core of these protests harbor some revolutionary spirit? Undoubtedly. Yet they continue to act as reactionaries incapable of presenting true challenge to the State and status quo.

This expression of revolutionary intent in some areas and reactionary fear in others stems, I believe, from a liberal view of each expression of struggle as a disparate instance rather than the revolutionary view of each conflict as different faces of the same interconnected struggle. The source cause of the battle

over reproductive rights is the same as the defense of the Atlanta forest, the land back movement, the demand for police abolition, the Black Lives Matter movement, the demand for housing first, the labor movement, and any number of battlegrounds Leftists confront State and Capital.

This is not to say that Atlanta finds itself entirely lacking in revolutionary work. Groups exist within which tepidity is replaced with bold disruptions, charity with meaningful mutual aid, and myopic interests with a deep communal understanding of the interconnected struggle.

Those revolutionary organizations are not the subject of this missive; I speak, instead, to the organizers and organizations wasting the energy of the moment and to those individuals awakening to the need for mass action.

To the organizations and organizers, I say, step back your ego and attempts to control or adjudicate what acceptable protest looks like for the masses. Your job, as experienced organizers, is to, at most, hear and help channel the expression of revolutionary desire into an action that disrupts the churning of the State machine.

There is no longer a place for reactionary controlled protests or marches. The threats we face grow continually more immediate for an ever growing swath of the population. Connect these newcomers with those who have faced these struggles for far longer, enable the new to learn from the experienced, and the experienced to be reinvigorated by the new.

To those newcomers, I say do not let your revolutionary spirit be tampered by those who would use you to boost their own organizations, or to co-opt your energy into another feckless march from Centennial Olympic Park to the Capitol Building. The state has no fear of these marches. APD laughs at you from their cruisers as they watch you march. These organizers of such marches consult with the police to protect themselves.

What revolutionary acts are likely to arise from such controlled and compromised grounds?

Find others in these protests who are willing to push the boundaries. Protect yourself and your identity. Know the limits of what you feel comfortable doing and ignore those who wield megaphones telling you to stay on their script. You don't need to engage in property destruction or to physically confront fascists or police. You must, however, be willing to engage in civil disobedience and disrupt the machine of State and Capital.

Finally, I would be remiss in not addressing the cadre of newly come or now returning protesters awoken from their peaceful slumber and brunches only by the threat to their bodily autonomy: the white feminist.

Your presence is needed. Your energy is needed. Your creativity is needed. Yet these things cannot be brought fully to bear without first examining the nature of your arrival into this movement.

You come now because you no longer find yourself safe and you desire a return to a past that no longer exists, one in which Roe stands unchallenged. Your concept of security stands now shattered, but you are not the first to find yourself in this position. The struggle for bodily autonomy is not yours alone, nor is that struggle the only one of importance. I encourage you to examine the reactionary nature that only now compelled you to action and to rid yourself of those reactionary inclinations.

The struggle for bodily autonomy will not be won by fighting only on this front. Lend yourself to other causes and learn from those who have been engaged in the revolutionary struggle for most or all of their lives.

We do not win by acting as individuals concerned only for our own lives. We win through class consciousness and solidarity. We win through mass action and disruption. We win by taking every opportunity to strike at the status quo, the State, and Capital.