

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

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One Person's Account of the 2004 CrimethInc. Convergence in Des Moines

CrimethInc.

September 11, 2004

We spent months organizing and fundraising. Everything we did leading up to the gathering seemed to fall right into place. A week before the convergence was to start, two kids showed up early to help out and explore the city. They turned out to be amazing individuals with whom I hope to work again soon. We spent the following week gathering food items and other miscellaneous necessities. Groups and individuals started to show up as early as Wednesday. Everyone helped out around the house where we were staying, which I found quite refreshing. By night, we traded tales of our adventures traveling to Des Moines, and plotted new ones for the days that would follow. This was especially interesting because unlike similar convergences, people were showing up with completely different agendas. Some were here simply to engage in conversation, others to form affinity groups for the protests at the upcoming Republican National Convention, a few simply for a free

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ride to NYC, but most because they wanted change in their daily lives.

Friday night came quickly, and as the convergence officially began, things were off to a good start. Everyone traveled out to the camp site, and we had already started planning for the next few days. I was unable to attend the first few hours, due to circumstances out of my control, but Friday night seemed to go well; we prepared for the massive Food Not Bombs we had planned for the next day, at which skill shares and workshops would ensue in the middle of downtown Des Moines.

Saturday began with Food Not Bombs at noon. It went well, as we fed more homeless people that day than any other in recent memory. Afterwards, people split up into small groups to dumpster and gather food for the night. I got out to the campsite at around 10:00 pm, and was informed that the police had arrested at least one person in Des Moines on account of an allegedly broken Radio Shack window and supposed possession of a slingshot. Because the individual was a minor, he was put in Juvenile Hall, which made it very difficult for us to obtain information on his situation. This development was unfortunate news, because it offered a set up for constant police and FBI harassment and intimidation for the duration of the convergence.

We didn't let this affect our plans, however. We continued our efforts, doing everything we could to get our friend out of jail and to maintain morale and motivation in our numbers. We held a security culture workshop later that night, and everyone agreed to be very cautious when doing anything that would give the authorities any more opportunity than they already had to disrupt our activities. Of course, our being anarchists was itself sufficient to bring upon us all the scrutiny and repression they could muster. The intimidation tactics the authorities used the next few days were straight of the textbook: they threatened us with evictions, conspiracy charges, arrests, and so on. However, a few individuals didn't take the situation seriously, and were arrested the following

day, Monday, for stealing books at a Barnes & Noble. It seemed at this point that they were just picking us off one by one, and were clearly hoping to prevent all of us from going to the Republican National Convention. Materials that were to be used in workshops and skillshares mysteriously disappeared from our campsite, including lamp oil that was to be used for a fire-breathing skillshare and PVC pipe that was to be used in a home-made didgeridoo workshop. The pigs then issued a statement saying they had “evidence” that we were planning to make bombs and carry out attacks at the RNC. At that point, an article for which a friend of mine had been interviewed a week earlier came out in the press, preparing the public for such ridiculous accusations and calling them “typical police tactics that have been used to demonize anarchists and activists alike for well over 100 years.” This proved to be helpful, as we gained public support from many local activist groups.

Tuesday night, we held a screening of the film *The Fourth World War* at a local venue, and there was a surprising turnout, raising over \$200.

Wednesday some people who had affinity groups waiting for them in New York City left early for the demonstrations. That night, another member of our group was arrested on “5th degree theft charges,” on account of an American flag supposedly stolen from a local resident near the campsite—although the police would never release the person’s name or give any evidence that the person even existed. My friend, the arrestee, just so happened to have a piece of an American Flag around his injured ankle.

Thursday, everyone left safely as planned for the Republican National Convention, in a group about ten people strong. I stayed in town an extra day waiting for my friend to be released from jail, and on Friday we were on our thirty-hour greyhound bus ride to New York.

Although some of the activities we had planned were effectively disrupted, I still believe that this was a good experience for everyone. The most important thing to remember, in my opinion, is that

as we want to be taken seriously, we have to expect to be taken seriously by the authorities. This harassment came as no surprise to me, and shouldn't have to anyone else either. We were obviously doing something effective, and frightened them enough to take the actions they did. We just need to learn to be strong, and do as much as we can to prepare, and fight back against anything they dish out.