

Tactics, Intentions, Results?

Ever since the Seattle WTO protests of 1999, I have observed a dynamic at work that can best be described as “adventurism”. It accepts that peaceful protests might be of some use but the real action involves physical confrontations with the police or ultraright that is far more dramatic and likely to make the front pages of the bourgeois media. During the Vietnam antiwar movement, it was not uncommon for TV networks to make skirmishes between ultraleftists and American-flag toting “patriots” on the perimeter of massive demonstrations the lead story on the evening news. Back then, the demonstrations were highly disciplined affairs with parade marshals from the UAW and other major trade unions keeping things moving in an orderly fashion. Ultraleftists feeling constrained by the marshals would refer to them as “peace police”. Since 1999, “diversity of tactics” has prevailed. Nonviolent protestors can do their thing while the black bloc or antifa—the latest manifestation of adventurism—can do theirs. If tear gas and billy clubs cannot discriminate between the two groups, so what? All you need to do is retreat from the fray, suffering nothing more than irritated eyes or some bruises.

However, there are alarming signs that the stakes are becoming much higher. On May Day this year, Puerto Ricans took to the streets massively in order to show their opposition to the austerity forced upon the country that made it effectively the Greece of the Caribbean. As reported by Ed Morales in *The Nation*, “worker and student groups, faculty members, a feminist contingent, street artists, and an increasingly politicized middle class—coming from different points around the city converged at the Milla de Oro (Golden Mile) in the Hato Rey business district.” He described the protest as “massive and peaceful... an almost festive atmosphere”. But as the event was coming to an end, black bloc types began throwing rocks at the main headquarters of Banco Popular, the island’s largest bank, breaking windows in a time-dishonored stunt.

The police used this as an excuse to begin wading into peaceful protestors, firing tear gas and using billy clubs on the crowd. TV news that night led, of course, with footage of the black bloc running amok as tear gas dispersed the crowds. Ricardo Rosselló, the rightwing Governor of Puerto Rico, held a press conference to denounce the May Day action, lumping the adventurists in with the peaceful protestors.

That set the agenda for Banco Popular to punish the movement as a whole. It filed a lawsuit claiming damages against 42 plaintiffs, including community organizations and labor unions. Were the masked rock-throwing adventurists agent provocateurs working for the cops? While some probably were, the more likely explanation is a deep-seated belief by politically raw youth that breaking windows and fighting the cops is revolutionary.

On the morning of January 20th, when Donald Trump was set to be inaugurated, a large group of protestors dressed in black and faces covered ran wild through Washington, smashing windows just like their pals in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Once again, the cops threw out a very broad net that included more than two hundred people being

arrested, most of whom apparently had nothing to do with property destruction. They were charged with felony rioting, facing 10 years in prison and a \$25,000 fine. Reporters Alexi Wood and Aaron Cantu, who were also swept up in the mass arrests, face even harsher punishments. Wood was charged with five felony property destruction charges and three felony rioting charges. If found guilty, he could be sentenced to 70 years in prison as would Cantu who was faced with similar charges.

Turning now to Charlottesville, it is obvious to me that if the protests had been disciplined and under the *control* of marshals such as was the norm during the Vietnam antiwar movement, there would have been much less of a chance that James Fields would have been able to drive his Dodge Challenger into a crowd, killing a young woman and injuring 19 others.

The antifa contingent came to the city with the intent of turning it into a battle between the fascists and their own street fighters in the same way that it “intervened” at the Berkeley protest against Milo Yiannopoulos. Fortunately, nobody was killed or injured at Berkeley but the protest lacked political clarity.

If you want to keep tabs of the adventurists who are unaccountable to anybody outside of their ranks, you need to consult the “It’s Going Down” website. There you can read an assessment of the Charlottesville events by an anonymous author, which is typical of the lack of accountability that exists in this milieu. Titled “Charlottesville and the Rise of Fascism in the USA: What We Need to Do”, it is certainly not what one would call an exercise in false modesty.

They credit their window-breaking adventures with inspiring judges to block Muslim bans and motivating government officials to leak information to the press. Gosh, where would we be without them? The boys refer dismissively to nonviolent protestors: “Likewise, it won’t help to gather in churches, as some did in Charlottesville last night, congratulating ourselves on how nonviolent we are while fascists patrol the streets. Last night, when the church locked its doors, many were trapped outside, dramatically outnumbered. This kind of behavior is also complicity.” What ingrates. Cornel West credits them (rather hyperbolically) as saving his life while they charge him as being complicit with white supremacy. It is no wonder that the antifa cult has no concept of broad unity that is so urgently needed today. If you are not ready to get your teeth knocked out by a KKK member in a Rugby-like confrontation, then get lost.

The author does manage to call for unity but the words ring as hollow as Trump’s follow-up statement on Charlottesville: “As in our efforts against the Trump administration, we can’t take on fascism alone. We have to make sure that we are part of a much broader movement, yet that our efforts are not diluted or reduced to some lowest common denominator.” And what does he expect of us? “We need people to put up posters; we need people to hand out handbills”. Is this idiot for real? The antifa wants us to do grunt work while we have absolutely no voice in their decision-making? On their worst day, the worst Leninist sect did not have such arrogance.

There is an implicit ideological assumption in the antifa movement that is worth bringing to the surface and critiquing. In a way, they share the Communist Party’s long-standing obsession with “fascism” that surfaces in every election campaign. They called on people to vote for Hubert Humphrey against Nixon in order to “stop fascism” just as antifa calls on people to get their bones broke or worse taking on fascists who look forward to such confrontation since it gets covered in the bourgeois press that otherwise would have little interest in people like Richard Spencer. Reporting about violence increases newspaper sales and TV ratings.

The enemy is not fascism as much as it is capitalism that exploits the working class according to democratic and civilized norms that would never be associated with the swastika or other fascist regalia. How do I know? Just read the NY Times op-ed page that screams bloody murder about Trump but gave Obama and Hillary Clinton a free pass. It was, after all, Democratic Party indifference to the suffering of the *majority* of Americans that led to the current crisis.

In a way, the American antifa movement suffers the same kind of political myopia as the original movement in postwar Germany, where Socialists and Communists tried to root out the residual Nazism left behind in the German state.

Antifa groups totaled in the thousands, made up of older industrial workers who managed to elude the Gestapo. They were primarily focused on identifying and bringing to justice Nazis in the same way that Jewish Nazi hunters like Simon Wiesenthal did.

They also fought for social change with Stuttgart being a center of working class resistance to postwar austerity. In 1948 there was anger over drastic price rises that triggered a general strike that in which 79 percent of the workforce took part and that spread beyond Stuttgart.

Ultimately, the antifa movement was unable to transform a country that was undergoing massive economic changes orchestrated by the victorious USA.

Essentially, the movement was focused almost exclusively on tracking down Nazis and failed to develop a strategy for changing German society.

As a small, self-appointed savior of the America people, the antifa milieu has neither the massive support that the German antifa movement had nor little grasp of the tasks that face us. Right now it is the cops, not Richard Spencer, that is killing Black people with impunity. All across the country, fracking and other forms of environmental despoliation will be on the rise under Donald Trump. This requires a powerful mass movement to confront, not small-scale skirmishes. We are dealing with frightening confrontations over North Korea that cry out for a new anti-nuclear movement, not stupid, childish window-breaking.

I doubt that anybody involved with window-breaking, fist-fighting idiocy is capable of rising to the occasion but I urge people who have been seduced by their fake militancy in the same way that they got a kick out of the viral Richard Spencer getting punched video to wise up. We are in for some stormy battles and intelligence is needed much more than empty bravado.

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