

Miami (2003)

BRINGING THE HEAT IN MIAMI

An Analysis of Direct Action at the November 2003 Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) Ministerial

VICTORY BEFORE WE EVEN HIT THE STREET

It was almost a miracle (not to mention a victory for our movement) that the mobilization in Miami happened at all. Miami was one of the most repressive police states North America has ever witnessed; the \$8.5 million security plan, funded by federal anti-terrorism dollars, fortified an already incredibly brutal police force. In the days leading up to the event, paramilitary police stood guard on every downtown corner, arresting anyone who looked like they might be a protester. The media engaged in a smear campaign of lies and slander about anarchists, lionizing the police force that was to protect the city from these invading beasts. Plans for the protest seemed to grow murkier rather than clearer as the event approached. Many expected the worst.

Not to be deterred, anarchists entered a city with no infrastructure for direct action and set one up in a mere few weeks. The convergence and welcome centres, the legal, medical, and food support, the independent media and art spaces—these expressions of mutual aid, solidarity, and gift economics were living examples of the world we are fighting for. This infrastructure, pulled together in such a short period of time, was comparable to analogous structures that have taken months and even years to set up in cities that regularly host mobilizations. Our ability to put down such roots in the face of such repression is a moving example of the strength of our movement.

WE ARE EVERYWHERE

On Thursday afternoon, as a mass of activists were beating a spirited retreat from the police line to the sound of marching drums and whistles, a legal observer turned to face his comrades. “As your legal observer, I advise you to...” he began, echoing the familiar words of many a legal observer before him, “...pull shit into the middle of the street and set it on fire!!” Cheering ensued all around.

This anecdote foregrounds a marked difference in our movement today from the atmosphere of even three years ago, when direct action tactics such as property destruction were extremely controversial. Many of the liberals who claimed we were going to wreck ‘their’ movement with our confrontational approaches are gone—they’ve joined us or disappeared. And the new people who have gotten involved have, in large part, done so because they are attracted to the opportunity to confront power, rather than merely beseech it.

The mainstream media kept referring to an elusive minority of ‘bad’ or ‘violent’ protestors, the so-called ‘self-described anarchists’—as if there was any other kind! But make no mistake about it—besides the Root Cause and union marches, Miami was largely an anarchist mobilization. The entire infrastructure described above, including the convergence center, planning framework, and Indymedia coverage, was organized on decentralized anarchist principles. Nearly everyone involved was indeed a ‘self-described anarchist’. Even many of the NGO employees in Miami were closeted anarchists! And not only that: people and press mobbed a forum in Lake Worth called ‘A New World in Our Hearts’, to hear about anarchy from anarchists themselves—and some of the attendees were inspired to offer assistance, or even join the protests themselves.

This is not to say that we anarchists are not still struggling with internal problems—with sensitivities to race, class, and gender, for example, which groups like Anarchist People of Color brought to the forefront. One manifestation of this was discrimination against older people or people perceived, especially by the security crew, to be ‘normal’, ie: from outside the anarchist community proper. In one episode that almost beggars belief, a group of long-

time anarchist organizers who had dressed in civilian clothes to avoid police attention were set upon by some other activists who attempted to force them to give them their food! If we dismiss, alienate, or immediately suspect people who look and dress differently than the stereotypical black-hooded anarchist, we will piss off our most valuable allies—and many anarchists as well!

On the other hand, there were some remarkable bridges built across demographic lines. One of the best examples of this took place on Tuesday, November 18, when some anarchists typically associated with the Black Bloc got together for a ritual with the Pagan Cluster. Words cannot describe the feelings of solidarity and love experienced by these two groups, groups many would have written off as incompatible: singing, dancing, drumming, raving, and continuing an alliance built in the front-lines of earlier street battles, we wove a web that knit our communities together to be stronger and more inclusive. The black and gold bracelets that were shared that night could be seen on many a wrist over the following days, an uplifting affirmation of common cause and courage in the face of adversity.

SUPPORT FROM UNEXPECTED PLACES

Presumably, one of the reasons the powers that be picked Miami to host the negotiations for the Free Trade Area of the Americas was the ostensible absence of an anarchist community. All sorts of rumors went around in advance about how the locals were all going to be hostile to us, would perhaps even attack us. The discovery we made upon arriving in Miami—that not everyone there is a pro-capitalist Cuban refugee, that there are people everywhere who are suffering under the heel of the corporate class and know it—should be a reminder not to get carried away by our own alarmism in the future. In countless experiences with locals, we received heartfelt support and encouragement. Most people don't believe everything they see on television, nor do they appreciate their neighborhoods being overrun by belligerent police officers—nor do they believe corporate capitalism offers us the best of all possible worlds.

The police and media spent months and millions spreading the lie that small family-run businesses in downtown Miami would be destroyed in an orgy of anarchist violence. In an effort organized from the convergence center the week before the days of action, many activists visited businesses with letters of solidarity explaining anarchist ideas, the content of the proposed FTAA, and what to expect from the upcoming demonstrations—not to recruit, but to give people an idea of why the protests were taking place. Most welcomed these activists with open arms, glad to hear what they had suspected all along to be police hype dispelled by the protesters themselves. One person working at a local business said she had enough papers and letters from the police on the upcoming protests to start a fire—and she just might! In support, some shops even gave protestors free food or offered their stores as havens to those wishing to escape the police. Outreach efforts like these are powerful direct actions themselves, not to mention examples of successful acts of resistance in a city suffering such vicious police occupation that just walking downtown put individuals at risk of arrest.

DIRECT ACTION PLANNING

Despite all the pressure and police intimidation tactics, or perhaps even partly owing to the ambience they created, there was an incredible energy among activists in Miami in the days leading up to the FTAA ministerial. The convergence space was buzzing with activity; spokescouncil meetings were held every night to plan for the actions. The spokescouncil meetings focused on a direct action framework for what was to be the main day of action, Thursday, November 20, as well as a jail solidarity plan, preparations for smaller actions throughout the duration of the convergence, and general logistics for the convergence space itself.

Arriving in Miami, everyone wanted to know what the direct action plan was. As a large percentage of those participating in the actions came from far away, much of the organizing was done in a decentralized fashion. Consultas were held regionally throughout the US;

affinity groups and clusters made plans to implement when they arrived. In the months leading up to the event, it really seemed like people were coming with tight, organized plans to contribute to a larger collective action. Early the preceding summer, the plan for a Padded Bloc emerged, and organizers in Pittsburgh announced that a large number of people equipped with armor and shields would be ready to defend areas from police. This plan didn't actually materialize. Word of this plan helped to build momentum as people prepared for the protests, but it also spread the illusion that more people planned to attend than actually did, and that people were more prepared than they ended up being.

What happened in the end was far less organized than many expected. In conference calls and a consulta in Gainesville, a small working group was formed to plan a structure for direct action. This group planned a very basic framework that relied heavily on the independent planning of those who were to participate in it; but it seemed that the plan was not clear enough for many to know how to plug into it, even if they were prepared to do so in the first place. A 7am gathering was planned at Government Center a few blocks from the fence surrounding the hotel where the summit was taking place. The idea was that people would rally and then march towards the fence to carry out actions to 'bring down the fence and shut down the FTAA meetings.'

In an attempt to placate the AFL-CIO, there was an agreement made at the spokescouncil meetings that the direct action would stay clear of the intersection of Flagler and Biscayne between 11am and 5pm, the hours when the union march was to take place. Some felt that this decision was forced through without regard for the perspectives of many activists. Flagler and Biscayne is the main intersection in downtown Miami; it was the area outside the fence closest to the FTAA meeting site, and it ended up being the only place close to the fence that was accessible. This plan disregarded the rules of thumb that have helped to make direct action successful in the past: it meant that direct action activists would be alone out on the streets, with no permitted areas or safe zones to retreat to. Essentially, agreeing to a separate time of day for direct action offered the police a perfect excuse to brutalize and arrest everyone on the streets of downtown Miami outside the hours of the permitted march.

Naturally, this situation scared off many people who were uncertain about participating in direct action; it also gave the police a justification for picking people off before they got to the action, or at least blocking them out. These considerations may explain why the turnout for direct action in Miami was so much lower than expected—in the end, it was not so much the intimidation of the police as a lack of concrete and convincing preparation on our part that discouraged more people from joining in.

This submissiveness to the wishes of the AFL-CIO hierarchy compromised the times and places of the direct action while gaining little except empty words of 'solidarity' from the union officials. After months of frustrating negotiations with them, representatives of the AFL-CIO hierarchy were still being introduced as 'allies' by facilitators and certain others at spokescouncil meetings. We anarchists can choose our own allies, thank you very much; we should not unquestionably accept such loaded terms as descriptions of organizations that have done little in the past to warrant being called allies. And, not surprisingly, while affinity groups of rank and file union members did join the protesters in the streets, the AFL-CIO hierarchy urged union members to flee the protests into their buses as soon as their permitted march ended.

Ultimately, this 'direct action free' period during the main hours of the protest reinforced separation between members of unions and direct action activists, a separation that must be destroyed for both our sakes. Yes, it is important not to provoke unnecessary conflicts, but when representatives of a hierarchical organization that has a history of selling out workers' struggles inform us that the best way we direct action activists can show solidarity with them is by not engaging in direct action... well, even if a spokescouncil of anarchists decides to honor their request, that shouldn't prevent the rest of us from making up our own minds about the issue responsibly, and being prepared to do the organizing to make another approach possible if we deem it worthwhile.

IF YOU ATTACK ONE OF US, YOU ATTACK ALL OF US

Despite all these factors, the protesters made the best of their situation. At the last minute, a section of the Black Bloc decided to meet at the Convergence Center, many blocks away from the fence, where it was felt they could at least marshal a whole bloc to defend themselves, and travel into downtown side by side with puppeteers and foreign media for safety; but the puppeteers with automobiles, and most of the media, ended up driving to downtown, leaving them isolated on foot. For a time, this bloc march had the advantage of surprise, and it took a few minutes for the police to mobilize to block their route; but after a scuffle the bloc was contained, and attempted negotiations with the police only resulted in the bloc being contained again and brutally attacked with tasers and clubs. Ultimately, the group was forced to disperse, and some were arrested.

The larger group of protesters met as planned in Government Center at a peaceful rally, and then marched to the fence. Once there, a single grappling hook was successfully thrown and hooked on the 'anarchist-proof' fence—and it did wobble! But as the Padded Bloc didn't end up coming together, the police were able to attack an essentially undefended crowd. They attacked mercilessly with concussion grenades and rubber bullets, and charged peaceful and dancing protesters with their clubs and batons, brutally beating many. Heroic defenses were staged, bottles thrown, but little could be done in the face of such overwhelming attack.

A couple hours later, the AFL-CIO march took off. Many protesters tried to join, but were stopped at first by the AFL-CIO marshals, who only much later let the protesters in. Even inside the march, some protesters were attacked by police, and though steelworkers—not marshals!—came to their rescue, a few were arrested. At the conclusion of the march, new conflicts began with the police, that proved to be some of the most dramatic and exciting of the day... yet even then, the overwhelming force of the police ultimately forced us to split apart and flee to safety. Protesters were attacked by police wielding batons, tear gas, pepper spray and other chemical agents, and rubber, wooden, and plastic bullets. Over one hundred protestors were treated for injuries; quite a few were hospitalized—one with a bit of a police bullet in his head! Small groups leaving the protests were also targeted by police.

As people regrouped themselves, it was clear that the protest was neither a failure nor a success. It was far from a victory—many of us were wounded and bleeding, others in jail. The fence was not taken down and we had not had the numbers or militancy that we had hoped for. But it was a show of strength and courage that we assembled that day in the heart of the world's most well-defended police-state, and survived.

WHAT DID WORK: Building Alliances, Putting Down Roots, and Taking Aim

Outside the haze of tear gas and robo-cops wielding guns and batons, there were many successful aspects of the Miami mobilization against the FTAA, and it's important that these efforts aren't obscured by all the discussion of police brutality. Here are a few:

-Free housing, free food, free legal and free medical support was provided by and for thousands of people throughout the mobilization. Talk about workable alternatives to capitalism!

-The Green and Eco-Bloc set up a community garden in Overtown, and distributed cherry trees throughout the neighborhood as well as sharing gardening skills and other resources that will be of lasting value.

-Hundreds of people participated in the Root Cause march, which crossed the thirty four miles from Fort Lauderdale to Miami, one mile for every country involved in the FTAA discussions. The march connected important struggles in South Florida to the FTAA and brought out the ways that poor communities and people of color in the region are already being affected by 'free' trade. Many alliances were built and strengthened between those who took part in this march.

-Six weeks before the FTAA ministerial, the anarchists in the Lake Worth Global Justice Group organized the Free Carnival Area of the Americas (FCAA) in Lake Worth, Florida, about one hour north of Miami. The FCAA opened a warehouse to provide space for puppet and art making, planning meetings and workshops, and other preparations for protests against the FTAA. They put out a call for activists to join them in this effort in the weeks before the FTAA ministerial. The art and puppets were used in the Root Cause march and the direct actions in Miami, and the activist infrastructure in Lake Worth contributed in other crucial ways to the mobilization. Many other inspiring and successful events occurred under the umbrella of the Free Carnival Area of the Americas, too.

-Both prior to the main days of action and after, anarchists in South Florida organized three press conferences and public forums. One of these events, entitled 'A New World in Our Hearts', was held in Lake Worth a week before the main days of action. It attracted large numbers of people from the Lake Worth community and helped to get many involved in organizing and playing other supportive roles, such as providing much-needed housing for activists arriving from out of town.

-A couple affinity groups working together compiled and distributed packets including posters, wheatpaste, stickers, annotated maps, and similar redecorating tools to dozens of other groups and individuals. Several crews covered various Miami neighborhoods with messages of resistance to the FTAA in the nights before the main day of action. These groups went entirely unnoticed by the police, and put up a massive amount of posters and graffiti in neighborhoods whose only source of information on the FTAA might otherwise have been the corporate news media.

-Autonomous direct actions... One can guess that many affinity groups organized covert actions in Miami that have not been widely publicized. A communiqué on Indymedia announced that multiple military recruiting centers had suffered property destruction. Rumors have circulated about other similar actions. The powers that be have made a point of keeping silent about all such activities, of course, and from this we can deduce that they regard them as a genuine threat which must not be encouraged by any free publicity.

-'The Really Really Free Market' took place on the day after the main actions. Hundreds participated in setting up this working example of a gift economy in action. Groups set up blankets and booths providing free stuff from food, art, literature, and music to massages, new banner dropping methods, funny hats, and healing circles. This action highlighted our alternatives to 'free' trade and capitalism, and showed examples of how human beings can provide for one another through mutual aid.

MIAMI SCORECARD: What we did, what we didn't do, what we learned...

Before we conclude, let's review some of the goals we have to choose from whenever we engage in mass direct action:

- a. costing our enemies money and otherwise interfering with their misdeeds
- b. enjoying the liberating experience of taking on the powers that be and winning
- c. revealing the capitalist state for what it is by provoking police repression
- d. learning how to act and apply power in anti-authoritarian masses
- e. communicating with 'the world' through mass media
- f. communicating with locals about the issues

All these goals were achieved in Seattle, when we had the element of surprise on our side, and some of them were in Miami—though more of them could have been, had we been better prepared for the approaches we attempted, and augmented them with other tactics. Attacking

the fence, in the presence of such a police mobilization, was perfect for provoking police repression, obviously; it was also moderately good for learning how to act in anti-authoritarian masses, though the police presence discouraged many from attending and interfered with our ability to work together freely. We were able to attract some mass media coverage, for those who value that, though it was mostly along the spectrum that runs between “Murderous Anarchists Hope to Destroy City” and “Harmless Protesters Brutalized by Police,” which at best only portrays us as victims and frightens people away from future protests; the massive police presence prevented us from doing anything that could have really grabbed worldwide attention on the news, let alone invested others with a sense of their own limitless power. The goal of interacting with locals was achieved in part before and after the main demonstration by those who took the time to go around and do so—though we can always stand to do better there. Among other things, a more concerted, extensive effort to get graffiti and posters up around the area would have avoided the risks posed by police in the occupied zone, while demonstrating our power and omnipresence and thus raising morale.

As for the goal of actually striking effectively against the powers that be... considering the massive police presence around the fence, this would have been better achieved by small groups operating outside the centers of police occupation, targeting corporate property and infrastructures efficiently and stealthily. Had such plans been widely deployed and successful, they would have achieved many goals: they would have sent a stern message to both Miami and the world that hosting such contemptible events will result in great costs; they would have provided a new model for others in the anti-capitalist movement to try out themselves, as the older models become obsolete in the face of new police tactics; our enemies would have to consider widening the areas and methods of police surveillance next time, which would cost them more money, frustrate more citizens, and generally add to their already acute overextension. The drawback to such covert activity is that, unlike mass activity, it must be invitation-only, and thus doesn't lend itself to movement-building or skill-sharing; the main reason to go to a mass action rather than staying home blowing up banks is to have the opportunity to work with many others in collective projects that anyone can join in. On the other hand, many among us prefer the covert model as a matter of personal taste, plenty of us know each other well enough to arrange such activities together, and it's no secret that some of our more experienced folks didn't participate in actions in Miami because the overtly planned activities seemed suicidal and no covertly planned activities seemed to be in the works.

So what did we need in Miami that we didn't have? We should have had more clandestine planning sessions, for one thing. Direct action should not be planned like civil disobedience; in order for it to be safe, to elicit the confidence it needs to succeed, and to be unpredictable enough to stand a chance of working, it has to be arranged among friends. No organizing any massive spokescouncil can do could compensate for the lack of private initiative and planning, if affinity groups don't prepare effectively amongst themselves. More of us should have been forthcoming with our own ideas: even those of us already known for our resourcefulness often hesitate to come forward and actually organize something, feeling that someone else must already be doing it or that it must already be too late—but all too often it turns out that no one else is working on the things we'd like to see happen, and we find out after it really is too late that the ideas we'd had would have worked out perfectly if only they had been tried. Frequently we end up doing at the last minute what we should have had the confidence to do ahead of time. If we're going to have to organize groups and lay plans anyway, we might as well get over our fear of doing these wrong and just go ahead and try.

Ultimately, if an effective resistance is to be mounted, all the forces in a protest have to work together. This means everybody—from rank and file workers, puppeteers, and black-clad anarchists, to dancing Pagans and locals from Overton—everybody has to find a way to contribute to what others are doing, to complement others' projects without obstructing or endangering them. The long, steady process of building this cooperation can't be bypassed by communicating with hierarchies. A single representative from the management of the AFL-CIO is a poor substitute for actual communication with union workers. No amount of anti-racist workshops could possibly substitute for the experience of interacting with people of different economic and racial backgrounds. Many of the problems with the protest resulted from people's over-reliance on the spokescouncil to provide some master plan that would

magically coordinate the whole movement. Of course we need to coordinate in order to work together, but that isn't going to happen if we sit around waiting for orders at a spokescouncil meeting. We can do this inside and outside the spokescouncil meeting, months before protest, in private as well as in more public meetings. Every affinity group should come to town with a hundred secret plans to stop the FTAA single-handedly, as well as ideas they can share with other groups.

But, to repeat this once more, with the full brunt of the forces of the terror war being brought to bear against us in Timoney's Miami it was a wonder, albeit a symbolic one, that a single grappling hook reached the fence at all. If the more confrontational among us could have wrought more havoc there, it would have done much to discredit the idea that a militarized force of any size can succeed in dominating a decentralized, flexible gathering of freedom-hungry people; all the same, what we did just by being there at all was impressive and important—and maybe enough.

The difficult time we had in Miami is going to occasion much discussion of tactics at future demonstrations, but perhaps that focus is misplaced. Shutting down such meetings was always a symbolic goal, remember, even when it was possible by such straightforward means. Now that the government has to spend eight and a half million dollars every time a ministerial takes place, and not only paralyze the city but also terrorize its inhabitants, it might be that they're doing our work for us: the once-secret meetings are impossible to keep out of the public eye, the "free" trade they concern is associated with massive police repression and suspension of human rights, and there are more opportunities than ever for us to bring up our alternative. All we have to do is show up, cause them enough consternation that they'll have to make the same preparations for the next one, and get away without unsustainable losses.

Let's be realistic, anyway: although there are improvements we could have made in our strategizing for mass activity in downtown Miami—we could have gotten more militant people to the fence at once Thursday morning, or turned the retreat from it that afternoon into a forward march that was routed to pass by corporate targets, to name two examples—there's only so much we can accomplish under such intensive surveillance and repression. But the fact that they had to spend over eight million dollars to achieve this is a sign of their weakness, not of their strength—they sure can't do that everywhere, all the time. It's taken them four years since we won in Seattle to fully develop their anti-Seattle security system, and by now we should be ready to move on to the next unexpected line of attack. We've learned so much about mass activity in the training ground these summits have provided us—now we should take those lessons back to the unguarded environments in which such tactics first thrived. Next time we succeed in coming together in great numbers without the police state getting wind of it in advance, it's going to be spectacular. Let's start focusing our energy on how to get people together for mass action outside the context of international trade meetings—let's call our own days of action proactively, organize surprise group activities in our own communities, even hijack crowded events and turn them into mass actions. That's the future: more unanticipated covert activity at mass action demonstrations, more unanticipated mass actions in other settings!

So what's next? For starters, let's not forget to support all the people who were arrested in Miami, especially the ones with felony charges. They need both emotional support and assistance with legal costs, and we need to provide these in abundance so others will not be afraid to take similar risks in the future. And above all, let's not neglect the work in our own communities that generates the social foundation from which these efforts grow. Now is the time to start new infoshops, new outreach programs, even new anarcho-punk bands. Let's plan for the next massive demonstration such as the G8 in Georgia this June, or the Republican National Convention in New York City—just to be there to keep the heat on them without killing ourselves or getting all of us in jail, to keep them focused on protecting themselves from that angle so they won't see what's coming at them from the other side... and perhaps, also, to try out some new ideas, to show off how much more creative and powerful and dangerous than them we are.

As the Black Bloc sang with the Pagans:

"No Army can hold back a thought
No fence can chain the sea
The Earth won't be sold or bought
All Life shall be free."

Miami: A Dangerous Victory

For those of us who participated in the protests against the FTAA, the Free Trade Area of the Americas, in Miami the third week in November, it's a bit hard to feel victorious. We are bruised, battered, worried about '*companeros*' still in jail, and grieving for the Jordan Feder, a young medic who died of meningitis after the action. We've been harassed, arrested, tear gassed, pepper sprayed, hit, beaten, assaulted, lied about, and in some cases literally tortured and sexually assaulted in jail, and we've stared directly into the naked red gaze of the New American Fascism.

Nevertheless we have had a significant victory that we need to understand and recognize, not least because it throws us into a new and very dangerous phase of activism.

Our victory was not tactical. None of our own attempts to physically enter or disrupt the conference were very effective. I've heard rumors that one group did actually take down a section of fence, but most of us just managed to march up to it and maintain a presence close to it for short periods of time before being driven back by police riots. And while I could list numerous missed opportunities and tactical errors we made, I can't honestly think of anything much we could have done, given the overwhelming police presence and the physical layout of Miami, that would have made for a significantly different tactical outcome.

We were Iraqed—that is, we were attacked not for anything we'd done but for someone's inflated fears of what we might do; shot, gassed, beaten and arrested for weapons of destruction we did not have; targeted for who we are and what we stand for, not for acts we had committed. The 8.5 million dollars that was allocated for the policing of this event came out of the 87 billion dollar appropriations bill for Iraq. Miami was the Bush policy of pre-emptive bullying brought home.

There is a certain visceral sense of satisfaction in breaching a barricade and directly blocking a meeting, but those are not actually the measures we should use to judge our success. The direct action strategy in contesting the summits is not really about physically disrupting them. It's about undermining their legitimacy, unmasking them, making visible their inherent violence and the repression necessary to support them and undercutting public belief in their beneficence or right to exist. And there, we are winning, not because of any tactical brilliance on our part, but because in truth all we had to do was show up, to be there as a visible body of opposition and withstand the onslaught.

Our most effective direct actions may have been those we did in the days and weeks before the meetings: the outreach, the community gardening, the door-to-door flyering downtown, all conducted under the constant threat of arrest by a police force

acting like Nazi bully boys, arresting protestors for walking on the street, standing on the sidewalk, talking to people or witnessing other arrests. In spite of the major fear campaign and the negative propaganda being put forth by the police and the media, just about every interaction we had with ordinary Miami folks was positive. Locals were told by police that dangerous anarchists would burn their shops, would shoot them with squirt guns full of urine and feces, would smash their windows, and destroy Miami if not contained. Nevertheless, local people were scared, but interested in what we had to say. The poor and immigrant populations of downtown Miami understand the issues of underlying economic injustice. They could quickly grasp what the FTAA might mean for their jobs. They told us stories of water privatization in their home countries, of 16 hour a day workshifts on cruise ships that unions couldn't organize because they are registered in other countries, of their daily struggle to survive on the streets, of the ongoing police brutality faced by the homeless and the poor.

When we were driven back into Overtown, Miami's black ghetto, people smiled and waved, came forward to help us, offered places for hunted activists to hide, sheltered our puppets in their back yards. Other local people came forward to offer housing and shelter, to donate food, plants, and time to the mobilization, to hold vigils at the jail and to provide support after most of the action had left town. It was as if the bulk of the population pressed the 'mute' button on the soundtrack spewed by the media and the police, noticed what their own eyes were telling them, and knew who their true allies were.

That disconnect, that gap between the reality the power structure was attempting to construct and the actual reality of ordinary people, is the fertile political space we need to nurture and explore in order to move forward. For it leaves the bullies building a more and more elaborate fortress of control that is unsupported by any foundation of credibility or legitimacy. Where there should be the concrete of credence and the rebar of faith, there is only air: and such a structure is bound to fall. In its fall, it may well take a lot of us with it, and therein lies both the danger and the opportunity of this political moment.

Miami was a clear example of the New American Fascism brought home. I don't use the word 'fascism' lightly. I use it to mean that combination of brutal state power applied ruthlessly against its critics, backed by surveillance, media distortions, hate propaganda, and lies, allied politically and economically with those who profit from the industries of weaponry, prisons, and war.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, the evil Sauron is represented by a red, glaring, all-seeing eye. To be in Miami in November was to suffer that searing, hostile gaze. The red eye of fascism is a double-barrelled gaze: the eye that watches, that records, that holds you under surveillance and videos your comings and goings and compiles the records: and the media/propaganda eye, that frames the story, that defines and distorts you and tells everyone just what the justification is for your repression.

For true totalitarian control, misrepresenting facts, telling a false story, is not enough. Total control requires control over the frame of the story, the meaning of the language you use, the boundaries of what it is possible to think about. So 'Violence' becomes a word whose meaning changes radically when it is applied to protestors as opposed to agents of the state. 'Violence' is simply not applied to police by the media or the political powers that be. The use of sound bombs, pepper spray, rubber, wooden and plastic bullets, wooden batons, bean bag pellets, and tear gas, illegal arrests, beatings, deprivation of basic human rights, medical care, food and water,

overt torture and sexual assault are properly characterized by the word, 'restraint', as in "the police acted with restraint."

Friends of mine who were watching the news on the days of action all reported a similar experience. They saw police move in on a crowd of peaceful protestors, swinging billy clubs and firing tear gas and rubber bullets. What they heard was commentary suggesting that protestors were 'violent', and that therefore the police were justified in whatever measures they chose.

Applied to activists, 'violence' means, 'any act of opposition to total military and police control, any act of resistance from walking in the wrong place to talking to the wrong people to allying with other suspects.' Above all, any attempts to remove oneself from the all-seeing gaze, to mask oneself, to carve out any space free of that hostile red arc light, are evidence of violence.

Totalitarian control is deeply racist, sexist and homophobic, for it depends on division and separation. Police attempted to divide the unions from the direct action folk, by pushing the action into the area where the permitted labor march was scheduled to go, attacking the crowd there, attacking union members and punishing them for associating with 'potentially dangerous' others.

Activists of color were singled out for special abuse by the police and prison guards, subjected to brutal beatings and outright torture in jail, in spite of solidarity efforts by other activists. Sexual assaults were carried out on women and transgendered prisoners. Queer prisoners were harassed and mistreated.

The greatest victory we achieved in Miami is that these strategies of division did not work. Instead of dividing labor and direct action, repressive police tactics angered the unions who are now calling for a congressional investigation. Our solidarity with labor remains strong, as does our commitment to stand together and support each other through the aftermath of the brutal attacks against our fellow activists, and to name and unmask the racism, sexism and homophobia we encountered.

The overwhelming military force and brutality of the police was a measure of the utter bankruptcy of the policies they were defending. Neoliberal economics, the 'Washington consensus' behind the various free trade agreements and institutions, is not hard to delegitimize because it doesn't work. It promises increased prosperity for all if we allow corporations free reign over the globe, privatize all public resources, and end government support for any arenas of human activity that actually increase health or well-being or quality of life. Somehow the poor are supposed to benefit from this. But this promise has overwhelmingly proved false. Countries that implement these policies have lost economic ground or gone belly-up, like Argentina. The gap between rich and poor has grown into a vast chasm. NAFTA has been devastating to the US economy, costing us over 785,000 good manufacturing jobs, allowing corporations to sue governments for loss of their projected profits if governments pass inconvenient environmental or labor regulations. The developing countries have not been able to use the WTO or any of these trade agreements as platforms to reduce tariffs for their products or persuade the US and EU to reduce the agricultural subsidies that have devastated small farmers around the world—hence the walkout in Cancun of countries from the global south.

No one was defending the FTAA with any passion. In fact, brute force seemed to be the major argument in its favor. And the FTAA summit ended in a glossed-over failure. To prevent its utter collapse, the conveners referred all controversial issues back to committee, ended a day early, and pulled back from the original vision of an

overarching agreement to a truncated 'FTAA-Lite'—which even in its watered-down form has little chance of being adopted.

Their failure was a result of the years of organizing, education, truth telling, and direct action we've done in the north to create and foster that gap of belief, and perhaps even more, a result of the absolute social disruption that the policies of the neoliberalism have spawned in the global south, where governments have already fallen and ministers know their populations will not tolerate more of the same.

We in the north are left confronting an alliance between economic powers desperate to retain their advantage in a sinking economy, the most powerful military/police force ever amassed on the planet, and a subservient media willing to tell whatever story the rulers command. But the more ruthless and brutal the system becomes, the wider and deeper that gap of legitimacy may become.

Our political success and personal survival may depend on our ability to understand and deepen that disconnection between eyes and ears, direct experience and propaganda. At what point does it set in? When do people start to believe their own eyes, to question the authority of the commentators? How do we prevent the power structure from consolidating a new foundation of belief? How far does that gap extend? How do we widen and deepen the gap, and how do we mobilize and empower those who have ceased to believe to take action? And as the fortress of control begins to crumble over our heads, where do we find shelter from the falling debris, and what new structures will we build in its place?

If we can build on the successes of Miami: the solidarity, the deepened alliances, the trust, if we can turn those alliances into real political power, we will have a strong victory. If the combined forces of the progressive movements and the unions and the NGOs can succeed in making the political and police powers of Miami pay a political and social cost, we can stem the tide of repression.

There were actions we took in Miami that undoubtedly contributed to the support we received: we waged a proactive media campaign, we planted a community garden in Overtown and gave away dozens of trees, above all, we went out and talked to people on the street. In the worst moments of police assault, there were always those who moved forward to put their bodies on the front line and slow the assault of the storm troopers. People helped and supported and strengthened each other, and the shock of the violence we experienced was tempered by the sweetness of support and the inspiration of acts of courage.

We can go further in making our actions and organizing welcoming and friendly, can perhaps devote more of our efforts to outreach and connection instead of obsessing on our tactics, can confront our own vestigial racism, sexism, homophobia and the other prejudices that can divide us, and we can frame our actions and organizing with a clear strategic goal: to broaden and deepen that gap of belief, to make strong alliances with the disaffected and to mobilize the political power of dissent, to unmask the violence, repression, and sheer ugliness of the structures of control, to counter them with the beauty and joy of our visions brought to life. Then we can stare back into that red, totalitarian eye and pierce it with a white-hot gaze of truth, a spear in the eye of the Cyclops. And we will have the support and strength we need to withstand the monster's crash, and to begin the process of building the world that we want.