

## The Commoner N.9 Summer/Spring 2004

### amory starr hunted in miami, "the model for homeland defense"

29 November, 2003:

"...a sweep", came the call, but i didn't know what it really meant. it was just another cop word whispered by another paranoid activist. there were three landlines and twelve cell phones ringing and our internal nextels were beeping and buzzing. i was supposed to "coordinate incoming information" for Miami Activist Defense, the legal collective set up to provide support activists protesting the ftaa meetings.\* over the next hours i learned that a sweep means a fifteen-block-wide wall of vaderesque police shoulder-to-shoulder moving north, doing violence to every person in their path. the callers were all breathing hard. i realized that most of my closest friends were being hunted through the streets of miami.

the MAD phones had already been ringing fairly constantly for days with reports of detentions, illegal searches, bizarre arrests of medics and legal observers, persistent and intrusive surveillance and invasion of activist spaces, including media and medical spaces. in a chilling echo of the iraq war (for which part of the budget was routed to miami), the media invited to "embed" with the police were required to wear gas masks and helmets, but young activists with gas masks in their backpacks were portrayed as violent thugs. in the detentions and searches of backpacks during the week, the police were apparently seeking materials for their press conferences, and they did find piles of gas masks (nevermind that they're legal in this city). but we now have piles of their bullets.

it's very hard to claim that protesters were intending violence when half of all backpacks in the entire city had been searched. nevermind that the detentions had no probable cause and the searches were illegal, the police and public now knows with great certainty that protesters, even the grubbiest, angriest, and most vegetarian of them, who were subject to the most profiling and, in many cases, multiple stops and searches during the week, were not found to be carrying a single weapon! these were probably the most upstanding collection of youngsters in america, since these searches also resulted in only ONE charge of a controlled substance and it turned out to be a prescription medication!

the thursday morning direct action had been a predictable series of clever, but puny, actions focused on the fence surrounding the ftaa meetings in the inter-continental hotel. the noon afl-cio rally and march was unusually militarized. but no one expected what happened in the afternoon. at 3:53 pm activists remaining in the streets after the end of the union march were told by a police representative with a bullhorn that the demonstration could continue "until there is violence". within seven minutes, a wall of police moved on the crowd, firing rubber bullets and teargas and eviscerating all of our elaborate tactical debates, color-coded spatial and temporal distinctions of action intensity zones, and painstakingly-wrought "action guidelines" .

in the next four hours MAD received hundreds of calls bringing overwhelming, terrifying information from our legal observers, friends, and activists in the street. they told us who they had just seen beaten to the ground, dragged into an unmarked car, or brutally arrested, that they were running, that they were being pursued, and that they didn't know where they could go to be safe. the lawyers and police liaisons working with our team were all at locations surrounded by armies of riot police and could not be reached on their cell phones. we knew that the activists' "convergence center" was surrounded by an army. we put out the word to people to take off dark clothes and get inside anywhere they could. and we told our legal observers to take off their distinctive hats as they were, apparently, at particular risk.

'hunting' is really the right word to describe what happened. on november 23, the miami herald said that police chief timoney hunts activists "like a hawk picking mice off a field" the november 17 sun-sentinel said timoney himself calls it "a game of cat and mouse". the november 21 orlando sentinel quoted Timoney saying "if we don't lock 'em up tonight, we'll lock 'em up tomorrow, so let's lock 'em up." and this week was described by miami mayor manuel diaz as "the model for homeland defense" ...

the police stated that these measures were necessary to control protesters intending violence. as wednesday's press release from MAD stated, the vicious, unnecessary, and vindictive targeting of activists had no justification and did not follow any pattern based on profile. there is no evidence of violent behavior justifying the police response. a soft plastic fence was torn down and a few cardboard fires were set. there were no broken windows. the well-publicized "padded bloc" (based on the European tactic of Tute Bianchi) never even appeared in the streets; so even the most militant (while avowedly non-violent) element of the protest could not be blamed for the response. apparently the only probable cause needed by the police was the media's uninformed but insistent pairing of the words 'anarchist' and 'violent'.

in response to resounding non-provocation, we have confirmed reports that police used a wide variety of weapons: rubber bullets, plastic bullets, beanbags, a new weapon containing metal pellets which explode on contact and leave shrapnel in the body, tear gas, pepper spray, and tasers. the medics confirmed that rubber bullets were directly shot into the face, resulting in at least five head wounds. medics report dozens of serious injuries. MAD confirms receipt of police misconduct reports documenting ten beatings and seven incidents of detainees being held at gunpoint. two activists are still in hospital, one with brain damage and the other awaiting surgery to remove fragmented metal projectiles from his face.

justified on the grounds that the afl-cio refused to exclude non-members, they were restricted entry to and egress from their permitted rally area, agreements for bus access were revoked, the march route was changed after it had begun, and union members and afl retirees were brutally arrested. other groups were also denied use of permits. unitarians attempting to attend an educational workshop at a methodist church on thursday were barred entry by dozens of riot police and bomb squad personnel from several agencies (local, federal, ATF, and others unspecified) and the event was cancelled.

**the presumption was that if you were in the street or on the sidewalk in the downtown area of miami, you were an activist, and therefore a criminal.**

activists, once defined as criminals, were then hunted and terrorized by local, state, and federal agencies unbound from the rule of constitutional law. currently in the legal office we are cataloguing lists of violations of the first, fourth, fifth, sixth, and eighth amendments. early in the week, somebody joked that "all the even-numbered amendments had been suspended in miami... and of course the first."

the wholesale criminalization of activists included the targeting of clearly marked safety personnel, indicating that "homeland defense" is not concerned with public health and safety. medics were denied access to areas where people were injured and shot at while treating people. legal observers were targeted for beatings and violent arrests. union marshals, lawyers, and police liaisons were arrested. snatch squads showcase hemispheric free trade in political repression as these are terror tactics taught at the School of the Americas and used by Latin American paramilitaries.

still in shock from thursday, activists did the classic thing and held a press conference and vigil outside the courthouse/jail on friday. police initially informed 200 activists that they could demonstrate in an adjacent parking lot. after the activists held an excellent street spokescouncil, police issued a 3-minute dispersal order. as people were trying to disperse, and to the amazement of courthouse staff, the 680 riot cops on the scene surrounded, pepper sprayed, and arrested about 70 people, including a retired miami attorney along with three other legal observers in distinctive hats, as well as a lawyer acting as police liaison.

once in custody, the terror tactics continued. processing of arrestees was slow and inaccurate. paperwork was lost, access to counsel and phone calls was denied, public defenders were frustrated by constantly changing procedures in jails and courts, excessive bails were set (such as five thousand dollars for the misdemeanor "resisting arrest without violence"), and there were extreme delays in bond release (up to 12 hours). those arrested on friday afternoon, charged with "unlawful assembly", "failure to disperse", and "resisting without violence", were held on average \$1500 bail, denied food and water for 8-16 hours, and some were strip-searched (and several of the strip searches were done by or in front of the opposite gender).

signed jail outtake reports document five cases of denial of medical care in custody, 30 cases of serious handcuff abuse (keeping people in handcuffs for thirteen hours with cuffs so tight that their hands turned purple), 4 cases of sexual assault, ten death threats, six other threats of bodily harm, ten reports of people beaten or pepper sprayed while cuffed or sprayed directly in the face, one report of a person forced to sign a confession not written by the defendant, and arrestees threatened with federal charges and federal detention for not revealing their national origin (not a crime).

many of us have pushed ourselves beyond exhaustion in our efforts to simultaneously express our dissent, care for one another, and address misunderstandings and tensions in the interest of future solidarity. for several days, there was no time to discuss having been hunted, jailed, and beaten, because there was too much work to do. we just pushed on, leaving ourselves for later. one of the dedicated young street medics, Jordan Fader, died saturday morning of viral meningitis, his immune system weakened by exposure to chemical weapons in the streets and his valiant efforts to care for others in a context of police violence.

welcome to "homeland security".

\* i am not a spokesperson for and none of this document may be taken as representing Miami Activist Defense (MAD).

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