

A Report Back from the Seattle Anti-Capitalist May Day March



2015

There are as many perspectives on May Day as there were participants, this is but a small collection of them.

“This is no longer demonstration management, this is a riot.” - Captain Chris Fowler

It shouldn't be a surprise that this year's May Day Anti-Capitalist march got wild. The media had been in scare tactic over drive and police press conferences urging calm began nearly a week before a single person hit the street. For better or worse, the city has developed traditions around the 1st of May in Seattle. The media creates a climate of fear around posters and runs a constant stream of stock footage in an effort to sensationalize “what might happen?”. The police hold press conferences about their improved methods for both neutralizing the crowds and minimizing property damage, all the while decrying ‘a few bad protesters’ that might ruin an otherwise peaceful day. While much of the ritual of media sensationalism and police demonstration of force were repeated verbatim from previous years, the crowd this year was unswayed and more confrontational, more angry and more prepared.

As usual, the march began at Seattle Central College, a space often used as the meeting point for antagonistic anarchist marches. It's never clear what draws numbers to an event, but an understanding has been established that if you want to be at the rowdiest shit that day, then Central is the place to be. By 6pm over 150 people were milling about, some in bloc, some not, while supplies were passed between hands and tensions grew.

After some time the march headed north on Broadway, completely flanked by bike cops in riot gear. More pigs waited in marked and unmarked vans throughout the Capitol Hill neighborhood and helicopters circled overhead. The threats of a well outfitted response to past violence made by both mayor Ed Murray and police chief O'Toole were not empty ones. After only a few short blocks the first sound of breaking glass could be heard as the march passed the Bank of America.

Near the end of the obvious commercial district the march, now with about 250 people, made use of side streets to turn around and come back south on Broadway. As it passed construction sites along the route people started to drag debris and street signs into the street in an effort to thwart the phalanx of bike cops behind them. Seemingly out of nowhere, a snatch squad moved in and tackled one person to the ground, prompting an immediate response of projectiles and direct attacks from the crowd. People began throwing rocks and whatever they could find at the re-forming police lines. Others bashed cops in the head with wooden flags in a valiant attempt of solidarity. In an effort to disperse the crowd, the police began pepper spraying and throwing a fuck ton of flash bangs - a tactic they would use many more times throughout the evening, always garnering the same response of a barrage of projectiles from the crowd.

This first arrest cemented the already incredibly confrontational tone of the crowd.

The police were able to split the crowd into two large groups but were unable to disperse it. One group was trapped north of the police line while the other found itself on a street with almost no police presence but rows of waiting media vehicles. This lucky group smashed the windows of at least 3 news vans while camera crews ducked for cover. Large objects were thrown at reporters and those trying to interfere with the vandalism. As no police moved into the area, the now divided march began to snake around Capitol Hill. Eventually the two parts joined up again and began tearing down construction fences and putting dumpsters and piles of debris in the street. Attempts were made to set a dumpster on fire, but it was put out.

The march wound around Capitol Hill, as some continued to drag dumpsters into the street while others vandalized cars and broke the windows of businesses on the ground floor of new condo buildings. In both defensive and offensive moments projectiles smashed officers and their cars as they held their lines. At one point, a dumpster was pushed to the top of one of the steepest hills in the neighborhood in an attempt to strike the line of cops nearly two blocks below. Unfortunately, the police moved in quickly and forced the crowd back away from the dumpster.

The vandalism continued as the groups were split and re-converged on neighborhood back streets. Eventually, one step ahead of the bike cops, the reformed march made its way back onto the main thoroughfare of Broadway. An Urban Outfitters and a grocery store had almost all of their windows broken out. Once heading back south on Broadway the police made a few more arrests. Each time the crowd responded with violence but were unable to make successful un-arrests. A few blocks later, back at Seattle Central the march took over the square and lit small trash can fires, while openly painting on the building itself and the statues outside. Some idiot attempted to block people from painting and had a giant circle A painted on him instead. Eventually after a few more police charges the last of the crowd dispersed.

The atmosphere across the country has shifted, nearly a year ago everyone saw Ferguson explode in anti-police violence with other cities across the country following suit. Not even a few weeks ago Baltimore burned in the largest riots a major East Coast city has experienced since 1968. In this context Seattle has seen some of the largest demos and most intense street clashes in recent memory. These demos brought varied crews together night after night in what has become an unspoken level of confidence amongst a large amorphous body of antagonists. This May Day, black clad anarchists, skate bros, downtown street kids and militants from a variety of politicized movements came together with an aim of keeping each other safe and wrecking as much shit as possible.

In total 16 people were arrested and they will need immediate and continued solidarity. The bonds of affinity created while attacking the police or watching each others backs in moments of riotous vandalism should not be forgotten. Here's to the next one!

Solidarity With The Arrestees!

Long Live Mayday!



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