

# Reflections on Quebec, strategy and tactics

While tens of thousands rose up, with great energy and spirit, in Quebec City to protest the Summit of Americas, there was no goal or strategy across sectors or within the direct action movement that unified us, focused collective actions or defined victory. Some people question whether or not this was strength or a weakness--whether or not there should have been a clear goal and plan.

Within the direct action, the CLAC goal was articulated as "disrupt to the maximum extent possible". The strategy was one of color zones each representing a diversity of tactics formula – green "safe", yellow – defense/nonviolent actions, aware of arrest risk and red – disruptions, an area where diverse tactics can be used, high risk involved, includes police reaction.

In light of the fact that there was no clear plan that people knew how to hook into, or that offered a clear offensive nonviolent action, what happened in the streets of Quebec felt appropriate. The action while scary at times did not feel violent since the outrage was focused primarily on the fence and the police who defended it. They were armored sufficiently to withstand most of what was thrown, including their own teargas. Had there been a clear offensive non-violent action however, what happened may have felt more like violent tactics.

The CLAC formula gave lots of permission and space for these elements in our movement to define the day. As my friend Scott said that unless clearly delineated by time and space, the most provocative would absorb all others. That's what happened and again since there was not other plan, it felt fine and good to me. While it was a minority who fought back, they were seen as demonstrating the courage needed to take down the wall and return whatever gas came our way. In QC one was forced to accept that there is a militant sector of youth, uncivil tactics and outrage that part of this movement. They should be proud of some of what they did, but those of us who want to continue to grow this movement, need to respect and acknowledge them, but not embolden them. Instead we must create alternatives that minimizes the space for more provocative tactics.

If we learn from history, these elements will drive some of this movement underground and choices will be made that will escalate the conflict into a realm that will inevitably destroy it. We must help education and put today's resistance into historical and global contexts....

I do not believe we will see a successful armed revolution in this country. I do believe we could see a successful popular revolution, if enough people are outraged at the corruption, brutality and evilness of this system.

They know this too, which is why they push the militants and violent tactics and why they will attack us whether we are non-violent or not non-violent. I've come to expect this and thus find it hard to express outrage at the police behavior. For me it's like what do you expect. The terms on the street are different now that we are going after the heart of the beast – capitalism. If we tear down the fence they will defend the space with whatever means they consider necessary. If we throw rocks, molotovs- they will respond. This is not to justify the police attacks. In a "democratic" "civilized" society where we do have political rights, we should not have to be fenced out or tear gassed in order to express our views.

Unfortunately, we really don't live in either – democratic or civilized. Our rights exist more

in theory than practice. Like I tell folks in my trainings, what the police do is not what is legal, but what they can get away with. Same with our rights, they don't give them we take them.

So what does all this mean? For me, it means that the state will do everything it can to keep people out of this movement. They will create fear on two levels. One – we are violent, the other that coming to a demonstration you can be hurt. They are playing to the wider public in their strategy.

Who are we playing to? Who is the audience - the police, the delegates, the action participants, potential allies or the general population? Our answer should be a factor in our strategic and tactical thinking. We know that the media is obsessed with the black bloc fight the police images. We can't control this, but we do need to understand the depth of their influence on the collective think of our society. Even our allies buy into the criminalization campaign, which are continually re-inforced with images of rock-throwing, fire-burning images.

I have never been a morally grounded nonviolent activist. I am a strategically grounded nonviolent warrior. I do not believe nonviolence has to be passive or defensive. I do believe it has offensive and smart. In light of the ravages, exploitation and destruction being wrought by the state, it needs to be proactive and have edge. The urgency and anger of the youth and conscious people is real. We are in a war, not of our choosing, but of one in which we have no choice – if we want to survive that is.

To wage this war however, we must nurture and sustain ourselves. That is why the creative, playful, colorful and spiritual actions are so important. They immediately show the contrast between them and us.

While change comes from the edges or margins, it consolidates with the mainstream. While it only takes a small group to change the world, we need the masses to accept it. While a minority strategy can redefine the power relationship, we need the majority to go along. The state knows this, that our cooperation is necessary to maintain them. That is why we must think more and more about creating conditions that will enable non-cooperation on a mass scale. If you look at any popular revolution in recent memory, it occurred because enough people said no more and took over the streets and government building etc in a mass act of non-cooperation. In addition, no armed struggle has ever won, with out the tacit or active support of a popular movement.

To this end, while all of the tactics available to us may be necessary. We need to take great care as to when and how. The more militant should not be our default, our first choice, and our definers. The more militant tactics do not help us grown, but can be so far outside the experience of our allies that we drive a wedge between us that will not enable

This brings me to a last but central dilemma. Simplified it's the question of reform or revolution. This is an unnecessarily polarizing question. But a real one in light of how it plays out in reality, especially if we want to talk about community based organizing.

While I do not believe that capitalism can be reformed, or our political system for that matter. The reformers and the revolutionaries have equally important roles to play. Both are necessary and can aid and abet each other. We allow the state and ourselves to keep us divided however. Fear and lack of trust drive so much of the dynamic.

Nonviolence has become a polarizing term unfortunately.

When we understand the art of action, and that the world is our stage and we are actors with different roles to play, it is easier to write a script, If we can create a collective vision of what we want, of our different roles, of what we want the audience to learn and come away with, then our chances of success are greater. We will know how to define victory. We will know how to achieve victory. We

There will always be negative and positive, things we like and don't like critiques and applause to be made at these actions. But in the overall analysis, did they take us closer to withdrawing mass consent? Did we do anything to dismantle the state and their agreements and policies? Did we build creative and positive empowerment for the youth and other warriors?

In conclusion – we need the mainstream to join with those of us in the margins. We need a common vision, a common strategy with different roles and tactics appropriate to those roles. We need to build creative, positive, offensive resistance that fundamentally challenges and dismantles capitalism and it's tentacles of oppression.