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Message in a Bottle, Smashed in the Face of a Cop

Cory Stephens

18 September 2014

We are the storm we've been waiting for.

Maybe it was Napoleon Bonaparte or maybe it was Frederick the Great that put forth the maxim that moves the people. Try as you might—and it matters little outside of boutique branding opportunities—you cannot accredit an idea whose time has come. An army marches on its stomach; neoliberal forces crawl on its belly.

A breadth of events outline September 17–24, 2014, as New York City hosts the United Nations Climate Summit in preparation for the COP20 in Lima, Peru where the party-states will set the agenda for the 2015 COP21 in Paris. Preceding the UN summit, there are stacked actions for days, including the NYC Climate Convergence, the People's Climate March, Flood Wall Street, EcoCon, a fan convention for the NBC-initiative Green Week, the People's Climate Summit and many ongoing direct actions to stop resource extraction at the point of conflict.

The organizing head of the People's Climate March, 350.org, promises attendance in the hundreds of thousands – culled from

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over a thousand organizations – to march through Manhattan on a Sunday afternoon for the purpose of maybe convincing someone in a global position of power to do something. The totem environmental justice NGOs involved are nothing short of neoliberal arbiters between the corporate state and the working class to cushion the former from the latter, more often than not with the former’s financial support. Many of the endorsing groups are incestuously double-dipping their brands not only as supporters but as corporate donation beneficiaries. For example, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund owns 350.org and has previously partnered in campaigns against competitors’ tar sands with many of the top endorsing groups of the People’s Climate March, such as Greenpeace, Sierra Club, World Wide Fund for Nature, the Natural Resource Defense Council, and Global Exchange to name a few. Rockefeller’s Climate March intends to go swimmingly. Here’s hoping it doesn’t.

As with all permitted marches, the People’s Climate March in New York City is planned in full cooperation with the police and their demands on when and where to vent that anger. There aren’t any flagship demands waving over the estimated 200,000 people marching on the city. The march is decidedly without demands. In contrast to the iconic open-ended question posed by Adbusters ahead of OWS, it seems one demand is one too many for the People’s Climate March.

In the summer of 2013, the Creative Action Cookbook was released by 350.org to promote the hashtags #summerheat and #fearlesssummer and was branded onto some daring indigenous-led tar sands shutdowns and oil refinery blockades. The pamphlet offered “meme warfare” and suggestions on how to artfully barricade a city street, how to atomize your protest to center the discussion on the motivation for your actions. But it also outlined the umbrella safety that comes with a 350.org protest as opposed to one that forsakes their leadership and the police violence they will unleash as punishment. An excerpt from the passive threat in the pamphlet reads:

“State power does not rest on a war-machine, but on the exercise of binary machines which run through us and the abstract machine which overcodes us: a whole ‘police’... One of the most formidable problems which States will have will be that of integrating the war-machine into the form of an institutionalized army, to make it one with their general police. The army is never anything but a compromise. The war-machine may become mercenary or allow itself to be appropriated by the State to the very extent that it conquers it. But there will always be a tension between the State apparatus with its requirement for self-preservation and the war-machine in its undertaking to destroy the State, to destroy the subjects of the State and even to destroy itself or dissolve itself.” (Gilles Deleuze, *Dialogues II*, p 141-42)

To embrace the street fair aesthetics, in this moment, the opportunity is given to both test our collective abilities and the affinities we can make. In this context, being in contact with, sharing knowledge and showing solidarity is very important. Perhaps far more important in this microburst storm is to devote as much time as possible while in the New York area engaging with existing efforts in stopping the Rockaway pipeline, oil train traffic, nuclear plants, tar sands barges, enormous power line tower construction or a proposed gas-fired power plant. Upon returning home, continue this work locally. If you’re privileged enough that you don’t already live in or near a sacrifice zone, somewhere in your region is a sacrifice zone waiting to eliminate that privilege. Write the epitaph in your footsteps. Seal capitalism in a coffin of its own making.

It is time to turn the Financial District of NYC into a sacrifice zone.

Pennsylvania and West Virginia. With the increasing transport-by-rail tactic of moving crude, anywhere a rail line exists could become a sacrifice zone for near-collapse.

Sacrifice zones for resource extraction and waste storage are as easily replicated as a broken window or severed head, everyone has at least one and the conditions can present anywhere a vulnerability is found. Sacrifice zones are also where the people are finding themselves directly marching against the dead-eyed collapse doers, but without some affiliation with at least one 350.org tentacle, will only be at the NYC street fair in spirit. Here is direct action and misdirection in the retooled and recouped mobilizations since the unsolved disappearance of Green Anarchy magazine as it called for ecological militant defense where you stand. The People's Climate March aims for misdirection, pleading for something to be done by the UN, (and before the member-states even convene in what amounts to a corporate trade show for resource extractors), finally chalking it up with an eerie 'well, we tried' and leaving the State and the capitalists to continue sloughing on with a meager resistance ahead. If 350.org succeeds in the coalescing of a climate people without a clear victory against capitalist resource accumulation and this new climate bloc is piped back to the sacrifice zones, save for some lost souls damned into the purgatory bowels of prison, the NGO arm of the State have accomplished their goal of containment and de-radicalization.

350.org knows it wields incredible powers of abdication of the State. 200,000 people are estimated to descend on NYC for a day of action and maybe one-third of that can stay for the week of divergent actions. 200,000 is a mighty force and one-third of that is still more than the 34,000 uniformed cops in the New York City Police Department. But, again, the State has doubled down on the pacifist pathology in the Big Green leadership and the cop-to-climate marcher ratio becomes closer to 1:1.

A Tale of Two Protests: Which would you rather attend? Which would your mother prefer to attend?

Protest A: Screaming chants, hastily painted angry signs on different sizes of cardboard and the police are in riot gear and begin pepper spraying protesters. The protesters are all dressed in black and wearing face masks. The crowd is mostly white young men in their twenties. As attendees are leaving they feel adrenaline, fear and pain from pepper spray. Many are going to jail after being arrested for rioting.

Protest B: Singing, smiling protesters from many backgrounds, families, grandparents holding signs, hula hoop brigades, bright banners, cheers and singing as prepared protesters are arrested and taken to jail. Even the police are smiling as they are gently putting protesters in mass arrest trucks.

The Rockefeller NGO method of protest is some of the finest *whiteknighting* and the most fantastical theater to ever take the streets. Any rogue improv actors that show up will be punished later in the news and reviews for going off-script. The 350.org demand for absolute pacifism means anyone arrested or brutalized by the police surely brought it upon themselves for exiting stage left, pursued by a bear.

Self-identified left-liberals are calling for an ultimatum to the 350.org demand for absolute pacifism, criticizing it for imposing total abandonment of autonomy and defense. Rather ironically, Chris Hedges has expressed exasperation in his own belief that militancy was the "cancer of Occupy" by stating "resistance will come from those willing to breach police barricades. Resistance will mean jail time and direct confrontation."

As seen in the *Tale of Two Protests*, the 350.org march has solved both of those issues by claiming only young white men wear black

to a march, and coupled with the last minute McKibben pledge to put indigenous groups at the prestigious front of the march like trophies, thereby absolving his organization for the years of ignoring and speaking over these very same groups at meetings and mobilizations. Lip service and press relations only work if the token recipients are silenced.

Amanda Lickers of Defend Our Lands/Reclaim Turtle Island refused that silence. She had a few words for Bill McKibben during a Montreal speech on September 3, 2014 that highlighted so many of the lies, distortions, and blind eyes cast by the 350.org PR machine. As McKibben was describing his idea of truth in justice, Amanda Lickers interjected, “We have these dreams of justice and this idea of coming together, right? But, if we cannot understand justice as it is so deeply tied to processes of colonial and capitalist violence, we will never achieve that dream.” She went on to express dismay and distrust in the People’s Climate March organizing because “there is no acknowledgement of indigenous territories whatsoever and the ongoing invisibilization of settler-colonialism is unacceptable.” Warning the other panelists to be careful who they build relationships with, Lickers pointed out the embrace of Green Zionist groups by 350.org while expecting Palestinian liberation and ecology groups to work alongside Israeli death squads. Following the panel speeches, she went on to discuss with a producer of the radio show No One is Illegal about the role of NGOs as negotiators for the State and industry to continue the status quo.

As a final jab to the false information propagated through the 350.org one-way channels about acceptable tactics, Lickers offered this explicit call-to-arms: “Good luck to the black bloc and I hope that y’all make a real serious dent. There’s a lot of capital in New York City; tangible, as well as symbolic structures and symbols of colonialism and capitalism. It is white supremacy that allows colonization to become a social norm and it is white supremacy that fuels capitalism.”

Erased and buried under white noise for centuries, the indigenous peoples of Turtle Island and the colonized United States and Canada have continued to offer clear demands about environmental issues. Stop stealing resources and leave. Stop stealing resources for capitalist accumulation. Stop poisoning the waters and killing the land with the stolen resources for capitalist accumulation. Stop.

Drowned out by the noise of expansion for hundreds of years, the non-native people of color and poor whites in the United States have continued to offer clear demands about environmental issues. Stop placing the toxic industries and its wastes in our communities. Stop stealing the resources for capitalist accumulation. Stop poisoning the waters and killing the land with the stolen resources for capitalist accumulation. Stop.

But, the hoisting of these distress flags are taken down by the self-appointed general of the armies – the NGO steering coalitions, funded by capitalists and the State. They keep taking on more passengers on an ark built big enough to weather this storm they say affects us all. All are welcome as long as they agree climate action is needed, regardless if that action is green capitalist ventures giving up the ghost on reality, like carbon credits or clean coal, domestic oil or carbon capturing. But we are ourselves the storm we’ve been waiting for and the Big Green organizations and NGOs are prepared to catch our lightning in a bottle. Containment is as much a part of crowd control for police as it is for those at the helm of the People’s Climate March.

We are the 100 percent. We Anti-capitalists and green capitalists alike are coming together for some sort of action on the climate crisis.. We’re just floating memes out here in the sacrifice zones and ghost towns of Moab and Escalante, Utah; Camden, New Jersey; Immokalee, Florida; North County St Louis, MO; Rockaway Beach in Queens, NY; Lakota territory; Kalamazoo, MI; Omaha, NE; Springfield, IL; Cincinnati, OH; Aliceville, AL; Pilsen-Chicago, IL; Iatan, KS; Mayflower, AR; Ripley County, MO; Richmond, CA, the entire Gulf Coast, the Great Lakes and most of Ohio, Texas, Nevada,