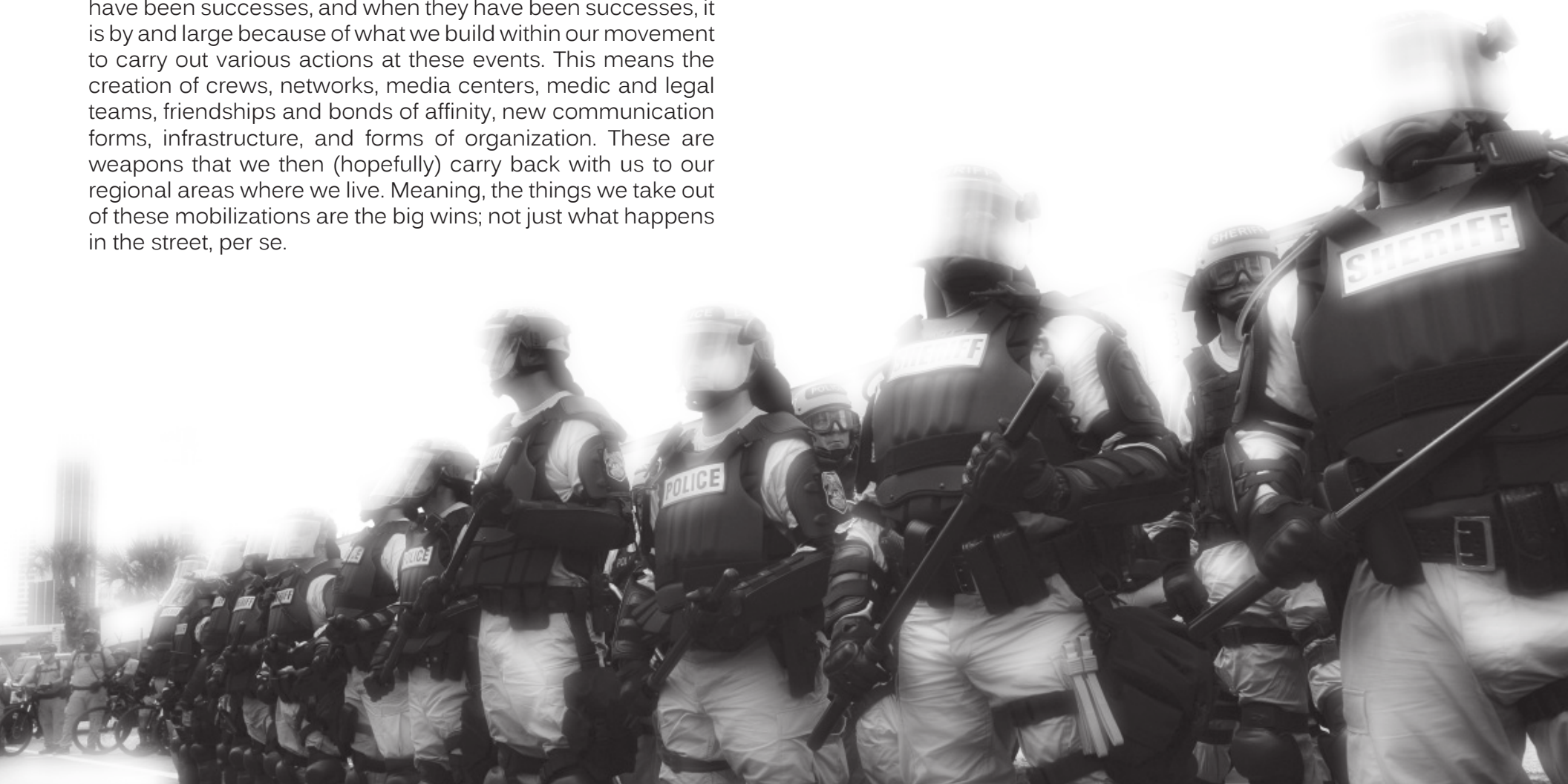


# BREAKING WITH CONVENTION

Remembering Where  
Our Power Lies

The contentions raised in this essay are several. Overall, we want to attack the idea that **specifically** convention protests have regularly been grounds for “success.” In reality, convention protests have presented a paradox, as even at times of **high** anarchist activity and organizing, this often does not translate into ‘winning’ on the streets, either in terms of people brought into the movement, the generalizing of revolt, shutting things down, or even the shattering of the conventions’ spectacle or breaking control of the streets by the police.

Overall, we should keep in mind that historically convention protests for anarchists **have** been failures more often than they have been successes, and when they have been successes, it is by and large because of what we build within our movement to carry out various actions at these events. This means the creation of crews, networks, media centers, medic and legal teams, friendships and bonds of affinity, new communication forms, infrastructure, and forms of organization. These are weapons that we then (hopefully) carry back with us to our regional areas where we live. Meaning, the things we take out of these mobilizations are the big wins; not just what happens in the street, per se.





Both the Republican and Democratic National Conventions have come and gone, and at both conventions anarchists, anti-authoritarians and more broadly anti-fascists and anti-capitalists have in general continued to decline in participation in either organizing extensively for these mobilizations, or showing up to the protests at all. The decline this year resembles the low participation at the 2012 DNC and RNC, despite the upswing in activity around the Occupy Movement. At the same time, many anarchists still have a fond memory of the 2008 conventions, which saw anarchists organizing before hand for over a year prior, at a time when there seemed to be a low period of activity. Around both the 2008 DNC and RNC, anarchists did everything from make amazing looking t-shirts, organize legal and medical support, set up convergence spaces, to even getting liberals to agree to the ‘St. Paul Principles,’ which attacked public condemnation of other groups in the media and embraced a diversity of tactics. The connections, organizations, and networks that grew out of the 2008 conventions set the stage for a new wave of anarchist organizing and activity; so it is no surprise that people are hoping that lightning would strike twice. However, as this article will argue, it isn’t a question about being lucky, but about *putting in the fucking work*.



The contentions raised in this essay are several. Overall, we want to attack the idea that *specifically* convention protests have regularly been grounds for “success.” In reality, convention protests have presented a paradox, as even at times of *high* anarchist activity and organizing, this often does not translate into ‘winning’ on the streets, either in terms of people brought into the movement, the generalizing of revolt, shutting things down, or even the shattering of the conventions’ spectacle or breaking control of the streets by the police. Overall, we should keep in mind that historically convention protests for anarchists *have* been failures more often than they have been successes, and when they have been successes, it is by and large because of what we build within our movement to carry out various actions at these events. This means the creation of crews, networks, media centers, medic and legal teams, friendships and bonds of affinity, new communication forms, infrastructure, and forms of organization. These are weapons that we then (hopefully) carry back with us to our regional areas where we live. Meaning, the things we take out of these mobilizations are the big wins; not just what happens in the street, per se.

It is clear to us that if anarchists are to be successful in these events in the future, we also have to organize ourselves and prepare, as *CrimethInc.* stated, ‘to go it alone.’ Meaning, in a ever more militarized environment, as well as coming up against police forces that seek to dialog, engage, and even work with “protest leaders,” we have to put in the work to build up our *own* infrastructure if we hope to be a tangible force; we can’t just can’t simply rely on the Left or NGOs to provide cover, bring out numbers, or do the leg work. If we want to see anarchist resistance, we have to build anarchist infrastructure and bases of support.

We contend that this has large implications towards the question of if anarchists should engage in the conventions in the future. While we do not believe that the mass action or “summit” model should be tossed into the trash bin of history, we think that if anarchists are to develop themselves into a tangible force that begins to think, plan, and act like a dynamic movement, then we will have to critically think about both our activity, our level of organization, and our strategy. The answers to these questions are to be found in the activity that we

are engaged in now, where we are based, and by coming to grips with where we are weak in our present terrain.

## Setting the Stage

The conventions took place in an extremely repressive context, as police were/are on high alert due to an uptick of violent attacks against law enforcement, but also due to the increasingly militarized nature of their formations. In the context of the RNC, this meant a huge amount of cops, sometimes even outnumbering protesters and making it next to impossible for anything besides completely scripted and boring marches to take place. Police departments also came from all over, for the police, this convention was as much about training in the tools and strategies of repression as it was about “Making America Safe Again.”

In the context of the DNC, inside the convention center an environment was generated that sought to secure a clean spectacle for the assertion of Hillary Clinton and the suppression of Bernie Sanders supporters, which in some ways was mirrored by the Republican minority that dissented against Trump. In short, it wasn't just the space *around* the conventions, but the political parties themselves that became increasingly policed, while on the inside internal divisions within each of the parties appeared front and center.

Ironically, with many in the RNC now coming to terms with the reality that Trump may actually walk away from the ticket (or be pushed out) and Bernie supporters running around as if the sky was falling, these events should be concretely understood first and foremost as the media spectacles that they are. They are attempts by the parties to reign in membership, work out their talking points for the wider public, and rally the various elements that often are opposed to each other, *into one camp*. As the DNC Wikileaks' emails show, it's not like as if stopping these things will somehow change the decision of those that control the parities. The decisions were made along time ago.

But there is also the question of the far-Right. Some would argue that if anything, people should have been better prepared to engage the various white nationalists that appeared at the RNC to livestream,

*This text originally appeared on [itsgoingdown.org](http://itsgoingdown.org) in August 2016. Layout and minor typographical edits by Sprout Distro.*

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talk with white nationalist delegates who were not fired by Trump's campaign staff, or meet up with each other. If anything, we are more than sympathetic to this position. But still, questions remain: what did their "coming out" at the convention signal? Were they becoming a movement and what does their presence mean for us more broadly? How should this inform our activity now?

Lastly, it is important for younger and greener anarchists to put the convention protests in a context. We must realize that being physically organized and prepared (both in terms of infrastructure, outreach, media, training, money, and numbers) for such events actually, *really matters*. We can have a debate about whether we should engage at the conventions or not, but unless people are will to plan, organize, and build infrastructure around them, then they will continue to be a waste of time, a drain on resources, and totally demoralizing. We can't just expect that because Trump is coming people will show up to throw down. Especially in a situation where there are lots of cops, a host of FBI agents just itching to indict anyone and anything, and a parade of heavily armed far-Right militants, we actually have to be incredibly organized in our support and communication networks, to say nothing of the numbers needed to make a physical disruption possible and the costs we are sure to suffer in terms of arrests and repression, if not physical violence.

## Conventional Wisdom

Going back to 2000, we will talk about how convention protests at both the DNC and the RNC have been 'successes' (very rarely) and more often 'failures' (both in terms of both liberal co-option and police and state repression). In 2000 the action that seemed most successful that year at the conventions was at the DNC, which was held in Los Angeles. At this time, LA was part of a growing movement of anarchist groups and formations which sprang up along the west coast (and elsewhere) that included growing communities in Eugene and Portland, Oregon, and the Pacific Northwest more broadly, the bay area, Phoenix, Arizona, and Los Angeles, California. Various struggles and movements played into this, from Earth First!, to anarcho-punk, to Anti-Racist Action, to solidarity work with indigenous struggles, to

means stopping a fracking development. The point is, we got to get in where we fit in. We got to grow from there and build that solid organized crew. But more over, we have to start thinking beyond just the local. We have to link up with others around us, regionally, then nationally. Beyond that, we have to build our base of support in the communities that we live in. We have to create a sea for our ideas and actions to swim in. Have regular meetings, reach out to the outside world, and get the world out about your activities to other comrades.

***Link up regionally:*** We have to begin to organize regionally. This means anarchists and other autonomous anti-capitalists beginning to come together in regional get togethers to plan, organize, and carry out a strategy. It means groups in bigger towns supporting those in smaller ones with less resources, access to lawyers, or ability to make copies, design websites, or host events. Host regional convergences, have regular check-ins with other groups, and support each others endeavors.

***Begin to have a national and international conversation:*** The bookfair model has failed us. We can't rely on the declining interest in the anarchist subculture to build the kind of force we need. We need to move away from bookfairs to having regional and international gatherings were we can start to have bigger and better conversations. Help plan conferences which have set aims and desires. Organize around regional and international struggles, building our capacity and developing a strategy.

***Begin to develop a praxis and strategy outside of the election cycle:*** Currently, there are anti-police occupations happening in multiple cities. If we are to push these occupations ourselves and help them expand into other areas, they will will require the creation of new methods of discussion and organization. Start from the local and build towards the regional. Start from the regional and build towards the national and international.

But above all, let's not wait another four years to react. Let's build it now, and let's build it based around what is in front of us.

as being asked if anarchists should engage in voting. To contend that anarchists could impact a national election by voting for a candidate contends that we are a large enough force to do so. If that is the case, then why wouldn't we be doing something that puts our own politics front and center? The same goes for the conventions. If the goal of the convention protests is to help build and nurture a movement, then the question more over is not should we organize around the conventions, but *above all*: how do we build that movement?

## Out of the Politics, Into the Fire

Anarchists have a horrible habit of understanding their weaknesses, yet feeling powerless to do anything about them. This mirrors the same feelings of powerlessness that pervades everyday life within capitalist civilization, from work, to politics, to personal relationships, to climate change, to mass media. In short, we want things, yet don't often have agency over *how* to get them. We want to be powerful and be able to defend ourselves, we want to be organized amongst each other and to construct ourselves as a force, and we want our ideas and actions to resonate among the wider population and within social struggles.

In short this means having the ability to *physically* engage in self-defense and also be offensive, this means having above all *relationships* based around being *organized* and the *will* to carry out a *strategy*, and more over, the ability to nurture and create a *base* of support within a wide population.

Looking critically about the conventions is important because it shows us what we want and where we currently are weak. But in looking at what positive things we have gotten out of conventions in the past, we can then apply these lessons to where we want to go in the future. In short, these things appear to be:

***Building up local crews, local capacity, and our ability to act, defend ourselves, and build a base of support:*** We have to build where we are. Where we live, where we work, and where we go to school. For some people this means joining the IWW and fighting at work, for some this means running a counter-information project, for some it means organizing in Black Lives Matter, and for others it

support for political prisoners. But over all, these trajectories congealed during the height of the anti-globalization movement, and the DNC in LA was certainly a focal point within that storm.

In short, the DNC in LA happened at the right place and the right time and also fed off of the local context such as anger at the police over their role in the Rampart scandal and the tingly feelings brought on by the recent Lakers riot. Despite a heavy police crackdown, massive surveillance against anarchists, and many arrests, the DNC saw a large black bloc take the streets and the activity invigorated the Southern California anarchist movement. Also helping the build the numbers at the DNC was a large scale anarchist conference that brought together a wide variety of participants and received a large scale of media attention, not to mention police surveillance. Rage Against the Machine also was on hand to play for the protesters (originally for MTV, but were soon dropped by the corporate network them due to their radical message), which also helped swell the numbers of those in the streets.

As Crimethinc wrote in the mid-2000s (“Demonstrating Resistance: Mass Action and Autonomous Action in the Election Year”):

Because the Seattle protests had not been a mere fluke but rather the culmination of a long period of growth and development, there was a root structure in place to sustain further such actions—the most notable being the protests against the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in Washington, D.C. the following April, against the Democratic and Republican National Conventions that summer, and against the Free Trade Area of the Americas summit in Quebec in April 2001. And because each demonstration attracted new attention and additional participants to the anarchist movement, the root structure quickly deepened and spread. The movement, focusing much of its energy on these convergences and mass actions, rode a wave that sometimes made it appear to be an unstoppable historical force.

Anarchist activity in LA was on the rise and the DNC only helped it grow, much as the Seattle WTO protests did in the Pacific Northwest. In response to this growth, it took a massive police clampdown on anarchist organizing to defang the movement. Thus, just as in Eugene, where police and FBI went after people like Jeff “Free” Luers and

others with lengthy jail sentences, in LA, the police targeted organizers and militants like Sherman Austin and Matt “Rampage” Lamont. Spaces were harassed and shut down, collectives folded, and police brutally attacked anarchist demonstrations, such as on May Day in Long Beach in 2001.

The lesson of the DNC 2000 is two fold. First, that the physiological victory of thousands holding the streets helped to build anarchism in Southern California. With a lot going on, both locally and nationally, those interested in the movement could then filter in and find something to do. From working in an Anarchist Black Cross collective, to volunteering at a space or infoshop, or organizing Copwatch programs, and feeding people at Food Not Bombs – there was a lot to plug into. Current anarchists should keep this in mind. Not only does activity and organizing have to come before big upswings to generate the numbers that could come out to a mobilization, but moreover if we don’t have anything in place when it does go down, after a big showdown there will be nowhere for anyone to plug into.

In the situation of LA post-DNC, by and large the movement was not prepared for the wave of police repression that soon followed, much like their cousins in Eugene, Oregon, and a wave of arrests and indictments quickly followed. We must ask ourselves, what could have been done different? Why aren’t many of these people still around today? What happened to them? How can we ensure that we both welcome them back into the fold if possible, but also keep people involved now, at whatever level, and not just cycle through thousands upon thousands of people, losing potential comrades after only several months time? Creating a fighting movement also means creating a movement where people can stay involved at various levels of activity. From people out fighting in the streets, to people doing childcare at meetings.

The RNC that year fared much worse, which was held in Philadelphia. As *Slate* wrote:

The 2000 Republican National Convention resulted in more than 400 arrests, including a pre-emptive raid on a puppet-making warehouse in West Philadelphia. It later came out that state police officers had infiltrated the protest groups, even though

Regardless of what we do, the trajectory of the police and security apparatus will only continue. As Hermes writes:

We must continue to push back against characterizations of the police as restrained and reformed. If anything has become clear from the contemporary model of policing political protest, coined by social scientists as “strategic incapacitation,” it’s that the more our social movements gain momentum, adopt militant tactics, or appear to threaten the status quo, the more we can expect a repressive and violent response by the state.

Meaning, the police will continue to operate as a force that fights multiple civil wars within a variety of fixed territories, against enemies that are before them and ones that have yet to even materialize. This is a war that has no end; one that is not meant to be won, only contained. As anarchists, we struggle against this by choosing a side in this conflict and getting organized, but moreover, pushing for a world without the police and attacking Leftist notions that police can either be reformed or as an institution, be made to serve the people, or worse yet, a ‘revolutionary State.’

As for the fascists, as we have articulated much before, we not only have to smash the white nationalists off the streets but also out organize them. This means defeating them at every opportunity but also fighting for the heart and soul of the white working class against white supremacy, linking the class interests of the white poor with communities of color already in struggle. If we are not prepared to organize in the trailer parks and de-industrialized working class towns these groups hope to gain a foot hold in, we will never materialize a force that can defeat them.

On the bright side, the RNC again shows us a set of players, some serious, some not. We have our targets, let’s continue to do the work. But moreover, looking down not only the barrel of a gun from the police but also the state in waiting that is the fascist groups that seek to be an auxiliary to them, we also have to understand that now is the time to get ready, get trained, and get organized.

Some would still ask though, “should we still organize around and against the conventions?” While we can’t give a definitive answer because material conditions are sure to change, we feel much the same



areas or to banal activities like livestreaming. Even the armed groups seems there for more as a photo opt than anything else, and only added the the police state circus atmosphere.

At the end of the day, by and large we are surprised that more figures within the white nationalist scene didn't show up. Where was the Lion's Guard? Where were all the other Neo-Nazi groups that have put time and effort into supporting Trump? For that matter, where were all the Trump supporters? While certainly anti-fascist defense is a top priority, there seems to be much better arenas than the streets of a police state to see that reality through.

## Breaking With Convention

In our analysis, it seems paramount that if anarchists are going to mobilize around conventions, first and foremost there needs to be support on the ground. People need a place to stay, infrastructure to plug into, and things like legal, medical, food, communications, and media support set up. Beyond that, there needs to be a national conversations about organizing around these conventions. People have to be mobilized. People have to plan, activate their bases of support, and get people out. To be blunt, we can't just roll the dice and *hope* this happens, especially not in today's repressive and far-Right climate.

Organizing a successful mobilization takes time, energy, money, and work. If people aren't interested in taking on these roles, then we are better off staying home and working on that we already *are* doing. Or, we can opt instead to organize local actions in a decentralized matter. Demonstrations, free-way blockades, informational events, and autonomous actions in cities and towns across the US would have gone further than 50 militants on the streets being out flanked by police at every turn. But even still, this step forward takes more than just the imagination to conceive of it; it takes the human will to make it so and for these actions to resonate across the social terrain. Moreover, these lines of communication and organization have to be built and kept in place, just as they did in 2008.

the Philadelphia Police Department's then-commissioner, John Timoney, had explicitly denied the use of such tactics. Activist leaders were identified, arrested, and held on astronomically high bails to keep them off the streets until George W. Bush left the city.

In 2004, convention protests again took place, this time happening against a backdrop of anti-terrorism and increased repression after the events of 9/11. On the positive side, thousands of new militants had gained the experience of involvement in massive anti-war activity in the past year against the second Iraq War, and on the negative side, we also witnessed the bitter crushing and violent defeat of anarchist forces at the hands of the police in Miami at the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) summit. For many, by 2004 the anti-globalization movement was dead and gone as the anti-war movement swept away anarchist methods of network and affinity group organization and replaced it with Marxist-Leninist and liberal top-down, authoritarian leadership and stale mass marches that were largely symbolic.

For the most part, anarchists (with of course notable exception) did not attend the DNC protests in Boston in 2004 and instead looked towards the RNC in New York City as a possible showdown. By and large, this was not to be and hundreds of anarchists were arrested among many others. According to Crimethinc:

[When] anarchists fail to coordinate themselves will be coordinated by authoritarians, and so, while anarchist labor was central to the infrastructure that enabled them, the character of most of the actions planned for New York was non-confrontational, even liberal. At the last minute, the organizers of the main march finally accepted the conditions of the city, agreeing to march in circles rather than follow through on the desires of the rank-and-file who wanted to go to Central Park with or without a permit; likewise, though anarchists and militants swelled the numbers of many other actions, these were largely orchestrated to avoid actually challenging the activities of the Republicans or the occupation of the city.

In 2008, things were different. Anarchists made a decisive move to organize around both the DNC and RNC, and started organizing themselves over a year ahead of time. The organizing network, 'Unconventional Action' was formed, and produced printed materials, videos, conducted various speaking and training events, and formed

local groups across the US. As CrimethInc. wrote (“Going it Alone: Anarchist Action at the Democratic and Republican National Conventions”):

For good or for ill, the protests at the 2008 Democratic and Republican National Conventions constituted the most significant nationwide effort anarchists have undertaken to organize militant action in the US in several years. In short, the convention protests were not a stunning victory, but they set valuable precedents in coordination, strategy, and infrastructure. Perhaps the greatest danger is that, because they were not an unqualified success, they will have been forgotten by the time of the next mass mobilization.

We encourage people to read the CrimethInc. piece ‘Going It Alone’ which offers an amazing appraisal of the conventions, but to be short and sweet, anarchists organized hard, long, and well for the conventions. They created new ways of communicating, they created infrastructure, and they also refused to be simply actors in a Leftist charade of protest. As CrimethInc. wrote:

In terms of specifically anarchist participation, many aspects of the mobilizations were unprecedented. Nationwide preparations began well over a year in advance, and the majority of participants showed up in organized affinity groups. Anarchists took the initiative to determine and coordinate their own strategies and tactics, and made breakthroughs in establishing solidarity with other groups—as exemplified by the historic St. Paul Principles. They also debuted communications structures that had not previously been applied at mass mobilizations, which have since been cited by the US military and utilized during the riots in Greece. Just as the global indymedia network came out of the Seattle WTO demonstrations, the DNC/RNC mobilizations produced the Bash Back! network and plenty of other projects and momentum that continue to the time of this writing. Proportionate to the number of participants, the mobilizations were surprisingly successful.

Many of the networks, friendships, and crews that were formed out of the RNC went on to organize and be players on a local level back in their own localities. These groups formed the backbone of the ‘insurrectionary wave’ of groups that blended community building with insurrectionary tactics, creating a flurry of projects, publications, social spaces, and other anarchist activities. Unconventional Action,

nationalist, and Neo-Nazi movements. These include:

**Red Ice Creations:** Hosted a live stream, which was made possible by Nathan Damigo of Identity Evropa and Matt Forney, of the pro-rape Men’s Rights Activist website, Return of Kings. By and large these groups focused mainly on simply livestreaming and getting shots of the goings on of things around the convention and at various right-wing events, such as Alex Jones rally or following around Milo. Matt Forney was at both RNC and DNC and was run off several times.

**Richard Spencer:** Of the National Policy Institute. Held a sign in a major square that said, “Wanna Talk to a Racist?” Gave commentary for Nathan Damigo while he livestreamed for Red Ice.

**Traditionalist Worker Party (TWP):** After being shut down in Sacramento, TWP leader Matthew Heimbach who is currently in court after assaulting a young woman at a Trump rally, announced that his group would then go to the RNC to defend Trump supporters against Leftists. When their permit was denied, Heimbach then announced they would rally in New York instead. Then Heimbach bawked at that plan and moved to hold an event at the restaurant owned by white nationalist Rick Tyler in Tennessee, who was running for Congress under the banner, “Make America White Again.” Despite not attending the Sacramento rally due to his car being broken, Heimbach still made it out to the RNC with two followers, and stated in the media that he was meeting with several white power Trump delegates who had yet to be found to be active Neo-Nazis and kicked out.

**Soldiers of Odin:** A gang like organization that “patrols” for refugees and immigrants. Linked to other Neo-Nazi and white nationalist groups.

**West Ohio Minutemen:** Anti-immigrant group. Appeared heavily armed at the RNC, often seen talking and being cordial with law enforcement.

While certainly all of these groups needs to be opposed and mobilized against, from our vantage point it does not appear that the various far-Right groups that were in attendance were there in any capacity as a ‘movement.’ There was not a public event that these groups tried to organize or go to as a set group. They stuck mostly to heavily policed

turn in which police attempted to incorporate community policing into their strategies and began to learn from counter-insurgency techniques. The WTO riots and demonstrations in 1999 brought this strategy to an end, as anarchist organizing sought to break down this cooperation between protest organizers and the police and refuse is completely. In some cases, such as when union members broke ranks with leadership and joined in more disruptive marches, anti-authoritarian initiatives actually led to generalized refusal at this policing strategy. Ultimately, the WTO demonstrations generalized beyond simply a protest against globalization, as the riots spread into neighborhoods, youths began to loot, and fighting with police trying to implement a curfew took place.

Speaking to the period we are now in, an article submitted to the *Policing and Society* journal argues:

Like previous policing repertoires, strategic incapacitation is rooted in a philosophy of social control, in this case in the 'new penology' of the 1980s (Feeley and Simon 1992, Garland 2001), which emphasizes preventing citizens from committing crime through risk management and the spatial redistribution and incapacitation of potential offenders. It is fundamentally different from "penal modernism" which held sway when negotiated management was adopted. The U.S. response to the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks accelerated the adoption and refinement of strategic incapacitation as the new strategy for policing protest and other 'threats to public order.'

In short, this means not only broken windows theory pushed to the extreme, but also targeting potential threats, neutralizing them before they commit disruptions, but above all, control over the territory they plan to act within.

## **Bash of the Fash**

All of this aside, some would still point to the the 'build up' of fascist forces at the RNC as reasons why anarchists and anti-authoritarians should have mobilized. A possible strategy towards this end has not yet been produced, but the thinking goes that at the very least we should have opposed far-Right forces on the streets that were attempting to be there publicly. At the time of this writing, we know of several groups and individuals that were in attendance from the various militia, white



the support network that had been building towards the DNC and RNC in 2008 also remained in place in many areas (or went on to evolve into something else), as did Bash Back!, which played a key role in anarchist movement in the years to come.

But these mobilizations also came at a huge price. Both in terms of those those that were arrested and the resulting conspiracy trial of the RNC 8, and the arrest of two young men, known as the Texas 2, who were also entrapped and railroaded by Brandon Darby, a former organizer turned FBI informant. Moreover, the initial plan of the anti-RNC mobilization to blockade delegates from getting into the RNC was (in the end) not successful. From the CrimethInc. report:

The blockades failed to prevent delegates from reaching the convention. This may have been in part because of the last minute change in plans on the part of the RNC: it must have been easier to get half as many people into the convention center as originally planned. The small turnout from outside the anarchist camp was also a contributing factor: had thousands more protesters showed up, many would surely have reinforced the blockades.

Another essay stated (“Wrecking You Again for the Very First Time”):

The blockades were never enough for us, and judging them solely on their own terms, they were a failure. The delegates weren’t blocked and the convention occurred with little disruption. But to even accept the goal of shutting down the convention requires accepting the discourse of power the RNC itself represents. It is a gathering of figureheads, nothing more. It is not a strike against the heart of the system; at best it is a site where we can manifest social war. The overt objective of the mobilization was always a bit banal, and luckily most saw through this thin veneer and prepared for street conflict instead.

Many would like to use the events of September 1st to gain credibility for or to invigorate their historical reenactivist societies, be it recreating the ‘60s or the anti-globalization protests. It’s time to bury the myths of Chicago and Seattle once and for all. The demonstration form is a suffocating cocoon from which we need to break free. We were not in St. Paul for the illusory goals some had swallowed wholesale. We don’t give a fuck about a summit, but we can use it as a springboard, parasitically sucking life and leaving behind anemic remains. We were there this time because we do not yet have the force to manifest such conflict outside of the context of mass mobilizations. One of our goals is to take all of the force directed against false epicenters of power and redirect it into social conflicts that have the actual potential to disrupt the flows of this system. We are abandoning the vapid discourse of protest towards a concrete offensive in the social war. We refuse to run in circles anymore.

Thus, in some ways similar to the recent anti-fascist mobilizations we have recently seen throughout the US, the “success” of the mobilization came at a high cost and ultimately, was worth more to the movement in what it produced in terms of organization, infrastructure, lessons learned, and crews formed, than in the physical ability to shut down the convention.

In 2012, protests again happened at the RNC and DNC, but were very lackluster. Fearing a repeat of the RNC in 2008, police doubled their efforts and also came down hard on the streets protests, arresting many. In the lead up to the RNC, the police also used their justification for military style build up on the threat of “outside agitators” and

By exaggerating potential threats ahead of time, however, the state can deploy massive numbers of police as it did in Cleveland and conveniently take advantage of the consequential chilling-effect on political dissent.

Hermes goes on to give an example of police harassment of anarchists:

The street protests at the RNC only numbered in the hundreds. Yet, there were thousands of police in Cleveland from dozens of jurisdictions around the country, often far outnumbering the protesters. Police also seemed to selectively target certain political groups as they did with one march consisting of about two-dozen anarchists, which was intently followed and eventually surrounded by roughly 100 cops.

Hermes ending assessment of the low protest turnout is telling:

Since 2000, the convention protests and the corresponding spectacle that surrounds them leave little room to draw attention to important social struggles. Indeed, the cat-and-mouse dynamic between protesters and police that invariably plays out at each convention (mainly as a result of repressive tactics by the state) forces activists to seek out more meaningful moments and sites of confrontation.

Perhaps the utility of using the conventions, in particular, as a platform to advance social change movements — like those fighting against wars, economic inequality, or police violence — has run its course. Low protester turnout probably has more to do with burnout from fruitlessly organizing around events that only occur once every four years than it is a reflection of the Left’s political strength more generally, since effective militant actions continue to occur in cities across the U.S.

In the 1960s, the state used a tactic of “escalated force” to clamp down on riots, occupations, and demonstrations. When things got out of hand, pigs came in swinging. However, the police soon learned that this strategy largely made people only angrier and the disturbances in turn, grew. In response, the police turned towards a strategy of ‘negotiated management,’ in which they sought to work with protest leaders to weed out disruptive elements and work with people who could be contained and managed. This mirrored the post-black liberation

Furthermore, Kris Hermes in the Huffington Post argued that even as attendance to protest events at the conventions goes down, money towards police operations only continues to grow:

Despite a relatively low turnout by protesters, the law enforcement apparatus in both cities was as robust as ever. Part of the excuse for the disproportionate police response is that each quadrennial political convention since the turn of the century has been designated a National Special Security Event (NSSE).

The NSSE designation means that millions of dollars is funneled from the federal government into local coffers and spent on police personnel, equipment and weapons. Cleveland and Philadelphia each got roughly \$50 million for this purpose. The NSSE designation also places the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and U.S. Secret Service at the top of a multi-agency “security” force.

Such a configuration of local, national, and federal police and government forces mirrors agencies such as the JTTF, or Joint Terrorism Task Force, which has been notorious for political repression and harassment of political dissidents and the creation of ‘fusion centers’ throughout the US which bring in and organize information for police and federal security agencies.

But Hermes argues that this build up at the RNC included the suspension of basic civil liberties over a wide geographic area for the creation of a temporary security state:

In both cities, we saw unconstitutional time and place restrictions on planned free speech activity weeks before the protests. Law enforcement officials also discredited activists in the mainstream press, a tactic commonly used to frighten the public and justify any heavy-handed approach used during the convention.

In the days leading up to and during the RNC, the FBI and other law enforcement agencies harassed and tried to interrogate known activists and political organizers in Cleveland. In one instance, agents carried out a warrantless raid at the home of several activists, with guns drawn in an apparent effort to intimidate protesters.

Continuing a trend that began in 2000 at the RNC, both Cleveland and Philadelphia purchased insurance policies indemnifying the police against any claims of civil rights violations.

“anarchist extremists.” According to a report on the 2012 Conventions by the National Lawyers Guild:

The vilification of anarchists serves the dual purpose of justifying the government’s strategies of police and state repression of protesters as well as the further militarization of police departments. Many of the warnings in intelligence reports circulated prior to NSSEs include fabricated information accusing anarchists of plotting to destroy bridges, manufacture explosive devices, and throw urine, feces, and acid at police. These fabrications provide the rationale for the continuing existence of the massive and expensive police and security apparatus. Furthermore, after the September 11 attacks, the language used to describe the threat of violent protesters has often conflated activists with terrorists (e.g. Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act).

Despite the government and media hype about the “anarchist threat,” protests at both the RNC and DNC saw none of the activities described in the FBI/DHS report. This section details the demonstrations that took place at each convention, with a focus on police response. This summary is based on media reports, interviews with activists, and the observations of NLG staff and volunteers who were on the ground in Tampa and Charlotte before and during the conventions.

The NLG report is interesting for another reason, because the wave of support and engagement that the Occupy Movement experienced before the 2012 conventions mirrored the post-Ferguson terrain of the 2016 DNC and RNC. The NLG writes:

Tampa and Charlotte both proved difficult locations for organizing robust protests at the conventions. In both cities, police and organizers predicted as many as 15,000 protesters, but actual participation was closer to 600 in Tampa and 800 in Charlotte. The widespread appeal of the Occupy movement that emerged in 2011 and its critique of contemporary electoral politics indicate that dissatisfaction with both parties is prevalent. However, the hot summer climates and politically conservative locations of both conventions (combined with the threat of Hurricane Isaac in Tampa) contributed to much smaller demonstrations than expected. As a result of Isaac, at least sixteen buses of RNC protesters traveling from other cities were cancelled.

According to protesters, other reasons for the poor attendance

were the heavily publicized law enforcement security plans at the conventions and the threat of arrest. Many activists admitted to being afraid to attend, knowing that an overwhelming police presence was guaranteed. Others spoke of the expense of being arrested far from home at a time when many are struggling financially. Organizers also spoke of fears of being arrested and charged with serious conspiracy or terrorism charges, which has occurred at previous conventions and summits. Overall, the combination of remote host cities with small activist networks and the intimidating security plans for the conventions resulted in many protesters not attending the demonstrations at all.

In short, for many people, despite the success and popularity of the Occupy Movement and anger at the established political system, the conventions just weren't worth it for many people, nor were they a priority.

## Rage Against the Repression Machine

As the NLG reports on the 2012 conventions, the build up of police and police infrastructure plays a large factor in people coming out to engage. However at the RNC this year, police, security, and military personnel took things into a whole other level. As *Unicorn Riot* reported:

A trove of new documents exposes how Cleveland's impending Republican National Convention will subject the public to a massive domestic military operation. Following decades of planning and millions of dollars spent, the RNC this July will amass into an unprecedented security state, constricting the constitutional rights of thousands of people.

As the panopticon descends on Cleveland, military forces will begin staging security operations at NASA's Glenn Research Center, while other federal forces begin staffing a "Multi Agency Communications Center" (MACC), located at the International Exposition Center (IX) near the Hopkins International Airport.

They go on to write:

The mechanics of America's most distilled form of political lockdown, the National Special Security Event (NSSE), are spelled out in a series of posted PDFs, some from the Ohio Emergency Management Agency (these have since been taken down).

NSSEs are massive security operations managed by the Secret Service, which activate many supporting federal and military agencies, such as Homeland Response Forces, and tactical units from state and local police departments across the region.

Large event planning has evolved dramatically since the 1968 Chicago Democratic National Convention marshaled massive police, federal and military support. NSSEs were defined and systematized as perpetually repeating large activations by President Bill Clinton in 1998's Presidential Decision Directive 62 (PDD-62). In 2016, the NSSE framework remixes the Incident Command System (ICS) for civilian law enforcement aided by FEMA, along with a "Dual Status" Joint Task Force military command. NSSEs have regularly featured extreme abuses of human rights, combined with sophisticated messaging to bolster acceptance of authoritarian policies. At the 1999 WTO protests, FEMA operated a detention facility at Sand Point Naval Station. After the 2004 RNC, New York City paid out \$18 million to settle lawsuits stemming from the mass detention of thousands of people inside Pier 57, which was contaminated with oil and asbestos. During the NATO Summit in Chicago in 2012, some anti-war protesters were taken to Homan Square, a notorious "black site" where people report being assaulted and tortured by local police and access to legal council was systematically denied.

In short, just as anarchists hope that convention protests prove to be 'training grounds' in which crews, organizations, and individuals can take lessons back with them to their respected regions – the police and security apparatus thinks the same thing.

