

# Stop the City considered

The Stop the City action was a disappointment for many people. And I'm sure the main reason was the failure to identify aims and means at the planning stage. I'm perhaps not best placed to criticise Stop the City, as I didn't attend any planning meetings and went down alone at the last minute. But I expected to see autonomous group actions, and saw mainly chaos, confusion and confrontation. And similar faults can be found in so many actions in the peace movement, because we tend to see an action such as a blockade as an end in itself, rather than thinking about what we hope to achieve by it. We need to decide who we are hoping to impress: the authorities, the media, the passers-by, ourselves? If our aims aren't clear, we may end up impressing no-one.

The name Stop the City implies an intent to seriously disrupt the financial workings of the City. Random blockades are unlikely to achieve this. In order to stop the City, we need an intimate understanding of what makes it go. We need to identify its weak points and exploit them by whatever means are available to us. This can

I'm disappointed at the inconvenience to other people basically. They've desecrated churches and other buildings—it's been horrible. Any feeling that I had towards them has been lost. I see no connection between my work and them, none whatsoever. It's a lot of punks really, which people avoid anyway. A peaceful demonstration is alright—but you don't get any sympathy inconveniencing other people... It's made my lunch hour more interesting though.

BANK WORKER (MALE)

are likely to respond, and what contingency plans they might use. We should decide in advance whether forcing them to change their plans is action enough, or whether we should attempt to sabotage the alternatives.

Another aim of Stop the City is to draw attention to the links between profit and exploitation etc. Whose attention? The way to reach the largest number of people is through the media, but because they're a part of the system, this is difficult. On March 29 the press gave a lot of attention to isolated instances of violence and damage to property, and virtually none to

violence on our part—which worked to some effect. Bottles were thrown and some police were attacked. One element I hadn't foreseen was the number of plainclothes police in our midst. A punk was pointed out by uniformed police and grabbed and beaten to the road by a plain clothed policeman, helped by three uniformed police. However, some of us mingled disguised as stockbrokers, which helped to foil the police efforts.

Better news came from the St Paul's area. In a square devoid of police there was a large die-in. Women stormed Boots and took armfuls of tampons and delivered them to Fleet Street, especially to the seedy offices of the Sun. London Bridge was blockaded by 400 punks for six minutes before a massive police response.

PHIL HEDGEHOG

include selective road and telephone blockades at strategic moments, and perhaps finding a way to interfere with computer transactions.

Unfortunately the authorities are liable to anticipate and prevent our plans, and the larger the number of people involved, the more likely this becomes. So planning is best done by small groups, and should involve an awareness of how the authorities

what the demonstration was about. This is difficult to overcome, but well-written press releases and reports can help. We can try to ensure that there are no "bad" incidents to focus on, though this isn't easy given the large numbers involved and the degree of police provocation. The whole peace movement still has much to learn about control.

Perhaps we can't prevent media distortion,

Bank at about one o'clock, a small procession bearing the banner "Brokers against Bombs".

The only violence I saw was when a young City gent at Bank tore my poster from me, saying "You don't need that!", crumpled it up and chucked it in a passing lorry. All it said was: "We need more information/less secrecy from multinationals", so I can't see why he got in such a pet about it.

MOIRA HOPE

but we should be able to control what the people on the spot see. Most of the passers-by, tourists and City workers are very conventional people, who expect to be approached in conventional ways. Many of them seemed genuinely frightened on March 29 by the large crowds of "strangely dressed" demonstrators (who were usually doing nothing more alarming than singing or chanting). This made them unlikely to read our leaflets or listen to what we had to say, and made them receptive to media tales of violence.

We need to get the message across in ways which people will be open to. Music and theatre, if not too "outlandish", can be

I think they've got a valid point, but I don't like these demonstrations. I think it should be more organised. When you think back to the Jarrow March...

What would you think if we did things like the miners are doing?

I'm with them—aren't you?

WOMAN MESSENGER

The demonstrators on March 29 made a mockery of the peace movement. I urge those whose concern is to reduce violence to have nothing more to do with this sort of protest.

I joined my friends—fellow demonstrators—in Lombard Street. I'd picked up an STC leaflet which said that people were there to "express in an effective nonviolent way their feelings about how the City helps to destroy life" and that "life is love, understanding and tolerance".

Whatever was reported in the press the next day was far from this: "several cars were damaged, smoke bombs thrown, slogans sprayed on statues and buildings, windows broken and two policemen injured". To on-lookers it was indistinguishable from hooligans on a rampage.

There's a lot wrong with demos if they get such reports—we can't even accuse the media

of distortion. Methods like blocking the streets without explanation are surely bound to be counter-productive. They are not likely to persuade the City people, and the others watching the TV, to change their views. What was the message that got across?

Merely to stop the City, however much we deplore the profit motive, is one thing. To "create a new world of freedom, sharing and co-operation" (STC leaflet) quite another. That will hardly come about by baiting the police or simply accusing others of exploitation. We must take responsibility for our own oppression—and admit that living in the Western world we are part of the greedy minority that exploits the Third.

If the answer to political, moral and economic problems lies in nonviolence, our own way of life should exemplify that. The freedom we seek has surely to be earned by our own efforts.

DR TONY WEAVER

effective. Leafleting is very important as a quick and easy way of letting people know "why we're here", but is only as good as the leaflet! Leaflets should explain the reasons for the action in a readable and understandable way, and should try to avoid loaded words like "capitalism" and "patriarchy".

Person-to-person contact is most important—encourage people to talk to you about the issues, without forcing your own ideas upon them. And it's a sad fact that if you dress and behave "conventionally", you're more likely to be listened to. If you dress really conventionally, you might be able to pass as one of "them", and infiltrate areas not open to other protesters!

Shock tactics may work if well considered. For example, removing tampons from Boots could be a graphic way to draw attention to the profit from sanitarywear and exploitation of women's needs. But

the action must achieve this aim, rather than being seen by most people as theft or vandalism. Leaflets should be prepared to explain the meaning of the action to everyone in the vicinity. This can also be done through songs, posters etc. We have to live with the fact that most people believe that breaking the law, for whatever reason, is wrong. It takes a lot to change this view. We should only break the law if we're prepared to face the legal consequences. And perhaps the best way to emphasise the political nature of the action is to stand (eg with armfuls of tampons) and wait to be arrested. Too many Stop the City dem-

I came down to take part in the women's actions, but nothing seems to have happened so far. Just now I went smashing windows with a bunch of punks—which wasn't the most beautiful thing, but it was the most effective so far.

If we'd had more communication we could have blockaded the Bank of England—they seemed only to have one entrance open.

There'll be a lot of arrests today, but there doesn't seem to be much support for those arrested—less than on other demos.

I wish I was with a group that had worked out exactly what it wanted to do. But it'd go against the whole feeling of the thing for anyone to organise us.

I don't think there's been enough contact with the workers. I suppose they have enough stereotypes of unruly punks and lesbians not to want to listen to us. But perhaps we're not here to persuade them as individuals. It's more to let them know that we object to what they're doing.

I was tearing down the road breaking windows and a NALGO bus went by on the way to the GLC demo. I didn't expect there to be any sympathy between trade unionists defending government and a bunch of anarchists—but there was. We were all yelling and cheering each other and it was really great.

The police have been very dour and miserable. There's everybody else with a real feeling of warmth and generosity. I'll start singing now—I can see people who think that's a bit of wanking as well...

WOMAN FROM GLASGOW

They call it a peace movement, it broke all the windows... that's a bit hypocritical. Just seems a shame if you come together, people can't act civilly like...

MAN REPAIRING WINDOWS

It's a lot of shit. Fair enough you say this or that... but why the fuck are you going around breaking windows? Who's going to take any notice of anyone who smashes windows? You go round like that, your hair all done up, you frighten a lot of people—as well as the coppers... I love this sort of thing, I'd go down and watch it, you know what I mean?

PUB WORKER

onstrators played hit-and-run games with the police. Dealing with the police is perhaps the greatest problem of all. When a line of blue uniforms and horses crashes down on you, it's difficult not to see the police as "the enemy". But if we turn our attention away from profit, militarism etc and concentrate instead on confronting and annoying the police, they've achieved their aim. It's counter-productive to shout or swear at the police, or charge at their neat blue lines. If they try to move us, we can either passively resist and be arrested, or move on and find another way to do what we've planned.

Although we may feel more vulnerable in small groups, I think they're probably the most difficult for the police to cope with. When we gather together they can surround us and isolate us from the rest of humanity—the people we're trying to reach. Small groups scattered throughout

If you compare it with the CND march in October, that didn't change anyone's way of thinking. It was just an easily-contained well-ordered grouping, using the conventional structure to get the message across in a way that would be easily understood. But it had little effect. A very decentralised action has more benefit for those involved. They're taking control of what they're actually doing, not just going along with someone else's idea. It's like a positive act instead of a passive act.

DEMONSTRATOR

the City would be more in the public eye, making "policing" more difficult and brutality less likely.

Much of what I've been saying seems to imply that we should accept conventions and respect the law—rather a lot to expect, especially from an anarchist protest! But all I'm saying is that if the aim of any protest is to change people's views, then we should use methods which are most likely to achieve this. If the aim is to promote anarchism, then we should

I've just been taking part in a fur trade action down the road. The police seemed to get you just where they wanted, just walking round in circles all the time. But I don't think we've had any effect on the people who work here. Last year we took them by surprise.

PUNK

make sure people see anarchism at its best, destroying the myth that anarchy equals violence and vandalism, and replacing it with an image of self-control.

I suggested that one aim of an action might be to impress ourselves. Each action should be enjoyable, empowering and energising, to give us strength for the next. There was a great carnival atmosphere for much of Stop the City, but it was marred by the confrontations with the police. If we'd had more sense of purpose and achievement, the confrontations and arrests might have been easier to bear. Preparation helps—knowing what you're aiming for and your chances of achieving it can lessen frustration and disappointment, and failures can even be turned into success! Let's start planning now for the next Stop the City, to make it both effective and fun.

LINDA PEIRSON

The comments on the Stop the City action come from street interviews by Alan Schofield and from letters we've received. All have been edited and shortened—we've tried to present the spectrum of opinions.

