

History: It's not made by great men!

The war effort got a black eye last week. Thousands of people, organized into small but highly effective affinity groups, managed to shut down the financial heart of a major American city, blowing the media myth of a complacent, supportive public out of the water.

A shiner for Bush, and one small victory for our side. Not that it means all that much in the face of our many defeats—the war of course is going ahead as planned, our civil liberties lie in a shambles under Ashcroft's black boots, and another round of tax cuts have eased life for those at the top, with very little complaint from those of us at the bottom.

But you have to take credit when you can, and we can all take credit for the creation of an historic moment. We saw and felt what it was like to be part of a massive, global movement. And the world saw us. If you have spoken with people who live overseas or were traveling at the time, you know that pictures of our resistance brought a little cheer to people all over the planet who are as horrified as we are by the Bush cabal and their relentless march toward war.

Critical Mass can also take a look at what happened last week and smile at all our fellow travellers. Here were our tactics: leaderless organization from the bottom up, without central committees or formal organization; occupation of city streets to experiment with a new kind of face-to-face politics; and an unrelenting critique of the politics of oil and the violence that underlies it.

DIRECT ACTION UNDER ATTACK

No wonder, then, that the very tactics of militant, non-violent direct action are now under attack. Turn on the TV, listen to the radio or pick up a newspaper, the messages are the same: Protest is as American as apple pie, but the blocking of intersections! The disruption of ordinary people! "It's turning even those sympathetic to the protestors against the anti-war movement!"

The logic is seemingly irrefutable. Talk to people on the street and you won't have to wait very long before you hear that view. Many anti-war activists accept this idea in theory, and many protests are now being planned in such a way that "ordinary people" are not inconvenienced.

As people who have been involved in Critical Mass for years, we're skeptical of this line of reasoning. We know from experience that occupying the streets is extremely unpopular, AND extremely successful, if done correctly. We hope that the anti-war movement does not shy away from disrupting "normal" life just because it angers some people.

OUT OF YOUR CARS! INTO THE STREETS!

Being in the streets, disrupting the continuation of ordinary life, is what made Critical Mass what it is today—a global, decentralized mass movement, a powerful voice for change that is difficult to ignore. We may have lost a few friends, but we have also changed the world!

We suggest that disrupting and irritating people is not such a bad thing. Americans are famous for wanting things their way, and getting very pissed off if they don't get it—you could even argue that this war is partially the result of this same cultural quirk of ours.

On Critical Mass, we have been incurring the wrath of decent, hard-working people for over ten years. And while we have always used humor and our irresistible charm to deflate mounting tension, we know that we do cause considerable inconvenience in this city.

Do we care? A little. It's sad to think that our celebration of a vibrant urban life causes some people to curse us under their breath. We're sorry to hear that some people have been held up on occasion for as much as an hour. And it bothers us that some people hate us, call us names—some of us have even been labeled "terrorists"!

But we don't let that deter us from the project of reclaiming these streets as our own, fighting for the space and the attention for issues that we know are more important than the few minutes a motorist may lose on their way home. In response to the anger of the inconvenienced, we have always shouted sincerely and happily: JOIN US!!!

Sure, some of the people angered by the actions of Thursday the 20th will turn against the anti-war movement. And some of the people who encounter Critical Mass will decide as a result never to ride a bike. But at night, when such people turn on their television to ingest carefully constructed messages of consumption and obedience, a feeling will nag them that something is wrong. Things could be different.

Something is very wrong, and those of us brave enough to point it out repeatedly and loudly are not going to win a popularity contest. But we know something about history, and we know that these tactics—used thoughtfully and carefully—have re-shaped the world repeatedly.

A PROPOSAL FOR THE FUTURE

The Committee for Full Enjoyment calls for more disruptions as the barbarism of this war continues to unfold. We put forward the following proposal: SHUT DOWN THE CITY ONE DAY EACH WEEK!

This approach would help concentrate the scattered energy of the many anti-war groups, providing a focus and rhythm for ongoing resistance. And it would introduce to the anti-war movement a critique of a culture that behaves like a Cult of Work. We all work too much, and most of the work we do is a waste of time at best, or actively making life worse! So in the spirit of moving NOW towards the world we want to live in, we propose imposing, through direct action, a FOUR DAY WORKWEEK, starting as soon as we can....

It's the only way to restore some *normalcy* to our lives!

— The Committee For Full Enjoyment

