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Not Very Minnesota Nice

Medea Benjamin in Minneapolis, May 2023

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We wish to make it *unmistakably* clear

On May 23rd Medea began posting misleading videos and press releases of our action on Friday claiming that:

1. Someone tried to steal her phone

No one tried to steal her phone (the very thought of what might be on it is unsettling). One person tried to get her phone out of their face.

2. a member of our group struck an elderly man

An elderly man struck an individual in our group. Cognizant of the fact that this man was quite elderly, the person attempted primarily to push him away, not hurt him. The man fell to the ground, at which point another person from our group tried to help him up. The elderly person then decided to punch the person helping him up.

As we note in our reportback below: **under no circumstances was our intent to be escalatory**, not least because of the age of the people attending the event. Unfortunately for all of us, the members of "Veterans for Peace" who instigated the melee chose a different path.

The Scene

On an unseasonably cool May evening even by Minneapolis standards a small and diverse group of antifascists stood outside of a building used by a number of Minneapolis non-profits, among them the local chapter of "Veterans for Peace" (VFP) and "Women

friends and comrades, including and especially those who have given their lives in defense of our common antifascist values.

To paraphrase the Belarusian anarchist group Pramen: international solidarity is incredibly difficult. A multitude of factors like language barriers and lack of common connections to people on the ground can make it incredibly frustrating if not impossible for many people to find ways to help and know that their help is making a difference. It is therefore obligatory for those of us fortunate enough to overcome these barriers to help others do the same. In doing so, we also have the chance to advocate for our values as anarchists and make it clear how our struggles here and the struggle in Ukraine are deeply related. Our anti-imperialism cannot be one sided: true anti-imperialism must oppose every imperialism, not just that of the United States.

As our fallen comrade Dmitri Petrov noted in an interview with Tom Lord: this war is a challenge for the global anarchist community to develop our understanding of how imperialism works and how we can most effectively combat it. The temporary alliance our anarchist and antifascist comrades find themselves in is exactly that: temporary. Failing to resist Russia's invasion would result in the same kind of state repression—where many of our comrades rot away in prison cells—as is now the case in Belarus or Kazakhstan.

In sum, we are very proud of the success of our actions and encourage others to do the same. If you are able, we ask that you consider supporting our comrades in Solidarity Collectives as they continue to support our friends and many civilians with medical and other supplies.

We remain in unbreakable solidarity with our Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Russian comrades and friends. In memory of Dmitry Petrov, Cooper Andrews, Finebar Cafferkey and all antifascists who have fallen while resisting imperialism in Ukraine: in our hearts and in our struggles they live forever!

Against Military Madness” (WAMM). The occasion was a book talk by Medea Benjamin to discuss her book about Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Some older anarchists will recall Medea as the person who was quoted in the New York Times during the 1999 Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization, stating: “Here we are protecting Nike, McDonald's, the Gap and all the while I'm thinking, ‘Where are the police? These anarchists should have been arrested.’ More recently, she taken to shilling for authoritarian regimes like Iran, Russia, and China, under the guise of preventing Iraq style “preemptive” wars which she frequently claims are imminent (coincidentally: she and CodePink are the only ones capable of stopping them).

Her event was held at a building owned by Dave Bicking, a former Green party candidate for City Council and prominent member of Communities United Against Police Brutality, among other groups. Conveniently for us, the road immediately outside the building was closed due to construction in the adjacent intersection and people were only able to access the building from one direction.



Medea enjoys a moment standing behind one of the many cops she called.

Some of the members of the action also have significant family and personal ties to the region, including relationships with people on the frontline. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that protesting a book which argues that in order to bring about an end to a war, the victims of this war must unilaterally capitulate to Russia's invasion. Medea claims that the 2013-2014 popular protests that brought down a Russian-backed dictator were actually a far-right CIA supported coup. To anyone who has followed events in Ukraine over the past decade as we have, even the most generous interpretation of these claims will ring hollow at best.

Conclusion

The action's ideological heterogeneity resulted in a much different environment than we are used to operating in. The use of the word "fuck" when addressing Medea directly resulted in at least one Medea-supporting person taking offense (we repeat our suggestion that they cool their fucking jets).

We also wish that we had been able to have more of a genuine dialog with the people attending the event, though it is clear that they were attending primarily to ave their existing ideological commitments reaffirmed. Therefore, even as a matter for scholarly inquiry, there was little to no chance of any meaningful exchange. Especially when trying to talk to someone who started calling you a fascist the second they walked up.

We recognize that some, including those in our local circles, will question or criticize our decision to align ourselves with some whose views about the future of a Ukrainian state we—and our comrades in Ukraine—find distasteful at best. Our participation was on the basis that we would not propogandize for the government in Kyiv and were only there to relay the views and experiences of our



Medea Benjamin
@medeabernjamin

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Important piece by @ChrisLynnHedges about the need for a left-right alliance to stop the war in Ukraine. #peaceinUkraine scheerpost.com/2023/02/12/chr... via @scheer_post



scheerpost.com

Chris Hedges: There Are No Permanent Allies, Only Permanent Power - schee...
If we do not build left-right coalitions on issues such as militarism, health care, a living wage and union organizing, we will be impotent in the face of corpora...

6:49 AM · Feb 13, 2023 · 58K Views

96 Retweets 24 Quotes 290 Likes 14 Bookmarks

Note: when Medea says "right", she means "Co-organized the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville with close neo-Nazi Friends" kind of "right"

Our plan was simple: stand outside, sing songs, make noise, and generally make Medea feel as unwelcome as possible in Minneapolis. Given the age of the people attending the event (Medea's tour in Minneapolis includes a senior care facility for a reason) there was no need to escalate.

As the few attendees arrived, we stood on the sidewalk leading to the building passing out fliers highlighting the lived experience of our anarchist and antifascists comrades in Ukraine and the objective historical falsehoods of Benjamin's book. Finally, Medea herself arrived. She immediately began filming us and members of our crew began shouting. Someone ironically for self professed "peaceniks"—many of whom were bedecked with peace symbol buttons or jewelry—they woke up choosing violence and shoved a member of our group off the sidewalk and causing him to fall into a shallow ditch.

This caused a minor scuffle which was relatively quickly resolved. Nevertheless, Medea Benjamin, a member of WAMM, and the building owner all called 911, claiming there was a large mob fighting outside the building. MPD arrived some minutes later which members of VFP and WAMM took as an opportunity to stand behind the protection of no fewer than 7 bored looking Minneapolis cops while accusing us of being "fascist sympathizing pro-NATO warmongers." After about 45 minutes of standing around while members of WAMM and VFP (including Bicking) gave detailed accounts of events to the cops milling about, most of their group went inside while our group sang one too many verses of "Which Side Are You On." The one WAMM member who remained to scowl and yell at us resulted in this gem of a photo.

a "progressive" twist. In addition, many of the people we attempted to speak with also mentioned that they had been following her for more than 10 years and that her tweets about a "left-right" alliance were "faked."



Arriving roughly 45 minutes after the scheduled beginning of her talk, they approached the May Day stairwell, depositing an estimated 500 small paper strips and approximately 80 zine sized fliers left over from the night before. The "security guard" at the other side of the stairwell was facing away and the action went unnoticed at the time. Passing by in an auto approximately 10 minutes later, comrades reported seeing several members of VFP milling about with a trash bag, presumably attempting to collect nearly 600 pieces of paper.

Purpose

To many people, the authors of this reportback included, this might have seemed like an altogether silly action to participate in, let alone help organize. The crowd was much more ideologically heterogeneous than many/most actions we typically participate in, ranging from self described "progressive liberals" to multiple types of anarchists like ourselves. But the person we were their to oppose has allied herself with literal Neo-Nazis (e.g. *Dungeons and Dugin: How an Alliance of Authoritarians Hopes to Destroy a Politics of Solidarity* and *Neo-Nazis Who Organized Deadly 'Unite the Right' Rally Claim They're In "Communication" with 'Anti-War' Protest Leaders in DC*) and our multitude of views simply strengthened our unity in seeking to stop a fascist collaborator.

We also wish to highlight that she was targeting retirement (and older) aged adults that seemed to have little else to do with their time. To explain what we mean: how many of us have watched conservative older relatives slowly descend into a highly conspiratorial view of the world from obsessively watching too much Fox News? Medea is targeting the same demographic with the same obsession that leads to the same conspiratorial thinking, but with

We dispersed without incident and no arrests. We achieved our goal of making Medea feel like she received a less than "Minnesota Nice" welcome, and we made new connections and friendships.

Litter Bloc, Minneapolis Style

The day after Medea's WAMM and VFP event, she was hosted by May Day Books, a local authoritarian leftist bookstore in Minneapolis' Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. We understand the attendees of the Mayday Event were nearly all the same people as the one the night before. May Day is an interesting target because it has the distinction of being in the basement of a fairly ramshackle building with only one known entrance and exit. Comrades took it upon themselves to create approximately 500 double sided strips of paper with a simple message: "Medea Benjamin is lying to you." Each small strip included a link to <https://medeabenzamin.com> with a QR code. May Day's stairwell can be accessed numerous ways and in the initial pass of the building, "Security" i.e., one of the people responsible for starting the scuffle the night before, was standing nearby. Happily enough, he was "guarding" the route that would be taken by someone doing what our comrades planned to do if they had no knowledge of the local area or had not performed the most cursory tactical terrain analysis.



Now, imagine 500 of these and a lot of larger pieces of paper.