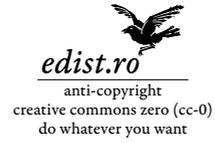


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# The CHAZ Trap

Jordan Martinez

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2020

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Following a tragic spate of shootings, the Seattle Police Department cleared the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone/Capitol Hill Organized Protest (CHAZ/CHOP used interchangeably throughout) on July 1st, concluding that phase of local struggle. While the Defund SPD movement has long since moved on from the CHAZ, much has still been left unsaid on the 'hows' and 'whys' of the dissolution of CHAZ. The roughly one month of continual occupation around the East Precinct presented a wealth of political experiences which must be examined. However, people have hesitated to draw lessons. Such as lessons on the tensions between radicals and liberals, institutional activists and street activists, and the roll of identity politics. What is useful now is dissecting the events that took place, the actors, and their roles. For that, we have to jump to the end of May.

## Rupture

The May 30th George Floyd rally called for by the liberal Not This Time organization, led by Andre Taylor, was the main launching point for the current wave of protest in Seattle, when thousands of people descended upon downtown Seattle, following on the heels of an anarchist organized march on May 29th. However, who was running the speakers list at Westlake Park hardly mattered, as the downtown grid swelled with far more people than could be contained at the event. After seeing so many images of a Minneapolis set aflame and a police precinct turned to ash, an openness to the unexpected hung over the crowd. The spark was lit when a trigger-happy cop pepper sprayed a mass of demonstrators.

**Excerpted from the Seattle Police Department Blotter<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> seattle.gov (via Internet Archive)

or challenged to the degree it needed to be by those with authority. On the part of the militants however, there was a need for greater confidence in combating the liberal self-destruction of the movement, and challenging the self-serving identity politics weaponized by leaders. We must build a movement not in service of an abstract "Black leadership", but one that has consciously committed itself to a multi-racial political project of international eco-socialist revolution tied to a process of radical global reconstruction. Such a movement privileges making war on white supremacy, including white supremacy with black skin. CHAZ offers us many lessons, it would do us a great error to cast the experience away as merely a historic accident. Historic accidents must be transformed into rupture.

2:19:35 PM Approximately 4000-5000 crowd size at Westlake  
2:32:17 PM Crowd is more hostile on 5/Pine. Bikes from 4/Pine to 5/Pine  
2:36:33 PM 5/Pine rocks and bottles  
2:38:15 PM rocks and bottles- unlawful assembly- need dispersal order  
2:39:07 PM taking glass bottles 5/Pine  
2:39:16 PM officer exposed- need medical  
2:40 PM SPD officer injured. SFD Deployed.  
2:45:44 PM SFD to 6/pine. Individual pepper sprayed.  
2:59:53 PM Projectiles being thrown 5/Pine  
3:01:18 PM Officer struck in the throat by a projectile. Minor injury  
3:09:00 PM Patient was pushed to the ground during the protest. Transported to HMC by AMR.  
3:10:20 PM Dispersal orders given at 5/pine  
3:35:14 PM Large crowd headed to HQ- currently 5/ Columbia  
3:43:00 PM SPD officer injured.  
3:46:25 PM Throwing bottles in front of Bartells at 5/ Olive  
3:52:45 PM SFD to 3/Pine for injured officers  
3:53:56 PM Patrol car being vandalized in front of Old Navy  
3:55:53 PM Patrol car on fire by Old Navy  
3:59:19 PM Crowd is on I-5...

A day of action that was intended to be a release valve for rage, quickly became much more. “‘We’ve dealt with crowds of thousands of people before,’ (SPD Police Chief Carmen) Best said, calling the situation the worst in her 28-year career. ‘But this crowd was different ... The anger directed toward the Police Department was unprecedented and the numbers were unprecedented.’”<sup>2</sup> A radical mood set into the crowd, and the openness to the unexpected turned to combativeness with the police and mass acts of looting throughout the downtown area into the night. Multiple police vehicles were set on fire, barricades were erected, and police skirmished with numerous groups as storefronts were broken into. Looting spilled over into the greater Seattle-area over the weekend, with groups coordinating over social media to hit shops from Bellevue all the way to Auburn. As USA Today reported in Bellevue: “On the afternoon of Sunday, May 31, a handful of demonstrators carrying signs gathered at a major intersection in the Seattle suburb. The crowd quickly grew to 40. Then, after two men got on cell-phones, 300 more showed up, then 1,000 white, Black and brown. ‘It was a tsunami of people, and they just started running,’ (Bellevue Police Chief) Mylett said. ‘I didn’t hear George Floyd’s name once. I didn’t hear, ‘Police reform!’ They just scattered throughout the city. ... They used tactics we’ve never seen before.’”<sup>3</sup> In reaction to the looting spreading across the region, Washington State Governor Jay Inslee activated the National Guard, reinforcing the curfews of multiple municipalities.

Is it really so surprising, months into a global pandemic that has decimated working class communities while inexplicably shoring up the stock market, that masses of people would turn to seizing goods? For weeks prior to the uprising, storefronts had already long been boarded up to defend against theft. As Cornel West ex-

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<sup>2</sup> Seattle Times: “Seattle mayor, police face questions over response to George Floyd protests, downtown turmoil”

<sup>3</sup> USA Today: ‘Peaceful protests got hijacked’: Some criminals used George Floyd protests as cover for looting, police say

The morning of CHAZ’s dismantling by SPD, Rick Hearn was seen out with a megaphone, “‘We’ve made history here! You’re doing great!’ Hearn shouted. ‘Everybody out. We’ll get another place. Don’t taunt the officers. Show them that the Black race is peaceful. The whole world can see us!’” David Lewis was there as well to remind people of the empty platitude “(i)t was never about the location; it was about the movement.”<sup>22</sup> With the liberals clearing CHAZ, the institutional radicals were more than comfortable for the spotlight to shift to traditional forms of pressure politics. On June 28th, Socialist Alternative and Seattle DSA led a hugely successful march on Jenny Durkan’s mansion in the wealthy Windermere neighborhood. The Decriminalize Seattle and King County Equity Now coalitions led a mass march from the youth jail to the King County jail on July 3rd. While numerous marches would continue to form (e.g., the Every Day March, Every Night Direct Demonstration, Engage Team, and others), the weight of the movement has decidedly shifted from the chaotic early forms that developed out of CHAZ back to the older order of the established organizations, marking a new period of the movement in Seattle, and the end of the chapter of CHAZ.

It has been dismaying to see the quite often hands-off approach towards CHAZ by the developed organizations of the left in Seattle. For Socialist Alternative, it echoes of their conservative approach to the Black Lives Matter movement five years ago.<sup>23</sup> Ironically, the same establishment Black organizations SAIt leaned on then, the NAACP in particular, Durkan now relies on in covering her image. For their part, the same wariness towards militancy doesn’t exist from Decriminalize Seattle, still perhaps, a reformist routinism has set in – march, petition, rinse, repeat. CHAZ contained possibilities which had to be actively dulled and suppressed by the liberals within the movement, this suppression was not actively identified

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<sup>22</sup> “Seattle police clear CHOP protest zone”

<sup>23</sup> “Seattle Socialist Alternative and the Black Lives Matter Movement”

East Precinct 'was never the goal of the Black collective or the allies' at CHOP. She said the Seattle Police Department drew the zone's borderlines when they 'terrorized' the neighborhood and the protesters who they had kettled on 11th and Pine for over a week."<sup>20</sup> It is less reclaiming a narrative than rewriting history to claim that the stand-off was a week-long kettling of demonstrators, when it was the police who were being kettled.

Just before 3 AM on June 29th, shots rang out again at the CHAZ. This time, two young Black boys had been shot, one of whom killed. The youths had been driving a stolen vehicle, and sparked concerns of a possible right-wing drive-by or car attack, with seemingly unrelated gun shots reported earlier. The Seattle Times reported that "(t)he white Jeep appears to have been driven on the turf playfield at Cal Anderson a little earlier in the night, alarming protesters who were camped nearby. But no solid evidence has emerged publicly indicating that anyone in the Jeep was firing gunshots. No one else was reported shot. 'Active shooters came through in a stolen vehicle that spun around the field a few times and then they tried to come through our barriers,' one man says (in video taken at the incident), standing next to the crashed Jeep, blood stains on his sweatshirt. 'And our people weren't having it. We already had their right tire out and we [expletive] drew down and took them out the car and we gave them the service.'"<sup>21</sup> The last nail in the coffin of CHAZ, the murder of a young man, was driven in by a vigilante, long after the liberal leadership had already conceded they saw nothing left to hold on to. CHAZ was dismantled with relatively little fightback within 48 hours. Ultimately, the failures of the liberals fell on the radicals, who now carry the undeserved blame for the collapse of CHAZ.

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<sup>20</sup> "Seattle Black Collective Voice Seeks to Reclaim the CHOP Narrative"

<sup>21</sup> "'Everybody down!': What happened at the shooting that killed a teenager and led to CHOP's shutdown"

plained, "(t)he catalyst was certainly Brother George Floyd's public lynching, but the failures of the predatory capitalist economy to provide the satisfaction of the basic needs of food and healthcare and quality education, jobs with a decent wage, at the same time the collapse of your political class, the collapse of your professional class. Their legitimacy has been radically called into question, and that's multiracial. It's the neofascist dimension in Trump. It's the neoliberal dimension in Biden and Obama and the Clintons and so forth. And it includes much of the media. It includes many of the professors in universities. The young people are saying, 'You all have been hypocritical. You haven't been concerned about our suffering, our misery. And we no longer believe in your legitimacy.' And it spills over into violent explosion."<sup>4</sup>

What we saw in May was a moment of rupture, and a key to that was the multi-racial and mass composition of the actions against property. This stands contrary to the propaganda efforts to cast looting as conducted by either gangs according to police departments or as Trump and the liberal establishment have asserted, White antifascists and fascists.<sup>5</sup> Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan – against all evidence – claimed "'much of the violence and destruction, both here in Seattle and across the country, has been instigated and perpetuated by white men' who are 'co-opting peaceful demonstrations.'"<sup>6</sup> This reflects a nationwide pattern of attempts to divide looting from "legitimate" protest, alienate radical politics from this wave of rebellion, and drive white and Black activists from each other.

Former Black Panther leader Aaron Dixon reminds us that:

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<sup>4</sup> "America's Moment of Reckoning": Cornel West Says Nationwide Uprising Is Sign of "Empire Imploding"

<sup>5</sup> CNN: "Police point finger at gangs and local groups for riot damages, contradicting Trump's claims"

<sup>6</sup> Seattle Times: "Don't buy the 'outside agitator' trope: Arrest records suggest Seattle's riot was more likely homegrown"

Back in the day what today people refer to as “looting”, we called “liberating”; freeing things we need for our survival from the oppressor. This land is ravaged by poverty; people are truly poor, without food, health-care or clothes. Rage leads to damage. Rage is a reaction to systemic violence and everything representative of the establishment becomes a target, whether it is a Nordstrom’s, Macys, or other symbols of white supremacist capitalism. We saw that in the 60s when we had riots for three summers in a row; looting was always a feature [emphasis added]. The corporate media want to frame property damage as violence. Violence is what happened to George Floyd, to Trayvon Martin, to Breonna Taylor and so many others. State violence is what we see every day happening to Black, Latino, Native, and poor people of every color, shape, orientation, what have you.”<sup>7</sup>

## Agitation

While thousands of Seattleites did not pour into the streets for the deaths of John T. Williams, Oscar Perez-Giron, or Charleena Lyles. They came out for George Floyd, alongside thousands across the world, because of the images of rebellion emerging out of Minneapolis telling people that change had arrived. Militancy, the liberals will tell us, divides, alienates, drives away. Yet again and again, recent and past history shows that militancy can galvanize. Nationally, one survey showed 54% of Americans supporting the burning of Minneapolis’ third precinct, and 78%

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<sup>7</sup> “Living the Panther Dream – An Interview with Black Panther Party Veteran Member Aaron Dixon”

## Possibilities

Soon after the redrawing of CHAZ, a spate of shootings occurred on June 20th, 21st, and the 23rd. These shootings appeared to be motivated by a variety of causes. While none linked to the protesters in particular, they were still moved on quickly by the city as justification for the definitive end of CHAZ. Police Chief Carmen Best shockingly claimed lives may have been saved, had the police not been deprived of tear-gas. This built on her earlier fabrications, such as the debunked claims of extortion taking place at CHAZ. Still, the writing was on the wall. Jenny Durkan, with the support of a number of Black liberal leaders including Andre Taylor, called for the end of CHAZ, with the suspension of night time activities. The institutional radicals were largely apathetic to this call. As The Seattle Times reported, “Councilmember Kshama Sawant said decisions regarding CHOP are ‘the movement’s,’ not Durkan’s, but that she supported focusing protest activities in the area between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m.” Andre Taylor, blaming the movement for the violence committed against it, supported the slow dismantling, saying “I feel like I cannot help the situation now because of the violence that will probably continue... CHOP is not a place, it’s an idea”.<sup>19</sup>

This comment, that CHAZ/CHOP was not a place, but an idea, became a widespread rhetorical tool to move on from, without dealing with the errors of the occupation. Soon after the City made known its intention to clear CHAZ, other “leaders” moved in lock step. As The Stranger reported from a June 25th press conference, “members of the Seattle Black Collective Voice from the Capitol Hill Organized Protest (CHOP) sought to ‘reclaim the narrative’ of the area following a weekend of gun violence... (Naudia) Miller (of the Harriet Tubman Foundation for Safe Passage) argued the

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<sup>19</sup> “Seattle will phase down CHOP at night, police will return to East Precinct, Durkan says”

did not entirely or consistently form itself as a cohesive lasting organization. Rather it was an ideological battle amongst constellations of individuals that played out, not a battle between organizations. Without taking serious the development of decision-making structures across the entire encampment in an open, mass, centralized way, i.e. participatory democratic assemblies, CHAZ was unable to grapple with issues which would undermine and destroy it over the course of the month.

A key concession was the installation of concrete barriers by the city on June 16th. While arranged by certain liberal “organizers”, it was understood by most that the changed shape of CHAZ’s border – now allowing for a lane of traffic around the precinct and past one side of Cal Anderson Park – created a higher risk for drive by shootings.<sup>17</sup> The fear of continued violence entering the zone was warranted, as CHAZ faced constant threats of right-wing violence, with numerous barricade security volunteers already facing doxing and exhaustion. Unfortunately, the political will to restore the aggressive stance against the city seemed to have evaporated.

Omari Salisbury reflected on the 22nd that “(b)oth (Wyking) Garrett and (Nikkita) Oliver are leaders in the King County Equity Now coalition which Black Lives Matter Seattle-King County now endorses, but neither Garrett nor Oliver up to this point have shown a willingness to take direct ownership or leadership in what is occurring at the CHOP. With that being said, Oliver has at times been spotted within the zone in what can be described as community building with protesters.”<sup>18</sup> Following weeks of isolating attacks by liberal leadership and abandonment by larger organizations, militants and many volunteers had been alienated from CHAZ, leaving few to do much more than despair for what was to come.

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<sup>17</sup> “City meets with organizers, stakeholders about reducing Seattle’s CHOP footprint”

<sup>18</sup> “#CHOP - Who are the “Black-led community organizations” the Mayor is working with and where have they been this whole time?”

saying the anger expressed in that city was justified.<sup>8</sup> Support for “Black Lives Matter” went up nearly as much during the two weeks of initial demonstrations and rebellion as it did during entire preceding two years.<sup>9</sup> When we fight, we win. This is precisely why the ruling class seek to undermine and destroy militant resistance. Curfews were put in place nationwide to deter and give additional leverage to protect property against further looting and rioting, not primarily to go after stage managed marches. Unfortunately, those ruling class tactics of divide and conquer largely worked in Seattle, furthered most damagingly not by politicians, but by unchecked wreckers within, coddling and reaffirming the liberal ideological morass rendering the movement inert. The original sin of the continued Seattle George Floyd protests, was its rejection to recognize the condition of it’s birth: out of fire.

From the first marches to hit the streets in the aftermath of the weekend uprising, Seattle was cursed by the cooptation of it’s energy by police-friendly saboteurs. Playing on warranted fears of government infiltration, the individualistic, unaccountable leadership that most quickly arose struck out against radicalization. Here, Rashyla Levitt and David Lewis must be singled out in particular. Whether for personal predilection or police payment hardly matters, these two “activists” publicly represented themselves as leaders of a movement they helped run into the ground as useful fools for the mayor. Levitt was front and center for media at the first marches, seizing the lead. She was a consistent ally for the Seattle Police Department, with her marches often characterized by her demeaning and disgusting demands for people to kneel in front of police lines, a Dollar General version of Kylie Jenner’s Pepsi Protest. The immediate spatial effect of this is to immediately divide out radicals, so-called “outside agitators”, who are left standing, alienating them

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<sup>8</sup> “54 Percent of Americans Think Burning Down Minneapolis Police Precinct Was Justified After George Floyd’s Death”

<sup>9</sup> “How Public Opinion Has Moved on Black Lives Matter”

from the crouching crowd, driving them out for the crime of disobeying “Black leadership.”

Catalonian anarchist Peter Gelderloos quite strongly illustrates the deep attack on the movement this represents.

The trope of the outside agitator is a psychological operation meant to suggest that those who rebel have no legitimacy. Those who come from outside threaten the closed, localized system of oppressor and oppressed. The outsiders are imputed with evil, ulterior motivations, whereas the authorities are simply motivated by a desire to protect that closed system. And of course they want to protect it: as the oppressors in the closed system, they are the ones who benefit from it. Solidarity and collective power are discouraged, as people are impelled to distrust anyone who does not come from within a very small circle, family member or immediate neighbor. Obedience is normalized while rebellion is portrayed as something sinister.

Another disturbing element of the trope is the suggestion that white people are being irresponsible if they also want to fight against slavery, and people born in other countries are suspect if they also claim to suffer under capitalism. The racist, classist implications translate well to the modern uses of the provocateur bogeyman.

“The logic of counterinsurgency is spread across the political spectrum: everyone who has an officially recognized right to comment on the unfolding rebellion, everyone given a bullhorn by the mainstream media, has been warning about outside agitators. Trump does it, most police chiefs do it, Democratic mayors do it, even the progressive wing of the Democratic Party like Ilhan

major incidents that cause bad press — all the aforementioned interest groups that dominate local politics will be citing us as the reason why the budget needs to stay as it is.

The City took up a carrot and stick approach with Durkan attempting to shore up her image by feigning support for the Zone, speculating that the CHAZ could lead to “a summer of love.” The city installed portable toilets, removed garbage, officially closed streets in the CHAZ, and provided concrete barriers. During the daytime, CHAZ resembled a Black Lives Matter-themed activism street festival, with regular music performances, \$30 Black Lives Matter shirts, and a drastically changed demographic as increasing numbers of spectators came to become tourists of the CHAZ, cameras in hand. However, this mandate for self-management inclusive of four city blocks of street and a large city park quickly revealed weaknesses within the movement. The call for protesters, activists, and occupiers to “follow Black leadership” collapsed any mass democratic impulse sustained uprisings typically inspire. Instead of developing any coherent democratic structures, CHAZ denizens were confined to follow one or another “legitimate” bullhorn holder, their own liberal ideological constraints robbing them of conscious agency.

Of course, agency still existed. At CHAZ, had “Black leadership” meant the militant Black women who were the leading fighters within the movement, things may have played out differently. People choose the Black leadership they agree with. Politics is always in command, whether acknowledged or not. “Follow Black leadership” nine times out of ten was used in support of generally conservative public figures and organizations firmly in the Democratic Party orbit. Liberal ideological foot soldiers move to isolate white radicals before turning inward and alienating Black radicals, flourishing in environments without authoritative democratic check on their abuses. The liberal misleadership within CHAZ individuals

space is secure that building during the protest. Can you guys work with us on that?’ Scoggins asked.” The misleaders, in service of the City, argued in bad faith that anyone who approached the precinct likely sought to torch it, peddled conspiracy theories of police hiding like a Trojan Horse in the basement. At one point, uniformed officers were given an escort back into the Precinct. Clearly, this was in service of defending the precinct from a building occupation that would have elevated the struggle. The liberal’s interests were in friendly relationships with the City, a building occupation would obliterate that chance. Black liberal misleadership intervened to put a ceiling on how high the movement might climb. Without the political will to fly higher, eventually the only way to go was down. Counter-posed to the militant action of a takeover of the precinct, the liberals forced the impossible task on the movement of regulating society by attempting to run a diffuse political street festival and encampment in the center of Seattle, which cut away from the demands being made for police defunding. CHAZ was a trap from the start, but it didn’t have to be that way.

Justin Ward concluded their post with prescience:

The longevity of the occupation will largely depend on its relations with the neighbors and how well it manages its affairs.

Relationships with the wider community will also be essential to building a mandate for defunding. There are certain interest groups who will be implacably opposed — the chamber of commerce, Downtown Seattle Association, etc. — but there are others, such as neighborhood associations and progressive-owned businesses that can be won to our side.

The Seattle Police Department are self-sabotaging at the moment, but it could easily swing the other way. If the occupation gets out of hand — if there are some

Omar and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez do it. The right wingers add the obviously anti-Semitic suggestion that George Soros funds these agitators, the “professional anarchists,” but all of them, nonetheless, are using a trope that is irremediably racist.<sup>10</sup>

After three days of demonstrations under them, Rashyla Levitt and David Lewis were granted a seat with the Mayoral administration, following a June 2nd march on Jenny Durkan at City Hall where they heavily managed the crowd. With Levitt admonishing hecklers and without any substantial demands put on her, Durkan was able to walk away with the appearance of offering an olive branch. The Seattle Times’ headline on June 3rd blared “Seattle mayor pledges to meet with protest leaders”. Doug Trumm described the fallout of that shameful moment, “The lack of commitment and absence of remorse on the part of the Mayor, combined with the fact that she was negotiating with two leaders who weren’t well known in the social justice community led some Black, Indigenous and People of Color (“BIPOC”) leaders to speak out. Black Lives Matter King County issued a statement saying they didn’t have any affiliation with Rashyla Levitt nor David Lewis. Nikkita Oliver, who ran against Mayor Durkan on a platform that including sweeping police reform, criticized their organizing tactics and promised a response.”<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the June 3rd private meeting between the Mayor and “protest leaders” was crashed by Nikkita Oliver leading a march of thousands under the slogan “Defund SPD”. Oliver negotiated for Jenny Durkan to speak to the crowd, and the mayor was this time utterly shredded for her cheap pandering and avoidance of hard promises.

Importantly, their cooptation was not just put into check by words, but by the movement’s actions. On Capitol Hill, in a historic

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<sup>10</sup> “Counterinsurgency: dousing the flames of Minneapolis”

<sup>11</sup> “On Fifth Day of Protest, Mayor Durkan Pledges Changes but Won’t Surrender Her Tear Gas”

accident, the typical SPD East Precinct blockade during protests turned into a 24-hour standoff at the beginning of June. A whole ecosystem sprouted up to maintain a constant harassment of SPD and National Guard forces, while providing free food, water, face masks, and other supplies. This took the wind out the sails of Levitt and Lewis who had to contend with a growing new spatial and ideological center of gravity for the movement – continual engagement with SPD, alongside the new taste for abolitionist politics. However, while the demand for a 50% reduction in the SPD budget had won over the movement, it was never made to impact the lived daily reality of the Capitol Hill stand off. What was the “Defund SPD” strategy for the barricade stand off, or for CHAZ later? For that matter, where were any organizations at the barricades? A separation was growing between the campaign brewing within City Hall, and the protests outside.

Independent journalist Omari Salisbury reported his thoughts at the time:

“Currently, there are several other Black organizers on the ground daily that I have never ever seen or heard of before telling protestors that they represent the leadership of Seattle’s Black community and others saying they represent various politicians and are espousing an ideology that is counter to everything that I know about the struggle that the Black community has encountered or is working towards here in Seattle. There are Black organizers out there telling the White protestors that the only thing all Black people in Seattle want is to ‘start a dialogue’ with the city and that a dialogue is a great first step. These are also the same Black people wanting to convince protestors to ‘take a knee’. Many of these people are the same people that are constantly trying to reduce the numbers of people at the Western Barricade by splitting the protestors up and leading them

stood in sharp disagreement with radicals involved in the occupation. The New York Times featured Hearn, saying that while he supported the movement in general, “he was appalled by the violent tactics and rhetoric he witnessed during the occupation. He blamed the destruction and looting on ‘opportunists,’ but also said that much of the damage on Capitol Hill came from a distinct contingent of violent, armed white activists. ‘It’s antifa,’ he said. ‘They don’t want to see the progress we’ve made. They want chaos.’”<sup>16</sup>

This aggressively anti-radical politics eventually led to open conflict between the liberal leadership and militants. On Juneteenth, a multi-racial radical contingent led by its Black members, sought to occupy the East Precinct. This attempt was frustrated by the liberal outrage at this intrusion upon their peace with the city, with the Black Bloc clad militants facing down physical assaults by self-declared security. This attack on militants stood in sharp contrast to the treatment of Proud Boys just four days prior, when security peacefully escorted them through CHAZ, failing to defend one of their own who was assaulted just two blocks outside the zone. For the liberals, while far right violence gave them a warrant for their “defense” of the CHAZ, it was the militants that they saw as the main threat to a peaceable relationship with the city. That untenable peace however, exactly led to the withering away of the CHAZ.

Despite the militant basis for the Precinct standoff victory, liberals were quick to maintain control of the situation, acting to keep protesters from entering the precinct. In documents that have since surfaced, Seattle Fire Chief Harold Scoggins was in communication with Raz Simone early in the occupation, requesting his aid in managing demonstrators away from the precinct. “‘Raz, I just got word that 4 people just broke the door at SPD and entered the building,’ said a Scoggins text to Simone. ‘A way to keep SPD out of the

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<sup>16</sup> “Abolish the Police? Those Who Survived the Chaos in Seattle Aren’t So Sure”

attempted car attack and mass shooting was largely foiled by the quick actions of demonstrators and the assailant's weapon jamming (though one protester was still shot). These fears were quickly reinforced by rumors of a Proud Boy march on the CHAZ over its first evening. While that threat never materialized, it did create the legitimated precedent for an armed presence defending the space.

Although militants, such as the Puget Sound John Brown Gun Club, participated in armed defense, it was largely liberals who took up the gun and most visibly regularly patrolled. Notably, local rapper Raz Simone, often seen with a cameraman at his side. Simone's very visible presence, beginning during the stand-off with his frequent speeches atop his Tesla, would earn him the moniker "Warlord Raz" by right-wing media. More than white supremacists, however, it was petty acts of vandalism that would receive reprisals, with one disturbing instance being caught on camera of Simone appearing to assault an individual tagging a wall.<sup>14</sup> Simone's purpose at CHAZ was maintaining the interests of business owners, consistent in his politics as acting as a privileged mediator between property and protest, rather than a true partisan of CHAZ. As Jack Kelly wrote on him for Forbes, "Simone loves America and is devoted to positivity and unity. He's committed to the country and seeks to make it an even better place and is not a proponent of the 'burn it all down' contingent. He's been in constant communications with the mayor, police and fire chiefs and other members of the establishment. It's important to him and the city officials to ensure that life goes on peacefully. We've already seen how quickly violence, mayhem, looting and rioting can occur."<sup>15</sup>

A more consistent armed presence came in the form of "Two Clip" Rick Hearn, a private security guard who voluntarily kept his own form of peace in the CHAZ. Hearn, even more than Simone,

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrjhcDVBV5k> (deleted)

<sup>15</sup> "Meet Raz Simone, The Alleged 'Warlord' Of The Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone"

away from Capitol Hill. I do not see (any Black organizations) on the ground visible at Western Barricade. I don't see any of you setting up tables with your literature or information on your agenda points or educating the protestors on what else they can do to further your cause beyond just protesting. I will be honest, your ground game is lacking and because of that, you have left a vacuum for those whose agenda is counter to actual measurable and sustainable change that is overdue for Seattle's Black community.<sup>12</sup>

By and large, the dominant leftist organizations and recognized leaders in Seattle – Socialist Alternative, fronted by City Councilor Kshama Sawant, and Nikkita Oliver who ran for Mayor with the Seattle Peoples Party – chose to not greatly weigh in on the internal politics of the "Western Barricade". To their credit, they each mobilized supporters and spoke against the city's actions against protesters. Still, without either person taking clear leadership, the liberal pull on the movement generally dominated the day to day. CHAZ was often criticized for degenerating into a street festival, however a similar mood existed while the stand-off occurred, with many people coming by the mostly sanitized barricade confrontation – safely staying behind police erected barriers enjoying the catharsis of hurling insults and chants, listening to various megaphone equipped speakers reminiscent of dueling street preachers – before heading back home, a good day's protest done.

It is with great irony that the liberals talk in reverence of Martin Luther King Jr, Rosa Parks, and Gandhi but fail to commit themselves even to that standard of action. "Non-violence", as a political tactic wielded by those leaders, was expressed as civil disobedience. Civil Disobedience takes various forms but involves the conscious and direct breaking of social order by peaceful means. This

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<sup>12</sup> "What is the end game? The disconnect between white protestors and black organizers in Seattle"

has meant many things – anti-war activists chaining themselves to intercontinental ballistic missiles, civil rights activists using white-only facilities, blocking distribution of goods, etc. These tactics often intentionally invite violence, whether by the state or other repressive agents, for the purpose of shocking and appealing to a third-party who can intervene on behalf of the oppressed. It was the militants on the barricade line who acted on this logic, not the liberals.

The performative protest around the East Precinct was challenged by a militant minority of demonstrators, most visibly black bloc-clad Black women, who worked to galvanize the crowd in the evenings to push the Western Barricade line forward towards the precinct. On every occasion this was opposed by the liberal leadership under cover of dishonest advocacy for “non-violence” and against “agitators”. This leadership sought to maintain the peace of the barricade equilibrium, rather than to invite tear gas, and fought to maintain peace with the city, rather than challenging the establishment. However, it was precisely evoking the flash bangs, pepper spray, and tear gas, that made the movement’s gains. Particularly the tear gas. At the June 2nd rally Durkan spoke at, she refused to commit to ending the use of tear gas, three days later she publicly reversed that decision – issuing a 30 day “ban” on tear gas that allowed for its use by SWAT. Still, it was a concession that acknowledged the political crisis that enveloped the Mayor generating from the frustration and anger of protesters and Capitol Hill residents against the massive constant police presence, and regular deployment of tear gas seeping into apartments in the surrounding area. That crisis was sparked by the militants committing themselves to civil disobedience. Over the first week of June, an explosive recall campaign was launched against Durkan, that gained open support of City Council members. In the context of mounting pressure against Durkan, the call to pull the Seattle Police Department out from the East Precinct was made, abandoning the area on June 8th.

A local blogger, Justin Ward, described the opening of this new chapter:

(a)fter more than a week of battles on Capitol Hill, the Seattle Police Department finally managed to stop the violence — by leaving. On Monday, the department evacuated the East Precinct, which they had been defending with a round-the-clock presence since the uprisings over the death of George Floyd first spread to Seattle.

The police were likely assuming their retreat would end in chaos. They were hoping that the protests would devolve into an orgy of riots, looting and destruction — that by the end of the day, the public would be crying out for them to come in and restore order in the most brutal fashion.

They were mistaken.

After the police removed their barricades and opened up Pine Street, the protesters moved in and the celebration began. No one so much as touched the boarded-up precinct building. The nonstop chanting that had filled the air for the past several days gave way to music, dancing and speeches. No cops could be seen for blocks save for a single helicopter circling over head.<sup>13</sup>

## Mediation

Immediately, the defense and security of CHAZ was a central issue. A diffuse structure emerged to handle barricade watch and internal safety. Early on, the threat of far right violence was seen as the most immediate danger. During the Precinct stand off, an

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<sup>13</sup> “Defund SPD: This is how we win”