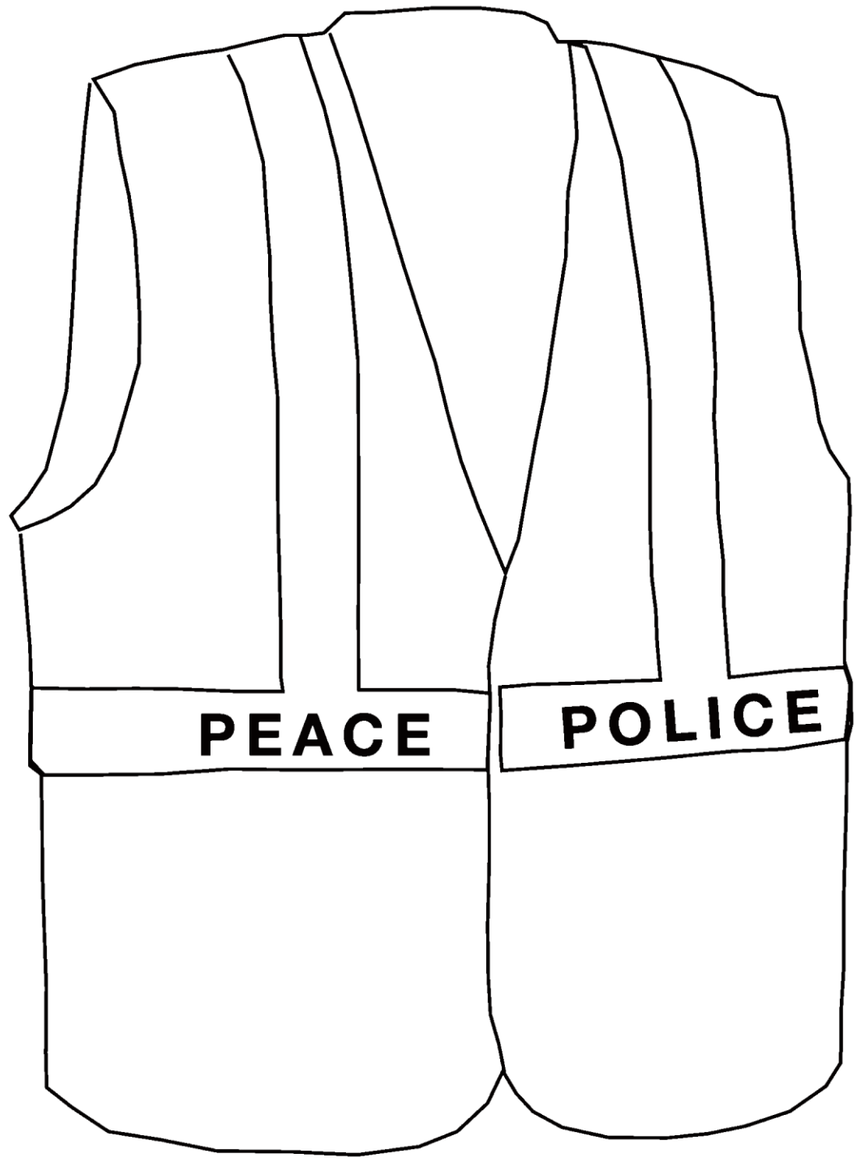

PEACE POLICE ARE POLICE

HOW PROTEST MARSHALS SABOTAGE LIBERATION AND PROTECT THE STATE

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GLOSSARY:

KETTLING
Kettling is a tactic police use to end protests, even peaceful ones. Police block all exits from an area and box the crowd into a smaller and smaller space for extended periods of time during which they collect valuable intelligence. Police then require everyone to leave through a narrow exit or just keep everyone contained and arrest them for refusing the leave the area. Kettles can be avoided by being aware of your surroundings, noting potential exit ways and police positions. Protests that move quickly along un-planned routes are more difficult to kettle but are vulnerable to police splitting and kettling sections of the group in smaller numbers. Police can also feign kettles to disperse a protest or make protesters move away from an area. Kettles are less likely to be formed in areas where protesters are difficult to isolate from members of the public such as outside the protestors' target or a major road junction. Working with the police and following their instructions is a quick way to leading yourselves into a potential kettle. Trust your comrades, have people scouting out police positions, block off both sides of traffic to prevent them from going around your group, block off intersections so they can not go through them. If you're smart and aware, you can avoid a kettle.

DIVERSITY OF TACTICS
Diversity of tactics refers to understanding within a crowd to allow whatever tactics the participants believe necessary in order to accomplish shared goals, while also keeping in mind collective safety and risk. We support all tactics as they are all necessary in our fights for liberation, for Palestine and beyond. Tactics are tools; we would not use glue when we need a hammer or vice versa. One is not inherently better or more moral than another. They must all be used at the appropriate times in order to further our shared struggle for collective liberation.

AUTONOMOUS ACTION
Autonomous action refers to action organized by people joining together to work, beyond the scope, structures, or control of any formalized organizations, agencies, or registered nonprofits. Autonomous organizing opens up the space for people to engage in our collective power and express that without needing to be backed by any hierarchy, bureaucracy, or state registration. It is a way for us all to actively participate in this struggle for liberation and organize it collectively, not just allowing ourselves to be dictated to by the bigger organizations on the scene. We all hold the power to create change, we do not need to entrust that power to an organization to handle it for us.

DIRECT ACTION
Direct action refers to actions aimed at directly confronting the oppression we face and having a material impact, beyond a symbolic impact. These can be anything from property destruction and vandalism of entities complicit in violence, preventing or slowing production, preventing events or gatherings (such as fundraisers or propaganda events), or blocking logistics (such as shipping from ports). Direct action seeks to materially impact those involved in order to force them to change their practices, or to change the practices ourselves. We exercise our collective power directly to further our liberation. We do not rely on the institutions that oppress us to suddenly grow a conscience but instead show them that their actions do have consequences and they will not remain unchallenged.

RUNNING INTERFERENCE

- Violent Zionists or reactionaries need to be handled. This could be with a large body of people surrounding them and not allowing them to access the rest of the protest.

- Preparing for police escalation is important because it cannot always be avoided. Monitor the police to watch for their staging efforts, for what weapons they have out, for how many riot lines have formed. Organize in small groups or "affinity groups" to watch out for each other, especially people who are priority unarrestable for any reason.

- In large crowds facing off against riot lines it's helpful to keep hands on people on the front lines (with consent) to prevent police from grabbing people. A more high risk option is to support with dearrests (preventing police arrests).

DISPERSAL ORDERS

- In order to arrest people on charges of "unlawful assembly" police must first declare the assembly unlawful and order everyone to disperse. This is known as a "dispersal order."

- Without a dispersal order, there is no crime that police can use to arrest a group that is doing nothing more than blocking a street. And even if individuals within a crowd are doing other things that police can claim are a crime (like decorating or damaging property), that cannot be a basis to arrest others, and there are both legal and practical limits on when and how police can rush a crowd to extract someone.

- In order for a dispersal order to be legally valid, police must announce it audibly so everyone can hear. The first dispersal order is rarely the last. Police will normally give multiple dispersal orders to ensure that they have been heard as well as to thin the crowd out and make it easier for them to manage. In addition, a dispersal order must provide the crowd an opportunity to disperse, which means giving sufficient time and a clear unblocked exit path. The dispersal order must be given clearly and must name the consequences for failing to disperse, how much time you have to disperse, and what clear route you can take to disperse.

- A protest marshal saying police asked for the group to disperse is not a dispersal order. A protest marshal saying police told them that the group will be arrested is not a dispersal order either. These are just trickery by the police.

- With large enough groups, you can hold a space beyond multiple dispersal orders, especially if all exits are not cut off. Police are definitely calculating their feasibility of intervention based on the number of people in a crowd and the nature of the terrain. Even in the rarer circumstances when police begin to deploy more violent crowd control tactics such as pepper spray and tear gas, these can also be prepared for and addressed in real time, including by medics or maneuvers to evade the attacks. Groups can also rove and move to other intersections essentially playing cat and mouse with police.

WHAT IS PEACE POLICING?

This is a term for individuals whose role at political demonstrations is to regulate the conduct of protestors in the name of protecting them, serving as the police's representatives within the crowd. These individuals often wear yellow vests and describe themselves as "protest marshals" who are either representing the "organizers" of a demonstration or "protecting" those organizers from the crowd's autonomous choices. **We call these practices policing because that is their function.** The goal is to keep protesters in line, abiding by the instructions of police.

Peace policing strips protests of power. Every protest or demonstration is an opportunity to demonstrate our collective power in opposition to injustice. We take the streets with many goals: to interrupt business as usual, to mark targets complicit in harm, to strengthen our cooperation, and to tangibly disrupt an economic order that runs on exploitation and slaughter. Only by materially disrupting everyday life and dislodging these institutions can we hope to create conditions for liberation. This potential is sabotaged when our own people enforce the orders of our oppressors.

Peace policing is also tactically dangerous. Peace policing, especially by self-appointed "protest marshals," is what the police state's response to protests is largely built around today. The state cannot outlaw all protest, so its best hope is to make protests manageable. The last thing the state wants is a protest completely out of its control or governance. At the same time, there are both practical and legal limitations on when police can use anti-riot weaponry to control and discipline a crowd. While police would love to unleash physical violence at every demonstration, their leadership has also come to understand that this is not the most sustainable way of managing protest.

This is where protest marshals come in. Even at demonstrations where organizers do not seek a permit, protest marshals reproduce the dynamics of a permitted march. Police actively cultivate this relationship, recognizing that it can be a far more efficient way to contain a protest than tear gas and rubber bullets. LAPD's proposals for protest-related reforms after 2020 uprising included millions for hiring cops tasked with liaising with protest organizers to manage "First Amendment activity." The U.S. Department of Justice has also been running a three-hour training for protest marshals, with the training materials explaining that a marshal's role is to "provide safe, welcoming, physical presence" and "serve as the conscience for those who would compromise public safety." These protest marshals, or the "organizers" commanding them, are who police communicate with during protests. Together they determine where the protest will remain or go, what protestors will and won't do, and who is acting within the bounds of permission versus who is not.

Protest marshals are an extension of riot police. In fact, protest marshals will often literally stand right in front of armed riot police, with their backs to them facing towards the protestors and holding the goal of keeping them in line. The goal is maintaining order. In this sense, **protest marshals are the police state's keffiyah-wearing ("safe, welcoming physical presence" as the Department of Justice puts it) front line against the people**, as seen at this December 8 protest outside a fundraiser for President Biden:

[Protest marshals and 'organizers' stand in front of a line of riot police, facing the protestors with their backs turned to the heavily armed threat.]

Peace policing is a weapon of counterinsurgency. The goal is to divert, redirect, and contain the people's insurgent energy into protests that the state can tolerate. Organizers convening protests will often use militant language ("Long live the intifada" "No justice no peace" "Shut it down!") while protest marshals ensure that everyone's actions are not at all militant. Numerous demonstrations have been convened with the goal of "shutting it down" only for peace police to aggressively ensure that nothing is in fact being shut down.

The immediate impact of peace policing is that people who organize and show up to protests might go home without the goal of the action being achieved. This is literally demobilizing. Because peace policing centralizes power within well-resourced organizations and their enforcement teams, it gives these entities the ability to disperse energy by prematurely dispersing protests even when there is still energy to continue. Worse, sometimes people who would have been able to safely escalate against a protest's targets within a crowd are singled out by protest marshals as harmful, exposing them to police repression. **We have even seen protest marshals get physically aggressive with protesters, pushing them up against walls and laying hands on them.**

TAKING STREETS

- Blocking streets fully helps keep a protest safe. Keeping lanes open creates opportunities for cars and drivers to assault protesters. It also can allow police through to surround or block the group from proceeding, initiating a "kettle." The more space that's ours means less for them.

- Blocking streets with a car caravan can help protect from aggressive drivers. But car caravans must be organized with a communication channel so they know what's going on, and of course cars are very identifiable by police.

- Rerouting traffic away from the protest, facilitating u-turns, and holding off aggressive drivers with barriers and people are also crucial to keeping a protest safe. Do not allow drivers through a crowd or to make turns at "blocked intersections." Once you let one car through, they will all expect to come through. Exceptions can be made in special circumstances like ambulances.

- If police are following, dragging items into the street like traffic cones or rocks or construction barriers can create obstacles to slow down and impede the police or reactionary drivers. Use the landscape against them.

- If you see police forming a line ahead of the group, a self-organized team can run ahead to hold off that police line from forming.

- Marching against traffic can also help evade a kettle or police line, as police are less likely to follow you going against traffic. This requires a strong presence to keep drivers stopped.

SCOUTING

- Scouts should go far ahead of the march in order to locate possible routes and scope out police activity/staging or any forming police lines.

- Scouts can also help reroute traffic so that ZERO cars are driving through the march. One car that is in the march could mean one possible aggressive driver plowing through the crowd.

- Bikes can be extremely helpful for scouting, but also bikers in groups can move ahead and take future intersections, preventing police kettle efforts, and doing circles in the intersection to hold space while the group comes along.

WE KEEP US SAFE:

TIPS FOR AUTONOMOUS SAFETY AT PROTEST

Below are some of the roles and functions that protest marshals and peace police claim they are essential for achieving. Whereas peace police hoard authority to keep people safe (and then use authority to contain and discipline a protest), the reality is we can all contribute to helping keep a crowd safe. This makes peace police irrelevant.

Diversity of tactics should be a priority at all protests, particularly ones that are open for anyone from the public to join. This entails a recognition that a multitude of protest goals can exist at once. If you are policing how people show up, it isn't a public protest as much a private performance. At the very least, if the organizers want to conclude a demonstration, it's important to give the crowd the option of staying, rather than forcibly dispersing everyone. Allow for a diversity of tactics and space to practice together.

PREPARING TO PROTEST

- When attending a protest, take security and anti-surveillance precautions to protect yourself both from government monitoring and from reactionaries that might be filming or gathering intel on protesters. Zionists and fascists have been known to dox (expose people's personal information and home addresses) from pictures of protesters that were later used to identify them.

- To defend against your identity being exposed against your will, you can show up in "bloc." There are different types of bloc appropriate for different circumstances. For example, wearing all black and a balaclava could make you more conspicious than wearing a generic hoodie, mask, keffiyah, and jeans. Either way, take care to mask anything that will distinguish you, including unique clothing, shoes, tattoos, hair, and facial features.

- Even if you don't plan on doing anything significant during a protest, increasing the number of people who are dressed generically keeps everyone safe. You can also bring a change of clothes, exchange clothes with others, or switch up your layers and masks to "de-bloc" as you leave the protest.

More broadly, peace policing means people new to direct action are conditioned to rely on designated authorities to tell them how, when, and why to escalate in the streets. This shapes people's expectations for what they can do at protests, which can be especially dangerous in moments of insurgency. These are times when a broader base of people are feeling inspired to join direct actions and disrupt oppressive institutions. Peace policing tells people that they should limit their activities to what a hierarchical leadership with open lines of communication to police have determined is acceptable. And it invites harsh consequences for anyone who dares step out of line.

As it happens, the true goal of peace policing is not safety. Rather, it's to maintain adherence to the dominance and hierarchical leadership of a particular organization or organizations. The long-term effect of peace policing is strangling the enthusiasm, effectiveness, and fluidity of our movement-building. We've even heard a protest marshal tell protestors to not worry about a march's safety or trajectory, saying: "This isn't your job. You're a protestor." The implication is that protestors have a limited "job" – following orders – and marshals have a different one, in which they are not even protestors yet can dictate what protestors do. These roles of hierarchy and subservience hinder effective organizing and demobilize the movement.

EXAMPLES

Below are a few examples illustrating the dangers of peace policing from three demonstrations across a span of a month in Los Angeles. Each of these examples involve protests against Israel's ongoing genocide of Palestinians in Gaza, but these trends are universal. We chose these examples because they fall outside the template of mass daytime street rallies turning out thousands of people and were instead each billed as more targeted direct actions.

Westwood, December 8th

Numerous groups promoted a rally to protest Joe Biden at a fundraiser he was holding near the Los Angeles Country Club in Westwood. The flier called to "show Biden he is not welcome in Los Angeles." Hundreds of people showed around 4 PM and convened along the edges of Holmby Park, located near the fundraiser. Police fenced off grassy areas of the park to prevent further incursion, though both car and foot traffic flowed toward the event venue through lines of police standing on a few open streets.

After sunset, protestors fanned out across the length of the fence and began shaking it, causing the fence to sway. Protest marshals in neon vests then started to march up and down the length of the fence, positioning themselves as a shield between protestors and the fence. Groups of marshals surrounded protestors who shook the fence and accused them of putting everyone at risk. When some in the crowd attempted to move sandbags off fence posts, peace police swarmed and physically attempted to stop them. Afterwards, peace police returned the sandbags onto the fence posts to make sure the fence would keep standing strong.

Another group of protestors stood along the un-fenced length of road where cars drove into the fundraiser. Protestors yelled at the passing cars from a distance. But as soon as anyone tried to enter the street to approach cars or block traffic, marshals physically intervened. The marshals stood with their backs to police (who one would think are the true threat at a protest), facing the crowd. They explained, implausibly, that police would arrest the entire crowd if people took the street. An observer even overhead an officer say, "This group over here is fine with us, I have some of the organizers on speed dial." This evidences the role that peace police serve as a "friendly face" of the police.

Of course, this was not what much of the crowd had gathered for. People had come to "shut it down." Some protestors soon left the area controlled by peace police and moved further down to an intersection where they successfully began to surround cars and block them from entering the park. This was direct confrontation, with the crowd able to stare down the donors they were protesting through windshields and physically intercept anyone daring to walk through. Some of the crowd even began identifying celebrity donors inside the cars, announcing their names to everyone assembled.

Blocking this intersection was very easy. All it took was the choice to do so. And unlike yelling from behind a fence far away, this actually disrupted the event's functioning. Cars trying to enter the park began turning around and leaving. If only the crowd had been allowed to block streets earlier (which people had attempted but were harassed and physically blocked from by marshals) then more of the fundraiser might have been shut down, with more donors and event personnel turned away.

Peace police embody dependence on authority. They reinforce this restriction of our minds, of our liberation. We must break free, we must seize our liberation with our own hands! We each have the power to act as agents of liberation, and that power becomes more secure and strong when surrounded by others who are seizing it in tandem. Throw an egg at a cop whose back is turned. Block traffic on every major intersection. Spray any slogan you want on the walls, windows, and sidewalks. Splatter every factory of war with blood and throw a wrench in the gears of their industry.

We can each liberate ourselves with acts of resistance. With every act of undermining efforts to discipline our power, we mediate a new relationship with the state and carry our liberation through everyday life. Take back your own power! It has never left you! The only difference between you and the person ordering you to stay on one side of the road is a cheap yellow vest.* You have all the power, authority, and judgment that they do. So act like it!

* You can buy such vests for cheap and make yourself your own little marshal if you wish. Enjoy!

RESISTANCE AS LIBERATION: FREE YOURSELF

Nothing about peace policing is necessary. We do not need to rely on specially designated people who are given authority to keep us safe. We each possess the authority, judgment, and autonomy to keep each other safe. This is a responsibility we should hone collectively. We do not need to rely on marshals to block off intersections: we will do it on our own. Our hands and eyes are as good as theirs. Our voices are just as loud. Let every protester take on whatever role they can. By participating in the process of keeping us safe, we can both ensure that our protests are secure and grow everyone's skills and instincts.

In **Blessed is The Flame: An Introduction to Concentration Camp Resistance and Anarchonihilism**, author Serafinski describes efforts at violent resistance and sabotage within Nazi concentration camps. They explain: "The nihilist concepts of negation . . . resonate deeply with these acts of sabotage, offering a framework through which we might think about acts of resistance not as a means of liberation, but as acts of liberation in themselves."

By taking action yourself, you are liberating yourself even for just a moment from the grip of the state, from police control, and from hierarchy itself. At a time when political and economic possibilities are so bleak, these acts of liberation are meaningful, beautiful, and mobilizing. They should be encouraged and held up! We should teach about and defend our right to such liberation at every turn. Peace police strip us of the learning and liberation that can be won from protests, instead reproducing the hierarchies, fear, and discipline that are used to maintain oppression.

The most beautiful moments of a protest are when police are afraid, perplexed, or on the run. The purpose of peace policing is to mitigate all that. When we depend on peace police to mediate the state's governance of a protest, we sacrifice our autonomous power. We fall into a position of dependence, as though we must be given power by someone or some entity above us in order to act. We give up on what's most liberating and effective because we have learned helplessness; we have learned that decisionmaking authority can only lie in certain "official" people, such as police, protest marshals, representatives ordained by a nonprofit, and organizers who are chasing celebrity (think of the types who promotes themselves on Instagram at every protest, making an ostentatious show of how much they are doing and how important they look in photographs with a bullhorn or at the head of crowd).

There were about 50 people who had broken away from the more controlled areas to block this intersection. Eventually police with riot gear began to form a cordon blocking off both streets as exits, gradually pushing people toward a fence. The situation was tense and looked like it might take a bad turn. But soon a few people who had broken through the potential kettle to the main group returned with support en masse. The kettle was broken, and most of the protest joined the intersection. People rejoiced.

By this time, neon-vested marshals had no choice but to leave their posts and herd the crowd towards this intersection since this is where the action was. Though most of the group in this area had not heard any dispersal order, marshals began telling the crowd that police had declared unlawful assembly. Someone on a bullhorn then announced that the protest would transition into a march away from the fundraiser. Marshals then led a march away from the fundraiser, out of the neighborhood and toward Wilshire Boulevard.

El Segundo, December 15th

This was a rally and march around the LAX area, under the banner of "shutting down" access to the airport. The action was planned and announced by a variety of groups and individuals, without any name or recognizable organization attached. Instead, the call was explicitly to "transcend organizational boundaries." This framing invited people to come out and take action autonomously. But the way the protest was organized used the same tactics that big organizations use to discipline and restrict a crowd.

First, there was a large number of peace police among the crowd. Around a quarter the crowd appeared to be marshals wearing vests. They surrounded the protest at all times, facing inwards toward the crowd, not outwards towards the cars, public, or police. When the group took the streets, the peace police insisted on only taking one street or lane, even though it can be more dangerous to allow cars or police to drive alongside a march.

On numerous occasions, there were opportunities to block traffic but the peace police declared it was too risky and would not allow people to do it. Only after riot police began blocking roads themselves did the organizers join them in occupying intersections. And even then, protest marshals would insist on letting cars make turns around the protest, effectively unblocking the intersection. Although there were people (not the marshals) willing to block and redirect traffic, the focus of marshal energy was on getting people to comply with their plans rather than protecting the group from outside threats.

While this was an unpermitted protest, the police were able to direct the march via negotiation with marshals. The marshals spread rumors about a dispersal order, claiming that police had ordered everyone to disperse. But it's unclear if police actually communicated that order, and they certainly did not audibly announce the order in the manner required by law. Sometimes the marshals circulating these claims appeared panicked, as if they were expressing their anxious (or intimidated) interpretation of police's wishes rather than an express order.

Allowing police to communicate and negotiate with a select few marshals, who then have authority to direct or disperse the entire protest, means police do not need to contend with the strength and ungovernabilty of the entire crowd. Instead, they only need to persuade a small few representatives, who might relent either out of intimidation or out of concern for staying in the good graces of police who they have been carefully negotiating with. **This is of course a very different dynamic from forcing police to contend with a defiant mass.**

While many groups use some sort of "police liasons" (or "pig whisperers") to distract the police and buy time, the risk is that any such interaxction can become an opportunity for police to gather intelligence, intimidate the liaison into compliance, or to pit elements of the protest against one another with the liaisons placed in a role of mediating. The police will always seek to intimidate organizers and their representatives to prevent direct action or anything outside the realm of legally permissible protest.

Hollywood, November 15th

This third example doesn't exactly feature peace policing, but it illustrates some of the increasing interdependence of police and nonprofit-engineered protests that form the backdrop of coercive protest marshaling. Starting in early November, the L.A. chapters of Jewish Voice for Peace and If Not Now began recruiting volunteers for a mass civil disobedience arrest in Hollywood. The organizers explained that the action was patterned after similar protests across the country where hundreds of protestors were dramatically arrested at symbolic locations like Grand Central Station and the U.S. Capitol. They explained that this would be a corresponding protest to confront Hollywood and the entertainment industry.

The recruitment pitches for arrestees announced a goal of 250 arrests and the "largest civil disobedience" that Los Angeles had seen. The organizers arranged comprehensive logistics and resources to facilitate these arrests. On the day of the demonstration, protestors marched to the intersection of Hollywood Boulevard and Highland Avenue and sat down to block traffic. But police had already cordoned off the intersection with roadblocks as the crowd arrived. So the crowd was not quite blocking an intersection – the police barricades did that – as much as staging a rally within a police cordon. Even though the rally was presumably not permitted, it appeared that way visually.

Again, the stated goal was a televised mass arrest. That never came though. Instead, LAPD staged in massive numbers in a parking lot nearby. But instead of bothering the protestors, police just sat in their cars on their phones collecting massive overtime. This continued for hours, with rain drenching the protesters. Eventually concern arose about hypothermia. After a medic warned that arrests might mean people sitting in cold holding cells wearing wet clothes for hours, the organizers decided to get everyone on their feet to dance. But that did little to help. So the organizers announced a full dispersal but without much communication with the larger crowd. Organizers and marshals had earlier promised an organized march back to the starting point where people had left their cars, but they left before that happened.

Because this protest's limitations were carefully planned, never exceeded, and not responsive to the actions of police, the state was able to cash in on the protest without delivering the arrests that the organizers wanted. Demonstrations that rely on arrests like this are subcontracting the services of police and courts, who earn hefty pay from the overtime of processing all these arrests (along with revenue in the form of fines and court costs). But this example shows police calling the bluff: LAPD realized that they could collect a payout even without providing any of the service the protest's organizers were trying to purchase (media-friendly visuals of a mass arrest).

When news coverage circulated of all the police staged nearby idling and collecting overtime, liberal critics of police complained: why is the state spending so much resources on this peaceful protest? We hear this same refrain after mass arrests. The irony is that this is exactly what the organizers wanted. It's what they were banking on for the success of their protest. That was the whole point. **If the entire significance and payoff of your action depends on police doing their job, then you are hiring them.**

There is another danger to these kinds of demonstrations, which corresponds to the harms of peace policing. When protests like this are represented as direct action, with the images of mass arrests amplified across the media, it shapes the broader public's expectations of how police will confront a protest. Namely, people new to direct action who are feeling a new urge to participate by the urgency of the moment might feel discouraged by the fear that any disruptive protest or direct action will lead to arrests, since that's what they are seeing in the media. But the mass arrests at demonstrations by JVP and INN are always planned with police: the demonstrators are in a real sense enlisting police to perform this function, whereas normally people participating in direct action are trying to avoid arrest.

This is a danger of making police arrests the central goal of your action: it reiterates and reinforces the violent power of police. To be sure, there is nothing wrong with wanting to hold visually dramatic actions and vigils for symbolic purposes or to stage location-based agitprop. But a tangible downside of courting highly visible mass arrests is a kind of "self kettling" wherein people newer to direct action will have a heightened fear that police can arrest everyone at a protest, even though the arrests they saw proliferated in media were in fact pre-negotiated. In reality, mass arrests tend to be rare due to the massive police resources required to arrest, process, and detain a large crowd, as well as the costly civil rights litigation that is likely to follow. But peace police can leverage a crowd's uninformed fear of arrest in order to discipline everyone's conduct.