

## **On the Road Again: IMF/World Bank Protests Show a Revived Movement for Global Justice**

by BENJAMIN SHEPARD

**H**aving lost the possibility of surprise in the days after the Seattle, the Global Justice Movement's cacophony of voices was successful with the theatre of bringing its message to the world. A coalition of debt reduction activists, anarchists, pagans, queer/AIDS activists made their presence known for the weekend of protests. Activists barely got off the ground on Friday morning before facing police. Around 9 am, forty members of the Pagan Cluster were arrested at the Blake Building on K St. just down from the intersection of 17th St. Their march had started quiet and peacefully in Dupont Circle. Police moved in as the cluster danced, chanted, and weaving a circle around the intersection of K & 17. Blowing bubbles, chanting, drumming, dancing, the cluster watched the police surrounded them, blocking the sidewalks in front, the sidewalks in back.

The story was the same for countless groups throughout the day. Yet, the strategy was similar. A critical mass style bike ride to Freedom Plaza was disrupted by the police in a similar fashion earlier that morning. Police cordoned off some 300 bikers at Pershing Park, separating them from activists at Freedom Plaza. By standards and activists alike complained about the police overkill. "They closed Freedom Plaza and turned it into a non-Freedom Plaza," Joseph Mayer, a retired Army Lieutenant colonel, explained. Other activists were simply arrested for marching without a permit. As always, part of the strategy of the peaceful protests was to expose the aggressive nature of the police. In the end, 649 activists were arrested preemptively during the People's Strike organized by the Anti-Capitalist Convergence on Friday October 28th. Activists were acutely aware that the arrests took place not because of any "threat" to the City but because of the vocal opposition to the IMF, World Bank, and War for Oil.

Arrestees were taken to the Police Academy outside of D.C. Those arrested reported it took some 6 hours to be processed and move them into the gym. Many reported long discussions with some of the police there, who were angry at having to pull double shifts to control the protests. My friend and I overheard one policeman complaining he'd been written up for refusing to arrest an activist who had done nothing wrong.

The main events of the Saturday protests were the ACT UP/ Healthgap/ Jubilee USA Drop the Dept March. After a brief rally highlighting speakers from ACT UP, Africa Action, and Health GAP, the diverse group of marchers demanded an end to the Global AIDS crisis and the cancellation of debt for developing countries through loud chants, and colorful signs and banners.

"We have returned to Washington because the rich countries still haven't got it right," explained Kris Hermes of Health GAP. "Despite poverty and death due to AIDS being on the rise, the IMF and WB refuse to cancel the debt of the most impoverished countries. It is unacceptable that money be robbed from essential services like health care while over 8,000 people a day continue to die from AIDS."

"At best, Treasury is standing by as IMF/WB policies kill people," says John Bell, of ACT UP Philadelphia. "At worst, they are helping the IMF/WB to obstruct the social and economic development of poor countries -- taking a direct role in the death of millions." The US Treasury is being targeted as the principal financier and architect of IMF/WB policies. Through debt and loan conditions, these institutions have worsened or destroyed the lives of millions of people struggling to survive in poor countries around the world.

The demands of the marchers, like the demands of thousands of people coming to protest these institutions, are the cancellation of all impoverished country debt owed to the IMF/WB, and an end to structural adjustment policies that result in the denial of access to health care and life-saving drugs through privatization and the imposition of "user fees."

"It's really quite simple," says Marie Clarke, National Coordinator for Jubilee USA. "When impoverished countries are relieved of their debt, they spend more on social services like health care and, as a direct result, lives are saved-allowing children a better chance to reach their potential."

The scope of the debt problem is staggering. Sub-Saharan Africa owes over \$300 billion in debt and will spend \$14.5 billion on debt repayments this year. This annual figure is roughly the estimated dollar amount needed to address AIDS and related diseases in Africa.

One of the most important elements of the largely successful IMF/World Bank protests over the last weekend in September was the movement's continued ability to push itself on a public agenda. The evening news/ war pep rally was constantly interrupted with countless images of activists willing to be arrested to fight corporate globalization. While the police, entertainment, war 10 o'clock news script attempted to stay on message about a need a preemptive attack, their message was disrupted with images of mass dissent. News reports across the world covered the images of activists standing up against the frenzy like attempt by the Bush administration to push its war agenda, shielding itself from a weak economy and the aftershock of corporate scandal.

After months of 9/11 backlash and forth, opposition is alive and well.

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