

“YOU GUYS ARE FUCKING NIGHTMARES AND YOU BROKE ALL OUR FUCKING WINDOWS”

and other notes from the ongoing fight to Stop Cop City

By Anonymous

Much has been written about the movement to defend the Atlanta Forest and Stop Cop City. I recommend checking out the CrimethInc articles “The City in the Forest”, “The Forest in the City”, and “Living in an Earthquake” for a solid overview of events and generally astute analysis of the movement. I’ll attempt to pick up where they left off and give some updates on how things have evolved over the summer.

On June 5-6, 2023, Atlanta City Council voted to allocate over \$60 million in taxpayer money to fund the construction of Cop City, despite a massive turnout of 1000 people who delivered 15 hours of public comment against Cop City. Liliana Bakhtiari -- the councilmember (CM) who is sympathetic to the movement to stop Cop City -- made sure that (almost) everyone had a chance to speak and express their opposition to the project. Liliana’s friend and fellow CM, Cop City supporter Matt Westmoreland, opined to the press that Liliana’s efforts were the only reason why the enraged crowd didn’t riot. After the vote, all of the CMs who voted “yes” had their home addresses posted on scenes.noblogs.org, as well as mayor Andre Dickens.

Shortly thereafter, DeKalb County announced plans to reopen Intrenchment Creek Park (ICP), which had been closed since March 24. This briefly fooled some people into thinking the park had actually been reopened, when in actuality it is still blocked with jersey barriers at every conceivable entrance. DeKalb County is still keeping it closed long-term while they carry out \$1.8 million in construction to turn the clearcut on Bouldercrest Rd, known as “Michelle Obama Park”, into a developed park with amenities. This is in spite of an ongoing legal battle over the county’s land swap with Ryan Millsap, in which the judge has stated that the disputed land must remain open to the public while the case is decided. Some people in the movement have been protesting and sending in public comments to DeKalb County meetings, urging them to reopen the park as-is. Although they are supported by DeKalb County Commissioner Ted Terry, they have been ignored by the Board of Commissioners as a whole.

On June 8th, there were solidarity demos around the country as supporters coalesced around the targets of general contractor Brasfield & Gorrie, loan provider Cadence Bank, and insurer Nationwide. (Mostly, people held protests at Nationwide because the other two are regional to the South.) The contractor Atlas

also continued to be targeted in addition to ubiquitous APF funders like Bank of America. Two APD cars were also destroyed in Atlanta around this time. Meanwhile, activists introduced a referendum to repeal the lease of the land for Cop City, which is owned by the City of Atlanta. They have recently finished collecting signatures, but it remains to be seen if they can get an injunction to stop construction until a vote is held on the referendum.

The sixth week of action (WoA) took place from June 24 - July 1. It was held primarily in Brownwood Park in East Atlanta Village. This was a major departure from previous weeks of action, which had always taken place within the disputed areas of the Weelaunee forest and fed into the long-term forest occupation. Since the forest encampment was abandoned at the end of the March week of action, almost the entirety of the forest on the Old Prison Farm (OPF) had been razed, and ICP was officially shuttered with Jersey barriers and 24-hour surveillance. Construction on Cop City was in the grading phase. WoA attendees decided not to camp in Brownwood Park after the police swept through the park on the first day, intimidating people into leaving by the official closing time of 11pm. Understandably, people did not want to risk getting arrested to try and hold down an encampment outside of the forest.

As in previous WoAs, there were many small actions throughout the week. Mayor Dickens was spontaneously confronted by clergy and by Tortuguita’s mom Belkis Terán, and there was a rally outside the ICE detention center where March 5 defendant Victor Puertas is still being held. There was a disruptive demo at Cadence Bank, where one person was charged with a felony for allegedly dumping shrimp. Lesbian activist Lorraine Fontana and one other person were arrested for trespassing while protesting at Home Depot. A jail vigil at the Fulton County Jail was dispersed by cops who pulled tasers on people and threatened to make more arrests.

A lot of people had come to town hoping for some wild shit to happen, as one could expect based on every week of action in the past. But many people limited themselves to just chilling, or to helping out at Brownwood Park, while others avoided spending time at the park altogether. Because of this, collaboration and coordination between militant affinity groups was significantly hindered. When they did meet, they agreed that there was not a sufficient number of militants

in town to attempt to enter and re-occupy the forest during the planned march on Wednesday. It certainly felt pointless to take the risk of attempting to enter the park, only for people to most likely cede the forest again a few days later. It might have been worthwhile if a March 5-style action was likely to happen again and deal another blow to the construction happening on OPF, but there was a general lack of confidence that this was possible or even desirable. Everyone thought it was a bad idea to do the exact same thing twice, but no one had an alternate plan for people to plug into. The whole situation must have been disappointing to any WoA attendees who came with the expectation that local activists would have a coherent plan to plug them into.

In the absence of a larger action or any possibility for spontaneous shenanigans, it appears that several affinity groups chose to take action independently, or possibly with one or two other groups. On July 1, the final day of the week of action, mainstream news reported that eight APD motorcycles at the current police training center at 180 Southside Industrial Parkway were burned overnight, and three APD cars were vandalized at 890 Memorial Drive. On July 4, two more machines were burned at the same Brent Scarbrough construction site that was attacked on April 5. At some point during the WoA, at least two nighttime visits were made to addresses of people who had recently been doxxed, such as the homes of an LS3P senior architect and an APF trustee. B&G executive Keith Johnson was also visited. The homes and vehicles of these individuals were vandalized and redecorated. Outside of Atlanta, other actions occurred. In California, several Bank of America locations and a UPS store were smashed up. In Michigan, Chase Bank was vandalized. In New Orleans, a golf course was sabotaged.

On July 5, Mayor Andre Dickens held a press conference about the actions that had occurred in Atlanta over the holiday weekend. He warned about a very small group of “professional anarchists” and “career arsonists” lurking amidst peaceful protestors, and complained about how they’ll burn up construction equipment one day and have a bouncy castle party the next!

Not everyone has to become an arsonist, of course. A recent demo that visited the homes of several Atlas consultants revealed that Atlas had quietly dropped their involvement in Cop City back in April because, in his own words: “you guys are fucking nightmares and you broke all of our fucking windows.” Looking back, Atlas was one of the most relentlessly targeted contractors -- their windows had been smashed in about 10 different states at some point. This is an excellent reminder that the movement’s capacity to keep up persistent, low-level actions like call-in campaigns, home demos, and window-smashing is just as important as its capacity to pull off big one-off actions.

With a heightened level of repression over the past six months, and without the forest providing an organic space of encounter between different factions in the movement any longer, there is a new bifurcation developing between aboveground and underground activism. While public-facing groups have continued to affirm their respect for diversity of tactics, some militants in Atlanta have proposed taking the path of clandestinity, with the aim of developing the movement into an urban guerilla struggle. Writing on the movement’s counter-info site, scenes.noblogs.org, the group who attacked APD vehicles on July 1 offered the name “March 5 Movement” as a banner under which anyone can claim actions. While they hope to keep open the possibility of future mass actions like March 5, they recognize the need to keep up momentum within informal networks of like-minded individuals, without being too dependent on the ebb and flow of the broader movement.

It’s unclear why more people have not taken up the strategy of carrying out arson against police and vandalism of Cop City supporters’ private residences and vehicles. Although the movement has seen a great deal of arrests and repression, no one has been arrested for these types of clandestine actions -- and there have been plenty. I assume that militants haven’t been busy canvassing for the referendum, but maybe some of them are waiting for the referendum to fail. Maybe there is no particular reason for the lull beyond a lack of enthusiasm, motivation, or courage. To be fair, it’s way more fun to take action when your friends come to town around WoAs.

With referendum canvassing completed, it seems like there are a fair number of people in Atlanta trying to get more involved in efforts to Stop Cop City. At the same time, direct actions in the forest and elsewhere in Atlanta have ground to a complete halt, while street protests tend to draw a couple dozen people at most. There has been widespread frustration with the lack of action, the lack of straightforward ways to plug in to existing efforts, and lack of coordination between different individuals and groups. While there have been many informal meetings and spokescouncils in the past, there is a new biweekly assembly called the Weelaunee Action Council (WAC), where people can propose actions to a larger group. People are expected to begin organizing themselves into affinity groups if they are not representing an established group, and they are invited to come with fully fleshed-out proposals for people to give feedback on. Thankfully, many participants in the WAC seem skeptical of the dynamics that tend to emerge in assemblies like this that are founded on anarchist principles but open to non-anarchists. I hope the movement will be able to avoid co-optation by more liberal tendencies, whose influence has been tempered up to this point by the movement’s unabashed militancy, and figure out new ways to get shit done.