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## State of emergency: the violence of the Sydney 2007 APEC meeting

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### **Abstract**

This article emphasises the activity of what will be referred to as the alter-globalisation movement rather than the antiglobalisation movement, as I consider this a more accurate description of the global movement against neo-liberalism. It also examines the global state of emergency which has become increasingly evident since September 11, 2001. My aim is to help understand how and why this state of emergency was manifested during the APEC week in Sydney, September 2007. To shed more light on the implications of the state of emergency, the article traces a history of confrontations between those advocating neo-liberal globalisation and those opposing it.



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APEC rally poster, Sydney, September 2007  
Photograph by Nick Southall

# State of Emergency: the Violence of the Sydney 2007 APEC Meeting

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**This article emphasises the activity** of what will be referred to as the alter-globalisation movement rather than the anti-globalisation movement, as I consider this a more accurate description of the global movement against neo-liberalism. It also examines the global state of emergency which has become increasingly evident since September 11, 2001. My aim is to help understand how and why this state of emergency was manifested during the APEC week in Sydney, September 2007. To shed more light on the implications of the state of emergency, the article traces a history of confrontations between those advocating neo-liberal globalisation and those opposing it.

The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) was formed in 1989 at the behest of the Hawke Labor government. Leaders of 21 of the economies of the Pacific Rim meet yearly, with working groups between Summits. APEC includes Australia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Russia and the United States and seeks to promote neo-liberal development policies and processes. In September 2007 it was Sydney's turn to host the annual APEC summit. Preparations began months before, both for the Summit and its massive security operation, and for those who wished to protest against it.

The planned anti-APEC demonstrations in Sydney were initially centred on the visit of George Bush. As well, the call out for the main protest explained that "APEC furthers corporate globalisation bringing war, environmental destruction and a continual assault on worker's rights and peoples livelihoods" (Stop Bush Coalition: 2007). But, as the Federal and NSW governments prepared for the demonstrations, the protests



*APEC protests, Sydney, September 2007.*

increasingly became about state repression and the ability to protest. In the lead up to the APEC meeting and the planned demonstrations against it, violence became a central issue. Many of those preparing to protest, sought to highlight the continuing violence of the Iraq war, as well as the everyday violence of neo-liberalism against people, communities and the planet. Meanwhile, the main issue for those supporting APEC and the neo-liberal state was the potential violence of protestors. h

In Australia, protests have at times been confrontational, for example the storming of Federal parliament in 1982 and 1996 and the Maritime dispute in 1998. A year after the Maritime dispute, at the 1999 World Trade Organisation's meeting in Seattle, the infamous "Battle of Seattle" occurred, launching the alter-globalisation movement onto the world stage. The Seattle protests against the WTO combined the many grievances of the North and the South against neo-liberal globalisation. This combination would demonstrate tremendous power in Seattle, disrupting and helping to derail the WTO meeting. The response from law enforcement has been described as a 'police riot'. Having been attacked by the police, sections of the protestors began to defend themselves and some started smashing symbols of corporate power, at times joined by local inner city residents. By nightfall the city authorities had declared a state of emergency and sent in the National Guard.

The following year, inspired by the Seattle tactic of blockading meetings of the powerful, thousands of people blockaded every entrance into Melbourne's Crown Casino, severely disrupting a meeting of the World Economic Forum. The s11 protest began turning ugly when police broke through the blockade using batons, horses and vehicles. During the three days of action five hundred blockaders had to be treated by medical officers. Many of them were so badly injured that they had to be hospitalised. The police operation to break the s11 blockade, the largest police operation in Victoria's history, had been planned for over a year, with the assistance of police from the United States (*s11.org archive*: 2000). The large amount of police violence prompted the Victorian Ombudsman to carry out a full investigation of the police's actions. In the resulting report the s11 legal observers explained that "senior police and

the force in general seemed to approach the protest as if they were at war". According to the Ombudsman's report, police "statements to the media, the use of paramilitary equipment, tactics and units all contributed to increased conflict during the protest. Despite this, overall the actions of the protestors were very restrained and generally peaceful and non-violent. However, such restraint is by no means guaranteed and is likely to change if the use of paramilitary force continues to develop into the standard approach to policing of protests" (Victorian Ombudsman's Report: 2001: 41).

In July the following year, Genoa Italy saw the largest demonstrations for alternative globalisation yet, when two hundred thousand people protested leading up to the G8 Summit. This massive mobilisation was met with the most violent police response seen in Europe or North America to counter-summit protests, as the authorities and 20,000 police transformed the city into a war zone, under a form of marshal law. During the demonstrations "provocateurs and members of right-wing, Nazi groups . . . clad in black and moving in paramilitary fashion were given free reign" by police, while those peacefully marching were "viciously beaten . . . with a determination that was almost murderous". As some protestors attempted to defend themselves the police launched further attacks, including the shooting death of Carlo Giuliani, and an attack later that night on a hundred sleeping protestors who were beaten "to the edge of their lives" and the torture of many of those arrested (Federici and Caffentzis: 2001: 291-292). Silvia Federici and George Caffentzis (2001: 290) explain that the strategy of terror at Genoa, involving "the abolition of all legal, civic, and human rights" was a "pre-meditated institutional plan to repress and terrorise the demonstrators" and that it "was not shaped by how activists behaved".

According to Antonio Negri (2004: 76) the police violence in Genoa indicated the transition to "low intensity war combined with a high-intensity police action", a fascistic development to block the new emerging cycle of struggles against neo-liberalism. In response to this increased police violence, what began as a demonstration against the G8 "became transformed into a demonstration against war". For Negri, Genoa was "an anticipation on both sides" of the post-September 11 global

war and Genoa's message to the alter-globalisation movement was that protests are regarded as acts of subversion, peace demonstrations are regarded as acts of treason and "everything is potentially terrorism".

As it became clear that the 'Seattle tactics' were now being thwarted and that direct action would be met by far superior and potentially deadly force, debates raged regarding the use of 'violence'. At the centre of many of these debates were those taking part in the so-called "Black Blocs". These protestors, usually dressed in black, were increasingly criticised for using 'violence' and fighting back when attacked by police. Some suggested that they had been infiltrated by agent provocateurs, since those participating in the Blocs were usually masked, making it hard to identify them, but also making infiltration easier. Susan George, vice president of alter-globalisation movement ATTAC (in Callinicos: 2003: 136) explained that; "I cannot now encourage our members to put life and limb on the line, to participate in demos where we have police trapping people and shooting live ammunition on the one hand, and on the other the Black Bloc, completely infiltrated by police and fascists, running wild and apparently unable or unwilling to police its own ranks". Negri (2008b: 95 & 98) in defence of black bloc tactics argued that many of the criticisms of the bloc disfigured those who were able to engage in conflict to resist state attacks and defend protesters. He pointed out that in Genoa violence was actively used by many protestors, well beyond the black blocs, in order to defend themselves.

By 2006, at protests against the G20 meeting in Melbourne, it was clear that global war had become permanent and the prediction of the s11 ombudsman's report that protestors were unlikely to remain passive in the face of continued paramilitary policing was confirmed. When confronted by the police at G20 a section of protestors attempted to disarm them, pushed through police lines and smashed a police truck. One or two police officers were injured. Police retaliation for this defiance would injure over 50 protestors, hospitalising some. Following the G20 demonstrations, many participants in the confrontations were targeted in an extensive police operation, codenamed Operation Salver. The Operation, involving both Victorian and New South Wales police, included raids on people's homes by the NSW anti-



terrorist squad and resulted in the imprisonment of at least one man for 18 months. Operation Salver also included the unprecedented release of 'wanted' photos of protestors to the media. Police refused to say whether those identified as persons of interest had committed any crimes, only that they were being sought by police (*A Rush and a Push*: 2008).

The events surrounding the G20 protests again sparked heated debates within activist circles about the use of confrontational tactics. A great deal of criticism of confrontational protestors referred to the use of masks and disguises. Most criticism of this tactic centred on the idea that "disguise" is sinister and that it leaves the movement open to infiltration by police and/or fascists. Some of those who had been wearing masks at G20 defended the tactic arguing that it protected militants from state repression (*A First Communique of Two Uncitizens of Arterial Bloc*: 2006). As it turned out, police had little problem identifying those taking part in G20 confrontations, as they had infiltrated organising meetings and had plenty of images of the protests.

The debates following G20 are a small part of much wider and long-running debates about pacifism, non-violence, violence and democracy. In the lead up to the APEC protests in Sydney this debate flared again after the main protest march was initially advertised as a peaceful protest. In an open letter to those planning APEC protests, the Sydney based group Mutiny argued that an assertion of peaceful protest would close down discussion of different protest tactics. According to Mutiny (2007) it was irresponsible to promise or demand peace and the declaration of a peaceful protest was an attempt to marginalise and exclude those prepared to be disobedient, confront police and defend themselves.

Meanwhile, those supporting the need to publicise a peaceful march saw this as the best way to encourage people to attend in the face of police, government and media hysteria (Cunich: 2007). As one of them put it, the intent was to "make clear that the threat of violence comes not from protesters but from the Federal and State governments" (Clancy & Cunich: 2007). As a letter writer argued in *Green Left Weekly* "it is entirely legitimate for an organised protest movement to set collectively decided limits on protest behaviour at rallies when

these limits are justified by the need for safety and unity” (Gaiswinkler: 2007). Yet, clearly there is not a unified movement and at the following meeting of the Stop Bush Coalition the majority supported a motion to remove the line “Join a peaceful protest against the warmongers” from the poster advertising the main protest march (Cunich: 2007). A short time later some of the protest organisers held a public meeting on a “Shared Intent Against the Violence of APEC”. In the call out for this meeting they explained: “By the very praxis of stepping out and challenging their control of space, we are committing what is regarded as a violent act. It is the violence of articulating resistance” (*A Call for Shared Intent Against the Violence of APEC*: 2007). While these discussions and debates may seem to be isolated to a few activists, the APEC protest organising meetings were not necessarily small meetings. For instance, on the night before the main protest march, hundreds of people packed an inner-city church hall to overflowing in order to discuss the final route of the march and whether to enter the declared security zone around the APEC meeting.

A couple of months before the APEC meeting, NSW Police Minister David Campbell (2007) introduced the *APEC Police Powers Bill* to Parliament. He justified the new laws in the face of what he said was “the threat of large organised and sustained violent protests”. The NSW Council on Civil Liberties (2007) described the new laws as akin to those of a police state and part of an increasing criminalisation of protest and dissent in NSW. The laws created two categories of security zones within greater Sydney – “declared areas” and “restricted areas” – which were to be determined by the NSW Police Commissioner. According to Mr. Campbell, if anyone did not obey orders to disperse or leave these areas, they could be arrested and held in jail until after APEC was over.

The most controversial part of the *APEC Police Powers Bill* was the creation of an “excluded persons list”. Those on the list faced lengthy jail terms if they entered any of the restricted or declared zones, even if they didn’t know that they were on the list. It was not necessary to have criminal convictions to be placed on the list. The Police Commissioner could put anyone on the list based on police intelligence. Initially Mr Campbell declared that those on the list would not be named and that

they didn't need to be told they were on the list – that they should just know (Tadros: 2007). After a public outcry, those on the initial list were publicly named, although the police admitted that the list could still be added to, at any time. It was also announced that police would be using preventative detention and had been issued photographs and details of those they described as “known vicious protesters”. Airports would be on alert to look for any of these people entering the country and the interstate movements of ‘known troublemakers’ would be monitored (Lawrence: 2007). To help gather information on protest plans the police intelligence groups sought to recruit spies from among activist circles and asked universities to monitor any activity in support of the protests occurring on campuses (Tadros: 2007).

For months leading up to APEC police and troops trained for conflict, purchased new weapons, including a \$600,000 water cannon, and prepared to carry out attacks on demonstrators. Senior NSW police announced they planned to arrest hundreds of people, and were clearing jail cells, as well as building a fleet of special jail buses to be able to herd large numbers of demonstrators into detention. While there was an occasional mention of potential terrorist attacks, the massive police and military operation was clearly aimed at those attempting to protest. As APEC drew closer the Federal and State governments and the NSW police carried out a scare campaign in relation to the APEC protests. As part of this campaign Premier Iemma put together a special taskforce of Muslim leaders to help urge Muslims to stay away from the demonstrations (Kerbaj: 2007). Sydneysiders were given a public holiday and advised to get out of town, and much of the city became a no-go zone, enclosed in an iron cage. As the rhetoric of authorities created an intensifying climate of danger, fear and menace, it was clear that they were trying to threaten and intimidate people, to deter them from protesting and attempting to demonise those who would be. From my own experience this scare campaign was very successful, with many activists deciding not to attend the protests, expressing heightened concerns for those who were, and at times attempting to dissuade people from taking part.

In the week leading up to APEC, the police and media hysteria was ramped up a notch. The *Illawarra Mercury* (2007:

1) announced on its front page that police were “braced for riots” with senior police warning that a “violent riot is probable” at the main demonstration. Two days before the main protest the *Mercury* (2007: 4–5) headline emblazoned across two pages declared “Top cop warns: it’s going to get nasty”. In the article below this headline New South Wales top riot squad officer, Chief Superintendent Cullen, said he was expecting “the worst violence of his career”, a level of violence “not previously experienced in Sydney”. He told the media that “Police lines will come under attack and a full-scale riot is probable”.

Just a couple of days before the APEC meeting began, the mainstream media outlets and the Police Minister announced that they had uncovered a ‘rioters training manual’ which they claimed “openly declares an intent to commit violence”. The evidence provided for this claim of violent intent was some of the articles published in the counter-APEC conference reader that the initial form of this article appeared in. Those attending the ‘FLARE (For Liberation, Autonomy, Resistance, Exodus) in the Void’ convergence were described in the media as “rioters” and the organisers declared public enemy number one. According to media outlets, the FLARE in the Void reader called for violence by advocating “direct action” and by stating “It is important to defy police attempts to frighten us”. Prime Minister Howard quickly responded to the reports of a riot manual, saying that if violence occurred “people should not blame him or Mr Bush. Don’t blame the police, don’t blame the NSW Government, don’t blame any of our guests, and don’t blame the Federal Government. Blame the people who threaten violence” (Hilderbrand & Farr: 2007: 1 & 8).

On the day of the main APEC protest, around ten thousand people took part. The frenzied media, political and police campaigns failed to deter thousands of people from a wide variety of community organisations – trade unions, indigenous rights, environmental, socialist, communist, anarchist, Christian and Muslim groups. There were young and old people, families with their children and even babies in strollers. Arriving at the assembly point in front of Sydney Town Hall they were surrounded by thousands of police, many in riot gear and backed by police dogs, riot vehicles and the new water cannon. Police helicopters hovered overhead and snipers were

stationed on rooftops. Arguments about which route to take and whether to march into the security zones were answered by the caged jail buses, which barricaded the proposed march route, totally blocking access to George and Pitt Streets. As speakers addressed the crowd and people filled the road preparing to march, behind them assembled a group in silent formation, clad all in black, masked, and with an air of menace. Although they had banners with anarchist and anti-corporate slogans on them, they were quickly identified by protest organisers as neo-Nazis. An announcement from the speaker's stage was made that they were provocateurs and possibly police agents. APEC protest organisers had pre-warned the media of possible police provocation, pointing out that after an alter-globalisation demonstration in Quebec a few weeks before APEC, Canadian police were forced to admit that some of their officers had joined the protest dressed in masks and 'black bloc' attire and armed themselves with rocks to throw at lines of riot police (Harrold: 2007).

According to the website of the Sydney neo-Nazi group joining the protest, they considered themselves part of the 'new right'. On this site they explained that they came to the APEC protest with the intention of blending in with anarchist groups as part of the 'black bloc' (Middleton: 2007). But there was no 'black bloc' at the APEC protest and the neo-Nazis stood out because they were the only people dressed all in black and masked. Obviously many others had learnt a lesson from the G20 protests, that masks and disguises would not prevent identification and that those wearing them could be considered a danger to those who were not. The neo-Nazis, positioning themselves between the police water cannon, some riot police and the back of the protest, were blocked from marching by sections of protestors and were eventually escorted away by the police to safety. According to the *Sydney Morning Herald* (2007) there were some scuffles, involving these neo-Nazis, but as the *Herald* reported, the rest of the protest was mostly peaceful and largely had a carnival atmosphere. Two police officers were injured when they were assaulted by a man, reportedly a One Nation supporter, who was promptly arrested. There were 16 other arrests during the protest. Ten men and six women were charged with the minor offences of offensive conduct, resisting

arrest, breaching a secure area and hindering police. There were also scuffles when police tried to arrest two protest organisers who were on the APEC excluded persons list. The police were soon forced to release them, when legal observers pointed out that they were not in an exclusion zone.

These arrests added to the arrests in the days before, which included the detention of a homeless man for taking photos of the security fence (Hildebrand: 2007) and an accountant trying to cross the road with his child (Benns: 2007). This latter arrest received a great deal of media attention, helping to expose the aggressive nature of APEC policing. By the end of the APEC week many media outlets and commentators were asking serious questions about the behaviour of the police and government. An ABC poll shortly after APEC, into what concerned people about the APEC week, found that the majority were mostly concerned about the increased police powers, the heavy policing and the tough methods used during the demonstrations (*ABC Sydney*: 2007).

However, during the APEC week the police were kept busy. Their hands were full, dealing with regular outbreaks of humour across the city. These outbreaks of humour included a fifty bum salute for George Bush, a group of people dressed in business suits, calling themselves the “Billionaires for Bush”, who stood and heckled protest marchers with chants such as “corporate might, not human rights” (*Sydney Morning Herald*: 2007). And of course there was the Chaser team, who managed to enter the main APEC security cordon with a motorcade and Julian Morrow dressed as Osama Bin Laden. This use of protest humour as a weapon against repression has been an important element of the alter-globalisation movement, which has regularly used it to try and defuse tension and confuse police. In Quebec City a giant catapult trundled up towards police lines only to be used to lob soft toys at them. When Reclaim the Streets activists were confronted by police violence in England “the weapon of choice was . . . the custard pie” (Klein: 2001: 322), while the Revolutionary Anarchist Clown Bloc would run at police lines with squeaky toy mallets and then attack each other (Graeber: 2003: 330).

In examining the confrontations between state forces and the alter-globalisation movements, Michael Hardt and Antonio

Negri (1994: 204) explain that capitalist society is a “monster of provocation and devastation” and constitutional bourgeois democracy is a “theory of the management of legitimate violence” (Negri: 2008a: 129). They point out that the neo-liberal project has involved “a substantial increase of the State in terms both of size and powers of intervention” to deal with capitalist crisis (Hardt and Negri: 1994: 242). While advocating less state intervention, neo-liberal states have boosted the prison population and introduced more repressive laws governing such things as protest, strikes, behaviour, movement, use of public space, censorship and other civil rights. While cutting back spending on the ‘social security’ of welfare, spending on state security forces has been increased and these forces are called on to intervene wherever capital is threatened or challenged.

According to Hardt and Negri (2004) the fear of violence and the constant and coordinated application of violence are used to maintain capitalist social relations, social hierarchies, social anxiety and conflict. They describe the contemporary situation as one of “permanent exceptionalism”. While states tend to have provisions to suspend civil liberties in times of emergency these exceptional circumstances are now considered permanent and general. State policies and practices for events such as APEC are touted as temporary – but they are increasingly becoming a feature of the urban environment. When he introduced the special APEC laws David Campbell (2007) assured the NSW parliament that they included a number of safeguards to ensure they were not abused. One of these safeguards was that the laws would terminate automatically after the APEC meeting. Since then the government has announced that they have decided to keep them (Mills: 2008).

In many ways the state of emergency that was declared in Seattle in 1999 did not end, but instead spread across the globe. Yet looked at in another, and probably more accurate, way the state of emergency in Seattle was the materialisation, in the heart of North America, of a permanent state of exception that has long existed in many parts of the world. According to Walter Benjamin (1940) “the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule”. In the contemporary metropolis the first and third world, the north and south, the centre and

periphery, are to different degrees infused and here the state of emergency and exception is continuous. Unprecedented levels of social inequality are helping to fuel increasing hostility, on the part of wide layers of the global population, to the entire official establishment. The politics of social compromise and concessions that characterised the years of the post-war economic boom, have given way to social tensions and a deepening social polarisation that cannot be contained through the old political channels. That is why, as Nick Dyer-Witheford (1999: 78) explains, the neo-liberal transition from welfare state to warfare state is supported by the adoption of military technology to provide 'battlefield control' in the workplace and civil society.

Many cities are now considered permanent zones of conflict. As the *Journal of the U.S. Army War College* (2008) explains: "The future of warfare lies in the streets, sewers, high-rise buildings, industrial parks, and the sprawl of houses, shacks, and shelters that form the broken cities of our world". According to geographer Professor Stephen Graham (2006) contemporary cities are divided into two classes – citizens who are deemed to warrant value and the full protection of citizenship, and those that have been deemed threatening, the targets of the security state. Who those considered threatening might be, in the city of Sydney, was indicated during the training of police helicopter flight crews preparing for APEC, who targeted 149 hot spots across the western suburbs (Creedy: 2007). *The Daily Telegraph* (Watson: 2007) also pointed to the similarities of police training for APEC and their training for urban rioting in places like Redfern and Macquarie Fields. According to the *Telegraph* (Massoud: 2007) the NSW riots squads' APEC tactics were also tested before-hand on unruly western suburbs football fans at a Parramatta versus Canterbury-Bankstown game.

The major confrontations of the future are expected to involve a melding of policing and military operations and Australian military/police forces are increasingly being deployed at home and abroad. On top of their roles in Iraq and Afghanistan, Australian troops and police have recently been deployed across the Pacific from the Northern Territory to the Solomon Islands, East Timor, Papua New Guinea and Tonga. These military interventions have included Australian assistance to what John



Pilger (Pilger: 2006) describes as the “coup” in East Timor to overthrow the elected Prime Minister and the establishment of a permanent military base in the fledgling state (O’Malley: 2006). In the Solomon Islands Australian troops, police and officials have taken over the running of the country and Australian police have been installed in Papua New Guinea, Nauru and Vanuatu. The leaders of Tonga’s pro-democracy movement have condemned the intervention of Australian soldiers and police in that country to enforce martial law (*ABC News*: 2006). These Australian forces are deployed to impose the APEC agenda of neo-liberal reforms, law and order measures and the removal of barriers for business. Since these processes involve mass impoverishment, environmental destruction and the erosion of communal and cooperative social relations and structures, they are widely resisted.

For all the talk of violence, the meanings of the term are rarely examined. ‘Violence’ is often a catch-all phrase which is relatively easy to condemn. Yet, what is classified as violence reflects the concerns and priorities of different classes, movements, social groups and individuals. Some kinds of violence and some kinds of actions that cause harm, injury and death, are considered far worse than others. It is a common perception, promoted by capital, its state forms and media outlets, to view violence as the illegitimate use of force. Peace demonstrators can be described as “violent ferals” by Prime Minister Rudd (in Braithwaite & Tadros: 2007) and the bombing of children as ‘combating terror’. The definition of violence as illegitimate force allows those who claim they are ‘defending the law’ and ‘protecting social order’ to present themselves as opposed to violence, as the protectors and keepers of ‘the peace’. Accepting these parameters helps to disguise the daily violence of oppression, condones state violence and delegitimises militant struggle against the status quo. The reality is that the social relations of capital are violent and that capitalist states employ police, the military, prison and other violent institutions to repress dissent. Many people, in resisting the imposition of the violence of capitalist rule, defend themselves physically. Yet much of the alter-globalisation movement appreciates that even defensive violence can compromise attempts to create alternative social relations.

Faced with the shock of a permanent state of emergency and the awesome power of capitalist political, economic and armed forces, there is a continuing global wave of disobedience, defiance and rebellion, that will continue to bring to the fore questions of violence, non-violence, power and democracy. At the same time millions of people across the globe understand that peace – not violence – is the fundamental condition for liberating, cooperative and creative social relations. The intention in this paper has not been to deny that some of those involved in alter-globalisation movements engage in violence and there are those who rage against the machine in ways that are mirror images of the violence of capital and its state forms. What I have sought to show, is that at APEC, militant non-violence helped to counter the demonisation of those who protest and resist and exposed the violent practice and intent of state forces. The APEC protests revealed that many people refuse to be threatened, intimidated or forced into compliance and silence. Despite a global environment of war and terror, it is still possible to come together in collective action, to create spaces for different points of view and to deploy fluid and varied protest tactics. Rather than being caught up in an escalating competition of violence, antagonism can be combined with optimism rather than despair. In response to the global state of emergency and global war many continue to refuse and reject the neo-liberal agenda and organise forms of power that are effective, angry and affectionate, rather than violent.

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