

**ON THE  
LEGITIMACY  
OF PROPERTY  
DESTRUCTION**

Recent well-publicized actions of property destruction by protesters, particularly those on June 18, 1999 and during the WTO conference in Seattle, have been met, inside and outside the activist community, with harsh criticism. Especially troubling are activists who have publicly disassociated themselves from, or publicly condemned, individuals who carried out acts of property damage. As those who engaged in these actions are forced to remain anonymous, the media (let's not forget the majority of the media is own by, and produced in the interest of corporations) has taken advantage of their increased area of freedom, and used terms "anarchists" and "riots" with the intention creating an extremist-like stigma. Property damage is a form of economic sabotage, a tactic which has been used by those in social justice movements for years. As laborers have called strikes to create an economic pressure on their bosses, as consumers have participated in boycotts to financially hurt those companies engaging in exploitative practices, as people have protested businesses and encouraged others to withdraw their support, this is the principle behind those who seek to render property ineffective and useless.

Damaging the property of corporations is a tactic which is intended to slow down or disrupt normal activity, whether this be a logging operation, an animal breeding or slaughter facility, or a corporate retail outlet store, and can be carried out injuring no one except the bank accounts of the company. These acts have been referred to as acts of "violence" by both media and activists. This is an association which needs to be questioned. The extent of the violence of such acts are that they are carried out with the intent to create a sense of fear, but in that causing fear in an individual would more easily justify the label of "violence", instilling fear in a company that if they carry on their unjust, harmful practices, then more and more actions targeting them economically will ensue until they are put out of business can only questionably, at best, deserve the label of violence.

Targets of property destruction are not random, companies are singled out due to their practices and abuses. This eliminates the notion that protesters who incorporate these tactics into their resistance are "senseless vandals" or "anarkids". People who damage the property of companies are risking more extreme consequences so that they can send a message to the abusive businesses. Do these individuals sound like they are deserving of the title "criminals"?

Activists have held the belief that property damage has ruined otherwise "peaceful protests". This statement in itself is to deny the legitimacy of economic sabotage in the form of property destruction as a non-violent tactic. Then, also, one must consider how realistically effective the continual use of, or restriction to, a single tactic can be. It is common sense that a single-front war allows all of an entity's resistance which go beyond marches and demonstrations, we are forcing the corporations to spend their time, energy, and money to defend themselves on another front, particularly one that they fear even more than the leafletting and chanting. It is also questionable whether the WTO protest, or other demonstrations would have received the amount of media attention that they did had the property damage not taken place. The increased coverage subsequently increases the exposure and potential for dialogue regarding the reasons why such entities are targeted in the first place.

None of this is say that property damage is necessary all the time, or is more important than any other form of protest or outreach. It is an obvious fallacy to assume that any movement would be successful without engaging in a variety of activities, particularly those which include elements of, both, public and media outreach and some form(s) of direct action, seeking to affect the company on a short term and long term basis. We must think about the progress that has been made by movements who have decided to engage or refrain from engaging in more aggressive direct action. There must be a range of tactics used to accomplish our goals, and we cannot alienate each other bases on personal preferences when we are all struggling for a common goal. The companies are basking in our infighting, and in turn, we are hurting our movements and the resistance as a whole. We are fighting for freedom, not uniformity, and this includes the freedom to think, believe and act differently, but to cooperate in harmony. Our goals and ideas mean nothing if we can't even apply them today to our movements or everyday actions.

The purpose of this is not to say that property damage is necessary as part of every protest, march or demonstration, but to encourage more of us to include it and/or support its inclusion in the tactics which we can consider using after examining the circumstances of our situations. Those who do engage in this activity would never be so audacious to request you participate in these activities, but only to request that you recognize and support them as having a place within the social justice movements.